Course Introduction

Session 1

Professor Devin Caughey

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17.263: American Elections
Welcome to 17.263: American Elections!
I am Professor Devin Caughey (ko-ee).
What’s at Stake in 2020

2020 is a presidential election year, but in addition to the presidency and vice presidency, many other elections will occur (not all in November).

- National
- State
- Local
What’s at Stake in 2020

2020 is a presidential election year, but in addition to the presidency and vice presidency, many other elections will occur (not all in November).

► National
  ► All 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives
  ► 35 of 100 seats in the U.S. Senate

► State

► Local
What’s at Stake in 2020

2020 is a presidential election year, but in addition to the presidency and vice presidency, many other elections will occur (not all in November).

► National

► State

► 11 of 50 governorships
► 86 of 99 state legislative chambers (5,876 of 7,383 seats)
► State supreme court seats in 35 states
► Various other state offices, ranging from lieutenant governor to insurance commissioner
► Initiatives, referenda, and other forms of direct democracy

► Local
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- National
- State
- Local
  - City councilors and mayors
  - Sheriffs and other county officials
  - School board members and other special district officials
  - More direct democracy: bond issuances, tax levies, . . .
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- National
- State
- Local

In addition, there will be (or have been) government-administered primary elections to select the party’s nominee for each office.

(As you can see, the USA holds lots of elections.)
The Presidential Race

- Let’s take a look at where the presidential race between Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Joseph Biden stands right now.
- We’ll use the popular forecasting site, Nate Silver’s FiveThirtyEight.com (there are 538 votes in the Electoral College).
FiveThirtyEight Forecast (Aug 31, 2020): Popular Votes

As the election gets closer—and as we get swamped with new polls—the forecast will get less uncertain.
FiveThirtyEight Forecast (Aug 31, 2020): Electoral Votes

How the forecast has changed

The forecast updates at least once a day and whenever we get a new poll. Click the buttons to see the ways each candidate’s outlook has changed over time.

As the election gets closer – and as we get swamped with new polls – the forecast will get less uncertain.

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FiveThirtyEight Forecast (Aug 31, 2020): Snake Plot
FiveThirtyEight Forecast (Aug 31, 2020): Tipping Points

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FiveThirtyEight Forecast (Aug 31, 2016): Win Probability
FiveThirtyEight Forecast (Nov 8, 2016): Electoral Map

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