Class Game
Single Dimensional Voting

This experiment illustrates the power of the median voter theorem and its corollary for majority voting in single dimension. As Poole and Rosenthal (1997) argue, most of congressional and presidential voting in the United States may be single dimensional.

Objective
The experiment helps students gain first-hand experience with voting in committees. The experiment also helps introduce the median voter theorem, its corollary, and the predictive power of both, which is high.

Time
Roughly 15-20 minutes in class, without discussion.

Administration
Prior to class write numbers between 0 and 10 on a small sheet of paper, one for each student, which will be the student's ideal point. Remember to leave enough room for them to write their name on the paper. Create enough numbers for the full class then remove numbers from one end of the distribution in class for students who don't attend. Also write out a list of the numbers you are using so you can identify the median during class, removing those that were discarded from your list. Fold papers and put them in a box. When you arrive in class, ask students not to communicate during the experiment (to avoid contamination). Then have them randomly draw their ideal point from the box. Next show them the power point slide 1D_voting.pptx. As they read directions, calculate the median and write it on a large piece of paper, fold it in half, and announce to the class that you have written something that you will reveal later. Keep in mind that for an even sized population, the median is the range of the two center numbers (inclusive), not the average of the two center numbers. Then go over the directions as a class, and ask students to write their name on the paper they drew (on the same side as their ideal point).

Write two columns on the board, with the headers "status quo" and "proposal." Write "nothing" under "status quo" and announce no one will get extra credit points if nothing is the final outcome. Then ask for proposals. Students will raise their hand, call on the first one raised, and ask if the proposal is seconded. If it is, write it under the proposal column. Then say, "all those in favor of the proposal raise your hands." If you have a majority, write the number of the proposal down in the next row under status quo, then ask for another proposal. If it is not seconded, or you don't have a majority, write the number of the status quo down in the next row under status quo, then ask for another proposal. Repeat this process until a student proposes to adjourn, another student seconds it, and a majority agree to adjourn. The final outcome is the status quo when a vote to adjourn succeeds. You can now reveal what you wrote on your paper (the median) and compare it to what students agreed to as a group. One reason that you might not get the median as an outcome is that the person at the median is shy and doesn't propose their ideal point. Before leaving, collect papers from each student so you can give them credit.

Electronic Responses

If you want to go paperless, perhaps because your class is remote, give each student an ideal point in the course grade book (ELC, Blackboard, etc) and replace "(randomly drawn out of a hat)" on the second line of the power point with "(which you can find in the grade book of ELC)." With this approach, you don't have to hand out ideal points or pick them up, but you still need to bring a list of the preassigned ideal points so you can 1) calculate the median after striking those who do not attend, and 2) give ideal points to students who did not bring their computer.