

PLSC 481J - American Elections & Campaigns

Instructor: Tyler W. Clarke

Class Meeting: TR 4:25-5:50, CW 310

Office Hours: TR 3:00-4:00pm, and by appt., LNG 279

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Seminar Description

This course covers the history and evolution of the modern political campaign in the United States with emphasis on presidential and congressional contests. Students will learn about the origins of the presidential nomination and election processes, the roles of various institutions and actors in these processes (voters, parties, campaign finance regulations, interest groups, the media, etc), and be exposed to important Political Science scholarship dealing with these topics. The course will also deal extensively with the ongoing 2024 presidential election in real time as it unfolds throughout the semester.

Learning Objectives

Students who pass this course will fulfill the requirement for a Social Science General Education course (N Gen Ed). Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to describe major concepts in the study of elections and campaigns and theories of mobilization and political participation in the discipline of Political Science. The primary learning objectives of the course are; first, to provide a clear understanding of the processes and structures of the American political system; second, to improve analytic and argumentative skills that may be used to understand and explain political and social phenomena like elections and campaigns; and third, explore scholarly work in political science and other disciplines that seeks to understand electoral and campaign processes and the outcomes they produce. We will spend time on each of these goals; however, as this is an upper level course, I expect that our emphasis will be on the latter two goals rather than the first.

Statement on the use of AI

I encourage the use of technology, including generative AI tools, to contribute to your understanding of course materials. However, this is a writing intensive class and it is important for assessing student learning that students' written

work be their own. Ultimately students will be accountable for the work that they submit. While I do not recommend use of generative AI (or such tools) for work in this class I do request that if students use AI for **any** portion of **any** submitted assignment they adhere to the following procedure:

- Students will disclose uses of AI clearly in the text of assignments.
- Disclosures will also include a link to the prompt(s) used to generate AI responses. Be sure you know how to document your use of a tool before using it.

Additional Course Policies:

- **Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD):** At Binghamton University, all faculty and instructors have the legal and ethical responsibility to ensure the provision of accommodations that afford enrolled students with disabilities equal access to, and participation in, all institutional programs and activities. Students requesting disability-related accommodation should register with the Services for Students with Disabilities office (SSD). These accommodations can be submitted through Services for Students with Disabilities office (SSD) at any point throughout the semester. Their office is in the University Union, room 119, and can be reached via their office phone number, (607) -777-2686, or through their email ssd@binghamton.edu. Students are responsible for contacting their instructors to discuss the implementation of their accommodation. As accommodations can be sensitive, students are encouraged to schedule a meeting with the instructor outside of office hours. If students do not contact the instructor about accommodations, it is assumed that they have chosen not to use them now.
- **Classroom Electronics:** Online shopping, Social Media browsing, and online gaming are unacceptable during class. If a student is disrupting class, I reserve the right to ask the student to close their technology, and further issues may result in a ban on technology for not only the student but the entire class usage during class time.
- **Grade Appeals:** All grade appeals must be submitted in writing during class or office hours. All appeals must include an explanation for the grade appeal, including your concerns and the original graded assignment.

Required Texts

- Campaigns And Elections, 4th Edition, John Sides ISBN: 9780393441680
- Green, Donald P., and Alan S. Gerber. Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout. Brookings Institution Press, 2019.

I also reserve the right to assign additional readings from new sources should the need arise.

On reading, or How to Read

Reading academic stuff is a bit different from most other reading. It's important to think about what you're trying to accomplish. With journal articles, the goal has to be to understand the novel claim the paper makes, to understand why that novel claim is interesting or novel (at least according to the author), to understand how the author assesses the evidence, and to understand what that evidence tells us. Most importantly, you should have two answers to each of these - what the author says, and what you think. The author may tell you the argument is important for some reason, and you might disagree - you might think it's unimportant, or important for a different reason, or wrong, or whatever.

On Writing

It would be dishonest to say there is not a good deal of variation in what one instructor or another defines as "good" writing; to that end I will do my best to spell out my expectations explicitly. First and foremost, I cannot emphasize enough how much I prize clarity and conciseness in writing submissions. An audience's attention is hard to obtain and easy to lose and I am no exception. Often I suggest to students when writing or presenting they ask "What is the minimum number of words I need to communicate my message?" And this class will follow suit. Obviously I recognize that at times an author must sacrifice some degree of brevity in exchange for an appropriately thorough treatment of the subject but students should not treat this admission as a license to expound needlessly.

Moving toward more specific details I expect all assignments typed, in 12pt Times New Roman or Arial font, and double spaced with numbered pages. All submissions should have the students' name clearly indicated on the first page as well as any relevant assignment information and a date. Beyond these I request students omit unnecessary stylistic elements such as cover pages and the like, although whimsical titles are within bounds if you are so inclined. Although it may seem both old-fashioned and environmentally irresponsible I request all **essay** assignments be submitted in hard copy form i.e. printed out, stapled not paper clipped. This is not a class in English spelling or grammar but proper execution of these elements serves to bolster the persuasiveness of your essay as well as its clarity therefore do your best to avoid such mistakes. As far as citation styles go I am agnostic, Political Science tends to employ Chicago style or APSA (a variant of Chicago) but as long as the student is consistent and clear I will be satisfied. On the topic of citation, it is absolutely fundamental that students cite those authors who served as direct or indirect inspiration for their ideas both in the text of their assignments as well as at the end in a

bibliography or works cited list. Finally, when writing for this class it should be ever present in the student's mind that the goal of our class is analysis, not summary. In almost all cases I am well aware of what was said in such and such book/text/article and the space you are devoting to telling me what I already know could be devoted instead to telling me what I don't know i.e. your take on the content. While I do believe the guidelines offered in this section are quite expansive I do not consider them exhaustive and so any omissions need not be interpreted as especially meaningful.

Course Requirements

The course grade will be determined on the following basis:

- Participation - 20%
- Midterm - 15%
- Short Essays - 20%
- Campaign Report Assignment - 15%
- Campaign Report Paper - 30%

Participation

This is a seminar course not a lecture so participation is fundamental to success. I expect students to come to class not only having read the material assigned but also prepared to discuss it at length. The first 30 minutes of class I will give an overview of the topic at hand including the broad themes, history, and/or background context that may or may not be present in the readings assigned. The remainder of the class time will be devoted to students' discussion/analysis of the readings. Students are encouraged to ask questions (both of the instructor and each other), answer questions, take stances and support those stances with real world evidence, etc. Another core component of participation is not only how much you participate but the quality of that participation. Student discussion should reflect a deep understanding of the material for a given week/day as well as the broader material explored in the class as a whole. Lastly, participation should **always** be conducted in a civil and respectful manner consistent with the intellectual community we inhabit and university policies on harassment, bullying, and the student code of conduct. Students agree to adhere to these policies by continuing their enrollment in the course. The instructor reserves the right to ask disruptive or disrespectful students to leave (I do not foresee having to use this right but I reserve it nonetheless).

Midterm

We will have a midterm in this class on March 21st, the exam will consist of a mix of "identification" questions and short answer questions (3-7 sentences). The midterm will cover the content of weeks 1 through 7. The format will be a choice of 10 of 15 terms to identify (define, example, significance) and 3 of 5 short answers. Given the advance notice I expect all students to be in attendance and those in need of accommodations to be sufficiently proactive to secure a place in the testing center or any other such needs.

Short Essays

Students will write two short essays from the list of six topics below. The essays should be 3-5 pages in length and fully respond to the prompt. More specific guidance on written assignments is described in a separate section. Students will have considerable leeway in terms of time to submit their short essays, therefore students should try to take advantage of this flexibility as a means of maximizing their submission quality. Topics are grouped into two clusters of three with students choosing one topic from each cluster and each cluster having its own due date. Submissions should clearly indicate the prompt they are responding to (e.g. 1,2,3).

Topics:

Cluster 1 Due No Later than Feb. 27

Choose 1 from the following:

1. Choose a historical campaign/election and analyze it in the context of the course's content. What sorts of tactics and strategies were used? How effective in your estimation, (given what we know as inhabitants of the future and burgeoning scholars of elections), were these tactics? What was the biggest contributor to the ultimate outcome in your opinion? Be sure to support your positions with a variety of evidence (news, scholarship, etc.). As with all essays in this class, the goal is analysis rather than simple description and as such summary of the campaign/election in question, while more necessary here than in other prompts, should be deployed sparingly.
2. In 1964 the political scientist John W. Kingdon conducted research on candidate beliefs and campaigns in which he interviewed 66 candidates for a variety of offices. He details his findings in a short, 150 page book published in 1966 "Candidates For Office: Beliefs and Strategies" which thanks to the passage of time is now available freely on Google Books (a pdf is also available on Brightspace). You are to read chapter 1 and at least 2 other chapters and then write an essay analyzing the merits of the work. The essay should focus on what truth you see in Kingdon's analysis, what you think has changed (or

stayed the same) since his analysis was conducted, and overall how the work adds to our understanding of candidate beliefs and strategies. *Two points of caution: 1) the argument that Kingdon's work has little value due to its publication date is not only incorrect but also uninteresting (two things one does not want in an essay); 2) this essay calls for *analysis*, not summary, therefore descriptions of the work should only be present to serve analytical purposes. I am open to other analytical explorations of Kingdon's work such as what you think he would find if he conducted this research today but such essays should still reflect a deep understanding of the original piece.

3. There has been much made of the need to reform the U.S. presidential primary election system and in fact there exist several different proposals for such reforms from many different sources. You will examine three different sources for primary reform: Heather Fredrick's 2012 feature in PS: Political Science and Politics (on Brightspace), a report from Fordham University Law School faculty (on Brightspace), and at least three substantially different plans from the 8 offered at fixtheprimaries.com (e.g. the America Plan vs. the Rotating Regional Plan vs. the One Day National Primary Plan). Compare and contrast the plans offered by the three different sources: what do they have in common and where do they differ? and how by how much? Identify the one you think would serve best and discuss the impacts you expect it would have and why supporting your arguments with a variety of evidence. Or if you feel so inclined you could attempt to articulate a defense of the status quo or even a reform plan all your own (although these options are sure to be labor intensive).

Cluster 2 Due No Later than Apr. 18

Choose 1 from the following:

1. In our excerpt from Robert Erikson's 2007 book "The Macro Polity" the author alludes to set of competing models of voting and elections. One model attributes decision making to psychological explanations of candidate evaluations and another to general economic indicators. These are sometimes called the Michigan model and the Downsian model respectively. Your task is read two articles (cited below) which represent the different models, discuss their merits and the strength of their arguments, and then choose a "side" and defend that choice with a variety of evidence. Consider also how these models stand the test of time and if need be delve deeper into the literature.
 - Campbell, Angus. "Voters and elections: Past and present." The Journal of Politics 26, no. 4 (1964): 745-757.
 - Popkin, Samuel, John W. Gorman, Charles Phillips, and Jeffrey A. Smith. "Comment: What have you done for me lately? To-

ward an investment theory of voting." *American Political Science Review* 70, no. 3 (1976): 779-805.

2. There is a wealth of Political Science literature on not only the efficacy of political advertising but also its potential impacts on American democracy. We touch on these themes only briefly in our course due to time constraints with much of our time spent on efficacy rather than democratic impacts. Your task is to take up the issue of democratic impacts of advertising and stake out a position on one side or the other i.e. are political ads destroying our democracy or not. You should read and cite at least two scholarly works as part of your inquiry but likely it will be more. While I will not explicitly direct you to read one article or another I suggest consulting the works of the following authors:

- Diana Mutz
- Kathleen Hall Jamieson
- Stephen Ansolabehere
- Martin "Marty" Wattenberg

3. Our class deals primarily with the presidential contest and congressional elections but there are many more elections that occur in the U.S. To that end choose a particular office and conduct an in-depth analysis of its elections; what does a campaign for this office entail? what are the techniques used? how competitive are they? how do these elections relate to the others we've studied? what changes in the elections have occurred over time? And why? Some examples include an examination of judicial elections, state legislative elections, local elections, mayoral elections in large cities, or gubernatorial elections. As always integrate our course content into your analysis and support your positions with a variety of evidence. You could also compare and contrast elections of a given office across jurisdictions e.g. state legislative elections in Maine vs California.

Campaign Report

As we have the advantage of conducting this class during an active campaign season students will choose a campaign/race to follow for the duration of the semester. I recommend choosing either a congressional or gubernatorial race but students may solicit permission to follow other sorts of campaigns. Every two weeks students will submit a 1-3 page report on the latest developments in their chosen campaigns. Developments may be candidate appearances, debates, organizer events, news coverage, scandals, polling numbers or any combination of these or other sorts of activity. Students should not merely document the activity of their campaigns but also analyze them through the context of the content we are learning in a given week. Remember a core theme of this class is looking beyond the "usual suspects" in the study of campaigns (candidates and parties) and so students should make an effort to document the role of voters,

activists, and nonprofits in their chosen campaigns as well. Students should inform me of their chosen campaign no later than Jan. 25th. The first report will be due Feb. 1st and can focus on the student's reasons for choosing the campaign and an overview of the contest (e.g. who are the candidates, details about the jurisdiction, etc).

Campaign Report Paper

The Campaign Report paper should be the culmination of your exposure to all the class content and of your campaign reporting assignment. Students will write an essay, 5-8 pages long, in two parts. The first part should describe the dynamics of the campaign they have followed all semester long, how has the contest changed from the start to the end of the semester e.g. have candidates dropped out? entered? has it become more or less competitive and if so why? does it command a great deal of national attention or very little and again if so why? What techniques have dominated the campaign? Has it been a war of ads? a social media storm? an old-fashioned door-to-door ground game? Be sure to refer back to the content we have studied this semester. The second portion of the essay should entail students' advice to the candidates or an individual candidate from their campaign. The advice should come in the form of a comprehensive campaign plan (chapters 11 and 12 of Green and Gerber should prove quite useful here) where you advise the candidate as what techniques they ought to employ and in what measure as well as what messaging you think would work best for them. As always support your claims with a variety of evidence and be sure to cite those sources you've leaned on.

Grades will be assigned on the following scale:

94 – 100 = A

90 – 93 = A–

87 – 89 = B+

83 – 86 = B

80 – 82 = B–

77 – 79 = C+

73 – 76 = C

70 – 72 = C–

60 – 69 = D

< 60 = F

Attendance

Given that 20% of the grade in this course is participation it should go without saying that attending class is of the utmost importance; however, as in all things, clarity is best. Students are expected to attend all class meetings unless absence is necessary due to illness or other such issues. If a student needs to miss class they should email the instructor **prior to** the class in question. Unexcused absences directly impact not only the student in question but the rest of the class as a whole since we are deprived of our classmate's unique insights which are vital to a seminar-style course. With this in mind it is expected that no student should miss more than 3 of the 28 class meetings we have scheduled this semester without serious extenuating circumstances. Students who fail to uphold their commitment to this course and their classmates will be penalized 10% of their final grade. Lastly, I have put forth a great deal of effort into making the due dates of all assignments known ahead of time therefore if a student anticipates missing a class meeting where an assignment is due they should submit the assignment early rather than late. This is especially true for short essays for which students are afforded substantial flexibility.

Course Schedule

Week 1, Jan. 16 & 18 - Introduction and Background

- Sides, Chapter 1
- Sides, Chapter 3

Week 2, Jan. 23 & 25 - Introduction and Background cont.

Campaign selection due by EOD Jan. 25

- Sides, Chapter 1
- Sides, Chapter 3
- Carleton, William G. "The revolution in the presidential nominating convention." *Political Science Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (1957): 224-240.

Week 3, Jan. 30 & Feb. 1 - The Presidential Contest

Campaign Report (CR) 1 Due Feb. 1

- Sides Ch. 9

- Wlezien, Christopher, and Robert S. Erikson. "The timeline of presidential election campaigns." *The Journal of Politics* 64, no. 4 (2002): 969-993.
- Gelman, Andrew, and Gary King. "Why are American presidential election campaign polls so variable when votes are so predictable?." *British Journal of Political Science* 23, no. 4 (1993): 409-451.

Week 4, Feb. 6 & 8 - The Presidential Contest cont.

- Sides Ch. 9
- Aldrich, John H. "A dynamic model of presidential nomination campaigns." *American Political Science Review* 74, no. 3 (1980): 651-669.
- Cohen, Marty, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. "Party versus faction in the reformed presidential nominating system." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 49, no. 4 (2016): 701-708.
- Bartels, Larry M. "Expectations and preferences in presidential nominating campaigns." *American Political Science Review* 79, no. 3 (1985): 804-815.

Week 5, Feb. 13 & 15 - Campaign Strategies

CR 2 Due Feb. 15

- Sides Ch. 5
- Green and Gerber Ch. 1-2
- Green and Gerber Ch. 3-6 & 8

Week 6, Feb. 20 & 22 - Campaign Strategies cont.

- Nickerson, David W., and Todd Rogers. "Political campaigns and big data." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 28, no. 2 (2014): 51-74.
- Darr, Joshua P., and Matthew S. Levendusky. "Relying on the ground game: The placement and effect of campaign field offices." *American Politics Research* 42, no. 3 (2014): 529-548.
- Snyder Jr, James M., and Hasin Yousaf. Making rallies great again: The effects of presidential campaign rallies on voter behavior, 2008-2016. No. w28043. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2020.

Week 7, Feb. 27 & 29 - Campaign Finance

CR 3 Due Feb. 29

- Sides Ch. 4
- Jacobson, Gary C. "The effects of campaign spending in congressional elections." *American Political Science Review* 72, no. 2 (1978): 469-491.
- Green, Donald Philip, and Jonathan S. Krasno. "Salvation for the spendthrift incumbent: Reestimating the effects of campaign spending in House elections." *American Journal of Political Science* (1988): 884-907.

Week 8, Mar. 5 & 7 - **No Class: Spring Break**

Week 9, Mar. 12 & 14 - Congressional Elections

CR 4 Due Mar. 14

- Sides Ch. 10
- Zaller, John. "Politicians as prize fighters: Electoral selection and incumbency advantage." *Politicians and party politics* (1998): 125-85.
- Cox, Gary W., and Jonathan N. Katz. "Why did the incumbency advantage in US House elections grow?." *American journal of political science* (1996): 478-497.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, and James M. Snyder Jr. "The incumbency advantage in US elections: An analysis of state and federal offices, 1942-2000." *Election law journal* 1, no. 3 (2002): 315-338.

Week 10, Mar. 19 & 21 - Congressional Elections cont.

- Sides Ch. 10
- Tufte, Edward R. "Determinants of the outcomes of midterm congressional elections." *American Political Science Review* 69, no. 3 (1975): 812-826.
- Campbell, James E. "Explaining presidential losses in midterm congressional elections." *The Journal of Politics* 47, no. 4 (1985): 1140-1157.

Week 11, Mar. 26 & 28 - Persuasion, Participation, and Vote Choice

CR 5 Due Mar. 28

- Sides Ch. 12
- Sides Ch. 13
- Erikson, Robert S., Michael B. Mackuen, and James A. Stimson. "Elections." Chapter. In *The Macro Polity*, 237–83. Cambridge Studies in Public Opinion and Political Psychology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Week 12, Apr. 2 & 4 - Persuasion, Participation, and Vote Choice cont.

- Lipsitz, Keena. "The consequences of battleground and "spectator" state residency for political participation." *Political Behavior* 31, no. 2 (2009): 187-209.
- Holbrook, Thomas M., and Scott D. McClurg. "The mobilization of core supporters: Campaigns, turnout, and electoral composition in United States presidential elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 4 (2005): 689-703.
- Druckman, James N. "Priming the vote: Campaign effects in a US Senate election." *Political Psychology* 25, no. 4 (2004): 577-594.
- Kalla, Joshua L., and David E. Broockman. "The minimal persuasive effects of campaign contact in general elections: Evidence from 49 field experiments." *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 1 (2018): 148-166.

Week 13, Apr. 9 & 11 Media and Advertising

CR 6 Due Apr. 11

- Sides Ch. 8
- Krasno, Jonathan S., and Donald P. Green. "Do televised presidential ads increase voter turnout? Evidence from a natural experiment." *The Journal of Politics* 70, no. 1 (2008): 245-261.
- Franz, Michael M., Paul Freedman, Ken Goldstein, and Travis N. Ridout. "Understanding the effect of political advertising on voter turnout: A response to Krasno and Green." *The Journal of Politics* 70, no. 1 (2008): 262-268.

Week 14, Apr. 16 & 18 - Media and Advertising cont.

- Sides Ch. 8

- Green and Gerber Ch. 7 & 9
- Ridout, Travis N., and Glen R. Smith. "Free advertising: How the media amplify campaign messages." *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (2008): 598-608.
- Hong, Sounman. "Who benefits from Twitter? Social media and political competition in the US House of Representatives." *Government Information Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2013): 464-472.

Week 15, 23 & 25 - **No Class: Passover Break**

Week 16, Apr. 30 & May 2 - The Other Campaigns

Campaign Report Paper Due May 2

- Sides Ch. 7
- Sides Ch. 11
- Holbrook, Thomas M., and Aaron C. Weinschenk. "Campaigns, mobilization, and turnout in mayoral elections." *Political Research Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2014): 42-55.