PSCI 215-1
Fall 2024

Professor Jamie Druckman
j.druckman@rochester.edu
Office Hours: Tues./Thurs.
2:00-3:00 or by appointment.
324 Harkness Hall

American Elections

Course Description

What explains the current state of the American political system? How do elections and political campaigns work? Are voters manipulated by slick media-based election campaigns? What about campaign ads or social media? Do polls help or harm voters? Do differences in how states regulate voting matter? The goal of this course is to enhance our understanding of the contemporary political environment, how elections work, how politicians conduct campaigns, how campaigns and media coverage affect voters, and how we study election campaign dynamics. We will not only examine the academic literature on these topics but will also follow the ongoing events of the 2024 campaigns. Through a combination of assignments, quizzes, and tests, we will arrive at an understanding of elections and campaigns. We also will consider the place of elections and campaigns in contemporary American democracy.

Class Meeting and Structure

The class meets in Meliora Room 203 on Tuesday and Thursdays from 3:25-4:40. Students are expected to attend all classes, to complete all assigned readings and assignments on time, and to actively participate. Classes will include some lecture, informal discussions of the 2024 campaign, discussions of the assigned readings, and class activities/assignments. Additionally, assignments will be provided during many classes, and unexcused absences will result in a 0 on such assignments.

Assignments and Grades

Students will be involved in five types of formal activities, as follows.

1. Election Diary. Each student will spend 5-10 minutes a day keeping an election (digital) diary.
    a. This will entail recording from where they received political information (if any), what that information was, and what they thought of it.
    b. It also will involve recording, on a weekly basis, thoughts about whether the election generates enthusiasm or distress (or both or neither) and how the election affects beliefs about institutions and democracy.
    c. To ensure this is done on a daily basis, each student will choose one newspaper that they will look at each day and then record the front-page headline in their diary (it is up to the student if they want to read more of the paper). The same paper should be used throughout the course.

Students will turn in their diaries every other week and receive either full credit, half credit, or no credit. Full credit requires having a daily entry of at least four sentences (most days) and covering the topics. The content itself will not be graded (the idea is to be authentic and keep a record for yourselves).

The election diary, in total, will compose 10% of each student's grade.

2. Short Individual/Group assignments. There will be a set of five individual or small group assignments. These include:
   a. *AI Legislation:* States have increasingly sought to regulate the use of AI in campaigns. Each student will be assigned a state. The assignment is to learn about the state's AI law and discuss its strengths and weaknesses. Do you think the law will work? Should it be strengthened and if so, how? Should it be weakened or eliminated – why? This should be two pages, double spaced, and is largely an opinion-based argument.
   b. *State Election Laws:* Each student will be assigned a state. For that state, the student will report about the election laws including rules around who is eligible to vote (e.g., felon disenfranchisement), registration rules, early/absentee voting rules, voter identification rules, polling place details, and historic turnout rates. The result will be a spreadsheet with rules for every state. Each student will use these data to write a paper, discussing patterns they observe (e.g., based on region, state partisanship). The essay should be two pages, double spaced.
   c. *Candidate Web Coding.* Each student will be assigned two Congressional or Senate races, with a total of four candidates. In collaboration with professors at Oberlin and High Point University, we have created a detailed coding scheme for looking at the websites. (It takes about an hour to code one site.) Websites are interesting because they provide a holistic statement of the candidate/campaign. Students will code the cites and write a one to two pages, double spaced paper about their impressions. All the data will then be merged so the class can look at patterns.
   d. *Campaign Ad:* Teams of five or six will be assigned a House or Senate candidate. They will create a persuasive video ad for the candidate, using the techniques from the readings. The ad can be general or target a specific state/population. The ad should be turned in via a video recording with a one-page double spaced justification/explanation. The class will watch a selection of the ads.

      Campaign ad groups will be assigned by the professor and provided with time in class to coordinate and work together. In addition, they also are expected to work outside of class. Each student is expected to do their share, and it will be clear who did what. Grades may differ among team members.

   e. Choose one of the following two assignments. You will be asked to register your choice by early September.

      1. *Election Race Report*: Each student will choose one House, Senate, or gubernatorial race. Write a two pages double spaced report that covers: a)

information on the geographic area such its demographics and political orientation, b) the history of the office since 2000, c) the major party candidates' backgrounds, d) the major party candidates' issue positions and campaign spending, e) media coverage/endorsements, and f) the results. Explain what seemed to matter most in the campaign.

2. *Exit Polling*. The most crucial part of elections and democracy is voting. To observe this experience, students will be deployed to spend up to 90 minutes at a polling station, either during early voting or on Election Day. The class will develop a brief survey and students will be asked to solicit voters, after they vote, to complete the survey. Students will turn in the polls and then write about the experience in their election diaries (roughly a half page).

The early voting location is at Staybridge Suites – 1000 Genesee St. It occurs from October 26th to November 3rd, from 9-5 on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and 12-8 on Tuesday and Thursday.

The Election Day regular voting locations, closest to campus are:

Plymouth Garden Apartments – 1400 South Plymouth Avenue, 14611

St. Anne Church – 1600 Mount Hope Avenue, 14620

St. John's Chestnut Court Building – 1 Johns Arbor Drive W. (may want to take short bus ride).

State laws require that you remain at least 100 feet from the polling entrance, only approach voters after they have voted, and emphasize that participation is entirely voluntary.

If a student plans to do the polling but unforeseen circumstances prevent it, the student will then be given an alternative assignment.

Each of these five assignments will compose 12% of each student's grade (for a total of 60%).

3. Reading Annotations/Quizzes. We will allocate some class time for reading some of the assigned materials. During this time, students are asked to put away all electronic devices (including phones). Paper copies of the reading material will be distributed in class. After the reading time (roughly 10 minutes), students will have small group discussions, annotate the reading (i.e., write a critical summary), or take a quiz. Unless instructed otherwise, use of electronic devices during the reading time results in failure. These times will be announced at least one class in advance.

   These annotations/quizzes (all together) will compose 10% of each student's grade.

4. Tests. There will be two tests based on the readings, lectures, and discussion.

   Each of these tests will compose 10% of each student's grade (for a total of 20%).

5. Attendance/Participation. Students are expected to attend every class. If a student misses a class, it is the *student's* responsibility to provide written documentation of a legitimate excuse (see course policies); otherwise, it will be counted as an unexcused absence. Also, if a student misses a class (excused or unexcused), it is the *student's* responsibility to learn about any missed assignments, discussion, and so on. The student should do this by talking to other students (first), the teaching assistants (second), and, if necessary, the professor (third). Participation involves taking part in class activities, discussing class readings in an informed way, discussing ongoing campaign events, and completing occasional informal assignments.

   Attendance/Participation is not a formal part of students' grade, except in exceptional cases. Students who regularly actively participate can earn a bonus of up to 2% to their final grade. Students also can have up to 2% deducted from their final grade. This occurs for students who are chronically absent, disruptive, and/or clearly regularly spend their time during class engaging in other activities (e.g., sleeping, texting).

All assignments should include the student's name and full references and must be uploaded via Blackboard.

A table with a summary of due dates appears at the end of the syllabus. There will be some informal assignments, however, that are not listed on the syllabus; these will be discussed in class.

Writing requirement.

Those taking this course for writing credit will be asked to complete a paper with a research design for data collection on a topic of their choosing. More information/details will be provided to these students (including how this will be factored into their grade). This does not apply to students not taking the class for a writing requirement.

Teaching Assistants

There are four teaching assistants (TAs), listed below. The TAs will assist in certain class activities, hold offices hours to answer questions, and be responsible for grading most of the assignments.

Thomas Chamberlain (tchambe6@ur.rochester.edu) (Graduate TA). Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:00-2:45, Harkness Hall 305.

Elijah Bader-Gregory (ebadergr@u.rochester.edu). Office hours: Tuesday, 12:30-2:00, Political Science Lounge in Harkness Hall.

Owen Christensen (ochriste@u.rochester.edu). Office hours: Thursday, 6:00-7:30, Gleason Study Room.

Tim Mariani (tmarian4@u.rochester.edu). Office hours: Monday / Wednesday, 4:00-6:00, Bosch and Lomb, Third Floor Library.

Readings

Each student should regularly read about the 2024 campaign in a major newspaper (information on library access to *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* can be found here). We will discuss campaign events in many classes. All other readings are either provided by links on the syllabus or provided on Blackboard by the professor. Readings could be changed throughout the semester; this will be discussed in class.

Students are expected to read all of the assigned readings before each class. Surprise quizzes on the readings are possible (as part of the Reading Annotations/Quizzes grade). If a student misses a class without a legitimate excuse, they will receive a 0 on any quizzes.

Course Policies

It is the student's responsibility to obtain an assignment if they are absent during the class in which the assignment is distributed or discussed. Unless otherwise noted, assignments are due at 5PM EST on due dates and should be submitted via Blackboard. Make-up in-class assignments and/or late papers will be permitted *only* if the student presents written documentation of legitimate circumstances that prevented the student from completing the assignment on time. This documentation must be provided in a timely manner (i.e., within a week); failure to provide such documentation will result in the student receiving a 0 on the assignment in question. Legitimate circumstances include religious holidays, illness (verified by a note from a health care provider), serious family emergencies, subpoenas, jury duty, military service, and participation in group activities sponsored by the University.

If a student wishes to appeal an assigned grade, they must submit a *written* statement to the professor explaining why the grade should be changed. This must be done within one week from when the assignment was graded. Incompletes will be granted only in the case of documented illness, and if the student and professor complete the required form.

Students are expected to type each written assignment. The assignments should be proofread; spelling, grammar, and writing style will make up part of a student's grade.

Artificial Intelligence

The use of artificial intelligence in writing and research is quickly evolving. It can be very useful for many tasks including academic ones. Yet, for the assignments in this class, it is not a technology that would be particularly helpful. Thus, artificial intelligence should not be used for assignments. It is often easy to detect its use and if it is detected on an assignment, the result will be a score of 0.

Course Outline

August 27 Introduction

August 29 Politics in the 21st Century: From Bush v. Gore to the Capitol Insurrection

"The 2000 Election Never Ended," by Andrew Rice, *New York Magazine*, 2020.

"9/11 Was a Test. The Books of the Last Two Decades Show How America Failed," by Carol Lozada, *The Washington Post*, 2021.

"Who Authorized America's Endless Wars?," by Andrea Mazzarino, *The Nation*, 2021.

"A Short History of the Great Recession," by Wayne Duggan, *Forbes*, 2023.

"The Arab Spring at Ten Years: What's the Legacy of the Uprisings?," by Kali Robinson and Will Merrow, Council on Foreign Relations, 2020.

"How Partisanship Affects Pandemic Thinking," by Maggie Astor, *The New York Times*, August 19, 2021.

September 3 Demographic Change, Threat, and Trust in America

"New Census Projections Show Immigration Is Essential to the Growth and Vitality of a More Diverse U.S. Population," by William H. Frey, *Brookings*, 2023.

"The Scientific Case That America is Becoming More Prejudiced," by Brian Resnick, *Vox*, 2017.

"A Close-Up Picture of Partisan Segregation, Among 180 Million Voters," by Emily Badger, Kevin Quealy, and Josh Katz, *The New York Times*, 2021.

"Understanding the Crisis in Institutional Trust," by Jacob Harold, *Urban Institute*, April, 2024.

September 5 No Class

September 10 The Evolution of Media in America

Media Politics, by Shanto Iyengar, 2022, Chapter 5.

"How Harmful Is Social Media? | The New Yorker," by Gideon Lews-Kraus, *The New Yorker*, June 3, 2022.

"AI and Elections," Brennan Center for Justice, 2023-2024. *Students will be assigned to read four of eight reports.*

"Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Elections and Campaigns," National Center for State Legislatures, July 15, 2024.

AI Legislation Assignment Due

September 12 Polarization

Polarization: What Everyone Needs to Know, by Nolan McCarty, Oxford University Press, 2019, Chapter 3.

"Trump's Approval Ratings so Far Are Unusually Stable – and Deeply Partisan," by Amina Dunn, Pew Research, August 24, 2020.

"Partisan Antipathy: More Intense, More Personal," by Pew Research, October 10, 2019.

"Political Sectarianism in America," by Eli J. Finkel et al., *Science*, 2020.

"The Perception Gap, Findings," by More in Common, June 2019. *Take the Perception Gap Quiz.*

September 17 How Democratic Elections Work

"Electoral Systems," by Alan Ware, *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)*, 2015.

"Democratic Electoral Systems Around the World, 1946–2020," Nils-Christian Bormann and Matt Golder, *Electoral Studies* 78: 102487, 2022.

"Primer on the U.S. Election System," by Thad E. Hall, 2012.

State Election Law Data Due

September 19 Voting Rights and Political Participation

The ~~R~~Fight to Vote, by Michael Waldman, 2016, pages 125-170.

"Election Administration at State and Local Levels (ncsl.org)," by the National Conference of State Legislatures, 2023.

"Voting Laws Roundup: May 2024 | Brennan Center for Justice," Brennan Center for Justice, May, 2024.

"Reporting on Violence and Threats Against US Election Workers," by Clark Merrefield, *Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy*, June 18, 2024.

State Election Law Paper Due

September 24 Test

September 26 Polling

The Voter's Guide to Election Polls, by Michael W. Traugott and Paul J. Lavrakas, Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 2008, pages 1-47, 59-106.

"American Association for Public Opinion Research Task Force on 2020 Pre-Election Polling, Executive Summary."

October 1 Election Surveys and Experiments

"How Public Polling Has Changed in the 21st Century," by Courtney Kennedy, Dana Popky and Scott Keeter, Pew Research Center, April 19, 2023.

Go to: https://electionstudies.org/data-tools/anes-guide/. Choose one topic and come ready to report on trends over time.

Go to: https://abcnews.go.com/538. Choose one topic and come ready to report on the details of the poll(s).

"The Power of Television Images: The First Kennedy-Nixon Debate Revisited," by James N. Druckman, *The Journal of Politics* 65: 559-571, 2003.

October 3 The 1968 Chicago Convention

"A Deeply Divided Nation," by Kenneth T. Walsh, *U.S. News and World Report*, 2018.

"'The Whole World Is Watching': The 1968 Democratic Convention, 50 Years Later," by Maggie Astor, *New York Times,* 2018.

"The Good Old Days?," by the Brookings Institute, 2018.

Watch Decades documentary on 1968 Democratic National Convention

Read Website Coding Framework.

October 8 Website Coding

October 10 Persuading Voters

Persuasion, by Daniel J. O'Keefe, 2016, pages 1-9, *Skim* pages 188-267 (as needed for your presentations).

"Political Campaigns and Big Data," by David W. Nickerson and Todd Rogers, *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 28: 51-73, 2014. (*Skim*.)

"Campaigns Influence Election Outcomes Less Than You Think," by David W. Nickerson and Todd Rogers, *Science* 369: 1181-1182, 2020.

October 14-15 Fall Break

October 17 No Class

Candidate Web Coding Paper Due.

October 22 Misinformation

"The Science of Fake News," by David M.J. Lazer et al., *Science* 359: 1094-1096, 2018.

"Misinformation Interventions Are Common, Divisive, and Poorly Understood," by Emily Saltz, Soubhik Barari, Claire Leibowicz, and Claire Wardle. *Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review* 2(5), 2021.

"Misinformation Is Eroding the Public's Confidence in Democracy," by Gabriel R. Sanchez and Keesha Middlemass, *Brookings*, 2022.

Campaign Ad and Paper Due.

October 24 Debates

"Performing Populism: Trump's Transgressive Debate Style and the Dynamics of Twitter Response," by Erik P. Busy, Jordan M. Foley, Josephine Lukito, Larissa Doroshenko, Dhavan V. Shah, Jon C.W. Pevehouse, and Chris Wells, *New Media & Society* 22: 634-658, 2020.

"Biden's Debate Performance Threatens His Ability to Win," by William A. Galston, *Brookings*, 2024.

"Inside Biden's Unprecedented Exit From the Presidential Race," by Jeremy Herb, MJ Lee, Jeff Zeleny, Phil Mattingly, Arlette Saenz and Priscilla Alvarez, *CNN*, July 21, 2024.

Explore the website for Commission on Presidential Debates, particularly look at the history section.

"The Demise of the Commission on Presidential Debates," by Norman J. Ornstein, *Brookings*, June 2024.

October 29 Gender and Elections

"Self-Confidence and Gender Gaps in Political Interest, Attention, and Efficacy," by Jennifer Wolak, *The Journal of Politics* 82: 1490-1501, 2020.

"Reassessing Public Support for a Female President," by Barry C. Burden, Yoshikuni Ono, and Masahiro Yamada, *The Journal of Politics* 79: 1073-1078, 2017.

See Center for American Woman and Politics. Students will be assigned to read specific reports from the website.

October 31 Race and Elections

"We Are One: The Social Maintenance of Black Democratic Party Loyalty," by Julian J. Wamble, Chryl N. Laird, Corrine M. McConnaughy, and Ismail K. White, *The Journal of Politics* 84: 682-697, 2022. (*skim*)

"What Trump Means When He Mispronounces 'Kamala'," by John McWhorter, *The New York Times*, August 1, 2024.

"Not One of Us: Trump Uses Old Tactic to Sow Suspicion About Harris," by Adam Nagourney, *The New York Times*, August 2, 2024.

"Do Politicians Racially Discriminate Against Constituents? A Field Experiment on State Legislators," by Daniel M. Butler, and David E. Broockman, *American Journal of Political Science* 55: 463-477, 2011. (*skim*)

November 5 Election Day Polling (or work on Election Race Report)

November 7 Young Voters

Making Young Voters: Converting Civic Attitudes Into Civic Action, by John B. Holbein, and D. Sunshine Hillygus, Cambridge University Press, 2020, Chapter 1.

"Learning to Dislike Your Opponents: Political Socialization in the Era of Polarization," by Matthew Tyler, and Shanto Iyengar, *American Political Science Review* 117: 347-354, 2023.

November 12 Campaigns and Representation Speaker (Anna Kanter)

See https://indigov.com/

Exit Poll Diary Entry / Election Race Report Due.

November 14 No Class

November 19 Money, Speech, and Local Elections

"Campaign Finance," by the Policy Circle, 2023.

Campaign Finance and American Democracy: What the Public Really Thinks and Why It Matters, by David M. Primo and Jeffrey D. Milyo, University of Chicago Press, 2020, chapters 1 and 9.

"School Board Elections in the US: What Research Shows," by Denise-Marie Ordway, *Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy*, May 28, 2024.

November 21 Test

November 26 Elections and Democratic Erosion

"Searching for Bright Lines in the Trump Presidency," by John M. Carey, Gretchen Helmke, Brendan Nyhan, Michell Sanders, and Susan Stokes. *Perspectives on Politics, 17*(3), 699–718, 2019.

"The Crisis of American Democracy," by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *American Educator*, Fall, 2000.

"Here's What Persuades Americans to Support Democracy Over Party," by Robb Willer and Jan Voelkel, *The Washington* Post, September 13, 2022.

"House Republicans Were Rewarded for Supporting Donald Trump's 'Stop the Steal' Efforts," by Larry M. Bartels, and Nicolas Carnes, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120: e2309072120, 2023. (*Skim.*)

See https://brightlinewatch.org/

.

November 27-December 1 Thanksgiving Break

December 3 Democratic Reforms

"Reforming the Electoral Count Act," League of Women Voters, November 27, 2023.

"Warning of 'Extreme' Agenda, Biden Calls for Supreme Court Overhaul," by Katie Rogers, *The New York Times*, July 29, 2024

"Electoral College Reform: 110th Congress Proposals, the National Popular Vote Campaign, and Other Alternative Developments," Congressional Research Service, February 9, 2009, pages 1-6.

"The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act," Brennan Center for Justice, February 29, 2024.

"A Proposal for Bipartisan Federal Election Reform," by Rachel Orey, Bipartisan Policy Center, July 31, 2023.

See https://www.democratic-reforms.org/

December 5 Reflections on the 2024 Election

Assignments

Assignment	Due Date
AI Legislation Assignment	September 10
State Election Law Data	September 17
State Election Law Paper	September 19
Test	September 24
Candidate Web Coding Paper	October 17
Campaign Ad and Paper	October 22
Exit Poll Diary Entry	November 12
Election Race Report	November 12
Test	November 21