Professor Jamie Druckman   PSCI 215-1
jdruckma@ur.rochester.edu   Fall Semester, 2025
Office: 324 Harkness   Office Hours: T./Th. 2:00-
                                            3:00/by appointment

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 also will reflect on the events of actual 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. By the end of the course, students will understand the nature of campaign strategies and how electoral campaigns have evolved over time.

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, 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.

Throughout the semester, the Professor will lecture about the 2024 presidential election campaign (particularly during the classes on debates, race, and gender). The course outline may change as well depending on the amount of time devoted to each topic (e.g., some topics may take longer/shorter than anticipated).

Assignments and Grades

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

1. Short Individual/Group assignments. There will be a set of five individual or small group assignments. These include:
   a. *Congressional Districts:* States draw the districts for federal House elections. Each student will be assigned a state. The assignment is to document a) what is the process through which the state draws districts and has that process changed since 1960?, b) since 2000, have there been campaigns after redistricting that pitted two incumbents against one another and if so which party won?, and c) how have the Congressional

delegations evolved since 2000 relative to presidential vote in the state? This should be two to three pages, double spaced.

   b. *Local Election Laws:* Each student will be assigned a city. For that city, the student will report about the election laws including a) what elected offices exist at the city level, b) how and when are elections held/votes counted, c) who is eligible to vote in the city elections and what was the turnout in the most recent election, and d) what is the partisan composition of elected officials. Students will enter this information in a class google spreadsheet. Each student will use these data to write a paper, discussing patterns they observe across three to five cities (the specific cities can be any the student prefers). The essay should be two to three pages, double spaced.

   c. *Campaign Ad:* Teams of five or six will be assigned a 2024 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.

   d. *Candidate Biographies:* Candidates come from many distinct backgrounds. A database available at: https://campaignview.org/ offers details on most major party House candidates between 2018 and 2022. Read the article about these data. Then choose four states and one year. Explore all of the candidates' biographies and issue positions. What is the gender division overall? Do you see any patterns of gender by party / issue positions / professional background? Answer these questions across states and then discuss whether there are differences between the states you explore. In short, compare differences by gender across all states, and then whether there are differences between states. The essay should be two to three pages, double spaced plus extra pages with tables that report the results of gender divisions by state and any other analyses you pursue.

   Each of these assignments will comprise 8% of each student's grade (for a total of 32%).

2. *Election Race Report*: Each student will choose one 2022 House, Senate, or gubernatorial race. Write a four-page 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) the results, and f) anything notable about the winner since being elected. Explain what seemed to matter most in the campaign.

   The report will comprise 15% of each student's grade.

3. Reading Quizzes. There will be occasional quizzes on the assigned readings. This may or may not be announced in advance. Missing class when a quiz occurs results in a 0 unless a legitimate excuse is provided.

   There will be at least one quiz after the second test.

   These annotations/quizzes (all together) will comprise 15% of each student's grade.

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

   The test that the student performs best on will be worth 20% of their grade. The other test (on which they perform worse) will be 15% of their grade (for a total of 35%).

All assignments should include the student's name and full references (written out in any style such as Chicago, APA – do not just provide links) 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.

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 campaign events, and completing occasional informal assignments.

Attendance/Participation will comprise 3% of each student's grade. Students who attend class and regularly participate will earn a perfect score. Students who are chronically absent, disruptive, and/or clearly spend their time during class engaging in other activities (e.g., sleeping, texting) will receive 0 credit for this part of the grade.

When videos are being played or speakers are presented, students will not be allowed to take out their phones and will be asked to close their computers.

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.

Alice Brocheux (abrocheu@UR.Rochester.edu). Office hours: Wednesday, 3:00-4:30, Harkness Hall 315A.

Aniela Giarmo (agiarmo@u.rochester.edu). Office hours: Monday or Wednesday, 4:00-4:45, Gleason Study Room.

Aliya Peremel (aperemel@u.rochester.edu). Office hours: Tuesday, 11:00-12:30, Political Science Lounge in Harkness Hall.

Katie Young (cyoung41@u.rochester.edu). Office hours: Wednesday, 10:30-12:00, Political Science Lounge in Harkness Hall.

Readings

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. For the few readings that are labeled "skim," students should make sure to understand the main points but the details are less crucial. 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 held that day.

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 by midnight on the stated due date 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. Put another way, late assignments will not be accepted without a documented rationale. Any 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. While the class does not have formal rules on the use of artificial intelligence, incorrect content in assignments (that is common due to artificial intelligence hallucinations) will substantially lower grades.

Course Outline

August 26   Introduction

August 28   Evolution of American Politics: _America First_ Documentary

"Foreign Policy: Where is Trump Going?," by Michael McFaul, Hoover Institution, 2025.

"Trump's Tariffs and 'One Big Beautiful Bill' Face More Opposition as His Support Ratings Slip – Confidence in Trump on Foreign Policy Issues," by Jocelyn Kiley, Gabriel Borelli, Joseph Copeland, and Shanay Gracia, Pew Research Center, August 14, 2025.

"How Americans View the Trump Administration's Approach to the Russia-Ukraine War," by Hannah Hartig, Pew Research Center, August 14, 2025.

September 2   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 4   Politics in the 21ˢᵗ Century (cont.) and Demographic Change

"The Meh-ification of Jan. 6," By Aaron Blake, _Washington Post_, January 6, 2025.

"Support for Black Lives Matter Surges Last Year. Did It Last?," by Jennifer Chudy and Hakeem Jefferson, _New York Times_, May 22, 2021.

"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.

September 9 Trust in America

"[Fifty Years of Declining Confidence & Increasing Polarization in Trust in American Institutions](#)," by Henry E. Brady, and Thomas B. Kent, *Daedalus* 151: 43-66, 2022.

"[Understanding the Crisis in Institutional Trust](#)," by Jacob Harold, *Urban Institute*, April, 2024.

"[America' Deepening Mistrust of Institutions](#)," by Claudia Deane, Pew Charitable Trust, 2024.

September 11 No Class*

*[Watch](#) or [listen](#) to *The War on Government*

September 16 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.

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

"[Podcasts as a Source of News and Information](#)," by Elisa Shearer et al., Pew Research Center, April 18, 2023.

"[How Popular Podcasts Became a Political Must-Stop, Even In An Off-Election Year](#)," by Stephen Fowler and Juana Sumers, NPR, July 31, 2025.

Congressional Districts Assignment Due

September 18 No Class

September 23 Polarization

[Polarization: What Everyone Needs to Know](#), by Nolan McCarty, Oxford University Press, 2019, Chapter 3.

"[Partisan Antipathy: More Intense, More Personal](#)," by Pew Research, October 10, 2019.

"[Political Sectarianism in America](#)," by Eli J. Finkel et al., *Science*, 2020.

September 25 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.

Local Election Laws Data Due

September 30 Voting Rights

The R̶Fight 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.

Local Election Laws Paper Due

October 2   No Class

October 7   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 14   Fall Break

October 16   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.

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

October 21   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

October 23   Test 1

October 28   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 30   Candidate Perceptions and 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.

"The Relative Weight of Character Traits in Political Candidate Evaluations," by Lasse Laustsen and Alexander Bor, *Electoral Studies* 49: 96-107, 2017.

Campaign Ad and Paper Due

November 4   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.

November 6   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 11 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. (*skim*)

"[If Only They'd Ask: Gender, Recruitment, and Political Ambition](#)," by Richard L. Fox and Jennifer L Lawless, *The Journal of Politics* 72: 310-326.

See [Center for American Woman and Politics](#). Students will be assigned to read specific reports from the website.

Candidate Biographies Assignment Due

November 13 No Class

November 18 Speaker: Clara Sanguinetti, candidate for Brighton Town Board

November 20 Test 2

November 25 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 27 Thanksgiving

December 2   Voting Turnout

"The Political Logic of Political Participation," by Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, 1993. (from *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*, pages 1-37).

"Does Canvassing Increase Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment," by Alan S. Gerber, and Donald P. Green. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 96: 10939-10942, 1999

"Gerber, Green, and Larimer: Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment," by Adam R. Brown, 2008 (this is a summary of an article).

"Universal Vote-By-Mail Has No Impact on Partisan Turnout or Vote Share," by Daniel M. Thompson, Jennifer A. Wu, Jesse Yoder, and Andrew B. Hall. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117: 14052-14056, 2020.

"Trump Says Only the U.S. Votes by Mail. Here Are the Facts," by Rebecca Schneid, *Time*, August 18, 2025.

December 4   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.

Election Race Report Due

December 9   Elections, Democratic Erosion, and Democratic Reforms

"[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.

"[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.*)

"[Reforming the Electoral Count Act](#)," League of Women Voters, November 27, 2023.

"[The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act](#)," Brennan Center for Justice, February 29, 2024.

See https://brightlinewatch.org/

Assignments

Assignment	Due Date
Congressional Districts	September 16
Local Election Laws Data	September 25
Local Election Laws Paper	September 30
Test 1	October 23
Campaign Ad and Paper	October 30
Candidate Biographies	November 11
Test 2	November 20
Election Race Report	December 4