

PSCI 3170.001: Presidential Elections

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Office hours:
T 1:00-2:30
W 12:00-1:30
and by appointment

Presidential elections are the one time when a majority of Americans simultaneously express their opinion about the direction of public policy in the United States. Leaders of the winning party often interpret the results of the presidential election as the people's mandate for one set of policies or another, while the defeated downplay the election's significance. Who should we believe? What goes into the selection of the only elected official who is responsible to the entire electorate?

This course starts with the theories of voting in presidential elections. Attention is, then, devoted to such topics as candidate strategy, voter mobilization and participation, voter information, the media's role in the presidential election process, and the nomination process. The goal of this course is to examine the inputs of the presidential selection process and use knowledge of these inputs to evaluate how voters make decisions and as a starting point for evaluating how well our system selects good leaders.

At the conclusion of the course, students should be able to:

1. Use data to evaluate the nature of relationships relevant to understanding American presidential elections.
2. Understand competing arguments about the factors that help us understand American presidential elections.
3. Construct normative arguments about the quality of American presidential elections that are supported by the empirical research concerning American presidential elections.

There is one book required for the course.

1. Aldrich, John H., Jamie L. Carson, Brad T. Gomez, and Jennifer Merolla. 2022. *Change and Continuity in the 2020 Elections*. Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN 9781544356778

Other readings will be available on Canvas or in e-journals available through the library web-site (<https://library.unt.edu>).

Grades and Extra Credit

Students are responsible for keeping up with all reading on the syllabus. Your grade will be determined by the following:

1. There will be two exams: a comprehensive final examination at the conclusion of the course that is worth 35% of the final grade and a midterm that is worth 25% of your grade. **NOTE, THERE WILL BE NO MAKEUP EXAMS OR INCOMPLETES GRANTED WITHOUT AN EXCUSE FROM THE DEAN OF STUDENTS OFFICE.**
2. You also have three short paper assignments that are collectively worth 30%. Papers need to be turned in through Turnitin on the class Canvas site. **You are responsible for making sure that assignments are posted on time.** All papers must be posted **by class time** on the date that they due. If a paper does not show up in Turnitin as being received by the due time, the paper's grade will be dropped by 10% per 24-hour period, up to three days. Papers posted after that time will not receive any credit. Exceptions will also be granted only with an excuse from the Dean of Students Office.
3. The final 10% of your final grade will be determined through your responses to discussion questions. Twenty-four hours prior to every class meeting (excluding the classes where we go over using SDA and the midterm), a question will be available on Canvas (see assignments) that you need to answer. Your answers should only be three to four sentences and should refer to the readings in order to support your answer. Three students will then be randomly selected to use their responses to motivate a short discussion of the question at the beginning of the following class. (When a student who had been selected is not in class, I'll move to the next student on the list.) Students who are selected and are able to discuss their responses in

a way that reflects reasonable consideration of the question and application of the readings will receive one point. Students who are not present will not receive credit for their response. At the end of the semester, ten percent of your final grade will be based upon the percentage of the satisfactory responses you provided when asked to lead discussion.

You should *not* expect extra credit. If I do offer extra credit, it is only when I can make it available to everyone in the class and when it furthers some educational goal that complements the goals of the course curriculum. I will not offer it as a “do-over” to students who have not completed their work satisfactorily. If you need a particular grade to graduate, maintain a particular GPA, etc. make sure you are putting in the effort to get that grade. If problems arise, address them early before they become unresolvable.

Grades will be posted on Canvas in a timely fashion. In the event of questions about grades records, questions must be resolved within two weeks of their posting. So, for example, challenges to recorded grades from assignments in October will not be entertained at the end of the semester. Finally, keeping apprised of your standing with respect to your grades is your responsibility. Use the percentages above to calculate a rough estimate of your current grade. I will not calculate your overall grade during the semester. Finally, do not use the total points in the grade book on Canvas to estimate your grade as that figure does not account for differences in how each paper or exam are weighted.

Classroom Policies and Attendance

With respect to classroom policies, I assume that you are adults who are either capable of making your own decisions regarding your best interests or have reached the time when you need to start learning how to make such decisions. I also assume that most, if not all, of you are in college to prepare yourself in some way for professional life beyond college. As such, attendance in class is not required. But just as there would be consequences for regularly missing a job, there are also consequences for regularly missing lecture.

Please help make the classroom environment conducive to learning. Show respect for others’ opinions, even when you do not agree. Also show respect for your classmates by arriving to class on time and not getting up to leave or go out before class is over. In rare situations when you cannot make it on time or need to leave early, please make your entrance/exit as unobtrusive as possible. Students who repeatedly interrupt class in this manner will be asked to leave or not return. You are free to use laptops for taking notes (even though research increasingly shows that retention is significantly better if you take notes by hand—see:

<http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away> and <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>)

If your use of your laptop distracts others, I will ask you to shut it down.

Finally, please remember to TURN OFF and PUT AWAY your cell phones before lecture. During exams, cell phones and any other electronic devices should be turned off and placed in your bags or under your seats. If you take these items out during an exam, you will receive a grade of zero for the exam. Other disruptive behavior not mentioned specifically here will also be treated in an appropriate manner.

Academic Integrity

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. Students should review the policy, which may be located at <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>. Faculty are required to submit reports of violations of academic dishonesty even in instances that do not result in sanctions. There will be no deviation from this policy.

All work turned in for this course must be your own original work. Such actions as plagiarizing by using a source without giving it appropriate credit, or using material written by somebody else or by generative AI/chatbots like ChatGPT and presenting it as your own, represent violations of academic integrity. According to the UNT Academic Integrity Policy (UNT Policy 6.003), any form of “unauthorized assistance” constitutes

cheating. As a result, use of any artificial intelligence is not authorized for completion of assignments or exams in this course, unless specifically authorized by the instructor.

Disabilities Accommodation

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the Office of Disability Access website at <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>. You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify you with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

1 Introduction (Aug. 22)

This lecture will cover basic course requirements and provide a framework for examining the qualities of the presidential selection process.

1. Federalist #68 (<https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/text-61-70>).

2 Voting Behavior

2.1 Social Group Theories of Voter Behavior (Aug. 24-29)

These lectures will discuss the effect of campaigns and communication among social group members upon how—and when—voters make up their minds during a presidential election.

1. *Change and Continuity in the 2020 Election* Ch. 5.
2. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet. *The People's Choice* Ch. 1, 3, 7, 8, 15-16 (see Canvas).
3. Pew Research Center. 2021. "Behind Biden's 2020 Victory." <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/06/30/behind-bidens-2020-victory/>.
4. Zingher. 2020. "On the Measurement of Social Class and its Role in Shaping White Vote Choice in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election." *Electoral Studies*. Vol. 64.
5. Johnson, K.M. and Scala, D.J., 2022, June. "The Rural-Urban Continuum and the 2020 US Presidential Election." In *The Forum* (Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 229-255). De Gruyter.

2.2 Using the SDA for Electoral Analysis (Aug. 31)

This class will introduce students to doing analysis of the presidential election using the SDA Archive at UC-Berkeley (<https://sda.berkeley.edu/archive.htm>). Attendance at this class is extremely important for students' abilities to complete paper assignments.

2.3 Social Psychological Theories of Voter Behavior (Sep 5-7)

These lectures will focus upon an alternate means, party identification, for explaining how voters make up their minds during a presidential election.

1. *Change and Continuity in the 2020 Election* Ch. 6.
2. Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes *The American Voter* Ch. 4, 6-7 (Canvas).
3. Bankert. 2021. "Negative and Positive Partisanship in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections." *Political Behavior*. 43:1467-1485.

2.4 Rational Choice Theories of Voter Behavior (Sep. 12-14)

These lectures provide yet a third theory, issue proximity, for explaining how voters make up their minds during an election, and how this theory helps us better understand candidate behavior in campaigns.

1. *Change and Continuity in the 2020 Election* Ch. 7.
2. Downs *An Economic Theory of Democracy* Ch. 2-3, 7-8 (Canvas).
3. Gibson and Shaw. 2019. "Politics as Unusual? Exploring Issues and the 2016 Presidential Vote." *Social Science Quarterly*. 100(2):447-465.

⇒ **Social group and party identification paper due Sep. 14.**

2.5 Retrospective Theories of Voter Behavior (Sep. 19-21)

These lectures provide one more class of theories, retrospective evaluations, to explain how voters decide which candidate to support in presidential elections.

1. *Change and Continuity in the 2020 Election* Ch. 8.
2. Key *The Responsible Electorate* Ch. 1-2 (Canvas).
3. Fiorina *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* Ch. 1 & 4 (Canvas).
4. Jones. 2020. "Partisanship, Political Awareness, and Retrospective Evaluations, 1956-2016" *Political Behavior*. 42:1295-1317.
5. Baccini, Brodeur, & Weymouth. 2021. "The COVID-19 Pandemic and the 2020 US Presidential Election." *Journal of Population Economics*. 34:739-767.

2.6 Candidate Traits and Voter Behavior (Sep. 26-28)

These lectures discuss the ways in which voters evaluate candidates' images and the images that appeal most to voters in presidential elections.

1. Kinder, Peters, Abelson, and Fiske. 1980. "Presidential Prototypes" *Political Behavior* 2(4):315-337.
2. Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk. 1986. "Schematic Assessments of Presidential Candidates" *American Political Science Review* 80(2):521-540.
3. Wattenberg. 2016. "The Declining Relevance of Candidate Personal Attributes in Presidential Elections." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. 46(1):125-139.
4. Holian and Prysby. 2020. "Polls and elections: Did character count? Candidate traits and the 2016 presidential vote." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 50(3): 666-689.

⇒ **Issues and Retrospective evaluations paper due Sep. 28.**

3 The Candidates

3.1 Campaign Strategy (Oct. 3-5)

The lectures examine one aspect of candidate strategy: resource allocation. Candidates' ability to win elections depends upon their ability to wisely use their resources where they can have the maximum effect.

1. *Change and Continuity in the 2020 Election* Ch. 2-3.
2. Shaw. 1999. "The Methods Behind the Madness: Presidential Electoral College Strategies, 1988-1996" *Journal of Politics*. 61(4):893-913.
3. Chen and Reeves. 2011. "Turning Out the Base or Appealing to the Periphery? An Analysis of County-Level Candidate Appearances in the 2008 Presidential Campaign" *American Politics Research*. 39(3):534-556.
4. Darr and Levendusky. 2014. "Relying on the Ground Game The Placement and Effect of Campaign Field Offices." *American Politics Research*. 42(3):529-548.
5. Heersink, B., Napolio, N.G. and Peterson, J.C., 2022. "The mixed effects of candidate visits on campaign donations in the 2020 presidential election." *American Politics Research*, 50(3):320-325.

⇒ **Mid-Term Exam** (Oct. 10)

3.2 Candidate Image (Oct. 12-17)

These lectures examine a second aspect of candidate strategy: presentation. Candidates try to present positive images of themselves, while portraying their opponents in the worst possible way.

1. Petrocik. 1996. "Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections" *American Journal of Political Science*. 40(3):825-850.
2. Baum. 2005. "Talking the Vote: Why Presidential Candidates Hit the Talk Show Circuit" *American Journal of Political Science* 49(2):213-234.
3. Brader. 2005. "Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions" *American Journal of Political Science*. 49(2):388-405.
4. Tedesco and Dunn. 2019. "Political Advertising in the 2016 US Presidential Election: Ad Hominem Ad Nauseam." *American Behavioral Scientist*. 63(7), 935-947.
5. Broockman, D.E. and Kalla, J.L., 2022. "When and why are campaigns' persuasive effects small? Evidence from the 2020 US presidential election." *American Journal of Political Science*.

3.3 Voter Information in Presidential Elections (Oct. 19-24)

Voters have the opportunity to consume vast amounts of information during a presidential campaign. Most choose to ignore most of the information that is presented. These lectures discuss the process by which voters become informed and how that process by which candidates manage their campaigns influences what voters learn about the candidates.

1. Popkin *The Reasoning Voter* Ch. 1-3. (Canvas).
2. Bartels. 1996. "Uninformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections" *American Journal of Political Science*. 40(1):194-230.
3. Lau, Anderson, and Redlawsk. 2008. "An Exploration of Correct Voting in Recent U.S. Presidential Elections." *American Journal of Political Science*. 52(2):395-411.
4. Holbrook. 1999. "Political Learning from Presidential Debates." *Political Behavior*, 21(1):67-89.

3.4 Mobilization and Voter Participation in Presidential Elections (Oct. 26-31)

Presidential elections are decided by the people who turn out to vote. But it is very clear that, at best, a narrow majority of eligible voters cast ballots in presidential elections. These lectures discuss why some people are more likely to vote than others and how candidates approach turnout strategically.

1. *Change and Continuity in the 2020 Election* Ch. 4
2. Leighley. 1995. "Attitudes, Opportunities, and Incentives: A Field Essay on Political Participation" *Political Research Quarterly*. 48(1):181-209.
3. Holbrook and McClurg. 2005. "The Mobilization of Core Supporters: Campaigns, Turnout, and Electoral Composition in United States Presidential Elections." *American Journal of Political Science*. 49(4):689-703.
4. Valentino, et al. 2011. "Election Night's Alright for Fighting: The Role of Emotions in Political Participation." *American Journal of Political Science*. 73(1):156-170.
5. Highton. 1997. "Easy Registration and Voter Turnout" *Journal of Politics* 59:565-575.
6. Thompson, Wu, Yoder, and Hall. 2020. "Universal vote-by-mail has no impact on partisan turnout or vote share." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (<https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/117/25/14052.full.pdf>).
7. Stein, R.M., Mann, C., Stewart III, C., Birenbaum, Z., Fung, A., Greenberg, J., Kawsar, F., Alberda, G., Alvarez, R.M., Atkeson, L. and Beaulieu, E., 2020. "Waiting to vote in the 2016 presidential election: Evidence from a multi-county study." *Political Research Quarterly*, 73(2):439-453.

4 The Media in Presidential Politics (Nov. 2-7)

These lectures examine the role of the news media in the presidential election process and how journalists' incentives for covering the news can influence election outcomes.

1. Patterson *Out of Order* Ch. 2 (Canvas).
2. Gilens, et al. 2007. "The Mass Media and the Public's Assessments of Presidential Candidates, 1952-2000." *Journal of Politics*. 69(4):1160-1175.
3. Hayes 2008. "Party Reputations, Journalistic Expectations: How Issue Ownership Influences Election News." *Political Communications*. 25(4):377-400.
4. Milita and Ryan. 2019. "Battleground States and Local Coverage of American Presidential Campaigns." *Political Research Quarterly*. 72(1):104-116.
5. Patterson. 2020. "A Tale of Two Elections: CBS and Fox News' Portrayal of the 2020 Presidential Campaign." <https://shorensteincenter.org/patterson-2020-election-coverage/>

⇒ Electoral participation paper due Nov. 7.

5 Presidential Primaries

5.1 The Nomination Process (Nov. 9-16)

These lectures describe how the unique American process for nominating presidential candidates influences how they navigate the primary period in terms of their receipt and allocation of resources and the subsequent effect upon the outcome of the nomination race.

1. *Change and Continuity in the 2020 Election* Ch. 1.
2. Polsby *Consequences of Party Reform* Ch. 1 (Canvas).
3. Aldrich. 2009. "The Invisible Primary and Its Effects on Democratic Choice" *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 42(1):33-38.
4. Donovan and Hunsaker. 2009. "Beyond Expectations: Effects of Early Elections in U.S. Presidential Nomination Contests" *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 42(1):45-52.
5. Haynes and Pitts. 2009. "Making an Impression: New Media in the 2008 Presidential Nomination Campaigns" *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 42(1):53-58.
6. Atkeson and Maestas. 2009. "Meaningful Participation and the Evolution of the Reformed Presidential Nominating System" *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 42(1):59-64.
7. Cohen, et al. 2016. "Party versus Faction in the Reformed Presidential Nominating System." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 49(4):701-708.
8. Dowdle, et al. 2016. "Forecasting Presidential Nominations in 2016: #We Predicted Clinton AND Trump." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 49(4):691-695.

⇒ No class for Thanksgiving (Nov. 21-23)

5.2 Reforming the Nomination Process (Nov. 28-30)

These lectures examine proposals for changing the way that presidential candidates are nominated in the United States.

1. Tolbert et al. 2009. "Reforming Presidential Nominations: Rotating State Primaries or a National Primary?" *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 42(1):71-79.
2. Lewis-Beck and Squire. 2009. "Iowa: The Most Representative State?" *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 42(1):39-44.
3. Mayer. 2009. "An Incremental Approach to Presidential Nomination Reform" *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 42(1):65-69.

6 Presidential Elections and the Efficacy of Democracy (Dec 5-7)

These lectures will provide an overview and review of the topics covered during the semester to provide an overall assessment of how well the actual presidential selection process compares with the desired characteristics described in Federalist 68.

1. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and McPhee *Voting* Ch. 14 (Canvas).
2. Erikson, Sigman, and Yao. 2020. "Electoral College Bias and the 2020 Presidential Election." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* <https://www.pnas.org/content/117/45/27940>

Final Exam

(Tentatively, Tuesday, Dec 12 10:30-12:30 p.m. Check Registrar's Web Site to confirm date and time <http://registrar.unt.edu/exams/final-exam-schedule/fall>)