

Political Science 4026-1 – Campaigns and Elections
Fall Semester/2020 Online
Dr. Christopher Kenny; Office: 228 Stubbs Hall
Phone: 578-2546; Email: pokenn@lsu.edu
Office Hours: by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Elections are the most visible and scrutinized events in American politics. While some are more interesting and exciting than others, those that allow for the possibility of a change in partisan control of government are the most eagerly anticipated. The presidential and congressional contests taking place this fall have that potential, as the two parties seek to gain control of a divided government. The contests began with the nomination phase of the presidential elections that took place this spring and summer in the fifty states and US territories. In addition to the presidential election, this fall will feature 435 House races and 35 Senate contests. All of this is taking place against a backdrop of a global pandemic and national social unrest. How will our national elections work in these uncertain times? We will address questions specific to this election season by examining recent national elections to understand how the factors that determine election outcomes may differ during these historic times.

The course will be divided into two parts that correspond to the midterm and final exams. The first part will mostly follow the Aldrich text and examine the theory and methods of studying elections, presidential nomination and general elections campaigns, voter turnout and the field experiments that have sprung up in the last two decades, and the social forces, candidates, and issues that make up the vote. The second half of the course will look at presidential performance and candidate choice, party polarization, party loyalties, policy preferences and the vote, congressional elections including the candidates, voters, and recent outcomes, and an examination of the 2020 congressional elections. We will also read a short text on cybersecurity and disinformation campaigns.

Since this is a class about voting and elections, you should also keep informed of what's going on in the national political scene. Reading a newspaper is perhaps the easiest and best way to accomplish this. The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, or The Los Angeles Times will provide information on the fall presidential and congressional races. You will also find good commentary and information from political blogs, like Nate Silver's 538, The Cook Political Report, Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball, and Politico, to name just a few. Real Clear Politics and other sites will have tons of polling data to peruse as well.

TEXTBOOKS

Change and Continuity in the 2016 and 2018 Elections, by Aldrich, et al.
Another book TBA

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for this course are a midterm and a final, regular short writing assignments, and a final paper. The dates for exams and papers are listed on moodle.

Exams: Two multiple choice exams will be given. The final is not comprehensive. These exams will make up 60% of your grade (30% each).

Paper: The paper assignment is described on moodle. It will involve analyzing a competitive congressional House or Senate race. The paper assignment will be 2500 words and will be worth 30% of your grade. A 5% penalty per day late will be applied to all late papers (up to a maximum of 25%).

Short papers: You will be required to write 5 short papers during the semester. These will be 450 to 500 words in length. You won't be penalized for going over the word count limit, but please try to stay around this figure. A list of the topics and the due dates will be posted on moodle. Papers should be saved as WORD or PDF files and uploaded to moodle. A 5% penalty per day late will be applied to all late papers (up to a maximum of 25%).

In summary, your grade breakdown is as follows:

Two Exams: 60%
Paper: 30%
Short Papers: 10%

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Standards of academic conduct are described in the University's Code of Student Conduct. By registering for this course you acknowledge your awareness of the Code, and your intention to follow the requirements of the Code. In short, don't cheat and don't plagiarize. Please see me if you have any questions about any aspect of the Code and how it relates to the specifics of this course.