

Political Science 4820

Voting & Elections in Time

Spring 2026

Professor: Stephen Nicholson (snicholson@uga.edu)

Class Schedule: Tuesday/Thursday 4:35-5:59 (Baldwin 301)

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 3:00-4:00 in Baldwin 309D

Course Description:

The purpose of this class is to introduce students to the study of voting behavior, campaigns, and presidential elections in the United States. The course is divided into two interrelated sections. In the first section, we will examine voter behavior and the fundamentals or historical patterns that regularly shape election outcomes. We will also examine the short-term factors that define a given election (e.g., candidate images, campaign strategies, debates), placing specific presidential elections in historical context. Building on the knowledge and applying the conceptual tools from the first half of the semester, in the second half students will examine a specific election analyzing how it is similar and different from other elections. This analysis is intended to help students better understand election outcomes and what strategies, if any, campaigns might have used to produce a different outcome.

Course Readings:

Mieczkowski, Yanek. 2021. *The Routledge Historical Atlas of Presidential Elections, 2nd edition*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Other course readings will be available online through eLC and the UGA library.

Course Requirements:

To complete this course successfully, students are required to take two exams, and contribute to a group project culminating in a group presentation.

Students are expected to attend class regularly and have read the material before coming to class. *Please note: Students are required to adhere to the standards of academic honesty as detailed in the College Handbook.* Please familiarize yourself with rules about plagiarism! If you have any questions about what is or is not plagiarism, please see me.

Students are also expected to be courteous. Please do not talk, eat, sleep, arrive late to, or leave during, class (if you must leave early, please notify me before class begins and exit discreetly). *Turn off cell phones!* Courtesy must also be extended to your classmates. If you do not behave courteously, I reserve the right to drop you from the course.

Courseware:

We will be using **Top Hat** for class participation (both lecture and discussion sections). You will be able to submit answers to in-class questions using Apple or Android smartphones and tablets, laptops, or through text message. For instructions on how to

This syllabus provides a general plan for the course. Deviations may be necessary.

download and use the Top Hat app, please click [here](#) for instructions on how to get started. You will need access to your Top Hat account during the lecture either through your laptop or your phone.

Use of AI

UGA's policy is that the use of AI for coursework is not permitted unless explicitly authorized by me ahead of time.

Grades:

The final grade is composed of two exams, quizzes, and a group project culminating in an in-class presentation. Unless contacted in advance regarding a critical problem, make-ups will not be granted. There are no extra credit assignments for this course so please do not ask—put extra time and energy into course work.

Your grade for the class will be allocated based on the following assignments:

Midterm	30%
Final	30%
Group project	35%
Quizzes	5%

I will assign grades according to the following scale:

A = 94 and above	B- = 80-82	D+ = 67-69
A- = 90-93	C+ = 77-79	D = 60-66
B+ = 87-89	C = 73-76	F < Below 60
B = 83-86	C- = 70-72	

Class Website:

The class will be administered through the eLC website and you will use it to submit assignments and to receive class announcements. My primary means of communication with you will be through announcements posted in eLC so make sure to check *frequently* (at least daily). To ensure you receive eLC updates for our class automatically via email you will need to do the following: eLC > Click on your profile > Notifications > Instant Notifications. Please note that you cannot reply to an email I send out via eLC (ending in @uga.view.usg.edu emails) so contact me at snicholson@uga.edu instead.

Semester Schedule

1/13 & 1/15 Historical and Social Scientific Thinking

-Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton University Press, 1992), chap. 1

-“20 Questions A Journalist Should Ask About Poll Results” by Sheldon R. Gawiser and  G. Evans Witt. Access from <http://www.ncpp.org/?q=node/4>

1/20 & 1/22 **Participation & Turnout**
-Sides, Shaw, Grossmann, and Lipsitz, *Campaigns and Elections*, 2nd ed. (W.W. Norton, 2022), Chapter 12 (Voter Participation).
-Panagopoulos, C. 2015. "All about that base: Changing campaign strategies in U.S. Presidential elections." *Party Politics*, 22(2), 179-190.

1/27 & 1/29 **The Public and Political Thinking**
-Clawson and Oxley, *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*, 3rd ed. Sage/Congressional Quarterly Press, Chapter 5 (Ideology, Partisanship, and Polarization), pages, 139-155.
Simas, Elizabeth N. *In Defense of Ideology: Reexamining the Role of Ideology in the American Electorate*, New York: Cambridge, pp. 1-24

2/3 & 2/5 **Partisanship**
-Clawson and Oxley, *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*, 3rd ed. Sage/Congressional Quarterly Press, Chapter 5 (Ideology, Partisanship, and Polarization), pages, 155-169.
-Hetherington, "Partisanship and Polarization." In *New Directions in Public Opinion*, edited by Adam J. Berinsky, 101–118. New York: Routledge.

2/10 & 2/12 **Voter Choice**
-Sides, Shaw, Grossmann, and Lipsitz, *Campaigns and Elections*, 2nd ed. (W.W. Norton, 2022), Chapter 13 (Voter Choice).
-Mayer, William G. 2012. "The Disappearing—but Still Important—Swing Voter." *The Forum*, vol. 10, no. 3, Article 2
[-Kustov, Good to Know: What is sociotropic voting?](#)

2/17 & 2/19 **Economic conditions, Incumbency & Performance Evaluations**
-Campbell, James E. "The Presidential Election of 2004: The Fundamentals and the Campaign" *The Forum*, vol. 2, no. 4, Article 1
[-Sides and Tessler, How much trouble is Joe Biden really in?](#)

2/24 & 26 **Campaign Strategy & Events**
-Shaw, Daron. "If Everyone Votes Their Party, Why Do Presidential Election Outcomes Vary So Much?" *The Forum*, vol. 10, no. 3, Article 1
-Holbrook, Thomas M. 1994. "Campaigns, National Conditions, and U.S. Presidential Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 38(4):973-98.

3/3 & 3/5	Campaign Advertising -Petrocik, John R., William L. Benoit, and Glenn J. Hansen. "Issue ownership and presidential campaigning, 1952-2000." <i>Political Science Quarterly</i> 118 (2003): 599.
3/10 & 3/12	Spring Break
3/17	Midterm
3/19	Placing Elections in Historical Context Erikson, Robert S. 2001. "The 2000 Presidential Election in Historical Perspective." <i>Political Science Quarterly</i> , vol. 116, no. 1, pp. 29–52. (we will create a rubric for understanding election outcomes so come to class prepared)
3/24	Workshop
3/26	The 1956 Election -Mieczkowski, chapter 39
3/31	The 1960 Election -Mieczkowski, chapter 40
4/2	Workshop
4/7	The 1964 Election -Mieczkowski, chapter 41
4/9	The 1972 Election -Mieczkowski, chapter 43
4/14	The 1976 Election -Mieczkowski, chapter 44
4/16	The 1980 Election -Mieczkowski, chapter 45
4/21	The 1984 Election -Mieczkowski, chapter 46
4/23	The 1992 Election -Mieczkowski, chapter 48
4/30	Final Exam 3:30-6:30

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