

AMERICAN POLITICS: ELECTIONS

Political Science 373
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
Fall 2012
T & TH, 3:00 – 4:15 p.m.
Saunders 624

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Office Hours: By appointment

**[NOTE: This is the 2012 syllabus.
The 2016 syllabus will be posted before classes begin in August]**

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we will ask a number of questions about the American system of campaigns and elections. Among them: How do elections work in the United States? Why do some people vote while others stay home? How has the American electorate changed over time? What influence do the media and campaign advertising have on voters? As we attempt to answer these questions, we will read work by political journalists, campaign consultants, and, of course, political scientists. Nevertheless, this need not be a purely academic exercise. As you are likely aware, the 2012 presidential election is just a few months away. So, as the candidates fight it out over the coming weeks, we will have an opportunity to consider these questions in real time. We will also have a number of important races to watch right here in Hawai'i, including a campaign for the first open U.S. Senate seat in decades. It is my hope that by the end of this course you will gain a solid understanding of both the theory and the practice of campaigns and elections in the United States.

Student learning objectives: 1) the ability to craft and defend evidence-based arguments, 2) command of the key theoretical traditions in democratic election theory, 3) understanding of the laws and traditions that govern American campaigns and elections, and 5) knowledge of key tools in the analysis of campaigns and elections such as public opinion surveys and political psychology.

READINGS

The following titles are the key texts for the course and are available for purchase at the UH Bookstore or any online vendor of your choice:

- John Sides and Lynn Vavreck, *The Gamble: Choice and Chance in the 2012 Presidential Election* (Princeton University Press, 2014)
- Donald Green and Alan Gerber, *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*, 3rd Edition (Brookings Institution Press, 2015)

All additional readings will be posted online at <https://laulima.hawaii.edu> (noted as “L” on the syllabus).

In addition to the required readings, you should plan to read a major national newspaper at least three times a week. *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* are both available for free online. You may also want to read one of the many blogs that focus on American electoral politics. Two excellent choices are Nate Silver’s FiveThirtyEight Blog (<http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com>) and The Monkey Cage (<http://www.themonkeycage.org>).

EVALUATION AND REQUIREMENTS

Your grade in this course will be based on class participation, several in-class assignments, a midterm, a paper, and a final exam. The breakdown is as follows:

- Participation: 10%
- In-Class Assignments: 10%
- Midterm: 20%
- Practicum and Reflection Essay: 30%
- Final Exam: 30%

At the end of the semester, your grade will be assigned according to the following scale: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (below 59).

Attendance and In-Class Assignments

This course relies for its success upon your faithful attendance and your regular contribution to our discussion. At various times throughout the semester you will be asked to complete a short, in-class assignment. Extended absences for reasons of illness or family emergency will be arranged on a case-by-case basis. Should there be any circumstance that makes it difficult for you to participate in class discussions, please talk with me about it. We will work together to find a solution.

Midterm and Final Exam

The midterm exam will consist of short-answer identification questions. It will be held on **October 18th**. The final exam will consist of short-answer identifications *and* two essay questions. I will distribute a list of possible essay questions at our final class meeting. Although it will be a cumulative exam, the majority of the questions will be drawn from the second half of the course.

Practicum and Reflection Essay

This is an election year! To gain some some practical, hands-on experience with the American electoral process (and to fulfill this course requirement) you must volunteer for at least four hours with a local campaign. You will be responsible for writing a reflection essay of 5-6 pages (double-spaced, one-inch margins, 12-point font) based on your experiences. The essay is due on **November 20th**. I will discuss the details of this assignment in class.

Extra Credit

If you attend a lecture related to the content of this course and submit a two-page reaction paper, I will give you extra credit to make up a missed class. I will highlight appropriate on-campus lectures and events during the semester.

COURSE POLICIES

Late Policy

Your essay assignment is due in hard copy at the beginning of class. Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade per day; e.g., a paper that receives a B+ becomes a B.

Academic Integrity

There are many ways to succeed in this course. Cheating and plagiarism are not among them. Serious sanctions may result from academic dishonesty of any sort. Should you have any questions or concerns about these policies, please consult the UHM Student Conduct Code: http://studentaffairs.manoa.hawaii.edu/policies/conduct_code

Academic Freedom

Please keep in mind that this is a class on elections. Some of the topics that we will discuss this semester are controversial. You are likely to encounter opinions that differ sharply from your own. This is a good thing. It will make our discussions more interesting and will allow us to learn from each other. Although it is perfectly acceptable to disagree with me and with your classmates, please do so in a respectful manner. You may rest assured that your personal views will not affect your grade.

Disability Access

If you have a documented disability, please talk with me about how I can make this course more accessible to you. I will be happy to make any appropriate accommodations. You may also wish to contact the KOKUA Program Office at 956-7511 or to visit the office website online at <http://www.hawaii.edu/kokua>

Cell Phones and Laptops

Please turn off your cell phone before entering class. Please do not use your laptop for anything other than taking notes. I expect your attention and energy to be focused on this course and not on texting your friends or updating your Facebook status—as appealing as those activities may be.

COURSE SCHEDULE

August 21: Thinking about Elections—Political Science, Political Consultants, and the Media

- Andrew Gelman and John Sides, “Stories and Stats: The Truth about Obama’s Victory Wasn’t in the Papers,” *Boston Review* (September/October, 2009)

Part I: The American Electoral System and Why It Matters

(August 23 – September 6)

August 23: What Were the Founders Thinking?

- The Constitution of the United States
 - Article I, Sections 1-3
 - Article II, Section 1
 - Amendments: 12th, 14th, 15th, 17th, 19th, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 26th
- Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist* #68

August 28 and 30: Registration, Redistricting, and the Two-Party System

- Gary C. Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (Pearson College Division, 2012). Chapter 2 (“The Context”)
- Jeffrey Toobin, “The Great Election Grab,” *The New Yorker* (December 8, 2003)

September 4 and 6: Critical Elections and the Changing American Electorate

- Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (Basic Books, 2000). Chapter 8 (“Breaking Barriers”)

Part II: What It Takes: Strategy, Turnout, and Money

(September 11 –27)

September 11 and 13: Candidates, Parties, and Campaign Strategy

- Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox, “Why Are Women Still Not Running for Public Office?,” *Brookings Institution Issues in Governance Studies* (May 2008)
- Karen M. Kaufmann, John R. Petrocik, and Daron R. Shaw, *Unconventional Wisdom: Facts and Myths About American Voters* (Oxford University Press, 2008). Chapter 2 (“Americans Hate to Love Their Party, but They Do!”)

- Ryan Lizza, “Battle Plans,” *The New Yorker* (November 17, 2008)

September 18 and 20: Targeting and Turnout—Why Does Anyone Bother to Vote?

- Kaufman, Petrocik and Shaw, *Unconventional Wisdom*. Chapters Six and Seven (“The Young and Not-So-Restless Voters” and “The Partisan Bias of Turnout”)
- Tim Dickinson, “The Machinery of Hope: Inside the Grass-Roots Field Operation of Barack Obama,” *Rolling Stone* (March 20, 2008)

September 25 and 27: Show Me the Money—The Disturbing World of Campaign Finance

- Lawrence Lessig, *Republic, Lost: How Money Corrupts Congress--and a Plan to Stop It* (Hachette, 2011). Introduction and Chapter 9 (“Why So Damn Much Money”)
- Examine Campaign Spending in 2012 Election: <http://www.opensecrets.org/pres12/index.php>

PART III: The Voters and the Message
(October 2 – 18)

October 2 and 4: How Voters Decide

- Kaufman, Petrocik and Shaw, *Unconventional Wisdom*. Chapters Four and Five (“Who Swings?” and “Soccer Moms and Other Myths about the Gender Gap”)
- Louis Menand, “The Unpolitical Animal,” *The New Yorker* (August 30, 2004)

October 9 and 11: Presidential Campaigns—Context and Message

- Lynn Vavreck, *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns* (Princeton University Press, 2009). Prologue and Chapters 1, 2, and 3
- Guest Speaker: Linda Lingle, Governor of Hawai’i (2002 – 2010)

October 16: The Art and Science of Public Opinion Polling

- Herbert Asher, *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, 4th ed. (CQ Press, 1998), pp. 141-169

October 18: Midterm

Part IV: The Media and Campaign Communications
(October 23 – November 1)

October 23 and 25: Communications and TV Advertising

- John G. Geer, *In Defense of Negativity: Attack Ads in Presidential Campaigns* (University of Chicago Press, 2006). Chapters 1 and 3 (“The Need for Negativity” and “The Information Environment and Negativity”)
- View Presidential Campaign Ads at Stanford Political Communications Lab:
<http://pcl.stanford.edu/campaigns/2012>

October 30 and November 1: The Media

- Thomas E. Patterson, *Out of Order* (Vintage Books, 1993). Chapters 1 and 2 (“The Miscalculation” and “Of Schemas—Games and Governing”)
- Examine Contrasting Views of Media Bias:
Conservative—Media Research Center: <http://www.mrc.org>
Liberal—Media Matters: <http://mediamatters.org>

Part V: The Election!
(November 6 – 15)

November 6 (No Class—Election Day)

November 8: So, Why Did Obama/Romney Win? Do Campaigns Matter?

- Kaufman, Petrocik and Shaw, *Unconventional Wisdom*. Chapter Eight (“Campaign Effects in the Twenty-First Century”)
- Additional Reading TBA

November 13 and 15: Red States and Blue States—Why?

- Kaufman, Petrocik and Shaw, *Unconventional Wisdom*. Chapter 3 (“Are American Voters Polarized?”)
- Andrew Gelman, *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do* (Princeton University Press, 2009). Chapters 1, 2, and 10 (“Introduction,” “Rich State, Poor State,” and “Putting It All Together”)

Part VI: The Rest of the Story
(November 20 – December 6)

November 20: The “Americanization” of Politics Abroad

- Stanley B. Greenberg, *Dispatches from the War Room: In the Trenches with Five Extraordinary Leaders* (St. Martin’s Press, 2009). Chapter 7 (“Gonzalo ‘Goni’ Sánchez de Lozada”)
- Movie: *Our Brand Is Crisis* (2005)
- Practicum Reflection Essay Due

November 22 (No Class—Thanksgiving)

November 27 and 29: The Future American Electorate

- Zoltan L. Hajnal and Taeku Lee, *Why Americans Don’t Join the Party: Race, Immigration, and the Failure (of Political Parties) to Engage the Electorate* (Princeton University Press, 2011). Chapters 1 and 5 (“Introduction” and “What Does It Mean to Be a Partisan?”)

December 4 and 6: Campaign Reform

- Lessig, *Republic, Lost*. Part IV (“Solutions”)

December 13: FINAL EXAM