

PERSPECTIVES ON THE 2020 ELECTION
George Mason University
GOVT 319-004 DL1 (CRN 81675)
Tuesday/Thursday 1:30pm – 2:45pm
Fall 2020

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Office Hours: Thursdays 4:00 – 5:00pm; Fridays 11:00am – 12:30pm
[Virtual Office Hours via Zoom. Choose a meeting time with this link.](#)
Course Website: <http://blackboard.gmu.edu>
Schar School Main Office: Research Hall, Room 359

I. Course Description

This course explores the 2020 general election in the United States. Based in political science theory and evidence about elections, campaigning, and voting, the class will use contemporary literature to explain the context of the 2020 elections and offer explanations about its events as it unfolds. The course begins by studying the 2016 US election as important context, then moves to explain the candidate nomination process. From there, the class investigates the intricacies of campaigning, voter behavior and choice, and wraps up with analytical post-mortem of the election. The course is designed to be grounded in a social science understanding of elections, using 2020 as a case study, to help us understand the role that elections play in democracy.

II. Course Goals

Broadly, the goals of this course are to provide students with foundational knowledge from political science research about the role, value, and process of elections in the United States. Armed with this understanding, students have opportunities to repeatedly practice applying foundational knowledge to current events and everyday civic practice. I am for students to leave the course prepared to be responsible citizens of democracy and learned stewards of its values, conflicts, and practices.

III. Course Requirements and Graded Evaluation

There are five graded requirements for this course, described below. Grades will be calculated on a non-curved typical A-F scale where,

97-100 A+	87-89 B+	77-79 C+	67-69 D+	< 60 F
93-96 A	83-86 B	73-76 C	63-66 D	
90-92 A-	80-82 B-	70-72 C-	60-62 D-	

Quizzes (15%) A weekly reading quiz is available on Blackboard. Quizzes must be submitted by 11:59pm on Fridays. **It is not possible to make up missed quizzes.** You may take each quiz a maximum of twice and your highest score will be kept. When you start a quiz, you must complete it in one hour. After completing a quiz, Blackboard will tell you your score and which questions you got wrong. Correct answers to all questions will be available on Saturdays. The lowest *two* recorded quiz scores will be excluded from course grade calculations.

Civic Engagement Activities (15%) Ten times during the terms students will be responsible for performing and describing one civic engagement activity. CEAs can be completed in one of two ways. **Option 1:** complete the activity described on Blackboard and upload a document that describes or documents your participation. **Option 2:** Contribute to [Democracy Squad projects via Magnify](#). Magnify is a public platform designed to help people solve collective problems using the tools of network and social science. Students may contribute to projects already posted in Democracy Squad, or create their own. Document and report your weekly Magnify activity and upload it to your CEA assignment. The activities are designed to help students practice applying lessons from class into real-life situations of politics and government, and to encourage responsible civic political activity. Late assignments will be accepted with a 5% per day late penalty.

Short Essays (10% each) Students will prepare two short essays (800 words maximum, each), which will be due in **weeks 6 and 12**. Essay prompts and instructions will be available on Blackboard. Students must submit original work and provide proper citations, using APSA or Chicago parenthetical, author-date citation style, with a complete bibliography. Students are encouraged to use [Zotero](#) to manage references. Late assignments will be accepted with a 5% per day late penalty.

Midterm Exam (25%) There will be one midterm exam in week 9. The exam is due **Friday, October 23 at 11:59pm**. The exam will be a take-home, essay-style exam, which will be submitted on Blackboard. Students are expected to submit original work that is only created by themselves and to follow [Mason's Honor Code](#). Complete instructions will be available in Blackboard.

Final Group Project (25%) Students will be organized into groups of 4-5 students and will work collaboratively to produce a research poster on an assigned topic. The poster project will provide students the opportunity to use contemporary data or evidence to answer a pertinent question related to the 2020 elections. Posters will be evaluated by group, and each student in the group will receive the same grade. Students will present their work to the class in a synchronous session on **Tuesday, December 15, 1:30pm – 4:15pm**.

IV. Extra Credit, Missing, and Late Work

There are NO opportunities for earning extra or bonus credit in this course. Quizzes cannot ever be made up. Civic Engagement Activities and short essays may be submitted late for a 5% per day late penalty. If you are aware that you will miss an exam you must notify the instructor *at*

least two days prior to the due date or exam date. Make-up exams are conducted at the instructor's discretion and are granted only in extraordinary circumstances, such as a verified illness (with doctor's note) or family emergency (be prepared to provide documentation).

V. News, media, and consumption of political information

As a part of this course, it is your responsibility to be well-informed about current events and political news. Synchronous class meetings will include a segment called "What's happening in politics?" (WHIP), where students will be expected to have information about current events. It is increasingly difficult to learn about political events in a way that is even-handed and non-partisan. Here are some tips about how to consume news in a way that will provide you with the most value:

1. Consume a variety of well-respected news sources. In general, for national political news I recommend *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and National Public Radio. Instructions for accessing subscription services through Mason are below.
2. Avoid television news altogether, except on election night.
3. Avoid getting your news exclusively from social media.
4. Avoid news sources that seek to provoke an emotional response. Try to consume news dispassionately. It's okay to have passion about politics, rights, justice, issues, etc. But try to consume news with a sense of curiosity, rather than an urge to be outraged, touched, or emotive in any sense. Train yourself to read a headline and respond with, "Huh, that's interesting," rather than automatically clicking forward, like, retweet, etc.

Instructions for access to news sources. As a Mason student, your tuition provides you access to dozens of subscription-only resources through the Mason library. These include many expensive, high quality news sources.

1. Install the Duo Mobile app on your smart phone. For complete instructions on enrolling in Mason's two-factor authentication service (2FA) see [this](#).
2. Sign up for your own [New York Times](#) and [Financial Times](#) accounts using the Mason libraries. See <http://infoguides.gmu.edu/politics/news> for instructions.
3. Access [The Chronicle of Higher Ed](#) and [The Economist](#) through the links given here, as they route you through the Libraries' proxy server.
4. Access many national and local newspapers (including the *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post*) through the [Factiva News Pages](#).
5. Podcasts are also an excellent way to stay abreast of the news. Many podcasts also have written blog sites. I recommend the following politics and news themed podcasts, which you can find on iTunes, or your favorite podcast service:

FiveThirtyEight Politics
Vox, The Weeds
NPR, Up First
NPR, Politics Podcast
The Economist Radio
The Ezra Klein Show

5 on 45, Brookings
Mischiefs of Faction
Slate, Political Gabfest
NYT, The Daily
Political Research Digest, The
Niskanen Center

VI. Resources for Students

College can be a stressful experience. It is normal to sometimes feel overwhelmed, out of place, or, insecure. Self-care strategies are important for maintaining your physical, emotional, and academic health. Developing self-awareness about stress, anxiety, or health issues is an important part of your development and success as a student. The following campus resources are available to you to help you learn to manage the complexities of your college:

[Center for Academic Advising, Retention, and Transitions](#)
[Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics \(including sexual misconduct and harassment; Title IX\)](#)
[Counseling and Psychological Services](#)
[Covid-19 Information Page from GMU](#)
[Disability Services](#)
[Financial Aid](#)
[International Programs and Services](#)
[Learning Services](#)
[Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Resources](#)

[Mathematics Tutoring Center](#)
[Military Alliance Program](#)
[Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education](#)
[Online Learning Services](#)
[Safe Return to Campus Plan](#)
[Student Conduct](#)
[Student Emergency Assistance Funding](#)
[Student Health Services](#)
[University Career Services](#)
[University Life](#)
[University Writing Center](#)

VII. Class Policies

- A. *Class Attendance and Participation.* Learning is an *active*, rather than *passive*, exercise. To succeed in this class, complete all the activities each week: readings, watching lessons, attending synchronous sessions, quizzes, and activities. Attendance and participation are not credited for points, but students who do not participate may struggle to perform well on graded assessments.
- B. *Readings.* As is the case with attendance, keeping pace with the reading is essential to succeeding in this class. It is *your* responsibility to obtain copies of the readings prior to the date we will discuss them in class. I will do everything I can to make this task easier for you. You will be much more successful in this course if you complete the assigned readings and **take notes** on them.
- C. *Technology.* This is a Distance Learning (DL) class. Students must have a laptop or desktop computer and a high-speed internet connection to adequately participate in all aspects of the course. If you have difficulty obtaining adequate technology, or require training for using technology in the course, please contact the instructor. When watching lectures or attending synchronous meeting, do so from a quiet space, and eliminate distractions (electronic and otherwise) from your environment.

- D. *Cheating, Plagiarism, and Academic Integrity.* Students in this course will be expected to comply with the George Mason University Honor Code (see <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>). There are three simple guidelines to follow with respect to academic integrity: (1) all work you submit must be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the expectations for any assignment, ask for clarification. Any student engaged in any academic misconduct *will receive an F on the offending exam or assignment.* Egregious violations will result in an F grade for the course and will be reported to the appropriate Dean's office. These violations include cheating on an exam, using someone else's work as your own, and plagiarizing the written word. Plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without providing credit or citation) is a serious offense. *If you have any questions at all about what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, or academic misconduct, please ask the instructor.*
- E. *Students with Disabilities.* If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the instructor and contact [Disability Services](#) at 703.993.2474 or ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.
- F. *Diversity is a value.* George Mason University values diversity in its learning, research, and civic activities. All members of the Mason community are asked to show respect to one another at all times. The learning environment in this class respects a wide array of viewpoints, and students of all cultural, ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds are welcome. More information about Mason's policies surrounding diversity can be found at the [Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education \(ODIME\)](#). Should you need accommodations related to observing a religious holiday, please contact the instructor. For your reference, a list of [major religious holidays can be found here](#). It is students' responsibility to communicate with the instructor if religious observations conflict with course requirements.
- G. *Student Privacy.* The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) grants students continuous access to educational records upon their request, allows students to amend their record if errors are found, and restricts how and when educational records can be disclosed. Your instructor will not release information about your academic record in this course to anyone without the student's permission. [More information about FERPA is here.](#)
- H. *Email.* Mason uses only Mason e-mail accounts to communicate with enrolled students. Students must activate their Mason e-mail account, use it to communicate with their department and other administrative units, and check it regularly for important university information including messages related to this class. *Email etiquette:* An email is a professional correspondence; do not write it as if it is a text message, snap, tweet, or IM. Always use a salutation and sign your name. Consider creating a signature that

automatically inserts your name and basic contact information at the bottom of your emails. Use proper punctuation and grammar.

I. *Dropping or withdrawing.*

August 31	Last day to add
September 8	Last day to drop (no tuition penalty)
Sept. 9 – 15	Drop with 50% tuition liability
Sept. 16 – 28	Drop with 100% tuition liability
Sept. 29 – Oct. 28	Selective Withdraw opportunity (results in “W” grade)

After October 28 there are no options for withdrawing from the course. If you have concerns about your performance in the course, or you find yourself unable to perform for any reason, you should discuss your concerns with your teaching assistant, professor, advisor, and Assistant Dean (in that order). Students seeking to drop or withdrawal are responsible for doing so on their own in Patriot Web. If you need help or advice, please see your academic advisor (gvip@gmu.edu--Government and International Politics majors, or puad@gmu.edu--Public Administration majors).

VIII. Course Materials

Prior to the August 24, materials can only be purchased from Mason Bookstore will online. After school begins, the bookstore will be open, but limiting the number of customers in the store at any one time. Please order your materials from the [bookstore's official website](#) in advance of the start of classes, to ensure delivery prior to classes beginning. The in-store pickup option will be available online just before school starts and students will be able to acquire their orders inside the bookstore. The bookstore will provide a full refund for all Fall 2020 textbooks through Monday, August 31. Those who drop classes will have until Tuesday, September 22, with proof of a schedule change.

Required books

Bernstein, Jonathan, and Casey B. K. Dominguez, eds. *The Making of the Presidential Candidates 2020*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019. [B&D]

Jacobson, Gary C., and Jamie L. Carson. 2019. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*. Tenth edition. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. [Cong]

Sides, John, Daron Shaw, Matt Grossmann, and Keena Lipsitz. 2019. *Campaigns and Elections*. Third Edition, 2018 Election Update edition. W. W. Norton & Company. [C&E]

Sides, John, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck. 2019. *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America*. 2 edition. Princeton University Press. [Identity]

Recommended books

Blum, Rachel M. 2020. *How the Tea Party Captured the GOP: Insurgent Factions in American Politics*. First edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fraga, Bernard L. 2018. *The Turnout Gap*. Cambridge University Press.

Masket, Seth. 2020. *Learning from Loss: The Democrats, 2016–2020*. Cambridge University Press.

Schaffner, Brian F., Jesse H. Rhodes, and Raymond J. La Raja. 2020. *Hometown Inequality: Race, Class, and Representation in American Local Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wolbrecht, Christina. 2020. *A Century of Votes for Women: American Elections since Suffrage*. Cambridge, United Kingdom : New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

IX. Course Schedule and Assignments

The course is broken into five themes: 2020 Context, nominations, campaigning, voters, and democracy. The following schedule follows a weekly pattern. Weeks begin on Monday. In includes the same general activities each week:

1. Do the readings first.
2. Watch the pre-recorded short video lessons.
3. Join the synchronous meetings Tuesdays and Thursdays.
4. Complete the weekly reading quiz.
5. Complete the weekly Civic Engagement Activity or short essay.
6. Repeat.

Week	Lessons	Assignments
Week 1 Aug 24 – 28	Course Introduction	Reading Quiz #1 DUE Friday 11:59pm Civic Engagement Activity #1 DUE Sunday 11:59pm <u>Reading:</u> 1. Edsall, Thomas B. 2020. "Opinion The George Floyd Election." <i>The New York Times</i> , June 3, 2020, sec. Opinion. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/03/opinion/george-floyd-trump-biden.html . 2. Goldenberg, Edie. 2020. "Research on Voting by Mail Says It's Safe – from Fraud and Disease." <i>The Conversation</i> . Accessed July 30, 2020. http://theconversation.com/research-on-voting-by-mail-says-its-safe-from-fraud-and-disease-141847 .

Week	Lessons	Assignments
Week 2 Aug 31 – Sept. 4	2020 Context: What happened in 2016?	<p>Reading Quiz #2 DUE Friday 11:59pm</p> <p>Civic Engagement Activity #1 DUE Sunday 11:59pm</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identity, Chs. 1-2 2. Searles, Kathleen, and Kevin K. Banda. 2019. "But Her Emails! How Journalistic Preferences Shaped Election Coverage in 2016." <i>Journalism</i>, May. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1464884919845459?casa_token=2hvWW-gxcroAAAAA:6v5FBSokzvGgFKCjGCLKFAZHYnEAO2BWILxwgW_HgL5MVRQcsChoRvt9V0AymNqR8GNjgGMgQ1wUYg . 3. Silver, Nate. 2017a. "The Real Story Of 2016." <i>FiveThirtyEight</i> (blog). January 19, 2017. https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-real-story-of-2016/. 4. Silver, Nate. 2017b. "It Wasn't Clinton's Election To Lose." <i>FiveThirtyEight</i> (blog). January 23, 2017. https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/it-wasnt-clintons-election-to-lose/.
Week 3 Sept. 7 - 11	2020 Context: What are the rules of elections?	<p>Reading Quiz #3 DUE Friday 11:59pm</p> <p>Civic Engagement Activity #3 DUE Sunday 11:59pm</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. C&E, Chs. 1-2 2. Cong., Chs. 1-2 3. "The Electoral College." CQ Researcher by CQ Press. Accessed July 30, 2020. http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresre2019083000.

Week	Lessons	Assignments
Week 4 Sept. 14 - 18	2020 Context: Campaign History	Reading Quiz #4 DUE Friday 11:59pm Civic Engagement Activity #4 DUE Sunday 11:59pm <u>Reading</u> 1. C&E , Ch. 3 2. Identity , Chs. 3-4 3. Center for Responsive Politics. n.d. "Money-in-Politics Timeline." OpenSecrets. Accessed August 2, 2020. https://www.opensecrets.org/resources/learn/timeline .
Week 5 Sept. 21 - 25	2020 Context: Campaign finance	Reading Quiz #5 DUE Friday 11:59pm Civic Engagement Activity #5 DUE Sunday 11:59pm <u>Reading</u> 1. C&E , Ch. 4 2. Cong , Ch. 4 3. B&D , Ch. 2 4. Center for Responsive Politics. n.d. "10 Things They Won't Tell You about Money in Politics OpenSecrets." Accessed August 2, 2020. https://www.opensecrets.org/resources/10things/ .
Week 6 Sept. 28 – Oct. 2	Nominations: The process of nominating candidates	Reading Quiz #6 DUE Friday 11:59pm Short Essay #1 DUE Sunday 11:59pm <u>Reading</u> 1. C&E , Ch. 6 2. B&D , Chs. 5 & 9 3. Identity , Ch. 5

Week	Lessons	Assignments
Week 7 Oct. 5 - 9	Nominations: The 2020 field	Reading Quiz #7 DUE Friday 11:59pm Civic Engagement Activity #6 DUE Sunday 11:59pm <u>Reading</u> 1. C&E , Ch. 9 2. Cong , Ch. 3 3. B&D , Chs. 1 & 7 4. Hilton, Adam. "Analysis Sanders Is out. Does That Mean That 'the Party Decides' after All?" <i>Washington Post</i> . Accessed July 30, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/04/10/sanders-is-out-does-that-mean-that-party-decides-after-all/ .
Week 8 Oct. 12 – 16 *No class on Tuesday this week	Campaigning: Strategy and Choice	Reading Quiz #8 DUE Friday 11:59pm Civic Engagement Activity #7 DUE Sunday 11:59pm <u>Reading</u> 1. C&E , Chs. 5 & 9 2. B&D , Chs. 3 & 4 3. Identity , Ch. 6
Week 9 Oct. 19 - 23	Campaigning: Themes and Candidates	MIDTERM EXAM Due Friday 11:59pm <u>Reading</u> 1. C&E , Ch. 8 2. Cong , Ch. 6
Week 10 Oct. 26 - 30	Voters: Organizations	Reading Quiz #9 DUE Friday 11:59pm Civic Engagement Activity #8 DUE Sunday 11:59pm <u>Reading</u> 1. C&E , Ch. 7 & 10 & 11 2. Cong , Ch. 5 3. B&D , Ch. 8
Week 11 Nov. 2 – 6	Voters: Voting	Reading Quiz #10 DUE Friday 11:59pm Civic Engagement Activity #9 DUE Sunday 11:59pm <u>Reading</u> 1. C&E , Chs. 12 & 13 2. Identity , Ch. 7

Week	Lessons	Assignments
		<p>3. Victor, Jennifer. 2018. "What Good Are Elections, Anyway?" Vox (blog). October 30, 2018. https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2018/10/30/18032808/what-good-are-elections.</p> <p>4. Pew Research Center. "As COVID-19 Cases Increase, Most Americans Support 'No Excuse' Absentee Voting." <i>Pew Research Center</i> (blog). Accessed July 26, 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/20/as-covid-19-cases-increase-most-americans-support-no-excuse-absentee-voting/.</p>
Week 12 Nov. 9 – 13	Elections and Democracy: Reprise	<p>Reading Quiz #11 DUE Friday 11:59pm</p> <p>Short Essay #2 DUE Sunday 11:59pm</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identity, Ch. 8 2. TBD
Week 13 Nov. 16 – 20	Elections and Democracy: Representation	<p>Reading Quiz #12 DUE Friday 11:59pm</p> <p>Civic Engagement Activity #10 DUE Sunday 11:59pm</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. C&E, Ch. 14 2. Cong, Ch. 7 3. Identity, Ch. 9
Week 14 Nov. 23 – 27 *Student holidays Nov. 25 - 27	Elections and Democracy: Reforms and the Future of USA	<p>Reading Quiz #13 DUE Sunday 11:59pm</p> <p>Civic Engagement Activity #11 DUE Sunday 11:59pm</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sifry, Micah L. "Why America Is Stuck With Only Two Parties." <i>The New Republic</i>, February 2, 2018. https://newrepublic.com/article/146884/america-stuck-two-parties. 2. Skelley, Geoffrey. "America Isn't Really Set Up For Third-Party Presidential Bids." <i>FiveThirtyEight</i> (blog), January 31, 2019. https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/america-isnt-really-set-up-for-third-party-presidential-bids/.
Week 15 Nov. 30 – Dec. 4	Elections and Democracy: Reforms and	<p>(No quizzes, essays, or CEAs this week. Work on group project.)</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p>

Week	Lessons	Assignments
	the Future of USA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. McElwee, Sean, Jesse Rhodes, and Brian F. Schaffner. "Is America More Divided by Race or Class?" <i>Washington Post</i>. Accessed July 30, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/10/12/how-do-race-ethnicity-and-class-shape-american-political-attitudes-heres-our-data/. <li>2. Tesler, Michael. "Analysis Views about Race Mattered More in Electing Trump than in Electing Obama." <i>Washington Post</i>. Accessed July 30, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/11/22/peoples-views-about-race-mattered-more-in-electing-trump-than-in-electing-obama/. <li>3. Wolbrecht, Christina, and Kevin J. Corder. "Predicting How Women Will Vote Requires Looking beyond Gender Alone." <i>Newsweek</i>, January 30, 2020. https://www.newsweek.com/2020/02/07/predicting-how-women-will-vote-requires-looking-beyond-gender-alone-1484448.html.
Tuesday, Dec. 15,	FINAL GROUP PRESENTATIONS	STUDENT GROUPS PRESENT FINAL PROJECTS IN SYNCHRONOUS SESSION, THURSDAY 1:30 – 4:15PM