

POLS 3150-01

American Presidential Elections
Spring, 2024, 1/16 – 5/14
Tuesday/Thursday: 2-15 – 3:30

Dr. Kenneth Warren

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STATEMENT ABOUT THE COURSE: The subject of presidential elections is inherently exciting to any person interested in politics. I want to make this course as informative, interesting, and exciting as possible. You have the special advantage of taking this course during the primary season of the 2024 presidential campaign. Consequently, we are going to follow and discuss the day to day progress of this campaign as it progresses.

You will be responsible for reading half of the chapters for the mid-term and the other half of the chapters for the final. I will cover much of the material in these chapters, but I am not going to bore you with tedious lectures, covering systematically practically all of the materials covered in these chapters by our authors, Nelson Polsby, Aaron Wildavsky, Steven Schier, and David Hopkins. I will definitely cover the highlights in these chapters and make certain what I expect from you for the mid-term and final, but I want to spend much of our time presenting and critiquing developments (breaking news) in the 2024 presidential election and placing them into historical perspective.

To do this, I will be forwarding to you the most current articles, editorials, columns, blogs, polls, etc. that will provide insights into what is happening in this presidential campaign. Often, the articles, poll results, etc. will be only hours old. I will comment on most of these materials and we will discuss their significance in class. Obviously, some of the articles may offend your partisan beliefs since some will slam Republicans, while others will slam Democrats. Please understand that, although most of us are partisans, we should act as political science scholars in our search for understanding presidential campaign politics, not as sensitive, not-so-open-minded partisans. Frankly, this may not be so easy for many of you not accustomed to having your partisan beliefs challenged and even shaken by facts. What we will learn is that both Republicans and Democrats lie and distort in their campaign speeches, debates, and political ads, saying about anything to get elected. In fact, we will consult fact checkers from time to time to check the truthfulness of what the candidates say during their campaigns. Presidential campaigns have been rather dirty since active campaigning for the presidency first began. The U.S. presidential election constitutes the most important electoral contest

- B. What are special interests and are they a threat to our democratic processes (e.g., presidential elections)
- C. How do they affect campaign spending and election outcomes?
- D. Are third party candidates excluded in part by special interests/interest group politics?
- E. Third party politics and the politics of futility
- F. Summary

V. Presidential Campaigns, Rules, and Resources

- A. Playing the Electoral College game: trying to win 270 electoral votes
- B. The role of money in presidential campaigns: can presidential candidates with more money simply “buy” the election victory?
- C. What is *Citizens United* and why all the fuss?
- D. Information as a resource: controlling the information
- E. Incumbency as an advantage and disadvantage
- F. Summary

VI.

- E. Appealing to voters on the basis of issues, but how much do issue stands really matter? What are the true determinants of vote choice?
- F. Trying to control the media to get good press and a lot of press coverage
- G. The importance of polling, focus groups, advertising, the Internet, and social media play in modern presidential campaigns.
- H. How effective are political ads in changing a voter's mind on who to vote for?
- I. GOTV drives: their importance and effectiveness
- J. Campaign blunders and their impact; Trump has caused political scientists to reassess what it means to "blunder"
- K. Summary

IX. Explaining Various Presidential Election Forecasting Models

- A. Introducing various forecasting models
- B. Looking at their success
- C. Explaining and critiquing forecasting models, especially stressing the assumptions of each
- D. Why Nate Silver's poll-based forecasting model is probably the best kind of model to use to predict presidential election results, despite missing the call in 2016, as did almost every forecasting model.
- E. What we can learn from studying forecasting models.
- F. Following forecasting models during this presidential election.
- G. Summary

X. The Impact Presidential Elections S000021706,)11644d soc3092) 18g at their success

E. Summary

Required Readings

Nelson Polsby, Aron Wildavsky, Steven Schier, and David Hopkins, *Presidential Elections: Strategies and Structures of American Politics*, 16th ed. (Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 2024). ISBN 978 -1-5381-2511-3

Assigned readings from recent articles, polls, and the like that provide current insights on what is happening in the campaign.

Attendance Policy: Under normal conditions, students are expected to attend class regularly since lectures are an important source of information, especially since topics discussed in lectures are frequently not covered in the book. This is because I will be lecturing on breaking news regarding the 2024 presidential campaign and political news in general that cannot be covered in previously published materials. I want to frequently comment on what is happening in the presidential campaign as it develops, putting the breaking events into an historical perspective.

Paper		70 points
Class Participation		<u>30 points</u>
	Total	400 points

The numerical equivalents of letter grades are:

94-100 = A	91-93 = A-	88-90 = B+	82-87 = B	80-81 = B-
77-79 = C+	73-76 = C	70-72 = C-	65-69 = D	Below 65 = F

Course Learning Objectives and Assessment of Student Learning

The purpose of this course is twofold: (1) to teach students comprehensively about the presidential election process from an historical and modern perspective; and (2) to make students think critically about American presidential elections in the context of political science research on the subject. Students will be assessed on their general knowledge about various aspects of presidential elections as taught in this class through a midterm and final exam and in-class discussions, as well as in their ability to apply what they have learned in this class to critique the strengths and weaknesses of the presidential election process.

COURSE EVALUATION

All students are expected to complete a confidential course evaluation on-line.

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Student Success Center Syllabus Statement:

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. The Student Success Center assists students with academic and career related services, is located in the Busch Student Center (Suite, 331) and the School of Nursing (Suite, 114). Students can visit www.slu.edu/success to learn more about:

- Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.
- University-level support (e.g., tutoring services, university writing services, disability services, academic coaching, career services, and/or facets of curriculum planning).

Academic Integrity and Honesty

Jennifer Popiel, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Affairs

