

Congressional Elections
Department of Political Science
POLI 3150
TuTh 3:30 – 4:45
22 Schaeffer Hall

Instructor	Prof. Colin Case
Email	colin-case@uiowa.edu
Office	359 Schaeffer Hall
Office Hours	Tuesday & Thursday 1:00 – 2:30

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers a comprehensive exploration of congressional elections, delving into institutional foundations of how congressional elections are run, campaign dynamics surrounding who runs, who wins, and how candidates behave on the campaign trail, as well as legislative implications of elections for public policy outcomes. The central focus of the course will be the U.S. Congress, but much of what we discuss will have direct relevance for the study of elections more generally. The course will deal primarily with political actors rather than voters in the context of elections. Throughout the course, we will pay particular attention to current political science research regarding factors affecting outcomes in congressional races. It is my hope that you leave the semester knowing more about the role congressional elections play in American politics and are able to think critically about political interactions in contemporary American politics. Furthermore, I hope that this course inspires greater engagement in public affairs by connecting political science to live questions in American politics

REQUIRED TEXTS

- All readings will be posted on the ICON Course Site. There is no required text for this course.

EXPECTATIONS

This course is an upper-level undergraduate seminar. With that, I have high expectations for students' engagement and participation in the course. In this course, classes will contain a mix of lecture, active learning, and discussion about course content and readings. Students are expected to take an active role in their learning by completing readings before class, coming to class ready to participate directly with classmates, and asking questions as they arise, either from readings or the lecture material. You will be responsible for all material from the readings and lectures, even if you miss a class.

We will frequently engage in group discussions about course content and current events. American politics is full of “hot topics” that you and your classmates may have strong opinions about. Our aim in this course is not to discuss the merits of our beliefs. Rather, we will focus on discussing how theories and concepts apply to current events from an analytical perspective. I encourage you to engage with viewpoints that differ from your own. I require that you do so in a respectful and productive way. An open environment will allow us to approach the ideas presented in the course as analytical, critical thinkers so that we can form, challenge, and develop theories and evidence about the issues we discuss.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Grades will be calculated as follows:

A+ 98.00-100
A 93.00-97.99 (exceeds expectations)
A- 90.00-92.99
B+ 87.00-89.99
B 84.00-86.99 (meets expectations)
B- 80.00-83.99
C+ 77.00-79.99
C 74.00-76.99 (below expectations)
C- 70.00-73.99
D+ 65.00-69.99
D 64.99-60.00
F 59.99-0

The following components will make up your final grade:

2 Exams (15% Each)

Exams will be taken in class and consist of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The first exam will be taken in class on Tuesday, October 15th. The second exam will be taken in class on Thursday, December 5th. Neither exam is cumulative, and each is worth 15% of your final grade.

2 Papers (25% Each)

For this class, you will write two papers. For the first paper, you will be assigned a congressional race to analyze. Using theories discussed in class, you will be asked to predict the results of your congressional election. The first paper will be due on November 4th at 11:59 PM and must be submitted through ICON. For the second paper, you will be assigned to an incumbent member of Congress. Using theories discussed in class, you will be asked to explain the candidate’s campaign strategy as well as their potential future legislative behavior for the upcoming term. The second paper will be due on the University assigned final exam date and must be submitted through ICON. More details about each paper will be posted closer to the due date.

In-Class Participation (20%)

As this grade indicates, a successful student will not only be physically present during class, but come prepared to engage with the material. Beyond showing up, active participation in this course is vital for success – both for the class as a whole and for your development as a student. Class participation can take many different forms such as speaking and listening to others during small and large group discussions, raising questions for classmates to consider, or completing occasional brief assignments either before or during class. I will communicate well in advance about these assignments. They will primarily serve the purpose of fostering discussion related to the week’s readings. I expect both quality and quantity with respect to class participation – your participation should illustrate that you are thinking critically about topics we cover and the assigned readings.

It should go without saying, if you do not regularly attend class, you cannot do well on your participation grade. You will be permitted three excused absences throughout the semester where you do not need to justify why you are missing class. Each additional absence will result in a 10 point reduction in your participation grade. Exceptions to this policy will be made in the case of multiple absences due to prolonged illness, religious holidays, military service obligations, and University-sponsored activities.

COMMUNICATION

I am very happy to meet with students outside of class time. Whether it be to discuss concerns about the course, questions about the material, or to engage further with the topic, please feel free to come to office hours. I will be holding office hours in 359 Schaeffer Hall. If you cannot meet during my office hours, which are listed at the top of this syllabus, please email me to set up an alternative time. Office hours are an important resource that should be utilized to improve understanding of the material or ask more personalized questions. Before writing assignment due dates, I will be available during office hours to read over paper outlines or talk through ideas and provide feedback. Please do not bring completed papers, and be advised office hours before paper deadlines may be busy.

Outside of office hours, e-mail is the easiest way to contact me. Please include “POLI 3150” in the subject line of the e-mail. I will typically respond to email within 48 hours. If I do not respond to your email in this time frame, please send a follow-up. If you have extensive questions requiring a longer conversation, please visit my office hours or stay after class. I will frequently send emails about the course material, upcoming assignments or activities, and general reminders. I expect you to check your UI email regularly to stay on top of these updates.

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND MISCONDUCT

Academic dishonesty — including cheating, plagiarism, or any instance of taking credit for work that is not your own — will not be tolerated in this course. All students in CLAS courses are expected to abide by the college’s standards of academic honesty. Undergraduate academic misconduct must be reported by instructors to CLAS according to these

procedures.

This course assumes that you will generate the work you submit. This means that the following would be considered violations of academic integrity: a student has another person/entity do the writing of any substantive portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write essays and drafts and/or other assignments research-based or otherwise, and using artificial intelligence affordances like ChatGPT. I will permit you to use AI tools to help you revise and edit your work (e.g., to help identify grammatical errors, spot confusing or underdeveloped paragraphs, or fix citations).

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES & STUDENT SUPPORT

Students are encouraged to be mindful of their mental health and seek help as a preventive measure or if feeling overwhelmed and/or struggling to meet course expectations. Students are encouraged to talk to their instructor for assistance with course-related concerns. For additional mental health support, please see the guidance and resources at mentalhealth.uiowa.edu, including the 24-7 UI Support and Crisis Line.

Additionally, the Office of the Dean of Students can help students navigate personal crisis situations. They can provide one-on-one support, help with identifying options, and access to basic needs resources (such as food, rent, childcare, etc.). Student Care and Assistance: 132 IMU, dos-assistance@uiowa.edu, or 319-335-1162 and more info: dos.uiowa.edu/assistance.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES (LINKS)

- **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**
- **Free Speech & Expression**
- **Absences for Religious Holidays**
- **Classroom Expectations**
- **Non-discrimination**
- **Sexual Harassment/Misconduct & Supportive Measures**

COURSE SCHEDULE

Aug 27	Course Overview and the 2024 Congressional Election <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Syllabus• Mutnick, Ally, Sarah Ferris, and Anthony Adragna. “Harris reset the election, and congressional Dems are starting to shift strategies,” <i>Politico</i>, August 17, 2024.• Weisman, Jonathan. “Battle for the House: These Are the Races to Watch,” <i>The New York Times</i>, April 24, 2024.
Aug 29	Congress Overview and Reading Academic Articles <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Article I of the Constitution• Green, Amelia Hoover. “How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps.”
Sep 3	Congressional Districts <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abramowitz, Alan I., Brad Alexander, and Matthew Gunning. “Incumbency, redistricting, and the decline of competition in US House elections.” <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 68, no. 1 (2006): 75-88.• Allen, Danielle. “Opinion: How big should the House of Representatives be?”
Sep 5	Redistricting and Gerrymandering <ul style="list-style-type: none">• McCartan, Cory, et al. “Simulated redistricting plans for the analysis and evaluation of redistricting in the United States.” <i>Scientific Data</i> 9.1 (2022): 689• Bring laptop to class for gerrymandering activity
Sep 10	Theories of Constituencies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fenno, Richard F. “US House members in their constituencies: An exploration.” <i>American Political Science Review</i> 71, no. 3 (1977): 883-917.*<i>Read first nine pages and skim the rest.</i>
Sep 12	Political Parties <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hassell, Hans. 2015. “Party Control of Party Primaries.” <i>Journal of Politics</i> 78: 75-87

Sep 17	<p>Primary Election Rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anderson, Sarah E., Daniel M. Butler, and Laurel Harbridge-Yong. 2020. <i>Rejecting Compromise: Legislators' Fear of Primary Voters</i>. Cambridge University Press. Ch 3. • DeVito, Frank. "Open Primaries and Closed Debate." <i>The American Conservative</i>. February 22, 2023. • Troiano, Nick. "Party Primaries Must Go." <i>The Atlantic</i>. March 30, 2021.
Sep 19	<p>Incumbency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayhew, David. Summary of <i>Congress: The Electoral Connection</i>. <i>The American Congress Reader</i> • Lopez, Ashley. "Term limits for Congress are wildly popular. But most experts say they'd be a bad idea." <i>NPR</i>. October 29, 2023.
Sep 24	<p>Candidate Emergence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacobson, Gary C. "Strategic politicians and the dynamics of US House elections, 1946–86." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 83, no. 3 (1989): 773-793.
Sep 26	<p>Candidate Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Porter, Rachel, and Sarah A. Treul. "Evaluating (in)experience in congressional elections." <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> (2023).
Oct 1	<p>Candidate Descriptive Representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomsen, Danielle M., and Aaron S. King. "Women's representation and the gendered pipeline to power." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 114, no. 4 (2020): 989-1000.
Oct 3	<p>Voters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sides, John, Chris Tausanovitch, Lynn Vavreck, and Christopher Warshaw. "On the representativeness of primary electorates." <i>British Journal of Political Science</i> 50, no. 2 (2020): 677-685.
Oct 8	<p>Partisanship and Voter Preferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dancey, Logan, John Henderson, and Geoffrey Sheagley. "The Personal Vote in a Polarized Era." <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> (2023).
Oct 10	<p>Voter Information & Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Oct 15	<p>Exam I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A

Oct 17	<p>Writing Day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Oct 22	<p>Nationalization & Macro Partisan Trends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina, Morris P. “The (Re) Nationalization of Congressional Elections.” <i>Hoover Institution</i> (2017).
Oct 24	<p>Campaign Finance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bonica, Adam. “Why are there so many lawyers in Congress?.” <i>Legislative Studies Quarterly</i> 45, no. 2 (2020): 253-289. • Koerth, Maggie. “How Money Affects Elections.” <i>FiveThirtyEight</i>. September 10, 2018.
Oct 29	<p>Competition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomsen, Danielle M. “Competition in congressional elections: Money versus votes.” <i>American Political Science Review</i> 117, no. 2 (2023): 675-691. • Paper 1 Due Oct 30th @ 11:59 on ICON
Oct 31	<p>Campaign Strategy I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hewitt, Luke, et al. “How experiments help campaigns persuade voters: Evidence from a large archive of campaigns’ own experiments.” <i>American Political Science Review</i> (2024): 1-19.
Nov 5	<p>Campaign Strategy II (Election Day)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grimmer, Justin. “Appropriators not position takers: The distorting effects of electoral incentives on congressional representation.” <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> 57, no. 3 (2013): 624-642.
Nov 7	<p>Campaign Strategy III & Election Day Recap</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Porter, Rachel, Sarah A. Treul, and Maura McDonald. “Changing the Dialogue: Descriptive Candidacies and Position Taking in Campaigns for the US House of Representatives.” <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 86, no. 2 (2024): 458-474.
Nov 12	<p>Policy Congruence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ansolabehere, Stephen, James M. Snyder Jr, and Charles Stewart III. “Candidate positioning in US House elections.” <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> (2001): 136-159.
Nov 14	<p>Legislative Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canes-Wrone, Brandice, David W. Brady, and John F. Cogan. “Out of step, out of office: Electoral accountability and House members’ voting.” <i>American Political Science Review</i> 96, no. 1 (2002): 127-140.

Nov 19	Campaign Promises in Office <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sulkin, Tracy. "Campaign appeals and legislative action." <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 71, no. 3 (2009): 1093-1108.
Nov 21	Polarization I (General Elections) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lee, Frances E. <i>Insecure majorities: Congress and the perpetual campaign</i>. University of Chicago Press, 2016. Chs 1-2.
Nov 26–28	No Class (Thanksgiving) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Dec 3	Polarization II (Primary Elections) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomsen, Danielle M. "Ideological moderates won't run: How party fit matters for partisan polarization in Congress." <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 76, no. 3 (2014): 786-797.
Dec 5	Exam II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Dec 10	Paper Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Dec 12	Future of Congressional Elections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBD
Dec TBD	Final Paper Due