Elections are at the center of American politics. For citizens, campaigns are a time of heightened political interest and involvement, and an opportunity to convey their preferences to politicians. For political parties and interest groups, it is a time to gain new political influence (or lose it). Journalists are called upon to translate information about the campaign to the electorate, and politicians must market their policy platform both to the electorate and other political elites.

In this course, we will explore how campaigns are practiced in the United States. We will consider why people run for office and how political parties, interest groups, and electoral rules influence how the campaign plays out. Next, we will explore the content of campaigns – the positions candidates take, the effects of political contexts and campaign events, how campaign messages are conveyed to citizens, and how this all influences election outcomes. Finally, we will consider the effects of campaigns on citizens – what they learn, how they evaluate candidates, what animates their participation, and how they choose which candidate to vote for.

**reading assignments**

Course readings are drawn from several texts as well as journal articles. Journal articles are accessible through the library's website, while book chapters are available through the CULearn site for the course. In addition, the following books will be used the course:


**requirements**

**PARTICIPATION** (25% of your final grade)

One important prerequisite of participation is class attendance. Class attendance is vital and required. It is essential to read all of the assigned readings and think carefully about what you have read in advance of the class session. Frantically skimming the articles in the minutes before class begins will limit the quality of our class discussion and impede your ability to learn anything useful. Your education and our class discussion of the readings will both benefit from your careful reading of the articles as well as the time you spend in advance of class reflecting on what you have read and learned.

You will also be expected to actively participate in class discussions in a thoughtful way.
LEADERSHIP OF CLASS DISCUSSION (15% of your final grade)

For three weeks during the semester, you will be responsible for leading class discussion. Your goal is to ensure that the class engages in thoughtful reflection about what we can learn from that week’s readings. How you do this is up to you and your fellow discussion leader. You could spend time discussing the articles individually, engaging the themes that cross different articles, connecting that week’s topic to prior readings, or discussing ways to extend and elaborate on the week’s readings. Your grade will reflect the quality of your preparation, as well as the quantity and quality of class discussion you generate.

You will be graded on your class participation and discussion leadership, which will count toward 40% of your final grade. You can choose which assignments will compose the remainder of your grade from the following options:

**AN EXTRA WEEK OF DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP** (each is worth 5% of your final grade, if selected)

**RESPONSE PAPERS** (each is worth 5% of your final grade, if selected)

In these response papers, you will use the week's readings as inspiration for a possible future research project. In your memo, develop a plan for how you could empirically extend ideas raised in that week's readings. Your proposal might extend ideas raised in the studies, or you might propose an interesting question that the authors do not consider. Describe your research question, why it is important and how it would contribute to the literature, the central hypotheses you would want to test, and how you would test your hypotheses. These papers should be single-spaced and two to three pages in length. Turn them in at the beginning of class on the day we discuss that topic.

**BOOK REPORT** (each is worth 10% of your final grade, if selected)

If there is a book on campaigns and elections that you are interested in that is not on this syllabus, you can choose to read it and write up a book report. When we cover that topic in class, you will present a short summary of the book to the class and engage some of the strengths and weaknesses of the text. You should also turn in a book review essay (two to four pages) on the same matters, for distribution to the rest of the class via the course website.

**LONGER ESSAY** (worth 10% of your final grade, if selected)

Another option is to write a five page essay (single spaced) about how the study of campaigns and voting has evolved over time, based on themes evoked in The American Voter and The American Voter Revisited. More details will be outlined in a separate handout.

**LITERATURE REVIEW** (each is worth 20% of your final grade, if selected)

Another option is to write an essay that assesses the current literature on a topic of your choosing (given instructor approval). This essay should be five to eight single spaced pages in length and is due the last week of the semester. The central goal of the paper will be to address and summarize the research about a particular topic – to identify the central question or questions, highlight the most important literature related to the topic, and provide commentary about the strengths and weaknesses of the current research in the area. More details will be outlined on a separate handout.

**RESEARCH PAPER** (worth 50% of your final grade, if selected)

You also have the option to develop a research paper that tests an interesting question about campaigns and elections. This paper should follow the format of the kinds of academic papers read in class – including development of a research question, a review of relevant literature, theory, tests of these explanations, and interpretation of what you find. Expectations for the research paper are outlined in a separate handout.
CUlearn is your friend

This syllabus, assignments, and other exciting material can be accessed on the class website on culearn.colorado.edu.

special accommodations

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. You can contact the Disability Services office for more information at www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices.

some important comments on academic integrity

Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are not familiar with the rules of citing sources in written work or what constitutes plagiarism, you should contact me or refer to the University Honor Code at www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode. Academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course and referral to the Honor Court for additional non-academic sanctions.

All papers are expected to be original work, not previously or simultaneously handed in for credit in another course (unless prior approval of all instructors involved is obtained).
1. plan for the semester
Monday, August 23

2. candidate emergence
Monday, August 30
Who runs for office and why do they choose to do so?

Monday, September 6
Labor Day – Class does not meet

3. political parties
Monday, September 13
What roles do political parties play in elections? How do parties affect candidate strategies and voter choices?
4. **campaign money and the role of interest groups**

Monday, September 20

*Who donates to campaigns, to which candidates, and why? What are the effects of campaign money?*


5. **electoral institutions**

Monday, September 27

*How do electoral rules affect who runs and who participates? How do electoral institutions affect who wins?*


6. **the effects of member and district attributes**

Monday, October 4

*Where do candidates choose to campaign? How do campaigns play out in different contexts?*

7. the effects of the economy and other national factors

Monday, October 11

What determines election outcomes?


8. campaign messages

Monday, October 18

How do candidates communicate with voters? How do the media convey campaign messages?


9. media coverage of campaigns

Monday, October 25

How do the media cover campaigns? How does this coverage affect campaigns? How do voters respond?


10. campaign events and campaign dynamics

Monday, November 1

What are the consequences of campaign events? How do campaigns play out across time?

11. advertising strategies and their consequences

Monday, November 8
What kinds of advertising strategies do candidates employ, and how do campaign ads affect voters?

12. campaign effects: persuasion, priming, and learning

Monday, November 15
What explains campaign learning? How do campaigns influence how voters evaluate the candidates?

Monday, November 22 Fall break: Class does not meet.

13. campaign effects: turnout and mobilization

Monday, November 29
What promotes voter turnout? How do campaigns animate voter involvement?
14. vote choice

Monday, December 6

How do people decide how to vote? What factors direct vote choice?
