

Politics of Congressional Elections

Tuesday and Thursday

2:00 – 3:15 p.m.

Instructor: Jason S. Byers
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Room:
Office:
Office Hours:

Course Description

This seminar is intended as a broad survey of the literature on congressional elections. 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. We will focus on diverse topics such as the incumbency advantage, the role of strategic politicians, the impact of money in congressional elections, the effects of national and local tides on congressional races, and differences between House and Senate races. Along the way, we will pay attention to current political and scholarly controversies—as well as some “classics”—in terms of understanding factors affecting outcomes in congressional races. By the end of the course, you should have a better understanding of the nature of congressional elections.

Required Texts

Hassell, Hans J. G. 2018. *The Party's Primary: Control of Congressional Nominations*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hopkins, Daniel. 2018. *The Increasingly United States: How and Why American Political Behavior Nationalized*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jacobson, Gary C. and Jamie L. Carson. 2020. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*. 10th ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Mayhew, David R. 2004. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. 2nd edition. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Course Materials

The readings for the course will be drawn from the list of books above, in addition to scholarly articles each week. Required books are available for purchase from the usual sources or may be checked out from the library. Unless otherwise indicated, assigned articles can be downloaded from www.jstor.org or I will provide them to you. Please keep in mind that assigned readings or the course schedule may be altered at the discretion of the instructor.

Course Requirements and Grading

Your grade in this course will be based on the following components:

Attendance and Participation	10 Points
Short Writing Assignments	20 Percent
Midterm Exam	25 Points
Final Exam	25 Points
Final Paper	20 Points

Attendance and Participation: Each student will be granted 2 unexcused absences. After those are exhausted, the attendance grade will be the proportion of all classes attended. For example, a student who attends all classes will receive all 10 points. A student who attended all but 2 classes will also receive all 10 points. A student who missed 3 classes but had a university approved excuse will also receive all 10 points. However, a student who used both “freebies” but also missed 10 percent of the classes will only receive 90 percent of the available points.

Short Writing Assignment: Each student will be required to submit a short writing assignment on the day that you are responsible for leading class discussion. This assignment should briefly summarize and critically analyze the assigned readings. The paper should be approximately 2-3 pages in length in a typed, double-spaced format with one-inch margins. *Be sure to spell check and read over your paper before submitting it for a grade.*

Exams: There will be a midterm and a final exam in this course. Exams are closed book and will include a mix of identification, short answer, and essay questions. The final exam is cumulative and will include material covered in the class lectures and the assigned reading. *A blue book will be required for each exam.* Make-up exams will not be allowed without a university-approved excuse. It is the student’s responsibility to schedule a make-up exam as quickly as possible after her or she has provided an excuse. Any potential conflicts should be cleared with the instructor as soon as possible. Exams may not be taken early.

Final Paper: Everyone will be required to submit a final paper at the end of November. This assignment will analyze the outcome of the 2022 congressional elections in light of the explanatory theories discussed in class. These papers should be approximately 8-10 pages in length in a typed, double-spaced format with one-inch margins. *Your final grade on the project will be penalized if there are grammatical or spelling errors in the completed paper.*

Overall Grades: Grades are constructed to reflect the university standards, which are summarized below. Grades will be based on how many points you earn according to the following distribution:

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	F = 0-59	

How to Succeed in this Course

- Be respectful of your own and others' ideas.
- Attend class consistently.
- Keep up with the readings.
- If something is not clear, ask a question.
- Clarify expectations with the instructor.
- Utilize all resources available to you.

Course Schedule (Subject to change as events warrant):

8/18 Introduction

8/23 The Electoral Connection

Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (pgs. 1-77)

8/25 Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (pgs. 81-180)

8/30 Electoral Accountability in Congress

Canes-Wrone, Brandice, David W. Brady, and John F. Cogan. 2002. "Out of Step, Out of Office: Electoral Accountability and House Members' Voting." *American Political Science Review* 96(March): 127-140.

Jacobson and Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (pgs. 1-36)

9/1 Carson, Jamie, Gregory Koger, Matthew Lebo, and Everett Young. 2010. "The Electoral Costs of Party Loyalty in Congress." *American Journal of Political Science* 54(July): 598-616.

9/6 Congressional Primaries

Hassell, *The Party's Primary* (pgs. 1-87)

9/8 Hassell, *The Party's Primary* (pgs. 88-191)

9/13 Strategic Politicians

Jacobson, Gary C. 1989. "Strategic Politicians and the Dynamics of U.S. House Elections, 1946-86." *American Political Science Review* 83(September): 773-793.

9/15 Canon, David T. 1993. "Sacrificial Lambs or Strategic Politicians? Political Amateurs in U.S. House Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 37(4): 1119-1141.

9/20 The Incumbency Advantage in Congress

Cox, Gary and Jonathan Katz. 1996. "Why Did the Incumbency Advantage in U.S. House Elections Grow?" *American Journal of Political Science* 40(May): 478-497.

Jacobson and Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (pgs. 37-49)

9/22 Ansolabehere, Stephen, James M. Snyder, Jr., and Charles Stewart, III. 2000. "Old Voters, New Voters, and the Personal Vote: Using Redistricting to Measure the Incumbency Advantage." *American Journal of Political Science* 44(January): 17-34.

Jacobson and Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (pgs. 49-67)

9/27 Carson, Jamie L., Erik J. Engstrom, and Jason M. Roberts. 2007. "Candidate Quality, the Personal Vote, and the Incumbency Advantage in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 101(May): 289-301.

9/29 Jacobson, Gary C. 2015. "It's Nothing Personal: The Decline of the Incumbency Advantage in U.S. House Elections." *Journal of Politics* 3(July): 861-873.

10/4 **Midterm Exam**

10/6 **Nationalized Elections**

Hopkins, *The Increasingly United States* (pgs. 1-123)

10/11 Hopkins, *The Increasingly United States* (pgs. 124-239)

10/13 **Money in Congressional Elections**

Green, Donald Philip, and Jonathan S. Krasno. 1988. "Salvation for the Spendthrift Incumbent: Reestimating the Effects of Campaign Spending in House Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 32(November): 884-907.

Jacobson and Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (pgs. 67-73)

10/18 Jacobson, Gary C. 1990. "The Effects of Campaign Spending in House Elections: New Evidence for Old Arguments." *American Journal of Political Science* 34(May): 334- 362.

Green, Donald Philip and Jonathan Krasno. 1990. "Rebuttal to Jacobson's New Evidence for Old Arguments." *American Journal of Political Science* 34(May): 363-372.

10/20 Goodliffe, Jay. 2001. "The Effect of War Chests on Challenger Entry in U.S. House Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 45(October): 830-844.

Jacobson and Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (pgs. 73-76)

10/25 Gimpel, James G., Frances E. Lee, and Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz. 2008. "The Check Is in the Mail: Interdistrict Funding Flows in Congressional Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 52(April): 373-394.

Jacobson and Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (pgs. 85-110)

10/27 **Media and Elections**

Levendusky, Matthew S. 2013. "Why do Partisan Media Polarize Viewers?" *American Journal of Political Science* 57(July): 611-623.

Jacobson and Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (pgs. 121-125)

- 11/1 Arceneaux, Kevin, Johanna Dunaway, Martin Johnson, and Ryan J. Vander Wielen. 2020. "Strategic Candidate Entry and Congressional Elections in the Era of Fox News." *American Journal of Political Science* 64(2): 398-415.

Jacobson and Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (pgs. 125-146)

11/3 **Redistricting and Electoral Competition**

Carson, Jamie, Michael Crespin, and Ryan Williamson. 2014. "Re-evaluating the Effects of Redistricting on Electoral Competition, 1972-2012." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 14(2): 162-174.

11/8 **Election Day**

Carson, Jamie, Spencer Hardin, and Aaron Hitefield. 2021. "You're Fired! Donald Trump and the 2020 Congressional Elections." *The Forum* 18(4): 627-650.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2020-2103>

11/10 **Discussion of Election Results**

11/15 **Senate Elections**

Lublin, David I. 1994. "Quality, Not Quantity: Strategic Politicians in U.S. Senate Elections, 1952-1990." *Journal of Politics* 56(February): 228-241.

Jacobson and Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (pgs. 147-152)

- 11/17 Johnson, Gbemende, Bruce I. Oppenheimer, and Jennifer L. Selin. 2012. "The House as a Stepping Stone to the Senate: Why Do So Few African American House Members Run?" *American Journal of Political Science* 56(April): 387-399.

11/22 **Research Day**

11/24 **No Class, Thanksgiving**

11/29 **Representation**

Grimmer, Justin. 2013. "Appropriators not Position Takers: The Distorting Effects of Electoral Incentives on Congressional Representation." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(July): 624-642.

****Final Papers Due****

12/1 Thomsen, Danielle and Aaron King. 2020. "Women's Representation and the Gendered Pipeline to Power." *American Political Science Review* 114(4): 989-1000.

12/6 ***Final Exam*** (3:30-6:30 p.m.)