This seminar will study the 2020 presidential election in real time as the general election campaign proceeds. Students are required to write two short papers (approximately 1,200 words each), a take-home examination (approximately 1,500 words) and an online class presentation (approximately 20 minutes) based on one of the two short papers. (The class presentation will not be graded separately from the paper it is based on.)

Classes will meet online. Students giving a report should email all graphic materials they wish to use in their report to the course assistant, John Gudgel (john.gudgel@verizon.net), no later than the day before class so he can prepare them for use in class. You may use graphic material and PowerPoint slides if you wish, but they are not required.

Papers should be submitted via email to the instructor (address above). You will receive an acknowledgment that your paper has been received. Comments and grades will be sent by email about a week after papers are received.

Paper #1 (before Election Day): Analyze how an issue is affecting the campaign for president. What is each candidate proposing to do on that issue? Which candidate’s proposal is more likely to be effective? Which is more likely to win votes? Examples: the economy, the coronavirus pandemic, police brutality, systemic racism, immigration, climate change, foreign policy or any other issue of your choice (after first obtaining the instructor’s approval for your choice).
Each week, students will deliver a class presentation either on their paper or on the day’s topic. First (pre-election) papers must be received by October 29.

**Paper #2 (after Election Day):** Analyze the Election Day results in a battleground state (Virginia, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Florida, Arizona, North Carolina, Texas or Georgia). Were there any factors specific to that state that determined the outcome? Be aware that the final vote count in states that allow mail-in voting may not be known for a week or two after Election Day. Exit poll results should be available sooner, but they should not be accepted as final or authoritative.

We will schedule oral reports on battleground states for post-Election Day class sessions.

**Final paper:** Will be due by email to the instructor on Monday, December 7, on a topic to be distributed in class on November 12. The university has canceled classes after Thanksgiving recess.

The GMU bookstore has announced that, “This fall, they will sell textbooks and course materials online only prior to the start of the fall semester and recommends that you order your materials to be delivered at home in advance of the semester. In addition, the bookstore does not plan to sell textbooks/course materials in-store the first two weeks of the semester in order to comply with social distancing requirements.”

**Course materials**

Purchase is recommended. In order to abide by pandemic restrictions, the university library is attempting to obtain electronic copies of the books for reserve reading.


Campaign news and commentary

Students will be expected to follow the campaign regularly in at least one mainstream news source, at least one liberal blog and at least one conservative blog.

Mainstream news sources:

   The New York Times
   The Washington Post
   Politico
   Axios
   Vox

Liberal blogs:

   The Maddow Blog (MSNBC)
   Daily Kos
   Think Progress
   Talking Points Memo

Conservative blogs:

   Fox News
   Breitbart
   Daily Caller
   Rush Limbaugh

In addition, students should follow the campaign in their battleground state by monitoring local campaign coverage in the state’s leading newspapers and political blogs.

Polling

RealClearPolitics.com has the latest national polls as well as the latest state polls for battleground states, including state polls for Senate races.

FiveThirtyEight.com also has the latest national and battleground state polls and Senate race polls. This site
includes private as well as public polls and \`grades\’ each polling organization for reliability.

Exit polls

Google \`2020 exit poll\’ after election night to get national and state exit poll results. You can also Google \`2016 exit poll\’ for 2016 election exit poll results. You can find exit polls for the major 2020 Democratic state primaries if you Google \`2020 Democratic primary exit polls.\’

Readings:

Students are expected to follow the campaign news in the sources listed above (see \`Campaign news and commentary,\’ page 3 above).

Three books are also assigned, to be read one per month, during the course (see \`Course Materials,\’ p. 2 above).

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September reading:


The instructor’s book will provide an overview of the course and a context for understanding U.S. presidential politics.

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Weekly topics:

August 27 Populism: An American Tradition

September 3 The Law of the Missing Imperative

September 10 a. Political polarization
What’s causing it?
September 10 cont.  

b. Polarization in 2020  
*Is there evidence that the Republican Party is moving to the right and the Democratic Party to the left?*

September 17  
a. The coronavirus pandemic  
*Is it President Trump’s Vietnam?*

b. Obamacare  
*How did it pass? Is it still popular?*

September 24  
a. The economy  
*Is it less important in 2020 than in previous presidential elections?*

b. The economic debate  
*How do the candidates differ on economic issues?*

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October reading:  


The Klein book explores how the U.S. political system is designed to be dysfunctional and how the rise of identity politics has created gridlock. Excellent context for following the final stages of the campaign.

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October 1  
a. Race relations  
*Why did the Black Lives Matter movement get so much support from whites?*

b. Blacks and Democrats  
*Why are African-American voters strongly Democratic? Are they strongly liberal as well?*
October 8

a. Immigration
Is the immigration issue helping or hurting the Trump campaign?

b. Climate change
Is the climate change issue having any impact on the campaign?

October 15

a. Foreign policy
Is foreign policy having any impact on the campaign?

b. Middle East issue
Has Israel become a partisan issue, and how are Jewish and religious right voters responding?

October 22

a. Debates
Did anything change as a result of the debates?

b. Media coverage of the debates
Has the press coverage of the debates been fair and balanced?

October 29

a. Contingent election
What is a `contingent election' and could we have one in 2020?

b. Mail-in voting
Is there any reason to believe mail balloting invites voter fraud or foreign interference?
November reading:

Bill Bishop, with Robert G. Cushing, The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded Americans is Tearing Us Apart (Mariner Books paperback 2009).

This book provides an explanation of increasing political segregation of the United States into red and blue enclaves. While it was originally written in 2004 and published in 2008 (with an update added in the 2009 paperback edition), it provides the context for understanding the geographic patterns of the 2020 election results that we will be looking at in the battleground states. The paperback can be ordered from Amazon for about $10.00.

November 5

a. What happened?
   Did everything go "as expected" in 2020, or were there any big surprises?

b. 2020 versus 2016
   How was the 2020 election different from the 2016 election?

November 12

What happened in these states?
Did anything change since 2016, and why?
Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Florida, Texas

November 19

What happened in these states?
Did anything change since 2016, and why?
Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Texas

The university has canceled classes following Thanksgiving recess.
Students with disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

Policy on Plagiarism

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of public policy inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the School of Public Policy. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable.

Plagiarism is the use of another's words or ideas presented as one's own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another's work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one's professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.

The faculty of the Schar School takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of "F." This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student's transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (eg. F-1, J-1 or J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.
To help enforce the Schar School policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student's work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The SPP policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it.

<http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook/aD.html>