

POL4214G American Elections and Primaries  
Winter 2026, Thursdays 11:30-1:30 PM  
SSC 7236  
Professor Matthew Lebo

Office hours: Wednesday 10:00-12:00 SSC 7239, or by appointment at [matthew.lebo@uwo.ca](mailto:matthew.lebo@uwo.ca)

### I. Introduction and learning objectives:

We will focus on U.S. political parties, the electoral system, congressional and presidential campaigns while paying close attention to the 2026 races and looking ahead to 2028. We will also cover topics such as U.S. public opinion, polarization, redistricting and gerrymandering, voting behaviour, and campaign financing. Readings and assignments will include in-depth empirical research on these and other contemporary aspects of American politics. In preparation for the 2026 elections, we will discuss the Senate and House primaries as they unfold, election forecasting, election maps and math, and presidential campaigns. We will also cover recent trends of democratic decline in American electoral institutions and speculate on their effects for 2026 and 2028.

A background in American politics (like POL 2544) is preferred but not required.

### II. Course Requirements

- i. Weekly readings. I will assign readings each week on the topic of the week. Some weeks there may be a lot, some less. The readings will extend from textbook chapters to scholarly data driven articles to historical pieces to shorter journalistic accounts.
- ii. Follow American politics in the news. Make one of the following your homepage and listen to some podcasts:
  - a) at least one major, non-partisan newspaper such as The New York Times, The Washington Post or The Wall Street Journal; and
  - b) one political-science website such as Mischiefs of Faction, Substack like Good Politics/Bad Politics, Julia Azari and Seth Masket (Tusk on Substack), or <https://www.gelliottmorris.com>;
  - c) one history website such as History News Network.
- iii. Watching campaign events.

### III. Required Texts

There is one required textbooks for the course: Seth Masket. Learning from Loss: The Democrats, 2016-2020.

There will be many additional readings beyond that book.

### IV. Course Requirements:

Students are expected to attend class and to be prepared for questions by completing reading assignments *before* the class for which they are assigned. **For exams, students are responsible for material covered in lectures that may not be in the text and for material in the text that may not be covered in lectures.** Final grades will be based on the results of three short papers (worth 20% of the final grade), one final paper (worth

30% of the final grade), a final exam (worth 40% of the final grade), and class participation / attendance (worth 10% of final grade). The exam will be composed of mostly essay questions.

Class participation and attendance: 10%

Three short papers: 20% total. February 5, February 26, March 26.

Final paper: 30% Due in class April 2.

Final exam: 40%

All assignments must be handed in through OWL at the start of class the day they are due or beforehand. I will not open email attachments. Any paper that is handed in late will lose 5% per day it is late. Days start at 8am. After 7 days the paper will receive a grade of 0.

## V. Schedule

Week 1: January 8, 2026: Introduction

Readings:

1. The Single Most Important Fact about American Politics: <http://www.vox.com/2014/6/13/5803768/pew-most-important-fact-american-politics>

2. Hans Noel. 2010. Ten Things that Political Scientists Know that You Don't. *The Forum Volume 8, Issue 3*. [http://faculty.georgetown.edu/hcn4/Downloads/Noel\\_Forum.PDF](http://faculty.georgetown.edu/hcn4/Downloads/Noel_Forum.PDF)

Podcast: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rru6kyJByo>

3. Trump's Next Coup has Already Begun:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/01/january-6-insurrection-trump-coup-2024-election/620843/>

Discussion issues: what do we expect to happen in 2026 and 2028? What factors are most relevant in predicting the election?

Week 2: January 15, 2026: Political Parties and their Evolution in the United States

Readings:

1. Madison, Federalist 10.

2. Kathleen Bawn et al, 2012. "Theory of Parties" *Perspectives on Politics*

3. Koger and Lebo. 2017. Chapter 6 of *Strategic Party Government: Why winning Trumps Ideology*. "The Dynamics of Partisan Power."

Week 3: January 22, 2026: The American Party System and Party Realignment

Readings:

1. Larry M. Bartels. 2018. "Partisanship in the Trump Era," *Journal of Politics*, 80 (4): 1483-1494.

2. Joshua N. Zingher. 2018. "Polarization, Demographic Change, and White Flight from the Democratic Party," *Journal of Politics*, 80 (3): 860-872

3. Hans Noel. 2016. "Ideological Factions in the Republican and Democratic Parties." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*.

Week 4: January 29, 2026: Party Activists and Campaign History

Readings:

1. Julia Azari. 2016. Vox.com Weak parties and strong partisanship are a bad combination.

2. Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin, "The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism" *Perspectives on Politics*, 2011. [http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/williamson/files/tea\\_party\\_pop.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/williamson/files/tea_party_pop.pdf)

3. Lee Drutman. 2022. *The Atlantic* "Kyrsten Sinema and the Myth of Political Independence."

## Week 5: February 5, 2026: Party Identification

### **SHORT PAPER 1 DUE IN CLASS**

#### Readings:

1. Lilliana Mason. 2015 "I Disrespectfully Agree: The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Behavioral and Issue Polarization." *American Journal of Political Science* 59(1): 128-45.
2. Kane, John, Lilliana Mason, and Julie Wronski. 2021. "Who's at the Party? Group Sentiments, Knowledge, and Partisan Identity." *Journal of Politics* 83(4): 1783-1799.
3. Ezra Klein, "The Green Lantern Theory of the Presidency Explained."  
<http://www.vox.com/2014/5/20/5732208/the-green-lantern-theory-of-the-presidency-explained>

## Week 6: February 12, 2026: Reapportionment and Redistricting

GUEST SPEAKER: Professor Benjamin Bishin, University of California, Riverside

#### READINGS:

1. Carson, Jamie L, David Cottrell, and Ryan Williamson. 2025. A Retrospective on Redistricting Practices and Electoral Competition in U.S. Elections. *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*.
  2. McGhee, "The Effect of Redistricting on House Elections, Revisited" in *The Monkey Cage, a Washington Post Blog*, October 15, 2012.
- Common Cause and look up redistricting: <https://www.commoncause.org>

## Week 7: February 26, 2026: How Parties Choose Candidates

### **SHORT PAPER 2 DUE IN CLASS**

#### Readings:

1. Masket, Seth. Learning from Loss: The Democrats, 2016-2020, Chapters 1-4
2. Azari, Julia. Ten Years of Trump and Trumpism: <https://goodpoliticsbadpolitics.substack.com/p/ten-years-of-trump-and-trumpism>

## Week 8: March 5, 2026: Presidential Primaries

#### Readings:

1. Masket, Seth. Learning from Loss: The Democrats, 2016-2020, Chapters 5-7
2. Andrew Prokop (2015), "Political scientists think 'the party' will stop Trump. They shouldn't be so sure," Vox.
3. Nate Silver (2016), "The Republican Party May Be Failing: What 'The Party Decides' could get wrong about Donald Trump and the GOP," FiveThirtyEight.
4. John Aldrich. 2009. The Invisible Primary and Its Effects on Democratic Choice. *PS: Political Science and Politics*.

## Week 9: March 12, 2026: Presidential General Election Campaigns

#### Readings:

1. Alan Abramowitz (2024). "[Time for Change Model Predicts Close Election with Slight Edge for Kamala Harris.](#)" The Center for Politics at the University of Virginia, August 22, 2024.
2. Gelman, A., and Gary King. (1993). "Why Are American Presidential Election Campaign Polls So Variable When Voters Are So Predictable?" *British Journal of Political Science* 23: 409-451.

## Week 10: March 19, 2026: Voter Choice and Participation

#### Readings:

1. Bernard L. Fraga and Michael G. Miller. 2022. "Who Do Voter ID Laws Keep from Voting?" *Journal of Politics*, 84 (2): 1091-1105.
2. Meredith Conroy, Erin Cassese, Dhruvil Mehta, Ciera Hammond, Linda Beail, Al Johri, Sean Long, Dominik Stecula. 2025. "Mayor Pete is Smart and Elizabeth Warren is Unlikable? Coverage of Warmth and Competence Traits in the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary." Published online by Cambridge University Press: 24 February 2025.

#### Week 11: March 26, 2026: House and Senate Elections

##### **SHORT PAPER 3 DUE IN CLASS**

###### Readings:

1. Benjamin Melusky, Eric Loepp, and Kristin Kanthak "Candidate Emergence and the Success of Women," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 2020: 440-446.
2. Strategic Party Government, Chapter 4. Gregory Koger and Matthew Lebo. 2017.

#### Week 12: April 2, 2026: Trump, the presidency, and the state of U.S. democracy

1. Juan J. Linz (1990). "The Perils of Presidentialism." *Journal of Democracy*.
2. Eric Schickler (2025). "What Donald Trump Has Taught Us about American Political Institutions." *Political Science Quarterly*.
3. Suzanne Mettler and Robert C. Lieberman (2020). "The Fragile Republic: American Democracy Has Never Faced So Many Threats All at Once." *Foreign Affairs*.
4. Lee Drutman (2021). "Why The Two-Party System Is Effing Up U.S. Democracy." *FiveThirtyEight*, June 16, 2021.
5. Steven Levitsky, Lucan A. Way, and Daniel Ziblatt (2026). "The Price of American Authoritarianism." *Foreign Affairs*.
6. Zack Beauchamp (2025). "[Trump's war on democracy is failing.](#)" *Vox*, December 16, 2025.

##### **FINAL PAPER DUE**

#### **VI. Makeup Exam Policy**

It is essential that you understand the following policy for the course since *no exceptions will be made*. No exams may be taken early for any reason. A student who misses an exam must provide a *very good* reason supported by evidence such as a hospital admittance form. If you are ill prior to an exam, let me know as soon as possible beforehand if you may miss the exam. Failure to write one of the exams without providing a sufficient excuse will result in a grade of zero for that exam.

#### **VII. What is Expected from Students**

I expect every student to come to class fully prepared. That means you have read the required reading prior to class. This will make much of the discussion review for you and you will find class to be a good time to raise questions you may have about the reading. Class discussion is more interesting than lectures and is greatly enhanced by well-informed questions and comments. I hope that you feel free to voice your comments and to question my lectures. However, you are expected to be respectful of myself and the other students in the class especially when it comes to discussing issues with which people may have strong feelings.

Staying informed with current events is a good way for you to apply what you are learning in class to the real world. In terms of grades, there is no substitution for hard work. Test questions will be fair, though difficult, and will come from books or lecture material. If you have questions or require additional help, please let me know.

### **VIII. Academic Integrity:**

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

#### In papers and assignments:

1. Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement;
2. Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor;
3. Making up sources or facts;
4. Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.

#### On tests and exams:

1. Using or possessing unauthorized aids;
2. Looking at someone else's answers during an exam or test;
3. Misrepresenting your identity; and
4. When you knew or ought to have known you were doing it.

#### In academic work:

1. Falsifying institutional documents or grades;
2. Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes; and
3. When you knew or ought to have known you were doing so.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated. If students have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, they are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from their instructors or from other institutional resources.

### **X. Accommodations for Disability**

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or Accessibility Services.