

GOVT 319 DL1 (Fall 2025)

Virginia Elections

[DRAFT]

Time: Thursdays 4:30PM – 7:10PM
Faculty: David Ramadan, Ed.D.
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Location: Online via Zoom
Office Hours: By appointment only
Tel: (703) 945-1741

Weekly Zoom: [TBD](#)
Meeting ID: ... Passcode: ...

Course Description:

This is non-traditional course. It offers a comprehensive exploration of the unique elections landscape of Virginia. Students will delve into political campaigns and elections within the state, as well as the broader political and historical contexts provided by the assigned readings. Drawing from *Bellwether*, students will explore Virginia's role as a harbinger of political change, examining themes such as Virginia exceptionalism, race, and the influence of legislative power on campaigns. Meanwhile, insights from *Laboratories Against Democracy* will offer a deeper understanding of the nationalization of state politics and the role of federalism in shaping subnational democracy and democratic backsliding.

Through case studies, guest speakers, practical exercises, and analysis of these readings, this course provides hands-on experience in campaigns and politics in Virginia. Ideal for students interested in politics, public policy, and civic engagement.

My Teaching Approach:

- Introduce topics, issues, and/or events to be examined.
- Invite guest speakers –most will be practitioners and current/or former elected officials.
- Reflect and elaborate on information/presentations by guest speakers.
- Facilitate the class, but the focus will be on student engagement and contribution.
- Encourage critical thinking, analysis, synthesis of information, and diverse perspectives.

Important: This is NOT a traditional 'follow the regular pattern of reading weekly textbook assignments' kind of course; students must keep up with weekly readings from secondary sources as well as the web, newspapers, and handouts. Students are expected to keep up with news re/from campaigns. Class attendance is crucial, and participation will be graded.

WARNING: This is an off-the-record course. No recordings and no quoting of the professor and/or guests. Recording or quoting will be considered a violation of the university's regulations and will be pursued as such!

Grade Distribution:

- Participation 20%
- Chapter Presentation 20%
- Final 20%
- Reading Assignment Summary (2 pages) 10% & Presentation 10%
- Reflections 20% – 10 Reflections each due at the beginning of class

Extra Credit, Missing and Late Work: This course will have opportunities for earning extra or bonus credit. All assignments/presentations are due as scheduled. Missed presentations will not be rescheduled; late assignments will not be accepted; both will result in lost credit.

Required Books:

- Toscano, Bellwether: Virginia's Political Transformation, 2006-2020
- Grumbach, Laboratories against Democracy: How National Parties Transformed State Politics

News, Media, and Consumption of Political Information: As a part of this course, it is your responsibility to be well-informed about current events and political news. It is increasingly difficult to learn about political events in a way that is even-handed and non-partisan. Here are some tips about how to consume news in a way that will provide you with the most value:

1. Consume a variety of well-respected news sources.
2. Be very mindful of television news.
3. Avoid getting your news exclusively from social media.
4. Avoid news sources that seek to provoke an emotional response. Try to consume news dispassionately. It's okay to have passion for politics, rights, justice, issues, etc. But try to consume news with a sense of curiosity rather than an urge to be outraged, touched, or emotive in any sense. Train yourself to read a headline and respond with, "Huh, that's interesting," rather than automatically clicking forward, like, retweet, etc.

Class Readiness, Attendance, and Participation: Learning is an *active*, rather than *passive*, exercise. To succeed in this class, students must prepare for class each week: research and read, then write weekly reflections. On-camera class attendance is crucial, and participation will be graded.

Technology:

This is a Distance Learning (DL) class. Students must have a camera-equipped laptop or desktop computer and a high-speed internet connection to participate in all course aspects adequately. If you have difficulty obtaining adequate technology, or require training for using technology in the course, please contact the instructor. When attending synchronous meetings, do so from a quiet space, and eliminate distractions (electronic and otherwise) from your environment. Participation with your camera on is required to receive credit towards graded participation.

Cheating, Plagiarism, and Academic Integrity:

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the [George Mason University Honor Code](#). There are three simple guidelines to follow with respect to academic integrity: (1) all work you submit must be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the expectations for any assignment, ask for clarification. Any student engaged in any academic misconduct *will receive an F on the offending exam or assignment*. Egregious violations will result in an F grade for the course and will be reported to the appropriate Dean's office. These violations include cheating on an exam, using someone else's work as your own, and plagiarizing the written word. Plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without providing credit or citation) is a serious offense. Further, academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind), please ask for guidance and clarification.

Students with Disabilities:

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the instructor and contact Disability Services at 703.993.2474 or ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

E-mail:

Mason uses only Mason e-mail accounts to communicate with enrolled students. Students must activate their Mason e-mail account, use it to communicate with their department and other administrative units, and check it regularly for important university information, including messages related to this class. *E-mail etiquette*: An e-mail is a professional correspondence; try not to write it as if it is a text message, snap, tweet, or IM. Always use a salutation and sign your name. Consider creating a signature that automatically inserts your name and basic contact information at the bottom of your e-mails. Use proper punctuation and grammar.

Weekly Reflections –explanation:

Each reflection –due weekly before class– should be no longer than a single page double-spaced. Reflect on something you learned during the week. Preferably related to a current elections issue. Reflections are summaries of news or issues AND your thoughts and reflections on a particular issue/news/reading material.

Reading Assignment Summary:

As the presenter of the assigned chapter, you've become the subject matter expert on the chapter's topic. In presenting your findings, assume that your classmates and I are not as familiar with your topic. You will have 2 pages to educate us about the chapter/case you researched.

Presentation:

Present your findings to the class. The presentation should be no less than 10 minutes and provide an overview of your issue, key findings, and conclusions. Use visual aids (e.g., PowerPoint slides) to enhance your presentation and communicate your findings effectively.

Here are a few tips to make the most out of your presentation:

- **Start with a Clear Objective:** Begin by stating what you intend us to learn. A clear objective sets the stage for your audience's expectations.
- **Structure Your Presentation:** Organize your content logically. Start with a brief introduction to the topic, followed by an explanation of the case/campaign, arguments for and against, and conclude with your position.
- **Engage Your Audience:** Use language that is accessible and engaging. Avoid jargon unless it is widely understood or you plan to define it. Incorporate visuals or examples that make complex information easier to digest.
- **Practice and Time Your Presentation:** Rehearse your presentation to ensure it fits within the 10-minute timeframe. This helps you maintain a good pace and cover all critical points without rushing.
- **Be prepared to answer questions** from the professor and your classmates following your presentation.

Schedule:

The schedule is subject to continuous change. Updated syllabus will be posted on BlackBoard.