

What we are reading in 2018:

Blue Wave Coming!!!

When Dems win House, impeachment is next!

What we read in 2016:

Pundits predict a Clinton win by 2 to 4 points!

Not since Truman-Dewey has there been such a grave misunderstanding of voters and elections. This seminar seeks to help us better understand the 2018 midterm elections so that we might avoid the mistakes of 2016.

Many of us follow elections by reading or listening to news accounts of candidate actions and campaign events and by checking out the latest poll results. We then form opinions about how those actions or events will affect the election. In 2016, many media sources reported that the FBI renewal of the Clinton emails investigation changed the outcome. But did it really? Pundits said that the “Access Hollywood” was the last straw. But it clearly wasn’t. Many speculated that the reason Trump won was the number of Obama to Trump switchers? But was it?

While news accounts and pundits’ interpretations are important to understanding an election, they are only part of the much larger puzzle. That larger puzzle is comprised of a large body of information available that can help us understand how to make sense of what is happening in a political campaign. Some of that information is provided by seasoned political reporters, some by social science studies, and still others by historical studies. In this seminar, we hope to bring that information to bear on how we think about the 2018 elections.

The model on page 3 illustrates the major elements of a campaign. In the seminar, we hope to look at different elements as they relate to the 2018 election. No one participant would be expected to learn about all of the elements for their presentation, but over the course of the seminar, we would hope that the sum total of the presentations would give us a better understanding of the 2018 elections.

If you are interested in a particular candidate, district or issue or advocacy group, you can easily see it in some of the topic suggestions that are listed below. In the seminar welcome letter, we will expand the list of topics.

- Virtually all states use direct primaries to elect party nominees. How has the direct primary affected Congressional elections in the past? What effect will it have on the 2018 races?
- Bill Clinton was famous for saying “It’s the economy, stupid.” Would that advice still hold true? How important will the current economic, social, and political context be in 2018 – either in general, or in specific races? What specific issues are important this year overall? And does this vary by state? Gun control? Abortion? Education? Environment? Sexual harassment?
- Many observers say that gerrymandering makes for unfair elections. How will gerrymandering affect the 2018 races – either in general, or in specific races?
- Who votes in mid-term elections? Are they different from voters in Presidential years? Will demography be destiny? Who is likely to vote in the 2018 elections and how important will that will be either in general – or in specific races?
- Connor Lamb was the “perfect” Democrat to run in the Pennsylvania 18th. What candidate(s) has/have emerged as major contenders in 2018? What characteristics make them “perfect”. What impact will women have – as candidates, as campaign staff/volunteers, as voters?
- Some say that all modern campaigns need to be “negative” to win. Is that true? What are some examples of negative and positive campaigns in 2018? How well did they work?
- The social media have become the bogey man in modern politics. Will the Russians (or a 400 pound guy laying in his bed in NJ) use social media to foment discord and influence the 2018 elections? Do we see any evidence? Were social media platforms successful in curbing it?

- #MeToo and #NeverAgain are issue advocacy groups that have attracted a great of attention. Do issue advocacy groups make a difference in campaigns? Will they in 2018?
- Indivisible, Sister District, Swing Left, and People Power are advocacy groups that started after Trump's election. Their goal is to win back the House or the State House. What do we know about how effective these kinds of groups are? What are these groups doing in 2018 and how effective will they be?
- Conventional wisdom says a candidate must raise close to the same amount of money as her/his opponent to win. But Trump disproved that in 2016. How important will money be in the 2018 midterms?
- Will the Russians (or someone else) actually interfere in some way with the voting process? What steps have been taken to prevent this? Was it effective?
- What effect will state election laws that erect barriers to voting having in 2018?

Seminar format: Participants will give 20-30 minute presentations that look at both past research on their topic (moderators will provide short bibliographies) as well as how it is playing out in 2018. For example, if you choose direct primary for your topic, you could spend 5-10 minutes discussing how they came about and the impact has been and the remaining time looking at the effect in some interesting races.

Meetings will consist of two presentations, a question-answer period for each and a 20-30 minute time slot to discuss key events/polls/etc. from the prior week. We will take a break at a convenient stopping point. The meeting after the election will be an open meeting to discuss election results and prognosticate its impact on the 116th Congress.

Recommended (but not required) books:

The Politics of Congressional Elections, G.C. Jacobson & J.L. Carson, 9th edition (2016) is a good summary of the factors influencing congressional. (Amherst College)

Change and Continuity in the 2012 and 2014 Elections, Abramson, P.R., & three others, (2016) is an excellent examination of factors influencing any election. (Smith College)

The Gamble: Choice and Chance in the 2012 Presidential Elections, L. Vavreck & J. Sides, 2013 is an excellent examination how fundamentals vs campaign events influenced the election. (Smith & Mt Holyoke)

The Surge: 2014's Big GOP Win and What It Means for the Next Presidential Election, edited by Larry Sabato and two others, 2015 is a collection of articles attempting to explain the 2014. (Smith)

Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations, Amy Chua, 2016 does a very good job explaining the 2016 election as well as the current political climate in terms of how we have moved from a unified country to one motivated by group identities.

Online Resources: Because of the current nature of the seminar, much of the research will need to be done online. The moderators will prepare a help sheet with suggestions for how to use internet search engines to locate relevant resources. In an effort to be fair and balanced, we include sources from both sides of the political spectrum.

There are a variety of online political websites that provide analysis of upcoming elections and extensive polling data. Many of them are polling aggregators that compile polls and provide an average. These include *FiveThirtyEight*, *Cook Political Report*, *Sabato's Crystal Ball*, *Inside Elections*, and *RealClearPolitics*.

Useful online sites that engage in both news reporting and political analysis include Politico, Slate, Breitbart News Network, Salon, Huffington Post, and RedState. These all show clear political bias.

Useful print media include *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *National Review*, and *The Nation* (all of which have digital editions).

We will provide more resources in the welcome letter to seminar participants.