

POLITICAL LOSERS
POSC389/USSO289S

Professor Karen Beckwith
Fall Semester 2022
TTh 1:00-2:15pm

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Office Hours: MW 2:30pm-3:30pm
[For appointments and office hours, sign up here.](#)

“Even the losers get lucky sometimes.”
Even the Losers, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers

“We’ll be singing when we’re winning.”
Tubthumping, Chumbawamba

COURSE OUTLINE AND REQUIREMENTS

POSC389 Political Losers shifts the usual focus of political science research, from who wins and what explains the victory, to who loses, why they were defeated, and what impact defeat has upon the losers. The course considers the effects of losing on voters (what happens to voters whose candidates never win?), on candidates (can electoral defeat position a candidate for future success?), on social movements (what happens when a social movement loses badly?), and on nations (can defeat in war advantage the losing party?). Exploring political loss and its impact on losers and on democratic legitimacy, the course focuses not only on loss and how loss can be evaluated and analyzed, but also on how political actors (including countries) can recover from defeat.

The course is divided into four major sections. The first focuses on theoretical considerations of loss and examines the options available in situations of loss; that is, how, in the context of losing, political actors can articulate demands for change, pledge support for existing arrangements, or capitulate or surrender. The second section investigates issues of loss in social movements, asking how victory and defeat may function across time, how loss might have cumulative effects, how loss might be recuperated as victory, and how those who lose might ultimately succeed, turn to extreme alternatives, or experience complete and permanent defeat.

Turning to electoral politics, the third section first asks what happens to defeated candidates for office and their supporters. This section examines the impact of perpetual electoral defeat upon voters: what happens when (some) voters never succeed in achieving their electoral preferences through elections? What are the consequences for democracy and for political system legitimacy? This section also considers candidate loss and opportunities for post-loss recovery. Finally, the section includes “sore losers,” candidates rejected by their party who turn to another party as an alternative venue for advancing their electoral ambitions.

Finally, the course turns to big loss: losing in war. What are the consequences of loss in war and how is loss understood? What constitutes “victory” in warfare, and how do the defeated construct their postwar future? The course concludes with reflections of political loss: what losing means, how it can be identified, and what its consequences – positive and negative – may be for democracy.

Evaluation of student performance is based on the following criteria. First, each student is expected to attend class and to be prepared for each class meeting by having read, in advance, the materials assigned for that day. Students should be prepared to discuss the material in detail in class every day, and all students are expected to participate. Students are expected, and obliged, to comport themselves, in class, in a professional manner. Professionalism refers to adherence to standards of behavior and performance expected from political scientists. This includes, but is not limited to, courteous attention to other speakers; engagement with the work at hand; appropriate use of language; and, of course, adherence to [university standards of academic integrity](#). Informed class participation and professionalism are requirements of the course, and account for 10 percent of the final course grade.

Second, each student will facilitate an in-class discussion of course readings. The specific dates and readings will be assigned by the professor. In addition to facilitating discussion of readings, each facilitator will submit a short paper, analyzing the readings and identifying questions and problems posed in and by the readings. Each discussion facilitation is worth 10 percent of the final grade; the summary paper is worth 10 percent. See *Guidelines for Discussion Facilitation and Summary Papers*, posted on Canvas.

Third, students will complete two research papers, each of which accounts for 15 percent of the final grade. Details of these assignments are available on Canvas; see *Guidelines for Research Papers and Presentations*.

Fourth, students will complete a final research paper, which accounts for 30 percent of the final course grade, and will present their final research papers' preliminary findings to the class, which accounts for remaining 10 percent of the course grade. Details of all assignments are available on Canvas; see again *Guidelines for Research Papers and Presentations*.

Note that students are required to attend all classes and to complete all course assignments.

Books required for this course are listed below:

Anderson, Christopher et al. 2007. *Loser's Consent*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Available as e-book through Kelvin Smith Library.

Gaventa, John. 1980. *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Hirschman, Albert O. 1970. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Available as e-book through Kelvin Smith Library.

Johnson, Dominic and Dominic Tierney. 2006. *Failing to Win*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Available as e-book through Kelvin Smith Library.

Additional readings are available through the Canvas course site. Students are encouraged to read an international newspaper daily (e.g., the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*).

Standards of professionalism and academic integrity are integral components of this course. Students are reminded that they are obliged to understand, to uphold, and to comply with the Academic Integrity Policy of the University. A copy of the Code may be found online at <http://bulletin.case.edu/undergraduatestudies/academicintegrity/>.

Students who do not understand this Policy after having read it should make an appointment with me to discuss it; indeed, I welcome this discussion and encourage students to see me in advance of any assignment about which they have doubts or questions. It is a course requirement that students read the University's Academic Integrity Policy.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

August 30 **Introduction to the Course: Loss and Losing**

READ: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/29/opinion/political-violence-congress.html>;
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/05/opinion/trump-call-georgia.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage>;
https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-rnc-amelia/2021/01/08/6cd0c730-51e6-11eb-b2e8-3339e73d9da2_story.html; https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-rage-riot/2021/01/07/26894c54-5108-11eb-b96e-0e54447b23a1_story.html;
https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2021/politics/trump-insurrection-capitol/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most&carta-url=https%3A%2F%2Fs2.washingtonpost.com%2Fcar-ln-tr%2F2e4945a%2F5ff9e6a69d2fda0efba77374%2F597296829bbc0f1cdce73c7a%2F13%2F72%2F5ff9e6a69d2fda0efba77374; https://politicsoutdoors.com/2021/01/10/capitol-invasion-splits-badly-for-republicans/?fbclid=IwAR30H1jp_Te9FRCAe_VzjBKPpXITKuloXfjR_kpG_UbIgwSD7L0-wCoffMU

September 1 **Loss and Democracy**

READ: Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Chapters 1 and 2 [available on Canvas]

September 6 READ: Michael J. Parenti, “Power and Pluralism: The View from the Bottom,” *Journal of Politics*, 32 (3), 1970: 501-530; and Jan-Werner Müller, “[Democracy for Losers](#),” *Boston Review*, August 6, 2020.

September 8 **Responses to Losing**

READ: Albert Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, Chapters 1 and 2

September 13 READ: Albert Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, Chapters 3 and 4

September 15 NO CLASS; PROFESSOR ATTENDING AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION MEETINGS

September 20 LIBRARY RESEARCH SESSION

September 22 READ: Albert Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, Chapters 7 and 8

September 27 READ: Leonard J. Schoppa, “Taking Voice Seriously,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 2022, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/09EEDA9520180DAC0709D0742ABC4BE6/S1537592722001128a.pdf/taking-voice-seriously.pdf>.

September 29 DISCUSSION

October 4 **Loss in Social Movements**

READ: John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, Chapters 1 and 2

October 6 READ: Beckwith, “Narratives of Defeat: Explaining the Effects of Loss in Social Movements,” *Journal of Politics*, 77 (1), 2015: 2-13; and Kelly Bergstrand, “The Mobilizing Power of Grievances: Applying Loss Aversion and Omission Bias to Social Movements,” *mobilization*, 19 (2), 2014: 123-142 [available on Canvas]

RESEARCH PAPER FOCUS APPROVED BY PROFESSOR BY THIS DATE

October 11 FILM: *American Dream*

READ: Second Try at Bessemer (<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/04/1077089349/amazon-union-vote-alabama>; <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/31/amazon-workers-in-alabama-reject-union-for-second-time.html>; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/08/02/amazon-union-election-redo/>).

October 13 DISCUSSION

FIRST SHORT RESEARCH PAPER DUE BY EMAIL ATTACHMENT NO LATER THAN 1:00PM

October 18 **Election Loss**

READ: Anderson et al., *Loser’s Consent*, Chapters 1 and 2; and Republican National Committee. 2013. *Growth and Opportunity Project Report*. [available on Canvas]

October 20 READ: Anderson et al., *Loser’s Consent*, Chapters 3 and 4

October 25 FALL BREAK

October 27 READ: Anderson et al., *Loser’s Consent*, Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10

November 1 READ: Seth Maskit, *Learning from Loss*, Chapters 3 and 6 [available on Canvas]

TOPICS FOR THE SECOND PAPER MUST BE APPROVED BY THIS DATE.

November 3 READ: Hansen et al., “Losers lose more than winners win: Asymmetrical effects of winning and losing in elections,” *European Journal of Political Research*, 58: 1172–1190, 2019; major 2020 election law cases at https://electioncases.osu.edu/case-tracker/?sortby=filing_date_desc&keywords=&status=all&state=all&topic=25

November 8 ELECTION DAY

Sore Loser Laws

READ: Kang and Burden, “Sore Loser Laws in Presidential and Congressional Elections,” *Routledge Handbook of Primary Elections* (2018) (https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3410165); Burden, Jones, and Kang, “Nominations and the Supply of Candidates: The Connection between Sore Loser Laws and Congressional Polarization” [available on Canvas]

READ: *Libertarian Party of Michigan v. Ruth Johnson* (2013); *South Carolina Green Party v. South Carolina State Election Commission* (2009) (<https://www.aclu.org/legal-document/south-carolina-green-party-et-al-v-south-carolina-state-election-commission-et-al-2>)

November 10 DISCUSSION

SECOND SHORT RESEARCH PAPER DUE BY EMAIL ATTACHMENT NO LATER THAN 1:00PM

November 15 **Loss in War**

READ: Johnson and Tierney, *Failing to Win*, Chapters 1 and 2

November 17 READ: Johnson and Tierney, *Failing to Win*, Chapters 3 and 4

November 22 READ: Johnson and Tierney, *Failing to Win*, Chapters 9 and 10

November 24 THANKSGIVING BREAK

November 29 IN-CLASS PAPER PRESENTATIONS

December 1 IN-CLASS PAPER PRESENTATIONS

December 6 IN-CLASS PAPER PRESENTATIONS

December 8 **Conclusion: What Does Loss Mean?**

DISCUSSION

FINAL PAPERS DUE NO LATER THAN 11:00AM ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15