

STUDY GUIDE



THE CANDIDATE (EL CANDIDATO)

a Film by DANIEL HENDLER
ARGENTINA-URUGUAY/2016/84 MIN
Spanish with English subtitles



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BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a foreign film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country where that film comes from. Find two or three articles on Argentina and write a brief summary on what is happening and what has happened in the country. Please use reliable sources.

INTRODUCING THE FILM

A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film's narrative, genre, style, and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for *The Candidate*:

One needn't be a cynic to recognize that a politician's persona is very much a designed thing, the product of various minds—and various agendas. Martín Marchand, the titular character in Uruguayan director Daniel Hendler's pitch-perfect political comedy, radiates charisma, intelligence and commitment—attributes that seem set to win Marchand his country's highest office. But as his team of advisers and creatives assemble at his country home to devise campaign strategies, it appears that not everyone present agrees that a Marchand presidency is a foregone conclusion.

- ❑ From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the main elements from the film's plot and the socio-political background to the film.
- ❑ How do the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- ❑ Can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about just from the marketing materials (i.e. trailer, poster, and still images)?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ What do the close up and medium shots of the different characters aim to portray? What can you uncover from the characters' emotions from these shots? Do these emotions vary throughout the narrative? Cite specific scenes in your answer and connect them to the plot.
- ❑ What does the mise-en-scène¹ reveal about Martín's private life that he does not want to disclose to the public? Connect what you find in the mise-en-scène to the major theme(s) that emerge from the narrative.
- ❑ Diegetic and non-diegetic² sound play a major role throughout the film. Television shows act as if they are speaking to Martín directly, asking existential questions that are relevant to his campaign (8:08-8:54). On the other hand, the soundtrack of the film guides the audience by eliciting emotions during the key moments of the narrative. Select at least two scenes that emphasize diegetic and non-diegetic sound and analyze its function: the tone it produces, the emotions it elicits, and the themes that it connects to.



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¹ "Mise-en-scène...is used in film to refer to everything that goes into the composition of a shot--framing, movement of the camera and characters, lighting, set design and the visual environment, and sound."

"Term Index." *The Columbia Film Language Glossary*. <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>

² "Diegetic music is 'produced within the implied world of the film'...The sound of a mother's voice as she is shown singing to her infant is clearly diegetic, and the faint sounds of a music box might be assumed to be coming from inside the nursery, even if the source is not shown on screen. In contrast, non-diegetic music refers to music that accompanies a scene but is external to the fictional world, such as dissonant orchestral chords sounding as a figure appears in a deserted alley or throbbing music punctuating a car chase."

Tan, S.-L., Spackman, M., & Wakefield, E. (2017). The effects of diegetic and non-diegetic music on viewers' interpretations of a film scene. *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 34(5), 605-623.

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES *(continued)*

- ❑ The Hollywood Reporter states, "...perhaps [*The Candidate*'s] strongest suit is the creeping atmosphere of unease which trickles into many of the scenes, conveyed via dialogues in which much of what is said is veiled."³ Do you agree with this statement? Explain why or why not using specific scene(s) to support your answer.
- ❑ How does the film build up suspense in the final third act? Analyze different elements of filmmaking to support your answer (set design, dialogue, acting, lighting, placement of the camera, etc.)

³ Holland, J (2017). 'The Candidate' ('El Candidato'): Film Review. *The Hollywood Reporter*. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/candidate-review-986812>

NARRATIVE

- ❑ How does the first scene (00:15-03:26) introduce to the audience that this narrative is a political satire specifically targeting Argentine politics? What makes this conversation comical? Think about the dialogue and behaviors of Martín and his team members in your response.
- ❑ How is Martín first introduced to the audience? How would you describe his personality and values? Does his character develop as the narrative moves forward? If so, in what ways does Martín change?
- ❑ Describe Martín's interactions with his employees. Is he directing his campaign or being directed? How do these interactions serve to advance the plot?
- ❑ Explain why you think Martín decides to run for president. What motivated or pressured him? What does becoming president mean for both his present and his future?
- ❑ What is Martín's major obstacle regarding his campaign? Does he ever grow past this obstacle? Cite specific scene(s) that emphasize the central problem that Martín must overcome in your response.
- ❑ What emotions surround the topic of transparency for Martín? As Martín's private veil begins to lift, what does the audience learn about the other characters? Explain how the value of transparency—a trait that many voters look for in a politician—leads to major conflict in Martín's life.
- ❑ What message do you think the filmmaker is sending in the portrayal of Martín? What is the filmmaker saying about our current political figures?
- ❑ The conference meetings verge on the absurd. They are spent discussing which kind of tree or bird most represents the campaign, or what color is most popular, or what actor most looks like Martín. What is the filmmaker satirizing? What is he saying about political campaigns and marketing, in Argentina and in general?
- ❑ What sparks Martín's interest in Mateo? How does the relationship between Martín and Mateo advance the plot? Does this relationship create any problems? If so, do these problems get resolved by the film's ending?
- ❑ How does the Tacuara bird become an accurate symbol for Martín? Connect the opening scene where the team first attempts to use the Tacuara as a symbol for Martín's campaign (00:15-00:50) to other scenes throughout the narrative that include or mention the Tacuara.
- ❑ How does Martín attempt to be independent in both politics and in his private life? Does he fail or succeed at establishing his independence? Cite specific scenes in your response.



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NARRATIVE *(continued)*

- Do you sympathize with Martín? Can you justify his actions? Does your perception of Martín change as the narrative develops? Use key scenes throughout the narrative to explain why or why not.
- Is the narrative suspended, or is there a resolution in the final scene (1:18:11-1:20:47)?
- What did you enjoy most about the film? Was there something you did not like or fully understand about the film?

THEMES

- The debate between “Neo” and “South Wind” between Martín and his team in the opening minutes speaks to a larger issue that Latin Americans have dealt with since the era of independence. Can you connect this debate to issues that Latin American countries have dealt with regarding development and modernity? Can you think critically about the issues being detonators in political campaigns?
- Does the film’s depiction of a presidential campaign act as a critique? Can you assess the filmmaker’s political view on Argentina’s political system? Can you find similarities or differences with U.S. politics? Analyze the filmmaker’s intentions using key scenes throughout the film.
- What do you think is the most important message emerging from the film that the director wishes the audience to understand. Think about what role the voting age population plays during presidential campaigns and how the candidates attempt to capture this audience. Think about connecting this to President Mauricio Macri and Donald Trump’s beginning as an unlikely leader in the race to his eventual dominance in the polls ⁴.
- Analyze the campaign’s strategy to avoid discussing Martín’s socio-economic status and connect this to what you know about the business elite’s role in politics, specifically within the Latin American and U.S. context.
- The conversation between Martín and his team becomes tenser when actual politics become a topic of conversation; for example, the debate regarding right, left, or center political ideologies. Why do you think the group avoids using strict distinctions? Do you believe that political characterizations, such as right, left, or center, are important for elections? Was it surprising to find out that younger people, such as Mateo and Rocío, define themselves as “apolitical”. Why or why not?
- What do you believe the director wants the audience to understand about modern technology and more specifically, the use of media in politics? Does the portrayal of media in this film demonstrate how technology produces problems or creates solutions?
- Does the last scene (1:18:11-1:20:47) give the audience a concluding message regarding the film’s theme(s)? Why or why not?
- What tone does the film end on? How does this tone impact the theme(s) that emerge throughout the film?
- Explain whether you believe the themes that emerge from the narrative are universal, or whether they can only apply to Argentine society.



⁴ Ibid.