

Introduction to American Politics¹
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This course will introduce you to the study of American politics. It will offer a broad introduction to basic political concepts and institutions as well as provide alternative models of political behavior, ideology, and policy-making. Through a variety of books, articles, and primary documents, we will examine how the nation's democracy and government have developed over time. In the process, we will examine the key features of American politics—courts, Congress, the president, political parties, the media, bureaucracy, interest groups, movements, and sub-national governments. A big question of the class is whether modern-day politicians and activists can effectively do *anything* to make substantive changes to the political system. Along the way, we will also discuss the contours of democracy, particularly the role of “We, the People” that give energy and motivation to the formal institutions and actors that run government.

Requirements

Short Paper: 20 percent

Take-Home Midterm: 20 percent

Comprehensive In-Class Final Exam: 40 percent

Active Attendance & Participation: 20 percent

Readings & Schedule

Week 1. Power

John Gaventa, “Power & Powerlessness.”

Kenneth A. Shepsle, “Cooperation, Collective Action, and Public Goods.”

Martin Luther King, “Letter From a Birmingham Jail.”

Malcolm Gladwell, “Small Change: Why the Revolution Will not be Tweeted.”

Week 2. Ideology

Louis Hartz, “The Liberal Tradition in America.”

¹Draft syllabus. Last updated: November 9, 2015

Gordon Wood, "The Creation of the American Republic."

Sarah Palin, "America By Heart."

Anand Giridharadas, "Some of Sarah Palin's Ideas Cross the Political Divide"

Jason Puskar, "Risking Ellison."

Week 3. Becoming & Being an American

Sarah Song, "What Does it Mean to be an American?"

Steven M. Warshawsky, "What Does it Mean to be an American?"

William H. Chafe, "The American Narrative: Is There One and What is it?"

Jay Caspian Kang, "Immigrant Misappropriations: The Importance of Ichiro."

W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings."

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations."

Week 4. The Constitution

The U.S. Constitution, Articles & Amendments

Laurence H. Tribe, "America's Constitutional Narrative."

Robert A. Dahl, "How Democratic is the Constitution?"

Keith Whittington, "Constitutions."

Week 5. Courts

Marbury v. Madison (1803)

Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

Romer v. Evans (1996)

Judith Resnik, "Reinventing Courts as Democratic Institutions."

Gerald Rosenberg, "Same Sex Marriage."

Susan Silbey, “The Courts in American Public Culture.”

Mary Ann Glendon, “Rights Talk.”

Week 6. The President & the Executive Branch

James L. Sundquist, “The Decline and Resurgence of Congress.”

Stephen Skowronek, “The Politics Presidents Make.”

Andrew J. Polsky, “The Presidency at War.”

Week 7. Congress

Reynolds v. Sims (1964)

Citizens United v. FEC (2010)

David R. Mayhew, “Congress: The Electoral Connection.”

Gerhard Loewenberg, “Paradoxes of Legislatures.”

New York Times, “Salty Food and Belching Cows are Winners.”

Mathew D. McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz “Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms”

Week 8. Parties & Elections

V.O. Key, Jr., “A Theory of Critical Elections.”

Louis Menand, “The Unpolitical Animal: How Political Science Understands Voters.”

Kathleen Bawn et al., “A Theory of Political Parties.”

Tali Mendelberg, “Deliberation, Incivility, and Race.”

John B. Judis, “Obama and the Psychology of the Color Barrier.”

Zoltan L. Hajnal and Jeremy Horowitz, “Racial Winners and Losers in American Party Politics.”

Week 9. Media & Public Opinion

Anthony Downs, “Up and Down with Ecology: The Issue-Attention Cycle.”

Martin Gilens, “Why American Hate Welfare.”

James N. Druckman and Thomas J. Leeper, “Is Public Opinion Stable?”

Markus Prior, “News v. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout.”

Diana Mutz, “The Great Divide: Campaign Media in the American Mind.”

Week 10. Interests & Movements

E.E. Schattschneider, “The Semisovereign People.”

Jonathan Rauch, “The Hyperpluralism Trap.”

Jane Mansbridge, “Why We Lost the ERA”

Terry M. Moe, “The Rise of Teachers Unions.”

Ben McGrath, “The Movement: The Rise of the Tea Party Activism.”

Week 11. Current Issues: Polarization & Inequality

Nolan McCarty, et al., “Polarized America.”

Jonathan Rauch, “Bipolar Disorder.”

Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, “Winner-Take-All Politics: Public Policy, Political Organization, and the Precipitous Rise of Top Incomes in the United States.”

Marta Tienda and Susana M. Snchez, “Latin American Immigration to the United States.”

Week 12. Federalism, State & Local Politics

Riker, “Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance”

Peterson, “City Limits”

Bridges, “Morning Glories”

Week 13. Review & Conclusions