

Political Science 105: Introduction to American Politics

Doug M Johnson

Spring 17

E-mail: dmjohns2@gmail.com

Office Hours: M 9-11a, or by appt.

Office: Harkness 316

Web: dougjohnson.com

Class Hours: MWF 1150-1240

Class Room: Morey 321

Introduction

How has presidential behavior changed over time? What strategic decisions do members of Congress make to achieve their goals? Why has the American electorate become so polarized? This course introduces students to the foundations of American government. Key concepts at the heart of American politics will be introduced, their evolution over time presented, and their place in contemporary politics discussed. The course is appropriate for majors and non-majors with an interest in understanding how the American political system works.

Objectives

- To provide a basic understanding of the institutions of the American government
- To introduce students to concepts and research within political science
- To provide opportunities to improve critical thinking and analytical skills
- To explain contemporary political phenomena using theoretical foundations

Readings

[LGSA] American Government: Power and Purpose - Brief 13th Edition, *Lowi, Theodore J.; Ginsberg, Benjamin; Shepsle, Kenneth A.; Ansolabehere, Stephen* (Either version of the 13th is acceptable, ie 2014 election update)

[KS] Principles and Practice of American Politics - Classic and Contemporary Readings 6th Edition, *Kernal, Samuel; Smith, Steven S*

Other materials and readings will be made available to you via blackboard, or have links provided in the online version of this syllabus. I reserve the right to change/update readings, and/or adjust the weeks as needed to fit class scheduling demands. Sufficient notice will be given if a change occurs.

Course Policy

Grading

- 30% Midterm to be given 3/3
- 40% Final, given according to registrar schedule
- 20% Response Essays
- 10% Participation and Attendance

Midterm

The midterm will be given at the end of class on 3/3. You will have 24 hours to complete the exam and email it to me. I will not accept handwritten exams, except from those with university approved accommodations. The exam will consist of essay questions drawn from the course materials and discussions. Well received answers will be clear, concise, identify and discuss the readings. You may use any notes and course materials on this exam.

Final

This will be given in class. Blue books will be provided. The exam will consist of short answer and/or essay questions pertaining to the material covered in class and the readings. Well received answers will be clear, concise, identify and discuss the readings, and be legible. No notes or materials can be used on the exam. The final exam is comprehensive, but not cumulative.

Response Essays

All but two reading sections listed below have an associated prompt for writing a response essay. You must write 2 response essays over the course of the semester, with at least 1 being completed before the midterm exam (you may write both before the midterm). You may write as many as 4 total essays, in order to replace an unsatisfactory grade (the pre-midterm response and replacement must be done prior to the midterm). Responses should be limited to 2-3 pages, normal font and spacing (500-750 words). The responses should answer the prompt using the specific readings for the week. Responses are due by the beginning of class on the first day of the section. If the schedule changes, the dates will be adjusted, but the papers are meant to be due BEFORE we discuss them in class.

Participation and Attendance

It is your responsibility to come to class and participate. A good rule of thumb: if I do not know who you are, you are not participating enough. Participation includes, but is not limited to, attendance, being on-time, paying attention, avoiding digital distractions, participating constructively in discussion, asking questions during and after class, coming to office hours, sending me emails with questions, etc. There are unlimited ways for you to demonstrate that you are committed to this class, so there is no reason to not get all of these points.

Academic Honesty

Students must conduct themselves in accordance with the University's Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade and a report to the necessary dean(s) and academic advisors for disciplinary action. It is harder to cheat and not get caught than it is to simply do the work.

All work turned in for a grade must be your own. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade and a report to the necessary dean(s) and academic advisors for disciplinary action. This includes putting uncited work in your papers and assignments. If you have a question about whether you are unintentionally plagiarizing, ask.

Rochester Policies

It is the student's responsibility to report to the University any disabilities that require accommodation. I will follow any and all required provisions to ensure every student has the equal opportunity to be successful in this course. All students in the course are expected to do the same.

Behavioral Expectations

We will routinely discuss issues of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality, etc. These discussions must remain civil and informative, and never become destructive or abusive in nature. If you feel this will be a problem for you, whether in discussing topics you are uncomfortable with or remaining constructive, please consider an alternative to this course.

Section 1, 01/16 - 01/20: Institutional Design

No Paper

- KS 1-1 Mancur Olson. From *The Logic of Collective Action*
- KS 1-2 Garrett Hardin. *The Tragedy of the Commons*

Section 2, 01/23 - 01/27: The Constitution & Federalism

Compare and contrast the Massachusetts and Pennsylvania state constitutions. In doing so, pay close attention to the organization of the executive and legislative branches. Which of the two is a better example of the US Constitution and why?

- [Massachusetts Constitution of 1780](#)
- [Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776](#)
- KS Appendix - Constitution of the United States
- LGSA Chapter 2
- [NYTimes Op-Ed, States Will Lead on Climate Change in the Trump Era](#)
- LGSA Chapter 3
- KS 3-2 Jonathan Rauch. *A Separate Peace*
- KS 3-3 Thad Kousser. *How America's "Devolution Revolution" Reshaped Its Federalism*

Section 3, 01/30 - 02/03: Civil Liberties and Rights, Part I

Abortion and same-sex marriage remain as highly salient issues in American politics, despite having established case law defending both. Removing your personal opinions among the two, which decisions is at greater risk? Why?

- LGSA Chapter 4
- KS 5-2 *Roe v. Wade*
- [Obergefell v. Hodges](#)
- [The New Yorker, To Have and To Hold, Reproduction, marriage, and the Constitution.](#)

Section 4, 02/06 - 02/10: Civil Liberties and Rights, Part II

Without relying on simple racism as the exclusive reason, explain why voting rights presents itself as a challenge to equality. In other words, why would any group of individuals want to restrict voting? What gains are made by doing so? And assuming those reasons are legitimate, does that constitute a civil rights violation?

- BB V.O. Key. *Of the South*, from [Southern Politics in State and Nation](#).
- KS 4-2 Justin Levitt. From *New State Voting Laws: Barriers to the Ballot?*
- [Shelby County v. Holder](#)
- [Washington Post, Appeals court strikes down North Carolina's voter-ID law.](#)

Section 5, 02/13 - 02/17: Congressional Development

Identify competing explanations for institutional change in Congress - in particular, explanations for a shift in the leadership styles of House Speakers, the adoption of the Reed Rules, and the emergence of standing committees.

- **LGSA** Chapter 5
- **BB** Thomas B. Reed, "Obstruction in the National House," *North American Review* 149 (1889), 421-28.
- **BB** Joseph Cooper and David W. Brady, "Institutional Context and Leadership Style: The House from Cannon to Rayburn," *American Political Science Review* 75 (1981), 411-25.
- **BB** Gerald Gamm and Kenneth A. Shepsle, "Emergence of Legislative Institutions: Standing Committees in the House and Senate, 1810-1825," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 14 (1989), 39-66
- **KS** 6-3 John Aldrich and David Rohde "Congressional Committees in a Continuing Partisan Era"

Section 6, 02/20 - 02/24: The Presidency

In what ways has the presidency changed since the early 20th century, in the nature of presidential power, and in the use of appeals to the public—and when have crucial innovations occurred?

- **LGSA** Chapter 6
- **KS** 7-1 Richard E. Neustadt, From "Presidential Power"
- **KS** 7-2 Samuel Kernell, From "Going Public."
- **BB** James W. Ceaser, Glen E. Thurow, Jeffrey Tulis, and Joseph M. Bessette, "The Rise of the Rhetorical Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 11 (1981), 158-71.

Section 7, 02/27 - 03/03: The Bureaucracy

How do Presidential appointments shape bureaucratic policy? What limits their power and what can they do to increase it?

- **LGSA** Chapter 7
- [Donald Trump Is Choosing His Cabinet. Here's the Latest List.](#)
- [Rick Perry, Ex-Governor of Texas, Is Trump's Pick as Energy Secretary](#)
- **KS** 8-2 David E. Lewis, From "The Politics of Presidential Appointments."

Section 8, 03/06 - 03/10: The Judiciary

How is Hamilton's argument about the weakest branch upended by the politicization of the judiciary in the modern era (since FDR). Does this politicization help or harm the legitimacy of Supreme Court decisions? Why?

- LGSA Chapter 8
- KS 9-3 Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist No. 78"
- KS 9-4 Robert A. Carp and Kenneth L. Manning, "Selecting Justice: The Ideology of Federal Judges Appointed by President Obama"
- **How the NRA Learned to Play Hardball on Supreme Court Nominations**

Spring Break, 03/13 - 03/17:

Section 9, 03/20 - 03/24: Public Opinion and the Media

How do the readings below help explain the discrepancies between the 2016 Presidential election polls and results? In light of this, how closely should polls be trusted or used in answering important questions?

- LGSA Chapter 9
- KS 10-2 John Zaller and Stanley Feldman, "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions Versus Revealing Preferences"
- BB Hillygus, D. Sunshine. "The Evolution of Election Polling in the United States," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75 (2011) 962-981
- BB Hetherington, Marc. "Why Polarized Trust Matters," *The Forum* 13 (2015) 445-458

Section 10, 03/27 - 03/31: Partisanship vs. Polarization

Is there a difference between partisanship and polarization when we consider outcomes like elections and/or policy? If so, explain what it is, and if not, why?

- LGSA Chapter 11
- KS 12-1 John Aldrich, From "Why Parties?"
- KS 12-2 Larry Bartels, From "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996"
- KS 10-3 Morris Fiorina, From "Culture War? THE Myth of a Polarized America"
- KS 10-4 Alan Abromowitz, "The Polarized Electorate"

Section 11, 04/03 - 04/07: Elections

Given what we know about voters knowledge and ability to vote correctly, do you support or oppose the abolition of the electoral college? Why?

- LGSA Chapter 10
- KS 11-1 Samuel Popkin, From “The Reasoning Voter”
- KS 11-3 Michael Schudson “America’s Ignorant Voters”
- [Washington Post, In defense of the electoral college](#)

Section 12, 04/10 - 04/14: Interest Groups

Explain why it is difficult to clearly establish the direct relationship between interest groups and congressional outcomes. Why is determining causality between the wealthy and policy so difficult?

- LGSA Chapter 12
- KS 13-1 E.E. Schattschneider, “The Scope and Bias of the Pressure System”
- BB Martin Gilens, “Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69 (2005), 778-96.
- BB Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 312-46.

Section 13, 04/17 - 04/21: Modern Congress

What is the relationship between electoral polarization and congressional dysfunction? To what extent is gridlock in Congress a function of divided constituents and to what extent is it due to factors within the legislature itself?

- KS 6-1 Steven S. Smith, “Congress, The Troubled Institution.”
- KS 6-2 Sarah A. Binder, “The Politics of Legislative Stalemate.”
- KS 11-2 Gary C. Jacobson, “No Compromise: The Electoral Origins of Legislative Gridlock.”

Section 14, 04/24 - 04/28: Public Policy

No Paper Due

- LGSA Chapter 13
- BB Kenneth T. Jackson, “Race, Ethnicity, and Real Estate Appraisal: The Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration,” *Journal of Urban History* 6 (1980), 419-52.
- BB Thomas J. Sugrue, “Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940-1964,” *Journal of American History* 82 (1995): 551-78.