

PSCI 798-302  
Field Seminar: American Politics

This course surveys many of the major topics in American politics being addressed by political scientists today. It focuses on the constitutional structure of the system; the sources and features of democratic public opinion; the roles of race, gender, and class; national political parties, national elections, and the behavior of national political institutions, including Congress, the Presidency, the Supreme Court, and the national bureaucracy. It also examines the roles of business lobbies, think tanks, and interest groups. Discussions throughout will be concerned with what work in contemporary “mainstream” American politics tells us about how, and how well, the American political system is actually working.

This is a reading course, not a research seminar. Students should come prepared to discuss the readings in some depth each week. Students are to write 7 3-5 page essays analyzing a work, argument or theme in the readings. They are encouraged to do so by locating readings taking contrasting views to the one(s) assigned in a particular week and evaluating the criticisms. They may do so in any of the 7 weeks they choose. All readings are available online or on a designated shelf in the room outside the chair’s office, 220 Stiteler. Students may of course purchase any books they wish online.

1. Jan. 13. Planning the Course.

A constitutive proposal followed by democratic deliberation.

2. Jan. 20. The Constitution and Its Critics.

The Federalist Papers, Nos. 10, 39, 48, 51, 54, 55, 62, 70, 78  
Robert A. Dahl, How Democratic is the American Constitution?, 2d ed., 1-177.

3. Jan. 27. Understanding “We the People:” Studying Mass Opinions.

Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, The Rational Public, 1-171, 383-398.  
John R. Zaller, The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion, 1-96, 185-215.

4. Feb. 3. Influencing “We the People”: Shaping Mass Opinions.

Page and Shapiro, 321-382.  
Diana C. Mutz, Impersonal Influence, 1-98, 179-296.  
Taeku Lee, Mobilizing Public Opinion, 1-185.

5. Feb. 10. “We the People” and the Trinity of Inequalities (Race, Class, Gender).

Page and Shapiro, 285-320.

- Donald R. Kinder and Lynn M. Sanders, Divided by Color, 3-127.  
Michael C. Dawson, Black Visions, 1-84.  
Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, Rising Tide, 73-100.  
Jennifer Hochschild, What's Fair, 1-45, 260-285.
6. Feb. 17. The Unanticipated Basic Institution: Political Parties.
- John H. Aldrich, Why Parties?, 1-61, 159-296.  
John Gerring, Party Ideologies in America, 3-54, 125-158, 232-286.
7. Feb. 24. The Mirror of the People? Congressional Elections  
(NOTE: This class must be rescheduled due to APSA Council service).
- Gary C. Jacobson, The Politics of Congressional Elections.
8. Mar. 3. The Tribune of the People? Presidential Elections
- Samuel Popkin, The Reasoning Voter, 1-148.  
Richard Johnston, Michael G. Hagen, Kathleen Hall Jamieson,  
The 2000 Presidential Election and the Foundations of Party Politics
9. Mar. 17. Lawmaking in the American Republic: Congressional Behavior.
- Keith Krehbiel, Pivotal Politics, 3-144, 164-185.  
Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal, Congress, 1-145.
10. Mar. 24. The Leader of the Republic: Presidential Behavior.
- Fred I. Greenstein, The Presidential Difference
11. Mar. 31. A Factious Republic? Interest Groups, Elections, and Policy-Making
- Poole and Rosenthal, 165-183.  
Allan J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis, eds., Interest Group Politics (excerpts).  
Mark A. Smith, American Business and Political Power.  
Theda Skocpol, Diminished Democracy
12. Apr. 7. The Least Dangerous Branch? National Courts
- Jeffrey A. Segal and Harold J. Spaeth, The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited, 1-114.  
Tracey E. George and Lee Epstein, "On the Nature of Supreme Court Decision Making," American Political Science Review 86: 323-337.  
Keith Whittington, "Interpose Your Friendly Hand": Political Supports for the Exercise of Judicial Review by the United States Supreme Court, American Political Science Review 99: 583-596 (2005).

13. Apr. 14. The Fourth Branch of Government: The Federal Bureaucracy

Daniel P. Carpenter, The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy.

14. Apr. 21. The Social Capital Debate and the State of the American Republic

Robert D. Putnam, Bowling Alone