

Political Science 202: Introduction to American Politics

University of Washington
Lectures MWF at 11:30 in Smith 120

Autumn 2016
Sections at various times

Professor Mark A. Smith

Office: Gowen 29; Hours: Wednesdays, 1:30-2:30; Fridays, 10:00-11:00; and by appointment

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Overview of Class:

Who really rules America? How do our major institutions of government work? Do elections give the general public a voice in the political system? And how did a certain New York billionaire manage to win the Republican nomination for president? Political scientists study these and other questions. In this course we will examine both government officials—elected and unelected—and extra-governmental actors such as the news media, interest groups, and political parties. Because this is a survey course, we will aim for breadth rather than depth. Among the specific questions considered are why the U.S. has only two major parties; why Congress tends to move slowly; how the electoral College works; why bureaucratic agencies use lots of formal rules; why the mass media cover certain stories and not others; and how polls attempt to measure public opinion. Given that this is an election year, we'll spend extra time on campaigns and voting. For most of our topics, what we cover would serve as a useful gateway to more advanced courses.

Required Readings:

A collection of articles and essays available online.

Course Requirements:

The grading is based on two midterm exams, a final exam, a paper, and participation in sections. The final exam will cover the entire quarter. All exams will cover material from the lectures and assigned readings.

Grading:

First exam: 17.5%

Second exam: 17.5%

Final exam: 30%

Paper: 20%

Section participation: 15%

The first exam will be given in class on October 21 and the second exam on November 18. The final exam will be given on Wednesday, December 14 from 2:30-4:20. The paper will be due on November 3.

Class Schedule
(lectures in bold, sections in italics)

Part I. Political Science as a Science

September 28 Introduction to the course.

September 29 Sections: Read Hans Noel, “Ten Things Political Scientists Know That You Don’t”

September 30 What is political science, and where does the study of American politics fit within it?

Part II. From the Founding to the Present

October 3 How the meaning of the terms “liberal” and “conservative” have evolved.

October 4 Sections: Read David Wearing, “How Scientific is Political Science?”, Jill Lepore, “Long Division: Measuring the Polarization of American Politics,” and Arvind Kumar, “Essay on Whether Political Science is a Science or an Art?”

October 5 Changing beliefs, institutions, and practices related to majority rule.

October 6 Sections: Read James Madison, *The Federalist* #10; and excerpts from *The Federalist* #63 (James Madison) and *The Federalist* #68 and #71 (Alexander Hamilton).

October 7 Does America have majority rule today?

October 10 How the meaning of the Bill of Rights expanded over time.

October 11 Sections: Read Peter Schuck, “James Q. Wilson and American Exceptionalism”; Andrew Roberts, “What Americanists Don’t Know about American Politics”

October 12 The development of judicial review.

October 13 Sections: Read Steven Teles, “Kludgeocracy in America”; Suzanne Mettler, “Our Hidden Government Benefits”

October 14 The development of the Electoral College and the presidential selection system.

Part III. Elections and the Public

October 17 The two-party system in America.

October 18 Sections: Read The Economist, “The Art of the Lie”; Peter Wehrer, “Confirmation Bias and the Limits of Human Knowledge”; Peter Wehrer, “Have You Ever Been Wrong?”

October 19 Party nominations.

October 20 Sections: Read Gil Troy, “The Campaign Triumphant”; and Kenneth Goldstein, Matthew Dallek, and Joel Rivlin, “Even the Geeks are Polarized: The Dispute over the ‘Real Driver’ in American Elections”

October 21 First exam.

October 24 The competence of the American electorate.

October 25 Sections: Read Larry Bartels, “The Irrational Electorate,” and R. Douglas Arnold, “Can Inattentive Citizens Control Their Elected Representatives?” Paper assigned.

October 26 Initiatives and referenda.

October 27 Sections: Read Jamelle Bouie, “How Trump Happened”; Amanda Taub, “The Rise of American Authoritarianism”

October 28 How institutional rules affect political outcomes.

October 31 Parties and political polarization.

November 1 Sections: Read Matthew Yglesias, “American Democracy is Doomed”; Ezra Klein, “America’s Political System Isn’t Going to Collapse”

November 2 Money in elections.

November 3 Sections: Read Didi Kuo, “Polarization and Partisanship”; Gary Andres, “Campaign-Style Advocacy: A Broader View of Lobbying”; and Melinda Burns, “K Street and the Status Quo”. Paper due.

November 4 Do campaign contributors buy influence in Congress?

November 7 Presidential campaign ads.

November 8 Sections: Read Jonathan Rauch, “How American Politics Went Insane”

November 9 Election recap.

November 10 Sections: Reading TBA

November 11 No class (Veterans’ Day).

November 14 Divisions over religion in American politics.

November 15 Sections: Read Lee Drutman, “How Race and Identity Became the Central Dividing Line in American Politics”

November 16 Divisions over race in American politics.

November 17 Sections: Read Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”

November 18 Second exam.

Part IV. American Political Institutions

November 21 How we arrived at the current American health care system.

November 22 Sections: Read Ezra Klein, “Unpopular Mandate”; R. Douglas Arnold, “Politics at the Precipice: Fixing Social Security in 2033”

November 23 Interpreting public opinion polls.

November 24 No class (Thanksgiving break).

November 25 No class (Thanksgiving break).

November 28 Presidential powers.

November 29 Sections: Read Ezra Klein, “The Unpersuaded”; Kenneth S. Lowande and Sidney Milkis, “‘We Can’t Wait’: Barack Obama, Partisan Polarization, and the Administrative Presidency”

November 30 Why Supreme Court justices make the decisions they do.

December 1 Sections: Read “Scalia Defends Originalism as Best Methodology for Judging Law”; Ralph Rossum, “Justice Scalia’s Legacy of Originalism”; Ronald Lindsay, “Justice Scalia and Originalism: May They Rest in Peace”; Jedediah Purdy, “Scalia’s Contradictory Originalism”

December 2 Local government.

December 5 The news media: How journalists determine what qualifies as news.

December 6 Sections: Read Paul Starr, “Goodbye to the Age of Newspapers (Hello to a New Era of Corruption)”; John Heltman, “Confessions of a Paywall Journalist”; Johan Norberg, “Why

Can't We See That We're Living in a Golden Age?"

December 7 The news media: How journalists cover politics and elections.

December 8 Sections: Read Shanto Iyengar, "The Media Game: New Moves, Old Strategies," Brent Cunningham, "Re-thinking Objectivity"

December 9 The causes of red tape.

Wednesday, December 14 Final Exam from 2:30-4:30