



Political Science 104; Spring, 2020
American Politics and Government
Professor David Canon
T+Th 1:00 - 2:15 p.m., 2650 Humanities

Office Hours: T+Th 2:30-3:30 p.m. and by appt.
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Course Description:

This course is an introduction to American politics and government. By the end of the semester you should have a good understanding of how the government makes policy and why decisions are made as they are. The course will combine accounts of how "Washington really works" from the popular media, scholarly work on the governmental process, and debates on various political issues and institutions. This is an especially exciting time to be taking a class on American politics, with the upcoming presidential election, debates over the wall with Mexico, continuing debates over Social Security and Medicare, energy and global warming, immigration, gun control, how to deal with the budget deficits, growing concerns about polarization and gridlock in Washington, and the Trump presidency and impeachment.

The course begins with a discussion of the foundations of our governmental system: the Constitution, federalism, capitalism and questions concerning the democratic nature of our government. Then we will examine the American political institutions: Congress, the president, the bureaucracy, and the courts. From there we turn to political participation and examine public opinion, parties, campaigns and elections, the media, and interest groups. Finally, we will see how it all fits together by examining civil rights, social policy, economic policy, and foreign policy. While the course is a lecture class (intimate discussions are a little difficult with 250 students), I encourage you to raise questions you have about anything presented in the lectures. The weekly discussion sections also provide an opportunity to examine critically the course material.

Course Format

This class is offered for four credits with two 75-minute lectures and one 50-minute discussion section each week. It also carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities for about two hours out of classroom for each credit hour (that is, eight additional hours a week). This course will be primarily a lecture class given its size. Yet, I encourage class participation. I will begin each class

with a discussion of current events. I encourage you to bring questions to class and to respond to issues I may raise. You also will have the opportunity to discuss the readings and lectures in your weekly discussion sections. The goals of this class are both theoretical and practical: I aim to give you a theoretical basis for understanding American politics and a greater awareness of the events to which theory can be applied. I also hope to provide you the tools you need to evaluate the political system and engage you in national politics.

Learning Outcomes

The goal of this class is to familiarize you with American political institutions, prepare you to take upper-level classes in American politics, and to get you interested in American politics.

Course Evaluation:

The grades for the course will be based on two midterms (27.5% each), attendance and participation in discussion section (10%), and a final exam (35%). The midterm exams will be a combination of multiple choice and short IDs and the final exam will be a combination of multiple choice, short IDs, and one long essay. The multiple choice and short essay portions of the final exam will not be comprehensive and only cover material since the second midterm; the long essay, which I will give you in advance, is comprehensive in nature. All reading material and lectures will be fair game on the exams.

Books and Readings:

The following books are required for the course and are available for purchase at the University of Wisconsin Bookstore on State Street. The books are shrink-wrapped together as a packaged deal.

William T. Bianco and David T. Canon, *American Politics Today*. 6th ed. W.W. Norton, 2019 (make sure to get the full edition, not the brief edition (“core”), or the “essentials”).

David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, Kenneth R. Mayer, eds. *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*, 8th ed., W.W. Norton, 2018.

A few additional required readings are on posted on Canvas, which you can access through your Student Center on MyUW. Also, I urge you to read a good national newspaper, such as the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, or the *Washington Post*.

Student Responsibilities

A friendly word of advice on the readings that should be taken seriously: you should complete the assigned reading before the topic is discussed in lecture. At a minimum you should complete the reading before your discussion section or you will not be prepared to participate. Also, many of the lectures will use the readings as a point of departure, so your understanding of lecture material will be enhanced by having completed and understood the assigned reading. The reading load averages about 85 pages a week. This should not be a difficult pace to maintain if you do not fall behind. If you put off reading anything until before the exams will you find yourself staring at 425 pages for each of the exams . . . this strategy is not recommended. One other thing I should mention – the reading load is not equally distributed across the weeks. Some weeks you will only have 30-40 pages of reading; other weeks will be more than 100. Therefore, it may be useful for you to try to get ahead on the next week's readings when the reading load for a given week is relatively light.

Other Considerations

Your success in this class is important to us. All students are strongly encouraged to visit office hours if only to introduce yourself and share how the course is working for you. We expect the classroom to be

an inclusive and welcoming environment where each student has the potential to learn. For more information on diversity and inclusion the University of Wisconsin see: <https://diversity.wisc.edu/>.

If you have a disability or circumstance that could affect your performance in class, please contact me early in the semester so that I can identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. The McBurney Center for Disability Services can provide official documentation of disabilities (for more information see <https://mcburney.wisc.edu/>).

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. This includes using someone else's words or ideas without proper attribution and copying from someone else's exam. We will report any cases of academic dishonesty to the Assistant Dean for Academic Integrity. Please make sure you are familiar with the policies outlined by the Dean of Students (<https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/>).

Finally, electronic devices (laptops, phones, etc.) will not be allowed in class except for legitimate academic purposes. I will talk more about this on the first day of class.

Online course material

The Canvas site for the course also includes chapter reviews, study questions, on-line quizzes, links to other political sites, political blogs, vocabulary flash cards, plus other readings and resources. Outlines of the powerpoint presentations will be posted before each lecture on Canvas.

Lecture Schedule, Reading Assignments, and Discussion Questions:

The following abbreviations are used in the outline of assigned reading for each day: "TED" for *The Enduring Debate* and "APT" for *American Politics Today*. There are a few on-line readings that will be available on Canvas.

I. FOUNDATIONS

A. Introduction to the Course – January 21

Preface and Chapter 1 in APT, xxi-xxiii, 2-26.

Michael Schudson, "The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life," TED, 26-33.

B. The Constitution – January 23

Chapter 2 in APT, 30-66.

The Constitution and its Amendments, A6-A15 in APT (back of the APT book).

Federalist Papers #10 and #51, A16-A19 in APT (back of the APT book).

Michael Kammen, "The Nature of American Constitutionalism," TED, 45-53.

Discussion Section Questions, (Discussion sections will meet starting after lecture on the 21st): What are the three themes of the textbook? Can you think of examples from your life that illustrate the idea that "politics is everywhere?" Why is government necessary? Do you think conflict in politics is a good thing or bad thing? Why? What were the central problems the Founders faced at the Constitutional convention and how did they resolve them? What are some of the unresolved constitutional problems? What is distinctive about the American constitutional system? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a strong central government? What explains the simplicity and durability of the Constitution? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the document's simplicity? How did the Founding Fathers' view of people help shape the Constitution? What does Madison say about the relation between self-interest and the nature of government

in Federalist #10? What is the proposed solution in Federalist #51?

The Constitution, continued – January 28

Charles Beard, “An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution,” TED, 59-66.

Levinson, Abbot, and Olson, “Should the Constitution be Fundamentally Changed?,” TED, 65-85.

C. Federalism – January 30

Chapter 3 in APT, 70-98.

Paul Peterson, “The Price of Federalism,” TED, 91-99.

George Annas, “Jumping Frogs, Endangered Toads, and California’s Medical Marijuana Law,” TED, 100-109.

The Economist, Gulaskekaram and Ramakrishnan, and Dalmia, “Immigration Reform: More Power to the States?,” TED, 110-120.

Discussion Section Questions: What is Charles Beard’s “economic interpretation of the Constitution”? To what extent do the ideas he talks about still shape our government today? Do you think it is good to regularly amend the Constitution to reflect changing values and address current problems, or should the Constitution be changed only rarely? When should the national government have the power to coerce states to adopt national policies against their will, if ever? How has the balance of power between the states and the national government evolved over time? How are the states fighting back to resist centralization at the national level? What role has the Supreme Court played in this evolution (as in the medical marijuana and assisted suicide cases)? Do you think the Supreme Court should have intervened in either of these cases, or left those decisions up to the states? Which level of government should play the primary role in immigration policy? What if the national government does not enforce its own laws? Should the states be able to step in to fill the void? How has the Supreme Court addressed this issue?

D. Civil Liberties – February 4-6

Chapter 4 in APT, 102-144.

Jonathan Rauch, “In Defense of Prejudice,” TED, 130-137.

Cole and Helfman, “Should There be a Religious Exemption to Nondiscrimination Law?,” TED, 138-151.

Discussion Section Questions: Should the Bill of Rights apply to the states as well as the federal government? Why? Should hate speech be allowed? Do you agree with Rauch’s assessment of the problems associated with trying to limit hate speech? If so, is all speech protected by the Constitution? If not, where do you draw the line between protected free speech and speech or actions that may be harmful to others? What about defendants’ rights, protections against illegal searches and seizures (as discussed in lecture and in the textbook)? Should there be a religious exemption to nondiscrimination law? If so, could that exemption apply to race and gender as well as sexual orientation? If not, how does the state decide where to draw the line on protecting religious freedom?

II. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

A. Congress – February 11-13

Chapter 11 in APT, 374-414.

David Mayhew, “Congress: The Electoral Connection,” TED, 155-58.

Richard Fenno, “U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration,” TED, 159-71.

John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, “Too Much of a Good Thing,” TED, 172-178.

Appelbaum and Spaulding, "Check and Balances: Too Many Checks or Not Enough Balances," TED, 179-88.

Discussion Section Questions: Is Congress truly the "first branch" of government? What aspects of its operation either justify or undermine that label? Do the justifications for the bicameral legislature presented by the Founders still ring true today, or would we be better off with a unicameral legislature? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the strong reelection goal among members of Congress? How does the "home style" adopted by a member of Congress help in this quest for reelection? What are the types of things that members do that influence their home style? Why do Hibbing and Theiss-Morse argue that having a responsive Congress is "too much of a good thing?" Do you agree? Would term limits help solve the problem of an over-responsive Congress? How resilient is our system of checks and balances? Is Congress giving up too much authority to the executive branch? What happens when the president and Congress refuse to compromise (as with the recent government shutdown)? Does this gridlock reveal the fragility of our constitutional system?

***** First In-Class Midterm Exam on Tuesday, February 18th *****
(exam will cover readings and lectures through February 13th)

B. The Courts – February 20

Chapter 14 in APT, 488-526.

Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist* 78, TED, 259-65.

David O'Brien, "The Court in American Life," TED, 266-72.

Gerald Rosenberg, "The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?" in TED, 273-78.

Antonin Scalia and Stephen Breyer, "Interpreting the Constitution: Originalism or a Living Constitution?" TED, 279-300.

Discussion Section Questions: Are the federal courts the "least dangerous branch?" What is the proper role of the Supreme Court in the American political process? Should they be responsive to political forces, as O'Brien discusses? What is the meaning of "judicial restraint" and "judicial activism"? Are they related to "strict constructionism"? Which approach to interpreting the Constitution, Scalia's textualism or Breyer's consequentialist approach, do you find more appealing? Can the Supreme Court be an agent of social change?

C. The Presidency – February 25-27

Chapter 12 in APT, 418-50.

Richard Neustadt, "The Power to Persuade," TED, 189-98.

Charles O. Jones, "Perspectives on the Presidency," TED, 199-205.

Nichols, Posner, Guelzo and Hulme, "Should the Electoral College be Replaced with a Direct Popular Vote for President?," TED, 206-18.

Discussion Section Questions: Neustadt argues that the president's central power is the "power to persuade." Do you agree? Has the president become too powerful? What would the Founding Fathers say about the current state of the presidency? How are the president's powers limited by our system of separated powers? Have these limits on presidential power changed during war time? What are the arguments for and against reforming the electoral college? Do you think it will ever be changed?

D. The Bureaucracy – March 3

Chapter 13 in APT, 454-84.

James Q. Wilson, "What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It," TED, 228-36.

Edwards and Wedel on “Should Government Functions be Outsourced to Private Contractors,” TED, 237-58.

III. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

A. Public Opinion – March 5

Chapters 6 in APT, 198-228.

George Gallup, “Polling the Public,” TED, 303-310.

Richard Morin, “Choice of Words,” TED, 311-15.

Discussion Section Questions: Does the bureaucracy serve the public interest? What is the proper standard for assessing the bureaucracy? Efficiency? Equity? How does this play out in the comparison of the DMV and McDonalds presented by Wilson? What are the advantages and disadvantages of contracting out some government programs to the private sector (“privatization”)? How does the debate over privatizing government programs fit into Wilson’s discussion? As discussed in lecture, what are the differences between “police patrol” and “fire alarm” oversight, and which do you think would be the preferable form of oversight? What are some of the problems associated with interpreting the results of public opinion polls? How can question wording shape the results of polls? How did question wording influence the interpretation of President Clinton’s impeachment? Can you think of other examples how question wording influences the outcome of polls? To what extent should political leaders listen to public opinion?

B. Campaigns and Elections – March 10-12

Chapter 9 in APT, 296-336.

V.O. Key, “The Voice of the People: An Echo,” TED, 333-38.

Louis Menand, “The Unpolitical Animal,” TED, 339-47.

William Galston, “Telling Americans to Vote, Or Else,” TED, 348-51.

Fund, Beinart, and Minnite on “Reducing Fraud or Suppressing Voters?,” in TED, 352-61.

Discussion Section Questions: How do voters decide who to vote for? What does this view of voting behavior say about how we should interpret the results of elections? Do elections “send a message” or can we really tell much about what voters want from the outcome of elections? Which of the three theories of voting reviewed by Menand sounds the most convincing? Do you think that Americans should be required to vote? What are the advantages and disadvantages of compulsory voting? What are the implications of requiring identification for voters? Do you support this policy? Do you think voter fraud is a problem?

**** Spring break, March 14-22 ****

C. The Media – March 24

Chapter 7 in APT, 232-58.

Markus Prior, “News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout,” TED, 316-22.

Sides, Jolly, and Levendusky, “Is Partisan Media Exposure Bad for Democracy?,” TED, 323-32.

D. Political Parties – March 26

Chapter 8 in APT, 262-92.

Morris Fiorina, “The Decline of Collective Responsibility in American Politics, TED,” 361-72.

Nicol Rae, “Be Careful What You Wish For: The Rise of Responsible Parties in American National Politics,” TED, 373-83.

Diamond and Klein, “Should the United States Encourage Multi-party Politics?,” TED, 384-91.

Discussion Section Questions: How has the “new media” changed coverage of politics? Is this good or bad for the political system? How have the media changed governing? Do you think they play too much of a role in politics? If so, how could this be changed? What is the impact of media choice on political knowledge and turnout? What are the implications for politics? Is partisan bias in the media good or bad for democracy? If you think it is bad, how can the “political silo” effect be changed? What are the major differences between the Democratic and Republican parties? Would our political system benefit from stronger parties? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of stronger parties? How do parties provide collective responsibility? Is this possible under divided government? What does Rae mean by “be careful what you wish for”? Would our democracy be stronger with a multi-party system?

***** Second In-Class Midterm Exam on Tuesday, March 31st *****
(exam will cover readings and lectures through March 26th)

E. Interest Groups – April 2
Chapter 10 in APT, 340-70.

Alexis de Tocqueville, “Political Association in the United States,” TED, 392-95.

David Truman, “The Alleged Mischiefs of Faction,” TED, 396-403.

Mancur Olson, “The Logic of Collective Action,” TED, 404-13.

Campaign Legal Center and Riches, “Donor Disclosure: Is Anonymous Campaign Funding a Problem?,” TED, 414-26.

Discussion Section Questions: What are the various strategies used by interest groups to influence politics (as described in the textbook). Which do you think is likely to be more effective? Which of these tactics are appropriate and which should be regulated? What are some of the advantages of political association and organization described by Truman? Do interest groups reflect the collective interests of the nation? What are the implications of Olson’s collective action problem for the representativeness of interest groups? Do all groups have their voices heard through the political process, as the pluralists such as Truman would maintain, or are some groups unrepresented because of the logic of collective action? How can collective action problems be solved? Is “dark money” a problem? What are the most important consequences of dark money?

IV. Public Policy

A. Civil Rights – April 7-9
Chapter 5 APT, 148-94.

Rogers M. Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America,” TED, 3-13.

Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at the 50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery Marches,” TED, 121-129.

Abraham Lincoln, “The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions,” on Canvas.

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter From the Birmingham Jail,” on Canvas.

Warshawsky and Jones et. al., “What Does it Mean to be American?” TED, 34-44.

Discussion Section Questions: What are the “multiple traditions” that Smith refers to? Does his argument change your view of our founding era? What is the best means of achieving an integrated society? Describe the progress made in the area of civil rights in the past 50 years. What remains to be done? How do the events at Selma still resonate today? Lincoln and King take opposing views about the place of civil disobedience in trying to promote social change. Which do you find more convincing? If you think that civil disobedience can be appropriate, how does one decide where to draw the line between legitimate civil disobedience and lawless behavior? Which of the authors makes a more convincing case concerning what it means to be an American?

What are the implications of this debate for immigration policy in the United States?

B. Social Policy – April 14-16

Chapter 16 in APT, 572-610.

David John, "Providing Social Security Benefits in the Future," TED, 462-75.

Theodore J. Lowi, "American Business, Public Policy, Case Studies, and Political Theory," TED, 476-82.

Obama and Haislmaier, et. al., "Should the Affordable Care Act be Repealed?," TED, 483-506.

Discussion Section Questions: What different techniques does the federal government use to achieve its social policy goals? What should be done to reform Social Security, if anything? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the various proposals? Does the recent volatility in the stock market change your views (if you support some type of privatization)? What are the types of policy outlined by Lowi? How does the nature of the type of policy influence the nature of politics associated with that issue? What role should the government play in providing health care, if any? Should market forces play more of a role in health care? Is Obamacare a reasonable middle ground between a national health care plan and a market-oriented system, or it just making things worse, as its critics claim?

C. Economic Policy– April 21- 23

Chapter 15 in APT, 530-68.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Call for Federal Responsibility," TED, 429-33.

Herbert Hoover, "Against the Proposed New Deal," TED, 434-38.

Jon Gertner, "The Rise and Fall of the GDP," TED, 439-48.

Williams, Will, and Hinkle, "Is Income Inequality a Problem?" TED, 449-61.

Discussion Section Questions: To what extent should the federal government have responsibility for making sure that the economy is running smoothly? Is the government responsible for providing a "social safety net," as argued by Roosevelt? Or should the market be allowed to operate freely without as much government regulation or intervention, as argued by Hoover? What are the implications of the debate over how to measure GDP for economic policy? How might economic policy differ if we valued "low GDP man" over "high GDP man"? Is economic inequality a central problem that should be addressed through economic policy?

D. Foreign Policy and Summing it Up – April 28-30

Chapter 17 in APT, 614-50.

George Soros, "The Age of Open Society," TED, 507-509.

Ronald Bailey, "Globalization is Good For You," TED, 510-15.

Olsen and Pillar, "How Dangerous is ISIS?" TED, 516-35.

Discussion Section Questions: What is the proper role of the United States in the international community? Is economic and political globalization out of sync? Does economic globalization pose challenges to the United States more generally? How do Soros and Sutherland differ in their interpretations of the impact of globalization on poor countries? Which argument do you find more convincing? How serious a threat is global terror? Do politicians use the threat of terror for their own political ends, is the focus on fighting terrorism a necessary part of modern politics?

*** FINAL EXAM, Monday, May 4th, 7:45-9:45 a.m., Location TBA ***