

## Politics 100: Introduction to American Politics

Spring 2012

Tuesday and Thursday, 1:30 – 2:45 in King 106

Michael Parkin

775-6197

[mparkin@oberlin.edu](mailto:mparkin@oberlin.edu)

Office Hours: Wednesday and Thursday, 3:00 – 4:30 in Rice 203

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This course provides an introductory overview of American politics with an emphasis on current political controversies and debates. You will have the opportunity to consider and discuss a range of institutional and behavioral issues such as the timelessness of the US Constitution, the effectiveness of the legislative process, and the rationality of American public opinion and voting behavior.

### Course Objectives

This course has four major objectives:

1. To introduce you to the *basics* of American politics. By the end of the course, you will have acquired a better understanding of how the American government was formed, how it works, and the public's role in the American political system.
2. To *engage* you in the study of American politics. Despite what you might have heard, American politics is fascinating! This course strives to spark interest and curiosity in various political topics and current events, both for future academic study and for personal consideration.
3. To have you critically *evaluate* and *debate* issues in American democracy. You will be asked to question your preconceived ideas about American politics and think more deeply about how well the American political system works.
4. To help you *form* and *express* political opinions. You will have numerous opportunities to evaluate political information and make compelling arguments. Honing these skills will not only make you a better democratic citizen, it will also impress friends and family during your next political discussion!

### Class Structure

Research in educational psychology shows that people have different learning styles—some learn best from reading or hearing things, others are visual learners, and still others learn best by doing things in a hands-on manner. With this in mind, the class will incorporate various teaching methods to help students learn the material in the most effective way possible. Classes will generally mix lecture (auditory), discussion and participation (hands-on), and an occasional electronic presentation (auditory and visual).

*Current Events:* We will begin most classes with a brief discussion of current political events. You are required to follow the news on a daily basis using a reputable news source (e.g., *The New York Times*, *CNN*, *PBS*). Your ability to effectively discuss current political events will factor into your participation score.

*Lecture:* A portion of class time will typically be devoted to lectures. Lectures will generally follow the topics covered in the readings; however, they will also include new information that students can expect to see on exams. The Power Point slides will be available on Blackboard after class.

*Active Learning:* Actively engaging with material is one of the best ways to learn it. Therefore, considerable emphasis will be given to student participation in this class. You will frequently participate in discussions and simulations. I will also call on you from time to time using the Socratic method to ensure that you have an opportunity to demonstrate your thinking on particular issues—be ready! To be fully prepared you ought to do all of the reading, take notes on it, and reflect on the arguments *before* class. Discussion, debate, and action represent the essence of politics so your active participation in this class is required.

### Course Requirements and Grading

Final grades will be based on class participation, three short essays, and two in-class exams. The relative weight and due date of each component is as follows:

Class Participation:	10%
Quizzes:	Optional (unannounced throughout the semester)
First Exam:	15% (March 22 <sup>nd</sup> )
Second Exam:	15% (May 10 <sup>th</sup> )
First Discussion Question Essay:	20% (March 6 <sup>th</sup> before 11:00 am)
Second Discussion Question Essay:	20% (April 12 <sup>th</sup> before 11:00 am)
Third Discussion Question Essay:	20% (May 19 <sup>th</sup> before 11:00 am)

*Participation* (10%): As not everyone is equally verbose, participation grades will be based on the *quality*, not the *quantity*, of participation. Quality participation requires consistent attendance, thoughtful contributions, and a positive attitude toward the class and its activities—even if something irks you, hiding your disdain and/or pretending that you actually like it will improve your participation grade!

*Quizzes* (optional): Having an opinion is great, but having an *informed* opinion is much better. To ensure that you are gaining background knowledge and mastering the basic concepts found in the readings, quizzes will be administered throughout the semester. Quizzes may be given at *any time* during class periods—there will be no warning—and **no make-up quizzes** will be given under any circumstances. You must take each quiz when it is given; if you miss the quiz, you get 0. I will, however, drop your two lowest quiz scores before calculating your total quiz score for the semester.

Applying your quiz scores to your final grade is optional. If you choose to count your quiz scores towards your final grade, you do not have to write the third discussion question essay. If you do not want your quiz scores to count towards your final grade, you will have to write the third discussion question essay. If you do not submit your third discussion question essay by **May 19<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am**, I will assume that you want your quiz scores to count—i.e., to replace the 20% for the third paper. If you do submit your third paper on time, I will discard your quiz scores.

*Exams* (15% each): There will be two in-class, closed book, 75-minute exams in this course. The first will occur on **March 22<sup>nd</sup>** and the second will take place on **May 10<sup>th</sup>**. Questions on each exam will be drawn from the readings and information presented in class. The second exam will focus primarily, but not exclusively, on material from the second half of the course.

*Discussion Question Essays* (20% each): You are required to write at least the first two discussion question essays. As mentioned above, the third discussion question essay is optional. Appendix 1, at the end of this document, provides details on how these essays should be written. You must submit your first paper on or before **March 6<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am**, your second on or before **April 12<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am**, and your third on or before **May 19<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am**. Each paper must be submitted via Blackboard in a single MS Word file. Extensions will **NOT** be granted and late essays will **NOT** be accepted without official documentation from the College. If your paper is not properly uploaded to Blackboard before the deadline, you will receive 0—so plan accordingly!<sup>1</sup>

### *Final Grades*

Final letter grades will be assigned in the following way:

A+	96+	B+	84-87	C+	70-74	D	50-59
A	92-95	B	80-83	C	65-69	F	0-49
A-	88-91	B-	75-79	C-	60-64		

<sup>1</sup> This is an absolute deadline! To be safe, you should assume that all of the following will happen to you 24 hours before your paper is due: (1) you will get in a fight with your roommate; (2) your computer will crash; (3) the fire alarm in your building will go off repeatedly in the middle of the night; (4) you will get some curious sickness for which Health Services has no cure; and (5) 6 feet of snow will fall within a 20-minute period. In short, you do not have the luxury of leaving your paper until the last minute! You are being warned now so that you have plenty of time to get the papers done. Remember, there is no shame in submitting your paper early. In fact, I strongly recommend that you aim to have your paper done 24 hours before it is due. This is the best way to avoid the heartache you will feel if you submit the paper late and receive a 0.

## General Course Policies

### *Courtesy*

Please exercise common courtesy (e.g., no talking at inappropriate times, sleeping, Internet browsing, cell phones) so that you and your classmates can get the most out of lectures and discussions. Some of the topics we will be discussing are controversial; it is fine to disagree, but please do so in a respectful manner.

### *Honor Code*

Oberlin College policy mandates that your performance in this class adhere to the honor code. In general terms, this means that you will be given significant freedoms in exchange for your promise to not cheat, plagiarize material, fabricate information, or participate in any other dishonest academic activity. If you have any questions about the honor code, I encourage you to visit: [http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rulesregs\\_pdf/Rules+Regs06\\_HonorCode.pdf](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rulesregs_pdf/Rules+Regs06_HonorCode.pdf).

### *Disabilities*

Any student with a documented disability should see me immediately so that we can make reasonable accommodations.

## Topics and Readings

The following book is *required* and can be purchased online or from the college bookstore. Two copies are also available on reserve in the library.

- Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. 2011. *American Government: Power and Purpose, Brief Eleventh Edition*. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company) (ISBN: 978-0-393-11821-6 or 978-0-393-93299-7)

Other *required* readings (e.g., chapters, articles) are available on Blackboard. Login to Blackboard with your email username and click on 'Readings' to find the material. You are expected to do all of the required readings before the class meeting for which they are assigned.

Please note that the chapters in Lowi et al. provide basic background information while the subsequent articles take us further into specific controversies and debates. If you already have a firm grasp of the basic material (e.g., have already taken an American government course) you may want to focus most of your time and attention on the articles while moving through the Lowi et al. chapters rather quickly.

### Class One (February 7<sup>th</sup>): **Class Introduction**

### Class Two (February 9<sup>th</sup>): **Government and Politics Overview**

This class introduces the study of American government and politics. We will discuss the meaning of politics and think about how and why governments are created. We will also spend some time discussing the work of political scientists—what does a political scientist actually do?

#### Required Reading:

- Lowi et al., Chapter 1 "Introduction: Making Sense of Government and Politics" (1-18)

#### Optional Reading:

- Steven Lukes. 2005. "Power: A Radical View" in *Power: A Radical View*. New York, NY: Palgrave (14-60)

### Class Three (February 14<sup>th</sup>): **The Founding and Constitution**

To understand American politics, we must first understand the founding and the creation of the constitution. In this class, we will explore the history behind the founding and the debated motivations that led to the various features of the United States constitution. Why, out of all of the available options, did the founders create this constitution?

Required Reading:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 2 “The Founding and the Constitution” (20-47)
- Alexander Hamilton (1787) “The Federalist, No. 15” (1-5)
- Brutus (1787) “The Antifederalist, No. 1” (1-12)
- James Madison (1788) “The Federalist, No. 51” (1-3)

Optional Reading:

- Lowi et al., Appendix “*The Declaration of Independence,*” “*The Constitution of the United States of America,*” “*Amendments to the Constitution*” (A1-A27)

Discussion Question:

- If you were living in New York in the late 1780s, would you have supported the proposed constitution (federalists) or would you have opposed it (anti-federalists)? Why?
- Is the system of “separation of powers” and “checks and balances” able to handle the current challenges facing the United States? Would the United States be better off with a more efficient form of government that would allow for quicker action and more centralized accountability?

Class Four (February 16<sup>th</sup>): **Our Constitutional Convention**

While many revere the constitution, some have suggested that its flaws are in need of repair. History shows, however, that writing a constitution can be very difficult. In this class, you will critically evaluate the current US constitution and attempt to draft a new one. Come prepared to actively engage in our own constitutional convention. Details are found in the “Rules for a Constitutional Convention” handout on Blackboard.

Required Readings:

- Howard Zinn. 1987. “Some Truths are Not Self-Evident” in William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, eds., *Voices of Dissent: Critical Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (110-112)
- Robert A. Dahl. 2001. “How Democratic is the American Constitution?” in Ken Kollman, ed., *Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (71-75)
- Sanford Levinson. 2006. “It Is Time to Repair the Constitution’s Flaws” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 53(8): B10.
- “Rules for a Constitutional Convention”

Class Five (February 21<sup>st</sup>): **Federalism and the Separation of Powers**

One of the great compromises in the constitutional convention was the creation of a federal system of government with separation of powers. In this class, we will explore the motivations for this system of government and analyze the implications of federalism on a host of critical political issues. How well does federalism work in the United States?

Required Readings:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 3 “Federalism and the Separation of Powers” (48-73)
- George J. Annas. 2008. “Jumping Frogs, Endangered Toads, and California’s Medical-Marijuana Law” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (98-105)
- Randal G. Archibald. “Arizona Enacts Stringent Law on Immigration” *New York Times*. April 23, 2010 (1-2)
- Robert Barnes “Supreme Court to Hear Challenge to Arizona’s Immigration Law” *Washington Post*. December 12, 2011 (1-3)
- Timothy Jost. “Can the States Nullify Health Care Reform?” *New England Journal of Medicine*. March 11, 2010 (869-871)

Optional Reading:

- James Madison. 1788. “The Federalist, No. 46” (1-4)
- William H. Riker. 1964. “Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance” in Ken Kollman, ed., *Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (83-96)

- Andrew Karch. 2007. “Democratic Laboratories” in Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd, eds., *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, Fifth Edition*. Baltimore, MD: Lanahan (129-135)
- Paul Peterson. 2008. “The Price of Federalism” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (pages 87-96)

Discussion Question:

- Does the federal government have too much power relative to the states? Should the federal presence in state matters be reduced? Should it be increased?

Class Six (February 23<sup>rd</sup>): **The Individual and the Constitution: Civil Liberties**

The United States was initially founded with the language of “freedoms” although its history has often challenged the veracity of these claims. In this class, we will examine the government’s relationship to the individual in terms of civil liberties. We will look specifically at the debates dealing with the free speech component of the first amendment.

Required Readings:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 4 “Civil Liberties and Civil Rights” (74-93)
- Jonathon Rauch. 1995. “In Defense of Prejudice” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (82-90)
- David Bernstein. 2003. “You Can’t Say That!” in Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd, eds., *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, Fifth Edition*. Baltimore, MD: Lanahan (409-416)
- CNN Staff. “Controversy Erupts Over Campus Republicans Bake Sale” *CNN*. September 25, 2011 (1-2)

Optional Readings:

- Marcia Clemmitt. 2007. “Hate Speech” in *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy: Ninth Edition*. Washington, DC: CQ Press (247-270)
- Thomas J. Billitteri. 2010. “Government and Religion” in *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy: Eleventh Edition*. Washington, DC: CQ Press (125-148)

Discussion Question:

- Individual liberty is a central principle of American political life. However, the amount of individual liberty that should be granted to citizens is a matter of debate. Is there too much individual liberty in America or should Americans have more individual freedom? You may want to focus on a particular issue (e.g., free speech, freedom of religion) to make your argument.
- Several campus administrators have shut down “affirmative action bake sales,” protests against affirmative action in which white students are charged more for cookies than minorities. Critics argue that such events are racist and disrespectful, while defenders note that this is precisely the kind of symbolic speech at the core of the First Amendment. What do you think?

Class Seven (February 28<sup>th</sup>): **The Individual and the Constitution: Civil Rights**

The Bill of Rights established that all citizens had certain government-protected rights. However, the struggle to secure these rights in practice has been one of America’s most challenging tasks. This class is devoted to understanding the historical and contemporary struggle for civil rights in America.

Required Readings:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 4 “Civil Liberties and Civil Rights” (94-118)
- Martin Luther King, Jr. 1963. “Letter from Birmingham Jail” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company) (142-149)
- Malcolm X. 1964. “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1-9) or listen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRNciryImqg>
- Cornel West. 1993. “Race Matters” in Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd, eds., *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, Fifth Edition*. Baltimore, MD: Lanahan (25-32)

- Walter Benn Michaels. 2010. “Race, Gender, and Class in US Politics” in William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, eds., *Voices of Dissent: Critical Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (316-319)

Discussion Question:

- What does the election of Barack Obama say about the state of racial politics in the US? To what extent does his election signify a new era in racial harmony and equality?

Class Eight (March 1<sup>st</sup>): **Congress I**

Congress is the principle legislative body in the United States government and thus quite important to the health of the country and the prosperity of its citizens. In this class, we will look at the functions of Congress, how members act in Congress, and the public’s relationship with Congress.

Required Readings:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 5 “Congress: The First Branch” (119-152)
- John C. Berg. 1994. “Congress and Big Business” in William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, eds., *Voices of Dissent: Critical Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (193-199)
- Paul Burstein. 2003. “Is Congress Really For Sale?” *Context* 2(3) (19-25)
- Common Cause. 2004. “Democracy on Drugs: How a Bill Really Becomes a Law” in William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, eds., *Voices of Dissent: Critical Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (200-207)
- John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 1998. “Too Much of a Good Thing: More Representative is Not Necessarily Better” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (184-190)

Optional Readings:

- Sarah Binder. 2003. “Stalemate” in Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd, eds., *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, Fifth Edition*. Baltimore, MD: Lanahan (157-162)
- Paul Jacob and John Hibbing. 2010. “Congressional Term Limits” in John Rourke, ed., *You Decide: Current Debates in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (82-90)
- Brian Freil. 2010. “Inhofe: Earmarks are Good for Us” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *Faultlines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (94-98)
- Jonathan Rauch. 2009. “Earmarks Are a Model, Not a Menace” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *Faultlines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (98-101)

Discussion Question:

- Approval of Congress is at an all time low. In fact, nearly 90% of Americans think that Congress does not work well. What reforms, if any, would make Congress work better?

Class Nine (March 6<sup>th</sup>): **Congress II**

This class is devoted to getting our hands dirty with a congressional simulation. Please read the simulation rules—i.e., “Lawmaking”—and come prepared to actively participate in the law-making process. Feel free to strategize and/or organize before class begins.

Required Readings:

- J. Tobin Grant. 2004. “Lawmaking” in *Playing Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (31-36)

Discussion Question:

- Congress is generally unpopular, whereas individual members are popular and usually get reelected. Why does the institution suffer while individual members shine?

**Discussion Question:**

First Written Answer is Due before 11:00 am on March 6<sup>th</sup>. Please submit via Blackboard.

**Class Ten (March 8<sup>th</sup>): The Presidency**

Most people believe that the president is the country's most powerful political figure. However, a president's power is often constrained and he (possibly 'she' soon) often has to bargain for power. In this class, we will discuss the constitutional and practical role of the president. We will examine the relationship between the president and the public, and the longstanding debate about presidential powers. We will then use this background to evaluate the Obama presidency.

**Required Readings:**

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 6 "The Presidency" (153-186)
- Thomas Cronin and Michael Genovese. 1998. "The Paradoxes of the American Presidency" in Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd, eds., *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, Fifth Edition*. Baltimore, MD: Lanahan (236-246)
- Michael Genovese. 2003. "The Limits of Presidential Power" in William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, eds., *Voices of Dissent: Critical Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (230-234)
- David Greenberg. "The Honeymooners" *The Atlantic*. January/February 2010 (1-7)
- Katrina Vanden Heuvel and Robert L. Borosage. "Change Won't Come Easy" *The Nation*. February 1, 2010 (1-5)
- Tom Curry "Ahead of State of the Union, Rating Obama's Promises" *MSNBC*. January 24, 2012 (1-7)

**Optional Readings:**

- Lowi, et al., "Analyzing the Obama Presidency: The First Two Years" (E1-E16)
- Richard Neustadt. 1986 "The Power to Persuade" in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (140-149)
- Gil Troy. 2008. "Leading from the Center" in Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd, eds., *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, Fifth Edition*. Baltimore, MD: Lanahan (256-263)
- Bruce Miroff. 2006. "The Presidential Spectacle" in William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, eds., *Voices of Dissent: Critical Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (235-252)

**Discussion Question:**

- How would you evaluate President Obama's first term in office?

**Class Eleven (March 13<sup>th</sup>): The Bureaucracy**

On the surface, the national bureaucracy may seem quite boring. Indeed, bureaucracies by their very nature are large, complex, and often difficult to understand. However, there are many fascinating aspects of the American bureaucracy that we will cover in this class. In particular, we will examine the relative effectiveness of the bureaucracy and congressional oversight.

**Required Readings:**

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 7 "The Executive Branch" (152-174)
- James Q. Wilson. 1989. "Bureaucracy: Donald Trump's Ice Rink" in Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd, eds., *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, Fifth Edition*. Baltimore, MD: Lanahan (302-307)
- James Q. Wilson. 1989. "Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It" in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (238-246)
- Jacob Hacker. 2007. "Bigger and Better" in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *Faultlines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (247-252)
- J. Tobin Grant. 2004. "Budget Cutting" in *Playing Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (45-50)

**Optional Reading:**

- D. Roderick Kiewiet and Mathew McCubbins. 1991. "The Logic of Delegation" in Ken Kollman, ed., *Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (38-49)

Discussion Question:

- Imagine that you are the head of a small federal agency, and an employee comes up with a plausible plan that would allow your agency to provide the same level of service with half the budget and half the staff that you currently have. What do you do? Do you present the plan to Congress? Why or why not? How do you think Congress would react if you did propose the plan?

Class Twelve (March 15<sup>th</sup>): **The Judiciary**

Alexander Hamilton argued that the judiciary would be the "least dangerous" branch of government although history has proven this to be debatable. Indeed, the judiciary in general and the Supreme Court in particular are institutions within which a great deal of consequential political action occurs. In this class, we will look at the constitutional structure of the federal judicial system and discuss how the courts relate to other political institutions and public opinion.

Required Readings:

- Lowi, et al. Chapter 8 "The Federal Courts" (218-251)
- Mark Tushnet. 2010. "Democracy versus Judicial Review" in William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, eds., *Voices of Dissent: Critical Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (288-293)
- Leon Friedman. 2011. "Overruling the Court" in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (298-302)
- Steven G. Calabresi, James Lindgren, and Ward Farnsworth. 2011. "Resolved, the Terms of Supreme Court Justices should be Limited to Eighteen Years" in Richard J. Ellis and Michael Nelson, eds., *Debating Reform: Conflicting Perspectives on How to Fix the American Political System*. Washington, DC: CQ Press (237-250)

Discussion Question:

- Judicial review is not found in the Constitution; it came about after *Marbury v. Madison*. How would you evaluate the history of judicial review? Has it generally been good or bad for America? Would we be better off without it?

Class Thirteen (March 20<sup>th</sup>): **Midterm Review**

This class is devoted to review for the midterm exam. Please come prepared to ask and answer questions from the first half of the course.

Class Fourteen (March 22<sup>nd</sup>): **Midterm Exam**

The midterm exam will take place during our regular meeting time in our regular classroom. Exam questions will be based on assigned readings and material presented in class.

March 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> – **Spring Break**

Class Fifteen (April 3<sup>rd</sup>): **Public Opinion**

Public opinion is often considered the lifeblood of democracy. Therefore, understanding the nature and origins of public opinion is critical to understanding the overall health of a democracy like the United States. Past research has shown, however, that American public opinion is not always well considered or easy to understand. In this class, we will evaluate American public opinion, discuss its origins and influences, and consider some of the difficulties associated with measuring public opinion.

Required Readings:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 9 "Public Opinion and the Media" (252-272 only)



- Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. 2008. “Knowledge, Interest and Attention to Politics” *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. Washington: CQ Press (181-192 only)
- Michael Schudson. 2007. “America’s Ignorant Voters” in Samuel Kernell and Steven S. Smith, eds., *Principles and Practice in American Politics, Third Edition*. Washington, DC: CQ Press (492-499)
- George Gallup. 1944. “Polling the Public” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (257-264)

Optional Reading:

- Arthur Lupia and Mathew McCubbins. 2010. “The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What they Need to Know?” in Ken Kollman, ed., *Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (365-377)

Discussion Question:

- How would you rate the quality of American public opinion on a scale from embarrassingly bad to well-informed and thoughtful? What are the implications of this?
- How valuable are public opinion polls? Given what you know about public opinion and polling, do you think that polls actually serve a useful function in our democracy?

Class Sixteen (April 5<sup>th</sup>): **Public Opinion and the Media**

This class explores the media’s role in shaping public opinion. We will look at the subtle ways in which the media influences public opinion, and evaluate the media’s ability to cover politics and provide citizens with useful political information. We will also consider the relative objectivity/bias of the media’s political reporting as neutrality has often been considered necessary for the media to be democracy’s ‘watchdog’.

Required Reading:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 9 “Public Opinion and the Media” (272-283)
- W. Lance Bennett. 2010. “News Content and Illusion: Four Information Biases that Matter” in William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, eds., *Voices of Dissent: Critical Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (127-136)
- Gadi Wolfsfeld. 2011. “The Media Get You When You Are Not Paying Attention” in *Making Sense of Media and Politics: Five Principles in Political Communication*. New York, NY: Routledge (97-118)
- Rosalee Clawson and Zoe Oxley. 2008. “Attitude Stability and Attitude Change” in *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. Washington, DC: CQ Press (106-114 only)

Optional Reading:

- Diana Mutz. 1998. “The Generalized Other” in *Impersonal Influence: How Perceptions of Mass Collectives Affect Political Attitudes*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press (3-26)
- Markus Prior. 2005. “News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (340-346)

Discussion Question:

- According to Howard Myrick, “In a democracy, people often get the government they deserve; they also get the media they deserve.” To what extent is this true in the United States? Are Americans getting “the media they deserve”?

Class Seventeen (April 10<sup>th</sup>): **Political Participation**

Voting is the most common form of political participation. However, turnout has been relatively low in the United States for many years and recent elections have uncovered important issues with the way votes are cast and counted. In this class, we will discuss elections and voting in America by focusing on voter turnout and the possibility that immigrants (i.e., legal and documented non-citizens) should be allowed to vote.

Required Readings:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 10 “Elections” (284-303 only)
- Katrina vanden Heuvel. 2010. “Just Democracy: The Crisis and Opportunity in American Elections” in William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, eds., *Voices of Dissent: Critical Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (179-191)
- Ron Hayduk. 2010. “The Case for Immigrant Voting Rights” in John Rourke, ed., *You Decide: Current Debates in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (82-90)
- Stanley Renshohn. 2010. “The Debate Over Non-Citizen Voting” in John Rourke, ed., *You Decide: Current Debates in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (90-100)

Discussion Question:

- Is increasing mass political participation, by definition, a good thing? Is it “elitist” to believe that it may not be?
- Should immigrants (i.e., documented non-citizens living in the US) be allowed to vote in federal elections?

Class Eighteen (April 12<sup>th</sup>): **No Class Meeting Scheduled**

I will be out of town at a conference on this day so there is no class scheduled. Please use the time to finish up your second paper.

**Discussion Question:**

Second Written Answer is Due before 11:00 am on April 12<sup>th</sup>. Please submit via Blackboard.

Class Nineteen (April 17<sup>th</sup>): **Voting Behavior**

Significant research has sought to understand how people vote in America. This class reviews some of the findings by addressing the following questions: How do Americans decide for whom to vote? Are their vote choices rational and/or well informed? Do their vote choices need to be rational and/or well informed?

Required Readings:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 10 “Elections” (303-312 only)
- V.O. Key, Jr. 2008. “The Voice of the People: An Echo” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (367-372)
- Louis Menand. “The Unpolitical Animal: How Political Science Understands Voters” *The New Yorker* August 30, 2004 (1-5)
- Thomas Frank. 2010. “What’s the Matter with America?” in William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, eds., *Voices of Dissent: Critical Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (155-159)
- Bryan Caplan. 2007. “The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies” in Ken Kollman, ed., *Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (345-349)

Optional Reading:

- David Patrick Houghton. 2009. “The Psychology of Voting Behavior” in *Political Psychology: Situations, Individuals, and Cases*. New York, NY: Routledge Press (157-167)

Discussion Question:

- Political scientists have long debated the quality of American voting behavior. Some claim that voters are irrational and capricious while others maintain that “voters are not fools”. What do you think? Are American voters fools? Why or why not?

## Class Twenty (April 19<sup>th</sup>): **Campaigns and Elections**

In this class we will touch on the strategies that candidates use to gain our support. We will then focus on the representativeness of American elections. We will look at how elections are structured and the connection between election outcomes and the will of the people.

### Required Reading:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 10 “Elections” (312-325)
- Leonard Steinhorn. 2010. “Selling of the President in a Converged Media Age” in James A. Thurber and Candice J. Nelson, eds., *Campaigns and Elections American Style*. Boulder: Westview Press (137-155)
- Bradley A. Smith. “Citizens United We Stand” *The American Specter*. May 2010. (1-4)
- Stephen J. Wayne. 2011. “How Representative are American Elections?” in *Is This Any Way to Run a Democratic Election?* Washington, DC: CQ Press (56-87)

### Optional Reading

- Darrell M. West. 2011. “A Brief History of Political Advertising on Television” in Robert Mann and David D. Perlmutter, eds., *Political Communication*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press (23-32)
- Dennis W. Johnson. 2011. “The Modern Campaign” in *Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century: A Whole New Ballgame?* New York, NY: Routledge (1-10)
- Ronald Dworkin. “The Decision that Threatens Democracy” *The New York Review of Books* May 13, 2020 (1-5)
- Lowi et al., “Analyzing the 2010 Midterm Elections” (E17-E32)

### Discussion Question:

- To what extent do American elections accurately reflect the will of the people? Are there changes that could be made that would make American elections more representative?

## Class Twenty-One (April 24<sup>th</sup>): **Political Parties and Contemporary Political Culture**

Political parties are important in American politics both for organizational and social identification reasons. This class explores the development of the American party system and seeks to understand why the United States has, throughout so much of its history, been a two-party system. We will also look at how the party system relates to contemporary political culture and the idea of a “culture war” in America.

### Required Readings:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 11 “Political Parties” (326-351)
- Caroline J. Tolbert and David P. Redlawsk. 2011. “Resolved, Political Parties Should Nominate Candidates for President in a National Primary” in Richard J. Ellis and Michael Nelson, eds., *Debating Reform: Conflicting Perspectives on How to Fix the American Political System*. Washington, DC: CQ Press (70-85)
- Jody C. Baumgartner and Peter L. Francia. 2010. “A Polarized Nation? The Culture War and Divisions in American Politics” in *Conventional Wisdom and American Elections*. New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield (17-35)
- Jacob Weisberg “Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party: Do They Agree on Anything?” *Slate.com* October 13, 2011 (1-2)

### Optional Readings:

- Stephen J. Wayne. 2011. “Are American Parties Still Representative?” in *Is This Any Way to Run a Democratic Election?* Washington, DC: CQ Press (148-171)
- Peggy Nonnan. 2007. “Third Time” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *Faultlines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (149-152)
- Ryan Lizza. 2007. “But is a Third Party Possible?” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *Faultlines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (152-157)
- Morris P. Fiorina. 2008. “What Culture Wars: Debunking the Myth of a Polarized America” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics* New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (445-448)

- James Q. Wilson. 2008. “How Divided Are We?” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (448-458)

Discussion Questions:

- There has long been talk about third parties in American politics, including recent discussion about the sustainability of the Tea Party and Occupy movements. How would a third party (or even an independent presidential candidate in 2012) affect American politics? In what ways, if any, would a third party improve American politics?
- Is there a “culture war” in America in which the public is deeply split on a range of key issues? If not, why is there so much discussion of a “culture war”? If there is, in fact, a “culture war” in America, what effect is it having on our democracy?

Class Twenty-Two (April 26<sup>th</sup>): **Interest Groups**

This class is devoted to analyzing interest groups in America. We will discuss their development and debate the relative pros and cons of their participation in the American political system. To what extent do interest groups serve an important role in American politics?

Required Readings:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 12 “Groups and Interests” (352-380)
- Jonathan Rauch. “The Hyperpluralism Trap” *New Republic*. June 6, 1994 (22-25)
- Dara Strolovitch. 2010. “Affirmative Advocacy” in Ken Kollman, ed., *Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (473-488)
- J. Tobin Grant. 2004. “Campaign Finance” in *Playing Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (91-96)

Optional Reading:

- Earl Latham. 1952. “The Group Basis of Politics: Notes for a Theory” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *Faultlines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (187-195)
- David B. Truman. 1971. “The Alleged Mischiefs of Faction” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (492-498)
- E.E. Schattschneider. 1961. “The Scope and Bias of the Pressure System” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (499-503)

Discussion Questions:

- Placing restrictions on interest group activities is difficult because of the constitutional protections afforded to these groups. The Constitution guarantees the right to assemble and to petition government, and it also guarantees freedom of speech. All of these are the essence of interest group activity. Nonetheless, many Americans are uneasy with the influence wielded by organized interest groups. What, if any, restrictions on interest groups would you be comfortable with? Can you think of any instances where the influence of groups should be limited (e.g., political extremists like various militia groups, or large political-action committees in electoral campaigns)?

Class Twenty-Three (May 1<sup>st</sup>): **Public Policy**

In many ways, public policy is where ‘the rubber hits the road’ in American politics. Public policies are the actions that governments take in an attempt to improve the lives of citizens. Yet, developing, enacting, and monitoring public policy can be a very messy business. This class examines the public policy process and challenges students to evaluate the effectiveness of current regulatory and redistributive policies.

Required Readings:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 13 “Introduction to Public Policy” (382-413)

- Gary Burtless. 1999. “Growing American Inequality: Sources and Remedies” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (590-598)
- Marilyn Werber Serafini. “Grading Health Care Reform: Experts Assess Whether the Bill Delivers on Its Promises” *National Journal* March 27, 2010 (1-2)
- Yuval Levin (2010) “Repeal: Why and How Obamacare Must be Undone” *The Weekly Standard* April 25, 2010 (1-5)

Optional Reading:

- Jim Holt “The Human Factor: Should the Government Put a Price on Your Life?” *New York Times* March 28, 2004 (1-2)
- Roger Scruton. 2008. “What is Acceptable Risk?” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (566-573)
- Jonathan Rauch. 2004. “Objections to These Unions” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (599-607)
- Nurith C. Aizenman. 2008. “The Case for More Regulation” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (574-583)
- Marcia Clement. 2011. “Health-Care Reform” in *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy: Eleventh Edition*. Washington, DC: CQ Press (375-397)
- Paul Krugman and Robin Wells. 2008. “The Health Care Crisis and What to Do About It” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (617-624)
- Grace-Marie Turner. 2008. “Toward Free-Market Health Care” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (624-628)
- Jacob S. Hacker. 2008. “Health Care for America” in David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds., *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (628-637)

Discussion Questions:

- Has the government become too involved in protecting us from ourselves? Do you think there should be more or less government regulation of potentially harmful personal behaviors like smoking, over-eating, and drug-use?
- Health Care has been a matter of considerable debate in the US for more than twenty years. What, if any, changes would you make to the current US Health Care system? In other words, what type of health care system do you think the US should have?

Class Twenty-Four (May 3<sup>rd</sup>): **Foreign Policy**

As the world’s only true superpower, the US has considerable interest in the affairs of other countries. This class is devoted to understanding the ethos behind US foreign policy and the history of US involvement around the world.

Required Readings:

- Lowi, et al., Chapter 14 “Foreign Policy and Democracy” (414-443)
- Ira Chernus. 2010. “The Theology of American Empire” in William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, eds., *Voices of Dissent: Critical Readings in American Politics* (New York, NY: Pearson (72-77)
- Robert Jensen. 2010. “The Greatest Nation on Earth” in William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, eds., *Voices of Dissent: Critical Readings in American Politics*. New York, NY: Pearson (78-84)

Discussion Questions:

- The United States has long had an active but selective foreign policy, getting involved in certain matters around the globe while bypassing others. How would you characterize this foreign policy approach? Has the US been too engaged? Not engaged enough? Misguided in its engagement?

**Class Twenty-Five (May 8<sup>th</sup>): Review, Wrap-Up and Fun Stuff**

For our last class we will review material for the second exam, wrap-up any loose ends, and engage in one last fun exercise. Students who attend this class may be eligible for a rather significant reward.

**Class Twenty-Six (May 10<sup>th</sup>): Second Exam**

The second exam will take place during our regular meeting time in our regular classroom. Exam questions will be primarily, but not exclusively, based on assigned readings and class material presented during the second part of the semester.

**Discussion Question:**

Third Written Answer is Due before 11:00 am on **Saturday, May 19<sup>th</sup>**.

Please submit via Blackboard.

## Appendix 1: Discussion Question Guidelines

Pol1 100: Introduction to American Politics

**Assignments and Deadlines:** You are required to provide written answers to two or three of the discussion questions from the syllabus (see above). Your first answer is due on or before March 6<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am, your second is due on or before April 12<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am, and your third is due on or before May 19<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am. Late papers will **NOT** be accepted without an “incomplete” from the College (computer explosions, problems with your roommate, bad weather, etc. are not sufficient). Consider this your warning. Also, remember that Blackboard notes exactly when your paper is submitted and, yes, a paper that comes in at 11:01 am on the due date is late and will not count. I strongly encourage you to submit your answers early to avoid any last minute stress and/or disappointment.

**Which Questions?** You are free to answer any three of the questions on the syllabus. This means that you may answer a question that we have already covered in class or you may skip ahead to one that we have yet to cover. You also have the option of creating and answering your own question. Your proposed question must be relevant and must be approved, in writing, by me BEFORE you start to answer it.

**Mechanics:** Each paper must be 4-5 pages (double spaced) with normal font and margins. Please list your name, the course title (i.e., Pol1 100), and the date in the top left hand corner of the first page. Include the actual question, in italics, before starting your answer. Also include page numbers and a header or footer with your name on each page. All citations should be parenthetical in the text with a corresponding bibliography.<sup>2</sup> Finally, please submit your paper (including your bibliography) as a single Microsoft Word file so that I can grade it using track changes—i.e., do not use Word Perfect, Pages, PDF, etc. Failure to follow these simple guidelines may result in a lower grade.

**Organization and Argument Guidelines:** Your answer should start with an introduction in which you clearly state your argument. Do not leave your argument to the end—this is not a suspense novel. The body of your paper should substantiate your argument with logical claims and empirical evidence. Your evidence should come from both class material and outside research. Think of your argument as a lawyer does—present a logical and substantiated case in which you explain to the jury (i.e., me) why I should believe what you believe. Make sure your argument is well organized, clear, logical, and supported by evidence. End your paper with a concluding paragraph (i.e., closing argument) in which you restate and summarize the main points of your argument.

**Writing Process:** Keep a few simple suggestions in mind when writing your paper. Start your paper early so that you have enough time to do a good job. (I know you’ve heard that before, but I really mean it!) You should prepare to write your paper before you actually sit down to write it. Do some research and get your thoughts organized (e.g., write an outline). You might even bounce your ideas off me during office hours. You should also write more than one draft of your paper. It helps to write a draft, leave it for a while, and then go back to it. Finally, have someone else proofread your paper for grammatical errors—we often miss these in our own writing, and they can distract the reader from important points.

**Grading and Feedback:** I will grade your paper using track changes and return it to you via Blackboard. You should read my comments carefully and ask for clarification if anything is unclear. You are advised to incorporate this feedback into your subsequent papers. You should also be aware that I will assign a grade to your paper based on the following:

An “A” paper will have most or all of the following attributes:

- Main argument is very clear, original and convincing
- Main argument is supported with sufficient and appropriate evidence from both class material and outside research
- The paper is organized appropriately and flows well with smooth transitions between paragraphs
- The writing is clear and effective; there are no grammatical or typographical errors
- All sources are correctly cited in the text and listed in the bibliography

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<sup>2</sup> For example, you might write “According to Smith (2010: 213), dogs don’t like cats.” Or “Some authors contend that dogs do not like cats (Smith 2010: 213; Jones 2009: 113) while others claim that that is untrue (Brown 2008: 456).”

A “B” paper will have most or all of the following attributes:

- Main argument is clear, fairly original and more or less convincing
- Main argument is generally supported with evidence from both class material and outside research
- The paper generally flows well although there are some minor problems with organization within and between paragraphs
- The writing adheres to grammatical conventions (i.e., few grammatical or typographical errors) but is not especially eloquent
- Most sources are correctly cited in the text and listed in the bibliography

A “C” paper will have most or all of the following attributes:

- Main argument is somewhat unclear, lacks originality and/or is less than convincing
- Main argument is supported with little evidence from either class material or outside research
- Significant problems with organization within and between paragraphs
- The writing is unclear and ineffective; there are grammatical and/or typographical errors
- Many sources are incorrectly cited in the text and/or missing from the bibliography

A “D” paper will have most or all of the following attributes:

- Main argument is unclear, unoriginal and/or unconvincing
- Main argument is not supported with evidence from either class material or outside research
- Little logical flow within and between paragraphs
- The writing is unclear and ineffective; there are significant grammatical and/or typographical errors
- Most sources are incorrectly cited in the text and/or missing from the bibliography

As you can probably tell, I do not think every paper is worthy of an A. It is certainly possible to get an A on your paper although you will really have to do high-quality work. I am sure that you will agree that an A should actually mean something special!