

POL-GA.1300: NYU Department of Politics, Fall 2019

Prof. Cliff Frasier

Weekly Meeting: Wednesdays, 12:00 noon – 1:50 pm (room 212)

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm (room 303) and by appointment

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American Politics (updated 092419)

Course Description

This course offers a broad survey of key features of American politics. It is organized into four parts: In the first part of the course, we will examine American political development with an emphasis on major theoretical perspectives, including the pluralist school, normative and empirical critiques of the pluralist school, and the development of rational choice approaches. In the second part, we will focus on political behavior, including public opinion, political parties, and interest group participation in politics. This part of the course emphasizes key debates about the role of these processes in American democracy. In the third part, we will consider the broad topic of political institutions, and then examine the branches of the federal government, including the judiciary, the federal bureaucracy, Congress, and the Presidency. And in the final weeks of the course, we will consider several topics that are in wide discussion in political science scholarship: accountability of American government, including the bureaucracy; and political polarization. Along the way, we will grapple with the contours and challenges of American democracy.

The central goal of this class is to help you engage with important research in the field of political science, both as a citizen and a scholar. By the end of the class, you will be able to use relevant research to analyze contemporary political events and trends. You will also be able to critically evaluate core topics in a way that advances the scholarship on American politics.

The course will be conducted as a seminar. You should treat class meetings as an opportunity to practice your analytical skills and improve your comprehension of the material. Very little time will be devoted to lecture, so it is essential that you complete the readings in advance of each meeting.

Course Materials

Since this course is a survey in American politics, there are a wide variety of readings. Most are book chapters or articles. All required course readings are available on NYU Classes. For those who may wish to brush up on basic details about how the American government functions, the textbook *American Government: Power and Purpose* (Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsburg, and Kenneth Shepsle) is a good place to start. New and used copies can be readily purchased.

Laptop and tablet policy

The use of laptops and tablets in the seminar will be restricted to viewing the course's PDF readings. All other use of electronic devices, including cell phones, is prohibited during the seminar.

Course Requirements

(1) Seminar Participation (15%)

Be engaged and ready to contribute at each seminar meeting. Active listening, particularly insightful comments, or frequent contributions to discussion can all signal high levels of engagement. Be prepared for short in-class assignments and activities.

(2) Synopsis (10%)

You will be responsible for presenting a succinct review of the readings for one seminar meeting. This entails writing a 2-3 page (total) synopsis of the readings that: (1) identifies the principal argument or debates on the issue; (2) comments on the main empirical approach of the works under study; and (3) discusses how the scholarly debates have been resolved and/or remaining questions. For the week you write your synopsis, you will distribute it to the entire class the Monday before the seminar. In class, you will give an informal 10-minute presentation designed to initiate focused and critical discussion of the readings.

(3) Take-Home Exams (75% total, 25% each)

The principle requirements for this course are three take-home exams. They will provide you with an opportunity to critically, creatively, and systematically analyze course readings and theoretical debates. The later exams may give you opportunities to explore thematic connections to earlier parts of the course. To help prepare for the exams, every week there will be posted a question for your reflection — the question will ask you to consider a connection between the week's readings and a topic from earlier weeks. Each exam will be released on a Wednesday afternoon after the class meeting and will be due by the following class (or on the Wednesday following the last class). Late exams will result in a 10% grade reduction for each day late. Respond to one out of two, or two out of three, possible short essay questions that cover the required readings in the weeks preceding each exam. Responses on each exam should total no more than 6 pages (double-spaced) in length.

Course Schedule

This is the anticipated course schedule, but it may be subject to minor revisions as the semester progresses.

PART 1: American Political Development

September 4th Meeting (Week 1): Course Introduction

No assigned reading in advance of Week 1.

Assignments of weekly presentations

September 11th Meeting (Week 2): American Institutions and the Constitutional Order

James Madison (1787), Federalist 10, 51

(can be accessed at: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/help/constRedir.html>)

de Tocquville (1835), *Democracy in America*. Selections:

- Volume One, Part One
 - Chapter 2: (selection pp. 36-44)
 - Chapter 5: (selection beginning p. 86)
 - Chapters 6-8
- Volume One, Part Two
 - Chapter 4: "On political association in the United States" (pp. 180-186)

Hardin, Russell. (2002). "Liberal Distrust: Madison and the Constitution", in *European Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1. Selection: "Madison and the US Constitution" (pp. 76-82)

The United States Constitution, including the Bill of Rights and other Amendments (skim)
(can be accessed at: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution/>)

September 18th (Week 3): Democratic Pluralism and its Critics

Robert Dahl (1961), *Who Governs?: Democracy and Power in an American City*, Selected chapters: 1, 7, 8, 12, 19, 24, 27

Robert Dahl (1965), *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, Chapters 3-5 (89 pages) (skim)

Bachrach, Peter and Morton Baratz. (1962, The Two Faces of Power. *American Political Science Review* 56

E.E. Schattschneider (1960), *The Semisovereign People: A Realists View of Democracy in America*, Chapters 2 and 3

September 25th (Week 4): Collective Action and Rational Choice

Anthony Downs (1957), *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, & 8

Mancur Olson (1965), *The Logic of Collective Action*, Introduction, Chapters 1 & 2

Donald Green and Ian Shapiro (1994), *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*, Chapters 1, 2 & 3. Chapter 8 (skim).

Rogers Smith (2002), "Should We Make Political Science More of a Science or More About

Politics," *Political Science & Politics*

PART II: Political Behavior

October 2nd (Week 5): Public Opinion

Exam #1 due in class

Burstein, Paul. 2010. "Public Opinion, Public Policy, and Democracy." In *Handbook of Politics: State and Society in Global Perspective*, edited by Kevin T. Leicht and J. Craig Jenkins. New York: Springer.

Shapiro, Robert Y. 2011. "Public Opinion and American Democracy." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 75(5).

Egan, Patrick. 2012. "Turning Personal Experience into Political Attitudes: The Effect of Local Weather on Americans' Perceptions about Global Warming." *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 74, No. 3, July 2012.

For further reading:

Bafumi, J., & Herron, M. C. (2010). "Leapfrog representation and extremism: A study of American voters and their members in Congress." *American Political Science Review*, 104(3), 519-542.

Wlezien, Christopher, and Stuart Soroka. 2007. "The Relationship between Public Opinion and Policy." In *The Oxford handbook of Political Behavior*. Edited by Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Lingemann. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

October 9th (Week 6): Partisanship and Political parties

Fiorina, Morris. 2002. "Parties and Partisanship: A 40-Year Retrospective," *Political Behavior* 24.

Partisanship:

Green, Palmquist, and Schickler. 2002. *Partisan Hearts and Minds*, Chapters 1, 2 and 8

Parties:

Bawn, Cohen, Karol, Masket, Noel, and Zaller . 2012. "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* Vol.10, No. 3.

Cohen, Karol, Noel and Zaller. 2008. *The Party Decides*. Chapter 10.

For further reading:

Grossman, Matt and Casey Dominguez. 2009. "Party Coalitions and Interest Group Networks" *American Politics Research*, Vol. 37, No. 5.

October 16th (Week 7): Parties, electoral systems and third parties

John Aldrich. 1995. *Why Parties?* (Ch. 1 and 2)

Two party system

Cox, Gary W., (1997) *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*, Introduction (Chapters 1 & 2)

Third parties

Lee, Daniel. 2014. "Third-party threat and the dimensionality of major-party roll call voting." *Public Choice*, 159:515–531

Tamas, Bernard and Matthew Dean Hindman. 2014. "Ballot Access Laws and the Decline of American Third-Parties." *ELECTION LAW JOURNAL* Volume 13, Number 2, 2014.

October 23rd (Week 8): Political participation; interest groups

Nownes, Anthony. 2013. *Interest Groups in American Politics*. Chapters 1, 9 and 10.

Godwin, Ainsworth and Godwin. 2013. *Lobbying and Policymaking*.

- Chapter 2, "Models of Influence."
- Conclusions and Implications

Anzia, Sarah F. 2012. "The Election Timing Effect: Evidence from a Policy Intervention in Texas." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 7: 209-248.

For further reading:

Kollman, Ken. 1998. *Outside Lobbying. Public Opinion and Interest Group Strategies*. Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

October 30th (Week 9): Political participation; interest groups and social movements

Prakash, Aseem, and Mary Kay Gugerty, eds. 2010. *Advocacy Organizations and Collective action*. Chapter 1.

McCarthy and Zald. 1977. "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory." *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82, No. 6

McAdam, Doug. 1986. "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer" *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 92, No. 1

Putnam, Robert. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Chapter 2

PART III: Institutions of Government

November 6th (Week 10): Institutions

Exam #2 due in class

Kenneth Shepsle, Kenneth. 1989. "Studying Institutions: Some Lessons from the Rational Choice Approach" *Journal of Theoretical Politics*.

Waterman, R. W., & Meier, K. J. 1998. Principal-agent models: an expansion? *Journal of public administration research and theory*.

North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Part I (Institutions)

- Read Chapters 4, 6 and 7
- Chapters 1, 2, and 8 (Skim)

Ostrom, Elinor. 2015. *Governing the Commons : The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Chapter 2, Chapter 3 pp. 88-102, Chapter 6. (Skim)

For further reading:

Bertelli, Anthony. 2012. *The Political Economy of Public Sector Governance*.

- Chapter 2 ("Methodological Foundations").
- Section 4.I — 4.II (pp. 80-88)

November 13th (Week 11): The Bureaucracy and the Judiciary

Gillman, Graber, and Whittington. 2013. *American Constitutionalism: Volume I Structures of Government*. Selection: "The politics of Constitutional Argument" through "The Politics of Constitutional Authority" (pp.14 thru p.22)

McCubbins, Noll and Weingast. 1987. "Administrative Procedures as Instruments of Political Control." *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization*, Vol.3, No. 2.

Gailmard and Patty. 2007. "Slackers and Zealots: Civil Service, Policy Discretion, and Bureaucratic Expertise." *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 51, No. 4, Pp. 873–889

Clinton, Bertelli, Grose, Lewis and Nixon. 2012. "Separated Powers in the United States: The Ideology of Agencies, Presidents, and Congress." *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 56, No. 2, pp. 341-354

For further reading on the Supreme Court:

Epstein and Knight. 1997. *The Choices Justices Make*, Chapters 1 and 2

November 20th (Week 12): The Presidency and Congress

Whittington and Carpenter. 2003. "Executive Power in American Institutional Development." *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 495-513

Howell, William. 2015. *Thinking About the Presidency: The Primacy of Power*. Chapter 2, "Bearing Witness."

Krehbiel, Keith. 1998. *Pivotal Politics*, Chapters 1-2.

Wawro, Gregory J., and Eric Schickler. 2004. "Where's the Pivot? Obstruction and Lawmaking in the Pre-cloture Senate." *American Journal of Political Science* 48

For further reading:

November 27th (Week 13) No Meeting: Thanksgiving Holiday

PART IV: Current Issues in American Politics

December 4 (Week 14): Representation and Accountability

Manin, Bernard. 1995. *The Principles of Representative Government*, pp. 175-183.

Przeworski, A., Stokes, S.C. and Manin, B. eds. 1999. *Democracy, accountability, and representation* (Vol. 2). Cambridge University Press. Introduction (With attention to Figure I.1)

Soroka and Wlezien. 2008. "On the Limits to Inequality in Representation." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 41(2).

Gilens and Page. 2014. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens." *Perspectives on Politics*.

For further reading:

Milward, H.B. and Provan, K.G. 2000. Governing the hollow state. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 10(2).

December 11 (Week 15): Polarization

Fiorina, Morris P., and Sam Abrams. 2008. "Political Polarization in the American Public." *Annual Review of Political Science* 11:563-588.

Abramowitz, Alan I., and Kyle L. Saunders. 2008. "Is Polarization a Myth?" *Journal of Politics* 70: 542-555.

For further reading:

Druckman, James, Erik Peterson, and Rune Slothuus. 2013. "How Elite Partisan Polarization Affects Public Opinion Formation." *American Political Science Review* 107: 57-79.

Hirano, Shigeo, James M. Snyder, Jr., Stephen Ansolabehere, and John Mark Hansen. 2010. "Primary Competition and Partisan Polarization in the U.S. Congress." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 5: 169-191.

Exam #3 due on Wednesday December 18 at noon