

POL-GA.1300: NYU Department of Politics, Summer 2021

Instructor Cliff Frasier

Weekly Meeting: Mondays and Wednesdays, 5:00 pm – 7:30 pm (room 217)

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:00 – 4:00 pm and by appointment

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American Politics (updated 060721)

Course Description

This course offers a broad survey of key features of American politics. It is organized into three 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. In the final session of the course, we will consider several topics that are in wide discussion in political science scholarship: accountability of American government; 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. Relatively 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 session you write your synopsis, you will distribute it to the entire class by 5 pm the day before the seminar. In class, you will give an informal 10-minute presentation designed to initiate focused and critical discussion of the readings; the presentation will conclude with a discussion question based on the summary. We will divvy up sessions and readings and will begin this component on Wednesday June 2.

(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 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 session there will be posted a question for your reflection — the question will ask you to consider a connection between the session's readings and a topic from earlier sessions. The first exam will be released on Monday June 7th evening after the class meeting and will be due before class the following Monday. The second exam will be released on Wednesday June 16th evening after the class meeting and will be due before class the following Wednesday. The third exam will be released on Monday evening June 28 and will be due by Friday July 2 by 5 pm. Late exams will result in a 10% grade reduction for each day late. Respond to one out of two or three possible short essay questions that cover the required readings in the sessions preceding each exam. Responses on each exam should total no more than 5 pages (double-spaced) in length.

Course Schedule

This is the anticipated course schedule, but it may be subject to minor revisions as the summer session progresses. Class discussions will focus on each session's major readings. Students who are not responsible for the session's synopsis may opt to skim the readings marked "Skim." However, such readings are required material for the session's written synopsis and can be considered major readings to draw from when writing exams.

PART 1: American Political Development

Monday May 24th Session 1: Course Introduction and the Constitutional Order

James Madison (1787), Federalist 10, 51

Can be accessed at:

- https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed10.asp
- https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed51.asp

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)

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

Assignments of weekly presentations

Wednesday May 26th Session 2: American Institutions and Democratic Pluralism

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)

Truman, David (1951). *The Governmental Process*. Chapters: 2,3 and 16

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

For further reading:

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

Monday May 31 MEMORIAL DAY: no session

Wednesday June 2nd Session 3: Agenda Setting and the Critics of Pluralism

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

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

Cobb and Elder (1971). "The Politics of Agenda-Building: An Alternative Perspective for Modern Democratic Theory." *The Journal of Politics*.

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

For further reading:

Studlar, D. (2015). EE Schattschneider, The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America. In *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Public Policy and Administration*.

Monday June 7th Session 4: Rational Choice and Collective Action

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

Jessee, S. A. (2009). Spatial voting in the 2004 presidential election. *American Political Science Review*, 59-81.

For further reading:

Lowery, D. (2015). Mancur Olson, the Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups. In *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Public Policy and Administration*.

Release of Exam 1 (covering sessions 1-4) after class.

PART II: Political Behavior

Wednesday June 9th Session 5: Public Opinion

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).

Gray, V., Lowery, D., Fellowes, M., & McAtee, A. (2004). Public opinion, public policy, and organized interests in the American states. *Political Research Quarterly*, 57(3), 411-420.

Skim: 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.

For further reading:

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 Klingemann. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Saturday Jun 12th ("Legislative Monday") Session 6: Partisanship and Political parties

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.

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

Issue ownership:

Egan, Patrick. 2013. *Partisan Priorities: How Issue Ownership Drives and Distorts American Politics*, Chapters 1 and 6.

For further reading:

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

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

Monday June 14th Session 7: Parties, electoral systems and third parties

Exam 1 due before class.

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

Skim: 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.

Wednesday June 16th Session 8: Political participation; interest groups and and social movements

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

- Chapter 2, "Models of Influence."
- Skim: 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.

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

Skim: Putnam, Robert. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Chapters 9 and 15

For further reading:

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

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

Mahoney, C., & Baumgartner, F. R. (2015). Partners in advocacy: Lobbyists and government officials in Washington. *The Journal of Politics*, 77(1), 202-215.

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

Release of Exam 2 (covering sessions 5-8) after class.

PART III: Institutions of Government

Monday June 21st Session 9: Institutions

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

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

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

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

- Read pp. 173-183
- Skim pp. 183-199.

Skim: Marianne Levine, "Behind the minimum wage fight, a sweeping failure to enforce the law," Politico, February 18, 2018.

For further reading:

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

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

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

Wednesday June 23rd Session 10: The Bureaucracy and the Judiciary

Exam #2 due before class

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)

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

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

Skim: 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^[17]_[SEP]

For further reading on the Supreme Court:

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

Monday June 28th Session 11: The Presidency and Congress

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

Skim: 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

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."

Release of Exam 3 (covering sessions 9-12) after class

Wednesday June 30 Session 12: Current Issues in American Politics

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

Skim: 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)

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

McCarty, N., 2011. Chapter Nine. The Policy Effects of Political Polarization. In *The transformation of American politics* (pp. 223-255). Princeton University Press.

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

For further reading:

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

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

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 Friday July 2nd at 5:00 pm.