

Department of Political Science and Geography
Spring 2003

Political Science 5153
Location TBA

American Government

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Syllabus

This course is an overview and introduction to the study of American government and institutions. We will spend two or three weeks each on several topics: American democracy; Congress; the Presidency; and parties and the press.

Students will write frequent short (3-7 page) analytic essays responding to the reading. Essays are due on the Friday before class meets. Everyone, writing or not, should arrive at class prepared to discuss the reading.

Students will also be working on (article-sized) term papers on topics of their own choosing, in consultation with the professor. In the final weeks of class, the course becomes a workshop, as each student will present his or her paper-in-progress to the class. Papers are due on the final day of classes.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

Week 1. January 13: Introduction

(January 20: No Class, King Day Holiday)

I. Theories of Democracy

Read:

The Constitution of the United States.

Federalist Papers 10 and 51.

Robert Dahl, A Preface to Democratic Theory.

Other suggestions:

Pendleton Herring, The Politics of Democracy.

Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy.

Joseph Schumeter, Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy.

E.E. Schattschneider, The Semisovereign People.

Hannah Arendt, On Revolution.

Alexis de Toqueville, Democracy in America.

Seyla Benhabib, ed., Democracy and Difference.

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America.

Week 2. January 27. Is the American political system democratic? What do Madison and Dahl think constitutes a democratic system? Are their answers the same? Are they sufficient?

II. Congress

Read:

Richard Fenno, Home Style.

David Mayhew, Congress: The Electoral Connection.

Lawrence Dodd and Bruce Oppenheimer, eds., Congress Reconsidered (7th ed).

Other Suggestions:

Douglas Arnold, The Logic of Congressional Action.

David Brady, Critical Elections and Congressional Policy Making.

Richard Fenno, Congressmen in Committees.

Morris Fiorina, Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment.

John Kingdon, Congressmen=s Voting Decisions.

Nelson Polsby, Congress and the Presidency.

David Rhode, Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House.

Gary Jacobson and Samuel Kernell, Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections.

Richard Fenno, The Making of a Senator: Dan Quayle; Learning to Legislate; The Emergence of a Senate Leader.

3. February 3. How does a Member of Congress=s constituency affect what he or she does in Washington? What, if anything, does Home Style have to do with democratic government? How do individual Members= goals affect the way that Congress is organized?

4. February 10. How do the House and the Senate differ as organizations? Compare the roles of party and committee in organizing both bodies. You might want to think about what the abbreviated tenures of Trent Lott (in 2002) and Newt Gingrich (in 1998) tell us about the Senate and the House.

III. The Presidency

Read:

Richard Neustadt, Presidential Power.

Michael Nelson, ed. The Presidency and the Political System (7th ed).

Other Suggestions:

Fred Greenstein, Leadership in the Modern Presidency.

John Hart, The Presidential Branch.

Sam Kernell, Going Public.

Stephen Skowronek, The Politics Presidents Make.

Week 5. February 17. Neustadt, writing while Eisenhower was president, gives one description of presidential power. Is this description still relevant during the presidency of George W. Bush? Why or why not?

Week 6. February 24. To what extent does Neustadt's framework dominate contemporary scholarly efforts to understand and explain the presidency? What can competing frameworks, if any, tell us about the presidency? What are the difficulties in studying the presidency as an institution (as compared to, for example, studying the House or the Senate)?

IV. Intermediation in the American Political System

Read:

Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Paul Waldman, The Press Effect.

John Aldrich, Why Parties?

Jonathan Bernstein, The Expanded Party in American Politics.

Other suggestions:

Bernard Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy.

V.O. Key, Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups.

Daniel Shea and John Green, ed., The State of the Parties.

Nelson W. Polsby, Consequences of Party Reform.

Joseph Schlesinger, Political Parties and the Winning of Office.

Leon Epstein, Political Parties in the American Mold.

Week 7. March 3. Three theories purport to explain patterns of news coverage: the political views of journalists; the political views of owners of newspapers, television stations, and other media outlets; or, professional norms and competitive constraints. How successful are each of these three in shaping public opinion?

Week 8. March 10. What is a political party? How many parties should there be? None? One? Two? Many? Why? Have technological changes made parties no longer necessary for democratic government?

(March 17: No Class, Spring Break)

Week 9. March 24. Are American political parties in decline? Consider the main trends affecting the strength of political parties in America (1) in their role as organizers of voters= loyalties; (2) as organizers of Congress and state legislatures; (3) as creators and exploiters of issues and ideologies; (4) as recruiters and nominators of candidates for public office. Does the literature that is specifically intended to address parties portray the same reality seen in studies of the institutions in which parties do (or don't) operate?

V. Summary

Week 10. March 31. (Everyone writes). Does the day-to-day, practical experience of contemporary American government at the national level fulfill Madison's original hopes? Does it fulfill Dahl's requirements for democratic government? Is turn-of-the-century America democratic?

Or, turn it around: does the actual practice of American government inform us about democracy in some way that Madison (or Dahl) missed? Is there more – or less – to democracy than those theorists believe?

April 7 through April 28: Research Presentations

April 28: Final Day of Class B Papers Due.