

American Politics: Evaluating the Democratic Experiment

Political Science 2201
Fall 2017
MW 3:30–4:45 PM
141 Wehr Physics

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Office Hours: MW 10–12 AM

Democracy is not brute numbers; it is a genuine union of true individuals...
the essence of democracy is creating.

Mary Parker Follett (1918)

Course Description

This course aims to introduce students to the ideas and institutions that shape the national politics of the United States. We will focus in particular on the question of how political power is distributed in American democracy and how dilemmas of collective action and institutional design shape who governs us and how they govern. We will also examine how creative political actors navigate (and sometimes reinvent) the policymaking system itself to accomplish their desired objectives.

By the end of the course, students will be able to describe the essential features of American politics and government. Students will also develop a better understanding of the dilemmas of collective action that confront societies and how government interests solve (or fail to solve) these dilemmas. Students will also be able to evaluate arguments about the origins of individual behavior and the role of parties, interest groups, and the media in the functioning of government. Students will apply this knowledge to evaluate the quality of representative democracy in the United States. Throughout the semester, students will gain skills in empirical analysis through conducting their own fieldwork. In terms of writing skills, students will hone their ability to make rationally persuasive arguments, supported by evidence. Finally, students will improve their speaking skills through participating in class.

The course begins by examining the institutional and cultural origins of American democracy. Next, we will examine several modes of political participation and representation in the United States, including elections, the formation and maintenance of political parties, and the organization of interest groups. We then turn to the core institutions that structure U.S. governance: the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of national government, federalism, and the bureaucracy. The course concludes with a close look at how these institutions influence contemporary policy outcomes.

Course Requirements

Participation (5%): This course requires an extensive amount of reading and preparation prior to class. To facilitate this, weekly reading questions will be posted to D2L. You are expected to attend each class session having read and digested all assigned material, ready to engage in an informed, lively discussion with the instructor and with other students. If you do not speak at all during the semester or are absent for more than 6 class sessions, you will receive a 0 for participation.

Reading Quizzes (25%): There will be five unannounced reading quizzes during the semester. These quizzes are designed to ensure understanding and mastery of the readings.

Fieldwork (20%): Better understanding how American democracy works means observing it in practice. During the course of the semester, students will be asked to carry out four pieces of fieldwork. After conducting each piece of fieldwork, students will write-up two double-spaced pages of analytical field notes that describe their observations. More details will be provided during the semester.

- Field Assignment #1: Power in everyday life (5%)
- Field Assignment #2: Political attitudes (5%)
- Field Assignment #3: The legislative process (5%)
- Field Assignment #4: Laboratories of democracy (5%)

Op-Ed (10%): During the semester, students will craft a 750-word op-ed column. This op-ed will give students an opportunity to hone their skills at making and defending an argument with evidence.

Midterm and Final Exams (40% total, 20% each): Midterm and final exams will be made up of a combination of identification questions, short-answer questions, and essay prompts.

Course Policies

Academic Misconduct: Information on Marquette's Academic Misconduct Policy can be found here: <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/> Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, individual violations, helping another student with any form of academic misconduct, failing to report any form of academic misconduct, or intentionally interfering with the educational process in any manner. Academic misconduct of any type is unacceptable and will result in immediate referral to Marquette's Academic Integrity Director. If you are in doubt as to whether an action or behavior is subject to the academic misconduct policy, you should consult an appropriate member of the Academic Integrity Council, faculty or staff.

Disabilities: If you have a disability for which you are requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact the University's Office of Disability Services within the first week of classes. For more information, contact the Office of Disability Services in Marquette Hall, Suite 005 or at (414) 288-1645. If you require any accommodations for exams or other assignments, you must notify me (along with all required documentation) at least one week in advance of the assignment due date.

Courtesy: Your participation is essential to this course. As such, you are expected to behave with courtesy towards your classmates and professor. **Phones should be silenced and out of sight.** Laptops are acceptable for taking notes but please stay attentive to the task at hand. Failure to appropriately use technology will result in a lower participation grade.

Late Assignments: I expect all students to complete required assignments when they are due. If you are unable to complete an assignment for a serious or urgent reason you must contact me before the assignment is due. Otherwise, the assignment will be marked down a full letter grade for each day past the deadline.

Books

Two books are available for purchase at Book Marq:

Ken Kollman, *Readings in American Politics*, 4th ed. (WW Norton, 2018).
ISBN: 9780393283686

Brian Schaffner and John Clark, *Making Sense of the 2016 Elections* (CQ Press, 2018).
ISBN: 9781506384184

All other required readings will be made available on D2L. Additionally, you are advised to read publications with daily coverage of national politics, such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, or *Vox*. The *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* affords excellent coverage of local and state politics.

Schedule of Class Meetings

1. Analytical Foundations

Aug 28–30: Overview

- George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," *Horizon* 13(76, 1946): 252-265.

Sep 4: ****No Class – Labor Day****

Sep 6: Analyzing Power

- John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (University of Illinois Press, 1982), 3-17.

*Fieldwork assignment #1 distributed

Sep 11: Analyzing politics

- Kollman 1.2 (Olson)

2. The Origins of American Democracy**Sep 13: How did constitutional democracy take shape in the US?**

- Kollman 2.2 (Pope and Treier)

*Fieldwork assignment #1 due

Sep 18: How well does the Constitution protect democracy?

- *Federalist* #10
- *Federalist* #51
- Kollman 2.3 (Dahl)

*Op-ed assignment distributed

Sep 20: Is US political culture well suited to democracy?

- Selection from Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835)
- Selections from Rogers M. Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America.” *American Political Science Review* 87 (3, 1993): 549-566

Sep 25–27: Does American democracy strengthen civil rights?

- Samuel Kernell et al., *The Logic of American Politics* (CQ Press, 2017), Chapter 4.
- Mike McPhate, “Discrimination by Airbnb is Widespread, Report Says,” *New York Times*, December 11, 2015
- In-Class Movie: *Separate and Unequal* (PBS, 2014).

Oct 2: How does the press contribute to democratic rule?

- John Sides, “Can partisan media contribute to healthy politics?,” *The Monkey Cage* March 10, 2013
- Adam Berinsky, “This is how you stop fake news,” *The Monkey Cage*, March 28, 2017.

3. Participation and Representation**Oct 4: Can voters make reasonably informed choices?**

- Kollman 13.5 (Achen and Bartels)
- Kollman 9.1 (Lupia and McCubbins)

*Op-ed assignment due

*Fieldwork assignment #2 distributed

Oct 9: Who participates in politics and why?

- Zoltan Hajnal et al., “Do Voter Identification Laws Suppress Minority Voting? Yes. We Did the Research,” *The Monkey Cage*, February 17, 2017.

Oct 11–16: Do political parties make the US more or less democratic?

- Kollman 12.1 (Aldrich)
- Kollman 12.3 (Cohen et al.)
- Schaffner and Clark, pp. 4–12

Oct 18: **Midterm exam****Oct 20: **Fall break – no class******Oct 23: Are elections won on the campaign or the “fundamentals”?**

- Schaffner and Clark, pp. 13–28

Oct 25: Do special interests run American democracy?

- Kollman 11.1 (Gilens)
- Kollman 11.2 (Kollman)

*Fieldwork assignment #2 due

4. Evaluating the Institutions of American Government**Oct 30–Nov 1: How effective is Congress at representing voters?**

- Kollman 5.1 (Mayhew)
- Kollman 5.3 (Cox)
- Kollman 5.4 (Grimmer et al.)

*Fieldwork assignment #3 distributed

Nov 6–8: How powerful is the president?

- Kollman 6.1 (Neustadt)
- Kollman 6.4 (Howell)
- Kollman 6.5 (Kernell)

*Fieldwork assignment #3 due (11/8)

Nov 13: How can we manage the tension between bureaucracy and democracy?

- Kollman 7.1 (McCubbins and Schwartz)
- Kollman 7.4 (Moffitt)

Nov 15–20: Why, in a democracy, do we have unelected judges?

- Kollman 8.2 (*Marbury v. Madison*)
- Kollman 8.1 (Rosenberg)

Nov. 22: **Thanksgiving Break – No Class****Nov 27–29: Can federalism strengthen democracy?**

- Kollman 3.3 (Riker)
- Daniel Béland, Philip Rocco, and Alex Waddan. *Obamacare Wars: Federalism, State Politics, and the Affordable Care Act* (University Press of Kansas, 2016), Chapter 3.

*Fieldwork assignment #4 distributed (11/27)

Dec 4-6: How do polarization and inequality affect American democracy?

- Kollman 11.3 (Bartels)
- Adam Bonica, Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. "Why hasn't democracy slowed rising inequality?." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27, no. 3 (2013): 103-123.

Dec 11–13: In-class exercise – how can we strengthen American democracy?

- No readings

*Fieldwork assignment #4 due (12/11)

Dec 15: **Final Exam 8-10 AM**