

Political Science 150: American Government and Politics

Nicholas Jacobs

jacobsnf@longwood.edu

Office: TBD

Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30 - 1:15

Spring Semester 2018

Tuesdays & Thursdays

11:00 - 12:15

Hull Hall 128

Overview and Aims

This course surveys the fundamentals of American government and politics. It emphasizes constitutional development and political science's role in evaluating institutional and cultural change since the founding period. This course presents both historical and contemporary works of political science in order to facilitate students' understanding of American politics.

By the end of this course students will be able to speak and write about political issues that are central to the American political system; describe and evaluate institutional changes to that system, which have taken place since the Constitution's adoption; assess and debate contemporary reform proposals to those constitutional institutions; and discuss the philosophical and theoretical arguments that undergird the practice of contemporary American politics.

Course Requirements and Grade Distribution

Note: Failure to complete or submit any of the following will result in a grade of "F" for the course:

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| - Attendance and Participation | 10% |
| - Group Debate Presentation | 20% |
| - Midterm Exam (Due March 2 nd) | 30% |
| - Final Exam (May 5 th) | 40% |

All students will sit for a midterm and final examination. The midterm will be a take home, open-book exam. Per the University Registrar the final exam is scheduled for Tuesday, May 8th between 3:00 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. The final exam will be closed-book, timed, and subject to the University's Honor Code. For both exams, I will give you a list of possible essay questions. On the day of the exam, I will choose the questions on which you will write.

Readings

This course will rely exclusively on secondary readings, contemporary articles, and other primary documents related to our studies of American government. There are two books available for purchase at the bookstore, selections from which will *not* be posted on-line.

Charles Kessler (ed.). 2003. *The Federalist Papers*. New York, NY: Signet Books.
[ISBN-13: 978-0451528810](#)

Ann Serow & Everett Ladd (eds.) 2016. *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity*, Sixth Edition. Baltimore, MD: Lanahan Publishers.
[ISBN: 978-1-930398-19-1](#)

All other readings are posted on CANVAS for you to download. Additional readings and questions may be posted as the course proceeds. *NB: The syllabus available online and available for download is “clickable” and will direct you to PDF copies of each week’s readings.* While there is no textbook, I have written “reading and lecture guides” for you to use. *Click the list of discussion questions to open that week’s reading and lecture guide.*

Participation

Our weekly meetings will provide an opportunity for you to discuss the essential questions or problems related to each week’s set of readings. Generally, I will provide a brief lecture on Tuesday and begin to problematize the week’s main issues. Our Thursday meetings will be dedicated to one of nine group debates, and to a seminar-style discussion of the week’s readings. Please ensure that, at least by Thursday, to have completed the week’s readings and to have reviewed the questions listed in the syllabus.

Attendance and participation at all class meetings is required. Your attendance and consistent participation in class will comprise the 10% of your final grade. Of course, we all get ill from time-to-time or have intervening schedule conflicts. An absence or two will not count against you; just come to the next class fully prepared to participate. Moreover, there is no need to keep me apprised of minor colds/sniffles, although if there is a major conflict, I want to know so that I can help you make-up work and excel in this course.

Group Debate

Each student will select one of the topics identified in the lecture schedule and develop an argument in response to the debate question. Students will work collectively, in groups no larger than three, per side of the debate.

On the day of the debate, the presentations will be structured as follows. The affirmative side will give their opening remarks, then the opposing side will deliver their opening remarks. Opening statements should introduce the idea, the main justification for the position, and should be between 6-8 minutes. After the opening remarks, the affirmative side will have up to 5-minutes to respond without interruption to points raised, or by raising a new point. The opposing side follows. This back-and-forth will proceed until all members of each side have spoken. Then, beginning with the opposing side, each side may ask the other team up to three questions, going in turn. The audience is then given the opportunity to ask questions of either side. Each side will then be allotted 5 minutes for a prepared conclusion. Prepared, written remarks are highly encouraged throughout the debate.

Other Policies

I respect and uphold University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to students with physical, visual, hearing, and other disabilities or impairments; plagiarism; racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, or religious discrimination; and all forms of harassment.

If you have (or suspect you have) a learning or other disability that requires academic accommodations, you must contact the Office of Disability Resources (<http://www.longwood.edu/disability/>) three weeks before any assignments are due. I take learning disabilities very seriously and will make whatever accommodations you need to be

successful in this class. However, they must be properly documented by the ODR and I must have enough notice to make appropriate arrangements.

Plagiarism, or academic theft, is passing off someone else's words or ideas as your own without giving proper credit to the source. You are responsible for not plagiarizing and are expected to abide by the Longwood University Honor System: see page 19 in the [Longwood Student Handbook](#).

Lecture Schedule and Concept Outline

Week of January 15th

American Government and Political Science
First Class Meeting Thursday, January 18th

Lecture: "Thinking Institutionally about Politics"

[Jonathan Rauch](#), "How American Politics Went Insane" (online)

Questions

- 1) How do political scientists think about elections differently than pundits, talking heads, journalists, and those around the dining room table?
- 2) What role do *rules, institutions, and procedures* serve in creating the political outcomes discussed in news about elections and governance?
- 3) What alternatives are there to our current election system?

Week of January 22nd

The American People and the Concept of the Political Regime

Lecture: "The Origins of American Political Principles"

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (two selections; Lanahan Reader)

Michael Kammen, *People of Paradox* (Lanahan Reader)

David Brian Robertson, *The Constitution and America's Destiny* (Lanahan Reader)

Federalist 10 and Federalist 51

Questions:

- 1) How well has the American experiment lived up to the ends and objectives of the American regime as described in the Declaration of Independence?
- 2) Does Alexis de Tocqueville have a positive or a negative view towards the spread of democracy in America?
- 3) What type of political community did the Articles of Confederation envision? What were its advantages?
- 4) What is America's "political culture?" Is it stable? What nurtures it?
- 5) How would you describe the American regime? Even though it does not seek to instill virtue directly, is it indifferent to virtue or citizenship? Can it afford to be?

Week of January 29th

Debating the Founding

Lecture: “Founding a Polity”

Group Debate: Should we ratify the Constitution again, if given the choice?

Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (Lanahan Reader)

[Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison \(1789/1790\)](#)

Federalist 49

[Centinel, The Small Republic Argument \(online\)](#)

[Brutus, Against Consolidation \(online\)](#)

Questions:

- 1) Is the Constitution optimistic or pessimistic about human nature? In other words, how much of our system is predicated on the idea that we are selfish, individualistic political animals?
- 2) Is it a good idea to rewrite the Constitution every 19 or 20 years as Thomas Jefferson suggested? If so, why? If not, why not?
- 3) How did the Founders’ view of politics and society differ from the Anti-Federalists? How did these views translate into the institutions and procedures of the 1787 Constitution?
- 4) What was the anti-federalist case for the small republic as the political arrangement most compatible with maintaining a republican form of government? What was the response of The Federalist? What is the case for the large commercial Republic? (go back and see *Fed. 10 and Fed. 51* if needed)
- 5) Did the Constitution, although it formally codified a federal system, presuppose a centralized government that would destroy the independence of the State governments? Why did the Anti-Federalists champion state and local governments? In other words, did the Anti-Federalists get it right?

Week of February 5th

The U.S. Constitution and Federalism

Lecture: “Building the American State(s)”

Group Debate: Is the federal government too powerful in 2018?

Federalist 17 and Federalist 39

[Martha Derthick, “The Enduring Features of American Federalism” \(online\)](#)

Lori Riverstone-Newell, *Renegade Cities, Public Policy, and the Dilemmas of Federalism*
(Lanahan Reader)

Thomas Cronin, *Direct Democracy* (Lanahan Reader)

Questions:

- 1) Are state and local governments still relevant to American political life in the 21st Century? In other words, should we keep them around?

- 2) Are states and localities better suited to create and implement some policies like education, policing, and/or transportation? What are the disadvantages of decentralized administration?
- 3) What values does federalism promote? What values does it conflict with? Is there a way to reconcile these?
- 4) Why are so many policies, once left to the states now handled by the federal government, in full, or in-part? Was such a transformation inevitable?

Week of February 12th

Public Philosophies

Lecture: “Liberalism, Conservatism, and American ‘isms’”

Group Debate: Is America’s social welfare state too large or not large enough?

[Franklin Roosevelt, “Commonwealth Club Address”](#)

[Barack Obama, “2004 Keynote Address at the DNC”](#)

[Bernie Sanders, “My Vision for Democratic Socialism”](#)

[William F. Buckley, “Yale Commencement Speech”](#)

[National Review, “Against Trump”](#)

[Antonin Scalia, “Stone Ridge HS Commencement Address”](#)

Questions:

- 1) Is our political system today more influenced by the Progressives or the Founders?
- 2) Beyond their names, what elements in the speeches of Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan do you still hear in contemporary American discourse? Are politicians who invoke Reagan or the New Deal true to those principles?
- 3) Consider the positions of the two parties and candidates today. Are Republicans conservative? Are Democrats liberal? Should there be a liberal party and a conservative party?
- 4) Do these speeches, essays, “statements” matter for politics? In other words, are most Americans likely to think like intellectuals and elites? Does that matter?

Week of February 19th

Political Participation, Voting, and Elections

Lecture: “Voting, Campaigns, and Elections”

Group Debate: Should we replace the Electoral College with a nation-wide plurality vote?

[James Ceaser, “The Presidential Nomination Mess” \(online\)](#)

[Jonathan Samples, “Money and Speech,” *The Fallacy of Campaign Finance Reform* \(online\)](#)

[David Mark, *Going Dirty* \(Lanahan Reader\)](#)

[Kenneth Vogel, *Big Money* \(Lanahan Reader\)](#)

Questions:

- 1) In the 19th Century, less than half of adults were entitled to vote, but about 80 percent did. Today, virtually all adults are entitled to vote, but only about half do. Which one of these two eras is the “healthier democracy”?

- 2) Should government take an active role in ensuring that citizens vote, or is this a role for civil society (churches, civic groups, parties)?
- 3) If elections are won with votes, and every person gets only one vote, should it matter if organizations like political parties or Super PACs get to spend unlimited amounts of money?
- 4) Is it possible to create a campaign finance system that does not advantage either the incumbent or the challenger?
- 5) Given the importance of political parties to the electoral system, should state and national laws regulate how they operate, or should the party be free to choose its own rules and procedures?

Week of February 26th

Public Opinion and the Media

NB: Reading Load is Lessened to Help Accommodate Midterm Examination

Lecture: “Polls, Media, and Mass Democracy in American Politics”

Gallup, “Public Opinion in a Democracy” (online)

Diana Mutz, *How the Mass Media Divide Us* (Lanahan Reader)

Questions:

- 1) How much do citizens need to know about government and politics in order to play a meaningful role? Does it matter for the health of our representational system that most of the time, only 1 in 2 Americans knows that there are two U.S. Senators from each state, or could name their representative to Congress?
- 2) Has social media and increased interconnectivity among the public and between the political officials made the national government more responsive to the needs of the American citizenry?
- 3) How would we be able to determine whether the news was biased? In what other ways beyond liberal and conservative could news be biased? Can news ever be unbiased?
- 4) Should the government take an active role (subsidizing, public ownership, ownership caps, etc.) in ensuring that the news media provide substantive, unbiased coverage of politics?
- 5) Has the advent of scientific polling helped politicians decipher public opinion better or has it made public opinion more malleable and prone to elite interpretations?

***** MIDTERM EXAMINATION: DUE FRIDAY, MARCH 2nd at 11:59 p.m. *****

Week of March 12th

Political Parties and Interest Groups

Lecture: “Institutionalized Factions: Parties and Interest Groups”

Group Debate: Should we strengthen political parties? What reforms are needed?

Sean Trende, *Are We in an Electoral Realignment?* (Lanahan Reader)

Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort* (Lanahan Reader)

C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (Lanahan Reader)

Questions:

- 1) Are political parties necessary for our Constitution to work? In what ways do parties facilitate the design of 1787 Constitution? Does it undermine any provisions?
- 2) Given how polarized our politics seems to be, would American democracy be better served if there were no parties?
- 3) Are interest groups or political parties the best vehicle for representing citizen opinion to government?
- 4) Is the system “rigged” against third parties?
- 5) Should there be rules that prevent elected officials from lobbying their former colleagues after they leave office?

Week of March 19th

The Presidency

Lecture: “The Presidency”

Group Debate: Should the President have “fast track” authority for bills?

Federalist 70

[Abraham Lincoln, “Letter to Albert Hodges, 4 April, 1864” \(online\)](#)

Thomas Cronin and Michael Genovese, *The Paradoxes of the American Presidency* (Lanahan Reader)

Craig Rimmerman, *The Rise of the Plebiscitary Presidency* (Lanahan Reader)

Questions:

- 1) Are there circumstances under which presidents *should* violate the Constitution, defy a court’s rulings, or disobey an act of Congress – in other words, “break the law”?
- 2) Does Article II of the U.S. Constitution restrict the presidency as much as it empowers the office?
- 3) The Electoral College is the fourth institution created in the U.S. Constitution, yet many perceive it to be an outdated relic of the Framers’ fear of democracy. Is there any advantage to keeping this institution, even in its greatly modified form?
- 4) What makes a president great? Does a great president ensure a great government?
- 5) The Congress has not declared war since 1941; do presidents have too much authority to engage in foreign conflicts without Congressional approval?

Week of March 26th

The Bureaucracy

Lecture: “The Bureaucracy”

Kenneth Mayer, *With the Stroke of a Pen* (Lanahan Reader)

James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy* (Lanahan Reader)

Cornelius Kerwin and Scott Furlong, *Rulemaking* (Lanahan Reader)

Questions:

- 1) Given how large, administrative, and technocratic our government has become, what attributes are necessary for public leadership in the 21st Century?
- 2) Does the idea of American democracy suggest a large public sector or a small public sector? In other words, does a large bureaucracy increase or decrease freedom and opportunity?
- 3) In 1887, Woodrow Wilson wrote, “The field of administration is a field of business. It is removed from the hurry and strife of politics; it at most points stands apart even from the debatable ground of constitutional study. It is a part of political life only as the methods of the counting house are a part of the life of society; only as machinery is part of the manufactured product.” Is this an accurate portrayal of how bureaucrats behave in our political system?
- 4) Could a bureaucracy ever be as flexible, dynamic, or as innovative as a large corporation?

Week of April 2nd

The Congress

Lecture: “Congress”

Group Debate: Should Members of Congress have term limits?

Federalist 55 and Federalist 62

David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (Lanahan Reader)

[Evan Bayh, “Why I’m Leaving the Senate” \(online\)](#)

John Ellwood and Eric Patashnik, *In Praise of Pork* (Lanahan Reader)

Questions:

- 1) Which model of representation, trustee or delegate, best defines the relationship between members of Congress and their constituents today?
- 2) Are committees an efficient or inefficient way of structuring Congress, given how many members there are, but also given that so few bills come out of committee?
- 3) Is Congress too dependent on interest groups in gathering information and creating legislation?
- 4) If members of Congress are too busy raising money and running for re-election, how might we incentive them to stay in Washington, D.C. and write laws?
- 5) Is it possible for the Congress to reassert authority over the president and the bureaucracy? What provisions in the Constitution would support the institution’s resurgence?

Week of April 9th

The Judiciary

Lecture: “The Federal Courts”

Group Debate: Should U.S. Federal Judges serve for life?

Federalist 78

[Martha Derthick, “Preserving Federalism: Congress, the States, and the Supreme Court” \(online\)](#)

David O’Brien, *Storm Center* (Lanahan Reader)

[Obergefell v. Hodges \(2014\) – Scalia’s Dissent \(online\)](#)

Questions:

- 1) Does the fact that federal judges have lifetime appointments make them better servants of our democracy or are they too removed from the public and democratic pressures?
- 2) Should nine unelected justices have the authority to nullify state and national laws enacted by elected representatives?
- 3) Judicial restraint, judicial activism, or just plain opportunism – how should we think about how justices make decisions? How should they consider the facts before the bench?
- 4) We hear a lot about 5-4, contentious decisions on the court, but in the last 10 years, Chief Justice Roberts has overseen more unanimous decisions than any other Chief Justice. Can the Court escape partisan politics, or is it just as political an institution as the other branches of government?
- 5) In 1943, Justice Frankfurter called for a renewed sense of “judicial humility;” how would American history and politics be different if the courts more frequently exercised judicial restraint by deferring to legislatures and majority rule more often?

Week of April 16th

Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Lecture: “Civil Rights and Civil Liberties”

Group Debate: Should states make it easier for colleges and university to restrict “hate speech”?

[Thomas Healy, “Who’s Afraid of Free Speech,” *The Atlantic* \(online\)](#)

Charles Ogletree, *All Deliberate Speed* (Lanahan Reader)

Cornell West, *Race Matters* (Lanahan Reader)

Questions:

- 1) In Federalist 10, James Madison wrote that, “So strong is this propensity of mankind to fall into mutual animosities, that where no substantial occasion presents itself, the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions and excite their most violent conflicts.” Does this describe social movement politics?
- 2) Is there are common frame or impulse connecting social movements? Is the Constitution fundamentally against those types of values, if it routinely encourages popular protest?
- 3) Are there dangers in pursuing civil rights or civil liberties through the judiciary, or is that what the courts are there for?
- 4) If we value civil liberties so highly, why does the U.S. have the world’s highest rate of criminal incarceration?
- 5) Have millennials forsaken free speech?

Week of April 23rd

Policy Making

Lecture: “New Policies Create New Politics”

Milton Friedman, *Free to Choose* (Lanahan Reader)

Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality* (Lanahan Reader)

Sasha Abramsky, *The American Way of Poverty* (Lanahan Reader)
Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (Lanahan Reader)
Richard Haas, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home* (Lanahan Reader)

Questions:

- 1) Does our Constitutional system make it easier for policies to become “entrenched”?
- 2) In 1960, E.E. Schattschneider wrote that, “The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent.” How do inequities manifest in the current policy making process?
- 3) Why has the government taken on a greater role in managing the economy over the course of American political history?
- 4) Should the government be able to mandate certain economic behaviors (e.g., buy medical insurance)? What assumptions underlie those types of economic interventions?
- 5) Given what you know about the average American voter, is policy best left to experts and technocrats, or to more democratic procedures?

Week of April 30th

Conclusion

Lecture: “Politics, Policy, and Institutions”

***** FINAL EXAM, TUESDAY, May 8th, FROM 3:00 p.m. TO 5:30 p.m. *****