

# Political Science 105: Introduction to American Politics

Doug M Johnson

Spring 17

E-mail: [dmjohns@gmail.com](mailto:dmjohns@gmail.com)

Office Hours: M 9-11a, or by appt.

Office: Harkness 316

Web: [dougjohnson.com](http://dougjohnson.com)

Class Hours: MWF 1150-1240

Class Room: Morey 321

---

## Introduction

How has presidential behavior changed over time? What strategic decisions do members of Congress make to achieve their goals? Why has the American electorate become so polarized? This course introduces students to the foundations of American government. Key concepts at the heart of American politics will be introduced, their evolution over time presented, and their place in contemporary politics discussed. The course is appropriate for majors and non-majors with an interest in understanding how the American political system works.

## Objectives

- To provide a basic understanding of the institutions of the American government
- To introduce students to concepts and research within political science
- To provide opportunities to improve critical thinking and analytical skills
- To explain contemporary political phenomena using theoretical foundations

## Readings

[LGSA] American Government: Power and Purpose - Brief 13th Edition, Lowi, Theodore J.; Ginsberg, Benjamin; Shepsle, Kenneth A.; Ansolabehere, Stephen (Earlier version of the 13th is acceptable, ie 2014 election update)

[KS] Principles and Practice of American Politics - Classic and Contemporary Readings 6th Edition, Kernal, Samuel; Smith, Steven S



## **Participation and Attendance**

It is your responsibility to come to class and participate. A good rule of thumb: if I do not know who you are, you are not participating enough. Participation includes, but is not limited to, attendance, being on-time, paying attention, avoiding digital distractions, participating constructively in discussion, asking questions during and after class, coming to office hours, sending me emails with questions, etc. There are unlimited ways for you to demonstrate that you are committed to this class, so there is no reason to not get all of these points.

## **Academic Honesty**

Students must conduct themselves in accordance with the University's Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade and a report to the necessary dean(s) and academic advisors for disciplinary action. It is harder to cheat and not get caught than it is to simply do the work.

All work turned in for a grade must be your own. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade and a report to the necessary dean(s) and academic advisors for disciplinary action. This includes putting uncited work in your papers and assignments. If you have a question about whether you are unintentionally plagiarizing, ask.

## **Rochester Policies**

It is the student's responsibility to report to the University any disabilities that require accommodation. I will follow any and all required provisions to ensure every student has the equal opportunity to be successful in this course. All students in the course are expected to do the same.

## **Behavioral Expectations**

We will routinely discuss issues of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality, etc. These discussions must remain civil and informative, and never become destructive or abusive in nature. If you feel this will be a problem for you, whether in discussing topics you are uncomfortable with or remaining constructive, please consider an alternative to this course.

**Section 1, 01/16 - 01/20: Institutional Design**

No Paper

*KS 1-1* Mancur Olson. From *The Logic of Collective Action*

*KS 1-2* Garrett Hardin. *The Tragedy of the Commons*

**Section 2, 01/23 - 01/27: The Constitution & Federalism**

Compare and contrast the Massachusetts and Pennsylvania state constitutions. In doing so, pay close attention to the organization of the executive and legislative branches. Which of the two is a better example of the US Constitution and why?

### Section 5, 02/13 - 02/17: Congressional Development

Identify competing explanations for institutional change in Congress - in particular, explanations for a shift in the leadership styles of House Speakers, the adoption of the Reed Rules, and the emergence of standing committees.

*LGSA* Chapter 5

**BB** Thomas B. Reed, "Obstruction in the National House," *North American Review* 149 (1889), 421-28.

**BB** Joseph Cooper and David W. Brady, "Institutional Context and Leadership Style: The House from Cannon to Rayburn," *American Political Science Review* 75 (1981), 411-25.

**BB** Gerald Gamm and Kenneth A. Shepsle, "Emergence of Legislative Institutions: Standing Committees in the House and Senate, 1810-1825," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 14 (1989), 39-66

**KS** 6-3 John Aldrich and David Rohde "Congressional Committees in a Continuing Partisan Era"

### Section 6, 02/20 - 02/24: The Presidency

In what ways has the presidency changed since the early 20th century, in the nature of presidential power, and in the use of appeals to the public? And when have crucial innovations occurred?

*LGSA* Chapter 6

**KS** 7-1 Richard E. Neustadt, From "Presidential Power"

**KS** 7-2 Samuel Kernell, From "Going Public."

**BB** James W. Ceaser, Glen E. Thurow, Jeffrey Tulis, and Joseph M. Bessette, "The Rise of the Rhetorical Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 1 (1981), 158-71.

### Section 7, 02/27 - 03/03: The Bureaucracy

How do Presidential appointments shape bureaucratic policy? What limits their power and what can they do to increase it?

*LGSA* Chapter 7

[Donald Trump Is Choosing His Cabinet. Here's tsidentiahe](#)

**Section 8, 03/06 - 03/10: The Judiciary**

How is Hamilton's argument about the weakest branch upended by the politicization of the judiciary in the modern era (since FDR). Does this politicization help or harm the legitimacy of Supreme Court decisions? Why?

*LGSA* Chapter 8

*KS* 9-3 Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist No. 78"

*KS* 9-4 Robert A. Carp and Kenneth L. Manning, "Selecting Justice: The Ideology of Federal Judges Appointed by President Obama"

[How the NRA Learned to Play Hardball on Supreme Court Nominations](#)

**Spring Break, 03/13 - 03/17:**

**Section 9, 03/20 - 03/24: Public Opinion and the Media**

How do the readings below help explain the discrepancies between the 2016 Presidential election polls and results? In light of this, how closely should polls be trusted or used in answering important questions?

*LGSA* Chapter 9

*KS* 10-2 John Zaller and Stanley Feldman, "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions Versus Revealing Preferences"

*BB* Hillygus, D. Sunshine. "The Evolution of Election Polling in the United States," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75 (2011) 962-981

*BB* Hetherington, Marc. "Why Polarized Trust Matters," *The Forum* 13 (2015) 445-458

**Section 10, 03/27 - 03/31: Partisanship vs. Polarization**

Is there a difference between partisanship and polarization when we consider outcomes like elections and/or policy? If so, explain what it is, and if not, why?

*LGSA* Chapter 11

*KS* 12-1 John Aldrich, From "Why Parties?"

*KS* 12-2 Larry Bartels, From "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996"

*KS* 10-3 Morris Fiorina, From "Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America"

*KS* 10-4 Alan Abramowitz, "The Polarized Electorate"

### Section 11, 04/03 - 04/07: Elections

Given what we know about voters knowledge and ability to vote correctly, do you support or oppose the abolition of the electoral college? Why?

*LGSA* Chapter 10

*KS* 11-1 Samuel Popkin, From "The Reasoning Voter"

*KS* 11-3 Michael Schudson "America's Ignorant Voters"

[Washington Post, In defense of the electoral college](#)

### Section 12, 04/10 - 04/14: Interest Groups

Explain why it is difficult to clearly establish the direct relationship between interest groups and congressional outcomes. Why is determining causality between the wealthy and policy so difficult?

*LGSA* Chapter 12

*KS* 13-1 E.E. Schattschneider, "The Scope and Bias of the Pressure System"

*BB* Martin Gilens, "Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69 (2005), 778-96.

*BB* Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, *The Uneven Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 312-46.

### Section 13, 04/17 - 04/21: Modern Congress

What is the relationship between electoral polarization and congressional dysfunction? To what extent is gridlock in Congress a function of divided constituents and to what extent is it due to factors within the legislature itself?

*KS* 6-1 Steven S. Smith, "Congress, The Troubled Institution."

*KS* 6-2 Sarah A. Binder, "The Politics of Legislative Stalemate."

*KS* 11-2 Gary C. Jacobson, "No Compromise: The Electoral Origins of Legislative Gridlock."

### Section 14, 04/24 - 04/28: Public Policy

No Paper Due

*LGSA* Chapter 13

*BB* Kenneth T. Jackson, "Race, Ethnicity, and Real Estate Appraisal: The Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration," *Journal of Urban History* 6 (1980), 419-52.

*BB* Thomas J. Sugrue, "Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940-1964," *Journal of American History* 82 (1995): 551-78.