

Introduction to American Politics: Myths about American Government
Political Science 10

Summer Session I 2013

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Office Hours: Monday 12-2 in SSB 447

Mon & Wed 8:00-10:50 AM

Classroom: HSS 1305

TA: David Searle

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Course Purpose

This course will ask how we can think systematically and rationally about politics, using the American political system as our focus of study. Looking at American politics from a variety of approaches, this course serves not only as an introduction to the institutions, processes, history, and behavior of the American political system, but also will introduce key concepts and ideas that can be applied to the analysis of politics generally.

Required Textbook (available at the Bookstore):

1. *The Logic of American Politics*, 6th ed. (Kernell, Jacobson, Kousser, and Vavrick). The 5th Edition should work fine for most units, but you may want to read the revised sections on political behavior in the 6th Edition.
2. Other readings will be available via the internet. All are linked to from our course website (<http://pscourses.ucsd.edu/poli10/>), through e-reserves (<http://reserves.ucsd.edu/eres/coursepass.aspx?cid=20756>; password: jl10), jstor (links on website), or direct links. Each reading should indicate where you can find it.

Requirements and Grades:

- General: Yes, this class is early! But you should still be here on time and prepared. Each class period will have a lecture and a discussion or activity component. These discussions and activities are designed to reinforce material from lecture and are part of your evaluation. I will make slides from lecture available on the course website after class each day.
- Readings: As this is a summer class, we will be moving quite quickly through the material. You are not responsible for all the readings. Readings in **bold** are required for all students. This will generally be the textbook chapter(s) and primary sources (e.g. the Constitution). As discussed below under "Grading", each student is expected to do additional readings at two points in the quarter: (1) The reading for your presentation and (2) The readings for your reaction paper.
- This grading system gives you a number of opportunities to earn points, and offers you the chance to counterbalance a poor grade in one area. The grade will be broken down as follows:

Final—35% (DUE Friday, 8/2/2013)

The final is a 4-5 page final paper on one of the myths below, or another American Politics myth (subject to approval). You will turn it in to turnitin.com. I will give you details during Week 3.

Midterm—25% (Wednesday, 7/17/2013)

The midterm will be a bluebook exam designed to test your ability to remember key facts, theories, and arguments from the course until that point. It will be the Wednesday of Week 3. A study guide can be found on the last page of this syllabus.

Course Participation (40%), divided into:

Presentation/Debate—15%

Reaction Paper—15%

Attendance and Discussion—10%

During the quarter, you are expected to contribute in several ways. First, you will do a short (5-10 minute) presentation on one of the outside readings, which may take the form of a debate with another student in a class with fewer readings. You will also write one short (2 page) reaction paper on one of the discussion question for that week raising concerns, questions, or dilemmas inherent in the prompt. We will divide the classes so that there will be different students presenting and writing each week—those students who are presenting and writing should be prepared to help lead discussion during those classes. Finally, attendance will be taken each week, and will count toward this grade.

- Grading rubric:

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------|----------------------------------|
| ○ Above 92%: A | | 90 – 92%: A- |
| ○ 89 – 87%: B+ | 86 – 83%: B | 80 – 82%: B- (Same for C grades) |
| ○ 60-69%: D | Below 60%: F | |

Academic honesty

From the UCSD Statement on Academic Integrity: “Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so doing protect the validity of University intellectual work. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind.”

In plain English, you may not have someone else complete an assignment for you. Let’s be real here.

Asking someone to proofread your paper is okay, but if they’re telling you what to say, that’s too far. If you are unfamiliar with the University’s policy on academic integrity, please see

<http://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/policy.html>.

Learning disabilities

Students with University-documented learning disabilities should inform me as soon as possible.

Course Schedule

M 7/1—Thinking like a political scientist

Myth: People in politics are egomaniacs or power-hungry toadies. We’re better off not getting involved.

Reading: **Kernell, Jacobson, Kousser, and Vavrick (KJKV), ch. 1**

Discussion Questions:

- What approaches do we need to consider when analyzing politics?
- What factors are important in analyzing politics?
- Are politicians, parties, and voters rational? To what extent?
- If politicians and voters are rational, how can we predict what they might do?

W 7/3—the Constitution & Federalism

Myth: The Constitution was a radical document that created a new political order that had never previously existed.

Readings: **KJKV 2, 3**

- Key Documents in American History—**The Declaration of Independence (1776), the Articles of Confederation (1778), the Constitution (1787), the Bill of Rights (1787), Federalist 10, 39, and 51** (all but *Federalist 39* in KJKV; see website for link to 39)
- **Madison, James. “Vices of the Political System of the United States.” (Website)**
- Eavey, Cheryl L. and Gary J. Miller. 1989. “Constitutional Conflict in State and Nation”. Chapter 13. In The Federalist Papers and the new institutionalism. Eds. Bernard Grofman and Donald Wittman. New York: Agathon Press. (E-Reserves)

Discussion Questions:

- Was the Constitution radical or conservative? How does it fit into the context of English Civil Law and the Enlightenment?
- What does it mean to be a “Republic”? What do the arguments in the Federalist Papers and by Brutus tell us about the relationships between the electorate and government? Between the states and federal governments? Between branches of the federal government?
- How has the system of government proposed by the Constitution been altered over the years? Is the amendment process too hard?
- What is the current relationship between the Federal and State governments? What are the advantages and disadvantages of Federalism today?

M 7/8—The Judiciary: Civil Rights and Liberties

Myth: We are less free than we’ve ever been. We have traded liberty for security and now we live in basically a police state.

Reading: **KJKV 4, 5, 9** (skim)

- **Amendments XIII-XXI, esp. XIV (in KJKV)**
- **Postings on the *Shelby County* ruling (via SCOTUSblog)**
- Sunstein, Cass R. 2005. “Judges and Democracy: The Changing Role of the United States Supreme Court.” Chapter 2. In The Judicial Branch: Institutions of American Democracy. Eds. Kermit L. Hall and Kevin T. McGuire. Oxford: Oxford UP. (e-reserves)

Discussion Questions:

- How did the Supreme Court assume its current role? Has this been a positive influence in American government and society?
- In which areas has the Judiciary been most active? Why is the Judiciary consistently been rated the most respected branch of government?
- Do the Supreme Court and lower courts respond to or lead on public opinion? Does this matter?
- When does the Supreme Court reverse itself? How far can the Court reverse itself without losing credibility as an institution?

W 7/10—Congress: Lawmaking and Representation

Myth: Congress doesn't do anything. Lawmakers go to parties sponsored by lobbyists instead of solving real problems. And when they do actually pass a bill, they water it down rather than stand up for their convictions.

Readings: KJKV 6

- Lee, Frances E. 2005. "Interests, Constituencies, and Policy Making." Chapter 10. In The Legislative Branch: Institutions of American Democracy. Eds. Paul J. Quirk and Sarah A. Binder. Oxford: Oxford UP. (E-Reserves)
- Sinclair, Barbara. 2009. "The President and Congressional Party Leadership in a Polarized Era". Chapter 4. In Rivals for Power: Presidential-Congressional Relations. Ed. James A Thurber. New York: Rowman & Littlefield. (E-Reserves)

Discussion Questions:

- How has Congress' power changed over the years? Does professionalization of the legislature add or detract from democratic outcomes?
- What motivates lawmakers? What strategies do they use to ensure their success or reelection?
- What are the key differences between the House and the Senate? What factors contribute to these differences? How does this effect what they do?
- How is policy made? Is there room for compromise in making law? Has this gotten worse in recent times? Is it better to get something done that is not perfect or stand for conviction?

M 7/15—The Executive Branch: The President and the Bureaucracy

Myth: The President has the power to make law—if he (or she) wants something done, it gets done.

Reading: KJKV 7, 8

- James, Scott C. 2005. "The Evolution of the Presidency: Between the Promise and the Fear." Chapter 1. In The Executive Branch: Institutions of American Democracy. Eds. Joel D. Aberbach and Mark A. Peterson. Oxford: Oxford UP. (E-Reserves)
- McCubbins, Matthew D. and Thomas Schwartz. 1984. "Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols vs. Fire Alarms". American Journal of Political Science 28:1. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2110792>
- Wilson, James Q. 1989 (2000). "Bureaucracy and the Public Interest." Chapter 20, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. Basic Books. (E-Reserves)

Discussion Questions:

- How has the President's role changed over the years? What are the primary reasons for these changes?
- What does veto power substantively mean? Can the President get his agenda through? How?
- What are main the functions of the Executive Branch? What roles do bureaucrats have in American society? Why are they viewed so negatively?
- What is the difference between making law and making policy? What controls or limits are there in turning law into policy?

W 7/17—Midterm & Movie (White Collar, Season 2 Episode 2, "Need to Know")

M 7/22—Political Behavior: Individuals and Parties

Myth: We need third parties because the two-party duopoly is dividing us into opposing tribes of extremists

Reading: **KJKV 12, 10 (skim)**

- **Tocqueville, Alexis de. Excerpts from *Democracy In America, Part II.* (Website)**
- McCarty, Nolan. 2007. “The Policy Consequences of Political Polarization.” Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol eds. The Transformation of American Politics. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (read pages 223-248, appendix included for your reference) (E-Reserves)
- Silbey, Joel H. 1990. “The Rise and Fall of American Political Parties 1790-1990.” In The Parties Respond. Sandy Maisel, ed. (pdf on course website)

Discussion Questions:

- Why is there a two party system? Which groups tend to align with each party? What are the advantages and disadvantages to having two big-tent parties?
- How does an individual choose a party? Is there a difference between partisanship and ideology? Why would someone go against a natural alignment?
- How does the coalition-formation process in the electorate mirror the process in Congress? How does it differ?
- Is the electorate as polarized as Congress? How has this changed over time?

W 7/24—Elections, Voting, and Participation

Myth: Turnout is down because campaigns run mindless negative attack ads which scare people into staying home instead of making a substantive argument that would encourage them to vote

Reading: **KJKV 11**

- **Ansolabehere, Stephen and David Konisky. 2005. “The Introduction of Voter Registration and its Effect on Turnout.” *Political Analysis* 14:1. <http://pan.oxfordjournals.org/content/14/1/83.short>**
- Popkin, Samuel L. 1994. The Reasoning Voter, second ed. chapter 1. Chicago: Chicago UP. (E-reserves)
- Garcia Bedolla. 2005. “Community Problems, Collective Solutions.” Chapter 5. In Fluid Borders: Latino Power, Identity, and Politics in Los Angeles. Berkeley: University of California Press. (E-reserves)

Discussion Questions:

- Does a person’s vote matter? When would a person choose to vote or not to vote?
- What forms of participation exist beyond voting? What makes someone a “likely voter”?
- Has voter turnout declined over time? How have the incentives for voting and composition of the electorate changed? Have electoral reforms hurt or helped turnout?
- What makes a good candidate? Does this change between the primaries and general election? Why doesn’t the best candidate necessarily win?

M 7/29—Public Opinion and the Media

Myth: Media is more divisive than ever. Journalists today present opinion as fact and selectively choose polls and statistics to support their argument.

Reading: **KJKV 14, 10**

- Zaller, John. 2003. “Coming to Grips With VO Key’s Concept of Latent Opinion” In Electoral Democracy, MacKuen and Rabinowitz, eds. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (E-Reserves)
- Baumgartener, Jody C. and Jonathan S. Morris, 2011. “Stoned Slackers or Super Citizens? The Daily Show Viewing and Political Engagement of Young Adults.” In The Stewart/Colbert Effect. 2011. Amarnath Amarasingam, Ed. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company. (e-book, UCSD Libraries)

Discussion Questions:

- Why do politicians and consultants spend so much time and money on opinion polling? What are the strengths and weaknesses of opinion polling?
- How do politicians use polling to their advantage? How do politicians whether to follow stated public opinion or gauge latent public opinion?
- Where do people get political information? How can the choice of media shape public opinion?
- What is bias? Is it always bad? Why would an individual choose to get news from a biased source?

W 7/31—Lobbying, Interest Groups, and Campaign Finance

Myth: Campaign spending is out of control! Corporations (and/or unions) can buy politicians to get their way.

Reading: **KJKV 13**

- Walker, Jack L. Jr. 1991. “Explaining the Mobilization of Interests.” Chapter 3. In Mobilizing Interest Groups in America: Patrons, Professions, and Social Movements. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (E-Reserves)
- **Strolovitch, Dara Z. 2006. “Do Interest Groups Represent the Disadvantaged? Advocacy at the Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender.” Journal of Politics 68:4. (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00488.x/pdf>)**
- Robbins, Suzanne. 2013. “Drugs, Doctors, and Hospitals: Campaigning post-Health Care Reform.” Chapter 3. In Interest Groups Unleashed. Paul S. Herrnson, Christopher J. Deering, and Clyde Wilcox, eds. Los Angeles: Sage/CQ Press. (E-Reserves)

Discussion Questions:

- What are interest groups? When are we most likely to see interest groups formed? What are the difficulties or tradeoffs that interest groups face?
- What role does lobbying play in the law making and policy making process? What is the relationship between lobbyists and lawmakers or bureaucrats?
- How do interest groups attempt to influence public opinion? What role does the media play in this process?
- Does money matter? Does it matter *whose* money it is? That is, does changing the source of the money change your opinion? Why might that matter?

F 8/2—**Final paper due**

POLI 10
Summer 2013
Midterm Study Guide

The Midterm, which is on **Wednesday, July 17th (week 3)**, will be a one-hour, in-class blue book exam with short answer questions requiring you to remember theories we have discussed in class and apply them to specific situations. You will have some choice on questions, though you are expected to know the material we have covered up through that point in the term. Your answers should use appropriate terminology and show a good level of depth about the topic. The “Discussion Questions” under each week in the syllabus are good practice questions. Here’s an example of a good answer:

Question: Why were the Framers concerned about concentration of power? How did they seek to prevent it in the Constitution?

Answer: Madison argues in Federalist 51, if men were angels, there would be no need for government. This principle was informed first by philosophical concerns. One of the biggest potential problems with democratic governments is protecting the rights of minority groups in society, and providing for a separation of powers between two chambers of a legislature and an independently elected executive would allow different majorities at different levels of politics—for example, a group that could not possibly win a majority at the level of a state for the Senate could still have a locally preferred candidate in their House of Representatives district.

Building on this were concerns about the concrete harms that minority groups could suffer as a result of taking away state control over certain policies. To mitigate this problem, they instituted a system of checks and balances between the branches. This meant that no single branch would be able to control the lawmaking process. Even when the two elected branches—Congress and the President—agreed on a policy, a citizen could still find relief in the independent Supreme Court.

A second concern was institutional. States maintained control over large areas of public spending and it was impossible to convince states that the Constitution represented a solution unless they could guarantee limits on Federal power. Thus, the Framers added a Bill of Rights, which included the 10th amendment guaranteeing states the right to make decisions over any sphere not in the Enumerated Powers so long as they did not contradict Federal law.

Please note some of the key features of this response:

- Reference to the readings (no need to cite, but connect if relevant)
- Reference to the toolkit places the answer in perspective
- Transition words connect ideas and show causality (“Thus,” “Even when”, “Building on”)
- Specific examples demonstrate knowledge
- Paragraph breaks separate distinct ideas

And this isn’t the only way to write this answer! Here are some other things that would have also worked:

- While I give several concerns in less depth, a good answer could also have fewer concerns in more depth. For example, the first paragraph might be expanded to show the math.
- Also, I don’t answer the questions in turn, but rather answer them together. You might choose to answer each question separately, which is fine.
- Show me you’re thinking about the material, and you’ll do fine!