Course Description

This course introduces students to the dynamics and tensions that underlie American politics and government. We will start with the creation of the United States and think about how the values and practices of the Founders shaped the establishment of the nation’s political institutions and processes. Much of the first half of the semester will then be devoted to analyzing the primary institutions of governance, including the Congress, presidency, bureaucracy, and courts. Next, we will examine the important mechanisms that link Americans to the government such as political parties, the electoral system, interest groups, public opinion, and the media. Throughout the course we will contemplate a number of fundamental questions: Who wields power in American society and politics? Do ordinary citizens have adequate opportunities to express their views, influence decision makers, and shape public policy? Does the government produce public policy that responds more or less to the will of the majority? Are minority rights sufficiently protected? To what extent does the political system properly balance competing ideals of liberty, equality, and democracy? Do political institutions exercise appropriate or undue power, or are they essentially ineffectual? Is democracy in America flourishing or floundering?

Course Requirements

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Film outside of class (7:30 pm, Sunday, February 25)</td>
<td>no grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Paper (5 pages)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Paper (5 pages)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third Paper (10 pages)</td>
<td>40%</td>
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Note: Papers submitted after the due date will be penalized by one third of a grade each day they are late.

Required Texts


Benjamin I. Page and Martin Gilens, *Democracy in America? What Has Gone Wrong and What Can We Do About It* (University of Chicago Press, 2018)

All other assigned readings will be accessible on Moodle.
Topics and Readings

Week 1

I. Introduction to Course

II. Democracy in America

Benjamin I. Page and Martin Gilens, Ch. 1: “More Democracy” and Ch. 2: “Unequal Wealth Distorts Politics” in *Democracy in America?*

Week 2

III. The Founding

Joseph J. Ellis, “The Argument” in *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic*

Brutus, *Anti-Federalist No. 3*

James Madison, *The Federalist No. 10*

James Madison, *The Federalist No. 51*


Week 3

IV. Federalism

A. Divided Authority


B. The Debate over Devolution


Week 4

C. The Debate over Devolution (continued)

Week 4

V. Congress

A. The Congressional Experience


B. Money and the Legislative Process

Benjamin I. Page and Martin Gilens, Ch. 3: “Thwarting the Will of the People” in *Democracy in America?*

FIRST PAPER DUE

Week 5

C. Polarization

Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, “The Seeds of Dysfunction” and “Beyond the Debt Ceiling Crisis Fiasco” in *It’s Even Worse Than It Looks*
Frances E. Lee, “The Ins versus the Outs” in *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign*
Benjamin I. Page and Martin Gilens, Ch. 6: “Polarized Parties and Gridlock”; and Ch. 8: “Overcoming Gridlock and Democratizing Institutions” (pp. 210-217; 228-231) in *Democracy in America?*

D. Congress and the Presidency

Douglas L. Kriner and Eric Schickler, “Introduction” in *Investigating the Presidency: Congressional Checks on Presidential Power*

Film outside of class: “All the Way” in Screening Room, VCAM, 7:30 pm, Sunday, February 25

Week 6

VI. The Presidency

Richard Neustadt, “The Power to Persuade” in *Presidential Power and Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*
Andra Gillespie, (TBA), *Race and the Obama Administration: Substance, Symbols and Hope* (February 2018)

**Week 7**

**VII. The Bureaucracy**


**SPRING BREAK**

**Week 8**

**VIII. The Judiciary**


**IX. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**

**A. School Desegregation and the Politics of Race**

David A. Strauss, “*Brown v. Board of Education* and Innovation in the Living Constitution (with a Note on *Roe v. Wade*)” in *The Living Constitution*
Peter Irons, “War on the Constitution” in *A People’s History of the Supreme Court*
Film in class: “Brick by Brick: A Civil Rights Story”

**B. Abortion**

*Roe v. Wade* (1973)
Week 11

X. Political Parties

A. Origins and Evolution

Franklin Foer, “What’s Wrong with the Democrats?” Atlantic Monthly, July/August 2017
Benjamin I. Page and Martin Gilens, Ch. 4: “The Political Clout of Wealthy Americans” in Democracy in America?

SECOND PAPER DUE

Week 12

XI. Campaigns and Elections

Sam Wang and Brian Remlinger, “Slaying the Partisan Gerrymander,” American Prospect, Fall 2017
Benjamin I. Page and Martin Gilens, Ch. 7: “Equal Voice for All Citizens” (pp. 181-195; 202-209) and Ch. 8: “Overcoming Gridlock and Democratizing Institutions” (pp. 217-227; 231-235) in Democracy in America?
Week 13

XII. Interest Groups


Benjamin I. Page and Martin Gilens, Ch. 5: “Corporations and Interest Groups” and Ch. 7: “Equal Voices for All Citizens” (pp. 195-202) in *Democracy in America?*

Jeffrey M. Berry, “The Rise of Citizen Groups” in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, eds. Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina


Week 14

XIII. Public Opinion and the Media

A. The Media

Cass R. Sunstein, “The Daily Me” in *#republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*


David Greenberg, “There’s a Logic to Trump’s War on the Media,” *American Prospect*, Spring 2017

B. Public Opinion

Walter Lippman, “The Disenchanted Man” in *The Phantom Public*

Jennifer Hochschild and Katherine Levine Einstein, “It Isn’t What We Don’t Know that Gives Us Trouble, It’s What We Know that Ain’t So’: Misinformation and Democratic Politics,” *British Journal of Political Science*, 2014

Byron F. Harrison and Melissa R. Michelson, “The Theory of Dissonant Identity Priming: How Identity, Source Similarity, and Message Characteristics Influence Attitudes” in *Listen, We Need to Talk: How to Change Attitudes about LGBT Rights*

Todd Gitlin, “What Will It Take for Black Lives to Matter?” *American Prospect*, Fall 2017

Week 15

XIV. Concluding Thoughts: Democracy in America

Benjamin I. Page and Martin Gilens, Ch. 9: “A Social Movement for Democracy” and Ch. 10: “Signs of Progress” in *Democracy in America?*


**FINAL PAPER DUE**