

PSCI 3210
Electoral Politics in the United States

Friday 11:35 a.m. – 14:25 p.m.

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Course Description

Building upon the foundations provided by introductory courses and the knowledge you have gained simply by proximity to the United States, PSCI 3210 is a more systematic and thorough examination of the foundations of American electoral processes and the ways that they have evolved to meet the contemporary context. While the United States has some institutions and electoral mechanisms in common with other liberal democracies, it has many unique elements that distinguish it from even its closest allies: its two-party system; the Electoral College; the prominent role of morality in shaping debate; the place of polling and media, social and traditional; the length (and frequency) of campaigns; a wide range of demographic and geographic factors; and the ‘business’ side of elections. Through lens of the recent 2016 elections and with an eye towards the upcoming midterm elections, students will develop a deeper understanding of the structures involved in electoral politics in the United States.

Course Texts – Available at *Haven Books* [43 Seneca Street]

- Brewer, Mark D. and L. Sandy Maisel, *Parties and Elections in America: The Electoral Process*, 7th Edition, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015.
- Various journal and newspaper articles (see Schedule below). Keep in mind when reading non-academic sources that you are expected to do so with a critical eye. These readings are not necessarily telling the whole story – and grappling with that is an important part of why they have been assigned.
- Additionally, I recommend following at least one of the major American newspapers (*Newsweek*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*), prominent international coverage (*Reuters*, *BBC News*, *Al Jazeera*), or Larry J. Sabato’s *Crystal Ball*. There are many other sources that you can draw on to be well informed including television and radio/podcast programs, but remember that relying solely on news-as-entertainment sources can present as distorted a picture of current events as heavily biased sources can.

Evaluation

	Discussion Questions	5%
	Attendance/Participation	15%
2 March	Paper #1	20%
6 April	Paper #2	30%
Exam Period	Final Exam	30%

Discussion Questions (5%): At your own discretion, five times throughout the term you will submit a question about the readings for the week. They are due via email the night before each class at 11:59pm. You are expected to directly link your question to the *content* of the readings, not just its title or introduction. These may be used (anonymously) to spark class discussion. While you will not be marked for the quality of your questions, I reserve the right to reject off topic questions or those that show a lack of attention to the readings (at which point you can resubmit in a following week).

Paper #1 - Ballot Measures (20%): 1500-2000 words. Due to cuLearn at 11:59pm on *2 March*. While people, both within the US and around the world, tend to pay more attention to presidential elections, the importance of the midterms for shaping United States policy is becoming more apparent even to casual observers. Yet direct democracy, which receives considerably less attention than representative politics, has been gradually taking on a new importance in American elections: referendums, citizen initiatives, and other forms of ballot measures are increasingly becoming a way for the public to take part in political decision making. To help better understand the importance of these mechanisms, you will research a ballot measure from the 2016 election cycle and explain from where the original idea arose, how it got on the ballot, who the key stakeholders in the question were, and the eventual result. If your ballot measure was successful, you will be expected to explain where it stands today (or where it is going to go from here, if it has not yet materialized into policy decisions). If your ballot measure was unsuccessful, you should be able to explain whether that is the end of the issue at hand. While you may not be able to offer a full explanation as to why that outcome occurred, you should be able to provide at least some preliminary thoughts on the matter.

Paper #2 – Electoral Threats (30%): 2500-3000 words. Due to cuLearn at 11:59pm on *6 April*. Throughout the term, we will be discussing several key aspects of the American electoral process, some of which are long established and some of which are newer developments. In recent years, questions have been raised about the strength of that process and whether American democracy is truly as healthy as it is claimed to be. In this paper, you will identify and analyze a threat, either actual or potential, to the US

electoral process. This assignment does not demand that you believe American elections are in crisis – or even that a crisis is likely – but you are expected to be able to identify weaknesses or situations that could become worse.

Key questions to address:

- What are the **specific** institutions, processes, or ideals that are threatened? Are there particular actors that are disproportionately affected? And is this unique to the United States or is this a problem faced in other democracies around the world?
- How plausible is the threat? How seriously is it being taken by the people and institutions affected and by society at large?
- What potential solutions are there to this problem? While you are not expected to offer in depth policy paper on all the nuances involved, you should be able to speak to the kinds of steps that could either help neutralize an ongoing threat or prevent a budding one from emerging.

A Note on Papers: Title pages and bibliography do not count towards the overall length. The length requirements mean that you are expected to have that amount of *content*. While you are not required to have a title page, you do need to have a complete bibliography. We will discuss the sources to be used in class before the papers are due. Additionally, please double space your papers and use 12 point Times New Roman with one inch margins.

Final Exam: (30%): The exam will take place during the official exam period between 14-26 April. It will cover all aspects of the course material from the textbooks and discussion, but you are also expected to have at least a broad understanding of the lead up to the 2018 midterm elections. To that end, you should be paying attention to current events in American politics, specifically those that deal with parties, elections, and the stakes involved come November – and be able to incorporate those into your answers.

Late Assignments: If an assignment is not submitted to cuLearn on the due date, without valid reasons, it will receive a 5% penalty per day that it is late for up to 7 days – after which assignments will not be accepted.

Schedule

12 January

Introduction

19 January **Electoral Overview and Party Organization**

- Chapters 1-2, *Parties and Elections in America*
- Fiorina, Morris P. “Has the American Public Polarized?” *Essays on Contemporary American Politics*, 2016
(https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/fiorina_finalfile_0.pdf)

26 January **Voting and Participation**

- Chapter 3, *Parties and Elections in America*
- Shea, Daniel M. and Alex Sproveri, “The Rise and Fall of Nasty Politics in America.” *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 45.3. 2012 (416-421)
(<https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.library.carleton.ca/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/article/rise-and-fall-of-nasty-politics-in-america/4927007F42B81A6E8CD0E5AE7D051ECA>)
- Brown, Nadia E. “Political Participation of Women of Color: An Intersectional Analysis.” *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 35.4, 2014 (315-348)
(<http://www.tandfonline.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/doi/abs/10.1080/1554477X.2014.955406>)

2 February **Voter Suppression**

- Highton, Benjamin. “Voter Identification Laws and Turnout in the United States.” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 20, 2017 (149-167)
(<http://www.annualreviews.org.proxy.library.carleton.ca/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051215-022822>)
- Jonsson, Patrik. “One test case for voter fraud vs. suppression: Sparta, Ga.” *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 July 2017
(<https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Justice/2017/0710/One-test-case-for-voter-fraud-vs.-suppression-Sparta-Ga>)
- Berman, Ari. “Rigged: How Voter Suppression Threw Wisconsin to Trump.” *Mother Jones*, November/December 2017
(<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/10/voter-suppression-wisconsin-election-2016/>)
- Lithwick, Dahlia and Mark Joseph Stern. “Consequences in Texas.” *Slate*, 25 August 2017
(http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/jurisprudence/2017/08/an_era_of_racist_voter_id_laws_in_texas_may_be_coming_to_an_end.html)

9 February **Interest Groups and Campaign Finance**

- Chapters 4-5, *Parties and Elections in America*
- Lilla, Mark. “The End of Identity Liberalism.” *The New York Times*, 18 November 2016
(<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/opinion/sunday/the-end-of-identity-liberalism.html>)
- Bouie, Jamelle. “Democrats Don’t Have a ‘Religion Problem’.” *Slate*, 5 January 2017
(https://www.huffingtonpost.com/nigel-barber/why-religion-rules-america_b_1690433.html)
- “Do We Really Need Campaign Finance Reform?” *Time*, 19 January 2016
(<http://time.com/4182502/campaign-finance-reform/>)

16 February **Ballot Measures and Democratic Deliberation**

- Bozzo, Peter and Andrew Irvine. “The Dangers of Direct Democracy.” *Harvard Law Review*, 1 June, 2010
- Smith, Daniel A. and Caroline Tolbert. “The Instrumental and Educative Effects of Ballot Measures: Research on Direct Democracy in the American States.” *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, 7.4, 2007 (416-445)
(<http://journals.sagepub.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/doi/abs/10.1177/153244000700700404>)
- Rodriguez, Gregory. “Does America Need a Tahrir Square?” *Zocalo Public Square*, 14 April 2014
(<http://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2014/04/14/does-america-need-a-tahrir-square/inquiries/an-imperfect-union/>)

23 February **No Class – Reading Week**

2 March **State and Local Elections**

- Chapters 6-7, *Parties and Elections in America*
- Kondik, Kyle. “Primary Colors in Red.” *Sabato’s Crystal Ball*, 26 October, 2017
(<http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/primary-colors-in-red/>)

9 March **Presidential Elections**

- Chapters 8-9, *Parties and Elections in America*
- Conroy, Meredith. “Here’s how we talk about manhood — and womanhood — during a presidential race.” *Washington Post*, 27 July 2016.

[\(https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/07/27/heres-how-we-talk-about-manhood-and-womanhood-during-a-presidential-race/\)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/07/27/heres-how-we-talk-about-manhood-and-womanhood-during-a-presidential-race/)

16 March **The Media and Polling**

- Chapters 10, *Parties and Elections in America*
- Kaye, Barbara K. and Thomas J. Johns, “Across the Great Divide: How Partisanship and Perceptions of Media Bias Influence Changes in Time Spent with Media.” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 60:4, 2016 (604-623).
<http://www.tandfonline.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/doi/abs/10.1080/08838151.2016.1234477>)
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “How Breitbart Conquered the Media.” *The Atlantic*, 12 September 2016.
[\(https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/they-are-all-breitbart-now/499511/\)](https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/they-are-all-breitbart-now/499511/)

23 March **Elections as Entertainment**

- Baym, Geoffrey. “The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism.” *Political Communication*, 21 August 2006.
<http://www.tandfonline.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/doi/abs/10.1080/10584600591006492>)
- Edgerly, Stephanie and Emily K. Vraga, “News, entertainment, or both? Exploring audience perceptions of media.” *Journalism*, 13 September 2017.
<http://journals.sagepub.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/doi/abs/10.1177/1464884917730709>)
- Becker, Amy Bree. “Late-night shows are trying to make 2016 voters skeptical of Trump. It's probably working.” *Vox*, 25 July 2016.
<https://www.vox.com/2016/7/25/12256380/trump-daily-show-snl>)
- Allcott, Hunt and Matthew Gentzkow. “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election.” *National Bureau of Economic Research*, June 2017.
<http://www.nber.org.proxy.library.carleton.ca/papers/w23089>)

30 March **No Class – Good Friday**

6 April **Parties/Partisans in Government**

- Chapters 11-12, *Parties and Elections in America*
- Hanson, Victor Davis. “Can A Divided America Survive?” *The National Review*, 15 June 2017.

(<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/448643/divided-america-people-must-connect-america-survive>)

- Friedman, Uri. "Is American Democracy Really Under Threat?" *The Atlantic*, 21 June 2017.
(<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/06/american-democracy-trump/530454/>)
- Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. "Is Donald Trump a Threat to Democracy?" *New York Times*, 16 December 2016.
(<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/16/opinion/sunday/is-donald-trump-a-threat-to-democracy.html>)

11 April [*Wednesday] Catchup, Conclusion, and Exam Prep

- Readings TBA in Class (and cuLearn)