

PSCI 3210 (B)

‘They’ll like us when we win’:

Electoral Politics in the U.S.

Friday 2:35 a.m. – 5:25 p.m. (**See Technology Statement below)

Instructor: Steven Orr

Office: <https://calendly.com/stevenrayorr>

Email: steven.orr@carleton.ca

Office Hours: Fridays 12:30-1:30pm
(or by appointment)

Course Description

While the United States has some institutions and electoral mechanisms in common with other liberal democracies, there are many unique elements that distinguish America from even its closest allies: a fairly rigid two-party system; a strong emphasis on individual freedom; the Electoral College; the prominent role of morality in shaping political debates; the place of polling and media, both social and traditional; the length (and frequency) of campaigns; a variety of democratic and geographic factors; and the role of money in politics and government. An added complexity to understanding American politics is the speed with which its rules and norms change. In this course, we will seek to get ahead of some of those changes and provide you with a strong foundational knowledge (“How did we get here?”) so that you can appreciate the nuances of current (and future) situations with regards to politics and government in the United States.

Learning Outcomes

- Identify, understand, and navigate key aspects of the rapidly changing norms and institutions of American politics, including electoral processes and governing mechanisms;
- Expose students to a diverse range of ideas and views about American politics;
- Use this knowledge to analyze current events;
- Develop historical and critical understandings of popular and conventional wisdom in relation to American government;
- To provide an informed perspective that better enables you to clearly and carefully articulate your own ideas about US politics, in relation to both historical and current events.

Course Texts

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.
Each individual essay is available online: see links below
- Pakula, A. J. (Director), & Goldman, W. (Screenwriter). (1976). *All the president's men* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.
Available online through the Carleton Library: <https://media3-criterionpic-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/htbin/wwform/006?T=W76502>
- I also recommend following political coverage from at least one of the major American newspapers (*Newsweek*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*) or prominent international coverage (*Reuters*, *BBC News*, *Al Jazeera*).

Technology Statement

This is an online course which will primarily be delivered asynchronously via audio lecture. What that means is I will be posting pre-recorded lectures on cuLearn each week and expecting you to listen along throughout the course. In the event that there are visuals to go along with a lecture (ie: images or brief videos), those will also be posted to cuLearn. Additionally, that is where all assignments will be posted and submitted. Given that cuLearn will be the primary course space, you are responsible for regularly checking it and setting up your email to receive course announcements.

During our regularly scheduled class time (Friday 2:35-4:35pm) I will be holding an **attendance optional** weekly live Zoom meeting which will be recorded and posted on cuLearn. There will be aspects of this that will have more of a lecture feel, but it will also be an opportunity for you to engage with the material as well as ask for clarifications or answers to anything that comes up in relation to readings, lectures, or other course-related concerns. While I will be using my webcam and microphone, there will be no expectation that you need to. **Text participation is entirely acceptable.** If you do not attend Zoom live then you will be able to listen the session recording after the fact.

Office Hours

In addition to the weekly Zoom meeting, I will be also be happy to meet one-on-one with anyone who would like. To help cut down on the number of emails, we're going to be using Calendly to book those meetings: <https://calendly.com/stevenrayorr>. Calendly is just to help arrange the office hours schedule, so we'll be meeting on Zoom.

Evaluation

Due Date	Assignment	%
22 January	Election Reflection	5%
12 February	Paper Preparation	5%
26 February	Film Response	20%
26 March	Term Paper	35%
27 April	Take Home Exam	35%

- **Missed Term Work:** Late assignments will be subject to a late penalty of 5% per day (including weekends) of the total marks for the assignment. Assignments submitted more than a week beyond the due date will be assigned a grade of zero.

Election Reflection (5% — *Due 22 January, 2:30pm*): In approximately 250 words, why do you think that Donald Trump lost the 2020 presidential election? This is not a trick question, nor should you take it as a *test* of your knowledge. I am asking for you to, with the knowledge that you have walking into the class at the start of the semester, to present your opinion – whether it is informed by an in-depth knowledge of American politics or not. To help make that an easier on you, it will be marked on a Pass/Fail basis: as long as you do the assignment and submit it on time, you will receive full marks.

Paper Preparation (5% — *Due 12 February, 2:30pm*): To help you get started on your paper assignment (see below), you are going to begin working on it in February with this preparatory assignment. For this assignment you will need to come up with a preliminary thesis statement (2-3 sentences) and an annotated bibliography (including at least 2 academic sources, 2 credible journalism sources) to show you've started the research for your paper.

Film Response (20% — *Due 26 February, 2:30pm*): In approximately 750 words, after watching *All The President's Men*, identify and reflect on an aspect (or aspects, if you so choose) of the film that is still relevant for American politics in 2021. The film is available freely online through the Carleton Library:

<https://media3-criterionpic-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/htbin/wwform/006?T=W76502>

Term Paper (35% — *Due 26 March, 2:30pm*): 3000 words. 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.

Take Home Exam (35% — *Due 27 April, 2:30pm*)

A Note on Assignments: 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. Additionally, please double space your papers and use 12 point Times New Roman with one inch margins.

Schedule

15 January

If it is practical, please attend this week's live Zoom meeting

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The First White President." *The Atlantic*, 2018.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/>

22 January

Election Reflection Due (2:30pm)

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "This Is How We Lost to the White Man'." In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/01/my-president-was-black/508793/>

29 January

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “Why Do So Few Blacks Study the Civil War?” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/02/why-do-so-few-blacks-study-the-civil-war/308831/>

5 February

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “I’m Not Black, I’m Kanye.” *The Atlantic*, 2018.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/05/im-not-black-im-kanye/559763/>

12 February

Paper Preparation Assignment Due (2:30pm)

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “American Girl.” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/01/american-girl/307211/>

19 February – Winter Break

26 February

Film Response Due (2:30pm)

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “The Legacy of Malcolm X.” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/05/the-legacy-of-malcolm-x/308438/>

5 March

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “Fear of a Black President.” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/09/fear-of-a-black-president/309064/>

12 March

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “The Case for Reparations.” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

19 March

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/10/the-black-family-in-the-age-of-mass-incarceration/403246/>

26 March

Term Paper Due (2:30pm)

No Readings

2 April – Easter

9 April

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “My President Was Black” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/01/my-president-was-black/508793/>

14 April – Final Class

No Readings

27 April – Exam Period

Take Home Exam Due (2:30pm)

Requests for Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf

Religious obligation: Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. carleton.ca/pmc

Survivors of Sexual Violence: As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and is survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support

Accommodation for Student Activities: Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

For more information on academic accommodation, please contact the departmental administrator or visit: students.carleton.ca/course-outline

Plagiarism: The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in "substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a serious offence which cannot be resolved directly with the course’s instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They may include a mark of zero for the plagiarized work or a final grade of "F" for the course.

Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s).

Submission and Return of Term Work: Papers must be submitted directly to the instructor according to the instructions in the course outline and will not be date-stamped in the departmental office. Late assignments may be submitted to the drop box in the corridor outside B640 Loeb. Assignments will be retrieved every business day at 4 p.m., stamped with that day's date, and then distributed to the instructor. For essays not returned in class please attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you wish to have your assignment returned by mail. Final exams are intended solely for the purpose of evaluation and will not be returned.

Grading: Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the faculty Dean. Final standing in courses will be shown by alphabetical grades. The system of grades used, with corresponding grade points is:

Percentage	Letter grade	12-point scale	Percentage	Letter grade	12-point scale
90-100	A+	12	67-69	C+	6
85-89	A	11	63-66	C	5
80-84	A-	10	60-62	C-	4
77-79	B+	9	57-59	D+	3
73-76	B	8	53-56	D	2
70-72	B-	7	50-52	D-	1

Approval of final grades: Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by an instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Carleton E-mail Accounts:

All email communication to students from the Department of Political Science will be via official Carleton university e-mail accounts and/or cuLearn. As important course and University information is distributed this way, it is the student's responsibility to monitor their Carleton and cuLearn accounts.

Carleton Political Science Society: "The Carleton Political Science Society (CPSS) has made its mission to provide a social environment for politically inclined students and faculty. By hosting social events, including Model Parliament, debates, professional development sessions and more, CPSS aims to involve all political science students at Carleton University. Our mandate is to arrange social and academic activities in order to instill a sense of belonging within the Department and the larger University community. Members can benefit through our networking opportunities, academic engagement initiatives and numerous events which aim to complement both academic and social life at Carleton University. To find out more, visit us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/CarletonPoliticalScienceSociety/> and our website <https://carletonpss.com/>, or stop by our office in Loeb D688!"

Official Course Outline: The course outline posted to the Political Science website is the official course outline.