American Politics: Liberty & Equality

POSC 122
Fall 2023
HASE 105
MW 11:10-12:20, F 12-1 pm

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Office Hours: MW 1-2pm, Th 9-11 am

"Democracy is the art of running a circus from the monkey cage" – H.L. Mencken

"Politics is not about power. Politics is not about money. Politics is not about winning for the sake of winning. Politics is about the improvement of people’s lives.” – Senator Paul Wellstone (D-MN)

Course Description
To the casual observer, American politics appears confusing and plagued by acrimonious conflict. However, underlying the seeming complexity and vitriol of the American political system is a simple logic that drives the entire political process. This logic begins with the assumption that the primary purpose of government is to serve as a forum for identifying and solving problems concerning everyone. It’s in the service of this goal that government provides the processes and procedures that allow members of a community to overcome the problems associated with collective action and produce outcomes that represent the preferences of the majority while protecting the liberty and equality of the minority. This underlying logic of American politics is enshrined in the Constitution, it shapes the structure of this country’s core political institutions, and it drives the patterns of political conflict and cooperation that shape every aspect of American political life.

This course is designed to introduce students to—and undertake an examination of—significant topics in American politics from a social science perspective. As a result, many of the central themes of this course draw on a set of interrelated theoretical concepts and ideas that underwrite contemporary political science. Those ideas include the following propositions: 1) political actors behave strategically and in line with the re-election incentive, 2) effective collective action requires institutions to overcome coordination problems, and 3) different electoral rules for delegating sovereign authority determine different styles of representation and modes of democratic practice, including growing levels of partisan polarization.

It’s in the service of these ideas that this course will be divided into three parts. Part I lays out the constitutional foundations of the American political system. In doing so, this course will delve into the ideas that animate this country’s founding document and the institutional structure that it created. Part II provides a more in-depth look at this country’s governing institutions and how they operate in the service of representative democracy. Lastly, Part III of the course highlights the role that the people play in American politics and the linkage institutions that connect them to government. In addition to eliciting a greater understanding of American politics in the 21st century, the animating themes of the course are two-fold. First, we will be to uncover some of the sources of our increasingly polarized politics, which exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities. Second, we will provide some insight into the question: Does our current polarized politics represent a departure from constitutional design or does it reflect defects in the Constitution itself?

Course Objectives:
- To help develop an understanding of the purpose of government as a necessary solution to collective action problems.
• To introduce the central concepts that inform how political scientists make sense of politics and then use those concepts to think critically about the political world.
• To elucidate the various structures and institutions that comprise American politics
• To understand how the American political system is designed to facilitate representation
• To foster greater interest in current events and the day-to-day conflicts that make up American politics.

Course Requirements

Prerequisites
This is the introductory class in American politics. There are no prerequisites for this course.

Textbooks
There are no required textbooks for this course. All readings will be made available to you by the instructor.

Evaluation
The grade you earn in this class will be based largely on your understanding of both the reading material and lectures from the course. To that end, your final grade will be calculated as follows:

1. **Critical Response Papers (4 x 10%)**: Throughout the semester, you will be responsible for choosing four units on which you will write a two-page critical response to the unit’s readings. The intended goal is to get you to engage more deeply in the readings for that week and to tease out the major arguments and debates, as well as the real-world implications of the readings’ insights. You will choose the weeks for which you will write at the beginning of the second week of class and papers will be due at the start of class on the last day we meet that week. Failure to turn in a paper for the weeks you chose will result in a letter grade deduction for every day (including weekends) that it is late.

2. **Midterm Exam (25%)**: This will be a closed note, in-class exam covering the first two-thirds of the course. It will include multiple choice, identification terms, and short answers. The exam is on **October 18th**.

3. **Final Exam (20%)**: An in-class exam covering material from the second half of the course.

4. **Class Attendance and Participation (15%)**: Attendance is essential to doing well in this class, and simply showing up is at least 50% of success in life more generally. As a result, it's an important component of this class. This portion of the grade will reflect my evaluation of your classroom participation in class discussion and overall engagement during class—i.e. no sleeping, cell phones, computers, chatting among each other, etc. **This portion of your grade can also include random quizzes or other small projects at my discretion.**

Grading Scale
I will be using the following grading scale:

- 93 -100     A      73-76     C
- 90-92       A-     70-72     C-
- 87-89       B+     67-69     D+
- 83-86       B      63-66     D
- 80-82       B-     60-62     D-
- 77-79       C+     Below 60    F
Late Work
Assignments submitted after the deadline will be penalized 10 percentage points for every day it’s late unless cleared with me ahead of time, with the first penalty occurring immediately after the in-class deadline. I do not accept emailed assignments unless previously cleared by me first, and electronic submissions without a corresponding paper copy will not be graded. You must turn in all assignments to pass this class!

Grade Appeals
If you wish to challenge a grade earned on any work for any reason besides an obvious arithmetic error, I ask that you wait at least 48 hours and then email me with a request to meet to discuss your performance.

Classroom and University Policies

PLAGIARISM/CHEATING
Plagiarism and cheating are violations of academic integrity and thus violations of the Carleton Honor Code. For this class, plagiarism will be defined as submitting a piece of work that in part or whole is not entirely the student’s work without attributing those same portions to their correct source.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES - HELPDESK
The ITS helpdesk is a centralized support center for all students, staff, and faculty on campus. For students, we support their personally-owned devices including a drop-off repair service for software and some minor hardware issues. The helpdesk also supports and maintains 13 public computer labs and their associated printers across campus. To contact the ITS helpdesk, go to: https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/its/services/helpdesk/ or you can call, email, or contact the helpdesk directly by phone at 507-222-5999 (x5999 from on campus). Phone is best for time-sensitive requests. You can also email helpdesk@carleton.edu (any email sent here automatically opens a support ticket) or contact the Web Help Desk: https://helpdesk.carleton.edu/.

QUANTITATIVE SKILLS & REASONING
The Quantitative Resource Center (QRC) offers remote and in-person help for students working with numbers in their non-Math/Stats classes. Chat, drop in, or make an appointment with a trained peer tutor for help with: graphs, charts, and writing with numbers; Excel, R, and statistical analysis; and math up through Pre-Calculus.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
Carleton College is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Office of Accessibility Resources (Henry House, 107 Union Street) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, autism spectrum disorders, chronic health, traumatic brain injury and concussions, vision, hearing, mobility, or speech impairments), please contact OAR@carleton.edu or call Sam Thayer (’10), Director of the Office of Accessibility Resources (x4464), to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES: TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS
The Assistive Technologies program brings together academic and technological resources to complement student classroom and computing needs, particularly in support of students with physical or learning disabilities. Accessibility features include text-to-speech (Kurzweil), speech-to-text (Dragon) software, and audio recording Smartpens. If you would like to know more, contact aztechs@carleton.edu or visit go.carleton.edu/aztech.

LEARNING STRATEGIES AND TIME MANAGEMENT
Steve Schauz, Academic Skills Coach, is eager to help you develop learning strategies that work in the Carleton context. His goals are to heighten your awareness of your strengths and to offer different ways you can approach your academic work so you’re more efficient and effective. For details and resources: Learning Strategies & Time Management. If you prefer to learn these skills and strategies on your own, visit "Helpful DIY Resources."

LIBRARY RESOURCES
Your librarian for this course, and political science more generally, is Sean Leahy. You may also email reference@carleton.edu. Librarians are excellent sources of assistance with your research in this class. Library staff can help you find and evaluate articles, books, websites, statistics, data, government documents, and more. You can make an appointment with a librarian, get help via chat 24/7 from any page on the library’s website, email, or call. The library has lots of great study spaces, and we’d love for you to visit! For more information and our hours, visit the Gould Library website at carleton.edu/library.

WRITING SUPPORT
The Writing Center is a space with peer writing consultants who can work with you during any stage of the writing process (brainstorming to final proofreading). Hours and more information can be found on the writing center website. You can reserve specific times for conferences by using their online appointment system.

TERM-LONG PROGRAM FOR MULTILINGUAL WRITERS
If English is not your first language and you believe you might benefit from working regularly with a writing consultant this term, email Melanie Cashin, Multilingual Writing Coordinator, at mcashin@carleton.edu. She can arrange once- or twice-a-week meetings between you and a specific writing consultant throughout the term.

STUDENT WELL-BEING
Your health and well-being should always be your foremost priority. At Carleton, we have a wide array of health and wellness resources to support students. It is important to recognize stressors you may be facing, which can be personal, emotional, physical, financial, mental, or academic. Sleep, exercise, and connecting with others can be strategies to help you flourish at Carleton. For more information, check out Student Health and Counseling (SHAC) or the Office of Health Promotion.

TITLE IX
Carleton is committed to fostering an environment free of sexual misconduct. Please be aware all Carleton faculty and staff members, except for Chaplains and SHAC staff, are “responsible employees.” Responsible employees are required to share any information they have regarding incidents of sexual misconduct with the Title IX Coordinator. Carleton’s goal is to ensure campus community members are aware of all the options available and have access to the resources they need. If you have questions, please contact Laura Riehle-Merrill, Carleton’s Title IX Coordinator, or visit the Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response website: https://www.carleton.edu/sexual-misconduct/.
Schedule


Unit 1: Course Introduction

- **Monday (Sep 11):** What is this course? Why should you take it? Why take it from me?
  - Dawkins. “How to Critically Read Journal Articles” (recommended)

- **Wednesday (Sep 13):** What are the central concepts of this course? How do problems of collective action inform the study of American politics?
  - Mansbridge. 2014. “What is Political Science For?”

Unit 2: Constitutional Design: A Debate Over Republicanism

- **Friday (Sep 15):** Framing the Constitution

- **Monday (Sep 18):** What is Republican government? How does the Constitution provide solutions to collective action problems? How does the Constitution facilitate representation?
  - Federalist 10 & 51
  - Brutus I & III

Unit 3: Federalism

- **Wednesday (Sep 20):** What is Federalism? How has our understanding of it changed over time?

- **Friday (Sep 22):** How has federalism exacerbated inequality?

Unit 4: Civil Liberties & Civil Rights

- **Monday (Sep 25):** Is there a Right to Privacy in the Constitution? Does the right extend to access to abortion? What is the effect of the overturning of Roe v. Wade?

- **Wednesday (Sep 27):** What are civil rights, and how do they differ from civil liberties? What are the legacies of the civil rights movement?

Part II: Institutions of American Politics
Unit 5: The Legislative Branch: Congress, Part I

- **Friday (Sept 29):** Why is Congress organized the way it is?

- **Monday (Oct 2):** What is the role of Congress according to constitutional design? How is Congress organized? How do bills become laws?
  - Podcast: NHPR's Civics 101 – “How A Bill (really) Becomes A Law”
  - Klein. 2020. “The Definitive Case Against the Filibuster.” *Vox*

- **Wednesday (Oct 4):** How do electoral incentives shape lawmaker behavior? How has polarization changed congressional elections? What do you need to know about congressional redistricting?
  - Lee. 2018. *Insecure Majorities*. Chapter 3
  - Berlatsky. 2016. “Everyone Hates Congress. So Why do Congressmen almost always get re-elected?” *The Week*

Unit 6: The Executive Branch: The Presidency

- **Friday (Oct 6):** What are the powers of the Presidency? How have those powers evolved? How does the president steer domestic and foreign policy?

- **Monday (Oct 9):** Is a strong executive compatible with democracy? How does presidentialism drive partisan polarization?

Unit 7: The Judicial Branch

- **Wednesday (Oct 11):** What is the structure of the judiciary? How do justices come to their decisions? What influence does the public have on the courts?
  - Video: *Frontline’s Supreme Revenge*. (53 min)

- **Friday (Oct 13):** What are the dominant theories of constitutional interpretation?
  - Scalia. “Originalism: A Lesser of Two Evils”

- **Wednesday (Oct 18): **Midterm Exam**

Part III: The People in American Politics

Unit 8: American Political Culture

- **Friday (Oct 20):** What are the ideas that connect citizens to their government? What shapes citizens’ expectations about what government should do?
  - Ellis and Stimson. *Ideology in America*. Chapters 1 & 5.

- **Monday (Oct 23):** How do racial attitudes shape our political worldviews? What explains this country’s ‘authoritarian moment’?
Unit 9: Public Opinion

- **Wednesday (Oct 25):** What do people know about politics? How do people organize their political beliefs? How do you measure public opinion?
  - **Podcast:** NPR’s Fresh Air – *The Rise of Qanon* (45 min)

- **Friday (Oct 27):** How do political identities shape how people think about politics?

Unit 10: Political Parties

- **Monday (Oct 30):** Why Parties? What does the composition of the two parties look like today?

- **Wednesday (Nov 1):** Why are we becoming more polarized? How do parties exercise influence in the electorate and operate in the service of American democracy?
  - **Podcast:** The Ezra Klein Show – “The Age of Mega-Identity Politics” (1hr 20min)

Unit 11: Candidates and Political Campaigns

- **Friday (Nov 3):** How are candidates for office selected? What is the difference between primaries and caucuses? What is the Electoral College and how does it work?
  - **Podcast:** NHPR’s Civics 101 – Primaries and Caucuses (27 min)

- **Monday (Nov 6):** How do candidates determine their campaign messaging? What conditions influence political campaigns?

Unit 12: Elections

- **Wednesday (Nov 8):** How do campaigns inform voters? How do they identify and persuade swing voters?

- **Friday (Nov 10):** What factors determine a person’s vote choice?

Unit 13: Voter Turnout

- **Monday (Nov 13):** Why do some participate in American politics more than others?
  - Brady et al. 1995. “Beyond SES”
• Gerber, Green, and Larimer. 2008. “Social Pressure and Voter Turnout”

- **Wednesday (Nov 15):** What are institutional barriers to voting? Are there avenues for reform?