

PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS: MATERIAL SUBJECT TO CHANGE

GOVT S-30
INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN
GOVERNMENT

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Office hours: By appointment.

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Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8:30am–11:30am.

Teaching Fellows

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Course Description and Objectives

This course is an introduction to American democracy and its political institutions. It examines the constitutional foundation of the system and its development over time. It studies how the institutions of the federal government—the Congress, the presidency, and the courts—operate and how they interact with one another. It analyzes the increasingly important role of campaigns and electoral pressures in contemporary American governance and examines how political parties, interest groups, activists, and the media influence elections and policy-making. By applying key ideas from political science, students learn to think analytically about American politics and become more discriminating consumers of political news and information.

The course reading list is designed to offer diverse and sometimes competing perspectives on many of the key questions that animate contemporary debates in American politics and government. Unfortunately, as with all such courses, limits on our time require that some topics receive less attention than they could. I encourage you to consider how the theoretical perspectives provided in the class might provide insight that is relevant for topics we do not cover in depth. You might also consider writing about them for your short response essays or research project.

Course Meetings

The course meets twice per week. Attending all meetings is a natural expectation of the course and students are responsible for all assigned readings. All readings should be completed prior to the course meetings, which will be a combination of lecture, discussion, and small group activities, and students are expected to be active participants in each. Readings can be obtained via Canvas unless noted otherwise.

Course Requirements

Your evaluation for the course will be based on the components described below. All assignments are graded on a standard A through F grading scale; the course is not offered on a pass/fail basis.

Short responses and discussion: 30%. Students are expected to complete five short essays which will be posted on the course's Yellowdig site (accessed via Canvas). The goal of these assignments is to use and apply the material from the course to real-world politics. Students should submit a short response to an article from a major news source on some aspect of the American presidency. In approximately 250 words, students should use the material from the course to engage the claims made in the article. Based on our class discussions and readings, do you believe the author is correct or misguided? What has the author missed, overlooked, or misunderstood? What have political scientists missed, overlooked, or misunderstood? Students are responsible for posting five short responses to the course Yellowdig site on each of the first five Fridays by 5pm.

Students are also expected and required to engage with their classmates' postings on Yellowdig. Over the course of the semester, students must read and provide comments on 15 of their classmates' posts, with no more than five in a single week. These responses need not be either formal or long; a few sentences is sufficient. However, they should engage the author in a constructive and considerate manner. These comments must be posted by August 3.

Essays will count two-thirds and comments on them will count one-third toward this component of the course grade.

Research project and presentation: 30%. Due Friday, August 3 by 5pm via email to the instructor. It is likely our course will raise more questions for you than it will answer – and this is a good thing! Using the tools of social science inquiry, students should prepare an original research proposal on an empirically testable question related to American government. We will devote a significant portion of our class time together to working on the research projects. As part of this project, students

will present an overview of their research to the class on August 2. Additional details about the project, including specific formatting guidelines, requirements, and benchmarks will be discussed in class meetings.

Final exam: 30%. August 9. The exam will be administered via the Quizzes section of Canvas.

Participation: 10%. Students are expected to be active participants in class discussions and to make productive contributions to in-class group exercises.

Note to students enrolled in the course for graduate credit: In addition to the requirements outlined above, you will be responsible for making a short presentation in class on that day's readings and completing a more extensive final research project.

Late assignments

Late assignments are extremely discouraged and will be heavily penalized without a note from a doctor or resident dean. Written assignments will be penalized two-thirds of a letter grade (e.g., from B+ to B-) for every day late. Students will be unable to make up the final exam without documentation from a doctor or university official.

Academic integrity

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Summer School policies on academic integrity (<http://www.summer.harvard.edu/policies/student-responsibilities>) and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting the wrong draft, or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the Resources to Support Academic Integrity (<http://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources-support-academic-integrity>) where you will find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources and two free online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.

Collaboration

Collaboration, discussion, and the exchange of ideas is essential to the course and to academic research more generally. You are permitted and in fact encouraged to

discuss the material from the course with classmates and others. For instance, you may study with others and you may discuss your ideas for the short essays and the research paper with others. However, all submitted work must be your own. **Collaboration on the exam is strictly prohibited.** In addition to avoiding plagiarism, your written work must reflect your own ideas and your own writing.

Accessibility

The Summer School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Accessibility Office offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. Please visit <http://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/accessibility-services> for more information. Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessibility Office in the Division of Continuing Education and speak with the professor by the end of the first week of the term.

Resources for writing

We all need help with our writing. Fortunately, the Writing Center (<https://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/writing-center>) is available for just this purpose — but it is vastly underutilized. Please do not hesitate to contact the Writing Center if you would like assistance with developing or communicating your ideas for the course's written assignments.

Technology in the classroom

Depending on how it is used, technology can be an important classroom resource. It can also hinder your learning and your classmates' learning. All cell phones must be set to silent in class lectures and section meetings. Texting, emailing, Facebooking, etc. during class is also not permitted via cell phone, laptop, iPad, or any other device. The use of laptops and iPads is permitted for the purposes of taking notes and accessing course materials. However, you should be aware that growing evidence shows that laptop use is associated with significantly worse classroom performance for users (see, e.g., <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272775716307129>); it can also distract your classmates and detract from their learning experience. The instructor reserves the right to prohibit the use of all electronic materials at his discretion if such a ban appears warranted.

Course readings

The following text is required:

Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. 2016. *American Government: Power and Purpose*, 14th Brief Edition. New York: W.W. Norton. **Note: Students are strongly encouraged to purchase the electronic version of text either from Amazon or the W.W. Norton website.**

All other course readings are available from the *Files* section of the course Canvas site. Readings should be completed in advance of the class meeting for which they are listed. Completing the reading prior to class will enable students to get the most from that day's lecture. A sound understanding of the assigned readings is also critical for effective class discussions.

The course reading list has been curated with multiple goals in mind. For instance, I have sought to provide a balance of: primary sources and secondary literature; classic perspectives and contemporary counterarguments; readings that highlight the value of social science research while also remaining accessible, and; normative and positive perspectives. As a result, the reading list is fairly long for some classes but varies in length from class to class. I encourage students to form reading groups that meet outside of class as a commitment device for completing and engaging with the readings.

Course schedule

June 26. Introduction; American Founding.

Eric Nelson. 2014. *The Royalist Revolution: Monarchy and the American Founding*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Introduction. *American Government*, Chapter 1; Chapter 2 (pp. 22-28 only).

June 28. Constitutional foundations.

American Government, Chapter 2 (pp. 28-56 only).

Federalist Papers # 10, 47, 48, and 51.

Julia Azari and Seth Masket. February 9, 2017. "The 4 Types of Constitutional Crises" <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/constitutional-crisis/>.

William Howell and Terry Moe. February 2, 2017. "Americas Antiquated Constitution." <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/world/>

americas-antiquated-constitution-united-states-constitution-donald-trump-electoral-college.

July 3. Federalism and the Separation of Powers.

American Government, Chapter 3.

Federalist Papers # 39 and 45.

John Hudak, June 20, 2015. “The Conflict between Federal and State Marijuana Laws Claims a Victim.” *Newsweek*. <http://www.newsweek.com/conflict-between-federal-and-state-marijuana-laws-claims-victim-345099>.

July 5. Congress.

American Government, Chapter 5.

Sarah Binder. February 8, 2017. “3 lessons from Republicans’ attempt to silence Elizabeth Warren.” Washington Post’s Monkey Cage Blog. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/08/3-lessons-from-republicans-failed-attempt-to-silence-elizabeth-warren/?utm_term=.a4c074335134.

July 10. The President and the Presidency

American Government, Chapter 6.

Federalist Papers # 67, 69, 70, and 73.

William Howell. 2005. “Unilateral Powers: A Brief Overview.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*.

Keith E. Whittington. 2017. “So what exactly counts as an impeachable offense?” *Washington Post*, May 24, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/05/24/so-what-exactly-counts-as-an-impeachable-offense-spoiler-its-a-trick-question/?utm_term=.b5898e83f7bd.

July 12. Bureaucracy and the Executive Branch.

American Government, Chapter 7.

Nancy Cook and Andrew Restuccia. January 23, 2017. “Revenge of the Bureaucrats.” *Politico*. <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/01/trump-government-bureaucrats-234019>.

Christopher Flavelle and Benjamin Bain. December 18, 2017. “Washington Bureaucrats Are Quietly Working to Undermine Trump’s Agenda.”

BloombergPolitics. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2017-12-18/washington-bureaucrats-are-chipping-away-at-trump-s-agenda>.

Rachel Augustine Potter. February 6, 2017. “Why Trump Can’t Undo the Regulatory State So Easily.” Brookings: Series on Regulatory Process and Perspective. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/why-trump-cant-undo-the-regulatory-state-so-easily/>.

July 17. The Judiciary.

American Government, Chapter 8.

July 19. Public Opinion.

American Government, Chapter 9.

Pew Research Center. “Political Polarization in the American Public.” <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2014/06/6-12-2014-Political-Polarization-Release.pdf>.

Kyle Dropp, Joshua D. Kertzer, and Thomas Zeitzoff. April 7, 2014. “The less Americans know about Ukraine’s location, the more they want U.S. to intervene.” The Washington Post’s Monkey Cage Blog. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/04/07/the-less-americans-know-about-ukraines-location-the-more-they-want-u-s-to-intervene/?utm_term=.ccfb0a2454b6.

Dylan Matthews. January 30, 2018. “Trump has changed how Americans think about politics.” *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/1/30/16943786/trump-changed-public-opinion-russia-immigration-trade>.

July 24. Elections.

American Government, Chapter 10.

John Sides. August 23, 2016. “Never forget: The 2016 presidential election is supposed to be one that Republicans can win.” *The Washington Post’s Monkey Cage Blog*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/08/23/never-forget-the-2016-presidential-election-is-supposed-to-be-one-that-republicans-can-win/?utm_term=.1ae3222301b2.

Lynn Vavreck. June 20, 2016. “Yes, Political Ads Are Still Important, Even for Donald Trump.” *The New York Times UpShot*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/21/upshot/yes-political-ads-are-still-important-even-for-donald-trump.html>.

Andy Sullivan. 2012. "It's not just the economy: Why football and sharks can affect elections." Reuters, October 6, 2012. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-campaign-uninformed-voters/its-not-just-the-economy-why-football-and-sharks-can-affect-elections-idUSBRE89503720121006>

July 26. Parties and interest groups.

American Government, Chapters 11 and 12.

Matthew Green and Douglas Harris. November 18, 2016. "Nancy Pelosi will probably beat Tim Ryan. But that doesn't mean her job is secure." *The Washington Posts Monkey Cage Blog*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/11/18/nancy-pelosi-will-probably-beat-tim-ryan-but-that-doesnt-mean-her-job-is-secure/?utm_term=.10d491346384.

Anna North. January 19, 2018. "How the Women's March made itself indispensable." *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/1/19/16905884/2018-womens-march-anniversary>.

July 31. Media and politics.

In-class film: *The Post* (2017).

Kevin Curry. 2016. "More and more people get their news via social media. Is that good or bad?" *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/09/30/more-and-more-people-get-their-news-via-social-media-is-that-good-or-bad/?utm_term=.c2d25d7ccd1f.

August 2. Class wrap-up and research project presentations.

RESEARCH PAPERS: DUE 5PM ON AUGUST 3.

FINAL EXAM: BEGINS 8:30AM ON AUGUST 9.