

Pol 1: Introduction to American Politics

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

Summer 2017

Seminar: Bainer Hall 1130: M,T,W 12:10-1:50

Discussion: Olson Hall 106: TR, 12:10-1:50

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Office Hours: Wednesday: 2:10-4:30, by appointment

Course GitPage & Resources: <https://calgara.github.io/polls2017.html>

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Course Objective: How do we study & assess American democracy?

This course offers an introduction to the systematic and meticulous study of American politics. Building on the scientific foundation of political science, this course is designed to provide an understanding into the behavior of *citizens* and *institutions* operating within the national framework of American government. The main question motivating the course is a simple, yet complex one: how well does the American political system live up to the ideals of a representative democracy? Recognizing that representative democracy requires engaged citizens and responsive institutions, the motivating question of the course hinges on understanding:

- How does James Madison’s “Republic” provide the fundamental theory that justifies the representative framework which underlies the American political system and what are the role of *citizens* and elites within this “ideal” framework?
- How do individual *citizens* make political decisions, such as which candidate to vote for and what policies & political positions (preferences) to hold? What are the implications of how *citizens* make decisions for Madison’s framework and the function of democracy?
- What incentives motivate how elected elites (politicians) behave within the *institution* (i.e. the Congress and the presidency) in which they serve and what are the implications of differing incentives across *institutions* for responsiveness (policymaking)? How does collective *institutional* behavior, such as gridlock, fit into Madison’s view of democracy?

These thematic questions may seem daunting, but this course will give you the necessary framework to perform careful political and social science analysis to gain leverage on these questions. This course will provide not only an understanding of how to think of the quality of American democracy but also how to engage in careful social science analysis. This course emphasizes the tools you need to assess political behaviors, practices, and institutions based

on theory and evidence. Welcome to the class!

Course Logistics & Requirements

This section of the syllabus serves a guide for course expectations (both for me and for you) and logistical information such as grade breakdown and course texts.

Course Texts & Announcements: There is one assigned textbook for this course and the citation can be found below:

- Kollman, Ken. 2017 *The American Political System: Core Edition*: New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company ¹

The [Course GitPage](#) contains all lectures, supplemental readings, and exam study guides in the interactive syllabus. Course announcements will be made through [Canvas](#).

Grade Breakdown:

- 75% Midterm & Final Exam
- 25% Seminar Participation & Research Participation

$\geq 97\%$	A+	87 - 89% B+	77 - 79% C+	67 - 69 D+	$< 60\%$ F
93 - 96%	A	83 - 86% B	73 - 76% C	63 - 66% D	
90 - 92%	A-	80 - 82% B-	70 - 72% C-	60 - 62% D-	

Exams: The midterm & final exam will feature two main components: short answer and essay. The short answer component will be both the *definition* and *significance* of a concept discussed in lecture and in the readings. The essays will require the student to use the course concepts to **develop an argument** in response to stated essay question. This includes a thesis statement and supporting evidence for the thesis statement. Study guides will be provided a week before the exam along with “what constitutes an excellent” short answer and essay. The midterm is worth 35% while the **cumulative** final exam is worth 40%.

Make-Up Exams: I understand that throughout a quarter many exogenous, unanticipated events, may occur that would require the makeup of an exam. This course offers flexibility for administration of the *midterm exam* for whatever reason, independent of proper documentation such as a doctor’s note. However, makeup examinations will consist of a robust single essay written during a ninety minute window. However, per university policy, the final exam cannot be given early and will be administered during the schedule time found on the

¹Note that I have designed the course so that readings in the syllabus correspond to **both** the **Third** Edition and the **Second** Edition of the textbook.

[registrar website](#). Make-up *final exams* outside of this final exam period will *require* formal documentation and coordination at least a week in advance.

Seminar Participation & Research Participation: As stated earlier, there will be unannounced individual and group activities used to both 1) stimulate discussion during seminar and 2) assess student comprehension of a given day's concepts. These exercises will be done through an online survey hosted by ***Poll Everywhere***. These participation exercises will be incorporated into every other lecture and will be graded based on whether a student participated or not. Students may participate on a computer or over mobile text. Thus, **attendance** is critical to getting full points for the seminar participation. On the other hand, research participation entails participation in a graduate student political science project outside of the seminar period. Details will be explained in class and participation will be equivalent for *two seminar participation* activities in weight.

Academic Dishonesty & Ethics: This course is about developing critical thought and developing personalized skill-sets necessary to examine politics in a systematic and rigorous way. Thus, it is important to develop your own arguments and work to hone in analytical skills. Academic dishonesty is not only a serious breach of ethics in the university community, but it is also detrimental to your scholarly growth. Ethics breaches, such as cheating and plagiarism, will be referred to the [Office of Student Judicial Affairs](#). Students may refer to the [University's Code of Academic Conduct](#) for further clarification or may conduct the instructor for any specific questions.

Course Resources: If accommodations are needed for you to succeed in this course, please speak with me and we will work together to make sure you are accommodated. If you are unsure if you need accommodations, please visit the [UC Davis SDC site](#). On another note, I highly recommend taking advantage of the great campus resources offered by the [Student Academic Success Center](#) for strategies on how to succeed not only in this course but throughout your tenure here.

Successful Strategies for the Systematic Study of Politics

This section of the syllabus provides successful strategies on *how* to succeed in this course.

Note on Reading Scholarly Articles: After the foundational section, many of the readings in subsequent sections will be academic in nature. I understand that, as an introductory seminar, these works may contain empirical analysis that may seem daunting and confusing to read (i.e. lots of equations & statistics). I will convey the article's findings at length in lecture. The *only* expectation from you is to read the article carefully before seminar, attempt to understand the article's main argument (this includes that political phenomena does the article's argument seek to explain), how the article's findings fits with the theory presented, and what the implications of the author's empirical findings are for the function of democracy/course concepts. I will provide a checklist that outlines how to

read these works for content and using the content in seminar discussion.

Expectations: Students can expect me to come prepared to seminar. This entails that students can expect me to give a strong effort to convey the given seminar's course concepts and the implications these concepts have for the main questions highlighted in the course description. This seminar will be taught in a *dynamic* fashion which will require full participation from *everyone* in the seminar. As such, most lectures will incorporate activities designed to stimulate student involvement and gauge comprehension of the material. It is critical that everyone (including me) is ***prepared*** to discuss the seminar's assigned reading for that day and come ready to discuss the concepts and how what implications these concepts have for assessing the quality of American democracy.

Coming Prepared: Each seminar will introduce *new* theories that, in one way or another, **will provide different conceptions of what the ideals of democracy should be**. It is critical that you (and I) do the assigned readings before the class. Useful class discussion is conditional on both of us doing the readings, being familiar with the reading's argument/main points, and engaging the theories presented during that week. After understanding these different theories of democracy, we will evaluate whether the American political system as constructed works well or is in need of valuable reform. The better we prepare, the better we can assess our democracy.

Keeping an Open-Mind & Importance of Questions: It is critical to both challenge partisan predispositions and other biases we may hold, even if that means confronting powerful myths that can bias our perceptions and assessments. Assessing whether our democracy functions well requires **questioning everything**, both of the theories themselves and my interpretation of them. Intellectual curiosity and asking questions is both a strong and desirable virtue. Asking questions and engaging in a conversation by sharing your ideas and thoughts help strengthen our assessments.

Course Road-Map

This section of the syllabus outlines the course schedule & readings². The course will be divided into three distinct sections outlined in the course objective. Understanding of these three questions will help assess the behavior of ***citizens*** and ***institutions*** and the implications these behaviors have for the functioning of the American political system as a representative democracy. It is imperative that you treat each section as a part of a **framework** by which we judge the functioning of American democracy. Each section objective articulates the role of the section within the **framework**

²Each seminar slideset and supplemental material will be uploaded before seminar on the [Course GitPage](#).

1. Madison's Republic: Foundation of American Democracy

Section Objective: Madison's theory of representative democracy, outlined in *Federalist 10 & 51*, outlines the justification for the American constitution and our representative form of government. This section provides an understanding of the motivation underpinning a representative form of democracy, centered around Madison's argument about human nature, how representatives behave in political life, and the consequences of Madison's argument on political change. Ask yourself, is Madison's Republic democratic relative to other forms of democracy and how well does this theory explain the American system today?

1. Meeting 1: Course Overview & "First-Attempts" at American Democracy

- *Kollman Text*: Chapter 1: *Introduction*
- [The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union. 1777.](#)

2. Meeting 2: The Problem of Human Nature: Self-Interest, Factions, & Collective Action

- Madison, James. 1787. "Federalist 10." In [United States Congress Resources](#)
- *Kollman Text*: Chapter 2: *The Constitution*: Sections: What Do Constitutions Accomplish & Origins of the American Political System

3. Meeting 3: Madison's Theory: Self-Interest & Ambition as the Solution

- Reread: Madison, James. 1787. "Federalist 10." In [United States Congress Resources](#)
- Madison, James (or Alexander Hamilton). 1788. "Federalist 51." In [United States Congress Resources](#)
- [Constitution of the United States](#). 1788. *Particular* emphasis on Articles I, II, IV, & VI.

2. Citizen Political Behavior: Functioning as Critical Principals

Section Objective: It's clear that Madison's Republic posits an important role for citizens in a representative democracy. This section highlights how citizens function as *principals* of their elected representatives (i.e. agents). This section provides an understanding of which type of citizens participate in politics, what the incentives are to be "disengaged" from the political process, how well elections work, and what role parties play (if any) in helping citizens make political decisions. Pay close attention to some key questions. What are the implications of the "disengagement" incentive for the functioning of Madison's Republic? Do elections help citizens make a more "representative" form of government and how do we know when they do? How does party theory challenge Madison's republic? And, perhaps the most important question, is an informed electorate **NECESSARY** for Madison's theory to work?

1. Meeting 4: Variation in Citizen Participation: Resources and Free-Riding Incentive

- *Kollman Text*: Chapter 10: *Political Participation*

- Converse, Philip E. 2000. "Assessing the Capacity of Mass Electorates." *Annual Review of Political Science* 3(1): 331-353.
 - **Optional** (Really dense read, will go over in seminar): Zaller, John. 1992. *Nature & Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. **Read Ch2. Information, Predispositions & Opinion.**
2. Meeting 5: Developing Political Preferences: Citizen Self-Interest
 - MacKuen, Michael, Robert S. Erikson & James A. Stimson. 1992. "Peasants or Bankers? The American Electorate and the U.S. Economy." *American Political Science Review* 86(3): 597-611.
 3. Meeting 6: Overcoming Limited Information: How Citizens use Short-Cuts to Act
 - *Kollman Text*: Chapter 9: *Public Opinion*
 - Lau, Richard R. & David P. Redlawsk. 2001. "Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision Making." *American Political Science Review* 45(4): 951-971.
 4. Meeting 7: Electoral Dynamics: The Role of Campaign Context in Voting Choice
 - Stone, Walter J. & Elizabeth N. Simas. 2010. "Candidate Valence and Ideological Positions in U.S. House Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 54(2): 371-388.
 - Abramowitz, Alan I., Brad Alexander & Matthew Gunning. 2006. "Incumbency, Redistricting, and the Decline of Competition in U.S. House Elections." *Journal of Politics* 68(1): 75-88.
 - *Kollman Text*: Chapter 13: *Elections & Campaigns*
 5. Meeting 8: Parties in the Electorate: Helping Citizens Make Political Decisions at a Trade-off
 - Levendusky, Matthew S. 2010. "Clearer Cues, More Consistent Voters: A Benefit of Elite Polarization." *Political Behavior* 32(1): 111-131.
 - Bafumi, Joseph & Robert Y. Shapiro. 2009. "A New Partisan Voter." *Journal of Politics* 71(1): 1-23.
 6. Meeting 9: Parties as Organizations: Implications of the American Party System
 - Aldrich, John H. 1995. *Why Parties: The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. **Read Ch. 2 Why Parties Form**
 - Bawn, Kathleen, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel & John Zaller. 2012. "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands, and Nominations in American Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 10(3): 571-597.

- **Optional:** *Kollman Text*: Chapter 12: *Political Parties*: Sections: What are Parties? & In Comparison: Parties

7. Meeting 10: Review for Midterm & Catch-Up.

Meeting 11: Midterm Examination (July 17, 2017)

3: Post-Election: How Institutions Function within the Framework

Section Objective: This section turns our focus from citizens, the principals in a representative democracy, to elected representatives, the agents. This section focuses on two institutions, the Congress and the Executive, and assesses the *incentives* they have to be faithful agents for voters and *whether* they provide accurate political representation. This section wraps up with a discussion on collective ***institutional*** behavior. That is, how do the differing electoral incentives found in Congress and the Presidency inherently create a *status quo bias*? How does polarization exasperate this bias, what *types of citizens* get represented, and is the system in need of reform in light of Madison's theory?

1. Meeting 12: Congressional Incentives: Representation & Getting Re-Elected

- Mayhew, David. 1974. "The Electoral Connection and the Congress." In Terry Sullivan & Matthew Sullivan eds., *Congress: Structure and Policy*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 1987.
- Harbridge, Laurel & Neil Malhorta. 2011. "Electoral Incentives and Partisan Conflict in Congress: Evidence from Survey Experiments." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(3): 494-510.
- *Kollman Text*: Chapter 5: *Congress*: Section: Congressional Elections.

2. Meeting 13: Mechanisms of Re-election: How Congress Provides Representation

- Grimmer, Justin. 2013. "Appropriators Not Position Takers: The Distorting Effects of Electoral Incentives on Congressional Representation." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(3): 624-642.
- Engstrom, Erik J. & Georg Vanberg. 2010. "Assessing the Allocation of Pork: Evidence from Congressional Earmarks." *American Politics Research* 38(6): 959-985.
- Katz, Jonathan N. & Brian R. Sala. 1996. "Careerism, Committee Assignments, and the Electoral Connection." *American Political Science Review* 90(1): 21-33

3. Meeting 14: Change in Representation: Are Citizens Represented in the System? ³

- Bafumi, Joseph & Michael C. Herron. 2010. "Leapfrog Representation and Extremism: A Study of American Voters and Their Members in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 104(3): 519-542.

³Apologies in advance for the comprehensive reading list, this is a big question and one of my substantive areas of interest. Please, if you have time, *skim* the two optional articles.

- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, Brady, David W. & John Coogan. 2002. “Out of Step, Out of Office: Electoral Accountability and House Members’ Voting.” *American Journal of Political Science* 45(1): 136-159.
 - **Optional** (will discuss:) Theriault, Sean M. & David W. Rohde. 2011. “The Gingrich Senators and Party Polarization in the U.S. Senate.” *Journal of Politics* 73(4): 1011-1024.
 - **Optional** (dense read with dated language, **foundational representation piece** will discuss): Miller, Warren E. & Donald C. Stokes. 1963. “Constituency Influence in Congress.” *American Political Science Review* 57(1): 45-56.
4. Meeting 15: The Presidency: At-Large Constituency & Presidential Representation
- Moe. Terry M. & William G. Howell. 1999. “Unilateral Action and Presidential Power: A Theory.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29(4): 850-873.
 - Canes-Wrone, Brandice. 2001. “The Presidents Legislative Influence from Public Appeals.” *American Journal of Political Science* 45(2): 313-329
5. Meeting 16: Executive-Legislative Bargaining: Inherent Status-Quo Bias
- Krehbiel, Keith. 1993. “Pivotal Politics: A Theory in U.S. Lawmaking.” In Steven S. Smith et al. eds. *The American Congress Reader*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 2009.
 - Binder, Sarah A. 1999. “The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock, 1947-96.” *American Political Science Review* 93(3): 519-533.
 - Cox, Gary W. & Matthew D. McCubbins. 2005. “Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives.” In Steven S. Smith et al. eds. *The American Congress Reader*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 2009.
6. Meeting 17: Polarization: Implications for Policymaking & Accountability
- Lee, Frances E. 2015. “How Party Polarization Affects Governance.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 18(1): 261-282.
 - Jones, David R. 2010. “Partisan Polarization and Congressional Accountability in House Elections” *American Journal of Political Science* 54(2): 323-337.
7. Meeting 18: How Democratic is the U.S.? Policy Responsiveness
- Erikson, Robert S. 2015. “Income Inequality and Policy Responsiveness.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 18(1): 11-29.
 - Stimson, James A., Michael B. MacKuen & Robert S. Erikson. 1995. “Dynamic Representation.” *American Political Science Review* 89(3): 543-565.
8. Meeting 19: Reform Needed? Potential Reforms from Comparative Systems

- Bawn, Kathleen & Frances Rosenbluth. 2006. "Short versus Long Coalitions: Electoral Accountability and the Size of the Public Sector." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2): 251-265
- Huber, John D. & G. Bingham Powell. 1994. "Congruence between Citizens and Policymakers in Two Visions of Liberal Democracy." *World Politics* 46(3): 291-326.

9. Meeting 20: Review for Final & Catch-Up

Meeting 21: Final Exam (August 2, 2017)