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Political Science 3107: It's U.S. Against Them

Course Description

The term "American Exceptionalism" is often used to refer to the special character of the United States as a uniquely free nation based on democratic ideals and personal liberty. Sometimes this special character is thought to be institutionalized in the American political system. In this course, we put the United States in comparative perspective, examining how it compares with other democracies. Institutions we will examine include constitutions, the division of power in federal systems, electoral rules, political parties, legislatures, executives, and judiciaries.

As you can imagine, based on this list, the kind of questions we will address include: As an effort to engineer government-citizen relations, is the U.S. constitution particularly constraining and intrusive? Do state-level governments have comparatively unprecedented powers to tax and spend? Does the use of an electoral system based on single-member districts decided by plurality create particularly strong ties between an elected official and his or her constituents? Conversely, how does the electoral system fare in terms of creating responsible political parties who keep their promises once in power? Is the degree of legislative deadlock in the United States uncommon? Is the U.S. presidency long on constitutionally-allocated powers or is it formally weak? Is it common to let judges stay in office for life and does it matter for their independence? What are the impacts of all these institutional choices on policy outcomes?

The primary text, *A Different Democracy*, puts the United States in the context of 30 other democratic regimes – chosen, the authors claim, for their longevity and population size. Using these same cases across institutions should help us start to get a sense of “systems” of institutions, not just the varieties of individual institutions but instead how they get combined. While 30 is a nice number and was undoubtedly a lot of work for the authors, we are going to far exceed that number in our search for a comparative context. Fortunately for us, comparative data on democratic institutions is becoming more available. In particular, we will be making use of the Comparative Constitutions Project and the Varieties of Democracy project (web addresses below in the readings section). You should familiarize yourself with the data available through these large, collaborative scholarly efforts. You will be called on to use the data from these sources creatively throughout the semester.

We will be examining both historical and contemporary examples of democratic institutions and their impacts. We will be as concrete as possible in empirical terms, attempting to develop measures or indicators of concepts of interest in order to make comparisons across cases. Beyond simply identifying empirical patterns, we will be making use of and testing the limits of theories that portray democratic institutions as the rules of the political game or, in other words, as incentive structures that shape actors' strategies. Political

science requires a systematic form of critical thinking that emulates the scientific method. Therefore, we will not only discuss specific historical events but also ways to generalize from them to create conceptual constructs and theoretical lessons. It is the role of theory to guide us in our search for general lessons about politics — in this case how democratic institutions shape representation, broadly conceived.

Course Requirements

Your grasp of the subject matter will be evaluated in multiple ways: in class participation (regular quizzes), group projects, and in-class examinations. Some specifics of each of these components are explained in greater detail below.

Participation. I strongly encourage you to participate during class. Don't hesitate to ask questions or to offer relevant points of observation. In exceptional circumstances, outstanding levels of participation, high or low, may result in a change of one grade level (from B to B+ or vice versa, for example). To incentivize you to complete the readings and arrive prepared to participate, we will have frequent quizzes. At the end of the semester, we will drop approximately 25% of your quizzes – those with the lowest score including zeros for absences – and use the remainder to determine 20% of your final grade.

Group Projects. You will work in teams throughout the semester. You will need to capitalize on communication and collaboration skills in order to produce finished projects that would be impossible working alone in the time allotted. Shortly after the semester starts you will be randomly assigned to a team, and you will work with this team throughout the course on in-class assignments, take-home assignments, and your final research project. Instructions for the final research project will be detailed in a separate document. To ensure that each student contributes the group's success, your contributions will be assessed via self- and peer-evaluation. I will use this information when assigning a grade to each team member. The final research project will be worth 20% of your grade, and the other group projects will be summed to account for another 20% of your final grade.

Examinations. There will be two exams – one near the midpoint of the semester and one during the exam period (see the course schedule below for the exam dates). The exams will be comprised of short essay questions, multiple choice, true or false, fill-in-the-blank, matching, etc. Each exam will be worth 20% of your final grade.

Required Readings

Taylor, Steven L., Matthew S. Shugart, Arend Lijphart, and Bernard Grofman. 2014. *A Different Democracy: American Government in a Thirty-One-Country Perspective*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Comparative Constitutions Project — <http://comparativeconstitutionsproject.org>

Varieties of Democracy Project — <https://www.v-dem.net/en/>

Additional readings (noted with an asterisk) will be provided via Box.

Co-Instructor

This course will co-taught with Mr. Patrick Cunha. He can be reached at pcunhasilva@wustl.edu.

Course Policies

Please read these additional policies carefully. They will govern various aspects of how the class will function this semester.

One-on-One Consultation. I strongly encourage you to stop by frequently to see me about the course. Just send me an e-mail, and we will find a mutually convenient time to get together. Staying engaged with the course materials and getting informal feedback at regular intervals will have a big impact on your performance on the required assignments.

Due Dates. Due dates are detailed in the syllabus. If you foresee a conflict with some due date, see me immediately to talk about options, if I can offer any. I do not grant last-minute exceptions, and I will penalize any late work severely.

Attendance. I highly recommend it! It can directly and indirectly impact your grade. See the participation description above.

Technology. Do not use your phone at any time during class. Turn it off and put it out of your sight. There will be times during the semester when I will encourage you to make use of laptops. Other than those exact times, please abstain entirely from texting, surfing the web, etc. An expected offense will result in receiving no credit on the next four quizzes given. Students who are repeatedly disruptive to my train of thought or the focus of their fellow students will be administratively dropped from the course without credit.

Special Accommodations. If you require any, set up a time to meet with me early in the semester so that I can make sure your needs are met.

Academic Integrity. Plagiarism, misrepresenting one's identity, cheating, etc. will not be tolerated. Please review the university's policies in this regard at: <http://www.wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html>.

(TENTATIVE) COURSE SCHEDULE

Tuesday, August 28 No Readings	Class logistics
Thursday, August 30 APSA-CD* & V-Dem*	Data on Democratic Institutions
Tuesday, September 4 TSLG 1-24	Key Concepts
Thursday, September 6 TSLG 25-56	Can You Engineer Politics?
Tuesday, September 11 Vox*	Electoral Reform as Engineering
Thursday, September 13 TSLG 57-82	The Duration of Constitutional Orders
Tuesday, September 18 TSLG 83-114	National, State, and Local
Thursday, September 20 Vox* & Economist*	The Price of Federalism
Tuesday, September 25 TSLG 115-140	The Components of Electoral Systems
Thursday, September 27 TSLG 140-167	Major Families of Electoral Systems
Tuesday, October 2 New Yorker* & Economist*	Electoral Systems and Interparty Politics
Thursday, October 4 Vox* & Washington Post*	Electoral Systems and Intraparty Politics
Tuesday, October 9 No New Readings	Review Session
Thursday, October 11 No New Readings	Exam
Tuesday, October 16 No New Readings	Fall Break
Thursday, October 18 COR* (pages tba)	Stage 1, Linkage I, Stage 2

Tuesday, October 23 TSLG 168-199	Parties, Campaigns, Interest Groups
Thursday, October 25 Economist* Independent* BBC*	Party Manifestos
Tuesday, October 30 TSLG 200-226	Legislative Power: Parliament, Congress, National Assembly
Thursday, November 1 Economist* & Economist*	Bicameralism
Tuesday, November 6 TSLG 227-258	Executive Power: Presidents, Prime Ministers, Premiers
Thursday, November 8 TSLG 258-281	Checks and Balances?
Tuesday, November 13 COR* (pages tba)	Stage 2, Linkage II, Stage 3
Thursday, November 15 TSLG 282-308	Judicial Power
Tuesday, November 20 TSLG 309-324	Comparative Conclusions
Thursday, November 22 No New Readings	Thanksgiving Break
Tuesday, November 27 TSLG 324-359	Comparative Conclusions
Thursday, December 29 Carey & Hix 383-397	Comparative Conclusions
Tuesday, December 4 tba*	Comparative Conclusions
Thursday, December 6 No Readings	Group Projects
Wednesday, December 19 (6:00 pm) No Readings	Exam