GOVT 201 (01): Introduction to American Government & Politics

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Office Hours: Monday 2-4 pm, or by email or appt.

Location: 334 Blow Hall   **Day/Time**: MWF 10:00–10:50

1   Overview & Introductory Remarks

Welcome to GOVT 201! This course will introduce you to the American government and political system. Indeed, politics is a *system*, not a collection of independent actors making independent decisions in a vacuum. Most of our discussion and class time will flow from this frame of an interdependent system of strategic and calculated political actors, from politicians and special interests, to voters and judges.

While I would love it if everyone in the class became a political scientist, dedicating their lives to the scientific study of politics, I am not that optimistic. Rather, I do know that almost everyone consumes some form of news, or at the very least retains a set of opinions on politics and political outcomes. Therefore, the goal of this course will be to help each of you become better, more principled consumers of political news. This includes the often uncomfortable task of confronting the multidimensional nature of most issues and problems in American politics, which requires consideration of *all* sides of all issues, and avoiding at all costs, a hasty rush to judgement. Though this sounds great in theory, consider trying to view the world from Donald Trump's perspective: why would he make the decisions he makes, for example? Are there political or justifiable reasons for policy or communication strategies of the sitting president? Whether answers to these questions are yes, no, or something in between is largely immaterial for our purposes. Our real concerns, and my goals as your professor, are to honestly, ethically, and seriously consider the complexity of political decision making in American politics. This does not require you to agree with a given side, nor does it require you to always come up with a compact answer to a question. Instead, the idea is to push you to think more broadly than you may have about American politics as a system, as well as your place in it. I am confident that if you approach the class and material from such a perspective, you will learn things and grow, perhaps in ways you didn't anticipate. And, dare I say, you may even enjoy some of this.

As the goal is to make you better consumers of news and political information, and thus better citizens, we will walk through foundational and theoretical core concepts, all with an eye toward "digestibility." Here are a few examples of some guiding questions we will tackle:

1. How does polarization impact policymaking? Voters' perceptions of candidates and politicians? Patterns of responsiveness to constituents?

2. Are popularly elected politicians representing the needs and preferences of their constituents? Are they supposed to?

3. What is America's role in the world? What should it be and how do we know this? Is it constant, dynamic, or a little of both?

4. What should America's massive store of resources and wealth be used for? How are decisions to allocate resources and regulate markets through public policy made, why do they matter, and what constrains these decisions?

5. What are the constitutional limits on elite political actors?

6. What role does money play in policymaking? In campaigns and elections? In representation?

Ultimately, this class will be what you make of it, and the result of that which you invest. We will go through a lot of material, some of it exciting, and some of it on the dry side. Either way, I ask you to open your mind, allow yourself to consider the world from a different perspective, regardless of whether you agree with it or not, come prepared and ready to discuss, but most importantly, come ready and willing to *listen*. The latter will surely get you farther in life. Enough pontificating... for now.

Note: *Add/drop period ends*: 9/7/18. *Withdraw period ends*: 10/26/18

2   Text & Materials

Required:

Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. 2017. *American Government: Power and Purpose, 14th Ed.* Norton. ISBN: 978-0393283761

Recommended:

Many articles and books listed below in the course outline

3   Evaluation & Assessment

There are 5 components to students' final grades: (1) weekly debates (20%), (2) midterm exam (20%), (3) final exam (25%), (4) final paper (25%), and (5) participation and discussion (10%).

1. *Debates*: We will end most weeks spending the latter part of class on Fridays with a class debate. This is meant to be a different outlet for engaging with the material, while learning from others, and exploring, defending, and critiquing issues from different perspectives. Hopefully it will also be an enjoyable way to wind down from the week. Each debate will be on one specific salient topic or policy that is likely controversial at some level (e.g., gay marriage/wedding cakes, arming teachers in schools, etc.). Sides of the given issues will be assigned at random. Assignments and topics will be given at the beginning of the week to provide sufficient time to research and learn about your specific side of the issue that you are to debate.

   With these debates, it is very important that you distance yourself from your personal beliefs on the topic (*just for the purpose of the debate*). As hard as it may be, do your best to make a rational, well-reasoned, and *calm* argument for your assigned side of the issue. I cannot stress enough, these debates are intended to be a fun way to end class each week. As such, a respectful tone and calm approach to these topics is of the utmost importance. Remember that we are just talking about issues, and trying to learn something beyond a single perspective on the topic. While you may agree with the angle on the topic you have been assigned, you may not agree with it. That's OK. The point is not to believe and adopt the angle you have been assigned, but to simply learn how to at least consider another side of an important issue. I trust this will be fun and free from problems.

I will serve as moderator, keeping track of time that each side has to speak, and I will interject as appropriate to provide clarity to points of confusion, and so on. You will be evaluated on (1) your level of participation, and (2) the quality of your argument. For example, is it clear that you researched your side well? Is your argument based on personal assessment, or on policy and/or legal considerations, federal/state precedent, etc.?

There are three goals of these debates:

(a) Think critically about big topics in the news

(b) Learn to consider and respect both sides of an issue, *regardless of agreement*

(c) Related, learn to discuss the merits and nuance of issues, free from emotions

2. *Exams (midterm and final)*: The midterm exam will include a combination of multiple choice and true/false questions. You will be given a full class period to take the exam. Anything up to the day of the exam is fair game, whether from in-class discussion, assigned reading (whether or not we discussed it), or things I highlight.

In a similar format, the final exam will be given at the end of the term, and will include everything *after* the midterm. Questions will be a combination of multiple choice and true/false. Similarly, you will be given a full class period to take the exam.

3. *Final Paper*: For the final paper, students will be given two options: (1) traditional academic research paper or (2) op-ed-style paper. Students may select whichever paper format is most appealing, but **all students are *required* to get both format and topic approved by me in advance.** The deadline for approval of these items is the date of the midterm, though approval and writing should begin much earlier. I will provide a bit of guidance on topics below. But first, note that the length requirements and my expectations are the same for each option. It should also be noted that writing a high quality opinion piece is a difficult task. Like a research paper, op-eds require sources and citations, and understanding of the current state of literature, as well as a clear, logical presentation of an argument. The key difference is the style. Op-eds are typically written for a broader audience (i.e., use less academic jargon), and the tone is a bit more informal. Therefore, I will grade an op-ed with the same rigor as I will grade the traditional research paper. Here is the basis of each option:

Research papers: Select any policy instrument from any branch of the federal government, and use it to tell me about that branch. This can be a law that was passed by Congress, an executive order signed by the president, a line-item in the federal budget (e.g., natural disaster funding packages), a Supreme Court decision, and so on. There are many options available. The idea is to select a policy that has some impact on society, and then use it to tell me about the branch and/or the initiator. For example, if you select an executive order (EO), first tell me about the EO and its policy significance. Then, discuss the importance of unilateral action afforded to the president, as well as the downside of the president making policy on his own. How are these pros and cons of unilateral action reflected in the specific EO you selected? There are many directions you can take this assignment, so I will leave it relatively open, and also discuss this at several points in the semester. But from day 1, you should be thinking seriously about either a branch or political actor that is of interest to you, and then be thinking about a related law, policy, or political action that interests you. A few essentials: 7-10 pages in length, 5-7 academic sources (including the original policy document as one), double-spaced, 12

point font, Times New Roman/standard font, black ink, 1 inch margins, and a properly formatted reference list *with* in-text citations. You can select any reference style you wish (Chicago, APA, MLA, Turabian, etc.); just be correct and consistent.

Op-eds: Select any major, contemporary event in American politics (and there are *many* exciting ones lately), and use it to describe a feature of America's representative democracy. Whether you are critiquing democracy as it exists in America, supporting, or merely using the event to describe, the piece should clearly point to key aspects and features of our democratic system that are being upheld, abused, and so on, *as seen through the lens of your selected event.* For example, if you select the recent event of separating of families at the southern U.S. border, you can use that to talk about immigration policy, the president's and/or Congress' role in policymaking, the president's use of "going public" to drum up support for a particular policy to put pressure on member's of Congress, the role of public opinion and/or voting behavior in putting pressure on elites, etc. You will need to bring in key aspects of the American political system to support your analysis of the event and its impacts (e.g., if you talk about the President and policymaking, you will need to bring Constitutional considerations, past legal and political actions that constrain present policy options, and so on). If you select this option, you should read *several* op-eds at major news outlets (*NY Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, etc.) as a template to help think about how to organize your paper. Also, I would encourage you write this as if you were actually going to submit it to a news outlet, major or otherwise. A few essentials: 7-10 pages in length, 5-7 academic sources (including the original policy document), double-spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman/standard font, black ink, 1 inch margins, and a properly formatted reference list *with* in-text citations. You can select any reference style you wish (Chicago, APA, MLA, Turabian, etc.); just be correct and consistent.

Note: Regardless of the format you select, please feel absolute freedom to come talk with me to problem solve and brainstorm about policy options and other ideas. I want all of you to do well on this assignment and in the class, so I am very available to meet with you to discuss this final project and any other assignment, either via email, in person after class, during my office hours, or most days and times by appointment.

Final papers will be due the last day of class, Friday, 12/7/18.

4. *Participation*: There will be a heavy discussion component to the class every day we meet. Just as I have read all of this material and have spent many hours preparing the class, I expect everyone to have done the same, with all required reading completed *prior* to class, and come ready to discuss and answer questions and engage as appropriate. If you are someone who prefers not to speak up in class, I would urge you to step outside your comfort zone and answer (or ask) a question from time to time. If, on the other hand, you are a frequent contributor to class discussion, please be aware of your fellow classmates and make sure you are allowing them a chance to speak when they wish to do so.

Attendance at every class meeting is mandatory and expected in the absence of College-approved documentation for missing. **Otherwise, there are no make-ups, no excused absences, and no late papers or assignments accepted.**

5. **Extra Credit** – *Interactive Data Visualization*: For *up to* 25 extra credit points, any student may create an interactive data visualization tool to accompany their final paper. This can be made manually in the computational program `R`, via a Shiny app (also in `R`), or it can be facilitated through the online platform, `Plotly`. There are others tools out there, but these are the three I have used and trust the most. `Plotly` also has an `R` interfacing package for valuable crossover. Essentially, the idea is to reward any student who goes above and beyond by offering an interactive look at their "results" or trends from data used in their papers. *Importantly, data analysis is **not** required for the main paper.* But I know some students are particularly adept at data analysis and management, and may enjoy it as I do. Thus, if you want the option to do some extra work for some extra points, feel free to give it a try. I reserve the right to give *up to* 25 points, or none at all if I feel the submission is of insufficient quality.

My advice would be that if any of this is unfamiliar to you, I wouldn't hassle with it. Its tricky to learn programming in general, and in the context of a single semester as a "side project," I fear the likelihood of success may be low. Still, if you are interested and want to ask me more about any of these things, or other computational tools, please feel free to do so. I have many, many resources and have used these tools a lot, so I can certainly help get you started if you are so inclined. Ultimately, I don't want to discourage anyone from trying, but I want to reiterate that this is *extra* credit, and thus not required to succeed in the course. Your main assignments counting toward your final grade are significantly more important.

Some more on each:

(a) `R`: `https://www.r-project.org/`
(b) `Shiny`: `https://www.shinyapps.io/`
(c) `Plotly`: `https://plot.ly/`

4 The William & Mary Honor Code

The College of William & Mary has had an honor code since at least 1779. Academic integrity is at the heart of the university, and we all are responsible for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. The student-led honor system is responsible for resolving any suspected violations of the Honor Code, and I will report all suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the honor system. The Student Handbook (`www.wm.edu/studenthandbook`) includes your responsibilities as a student and the full Code. Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected. To read the Honor Code, see `www.wm.edu/honor`.

4.1 The W&M Pledge

As a member of the William and Mary community, I pledge on my honor not to lie, cheat, or steal, either in my academic or personal life. I understand that such acts violate the Honor Code and undermine the community of trust, of which we are all stewards.

4.2 Academic Honesty

The College defines academic dishonesty in several ways, such as plagiarism, which is the form of "deliberate" or "reckless" representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own

without appropriate attribution to the original author in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise, is a serious breach of academic integrity demanded by the Honor Code and one of the most common forms of academic misconduct processed by the honor system. Plagiarism can take many forms and there may be a number of reasons why it occurs. For example:

- Quote and cite any words that are not your own. If you paraphrase the words of another, you must still give proper attribution. If you look it up, write it down.

- Authorized vs. Unauthorized Collaboration. All academic work in this course, including homework, quizzes, and exams, is to be your own work, unless otherwise specifically provided. It is your responsibility if you have any doubt to confirm whether or not collaboration is permitted. Whenever possible, be clear and concise. Ambiguous statements often lead to confusion.

5 Student Accessibility Services

William & Mary accommodates students with disabilities in accordance with federal laws and university policy. Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact Student Accessibility Services staff at 757-221-2509 or at sas@wm.edu to determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more information, please see www.wm.edu/sas.

6 Outline of Topics & Calendar

The following is intended to be a general outline of proposed topics and reading. I reserve the right to update and move things around as the needs of the course dictate. In the event of such changes, students will be notified accordingly.

- **Week 1**: Course Introduction and Syllabus Review
    - *Wednesday, 8/29*: Course Introduction and Syllabus Review
    - *Friday, 8/31*: **No Class - APSA Annual Meeting in Boston**
- **Week 2**: Making Sense of Government & Politics
    - *Monday, 9/3*: American Government, Politics, & Politics as a Science
    - *Wednesday, 9/5*: Foundations and Basics (Ch. 1)
    - *Friday, 9/7*: Democracy and Representation (Ch. 1)
- **Week 3**: The Founding, Constitution, & Federalism
    - *Monday, 9/10*: The Founding, Constitution, & Branches (Ch. 2);
      The Constitution https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution
    - *Wednesday, 9/12*: **Class Canceled - Hurricane**
    - *Friday, 9/14*: **Class Canceled - Hurricane**
    - Recommended Reading:
        * The Federalist Papers
        * The Antifederalist Papers

- **Week 4**: Civil Liberties & Civil Rights

    - *Monday, 9/17*: Separation of Powers and Federalism (Ch. 3)
    - *Wednesday, 9/19*: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights (Chs. 4 and 5)
    - *Friday, 9/21*: Debate

- **Week 5**: Congress

    - *Monday, 9/24*: Representation (Ch. 6)
    - *Wednesday, 9/26*: Organization (Ch. 6)
    - *Friday, 9/28*: Debate
    - Recommended Reading:
        * David Mayhew, "Congress: The Electoral Connection"
        * Sarah Binder, "The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock, 1947-96," American Political Science Review (1990)
        * Nelson Polsby, "The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives." American Political Science Review (1968)

- **Week 6**: The Presidency

    - *Monday, 10/1*: Powers and Constraints (Ch. 7)
    - *Wednesday, 10/3*: Presidential Government (Ch. 7)
    - *Friday, 10/5*: Debate
    - Recommended Reading:
        * Ragsdale and Theis. "The Institutionalization of the American Presidency, 1924-92." American Journal of Political Science (1997)
        * Sam Kernell, "Going Public" (Book)
        * Stephen Skowronek, "The Politics Presidents Make" (1997, book)

- **Week 7**: The Bureaucracy

    - *Monday, 10/8*: Mechanics, Organization, Control, Interaction with Others (Ch. 8)
    - *Wednesday, 10/10*: Finish Bureaucracy and Exam Review (Q&A Format)
    - *Friday, 10/12*: **Midterm Exam - In-Class**
    - Recommended Reading:
        * Will Howell and David Lewis. "Agencies by Presidential Design." Journal of Politics (2002)

- **Week 8**: Federal Courts

    - *Monday, 10/15*: **No Class - Fall Break**
    - *Wednesday, 10/17*: Supreme Court and Lower Courts (Ch. 9)
    - *Friday, 10/19*: Debate
    - Recommended Reading:
        * Hamilton, Federalist 78
        * Brace & Hall, "The Interplay of Preferences, Case Facts, Context, and Rules in the Politics of Judicial Choice," Journal of Politics (1997)
        * Dahl, "Decision Making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as a National Policy Maker." Journal of Public Law (1957)

- **Week 9**: Public Opinion

  - *Monday, 10/22*: Opinion Nature and Formation (Ch. 10)
  - *Wednesday, 10/24*: Political Knowledge, Instability, and Psychology (Ch. 10)
  - *Friday, 10/26*: Debate
  - Recommended Reading:
    * Anthony Downs, "An Economic Theory of Democracy" (Book)
    * Converse, Philip. 1964. "The Nature of Beliefs Systems in the Mass Public." in Ideology and Discontent, ed. David Apter.
    * Berinkey, Adam. "The Two Faces of Public Opinion." American Political Science Review (1999)
    * Zaller, "Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion" (book)
    * Page and Shapiro, "Rational Public" (book)

- **Week 10**: The Media & Poilitical Communication

  - *Monday, 10/29*: An Institution & the "Fourth Branch" (Ch. 14)
  - *Wednesday, 10/31*: Government's Interaction with Media (Ch. 14)
  - *Friday, 11/2*: Debate
  - Recommended Reading:
    * Jamie Druckman, Martin J. Kifer, and Michael Parkin "Campaign Communications in U.S. Congressional Elections," American Political Science Review 103: 343-366, 2009.
    * Jamie Druckman, "Media Matter: How Newspapers and Television News Cover Campaigns and Influence Voters," Political Communication 22: 463-481, 2005.
    * Jamie Druckman and Michael Parkin, "The Impact of Media Bias: How Editorial Slant Affects Voters," Journal of Politics 67: 1030-1049, 2005.

- **Week 11**: Elections & Political Parties

  - *Monday, 11/5*: Election Processes & Voting (Ch. 11)
  - *Wednesday, 11/7*: Functions of Political Parties (Ch. 12)
  - *Friday, 11/9*: Debate
  - Recommended Reading:
    * Anthony Downs, "An Economic Theory of Democracy" (Book)
    * Costas Panagolpolous, "Thank You for Voting" Journal of Politics
    * Morris Fiorina, "Retrospective Voting in American National Election" (book)
    * John Aldrich, "Why Parties?" (book)

- **Week 12**: Interest Groups

  - *Monday, 11/12*: Structures and Strategies (Ch. 13)
  - *Wednesday, 11/14*: Influencing Policymaking (Ch. 13)
  - *Friday, 11/16*: Debate
  - Recommended Reading:
    * Madison, Federalist 10
    * Terry Moe, 1981. "Toward a Broader Theory of Interest Groups." Journal of Politics (1981)

* Nownes and Freeman, "Interest Group Activity in the States," Journal of Politics (1998)

- **Week 13**: Public Policy

  - *Monday, 11/19*: Economic Policy (Ch. 15)
  - *Wednesday, 11/21*: **No Class - Thanksgiving Break**
  - *Friday, 11/23*: **No Class - Thanksgiving Break**
  - Recommended Reading:
    * Kraft, Michael, and Scott Furlong. 2004. "Public Policy: Politics, Analysis, and Alternatives" (book)

- **Week 14**: Public Policy, cont'd

  - *Monday, 11/26*: Social Policy (Ch. 16)
  - *Wednesday, 11/28*: Foreign Policy (Ch. 17)
  - *Friday, 11/30*: *Final* Debate

- **Week 15**: Final Substantive Week: **Final Papers due Friday, 12/7**

  - *Monday, 12/3*: In-Class Paper Workshop
  - *Wednesday, 12/5*: ***No class - work on papers***
  - *Friday, 12/7*: Exam Review, Parting Words, and **Papers Due**

- **Exam Week**: **Final Exam: Tuesday, December 11, 2:00-5:00 pm**