PLSC 113: Introduction to American Politics*

Summer 2023

Yale University
Instructor: Christina M. Kinane
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Monday & Wednesday, 9am-12:15pm
Location: TBD
Course website: canvas

Office Hours: Mondays 12:30-1:30pm
Office Location: 77 Prospect St. (ISPS) B-211
Teaching Fellows (TF): TBD

Please sign up via Calendly

Course Description

This course’s primary objective is to introduce you to the study of the central processes and institutions of American politics. Politics plays an important role in your lives, no matter your level of civil engagement. Our political system produces policies aimed at solving larger collective problems which will, ultimately, shape your individual social and economic experiences as well. This course is designed to teach you about that system and how to approach American politics thoughtfully and critically. We will discuss the structure of government in the United States and its historical foundations, the major political institutions that link people to that government, and how people think about and participate in politics.

The majority of our readings will come from The Logic of American Politics. This textbook first examines why the American government is setup as it is and why politics operate as they do, and then considers how that institutional structure shapes the actions of citizens and politicians. Critically, this course is also designed to introduce you to the practice of political science. It is as much about developing different frames of references for evaluating politics as it is about learning particular facts; and, if we are successful, you will begin to see the political world through a social science lens. Throughout our discussions, we will consider how scholars conduct their study of American politics – highlighting their questions and the tools and approaches they employ to answer those questions. With each topic covered, we will supplement the textbook with relevant political science articles to introduce you to what that research says about contemporary issues.

Required Course Materials


*Thanks to Greg Huber and Ian Turner for sharing materials for similar courses.
- NOTE: The KJKVJ textbook will be listed as a core reading. You will be expected to know the information captured in the text, however, if you have taken AP US Government, you likely already know this information. I recommend skimming the KJKVJ reading assignment to make sure that you refresh your memory and are prepared for lecture and discussions. And then put more concentration on the week’s other readings.


- Additional reading material will be made available on canvas.

Course Requirements

Your grade will be determined by your performance on the following:

Participation (15%): Attendance and participation is key for your success in this class. There are many ways to maintain your participation grade – attendance is only one. You should be prepared to contribute meaningfully by asking questions and actively engaging in discussions. Attending class and being prepared by having read the assigned material will ensure that you are best able to fully participate in section.

Reading Responses (20%): Each student will write 4 2-page responses to an assigned reading, as indicated on the set of readings below. Each response is due by the start of class for the days they are assigned, turned in on Canvas.

Midterm Exam (25%): The midterm will consist of short answer and essay questions and take place in class on Monday, June 12. The exam will be drawn from lecture material, reading assignments, and discussions, and is designed to test your independent ability to apply what you have learned.

Final Exam (40%): The take-home final exam will be handed out at the end of the last class (June 28) and due on June 30, 2023 to be turned in on Canvas.

General Expectations

Learning is most effective when the classroom is comfortable, challenging, and fun. A key part of the academic environment is participating in the frank and civil exchange of ideas in an environment where people disagree but nonetheless treat one another with respect. As such, we – as a group – must cultivate mutual respect for ideas, freedom/ability to speak in class, and a professional tone. I will, consequently, not tolerate any form of disrespect geared towards me or another in class, cursing of any kind, dishonesty or disruptive activity. Spirited engagement and exciting disagreement, however, are encouraged.

If you wish to use an electronic device (laptop, Ipad, etc.) during lecture, please do not sit in the first 5 rows of the classroom. Research shows that students using electronic devices for note-
taking do worse and also negatively affect the performance of students sitting nearby. Dividing the classroom in this way allows students who do not wish to use electronic devices to avoid being distracted.

However, the use of electronic devices will be prohibited altogether during discussion section. While technology has many benefits, it has a funny way of getting in the way of conversation. This policy creates the best opportunities to engage in the important conversations that you will have this semester.

My office, office hours and email are at the top of the syllabus. The best way to contact me is to come to office hours where we can discuss questions about the material, assignments, or your experience in class. Please sign up for time slots during office hours (or for an appointment outside of office hours) via Calendly. As for email, please include “PLSC 113” in the subject line of the email. Generally, I will respond to e-mails within 48 hours. I cannot guarantee a response during the weekend; any e-mails received after 5pm on Friday will be answered by the following Monday.

**Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism is unacceptable, corrupts your personal integrity, and ultimately stunts your intellectual growth. Academic integrity is a core university value and the University expects that students will conduct themselves in an honest and ethical manner and respect the intellectual work of others. Academic dishonesty is not tolerated at Yale (see the Yale College Undergraduate Regulations [here](#)) and there are resources to help you maintain your academic honesty, including the Yale Writing Center (find more details on their [website](#)). When in doubt, cite your sources and trust your own brain - don't cheat.

**Students with Disabilities**

Your experience in this class is important to me. I am happy to accommodate students with disabilities and requests go through the Yale University Resource Office on Disabilities. If you have already established accommodations with the ROD, please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you feel you need accommodation please contact the [Resource Office on Disabilities](#).
Course Schedule

Week 1: Building the American Democracy

- May 29. The Logic of American Politics and the Founding
  - KJKVJ Chapter 1 and 2
  - Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. Excerpt from The Concept of Representation. [Kollman 1.5]
  - The Declaration of Independence [KJKVJ Appendix]

- May 31. The Constitution and Federalism
  - KJKVJ Chapter 3
  - The Constitution, including the first ten amendments [KJKVJ Appendix]
  - The Federalist Papers No. 10, 39, 46, and 51 [available at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subjectmenus/fed.asp.]
  - The Antifederalist No. 1 (the first essay of Brutus) [Kollman 2.1]
  - Riker, William H. Excerpt from Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance [Kollman 3.2]
  - Reading Response: Versteeg, Mila and Emily Zackin. Excerpt from “Constitutions Un-entrenched: Toward an Alternative Theory of Constitutional Design” [Kollman 2.3]

Week 2: Protecting Individuals and Political Institutions

- June 5. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights
  - KJKVJ Chapter 4 and 5
  - Brown v. Board of Education (1954) [Kollman 4.2]
  - United States v. Windsor (2013) and Scalia’s Dissent [Canvas]

- June 7. Congress
  - KJKVJ Chapter 6
  - Mayhew, David R. Excerpt from Congress: The Electoral Connection [Kollman 5.1]
  - Fenno Jr., Richard. Excerpt from Home Style: House Members in Their Districts. [Kollman 5.2]
  - Cox, Gary W. and Mathew D. McCubbins. Excerpt from Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives. [Kollman 5.3]
  - Bernhard, William and Tracy Sulkin. Excerpt from Legislative Style. [Kollman 5.4]
  - Lee, Frances E. Excerpt from Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign [Kollman 5.5]
Week 3: Political Institutions: Executive Branch

- June 12. The President
  - KJKVJ Chapter 7
  - Cameron, Charles M. Excerpt from *Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power*. [Kollman 6.2]
  - Canes-Wrone, Brandice. Excerpt from *Who Leads Whom? Presidents, Policy, and the Public*. [Kollman 6.3]
  - Beckmann, Matthew N. 2010. *Pushing the Agenda: Presidential Leadership in U.S. Lawmaking*. Ch 1. [Canvas]

- June 14. MIDTERM and The Bureaucracy
  - KJKVJ Chapter 8
  - Wilson, James. Excerpt from *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. [Kollman 7.1]

Week 4: Political Institutions and Political Behavior

- June 19. Federal Judiciary
  - KJKVJ Chapter 9
  - Rosenberg, Gerald N. Excerpt from *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring about Social Change?* [Kollman 8.1]
• June 21. Public Opinion, Elections, and Voting
  - KJKVJ Chapters 10 and 11
  - Lupia, Arthur and Matthew D. McCubbins. Excerpt from The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know? [Kollman 9.1]
  - Leighley, Jan E. and Jonathan Nagler. Excerpt from Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality, and Turnout in the United States. [Kollman 10.2]

Week 5: Influencing Policy and Politics
• June 26. Political Parties
  - KJKVJ Chapter 12
  - Aldrich, John H. Excerpt from Why Parties?: A Second Look. [Kollman 12.1]

• June 28. Interest Groups and the Media
  - KJKVJ Chapters 13 and 14
  - Guess, Andrew, Benjamin Lyons, Jacob M. Montgomery, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. 2019. Fake news, Facebook ads, and misperceptions: Assessing information quality in the 2018 U.S. midterm election campaign. [Canvas]

FINAL EXAM DUE JUNE 30, 2023 on Canvas.