POL SCI 40 - Intro to American Politics

Igor Geyn

Summer Session V 2023

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Office Hours: Timing TBD (by appt over Zoom)
Office: See below.

Web: TBD
Class Hours: See below.
Class Room: See below.

Introduction

Highlights

- Link to Schedule Zoom

Class meeting logistics

Class meetings will take place according to the following schedule:

Daily (M thru F), 9a to 4p. Meetings will roughly follow the form of (1) lecturing and discussion, (2) some form of interactive activity focused on the day's reading and lecture material–as well as synthesizing up to this point in the class, and (3) hearing from a guest speaker. **I reserve the right to modify this layout as needed.**

All sessions take place in-person at the following location: TBD.

Introduction to the class

This class is intended to achieve three primary goals: (1) to introduce you to a condensed version of a lower division UCLA class (we will talk about what this means), (2) to introduce you to *political science coursework* at UCLA in particular, and (3) to, of course, introduce you to course material specific to the study of American Politics.

After taking this course, you should be able to:

- Remember and recollect key facts about the institutions and theories of American politics.
- Cite key readings and findings from the *scholarly study* of American Politics (i.e. point to the evidence used to support the above).
- Deliver, in colloquial terms, compelling arguments about American politics.
- Perform basic statistical analysis by reading charts and other output from analyses commonly used in the study of American politics.

What is expected of me in this class?

You will attend every class meeting having done the reading assigned for the class and will be prepared to engage in discussion with your peers. This discussion will follow the guidelines laid out in the 'ground rules' section below, but in a basic sense you are expected to behave with

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respect and civility towards your classmates. This is being defined broadly here, but–if need be–community guidelines can be established and enforced.

A brief note on skimming: In several places in the course outline below, I ask you to skim a book chapter or two, etc. Skimming is a very important skill to master in college. Often, there is simply way to 'read' (word-by-word) everything that's assigned. **I really do mean in these cases.** If you find yourself spending longer than 15-20 minutes skimming a journal article or longer than 20-30 minute skimming a book chapter, find some time to chat with me.

Course Evaluation / Grading

Below are the details of how you will be graded for this course.

Attendance and Participation (30%)   Attendance for this course will consist of four things:

- Showing up to the weekly meetings, prepared for discussion (i.e. having done the reading),
- Posting reading comprehension questions to the class Bruinlearn page each week (two questions each time),
- Participating at least twice each week (ideally, referencing at least one relevant reading or something from a past lecture), and
- Providing discussion questions–separate from reading questions, these are questions aimed at getting the whole group talking–either during the big group meeting or in breakout session at least twice during the course.

Midterm (20%)   More details on the midterm exam to come. The exam will be taken in-person.

Policy Paper (30%)   The Policy Paper assignment will ask you to analyze an existing policy, tool, or practice in American government using what you learn in class. More details on the assignment will be given out with the assignment prompt Week 1.

Final (20%)   More details on the final exam to come. The exam will be taken in-person.

Course Instruction Outline

The following is an outline of course topics. The bullet points below each day's topic outline are the required readings for the day. **Make sure these are done prior to the class meeting.**

There are details of our class meetings–e.g., the guest speaker list–that are not captured below. *I reserve the right to change individual readings in the syllabus below. The general outline of the course will remain the same.*

Week 1: Introduction, Institutional Overview, Why Study American Politics, Why Political Science is not History, and Basic things about political science models.

Day 1: Meeting each other, Overview of the course, Mini lecture on U.S. political institutions.

- Ackerman, Seth. "A Blueprint for a New Party" (2016). LINK
- Beauchamp, Zack. "Is American democracy really in peril? A debate with Ross Douthat" (2022). LINK
- Oster, Emily (in ParentData). "Alcohol and Health: Cutting through the noise" (2023). LINK
- Metcalf, Stephen. "Ezra Klein's "Why We're Polarized" and the Drawbacks of Explainer Journalism" (2020). LINK

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Day 2: Models–what are they good for? Motivating political science models with models of (more common, real world) applications outside politics.

- American Experience, PBS. "Game Theory Explained". LINK
- Chwe, Michael Suk-Young. *Jane Austin: Game Theorist* (2013). Chapter 1 [*skim*]. *Read* Chapter 2.

Day 3: The U.S. Constitution, The Federalist Papers*, Legal foundations of the U.S., and Other things you may have missed in AP Gov.*

- Madison, James. "Federalist Papers No. 51 (+ No. 10, No. 81, and No. 78)" (Various Years). LINKS on Bruinlearn and Igor's course page.
- [*read, do not skim*] Kernell, Samuel et al. *The Logic of American Politics* (2021). Chapter 2.

Day 4: Putting models into practice, 'Workhorse' models in political science, Why (political) scientists use models.

- [*watch*] Marginal Revolution University. "Spatial Models" (2013). LINK
- voteview.com. "About" section. LINK
- [*skim*] Hall, Andrew B. *Who Wants to Run?* (2019). Chapter 3.

We will also talk about the Policy Paper assignment today.

Day 5: Reviewing week 1 and a 'Learning by Doing' activity.

- No Reading.

Week 2: More on elections, Who gets elected (and who doesn't) in U.S. politics–and why this matters, Some comparative context, and More details on key institutions in U.S. politics.

Day 6: Overview of elections in U.S. politics, Famous theories (and empirical evidence–for and against) about elections, and Some (recent) real-world problems with U.S. elections.

- [*skim*] Kernell, Samuel et al. *The Logic of American Politics* (2021). Chapter 11.
- Bouie, Jamelle. "'Stop the Steal' Didn't Start with Trump" (2021). LINK
- Lloyd Sealy Library, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY. "U.S. Elections 1972-2020: Scandals" (Last Updated 2023). LINK
- Levinson, Alexis and Tim Alberta. "Trump Bulldozes Blue Wall, Wins White House" (2016). LINK

Day 7: Holiday.

- No reading

Day 8: Descriptive facts and core theories about the main elected *and* unelected *branches of the U.S. government.*

- [*skim*] Kernell, Samuel et al. *The Logic of American Politics* (2021). Chapters 6 and 7.
- Davis, Julie. "In Wielding Rarely Used Veto, President Obama Puts Budget Heat on Republicans" (2015). LINK

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- Whittington, Keith E. "Trump's Defiance is Destroying Congress's Power" (2019). LINK
- [*read, do not skim*] Kernell, Samuel et al. *The Logic of American Politics* (2021). Chapter 9.

You will also take an in-class midterm today. Details about the exam will be announced in the days prior.

Day 9: How do things work in other democracies and why this is important.

- Boix, Charles. "Setting the Rules of the Game: The Choiceof Electoral Systems in Advanced Democracies" (1999).
    - *Read* the main substantive portions of the paper. *Skim* the data and methods sections of the paper. (*We will also talk about what this means in the previous class.*)
- [*skim*] Lijphart, Arend. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries* (2012). Chapter 2.

Day 10: Reviewing week 2 and a 'Learning by Doing' activity.

- No reading.

Week 3: Everyone else in American politics, Key historical (or are they?) issues in American politics, Key contemporary policy debates, and State and local politics.

Day 11: The Politics of civil rights and civil liberties, Legal and so-called de facto *segregation (in housing, education outcomes, etc.), Discrimination, and the Fight for equality in U.S. politics.*

- [*skim*] Kernell, Samuel et al. *The Logic of American Politics* (2021). Chapters 4 and 5.
- Aaronson, et al. "The Effects of the 1930s HOLC "Redlining" Maps" (2021).
    - *Read* the main substantive portions of the paper. *Skim* the data and methods sections of the paper. (*We will also talk about what this means in the previous class.*)
- Fishback, et al. "New Evidence on Redlining by Federal Housing Programs in the 1930s" (2021).
    - *Read* the main substantive portions of the paper. *Skim* the data and methods sections of the paper. (*We will also talk about what this means in the previous class.*)

Day 12: State and local politics, including why we (i.e. the U.S.) have *state and local politics.*

- [*read, do not skim*] Warshaw, Christopher. "Local Elections and Representation in the United States" (2019).
- Ferrer, Joshua, Igor Geyn, and Daniel M. Thompson. "How Partisan Is Local Election Administration?" (2023).
    - *Skim* the entire paper.
- Thompson, Daniel M. "How Partisan is Local Law Enforcement? Evidence from Sheriff Cooperation with Immigration Authorities" (2020).
    - *Skim* the entire paper.

Day 13: A final look at models, Accountability and representation (do they exist?), and Famous moments of political malfeasance.

- Ashworth, Scott. "Electoral Accountability: Recent Theoretical and Empirical Work" (2012).
- Kilpatrick,, Carroll. "Nixon Resigns" (1974).
- Jalonick, Mary. "Jan. 6 panel shutting down after referring Trump for crimes" (2023).

Day 14: Contemporary policy debates in U.S. politics. And pre-final review.

- Hoeven, Emily. "Tensions rise between Newsom, mayors over homelessness" (2022). LINK
- [*watch*] Pew. "Trust in America: Do Americans trust their elections?" (2022). LINK
- Pew. "Americans' views of the problems facing the nation" (2021). LINK
- Kolbert, Elizabeth. "How Politics Got So Polarized" (2022). LINK

Your Policy Paper assignment is due today. I will post a submission link to Bruinlearn.

Day 15: The Final, and one last 'Learning by Doing' activity

- No reading.

You will take an in-class final exam today. Details about the exam will be released in the days prior to the exam.

Course Details

Office Hours

I will be conducting office hours over Zoom **TIMING TBD**. You can sign up for an appointment slot here. Appointments are on a first-come, first-served basis.

E-mail Policy

I will respond to emails within 24 hours. Emails must be marked with "POL SCI 40" or something similar somewhere in the subject line. If you reasonably believe that what you're emailing about is urgent, please flag it with "URGENT" in the subject line. I also expect you to be courteous, professional, and respectful in your email correspondence.

A few brief notes on what we're doing in this class

What are the 'ground rules' for this class?

Everyone in this class is treated as an adult who is enrolled in a leading university having demonstrated proficiency in a number of academic and social skills. My philosophy to structuring conversation stems directly from that: *A group of students should be able to have a rigorous hour-ish discussion about research politics while being respectful, adhering to University, departmental, and other guidelines (to which you agreed when enrolling in UCLA and this course), and refraining from actions that undermine the goals of discussion and of the course broadly.* That is stated somewhat vaguely by design.

Put another way, I expect some adherence to the golden rule (do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you) as well as all statutory and other policies that regulate speech elsewhere on campus. I am not setting out to establish additional guidelines *ex ante*.

Details of Grading Policy

Late submissions will be docked a later grade (10% of the total assignment grade) for each and every 24 hours past the submission deadline. Assignments submitted more than 72 hours late will not receive a grade.

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What will help me succeed in this class?

You are all constantly optimizing your time based on a set of constraints: completing work for other courses, balancing non-academic obligations, maintaining your mental health, navigating COVID-era reality, and so on. Learning to strike a balance across these competing priorities, when you're able to, will likely be an ongoing challenge throughout your time at UCLA.

That said, you will get more out of this course if you spend more time on it. This includes, but is not limited to:

- **Going back through your notes**, organizing them, and making sure that they will help you days/weeks out from when they're taken.
- **Doing assigned reading carefully, and in some cases multiple times.** *I am happy to talk about reading strategies, of which note-taking strategies are a part.*
- **Explaining your ideas/thoughts/theories/opinions to others, preferably (1) people in this class and preferably (2) with a manageable number of people (e.g., 3-5) for a reasonable amount of time – prior to section.** *Things always sound better in your head than they do out loud.*

You should also lean on each other as your peers' experience will be much more useful than any advice I could give.

Attendance

Attendance in-person for each of our sessions is mandatory and counts towards the portion of your grade that comes from participation. See more details about what it means to attend our sessions in the above portions of the syllabus.