

17.20 Introduction to the American Political Process

Lecture: T, Th 3-4, 37-212

Recitation: TBA

Professor Gabriel Lenz

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This class introduces students to recent research on democracy in the United States. It explores questions such as, to what extent do members of Congress represent their constituents' interests and to what extent do public officials exploit their power to aid their reelection bids. The class also examines recent findings on heuristics and biases in citizens' voting behavior, such as the tendency for voters to be myopic. Through the reading and writing assignments, students will learn to think analytically about democracy and understand the statistical tools used to study American government. This is a communication intensive course. As such, you are required to write at least 20 pages – that's the C.I. requirement – and participate in class discussions.

Requirements

1. Participation (40 % of your grade)

Regular attendance and participation in lecture and recitation. Recitation and lecture attendance is mandatory. You are also required to meet at least once with the writing tutor. Finally, you are required to participate in one of several Election Day activities, such as conducting an exit poll or serving as poll workers. I will provide details in class.

2. Short papers and presentation (20 % of your grade)

Write three short papers on class readings. I will announce topics and due dates in class. The paper should be 3-4 pages, double spaced, 12 points, one-inch margins. Students must briefly present arguments from their papers in recitation at least once. Write a one-page paper about your experience on Election Day.

3. Term paper (40 % of your grade. Draft 50 %, Final 50 %)

I will announce topics. The paper should be 11-12 pages, double spaced, 12 points, and one-inch margins. Draft due 11.21. Final due 12.9.

Resources for this Course:

Books for you to purchase:

Bartels, *Unequal Democracy* (Princeton Univ., 2008)

Brady and Volden, *Revolving Gridlock* (Westview Press, 2006)

Fiorina, *Culture War* (Pearson Longman, 2005)

Kinder and Sanders, *Divided By Color* (Univ. of Chicago, 1996)

Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (Yale Univ., 1974)

On-line resources:

The Constitution and the Federalist Papers are available through a wide variety of online sources:

www.findlaw.com, www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/federal/fed.htm,

www.constitution.org/afp.

Academic Articles: available through Stellar and [Google scholar](#)

Outline:

Does American Democracy Survive Its Citizens?

9.4 Introduction, Is There a Public Will?

Does Religion Dupe Citizens into Voting against Their Self-Interest?

9.9 Introduction to Statistics in the Social Sciences

Frank, *What's the matter with Kansas?* pp. 1-10, 59-62, 89-109, 135-137

9.11 Bartels, "What's the Matter with What's the Matter with Kansas"

9.16 Frank, "Class Is Dismissed"

9.18 Lecture on Writing

Bartels, "What's the Matter with What's the Matter with Kansas (Revised)"

9.20 First short paper due. No reading assignment.

Red vs. Blue States: Is America Too Polarized for Democracy?

9.23 Fiorina, *Culture War*, Chs. 1-5

9.25 ... Chs. 6-8

Retrospective Voting: A Solution?

9.30 Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, Ch. 1 & 4

10.2 Healy and Malhotra, "Preferring a Pound of Cure to Announce the Prevention: Voting, Natural Disasters, and Government Response."

Voting on Party's Reputations (Issue Ownership): A Solution?

10.7 Petrocik, et al., "Issue Ownership and Presidential Campaigning, 1952–2000." And I will
Political Science Quarterly, Volume 118, Number 4, 1 December 2003, pp. 599-626

Collective Responsibility

10.9 Fiorina, Morris. "The Decline of Collective Responsibility in American Politics."
Daedalus Summer, 1980:25-46

Citizen Knowledge and Attitudes

10.14 Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, Ch. 6-7

10.16 Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, Ch. 8

Prejudice

10.21 Kinder and Sanders, *Divided by Color*, Chs. 1, 4.

10.23 ... Chs. 5, 7

Do Parties and Elected Officials Reflect the Interests of Their Constituents?

10.28 Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, Ch. 9

Suggested: Ansolabehere, Steve, Jim Snyder, and Charles Stewart. "Candidate Positions in Congressional Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 45: 136-159

10.30 Gilens, "Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 2005
69(5):778-796.

11.4 Election Day (no class)

Congress and the Executive: Do Democratic Institutions Serve the Public Will?

Congress: What motivates Representatives and Senators?

11.6 Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, Ch. 1
Articles of Confederation, U. S. Constitution, and Federalist Papers: 10, 51, 84
(www.constitution.org/afp/afpchron.htm)

11.11 Veterans Day

11.13 Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, Ch. 2

Policy Making: Do Elections Change Policy?

11.18 Brady and Volden, *Revolving Gridlock*, Ch. 2

11.20 ... Ch. 3

Draft of term paper due (11.21)

11.25 ... Chs. 6-7

11.27 Thanksgiving

Executive

12.2 Fiorina et al., *America's New Democracy* (third edition), Ch. 10.

12.4 Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, Ch. 2

Media and Politics

12.9 Zaller, "A Theory of Media Politics: How the Interests of Politicians, Journalists, and Citizens Shape the News," Chs. 1, 7