AMERICAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Understanding Political Change over Time

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Political Science

OVERVIEW

This course examines American Political Development, a subfield of American Politics that seeks to understand political change over time. Topics are divided into seven broad categories. First, we will examine the concept of political development itself, considering a variety of perspectives on how political change occurs. Second, we will consider American political culture and its impact on citizens. Third, we will examine state building, considering how, when, and to what extent the capacities of the American national government developed. Fourth, we will look at the political economy of the U.S. in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, considering the interactive relationship between economic activity and politics. Fifth, we will consider how ideas may impact political change. Sixth, we will survey American political institutions to get a sense of how they have changed over time and by what developmental processes. Finally, we will conclude the course by considering and debating the consequences the government’s turn toward policy as a solution for national problems.

More broadly, the lectures, discussions, primary source readings, and scholarly readings will help us achieve a few course goals. First, we will gain an improved ability to make sense of how American politics works (or doesn’t work!). Second, we will compare arguments and theories offered by various authors, critically evaluating their usefulness for describing American politics. Third, we will place the ideas from the readings into the context of present-day current events in politics. Finally, as a more general goal for the course, I hope that we all can take a step forward toward becoming more politically critical, informed, and engaged citizens. Politics can be maddening, but it becomes more interesting and fun when you can make some sense of what is going on.

Our activities in class may take a number of formats. While we will often have lectures, depending on the topic there may also be discussions, debates, and/or small group work. Political concepts and topics often may reveal differences of opinion – this is particular true around election years! So even as some of us may have strong views and potentially disagree, I ask that we listen to each other’s viewpoints while working to ensure that civility and respect for each other are always present in our conversations.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Students are expected to complete the readings, come to lecture, and participate in class. Three times during the semester, students will be expected to complete short papers critically analyzing one or more weeks of readings. The papers should be 5 pages double-spaced. There will also be

* In drafting this syllabus, I have partly drawn upon Stephen Skowronek’s “American Political Development” graduate seminar syllabus at Yale from Spring 2015.
a final exam for the course. Alternatively, students may elect to do a research paper in place of the exam. Topics for this should be discussed with me and approved by Week 5. The grade breakdown is as follows:

- Participation – 15%
- 3 Response Papers – 30%
- Final Assessment
  - Final Exam – 55%
  - Alternative Research Paper – 55%

**COURSE OUTLINE**

I. THE CONCEPT

**Week 1: What is Political Development?**


*Primary Sources:*

- Articles of Confederation (1777)
- Constitution (1787)
- Bill of Rights (1789)

II. POLITICAL CULTURE AND IDENTITY

**Week 2: Culture and Religion**

Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), Ch. 1

Rogers M. Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America,” *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (September 1993): 549-566

**Week 3: Race**


**Week 4: Gender and Sexual Orientation**


J. Kevin Corder and Christina Wolbrecht, *Counting Women’s Ballots: Female Voters from Suffrage through the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), Ch. 1


**III. STATE BUILDING**

**Week 5: A New American State**

Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Ch. 1-4, Intro to Part 2, Ch. 6-7


Robert P. Saldin, *War, the American State, and Politics since 1898* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Ch. 1

Megan Ming Francis, *Civil Rights and the Making of the Modern American State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Ch. 1

**Week 6: Was the State New?**


**IV. POLITICAL ECONOMY**

**Week 7: The Gilded Age and Populism**


Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), Ch. 6-7, 10-12

**Week 8: Progressivism and the New Deal**


Karen Orren, *Belated Feudalism: Labor, the Law, and Liberal Development in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Introduction, Ch. 1, 3-6

**V. POLITICAL IDEAS**

**Week 9: Can Ideas Cause Political Change?**


**VI. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

**Week 10: Congress and the Judiciary**

David R. Mayhew, “Congress as a Handler of Challenges: The Historical Record,” *Studies in American Political Development* 29, no. 2 (October 2015): 185-212


**Week 11: The Presidency and Administration**


Joanna L. Grisinger, *The Unwieldy American State: Administrative Politics since the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Ch. 2, 5

**Week 12: Political Parties**


Ruth Bloch Rubin, *Building the Bloc: Intraparty Organization in the U.S. Congress* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), Ch. 1, 6, 8


**VII. POLICYMAKING**

**Week 13: The Rise of the Policy State**


**FINAL EXAM**

- Identifications – Choose 10 of 15 – 40%
- Long Essays – Choice two of three questions – 60%