

# South Dakota School of Mines & Technology

## POLS 102 – 01: American Political Issues, Spring 2024

### I. Basic Information

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#### Course Description

Presidential election years often feel like American politics is on the brink of major change. This year is no exception. It is especially unprecedented for how back-to-back events disrupted what began as a blasé repeat of the 2020 election. At the beginning of the summer Former President Trump was running against President Biden, but then everything was turned upside-down. First, there was a blundered debate performance by the incumbent, followed by a resounding call by establishment Democrats for President Biden to withdraw from the race. When the call couldn't get any louder, there was an assassination attempt on former President Trump, then—when it looked like things couldn't get any *weirder*—President Biden withdrew from the race, passing the nomination to Vice President Kamala Harris. If you have found your head reeling from trying to understand what the heck is going on, you are not alone and you have come to the right place!

This course provides an introduction and overview to American politics and the American political system. The purpose of this course is to provide you with a broad understanding of institutions, principles, structures, and theoretical approaches to help you make sense of contemporary American politics. Many contemporary political scientists and pundits have warned that American democracy is in peril. In this course, we will look at why this may or may not be the case. There is also an increasingly entrenched partisan divide in American politics. While one class cannot solve the problem of increased divisions, we will explore ideas from across the political spectrum, and read texts that explore why this division exists. We begin by looking at the structural and ideological foundations of the American political system. These concepts are then used to study a broad selection of prescient topics in American politics.

### II. Tentative Course Schedule

Weekly reading list subject to change. Please refer to the Weekly Modules (found under “Content” in D2L). Updates to the reading schedule will be posted to D2L under the Weekly Modules, with at least one week's notice.

Unless otherwise noted, all readings can be found in Kollman, Ken. *Readings in American Politics: Analysis and Perspectives*, Sixth Edition, W.W. Norton Publishing, 2023. ISBN: 978-0393441697

## Section I: Foundational Concepts in American Politics

Since the founding of the United States there has been a persistent tension between freedom and equality, as embodied in the tension between the Bill of Rights and the decision to establish a federalist republic, which later veered toward representative democracy. This tension between freedom and equality is—in many respects—at the root of the partisan divide in the country. Should people have more rights to level the playing field, or should people have the freedom to do as they please with minimal government intervention? This tension may be so persnickety because the framers of the Constitution had to make big compromises to

establish the U.S., and they could not have foreseen the consequences of their compromises, nor how massive the U.S. would become. In this section we will study the framing of the constitution, the benefits and limitations of a federalist system, and civil rights vs civil liberties.

### **Orienting Questions:**

1. Is the United States a democracy, a republic, or something else? What would need to be changed to make the US more democratic?
2. What are the benefits and limitations of federalism? Is this a system that should be preserved?
3. What are the implications of social inequality, and the ways in which inequality has been addressed?
4. How has rights-oriented discourse changed in the past twenty years in American politics?

### **Week 1: Introduction to American Politics**

- Monday August 26: **Introduction to the Course**
- Wednesday August 28: **Collective Action Problems**
  - 1.1 Mancur Olson Jr. From *The Logic of Collection Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. 1-19.
  - 1.2 Jane Mansbridge, “What is Political Science For?”” *Perspectives on Politics*, 20-30.
  - **Recommended:**
    - **Watch:** [Rational Choice Theory](#): Collective Action Problems
- Friday August 30
  - **Friday Activity 1**
    - **Prisoner’s Dilemma Game**

### **Week 2: No Class**

### **Week 3: How Democratic is American Politics?**

- Monday September 9: **How Democratic is the American Constitution?**
  - Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution*, Chapters 1-3 (on D2L)
- Wednesday September 11: **Representation & Electing the President**
  - Dahl, Chapter 4
  - 2.4 Robert M. Alexander, from *Representation and the Electoral College*, 70-77.
- Friday September 13
  - **Friday Activity 2: Media Literacy Workshop**

### **Week 4: The Constitution and the Founding**

- Monday September 16: **Anti-Federalism & Compromises in the Founding**
  - 2.1 Brutus, *The Antifederalist*, No. 1, 43-51.
  - Adam Jentleson. *Kill Switch*. 2021. Chapter 1: Birth of a Notion. 17-41. **(D2L)**.
- Wednesday September 18: **Birth of the Supermajority**
  - Adam Jentleson. *Kill Switch*. 2021. Chapter 3: Dawn of the Supermajority. 64-84. **(D2L)**.
  - **Recommended:**
    - Lee Drutman. “To Fix Congress, Make It Bigger. Much Bigger.” *Washington Monthly*. 2018, November/December. [Online](#).
    - Lila Thulin, “Why the Equal Rights Amendment Is Still Not Part of the Constitution,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 15, 2020. [Online](#).
- Friday September 20

- **M-Day! Classes Cancelled after Noon**

## Week 5: Federalism

- Monday September 23: **Federalism – Should it Stay, or Should it Go?**
  - 3.1 William H. Riker. From *Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance*. 85-100.
  - 3.2 Pamela J Clouser McCann, Chales R. Shipan, and Craig Volden, “Top-Down Federalism: State Policy Responses to National Government Discussions,” *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*. 100-105.
  - 3.3 Donald F. Kettl, from *The Divided States of America: Why Federalism Doesn’t Work*, 106–115.
- Wednesday September 25: **Federalism and Health Care**
  - Jamila Michener, *Fragmented Democracies*, Chapter 1: Medicaid, Political Life, and Fragmented Democracy, 1-18 (D2L)
  - Jamila Michener, *Fragmented Democracies*, Chapter 3: Federalism, Health Care, and Inequity, 33-59 (D2L)
- Friday September 27
  - **Friday Activity 3: Federalism**

## Week 6: Civil Rights

- Monday September 30: **The New Jim Crow**
  - Michelle Alexander. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Chapter 1: The Rebirth of Caste. 25-73. (D2L).
  - 4.4 Vesla M. Weaver and Gwen Prowse, “Racial Authoritarianism in U.S. Democracy,” *Science*, 146-152.
- Wednesday October 2: **Color Blindness & Civil Rights**
  - Keeanga Yamahtta Taylor, “Barack Obama: The End of an Illusion” and “From Civil Rights to Colorblind” (2016). Skim the second chapter.
- Friday October 4
  - **Friday Activity 4: Implicit Bias**

## Week 7: Civil Rights & Civil Liberties Continued

- Monday October 7: **Gay and Trans Rights**
  - Heath Fogg Davis, *Beyond Trans: Does Gender Matter?* Introduction: Sex Stickers. 1-23. (D2L)
  - William N. Eskridge, and Christopher R. Riano, “Coming out of the Constitutional Closet,” in *Marriage Equality: From Outlaws to In-Laws* (Yale University Press: 2020): pp. 5-33.
  - **Recommended:**
    - Amisha Padnani and Celina Fang. “Same-Sex Marriage: Landmark Decisions and Precedents,” *NYT*, June 26, 2015. [Online](#).
    - Heath Fogg Davis, *Beyond Trans: Does Gender Matter?* The Sex Markers We Carry. 25-53.(D2L)
- Wednesday October 9: **Religious Rights & the Right to Bodily Autonomy**
  - 4.3 Andrew R. Lewis. From *The Rights Turn in Conservative Christian Politics: How Abortion Transformed the Culture Wars*. 137-145.

- **Listen:** *The Experiment* Podcast: The Crime of Refusing Vaccination. *The Atlantic*. March 25, 2021. [Online](#).
- Friday October 11
  - **Friday Activity 5**

## Section II: Institutions of Government in American Politics

In this section of the course, we will learn about US political institutions, including congress, the presidency, the judicial system, and the bureaucracy. There are innumerable theories debating why congress is prone to gridlock, the personality of the Supreme Court (SCOTUS), and whether US presidents have surpassed the authority vested to them by the constitution.

### Orienting Questions:

1. What are the obstacles to compromise in Congress? And what types of leadership exist in Congress?
2. Is the Supreme Court dynamic or stagnant? Should SCOTUS play an active role in policymaking or a more passive role of ensuring the constitutional legality of legislation enacted by Congress and POTUS?
3. Have US Presidents used court-packing to their benefit? Should this be allowed?
4. In a general sense, have US Presidents superseded the power granted to them by the US Constitution, and if they have, should they be reined in?

### Week 8: Congress

- Monday October 14
  - **No Classes: Indigenous People's Day**
- Wednesday October 16: **Agenda Setting and Congressional Style**
  - 5.1 David R. Mayhew, from *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. 155-167.
  - 5.2 Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins from *Setting the Agenda*. 168-187.
  - 5.3 William Bernhard and Tracy Sulkin from *Legislative Style*. 188-196. (**skim**)
- Friday October 18: **Public Gridlock vs Secret Congress**
  - 5.4 Frances E. Lee, from *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign*. 197-203.
  - 5.5 Sarah Anderson, Daniel Mark Butler, and Laurel Harbridge-Yong, from *Rejecting Compromise: Legislators' Fears of Primary Voters*. 204-212.
  - Simon Bazelon and Matthew Yglesias. "The Rise and Importance of Secret Congress." *Slow Boring*. June 21, 2021. [Online](#).
  - **Recommended:**
    - Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, Introduction: A House Dividing. 1-22. (D2L).

### Week 9: The Presidency

- Monday October 21: **Presidential Power**
  - 6.2 Charles Cameron, from *Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power*. 222-227.
  - 6.4 William G. Howell, from *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action*. 249-262.
  - 6.5 Dino Christenson and Douglas Kriner, from *The Myth of the Imperial Presidency: How Public Opinion Checks the Unilateral Presidency*, 263-272.
  - **Recommended:**

- 6.1 Richard E. Neustadt, from *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. 213-222
  - 6.3 Brandice Canes-Wrone, from *Who Leads Whom? Presidents, Policy, and the Public*. 228-248.
- Wednesday October 23: **Lying in Politics**
  - Hannah Arendt. "Lying in Politics: Reflections on The Pentagon Papers." *The New York Review of Books*. November 18, 1971. [Online](#).
- Friday October 25
  - **Friday Activity 6**

## Week 10: Bureaucracy and the Judiciary

- Monday October 28: **Bureaucracy**
  - Watch! Crash Course on [Bureaucracy Basics](#) and [Types of Bureaucracies](#) with Craig Benzine
  - 7.2 Matthew D., from "Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms," *American Journal of Political Science*. 287-301.
  - 7.3 Susan L. Moffit, from *Making Public Policy: Participatory Bureaucracy in American Democracy*, 302-321.
  - Nicholas G. Napolio, "Pork during Pandemics: Federal Spending and Public Health Crises," *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy*, 322-326.
- Wednesday October 30: **The Judiciary**
  - 8.1 Gerald N. Rosenberg, from *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* 327-333. (**skim**)
  - 8.5 Thomas M. Keck, "Court-Packing and Democratic Erosion," from *Democratic Resilience*. 382-392.
  - Adam Liptak. "Does the Supreme Court's Cherry-Picking Inject Politics Into Judging?" *The New York Times*, October 9, 2023. [D2L](#). [Online](#).
  - Jennie Suk Gerson. "The Conservative Who Wants to Bring Down the Supreme Court," *The New Yorker*. January 4, 2023. [D2L](#). [Online](#).
  - **Recommended:**
    - Adam Serwer. "The Lie About the Supreme Court Everyone Pretends to Believe." *The Atlantic*. September 28, 2021. [Online](#).
- Friday November 1
  - **Friday Activity 7**

## Section III: The Public's Role in National Politics

Without the public or *demos*, one cannot have democracy. In this section we will learn about public opinion, the development of in-group/out-group biases, and how this can be reinforced with distance or undone through proximity. We will learn how campaigns target particular identity groups and how or why this can be problematic. And we will learn how dissensus politics and social movements may have more sway in electoral politics than one might assume. We will also watch with anxious anticipation to see how the balance of power will be altered in the US (if it will) as a result of the 2024 Elections.

### Orienting Questions:

1. Campaigns often target (or choose not to target) voters based on their racial and class identities. What do you make of this tactic? Is it fair and strategic, or is it unethical and does it traffic in tropes?
2. How do in-group/out-group biases form, and how might we counter them?

3. Why might certain demographics feel discouraged from the electoral process? Is there any evidence that the electoral process does not benefit everyone equally?
4. What role does dissensus politics play in altering the political landscape? What are other theories of political change, and why might they fail to explain how social movements might be responsible for some political sea change?
5. What is the role that money plays in politics and how has money influenced the framing of political issues?

## Week 11: Public Opinion

- Monday November 4: **Mass Opinion & Polarization in American Politics**
  - 13.4 Christopher Achen and Larry M. Bartels, from *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*, 621-631.
  - 9.1 John R. Zaller, from *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, 393-397.
  - 9.2 Donald R. Kinder and Cindy D. Kam, from *Us Against Them: Ethnocentric Foundations of American Opinion*, 398-404.
  - 9.4 Ryan D. Enos, from *The Space Between Us: Social Geography and Politics*, 432-439.
  - Samara Klar, Yanna Krupnikov, and John Barry Ryan. "Is America Hopelessly Polarized, or Just Allergic to Politics?" *The New York Times*. April 12, 2019. [Online](#).
- Wednesday November 6
  - **Flex Day Post Elections (Readings TBD)**
- Friday November 8
  - **Friday Activity 8**

## Week 12: Campaigns, Voting, and Elections

- Monday November 11: **How Campaigns Perceive Voters**
  - 14.1 Marisa A Abrajano, from *Campaigning to the New American Electorate: Advertising to Latino Voters*. 661-670.
  - Cristina Beltrán. *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity*. Chapter 4: From Identification to Representation: Civic Latinidad and the Making of "the Latino Vote." (D2L).
  - 10.3 Hersh, Eitan D. from *Hacking the Electorate: How Campaigns Perceive Voters*. 463-471.
- Wednesday November 13: **Who even votes anyway?**
  - 10.2 Jan E. Leighley, and Jonathan Nagler, from *Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality, and Turnout in the United States*. 457-462
  - 10.4 John Holbein and D. Sunshine Hillygus, from *Making Young Voters: Converting Civic Attitudes into Civic Action*. 472-382.
- Friday November 15
  - **Friday Activity 9:**

## Week 13: Labor, Protest, and Dissent

- Monday November 18: **Conflict, Dissensus Politics, and Unions**
  - E. E. Schattschneider. *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*, Chapter 1: The Contagiousness of Conflict. 1975. (D2L).
  - Francis Fox Piven. *Challenging Authority: How Ordinary People Change America*, Chapter 5: Movements and Reform in the American Twentieth Century. 2006. Rowman & Littlefield. (D2L).
  - Andy Sernatinger. "Understanding Unions in the United States: A primer on labor law and history." *Tempest Magazine*. January 2021. (D2L)

- **Recommended:**
  - John Cassidy, "What the UAW Won," *The New Yorker*, 2023. (D2L).
- Wednesday November 20: **Indigenous Social Movements**
  - Dhillon, Jaskiron. "What Standing Rock Teaches Us About Environmental Justice," from Nick Estes and Jaskiron Dhillon. *Standing with Standing Rock: Voices from the #NoDAPL Movement*. University of Minnesota Press, 2019. (D2L).
  - Wilkins, Brett. "50 Years On, Legacy of Wounded Knee Uprising Lives in Indigenous Resistance," *Common Dreams*, February 27, 2023. ([Online](#)).
- Friday November 22: **APT: NO CLASS**
  - Work on your papers

### Week 14: Interests and Money; Deception and Fraud

- Monday November 25: **Money, Dark Money, and Politics**
  - Larry M. Bartels, "Economic Inequality and Political Representation," in *The Unsustainable American State*, ed. Lawrence Jacobs and Desmond King. (D2L)
  - Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*. Chapter 9: Money is Speech: The Long Road to *Citizens' United*. 2016. (D2L)
- **Recommended:**
  - Sharon Lerner, "How Charles Koch Purchased the Supreme Court's EPA Decision," *The Intercept*. 2022, [Online](#).
  - **Listen:** Noah Feldman w/Lidia Jean Kott, 'Take-Over: How a Conservative Student Club Captured the Supreme Court,' [Online](#).
- Wednesday November 27: **Flex Day**
  - **Readings (TBD)**
- Friday November 29
  - **No Class – Fall Break**

### Week 15: Climate Change and Environmental Politics in the United States

- Monday December 2: **Climate Change & Sowing Doubt**
  - Naomi Oreskes, and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Climate Change*. Chapter 6: The Denial of Global Warming. 2011.
  - **Listen:** *Drilled Podcast*, Season 1, Episode 1, The Bell Labs of Energy. [Online](#).
- **Recommended:**
  - **Listen:** *Drilled Podcast*, Season 1, Episode 2, The Turn. [Online](#).
  - Sharon Lerner, "How Charles Koch Purchased the Supreme Court's EPA Decision," *The Intercept*. 2022, [Online](#).
- Wednesday December 4: **Climate Denialism**
  - Robert Brulle, "Denialism: organized opposition to climate change action in the United States," in *The Handbook of Environmental Policy*, ed. David M. Konisky, 2020. (pp. 328-341). (D2L).
- Friday December 6
  - **Deadline: Assignment 3 Final Draft of Analytical Essay**

### Flex Day Reading Ideas:

- 9.3 Katherine J. Cramer, from *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. 405-431.

- 9.5 Ashley Jardina, “In-Group Love and Out-Group Hate: White Racial Attitudes in Contemporary U.S. Elections,” *Political Behavior*, 440-448.
- Suzanne Mettler and Trevor Brown. “The Growing Rural-Urban Political Divide and Democratic Vulnerability.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 699: 1. 2022. (D2L).