

Domestic Politics and Policies: 90714 A

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Course Objectives

Knowledge

The U.S. Political system just had a near death experience. As a result, the driving theme of the course is how to keep this democracy from dying. As noted by historian Timothy Snyder, “It is institutions that help us to preserve decency. They need our help as well. Do not speak of “our institutions” unless you make them yours by acting on their behalf. Institutions do not protect themselves. They fall one after the other unless each is defended from the beginning. So choose an institution you care about—a court, a newspaper, a law, a labor union—and take its side.”

(<https://equaljusticesociety.org/2020/04/16/on-tyranny-defend-institutions/>)

Thus, to understand how democracies work, we need to understand the role of the institutions: Congress, the Presidency, and the Courts. We also need to analyze voting rights and the limitations to the right to vote, as well as the meaning of inclusion and exclusion, equity, and inequity. The course will also emphasize the analysis of selected social policies.

Structure

The first section of the course will focus on How Democracies Die and the decline of bipartisan politics from the 1990s until today while the second section will analyze the “embattled right to vote”. The third section will focus on the Supreme Court’s role in defining our rights and the fourth section will allow us to analyze the “hidden rules of race” and their impact on economic exclusion, as well as selected policies that might have the power to repair the exclusion. Due to time limitations, we will not be able to cover all the policies that could play a role in this process, but students will be encouraged to do presentations on topics not covered by the syllabus such as wages, housing policies, and family policies among others.

Skills

The course emphasizes the development of qualitative analytical skills. Students will develop these analytical skills in three different forms and through four different processes:

- a) **Class discussions** which will allow the students to develop the ability to analyze and discuss different institutions and positions in an academic environment.

- b) **Writing policy memos:** It is critical for all of us to be able to summarize a problem, present possible solutions, and recommend policies/solutions to others. The policy memos allow the students to develop these very important skills. Students are expected to assume the role of a policy maker and provide specific policies recommendations. The policy memos emphasize the use of relevant data, the analysis of the problem, and the policy design.
Detailed memo guidelines will be provided to the class with each memo prompt.
- c) **Group presentations:** Group presentations are geared to allow the student to develop the ability to work in a project with two or three other students, learn about a specific topic in depth, and prepare a class presentation. To ensure the effectiveness of the presentation the instructor meets with the student about two weeks before the presentation to define the parameters of the presentation. A draft of the slides needs to be submitted to the instructor at least 48 hours before the presentation. The instructor will review the slides to verify the effectiveness of the presentation and comments will be sent to the group. The group is encouraged to debate alternative policy positions.

Presentation Guidelines: Please read these guidelines carefully.

Students will be asked to select topics for class presentation/debate during the second week of classes. The instructor will form groups of 2-4 students based on the students' preferences.

- a. **Structure:** The presentation can be structured either a debate, or a presentation depending on the nature of the topic. Students will be encouraged to debate the issues and present opposing viewpoints on the issues.
- b. **Content:** Presentations should have an agenda, thesis, a brief historical background, policy/issue analysis, data to support the analysis, and conclusions. Please include a couple of policy recommendations at the end. The material needs to be cited.
- c. **Topics:** Students will select three presentation topics during the second week of classes.
- d. **The instructor will form the presentation groups.** Information regarding groups, topics and dates will be sent during the third week of classes.
- e. The debaters/presenters will meet with the instructor about two weeks before the presentation to determine the format and approach to the issue or policy.
- f. The debate/presentation should last about 20-25 minutes (about 5-6 minutes per presenter)
- g. The debaters/presenters must prepare a power point presentation.
- h. The presenters/debaters must email the instructor a draft of the presentation no later than 48 hours before the presentation. The final copy should be emailed to the instructor and the TA no later than 24 hours before the presentation.

Presentations Grading Rubric

The presentation will be graded according to the following guidelines:

Content: Are the critical issues been addressed? Have the presenters complied with the format described in the guidelines? Is the material cited correctly?

Presentation Style: Are the presenters addressing the audience in a clear, professional, and convincing manner?

Quality of the slides: Includes citing the material and making sure the slides look professional.

Each of these factors will account for 1/3 of the grade.

Conclusion

At the end of the course the student is expected to have learned about the specific institutions and policies included in the syllabus and the principles and actors that inform those policies. Students will also develop a set of analytical, presentation, and writing skills that will be used in a professional setting.

Required readings.

Books:

Students will have to read the following books during the term.

Please note that some of these books are available in Kindle or pdf versions. Feel free to use either a paper or an electronic version if available. If you are using a kindle version, please make sure to keep track of locations for citations.

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, How Democracies Die, Crown Press, 2018.

Laurence Tribe and Joshua Matz, Uncertain Justice: The Roberts Court and the Constitution, Henry Holt and Co., 2014

Allan Lichtman, The Embattled Vote in America: From the Founding to the Present, Harvard University Press, 2018

Andrea Flynn, Susan R. Holmberg, Dorian T. Warren, and Felicia J. Wong, The Hidden Rules of Race: Barriers to an Inclusive Economy, Cambridge Studies in Stratification Economics, Cambridge University Press, 2017

Additional articles will be posted on Canvas

Requirements and Grading

Students are required to attend class, to have done the reading assignments, and to participate in the class discussions. The classes will be run as a combination of lectures, discussions, and class presentations/debates.

Students will have:

- a) To write three memos,
- b) To do a class presentation
- c) To attend class
- d) To participate in the class discussions

Students are expected to fulfill the class requirements on the assigned dates.

Make-up dates for papers will be granted only for medical reasons, or unique personal reasons. Students should present a note from the attending physician if there is a medical reason for not fulfilling the class requirements.

Class Attendance: Students are required to attend class.

Attending class requires to have the video on during class.

Students who do not attend class will have their grade substantially reduced. Grade reduction will proceed as follows:

4-5 unexcused absences= one-point reduction i.e., from A to B

6-7 unexcused absences=two points reduction i.e., from A to C

Over 8 unexcused absences=student will fail the class

If you have a medical or personal reason for missing class, please make sure to email the instructor before class.

Grading:

Presentation/debate: 25%

Three policy memos= 75% (25% each)

Policy Memos: Students will have to write three policy memos.

Guidelines and topics will be distributed about 10-12 days before the memo is due.

All memos should be submitted through Canvas.

Policy memos Due dates

Memo 1: Topic distributed Feb 22 memo due March 7 before 10:00 PM

Memo 2: Topic distributed March 24 memo due April 4 before 10:00 PM

Memo 3: Topic distributed April 28 memo due May 9th before 10:00 PM

Memo Grading Criteria

Problem

Grammar and spelling: minor problems
Major problems

Impact on the grade

minus half grade point
minus one point

Missing sections:

- a) Abstract and/ or conclusions:
- b) Missing one of the content sections:
- c) Failing to analyze the problem:

minus half point each
minus one point
minus one point

Recommendations:

No recommendations
Recommendation idea, but no development
or implementation:

minus one point
minus half point per recommendation

Citations:

Depending on the seriousness of the problem: minus one point to failing grade

Cheating and Plagiarism.

In case of cheating or plagiarism the instructor:

- a) Will make full use of University and the Heinz College policies and regulations.
- b) A full report of the incident will be sent to the Program Director and the Associate Dean.
- c) Students who plagiarize (represent someone else work as yours) will fail the exam/paper (get 0 points in the assignment) and as a result will fail the course. There will be no exemptions made to this rule.
- d) Please remember that the internet makes it very easy to plagiarize, but it also makes it very easy to find the plagiarized material. In other words, Google works for you and for me.

For more details, please see the [University Policy on Academic Integrity](#) in the CMU Website.

Please note:

Please disconnect your cell phone before class

Recording of Lectures University policies establish that “no student may record or tape any classroom activity without the express written consent of the instructor”.

Use of Internet sources: Please use reliable sources. Blogs and Wikipedia are not reliable sources.

Take care of yourself.

Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting enough sleep and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress.

All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone. There are many helpful resources available on campus and an important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is often helpful.

If you or anyone you know experiences any academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings such as anxiety or depression, we strongly encourage you to seek support. Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) is here to help: call 412-268-2922 and visit their website at <http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/>. Consider reaching out to a friend, faculty or family member you trust for help getting connected to the support that can help.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

If you have a disability and have an accommodations letter from the Disability Resources office, I encourage you to discuss your accommodations and needs with me as early in the semester as possible. I will work with you to ensure that accommodations are provided as appropriate. If you suspect that you may have a disability and would benefit from accommodations but are not yet registered with the Office of Disability Resources, I encourage you to contact them at access@andrew.cmu.edu.

Writing Support: Feel free to get in touch with the Global Communication Center (GCC) if you need writing support. You can schedule appointments by emailing the gcc-cmu@andrew.cmu.edu

Syllabus

Please make sure to do the readings before class.

Feb 2 Introduction to the U.S. Constitution and Presidential Power

Read:

The U.S Constitution. Please read Article 1, sections 1-3, and sections 8 and 10. Article 2, sections 1-4, as well as the Bill of Rights. You can find the Constitution here:

<https://constitutioncenter.org/media/files/constitution.pdf>

Richard Neustadt, “Presidential Power” with Matthew Dickinson, On canvas and on the link below

<https://sites.middlebury.edu/presidentialpower/tag/richard-e-neustadt/>

Section 1: How Democracies Die

Feb 4: How did we get here: Newt Gingrich, The Seeds of Dysfunction and its Consequences. The Iron Triangles

Read:

Articles on Canvas and on links

McKay Coppins, “The Man Who Broke Politics: Newt Gingrich turned partisan battles into blood sport, wrecked Congress, and paved the way for Trump’s rise. Now he’s reveling in his achievements”, The Atlantic, October 2018

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/11/newt-gingrich-says-youre-welcome/570832/>

E.J Dionne, Norman Ornstein, and Thomas Mann, “How the GOP Prompted the Decay of Political Norms: The Republican Party laid the groundwork for dysfunction long before Donald Trump was elected president”. The Atlantic, September 2017.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/09/gop-decay-of-political-norms/540165/>

Aaman Irfan, “Negative Effects of Iron Triangles on U.S. Defense Programs: Three Specific Examples”

<http://collegeamericangovernment.org/The%20Structure%20of%20Congress.pdf>
<https://medium.com/@amaanirf/negative-effects-of-iron-triangles-on-us-defense-programs-three-specific-examples-2b5162e0268>

Note: You can also follow Norman Ornstein on Twitter or watch his YouTube videos about the decline of American Democracy. He is an analyst for the American Enterprise Institute and one of the most distinguished experts on Congress.

Feb 9: Fateful Alliances and Gatekeeping in America

Read:

From the book, *How Democracies Die*, pp. 1-52

Feb 11: The Great Republican Abdication and Subverting Democracy

Read:

From the book, *How Democracies Die*, pp. 53-96

Feb 16: The Guardrails of Democracy and the Unwritten Rules of American Politics

Read:

From the book, *How Democracies Die*, pp 97-144

Read:

Article on Canvas and on link

Noah Feldman, “Is Trump above the Law?”, NY Review of Books, Jan. 2020

On canvas and on the link below

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2020/01/16/is-trump-above-the-law/>

Feb 18: The Unraveling and Trump against the Guardrails

Read:

From the book, *How Democracies Die*, pp. 145-204

Feb 23: Saving Democracy?

From the book , *How Democracies Die*, pp. 204-233

Read:

Articles on Canvas and on links

Timothy Snyder, “The American Abyss: Trump, the mob and what comes next”, The New York Times Magazine, January 17,2021.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/09/magazine/trump-coup.html>

You can also watch an interview with Professor Snyder here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ghw-mQB4sQc>

Aila M. Matanock and Paul Staniland, “The Militarization of U.S. Politics: How Trump’s Presidency Opened the Door to Armed Electoral Interference” Foreign Affairs, October 29, 2020

Suzanne Metler and Robert Lieberman, “The Fragile Republic: American Democracy has never faced so many threats all at once”. Foreign Affairs, September/October 2020

First memo topic distributed.

Memo due March 7

Feb 25 A quick look at Foreign Policy and War Powers

Read:

Articles on Canvas and on links

War Powers Resolution, Joint Resolution, Concerning the War Powers of Congress and the President. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/warpower.asp

Jennifer K Elsea, et. al. “Congressional Authority to Limit Military Operation”
Congressional Research Service, 2017, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R41989.pdf>
N. Ornstein and T. Mann, “When Congress Checks Out”, *Foreign Affairs*, Nov 2006,
Vol. 85, No 6, pp. 50-66
B. McKeon and C. Tess, “How Congress can take back Foreign Policy: A Playbook for
Capitol Hill” *Foreign Affairs*, Jan 2019

Section 2: How are we going to make sure democracy survives?
First: learning about how the right to vote has been limited.

**March 2-Voting Rights and Wrongs: The Founding Father’s Mistakes, and a White
Man’s Republic,**

Read:

From the book, *The Embattled Vote in America*, pp. 1-69

**March 4: Voting Rights and Wrongs: Constructing and Deconstructing the Vote,
Votes for Women, the Absent Voter.**

Read:

From the book *The Embattled Vote in America*, read pp. 70-146

**March 9-11: Voting Rights and Wrongs: The Voting Rights Act of 1965; the New
Wars over the Vote: Gerrymandering, new forms of voter suppression**

Read:

From the book *The Embattled Vote in America*, read pp. 147-230

Read:

Articles on Canvas and on links

Laura Royden and Michael Li, “Extreme Maps”, *Brennan Center for Justice*
<https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/Extreme%20Maps%205.16.pdf>

Fred Drews, “A Primer on Gerrymandering and Political Polarization”
<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2017/07/06/a-primer-on-gerrymandering-and-political-polarization/>

Voting Laws Roundup 2017, *Brennan Center for Justice*
<http://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/voting-laws-roundup-2017>

March 16: How to counter voter suppression and foreign interference?

Read: articles on Canvas and on links

L. Norden and I. Vandewalker, “Securing Elections from Foreign Interference”, Brennan Center for Justice.

https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/Securing_Elections_From_Foreign_Interference_1.pdf

Jelani Cobb, “Stacey Abrams Fight for a Fair Vote”, The New Yorker, August 12, 2019.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/08/19/stacey-abrams-fight-for-a-fair-vote>

The Guardian, ‘They always put other barriers in place’: How Georgia activists fought off voter suppression, Jan 13, 2021

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/13/georgia-election-high-black-voter-turnout-activist-efforts-stacey-abrams>

Check on the status of H.R.8363 - Protecting Our Democracy Act and of S.4263 - John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act

Section 3: What is the role of the Supreme Court Decisions in the survival of democracy? How are rights protected or not?

March 18: Introduction to the Supreme Court, Making Rights Real: Access to Justice and the Constitution and Gun Rights

Read:

From the book *Uncertain Justice*, read “Gun Rights: Armed and Dangerous”, pp. 154-184 and “Making Rights Real: Access to Justice and the Court and the Constitution”, pp. 282-320

March 23: Uncertain Justice and Equality, The Constitution and Race: How did the Constitution deal with Slavery?

Read:

From the book *Uncertain Justice*, read “Equality: Are we there yet?”, pp. 1-51

March 25: Freedom of Speech, Campaign Finance, and the Power of Money

Read:

From the book *Uncertain Justice*, read “Campaign Finance: Follow the Money” pp. 88-153

For excellent information on money and politics go to the website of the Center for Responsive Politics or Open Secrets.org.

Read:

Articles on Canvas and on links

Jill Lepore, “The Lie Factory: How Politics became a Business”, The New Yorker, September 24, 2012

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/09/24/the-lie-factory>

Jeffrey Toobin, Annals of Law, “Money Unlimited: How Chief Justice John Roberts Orchestrated the Citizens United Decision”, The New Yorker, May 21, 2012

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/05/21/120521fa_fact_toobin#ixzz2GI8G2dHV

Jane Mayer, “Covert Operations: The Billionaire Brothers who are Waging a war against Obama. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/08/30/covert-operations>

Elizabeth Drew, “How Money Runs Our Politics”, New York Review of Books, [June 4, 2015 Issue](#)

The Conversation, “Election spending in 2020 doubled to \$14 billion – 3 takeaways from a campaign finance expert” Nov 18, 2020. <https://theconversation.com/election-spending-in-2020-doubled-to-14-billion-3-takeaways-from-a-campaign-finance-expert-148700>

Second memo topic distributed.

Memo due April 4

March 30 and April 1st: Health Care: Liberty on the Line: Saving the ACA, but limiting other rights.

Read:

From the *Uncertain Justice* book read “Health Care: Liberty on the Line”, pp. 52-87

Read

Articles on Canvas and on links for Medicare, Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, and the Future of health care.

Chapin White “The Health Care Reform Legislation: An Overview”

<http://www.ncpa.org/pdfs/health-care-reform-legislation-overview.pdf>

Barack Obama, “A President Looks Back on His Toughest Fight: The story behind the Obama Administration’s most enduring—and most contested—legacy: reforming American health care.” The New Yorker, October 26, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/11/02/barack-obama-new-book-excerpt-promised-land-obamacare>

Angela Napili, “Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA): Resources for Frequently Asked Questions” Congressional Research Service, 2017 <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43215.pdf>

Patricia Davis, “Medicare Financial Status in Brief”, Congressional Research Service, 2020, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43122.pdf>

Allison Mitchell, Coordinator, “Medicaid: An Overview” Congressional Research Service, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43357.pdf>

April 6: Gay Rights, Privacy and Abortion,

Read:

From the *Uncertain Justice* book read “Privacy what have you got to hide” and “Rights for Sale: Discounting the Constitution”, pp. 219-81

Read

Articles on Canvas and on links

Dahlia Lithwick, “Extreme Makeover: The Story Behind the Story of Lawrence v. Texas”, The New Yorker, 2012

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/03/12/extreme-makeover-dahlia-lithwick>

David Cole, Gay Marriage: A Careful Step Forward, N.Y. Review of Books June 27, 2013

<http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2013/06/27/gay-marriage-careful-step-forward/>

Section 4: Democracy requires recognizing diversity and inclusion.

April 8 and 13: Understanding economic exclusion

Read:

From the book, *The Hidden Rules of Race: Barriers to an Inclusive Economy*, pp. 1-92

April 20: Education policies and educational exclusion

Read:

From the book *The Hidden Rules of Race: Barriers to an Inclusive Economy*, pp. 93-107

Read:

Additional articles on Canvas and on the link

Joseph Carroll, “Race and Education 50 Years after *Brown v. Board of Education*:

Majority of whites, blacks satisfied with their own educations, but blacks to a lesser

extent” Gallup data. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/11686/race-education-years-after-brown-board-education.aspx>

Economic Policy Institute, “Obama education policies a lot like Bush policies”

http://www.epi.org/publication/obamas_education_policies/

Mona Vakilifathi, “Why Trump is trying to reduce the Status of the Department of Education, Brookings Institution, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/07/16/why-trump-is-trying-to-reduce-the-status-of-the-department-of-education/>

Diane Ravitch, “The Dark History of School Choice: How an argument for segregated schools became a rallying cry for privatizing public education.” *The New York Review of Books*, January 14, 2021, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2021/01/14/the-dark-history-of-school-choice/>

April 22: Welfare policies: Analysis and Impact

Read:

All articles on Canvas and on links

Gene Falk, “The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant:

Responses to frequently Asked Questions”, *Congressional Research Service*, 2017

<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL32748.pdf>

Robert Moffitt “A Primer on U.S. Welfare Reform” *Institute for Research on Poverty*

<https://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/pdfs/foc261c.pdf>

Ashley Burnside and Liz Schott, “States Should Invest More of Their TANF Dollars in Basic Assistance for Families”, *Center for Budget and Policy Priorities*, February 25, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/states-should-invest-more-of-their-tanf-dollars-in-basic-assistance>

Eduardo Porter, “The Myth of Welfare Dependency Corrupting Influence on the Poor” *The New York Times*, 2015

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/21/business/the-myth-of-welfares-corrupting-influence-on-the-poor.html>

Arthur Delaney “Behind the Scenes, Trump Diligently Tries to Slash Social Programs”
Huff Post
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-social-safety-poverty-welfare_n_5cd5d5ebe4b054da4e895073

April 27: Something good: Social Security Policy’s Positive Impact

Read:

All articles on Canvas and on links

Dawn Nuschler, “Social Security Primer” Congressional Research Service, 2017,
<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42035.pdf>

W. Morton and W Liou, “Social Security: The Trust Funds”, Congressional Research Service, 2017
<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL33028.pdf>

Benjamin W. Veghte, Elliot Schreur, and Mikki Waid , “Social Security and the Racial Wealth Gap”, National Academy of Social Insurance, December 2016
<https://www.nasi.org/research/2016/social-security-racial-wealth-gap>

Peter Orzag and Peter Diamond, “Saving Social Security: A Balanced Approach”
<https://economics.mit.edu/files/684>

April 29: Health Inequality and Covid19

Read:

From the book, *The Hidden Rules of Race: Barriers to an Inclusive Economy*, pp. 127-144

Read

Article on Canvas and on the link

Joseph Betancourt, MD, PH, “Communities of color devastated by COVID-19: Shifting the narrative.”
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/communities-of-color-devastated-by-covid-19-shifting-the-narrative-2020102221201>

May 4: A quick look at Immigration

Read:

All Articles on Canvas

American Immigration Council, “How the United States Immigration System Works”, 2016 <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/how-united-states-immigration-system-work>

Center for American Progress, “The Facts of Immigration Today: 2017 edition, By the CAP Immigration Team and Michael D. Nicholson Posted on April 20, 2017, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2017/04/20/430736/facts-immigration-today-2017-edition/>

Gary Reich, “Hitting a Wall? The Trump Administration Meets Immigration Federalism” *The Journal of Federalism*, Volume 48, Issue 3, 1 July 2018, Pages 372–395, <https://academic.oup.com/publius/article/48/3/372/5004795>

Sarah Pierce, et al., “U.S. Immigration Policy under Trump: Deep Changes and Lasting Impact”, Transatlantic Council on Migration, 2018

May 6: The criminal Justice System and what will take to keep and expand our democracy?

Read:

From the book, *The Hidden Rules of Race: Barriers to an Inclusive Economy*, pp. 108-126 and pp. 145-174