Power and Politics in America

Course Number: POLSC-UH 2412

Credit Hours: 4

Prerequisites: None (though Intro to Political Thinking and Statistics are highly recommended)

Meeting Times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:35-4:50pm Location TBA

Instructor: Adam Ramey (adam.ramey@nyu.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00-4:00pm [A5 Rm 141]

Course Overview:

This course has as a central focus the political institutions of the United States and the effects of those institutions on policy outcomes. In the first half of the course, we look at how public opinion and voting serve as mechanisms to connect national institutions with the preferences of voters. In the second half of the course, we explore the three main branches of government: the Legislative Branch, the Executive Branch, and the Judicial Branch and evaluate the tension between voter preferences and institutional constraints.

Prerequisites:

None [however, Statistics for Social Sciences and Introduction to Political Thinking are highly recommended]

Textbooks:

There are two textbooks for the course:

• The American Political System (Core Edition with Election Update) by Ken Kollman
• *Readings in American Politics: Analysis and Perspectives* by Ken Kollman (supplement)

The first text will serve as our central textbook for the semester. The second book is a collection of writings by top scholars in American politics. *Please note that these textbooks are more for reference purposes. The vast majority of course content will be drawn from the readings.*

**Grading:**

Grades will be determined by three factors: weekly memos (one per week from weeks 2-14 at 5% each; 60% total), participation (15%), and a final critical paper (25%). The memos are intended to be short (1-2 page) summaries of the week’s readings. This will help to ensure that students have grasped the major takeaways. Memos are due on the Wednesday of the respective weeks.

The participation grade will be determined by student attendance and performance during in-class discussion. Students should come to class prepared to discuss the readings.

Finally, the critical paper will be a 7-10 page paper in which students choose one of topics in the course to delve in to more deeply. The student will find relevant literature on the topic, evaluate the arguments of the existing authors, and propose new strategies to resolve conflicting conclusions in the literature. This should be seen as the first step to a full paper. The second step would be to conduct the proposed analysis. This paper is due on the last day of class. No exceptions.

**Late Assignments and Attendance:**

Attendance and on-time assignments are essential for doing well in this course. If you miss a class, it will adversely affect your participation grade. *If you have extenuating medical or family conditions that require your absence, please communicate to me by e-mail in advance;* otherwise, performance penalties will ensue.

**No** extensions will be provided for the critical paper, since it is a semester-long project.
Teaching and Learning Methodologies:

This course will be taught using a combination of lectures on Mondays and discussions on Wednesdays. Media sources (e.g., audio and video) will be used where appropriate.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

At the end of the semester, students will be able to

- Understand the key aspects of the American political system
- Explain the role of institutions in terms of their effect on political outcomes
- Compare and contrast the roles of the three branches of government
- Identify major patterns and shifts in public opinion over the last three decades
- Formulate cogent arguments about the relationship between public opinion and governmental action

Course Schedule:

Week 1 (Jan. 27): Course Introduction; Introduction to American Politics

Reading:

Kollman Ch. 1

Week 2 (Feb. 1, 3): The Spatial Model and Constitutional Design

Reading:

Kollman Ch. 2

Charles Stewart, *Analyzing Congress*, 2nd Edition; Ch. 1

James Madison, *Federalist 10* and *Federalist 51* (Reader Ch. 2.1 and 2.2)
Week 3 (Feb. 8, 10): Disequilibrium and the Foundation of Political Parties

Reading:

Kollman Ch. 12

John Aldrich, from Why Parties? (Reader Ch. 12.1)


Reading:

Kollman Ch. 5

David Mayhew, from Congress: The Electoral Connection (Reader Ch. 5.1)

Week 5 (Feb. 22, 24): Congress: On Being a Member of Congress

Reading:

Kollman Ch. 5

Richard Fenno Jr., from Home Style (Reader Ch. 5.2)

Week 6 (Feb. 29, Mar. 2): Congress: Institutional Structures and Gridlock

Reading:

Kollman Ch. 5

Gary Cox and Mathew McCubbins, from Setting the Agenda (Reader Ch. 5.3)

Week 7 (Mar. 7, 9): The Presidency: Leadership and Power

Reading:

Kollman Ch. 6;

Richard E. Neustadt, from Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents (Reader Ch. 6.1)
Brandice Canes-Wrone, from *Who Leads Whom? Presidents, Policy, and the Public* (Reader Ch. 6.3)

William G. Howell, from *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action* (Reader Ch. 6.4)

Week 8 (Mar. 14, 28): The Presidency: Bargaining with the other Branch

**Reading:**

Kollman Ch. 6

Charles M. Cameron, from “Bargaining and Presidential Power” (Reader Ch. 6.2)

Week 9 (Mar. 30, Apr. 4): The Bureaucracy: Principals, Agents, and More

**Reading:**

Kollman Ch. 7

Mathew D. McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz, “Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms” (Reader Ch. 7.2)

Dan Carpenter, from *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy* (Reader Ch. 7.3)

Week 10 (Apr. 6, 11): The Courts

**Reading:**

Kollman Ch. 8

Gerald N. Rosenberg, from *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring about Social Change?* (Reader Ch. 8.1)

*Marbury v. Madison* (Reader Ch. 8.2)
Week 11 (Apr. 13, 18, 20): Public Opinion and its Malcontents

Reading:

Kollman Ch. 9

Arthur Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins, from *The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?* (Reader Ch. 9.1)

John R. Zaller, from *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Reader Ch. 9.2)

Week 12 (Apr. 25, 27): Political Participation, or Lack Thereof

Reading:

Kollman Ch. 10

Steven Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, from *Mobilization, Participation, and American Democracy* (Reader Ch. 10.1)

Robert D. Putnam, from *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Reader Ch. 10.3)

Week 13 (May 2, 4): Interest Groups and Lobbying

Reading:

Kollman Ch. 11

Terry M. Moe, from *The Organization of Interests: Incentives and the Internal Dynamics of Political Interest Groups* (Reader Ch. 11.1)

Ken Kollman, from *Outside Lobbying: Public Opinion and Interest Group Strategies* (Reader Ch. 11.2)
Week 14 (May 9, 11): Political Parties Revisited: Do Voters Care?

Reading:

Kollman Chs. 13-14

Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, from Polarized America (Reader Ch. 13.3)


CRITICAL PAPER DUE ON MAY 11th BY END OF CLASS