Core Seminar:  
The Domestic Politics of the United States  
(POL-GA 1350)  

Professor Patrick Egan  
patrick.egan@nyu.edu

Overview

The purpose of this core seminar is to engage in an (inevitably limited) exploration of the research conducted by political scientists on U.S. politics. We are interested in the United States for three primary reasons. First, we care about the United States—and its political culture and institutions—in itself. The U.S. remains the preeminent world power, we are its residents and citizens, and Americans make up many of the students in our classrooms. Second (and in contrast), the United States provides us with a particularly well-documented example of the politics of advanced industrial democracies. Thus the concepts, patterns and conclusions developed from the study of U.S. politics can help us understand other cases around the world—and when they fail to do so, it is interesting and enlightening. Third, many of the methodological innovations (both formal and empirical) in political science come from the literature on American politics. Here we can encounter them in situ.

Logistics

class meetings: Mondays, 2 – 3:50 pm  
19 W. 4th Street, Room 217

contact info: email (best way to reach me): patrick.egan@nyu.edu  
office phone: (212) 992-8078

office hours: by appointment  
19 W. 4th Street, Room 327
Requirements

Grades will be based upon the following criteria:

- **Attendance** and active **participation** in seminar.

- **Presentations** of seminar readings. We’ll discuss the schedule for these presentations in our first meeting. Three students per week will prepare a 15-20 minute presentation with slides that briefly reviews the readings’ main findings and poses questions for your classmates to consider. Post your slides to our class Dropbox folder, which I will create our first week of class.

- **Posts** written in response to the readings on weeks when you are not presenting the readings. These should be brief (1-2 paragraphs). They should *not* summarize the readings. Rather they should discuss interesting strengths and weaknesses of the research, and questions that are raised by the findings therein. They are due by 9 a.m. on the morning of class and should be posted to our class Google doc, link here: [http://bit.ly/2wgV9jf](http://bit.ly/2wgV9jf)

- A final **research paper** (of 25 to 40 pages in length) that advances your own scholarship on a relevant topic.
  - The topic of the paper must be approved by me no later than November 6.
  - The paper is due on Monday, December 18.

Note: Evaluation of students will depend on their stage in their graduate career: expectations are higher for students who have progressed further in the Ph.D. program.

Readings

All assigned journal articles may be found online via JSTOR and other electronic archives. Happily, the NYU Libraries now make most of the assigned readings from books available online, as well. Any other readings that come from books will be made available within a week of the relevant seminar meeting date.
Schedule

Note: We are meeting on Columbus Day (October 9), which is an NYU holiday. We will not meet on the day set aside by NYU to make up for this holiday (December 12).

I. Overview

Week 1: Sept. 11  Introduction to the seminar. Assignments of weekly presentations.

Week 2: Sept. 18  What's Going On?

We’ll spend most of this semester looking at “trees.” But this week, we’ll examine the “forest” of American institutions and behavior with some important overviews. They provide a glimpse of the themes and live questions regarding contemporary U.S. politics that we will keep in our sights as we proceed through the seminar.

McCarty, Nolan M., Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2016. Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches. MIT Press. [This book is not available online through the library; I'll leave three copies in my box for the seminar to share. It's also available for about $30 with free two-day shipping from Amazon Prime.]


Readings and data on the 2016 presidential election:


II. **American Political Institutions**

Here we examine how America’s unique set of institutions—in particular, its separation of powers, its directly elected head of state, and its strong federalist system—have important consequences for politics and policy.

**Week 3: Sept. 25**

**Congress: Organization and Control.**

Scott Gehlbach, *Formal Models of Domestic Politics*. Chapter 4: “Veto Players” (pp. 74-87).


**Week 4: Oct. 2**

**Congress: Lawmaking (and lack thereof)**


Week 5: October 9  The Presidency.


Week 6: October 16  Inter-branch relations and bargaining.


Week 7: October 23  The Bureaucracy.


Week 8: October 30  The Judiciary.


Week 9: November 6  Federalism.


Tausanovich, Chris and Christopher Warshaw. 2014. “Representation in Municipal Government” *APSR.*


III. American Political Behavior

We turn to examining the components of American political behavior, including the two-party system, voters’ preferences, competence and decision-making, U.S. election campaigns, and the role identity is playing in preference formation and vote choice.

Week 10: November 13  Political Parties.


Week 11: November 20  Voters: preferences and competence.


Week 12: November 27  
Voters: partisanship, choices and decision-making.


Amy E Lerman, Meredith L. Sadin and Samuel Trachtman. 2017. “Policy Uptake as Political Behavior: Evidence from the Affordable Care Act.” *APSR.*

Week 13: December 4  
Campaigns.


Huber, Gregory A. and Kevin Arceneaux. 2007. “Identifying the Persuasive Effects of Presidential Advertising,” *AJPS.*


Week 14: December 11  
Identity.


