

POL386 US Government and Politics, Fall 2021

Instructor: Renan Levine renan.levine@utoronto.ca

Office Hours: Location TBD 11 am – noon on campus; Tuesday 1-2:30 pm via Zoom

Description

Who rules the United State of America? This course will investigate this question by examining how power is attained and how power is exercised in American elections, the legislative process, the bureaucracy, and the federal courts. Particular attention will be paid to the role of national interest groups, regional economic interests, and new modes of political mobilization.

In this term, we will begin by paying special attention to the Obama and Trump Presidencies. We will then look at how federalism affects the response to COVID-19 before examining how power is wielded in the presidency, Congress, and the judiciary.

Objectives

- Understand the causes and consequences of the Obama and Trump presidencies and appreciate what their tenures teach us about power in the United States
- Identify power dynamics that enables the U.S. President to set the policy agenda.
- Comprehend how Congress, interest groups & the judiciary can thwart Presidential ambition.

Readings

There is no textbook required for purchase in this class; all readings are drawn from academic sources that are available (for free) to anyone with a UTORid or will be shared on Quercus.

Assignments

	<u>Deadline (11:59 pm)</u>	<u>Value</u>
Reflection Paper	October 8	15
Essay (Midterm)	October 18	20
Will Legislation Pass? Analysis Memo	November 27	20
Final Exam	TBA	40
Participation		5

Assignment Details

All work will be submitted electronically to Quercus and/or the PepperR discussion forums (accessible through Quercus). More detailed descriptions of each assignment will be posted on Quercus.

Reflection Paper

Drawing on at least three different sources from class materials, students should answer the question: *What does the election of Donald Trump teach you about power in American Politics?* Since this is a reflection paper, you do not need to come to a specific conclusion, but rather one should reflect upon what they knew before the class began, and how class materials (required and/or recommended readings and/or movies) have shaped their understanding of power in American politics.

Essay (Midterm)

Students will write a timed, two-hour essay evaluating Coates' argument that Trump was America's "First White President" in light of readings and films we covered in class.

Will Legislation Pass? Analysis Memo

Students will be given a few timely issues and/or pieces of legislation pending before Congress. Students will write a memo assessing the likelihood of the legislation becoming law.

Final Exam

A cumulative exam comprised of multiple choice questions with a few short answer and/or essay question(s).

Participation

A largely subjective measure, but one in which credit(s) can be earned during the year through attendance, engagement during lecture, on-line discussion forum postings and occasional activities announced by the instructor.

Grading Policies

Late Assignments

Unless explicitly specified, the deadline for all assignments is at 11:59 pm on turnitin.com (via Quercus). All matters of grading, exemptions, and discipline procedures will be handled in accordance with the UTSC Academic Handbook. After a 72 hour grace period, late assignments will be penalized 3% per day for the next seven days of lateness. After ten calendar days of lateness, the instructor will refuse to accept the work for grading. We will generously grant extensions for work, family, child care, or other non-health reasons prior to the deadline or quiz, so please make sure you, or someone you delegate, contacts the instructor or the TA whenever there may be an issue. Students whose health renders them unable to complete an assignment should also contact the professor before deadlines under non-exceptional circumstances.

See <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/main/faculty/resources/faculty/acaresources> for the complete handbook.

Appeals

Any student who believes that any work has been unfairly graded may ask the instructor to re-evaluate his or her work. Grading appeals should be submitted via email with a cover letter explaining the basis of the appeal to the instructor.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that the U of T degree that you earn will be valued as a true indication of your individual academic achievement and will continue to receive the respect and recognition it deserves.

Please familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>). It is the rule book for academic

behaviour at the U of T, and you are expected to know the rules. A list of potential offences can be found here:

<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/instructors-and-staff/tips-templates/AI-statement-and-checklist.docx>

The above link also includes a checklist that you should consult before you submit written work in any class to avoid any plagiarism issues. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense with a severe penalty. It is essential that you understand what plagiarism is and that you do not commit it. Please see <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize> for more information and tips on how to avoid plagiarism.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course assignments to the University's plagiarism detection tool website for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their material to be included as source documents in the University's plagiarism detection tool reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the University's plagiarism detection tool service are described on the company web site.

The final exam is open book; however, students may not communicate with each other during the exam. Because there are likely multiple sittings of the final exam, students should avoid all communications with other students from whenever students start taking the test until an hour or two after the test window closes to ensure that no one is given an unfair advantage.

Accessibility

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility; I wholeheartedly share that commitment by ensuring that every student should have an fair chance to excel in this course. I strive to create and maintain an inclusive environment and promise to provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations to persons who require them. Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. I invite you to discuss any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials with me and/or staffers at Accessibility Services. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services at 416-978-8060 or accessibility.services@utoronto.ca. Appointments and drop-in sessions for accessibility advisors and learning strategists are available. For more information, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>

Other

Family Care & Involvement

During these challenging periods of quarantine, I know that many often face unexpected child- and elder- care challenges. If you have children of any age, or responsibility to care for children, you should know that when circumstances require their presence, they are welcome to be present during online lectures or office hours. I know that for many of us, finding quiet, private space for class may be impossible. When/if we are on-line, videos may be kept off at all times (at most, you may need to show me your screen). Please encourage any family member who may be interested in politics, scientific research, or just some cheap entertainment to listen to lectures. I will be happy to respond to any

questions they might have, just please remember that everyone's work in this class must reflect their own efforts. If they are not interested, but present, just remember to keep yourself muted. 😊

Religious Accommodations

As a student at the University of Toronto, you are part of a diverse community that welcomes and includes students and faculty from a wide range of cultural and religious traditions. For my part, I will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations, or other compulsory activities on religious holy days not captured by statutory holidays. Further to University Policy, if you anticipate being absent from class or missing a major course activity (such as a test or in-class assignment) due to a religious observance, please let me know as early in the course as possible, and with sufficient notice, so that we can work together to make alternate arrangements.

Contact

The instructor will be available via Quercus email, and U of T email. Please include POL386 in the subject line of all emails. Please do not hesitate to request a time for a face-to-face or phone chat, including after 9 pm on weeknights. Be forewarned, the instructor is often occupied (or pre-occupied) with his children in the morning, and at dinner time, and attempts to unplug during the Jewish Sabbath from Friday evening through Saturday evening (if not all weekend). During the week, the instructor will try to respond to emails within 48 hours. Students are encouraged to use the Quercus (Pepper) discussion forums for class questions.

Weekly Schedule

September 12 Basics of American Politics

Lectures (Live and pre-recorded) on basics of American government & on the legislative process (Quercus)

Schoolhouse Rock "How a Bill Becomes a Law" [YouTube](#)

Elving, Ron. How Does The Electoral College Work, And Is It Fair? NPR (video/text)

<https://www.npr.org/2016/11/06/500660424/how-the-electoral-college-works-and-why-you-don-t-want-to-think-about-it>

September 19 Obama to Trump

Film: "America's Great Divide: From Obama to Trump (PBS Frontline)," Ep. 1 (Kanopy) Episode 2 is recommended.

Oliver, J. Eric, and Wendy M. Rahn. "Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667, no. 1 (2016): 189-206.

Hopkins, Daniel J., and Samantha Washington. "The Rise of Trump, The Fall of Prejudice? Tracking White Americans' Racial Attitudes Via A Panel Survey, 2008–2018." *Public Opinion Quarterly* (2020).

September 26 Trump: the First White President? Online Discussion

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The first white president." *The Atlantic* (October 2017): 74-87.

French, David. "No, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Trump Isn't 'America's First White President'" *National Review* September 12, 2017. <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/451289/ta-nehisi-coates-wrong-hillary-clinton-not-racism-why-donald-trump-president>

Bitecofer, Rachel. *The Unprecedented 2016 Presidential Election*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, Ch. 7 "Everybody Sucks, 2016," pp. 93-103. https://link.springer-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-61976-7_7

Reny, Tyler T., Loren Collingwood, and Ali A. Valenzuela, "Vote Switching in the 2016 Election: How Racial and Immigration Attitudes, Not Economics, Explain Shifts in White Voting," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume 83, Issue 1, Spring 2019, Pages 91–113

Recommended:

Sides, John, Michael Tesler and Lynn Vavreck *Identity Crisis* Princeton University Press, 2018 (pages 14-20 (economy and presidential approval); 50-60 (news coverage of Trump); 76-87 (Trump appeals) – available online through library <http://go.utlib.ca/cat/12297179> and/or read <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/11/5/18052390/trump-2018-2016-identity-politics-democrats-immigration-race> & <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/03/how-political-science-helps-explain-the-rise-of-trump-the-role-of-white-identity-and-grievances/>

Margolis, Michele F. "Who wants to Make America Great Again? Understanding Evangelical Support for Donald Trump." *Politics and Religion* July 2019.

Discussion Questions:

What was different about the reaction to Obama's presidency? Can one easily separate economic angst and anxiety from race-related populism and resentment?

Was Trump elected because of prejudice – against women (or a woman), Black-Americans, foreigners, Muslims, etc? Or, was Trump elected because Clinton was so disliked and distrusted?

What changed about prejudice during the Obama and Trump years? Could they have taken small steps as president to reduce hate and prejudice?

October 4 Party Evolution & Polarization

American Government Open Stax textbook, Chapter 9 <https://openstax.org/books/american-government-3e/pages/9-introduction>

Lee, Frances E. "Populism and the American Party System: Opportunities and Constraints." *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 2 (June 3, 2020): 370–88

Mason, Liliana., Wronski Julie, and Kane, John V. (2021) "Activating Animus: The Uniquely Social Roots of Trump Support," *American Political Science Review*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–9. <https://www-cambridge-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/activating-animus-the-uniquely-social-roots-of-trump-support/D96C71C353D065F62A3F19B504FA7577>

Williamson, Vanessa, Theda Skocpol, and John Coggin. "The Tea Party and the remaking of Republican conservatism." *Perspectives on Politics* (2011): 25-43.

October 8 Reflection Paper Due: What does the election of Donald Trump teach you about power in American Politics?

October 11 Thanksgiving

October 18 Essay Test: Evaluating Coates' claim that Trump was the first white President

October 25 Federalism (COVID-19)

American Government Open Stax textbook, Chapter 3 <https://openstax.org/books/american-government-3e/pages/3-4-competitive-federalism-today>

Holman, Mirya R., Emily M. Farris, and Jane Lawrence Sumner. "Local political institutions and first-mover policy responses to COVID-19." *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* 1, no. 4 (2020): 523-541.

Rodriguez, Cristian, Shana Kushner Gadarian, Sara W. Goodman, and Thomas Pepinsky. "Morbid Polarization: Exposure to COVID-19 and Partisan Disagreement about Pandemic Response." (2020).

November 1 Presidents and Agenda-Setting

Watch Daily Press Briefing by White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki

Eshbaugh-Soha, Matthew. "Presidential Leadership of Partisan News." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2018): 27-48.

Lovett, John, Shaun Bevan, and Frank R. Baumgartner. "Popular presidents can affect congressional attention, for a little while." *Policy Studies Journal* 43, no. 1 (2015): 22-43.

Recommended: American Government Open Stax textbook, Sections 12.3-12.5
<https://openstax.org/books/american-government-3e/pages/12-3-organizing-to-govern>

November 8 Reading Week

November 15 Congress

Rohde, David W. "Reflections on the practice of theorizing: Conditional party government in the twenty-first century." *The Journal of Politics* 75, no. 4 (2013): 849-864.

Griffin, John. "Senate Apportionment as a Source of Political Inequality." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*. 31, no. 3 (2006).

Binder, Sarah. "How political polarization creates stalemate and undermines lawmaking." Monkey Cage Blog, Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/13/how-political-polarization-creates-stalemate-and-undermines-lawmaking/>

November 22 Interest Groups & Lobbying

American Government Open Stax textbook, Sections 10.4 <https://openstax.org/books/american-government-3e/pages/10-4-pathways-of-interest-group-influence>

McKay, Amy Melissa. "Fundraising for Favors? Linking Lobbyist-Hosted Fundraisers to Legislative Benefits." *Political Research Quarterly* (2018): 1065912918771745.

*Note: Instructor will announce (given health conditions) whether this movie will be viewed or merely optional. Film: Dark Money <https://torontopl.kanopy.com/video/dark-money>

November 27 Will Legislation Pass? Analysis Memo due

November 29 Film: Advise & Dissent (Kanopy)

December 6 Judiciary & Precedent

American Government Open Stax textbook, Chapter 13 <https://openstax.org/books/american-government-3e/pages/13-introduction>

Short film about Griswold v Connecticut: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?443313-1/excerpt-birth-control-law>

December 9 (Thursday) Assessment: Democracy at Risk?

Weyland, Kurt. "Populism's Threat to Democracy: Comparative Lessons for the United States." *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 2 (June 2, 2020): 389–406

Final Exam: TBA