

**Manar Shorbagy**

**Fall 2016**

**Time: UW 5:10- 6:30 p.m.**

**Room: C 137 Waleed**

**Office: POLS 2027**

**Office Hours: W 2:00 – 3:15 or by appointment**

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## **POLS 3403- American Government**

As one of the most intriguing presidential campaigns is underway in the US, people around the world are watching with dismay. World leaders have abandoned their ‘diplomatic’ tone to express their concern and sometimes disgust. The French president has recently said that the “excesses” of the Republican nominee Donald Trump “makes you want to retch”. Former UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, while in office, described Trump’s call for banning all Muslims from entering the US as “divisive, stupid and wrong”.

More importantly, in poll after poll, the American voters say they neither trust Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump. Many Americans believe the current campaign has exposed the ills of the US democracy while others see it as a threat to it.

What is exactly going on in the US? What are the characteristics of the US democracy? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Precisely, what are the ills of and the dangers to US democracy?

These, and related questions, will be at the center of our work in this course. We will study the American political system in detail and work to understand the intricacies of its institutions and the complex processes they make possible i.e. we will struggle to understand how the political system actually works. We’ll see how electoral politics and political institutions shape both US national and foreign policy. Throughout, however, we will also engage the broader theme of the likely fate of the American democratic experiment.

### **Course Requirements**

The course material is designed in a way so as to deal with each topic from various angles, thus providing exposure to different points of view on the same issue. What we do in class is we discuss *together* the topic, explore different dimensions thereof, and develop the links to other issues and topics. Therefore, attendance, prior reading and class participation are basic requirements for this course. Otherwise, you will miss the point of class discussion and may not be able to handle the material. Missing class, and thus the discussions, will negatively affect your performance in both presentations and exams.

***Please do not hesitate to come and discuss with me any ambiguities as soon as they occur. The sooner you come the easier it will be for me to help you.***

### **Grading**

\* Exams: Three exams (20% each)

\* Dates of Exams

First Midterm: Oct. 9<sup>th</sup>.

Second Midterm: Nov. 6<sup>th</sup>

Third Midterm: Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>.

\* Research and presentations (30% including 15% for 3 work-in-progress reports)

\* Class performance and attendance 10% (including pop-quizzes)

\* All grades in this course are NON-NEGOTIABLE.

\* No make ups in this course.

## **Readings**

***We will work from mainly three books:***

1. Alexander S. Belenky, Understanding the Fundamentals of the US Presidential Election System, (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2012). Available as an e-book in the library.
2. D. B. Magleby & A. Corrado, Financing the 2008 election: Assessing reform (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2011). Available as an e-book in the library.
3. Edwards, Wattenberg and Lineberry, Government in America, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, (Boston: Longman, 2011). Available in both the bookstore and on reserve in the library.

Please note that we will be doing our work in class while the campaign events unfold. We will watch the results as well during the semester. The months ahead promise to be exciting and important. Ongoing developments will be used to illustrate broader course themes and hopefully will make class discussions lively and engaging for us all. Please note that your research will be focused on the presidential campaign and election. You are advised to follow events as they unfold and through mainly *American* sources. Throughout the semester, we will also watch some videos or parts thereof. However, two movies, in particular, are recommended to watch in their entirety *on your own* before we study 'Congress': 'Mr. Smith Goes to Washington', starring James Stewart, and 'Legally Blonde 2', starring Holland Taylor.

## **Course Outline**

*We will proceed according to the following plan. Any changes will be announced well ahead of time. (Please note that we will give time in class to discussing important unfolding events. Therefore the outline will remain somewhat flexible).*

## **The US Constitution**

Edwards et al: Chapter 2

### **Presidential elections**

- **The Constitutional Origins of the Electoral System**  
Belenky: Chapter 1 (*available on Blackboard*)
- **Primaries, Nomination and the Electoral College Math**  
Belenky: chapters 3 & 5 (*available on Blackboard*)
- **Campaign Finance**  
Candice Nelson, in: Magleby, Ch. 4 (*available on Blackboard*)

### **Political Parties:**

Edwards et al, Chapter 8 and Chapter 9: pp. 288- 294

### **Interest Groups:**

Edwards et al, Chapter 10

Magleby and Goodliffe, in: Magleby Ch. 7 (*available on Blackboard*)

### **Congress:**

Edwards et al, Chapter 11

### **Presidency:**

Edwards et al, Chapter 12

### **National Security:**

Edwards et al, Chapter 17