

Political Science Department

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Fall 2020

Time: UW 2:00- 3:15 p.m.

Office Hours: U 1:00 – 2:00 and by appointment

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POLS 4403- American Government and Politics

In May 2020, George Floyd, an African-American, was killed when a white police officer knelt on his neck for full eight minutes. A footage of the incident showed Floyd saying that he could not breathe more than 20 times. Since then, protests have continued unabated across the US, demanding racial justice. Nine months earlier, a white man opened fire in El Paso, Texas, killing 22 and injuring dozens of others. Police stated that, in a manifesto he wrote shortly before his killing spree, the perpetrator repeatedly referred to the ‘great replacement’ of the white race and expressed a clear hatred of non-whites. Such events make people around the world mystified; isn’t this the same US that had twice elected the first Black president?!

Indeed, America is in turmoil today; protests across the nation, staggering numbers of Covid-19 cases, and a president expressing his desire to delay the presidential elections.

What is exactly going on in the US? What do we make of the racial tension in America? How and why the above events are interrelated? And precisely, what do the institutions of government do and/or fail to do, and why? Can the US president unilaterally delay the elections? What does the US constitution say?

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 works *in theory and in practice*. We will look at the complexities of race and ethnicity in the US. Throughout, however, we will also engage the broader theme of the likely fate of the American democratic experiment.

Our learning outcome, therefore, is that you understand key concepts, grasp the theoretical approaches and be able to use them for analysis. You will also understand the different institutions of the US government and how each works. In an election year, you will also learn how the electoral college chooses the US president and will be able to test your understanding first hand on election night in November.

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 approaches. Therefore, class work and the material are *not* identical. What we do in class is we discuss *together* the topic, explore different dimensions thereof, and develop the links to other issues and topics. *Class work is designed with the goal that, by the end of the semester, you will be able to understand what happen in the US independently, and use the analytical tools you have obtained, in this course, to critically analyze US political events, past and present.*

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 research and exams. You are expected and encouraged to take notes. Recording classes without my consent, however, is unacceptable.

Our Fall online classes, in this course, will almost all be interactive (via zoom). For some specific learning purposes, however, *very few* (2-3) classes will take the shape of recorded lectures, (and will be announced well ahead of time).

Interactive classes are far more engaging; It is important that we all can see, listen to and interact with each other. Therefore, you are expected to turn on your camera **throughout** the class. Failing to open your camera for the entirety of the class and/or leaving your connection unattended means you have **no** participation grade for the class in question. While all of us may sometimes experience a bad internet connection, this should not be *abused* as an excuse for absence or attendance of only some part of the class. I would recommend you make sure your internet connection is adequate.

As mentioned above, this course is grounded in theory but will incorporate ongoing US events. These are extraordinary times in America. We will be doing our work in class while events unfold, (a presidential campaign and an ongoing racial tension). Therefore, new material will be added via blackboard. And throughout the semester, you will receive all-class-emails. Therefore, you are expected to regularly check your AUC email *and* blackboard.

The months ahead in the US 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. Therefore, you are advised to follow events as they unfold mainly through *reliable American* sources (which will be discussed in details in class).

Office hours: *Please do not hesitate to discuss with me any ambiguities as soon as they occur. The sooner you do, the easier it will be for me to help you.* Because the office hours will be conducted online, please email me, in advance, so that I can send you a zoom invitation to meet, and arrange the slots to accommodate all your colleagues. Please note that no off-camera office hours will be conducted.

Grading

* **Class participation and attendance** 10% (including pop-quizzes).

Attendance: you are required to attend all online classes. AUC's attendance policy for Fall 2020 applies to this course.

To link each class to the next, please note that at the beginning of each class you will be orally quizzed individually on the previous class work. In this regard, "*I did not attend the last class*" is not an acceptable answer. *On missing a class, it is your responsibility to update yourself and be ready for the next.*

Participation: In this course, it is very important that you interact and share ideas with your colleagues and myself. *Quality participation enriches class discussion and our ability to see the same topic from different points of views.*

* **Exams:** Three take-home-exams (20% each)

* **Dates of Exams**

First Midterm: Oct. 4th.

Second Midterm: Nov. 4th.

Third Midterm: Dec. 2nd.

* **Research and Critique** (30%). You will receive clear guidelines for your research papers. You are welcome to consult the AUC writing center on your writing skills.

Please expect to work in small groups. Team work is important for our intellectual development. However, the grade of such work is **evenly** divided into an individual and a team grade. It is designed as such so that no student who makes minimal or no

contribution to the teamwork can get away with it. It is also important that other team partner(s) would not be unfairly graded for no fault of their own. You will be provided in class with details of how that works.

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

* **NO MAKE UPS in this course.**

Academic Integrity

* Students are expected to commit to the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity includes a commitment to not engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty include cheating or copying, plagiarizing, submitting another person's work as one's own, using Internet or other sources without citation, fabricating data or citations, stealing examinations, tampering with the academic work of another student, facilitating other students' acts of academic dishonesty, etc. Plagiarism for research papers may result in a zero grade for the paper in question. Unless allowed, collaboration with colleagues during exams may result in a zero grade for the exam in question. Further action, according to university regulations, would also be implemented. You should be aware that all written work might be submitted to "Turnitin.com". Any detected plagiarism will be reported. *The University's statement on academic integrity, from which the above statement is drawn, is available at <http://www.aucegypt.edu/academics/integrity/Pages/default.aspx>*

Readings

All material is available on blackboard.

We will work mainly from a collection of book chapters, articles, videos and documents:

1. Chip Berlet and Mathew N. Lyons, Right Wing Populism in America, Too Close for Comfort, (New York: Guilford Press, 2000).
2. Ta-Nehisi Coates, The First White President, The Atlantic Monthly, October 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/>
3. Roger H. Davidson et al, Congress and Its Members, (Thousand Oaks: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2020).
4. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce L. Oppenheimer, eds., Congress Reconsidered, (Thousand Oaks: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2017).
5. Eddie S. Glaude Jr., Democracy in Black, How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul, (New York: Broadway Books, 2016).
6. David Neiwart, Alt-America, (New York: Verso, 2017).
7. Thomas E. Patterson, We the People, 6th edition, (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies Inc., 2008).
8. The US Constitution: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/index.html>
9. Educational video for the Electoral College. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9H3gvnN468>
10. The Electoral College map 2020.
11. Leonard Zeskind, Blood and Politics, The History of the White Nationalist Movement, (New York, Farrar Straus Giroux, 2009).

Course Outline

We will proceed according to the following plan and in the following order. 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:

Why a system of checks and balances?

Constitutional Democracy, (Thomas Patterson).

Please make sure you open the US constitution for the duration of the classes under this title.

How do Americans choose their President?

Videos of the Electoral College.

Constitutional Democracy, (Thomas Patterson).

Please make sure you open the Electoral College Map for the duration of the classes under this title.

The theory of party realignment:

Political Parties, Candidates and Campaigns. (Thomas Patterson).

‘The 2016 Elections and its Aftermath’, (Congress Reconsidered).

What is the ‘Trump base’?

‘The Id Unleashed’, (Alt-America).

The US political system: theoretical approaches:

Thomas Patterson, Ch. 1

Race in America

Beyond the Civil Rights Movement:

‘Equal Rights’, (Thomas Patterson).

‘The value gap’, (Democracy in Black).

‘Racial Habits’, (Democracy in Black).

‘New Faces of White Nationalism, (Right Wing Populism in America)

Chapter I, (Blood and Politics).

‘The First White President’.

Interest Groups:

‘Organized Interests’, (Congress and Its members)

Conflict and Cooperation:

‘Congress and the President’, (Congress and Its members).