

**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

Political Science 101 - Introduction to American Politics

Dr. Stephen Thomas

Autumn 2005 - MWF 11:30 - 12:48

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**Course description**

This is an introductory course in American government and politics. It does not assume that you want to be a political scientist (although you might), but recognizes that politics shapes our common life and how we argue about it. The course will seek to strike a balance between addressing the practical concerns of adult citizens and examining the professional work of political scientists. Political scientists ask questions that require unnatural detachment and specialized methods, but good political science should also say interesting and useful things to the rest of us. Included are the major fields and methods in the study of American politics.

The course takes a largely “developmental” approach, and seeks to show how present political behavior and institutions continue to be shaped by the past. But our questions, though attentive to what happened in the past, are political questions and not historical ones.

This course will enlist a variety of teaching approaches -- some lectures with discussion, videos, quizzes, written assignments based on the Internet, and essays. There will also be a midterm exam and a final exam.

As we proceed, I will from time to time demonstrate the use of statistical techniques to answer questions of interest to us.

**Goals of the course**

These are the goals of the course.

- To understand the basic political institutions and political culture of the United States: how they work, who gets what, what’s on and off the agenda, strengths and weaknesses.
- To develop the ability to think politically. This is of course not the only way to think, but it is distinctive. Learning some history will help; so will simple analytic methods and basic theory.
- To locate politics and government in relation to other human pursuits: business, science, the arts, and so on.
- To develop informed and reasoned opinions about contemporary American government and politics.
- To develop skill at organizing and interpreting numerical information.

**Textbook and other reading**

We will read three books. We start them more or less at the same time, with class time keyed to them all. From time to time there will be other short readings, as noted in the schedule. It is important not to fall behind on the reading.

- The basic text for the course is Marc Landy and Sidney M. Milkis, *American Government* (McGraw Hill, 2004). This book contains some history. It takes a “developmental” approach to politics by showing how the past changed into the present - that is, how American history sheds light on contemporary politics. Assignments from the text are spread over the whole quarter.
- Richard F. Fenno Jr., *Congress at the Crossroads: Representational Change in the South, 1970-1998* (UNC Press, 2000). This is a portrait of politicians at work in their congressional districts: how to account for different representational styles and electioneering strategies. (See the study questions for Monday October 3, below.)
- From time to time, I will hand out short articles to be read. A few of them, but not all, are already noted in the reading.

I will expect you to read a newspaper regularly or otherwise stay abreast of national political news. From time to time I will make specific assignments. There are on-line versions of *The New York Times* ([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)) and the *Washington Post* ([www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)). By far the best weekly news magazine is *The Economist* and it has lots on the US. *US News and World Report* is acceptable. The *Dispatch* has pretty good national and very good state coverage of politics and government.

Some reading assignments are web-based. The paper will require finding things online. Be sure you are Internet-literate. Talk to me if you are not. If you do not have Internet-access away from the university, familiarize yourself with university computer resources and allow time in your schedule.

### **Course requirements and grading**

I will of course expect you to come to class (see below). Much of our time together will be discussion. Lectures are meant to clarify the reading, frame the classroom discussion, and/or present new material. The final grade will reflect your performance in the following way.

- 10% = the quality (not the frequency) of your contributions to discussion (you will know exactly what to prepare). To be sure you are staying abreast of the reading, I will sometimes "cold call."
- 20% = two quizzes - multiple choice & short answers (each covers incremental work)
- 20% = midterm exam - short answers & essays (covers everything to that point)
- 20% = two short papers
- 30% = final exam (Monday, December 5, 11:30)

### **Schedule of Graded Assignments:**

**Wednesday, October 5 - Quiz #1**

- Friday, October 14** - **Written assignment #1 (3-4pp. interpretative essay)**
- Monday, October 24** - **Mid term**
- Wednesday, November 9** - **Quiz #2**
- Friday, November 18** - **Written assignment #2 (short research report, using the Internet)**
- Monday, December 5** - **FINAL EXAM 11:30am in our same room**

### **Class policies**

*Attendance.* While you will not lose points for absences as such, you may lose participation points if you are not in class to participate. *More important, you will be responsible for whatever new material is covered in class, even if it is not in the textbook.*

*Note-taking.* I expect you to take regular notes and to keep them organized. At the start of each class, I will put an agenda on the board as a guide. Each day's notes should be dated (so we can refer back to previous classes). Notes are for your use, so there is no standard format for them. Figure out what works for you. New material from me or summaries of where we have come from should be in your notes. So should the gist of what other people say. Keep in mind that I will be keeping track of the discussion!

*Make-ups.* No make-ups on quizzes or tests except in the most dire emergencies.

*Mutual respect among adults.* Turn off your beepers/pagers while we are together, and put away the headphones. No smoking or eating in class.

*Classroom decorum.* We are here to be challenged and to learn from each other. Learning is not always easy or comfortable, and any form of prejudice, especially any of my own, gets in the way. The university and I are committed to supporting the learning of all students regardless of gender, race, nationality, religion, disability or sexual orientation. I welcome points of view different from my own, and I will avoid partisan or ideological editorializing in class. If I fail at that, please call it to my attention.

### **Academic honesty**

The following words apply to our quizzes, exams including the final, and written homework assignments or research papers. Cheating (copying from somebody's else's work during an exam, or encouraging another person to do so) is dishonorable, childish, self-defeating, and unacceptable. If you do it, I will report it and you will get a zero. Plagiarism is the act of representing another person's work as your own. These days, the temptation to plagiarism often comes with the Internet. Do not download material from

the Internet and present it as your own. Lying like that is plagiarism. If you use a website as a source, put quotations around anything you present directly, and then cite the source. The same goes for books, articles, and so on. If you put the material into your own words, you must still cite the source. In general, anything but common knowledge needs a citation or "footnote." Here are examples. Columbus is the capital of Ohio is common knowledge. The population of Ohio, at any time, is not. Ohio sent more troops to the Union Army than any other state requires a source; Ohio was part of the Union during the Civil War does not. ". . . That government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth" requires citation. In short, any quotation requires a footnote; failure to use quotation marks, or claiming someone else's knowledge as your own, risks the charge of plagiarism. When in doubt, ask yourself what the honest thing to do is. Telling me that some famous person "did it" will be irrelevant. You'll still get a zero on the work.

### **Disability services**

It is university policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. If you need to request such accommodations because of a physical, mental, or learning disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services, as soon as possible.

## **Outline and Specific Assignments**

Readings are listed for each of six Parts of the course. For each of the classes in each of the Parts, I list study questions or other headings that should guide you as you read. Of course, these questions might change as we go along and I will indicate such changes. They are for your use as you read, and they are a fair indication of what I think is important.

### **Part I - Congress and Representational Change (7 classes)**

First, we review a little American political arithmetic: the Electoral College, reapportionment and redistricting, and the logic of single-member districts. Then we consider an example of representative government in action: how two Georgia congressmen, a Democrat and a Republican, represented the same House district. We see that the changes in Georgia are part of a profound change in American politics in the last generation, Republican resurgence in the South. We step back and ask: what does it mean, practically speaking, to represent a constituency? and, What is political representation anyway?

#### **Reading:**

Richard Fenno, *Congress at the Grassroots: Representational Change in the South, 1970-1998*. Read the entire book by Monday October 3.

Landy & Milkis, pp. 263 (Congressional districting and race)-281 (The Resurgence of Congress), and pp. 465-78 (Republican Resurgence); then Chapter 1 (pp. 3-22)

### September

W21 - The syllabus, and getting started: The Electoral College and American political arithmetic

- Did George W. Bush win the 2000 and 2004 elections?

F23 - continued

1. What is the Electoral College and who are the Electors?
2. How does the Electoral College shape presidential campaign strategies?
3. Who is likely to support, and who oppose, abolishing the Electoral College?
4. What is reapportionment? What is redistricting?
5. What does the Census Bureau do? Take a look at <http://www.census.gov/>

M26 - Representation, in the single-member districts and in the House; what representatives do; how is the Senate different?

W28 - Review of Major Concepts, Landy & Milkis, p. 21 and Chapter 1.

1. How is history relevant to American politics, according to the authors?
2. How do we distinguish between democratic republicanism and liberalism? What is the point of the distinction?
3. "Religion was at the heart of the original founding of this country." What does this sentence mean? To what extent was religion on the *minds* of the original founders?
4. What are the alternatives to "popular sovereignty"? What does "sovereignty" refer to?

F30 - Loose ends and preview of Fenno discussion on Monday.

### October

M3- Congress at the Grassroots (**you should have finished Fenno's book by today**)

1. Why, despite the Republican resurgence nationally in the 1980s, did the Democrats hang on for so long in the South? Why did being a conservative Democrat cease to be "golden" in the South?
2. How did redistricting after the 1970 and 1990 censuses affect the careers of Flynt and Collins?
3. In the 1970s, Flynt represented a "transitional district," says Fenno. What was transitional about it?
4. Flynt's 1976 campaign gets extended treatment. What does that campaign tell us?
5. Flynt, a Democrat, felt betrayed by President Ford, a Republican. Why?
6. This little book compares Jack Flynt and Mac Collins in more or less the same district, which traded a Democrat for a Republican. Fenno says (p. 89) that he expected the changes he observed could be explained by *individual, contextual, and sequencing factors*. Were Fenno's expectations met?
7. Flynt and Collins had similar voting records. Yet "their supportive constituency relationships were very different. One cannot be inferred from the other." (p. 101) Explain.
8. How does "negotiation. . . shape the overall representational relationship" (p. 119)?
  
9. Fenno says "national politics has changed because, in many separate constituencies, representational relations have changed. . . [C]onservative southern Democrats and liberal northeastern Republicans both failed to hang on to their historic constituencies." (p. 151) Explain. This is "one of the most profound changes in recent American politics" noted on p. 2.

W5 - Review, then **QUIZ #1**

## **Part II - Constitutional Arrangements and Political Culture (7 classes)**

Politics is about seeking power and voicing ideas to win support -- always in specific circumstances. (Of course there will be disputes about whether those circumstances can and ought to be changed: such disputes are essential to politics.) To keep our feet on the ground, we need to know how our own politics work by knowing how the basic institutions of our government work. (A constitution can be successful over time only if there is a "fit" between basic institutions of a certain kind and political expectations of a certain kind. Success means that the "rules of the game" are relatively stable and in that sense legitimate.)

We need therefore to review the constitutional principles and basic institutions that made America distinctive among nations and that nurtured a "liberal tradition" in America's political culture.

We begin this unit by locating our politics in the history of political ideas. America was founded as a democracy of a particular kind: a democratic republic or a liberal democracy. As I hope we all learned in school, the basic principles are "natural rights," federalism, and the separation of powers. Natural rights theory defines freedom and equality in a certain way. They also help to explain the emphasis on property rights, the tilt toward free markets and capitalism, and the bias against "big government" in our history.

The people of the founding generation who wrote the Constitution and the Bill of Rights knew they were flawed and that there was no guarantee that the Union would be "perpetual." Obviously the biggest flaw or contradiction was slavery. The republic contained tyranny within it. (The founders chose union over abolition. The circumstances of the Civil War eventually required or allowed Lincoln to combine the two causes. That War worked a revolution in the country's legal and political life, whose effects continue to shape politics today.)

### Reading:

Landy & Milkis, Chapters 2-4 (pp. 25-148) and *Federalist* 10 & 51 (back of book)

I will provide an outline of the argument of *Federalist* 10.

F7- Political culture: Landy & Milkis, chapter 2

1. Landy & Milkis say some unfriendly things about your favorite TV shows! (See page 30.) Do you agree with them?
2. What do you think are the essential components of American political culture? (What does "political culture" refer to?)
3. Do you think you have natural rights?
4. Did the Declaration of Independence apply to the slaves? If so, why were they slaves? If not, were they not recognized as human beings?
5. How did America's first constitution, the Articles of Confederation, operate? What was wrong with it?

M10 - The principles at stake in the Ratification debates: Landy & Milkis, Chapter 3

1. What did the "Federalists" and "Antifederalists" disagree about?
2. What does the term "deliberation" refer to?
3. In what ways was the new constitution different from what went before? What

compromises were required to get agreement in Philadelphia?

- W12 -
1. What issues and principles were left ambiguous?
  2. What problems do Federalist 10 and 51 address? How does Madison think the proposed Constitution contributes to their resolution?

F14 - A review of the decisive moments or “refoundings” in American political development. Landy & Milkis, Chapter 4.

1. What makes these historical episodes worth singling out? Did each episode pass something forward, so to speak, to the present?
2. What do they have to do with democracy and rights? With “development”?
3. How do the “refoundings” help explain present-day political arrangements?

M17 - Finish “refoundings” (Chapter 4) **and** begin Federalism (Chapter 5).

1. What is the “compact theory” of American federalism? Why did it come to be associated with the defense of slavery?
2. What role has the Supreme Court played in defining and redefining federalism?
3. What is the meaning of federalism today? How does it shape American politics and public policy?
4. What is “fiscal federalism”?

W19 - the same continued

F21 - **MIDTERM**

### **Part III - Federalism and Political Economy (4 classes)**

This unit considers some of the many relationships between limited government and a liberal, free-market economy. *Federalism* distributes political and regulatory power between the national and state governments. The term also refers to fiscal relationships: the collection of taxes from individuals and corporations in the states, and the distribution of those funds back to the states. We are interested in how the development of the American economy and the development of American federalism have interacted. *Political economy* refers to economic relationships as they affect, and are in turn affected by, government. The proper role of government in a free economy has been contested throughout our history, and continues to animate political debate.

#### Reading:

Landy & Milkis, Chapters 5-6 (pp. 191-233).

M24- Political Economy (Chapter 6).

1. What makes an economy “liberal”?
2. How did Hamilton’s policies, Whig policy, and the Civil War reshape the American economy?
3. What role did corporations play in early American economic development?

W26- continued

1. What were the Jacksonians’ grounds for attacking corporate “privilege”? What did this have to do with the Second Bank?
2. How did the New Deal affect the American economy?
3. What is the difference between monetary and fiscal policy? What are their respective

objectives?

F28 - continued

1. What are the instruments of monetary policy? What is “money”?
2. How does the Fed influence “interest rates”?
3. Who are the principal players in the budget process?

M31 - continued

1. What are the main functions of the Office of Management and Budget?
2. What congressional committees have budgetary responsibility?

## **Part IV - Legislative-Executive Relations: Congress and the Presidency (4 classes)**

The separation of powers means that functions are shared. The president, for example, is part of the legislative process. Both the Congress and the president oversee the administrative process. The federal government was not designed to be efficient, and interested parties have many ways to try to get what they want.

### Reading:

Landy & Milkis, Chapters 7-8 (pp. 237-331)

November

W2 - “Congressional government”

1. What accounted for the dominance of Congress in much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century?
2. What did Progressive reformers want? What was their attitude toward politics generally?

F4 - After Watergate

1. What explains the resurgence of Congress in the 1970s, and the decentralization of power?
2. What explains the current bitter partisan divisions in the Congress?

M7 - Oversight

- What is “oversight”? What are its value and limits?

W9 - **QUIZ #2**

## **Part V - Governing: The President, the Bureaucracy, and the Courts (3 classes)**

Politics and policy-making in Congress and the presidency: how those branches are organized and how they function. The role of the executive branch in the legislative process; the roles of the Congress and the judiciary in the administrative process. The “parties-in-government.”

### Reading:

Landy & Milkis, Chapters 9-10 (pp. 335-429)

“A Note on *Brown v. Bd. Of Ed.* and the Fourteenth Amendment”

Noam Scheiber”TRB from Washington: Friends,” *The New Republic*, September 26,

2005

Christopher Lee, "Flops and No Fluke in the Annals of Political Payback," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2005.

M14 - Administrative discretion and the "president's program": An overview of decisionmaking in federal agencies (of various kinds)

W16 - "Political" in government: the problem of presidential control

F18 - The *Brown* case, the rights revolution, and the origins of "originalism."

## **Part VI - Political Parties and Other Linkages (4 classes)**

Political parties were despised by the founding generation; think of the classic indictments by Madison and Washington. Yet parties emerged to play essential functions. How did that happen? Currently partisanship is strong but parties are relatively weak. Why? How is public opinion expressed -- and shaped -- and how do various groups respond to it; why has American politics become more ideological? Who are the other players in the "linkages" between public opinion and governmental action?

### Reading:

Landy & Milkis, Chapters 11-12 (pp. 435-524)

Excerpt from John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties: The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (1995).

M21 - Why did parties become essential? Why did they fail in 1860?

W23 - Party systems

M28 - Politics by other means (besides parties and elections)

W30 - Inside the beltway: pork and the public interest

December

F2 - Review and wrap-up