

PO207-30 Politics of the U.S.A.

20/21

Department

Politics & International Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Trevor McCrisken

Credit value

30

Module duration

20 weeks

Assessment

Multiple

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module provides a comprehensive introduction to the political system of the United States of America and to the rival theoretical accounts explaining the political outcomes this system generates. It focuses on the ideas that influence US politics, and the key actors that participate in the American political system. These actors include the President, Congress, the Supreme Court, political parties, and the electorate. It also assesses the power and influence of informal actors that affect US politics such as the media and special interest groups, as well as considering the impact of race, ethnicity, gender and religion on political participation and representation. Finally, the module explores the political formulation of foreign policy.

Module aims

The module aims to:

Provide students with a comprehensive overview of how government and politics are organised in the United States, focusing on the federal level.

Introduce students to the complex and distinct nature of American political institutions, along with their historical and ideational basis.

Locate contemporary US politics within the context of the theoretical debates on the nature of the US political system, and its relation with the rest of the world.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

The module is broken down into two parts. The first part (Term One) analyses the basis of the US political structure (American political culture, the Constitution, federalism, political parties, and the electoral system) and will show how the political ideals and issues that motivated the founding of the United States continue to shape its political system today. It also focuses on the formal institutions of US federal politics (Congress, the Presidency, the Supreme Court) and surveys issues relating to the role, power and structure of these political institutions. The second part (Term Two) considers issues of representation and participation in US politics by looking at electoral behaviour and political engagement, at nongovernmental influences on US politics (interest groups, the media, money and class, religion, gender, race and ethnicity), and at the politics of US foreign policy.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- To be familiar with the main foundations of the US political structure;
- To understand the format, functions and powers of the major institutions of US government at the federal level;
- To have an awareness of the major policy debates in contemporary US politics;
- To be familiar with a wide range of contemporary academic literature on US government and politics;
- To be able to critically analyse complex ideas, both orally and in writing, with relation to contemporary US politics.

Indicative reading list

The following books provide the majority of the core reading for this module. There are copies of these books in the Library and the Learning Grid. The reading list is not meant to be exhaustive, but to give an introduction to the texts available on topics covered in this module. The majority of these books and journals should be in the Library, if they are not please report this to me and the library. Subject to the legal requirements of copyright law, copies of all required readings are available in the Short Loan Collection in the Library. You can also consult the bibliography of any of these books to find further readings that might interest you.

The two main textbooks for this module are available to buy BUT are also available through the Library as Electronic Resources so you can download or read them for free. Just follow the links to the Library entry for each book and follow the links there to the electronic copies. You can choose between McKay and Bowles and McMahan, and supplement this reading with the core reading listed each week:

David McKay, *American Politics and Society*, 9th Edition (Wiley, 2017)

OR

Nigel Bowles and Robert K. McMahon, *Government and Politics of the United States*, 3rd Edition (Palgrave, 2014)

These books alone, however, are not enough and only provide a basic introduction into relevant topics and key issues. You should also use the Library to consult on a regular basis the further reading suggested under each topic.

General sources

Apart from the module core texts there are many other general American politics books. Chapters from these books are not, on the whole, listed under the further reading for seminars listed below, but they can prove useful for seminar preparation:

R.V. Denenberg, *Understanding American Politics* (4th edition)

A. Grant, *Contemporary American Politics*

A. Grant, *The American Political Process*

T. Hames and N. Rae, *Governing America*

K. Janda, J. M. Berry and J. Goldman, *The Challenge of Democracy: Government in America*

Richard S. Katz, *Political Institutions in the United States*

I. Katznelson and M. Kesselman, *The Politics of Power: A Critical Introduction to American Government* (4th ed)

T. Lowi and B. Ginsberg, *American Government: Freedom and Power*. (6th ed)

R. McKeever and P. Davies, *Politics USA*, 3rd Edition (Pearson, 2012)

R. Maidment, *The American Political Process*

B. Miroff, R. Seidelman and T. Swanstrom, *Debating Democracy: A Reader in American Politics*

M. Parenti, *Democracy for the Few*

J. Roper, *The Contours of American Politics*

R. Singh, ed., *Governing America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

R. Singh, ed., *American Politics and Society Today*

J. Wilson and J. Dilulio, *American Government: The Essentials*

T.R. Dye & L.H. Zeigler, *The Irony of Democracy*

For a different perspective, on how to analyse American politics through popular culture, have a look at Joseph J. Foy ed. *Homer Simpson Goes To Washington* (Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2010)

These are just some of the more general texts on Politics of the USA. Within each weekly topic there numerous amounts of more specific and diverse readings on the subject matter for the students.

Subject specific skills

tbc

Transferable skills

tbc

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	22 sessions of 1 hour (7%)
Seminars	22 sessions of 1 hour (7%)
Private study	256 hours (85%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

tbc

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group C1

	Weighting	Study time
3000 word essay	50%	
Online Examination	50%	
1.5 hour examination		

- Online examination: No Answerbook required

Assessment group B1

	Weighting	Study time
Online Examination	100%	

- Online examination: No Answerbook required

Feedback on assessment

Availability

Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 2 of UPOA-M100 Undergraduate Politics

This module is Optional for:

- UECA-3 Undergraduate Economics 3 Year Variants
 - Year 2 of L100 Economics
 - Year 2 of L100 Economics
 - Year 2 of L100 Economics
- UECA-4 Undergraduate Economics 4 Year Variants
 - Year 2 of LM1H Economics, Politics & International Studies with Study Abroad
 - Year 2 of LM1H Economics, Politics & International Studies with Study Abroad
- UECA-LM1D Undergraduate Economics, Politics and International Studies
 - Year 2 of LM1D Economics, Politics and International Studies
 - Year 2 of LM1D Economics, Politics and International Studies
- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
- Year 2 of UPOA-M100 Undergraduate Politics
- UPOA-M16A Undergraduate Politics and International Studies
 - Year 2 of M16A Politics and International Studies
 - Year 2 of M16A Politics and International Studies
 - Year 2 of M16A Politics and International Studies
- Year 2 of UPOA-M169 Undergraduate Politics and International Studies with Chinese (3 year)
- Year 2 of UPOA-M162 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and Quantitative Methods

This module is Option list A for:

- UPOA-M168 Undergraduate Politics and International Studies with Chinese
 - Year 2 of M168 Politics and International Studies with Chinese
 - Year 3 of M168 Politics and International Studies with Chinese
- Year 2 of UPOA-ML13 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology
- UPOA-M163 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and French
 - Year 2 of M163 Politics, International Studies and French
 - Year 3 of M163 Politics, International Studies and French

- UPOA-M164 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and German
 - Year 2 of M164 Politics, International Studies and German
 - Year 3 of M164 Politics, International Studies and German
- UPOA-M166 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and Hispanic Studies
 - Year 2 of M166 Politics, International Studies and Hispanic Studies
 - Year 3 of M166 Politics, International Studies and Hispanic Studies
- UPOA-M165 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and Italian
 - Year 2 of M165 Politics, International Studies and Italian
 - Year 3 of M165 Politics, International Studies and Italian

This module is Option list C for:

- UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
 - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
 - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
 - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics

This module is Option list E for:

- UPHA-V7MW Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law
 - Year 2 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law
 - Year 2 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law