

PO207-30 Politics of the USA

23/24

Department

Politics & International Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Trevor McCrisken

Credit value

30

Module duration

24 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

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 web page](#)

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 with relation to contemporary US politics.

Indicative reading list

The books and articles in the reading list are divided between core and further reading. The core reading is essential for discussions in seminars and will provide a starting point for assessments on the module. Students should use the further reading to deepen their understanding of the topics we cover, especially those on which they are assessed.

The reading list is not meant to be exhaustive, but to give an introduction to the sources available on topics covered in this module. The emphasis is on easily accessible electronic sources but inevitably some sources are only available at the Library in hard copy. Students can obviously purchase hard copies or e-copies of any of the sources on the reading list if they wish. They can also consult the bibliography and references of any of the suggested books and articles to find further readings that might interest them.

The main textbook for this module is available to buy but is also available through the Library as an Electronic Resource so students can download or read it for free. The Moodle page for the module provides links to the Library entry for each book including electronic copies:

David McKay, American Politics and Society, 10th Edition (Wiley, 2021)

This book alone, however, is NOT enough to do well on this course and will only provide a basic introduction into relevant topics and key issues. Students should also use the Library to consult on a regular basis the rest of the core reading and delve into the further reading suggested under each topic.

General sources

Apart from the module core textbook there are many other general American politics textbooks. 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 or might be chosen as an alternative to McKay:

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

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

T. Lowi and B. Ginsberg, American Government: Freedom and Power

R. McKeever and P. Davies, Politics USA

R. Maidment, The American Political Process

B. Miroff, R. Seidelman and T. Swanstrom, Debating Democracy

M. Parenti, Democracy for the Few

J. Roper, The Contours of American Politics

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, see Joseph J. Foy ed., Homer Simpson Goes To Washington (Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2010)

Subject specific skills

By studying this module, students will acquire the following subject specific skills:

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 with relation to contemporary US politics.

Transferable skills

The module provides students with opportunities to acquire or develop the following key skills:

Communication skills, both oral and written

Lateral thinking skills

Skills in the distillation and application of complex information and ideas

Critical thinking
Analytical skills
Independent research skills
Problem solving
Time management
Information Technology
Skills in academic practice
Awareness of, and sensitivity to, diversity
Decision making

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 A

| Assessment component | Weighting | Study time | Eligible for self-certification |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|---------------------------------|
| Critical Review essay | 20% | | Yes (extension) |

| | Weighting | Study time | Eligible for self-certification |
|---|------------------|-------------------|--|
| "It's My Constitutional Right" - critical review essay on opposing views of a major constitutional question (e.g., separation of church and state; the right to bear arms; abortion rights, etc.) | | | |

Reassessment component is the same

Assessment component

| | | | |
|---|-----|--|-----------------|
| 2500 word essay on Term One topic | 40% | | Yes (extension) |
| 2500 word essay on Term One topic - Political Culture, Institutions and Processes | | | |

Reassessment component is the same

Assessment component

| | | | |
|---|-----|--|-----------------|
| 2500 word essay on Term Two topic | 40% | | Yes (extension) |
| 2500 word essay on Term Two topic - Participation and Representation in US Politics | | | |

Reassessment component is the same

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback provided to students via Tabula for all assessment components with opportunity for follow-up face to face discussion.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 2 of UPOA-M100 Undergraduate Politics
- Year 2 of UPOA-M164 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and German

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UECA-3 Undergraduate Economics 3 Year Variants
- Year 2 of UECA-4 Undergraduate Economics 4 Year Variants
- Year 2 of UECA-LM1D Undergraduate Economics, Politics and International Studies
- Year 2 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
- Year 2 of UPOA-M100 Undergraduate Politics
- Year 2 of UPOA-M16A Undergraduate Politics and International Studies
- Year 2 of UPOA-M169 Undergraduate Politics and International Studies with Chinese (3 year)
- Year 2 of UPOA-M164 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and German
- Year 2 of UPOA-M162 Undergraduate Politics, International Studies and Quantitative Methods
- Year 2 of UPHA-V7MW Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law

This module is Unusual option for:

- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 - Year 2 of V7MR Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major)
 - Year 2 of V7MP Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite)
 - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
- Year 2 of UPHA-V7MW Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 2 of UPOA-M168 Undergraduate Politics and International Studies with Chinese
- Year 2 of UPOA-M169 Undergraduate Politics and International Studies with Chinese (3 year)
- 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 B for:

- Year 2 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics

This module is Option list D for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
- Year 2 of UHIA-VM13 Undergraduate History and Politics (with a term in Venice)
- Year 2 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics

This module is Option list E for:

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