

# Seminar: The architecture of American Democracy

Spring 2020

Masters' in Global Affairs, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos: March 2020

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Class Time: 9:00am-1:00pm

## Course Overview

This course provides an introduction to the architecture of American Democracy. While it covers classic and contemporary works on the subfield of U.S. politics, it does not serve as a complete survey of it. In class, we explore key issues on American political institutions. We begin with a class on how to read and write research at the graduate level. We then study the American Constitution and the U.S. Federal system, followed by an analysis of American Exceptionalism. Subsequently, we consider the roles and powers of the three levels of government. Finally, we look at the influence of public opinion and interest groups on American politics. While the class is focused on providing an overview of the structure of the American Democracy, it also serves as an introduction to key concepts of political and social sciences, as well as a space to learn the basic elements of social science research.

## Course Objectives

- (1) Introduce master students to the study of American Politics
- (2) Practice academic reading and evaluation of social science research
- (3) Familiarize students with classic and contemporary research on American Politics
- (4) Familiarize students with academic research

## Class Policies & Expectations

**Participation** (50% of final grade). Students are expected to come prepared and participate in class by discussing the material assigned for each class, that is you should be ready to discuss the themes, contributions, criticisms and main questions of the readings.

**Final Paper** (50% of final grade). Students will have to draft an original research design paper at the end of the course. Details to be worked out in class.

**Academic Integrity.** Do not cheat or plagiarize. Just don't please.

**Technology.** Cellphones and internet browsing on laptops is not allowed in class.

## Schedule and Readings

### Day 1: Seminar basics

- How to read an Academic Paper

Kriner, Douglas L., and Andrew Reeves. "Presidential particularism and divide-the-dollar politics." *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 1 (2015): 155-171.

- How to write a graduate level research paper

Gerring, John. "Mere description." *British Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (2012): 721-746.

Gerber, Alan S., and Donald P. Green. "Field experiments and natural experiments." In *The Oxford handbook of political science*. 2008, Chapter 1

### Day 2: Federalism, the U.S. Constitution and American Exceptionalism

- The American Constitution

The Constitution and Bill of Rights (See at: <https://constitutionus.com>)

Dahl, Robert A. *How democratic is the American constitution?*. Yale University Press, 2003, Chapters 1,2,3

- The structure of Federalism

Trounstine, "How racial segregation and political mismanagement led to Flint's shocking water crisis," *The Monkey Cage*. ( See at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/02/08/heres-the-political-history-that-led-to-flints-shocking-water-crisis/>)

- American Exceptionalism

Lipset, Seymour Martin. "American exceptionalism reaffirmed." *International Review of Sociology* 2, no. 3 (1988): 25-69.

Dahl, Robert A. *Who governs?: Democracy and power in an American city*. Yale University Press, 2005.

Chapters 1, 7, 8, 10, 12, 15, and 19-28.

### Day 3: The three levels of Government in the American system

- Congress

Mayhew, David R. *Congress: The electoral connection*. Vol. 26. Yale University Press, 1974, 1-77.

Fenno, Richard F. *Home style: House members in their districts*. HarperCollins,, 1978.  
Introduction and Chapters 1 and 3 (x-xv, 1-28, 54-99).

- Presidency

Kiewiet, D. Roderick, and Mathew D. McCubbins. "Presidential influence on congressional appropriations decisions." *American Journal of Political Science* (1988): 713-736.

Moe, Terry M., and William G. Howell. "The presidential power of unilateral action." *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 15, no. 1 (1999): 132-179.

- Courts

Judicial Philosophy from Justices Scalia and Breyer (See video:  
<https://www.annenbergclassroom.org/resource/conversation-constitution-judicial-interpretation/>)

#### **Day 4:** Public Opinion and Interest Groups

- Public Opinion

Walsh, Katherine Cramer. "Putting inequality in its place: Rural consciousness and the power of perspective." *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 3 (2012): 517-532.

- Interest Groups

Walker, Jack L. "The origins and maintenance of interest groups in America." *American Political Science Review* 77, no. 2 (1983): 390-406.

Ban, Pamela, Maxwell Palmer, and Benjamin Schneer. "From the Halls of Congress to K Street: Government Experience and its Value for Lobbying." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2019): 713-752.