

**PSCI 6200: Survey of American Institutions**  
**University of Pennsylvania**  
**Spring 2025**

John Lapinski  
Email: lapins@sas.upenn.edu  
Office: PCPSE, Room 411  
Office Hours: Drop-In or By Appointment

William Marble  
Email: marblew@sas.upenn.edu  
Office: Fox-Fels Hall, Room 33  
Office Hours: Tuesday 2-3:30pm or By Appointment

**Course Description**

This course is designed to introduce students to the scholarly study of American political institutions. These institutions are a set of rules, procedures, and norms through which government power is exercised. The study of political institutions is thus the study of power: Through what processes is power wielded? How does the process shape the set of possible policy outcomes? Who can exercise power? To what ends do they use that power? How do actors constrain each others' power?

With these questions in mind, this course covers a broad overview of the literature on American political institutions. Each section will introduce students to classic works, while also highlighting some of the best new research in each topic area.

The course will introduce students to two research traditions. The first is American political development, a historically oriented subfield that seeks to explain the development of the American state. The second seeks to understand the internal workings of American government, including lawmaking, the presidency, bureaucracy, and elections as institutions. This work leans heavily on a rational choice approach to understanding politics.

This course is intended for Ph.D. students who intend to specialize in American politics. It is part of a sequence that serves as the basic preparation for the American politics field exam. While this course surveys major themes in the field, we cannot cover everything in a semester. A key aim of this course (and of the graduate program more generally) is to prepare students for a career of self-directed learning.

**Class Format**

This course will be conducted in a seminar format: students will develop their understanding of the course material through joint discussion with instructors and classmates. Each week, one student will be responsible for summarizing the week's readings and starting the discussion. In connection with this task, they will circulate a response memo (2-4 pages in length) a day before class. The point of this memo is to critically analyze the week's readings from the perspective of theory and/or research design. The memo should not merely summarize the readings, but should synthesize themes, point out tensions between readings, draw out implications, propose empirical tests, etc.

Class discussions will be jointly guided by instructors and the author of the response memo. Some sessions will also feature short lectures covering technical material.

This course will only be successful if all students participate. Do the readings, ask and answer questions, and, if you don't know, guess. We are not in the business of punishing students for

saying something wrong or ill-considered. Working out ideas with colleagues and collaborators is an important skill in academia that we will model in this seminar.

## **Prerequisites and Background Knowledge**

There are no formal prerequisites for this course. However, you will get more out of the reading if you have a basic understanding of game theory and causal inference. We will provide primers on advanced methods when appropriate.

Additionally, background knowledge about the lawmaking process in the United States will be helpful. To this end, the reading list for the first week includes both foundational texts about the structure of American government and a primer on the American legislative process.

## **Assignments**

In addition to the reaction papers, outlined above, students will complete two assignments.

**Mock Comprehensive Exam.** All students will take a practice comprehensive exam in the field of American politics. This will consist of several essays, written during exam week.

**Research Proposal.** The proposal should present an argument: a set of assumptions about how the world works and implications that follow from those assumptions. The proposal will then evaluate the argument by identifying implications that are known to be true (either by observation or through prior research) and implications that could be tested in future research.

The proposal should draw on the themes from the course material but does not need to be focused on American political institutions. The point of the proposal is to develop your skills in scholarly argumentation and identifying areas for research. There is no set length requirement, though 6 to 10 pages seems reasonable.

## **Reading**

Discussion and response memos will be centered on (though not necessarily limited to) the required reading listed for each topic. Students who want a deeper understanding of a topic or who are interested in more recent empirical work should consult the recommended reading. Excerpts of assigned books will be posted on Canvas. That said, many of these books are classics that you should consider purchasing for your library. Cheap used copies are often available on Amazon. You can find journal articles online through JSTOR or the Penn Library.

## **Grading**

50% participation in class and response memos

25% research proposal

25% mock comprehensive exam

## **January 22 - Introduction**

### **Required**

Barry Weingast. 2002. "Rational Choice Institutionalism." In *Political Science: State of the Discipline* (Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner, eds.). W.W. Norton and Co.

James Madison, [Federalist No. 51](#).

Congressional Research Service, [Introduction to the Legislative Process in the U.S. Congress](#).

## **January 29 - Explaining Political Institutions**

### **Required**

Eric Schickler. 2002. *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the U.S. Congress*. Princeton University Press. Chapters 1 and 6.

David Mayhew, 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Yale University Press. Introduction and Chapter 1.

Brandice Canes-Wrone, David W. Brady, and John F. Cogan. 2002. "Out of Step, Out of Office: Electoral Accountability and House Members' Voting." *American Political Science Review*.

Pamela Ban and Jaclyn Kaslovsky. 2024. "Local Orientation in the U.S. House of Representatives." *American Journal of Political Science*.

### **Recommended**

Richard Fenno, 1978. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Chapters 1 and 3.

Sean Gailmard. 2024. *Agents of Empire*. Princeton University Press. Chapters 1 and 3.

James Feigenbaum and Andrew Hall. 2015. "How Legislators Respond to Localized Economic Shocks: Evidence from Chinese Import Competition." *Journal of Politics*.

## **February 5 - APD I: Introduction and Foundations**

Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek. 2004. *The Search for American Political Development*. Cambridge University Press. Pages 1-13, 19-26.

Ira Katznelson and John Lapinski. 2006. "At the Crossroads: Congress and American Political Development." *Perspectives on Politics*.

Stephen Skowronek. 1982. *Building a New American State*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.

Adam Sheingate. 2014. "Institutional Dynamics and American Political Development." *Annual Review of Political Science*.

## **February 12 - Congress I: Legislative Organization**

### **Required**

Keith Krehbiel. 1991. *Information and Legislative Organization*. University of Michigan Press. Chapters 2-3.

Pamela Ban, Ju Yeon Park, and Hye Young You. 2023. "How Are Politicians Informed? Witnesses and Information Provision in Congress." *American Political Science Review*.

Barry Weingast and William J. Marshall. 1988. "The Industrial Organization of Congress: or, Why Legislatures, Like Firms, Are Not Organized as Markets." *Journal of Political Economy*.

Scott Adler and John Lapinski. 1997. "Demand-Side Theory and Congressional Committee Composition: A Constituency Characteristics Approach." *American Journal of Political Science*.

### **Recommended**

Christian Fong. 2020. "Expertise, Networks, and Interpersonal Influence in Congress." *Journal of Politics*.

Pamela Ban, Justin Grimmer, Jaclyn Kaslovsky, and Emily West. 2022. "How Does the Rising Number of Women in the U.S. Congress Change Deliberation? Evidence from House Committee Hearings." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*.

Adam Zelizer. 2018. "How Responsive Are Legislators to Policy Information? Evidence from a Field Experiment in a State Legislature." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.

Tim Groseclose and James M. Snyder Jr. 1996. "Buying Supermajorities." *American Journal of Political Science*.

## **February 19 - Congress II: Lawmaking**

### **Required**

Keith Krehbiel. 1998. *Pivotal Politics*. University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1-3.

Gary W. Cox and Matthew D. McCubbins. 2005. *Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-5.

Jeffery A. Jenkins and Nathan W. Monroe. 2012. "Buying Negative Agenda Control in the U.S. House." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Joshua D. Clinton. 2012. "Using Roll Calls to Test Models of Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science*.

### **Recommended**

Gary W. Cox. 2024. "Comparing Responsible Party Government in the United States and the United Kingdom." *Journal of Politics*.

Jed Stiglitz and Barry Weingast. 2010. "Agenda Control in Congress: Evidence from Cutpoint Estimates and Ideal Point Uncertainty." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.

Gary Cox and Mathew McCubbins. 1993. *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House*. University of California Press. Chapters 4, 5, 7.

Thomas Romer and Howard Rosenthal. 1978. "Political Resource Allocation, Controlled Agendas, and the Status Quo." *Public Choice*.

Keith Krehbiel. 2018. "Pivotal Politics as Normal Science." *Journal of Politics*.

Christian Fong and Keith Krehbiel. 2018. "Limited Obstruction." *American Political Science Review*.

David C. King and Richard J. Zeckhauser. 2003. "Congressional Vote Options." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.

## **February 26 - Congress III: Polarization**

### **Required**

Frances Lee. 2016. *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign*. University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1-3.

Danielle M. Thomsen. 2017. *Opting Out of Congress: Partisan Polarization and the Decline of Moderate Candidates*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 2 and 4.

Paul Pierson and Eric Schickler. 2020. "Madison's Constitution Under Stress: A Developmental Analysis of Political Polarization." *Annual Review of Political Science*.

### **Recommended**

Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2016. *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. MIT Press (2nd edition). Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

American Political Science Association. 1950. *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*. Chapter 2: "Summary of Conclusions and Proposals."

David Mayhew. 1991. *Divided We Govern*. Yale University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.

Patrick W. Buhr, Craig Volden, Alan M. Wiseman. 2024. "Polarization and Lawmaking Effectiveness in the United States Congress." Center for Effective Lawmaking Working Paper.

## **March 5 - Interest Groups and Lobbying**

### **Required**

Richard L. Hall and Alan V. Deardorff. 2006. "Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy." *American Political Science Review*.

Alexander V. Hirsch, Karam Kang, B. Pablo Montagnes, and Hye Young You. 2023. "Lobbyists as Gatekeepers: Theory and Evidence." *Journal of Politics*.

Julia Payson. 2020. "Cities in the Statehouse: How Local Governments Use Lobbyists to Secure State Funding." *Journal of Politics*.

## **Recommended**

Randall L. Kroszner and Thomas Stratmann. 1998. "Interest-Group Competition and the Organization of Congress: Theory and Evidence from Financial Services' Political Action Committees." *American Economic Review*.

Mancur Olson. 1966. *The Logic of Collective Action*. Harvard University Press. Chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6.

Zhao Li. 2018. "How Internal Constraints Shape Interest Group Activities: Evidence from Access-Seeking PACs." *American Political Science Review*.

Marianne Bertrand, Matilde Bombardini, and Francesco Trebbi. 2014. "Is It Whom You Know or What You Know? An Empirical Assessment of the Lobbying Process." *American Economic Review*.

Nolan McCarty. 2004. "The Appointments Dilemma." *American Journal of Political Science*.

## **March 12 - Penn Spring Break**

## **March 19 - APD II: Temporality and Periodization**

Stephen Skowronek. 1993. *The Politics Presidents Make*. Belknap Press. Chapters 2 and 3.

Paul Pierson. 2002. "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics." *American Political Science Review*.

Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek. 2004. *The Search for American Political Development*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1, 3, and 5.

## **March 26 - The Presidency I: Executive Authority**

### **Required**

Lyn Ragsdale and John Theis. 1997. "The Institutionalization of the American Presidency, 1924-92." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Terry Moe and William Howell. 1999. "The Presidential Power of Unilateral Action." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*.

Christina M. Kinane. 2021. "Control Without Confirmation: The Politics Of Vacancies In Presidential Appointments." *American Political Science Review*.

Dino P. Christenson and Douglas L. Kriner. 2015. "Political Constraints on Unilateral Executive Action." *Case Western Reserve Law Review*.

### **Recommended**

Eric Schickler and Douglas Kriner. 2016. *Investigating the President: Congressional Checks on Presidential Power*. Princeton University Press. Chapters 1-5.

## **April 2 - The Presidency II: Interbranch Bargaining**

### **Required**

Charles Cameron. 2000. *Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6.

Tim Groseclose and Nolan McCarty. 2001. "The Politics of Blame: Bargaining Before and Audience." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Brandice Canes-Wrone. 2001. "The President's Legislative Influence from Public Appeals." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Christopher R. Berry, Barry C. Burden, and William G. Howell. 2010. "The President and the Distribution of Federal Spending." *American Political Science Review*.

### **Recommended**

Richard Neustadt. 1990. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*. The Free Press. Chapters 2 and 3.

Stephen Skowronek. 1998. "Presidential Leadership in Political Time." In *Researching the Presidency*, 5th edition (Michael Nelson, ed.). CQ Press.

## **April 9 - The Judicial Branch**

Lee Epstein and Jack Knight. 1998. *Choices Justices Make*. CQ Press. Chapters 1 and 3.

Jeffrey Segal and Harold Spaeth. 2002. *The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 3 and 8.

Tom Clark, Pablo Mantagnes, and Jorg Spenkuch. "Politics from the Bench? Ideology and Strategic Voting in the U.S. Supreme Court." *Journal of Public Economics*.

Michael A. Bailey and Forrest Maltzman. 2008. "Does Legal Doctrine Matter? Unpacking Law and Policy Preferences on the Us Supreme Court." *American Political Science Review*.

### **Recommended**

Charles Cameron and John Kestel. 2016. "Are Supreme Court Nominations a Move-the-Median Game?" *American Political Science Review*. (See also the erratum published in 2017.)

Tom S. Clark. 2009. "The Separation of Powers, Court Curbing, and Judicial Legitimacy." *American Journal of Political Science*.

## **April 16 - APD III: State-Building, the Regulatory State, and the Progressive Era**

Stephen Skowronek. 1982. *Building a New American State*. Cambridge University Press. **Chapters TBD.**

Daniel P. Carpenter. 2000. "State Building through Reputation Building: Coalitions of Esteem and Program Innovation in the National Postal System, 1883-1913." *Studies in American Political Development*.

## April 23 - Bureaucracy

### **Required**

Matthew D. McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz. 1984. "Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols vs. Fire Alarms." *American Journal of Political Science*.

David Epstein and Sharyn O'Halloran. 1999. *Delegating Powers: A Transaction Cost Politics Approach to Policy Making under Separate Powers*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 2 and 4.

Luca Bellodi. 2024. "A Dynamic Measure of Bureaucratic Reputation: New Data for New Theory." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Gabriele Gratton, Luigi Guiso, Claudio Michelacci, and Massimo Morelli. 2024. "From Weber to Kafka: Political Instability and the Overproduction of Laws." *American Economic Review*.

### **Recommended**

John D. Huber and Charles R. Shipan. 2002. *Deliberate Discretion? The Institutional Foundations of Bureaucratic Autonomy*. Cambridge University Press. **Chapters TBD**

Matthew D. McCubbins, Roger G. Noll, Barry R. Weingast. 1987. "Administrative Procedures as Instruments of Political Control." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*.

Sean Gailmard and John W. Patty. 2007. "Slackers and Zealots: Civil Service, Policy Discretion, and Bureaucratic Expertise." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Jonathan Bendor and Adam Meirowitz. 2004. "Spatial Models of Delegation." *American Political Science Review*.

Steve Callander and Gregory Martin. 2016. "Dynamic Policymaking with Decay." *American Journal of Political Science*.

## April 30 - Elections and Representation

### **Required**

Scott Ashworth. 2012. "Electoral Accountability: Recent Theoretical and Empirical Work." *Annual Review of Political Science*.

James Alt, Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, and Shanna Rose. 2011. "Disentangling Accountability and Competence in Elections: Evidence from U.S. Term Limits." *Journal of Politics*.

Sarah F. Anzia and Christopher R. Berry. 2011. "The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?" *American Journal of Political Science*.

James M. Snyder Jr. and David Strömberg. 2010. "Press Coverage and Political Accountability." *Journal of Political Economy*.

### **Recommended**

James D. Fearon. 1999. "Electoral Accountability and the Control of Politicians: Selecting Good Types versus Sanctioning Poor Performance." In *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation* (Adam Przeworski, Susan C. Stokes, and Bernard Manin, eds.). Cambridge University Press.



Eric McGhee, Seth Masket, Boris Shor, Steven Rogers, and Nolan McCarty. 2013. "A Primary Cause of Partisanship? Nomination Systems and Legislator Ideology." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Alexander Fournaies and Andrew B. Hall. 2021. "How Do Electoral Incentives Affect Legislator Behavior? Evidence from U.S. State Legislatures." *American Political Science Review*.

Stephen Ansolabehere, James M. Snyder Jr., Charles Stewart III. 2001. "Candidate Positioning in U.S. House Elections." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Andrew B. Hall. 2016. "What Happens When Extremists Win Primaries?" *American Political Science Review*.