

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICAL PROCESSES

Dr. David A. Yalof

(TAs: Timothy Bussey, Christopher Guay, Stavros Papadopoulos)

This course provides an introduction to government through the study of the government of the United States. Not enough people know and/or care about how our own government works. As you'll soon discover, all governments survive by combining elements of coercion and legitimacy. Of course in a stable and legitimate system of government, that coercion should be barely noticeable to the general public. But the purpose of the course is to look behind institutions, practices, and benefits to appreciate just how, for what, and for whom we are governed.

MATERIALS

1. *The Enduring Democracy 4th ed., with Mindtap access* (2015), by Kenneth Dautrich and David Yalof. You may purchase either:
 - (1) the actual textbook plus Mindtap access (which includes MINDTAP); or
 - (2) the Mindtap instant access digital package alone, which includes e-book chapters
 2. *Current Debates in American Government* (2016), by Ryan Emenaker and James Morone, eds.
 3. *It's Even Worse Than it Looks (Was)* (Revised, expanded ed., 2016), by Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein.
 4. (OPTIONAL) *Listen, Liberal: Or, What Ever Happened to the Party of the People?* (2016), by Thomas Frank
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HOW THIS COURSE WORKS

The format of the course will normally consist of two lectures per week (Mondays and Wednesdays) and one discussion section per week held during the same time period every Friday. Each section is directed by a TA, who will answer questions and lead discussions about that week's topic in American politics through the use of *Current Debates in American Government* and other materials. (The *Current Debates* reader will receive its primary emphasis in sections and on exams). Students are welcome to consult with the professor on any subject, but questions pertaining to course requirements -- such as papers, exam performance or grades -- should be directed first to the TA. Important announcements concerning procedures will be made during lectures and in sections as necessary. Individual questions can be brought to the TA during office hours. Dr. Yalof's office hours will be held on Mondays and Wednesdays from 11 am – 12:00 Noon.

GRADING

There will be one midterm exam, a final exam, and 10 graded “focus activities” assignments in MINDTAP. (Individual TAs will announce any modifications to these assignments in sections). Make-ups and incompletes will be given only when excuses are properly documented. Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

Midterm Examination	20%
Section participation & Papers	20%
Mindtap Assignments (10 of 11)	20%
Final Examination	<u>40%</u>
	100%

To access Mindtap, you will need to register for an account using the registration URLs provide to you as well as the course key. During the first week of class I will provide you with all the information you need to properly register. There are 11 on-line homework assignments spread throughout the semester – the average of the 10 highest scores will determine your overall Mindtap homework grade on a scale from 0 to 20. (The lowest score will be dropped, giving every student a “free pass” to skip a week of on-line homework assignments). Each week’s graded focus activities are available starting Sunday and are due by 11:59 pm Wednesday night.

All performance in section will be graded by the TA (Two short papers will be worth 5% each; class participation is worth an additional 10%). The final mark thus at least partially reflects each student’s active and constructive participation in Friday’s section discussions. Remember also that failure to submit papers and on-line homework assignments in a timely manner will affect your grade adversely.

All assignments are listed on the pages that follow, with approximate dates assigned for discussion. Naturally, all reading assignments should be completed, regardless of whether or not they have been discussed in class.

PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS

I. GOVERNMENT AS A PROBLEM; THE AMERICAN SOLUTION (August 29 & 31, September 7)

Government is both a solution and a problem. All governments combine force and legitimacy in different measures to achieve legitimacy. The complexities of the 21st century world only add to the challenge modern governments must face.

Readings: *Dautrich & Yalof’s Enduring Democracy* Textbook, Chapter 1
 MINDTAP assignments, Chapter 1 (due 9/7/16)
 Current Debates in American Government, pp. 1-22

NO CLASS WILL BE HELD ON MONDAY SEPTEMBER 12

II. THE CONSTITUTION'S SEPARATION OF POWERS: Power, Order and Consent
(September 14 & 19)

The American Constitution was the product of an effort to create a strong central government and to impose order on the society, while at the same time maintaining a degree of popular consent.

Readings: *Dautrich & Yalof's Enduring Democracy* Textbook, Chapter 2
 MINDTAP assignments, Chapter 2 (due 9/14/16)
 Current Debates in American Government, pp. 23-49

III. GOVERNMENT UNDER THE CONSTITUTION: Federalism and States' Rights
(September 21)

During the past 70 years, the government of the United States has grown enormously in size, scope and power. Although some features of the modern American system would still be recognizable to the founders, the Constitution had to change if the modern needs of government and politics were to be accommodated. Federalism still exists, but in a markedly different form than it was originally conceived.

Readings: *Dautrich & Yalof's Enduring Democracy* Textbook, Chapter 3
 MINDTAP assignments, Chapter 3 (due 9/21/16)
 Current Debates in American Government, pp. 50-66

PART TWO: THE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

IV. CONGRESS: The First Branch
(September 26 & 28)

Although the Constitution provides for three branches, the legislature was considered the "First Branch," and the golden age of the legislature lasted for well over a century. The American Congress remains today the most important legislature in the world, but it is no longer the dominant institution in our own national government. Can Congress ever regain its national status? Is the separation of powers all but dead?

Readings: *Dautrich & Yalof's Enduring Democracy* Textbook, Chapter 6
 MINDTAP assignments, Chapter 6 (due 9/28/16)
 Current Debates in American Government, pp. 232-249

V. THE PRESIDENT: From Chief Clerk to Powerful Chief Executive
(October 3 & 5)

During the 20th Century, the presidency became the central institution of American national government. Is presidential government in the early 21st Century compatible with the Constitution and traditional notions of representative government?

Readings: *Dautrich & Yalof's Enduring Democracy* Textbook, Chapter 7
MINDTAP assignments, Chapter 7 (due 10/5/16)
Current Debates in American Government, pp. 250-263

VI. THE BUREAUCRACY.
(October 10)

Americans cannot live with bureaucracy... and they cannot live without it. Bureaucracy is a pejorative name for the most efficient way of organizing people for production and service or control. The problem of bureaucracy is not efficiency but accountability: Is it possible to organize nearly three million civil servants and over two million personnel to do the work of American government, and at the same time to keep all the personnel in line with the needs and wishes of each generation of Americans?

Readings: *Dautrich & Yalof's Enduring Democracy* Textbook, Chapter 8
 NO *MINDTAP* assignments this week
Current Debates in American Government, pp. 264-282

MIDTERM EXAM ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12 (NO SECTIONS ON OCTOBER 14)

PART THREE: THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AT WORK

VII. VOTING: Instrument of Democracy or Institution of Government?
(October 17, 19)

Majority rule is the key to democracy. And yet even in the most important elections, less than half of those eligible to vote do so. Elections are of course important, but for whom?

Readings: *Dautrich & Yalof's Enduring Democracy* Textbook, Chapter 13
MINDTAP assignments, Chapter 13 (due 10/19/16)
It's Even Worse Than It Looks (Part I: The Problem)

VIII. CAMPAIGNS AND THE ELECTION PROCESS

(October 24, 26 & 31 & November 2)

Readings: *Dautrich & Yalof's Enduring Democracy* Textbook, Chapter 14
MINDTAP assignments, Chapter 14 (due 10/26/16)
Current Debates in American Government, pp. 185-201
It's Even Worse Than It Looks (Part II: What to do about it)
Of The People (video)

IX. PUBLIC OPINION, POLLING AND THE ELECTION OF 2016

(November 7 & 9)

Public opinion has become the modern-day definition of “the people.” The more recent revolution in information technology has made an effective science of the measurement of opinion, and politicians can, if they wish, have a referendum on any subject at practically any time. But is “the government of opinion” a good alternative to party or electoral democracy? Should we permit public opinion, as measured by a sample survey, to have a lasting influence over government?

Readings: *Dautrich & Yalof's Enduring Democracy* Textbook, Chapter 10
MINDTAP assignments, Chapter 10 (due 11/9/16)
Current Debates in American Government, pp. 134-146

X. POLITICAL PARTIES and INTEREST GROUPS

(November 14 & 16)

Elections have been particularly important in the United States because of political parties. Yet political parties today are in a weak and declining state. Interest groups have had an equally long and influential history in American politics, but their influence may be problematic today precisely because of the decline of political parties. Should we try to restore the parties or let democracy depend increasingly upon interest groups and mass opinion?

Readings: *Dautrich & Yalof's Enduring Democracy* Textbook, Chapters 11 and 13 (re-read)
MINDTAP assignments, Chapter 11 (due 11/16/16)
Current Debates in American Government, pp. 202-231

XII. THE JUDICIARY

(November 28 & 30)

Alexander Hamilton wrote in the Federalist Papers that the judiciary is “the least dangerous branch.” Today many of its friends as well as its critics refer to it as “the Imperial Judiciary.” What has actually happened to the federal judiciary?

Readings: *Dautrich & Yalof's Enduring Democracy* Textbook, Chapter 9
MINDTAP assignments, Chapter 9 (due 11/30/16)
Current Debates in American Government, pp. 283-305

XI. THE MEDIA
(December 5 & 7)

The “Fourth Branch of Government.” enjoys a love-hate relationship with the American people. We want reporters to serve as ever-present watchdogs, uncovering corruption and scandal. But we resent the media’s attempts to avert our attention away from the “pressing issues of our nation.” Can we have one without the other?

Readings: *Dautrich & Yalof’s Enduring Democracy* Textbook, Chapter 12
 MINDTAP assignments, Chapter 12 (due 12/7/16)
 Current Debates in American Government, pp. 147-184

XIII. AMERICAN GOVERNMENT: WRAPPING IT ALL UP
(December 7)

Readings: *It’s Even Worse Than It looks* (Afterword to the 2016 paperback edition)

FINAL EXAM: Dates and Times TBA
