

PLS 338

U.S. Government and Politics

Nazarbayev University

Fall 2020 (Online)

9:00 to 10:15 AM on Tuesdays and Thursdays via Zoom

(Zoom Sessions Consist of Two Consecutive Meetings of 40 Minutes Apiece for Every Class)

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Office Hours: By Online Appointment

Course Description:

- The purpose of this course is to acquaint students with the history and conduct of the American system of governance. Specifically, this course will examine topics such as the American Revolution, the founding of the U.S. Republic, and the Constitution of the United States of America; the institution of slavery and the American Civil War of 1861-1865; the U.S. Presidency, U.S. Electoral College, U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, and U.S. Supreme Court; America's two-party system, the concept and practice of federalism within the U.S. political context; the U.S. bureaucracy; as well as a range of contemporary issues such as race relations, gun control, immigration policy, and wealth inequality. This is a 300-level undergraduate course designed to enhance students' knowledge of U.S. domestic politics.

Course Outcomes:

- This course is designed to provide students with the necessary analytical skills so that they are able to:
 - Identify various challenges facing the United States in historical and contemporary contexts;
 - Critically evaluate the historical development and conduct of the U.S. democratic system of rule;
 - Compose a research paper based upon a detailed analysis of some defining aspect of a recent U.S. presidential administration, from Franklin D. Roosevelt up to and including Barack Obama.

Course Readings:

- All assigned readings for this course are available via hyperlink in the syllabus or the NU Library online academic databases. Readings are not available on Moodle. Students need to locate assigned readings.

Course Objectives:

- Identify challenges confronting the United States government at the federal and national levels;
- Critically evaluate the conduct of U.S. politics from an agency and institutional perspective;
- Write a research paper based on some defining issue of a recent U.S. presidential administration.

Course Requirements:

Students are encouraged to participate in class by asking questions. Students are also encouraged to meet with the professor at an agreed upon time via Zoom to discuss course materials. The professor reserves the right to revise the readings listed on the syllabus. Students are expected to log-on to class on-time. Please silence phones before the online class starts. Attendance is not taken but it is absolutely required.

Students will sit for **THREE** online examinations during the semester. The first online examination will take place on 9/15; the second online examination will take place on 10/15; the third online examination will take place on 11/19. The first online examination covers all course materials from Weeks 1 to 4 on the syllabus. The second online examination covers all course materials from Weeks 5 to 8 on the syllabus. The third online examination covers all course materials from Weeks 9 to 13 on the syllabus. Students will have 24 hours to submit their examinations. Examinations are based on lecture materials plus assigned readings/videos and consist of multiple-choice questions plus define/describe key concepts questions.

Students are required to write **ONE** critical reaction memo consisting of approximately 1,750 words.

- Memos must critically analyze/synthesize **ALL** of a given week's assigned **readings/videos**.
- In writing memos, students should strive to provide answers to the following questions:
 - i. **What are the questions the readings/videos are addressing?**
 - ii. **What are the shortcomings of the authors' main arguments?**
- Each memo should consist of: (1) a brief introductory paragraph summarizing the topic which you intend to discuss; (2) followed by several paragraphs which emphasize the assigned readings/videos; along with (3) a critical discussion of **ALL** of them; and (4) a conclusion.
- Memos are to be submitted by the start of class (9:00 AM) online via Moodle on the day of the last scheduled seminar meeting of a given week. **Late memos for any week will receive a grade of 0. The professor will not accept any memos submitted after the start of class.**
- Students will sign-up for the weeks in which they intend to write memos at the start of the semester. Memos should analyze and synthesize **ALL** assigned readings/videos for a given week. **It is not necessary to conduct a review of other works outside of the syllabus for this assignment.** No more than **FIVE** students may write their reaction memos on any given week. Students may only choose to write their reaction memos for **Weeks 6, 7, 11, and 12.**
- Students are required to cite assigned readings/videos in their memos. Students must use footnotes for citations, 1-inch margins, double-spaced pages, and any legible 12-pt. size font.

The formulation of a research paper constitutes the main assignment for this course. Students are tasked with writing an essay of approximately 3,000 words based on a detailed analysis of some defining aspect of a recent presidential administration, from the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration (1933-1945) up to and including the Barack Obama administration (2009-2017). Papers require an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Students are required to schedule an online meeting with the professor to discuss topic ideas. Students must use footnotes for citations (any style), 1-inch margins, double-spaced pages, and any legible 12-pt. size font. Research papers are to be submitted by 5:00 PM on 12/2 via Moodle. Students are also encouraged to submit a copy of their research paper to the professor via email as a backup. All late research papers submitted will be penalized a full letter grade for **EACH DAY** after the passage of the due date.

Each student is required to submit a PowerPoint (PPT) presentation (8-10 slides) on their research paper towards the middle of the semester outlining research conducted thus far. Presentation grades will reflect content and delivery style (see rubric below). Students should present their research question and give an

overview of their findings to date. Students are required to utilize Microsoft PowerPoint in their slide presentations. Students must email their PowerPoint presentations to the professor by 9:00 AM on 11/3.

Reaction Memos and Research Papers will be graded by the professor according to the following rubric:

Grading	Assessment
<p style="text-align: center;">A Research Paper: 135-150 Critical Reaction Memo: 23-25</p>	<p>Student writes in a very coherent and creative manner; usage of proper citation format; research paper/memo adheres to professor's guidelines; few/no grammatical/spelling errors in student's work; student references scholarly articles/texts outside of the syllabus to supplement his/her research paper and critically analyzes the works of other scholars/authors.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">B Research Paper: 120-134 Critical Reaction Memo: 20-22</p>	<p>Student writes in an intelligible manner but his/her work is also somewhat lacking in creativity; citation format is evident but not fully consistent either; research paper/memo adheres to professor's guidelines to a considerable extent but not completely; noticeable grammatical/spelling errors; student references some scholarly articles/texts outside of syllabus to supplement his/her research paper and analysis of scholarly works is adequate.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">C Research Paper: 105-119 Critical Reaction Memo: 18-19</p>	<p>Student barely writes in a satisfactory manner; research paper/memo is lacking in terms of adherence to professor's guidelines; citation format is inconsistent; grammatical/spelling errors are prevalent; few references to scholarly articles/texts outside of syllabus readings; critical analysis of other works is inadequate.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">D Research Paper: 90-104 Critical Reaction Memo: 15-17</p>	<p>Student writes in an unsatisfactory manner; citation format suffers from serious flaws; research paper/memo does not adhere to professor's guidelines; grammatical/spelling errors; few references to articles/texts outside of syllabus; minor critical analysis of other works.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">F Research Paper: 0-89 Critical Reaction Memo: 0-14</p>	<p>Student writes in an unintelligible manner; citation format is wholly nonexistent; research paper/memo does not adhere to the professor's guidelines at all; multiple grammatical/spelling errors; few/no references to scholarly articles/texts outside of syllabus readings; critical analysis of scholarship is inadequate.</p>

PowerPoint presentations for students' research papers will be graded according to the following rubric:

Grading	Assessment
A 23-25	Student presents in a clear and concise manner; presentation of information and discussion of the research paper topic and plan of action are conducted by the student in a masterful manner.
B 20-22	Student's work is intelligible but the presentation of information and discussion of the paper topic and plan of action lacks clarity.
C 18-19	Student shows that s/he did not adequately prepare; presentation is difficult to follow in terms of the research paper topic and a plan.
D 15-17	Student's work is unintelligible; presentation suffers from a serious lack of preparation; research topic and plan not discussed in detail.
F 0-14	Student's work is unintelligible; little or no discussion of the research paper topic and plan of action; unprofessional text in presentation.

Grading:

Online Examinations (3)	300 (100 Points per Exam)
PowerPoint Presentation	25
Critical Reaction Memo	25
Research Paper	150
Total	500 points

Scale:

	A: 475-500	A-: 450-474
B+: 425-449	B: 400-424	B-: 375-399
C+: 350-374	C: 325-349	C-: 300-324
D+: 275-299	D: 250-274	F: 249 and below

Academic Integrity:

- Students are required to ensure that the work which they submit for grading is their own. Students must provide citations in the form of footnotes when referencing the works of other scholars. Instances of plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in receiving a score of **0** for an assignment. All instances in which plagiarism is suspected will be referred to SSH for disciplinary committee review. **Copying, rephrasing of text without citations, as well as submitting unoriginal work constitutes plagiarism.** Any instances of cheating during online examinations will also result in a student (or students) receiving a 0 score on the examination in addition to automatic referral to SSH for disciplinary committee review.
- All enrolled students need to attend **ALL** seminar meetings. Students who fall ill need to contact the professor **BEFORE** the due dates of assignments. Extensions or make-up exams can only be given if the student can provide a valid medical excuse to SSH administration and/or a very convincing explanation.
- All enrolled students are expected to treat one another with dignity and respect. Students are encouraged to voice their opinions on controversial political issues, albeit in a professional and courteous manner.

Class Schedule:

Week 1: America's Founding Fathers and the Revolutionary War

8/18 and 8/20

- Saul K. Padover, "The World of the Founding Fathers," *Social Research* 25.2 (1958): 191-214.
- J.N. Rakove, "The Madisonian Moment," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 55.2 (1988): 473-505.
- Gregg Frazier, "The American Revolution: Not a Just War," *Journal of Military Ethics* 14.1 (2015): 35-56.
- VIDEO: "The American Revolution: Episodes 1-10," *The History Channel* (2006).

Week 2: Slavery and the American Civil War

8/25 and 8/27

- Warren E. Burger, "Obstacles to an American Constitution," *The Journal of Legal History* 8.3 (1987): 237-243.
- Brian H. Reid, "The Origins of the American Civil War," *RUSI Journal* 154.6 (2009): 88-94.
- Brian H. Reid, "The American Civil War and the Strategy of Attrition," *RUSI Journal* 156.3 (2011): 88-95.
- Brian Dirck, "Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief," *Perspectives on Political Science* 39.1 (2010): 20-27.
- VIDEO: "Sherman's March to the Sea," *The Conquerors* (2005).

Week 3: The U.S. Presidency, Electoral College, and Impeachment

9/1 and 9/3

- Christina Villegas, “Electing the People’s President: The Popular Origins of the Electoral College,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 47.4 (2018): 201-209.
- Gerald R. Webster, “The Purpose, Structure, and Limitations of the Electoral College,” *The Geography Teacher* 13.3 (2016): 101-105.
- Steven G. Koven and Julie C. Kunselman, “Trust in Government: Lessons from the Clinton Impeachment,” *International Journal of Public Administration* 26.2 (2003): 197-212.
- VIDEO: “The Clinton Years,” *PBS Frontline* (2001).

Week 4: U.S. Congress and U.S. Senate

9/8 and 9/10

- R. M. English, *The United States Congress* (Manchester University Press, 2003): pp. 1-15, 39-60, 61-86.
- Ian Millhiser, “How to Make Sure Congress Can Still Function if Its Members are Quarantined,” *Vox* (March 24, 2020).

Week 5: American Federalism

9/15 and 9/17

- **Online Exam (9:00 AM on 9/15 – Test Due Back to Professor via Moodle by 9:00 AM on 9/16)**
- James Madison, “Federalist Papers No. 10,” *The Federalist Papers* (1787).
- Ralph C. Hancock, “Tocqueville on the Good of American Federalism,” *Publius* 20.2 (1990): 89-108
- John Kincaid, “Federal Democracy and Liberty,” *Publius* 32.2 (1999): 211-216.

Week 6: U.S. Supreme Court

9/22 and 9/24

- Michael Nelson, “The President and the Court: Reinterpreting the Court-Packing Episode of 1937,” *Political Science Quarterly* 103.2 (1988): 267-293.
- Jeffrey A. Segal and Albert D. Cover, “Ideological Values and the Votes of U.S. Supreme Court Justices,” *The American Political Science Review* 83.2 (1989): 557-565.
- Jonathan P. Kastellec, Jeffrey R. Lax, and Justin H. Philips, “Public Opinion and Senate Confirmation of Supreme Court Nominees,” *The Journal of Politics* 72.3 (2010): 767-784.
- VIDEO: “Supreme Revenge,” *PBS Frontline* (2019).

Week 7: Republicans and Democrats

9/29 and 10/1

- James C. Charlesworth, “Is Our Two-Party System ‘Natural’,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 259 (1948): 1-9.
- Craig R. Smith, “Ronald Reagan’s Rhetorical Re-Invention of Conservatism,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 103:1-2 (2017): 33-65.
- David J. Siemers, “Bill Clinton’s Contractarian World View: The Intellectual Origins and Public Face of the Clinton Philosophy,” *Congress and the Presidency* 35.2 (2008): 65-86.
- VIDEO: “Divided States of America,” *PBS Frontline* (2017).

Week 8: U.S. Bureaucracy

10/13 and 10/15

- Michael Nelson, “A Short, Ironic History of American National Bureaucracy,” *The Journal of Politics* 44.3 (1982): 747-778.
- Charles M Wiltse, “The Representative Function of Bureaucracy,” *The American Political Science Review* 35.3 (1941): 510-516.
- **Online Exam (9:00 AM on 10/15 – Test Due Back to Professor via Moodle by 9:00 AM on 10/16)**

Week 9: Gun Control and White Supremacism

10/20 and 10/22

- Mark Gius, “The Effects of State and Federal Gun Control Laws on School Shootings,” *Applied Economics Letters* 25.5 (2018): 317-320.
- Jeffrey Toobin, “Politics Changed the Reading of the Second Amendment – And Can Change it Again,” *The New Yorker* (August 15, 2019).
- Pei Shaohua, “White Supremacism and Racial Conflict in the Trump Era,” *International Critical Thought* 7.4 (2017): 592-601.
- PODCAST: “Samantha’s Journey into the Alt-Right, and Back,” *The New Yorker* (November 25, 2019).
- VIDEO: “Gunned Down: The Power of the NRA,” *PBS Frontline* (2015).
- VIDEO: “Documenting Hate: Charlottesville,” *PBS Frontline* (2018).

Week 10: Poverty and Inequality in America

10/27 and 10/29

- Daniel L. Sandoval, Mark R. Rank, and Thomas A. Hirschl, “The Increasing Risk of Poverty across the American Life Course,” *Demography* 46.4 (2009): 717-737.
- Lisa A. Keister and Stephanie Moller, “Wealth Inequality in the United States,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 63-81.
- Joseph G. Peschek, “The Obama Presidency and the Great Recession: Political Economy, Ideology, and Public Policy,” *New Political Science* 33.4 (2011): 429-444.
- VIDEO: “Hard Times Generation: Families Living in Cars,” *60 Minutes* (2012).
- VIDEO: “The Pension Gamble,” *PBS Frontline* (2018).
- DOCUMENTARY: “Panic: The Untold Story of the 2008 Financial Crisis,” (2018).

Week 11: COVID-19

11/3 and 11/5

- E. Lipton, D.E. Sanger, M. Haberman, M.D. Shear, M. Mazzetti, and J.E. Barnes, “He Could Have Seen What Was Coming: Behind Trump’s Failure on the Virus,” *The New York Times* (May 4, 2020).
- Sebastian Junger, “Tribalism and the Pandemic,” *The National Review* (April 6, 2020).
- David Litt, “The Coronavirus Crisis in the U.S. is a Failure of Democracy,” *Time* (May 20, 2020).
- George Packer, “We are Living in a Failed State,” *The Atlantic* (June 2020).

- VIDEO: “The Virus: What Went Wrong?” *PBS Frontline* (2020).

Week 12: Race Relations, Mass Protests, and Civil Unrest

11/10 and 11/12

- Elijah Anderson, “The Iconic Ghetto,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 642 (2012): 8-24.
- Polly F. Radosh, “War on Drugs: Gender and Race Inequalities in Crime Control Strategies,” *Criminal Justice Studies* 21.2 (2008): 167-178.
- Jelani Cobb, “The Death of George Floyd, in Context,” *The New Yorker* (May 28, 2020).
- Kareem Abdul-Jabar, “Don’t Understand the Protests? What You’re Seeing is People Pushed to the Edge,” *The Los Angeles Times* (May 30, 2020).
- Jelani Cobb, “An American Spring of Reckoning,” *The New Yorker* (June 14, 2020).
- Tom Jackman, “Defunding or Disbanding the Police is a Dangerous Idea if Done Hastily,” *The Washington Post* (June 18, 2020).
- VIDEO: “Policing the Police,” *PBS Frontline* (2016).

Week 13: Immigration

11/17 and 11/19

- Douglas S. Massey, “Understanding America’s Immigration ‘Crisis,’” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 151.3 (2007): 309-327.
- “Trump’s Wall Gets America Nowhere on Border Security,” *The New York Times* (July 26, 2019).
- S. Valentino, “The Supreme Court Weighs the End of DACA,” *The New Yorker* (November 11, 2019).
- Elie Mystal, “Roberts’s DACA Ruling Had Nothing to Do with His Own Moral Awakening,” *The Nation* (June 18, 2020).
- VIDEO: “Zero Tolerance,” *PBS Frontline* (2019).
- **Online Exam (9:00 AM on 11/19 – Test Due Back to Professor via Moodle by 9:00 AM on 11/20)**

Week 14: The Trump Presidency

11/24 and 11/26

- Thomas Rudolph, “Populist Anger, Donald Trump, and the 2016 Election,” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* (2019).
- Jerry Harris, Carl Davidson, Bill Fletcher, and Paul Harris, “Trump and American Fascism,” *International Critical Thought* 7.4 (2017): 476-492.
- Jeffrey Goldberg, “James Mattis Denounces President Trump, Describes Him as a Threat to the Constitution,” *The Atlantic* (June 3, 2020).
- Daniel W. Drezner, “Why Law and Order Won’t Make Trump Great Again,” *The Washington Post* (June 2, 2020).
- David A. Graham, “White Voters are Abandoning Trump,” *The Atlantic* (June 30, 2020).
- Susan B. Glaser, “Trump Hates Losers, So Why is He Refighting the Civil War – On the Losing Side?” *The New Yorker* (June 12, 2020).
- I. Chotiner, “Trump’s Dangerous Attempt to Create a Federal Police,” *The New Yorker* (July 26, 2020).
- VIDEO: “Trump’s Road to the White House,” *PBS Frontline* (2017).