

# PS299 American Government in Perspective

Seminar Leader: Boris Vormann

Course Times: tba.

Office Hours: By appointment

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## Course Description

This class is organized around the 2020 US Presidential Elections. In its first section we will explore the main political actors, institutions and processes of the US political system, from its political culture and development to its federal structures and the workings of the separation of powers. The second section turns to the mechanisms of the electoral system as well as to the specific domestic and foreign policy issues dominating the 2020 election cycle. Election Day will take place during that section of the course, and we will devote sessions to analyzing predictions in the latest run-up to the elections. The final section of the core seeks to put the election results into a broader perspective. Students will be participants in an international online conference on 'Democracy and its Limits' to engage with experts and their assessments of the election's implications. As a backdrop for the discussion of the elections outcomes in the subsequent weeks, we examine the standing of liberal democracy at home and internationally, and explore the feasibility of some of the major promises made on the president-elect's campaign trail in a number of policy fields, incl. health, immigration, taxation, and trade.

## Requirements

### **Reading material (you must have your own copy of the edition with this ISBN!)**

- Landy, Marc. 2019. American Government. 4<sup>th</sup> edition.
- Additional readings, posted on google classroom.

### **Class preparation**

In preparation for class, read the texts thoughtfully and engage with their core argument. Take notes while reading and try to identify questions in advance: Why do the authors argue as they do? How do they raise and substantiate their claims? How does their line of argumentation relate to earlier readings and discussions in class?

### **Attendance**

Because Bard College Berlin has an intensive, student-centered and seminar-based educational model, attendance at all sessions of courses is mandatory. Students may be excused if circumstances outside of their control prevent their attendance. Two absences will not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Every unexcused additional absence from a 90-min session lowers the participation grade by one step (i.e., from B+ to B). Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. Students facing the unusual situation of long-term, serious medical or personal emergencies (generally lasting more than two weeks) can request a Leave of Absence, to be approved by the Dean, Associate Dean, Head of Student Life, or Director of Academic Services. The 30% rule applies even in these cases.

## Assignments, Grade Breakdown and Essay Deadlines

### Oral

- **Classroom Participation (2\*10%)** **20%** (of total grade)  
This seminar involves thoughtful and active participation in class discussions and working groups. This includes a persistent reflection on current events related to the course's core themes. The classroom is a protected space and you should feel free to voice your arguments and comments. Please do not hesitate to address the seminar leader if you feel that this is not the case.
- **Election Assessment Workshop** **30%**  
Each student will workshop **potential implications of the election outcomes on their selected policy field during 20 minutes (max.) in the sessions during weeks 10 and 11.**
  - For your fellow students to prepare for the workshops, you will have to **post relevant reading material one week before the workshop takes place at the very latest**
  - The workshop itself will include a **presentation element (no longer than 5 minutes)**
  - In the workshop, you should (1) give the participants a clear sense of the President Elect's policy preferences in your particular field, and develop a sense of possible scenarios, together with your fellow students.

### Written

- **5 response papers (5\*400 words)** **20%**  
Each student is required to write 5 response papers (1.5-spaced, 12 pt., Times New Roman) on sessions of their choice in weeks 3-7.  
Response papers should include a short abstract of the primary texts' main tenets, an analysis (not simply your personal reaction) that embeds the reading in earlier class discussions, and the articulation of one central synthetic question that engages the issues and debates addressed in the reading as a starting point for broader discussion.
  - Response papers need to be submitted **per email** by the beginning of the respective session. **Late submissions will not be accepted!**
  - Indicate your name, the number of the response paper, and the date of submission in the header of the document.
- **Election Brief (3,000 words)** **30%**  
The Election Brief is due on Wednesday, December 16, and will assess the implications of the election outcome for one policy field that the student will be able to choose according to her/his interests. The Brief should develop an argument about likely scenarios for the new administration, given power dynamics in government, public opinion, international dynamics, mechanisms of checks and balances, and other possible context factors for the next four years.  
**Late submission of the Election Brief will be downgraded by 10 points, and by an additional 2 points per extra day.** After four weeks of the deadline the essay cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.  
  
Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

## Schedule

Week  
Beginning

Session 1

Session 2

### I. INTRODUCTION

1  
Aug 31

**Concepts and Approaches**  
Landy, *Ch. 1*

**\*\*\*Select Policy Field\*\*\***

**Political Culture**  
Landy, *Ch. 2*  
Hartz, [Liberalism](#)

2  
Sept 7

**Contesting the Constitution**  
Landy, *Ch. 3*  
[The Constitution of the United States](#)

**Political Development**  
Landy, *Ch. 4*  
Orren/Skowronek, [Erosion of Am. Gov.](#)

### II. INSTITUTIONS & ACTORS

3  
Sept 14

**Federalism**  
Landy, *Ch. 5*  
Kettl, *States Divided*

**Political Economy**  
Landy, *Ch. 6*  
Mazzucato, [Breaking the Wall](#)

4  
Sept 21

**Congress**  
Landy, *Ch. 7*  
Bergner, *The Congressional Apprentice*

**The Presidency**  
Landy, *Ch. 8*  
Drezner, *Immature Leadership*

5  
Sept 28

**The Judiciary**  
Landy, *Ch. 9*  
Cordy, *Independent Judiciary*

**Bureaucracy**  
Landy, *Ch. 10*  
Michaels, *The American Deep State*

### III. 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: ISSUES & PROCESSES

6  
Oct 5

**Public Opinion**  
Landy, *Ch. 11*  
Cramer, *Racism in Public Opinion*

**Political Parties**  
Landy, *Ch. 12*  
PBS, [Opponents Became Enemies](#)  
Mansbridge, [Causes of Polarization](#)

7  
Oct 12

**Campaigns, Elections, and Media**  
Landy, *Ch. 13*  
UK Parliament, [US Elections](#)

**Political and Civic Participation**  
Landy, *Ch. 14*  
*Debate Excerpts (tba.)*

### Fall Break (Oct. 19-25)

8  
Oct 26

**Individual Policy Field Work**  
**One-to-one meetings**

**Individual Policy Field Work**  
**One-to-one meetings**

5  
Response  
Papers  
in weeks 3-7

#### IV. PUTTING THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

Conference 'Democracy and its Limits' (Online platform tba.)	
Conference Day 1 Thursday, Nov 5	Conference Day 2 Friday, Nov 6
1) 3:00-4:30 pm (CET) 'Illiberalism and Democracy'	4) 1:30-2:45pm (CET) 'International Relations under Trump'
2) 4:45-6pm (CET) ' Fake News, Social Media, and Political Communication'	5) 3:00-4:15 pm (CET) 'Inequalities and Social Rights'
3) 7:00-8:30pm (CET) 'Assessing the Elections'	6) 4:30-5:45pm (CET) 'Racism and the Future of the Welfare State'
	7) 7:00-8:30pm Keynote by Ruth Wilson Gilmore

Participate in  
(at least) 4 out  
of 7 events of  
your choice

9  
Nov 2

10  
Nov 9

**Conference debrief  
Domestic Implications I  
Elections / Economy**

**Domestic Implications II  
Health Care, Education, Infrastructure**

11  
Nov 16

**Foreign Policy Implications I  
Military / International Trade**

**Foreign Policy Implications II  
International Institutions / Immigration  
Final Wrap Up**

12  
Nov 23

13  
Nov 30

**One-to-one meetings  
In Preparation of Election Brief**

14  
Dec 7

Election Brief  
due on  
December 16