POIR3920

United States Politics: Money, Culture, Power

Session 2, In person-scheduled-weekday, North Ryde 2025

School of International Studies

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General Information

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Andrew Kapos
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Credit points
10

Prerequisites
130cp at 1000 level or above OR (20cp in POL or POIR or POIX units at 2000 level).

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description
US politics is today, as in much of its past, dominated by money and the power that money can buy. US cultural life is also preoccupied with money, in ways that profoundly affect the distribution of political power. Proceeding from these premises, this unit explores the relationship between money, culture and power in contemporary US politics. Topics covered include campaign financing, interest groups and the media; the impact of social inequalities of class, race, gender and sexual preference on US politics; the role of religion and political parties in the formulation of dominant political ideas; and the politics surrounding the global financial crisis and its aftermath.

Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

ULO1: Analyse and interpret primary and secondary US political sources and present the information in a written form

ULO2: Distinguish between competing interpretations of key US political issues, and succinctly express the strengths and weaknesses of these interpretations in written and oral form

ULO3: Plausibly explain how and why Donald Trump won the 2016 Presidential election

General Assessment Information

Late Assessment Submission Penalty

Unless a Special Consideration request has been submitted and approved, ***a 5% penalty (of the total possible mark) will be applied each day a written assessment is not submitted****, up until the 7th day (including weekends). After the 7th day, a mark of '0' (zero) will be awarded even if the assessment is submitted. Submission time for all written assessments is set at 11.55pm. A 1-hour grace period is provided to students who experience a technical issue.*

This late penalty will apply to non-timed sensitive assessment (incl essays, reports, posters, portfolios, journals, recordings etc). ***Late submission of time sensitive tasks*** *(such as tests/ exams, performance assessments/presentations, scheduled practical assessments/labs etc)* ***will only be addressed by the unit convenor in a Special consideration application. Special Consideration outcome may result in a new question or topic.***

Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Hurdle	Due	Groupwork/Individual	Short Extension	AI Approach
Major Essay	50%	No	Monday, 22 September, 11.55pm		No	
Take home exam	50%	No	Sunday 9 November. 11.55pm		No	

Major Essay

Assessment Type [1]: Essay
Indicative Time on Task [2]: 48 hours
Due: **Monday, 22 September, 11.55pm**
Weighting: **50%**
Groupwork/Individual:
Short extension [3]: No
AI Approach:

2500 word essay drawing on topics related to the unit

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Analyse and interpret primary and secondary US political sources and present the information in a written form
- Distinguish between competing interpretations of key US political issues, and succinctly express the strengths and weaknesses of these interpretations in written and oral form
- Plausibly explain how and why Donald Trump won the 2016 Presidential election

Take home exam

Assessment Type [1]: Quiz/Test
Indicative Time on Task [2]: 37 hours
Due: **Sunday 9 November. 11.55pm**
Weighting: **50%**
Groupwork/Individual:
Short extension [3]: No
AI Approach:

Take home online exam on topics across the entire unit.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Analyse and interpret primary and secondary US political sources and present the information in a written form
- Distinguish between competing interpretations of key US political issues, and succinctly express the strengths and weaknesses of these interpretations in written and oral form
- Plausibly explain how and why Donald Trump won the 2016 Presidential election

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[1] If you need help with your assignment, please contact:

- the academic teaching staff in your unit for guidance in understanding or completing this type of assessment
- Academic Success for academic skills support.

[2] Indicative time-on-task is an estimate of the time required for completion of the assessment task and is subject to individual variation.

[3] An automatic short extension is available for some assessments. Apply through the Service Connect Portal.

Delivery and Resources

Welcome to POIR/POIX3920 - United States Politics: Money, Culture, Power.

Welcome to United States Politics: Money, Culture, Power. US politics is today, as in much of its past, dominated by money and the power that money can buy. US cultural life is also preoccupied with money, in ways that profoundly affect the distribution of political power. Proceeding from these premises, this unit explores the relationship between money, culture and power in contemporary US politics.

Unlike most other courses you will do at university, the unit will be tracing developments in its subject matter in real time, discussing new issues as they arise on a week-to-week basis. This will occur alongside and in conjunction with the main substantive themes that the unit deals with, which together will give students an immersive experience of U.S. politics.

Topics covered include campaign financing, interest groups and the media; the impact of social inequalities of class, race, gender and sexual preference on US politics; the role of religion and political parties in the formulation of dominant political ideas; the rise of the so-called "alt-right"; and the vexed issue of US- Chinese rivalry. We'll examine how these factors played into the 2020 and 2024 presidential and congressional elections, and how they may shape future elections.

To make the most of the unit, be sure to listen to the lectures, do all of the prescribed reading, contribute regularly to the discussion board, and prepare well for the assessment tasks. Please don't hesitate to contact me using the Contact Teaching Staff link below if you have questions.

Lecture Outlines and Required Reading

Week One: Introduction: Money, Culture, Power and US Exceptionalism

An enduring feature of American political life is the belief in US exceptionalism – the idea that the United Stated is a unique polity that embodies liberty and democracy in a way that is or should be a beacon for the rest of the world. In this week, we explore the origins of American exceptionalism, and discuss the ways in which it relates to the organizing themes of this unit - money, culture, power.

Readings: No required reading for this week, though students are encouraged to start reading for the following week.

Week Two: Explaining the 2016, 2020 and 2024 US Elections

The 2016 Presidential election stunned the world with the unexpected election of Donald Trump.

This was despite polling that consistently predicted a Clinton victory, and despite Trump receiving nearly 3 million fewer votes than Clinton. This lecture explains how and why this occurred. We discuss the reasons the polls were so wrong, before analysing the electoral college system that enabled the candidate with fewer votes to win. This is followed by a detailed examination of Trump's winning electoral coalition and path to victory. We then do for the 2020 and 2024 presidential election what we did for 2016. All of this is linked to a broader discussion of continuity and change in US party politics and political culture, which anticipates content explored in subsequent lectures.

Readings:

Ruth Igienik, Scott Keeter and Hannah Hartig, **'**Behind Biden's 2020 Victory An examination of the 2020 electorate, based on validated voters,' The Pew Research Center (2021), https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/06/30/behind-bidens-2020-victory/

Rob Griffin, Ruy Teixeira and John Halpin, 'Voter Trends in 2016: A Final Examination,' Center for American Progress (2017), No pagination.

Supplementary Readings

John Sides, Michael Tesler and Lynn Vavreck, 'The 2016 U.S. Election: How Trump Lost and Won,' *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 28, 2 (2017), Pp. 34-44.

Emily Ekins, 'Five Types of Trump Voters: Who They Are and What The Believe,' Center for American Progress (2017) No Pagination.

Week Three: Elections, Campaigns and Campaign Financing

This lecture demystifies the US electoral system and key campaigning issues with which it is entwined. As well as outlining the mechanics of electoral processes for Congress and for the Presidency, we discuss the main techniques of voter identification and mobilization. We conclude by focusing on the vexed question of money in US politics and electoral funding. Can elections and political office be bought?

Readings:

Thomas Stratman, 'Campaign Finance: A Review and an Assessment of the State of the Literature' in Roger D. Congleton, Bernard N. Grofman, and Stefan Voigt (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Public Choice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 1-28.

Denis W. Johnson, *Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century: Activism, Big Data, and Dark Money* (New York: Routledge, 2016) pp. 77-92.

Jane Meyer, *Dark Money: How a Secretive Group of Billionaires is Trying to Buy Political control in the US* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2016), pp. 1-26.

Week Four: The Republican Party

The American two Party system emerged in the nineteenth century, and endures to this day, though in a very different form. We here discuss the emergence of the modern Republican Party and the subsequent changes in its politics and its key constituencies. How did the party of Lincoln become the Party of Trump? To answer this question, we pay particular attention to the transformations of the GOP since 1964, and the shift in its power base from the Mid-West and North East to the South and South West, as it has become more politically conservative.

Readings:

Ezra Klein, 'How Democrats Became Liberals and Republicans Became Conservatives', in Ezra Klein, *Why We're Polarized* (London: Profile Books 2020), pp. 1-18.

Steven Levinsky and Daniel Ziblatt, 'The Great Republican Abdication,' in Steven Levinsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die: What History Reveals About Our Future* (New York: Penguin/Random House, 2018), pp. 53-71.

Alan Ware, 'Donald Trump's Hyjacking of the Republican Party in Historical Perspective,' *The Political Quarterly,* Vol. 87: 3 (2016), pp. 406-414.

Supplementary Readings

Charles J. Sykes, *How the Right Lost Its Mind* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2017), pp. 3-18.

Matthew C. MacWilliams, 'Who Decides When the Party Doesn't? Authoritarian Voters and the Rise of Trump,' *Political Science and Politics*, Vol 49:4 (2016) pp. 716-721.

Week Five: The Democratic Party

The Democratic Party was once the champion of white supremacy, slavery and segregation in the South. In the 1930s it emerged as the party of the New Deal for American workers and, in the 1960s, the party advancing civil rights and the 'Great Society'. Today, it is unclear what the Democratic Party stands for and for whom it stands. In this lecture we examine how the party of Roosevelt became the Party of Clinton(s), and explore the contradictions between its centrist and left factions. we also consider its chances in the 2020 election.

Readings:

John Nichols, 'The Party that Lost Its Way,' in John Nichols, *The Fight for the Soul of the Democratic Party* (London: Verso, 2020), pp. 155-2017.

Thomas Frank, *Listen, Liberal: or What Ever Happened to the Party of the People?* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2016), pp. 217-245.

Supplementary Reading

Timothy Shenk, 'The Next Democratic Party,' *Dissent*, Vol 64: 1 (2017), pp. 12-15.

Lance Selfa, *The Democrats: A Critical History* (2nd edn) (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), pp. 63-85.

Week Six: Post-Racial or Most-Racial?

After Barack Obama won the Presidency in 2008, many pundits declared the dawn of a post racial America. This proved to be a false dawn. People of colour continue to be disadvantaged in many areas of social and political life, and structural racism persists in an era of supposed colour blindness. In the first of three weeks that focus on the centrality of race in US politics, we begin exploring the origins and contemporary manifestations of these inequities.

Readings:

Stephanie L. Canizales and Jody Agius Vallejo, 'Latinos and Racism in the Trump Era,' *Daedalus* (2021), 150 (2), pp. 150-164.

Brian F. Schaffner, Mathew Macwilliams and Tatishe Nteta, 'Understanding White Polarization in the 2016 Vote for the President: The Sobering Role of Racism and Sexism', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 133: 1 (2018), pp. 9-34.

Carol Anderson, *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression is Destroying Our Democracy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 72-95.

Week Seven: The New Jim Crow: Race, Incarceration and (in)Justice

Since the early 1970s, the politics of law and order has become a pervasive US preoccupation. This has been manifested in spiraling rates of incarceration, and a militarization of US policing. The weight of this shift has fallen disproportionately on African Americans males, who are now imprisoned in record numbers. This week we examine why.

Readings:

Bouke Klein Teeselink and Georgios Melios, 'Weather to Protest:The Effect of Black Lives Matter Protests on the 2020 Presidential Election,' (2021), Available at SSRN: http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3809877

Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness (New York: The New York Press, 2012), pp. 97-139.

Loic Wacqant, 'Class, Race and Hyperincarceration in Revanchist America,' Socialism and Democracy, 28:3 (2014), pp. 35-56.

Week Eight: Race, Class and the Destruction of the Welfare State

Continuing where we left off last week, we deepen our exploration of the connection between race inequality, class inequality, and the destruction of the welfare state since the 1970s. The US never had the developed welfare states that prevailed in Northern Europe, Scandinavia and Australasia, but it did nonetheless develop welfare systems that gave a modicum of social security to the less fortunate. These have been systematically dismantled by both Republican and Democratic administrations, over a period of several decades, with disastrous consequences for disadvantaged people regardless of ethnic background. We examine why.

Readings:

Christopher Faricy, 'Partisanship, Class, and Attitudes towards the Divided Welfare State,' *The Forum*, Vol. 15: 1: (2017), pp. 111–126.

Hana E. Brown, 'Racialized Conflict and Policy Spillover Effects: The Role of Race in the Contemporary U.S. Welfare State,' *American Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 119: 2 (2013), pp. pp. 394-443.

Week Nine: Political Emotions in the Age of Post-Truth Politics

Political science has historically been wedded to a rational actor view of political preferences, behaviour and voting. This approach is being increasingly discredited, as social scientists begin to appreciate that reason and rationality are frequently trumped by passions and emotions in politics, as contemporary developments in the US so clearly demonstrate. In the first of two lectures, we begin exploring the ways in which human emotions are collectivized and deployed for political purposes. We will be paying particular attention to the ways that emotions like fear, anger, humiliation, hate and love are used instrumentally by politicians to mobilize supporters, as Trump so successfully did in the Republican primaries and Presidential election.

Readings:

Lloyd Cox and Steve Wood, '"Got Him" Revenge, Emotions and the Killing of Osama Bin Laden', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 43: 1 (2017), pp. 112–129.

Paula Ionide, *The Emotional Politics of Racism: How Feelings Trump Facts in an Era of Colorblindness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), pp. 1-26.

Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, 'Public Displays of Disaffection: The Emotional Politics of Donald Trump', in Pablo J. Boczkowski and Zizi Papacharissi (eds) *Trump and the Media* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2018), pp. 79-86.

Week Ten: Political Emotions, Media and Social Media

Emotional contagion, which was discussed in the previous lecture, is today transmitted via

traditional and social media. Without necessarily knowing it, significant constituencies take their emotional cues from what they see, hear and read in mass and social media. This week we examine the changing role of media and social media in US politics. The emphasis will be on the broader relationship between politics and social media, money and the cult of celebrity that seems to now pervade so many aspects of US cultural and political life. We examine the deeper structural and cultural forces that shape these developments, and discuss the growing political polarization that they encourage.

Reading:

Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2017), pp. 31-68.

Cass R. Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 59-97.

Week Eleven: The Religious Right

Despite the formal, constitutional separation between church and state in the US, religion plays a more important role in US politics than in any other comparable western state. We explore why this is and analyse how it is manifested. We pay particular attention to the influence that the Religious Right has exercised over the contemporary Republican Party, and ask how their values can be reconciled with a Trump Presidency.

Reading:

Ceri Hughes, The God Card: Strategic Employment of Religious Language in U.S. Presidential Discourse,' *International Journal of Communication* 13(2019), pp. 528–549.

Nicholas T. Davis, 'Religion and Partisan-Ideological Sorting, 1984–2016' *Social Science Quarterly* (2018), https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12508

Travis Gettys, 'Former Evangelical Republican warns the religious right's support of Trump will harm Christianity' Salon.com (2019) https://www.salon.com/2019/07/08/former-evangelicalrepublican- warns-the-religious-rights-support-of-trump-will-harm-christianity_partner/

Week Twelve: The Alt-Right and Authoritarianism in the Age of Trump

In recent years, US politics has seen the growth of what many commentators have labelled the Alt-Right. This broad label encompasses various political tendencies and organizations that are to the right of the Republican Party and traditional conservatives. Such groups include a rogues' gallery of white supremacists, Neo-Confederates, conspiracy theorists, Anti-Semites, Neo-Nazis, militia organizations and men's rights groups. Worryingly, their resentments and hatreds are being increasingly mainstreamed and tolerated, if not encouraged, by establishment Conservatives. In this lecture we examine the sources of this renewed vigor on the Far-Right, and discuss its relationship to Trump and the Republican Party more generally.

Reading:

George Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 4-30.

Karen Stenner and Jonathon Haidt, 'Authoritarianism is Not a Momentary Madness, But an Eternal Dynamic Within Liberal Democracies' in Cass R. Sunstein (ed) *Can it Happen Here: Authoritarianism in America* (New York: Harper Collins, 2018), pp. 175-220.

Week Thirteen: The United States and China

In this final week, we explore the intensifying rivalry between the United States and China, in its economic, political and military dimensions. We will try and examine this unfolding dynamic in the context of the domestic politics that constrains state leaders in bother countries. We end by summarizing the unit and preparing for the exam. Students will also find the following resources useful.

Useful Journals

• Political Science Quarterly

• Political Perspectives

• The Nation

• Presidential Studies Quarterly

• American Historical Review

• American Political Science Review

• American Journal of Political Science

• Diplomatic History

• Foreign Affairs

• Foreign Policy

• International Organization

• International Security

• International Studies Quarterly

• International Studies Review

• Journal of Cold War History

• Journal of Conflict Resolution

• Journal of Politics

• Millennium

• Security Studies

• Survival

• The National Interest

• World Politics

Useful Websites

• http://www.census.gov/

• https://www.pewresearch.org/

• http://www.gallup.com/home.aspx

• http://www.electionstudies.org/

• https://www.realclearpolitics.com/

• http://international.nytimes.com/

• http://www.washingtonpost.com/

• Http://meria.biu.ac.il/research-g/us-policy.html [Internet Resources on American Foreign Policy]

• www.gwu.edu/ [see link on 'national security archive']

• www.opendemocracy.net

• www.zmag.org

• www.politics1.com

• www.americanpolitics.com

• www.americanempireproject.com

• www.newamericancentury.org

• www.datagold.com/empire-ip

• www.wilsoncenter.org

• www.bbc.co.uk

• www.brookings.edu

• www.politico.com

Unit Schedule

Week	Date, week beginning	Lecture	Tutorial	assessment

1	28July	Introduction: Money, Culture, Power and US Exceptionalism	American exceptionalism, liberalism, capitalism, religion	None
2	4 Aug	Explaining the 2016, 2020 and 2024 U.S. Elections	The electoral college, federalism and congress; the election results; explaining the results	None
3	11 Aug	Elections, Campaigns and Campaign Financing	Assembling winning electoral coalitions; segmenting the electorate; the science of successful campaigning; campaign finance - can money predict winners?	None
4	18 Aug	The Republican Party	The Party of Lincoln to the Party of Trump: How did we get here?	None
5	25 Aug	The Democratic Party	The Party of Roosevelt to the Party of Biden: How did we get here?	None
6	1 Sept	Post Racial or Most Racial?	The long shadow of slavery and white supremacy; civil rights and white backlash; the politics of changing ethnic demographics; the Obama Presidency and the foundations of Trumpism; coloured disenfranchisement	None
7	8 Sept	The New Jim Crow: Race, Incarceration and (in)Justice	The colour of mass incarceration; the war on drugs; 'broken windows' and zero tolerance; the new Jim Crow; militarising police; Black Lives Matter	None
8	15 Sept	Race, Class and the Destruction of the Welfare State	New Deal/Great Society and its dismantling; Reagan and welfare retrenchment; (Bill) Clinton and welfare retrenchment; Bush and welfare retrenchment; consequences for race and class	Major essay due Monday 22 September, 11.55pm
9	6 Oct	Political Emotions in the Age of Post-Truth Politics	Transcending the rational actor view of politics; emotions trump facts; collectivizing emotions and making them public and political; the political emotions of masculine, white nationalism - fear, humiliation, rage and hatred	None
10	13 Oct	Political Emotions, Media and Social Media	Mechanisms of mediated emotional contagion; talk radio, Fox News and the politics of outrage; political polarization and social media; the emotional politics of Donald Trump	None
11	20	The Religious Right	The emotional and political power of organized religion; Protestant Nation?; the 'Born Again' Republican Party; the politics of pro-life and pro-choice; why did evangelicals support Trump in record numbers in 2106 and 2020?	None
12	27 Oct	The Alt Right	What is the alt-right and where did it come from?; white nationalism and the politics of extremism; traditional conservatives and the alt-right; Trump and the alt-right	None
13	3 Nov	The United States and China	Points of conflict; the role of domestic politics in U.S.-China rivalry	Final, online exam due Sunday 9 Nov, 11.55pm

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from Policy Central (https://policie

s.mq.edu.au). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

- Academic Appeals Policy
- Academic Integrity Policy
- Academic Progression Policy
- Assessment Policy
- Fitness to Practice Procedure
- Assessment Procedure
- Complaints Resolution Procedure for Students and Members of the Public
- Special Consideration Policy

Students seeking more policy resources can visit Student Policies (https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/policies). It is your one-stop-shop for the key policies you need to know about throughout your undergraduate student journey.

To find other policies relating to Teaching and Learning, visit Policy Central (https://policies.mq.edu.au) and use the search tool.

Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: https://students.mq.edu.au/admin/other-resources/student-conduct

Results

Results published on platform other than eStudent, (eg. iLearn, Coursera etc.) or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your student email address and will be made available in eStudent. For more information visit connect.mq.edu.au or if you are a Global MBA student contact globalmba.support@mq.edu.au

Academic Integrity

At Macquarie, we believe academic integrity – honesty, respect, trust, responsibility, fairness and courage – is at the core of learning, teaching and research. We recognise that meeting the expectations required to complete your assessments can be challenging. So, we offer you a range of resources and services to help you reach your potential, including free online writing and maths support, academic skills development and wellbeing consultations.

Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit http://students.mq.edu.au/support/

Academic Success

Academic Success provides resources to develop your English language proficiency, academic writing, and communication skills.

- Workshops
- Chat with a WriteWISE peer writing leader
- Access StudyWISE
- Upload an assignment to Studiosity
- Complete the Academic Integrity Module

The Library provides online and face to face support to help you find and use relevant information resources.

- Subject and Research Guides
- Ask a Librarian

Student Services and Support

Macquarie University offers a range of Student Support Services including:

- IT Support
- Accessibility and disability support with study
- Mental health support
- Safety support to respond to bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and sexual assault
- Social support including information about finances, tenancy and legal issues
- Student Advocacy provides independent advice on MQ policies, procedures, and processes

Student Enquiries

Got a question? Ask us via the Service Connect Portal, or contact Service Connect.

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit http://www.mq.edu.au/about_us/offices_and_units/information_technology/help/.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the Acceptable Use of IT Resources Policy. The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

Unit information based on version 2025.03 of the Handbook