**AMERICAN POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT**

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**Course description and class schedule**

The aim of the course is to provide a general overview of the U.S. political system and a basic understanding of American politics. The topics discussed during the semester include: the “exceptional” nature of American society and political institutions; the historical and theoretical background of the American Founding; the significance, overall structure and most important provisions of the U.S. Constitution; the principle of federalism; the structure and workings of the different branches – the legislative, the executive and the judicial – of the American government, with special emphasis given to the principle of the separation of powers and the system of checks and balances; political culture and participation; the role of political parties and interest groups; election campaigns and the news media; and the future of the United States as a superpower. All through the semester we are going to use current political events and debates as starting points, or illustrations to the topics under discussion.

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| **Week** | **Topic** |
| 1. | Introduction, course requirements |
| 2. | American exceptionalism |
| 3. | The American Founding |
| 4. | The Constitution; federalism |
| 5. | Congress |
| 6. | The President |
| *7.* | *Fall Break* |
| 8. | The Supreme Court |
| 9. | Political culture and participation |
| 10. | Political parties and interest groups |
| 11. | Election campaigns and the news media |
| 12. | Class debate: America’s future |
| 13. | Final test |

**Required and recommended readings**

James Q. Wilson – John J. DiIulio, Jr. – Meena Bose: *American Government. Institutions and Policies.* Wadsworth Publishing, 2012. [designated chapters]

The Declaration of Independence: <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html>

The Constitution of the United States: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution>

The Federalist Papers: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/fed.asp>

Ron Chernow: *Alexander Hamilton.* The Penguin Press, New York, 2004.

Alexis de Tocqueville: *Democracy in America.* Edited by J. P. Mayer. Perennial Classics, 2000.

Seymour Martin Lipset: *American Exceptionalism. A Double-Edged Sword.* W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1997.

Robert Dahl: *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?* Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2001.

Joseph Joffe: *The Myth of America’s Decline. Politics, Economics, and a Half Century of False Prophecies.* W.W. Norton & Co., 2014.

Peter Woll (ed.): *American Government. Readings and Cases.* Pearson Longman, New York, 2004.

**Useful websites**

The New York Times ([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com))

The Washington Post ([www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com))

The Wall Street Journal ([www.wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com))

Politico ([www.politico.com](http://www.politico.com))

Vox ([www.vox.com](http://www.vox.com))

FiveThirtyEight (<https://fivethirtyeight.com/>)

The Economist ([www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com))

The New Yorker ([www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com))

The Atlantic ([www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com))

Foreign Affairs ([www.foreignaffairs.com](http://www.foreignaffairs.com))

Foreign Policy ([www.foreignpolicy.com](http://www.foreignpolicy.com))

The American Interest (<http://www.the-american-interest.com/>)

**Course requirements/evaluation**

* class attendance: max. 3 absences
* Erasmus students have to submit a brief (2-3 pp.) summary of a book chapter, article, or series of articles chosen from the recommended readings by the end of the semester
* elective: presentations (15 mins.)/essays (5-10 pp.) on approved topic, based on the readings; students giving presentations/writing essays get extra points in the final test
* final test: multiple choice test, based on class discussions and readings