

Minority Politics in the US: Understanding Racial and Ethnic Politics in the Obama Era

GOVT 205

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In 2008 Americans witnessed a historical moment, Barack Obama, an African American, was elected the 44th president of the United States of America. Some pundits and scholars argue that we have truly entered a new “post-racial” era, in which the color of one’s skin is no longer an impediment to one’s opportunities or success in life. This course seeks to understand minority politics via the significance of Barack Obama as the first African American president. The course examines the extent to which the United States of America has entered into a post-racial society. We also examine the policy challenges Obama has faced as the first African American president. One example is the passing of comprehensive health care reform. We discuss whether opposition to health care is driven by people’s racial attitudes or their different views about the role of government. Other topics that the course will examine are: how Obama became the first African American president; the strategies his campaign used to motivate citizens to the voting booth; the public’s reaction to Obama’s election; racial group identity during the Obama era; Trump’s victory as a response to Obama.

Course Requirements

Your course grade is based on the following components:

- 1 Reaction Papers (15%)
- Final Exam (30%)
- Midterm Exam (30%)
- Class Participation (10%)
- 1 Assignments (15%)

Exams: The exam will be an in-class exam based on the readings and the materials discussed in lecture up to that point. **There will be NO early or make-up exams except in cases of *extreme, documented emergencies, observance of religious holidays, or properly documented University-sponsored planned activities.*** Missing the exam in all other cases will result in a score of zero on the exam.

Reaction Paper: Reaction papers are a short 3 -5 page paper that summarize your **analysis** of the readings from one of the topics listed below (e.g., Who Elected Obama?, Blacks Politics in the Obama Era, or Tea Party Movement). A **Reaction paper must be turned in at the beginning of class the day of the assigned readings.** The paper is structured to encourage you to develop your own arguments and evaluations of the topics in the course. A reaction paper is NOT just summaries of the readings. A good reaction paper contains a well-structured argument and should examine at least one of the following questions: How do the readings fit together? What important questions were answered by the readings? How well are these questions answered?

What important questions are left unanswered? What shortcomings characterize this week's reading? How would you improve upon them?

Your reaction papers should:

- Be well written (proofread) and organized
- Contain original ideas and analysis of the readings
- Contain support for your claims (e.g., with well-structured arguments, convincing examples, or references to other research)
- Discuss all of the week's readings under a chosen topic
- All references to other person's thoughts, ideas or terminology should be acknowledged using some standard form of citation such as Modern Language Association (MLA), Chicago Manual of Style (CMS), American Psychological Association (APA)
- Doubled spaced with 1" top and bottom margins and 1" or 1.25" left and right margins
- 12 point, Times New Roman font

Your reaction paper should **NOT**:

- Be over 5 pages
- Be a simple summary of the readings
- Offer simply stylistic comments about the readings

Class Participation: Please read all assigned materials and participate in class discussions. Your class participation grade consists of an equal weighting of attendance and *quality* of participation. *Quality* refers not to quantity but to close attention to the readings and course materials.

Assignments: There will be 2 assignments this semester. The assignments will be on 2 course topics (e.g., Who Elected Obama?) Each assignment will require you to answer several questions based on the readings of that week's course topic (e.g. Who Elected Obama?). You are required to write your answers (1-page single spaced) and post them on ELMS. All assignments are due Tuesday before class the week of the assigned readings.

Learning Objectives

- Students will develop a better understanding of racial diversity in the United States. They will also learn about the difficulty politicians experience in representing such a diverse population. These skills will help students in the future as they interact with a growing diverse population.
- Students will also learn the different methodological techniques scientists use to examine questions of race. They will read articles and books by leading experts that employ a multitude of techniques to answer their research questions, such as experimentation, large-scale surveys, and case studies.
- Students will also improve their writing skills. The course requires students to write two reactions papers. They will have to develop well-structured arguments and provide convincing examples to support their theory.

Professionalism

Remember that this is an academic environment. Therefore, I ask that you minimize unnecessary disruptions (This includes, but it is not limited to, side conversations and cell phone calls), respect others beliefs (challenge the idea and not the person), be courteous and refrain from using profanity in the class. I also ask that you be proactive if any conflict occurs. This means notifying me immediately of any problems you are having in class.

Academic Dishonesty

All written work must be your own, and must be in line with Georgetown University regulations on academic honesty. You are expected to be well aware of these guidelines; ignorance does not excuse a violation of these guidelines.

Laptops, cellphones, and other distractions

Please silence your cellphone and refrain from texting—which is distracting to me and to other students. Laptops should be used only for course-related reasons, such as taking notes. If I can hear you talking, it means you are too loud and are disturbing the class. If you repeatedly disrupt class by talking with friends, texting, surfing the web, etc., it will negatively affect your course participation grade.

Medically necessitated absences:

Georgetown University has a policy regarding medically necessitated absences from class. I will not take attendance during class. Under the policy, I will accept a self-signed note from the student attesting to the date of the illness as an excused absence. A student is allowed only TWO self-signed notes per class per semester.

A student who experiences a prolonged absence or an illness preventing attendance at a major scheduled grading event (see above) is required to provide written documentation of the illness from the Health Center or an outside health care provider, verifying the dates of the treatment and the time period during which the student was unable to meet academic responsibilities.

Students with disabilities: I will make every effort to accommodate students with disabilities. If you need accommodation, please let me know as early as possible, and please provide written documentation from the Disability Support Service office.

Religious observances:

Please provide advance notice if a religious observance will cause you to miss section or a major grading event so that we may make alternative arrangements ahead of time.

Grade Appeals:

All grade appeals will only be considered in writing. Should you believe that you deserve a higher grade on an exam, assignment, or paper, you must write a paragraph or so outlining your case and why the grade should be changed. You should submit this written appeal to your TA, who will then be happy to read your explanation and consider your exam, assignment, or paper. The deadline for consideration of any appeal will be **one week** following the receipt of the grade in question. There will be no exceptions to this policy. Of course, you may always ask questions for clarification, but we will not consider grade changes that you have not pursued in writing (or that you fail to submit before the one-week deadline).

Readings

As you do the readings, you might find it useful to keep the following questions in mind:

1. TYPE: What type of reading is this? Is it a theoretical piece? Is it a literature review? Is it an empirical piece?

2. PROPOSITIONS/HYPOTHESES: What are the propositions, or hypotheses, advanced by the author?
3. EVIDENCE: If it is a theoretical piece, what are the justifications? If it is a literature review, what are the sources? If it is an empirical piece, what data are analyzed?
4. CONCLUSIONS: What are the conclusions that the author reaches? Are they justified given the evidence presented?
5. REMARKS: What are your reactions to this piece? What questions does it answer? What does it leave unanswered? If you have criticisms, how would you improve upon the piece?

Texts

Each of these required texts are available for purchase at Stamp in the bookstore.

- 1) Tesler, Michael & David Sears. 2010. *Obama's Race: The 2008 Election and the Dream of a Post-Racial America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 2) Banks, Antoine. 2014. *Anger and Racial Politics: The Emotional Foundation of Racial Attitudes in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

In addition to these books, there are several required readings that are available via the library's e-journal collection or the course ELMS page. Readings should be read by the date they appear on the syllabus.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments:

Part 1: Obama's Political Coalition and Political Strategy

This section examines how Barack Obama became the first African American president of the United States. We also look at whether his election demonstrates we are in a post-racial era. We do this by looking at who voted for Obama. For example, did he build a broad coalition of supporters? We also take a look at Obama's campaign strategy and how he was able to motivate new voters to the polls. Specifically, week 2 focuses on who voted for Obama in 2008. Week 3 looks at Obama's message of hope and change and how it resonated with many new voters.

Introduction

Who Elected Obama?

July 7. Obama, Barack 2006. *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*. Chapter 7.

July 8. Kinder, Donald R. and Allison Dale-Riddle. 2012. *The End of Race: Obama, 2008, and Racial Politics in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press Chapter 4.

How Obama Got elected?

July 9. Tesler, Michael & David Sears. 2010. *Obama's Race: The 2008 Election and the Dream of a Post-Racial America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 2.

July 9. Tesler, Michael & David Sears. 2010. *Obama's Race: The 2008 Election and the Dream of a Post-Racial America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 3.

Part 2: Deracialization

This part of the course focuses on Obama's strategy of deracialization. Some scholars have argued that for black candidates to win national office (e.g. President) they must run a deracialized campaign. We examine whether Obama deracializing his campaign means that the country has moved past race. We take an in-depth look at how Obama's campaign avoided issues of race by focusing on the economy (week 4) and minimizing his racial identity (week 5).

It's the Economy, not Race

July 13. Kenski, Kate, Bruce W. Hardy, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. 2010. *The Obama Victory: How Media, Money, and Message Shaped the 2008 Election*. Oxford Press: Chapter 8

July 14. Lewis-Beck, Michael S. and Richard Nadeau. 2009. "Obama and the Economy in 2008." *Perspective and Politics* pgs. 479-483.

Week 5: Obama's Racial Identity: Is he black?

July 15. Junn, Jane and David J. Anderson 2010. "De-Racializing Obama: White Voters' Evaluation of Minority Candidates," *American Politics Research*, 38:3 443-470.

Part 3: The New Black Politics

This section of the course examines what Obama's election means for black politics. For example, we focus on what Obama's victory means for the status of blacks in America. Does his election signify that we are in post-racial America where blacks have the same opportunities as whites? Should blacks move away from a strategy of protest politics to electoral politics? Week 6 focuses on how blacks have moved away from black politics and embrace Obama's message of moderation and coalition building. Week 7 discusses the rise of black politics with the emergence of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Is Black Politics on the Decline?

July 16. Harris, Fredrick C. 2012. *The Price of the Ticket: Barack Obama and the Rise and Decline of Black Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapters 1 and 5.

July 16. Harris, Fredrick C. 2012. *The Price of the Ticket: Barack Obama and the Rise and Decline of Black Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 6.

July 20. ***Midterm Exam***

Blacks Politics on the Rise?

July 21. Harris, Frederick 2015. *The Next Civil Rights Movement*. Dissent" Link Below

<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/black-lives-matter-new-civil-rights-movement-fredrick-harris>

July 22. Banks, Antoine, Ismail White, and Brian McKenzie. 2019. "Black Politics: How Anger Influence The Political Actions Blacks Pursue to Reduce Racial Inequality" *Political Behavior*

Part 4: The End of Racism as we know it?

This section of the course examines whether Obama's election signifies a decline in the impact of racism on American politics. Some pundits and scholars argue that for America to be in a post-racial society – racism should play a much smaller role in electoral politics. We look at whether racism had an effect on people's willingness to support Obama. In this section, we focus on two types of racism – explicit racial bias (a conscious form of prejudice) and implicit racial bias (an unconscious form of prejudice).

The Impact of Racism on Vote Choice

July 23. Piston, Spencer. 2010. "How Explicit Racial Prejudice Hurt Obama in the 2008 Election." *Political Behavior* 32: 431-451.

July 23. *** **Assignment 1 due** *** Take Implicit Association Test:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>.

July 27. Payne, Keith et al. 2010. "Implicit and explicit prejudice in the 2008 American presidential election" *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. 46: 367-374.

Party 5: Tea Party Movement

During the Obama presidency, we all witnessed the emergence of the Tea Party. Some pundits argued that the Tea Party emerged out of resentment of having a Black president. Others contend that the party is a grassroots movement that emerged from a bad economy and expanding government. This section focuses on why did the Tea Party emerge? We also examine if the emergence of the movement means we are in a post racial era. Week 10 focuses on how the Tea Party came about. Week 11 focuses on who are the Tea Party's strongest supporters.

Tea Party Movement

July 28. Parker, Christopher and Matt Barreto. 2013. *Change They Can't Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. Chapter 2.

July 29. Parker, Christopher and Matt Barreto. 2013. *Change They Can't Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. Chapter 5.

Part 6: Public Policy During the Obama Era

This part of the course focuses on Obama's top policy initiatives as president – health care reform and immigration. We discuss whether America is in a post racial society given the challenges the Obama administration has faced trying to implement policies to reduce racial and ethnic inequality. Specifically, we examine whether racial/ethnic bias or views about government played a significant role in people's opposition to his policy agenda. Week 11 focuses on the health care reform bill and various changes it proposes to the health care system. This week also covers the roadblocks the Obama administration has experienced trying to get the bill passed in Congress. Week 12 discuss people's opposition to bill and some of the factors driving their frustrations. In week 14, we focus on Trump's victory and whether it is a response to Obama's policies.

Health Care Reform

July 30. Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Theda Skocpol. 2010. *Health Care Reform and American*

Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know. New York: Oxford University Press. Introduction, Chapters 1 and 4

August 3. Tesler, Michael. 2012. "The Spillover of Racialization into Health Care: How President Obama Polarized Public Opinion by Race and Racial Attitudes and Race." *American Journal of Political Science*, 56: 690–704.

"Obamacare"

August 4. Banks, Antoine. 2014. *Anger and Racial Politics: The Emotional Foundation of Racial Attitudes in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1

August 4. Banks, Antoine. 2014. *Anger and Racial Politics: The Emotional Foundation of Racial Attitudes in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 5

Is Donald Trump a Response to Obama?

August 5. Antoine Banks and Heather Hicks. 2018. "The Effectiveness of a Racialized Counter-Strategy" *American Journal of Political Science*

August 6. *****Final Exam*****