

# POLITICS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

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This course will explore how electoral politics impacts the formation of national security policy. At the end of the course, students will have a better understanding of how elected officials approach national security issues, the role of the press in framing and influencing those issues, and the impact of relevant interest groups in connecting voters with elected officials. Students will spend a lot of time reviewing polling data, dissecting political ads, discussing how the two political parties approach national security issues and looking at case studies that bring together all of the above. And since this course will take place against the backdrop of the 2012 presidential election, this course will draw heavily on current events to explore topics related to the course. The class will be divided into four sections:

Section 1: This part will focus on elections and the extent to which voters consider national security issues when they go to the polls. Students will review polling data, discuss the stereotypes of the respective political parties, analyze political ads, and discuss recent elections where national security played a significant role. Particular attention will be paid to the 2004 presidential election and how 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan influenced the outcome of that election.

Section 2: The second part will focus on understanding the role of the press, the perspectives of different editorial pages, and how to assess the credibility of sources used to report on national security issues. Students will be assigned different publications to research editorial viewpoints and assess how those viewpoints influence debates over national security policy. Students will then look at how elected officials interact with the press to connect with and influence voters.

Section 3: The third part of the course will focus on how interest groups, which often serve as the primary conduit for voters to interact with their elected officials, influence politicians in pursuing the interest group's foreign policy and national security objectives. Students will be assigned various interest groups to research with the purpose of identifying and evaluating the effectiveness of the tools those interest groups use to impact the policy making process. Particular attention will be paid to fundraising, communications strategies, conventions, lobbying efforts, and participation in hearings and other parts of the legislative process.

Section 4: The fourth part of the course will be a series of case studies beginning with the creation of the 9/11 Commission and the implementation of the 9/11 Commission recommendations. (Students will be required to read the 9/11 Commission report in preparation for this section of the course). The case studies will allow students to look at how political considerations, the press, and interest group considerations influence the formation of national security policy.

## **GRADING**

Class Discussion and Participation – 33%: This will be a heavy discussion class and students will be evaluated accordingly. At the beginning of most classes, a student (or a group of students) will introduce the readings and other assigned material for the day. The presentation will summarize the assignment, provide context for the material that is being covered, and offer relevant critiques as warranted. The rest of the class will be expected to ask questions and engage with those making the presentation.

Writing Assignments – 33%: There will be a series of small writing assignments throughout the semester that will respond to weekly readings and there will be one lengthy writing assignment of 5-10 pages. The lengthy writing assignment will likely be a memo to a candidate or elected official on a national security issue of interest to the student.

Final Exam – 33%: The final exam will be a take-home writing assignment that will ask students to look at a case study and draw upon the different parts of the class. The assignment will require students to succinctly summarize the national security issue involved, evaluate the electoral politics surrounding that issue, review and assess relevant articles and editorials, and incorporate the views and influence of interests groups trying to affect the outcome of the policymaking decision. The ultimate task of the final exam will be for the students to make a recommendation to an elected official on how to formulate the best national security policy while also address the pressures of electoral politics.

## **READINGS**

This will not be an intensive reading course, but students are expected to do all the assignments and be prepared for class. Most of the readings will be assigned on a weekly basis and will likely include recently published newspaper and magazine articles, Congressional testimony, and speeches by government officials. The class blog will also be used to discuss many of the readings and for students to share pieces they think are particularly relevant to the direction of the class.

Students will be required to read the entire Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (the “9/11 Commission Report”) in preparation for the fourth section of the class. Students are also strongly encouraged to read The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11 by Lawrence Wright, also in preparation for the fourth section of the class. The other two books that will be required are Election 2004: How Bush Won and What You Can Expect in the Future by the staff of *Newsweek* and A Problem from Hell: American and the Age of Genocide by Samantha Power.

## **RESEARCH**

Information provided in class and in the reading material will not be enough for students to adequately prepare for class presentations, the writing assignment, and the final exam. Accordingly, students will be expected to be creative in how they conduct their research so as to capture as much relevant information as possible. Class time will be spent exploring research tools and how to evaluate the credibility of sources. Students will learn how to use LexisNexis, THOMAS, and other resources essential to understanding the national security policy formation process.