

Introduction to the American Political Process

Writing Assignment 2

Please answer **one** of the following questions, drawing from any relevant readings from the syllabus as well as your own research.

Your essay should be 1,000-1,500 words (about 4-6 double-spaced pages). We will not enforce a strict word limit, but please try to stay within these bounds. As always, please cite all your sources in-text and include a list of references (Chicago style).

1) In the last twenty years, “identity” has come to the forefront of both academic and nonacademic conversations about what shapes public opinion and drives political behavior. Discuss at least two recent articles from the American political behavior literature on each of (a) ethnic/racial, (b) gender or sexual, and (c) class or religious identities. How do the views represented in this literature differ from other arguments we have seen that are based on voters having coherent and independent policy preferences?

If the identity literature is correct, what implications do you see for democratic representation? In light of all we have learned about American political behavior (classes 16-19), do you think identity politics represent a harmful or beneficial form of political organization?

2) Public approval of Congress now ranges around 20%. Many more Americans believe it is possible to speak with the dead in seances than believe that Congress is doing a good job. What is the evidence of Congressional dysfunction and what are the leading theories about the decline in legislative capacity? Please also discuss a few solutions that you have seen proposed and whether you think they will be effective.

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