

## **American Politics Project Discussion Questions, Fall 2010**

### **DQ1: Introductions, Profiles, or "Who We Are"**

*Posted by Dr. Renee Van Vechten on August 10, 2010 at 11:35am*

After you create or edit your personal profile page to include your name, university, and a photo or image to represent yourself, respond to this Weekly Discussion Question by posting a message introducing yourself to your classmates on the site. Your response to this Discussion Question post should include at least your first name and initial of your last name, campus, and something interesting about yourself. Finally, answer this question: What one issue do you feel it's important for the US government (President, Congress, or Supreme Court) to address in the next year? Make a specific recommendation about the course of action that you think should be taken.

Replies: 301

### **DQ2: Should America have its first Constitutional Convention?**

*Posted by Dr. King-Meadows on September 5, 2010 at 11:56pm*

September 17<sup>th</sup> is Constitution Day, a day where Americans celebrate the U.S. Constitution that has existed since 1787 – 223 years ago! Some argue the Constitution fails to meet the demands and circumstances of life in the twenty-first century. These individuals would like to hold a national constitutional convention to discuss changes to the Constitution. America has never had a national convention to propose changes to the Constitution. Others believe the Constitution is fine without further amendments, and they reject the idea of hosting a national convention. What do you think? Should America have a national convention to propose amendments to the U.S. Constitution? What are the pros and cons associated with having such a convention?

Replies: 254

### **DQ3: Should the Mosque be Built Near Ground Zero?**

*Posted by Dr. Renee Van Vechten on September 13, 2010 at 9:45am*

Impassioned controversy surrounds the construction of an Islamic mosque near the site of "Ground Zero" in Manhattan. Many conservative U.S. political leaders have attacked the idea as "insensitive" or offensive, considering it a symbolic act that denigrates the memory of those who died because the terrorists were Islamic radicals. Pres. Obama has asserted the right of the community to build it, but has stopped short of endorsing it. Others assert that this is a matter of religious freedom and tolerance, and preventing the mosque (or moving it further away) would be an irrational act of surrender to intolerance or raw emotion.

There's no shortage of opinions -- reasoned and otherwise -- on this issue. Here are two articles hitting some of the arguments:

1. AGAINST: Charles Krauthammer, "Sacrilege at Ground Zero" (Washington Post, 8/13/10) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/12/AR2...>
2. FOR: Kathleen Parker, "The Ground Zero Mosque Must be Built" (Washington Post, 8/18/10) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/17/AR2...>

Where do you stand on this issue?

Tags: freedom, mosque, religious, tolerance

Replies: 413

### **DQ4: The Role and Place of the Tea Party in the American Political Landscape**

*Posted by Dr. Lilly Goren on September 19, 2010 at 8:11pm*

Now that the primary season has concluded, it is clear that the Tea Party Movement has had quite a lot of success recruiting candidates and ushering them through the nomination process, especially a number of senate candidates who have secured the nomination to run as Republicans in a host of states. What will be the long term effect of the Tea Party Movement? Will this movement be absorbed in to the Republican Party or will the Republican Party be absorbed by the Tea Party Movement? Or will the Tea Party Movement be able to establish itself as a separate and distinct political party within our political system?

Replies: 294

### **DQ5:Colbert goes to Washington**

*Posted by Prof. Wendy L. Johnston on September 27, 2010 at 4:15am*

Last week political satirist and comedian, Stephen Colbert testified before a Senate Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship and Border Security.

[link to video of his testimony: "Stephen Colbert Testifies on Capitol Hill":

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xy25NFH69gk&feature=player\\_embedded#at=55](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xy25NFH69gk&feature=player_embedded#at=55)]

Does Colbert's comedic approach bolster or hinder his message?

Replies: 332

### **DQ6: To Vote or Not To Vote**

*Posted by Prof. Wendy L. Johnston on October 5, 2010 at 12:05pm*

An article in today's NY Times posits that the Latino voter turnout will fall short for the 2010 midterm elections, largely due to issues surrounding the debate on immigration.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/06/us/politics/06immig.html?ref=poli...>

The article also suggests a growing number of Latino activists seeking to effect change in the immigration debate via the election booth.

In your opinion, which is the more effective tool, voting or not voting?

Replies: 327

### **DQ 7: Free speech versus privacy rights? where is the balance?**

*Posted by Dr. Anita Chadha on October 11, 2010 at 7:49am*

As the 2010 midterm elections heat up around the country, so does the case of Snyder v. Phelps (09-751) before the U.S. Supreme Court. The case revolves around the first amendment and the struggle to find a constitutional balance between free speech and privacy. At odds are the members of the Westboro Baptist Church who believe that their free speech gives them a right to protest no matter how disturbing or provocative their demonstrations versus the fallen Marine's father who argues that those protests are an invasion of privacy at his son's funeral.

How does one balance the privacy rights of grieving families and the free speech rights of demonstrators? There is no shortage of discussion on this issue. Also please note the discussions by the justices themselves in the following articles:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/07/us/07scotus.html?\\_r=1&scp=1&sq=Snyder%20v.%20Phelps%20%2809-751%29&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/07/us/07scotus.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Snyder%20v.%20Phelps%20%2809-751%29&st=cse)

<http://www.cnn.com/2010/CRIME/10/06/washington.free.speech.trial/index.html>

Where do you stand on this issue?

Replies: 313

### **DQ8: Should marijuana be legalized?**

*Posted by Dr. Renee Van Vechten on October 17, 2010 at 11:53pm*

On November 2nd, Californians will vote on a ballot initiative (Proposition 19) that would legalize the sale of marijuana in the state, but it would not change national law (the federal government would still regard it as an illegal drug). Currently, California allows marijuana (MJ) to be sold and used for medical purposes only. The federal government has taken the position that it will not prosecute users of medical marijuana, but it has no plans to stop enforcing general drug use laws.

Specifically, Prop. 19 would allow anyone who is 21 or older to grow, possess, or transport MJ for personal use. Local government would be empowered to regulate and tax its sale and production. The measure contains prohibitions against driving while impaired. Adults are prohibited from using MJ when minors are present.

QUESTION: Do you believe that marijuana should be legalized in California or in any state? Should the federal government enforce federal law in California even if Proposition 19 is approved by the voters? What consequences might this law have?

Replies: 399

### **DQ9: Does Early Voting Help or Hurt?**

*Posted by Dr. King-Meadows on October 25, 2010 at 5:22pm*

Does early voting help or hurt democracy? Many states have early voting - where a voter can cast a ballot before Election Day through the mail or in-person. Some suggest that early voting increases turnout. This is because early voters can vote when it is convenient (e.g., they do not have to take off work, can vote on Saturday, and can vote at voting centers located in/near places they normally frequent). Others argue that early voting depresses turnout. Scholars making the latter argument suggest, for instance, that early voting depresses the "civic stimulation" provided by personal and media discussions about competitive elections and the value of participation. In other words, early voting means that people are less likely to experience the "social pressure" and the collective sense of duty that often facilitates turnout. What do you think?

Replies: 332

### **DQ10: Tuesday's Election**

*Posted by Dr. Lilly Goren on October 31, 2010 at 5:55pm*

Regardless of what the totals are after the election on Tuesday, HOW will the federal government work, especially the two elected branches of government? How will the institutional and political dispositions of the House, the Senate and the Executive branch function after the election on Tuesday, especially once the new members are sworn in come January?

Replies: 257

### **DQ 11: 2010 Midterm Elections impact on Women in Office**

*Posted by Prof. Wendy L. Johnston on November 8, 2010 at 12:37pm*

The impact of the 2010 midterm elections on the Democratic Party is clear. What is also starting to come into focus is the impact the election has had on women. The 111th Session of Congress has 90 women (69D, 21R) [17 Senate, 73 House] a mere 17% of Congress.

If women hold steady at 90 members, between the two chambers, this will be the first year since 1987 that women have not made gains in numbers. If the number winds up below 90, it will be the first year since 1979 that women have lost ground in Congress, a decline echoed in the state legislatures as well.

What does this mean for the future of women in politics?

Replies: 284 + 25 in duplicate forum

### **DQ12: Are Full-Body Scanners Too Invasive or a Necessary Security Device?**

*Posted by Dr. Renee Van Vechten on November 18, 2010 at 3:58pm*

Last week a person with an airline ticket was randomly selected to receive a "full-body scan" and he not only refused to be scanned by the new x-ray machine, but also the alternative: a pat-down of personal areas.

Partly in response to the incident where a passenger hid an explosive device in his underwear, about 300 scanners are now in use at 60 airports nationwide, and more are on the way. The scans are beamed to a screen that displays an outline of a person's body.

Do you believe this is intrusive, government overreach (no pun intended) or a necessary security measure that protects travelers from terrorists? In other words, is this an unjustified invasion of privacy or not?

Tags: freedom, government, overreach, privacy, security, terrorism

Replies: 317

### **DQ13: Digital media in the classroom, a necessity or a distraction?**

*Posted by Dr. Anita Chadha on November 22, 2010 at 9:41am*

Has social media changed the way we communicate? Opinions abound about the use of social media in our everyday lives as well as in our educational setting. Here are a few opinions:

<http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2010/09/the-challenge-of-digital-media-in-the-classroom265.html>

<http://www.cnn.com/2010/TECH/social.media/11/22/social.media.isolation.project/index.html?hpt=C2>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/technology/21brain.html?src=me&ref=general>

There is no shortage of discussion on this issue. Are we, as these sites suggest wired for distraction and/or miscommunication? Or are these varied forms of medium necessary in the digital age? What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses and or challenges of the digital age in the classroom?

Replies: 231

### **DQ14: Should Supreme Court Justices be required to testify before Congress?**

*Posted by Dr. King-Meadows on November 28, 2010 at 6:12pm*

In a series of high profile speeches and interviews since stepping down from the Supreme Court, retired Justices David Souter, 71, and John Paul Stevens, 90, have provided the public with extraordinary insight into how some members of the high court think. For example, Souter offered a stinging critique of the judicial philosophies of Justices Scalia and Thomas, who favor what is often known as an originalist or a textualist approach to interpreting the intentions of the Founding Fathers (via the Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers, the Constitution, and the

ratification debates). Former Justice Stevens has criticized some of the Supreme Court's approaches to rights for the accused, campaign finance, the death penalty, and freedom of religious expression. What is remarkable about Souter and Stevens' comments is that the public is now only learning of these internal debates. John Paul Stevens, for example, served on the Court for 35 years and declined media interviews until last year. There is no requirement for members of the Court to testify before Congress about their decisions. This is to ensure the independence of judiciary. The Chief Justice does testify during hearings on the federal budget for the judiciary, and, of course, sometimes things come up. However, should Congress require retiring or current Justices to testify about particular cases or controversies? What do you think? Replies: 193

**DQ13 [15]: To pork or not to pork?**

*Posted by Dr. Robin Harper on November 23, 2010 at 6:35am*

In this week's New York Times there is an article about Republican leaders hoping to do away with earmarks or "pork" as it is sometimes known. The article (link below) explains that earmarks are both a problem and a solution to gridlock. What do you think: Is the proposed solution a good one? Why or why not? (That is, will eliminating earmarks make government more effective? Will it make more problems than it solves? Who would benefit and who would lose? And, further, why is this an electoral winner or loser?)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/23/us/politics/23earmarks.html?ref=p...>

Replies: 85