

Prof. David Peritz
Fromm Institute, USF
Mondays, 10:00 am
September 10-November 5, 2018
(No Class October 8)

Urgent Issues, Extraordinary Politics: Domestic and International Policy Issues in the Midst of National Elections

Overview: As another round of national election looms, there is a deficit of serious political discourse despite a surplus of serious issues. Internationally, the inexorable advance of global climate change, the vulnerability of American democracy to external manipulation, the on-going bloodletting in Syria, an increasingly assertive and authoritarian China and Russia, the threat of trade war and perhaps disruption to the global economy, and a US administration unwilling to play the traditional roles of architect, anchor and enforcer of a law based international order—all these issues speak to the dangerous times in which we live and the weakened capacity of the US to influence world affairs. Domestically, unprecedented and escalating levels of partisan polarization make it difficult for the public to coalesce around even the most urgent political issues, including ever-widening economic inequality, an increasingly unresponsive political system, affordable housing crises in many urban areas, a less-and-less competitive education system, a lack of stable middle-class jobs, epidemics of gun violence and opioid abuse, etc. In this course, we will examine policy issues at stake in a variety of urgent areas, surveying potential solutions but always with one eye on the long-term political, social and cultural trends underlying current issues and an other on possible policy solutions, including the question of the political viability of various approaches to addressing pressing problems. We will aim to conduct the serious conversation these issues deserve even if we are perhaps skeptical of the capacity of the present round of midterm elections to focus national attention or sustain discourse in the way required.

Outline of Topics:

Week 1: Is American Democracy in Peril? Polarization and Tribalism, Authoritarian Strains, Foreign Interference, Media Segmentation, Disenfranchisement, The Decline of Civility, etc.

Week 2: California is Burning (and by the way, so is the rest of the world): Climate Change, Environmental Issues, and the Existential Threat Posed by Inaction

Week 3: The Growth of Concentrated Economic Power and, with it, Inequality and Precariousness: What if anything We can Do About It?

Week 4: Gender, Race, Immigration—and Networked Protest—in the Trump Era

Week 5: New Frontiers in Social Policy: From the Crisis of Urban Affordability to 21st Century Consumer Rights and Protections

Week 6: The Rule of Law and the Judiciary Under Assault or Exposed? Are We All Legal Realists Now?

Week 7: Is a New Nationalism and Unilateralism a Stable Response to Globalization and Its Discontents: Tariffs and the American Retreat from a Rule Based System of International Order

Week 8: North Korea, China, Russia, Syria, Iran and other Hot Spots