

An inexperienced Cabinet and Congress, missing Obama already, and will Trump face a backlash?: roundup of US academic political blogging for January 14-20th

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USAPP Managing Editor, **Chris Gilson** looks at the best of the week's political blogging from academics and think-tanks. Don't see a blog referenced here that you think we should be reading? [Let us know](#) what we've missed out and we'll try to include it next week.

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President-elect Trump and the Republican Party

On Saturday, *OUP blog* [looks](#) at how the right is labelled at the time of Trump's ascendancy. They write that in the public conversation, people have difficulty labelling those like Trump's advisor (and ex-Breitbart news CEO) Steve Bannon, and when they do label him and his ilk as "neofascists" this implies that their views are beyond the pale and are therefore underserving of serious consideration. *Princeton Election Consortium* [gives](#) a checklist of ten things to look for to see if the US' institutions are collapsing in the wake of Trump's inauguration, such as the detention of journalists, defying the orders of courts, and the persecution of ethnic or religious minorities.

On Friday, Donald Trump will be inaugurated as 45th President of the United States. *Immigration Prof blog* [reports](#) Sunday that ahead of the big day, thousands have rallied in Washington D.C. to show their opposition to Trump's social justice and immigration agendas. Ahead of the inauguration, *FiveThirtyEight* [writes](#) that a president's first 100 days really do matter; by his 100th day, FDR had already begun to reshape the government's role in the US economy and passed 76 laws. They comment that Trump's first 100 days may be like Obama's with a number of bills and executive orders being signed which highlight the new administrations' differences with the previous one. Despite the apparent importance of the first weeks of the presidency, it turns out that Donald Trump is planning to take the first weekend as president off. *Outside the Beltway* [reports](#) that Trump has stated in a new interview that he won't be getting down to business until Monday morning. Trump made a huge number of promises to his supporters over the course of his election campaign and since he won the presidency. *Monkey Cage* [comments](#) that he will need to deliver on his promises – such as his guarantees about jobs, economic growth and to destroy Islamic State – or he will face a backlash.



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Writing at *The Society Pages*, [thickculture wonders](#) if Trump's obsessive tweeting habit is an addiction or part of some kind of strategy. Will Trump be a "President Mayhem"? *Balkinization* [says](#) that Trump's administration is very likely to produce mayhem on two fronts – scandals based on his financial interests, and by potentially taking a different line on the War Powers Resolution by challenging its constitutionality.

On Monday, *Marginal Revolution* [says](#) that as a thinker, Donald Trump is underrated in some ways in that he is willing to think things through from scratch compared to other politicians. *Outside the Beltway* meanwhile asks if Donald Trump will be a "legitimate" president, after Representative (and civil rights era activist) John Lewis (D-GA) [stated](#) that he would not be. They disagree with Lewis' assessment, arguing that Trump was legally elected president, and he will not be rejected in any way that matters. *Lawyers, Guns and Money* [writes](#) on Thursday that Trump's proposed budget has shown that he is a "bog-standard Republican" which would privatize the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and eliminate the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities.

Sabato's Crystal Ball [says](#) that this week marks the end of the beginning, referring to Donald Trump's transition to the presidency. Looking into past presidential transitions, there have been many which have been far less amicable than the present one has appeared to be.

The Democratic Party and President Obama

On Friday, *Lawyers, Guns & Money* [wonders](#): "where do the Democrats go"? They say that between President Obama's poor record of building up state and local parties, a lack of party leaders and gerrymandering, the Democrats are now facing some incredible challenges.

On Saturday, *The Volokh Conspiracy* [says](#) that President Obama's reversal of the "wet foot, dry foot" policy towards Cuban refugees last week is a "cruel reversal". They comment that there is absolutely no justification for Obama's new policy and that it is "gratuitously cruel" towards Cuban refugees, and does not create any meaningful benefits.

As might be expected, this week saw a number of comment pieces reflecting on President Obama's two terms and legacy. *FiveThirtyEight* [considers](#) how Obama will be judged by history, suggesting that his relatively high approval rating upon leaving office would tend to indicate the he will be well thought of in the future. From the right, *American Power* [writes](#) that Obama led the US in endless wars, after being the most antiwar Senator in 2007. *Angry Bear*, meanwhile [calls](#) Obama a "noble failure" in reference to his "firehose" of money aimed at the financial sector, and his failures at basic administration such as not having candidates confirmed across the government and the judiciary. *Duck of Minerva*, [writes](#) Thursday that Barack Obama has been an "unprecedented president", with his gifted discourse (which they call "the poetry...of leadership") and many domestic and foreign policy achievements. *Mischiefs of Faction* meanwhile [comments](#) on what we've learned from Obama's presidency – with one big

takeaway being that campaigning is not governing. Missing Obama already? So is *Nicholas Kristof*, who [says](#) that “America and the world will soon be craving that Obama Cool again”.

One thing that Obama has done right – at least [according](#) to *Lawyers, Guns and Money* is to commute Chelsea Manning’s 35-year prison sentence for leaking US diplomatic information. *FiveThirtyEight* [gives](#) context to Obama’s move, writing that the 44th president has granted clemency more often (1,715 times) than any other president in history.

The House and Senate

Vox’s Polyarchy [writes](#) this week that Trump’s historic unpopularity means that Congressional Republicans should be able to challenge him without fear of Trump inspiring primary challengers.

On Wednesday, *FiveThirtyEight* [reports](#) on what we learned (and what we didn’t) about Donald Trump’s pick for Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, at her confirmation hearing; that she would encourage states to create voucher programs, but not try to impose them, that decisions about guns in schools were best left to schools and states to decide, and that she wasn’t not sure how student progress should be measured.

Sabato’s Crystal Ball [comments](#) that of the current Congress, 77 percent of Republicans and 52 percent of Democrats have never served under a Republican president. Looking at Trump’s Cabinet, only 50 percent have government experience and none have PhDs, compared to 91 and 23 percent in Obama’s administration.

Elections and American democracy

Much has been made of the apparent unreliability of political polling in the past year. *Org Theory* writes this week that the national polls actually did better than expected this year, being only 1.2 percentage points off. The state polls were another matter though. [They sucked](#). Similarly, *Statistical Modelling...* [reminds us](#) that since most of the election polling was relatively accurate, there is no big reason to doubt the current opinion polling which shows Donald Trump as having a low approval rating.

Fake news has been in the news a great deal recently – many believe that it played an important role in Donald Trump’s election. *OUPblog* [says](#) that fake news has always had a presence in the US, and even Benjamin Franklin partook in the practice. That said, since Franklin’s time the ‘barriers to entry’ for fake news have decreased significantly, and the ease of producing such content via the Internet makes it a very attractive proposition to produce outrageous content and to therefore attract more advertising revenues.

On Tuesday, *Princeton Election Consortium* [announces](#) a new project on partisan gerrymandering, which will apply statistical analysis to Congress and to state legislatures to identify which states and parties benefitted from gerrymandering.

Vox’s Mischiefs of Faction this week [looks](#) at what the politics of presidential term limits teaches us about violating norms – and how a system of informal limits can be replaced by a more formal one, as was the case with the 22nd Amendment which limited presidents to two terms.

OxPol [talks](#) the Electoral College on Thursday, arguing that the US needs a proportional system which would see candidates receive a proportion of electoral votes for each state which were equivalent to the popular vote that they gained during the election. The new system would also include a state-specific popular vote threshold for a candidate to receive electoral votes.

The Government, Beltway and the Supreme Court

On Wednesday, *Immigration Prof blog* has the [news](#) that the priority family case backlog for the Immigration Court

has now surpassed 100,000 out of over 530,000 total cases.

Outside the Beltway [says](#) that the Supreme Court was this week due to hear oral arguments in a case which would determine the government's ability to bar "offensive speech" in the case of copyrights and trademarks. Still on SCOTUS, *Balkinization* [reckons](#) that it and Donald Trump are not off to a great start, after the Chief Justice, John Roberts does not seem to have extended his traditional invitation for the president-elect Donald Trump to pay him a visit prior to his inauguration. *The Volokh Conspiracy* on Friday [looks](#) at how President Trump might shape the federal courts, given that there are 114 pending vacancies in the federal courts – over 12 percent of the judiciary.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Sunday, *Duck of Minerva* [wonders](#) how International Relations theorists should respond to Donald Trump. While traditional IR theory suggests that institutions matter more than individuals, Trump's election was a "black swan" event which means that the role of individuals may become more of a focus in IR teaching. *Lawyers, Guns & Money* meanwhile [argues](#) that, in calling NATO 'obsolete, and predicting that the UK's exit from the European Union will be a success, Donald Trump is endorsing "American geopolitical suicide". *Political Violence at a Glance* [reckons](#) that we should relax, because "NATO isn't going anywhere". We should remember, they say, that we've been here before such as when in 2011 Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stated that European allies had failed to devote the necessary resources needed for their own defense.

Monkey Cage [says](#) on Thursday that new research shows that in spite of partisan differences, Americans support retaliation against Russia for that country's interference in the US 2016 election.

Obamacare and health policy

On Saturday, *Angry Bear* [argues](#) that comments the effect that "millions are uninsured" under Obamacare are "garbage". Why? These statistics include those in states which have blocked the expansion of Medicaid, undocumented immigrants, those eligible for employees sponsored insurance, among others.

This week, Donald Trump's pick to be Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tom Price was questioned by a Senate committee. *Beat the Press* [wonders](#) Wednesday if given Price's resentment for government intervention into medicine means that he is opposed to the current protectionism for doctors which prohibits foreign doctors from working in the US unless they complete a US residency, or to government granted drug patent monopolies.

Mischiefs of Faction [writes](#) Wednesday that when presidents try to touch healthcare, they are inevitably punished by voters. With his plans to change health care, Donald Trump will likely be no different to Barack Obama or Bill Clinton who faced a similar punishment for voters for their efforts at healthcare reform. But will Trump and Congressional Republicans actually be able to repeal Obamacare? *Monkey Cage* [says](#) that hundreds of forecasters say that there is a 65 percent probability of repeal – certainly not a ringing endorsement. *Lawyers, Guns & Money* meanwhile [argues](#) that if the Affordable Care Act were to be repealed, then that would represent a "massive upward distribution of wealth."

The economy, society and criminal justice

On Sunday, *Angry Bear* [looks](#) at the relationship between minimum wages and productivity, commenting that higher wages are a real incentive for firms to increase productivity. *Noahopinion* meanwhile [talks](#) on unemployment insurance and the Permanent Income Hypothesis. He says that a new paper shows why we can't just be satisfied with the idea that theories work sometimes and not others. *Contexts*, meanwhile, [argues](#) that the neglect of the working class by those in power helped lead to the rise and popularity of Donald Trump.

Political Violence @ a Glance [says](#) that on the eve of Donald Trump's presidential inauguration, many Muslims have reason to fear. They write that the real-world practice of counter-radicalization has done little to distinguish radical

Islam from the daily practices of Muslim Americans who lead normal lives.

Monkey Cage [writes](#) Thursday that John Kerry – the now former Secretary of State – accomplished something unprecedented on January 9th; he apologized for the persecution of State Department and Foreign Service officers who were gay in response to a request from a Democratic Senator.

Finally, *Big Think* [reports](#) on a new study which has found that gun violence spreads like an infectious disease, and concludes that it should be treated similarly to a public health epidemic and not just a policing problem.

Featured [image credit](#): *The White House* (Flickr, [US Government work](#))

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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