Annual Meeting of the Political Science Section
of the German Society for American Studies

The United States in Crisis?
Democracy, Politics, Policy, and Political
Institutions in an Age of Uncertainty and Risk

Date: Friday, 8 thru Saturday, 9 November 2013
(The meeting may be extended thru Sunday 10, 2013, depending on the number of papers suggested.)

Host: Atlantic Academy Rhineland-Palatinate, Kaiserslautern
Location: PfalzAkademie, Lambrecht

Conference Chairs:
Markus Siewert (Goethe University Frankfurt)
Boris Vormann, Christian Lammert (FU Berlin)
David Sirakov, Wolfgang Tönnesmann (Atlantische Akademie Rheinland-Pfalz)
Florian Böller, Jürgen Wilzewski (TU Kaiserslautern)

Call for Papers

Discussions of politics and policy in the United States recur, more and more often, to narratives and metaphors of crisis. This is not a new phenomenon: alluding to crisis in debates about the United States and its political system is arguably as old as U.S. democracy itself. But the 2008 economic and financial crisis, that originated in the United States – and that has since converged with a massive budget deficit and political gridlock in Washington D.C. –, has raised some serious questions about political governability and the functioning of the democratic decision making process in the United States.

The purpose of this conference is to raise a variety of questions pertaining to this theme. A first perspective addresses the intrinsic problems of democracy in the United States. Is the democratic system functioning normally? Is the talk of ‘crisis’ overblown since, now, as in the past, problems are being addressed that have always existed? Or are there deeper-seated structural flaws in the decision making process and the established institutional structures (representation, responsiveness, accountability) that need to be fixed? If there are, indeed, more structural problems, how do they relate to actually existing social relations in the United States? What are possible economic, political and social causes of this particular crisis?

The 2008 crisis that, in the beginning, was identified as a consequence of dangerous short-termist practices and incentive structures in the financial industries has soon evolved into a series of sovereign-debt crises in the course of the past five years. How do the ways in which the crisis is being politically managed and explained relate to the specific functioning of the political system in the United States? Are the different crisis phenomena variations on a theme – if so, how do they interact? – or are the instances of contemporary crises unrelated? Finally, crises can be moments in which taken-for-granted understandings of the political system and the political economy can be put into question. Given recent crisis tendencies, are we observing a shifting relation between state, society, and market? Can we witness a change in political processes, in the United States’ institutional order, or in contemporary understandings of democracy?
We invite scholars of political science, political economy, and public policy as well as historians and sociologists to address the following as well as related issues from an extensive range of perspectives:

- The gridlock in Washington and the repercussions it has on legislating and executing long-term solutions for political, economic and social problems
- The polarization in Congress and the role of political parties more generally
- Media polarization and its consequences for the public
- Different forms and problems of participation in the democratic process
- Centrifugal developments in the federal system of the United States
- Is U.S. democracy just a façade for capitalist plutocracy? Economic, social and political dimensions of growing inequality (poverty, wealth, elections)
- What is America’s future place in the world? Are we witnessing the decline of U.S. economic power and international influence?
- Is Washington still able to address problems that do not stop at any nation’s borders but that require multilateral or credible global solutions through enforceable international law?
- What are the chances for repairing democracy in the United States? Is there a need for changing/amending the Constitution?
- How is the crisis of politics in the United States related to concurring economic and social crisis phenomena?
- How does our understanding of crisis relate to the concepts of risk and uncertainty? Has the role of politics been reduced to providing stability and certainty for the economy? Can the political system still provide security for its citizens in an uncertain world?

Interested presenters are invited to submit paper proposals of at least two full pages (double-spaced) by May 31, 2013; decisions will be made by mid-June, 2013. Proposals should be submitted as Word or PDF attachment to christian.lammert@fu-berlin.de

The meeting in November 2013 will be hosted – as in previous years – by the Atlantic Academy Rhineland-Palatinate. The Academy offers the community of political scientists working on American politics an opportunity to exchange and discuss their ideas and research. As in previous years, the organizers of the conference will invite a key-note speaker from the US who will give a lecture on the topic of the conference.