

Introduction to American Politics

PS40 Summer 2024

Monday/Wednesday 10:45-12:50 Haines A2

Instructor: Sean Ewing

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Office Hours: Tuesday 2:00-4:00 or by appointment (Zoom link on Bruin Learn)

Course Overview

What does it mean to you to be a citizen of the United States? What are your rights? Your responsibilities? What do you need to know to fulfill those responsibilities? To form your own political opinions? How are your opinions and political beliefs rooted in your own experiences, in your religion, in your family traditions and ethnic culture? How many Americans share your background? Do they all share your views? What about people who come from a very different walk of life? How do you think their views differ? It's easy to tolerate and compromise with people who are just like you. But democracy requires us to both tolerate and compromise with people who have completely different cultures, values and beliefs about the role of government.

So just how can a diverse country like ours ever come to consensus about the common good? And when we try to come together to work toward a common good, what rules govern that discussion? How do those rules structure the behavior of individuals, parties, interest groups, and institutions? Do you like the outcomes of the political system? Do you know how they come about? How to change them?

Required Texts

Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck. 2021. The Logic of American Politics, 10th Edition. CQ Press.

Grade Breakdown

Reading Memos: 10%
Midterm Exam: 25%
Discussion/Participation: 20%
Paper Explainers: 20%
Final Exam: 25%

Reading Memos:

Before each class, students are expected to write a 1-2 page reaction memo to the assigned readings.. This assignment should briefly summarize the reading, analyze the content, and propose at least two critical questions. These summaries should cover all assigned readings for the day, not just the textbook.

Paper Explainers:

Throughout the quarter, you will complete two “paper explainers”. These are 2-3 page papers in which you lay out the details of an academic journal article. The paper should:

- Identify the research question and why it is important
- Briefly summarize the relevant literature surrounding the topic
- Explain the data and method used by the author and how it helps answer the research question
- Summarize the results and main findings
- Give a brief reaction- what did you think of this paper? Were the results surprising, or what you expected? Why?

The first paper explainer should be about a paper we read and talked about in class. The second paper should be an outside one of your choice (it must be related to American Politics). A list of papers to explore will be provided for you on my website, or you may find your own!

Discussion/Participation/Attendance:

Discussion is a critical part of this class, and it is my hope that every student will attend every lecture. I understand that, due to the nature of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, attendance is not always possible. If you are unable to attend a class (or multiple classes), please let me know ASAP so we can brainstorm ways for you to make up the participation points.

Exams

There will be two exams in this class (a midterm and a final). The midterm will cover material through week 3, while the final exam will cover material from the whole course. Both exams will happen during normal class time.

Grading

All assignments are due the day listed on this syllabus. Late work will be deducted by a letter grade. If you have an exceptional situation that you believe qualifies you for an extension, please email me *prior* to the due date.

I will grade your participation score based on attendance and participation in class. I understand that speaking in class can be difficult for some, so I will also periodically provide other ways for students to earn participation points.

Communication/Office Hours

The best way to reach me is via email. I check my email fairly regularly, but please allow me 24 hours to respond to emails. If I do not respond within 24 hours, feel free to spam me!

My office hours and location are listed above. If those times do not work for you, please email me and we can schedule an alternate time to meet.

Academic Integrity

It should go without saying that all assignments and exams are expected to be completed at the highest standards of academic integrity. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are taken very seriously and will not be tolerated. This includes the use of ChatGPT or other Artificial Intelligence tools- while there may be appropriate ways to use these tools in an academic setting, taking phrases or sentences directly from AI is considered plagiarism and will be treated as such.

For more information, see the UCLA Student Code of Conduct at <https://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/studentconductcode>

Course Schedule

TOPIC	READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS
6/24 Introduction	• The Logic of American Politics Chapters 1 and 2 • https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/ (No need to read all of this, just browse and read some of the annotations)	None
6/26 Federalism	• The Logic of American Politics Chapter 3 • Moskowitz, Daniel J. 2021. "Local News, Information, and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 115(1): 114–129.	Reading Memo #1 Due

7/1 Congress	• The Logic of American Politics Chapter 6 • Anzia, Sarah F., and Christopher R. Berry. 2011. "The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?" <i>American Journal of Political Science</i>.	Reading Memo #2 Due
7/3 The Presidency	• The Logic of American Politics Chapter 7 • Richard Neustadt, <i>Presidential Power</i>	Reading Memo #3 Due
7/8 The Judiciary and the Bureaucracy	• The Logic of American Politics Chapter 8 and 9 • Federalist #78 (available at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed78.asp)	Reading Memo #4 Due
7/10 Midterm	• None (Midterm Exam)	None
7/15 Public Opinion	• The Logic of American Politics Chapter 10 • Fowler, Anthony. 2020. "Partisan Intoxication or Policy Voting?" <i>Quarterly Journal of Political Science</i>.	Reading Memo #5 Due
7/17 Voting, Elections, and Campaigns	• The Logic of American Politics Chapter 11 • Hall, Andy B. and Dan Thompson. 2018. "Who Punishes Extremist Nominees? Candidate Ideology and Turning Out the Base in US Elections." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 115(1): 114–129.	Reading Memo #6 Due
7/22 Voting, Elections, and Campaigns p2	• Sides, John, Chris Tausanovitch, and Lynn Vavreck. 2022. <i>The Bitter End: The 2020 Presidential Campaign and the Challenge to American Democracy</i>. Princeton University Press. Chapters 1, 7-9 (available through UCLA library)	Reading Memo #7
7/24 Political Parties and Interest Groups	• The Logic of American Politics Chapter 12 and 13 • Thomsen, Danielle M. 2014. "Ideological Moderates Won't Run: How Party Fit Matters for Partisan Polarization in Congress." <i>Journal of Politics</i>.	Reading Memo #8 Due

7/29 The Media	• The Logic of American Politics Chapter 14 • Hayes, Danny, and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2015. "As Local News Goes, So Goes Citizen Engagement: Media, Knowledge, and Participation in US House Elections." <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 77(2): 447–462.	Reading Memo #9 Due
8/28 The Economics of the News Media	• Mass Media and American Politics Chapter 2 • Hamilton, James T. 2003 <i>All the News That's Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News</i>. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1 ("Economic Theories of News")	Weekly Reading Memo #10 Due

Resources

If you have concerns about or difficulty with academic writing, you can visit the undergraduate writing center. More information is available at <http://wp.ucla.edu/index.php/home>

For general academic concerns, you can contact the academic counseling office for help at <http://www.ugeducation.ucla.edu/more.htm>

If you want to speak to a therapist or psychological counselor you can contact CAPS at <http://www.counseling.ucla.edu>