

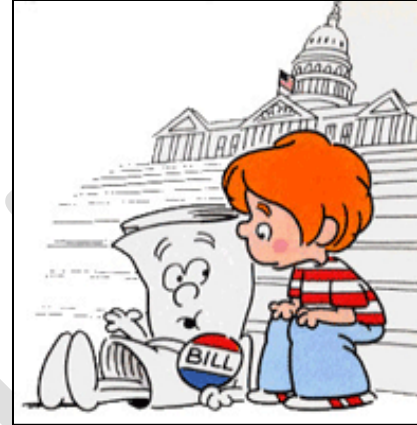
Introduction to American Politics

(100-level introductory course)

Instructor: Cory Maks-Solomon

Course Overview

This course will provide a wide-reaching overview of American political institutions and public opinion. A core theme in political science is authority and power. Who has power and how do they wield that power? After an introduction to the U.S. Constitution (that sets the rules of the road), we will discuss American government institutions and try to understand how those institutions formulate public policies. During the second half of class, we will focus on elections and public opinion and try to understand how the public shapes political institutions and how political institutions shape the public's preferences. Who has power in American democracy? Is power vested in the people? Or are people too easily manipulated to truly have power?



Expectations and Class Ground Rules

Since this is an introductory class, I do not expect students to have substantial knowledge about American government and politics coming into this course. However, I do make two requests of students.

First, if you have questions, please ask them! If you have a question, someone else probably has the same question. Office hours are available as a resource for students. Please take advantage of office hours if you need assistance understanding course material. To help students learn from each other, I will assign study groups during the second week of class. Meet with your study groups! Even if you are doing well in class, it can improve your understanding of the material to explain it to others.

Second, stay up to date with current events. When relevant to class, we will discuss topics in the news, which will help students contextualize the theories and abstract concepts that they learn in class. I recommend subscribing to a newspaper online. Many have special discounted rates if you use your student email address to sign up (e.g., [Washington Post](#), [New York Times](#), and [Wall Street Journal](#)).

Required Texts

There is one required text for this course, an open source introduction to American politics textbook. The textbook is published by OpenStax, a project of Rice University. One benefit of an open source textbook is that it is free. Another benefit of an open source textbook is that it is a collaborative project, with multiple contributing authors—each an expert in their area of study within American politics.

American Government from OpenStax, Print ISBN 1947172654, Digital ISBN 1947172662, <https://openstax.org/details/books/american-government-2e>

The textbook is available for free through the online [web viewer](#) but a print copy can be purchased through [Amazon](#). The textbook is also available on the OpenStax app for [Apple iOS](#) and [Google Android](#) devices and students can download a [PDF](#) copy and read with Adobe Reader or the eReader app of their choice. Read the course textbook in whichever format is best for you. If you need to actively read and highlight to learn effectively, get the hard copy. If you prefer to read on the go, download the app.

Listed in the Course Calendar section of this syllabus, other required readings will be posted to Blackboard.

Assignments and Grading

Final grades will be assessed based upon students' performance in four categories of assignments. **The total number of points that you can earn in the course is 100.** Do not plan on me "curving" assignments or your final course grade. The four types of assignments are as follows:

1. **Clicker Quizzes (20 points / 20%):** To make class interactive, we will use [WebClicker](#) to conduct "quizzes" throughout the class period. At no cost, students can use their cell phones, tablets, or laptops to access the WebClicker website: <http://webclicker.org/>. Clicker questions will be a mix of material covered in a previous lecture and material from readings due that day (that we didn't discuss in class yet). Clicker quizzes are designed to ensure that students are understanding the material; they should not be difficult for students attending class, taking notes, and keeping up with the readings. Quizzes may contain extra credit questions related to recommended readings. During some class periods, I might even let you answer clicker questions with your study group. Final clicker quiz grades will be based upon your highest 20 class periods. There are no make-ups for clicker quizzes; everyone is afforded the same opportunity to miss a few clicker quizzes. The first clicker quiz will take place during Session 2.
2. **Midterm Exam (25 points / 25%):** The midterm exam will be composed of seven short answer questions, of which students will respond to five. Exam review guide will be posted to Blackboard at least 10 days before the midterm.

3. **Final Exam (33 points / 33%):** The final exam will be composed of both short answer and long answer questions. For short answers: there will be seven short answer questions, of which students will respond to five (based upon material after the midterm). For long answers: there will be two long answer questions (mini essay, 2-3 paragraphs), of which students will respond to one. Long answer question will tie together material from the first and second parts of the course. Exam review guide will be posted to Blackboard at least 10 days before the last day of class.
4. **Report (22 points / 22%):** Each student will write a 6-8 double-spaced page report on a Senate or gubernatorial election of their choice. Reports are due on Blackboard by the time of the final exam (TBD). The goal of this assignment is for students to demonstrate that they can apply the theory and concepts that we learned in class. A rubric will be posted on Blackboard on or around the time of the midterm exam. One point will be deducted for each day the assignment is late.

Course Calendar

Please read each required reading *before* class. Readings with the clover symbol (♣) are recommended. Recommended readings expand upon the material covered in required readings. For students who are political science majors—or considering becoming political science majors—I strongly urge you to read each of the recommended readings in addition to the required readings. Readings are intended to be read in the order in which they appear below.

MODULE 1: INSTITUTIONS

Session 1 – The Constitution and American Political History (Part I)

**Don't wait until the last minute to start this reading!*

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 1: “American Government and Civic Engagement”
- Critchlow, Donald T. 2015. *American Political History: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press. (Chapters 1 & 2)
- Read the full text of the U.S. Constitution
<https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/index.html>

Session 2 – The Constitution and American Political History (Part II)

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 2: “The Constitution and its Origins”
- Subramanyam, RV. 2013. “Art of Reading a Journal Article: Methodically and Effectively.” *Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology* 17 (1): 65–70.
<https://doi.org/10.4103/0973-029X.110733>.

Session 3 – Civil Liberties

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 4: “Civil Liberties”
- Victor, Jennifer. 2019. “Which Parts of the US Constitution Have Aged Least Well?” Vox Mischiefs of Faction. April 1, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2019/4/1/18290934/constitution-aged-least-well>.

****Study groups will be assigned during Session 4. Please attend class!****

Session 4 – Civil Rights

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 5: “Civil Rights”
- ♣ Critchlow, Donald T. 2015. *American Political History: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press. (Chapter 8)

MODULE 2: Institutions

Session 5 – Congress Part I

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 11: “Congress”
- Ladd, Jonathan M. 2019. “The Senate Is a Much Bigger Problem than the Electoral College.” Vox Mischiefs of Faction. April 9, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2019/4/9/18300749/senate-problem-electoral-college>.

Session 6 – Congress Part II

- Miler, Kristina C. 2014. *Constituency Representation in Congress: The View from Capitol Hill*. Reprint edition. Cambridge University Press. (Chapters 1 & 2)
- Watch this Vox YouTube interview with Professor Frances Lee: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZCUa_fFxyY
- ♣ Lee, Frances E. 2008. “Dividers, Not Uniters: Presidential Leadership and Senate Partisanship, 1981-2004.” *The Journal of Politics* 70 (4): 914–28. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381608080961>.

Session 7 – Political Parties

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 9: “Political Parties.” (Intro, 9.1, & 9.2 only)
- Bawn, Kathleen, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. 2012. “A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics.” *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (03): 571–597. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592712001624>. – **This will be a difficult reading but do your best to read through it and we will discuss it further in class.*

Session 8 – Interest Groups and Lobbying

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 10: “Interest Groups and Lobbying”
- ♣ Strolovitch, Dara Z. 2006. “Do Interest Groups Represent the Disadvantaged? Advocacy at the Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender.” *Journal of Politics* 68 (4): 894–910. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00488.x>.

Session 9 – The Presidency Part I

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 12: “The Presidency”
- Azari, Julia. 2019. “The Constitution Doesn’t Say Enough about Limiting Executive Power.” Vox Mischiefs of Faction. April 11, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2019/4/11/18306412/constitution-executive-power-limits>.

Session 10 – The Presidency Part II

- LeLoup, Lance T., and Steven A. Shull. 2003. *The President and Congress: Collaboration and Combat in National Policymaking*. Longman. (Chapter 3)
- Neustadt, Richard E. 1991. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. Simon and Schuster. (Chapter 3)

Session 11 – Bureaucracy

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 15: “The Bureaucracy”
- ♣ Lipsky, M. 1971. “Street-Level Bureaucracy and the Analysis of Urban Reform.” *Urban Affairs Review* 6 (4): 391–409. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107808747100600401>.

Session 12 – Judiciary

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 13: “The Courts”
- ♣ Huber, Gregory A., and Sanford C. Gordon. 2004. “Accountability and Coercion: Is Justice Blind When It Runs for Office?” *American Journal of Political Science* 48 (2): 247–63. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1519881>.

Session 13 – Midterm Exam (and finishing the Judiciary)**Session 14 – Federalism**

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 3: “Federalism”
- ♣ Skocpol, Theda, Marjorie Abend-Wein, Christopher Howard, and Susan Goodrich Lehmann. 1993. “Women’s Associations and the Enactment of Mothers’ Pensions in the United States.” *The American Political Science Review* 87 (3): 686–701. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2938744>.

Session 15 – State and Local Politics

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 14: “State and Local Government”
- Listen to Episode 169 of the No Jargon Podcast (“Who Controls the States”): <https://scholars.org/podcast/who-controls-states>
- ♣ Miller, Michael K. 2013. “For the Win! The Effect of Professional Sports Records on Mayoral Elections: The Effect of Professional Sports Records on Mayoral Elections.” *Social Science Quarterly* 94 (1): 59–78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2012.00898.x>.

Session 16 – Public Policy

- Birkland, Thomas A. 2015. *Introduction to the Policy Process*. M.E. Sharpe. (Chapters 1 & 7)
- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 16: “Domestic Policy” (16.3 & 16.4 only)

MODULE 3: THE PUBLIC

Session 17 – Campaigns and Elections Part I

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 7: “Voting and Elections” (7.3 & 7.4 only)
- Niemi, Richard G., and Herbert F. Weisberg. 2001. “What Determines the Vote.” In *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, 180–99. CQ Press.
- Listen to episode 183 of the No Jargon Podcast (“Do Endorsements Really Matter?”): <https://scholars.org/podcast/do-endorsements-really-matter>

Session 18 – Campaigns and Election Part II

- Cohen, Marty, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. 2008. *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*. University of Chicago Press. (Chapter 7)
- Masket, Seth. 2019. “The 2020 Invisible Primary in Light of 2016.” Vox Mischiefs of Faction. January 7, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2019/1/7/18170894/2020-invisible-primary-2016-democrats>.

Session 19 – Identity

- Paxton, Pamela, Sheri Kunovich, and Melanie M. Hughes. 2007. “Gender in Politics.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (1): 263–84. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131651>.
- Dawson, Michael C. 1995. *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics*. Princeton University Press. (Chapter 2)
- ♣ Gay, Claudine, Jennifer Hochschild, and Ariel White. 2016. “Americans’ Belief in Linked Fate: Does the Measure Capture the Concept?” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics* 1 (1): 117–44. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rep.2015.3>.

Session 20 – Partisanship

- Arceneaux, Kevin, and Ryan J. Vander Wielen. 2013. “The Effects of Need for Cognition and Need for Affect on Partisan Evaluations.” *Political Psychology* 34 (1): 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2012.00925.x>.
- Mason, Lilliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press. (Chapter 4)

Session 21 – Media

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 8: “The Media” (Introduction, 8.1, & 8.4 only)
- Baum, Matthew A., and Angela S. Jamison. 2010. “The Oprah Effect: How Soft News Helps Inattentive Citizens Vote Consistently.” In *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, edited by Richard G. Niemi, Herbert F. Wiesberg, and David Kimball, 5th edition. Washington, D.C: CQ Press.

Session 22 – Public Opinion Formation Part I

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 6: “The Politics of Public Opinion”

Session 23 – Public Opinion Formation Part II

- Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press. (Chapters 2 & 3)
- ♣ Lodge, Milton, Marco R. Steenbergen, and Shawn Brau. 1995. “The Responsive Voter: Campaign Information and the Dynamics of Candidate Evaluation.” *The American Political Science Review* 89 (2): 309–26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2082427>.

Session 24 – Voting and Political Participation

- *American Government* (textbook) Chapter 7: “Voting and Elections” (7.1 & 7.2 only)
- Blais, André. 2000. *To Vote or Not to Vote?: The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory*. University of Pittsburgh Press. (Introduction required; Chapter 2 recommended)

Session 25 – Catch Up

Session 26 – Final Exam Review and Conclusion

****Final exam time and day TBD. Report due at start of final exam.****