POS 6045: Seminar in American Politics

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Office Hours: Thursday: 8:00 AM to 10:00 AM   Class Hours: 8:30 am to 11:30 am
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Course Description

This course serves as an introductory graduate-level seminar in American Politics. It is designed to expose students to a wide range of foundational debates across the many subfields of American political science. Rather than aiming to resolve these debates, the course introduces major questions and scholarly traditions related to topics such as public opinion, political behavior, institutions (Congress, presidency, courts, and bureaucracy), state politics, race and representation, and polarization.

The course also provides practical training in how to read and interpret political science research. Students will learn how to approach scholarly articles critically, evaluate theoretical arguments and empirical strategies, and contribute constructively to graduate-level seminar discussions.

By the end of the semester, students will have a broad overview of the intellectual landscape of American Politics. This will help them identify their research interests and select future courses in the Political Science Department that offer deeper engagement—such as seminars on Congress, political behavior, the presidency, or racial and ethnic politics.

Course Goals

1. **Introduce foundational debates and questions** in the study of American politics.
   - What motivates political behavior and participation in the U.S.?

   - How do institutions structure political outcomes at the national and subnational levels?

   - What role do partisanship, identity, and ideology play in shaping public opinion and political conflict?
2. **Expose students to the breadth of subfields and approaches** within American Politics.
   - Public opinion and mass behavior

   - Political institutions (Congress, presidency, courts, bureaucracy)

   - State and local politics

- Race, ethnicity, and political representation

- Polarization, media, and democratic accountability

3. **Help students identify areas of research interest** for further study and specialization.
   - Support informed decisions about future coursework in the Political Science Department

   - Lay the groundwork for developing research questions, thesis or dissertation topics in American Politics

4. **Teach students how to read and engage with political science scholarship** at a graduate level.
   - Develop strategies for approaching theoretical and empirical articles

   - Practice contributing productively to seminar discussions

   - Build skills in analytical critique and scholarly communication

Course Requirements

The most important requirement of the course is to read the assignments for each week **carefully** and **critically** before class. They will form the focus of our discussions in class. Be aware that some of your reading of some items will affect your reading of other items in the current week or a future week; we will discuss these links.

Required Books/Literature

There are no required books for this course; all necessary readings will be uploaded to E-Learning. However, if you are interested in American political institutions, Congress, state politics, political behavior, or racial politics, I highly recommend purchasing the books used in this class for your personal library. These texts provide valuable theoretical and empirical foundations that will serve you well in future coursework, research, or teaching.

Grading Policy

1. **Class Participation (20%)**

This is a graduate-level seminar, typically consisting of 5–10 students, and active participation is essential to its success. You are expected to come to each class having completed the assigned readings and prepared to engage thoughtfully in discussion. Simply being present does not count as participation. I expect each student to contribute meaningfully to every class session. Failure to do so will result in a reduction in your participation grade. If you are consistently silent or unprepared, you will not receive full credit for this portion of the course. I will keep track of participation throughout the semester.

2. **Reading Presentations (20%)**

To facilitate productive discussion, each student will write a short memo (no more than 400 words) each week based on the assigned readings. Your memo should engage one or more of the following questions:

- What is the most important takeaway from the readings?

- How do the readings complement or contradict one another? What tensions or debates do they highlight within the literature?

- What issues do the readings raise but fail to fully address? In other words, what promising directions for future research are suggested?

Memos are due by **Thursday at 8:30 AM**, prior to our Friday class, **late memos will not count toward your grade**. This ensures everyone has time to read each other's memos in advance. Memos should be circulated to the entire class via our course email list.

In addition, each week a pair of students will be responsible for opening the class discussion. The discussion leaders will prepare a brief (~20 minute) joint summary of the week's readings, incorporating key points as well as a few of their own analytical insights, similar in tone and depth to the memos. We will set the schedule for discussion leadership during the first class session.

3. **Midterm (25%)** *October 10*

There will be an in-class midterm exam that evaluates your ability to read, interpret, and critically engage with political science literature, as well as your understanding of the key theories and concepts covered in the course.

4. **Final Exam (35%)** *December 11*

The course will conclude with an in-class final exam designed to assess your cumulative understanding of the material. The exam will test your ability to synthesize and critically evaluate the key theories, concepts, and scholarly debates we have covered throughout the semester. You will be asked to engage with the readings and class discussions through a mix of short-answer and essay questions.

Note: **If it becomes clear that students are not consistently completing the readings or engaging thoughtfully in discussion, I reserve the right to introduce short reading quizzes at the beginning of class. If quizzes are implemented, the grading breakdown will be adjusted to reflect their inclusion.**

Grading Scale

Percent	Grade
93.4–100	A
90.0–93.3	A
86.7–89.9	B+
83.4–86.6	B
80.0–83.3	B
76.7–79.9	C+
73.4–76.6	C
70.0–73.3	C
66.7–69.9	D+
63.4–66.6	D

Percent	Grade
60.0–63.3	D
0–59.9	E

Academic Integrity

The University of Florida is an institution of learning, research, and scholarship that is strengthened by the existence of an environment of integrity. It is essential that all members of the University practice academic integrity and accept individual responsibility for their work and actions. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction and referral to the university's Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions.

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Click here to read the Conduct Code. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult me.

In-Class Recording

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal, educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student

Communication

Students should use Canvas to contact me. Although you may email me at my UF email account, the university strongly encourages we communicate via Canvas to avoid the potential of violations of student confidentiality protected by FERPA. I encourage students to visit office hours to discuss any questions, comments, or concerns regarding the course.

Email/Messaging Hours

You may email or message me via Canvas at any time that is convenient to you. I will respond within two business days between the hours of 8 am and 4 pm. If you do not receive a reply from me after 48 hours, please resend your message. Although I may sometimes reply outside of these designated hours, responses cannot be guaranteed after 4 pm on weekdays, weekends, or holidays.. Please plan accordingly to have your questions answered in advance of the assignment and exam deadlines.

Accessibility Services

If you have (or suspect you have) a learning or other disability that requires academic accommodations, you should contact the UF Disability Resource Center (DRC) as soon as possible. Please ensure that necessary accommodations are properly documented. To obtain a classroom accommodation, you must first pre-register with the DRC (352-392-8565) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to your instructors when requesting accommodations. I am always happy to make any accommodations you may need to be successful in this course.

Technology Resources

The UF Computing Help Desk can assist with any technical issues. Access support 24/7 at:

- helpdesk.ufl.edu
- Phone: 352-392-HELP (4357)
- Email: helpdesk@ufl.edu

When emailing, use your `@ufl.edu` email address and include your UFID and/or GatorLink username (never your password). Provide clear information about the course and issue.

Academic Resources

- **E-learning Technical Support:** https://helpdesk.ufl.edu or 352-392-4357

- **Library Support:** http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask

- **Teaching Center (Broward Hall):** https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu
  – Phone: 352-392-2010 or 352-392-6420 (appointments)

- **Writing Studio (2215 Turlington Hall):** http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio
  – Phone: 352-846-1138

- **Online Student Complaints:** https://distance.ufl.edu/getting-help/student-complaint-process

- **Career Connections Center:** https://career.ufl.edu

Crisis Resources

If you or someone you know is experiencing a crisis (including gender, sexual, racial, or domestic violence), please reach out to the following UF and community resources:

- **U Matter, We Care:** umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, https://umatter.ufl.edu

- **RESPECT – UF Division of Student Affairs:** https://respect.ufsa.ufl.edu

- **Counseling and Wellness Center (24/7):** 352-392-1575, https://counseling.ufl.edu

- **Student Health Care Center:** 352-392-1161, https://shcc.ufl.edu

- **Multicultural & Diversity Affairs:** 352-392-1217, https://multicultural.ufl.edu

- **Field & Fork Pantry (Food Insecurity Support):** https://pantry.fieldandfork.ufl.edu

- **UF Health Shands ER / Trauma Center:** 352-733-0111

- **Gainesville Police Department (non-emergency):** 352-955-1818, https://gainesvillepd.org

Class Schedule

Week 1, August 22: Introduction: American Values and Principles

Introductions

How to Read an Article in Political Science.

Then we will cover:

Smith, Rogers M. (1993). "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America''. In: *American Political Science Review* 87.3, pp. 549–566.

Schildkraut, Deborah J. (2007). "Defining American Identity in the TwentyFirst Century: How Much "There" Is There?'' In: *Journal of Politics* 69.3, pp. 597–615.

Alesina, Alberto and Edward L. Glaeser (2001). "Why Doesn't the United States Have a European-Style Welfare State?'' In: *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*. Brookings Institution Press, pp. 187–278.

Uscinski, Joseph E., Adam M. Enders, Michelle I. Seelig, Casey A. Klofstad, John R. Funchion, Caleb Everett, Stefan Wuchty, Kamal Premaratne, and Manohar N. Murthi (2021). "American Politics in Two Dimensions: Partisan and Ideological Identities versus AntiEstablishment Orientations''. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 65.1, pp. 877–895.

Week 2, August 29 : Public Opinion I: Issue and Attitude Formation

Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes (1960). *The American Voter*. University of Chicago Press. Chapter 8

Converse, Philip E (2006). "The nature of belief systems in mass publics (1964)''. In: *Critical review* 18.1-3, pp. 1–74. **(skim)**

Ansolabehere, Stephen, Jonathan Rodden, and James M. Snyder Jr. (2008). "The Strength of Issues: Using Multiple Measures to Gauge Preference Stability, Ideological Constraint, and Issue Voting''. In: *American Political Science Review* 102.2, pp. 215–232.

Freeder, Sean, Gabriel S. Lenz, and Shad Turney (2019). "The Importance of Knowing "What Goes with What": Reinterpreting the Evidence on Policy Attitude Stability''. In: *Journal of Politics* 81.1, pp. 274–290.

Broockman, David E. and Daniel M. Butler (2017). "The Causal Effects of Elite PositionTaking on Voter Attitudes: Field Experiments with Elite Communication''. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 61.1, pp. 208–221.

Carlson, Taylor N. (2019). "Through the Grapevine: Informational Consequences of Interpersonal Political Communication''. In: *American Political Science Review* 113.2, pp. 325–339.

Week 3, September 05: Public Opinion II: Opinion and Voting

Downs, Anthony (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row. Chapter 3

Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer (2008). "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a LargeScale Field Experiment''. In: *American Political Science Review* 102.1, pp. 33–48.

Ojeda, Christopher, Jamila Michener, and Jake Haselswerdt (2024). "The Politics of Personal Crisis: How Life Disruptions Shape Political Participation''. In: *Political Behavior* 46.4, pp. 2611–2630.

Lupia, Arthur (1994). "Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections''. In: *American Political Science Review* 88.1, pp. 63–76.

Lau, Richard R. and David P. Redlawsk (2001). "Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision Making''. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 45.4, pp. 951–971.

Week 4, September 12: Public Opinion III: Responsiveness to Public Opinion

Lax, Jeffrey R. and Justin H. Phillips (2012). "The Democratic Deficit in the States''. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 56.1, pp. 148–166.

Caughey, Devin and Christopher Warshaw (2018). "Policy Preferences and Policy Change: Dynamic Responsiveness in the American States, 1936–2014''. In: *American Political Science Review* 112.2, pp. 249–266.

Schlozman, Kay Lehman (1984). "What Accent the Heavenly Chorus? Political Equality and the American Pressure System''. In: *Journal of Politics* 46.4, pp. 1006–1032.

Gilens, Martin and Benjamin I. Page (2014). *Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens*. Vol. 12. 3 , pp. 564–581.

Butler, Daniel M. and David E. Broockman (2011). "Do Politicians Racially Discriminate against Constituents? A Field Experiment on State Legislators''. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 55.3, pp. 463–477. **(skim theory read method and findings)**

Butler, Daniel M. and David W. Nickerson (2011). "Can Learning Constituency Opinion Affect How Legislators Vote? Results from a Field Experiment''. In: *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 6.1, pp. 55–83. **(skim theory read method and findings)**

Week 5, September 19: Public Opinion IV: Partisanship

Downs, Anthony (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row. Chapter 7

Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes (1960). *The American Voter*. University of Chicago Press. Chapter 7

Green, Donald P., Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler (2002). *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Chapter 1 and 5

Bullock, John G., Alan S. Gerber, Seth J. Hill, and Gregory A. Huber (2015). "Partisan Bias in Factual Beliefs About Politics''. In: *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 10.4, pp. 519–578. **(skim)**

Hajnal, Zoltan L. and Michael U. Rivera (2014). "Immigration, Latinos, and White Partisan Politics: The New Democratic Defection''. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 58.4, pp. 773–789.

Barber, Michael and Jeremy C. Pope (2019). "Does Party Trump Ideology? Disentangling Party and Ideology in America''. In: *American Political Science Review* 113.1, pp. 38–54.

Week 6, September 26: No Class

Take a break from reading, take a three day weekend, do something.

Week 7, October 03: Institutions I: Organization of Congress

Fenno, Richard F. (1962). "The House Appropriations Committee as a Political System: The Problem of Integration''. In: *American Political Science Review* 56.2, pp. 310–324.

Shepsle, Kenneth A and Barry R Weingast (1987). "The institutional foundations of committee power''. In: *American Political Science Review* 81.1, pp. 85–104.

Aldrich, John H (2011). *Why Parties?: a second look*. University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1 - 2

Cox, Gary W. and Mathew D. McCubbins (2007). "Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House''. In: *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House*. Cambridge University Press. Part 5: Chapters 9 - 10

Rohde, David W. (2013). "Reflections on the Practice of Theorizing: Conditional Party Government in the Twenty-First Century''. In: *The Journal of Politics* 75.4, pp. 849–864.

Week 8, October 10: In Class Midterm

Week 9, October 17: Homecoming (No Class)

Week 10, October 24: Institutions II: Topics on Congress

Mayhew, David R. (1974). *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Yale University Press. pages 1- 78

Canes-Wrone, Brandice, David W. Brady, and John F. Cogan (2002). "Out of Step, Out of Office: Electoral Accountability and House Members' Voting''. In: *American Political Science Review* 96.1, pp. 127–140.

Jacobson, Gary C. (1989). "Strategic Politicians and the Dynamics of U.S. House Elections, 1946–86''. In: *American Political Science Review* 83.3, pp. 773–793.

Porter, Rachel and Sarah A Treul (2025). "Evaluating (in) experience in congressional elections''. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 69.1, pp. 284–298.

Hassell, Hans J. G. (2016). "Party Control of Party Primaries: Party Influence in Nominations for the U.S. Senate''. In: *The Journal of Politics* 78.1, pp. 75–87.

Week 11, October 31: Institutions III: Other Institutions: Presidency, Courts, Bureaucracy

Potter, Rachel Augustine (2017). "SlowRolling, FastTracking, and the Pace of Bureaucratic Decisions in Rulemaking''. In: *Journal of Politics* 79.3, pp. 772–786.

Lowande, Kenneth, Melinda Ritchie, and Erinn Lauterbach (2019). "Descriptive and Substantive Representation in Congress: Evidence from 80,000 Congressional Inquiries''. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 63.3, pp. 644–659.

Ragsdale, Lyn and John J. Theis III (1997). "The Institutionalization of the American Presidency, 1924–92''. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 41.4, pp. 1280–1318.

CanesWrone, Brandice and Scott DeMarchi (2002). "Presidential Approval and Legislative Success''. In: *Journal of Politics* 64.2, pp. 491–509.

Dahl, Robert A (1957). "Decision-making in a democracy: The Supreme Court as a national policy-maker''. In: *J. Pub. L.* 6, p. 279.

Whittington, Keith E. (2005). "'Interpose Your Friendly Hand': Political Supports for the Exercise of Judicial Review by the United States Supreme Court''. In: *American Political Science Review* 99.4, pp. 583–596.

Week 12, November 07: Institutions IV: State Politics

Shipan, Charles R. and Craig Volden (2008). "The Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion''. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 52.4, pp. 840–857.

Rogers, Steven (2017). "Electoral Accountability for State Legislative Roll Calls and Ideological Representation''. In: *American Political Science Review* 111.3, pp. 555–571.

Hansen, Eric R. and Sarah A. Treul (2025). "Prior Experience and State Legislative Effectiveness''. In: *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.

Gamm, Gerald and Thad Kousser (2021). "Life, Literacy, and the Pursuit of Prosperity: Party Competition and Policy Outcomes in 50 States''. In: *American Political Science Review* 115.4, pp. 1442–1463.

Grumbach, Jacob M. (2023). "Laboratories of Democratic Backsliding''. In: *American Political Science Review* 117.3, pp. 967–984.

Week 13, November 14: Race and Politics

Acharya, Avidit, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen (2016). "The political legacy of American slavery''. In: *The Journal of Politics* 78.3, pp. 621–641.

Dawson, Michael C. (1994). "Behind the Mule: Race and Class in AfricanAmerican Politics''. In: *Behind the Mule*. Princeton University Press. Chapters 1 and 5

Jefferson, Hakeem (2023). "The politics of respectability and Black Americans' punitive attitudes''. In: *American Political Science Review* 117.4, pp. 1448–1464.

Hainmueller, Jens and Michael J. Hiscox (2010). "Attitudes Toward Highly Skilled and LowSkilled Immigration: Evidence from a Survey Experiment''. In: *American Political Science Review* 104.1, pp. 61–84.

Lajevardi, Nazita and Kassra A. R. Oskooii (2018). "OldFashioned Racism, Contemporary Islamophobia, and the Isolation of Muslim Americans in the Age of Trump''. In: *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 3.1, pp. 1–41.

Week 14, November 21: Polarization

Hetherington, Marc J. (2001). "Resurgent Mass Partisanship: The Role of Elite Polarization''. In: *American Political Science Review* 95.3, pp. 619–631.

Fiorina, Morris P. and Samuel J. Abrams (2008). "Political Polarization in the American Public''. In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 11.1, pp. 563–588.

Levendusky, Matthew S. (2013). "Why Do Partisan Media Polarize Viewers?'' In: *American Journal of Political Science* 57.3, pp. 611–623.

Iyengar, Shanto and Sean J. Westwood (2015). "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization''. In: *American Journal of Political Science* 59.3, pp. 690–707.

Druckman, James N., Samara Klar, Yanna Krupnikov, Matthew Levendusky, and John B. Ryan (2021). "Affective Polarization, Local Contexts and Public Opinion in America''. In: *Nature Human Behaviour* 5, pp. 28–38.

Final Exam December 11 at 7:30 am to 9:30 am