

POL 102 - Introduction to American Politics

10:30 - 11:20 am MWF

Room: Buttrick Hall 203

Spring 2024

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Instructor Information

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Office hours: Thursdays 10 am - 12 pm

Course Overview

This course will provide an overview of the major topics in the study of American politics. The course is arranged in three parts. In the first part of the course, we will talk about the foundations of the American system (the Constitution, federalism, civil rights and liberties). In Part II, we will cover the major institutions of American government (Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, and the judiciary). In Part III, we will examine the role of public opinion, political parties, elections, and the media in American politics. In addition to these topics, the course will also introduce you to the methods political scientists use.

Learning Outcomes

- Develop an understanding of the foundations, major institutions, and principal actors in American politics
- Think critically about the ways in which Americans interact with their political institutions
- Apply the theories and concepts from American politics to current events

Work and Assessment

Required Text:

- Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck. 2023. *The Logic of American Politics, 11th Edition*. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press/SAGE.

Course expectations: Students are expected to attend class and participate during class discussions. This course has both a lecture and a discussion component. The lectures will incorporate the readings assigned for that day/week. I expected you will have completed all readings prior to class and will come prepared with comments and questions. Unless noted otherwise, all readings will be made available on Canvas.

- A note of caution: some of the readings come from academic journals and books. The articles can be quite technical and difficult even when one is familiar with the methodologies. Do not despair. Make sure to look for the main ideas presented in the text. Pay attention as well to how the authors support their arguments with data without getting bogged down by technical details.

Final course grades will be assigned as follows:

A+	(97-100)	C	(73-76)
A	(93-96)	C-	(70-72)
A -	(90-92)	D+	(67-69)
B+	(87-89)	D	(63-66)
B	(83-86)	D-	(60-62)
B -	(80-82)	F	(0-59)
C +	(77-79)		

Final grades will be calculated based on the following components:

Participation (10%): All students are expected to be active participants in class discussions. Our learning experience will be enhanced if you come prepared and ready to share your comments, insights, and/or questions from the material covered in the lectures and readings with the rest of the class.

- Attendance policy: Attendance is part of your participation grade, and while there is no separate grade for attendance it is a prerequisite for in-class participation. That said, to accommodate for unforeseeable circumstances, you have three *unexcused* absences that will not affect your participation grade. Please let the instructor know about any excused absences you anticipate during the semester.

Concept Map (20%): Throughout the course you will build a concept map that helps you organize and connect the material we will cover in class. At the end of each major section of the course, you will submit the current draft of your concept map (see schedule below). Since you will be incorporating new material each week, your concept map will evolve; some pieces of information may be removed, for example, to add others. The goal is to help you integrate new material and make connections with existing knowledge. You can build your concept map by hand or you can use an online tool such as [Bubbl.us](https://bubbl.us) or [Coggle](https://coggle.it).

Two Papers (15% each): You will be writing two short papers (3-5 pages) for this course. These assignments will require you to think about how what we learn in class relates to what you can observe in your political environment (what some call the “real world”). You can find a short description of each paper below (detailed instructions will be provided on Canvas):

1. Op-ed: students will write an op-ed for the college newspaper (no actual submission necessary) on a topic of American politics of their choice.

2. Campaign memo: students will pick a member of Congress and write a campaign memo covering the demographics of the member's constituency, the roll call record of the member, and the topics the campaign should focus on.

Papers must be submitted via Canvas. Late submissions will be penalized: half a point (out of 10) if turned in late but on the same day and one point for each 24-hour period after the due date.

Midterm and Final Exam (20% each): There will be a midterm and a final exam that students will complete on Canvas. These exams will assess your familiarity with the terms and theories in the American politics literature that we will have covered in class.

Course Conduct

Students in this course come from a variety of social, economic, and political backgrounds. As in bound to be the case when we talk about politics, we will discuss many topics that might be controversial or of a sensitive nature for some or all in our group. Our goal in this class is to gain an understanding of how political scientists study American politics and to use these tools to help us have productive discussions of contemporary politics. Derogatory comments toward other students or members of a particular groups will not be tolerated.

Communication Policy

If you have questions about class in general or about a specific assignment, you can email me or come by my office. You can expect a response within 24 hours (unless you email me on Friday). Students are also more than welcome to attend office hours, as this is time set aside specifically for you. In addition, if my office door is open, feel free to stop by. Please note that I will not be “pre-grading” assignments, but I am happy to answer clarifying questions about them either via email or, preferably, during office hours.

Regrading Policy

If a student wishes to appeal a grade, they must do so in writing within one week of receiving their graded assignment back. The student must indicate clearly what part of the assignment's grading they disagree with, making sure to respond to the instructor's comments in that section and making their case for why they should not have been deducted points. These requests should be done via email and the subject name should read “POL 102 Regrading request - [Name of assignment].”

Honor Code

Students are expected to do their own work and cite sources appropriately. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. In other words, students will be held to the standards of the Agnes Scott

Honor System to which they agreed when enrolling at this institution. The Agnes Scott College honor code embodies an ideal of character, conduct, and citizenship, and is an important part of the College's mission and core identity. This applies especially to academic honesty and integrity. Passing off someone else's work (or Chat GPT's) as your own represents intellectual fraud and theft and violates the core values of our academic community. To be honorable, you should understand not only what counts as academic dishonesty, but also how to avoid engaging in these practices.

You are responsible for the content of any work submitted for this course. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) to generate a first draft of text or code is permitted, but you must review and revise any AI-generated text or code before submission. AI text generators can be useful tools but they are often prone to factual errors, incorrect or fabricated citations, and misinterpretations of abstract concepts. I neither encourage nor discourage their use, but utilize them with caution.

Course Accessibility and Academic Accommodations

Agnes Scott College views disabilities as an integral part of the rich diversity of our community and strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you are a student who receives academic accommodations through the Office of Accessible Education, please schedule a meeting with me within the first two weeks of classes to discuss how your accommodations will be implemented for this course. During this meeting, you are not expected to disclose any details concerning your disability, though you may discuss these details at your discretion.

If you are a student with a disability—physical, medical, psychological, or learning-specific—and have not connected with Accessible Education to discuss your accessibility needs, please visit the [main Office of Accessible Education webpage](#) to learn more about accommodations, helpful resources and support, available through the Office of Accessible Education. Students who register for accommodations during the semester should schedule a meeting with me after accommodations have been approved by the Office of Accessible Education.

Wellbeing and Mental Health

The wellbeing and mental health of students is important; if you are having trouble completing your coursework, please reach out to the [Wellness Center](#). Agnes Scott College provides cost-free mental health services to help you manage personal challenges that threaten your personal or academic well-being. If you believe you are experiencing unusual amounts of stress, sadness, or anxiety, please contact the Wellness Center and ask about their [Counseling and Psychological Services](#).

Title IX

Agnes Scott is here to help you if you have experienced any form of sexual harassment or violence, dating or domestic violence, or stalking. Please talk to any faculty or staff member with whom you feel comfortable. Faculty and staff members want to support you and have been trained to help. They will also inform the Title IX office so that you learn about options available to you. If you do not want college administrators to know what you have experienced, you may talk to the chaplain, as well as nurses or counselors in the Wellness Center with complete confidentiality. They will not tell anyone what you share with them unless you give your express permission. You may contact the Title IX Coordinator directly at T9Coordinator@agnesscott.edu.

Diversity and Inclusion

Agnes Scott is a diverse and inclusive community. As one of the most diverse colleges in the nation, ASC is ideally positioned to be the model of a diverse and inclusive community that society can aspire to be. Such diversity raises the intellectual quality of the classroom experience, creating a unique environment for learning to understand and navigate the challenges of our times. By studying, living, and playing together, Agnes Scott College's remarkably diverse student body hones the habits of mind, skills, and knowledge essential to ethical and innovative leadership in our increasingly heterogeneous and global society. As such, this course adheres to the principles of diversity and inclusion as integral to the Agnes Scott community and respects people from all backgrounds. As a first step, this course affirms people's decisions about gender expression and identity and will use each other's preferred names and gender pronouns at all times.

Chosen Names and Personal Pronouns

Everyone has the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity. Rosters do not list gender or pronouns, so you may indicate the pronouns you use so that I don't make assumptions based on your name and/or appearance/self-presentation (*you are not obligated to do so*). If you use a chosen name, please let me know. Chosen names and pronouns are to be respected at all times in the classroom. Mistakes in addressing one another may happen, so I encourage an environment of openness to correction and learning. I will not, however, tolerate repeated comments that disrespect or antagonize students who have indicated pronouns or a chosen name.

Center for Writing and Speaking

The Center for Writing and Speaking offers one-on-one appointments with trained peer tutors who can help you improve your written and oral communication skills. You are encouraged to use this resource when working on your class assignments to make your arguments more

compelling, your sentences clearer, and persistent grammatical errors nonexistent. You can schedule an appointment at .

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

Course Schedule

Week 1 - Introduction to the Study of American Politics

January 10

- Syllabus

January 12

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 1.

Part I - Foundations of American Politics

Week 2 - The Constitution

January 15 - NO CLASS. MLK Day.

January 17

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 2.
- Constitution of the United States (<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript#toc-article-ii->)

January 19

- No assigned reading

Week 3 - Federalism and Civil Liberties

January 22

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 3.
- Federalist Papers #10, 51. <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/full-text>

January 24

- No assigned reading.

January 26

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 5.

Week 4 - Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

January 29

- No assigned reading.

January 31

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 4.

February 2

- Mazumder, Soumyajit. 2018. "The Persistent Effect of US Civil Rights Protests on Political Attitudes." *American Journal of Political Science* 62(4): 922-935.

Part II - Institutions of American Government

Week 5 - Congress

February 5

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 6.

February 7

- Mayhew, David R., 2004. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Yale University Press. Introduction and Chapter 1.

February 9

- No assigned reading.

Concept Map for Part I due February 9 at 11:59 pm on Canvas.

Week 6 - The Presidency

February 12

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 7.

February 14

- William G. Howell. 2003. *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.

February 16

- No assigned reading.

Week 7 - Bureaucracy and the Judiciary

February 19

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 8.

February 21

- White, Ariel R., Noah L. Nathan, and Julie K. Faller. 2015 “What Do I Need to Vote? Bureaucratic Discretion and Discrimination by Local Election Officials.” *American Political Science Review* 109(1): 129-142.

February 23

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 9.

Campaign memo due February 23rd at 11:59 pm on Canvas.

Week 8 - The Judiciary and Midterm Exam

February 26

- No assigned reading.

February 28

- Review for midterm exam.

March 1

- MIDTERM EXAM

Week 9 - Journeys/Peak Week

NO CLASS. March 4 - March 10

Week 10 - Spring Break

NO CLASS. March 11 - March 17

Part III - The Public in American Politics

Week 11 - Political Parties

March 18

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 12.

March 20

- No assigned reading.

March 22

- No assigned reading.

Concept Map for Part II due March 22nd at 11:59 pm on Canvas.

Week 12 - Public Opinion and Polarization

March 25

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 10.

March 27

- Berinsky, Adam J. 2017. "Measuring Public Opinion with Surveys." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20: 309-329.

March 29 - NO CLASS. Spring Holiday.

Week 13 - Voting, Elections, and Campaigns

April 1

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 11.

April 3

- Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer. 2008. "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review* 102(1): 33-48.

April 5

- No assigned reading.

Week 14 - Interest Groups

April 8

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 13.

April 10

- Ban, Pamela, Maxwell Palmer, and Benjamin Schneer. 2019. “From the Halls of Congress to K Street: Government Experience and its Value for Lobbying.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 44(4): 714- 752.

April 12

- No assigned reading.

Op-ed due April 12 at 11:59 pm on Canvas.

Week 15 - The Media

April 15

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 14.

April 17

- Prior, Markus. 2013. “Media and Political Polarization.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 16: 101-127.

April 19

- No assigned reading.

Week 16 - Policy

April 22

- Logic of American Politics, Chapter 15.

April 24

- Dynes, Adam M., and John B. Holbein. 2020. “Noisy Retrospection: The Effect of Party Control on Policy Outcomes.” *American Political Science Review* 114(1): 237-257.

April 26

- Neil Irwin. Jan 17, 2017. “Presidents Have Less Power Over the Economy Than You Might Think.” *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/17/upshot/presidents-have-less-power-over-the-economy-than-you-might-think.html>

Week 17

April 29

- No assigned reading.

May 1

- No assigned reading.

Concept Map for Part III due May 1st at 5 pm on Canvas.

Final exam - Date TBD