

## **PS 0200 - American Politics**

Department of Political Science

University of Pittsburgh

Tuesday/Thursday 12:00 – 3:15 pm (June 23 – July 30)

Web-based Course

### **Syllabus - Summer (II) 2020**

**Instructor:** Alex Honeker

**Email:** a.honeker@pitt.edu

**Online Office Hours:** By appointment

#### **Course Description and Goals.**

The goal of this course is to introduce students to the institutional and behavioral foundations of American politics. The course focuses on the institutional framework of the U.S. political system, its main relevant actors, and the attitudes and behaviors of elites and the mass public. Special attention will be given to the role of elite discourse in shaping public opinion as well as being shaped by it, and the role of linkage institutions such as political parties and interest groups in the electoral process.

The course will consist of two main sections: **political institutions** and **political behavior**. In the former, we will answer questions like: Were the Framers of the Constitution liberal or conservative? What are the consequences of a political system based on the separation of powers? How do we balance the sometimes contradictory aims of civil liberties and civil rights? Has the balance of power between Congress and the Presidency changed throughout the years? Is the U.S. Supreme Court democratic and should it be?

During the second section, we will focus on how political scientists study mass behavior and individuals' attitudes and explore questions like: How is public opinion measured? What is the role of experiments in political science? How do individuals' ideologies originate? Is the liberal-conservative ideological dimension a creation of political elites? Are American voters ideologically polarized? Is party identification issue-based or identity-based? What is the effect of political mobilization on voter turnout?

While the course is focused on American politics, examples of comparative political institutions and public opinion will be showcased in order to contrast the U.S. political system with that of other countries.

#### **Learning Objectives.**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify the main features of the U.S. political system and its main relevant actors.
- Explain how citizens' political attitudes are formed and how elites are affected by – and affect – them.

- Compare and contrast institutional and behavioral aspects of the U.S. political system with comparative examples.
- Critically evaluate the interactions between different institutional levels, the role of political actors, and the processes shaping citizens' attitudes towards government and society.

### Course Prerequisites.

This course does not require any previous knowledge on the subject.

### Textbook and Readings.

1. Textbook: Krutz, Glen. 2019. *American Government, Second Edition*. OpenStax.

The entire book is available on our Canvas course and you can also download it for free at <https://openstax.org/details/books/american-government-2e>.

2. All other readings and videos will be posted by the instructor on Canvas, as specified in the class schedule below.

Assigned readings should be done before the respective class.

### Evaluation Criteria.

Your grade will consist of the following components:

- |                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Response Papers (2)            | 30% |
| 2. Midterm Exam                   | 25% |
| 3. Final Exam                     | 25% |
| 4. Discussion + Small Assignments | 20% |

1. You will write **two short response papers** on a journal article (see in red on 1-page schedule below) assigned during the week of your choice. Each paper will contribute 15% towards your final grade. You can choose the week on which you want to write, the only exception being that you write one paper during the first half of the term (classes 1-6) and one during the second half (classes 7-12). These papers should critically discuss the article (you have to write about a journal article assigned, not a chapter in your textbook), connect the article's content with readings from previous classes, and end with a critical question that you think the article does not answer or does so in an incomplete way. A more detailed description of this assignment along with a grading rubric will be provided on Canvas. Papers should be 2-3 pages long, double-spaced, and use 12-point Times New Roman font. Response papers should be uploaded on Canvas. See class schedule below for due date.

2. There will be a **midterm exam** after class 6 covering the content from the first half of the course (classes 1-6). The exam will be administered via Canvas and will consist of multiple-choice, short-response, and fill-in-the-blank questions. The exam will be open-book, open-notes but the questions will be timed. The midterm exam will contribute 25% towards your final grade. See class schedule below for due date.
3. There will be a **final exam** on the last day of class covering the content from the second half of the course (classes 7-11). The exam will be administered via Canvas and will consist of multiple-choice, short-response, and fill-in-the-blank questions. The exam will be open-book, open-notes but the questions will be timed. The final exam will contribute 25% towards your final grade. See class schedule below for due date.
4. Before every class (except the first class on June 23), you will have to participate and complete small assignments in the **discussion board**. I will post questions and/or activities related to the readings for that class or extra content (videos, quizzes, etc.). This must be completed before our Zoom lecture by 12pm. Each discussion board is worth 10 points out of a total of 100 points in your “Discussion + Small Assignments” grade component. This component represents 20% of your final grade.

### **Extra Credit.**

You may choose one of the following U.S. Supreme Court cases and provide a short (2-page) reaction paper. Up to 5 points will be added to your final exam grade. This reaction paper is due by Tuesday, July 28 at 11:59pm. A grading rubric will be provided on Canvas.

List of cases to choose from:

- *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954)
- *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966)
- *Loving v. Virginia* (1967)
- *Roe v. Wade* (1973)
- *Bush v. Gore* (2000)
- *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010)
- *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008)
- *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013)
- *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015)
- *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* (2018)
- *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees* (2018)
- *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia* (2020)

## **Grading Scale.**

Letter grades will be determined in the following way:

A+	= 97 points or higher
A	= 93-96 points
A-	= 90-92 points
B+	= 87-89 points
B	= 83-86 points
B-	= 80-82 points
C+	= 77-79 points
C	= 73-76 points
C-	= 70-72 points
D+	= 67-69 points
D	= 63-66 points
D-	= 60-62 points
F	= 59 points or lower

## **Online Learning.**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this course will be entirely online. If you have any concerns regarding your ability to connect to any particular lecture, please let the instructor know in advance. Class sessions will be conducted via Zoom and will be held synchronously. Since internet connections can be unreliable from time to time, Zoom sessions will be recorded so students can access them via Canvas in case they had connection problems. A link to each Zoom lecture will be available on Canvas under the “Zoom” tab.

## **Regrading Policy.**

Regrade requests must be made within 1 week after your graded assignment has been returned and must be submitted with a written statement of at least 150 words to [a.honeker@pitt.edu](mailto:a.honeker@pitt.edu). This statement should explain why you think the grade should be changed. Remember that, after re-evaluating your work, your grade may remain unchanged or be adjusted in either direction. There will be no grade changes after the final exam.

## **Late Assignments.**

Late assignments (response papers and discussion board assignments) will be penalized with a 5% reduction in the grade per day, unless you provide a documented medical excuse.

### **Make-Up Exams.**

If you have a medical or family emergency and cannot take the midterm or final exam in the scheduled date, you should inform the instructor ([a.honeker@pitt.edu](mailto:a.honeker@pitt.edu)) as soon as possible and provide a documented excuse.

### **Classroom Conduct.**

Students are expected to connect to the Zoom lecture on time and to actively engage in class discussions and activities – both in Zoom and on Canvas. Additionally, students are expected not to engage on any behavior that may disrupt the learning process. Also, an environment of mutual respect will be maintained in every class session. Any kind of disrespect towards another individual in the Zoom session or on the discussion boards will not be tolerated.

### **Academic Integrity.**

Students are expected to follow the University of Pittsburgh's standards of academic integrity (<https://www.provost.pitt.edu/faculty/academic-integrity-freedom/academic-integrity-guidelines>). These guidelines will be strictly enforced in this class. Therefore, plagiarism on your papers and/or cheating on your quizzes will not be tolerated. Anyone thought to have violated the standards of academic integrity will face university-sanctioned penalties, including, but not limited to, failing the class.

### **Disability Resources.**

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-624-3346 (Fax), as early as possible in the term. Disability Resources and Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course. For more information, visit: <https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/drs/>.

## Course Schedule.

### Part I: Political Institutions.

#### Class 1 – Tuesday, June 23

**Topics:** Class Introduction; the U.S. Constitution; the Founders’ philosophy

**Readings:**

- Textbook Chapter 2
- Federalist Papers 10, 51

#### Class 2 – Thursday, June 25

**Topic:** Federalism

**Readings:**

- Textbook Chapter 3
- “How states’ rights became a liberal environmentalist cause”  
Available on Canvas and online at <https://www.csmonitor.com/layout/set/print/Environment/2019/1009/How-states-rights-became-a-liberal-environmentalist-cause>
- “Trump endorses states’ rights — but only when he agrees with the state”  
Available on Canvas and online at <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/04/02/trump-states-rights-education-sanctuary-drilling-492784>

#### Class 3 – Tuesday, June 30

**Topics:** Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

**Readings:**

- Textbook Chapters 4-5
- “The Intolerant Fifth”  
Available on Canvas and online at <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2017/10/12/free-speech-at-american-universities-is-underthreat>

#### Class 4 – Thursday, July 2

**Topic:** The Legislative Branch

**Readings:**

- Textbook Chapter 11
- Russell, A. (2020). “Minority Opposition and Asymmetric Parties? Senators’ Partisan Rhetoric on Twitter.” *Political Research Quarterly*. 1–13.

### **Class 5 – Tuesday, July 7**

**Topic:** The Executive Branch

**Readings:**

- Textbook Chapter 12
- Canes-Wrone, B. & Shotts, K. W. (2004). “The Conditional Nature of Presidential Responsiveness to Public Opinion.” *American Journal of Political Science* 48(4): 690-706

### **Class 6 – Thursday, July 9**

**Topic:** The Judicial Branch

**Readings:**

- Textbook Chapter 13
- Enns, P. K. & Wohlfarth, P.C. (2013). “The Swing Justice.” *Journal of Politics* 75 (October): 1089-1107.

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**Midterm Exam** (Due Sunday, July 12, 11:59pm on Canvas)

**Response Paper 1** (Due Sunday, July 12, 11:59pm on Canvas)

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## **Part II: Political Behavior.**

### **Class 7 – Tuesday, July 14**

**Topic:** Public Opinion I: Attitude formation; Surveys; Experiments

**Readings:**

- Textbook Chapter 6
- Mondak, J., Hibbing, M., Canache, D., Seligson, M., & Anderson, M. (2010). “Personality and Civic Engagement: An Integrative Framework for the Study of Trait Effects on Political Behavior.” *American Political Science Review* 104(1): 85-110.

### **Class 8 – Thursday, July 16**

**Topic:** Public Opinion II: Issues, Ideology, and Partisanship

**Readings:**

- Feldman, S. (2013) “Political Ideology.” In L. Huddy, D. O. Sears, & J. S. Levy (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology, Second Edition* (pp 591-618). Oxford University Press.

- Malka, A., Lelkes, Y., & Soto, C. (2019). “Are Cultural and Economic Conservatism Positively Correlated? A Large-Scale Cross-National Test.” *British Journal of Political Science* 49(3): 1045-1069.

### **Class 9 – Tuesday, July 21**

**Topic:** Political Parties; Partisan Polarization

**Readings:**

- Textbook Chapter 9
- Mason, L. (2015). “‘I Disrespectfully Agree’: The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization.” *American Journal of Political Science* 59(1): 128-145.

### **Class 10 – Thursday, July 23**

**Topic:** Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

**Readings:**

- Textbook Chapter 7
- “Debating the Electoral College”  
Available on Canvas and online at <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/debating-the-electoral-college.aspx>
- Bond, R., Fariss, C., Jones, J. et al. (2012). “A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization.” *Nature* 489, 295–298.

### **Class 11 – Tuesday, July 28**

**Topic:** Interest Groups; News Media

**Readings:**

- Textbook Chapters 10, 8

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**Final Exam** (Due Thursday, July 30, 11:59pm on Canvas)

**Response Paper 2** (Due Thursday, July 30, 11:59pm on Canvas)

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**Course Schedule (1-Pager).**

Class	Date	Topic/s	Assigned Readings	Activity Due
1	Tue, Jun 23	Class Introduction; the U.S. Constitution; the Founders' philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Textbook Chapter 2</li> <li>Federalist Papers 10, 51</li> </ul>	None
2	Thu, Jun 25	Federalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Textbook Chapter 3</li> <li>"How states' rights..."</li> <li>"Trump endorses states..."</li> </ul>	Discussion Board 1 (Due 12pm)
3	Tue, Jun 30	Civil Liberties and Civil Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Textbook Chapters 4-5</li> <li>"The Intolerant Fifth"</li> </ul>	Discussion Board 2 (Due 12pm)
4	Thu, Jul 2	The Legislative Branch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Textbook Chapter 11</li> <li>Russell 2020**</li> </ul>	Discussion Board 3 (Due 12pm)
5	Tue, Jul 7	The Executive Branch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Textbook Chapter 12</li> <li>Canes-Wrone &amp; Shotts 2004**</li> </ul>	Discussion Board 4 (Due 12pm)
6	Thu, Jul 9	The Judicial Branch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Textbook Chapter 13</li> <li>Enns &amp; Wohlfarth 2013**</li> </ul>	Discussion Board 5 (Due 12pm)
<p><b>Midterm Exam</b> (Due <u>Sunday, July 12</u>, 11:59pm on Canvas)</p> <p><b>Response Paper 1</b> (Due <u>Sunday, July 12</u>, 11:59pm on Canvas)</p>				
7	Tue, Jul 14	Public Opinion I: Attitude formation; Surveys; Experiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Textbook Chapter 6</li> <li>Mondak et al. 2010**</li> </ul>	Discussion Board 6 (Due 12pm)
8	Thu, Jul 16	Public Opinion II: Issues, Ideology, and Partisanship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feldman 2013 (Book chapter)</li> <li>Malka et al. 2019**</li> </ul>	Discussion Board 7 (Due 12pm)
9	Tue, Jul 21	Political Parties; Partisan Polarization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Textbook Chapter 9</li> <li>Mason 2015**</li> </ul>	Discussion Board 8 (Due 12pm)
10	Thu, Jul 23	Voting, Campaigns, and Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Textbook Chapter 7</li> <li>"Debating the Electoral College"</li> <li>Bond et al. 2012**</li> </ul>	Discussion Board 9 (Due 12pm)
11	Tue, Jul 28	Interest Groups; News Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Textbook Chapters 10, 8</li> </ul>	Discussion Board 10 (Due 12pm)  <b>Extra Credit</b> (Due 11:59pm)
<p><b>Final Exam</b> (Due <u>Thursday, July 30</u>, 11:59pm on Canvas)</p> <p><b>Response Paper 2</b> (Due <u>Thursday, July 30</u>, 11:59pm on Canvas)</p>				

\*The instructor may change the course schedule at any time throughout the term. You will be given sufficient notification of any changes. \*\*Journal articles to choose for response papers.