

POLS 206 | AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Sun-Thu 8:00-9:05 am, QENG 124

Instructor: Alex Honeker**Email:** alexhoneker@tamu.edu**Office:** 329E, Division of Arts & Sciences, TAMUQ**Office Hours:** Sun-Thu 9:30-11:00 am, and by appointment**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS**

The goal of this course is to introduce students to the national government, constitutional development, politics, and policy of the United States. The course focuses on the institutional framework of the U.S. political system, its main relevant actors, the attitudes and behaviors of elites and the mass public, and the main contemporary policy debates.

The course will consist of three main sections: political **institutions**, electoral and political **behavior**, and public **policy**. In **Section 1**, we will answer questions like: Were the Framers of the Constitution liberal or conservative? What is liberalism? What are the consequences of a political system based on the separation of powers? 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?

In **Section 2**, we will focus on the study of linkage institutions such as political parties and interest groups, and voter behavior, and explore questions like: How is public opinion measured? How do individuals' ideologies originate? What is "Left" and "Right" and how does that vary across the world? Are American voters ideologically polarized? What is the effect of political mobilization on voter turnout? How do electoral systems affect representation?

Finally, in **Section 3**, we will explore the main policy issues facing American domestic and foreign policy. We will explore questions like: What is the trade-off between taxes and spending? How has the size of the U.S. federal government evolved in the last 200 years? Are there different varieties of capitalism and welfare states? What are the main controversies surrounding U.S. education policy? Has the rise of populism and isolationism reshaped U.S. foreign policy priorities?

While the course is focused on American politics, examples of **comparative** political institutions, public opinion, and public policy will be showcased in order to contrast the U.S. political system with that of other countries, particularly other liberal democracies. Moreover, the course will provide **practical lessons** and assignments to strengthen students' **writing, presentation, and quantitative skills**. Finally, students will also have an overview of the **scientific study of politics**, with lessons on how to read political science articles, how to read regression tables, and a basic understanding of the use of experimental methodology in social science.

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.
- Understand the constitutional development of the United States.
- Critically evaluate the interactions between different institutional levels, the role of political actors, and the processes shaping citizens' attitudes towards government and society.
- Explore the main issues in contemporary American domestic and foreign policy.
- Explain the trade-offs and political constraints surrounding the adoption of a policy.
- Compare and contrast institutional, behavioral, and policy aspects of the U.S. political system with comparative examples.
- Summarize and assess the basic findings in a scientific article.

COURSE PREREQUISITES

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

SPECIAL COURSE DESIGNATION

This is a University Core Curriculum (Government/Political Science) course.

UNIVERSITY CORE CURRICULUM LEARNING OUTCOMES

The following skills will be addressed in this course:

- **Critical thinking:** including creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information.
- **Communication:** including effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication.
- **Social responsibility:** including intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.
- **Personal responsibility:** including the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making.
- **Empirical and Quantitative Skills:** including the manipulation and analysis of numerical data or observable facts resulting in informed conclusions.

TEXTBOOK AND/OR RESOURCE MATERIALS

- There is one textbook for this course, which you can download for free at <https://openstax.org/details/books/american-government-3e>:
 - Krutz, Glen. (2021). *American Government*. Third Edition. OpenStax. [Denoted as Textbook].
- All other readings and materials will be posted by the instructor on **Canvas**, as specified in the class schedule below. Assigned readings should be done **before** the respective week.

REQUIRED SOFTWARE

- We will use Canvas for the 7 quizzes mentioned below.

GRADING SCALE

Letter grades will be determined in the following way:

A = 90-100	B = 80-89	C = 70-79	D = 60-69	F <60
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EVALUATION CRITERIA

Your grade will consist of the following components:

1. 7 Quizzes (4% each, drop 2 lowest grades) **20%**
2. Attendance **5%**
3. Participation **10%**
4. Case Study Presentation **25%**
5. Case Study Report **20%**
6. Final Exam **20%**

1. **Quizzes.** There will be 7 quizzes during the semester (one per week) over the assigned articles from that week. Quizzes will be unannounced, so you have to make sure to be in class to take it. Quizzes will be delivered on Canvas. I will drop the two lowest grades in the 7 quizzes, so you will be graded on your best 5 quizzes (worth 20% of your final grade or 4% each quiz).
2. **Attendance.** You are expected to attend every class or provide a valid medical excuse *before* the missed class. Attendance will be worth 5% of your final grade. Excused absences will only be given if you inform me in advance and provide a justification. Otherwise, you will not be able to take a missed quiz. It is highly unlikely to get an A in this course if you miss class frequently.
3. **Participation.** Your participation grade will be based on your engagement in class discussions and activities. Specifically, you are expected to read the assigned readings before each week so you can actively participate in class and participate in the surveys and other activities we do in class or as homework. I may ask you to complete some surveys before class to use for specific activities. Failure to complete these surveys and quizzes will affect your participation grade. Participation will contribute 10% towards your final grade.
4. **Case Study Presentation.** You will choose one policy case study from a series of case studies provided by the instructor and prepare and deliver a presentation in front of the class where you simulate a policy briefing to a policymaker. In the presentation, you will explain the background of the case, the different actors (parties, interest groups, social groups) involved in the case, delineate the different policy alternatives, and recommend a course of action to a hypothetical policymaker based on your analysis of the most favorable course of action. A more detailed description of this assignment along with a grading rubric will be provided on Canvas. See class schedule below for due date. The case study presentation will contribute 25% towards your final grade.

5. **Case Study Report.** Following your case study presentation above, you will prepare a policy report putting in writing the elements of your presentation above and incorporating the feedback received during your class presentation. The audience of the report is a hypothetical policymaker you are advising on the policy discussed in the case study you chose. The report should clearly address the policy alternatives and the course of action you propose to follow, along with potential implications. The report should be around 3 pages long. A more detailed description of this assignment along with a grading rubric will be provided on Canvas. See class schedule below for due date. The case study report will contribute 20% towards your final grade.

Note on plagiarism: Canvas uses software to identify plagiarism or the use of AI for writing. Please be aware that plagiarizing your report or using AI to write it will result in a **0 grade** besides the university procedures indicated below in the section “Academic Integrity Statement and Policy.”

6. **Final Exam.** There will be a final exam covering the content from the semester. The exam will consist of multiple-choice, short-response, and/or fill-in-the-blank questions. The final exam will contribute 20% towards your final grade. The date and time of the final exam will be announced during the semester.

GRADING POLICY CHANGES

Regrade requests must be made within three days after your graded assignment has been returned and must be submitted with a written statement of at least 150 words via email to alexhoneker@tamu.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 will be penalized with a 5% reduction in the grade per day unless you provide a documented medical excuse.

CLASSROOM CONDUCT

Students are expected to attend class on time and to actively engage in class discussions and activities. Additionally, students are expected not to engage on any behavior that may disrupt the learning process. Students are encouraged to actively participate in class discussions in an environment of free and open intellectual exchange and mutual respect. Any kind of disrespect towards another individual will not be tolerated.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 | May 19-23

- **Topics:** U.S. Constitution; Founders' philosophy; federalism
 - **Mandatory Readings:**
 1. The Economist. (2022). "American policy is splitting, state by state, into two blocs."
 2. Federalist Papers 10, 51
 - **Optional Readings:**
 1. Textbook Chapters 1, 2, 3
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Week 2 | May 26-30

- **Topics:** Branches of government. Congress, Presidency, Judiciary
 - **Mandatory Readings:**
 1. Lieberman, R. C. & Mettler, S. (2023). "The Crisis of American Democracy in Historical Context." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 708(1), 122-136.
 2. Goldgeier, J. & Saunders, E. N. (2018). "The Unconstrained Presidency: Checks and Balances Eroded Long before Trump." *Foreign Affairs*, 97(5), 144-156.
 3. Cato Institute. (2020). "Maintaining Judicial Independence and the Rule of Law: Examining the Causes and Consequences of Court Capture."
 4. Vox. (2020) "The Supreme Court is too powerful and anti-democratic. Here's how we can scale back its influence."
 - **Optional Readings:**
 1. Textbook Chapters 11, 12, 13
 - **Practical Lesson:** How to read a scientific paper and a regression table.
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Week 3 | June 2-6

- **Topics:** Civil liberties and civil rights; public opinion and ideology
- **Mandatory Readings:**

1. The Economist. (2024). "Should American universities call the cops on protesting students?"
2. National Constitution Center. (2018). *Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*.
3. Malka, Ariel, Lelkes, Y., & Soto, C. (2017). "Are Cultural and Economic Conservatism Positively Correlated? A Large-Scale Cross-National Test." *British Journal of Political Science*, 49, 1045–1069.
4. Osborne, D., Costello, T. H., Duckitt, J., & Sibley, C. G. (2023). "The psychological causes and societal consequences of authoritarianism." *Nature Reviews Psychology*, 2, 220–232.

- **Optional Readings:**

1. Textbook Chapters 4, 5, 6

- **Practical Activity:** U.S. vs. international ideological quiz.
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Week 4 | June 9-13

- **Topics:** Political parties and interest groups; elections and voting

- **Mandatory Readings:**

1. Dias, N. & Lelkes, Y. (2022). "The Nature of Affective Polarization: Disentangling Policy Disagreement from Partisan Identity." *American Journal of Political Science*, 66(3), 775–790.
2. Gerber, A. S., Green, D. P., & Larimer, C. W. (2008). "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review*, 102(1), 33–48.

- **Optional Readings:**

1. Textbook Chapters 9, 7

- **Practical Activity:** Simulation of electoral systems.
 - **Practical Lesson:** Experimental designs in political science.
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Week 5 | June 16-20

- **Eid Al-Adha - No class this week.**
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Week 6 | June 23-27

- **Lecture:** Topics in U.S. domestic policy
 - **Mandatory Readings:**
 1. Alesina, A., Glaeser, E., & Sacerdote, B. (2001). "Why Doesn't the United States Have a European-Style Welfare State?" *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2, 187–254.
 2. Hasell, J. (2023). "How has income inequality within countries evolved over the past century?" *OurWorldInData.org*.
 - **Optional Readings:**
 1. Textbook Chapters 16
 - **ASSIGNMENT DUE: Case Study Presentations** to take place this week in class.
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Week 7 | July 30-July 4

- **Lecture:** Topics in U.S. foreign policy
 - **Mandatory Readings:**
 1. The Economist. (2024). "The world's economic order is breaking down."
 2. Wright, W. (2020). "How trade openness can help to 'deliver the poor and needy.'" *Economic Affairs*, 40, 100–107.
 - **Optional Readings:**
 1. Textbook Chapters 17
 - **ASSIGNMENT DUE:** Upload **Case Study Report** on Canvas on **July 6 by 11:59pm**.
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Week 8 | July 7-11

- Course recap. Review for final exam.
 - **Final Exam date to be confirmed.**
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COURSE INFORMATION ITEMS

TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

Students can direct their technical questions to servicedesk@qatar.tamu.edu.

LEARNING RESOURCES

Students should contact the Center for Teaching and Learning at ctl@qatar.tamu.edu for questions related to learning support, peer tutoring, supplemental instruction, writing support, etc.

SCIENCE LEARNING SUPPORT (SLS)

The Science Learning Support within the Division of Arts and Sciences provides a variety of services to support the academic success of all students at Texas A&M at Qatar.

Peer tutors are available to support their peers in achieving their academic goals. Students are welcome to book free one-to-one or group appointments to reinforce their learning outside class, gain confidence and develop study skills in chemistry, physics, math, and fundamental engineering courses. Walk-ins are also welcome! Visit the Science Learning Support website to find out more about their student support services and how to register or book an appointment.

Supplemental Instruction (SI) sessions are also offered for select subjects. Led by SI leaders who will typically reach out to students in specific supported courses, these sessions provide an opportunity for students to think critically about challenging concepts, solve practice problems, and apply various learning strategies in an interactive environment. Please get in touch with joelle.fadlallah@qatar.tamu.edu for assistance and further information.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

ATTENDANCE POLICY

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments. Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

MAKEUP WORK POLICY

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor. Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines. Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the time-frame for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" (Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1). "The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence" (Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2). Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](#).)

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT AND POLICY

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."

"Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one's work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case" (Section 20.1.2.3, [Student Rule 20](#)).

You can learn more about academic integrity and your rights and responsibilities at Texas A&M University at Qatar by visiting the [Aggie Honor System](#) website.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) POLICY

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below) Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Disability Services is located in the Engineering Building, room 318C or at +974.4423.0316 or visit <https://www.qatar.tamu.edu/students/student-affairs/disability-services>.

TITLE IX AND STATEMENT ON LIMITS TO CONFIDENTIALITY

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based

discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes, or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.
- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, a person who is subjected to the alleged conduct will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether or not to pursue a formal investigation. The University's goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

Texas A&M University at Qatar students wishing to discuss concerns in a confidential setting are encouraged to visit the [Health and Wellness](#) website for more information. Students can learn more about filing a report, accessing supportive resources, and navigating the Title IX investigation and resolution process on the University's [Title IX](#) webpage.

STATEMENT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors that influence a student's academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in healthy self-care by utilizing available resources and services on your campus. Texas A&M University at Qatar students wishing to discuss concerns in a confidential setting are encouraged to visit the [Health and Wellness](#) website for more information.