

## Course Information

Course Number: **POLS 207**  
Course Title: **State and Local Government**  
Section: 501  
Time: Sunday-Tuesday-Thursday, 3:35-4:25pm  
Location: Room 238, TAMUQ  
Credit Hours: 3

## Instructor Details

Instructor: Alex Honeker  
Office: 329E, Division of Arts & Sciences, TAMUQ  
Phone: +974 4423-0545  
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Office Hours: Sunday-Tuesday-Thursday 2:30-3:30pm, and by appointment

## Course Description

This course is a survey of state and local government and politics with special reference to the constitution and politics of Texas. The course focuses on the federal institutional framework of the United States and the institutions, political behavior, and policies of the states.

The course will consist of three main sections: political institutions, public opinion and political behavior, and public policy. Throughout the course, we will explore questions such as: What are the differences in the separation-of-powers system among the states? Which state institutions differ from those in the federal constitution? Why do some states elect judges, contrary to the federal model? Do states have different political cultures? How do American states differ in their approach to public policy?

At the end of the course, we will compare and contrast the U.S. federal system with other examples across the world at the national (e.g. Canada, Brazil, Germany, etc.) and supranational levels (European Union).

**Practical lessons.** Some classes will incorporate a more practical component, where we will apply some of the topics learned into practical activities. For instance, students will learn how to read a scientific paper, how to read a regression table, how to visualize data in R, among others. This component is intended to strengthen students' quantitative and data analysis skills.

## Course Prerequisites

None.

## Course Learning Outcomes

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

- Identify the main features of the U.S. federal system and its main relevant institutions and actors.
- Explain the constitutional development of the United States.
- Critically evaluate the interactions between federal, state, and local governments and the role of political actors.
- Explore the main issues in states' economic and social policy agendas.
- Contrast institutional aspects of the U.S. federal system with comparative examples.
- Summarize and assess the basic findings in a scientific article.
- Perform basic data analysis and visualization in the R statistical software.

## 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 **required textbook** for this course, which can be accessed online on Canvas under the "Course Materials" tab.

- Gray, Virginia, Hanson, Russell L., & Kousser, Thad. (2017). *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis. 11th Edition.* SAGE Publications, Inc. [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

- Students will need to download “R” and “R Studio” in their laptops. This software is freely available online. We will go over how to do this in class. Students will need to bring their laptops to class to use when we perform practical lessons in R.
- We will use “iClicker” for some of the 10 quizzes mentioned below. Students will need to download the iClicker App on their phones. Other quizzes will be delivered via Canvas.

## Grading Policy

### *Evaluation Criteria*

Your grade will consist of the following components:

- 1) 10 Quizzes **30%** (3.75% each, drop 2 lowest grades)
- 2) Data Analysis Paper **30%**
- 3) Participation **10%**
- 4) Midterm Exam **15%**
- 5) Final Exam **15%**

1) **10 Quizzes.** There will be 10 quizzes during the semester over the material from that week or the week before (with the exception of the first quiz which will be on the content of the syllabus). Quizzes will be unannounced, so you have to make sure to be in class to take it. Quizzes will be delivered via the iClicker App or Canvas. I will drop the two lowest grades in the 10 quizzes, so you will be graded on your best 8 quizzes (worth 30% of your grade or 3.75% of your class grade each quiz).

2) **Data Analysis Paper.** You will use one of the datasets used in the practical lessons in class and compare two US states. Specifically, you will generate 3 graphs or figures comparing 3 aspects of your choice (e.g., legislative composition, partisan history, ideological positions, policy mood, taxation levels, etc.) between the two states using what we have learned in class in R. Datasets will be provided to you on Canvas and you will also have access to the R code used in our class lessons. You will need to turn in a short paper (2-3 pages plus figures) including the 3 figures and a description of what they show (along with a paragraph introduction and a paragraph conclusion) and the R script that you used to generate the figures. I should be able to replicate the graphs you made with the R script you turn in. A more detailed description of this assignment along with a grading rubric will be provided on Canvas. For this paper, you will work in groups of 3-4 students. The paper will contribute 30% towards your final grade. A more detailed description of this

assignment along with a grading rubric will be provided on Canvas. The paper should be uploaded on Canvas. See class schedule below for due date.

- 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 polls, quizzes and other activities assigned. I may ask you to complete some polls and online quizzes before class to use for specific activities. Failure to complete these polls and quizzes will affect your participation grade. Participation will contribute 10% towards your final grade.
- 4) **Midterm Exam.** There will be a midterm exam on Week 7 covering the content from the first half of the course (weeks 1-6). The exam will consist of multiple-choice, short-response, and/or fill-in-the-blank questions. The midterm exam will contribute 15% towards your final grade.
- 5) **Final Exam.** There will be a final exam covering the content from the second half of the course (weeks 7-15). The exam will consist of multiple-choice, short-response, and/or fill-in-the-blank questions. The final exam will contribute 15% towards your final grade. The date and time of the final exam will be announced during the semester.

**Note on Attendance.** You are expected to attend class. Even though attendance will not be formally taken, quizzes will take place unannounced, so if you are not in class, both your quizzes and participation grades will be negatively affected. **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.

### *Grading Scale*

Letter grades will be determined in the following way:

<b>A = 90-100</b>	<b>B = 80-89</b>	<b>C = 70-79</b>	<b>D = 60-69</b>	<b>F = &lt;60</b>
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### *Grading Policy Changes*

Regrade requests must be made within one week 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](mailto: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 Work Policy

Late assignments will be penalized with a 5% reduction in the grade per day unless you provide a documented medical excuse.

## Course Schedule

### *Section 1: Political Institutions*

#### **Week 1 – January 7-9-11**

- Topics: Class introduction; state & local politics, and the comparative method
- Readings:
  - Textbook Chapter 1
- **Thursday 11: No class – Online assignment**

#### **Week 2 – January 14-16-18**

- Topics: Federalism and intergovernmental relations
- Readings:
  - Textbook Chapter 2
  - The Economist. (2023). “Republicans intensify their assault on city governments.”
  - Brown Political Review. (2018). “Democrats are Becoming the Party of States’ Rights.”

#### **Week 3 – January 21-23-25**

- Topics: The legislative branch; ballot initiatives
- Readings:
  - Textbook Chapters 7, 6
  - Nickelson, J., and Jansa, J. M. (2023). “Descriptive Representation and Innovation in American Legislatures.” *Political Research Quarterly*, 0(0), 1-18.

#### **Week 4 – January 18-30, February 1**

- Topics: The executive branch
- Readings:
  - Textbook Chapter 8
  - Breunig, C., and Koski, C. (2020). “Topping Off and Bottoming Out: Setting Budget Priorities Through Executive Power.” *Policy Studies Journal*, 48(2), 342-366.

#### **Week 5 – February 4-6-8**

- Topics: The judicial branch
- Readings:
  - Textbook Chapter 9
  - Brace, P., and Boyea, B. (2008). “State Public Opinion, the Death Penalty, and the Practice of Electing Judges.” *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(2), 360-372.

**Week 6 – February 11-15 (February 13: No class – Qatar National Sports Day)**

- Topics: State bureaucracies
- Readings:
  - Textbook Chapter 17
  - Boushey, G., McGrath, R. (2017). “Experts, Amateurs, and Bureaucratic Influence in the American States.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 27(1), 85-103.

*Section 2: Public Opinion and Political Behavior***Week 7 – February 18-20-22**

- Topic: Public Opinion
- Readings:
  - Textbook Chapter 5
  - Enns, P. K., and Koch, J. (2013). “Public Opinion in the U.S. States: 1956 to 2010.” *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, 13(3), 349–372.
- **Thursday, February 22: Midterm Exam**

**Week 8 – February 25-27-29**

- **Spring break – No class this week**

**Week 9 – March 3-5-7**

- Topic: Parties and elections
- Readings:
  - Textbook Chapter 3
  - Harden, J., and Kirkland, J. (2016). “Do Campaign Donors Influence Polarization? Evidence from Public Financing in the American States.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 41(1), 119-152.

**Week 10 – March 10-12-14**

- Topic: Interest groups
- Readings:
  - Textbook Chapter 4
  - Finger, L., & Reckhow, S. (2022). “Policy Feedback and the Polarization of Interest Groups.” *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, 22(1), 70-95.

*Section 3: Public Policy***Week 11 – March 17-19-21**

- Topics: Fiscal and welfare policy
- Readings:
  - Textbook Chapter 11-12
  - The Economist. (2022). “American policy is splitting, state by state, into two blocs.”

**Week 12 – March 24-26-28**

- Topic: Education policy
- Readings:

- Textbook Chapter 13-14
- The Economist. (2022). "America's school-choice movement is gaining steam."

**Week 13 – March 31, April 2-4**

- Topic: Health and environmental policy
- Readings:
  - Textbook Chapter 12, 15
  - Konisky, D., and Woods, N. (2016). "Environmental Policy, Federalism, and the Obama Presidency." *Publius*, 46(3), 366-391.
- **Thursday, April 4: Response Paper due. Upload in Canvas by 11:59pm.**

**Week 14 – April 7-9 (April 11: No Class - Eid Al-Fitr)**

- Topic: Economic development, poverty, and inequality
- Readings:
  - Textbook Chapter 16, 18
  - Pacheco, J., and LaCombe, S. (2022). "Too Much Democracy? Exploring the Link Between Majoritarian Institutions and Disparities in the American States." *APSA Pre-Prints*.

**Week 15 – April 16-18 (April 14: No Class - Eid Al-Fitr)**

- Topic: U.S. federalism in comparative perspective
- Readings:
  - Buchanan, J. (1995). "Federalism and individual sovereignty." *Cato Journal*, 15(2-3), 259-268.
  - Burgess, M. (2000). "Federalism and European Union: The Building of Europe, 1950-2000." Routledge. Pages 1-19.

**Week 16 – April 21-23**

- Topic: Course recap. Review for final exam.
- Readings: None
- **April 28 – May 1: Final Exam. Date to be confirmed.**

## Course Information Items

### *Technology Support*

Students can direct their technical questions to [servicedesk@qatar.tamu.edu](mailto:servicedesk@qatar.tamu.edu).

### *Learning Resources*

Students should contact the Center for Teaching and Learning at [ctl@qatar.tamu.edu](mailto: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](mailto: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 timeframe 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.