

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

Summer 2019 (second six-weeks), Indiana University

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1 Course Description and Overview

This course offers a broad overview of American politics (both political institutions and mass political behavior). We will cover the foundational topics: the disagreements at the Constitutional Convention; the branches of government; and what a “federal” system means for the balance between state and national government. We will also cover issues of enduring interest: civil liberties; political parties and their functions; public opinion and voting; the role of the news media and interest groups; and the nature of federal political institutions (e.g. Congress, the presidency, the Supreme Court).

But let’s address the elephant-in-the-room right away. **This is a unique time to be taking an introductory course in American politics.** You might have heard people say (on the news or talk shows) that very little about American politics in 2019 has any relationship with stuff that came before. Does this mean we should junk the textbook and wait for the dust to settle?

No!

In the end, this course offers a framework of analysis for understanding American politics. The framework holds even when American politics makes little sense, or seems to be changing in fundamental ways. By the end of this course, you should be able to explain:

- **What is enduring about the American system of government.** What are the core institutional features that stay the same even when lots of other things change? What “checks and balances” are built into the system, and how do they work? Why is it that a president and a congressional majority that shared the same party from 2017-2019 weren’t able to pass some of the major policies they championed during their campaigns?
- **What it means for policy outcomes to be determined by procedural rules.** When elected officials argue over rules and procedures, why are these actually arguments about what policies will “win?” How might this (obsessive) emphasis on procedure keep the system functional even when individual personalities are eccentric?

To be clear, we will talk about Donald Trump. (And Bernie Sanders, and Joe Biden, and everyone else running for president in 2020.) And we will talk about everything new-and-unusual in American politics. **But we will also learn tools for evaluating why our system has a relatively high threshold for “weirdness” in the first place.** This is an unusual time to study American politics. Yet it exemplifies the stability and strength of our political system.

2 Textbook

Bianco, William T. and David T. Canon. *American Politics Today, full sixth edition.*

You must obtain a physical or online copy of the *most current full version* (6th edition) of this textbook. This is our exclusive text. Since it is updated every two years, any past editions are out-of-date. *Please talk to me as soon as possible if you have any difficulties obtaining a current version of the textbook.* I will also place a physical copy of the textbook on reserve at the Wells Library media center, where you can borrow the textbook for four-hour blocks of time.

There are copies of the textbook (new and used) at the Indiana Memorial Union bookstore; copies are also available through [Amazon](#) and [Book Scouter](#). You may also purchase an online version of the textbook if you would like to access the book that way.

If you do not purchase your book through the IMU bookstore, you should refer to the current ISBN number to make sure you obtain the correct edition. Depending on which format you choose, here are the ISBN numbers. (Most online book vendors allow you to enter the ISBN number instead of the book title.)

Hardback: (978-0393679861)

Paperback: (978-0393679878)

3-Hole Punch: (978-0393679885)

E-book: (978-0393679861)

The textbook is associated with the online InQuizitive platform, through W.W. Norton & Company. InQuizitive helps students review each chapter and improve their understanding of core concepts. ***I will make information about accessing InQuizitive available on the first day of class.***

3 Expectations

Since this course is only six weeks long, much information will be consolidated into a (relatively) short period of time. This requires substantial commitment on your part to stay on track. For most class sessions, you will be expected to:

- **Read (ahead of time) selections from the textbook, as indicated in the schedule below.** I suggest taking detailed notes, and paying attention to the **bolded** terms throughout.
- **Take a short (multiple-choice) quiz at the start of class,** on the material assigned for that session. These will not contain “trick questions,” but you will do much better on these quizzes if you have completed the assigned readings.
 - We will review quiz results immediately after I have collected your quizzes. **I strongly encourage you to take notes on what you answered correctly or incorrectly.**
- **Keep up with current events by reading a daily national newspaper.** We will have regular discussions of current events, applying what we’re learning to real-time political events.
 - Authoritative newspapers are the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, or *Washington Post*. Online subscriptions to the *Times* and *Post* are available (for free!) through the IU library system. (I will provide information about accessing these on the first day of class.) Opinion-oriented websites (such as Daily Kos, Salon, MSNBC, Fox News, or Drudge Report) are not acceptable; neither are local newspapers such as the *Herald Times*.

- Note: reading a newspaper does *not* require the same attention-to-detail as the textbook. You should not be spending three hours reading the *New York Times* from front-to-back! Rather, spend about 30 minutes reading your chosen paper (e.g. by focusing on the first 3 or 4 paragraphs of each article, and skipping things that are redundant or unimportant). **As you read/skim, take special note of current events that are relevant to course materials.**

- **Complete (very) short, frequent in-class writing assignments.** Participation is a graded part of this course. To assess participation, I will often require the class to complete very short (4-5 minute) in-class writing assignments on discussion questions relevant to the topic(s) for that day (which I will then collect). **These will not be graded for “correct” answers.** Rather, they will help facilitate discussion and give me a clear sense of students’ willingness to participate. **Remember to bring writing utensils and notebook paper to each class.**

4 Course Structure

Each class session will meet for approximately two hours. The majority of sessions will be spent covering new material from the textbook. On those days, please keep the following format in mind:

- **You are always expected to show up for class on time.** For the first 5-10 minutes of class, you will take a short (five-question) multiple-choice quiz on the textbook material for that day. After quizzes are turned in, we will review the answers together.
- Then, I’ll lecture on the course material. I encourage you to take notes and ask questions. There is no need to copy down everything on my slides; the slides are meant to guide your understanding, not to function as a substitute for reading the textbook. **Without exception, slides will not be posted on Canvas.** Just focus on the “big picture” points and ask about areas that are unclear.
- We’ll always take a five-minute break at the “halfway point” of class. Remind me if I forget!
- **The second half of class will be more interactive.** We’ll sometimes break off into smaller groups to brainstorm responses to discussion questions I pose to the class (usually after an in-class writing assignment). And we’ll spend a not-inconsiderable amount of time linking the course material to current events.
- The final hour of class will be flexible enough that some conversations/tangents will not be abruptly stopped if I deem them to be helpful for our understanding of the material. But I do intend for most of these sessions to involve class reflection on both the lecture material and current events. On most days, you should expect roughly 30 minutes of small-group review of textbook and lecture material, and 30 minutes of discussion about how that material relates to current events you’ve been reading about. *This format is subject to change as the semester proceeds.*

The scheduled class before each exam, the final hour features an open-ended exam review session instead of the usual format. In my experience, the best review sessions are those in which students teach this material to each other. I will facilitate, answer questions, and re-explain difficult concepts. But you should come to each review session expecting to do small-group review work. (My attendance policy is discussed below in more detail; students will be excused from class in the event of illness or family emergency.)

5 Exams

We will have four in-class exams (and no final exam); **please look at the schedule carefully to make sure there are no conflicts with your plans for these six weeks. Exams will not be cumulative;** they will cover all the material since the previous exam. You will have the full class-time to complete your exam. Each exam will contain 30 multiple-choice questions and two essay questions.

I want there to be as few “surprises” as possible, but still give incentive to prepare. **At least one week ahead-of-time** (see schedule), **I will circulate a list of five possible essay questions for each exam, two of which will actually appear.** I encourage you to “prep” and study from as many of these questions as possible! (Note: if you study for the exams with your fellow classmates, group members are not allowed to memorize – and then write – identical answers to the exam questions.)

6 Course Schedule

Week 1: The Constitution and Bill of Rights; Civil Liberties

- Monday, June 17: Course introduction and overview.
 - *Possible Exam 1 essay questions handed out.*
- Tuesday, June 18: The Constitution and the Founding
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 2 (pp. 30-47)
- Wednesday, June 19: The Constitution and the Founding, continued
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 2 (pp. 48-65)
- Thursday, June 20: Civil Liberties
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 4 (pp. 102-129)

Week 2: Civil Liberties (continued); Political Parties

- Monday, June 24: Civil Liberties, continued; Exam 1 Review
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 4 (pp. 130-143)
 - *Final hour of class will be reserved for exam review.*
- Tuesday, June 25: **Exam 1 (covers Chapter 2 and Chapter 4)**
- Wednesday, June 26: Political Parties
 - *Possible Exam 2 essay questions handed out.*
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 8 (full chapter; pp. 262-292)
- Thursday, June 27: Political Parties, continued
 - **Assigned reading:** No assigned reading, in-class quiz will still involve Chapter 8.

Week 3: Interest Groups and Elections

- Monday, July 1: Interest Groups
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 10 (full chapter; pp. 340-370)
- Tuesday, July 2: Elections; Exam 2 Review
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 9 (full chapter; pp. 296-336)
 - *Final hour of class will be reserved for exam review.*
- Wednesday, July 3: **Exam 2 (covers Chapters 8, 9, and 10)**
- Thursday, July 4: **No class.**

Week 4: Public Opinion and the Media

- Monday, July 8: Public Opinion
 - *Possible Exam 3 essay questions handed out.*
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 6 (pp. 198-228)
- Tuesday, July 9: Public Opinion, continued
 - **Assigned reading:** No assigned reading; in-class quiz will still involve Chapter 6.
 - **Note: July 9th is the last date to drop this course with an automatic “W!”**
- Wednesday, July 10: The Media
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 7 (pp. 232-262)
- Thursday, July 11: The Media, continued
 - **Assigned reading:** No assigned reading; in-class quiz will still involve Chapter 7.
 - *Final hour of class will be reserved for exam review.*

Week 5: Institutions: Congress and the Presidency

- Monday, July 15: **Exam 3 (covers Chapters 6 and 7)**
- Tuesday, July 16: Congress
 - *Possible Exam 4 essay questions handed out.*
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 11 (pp. 374-394)
- Wednesday, July 17: Congress, continued
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 11 (pp. 395-414)
- Thursday, July 18: The Presidency
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 12 (full chapter; pp. 418-451)

Week 6: Institutions: The Bureaucracy and the Courts

- Monday, July 22: The Presidency, continued
 - **Assigned reading:** no assigned reading; in-class quiz will still cover Chapter 12.
- Tuesday, July 23: The Bureaucracy
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 13 (full chapter; pp. 454-484)
- Wednesday, July 24: The Courts; Exam 4 Review
 - **Assigned reading:** *American Politics Today*, Chapter 14 (pp. 488-426)
 - *Final hour of class will be reserved for exam review.*
- Thursday, July 25: **Exam 4 (covers Chapters 11, 12, 13, and 14)**

7 Course Policies

7.1 Grading

Your final grade, *after deducting percentage points for missed classes* (see “Attendance”), will be the weighted average of your scores as follows. Students’ lowest exam score will be dropped, and their highest exam score double-weighted. (Note that your “current grade” on Canvas will not be accurate until you have completed all four exams!)

- **Highest exam score (of four) (40 percent)**
- **2nd-highest exam score (20 percent)**
- **3rd-highest exam score (20 percent)**
- **Lowest exam score (0 percent)**
- **In-class quizzes (10 percent)**. Each quiz will be five multiple choice-questions (3-5 correct = 2 points; 1-2 correct = 1 point; 0 correct = 0 points).
- **Participation (10 percent)**. I will recognize good-faith efforts to participate in class discussions. Moreover, I will encourage participation with structured opportunities for students to collect their thoughts. The frequent in-class writing assignments will help me gauge students’ level of preparation for class. Just as important, these impromptu assignments will give you ideas for comments, insights, and questions that can be shared during class discussion. People will lose points on participation if it is clear from your in-class writing that you have not prepared for class or are not interested in earning a strong participation score. (If you have questions about the quality of your class participation, please see me during my office hours.)

7.2 Attendance

You are required to attend class sessions. **You are allowed to miss (i.e. skip without a valid excuse) two classes with no penalty. After that, I will deduct 5 percentage points from your final grade for each additional absence.** You will only be excused from class in cases of family emergency or illness.

Note that while this policy is strict, it is not draconian. Some students have extenuating circumstances (e.g. health (including mental health) crises; prolonged family emergencies) that require more flexibility. *I will waive my attendance policy for students whose family or health circumstances make it infeasible to attend class on a regular basis.* In all cases (but especially when students want to avoid sharing personal health details with the instructor), I encourage contacting Disability Services for Students to investigate whether you are eligible for temporary (*and formal*) accommodations for this and other classes.

On illness: I encourage students to not come to class if you have a bad cold, the flu, or another contagious illness. I have no desire to get sick, and neither do your classmates! If you are genuinely not feeling well, please let me know as soon as possible – and I will excuse the absence(s) assuming that you obtain a valid doctor’s note from the IU Health Center or another provider.

7.3 Make-up Exams

I expect students to take all four exams as scheduled. I will only allow make-up exams for students that are ill the day of the exam (and obtain a valid doctor’s note); or for students with a family emergency. (See “Attendance” for more information.)

7.4 Course Withdrawal

The last date to withdraw from this class (with an automatic “W” on your transcript) is **Thursday, July 9th**. After that time, I will not grant late-withdrawal requests except in extraordinary extenuating circumstances. If you believe that you are not performing well enough to pass the class, it is your responsibility to monitor your course performance on Canvas, and to evaluate the situation in advance of this deadline. *I promise that I will update your Canvas grades as quickly as possible after each class to allow you to make this determination with as much information as possible.*

7.5 Technology

I discourage the usage of laptops in this course. While some students take better notes on laptops, others abuse the privilege. Browsing the Internet or checking your cell phone during class-time is inherently distracting and disrespectful to your classmates. *I reserve the right to restrict laptop usage in the classroom at any time.*

7.6 Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

As the instructor-of-record for this course, I have authority to report suspected cases of plagiarism and academic dishonesty. Any student that cheats on an exam (e.g. by sneaking in reference materials or copying another student’s blue book) will receive an automatic 0 (zero) percent for that exam. If I see someone talking with another student during an exam, I will assume that both students are cheating on the exam.

Avoiding plagiarism is essential for anyone at any stage of their academic career. *Do not assume that plagiarism is not an issue in this class simply because there is no course paper requirement.* It is still possible to plagiarize on a written exam. For example, plagiarism would refer to instances where:

- Students quote (without citation) a verbatim definition from the textbook in one of their essay responses, rather than putting the definition into their own words.
- Groups of students all prepare for the exam essays by memorizing (and writing) identical prepared responses.

To avoid plagiarism, I strongly encourage you to visit Indiana University’s website on “How to Recognize Plagiarism”: <https://www.indiana.edu/academy/firstPrinciples/choice.html>. **In my experience, most cases of plagiarism are not deliberate; rather, students are not aware that what they are doing constitutes plagiarism.**

7.7 Sexual Harassment and Title IX

As your instructor, one of my responsibilities is to create a positive learning environment for all students. Title IX and IU’s Sexual Misconduct Policy prohibit sexual misconduct in any form, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and dating and domestic violence. If you have experienced sexual misconduct, or know someone who has, the University can help.

If you are seeking help and would like to speak to someone confidentially, you can make an appointment with:

- The Sexual Assault Crisis Services (SACS) at (812) 855-8900 (counseling services)
- Confidential Victim Advocates (CVA) at (812) 856-2469 (advocacy and advice services)
- IU Health Center at (812) 855-4011 (health and medical services)

It is also important that you know that Title IX and University policy require me to share any information brought to my attention about potential sexual misconduct, with the campus Deputy Title IX Coordinator

or IU's Title IX Coordinator. In that event, those individuals will work to ensure that appropriate measures are taken and resources are made available. Protecting student privacy is of utmost concern, and information will only be shared with those that need to know to ensure the University can respond and assist. I encourage you to visit <https://stopsexualviolence.iu.edu> to learn more.

7.8 Disability Student Services

Every attempt will be made to accommodate qualified students with disabilities (e.g. mental health, learning, chronic health, physical, hearing, vision, neurological, etc.). You must have established your eligibility for support services through the appropriate office that services students with disabilities. Note that services are confidential, may take time to put into place, and are not retroactive. Captions and alternate media for print materials may take three or more weeks to get produced.

Please contact Disability Services for Students at <https://disabilityservices.indiana.edu> or 812-855-7578 as soon as possible if accommodations are needed. The office is located on the third floor, west tower, of the Wells Library, Room W-302. Walk-ins are welcome 8AM to 5PM, Monday through Friday. You can also locate a variety of campus resources for students and visitors that need assistance at: <https://www.iu.edu/ada/index.shtml>.