

Introduction to U.S. Government and Politics (3 credits)

Spring Semester 2025

Instructors

Seongjoon Ahn

Email: ahn43@illinois.edu

Office: 317B David Kinley Hall

Office Hours: M 10 AM - 11 AM

W 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM

Office Hour Sign-Up: [CLICK HERE](#)

Matt Mettler

Email: mettler3@illinois.edu

Office: 433 David Kinley Hall

Office Hours: Wed 12 PM - 2 PM

Teaching Assistant

Jane Betchley

Email: janepb2@illinois.edu

Office: 2 David Kinley Hall

Office: Fri 12 PM - 2 PM

**Meetings outside office hours may be arranged by appointment, please email the instructor or TA.*

Meeting Time & Location

Lecture: Mon & Wed 3:00 - 3:50 PM (223 Gregory Hall)

Discussion: Fri 10 AM, 11 AM, 2 PM (307 David Kinley Hall)

Course Website

<https://canvas.illinois.edu/courses/55028>

Course Description and Learning Outcomes

This course is intended to provide students with an introduction to US government and politics and their study. We will engage with the constitutional and philosophical foundations of the US political system, explore the institutional organization and logic of US government, examine the workings of the US electoral

system and the ways in which the government and electorate are connected, and interrogate the individual and group factors that shape political behavior in the US. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Clearly articulate the structure, function, origins, and evolution of the political institutions of the US
- Explain the US electoral process and the basic role of citizen-government interactions in shaping electoral outcomes
- Identify and elaborate on core factors that give rise to variation in political attitudes, shape sociopolitical identity in the US, and that influence the effectiveness of citizens as drivers of democratic process

Required Textbook and Readings

*Bianco, William and David Canon. 2022. American Politics Today. New York: W.W. Norton. (8th edition - **NOT THE ELECTION VERSION!**)*

Purchase Book Here: <https://wwnorton.com/books/9781324039969>

The most recent previous edition (7e) is acceptable, though some minor discrepancies in page numbering and content may occur. This course also assumes a high-school level of knowledge of US history. The open-source textbook *American Yawp* (found [here](#)) is a good resource if you need to familiarize yourself or brush up.

Additional readings will be listed below in the Course Schedule with links where available. Readings not linked in the Course Schedule will be made available on Canvas.

Assignments and Grading

Assignment	Percentage of Course Grade
Participation	10%
Discussion Participation	10%
Writing Assignment 1	10%
Midterm Exam 1	25%
Writing Assignment 2	10%

Final Exam	35%
Total	100%

The course grade is calculated using a 100-point scale with the following lower bounds:

Percentage of Final Grade	Letter Grade
97	A+
93	A
90	A-
87	B+
83	B
80	B-
77	C+
73	C
70	C-
67	D+
63	D
60	D-
<60	F

Participation (10%)

Students are expected to attend class regularly, prepared to engage in discussions and activities. Students are asked to participate in small-group discussions and be responsive to questions asked during lectures. Students are also encouraged to ask clarifying questions of the instructors and of each other. Students must respect other students, their opinions, and their questions.

Discussion Participation (10%)

Students are expected to attend weekly section meetings regularly, prepared to engage in discussions and activities. Those students who feel uncomfortable speaking up in large groups are encouraged to participate more actively in sections to compensate for being engaged in lectures. Those who are uncomfortable speaking up in section can also indicate their engagement by attending office hour regularly to discuss the class material.

Writing Assignments (10% each)

Students will be required to write two (2) short essays throughout the semester. A topic prompt for each essay will be published on Canvas one (1) week prior to the due date of the essay. Essays will be 700-800 words each and detailed instructions will be published with each prompt. Late submissions will receive a penalty of 1 point per day with a maximum deduction of 5 points for being late. Late submissions will be excused only for extenuating situations.

Midterm Exams

Students will be required to sit an in-person midterm exam. The exam will cover materials from Weeks 1-7 of the Course Schedule. The exams will be given in the lecture classroom at the normal Thursday class time as specified in the Course Schedule. The rules of the Student Code on examinations (Articles 3-201 to 3-204; see <https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article3/part2/intro/> for details) apply to these exams.

Exam Rescheduling/Make-up

Exams may be rescheduled or made-up by students only in cases of emergencies or similar circumstances, or in cases of required student participation in university-sanctioned activities. Once aware of such a circumstance, students should contact the instructor as early as possible to arrange for a rescheduled/make-up examination. All requests for rescheduled/make-up exams must include documentation supporting the student's inability to sit the exam at the original time/place.

Retroactive requests for exam make-up for reasons known to the student in advance of the scheduled exam date will not be considered without an absence letter from the Office of the Dean of Students (see <https://odos.illinois.edu/resources/students/absence-letters> and Student Code Article 1-501 <https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1/part5/1-501/> on class attendance).

Final Exam

Students will be required to sit a final exam. This exam will be given in the normal lecture classroom. The final exam will not be cumulative. The rules of the Student Code on final examinations (Article 3-201; see <https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article3/part2/3-201/> for details) will apply to this exam.

Conflict Final Exams

Per Article 3-201a of the Student Code on examinations (<https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article3/part2/3-201/>), a student is entitled to schedule a conflict final examination if either/both of the following circumstances obtain:

- 3-201a, section 8: "...if that student has two instructor-scheduled, synchronous exams during the same exam window..."
- 3-201a, section 9: a student would be required to take more than two consecutive final exams in one day

If a student is entitled to schedule a conflict final examination, they must contact the instructor as specified in 3-201a, sections 8-10 of the Student Code. This must be done on or before the final day of instruction. Please consult the linked section of the Student Code for additional details about this process.

Assignment Grading

The TA will have primary responsibility for grading the writing assignments and exams as well as tracking discussion participation. The expected turnaround for grades on the writing assignments is no less than seven (7) days and no more than fourteen (14) days from the posted deadline.

Any inquiry about a specific grade must be made no less than 24 hours and no more than seven (7) days after its publication. Such inquiries must be made in writing or during office hours. Inquiries made later than seven (7) days after the publication of a grade will not be considered.

General Course Policies

Absence Policy

Unless otherwise noted in course communication, students are expected to attend all lectures and discussion meetings as outlined in the Course Requirements and Course Schedule sections of this syllabus. A student experiencing adverse circumstances, an emergency, or an obligation to participate in university-sanctioned activities may request an excusal of absence by contacting the TA or course instructor with documentation supporting their inability to attend class

BEFORE CLASS. Seeking an Absence Letter from the Office of the Dean of Students (<https://odos.illinois.edu/>) is recommended where other documentation is unavailable and/or for sensitive matters; *students should under no circumstances feel compelled to divulge sensitive or personal information to the TA or course instructor.*

Late Work, Extensions, and Make-up Assignments

Except where otherwise specified in the syllabus or course communication, late work is penalized.

Discretionary extensions of up to 24 hours may be granted by the TA or course instructor for the writing assignments in cases of a request made in writing and in advance of the listed deadline.

Except where otherwise specified in the syllabus or course communication, make-up opportunities/retroactive extensions of assignment deadlines will only be granted in cases of documented extenuating circumstances. Students are strongly encouraged to seek an Absence Letter (and other assistance if needed) from the Office of the Dean of Students (<https://odos.illinois.edu/>) in cases of extended absence or sensitive affairs.

Extra Credit: Subject Pool Participation

Students will have an opportunity to participate as a research subject in the Department of Political Science Subject Pool. The department's Subject Pool Coordinator will briefly address the class about this opportunity early in the semester; this will be announced in the first few weeks of the course. Participation in the subject pool is voluntary and is *not* required. Any student who participates in the subject pool and completes all study questionnaires required may opt to apply that participation to receive extra credit in PS 101 equivalent to 2% of the course grade; a student may not use their participation for both PS 101 and another course simultaneously.

Academic Integrity

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Student Code (<http://studentcode.illinois.edu/>) should also be considered as a part of this syllabus. Students should pay particular attention to Article 1, Part 4: Academic Integrity.

Academic dishonesty may result in a failing grade. Every student is expected to review and abide by the Academic Integrity Policy (<https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1/part4/1-401/>). Ignorance is not an excuse for any academic dishonesty: it is each student's responsibility to read this policy to avoid any misunderstanding. Students should not hesitate to ask the instructor if they in doubt about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity.

Evidence of violations against academic integrity standards will be investigated and punished in accordance with definitions and procedures detailed in Article 1-401 through 1-407 of the Student Code (<https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1/part4/1-401/>). Please be aware that analytical tools and software such as (but not limited to) TurnItIn will be used to support the detection of academic integrity violations where appropriate.

Use of Large Language Models (LLMs)/Generative AI Tools

These tools represent a potentially powerful aid for students, teachers, and researchers, but they are often misused in ways that violate the ethical standards of academic integrity; this is further complicated by the present lack of reliable methods of detection when there is no "smoking gun" evidence present. Thus,

- The submission of final substantive text generated by such software is considered plagiarism, subject to the relevant definitions and procedures in Article 1-401 through 1-407 of the Student Code (<https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1/part4/1-401/>)
- The use of LLMs, generative models, or other software tools based thereupon *to help organize, plan, or refine original student writing* is acceptable under the following conditions:
 - o The student cites the model used, including version where available
 - o The student includes, either as a separate page of the submission or a separate document, a copy of their input to the model and the model's subsequent outputs
- Any student suspected of using generative model content in a manner inconsistent with the stipulations above will be required to consult with the course instructor before a grade for the assignment can be recorded. Failure to comply will result in a grade of zero for the assignment and the possibility of disciplinary action.

Classroom Behavior

It is expected that students will behave in a civil and respectful manner in their interactions with both each other and the instructor/TA. Failure to do so may result in students being asked to leave the classroom and/or being referred to the Office for Student Conflict Resolution for disciplinary action (see <https://odos.illinois.edu/resources/faculty/student-behavior#reference>) in severe cases.

Copyrights

Lectures are copyrighted to the course instructors (Seongjoon Ahn, Matt Mettler). Friday discussions are copyrighted to the instructing TA (Jane Betchley). Posting videos or images of lectures/discussions, lecture notes, or other course materials to websites or social media is strictly prohibited. Sale of course materials is strictly prohibited and violates Student Code Article 1-302t (<https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1/part3/1-302/>).

Course Communication and Notifications

Students are strongly encouraged to check their University of Illinois email addresses and Canvas at least once per week to ensure that they are aware of important course communication, announcements, etc. All course communication regarding deadlines, changes to posted assignments, or similar will be delivered at least twice: at the beginning of the nearest lecture and via the Announcements function of Canvas. Students are strongly encouraged to check that they are subscribed to Canvas notifications for course announcements as it is possible to opt out.

Student Assistance

Mental Health

Significant stress, mood changes, excessive worry, substance/alcohol misuse or interferences in eating or sleep can have an impact on academic performance, social development, and emotional wellbeing. The University of Illinois offers a variety of

confidential services including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, psychiatric services, and specialized screenings which are covered through the Student Health Fee. If you or someone you know experiences any of the above mental health concerns, it is strongly encouraged to contact or visit any of the University's resources provided below. Getting help is a smart and courageous thing to do for yourself and for those who care about you.

- Counseling Center (217) 333-3704
- McKinley Health Center (217) 333-2700
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255
- Rosecrance Crisis Line (217) 359-4141 (available 24/7, 365 days a year)

If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

Community of Care

As members of the Illinois community, we each have a responsibility to express care and concern for one another. If you come across a classmate whose behavior concerns you, whether in regards to their well-being or yours, we encourage you to refer this behavior to the Student Assistance Center (217-333-0050 or <http://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/referral/>). Based on your report, the staff in the Student Assistance Center reaches out to students to make sure they have the support they need to be healthy and safe.

Further, as a Community of Care, we want to support you in your overall wellness. We know that students sometimes face challenges that can impact academic performance (examples include mental health concerns, food insecurity, homelessness, personal emergencies). Should you find that you are managing such a challenge and that it is interfering with your coursework, you are encouraged to contact the Student Assistance Center (SAC) in the Office of the Dean of Students for support and referrals to campus and/or community resources.

Students with Disabilities

To obtain disability-related academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the course instructor as soon as possible and provide the instructor with a Letter of Academic Accommodations from Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES). To ensure that disability-related concerns are properly addressed from the beginning, students with disabilities who require assistance to participate in this class should apply for services with DRES and see the

instructor as soon as possible. If you need accommodations for any sort of disability, please speak to the course instructor after class, during office hours, or by email (stm6@illinois.edu). DRES provides students with academic accommodations, access, and support services. To contact DRES, you may visit 1207 S. Oak St., Champaign, call 217-333-1970, e-mail disability@illinois.edu or visit the DRES website at <http://www.disability.illinois.edu/>, or use a direct link to apply for services at DRES (<https://www.disability.illinois.edu/applying-services>).

Emergency Response

Consult the UIUC Division of Public Safety guide to Run-Hide-Fight and associated resources for information (<https://police.illinois.edu/em/run-hide-fight/>) on emergency response, including specific procedures to follow in each of the named scenarios.

Religious Observances

Illinois law requires the University to reasonably accommodate its students' religious beliefs, observances, and practices in regard to admissions, class attendance, and the scheduling of examinations and work requirements. Students should contact the instructor as early as possible in advance of the observances to make arrangements regarding missed coursework.

Sexual Misconduct Reporting Obligation

The University of Illinois is committed to combating sexual misconduct. Faculty and staff members are required to report any instances of sexual misconduct to the University's Title IX and Disability Office. In turn, an individual with the Title IX and Disability Office will provide information about rights and options, including accommodations, support services, the campus disciplinary process, and law enforcement options.

A list of the designated University employees who, as counselors, confidential advisors, and medical professionals, do not have this reporting responsibility and can maintain confidentiality, can be found here:

wecare.illinois.edu/resources/students/#confidential.

Other information about resources and reporting is available here:

wecare.illinois.edu.

Course Schedule

Part I: Structures of US Politics

Week 1 (Jan 20 - 24): Introduction

Monday - No Class

Wednesday - Syllabus; What is Political Science? What are political institutions? The Foundations of US Politics

- [Required] B&C pp. 2-28

Friday (Discussion)

- <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/americans-dismal-views-of-the-nations-politics/>

Week 2 (27 - 31 Jan): Political Institutions

Monday - Political Institutions: articles of confederation to the US Constitution

- [Required] B&C Ch. 2 & 3

Wednesday - Congress

- [Required] B&C Ch. 11

Friday (Discussion)

- Saad, Lydia. "Historically Low Faith in U.S. Institutions Continues".
<https://news.gallup.com/poll/508169/historically-low-faith-institutions-continues.aspx>

Week 3 (3 - 7 Feb): Institutions – Executive

Monday - The President and Presidential powers

- [Required] B&C ch. 12 p. 456-475

Wednesday - The institution of the presidency

- [Required] B&C Ch. 12 p. 476-489

Friday (Discussion)

- Druckman, James N., and Justin W. Holmes. 2004. "Does Presidential Rhetoric Matter? Priming and Presidential Approval". *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34(4).

Week 4 (10 - 14 Feb): Institutions – Judiciary

Monday - Development of the US Judicial System

- [Required] B&C Ch. 14 p. 528-546

Wednesday - Access, decisions, and ideology of the US Supreme Court

- [Required] B&C Ch. 14 p. 547-571

Friday (Discussion)

- Amy Howe. 2024. "Justices Rule Trump has Some Immunity from Prosecution". *SCOTUSblog*. <https://www.scotusblog.com/2024/07/justices-rule-trump-has-some-immunity-from-prosecution/>
- Jeff Turrentine. 2024. "The Supreme Court Ends Chevron Deference—What Now?". *The Explainer*. National Resource Defense Council. <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-happens-if-supreme-court-ends-chevron-deference>

Week 5 (17 - 21 Feb): Institutions - Bureaucracy

***Writing Assignment 1 due Sunday, 23 February by 23:59 CST.**

Monday - What is the Bureaucracy & how has it changed

- [Required] B&C pp. 492-507, (Ch. 13)

Wednesday - The human face of the bureaucracy

- [Required] p. 508-525 (Ch. 13)

Friday (Discussion)

- <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/elon-musks-doge-panel-wont-fix-bureaucracy/>

Part II: Government and The People

Week 6 (24 - 28 Feb): Public Opinion

Monday - Understanding Public Opinion

- [Required] B&C pp. 214-249 (Ch. 6)

Wednesday - Does Public Opinion Matter?

- [Required] Lippmann-Dewey Debate (YouTube - [Click Here](#))
- [Required] Additional information on Lippmann-Dewey Debate ([Click Here](#))

Friday (Discussion)

- [Required] Pew Research, "Public Opinion Polling Basics."
<https://www.pewresearch.org/course/public-opinion-polling-basics/>

Week 7 (3 - 7 Mar): Midterm / Media

Monday - **MIDTERM EXAM**

Wednesday - Media and Politics

- [Required] B&C pp. 252-281 (Ch. 7)

Friday (Discussion)

- [Required] Pew Research, "Social Media and News Fact Sheet."
<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/social-media-and-news-fact-sheet/>

Week 8 (10 - 14 Mar): Media / Parties

Monday - Mis & Disinformation

- [Required] BBC Academy - The Truth About Fake News (Podcast - [Click Here](#))

- [Optional] OECD - More on Mis/Disinformation (Article - [Click Here](#))

Wednesday - Political Parties

- [Required] B&C pp. 284-318 (Ch. 8)

Friday (Discussion)

- Cullinane, Michael. "Why third-party campaigns have always been doomed to fail". *The Hill*. August 24, 2023. <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/4166273-why-third-party-campaigns-have-always-been-doomed-to-fail/>
- Samara Klar and Yanna Krupnikov. 2016. "9 media myths about independent voters, debunked." Vox. <https://www.vox.com/2016/1/22/10814522/independents-voters-facts-myths>
- Zaid Jilani. April 3, 2018. "New Study Shows How American Polarization is Driven by a Team Sport Mentality, Not by Disagreement on Issues". *The Intercept*. <https://archive.is/qAect>

Week 9 (17 - 21 Mar) - Spring Break (NO CLASS)

Week 10 (24 - 28 Mar): Polarization / Interest Groups and Social Movement

Monday - Polarization

- [Required] Pew Research - Polarization in the U.S (Article - [Click Here](#))
- [Required] Time - The Myth of Polarization (Article - [Click Here](#))

Wednesday - Interest Groups and Social Movement

- [Required] B&C pp. 368-402 (Ch. 10)

Friday (Discussion)

- Are US Interest Groups good for democracy? *The Politics Shed*. <https://sites.google.com/site/thepoliticsteacherorg/are-us-interest-groups-good-for-democracy?authuser=0>

Week 11 (Mar 31 - 4 Apr): Voting and Election

Monday - Elections in the United States

- [Required] B&C p. 322-353 (Ch. 9)

Wednesday - Understanding the 2024 Election: Retrospective, Prospective, Sociotropic, Pocketbook Voting

- [Required] B&C p.354-367 (Ch. 9)
- [Required] NPR - "Tight Race...Poll..." (Article - [Click Here](#))

Friday (Discussion)

- Alex Tausanovitch. 2023. "It's Time to Talk About Electoral Reform". *Center for American Progress*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/its-time-to-talk-about-electoral-reform/>

Week 12 (7 - 11 Apr): Public Policy

***Writing Assignment 2 due Sunday, 13 April by 23:59 CST.**

Monday - Social Policy

- [Required] Read B&C Ch. 16

Wednesday - Economic Policy

- [Required] Read B&C Ch. 15

Friday (Discussion)

- Policy Activity

Part III: Bridging the Past and the Future

Week 13 (14 - 18 Apr): Political Culture

Monday - Socialization and Political Culture

- [Required] Morone, J. A., Valelly, R., Mettler, S., & Liebermann, R. (2014). Political culture: consensus, conflict, and culture war. *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Development*, 132-147. (p. 1-16)

Wednesday - Political Values

- [Required] Jacoby, William G. (2014). "Is there a culture war? Conflicting value structures in American Public Opinion." *American Political Science Review* 118(4): 754-771.
- [Skim] Goren, Paul. (2005). "Party Identification and Core Political Values." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(4): 881-896.

Friday (Discussion)

- Gary Fields and Amelia Deveaux. April 3, 2024. "Yes, we're divided. But new AP-NORC poll shows Americans still agree on most core American values." *The Associated Press*. <https://apnews.com/article/ap-poll-democracy-rights-freedoms-election-b1047da72551e13554a3959487e5181a>

Week 14 (21 - 25 Apr): American Federalism and Democracy

Monday - Federalism in America

- [Required] B&C pp. 76-110 (Ch. 3)

Wednesday - Democracy in America

- Graham, Matthew H. and Milan W. Svobik. (2020). "Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States." *American Political Science Review* 114(2): 392-405

Friday (Discussion)

- State and Regional Division Activity

Week 15 (28 Apr - 2 May): America's Founding and Constitution

Monday - How the Founding and Constitution Influence Politics Today

- [Required] B&C Ch. 2

Wednesday - **READING DAY**

Friday (Discussion)

- Review Session

Week 16 (5 - 9 May): Final Exam

Monday - FINAL EXAM