

PLSC 113: Introduction to American Politics

Summer 2025: Session B, June 30 - August 1

Yale University

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Remote, Tuesday Thursday 10-11:30am

Course website: [canvas](#)

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Course Description

This course's primary objective is to introduce you to the study of the central processes and institutions of American politics. Politics plays an important role in your lives, no matter your level of civil engagement. Our political system produces policies aimed at solving larger collective problems which will, ultimately, shape your individual social and economic experiences as well. This course is designed to teach you about that system and how to approach American politics thoughtfully and critically. We will discuss the structure of government in the United States and its historical foundations, the major political institutions that link people to that government, and how people think about and participate in politics.

This course is remote and will feature a flipped classroom. The lectures are asynchronous and you are expected to watch the recorded lectures assigned to each synchronous class time. Our synchronous class time will be structured as discussion section where you are expected to attend remotely having read the assigned readings and be ready to participate. The majority of our readings will come from *The Logic of American Politics*. This textbook first examines why the American government is setup as it is and why politics operate as they do, and then considers how that institutional structure shapes the actions of citizens and politicians. Critically, this course is also designed to introduce you to the practice of political science. It is as much about developing different frames of references for evaluating politics as it is about learning particular facts; and, if we are successful, you will begin to see the political world through a social science lens. Throughout our discussions, we will consider how scholars conduct their study of American politics – highlighting their questions and the tools and approaches they employ to answer those questions. With each topic covered, we will supplement the textbook with relevant political science articles to introduce you to what that research says about contemporary issues.

Required Course Materials

- Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy Johnson. 2023. *The Logic of American Politics*. Sage Publishing. 11th Edition. [KJKVJ]
- Kollman, Ken. 2019. *Readings in American Politics: Analysis and Perspectives*. W.W. Norton. 6th Edition.
- Additional reading material will be made available on **canvas**.

Course Requirements

Your grade will be determined by your performance on the following:

Participation (21%): Attendance and participation is key for your success in this class. There are many ways to maintain your participation grade – attendance is only one. You should be prepared to contribute meaningfully by asking questions and actively engaging in discussions. Attending class and being prepared by having read the assigned material will ensure that you are best able to fully participate in section.

Reading Responses (24%): Each student will write 4 2-page responses to an assigned reading, as indicated on the set of readings below. Each response should summarize the assigned reading. Each response is due by the start of class for the days they are assigned, turned in on Canvas.

Midterm Exam (25%): The take-home midterm will consist of short answer and essay questions. It will be made available after class on Tuesday, July 15 and be due - turned in on Canvas - at the start of class on Thursday, July 17. The exam will be drawn from lecture material, reading assignments, and discussions.

Final Exam (30%): The take-home final exam will be made available at the end of class on July 29 and due on August 1, 2025 to be turned in on Canvas.

General Expectations

Learning is most effective when the classroom is comfortable, challenging, and fun. A key part of the academic environment is participating in the frank and civil exchange of ideas in an environment where people disagree but nonetheless treat one another with respect. As such, we – as a group – must cultivate mutual respect for ideas, freedom/ability to speak in class, and a professional tone. I will, consequently, not tolerate any form of disrespect geared towards me or another in class, cursing of any kind, dishonesty or disruptive activity. Spirited engagement and exciting disagreement, however, are encouraged.

For email, please include “PLSC 113” in the subject line of the email. Generally, I will respond to e-mails within 48 hours. I cannot guarantee a response during the weekend; any e-mails received after 5pm on Friday will be answered by the following Monday.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is unacceptable, corrupts your personal integrity, and ultimately stunts your intellectual growth. Academic integrity is a core university value and the University expects that students will conduct themselves in an honest and ethical manner and respect the intellectual work of others. Academic dishonesty is not tolerated at Yale (see the Yale College Undergraduate Regulations [here](#)) and there are resources to help you maintain your academic honesty, including the Yale Writing Center (find more details on their [website](#)). When in doubt, cite your sources and trust your own brain - don't cheat.

Students with Disabilities

Your experience in this class is important to me. I am happy to accommodate students with disabilities and requests go through the Yale University Resource Office on Disabilities. If you have already established accommodations with the ROD, please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you feel you need accommodation please contact the [Resource Office on Disabilities](#).

Course Schedule

Week 1: Building the American Democracy

- July 1. The Logic of American Politics and the Founding
 - KJKVJ Chapter 1 and 2
 - Olson Jr., Mancur. Excerpt from *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* [Kollman 1.1]
 - Mansbridge, Jane. Excerpt from “What Is Political Science For?” [Kollman 1.2]
 - Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. Excerpt from *The Concept of Representation*. [Kollman 1.5]
 - The Declaration of Independence [KJKVJ Appendix]
- July 3. The Constitution and Federalism
 - KJKVJ Chapter 3
 - The Constitution, including the first ten amendments [KJKVJ Appendix]
 - The Federalist Papers No. 10, 39, 46, and 51 [available at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/fed.asp.]
 - The Antifederalist No. 1 (the first essay of Brutus) [Kollman 2.1]
 - Versteeg, Mila and Emily Zackin. Excerpt from “Constitutions Un-entrenched: Toward an Alternative Theory of Constitutional Design” [Kollman 2.3]
 - **Reading Response 1:** McCann, Pamela J. Clouser, Charles R. Shipan, and Craig Volden. Excerpt from “Top-Down Federalism: State Policy Responses to National Government Discussions” [Kollman 3.3]

Week 2: Civil Liberties and Political Institutions

- July 8. Civil Liberties
 - KJKVJ Chapter 5
 - Riker, William H. Excerpt from *Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance* [Kollman 3.2]
 - Dahl, Robert. 2002. *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* Yale University Press. Chapter 2. [available at <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/yale-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3420181>.]
- July 10. Political Institutions: Congress
 - KJKVJ Chapter 6
 - Mayhew, David R. Excerpt from *Congress: The Electoral Connection* [Kollman 5.1]
 - Cox, Gary W. and Mathew D. McCubbins. Excerpt from *Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives*. [Kollman 5.3]
 - Bernhard, William and Tracy Sulkin. Excerpt from *Legislative Style*. [Kollman 5.4]
 - Lee, Frances E. Excerpt from *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign* [Kollmain 5.5]

- Krehbiel, Keith. 1998. *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking*. Chapter 1. [Canvas].
- **Reading Response 2:** Drutman, Lee and Timothy M. LaPira. “Capacity for What? Legislative Capacity Regimes in Congress and the Possibilities for Reform,” Chapter 2. in *Congress Overwhelmed* 2020. [Canvas]

Week 3: Political Institutions: Executive Branch

- July 15. The President
 - KJKVJ Chapter 7
 - Neustadt, Richard. Excerpt from *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. [Kollman 6.1]
 - Cameron, Charles M. Excerpt from *Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power*. [Kollman 6.2]
 - Canes-Wrone, Brandice. Excerpt from *Who Leads Whom? Presidents, Policy, and the Public*. [Kollman 6.3]
 - Howell, William G. Excerpt from *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action* [Kollman 6.4]
 - Christenson, Dino and Douglas Kriner. Excerpt from *The Myth of the Imperial Presidency: How Public Opinion Checks the Unilateral Presidency* [Kollman 6.5]
- July 17. MIDTERM DUE and The Bureaucracy
 - KJKVJ Chapter 8
 - Wilson, James. Excerpt from *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. [Kollman 7.1]
 - Clinton, Joshua, David Lewis, and Jennifer Selin. 2014. “Influencing the Bureaucracy: The Irony of Congressional Oversight” *American Journal of Political Science*. 58(April): 387-401. [Canvas]
 - Yackee, Susan Webb. 2019. “The Politics of Rulemaking in the United States.” *Annual Review of Political Science* [Canvas]
 - McCubbins, Mathew D. and Thomas Schwartz. 1984. “Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms.” *American Journal of Political Science*. [Kollman 7.2]

Week 4: Political Institutions and Political Behavior

- July 22. Federal Judiciary
 - KJKVJ Chapter 9
 - George, Tracey E. and Lee Epstein. Excerpt from “On the Nature of Supreme Court Decision-Making.” [Kollman 8.4]
 - Casillas, Christopher J., Peter K. Enns, and Patrick C. Wohlfarth. 2011 “How Public Opinion Constrains the US Supreme Court.” *American Journal of Political Science* 55.1: 74-88. [Canvas]
 - Rosenberg, Gerald N. Excerpt from *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring about Social Change?* [Kollman 8.1]

- July 24. Public Opinion, Elections, and Voting
 - KJKVJ Chapters 10 and 11
 - Zaller, John. Excerpt from *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* [Kollman 9.1]
 - Cramer, Katherine J. Excerpt from *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. [Kollman 9.3]
 - Enos, Ryan. Excerpt from *The Space Between Us: Social Geography and Politics* [Kollman 9.4]
 - Leighley, Jan E. and Jonathan Nagler. Excerpt from *Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality, and Turnout in the United States*. [Kollman 10.2]
 - **Reading Response 3:** Vavreck, Lynn. 2009. *The Message Matters*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapters 3 and 7. [Canvas]

Week 5: Influencing Policy and Politics

- July 29. Political Parties
 - KJKVJ Chapter 12
 - Aldrich, John H. Excerpt from *Why Parties?: A Second Look*. [Kollman 12.1]
 - Kollman, Ken and John Jackson. Excerpt from *Dynamic Partisanship: How and Why Voter Loyalties Change* [Kollman 12.5]
 - **Reading Response 4:** Berlinski, Nicolas, Margaret Doyle, Andrew M. Guess, Gabrielle Levy, Benjamin Lyons, Jacob M. Montgomery, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. "The Effects of Unsubstantiated Claims of Voter Fraud on Confidence in Elections." *Journal of Experimental Political Science*. 2021. [Canvas]
- July 31. Interest Groups and the Media
 - KJKVJ Chapters 13 and 14
 - Barber, Michael and Nolan McCarty. 2015. "The Causes and Consequences of Polarization," in *Solutions to Polarization in America*, eds. Nathaniel Persily. Cambridge University Press. [available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316091906.002>]
 - Hacker, Jacob S. and Paul Pierson. 2014. "After the "Master Theory": Downs, Schattschneider, and the Rebirth of Policy-Focused Analysis." *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(3): 643-662. [Canvas]

FINAL EXAM DUE AUGUST 1, 2025 on Canvas.