

Introduction to Political Science: American Politics

POLI 10D

Professor Benjamin Noble

b2noble@ucsd.edu

benjaminnoble.org

You can come to office hours to ask me questions about the course content (especially if you're having trouble). But you can also come to office hours to say hello, ask me about my research, learn what political scientists do, tell me about your interests (academic or otherwise), or talk about U.S. politics (but I don't know who will win the election...sorry). You don't need an appointment if you come by on Wednesdays between 10AM-11:55AM. I'd love to meet you.

Course Description

We are living through times of change: political polarization, mass protests, democratic backsliding, and challenges to civil rights—to name a few pressing issues. These developments have challenged the institutions of American government and changed how citizens engage with politics in their everyday lives. We'll use the tools of political science to examine how the institutions of American government work, how citizens participate in our democracy, and how some new (and some very old) challenges threaten our political system.

Our class is divided into roughly three parts. In the first half of the quarter, we will cover the foundations and institutions of American government—things like Congress, the presidency, and the courts. Then, we will turn to public opinion and voter behavior. We'll conclude by discussing current challenges facing the American political system: nationalization, polarization, and democratic backsliding.

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand, describe, and analyze (i) how the institutions of American government work, (ii) how people engage with these institutions, and (iii) current challenges facing American democracy.
- Interpret current events using the tools of political science.
- Engage more fully with politics in your academic and personal life.

Course Format

- Lectures on Mondays and Wednesdays covering the weekly readings, additional content, and related current events.
- Sections led by YOU, with help from graduate TAs.
 - Sections meet each week and will provide an opportunity to engage with, and expand on, the week's material in a smaller group setting.
 - TAs will take attendance at these sections.

Required Readings

Our course will use the following textbook:

Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy R. Johnson. *The Logic of American Politics*. CQ Press.

I will be using the 11th edition, released in 2023, but you can use any edition of this textbook published since 2012 (the 5th edition).

Most weeks, we will supplement the textbook reading with other materials. These are linked below and freely accessible. Please let me know if you encounter any issues.

All slides will be posted on Canvas before the class on which they are presented.

And just so you know...[UCSD provides free access](#) to newspapers like the New York Times and Wall Street Journal for students. You might also be interested in the website [GoodAuthority.org](#), which shares political science analyses of current events. I encourage you to take advantage of these resources to continue learning about American politics during, and after, this course.

Course Evaluation

- Weekly response (multiple choice questions, short answer) — 30%
- Section leader (once per quarter) – 20%
- Weekly, in-person section attendance and participation (as determined by your TA) – 10%
- Exam 1 – 20%
- Exam 2 – 20%

Weekly Response (30%)

- Each week, you will answer 10 multiple choice questions and one short answer question related to the week's content. A thoughtful response to the short answer question should include a clear claim, use examples from the lecture or readings, and connect to key course themes. These should be about 5-7 sentences in length.
 - How you arrive at the answer is completely up to you! The easiest way to get the right answers is to attend lecture and take careful notes. Almost every answer will be said in class.
 - Answers will also appear in the readings, likely come up during section, and are readily available online or through careful prompting of a large language model.
 - You are responsible for your own learning and understanding of the material. While discussing questions with peers can help, copying someone else's answers will not serve you well in the long run—especially since the same concepts will appear on the in-class exams. If you choose to work together, make sure you can explain your answers independently and understand the reasoning behind them.
 - The goal is that you understand the material. There are many ways to get to the right answer (and even more ways to get the wrong one). You're an adult, and you should do what works best for you and your learning style.
- These assignments will be graded for completion rather than for accuracy. To incentivize you to take care with these assignments, note that:
 - Completion does not just mean hitting submit! Completion means answering questions to the best of your ability and exerting effort. If we notice a pattern of consistently incorrect answers or low effort (e.g., random text in your short answer or something unrelated to the prompt), we will mark the assignment as incomplete.
 - The questions I ask on these weekly responses are a signal of what I think is most important. That means these questions and topics are very likely to appear on the two in-class exams. By carefully completing these assignments (rather than speeding through them), you will be much better prepared for the exams.
- These will be due at 8:59 AM on Monday before class begins. These are due on Monday morning to allow you to attend all lectures covering the material and attend office hours.
 - We will post the correct multiple choice answers as well as sample short answer responses following the submission deadline.
 - Note, we will be firm about the deadline. A submission at 9:01 on Monday will be counted as incomplete (even if only because your internet was slow). Please be responsible and plan ahead.
- Because life happens, and you may not always be able to complete the assignment on time, you will be allowed one excused response submission (i.e., we will drop a missing response from your final grade) with no questions asked. You do not need to email us to take advantage of this policy—it will be taken care of automatically when we calculate

final grades at the end of the quarter. However, please be wise in how you take advantage of this policy. We will be unlikely to grant additional exceptions, accept late assignments, or grant extensions.

Section Panel Leader (20%)

- Each week, you will attend a section led by one of our TAs. The goal of these sections is to deepen your understanding of key concepts from class in a smaller setting.
- To that end, section will be led each week by a small group of students (3-4) who will host a panel discussion of the week's topic. As section leader, you will be responsible for providing expert knowledge in one area of the week's topic(s).
- At the beginning of section, leaders will have about 5 minutes each to present a brief (three slide) presentation summarizing their topic. The slideshow should take on the following format: (1) overview of the topic, (2) concrete example or discussion of a relevant current event, (3) importance of the topic to political science. Slideshows should also include brief speaker notes detailing what you plan to discuss. You can see [an example presentation here](#) or on Canvas in the Files section. Please do not worry too much about design or formatting, focus on the content.
- Leaders will then take questions from the student audience and TA and respond to them when they are relevant to their particular topic.
- You must submit your slides to Canvas before your section begins. Your TA will assess your knowledge and contribution to the discussion as leader and assign a grade based on your performance.
- If you cannot attend your assigned leader section for an extenuating reason (e.g., illness, family emergency), please contact your TA as far in advance as possible to schedule an alternative day.
- During the first section, your TA will serve as the section leader and provide a demonstration. Your leadership date and topic will be assigned during the first section meeting.

Weekly Section Attendance and Participation (10%)

- In advance of the weekly section, non-leaders must submit one question on canvas about the topic that they would like to ask the panelists. These are due before the start of section. If you forget to submit a question, you can still receive partial credit for attendance.
- Note, the goal is not to stump panelists with obscure questions. Rather, the goal is to better understand the topics. You should ask questions about the material that you find confusing (many other people are probably confused if you are) or ask questions about current events that relate to our topic.
- Each week, non-leaders will receive a grade from their TA for submitting their question on time and attending, and participating in, section in-person.

- Each student will get one excused absence from submitting a question and attending section, no questions asked, that will not count against their grade. You do not need to email us to take advantage of this policy.
- Any *excused* absence beyond the first absence (i.e., illness, disability flare, family emergency, etc) will need approval from your TA. It will also require a short, written makeup assignment related to that week's topic to avoid any negative impact on your grade. If you need to request a make up assignment, please email your TA before your section meets and we will determine whether to assign the makeup. You will have until the following section meeting to submit the makeup assignment.
- Please do not email Professor Noble if you are seeking an excused absence as these are managed by your TA.

In-Class Exams (40%)

- You will complete two in-class exams during the quarter.
- Exam 1 will take place during class on 02/10/2025. Exam 2 will take place during the university assigned time for final exams on 03/19/2025 at 8AM (note the unusual start time).
- You will have 50 minutes to complete each exam (we will not use the full three hours during the final exam period).
- These exams will be similar to the weekly reading responses. They will include both multiple choice questions and short answer questions.
- These exams are NOT cumulative. Only material covered before 02/12/2025 will appear on Exam 1. Only material covered after 02/12/2025 will appear on Exam 2.
- These will be closed book/closed note. Please bring a pen or pencil with you. You will not need anything else.

Policies

Academic Integrity

I take academic honesty and integrity seriously. Please see the [UCSD policy on academic integrity](#) for more information or talk to me if you are ever uncertain about whether some action would violate academic integrity.

Use of AI

Large Language Models like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini are powerful and transformative technologies that will likely play a significant role in your professional lives after graduation. In fact, I use these tools every day when researching, learning new things, and preparing for this class. Given their potential value in learning and problem-solving, I encourage you to use them thoughtfully and ethically in this class as a complement to your own learning—not as a substitute for it.

These tools can provide helpful summaries or assist with specific tasks, such as reviewing concepts about the Constitution or Congress, but as you know: simply copying and pasting answers will not help you develop a deep understanding of the material. Instead, I would encourage you to try using AI to ask clarifying questions, generate practice problems, or explore complex topics in greater depth. These tools are especially effective when you use them to build on an existing understanding of the course content. For more guidance, I would recommend Professor Ethan Mollick's blog post, [15 Times to use AI, and 5 Not to](#).

Of course, I do not allow AI use for *every* aspect of the course. For exams, you will be required to demonstrate your knowledge without books, notes, or the internet. I do this to ensure you can engage critically with the material and internalize key lessons. In turn, mastering the content independently will make AI tools even more valuable as you continue to build on your knowledge.

Outside of exams, you should feel free to use AI as you see fit. If you are unsure, feel free to ask for clarification---but I will likely say that whatever you're doing is fine. However, please know that you are responsible for any AI output you incorporate in your work for this class. These models do make mistakes!

Requests for Re-grades

If you believe an error has been made, you have one week following the return of the assignment to request a regrade. To do so, please email your TA with a brief explanation of why you are requesting a re-grade as well as evidence from our course materials justifying the request. We reserve the right to refuse to re-grade, and if we do re-grade, please note it may result in a lower grade.

Communication

For all questions or comments, you may get in touch with me or the teaching assistants during our office hours listed on this syllabus, or via email. If your email requires a response, you can expect one within 24–48 hours, Monday through Friday. If you email us over the weekend, you can expect a response the following week.

Accommodations

Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#). Students are required to discuss accommodation arrangements with instructors, TAs, and OSD liaisons in the department.

Other resources, including the inclusive classroom statement, advising, and resources to support equity, diversity, and inclusion, and more can be found in the [Additional Resources](#) section below the reading list.

Reading List

You should complete these readings to help you with the weekly response questions, section preparation, and exams. You are free to complete them before or after the lecture in which they are assigned---whatever is most helpful to you.

Below, LAP refers to the course textbook, [Logic of American Politics](#).

01/06/2025: Introduction

- No reading.

01/08/2025: How to Think Like a Political Scientist

- LAP, Chapter 1.
- Paul Musgrave. August 17, 2023. [Political Science Isn't Civics](#). *Systematic Hatreds*.

Week 1 Section

01/13/2025: The Constitution Didn't Fall Out of a Coconut Tree

- The U.S. Constitution (it's pretty short, actually). The National Constitution Center provides an [interactive version](#).
- LAP, Chapter 2, start with "Drafting a New Constitution" and read to the end.

01/15/2025: What's the Point of Congress?

- LAP, Chapter 6, stop before "The Committee System."
- Steven Smith. June 2, 2021. [Note 16. Roles, Goals, and Styles](#). *Steve's Notes on Congressional Politics*.

Week 2 Section

01/20/2025: NO CLASS, MLK HOLIDAY

01/22/2025: Does Congress Actually Do Anything?

- LAP, Chapter 6, "The Committee System" to end.
- Steven Smith. June 3, 2021. [Note 14. Regular Order: What is It? What happened to It?](#) *Steve's Notes on Congressional Politics*.

- Brendan Buck. April 22, 2024. [The Freedom Caucus Started Believing in the Myth of Its Own Power](#). *New York Times*.

Week 3 Section

01/27/2025: The Presidency...Not (Just) What You See on TV

- LAP, Chapter 7.
- Ezra Klein and Brendan Nyhan. May 20, 2014. [The Green Lantern Theory of the Presidency, explained](#). *Vox*.
- Matthew Yglesias. June 7, 2023. [It's Great to Have a President Who Knows When to Shut Up](#). *New York Times*.
- Optional: Jack Goldsmith. January 20, 2025. [The Trump 2.0 Executive Orders Will Take Time to Sort Out](#). *Executive Functions*; Jack Goldsmith. January 21, 2025. [The Risks In Trump's Barrage of Executive Orders](#). *Executive Functions*. Jack Goldsmith. January 28, 2025. [Maximum Executive Power and the Fate of the Unitary Executive](#). *Executive Functions*.

01/29/2025: Are the Courts Making It All Up As They Go?

- LAP, Chapter 9.
- Jeffrey M. Jones. October 3, 2024. [Party Divisions in Views of Supreme Court Keep Ratings Low](#). *Gallup*.

Week 4 Section

02/03/2025: Is the Deep State Real?

- LAP, Chapter 8.
- Joe Davidson. December 13, 2024. [Trump allies, opponents prepare to battle over plans for at-will workforce](#). *Washington Post*.

02/05/2025: Catch Up Day, Exam Review

- No reading, but come with questions.

Week 5: NO SECTION

- No section this week. But, your section TA will be available during your usual section time if you'd like to ask questions in preparation for the exam.

02/10/2025: [Exam 1](#)

02/12/2025: Obviously, My Political Opinions Are Correct. So Why Doesn't Everyone Agree with Me?

- LAP, Chapter 10, stop before "Current Public Opinion."
- *Pew Research Center*. April 26, 2018. [What do you know about the U.S. government?](#) Take the quiz (no cheating!) and read the article.
- Michael Tesler. November 3, 2023. [Why the U.S. border wall is getting more and more popular](#). *Good Authority*.
- Alexander Kustov and James Dennison. August 26, 2024. [Good to Know: Issue importance in politics](#). *Good Authority*.
- John Sides. September 27, 2024. [Misinformation might not be the real problem in politics](#). *Good Authority*.

Week 6 Section

02/17/2025: NO CLASS, PRESIDENT'S DAY HOLIDAY

02/19/2025: Is Polling Broken?

- Nathaniel Rakich. September 16, 2024. [How to read political polls in 2024](#). *FiveThirtyEight*. (or listen to the [podcast version](#)).
- Andrew Mercer. September 8, 2016. [5 key things to know about the margin of error in election polls](#). *Pew Research Center*.
- Josh Clinton. October 28, 2024. [Poll results depend on pollster choices as much as voters' decisions](#). *Good Authority*.
- Brian Schaffner and Caroline Soler. November 26, 2024. [Pollsters weighted more in 2024 – and it helped](#). *Good Authority*.
- Skim: Justin Grimmer, Dean Knox, and Sean J. Westwood. August 26, 2024. [Assessing the Reliability of Probabilistic US Presidential Election Forecasts May Take Decades](#).

Week 7 Section

02/24/2025: Political Scientists Love Parties. But You Probably Hate Them.

- LAP, Chapter 12.
- Sahil Chinoy, August 8, 2019. "[Quiz: Let Us Predict Whether You're a Democrat or a Republican](#)." *New York Times*. (Take the quiz and read the article).
- Mark Wickham-Jones. July 24, 2018. [This 1950 political science report keeps popping up in the news. Here's the story behind it](#). *The Washington Post*.

02/26/2025: Why People Vote, How People Vote, and Why Trump Won in 2024

- LAP, Chapter 11 (skip the "Campaign Money" section).
- Jed Kolko. November 7, 2024. [Breaking down the election results](#). *Slow Boring*.
- John Burn-Murdoch. November 6, 2024. [Democrats join 2024's graveyard of incumbents](#). *Financial Times*.
- G. Elliott Morris, Amina Brown and Katie Marriner. December 12, 2024. [Where Have All the Democrats Gone?](#) 538.
- John Sides. November 18, 2024. [How to think about the "racial realignment" in U.S. politics](#). *Good Authority*.

Week 8 Section

03/03/2025: All Politics is National

- LAP, Chapter 3, stop before "Interpreting the Constitution's Provisions."
- Morris Fiorina. 2016. [The \(Re\)Nationalization of Congressional Elections](#). *Hoover Institution*.
- Dan Hopkins. June 6, 2018. [All Politics Is National Because All Media Is National](#). *FiveThirtyEight*.

03/05/2025: Can't We All Just Get Along (No!): Polarization and Negative Partisanship

- Laura C. Bucci. October 8, 2024. [Good to Know: What is polarization?](#) *Good Authority*.
- Steven Smith. June 15, 2021. [Note 3. The Search for Causes](#). *Steve's Notes on Congressional Politics*.
- Frances Lee. January 9, 2014. [American politics is more competitive than ever. That's making partisanship worse](#). *Washington Post*.
- Ronda Kaysen and Ethan Singer. October 30, 2024. [Millions of Movers Reveal American Polarization in Action](#). *New York Times*.
- Skim: Benjamin Noble. September 17, 2023. [Presidential Cues and the Nationalization of Congressional Rhetoric, 1973-2016](#). *American Journal of Political Science*. *This should be accessible on UCSD's internet*.

Week 9 Section

03/10/2025: Does Democracy Die in Darkness?

- Dan Balz and Clara Ence Morse. August 18, 2023. [American democracy is cracking. These forces help explain why](#). *Washington Post*.

- Sam Levine and Andrew Witherspoon. November 20, 2023. [‘Deliberate and anti-democratic’: Wisconsin grapples with partisan gerrymandering](#). The Guardian.
- John Sides. September 10, 2024. [Are we exaggerating populism’s threat to democracy?](#) Good Authority.

03/12/2025: Catch Up Day, Exam Review

- No reading, but come with questions.

Week 10 Section

03/19/2025: [Exam 2](#)

Please note, this is a Wednesday, and our exam will begin at 8:00 AM (sorry 🙄 I don’t make the rules!).

Grading Scale

Your final grade in this class will be determined according to the following scale. Please do not email me at the end of the quarter asking if I can round your 93.4 to a 93.5. I will not.

| Letter Grade | Range | |
|--------------|---------|-------|
| A+ | 100% | 96.5% |
| A | < 96.5% | 93.5% |
| A- | < 93.5% | 89.5% |
| B+ | < 89.5% | 86.5% |
| B | < 86.5% | 83.5% |
| B- | < 83.5% | 79.5% |
| C+ | < 79.5% | 76.5% |
| C | < 76.5% | 73.5% |
| C- | < 73.5% | 69.5% |
| D | < 69.5% | 59.5% |
| F | < 59.5% | 0% |

Additional Resources

[Satisfactory Academic Progress \(SAP\)](#) refers to the academic standards students must maintain to remain eligible for federal, state, and institutional financial aid. If you are receiving financial aid, please ensure you review the [SAP requirements and the appeals process](#).

These additional resources come from the UCSD Political Science Department:

Inclusive Classroom Statement

The TAs and I are fully committed to creating a learning environment that supports diversity of thought, perspectives, experiences, and identities. We urge each of you to contribute your unique perspectives to discussions of course questions, themes, and materials so that we can learn from them, and from each other. If you should ever feel excluded, or unable to fully participate in our class for any reason, please let me know, or please consult the Department's "[Report and Issue](#)" page for additional campus resources to support you, and diversity, equity, and inclusion in our classroom, and beyond.

Additional resources to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in our classroom, and beyond, may be found here:

<https://diversity.ucsd.edu/>

<https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/diversity/index.html>

<https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/4400.ht>

Resources to Support Student Learning

Library Help, eReserves and research tools: <https://library.ucsd.edu/ask-us/triton-ed.html>

Writing Hub: <https://commons.ucsd.edu/students/writing/index.html>

Supplemental Instruction:

<https://aah.ucsd.edu/supplemental-instruction-study-group/index.html>

Tutoring: <https://aah.ucsd.edu/content-tutoring/index.html>

Mental Health Services: <https://caps.ucsd.edu>

Community Centers: Learn about the different ways UC San Diego explores, supports, and celebrates the many cultures that make up our diverse community.

<https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/diversity/index.html>

Academic Advising

Students who have academic advising questions related to the Political Science major, should contact the department's Undergraduate Advisor, Emilie Hines, via the Virtual Advising Center. Academic advising questions often include (but are not limited to): add/drop deadlines, course

enrollment policies, planning major and minor requirements, quarter-by-quarter plans, department petitions and paperwork, and referrals to campus and student support services.

Additional resources to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in our classroom, and beyond:

Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

858.822.3542 | diversity@ucsd.edu | <https://diversity.ucsd.edu/>

<https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/diversity/index.html>

<https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/4400.html>

Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination

<https://ophd.ucsd.edu/>

ophd@ucsd.edu or (858) 534-8298

UCSD Office of the Ombuds

<https://ombuds.ucsd.edu/>

To reach a Confidential Ombudsperson, please call 858-534-0777.

UCSD's Principles of Community

To foster the best possible working and learning environment, UC San Diego strives to maintain a climate of fairness, cooperation, and professionalism. These principles of community are vital to the success of the University and the well being of its constituents. UC San Diego faculty, staff, and students are expected to practice these basic principles as individuals and in groups. The Principles of Community (<https://ucsd.edu/about/principles.html>) and the Student Code of Conduct(https://students.ucsd.edu/_files/student-conduct/ucsandiego-student-conduct-code_interim-revisions1-16-18.pdf) support equity, diversity, and inclusion in our classroom.

Food Support for Students:

If you are skipping and stretching meals, or having difficulties affording or accessing food, you may be eligible for CalFresh, California's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, that can provide up to \$292 a month in free money on a debit card to buy food. Students can apply at benefitscal.com/r/ucsandiegocalfresh.

The Hub Basic Needs Center empowers all students by connecting them to resources for food, stable housing and financial literacy. Visit their site at basicneeds.ucsd.edu.

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