

Political Science 40
Introduction to American Politics
Summer 2023

Instructor: [Graham Straus](#)
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Office Hours: Tues, 11:00 am - 1:00 pm
Bunche 4337

Class: Tuesday, Thursday
1:00 pm - 3:05 pm
Bunche 1209B

Overview

Who decides the minimum wage my employer can pay me, the support I receive from the government as I age, or the grounds on which I can be put in prison? Why do we grant this authority to governments? What motivates government decisions? How can we learn about these motivations? In this course, we will introduce you to the study of American politics. We will orient you in the American political system, pointing out the people and institutions who make government decisions. Politics uses institutions (like elections, Congress, the courts, etc) to bring people together and solve problems. We will study how these institutions work or fail. Throughout, we will ask how social scientists learn about these institutions.

Course Objectives

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

- analyze the ways that people work together or fail to produce a jointly preferred outcome,
- locate the people and institutions involved in important policy decisions that affect their lives,
- distinguish between high- and low-quality political science evidence.

Requirements and Evaluation

Midterm Exam (25%) and Final Exam (30%)

Our primary assessments for the course are two take home exams. Some of the exam material will be discussed in lecture but not in the reading, and some will be discussed in the reading but not in class. It is important to do all of the reading and attend all of the lectures.

Paper Explainers (40%, 20% each)

Throughout the quarter, you will submit two paper explainers. These paper explainers are your opportunity to read an academic paper closely, understand it, and explain it to someone else. There is a simple format to follow for these explainers, but I welcome you to convey this information either with an audio recording, video recording, or a short written piece. The expectations are described in more detail in the separate assignment document.

Participation (5%)

Come to class ready to ask questions, and discuss concepts with your peers.

Required Textbook

Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck. *The Logic of American Politics*, 10th edition. CQ Press. (hard copy or ebook)

Course Policies

Academic Accommodations Based on a Disability: Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE). Please do so within the first two weeks of the term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information, visit <http://www.cae.ucla.edu>.

Academic Dishonesty: As stated in the UCLA Student Conduct Code, violations or attempted violations of academic dishonesty include (but are not limited to) cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, multiple submissions, or facilitating any of the above. See <https://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Individual-Student-Code> for more details. If you are ever unsure about whether something counts as academic dishonesty, always feel free to ask me. UCLA takes academic dishonesty very seriously and does not accept ignorance as a defense. Being caught for academic dishonesty not only affects your GPA, but will and must be reported to the Dean's Office and the Office of Student Conduct. This may lead to suspension, revocation of financial aid or scholarships, and/or dismissal. If you are having problems with coursework, there are clear and much better alternatives to academic dishonesty. Please come talk to me or consult the available student resources at <https://firsttogo.ucla.edu/Resources-for-Students/Campus-Resource>.

Late Work: Late work loses one full letter grade (10%) for each 24 hours it is submitted after the deadline. After 72 hours, assigned work will receive a zero.

Regrading: Regrade requests must involve a specific potential error. They cannot be general appeals for a second look, involve issues of illegible writing, or object to the form and/or content of the assignment. The request should (1) be submitted within 72 hours of the work being returned, (2) include the original graded work, and (3) come with a document at least one paragraph long but no longer than one page that presents the rationale. This document should not be used to provide a new or more developed response that was not evident in the original work. Any requests that do not follow these requirements will be rejected. The full work will be graded again, and this new grade will be final. Keep in mind your grade may fall, stay the same, or rise.

Office Hours: Tuesdays between 11:00 am and 1:00 pm. If you need to meet remotely, zoom works fine, but please e-mail ahead of time.

E-mails: During the regular work week, I will respond to e-mails within 24 hours. I will not do so during the weekend unless it is a personal emergency. E-mails are only appropriate for brief questions or comments. Anything more substantive should be discussed during office hours.

Other Personal Issues: Life can throw surprises that make it hard to focus on schoolwork. If you are experiencing a personal problem that is affecting your participation in this class, come speak with me. Please do not wait until the end of the quarter or after the quarter to talk about issues that impacted your academic performance. If you are not comfortable talking about these issues with me, please consider reaching out to the other student resources on campus, most of which are listed at <https://firsttogo.ucla.edu/Resources-for-Students/Campus-Resource>. Services exist to address counseling, student wellness, equity, sexual harassment, financial stress, and more. I want you to succeed.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (6/27 & 6/29): Constitution

- Tues (6/27): Welcome; what is the government for? *Guest lecture on political advertising by Professor Vavreck
- Thurs (6/29): The Constitution & institutions of American politics
- Textbook Reading:
 - The Logic of American Politics, Ch 1 & 2
- Papers & Podcasts: [Not Another Politics Podcast](#), [“Does Ranked Choice Reduce Strategic Voting?”](#)

Week 2 (7/4 & 7/6): Representation

- Tues (7/4 NO CLASS): Why are there so few women in Congress? (Recorded Lecture)
- Thurs (7/6): Does policy reflect the will of the majority?
- Textbook Reading:
 - The Logic of American Politics, Ch 5
- Papers & Podcasts:
 - Anzia, Sarah F., and Christopher R. Berry. 2011. "The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?" American Journal of Political Science.
 - Simonovits, Gabor, Andrew M. Guess, and Jonathan Nagler. 2019. "Responsiveness Without Representation: Evidence from Minimum Wage Laws in U.S. States." American Journal of Political Science.

Week 3 (7/11 & 7/13): Influence & Citizen Competence

- Tues (7/11): What influence does money in politics have?
- Thurs (7/13): Are citizens competent in elections? The impact of irrelevant events.
- Textbook Reading:
 - The Logic of American Politics, Ch 13
- Papers & Podcasts:
 - Fournaies, Alexander and Anthony Fowler. 2021. "Do Campaign Contributions Buy Favorable Policies? Evidence from the Insurance Industry." Political Science Research and Methods.
 - Healy, Andrew J., Neil Malhotra, and Cecilia Hyunjung Mo. 2010. "Irrelevant Events Affect Voters' Evaluations of Government Performance." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.
- Deadlines: Midterm exam distributed 7/13, due 7/17 at midnight by email.

Week 4 (7/18 & 7/20): Parties & Polarization

- Tues (7/18): Fundamentals of Congress & political parties
- Thurs (7/20): Why is Congress so polarized?
- Textbook Reading:
 - The Logic of American Politics, Ch 12
- Papers & Podcasts:
 - Hall, Andrew B. 2019. Who Wants to Run? How the Devaluing of Political Office Drives Polarization. Chapter One.
 - [Not Another Politics Podcast, "How Much Should We Believe Surveys"](#)
- Deadlines: Paper Explainer 1 due 7/21 by email.

Week 5 (7/25 & 7/27): Elections and Participation

- Tues (7/25): Why do citizens participate?
- Thurs (7/27): What do Americans think about politics?
- Textbook Reading:
 - The Logic of American Politics, Ch 11
- Papers & Podcasts:
 - Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer. 2008. "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment." American Political Science Review.
 - Keele, Luke, William Cubbison, and Ismail White. 2021. "Suppressing Black Votes: A Historical Case Study of Voting Restrictions in Louisiana." American Political Science Review.

Week 6 (8/1 & 8/3): Media

- Tues (8/1): Can political campaigns persuade? Does the media facilitate Democratic Accountability?
- Thurs (8/3): Are we all stuck in partisan news bubbles? Would it matter if we were?
- Textbook Reading:
 - The Logic of American Politics, Ch 14
- Papers & Podcasts:
 - Guess, Andrew M. 2021. "(Almost) Everything in Moderation: New Evidence on Americans' Online Media Diets." American Journal of Political Science.
 - Sides, John, Lynn Vavreck, and Christopher Warshaw. 2021. "The Effect of Television Advertising in United States Elections." American Political Science Review.
 - [Not Another Politics Podcast: When Fox Viewers Watch CNN Instead](#)
- Deadlines: Paper Explainer 2 due 8/4; Final Exam due 8/7 at midnight. Turn in on Bruinlearn.

Extra Papers (for use on Paper Explainer assignments):

- Tausanovitch, Chris, and Christopher Warshaw. 2014. "Representation in Municipal Government." *American Political Science Review*.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, John M. De Figueiredo, and James M. Snyder Jr. 2003. "Why Is There So Little Money in US Politics?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*.
- Kaplan, Ethan, Jörg L. Spenkuch, and Haishan Yuan. 2019. "Natural Disasters, Moral Hazard, and Special Interests in Congress." Working paper.
- Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M. Bartels. 2004. "Blind Retrospection: Electoral Responses to Drought, Flu, and Shark Attacks." Working paper.
- Busby, Ethan C., James N. Druckman, and Alexandria Fredendall. 2017. "The Political Relevance of Irrelevant Events." *The Journal of Politics*.
- Gerber, Alan S., and Gregory A. Huber. 2009. "Partisanship and Economic Behavior: Do Partisan Differences in Economic Forecasts Predict Real Economic Behavior?" *American Political Science Review*.
- Enos, Ryan D., and Anthony Fowler. 2018. "Aggregate Effects of Large-Scale Campaigns on Voter Turnout." *Political Science Research and Methods*.
- Grimmer, Justin, and Jesse Yoder. 2021. "The Durable Differential Deterrent Effects of Strict Photo Identification Laws." *Political Science Research and Methods*.
- Grumbach, Jacob M., and Charlotte Hill. 2020. "Rock the registration: Same day registration increases turnout of young voters." *Journal of Politics*.
- Kalla, Joshua L., and David E. Broockman. 2018. "The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections: Evidence From 49 Field Experiments." *American Political Science Review*.
- Wang, Tianyi. 2021. "Media, Pulpit, and Populist Persuasion: Evidence From Father Coughlin." *American Economic Review*.