Introduction to American Politics

This course is designed as a broad survey of American national government and politics. It is supposed to convey fundamental concepts and information for understanding politics. The goal is to help you understand key concepts and then to employ these concepts to understand and critically evaluate a variety of political events.

We will begin by exploring the ideological and cultural foundations of the American political system. This exploration will highlight some of the criteria that we will use throughout the course to evaluate the performance of various political institutions (such as Congress) and actors (such as the electorate). Next, we will study how individuals, parties, and interest groups influence the political institutions that were established by the Constitution. Finally, we will study these institutions. You should emerge from this course with an understanding of the basic processes by which national public policy is made and the forces that have shaped national politics in recent years.

Learning Objectives: As a result of completing this course, students should be able to:

1. Distinguish between economic, sociological, and psychological approaches to understanding how individuals and institutions operate.
2. Explain the American political system and the outcomes it produces.
3. Apply basic political science theories to explain American politics.
4. Become a better analyst of politics and a thoughtful consumer of political news.
5. Learn about the value and use of experiments to understand politics.