



Introduction to U.S. Politics

Welcome to the course Introduction to U.S. Politics. I have designed this syllabus to help you understand which topic and important questions we will consider in each week's class. I recommend that you use this document each week prior to undertaking the readings.

Information

Class:	Introduction to U.S. Politics (ENS-2401)
Term:	Summer Semester 2024 (SoSe24)
Seminar:	Wednesdays 09:15–10:45 Room: CP18
Office Hours:	Virtual (Zoom), by appointment, email to arrange.
Me:	Dr. Mike Cowburn (he/him)
Email:	cowburn@europa-uni.de
TA:	Felix Trojan (trojan@europa-uni.de)
You:	Who you are isn't defined by records or bureaucracies, so if you prefer a name or a pronoun other than the one listed, please let me know.

Course Description

Political scientists commonly refer to politics as the process of deciding who gets what. This course addresses questions concerning how politics works in the United States. Why does the United States have its system of government, how can we evaluate whether it is working as intended, and how might we change it? What is public opinion, and how does it bear on public policy? How do people decide whether to vote and who to vote for? In short, how does the United States decide who gets what? In recent years, American democracy has faced a series of unprecedented challenges. What guiding principles, norms, and institutions was America built on, and how do they make democracy more or less effective? What do patterns of political participation in the United States tell us about the health of our democracy? How do partisan and social identities breed hostility and antagonism among our democratic citizenry? How does information from the media and other sources advance or limit democratic outcomes? What does increased violence—political, racially motivated, or otherwise—reveal about the trajectory of democracy in the United States? And where do we go from here? Our objective is to work



together to identify the greatest areas of weakness in the American political system, make sense of the most pressing threats facing democracy, and contemplate how democracy might be saved.

As this is an introductory course, the answers it will provide to these questions (and many others) will be broader than they are deep. Students who are successful in this course will have a foundation for further study in more advanced political science courses. More importantly, they will be better equipped to understand, approach, and navigate U.S. politics in their daily lives.

The aim of this course is to help make you a more sophisticated consumer and thinker about U.S. democracy, such that the judgments you make are well-considered and subjected to the rigor of science and open debate. This course is built on the science of politics, but we will spend much of our time together talking about the various contemporary problems that motivate our study of U.S. politics and democracy.

Communication

For short questions, email is the best way to contact me. I endeavor to respond to all emails within twenty-four hours Monday to Friday, I will respond to most emails considerably quicker than this. If I haven't responded within twenty-four hours, please feel free to email again.

If you wish to go over material covered in class, talk about connections between class material and other ideas, and so on, I will be happy to schedule time in my virtual office hours. Please email me to arrange. These discussions are generally student-led but I can help you formulate questions and point you in the direction of additional material based on my sense of your strengths and interests. I encourage you to take advantage of this time and I will be flexible enough to accommodate most appointments.

I also encourage students to take advantage of my office hours to ask questions or discuss issues related to the course, the discipline of political science, or academia more generally. If you have any comments about or problems with the course itself, I encourage you to share them in my office hours.

Course Requirements

This class is worth either 3 (partial credit) or 9 (full credit) ECTS points.



Partial Credit

Attendance, participation, and preparedness are important to your success in this course (and, I find, in life generally). There is an [accumulating](#) body of evidence suggesting that you will learn much more if you read consistently and attend class than you will if you periodically cram for high stakes exams, so I have designed this course to structure your incentives accordingly.

It is expected that you come to each class prepared, having read, and thought about the course material, and ready to engage. Class time will be divided between lectures and in-class activities. **Class attendance is mandatory.** Moreover, when in the classroom you are expected to contribute to our discussion, be active in answering questions and be able to talk about the themes and topics at hand.

For each week that has assigned readings, I will post a short quiz about that week's readings on Moodle. As you do the reading for that week, you should answer the quiz. To receive credit for this class you must **hand in a physical copy of your quiz answers at the start of the class.** Because these quizzes count as attendance they cannot be rescheduled and you cannot turn them in electronically. You are allowed two unexcused absences (I will convert up to two zeroes on quizzes to NAs that will not count toward your quiz average), and I will drop everyone's two lowest remaining quiz grades from the average. I will primarily base your partial credit grade on your performance in these quizzes, but will award additional marks for students who are consistently active and make excellent oral contributions throughout the semester.

Full Credit

Partial credit activity plus three ChatGPT critical reviews. At three points during the semester, I will ask ChatGPT to write a 1,000-word essay relevant to the course and provide you with both the essay prompt and ChatGPT's output. As ChatGPT is not enrolled in the course, I expect it to perform poorly. You will be asked to critically evaluate ChatGPT's performance in the context of what we have covered up to that point in the course. Which points are imprecise? Which points are wrong? Is there anything important that is missing entirely? Each of these three assessments should be roughly two pages. Each of these assessments will be worth a further 2 ECTS points. The due dates for these critical reviews



are indicated in the course structure below. If you do not hand in the critical reviews, I will assume you are taking this class for partial credit (3 ECTS).

Civility Policy

In accordance with the philosophy of an institution for higher learning, the classroom should be a place where diverse ideas can be explored with respect to promote learning and growth. We each come from a variety of backgrounds and bring with us different experiences to the classroom. Regardless of whether we share similar opinions and beliefs, I expect us to remain respectful of each other as we explore ideas. I encourage and expect you to express yourself with reason, clarity, courtesy, and compassion. This ensures that we may be comfortable learning and growing without fear of judgment, ridicule, or intimidation. I welcome each of you as worthy contributors in the classroom. **Student conduct that disrupts the learning process will not be tolerated.** Similarly, if any student feels unsafe or discriminated against during in the class, please contact me immediately. While academic discourse should be intellectually challenging, it should never be discriminatory, and **it is my responsibility to ensure everyone feels safe and able to participate in our classroom.**

In the same spirit, we should adopt inclusive language both in our discussions and written work. In line with recent style guide changes from the Associated Press, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and others, students should capitalize “Black” when describing this racial group in their written work. “White” should also have a capital letter, in line with recommendations of the National Association of Black Journalists, except when it is an adjective (white nationalism etc.). Similarly, we should use terms that acknowledge the humanity of people we are discussing, recognizing that individuals are not defined by their conditions or circumstances; for example, “enslaved people,” not “slaves.” Gender neutral terms should be used both in discussions and written work, so “member of Congress” not “congressman.” **Racist, sexist, homophobic, or any other offensive terms will not be tolerated in the classroom, regardless of the context in which they are used.** More generally, we should reflect upon our positionality as researchers in our contributions. If students have specific feedback on any of these points that they wish to discuss I welcome these conversations either directly or as part of our wider class discussions.



Prior Knowledge & Resources

This is an introductory level course in U.S. politics meaning that there are no prerequisites for participation. All levels of prior knowledge are therefore welcome in our classroom. Given the subject matter of the course some interest in politics and/or the United States is expected. If you don't like politics, this course probably isn't for you!

We will use one textbook throughout the semester. Given that we will be using this book throughout the semester you may want to consider purchasing a physical copy for your reading convenience, though a digital version is all that is required:

- Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy R. Johnson. *The Logic of American Politics*. 10th Edition. Los Angeles: CQ Press, 2019.

Links to all other readings are included below. I expect you all to be prepared to discuss the material when you come to class. However, that does not mean you need to read every single page of the material in depth. Reading strategically is an important skill that you should practice in this course.

Course Structure

Below is our schedule for the semester, depending on our progress through the course we may choose to expand or reduce certain sections. In such a scenario I will inform you of any changes sufficiently in advance. Each week we have one ninety-minute session. Most weeks we will begin with a short lecture by me on the topic that we have read for the week's class followed by some practical work. All readings are required.

Wednesday 10th April – Introduction

- Expectations
- Discussion of Syllabus
- No readings, no quiz

Wednesday 17th April – The Role of Political Science

Noel, Hans. 2010. "Ten Things Political Scientists Know that You Don't". *The Forum* 8(3).

[\(Link\)](#)

Mansbridge, Jane. 2014. "What is Political Science For?" *Perspectives on Politics* 12(1): 8-17.

[\(Link\)](#)



Wednesday 24th April – Democracy & Citizens

Logic of American Politics, Chapter 1.

Dubois, W.E.B. 1920. “Of the Ruling of Men” ([Link](#)).

Wednesday 1st May – Public Holiday, No Class

Wednesday 8th May – The Constitution

Logic of American Politics, Chapter 2.

The Federalist Papers, 10 and 51 (included as Appendices 4 and 5 in *Logic of American Politics*).

Tuesday 14th May – Critical Review #1 Due

Wednesday 15th May - Federalism

Logic of American Politics, Chapter 3.

Grumbach, Jacob, and Jamila Michener. 2022. “American Federalism, Political Inequality, and Democratic Erosion.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 699, 143-155. ([Link](#)).

Wednesday 22nd May – Civil Rights

Logic of American Politics, Chapter 4 & Chapter 5.

Bouie, Jamelle. “Making Voting Constitutional.” *The American Prospect*, January 30, 2013 ([Link](#)).

Wednesday 29th May – Congress

Logic of American Politics, Chapter 6.

Wednesday 5th June – The Presidency & Federal Bureaucracy

Logic of American Politics, Chapter 7 & Chapter 8.

McCrain, Joshua. “What does Donald Trump need for a successful presidency? Bureaucrats.” *The Monkey Cage*, January 27, 2017. ([Link](#))

Tuesday 11th June – Critical Review #2 Due

Wednesday 12th June – The Public

Logic of American Politics, Chapter 10.

Zaller, John, and Stanley Feldman. 1992. “A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions Versus Revealing Preferences.” *American Journal of Political Science* 36(3): 579-616. ([Link](#))



Wednesday 19th June – Elections

Logic of American Politics, Chapter 11

Skelly, Geoffrey, and Nathaniel Rakich. “Why The President’s Party Almost Always Has A Bad Midterm.” *FiveThirtyEight*, January 3, 2022. ([Link](#)).

Wednesday 26th June – Political Parties

Logic of American Politics, Chapter 12

Bawn, Kathleen, et al. 2012. “A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics.” *Perspectives on Politics* 10(3): 571-597. ([Link](#)).

Wednesday 3rd July – Reading Week, No Class

Tuesday 9th July – Critical Review #3 Due

Wednesday 10th July – The Judiciary

Logic of American Politics, Chapter 9

Bailey, Michael. “Just how liberal (or conservative) is the Supreme Court?” *Mischiefs of Faction (Vox)*, 2016. ([Link](#)).

Wednesday 17th July – The Media

Logic of American Politics, Chapter 14

Hopkins, Daniel. “All Politics is National Because All Media is National.” *FiveThirtyEight*, Jun 6, 2018. ([Link](#)).