**Introduction to American Politics**PLSC 101.002

Loyola University Chicago

Fall 2023

MWF 9:20 AM – 10:10 AM

Mundelein Center - Room 1410

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| **Instructor** | Professor G. Agustin Markarian |
| **Email** | [gmarkarian@luc.edu](mailto:gmarkarian@luc.edu) |
| **Office Location** | 327 Coffey Hall |
| **Office Hours** | 10:20 AM – 11:20 AM MWF or by appointment |

**Course Description**

Is America OK? Recent events, like the storming of the U.S. capital, have questioned the stability of U.S. democracy and the strength of U.S. political institutions. Federal policy seems stagnant, and political polarization high. Wealth inequality is increasing to unprecedent levels, yet it goes unaddressed. This course helps put current events into perspective by introducing students to American political institutions and behavior.

The course starts by introducing students to the discipline of political science, discussing the role of government, and why government matters. Students are then introduced to the basic structure and foundations of the US federal government, exploring the basic framework of the constitution and federalist institutions. Students then learn about political behavior in the US and what shapes it. The second half of the course covers the inner-workings of meso-institutions like political parties and interest groups and dives deeper into macro-institutions like Congress, the presidency, and the judiciary. We conclude by surveying the causes and consequences of major political issues like economic inequality, racial divisions, and political polarization.

The course integrates seminal work in American politics with influential modern research to help answer the following questions:

* 1. How do American political institutions support democratic principles? How do they create democratic deficits?
  2. Do citizens develop informed preferences? Are they able to make these preferences known to representatives? If so, how?
  3. Is political power biased in favor of certain groups? If so, what are the causes and consequences of this bias?

**Course Requirements Summary**

* Participation (10%)
* Reading quizzes (15%)
* Small assignments (10%)
* 2-page current event paper (15%)
* Midterm exam (20%)
* Final exam (30%)

**Course Requirements in Detail**

Participation (10%): Students are expected to participate in activities and in-class discussions of the course material. Students are expected to complete assigned readings before class and come prepared with notes and ideas. I will assess students based on the frequency of contributions, the relevance and insightfulness of the contributions in discussions, and active contributions to group work. Quality of participation can make up for lack of frequency. Please note that attendance is an integral part of discussions. Though there is no formal attendance requirement, you can't join the conversation if you don't show up. Participation in group discussions during class counts towards your participation grade.

Reading quizzes (15%): There will be fifteen short, multiple-choice reading quizzes each worth 1% of your toral grade. Quizzes will take place about once a week. Quizzes will be posted on Sakai and must be taken before the start of class. Late/make-up quizzes will not be accepted under any circumstance. However, students’ two lowest scoring quizzes will be dropped, meaning students can miss two quizzes and still receive full credit.

Small assignments (10%): There are four small assignments each worth 2.5% of your total grade. Assignments must be submitted on Sakai before the start of class. These are the assignments (details are post on Sakai) and their due dates:

* Syllabus quiz – August 28th (Day 1!)
* Constitutional amendment summary – September 22nd
* Public opinion reflection – September 29th
* Member of congress research – November 8th

2-page current event paper (15%): You will write one brief paper for this course. The paper will discuss a current event in the United States and how it relates to material from one or more of the readings. **Your focus should be on demonstrating the depth of your understanding of the course material and your ability to connect that material to the specific current event you are writing about. This paper is not an opinion piece but an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of class concepts.**

The paper should have three components: 1) a clear, thorough description of the argument made in the reading or lecture you are drawing on, 2) a description of the current event you are writing about (what is at stake, who is involved, etc.), and 3) a discussion of how the course reading(s) helps you better understand the current event you are writing about. Most of the paper should focus on part 3.

The paper should be about 2 pages long, double-spaced, using 12-point Times New Roman font and 1-inch margins (about 700 words), not including the reference page. I will deduct points from papers longer than 3 pages (not including the reference page). At the top of your paper, include your name, date, and paper title. Nothing else is needed. The fourth line of the first page should be the beginning of the text of your paper.

You should read at least two newspaper articles (that are not opinion/editorial pieces), reports, or academic articles (not included in this syllabus) on your topic to ensure that you have a solid understanding of the issue you are writing about. Please provide clear citations to your references at the end of the paper on a separate page. The article's title, source (e.g., New York Times), and URL are fine.

**The paper is due by Friday, December 1st, at 11:59 PM.** You need not wait until the due dates to hand the paper in. I encourage you to keep your eye out for news events that remind you of one of the readings and write your papers while those connections are fresh in your mind! Please submit your paper via Sakai (under Assignments). I will deduct 10 points per day for late papers. **Exemptions will only be granted for medical emergencies with documentation. You have all semester to submit the paper. Please do not wait until the last minute, as unexpected circumstances may arise.**

Note that all papers will be automatically submitted to Turnitin.com—a service that is remarkably effective at detecting plagiarism.

Midterm exam (20%)

There will be one midterm exam on **October 16th,** covering material from the course's first half. It will be a combination of multiple-choice, matched key terms, short-answer, and/or long-answer questions. You can bring a one-page, hand-written “cheat sheet” to the midterm.

Final exam (30%)

In line with university policy, there will be one final exam on the date and time listed on the university calendar. The final exam is cumulative—in other words, students should study by reviewing all material taught over the semester. It will be a combination of multiple-choice, matched key terms, short-answer, and/or long-answer questions. I will not offer make-ups of the final exam unless the student has petitioned their Dean's office for a change in exam time.

You can bring a one-page, hand-written “cheat sheet” to the final.

**Grade Policies**

Final grades for the course will be based on the following scale.

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| **Letter Grade** | **Percentage Score** |
| A | 93-100 |
| A- | 90-92.99 |
| B+ | 87-89.99 |
| B | 83-86.99 |
| B- | 80-82.99 |
| C+ | 77-79.99 |
| C | 73-76.99 |
| C- | 70-72.99 |
| D+ | 67-69.99 |
| D | 60-66.99 |
| F | 59.99 and below |

The scoring rubric above and the thresholds for various letter grades are non-negotiable. I will not change your numeric grade to "bump you up" to the next letter grade. For example, if your final score in the class is 86.9, your letter grade for the class will be a B, not a B+ just because you are so close. I do this to ensure transparency and fairness in my grading. I view it as problematic to "bump up" or offer special extra credit opportunities to students who ask but not those who do not. Your best bet to ensure you maximize your grade is to show up to class, do the reading and assignments, and participate frequently and thoughtfully.

If you have a question or concern about your grade on an assignment or exam, you must contact me within 7 days of receiving the grade. For example, if an exam is returned to you at the end of a Monday class, you have until the end of the following Monday class to contact me. The end of the semester (perhaps when you're so close to the next letter grade up?) is not an appropriate time to revisit your score on a midterm.

**Additional Policies and Notes**

Missing exams: If you are not feeling well on the day of the midterm exam, let me know right away (I cannot offer make-ups of the final exam unless the student has petitioned their Dean's office for a change in exam time). If you are dealing with illness or a family emergency, I will be happy to make accommodations. However, *you must notify me of your situation in a timely manner and provide appropriate documentation*. Given the wide availability of internet access, in virtually all cases, I expect you to contact me before the exam starts if there is an issue. You must make up the exam before the exams are graded and returned (about one week).

Office Hours/Getting Help: My regularly scheduled office hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10:10-11:20 AM. You can join me (without an appointment!) in person. If you would like to talk to me via Zoom or if you need to schedule another meeting time, email me.

Technology in the classroom: A rapidly growing body of research shows that laptop and tablet use during class time substantially interfere with learning for both [the user](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0956797616677314) and [peers](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131512002254). In the past, I did not allow the use of these technologies during class. However, some students have claimed that computers and tablets support their learning because it facilities note taking. Therefore, I have decided to:

1. *Temporarily* allow computers and tables in class under the condition that they are exclusively used for class-related purposes. This means that electronic devices may not be used to check email, scroll Twitter, buy movie tickets, etc. while in class. If too many students abuse this policy, I will reverse it for the whole class.
2. If I suspect you are using your electronic device for non-class purposes, I will give you one warning (either in class or over email).
3. If I suspect a second violation of the policy after the initial warning, you will lose the privilege of using your electronic device in class for the rest of the semester.

There may be some days when I will specifically ask you to bring a computer (if there is an online activity, for example). However, most of the class time will involve lectures or discussions of articles and concepts related to the course—this can be accomplished without computers if you wish to (I encourage it).

**The use of cell phones or other mobile communication devices is strictly prohibited during class, except in the event of an emergency.** Cell phones should be kept on silent but preferably should be turned off. Students discovered using their phones during class time will be asked to turn off their phones and place them out of reach.

Students with disabilities: If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please have the [Student Accessibility Center](https://www.luc.edu/sac/) contact me as soon as possible.

Academic integrity: Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Incidents of plagiarism or cheating on an exam (by copying from another student or other means) will result in a zero on the assignment or exam in question and may result in failing the course if deemed appropriate by the instructor. Severe or repeated incidents will result in failing the course.

Please refer to this useful guide if you are unsure when and how to cite your sources. Further details regarding what constitutes academic dishonesty are available here:

[https://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg\_academicintegrity.shtml.](about:blank)

Academic dishonesty will be reported to the chair of your major department and to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Academic misconduct records may be transmitted to medical schools, law schools, and other organizations with a legitimate reason to inquire.

AI software / ChatGPT Policy: we are living in a new world, and we (professors) are doomed to fail if we wage a cold war on AI software. These tools can be helpful in some cases and detrimental in many others. We are all still learning how to adapt these tools while making sure students are learning and engaging with the material. So here is what I hope is a realistic AI / ChatGPT policy, which I hope you will all respect:

* Use of AI / ChatGPT on quizzes and exams is strictly prohibited.
* AI / ChatGPT may be used to polish writing for other assignments, but not originate it. If students use AI / ChatGPT to polish their writing, they must:
  + Provide an original transcript of the text they fed to the AI software with their final assignment. The final AI-polished assignment will be graded, but I need to be sure the ideas in the assignment originate in your brain.
  + Note how and where AI was used at the end of your assignment.

Failure to comply with this policy is considered a violation of academic integrity and will be treated as such. You do not have to use these tools, and you will learn more if you don’t.

**Class Schedule and Reading Assignments**

The course textbook is [We the People by Ginsberg et al. (Published by Norton).](https://wwnorton.com/books/9780393538847/about-the-book/table-of-contents)

* 11th edition+ (13th preferred)
* Complete or Core edition, not Essential edition! It is missing critical chapters.
* Ebook or hardcopy OK.
* Available online. Used copies are fine.

**\*Note that assignments are due before class on the day they are listed.**

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| **Date** | **Topic** | **Assigned Reading** | **Assignment\*** |
| **Mon 08/28** | Introduction | The syllabus (the one you are reading now) | **SA: Syllabus quiz** |
| **Wed 08/30** | Foundations | Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons" (Kernell & Smith) | Reading quiz |
| **Fri 09/01** | ***No Class*** | ***No Class - Instructor at a conference*** | |
| **Mon 09/04** | ***No Class*** | ***No class – Labor Day*** | |
| **Wed 09/06** | Foundations | We The People – Ch. 1 |  |
| **Fri 09/08** | The Const. | We The People – Ch. 2 |  |
| **Mon 09/11** | The Const. | The Federalist No. 10 (Madison); The Federalist 51 (Madison and Hamilton) | Reading quiz |
| **Wed 09/13** | Federalism | We The People – Ch. 3 |  |
| **Fri 09/15** | Federalism | Buchanan, James M. 1995. "Federalism and Individual Sovereignty." Cato Journal 15: 259-268. | Reading quiz |
| **Mon 09/18** | Federalism | We The People – Ch. 4 | EC: Family Feud Federalism |
| **Wed 09/20** | Civil Rights & Liberties | [Lukianoff, G. & Perrino, N. (2017). Why Even Nazis Deserve Free Speech. Politico.](https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/08/19/why-even-nazis-deserve-free-speech-215508/) | Reading quiz |
| **Fri 09/22** | Civil Rights & Liberties | We The People – Ch. 5 | **SA: Amendment summary** |
| **Mon 09/25** | Public Opinion | [Dionne, E., & Mann, T. (2003). "Polling & Public Opinion: The good, the bad, and the ugly. Brookings.](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/polling-public-opinion-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/) | Reading quiz |
| **Wed 09/27** | Public Opinion | We The People – Ch. 6 |  |
| **Fri 09/29** | Public Opinion | [In a Politically Polarized Era, Sharp Divides in Both Partisan Coalitions](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/12/17/in-a-politically-polarized-era-sharp-divides-in-both-partisan-coalitions/) | **SA: Public Opinion Reflection** |
| **Mon 10/02** | The Media | We The People – Ch. 7 |  |
| **Wed 10/04** | Pol. Participation | We The People – Ch. 8 |  |
| **Fri 10/06** | Pol. Participation | Brady, H. E., Verba, S., & Schlozman, K. L. (1995). Beyond SES: A resource model of political participation. American political science review, 89(2), 271-294. (Abstract, Intro, Theory, and Conclusion) | Reading quiz |
| **Mon 10/09** | ***No Class*** | ***No Class – Mid-semester break*** | |
| **Wed 10/11** | Pol. Participation | Weaver, V. M., & Lerman, A. E. (2010). Political consequences of the carceral state. *American Political Science Review*, *104*(4), 817-833. (Abstract, Intro, Theory, and Conclusion) | Reading quiz |
| **Fri 10/13** |  | ***No Readings -* Midterm Review– come prepared with questions** | |
| **Mon 10/16** |  | **Midterm** | |
| **Wed 10/18** | Pol. Parties | We The People – Ch. 9 |  |
| **Fri 10/20** | Pol. Parties | Aldrich, J. (1995) Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Party Politics in America. *Pg 28-37, 45-50* | Reading quiz |
| **Mon 10/23** | Pol. Parties | *No Readings 😊* |  |
| **Wed 10/25** | Campaigns | Achen, C. H., & Bartels, L. M. (2004). Blind retrospection: Electoral responses to drought, flu, and shark attacks. CH5 | Reading quiz |
| **Fri 10/27** | Campaigns | We The People – Ch. 9 |  |
| **Mon 10/30** | Interest Groups | We The People – Ch. 11 |  |
| **Wed 11/01** | Interest Groups | [Koerth, M. (2019). "Everyone Knows Money Influences Politics... Except Scientists." FiveThirtyEight.](https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/everyone-knows-money-influences-politics-except-scientists/) | Reading quiz |
| **Fri 11/03** | Congress | We The People – Ch. 12 | EC: Surprise |
| **Mon 11/06** | Congress | [Klien, E. (2015). "Congressional Dysfunction." *Vox*](https://www.vox.com/2015/1/2/18089154/congressional-dysfunction) | Reading quiz |
| **Wed 11/08** | Congress | *No Readings 😊* | **SA: Member of Congress Research** |
| **Fri 11/10** | The President | We The People – Ch. 13 |  |
| **Mon 11/13** | The President | [*Listen* Freakonomics. "Does the President Matter as Much as You Think?" Ep 404.](https://freakonomics.com/podcast/does-the-president-matter-as-much-as-you-think-ep-404/) | Reading quiz |
| **Wed 11/15** | Bureaucracy | We The People – Ch. 14 |  |
| **Fri 11/17** | Bureaucracy | [Baxter](https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5262&context=faculty_scholarship), L. G. [Understanding Regulatory Capture: An Academic Perspective from the United States.](https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5262&context=faculty_scholarship) | Reading quiz |
| **Mon 11/20** | Jud. Branch | We The People – Ch. 15 |  |
| **Wed 11/22** |  | ***No class – Thanksgiving*** | |
| **Fri 11/24** |  | ***No class – Thanksgiving*** | |
| **Mon 11/27** | Jud. Branch | [Listen to ‘The Daily’: The Supreme Court Loses Its Swing Vote](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/28/podcasts/the-daily/supreme-court-anthony-kennedy-retirement.html) |  |
| **Wed 11/29** | Jud. Branch / Inequality | *No Readings 😊* | **EC: Confuse the Courts** |
| **Fri 12/01** | Inequality | Gilens and Page. (2014). Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens. (Abstract, Intro, Theory, and Conclusion) | Reading quiz  **Curent event paper due (by midnight)** |
| **Mon 12/04** | Inequality | Butler, D. M., & Broockman, D. E. (2011). Do politicians racially discriminate against constituents? A field experiment on state legislators. American Journal of Political Science, 55(3), 463-477. (Whole Paper!) | Reading quiz |
| **Wed 12/06** | Polarization | [*Listen* FiveThirtyEight. "How Education Became Today's Wedge Issue."](https://fivethirtyeight.com/videos/how-education-became-todays-wedge-issue/) |  |
| **Fri 12/08** |  | *No readings –* ***Final review*** – Come prepared with questions | |

**Changes to the Syllabus**

I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus at any time. If changes are made, students will be informed through email and verbally in class, and a new syllabus document will be posted on Sakai