

Political Science 201
INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS
Fall 2025

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 2-3; and by appointment

Course Description

This course introduces students to the workings of American Government. We will learn not only about American political institutions, such as the presidency, Congress, and the Supreme Court, but we will also learn about how the average American participates in government by covering topics such as voting, public opinion, and the media. We will explore why Americans seem to have increasing dissatisfaction with their government and attempt to explore the role that you as U.S. citizens and residents can take in improving democracy in America.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to...

- 1) Explain how individual behaviors and political institutions interact to create political outcomes
- 2) Properly use and critically evaluate political science data such as election returns and/or public opinion poll results
- 3) Analyze the actions of contemporary political actors (including ordinary citizens) using key course concepts
- 4) Explain and define the roles that key political actors, e.g., the president, members of Congress, Judges, the voting public, play in American democracy
- 5) Evaluate key concepts, principles, arguments, and contexts in founding documents of the American republic, including the United States Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and a representative selection of the Federalist Papers
- 6) Evaluate key milestones in progress and challenges in the effort to form “a more perfect Union,” including the arguments and contexts surrounding the Gettysburg Address, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Letter from Birmingham Jail, as well as other texts that reflect the breadth of American experiences.

Course objectives 1 – 3 meet GEP Social Science requirements and objective 5 and 6 meet GEP Foundations of American Democracy requirements.

Readings

American Politics Today, 8th Essentials Edition, by Bianco and Cannon (APT)

Online reserves via NCSU library ((* indicates required readings; ^ indicates recommended)

The New York Times (affordable college-rate subscriptions are available)

American Politics Today will serve as the primary text for this course. The class lectures and the text are intended to complement one another. In order to get the most out of the class it is important that you do the assigned reading prior to the appropriate class period. As part of this expectation, you will need to complete the Inquizitive for each textbook assigned reading. You are expected to read the *New York Times* (or Washington Post) on a daily basis in order to be able to apply course concepts to contemporary events in government and politics. **Good performance on exams will require a thorough knowledge of current events.**

Requirements and Grading

- Two Midterm Exams and Non-cumulative Final Exam (20% each)
- Discussion Section PS201L (10%)
- Norton InQuizitive (5%)
- Ideological Autobiography paper (10%)
- Misunderstanding American Politics paper (15%)

Grading will be on the following scale: A+≥97.0%; A≥93.0%; A-≥90.0%; B+≥87.0%; B≥83.0%; B-≥80.0%; C+≥77.0%; C≥73.0%; C-≥70.0%; D+≥67.0%; D≥63.0%; D-≥60.0%; F<60.0%

Discussion Sections

Enrollment in a discussion section/lab, PS 201L, is a basic requirement of the course.

This class will be in the format of lectures on Monday and Wednesday and a discussion section led by a teaching assistant on Friday. Participation is expected from all students in the class. At minimum, this means good attendance in discussion sections. In accordance with university policy, a record of student attendance will be kept and count towards your grade in the section. The discussion sections will focus on the reserve readings, current events, and selected topics from lectures to be explored in greater depth. You will be graded on your **active participation** in discussion sections and **demonstrated knowledge of assigned readings**. Your grade will also include knowledge and effort on in-class writing assignments. Approximately 1/3 of your discussion section grade will be based on weekly Norton InQuizitive assignments for the assigned book chapter.

Assignments

Ideological Autobiography. Outline your personal political beliefs in major areas of government and public opinion. Are you liberal or conservative? Why? What aspects of the larger political environment as well as your personal environment have helped you form these beliefs? Be sure to use concepts you have learned about in this class to explain your ideology. You are responsible for the complete details of the assignment at:

<http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/shgreene/PS201/AboutPaper1.htm> **Due September 19. 4 pages maximum.**

Misunderstanding American politics. Based on *what you have learned in PS 201 this semester*, what would you say is the most important concept for better understanding how government/politics works that is, in fact, widely misunderstood by the American public? Explain the reality of this concept versus how it is commonly misused/misunderstood. *You will need to cite research to make your case.* How might American democracy work better if more people properly understood this concept? Lastly, consider what you might have gotten wrong in your argument. You are responsible for the complete details of the assignment at:

<http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/shgreene/PS201/AboutPaper2.htm>. **Due November 14. 5 pages maximum.**

Complete policies regarding all paper assignments can be found at <http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/shgreene/PS201/AllPaperGuidelines.htm>. You are expected to read these guidelines before submitting your paper.

Late Policy

It is expected that exams will be taken and assignments turned in when they are scheduled on the syllabus. There will be a 20-point penalty for failure to take an exam at the required time and a 1/3 letter grade per day penalty for written assignments. If you miss an exam, the re-scheduling must take place at the convenience of the instructor/teaching assistant. Written assignments are due at the *beginning* of class. To avoid penalties you need to let the instructor know of valid, exigent circumstances *before* the assigned time.

Class Website

The class website at <http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/shgreene/PS201> is an additional resource designed to assist you in the class. It will contain important announcements and archived lecture outlines as well as basic course information. I will enter grades on Moodle, but be sure to go here for key information.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to complete their assignments with due regard to academic integrity. In order to do so they should familiarize themselves with the relevant sections of the student code of conduct, especially with regards to plagiarism (Sections 7-13). By signing, all work submitted on paper, or by identifying themselves in work submitted electronically, students affirm that they neither gave nor received unauthorized aid. Collaboration on assignments among students may only occur when explicitly authorized by an instructor.

AI Policy

You may use AI tools as research assistants and writing aids—to find sources (verify them independently), improve clarity, brainstorm ideas, or organize notes. However, AI cannot substitute for your own critical thinking and analysis. The core principle: when you submit work with your name on it, the ideas, arguments, and analysis should be genuinely yours. Using AI to generate your arguments or write substantial portions undermines the purpose of your education—developing your ability to think critically about political science and communicate effectively. Think of AI like a research librarian: helpful for finding materials and refining your work, but the intellectual labor of understanding, analyzing, and arguing must be your own. If unsure about your AI use, ask: "Am I still doing the thinking, or is the AI doing it for me?" You are building skills that will serve you long after this course ends.

Laptop policy

Due to the considerable evidence that laptops in classrooms can harm the learning environment by distracting you and your classmates while also leading to less learning than handwritten notes, laptops should not be used in class. Exceptions may be made due to special circumstances or in accordance with NCSU disability accommodations.

Disability

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must register with Disability Services for Students at 1900 Student Health Center, Campus Box 7509, 515-7653. For more information on NC State's policy on working with students with disabilities, see the Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Regulation 02.20.1 <http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-01>

Classroom Recording

You need to be in class when at all possible. Recordings exist as backup for excused absences and emergencies. You can be granted access to any missed classes if you contact me with a valid excuse.

Schedule of Lecture Topics and Assigned Readings (Fall 2025)

August 18	Course Introduction Klein, “How politics makes us stupid”* Matthews, “The book that changed how I think about thinking”* Inskeep, “A Finder’s Guide to Facts”*
August 20	The Founding and the Constitution APT and InQuizitive chapter 2 Declaration of Independence^ United States Constitution^ Federalist #10^
August 22	Discussion: Course intro and Constitution Rosen, “What If We Wrote the Constitution Today?”* Griffith, “In the framers we trust”* Levitsky, “How American Democracy Fell So Far Behind”*
August 25	Federalism APT and InQuizitive, chapter 3 Federalist #39^
August 27	Political Culture <i>APT and InQuizitive, chapter 1</i>
August 29	Discussion: Political Culture Moss, “5 Reasons The American Dream Is Still Alive And Well”* Tepper, “What Is The American Dream—And Can You Afford It?”* Brooks, “Despite Everything You Think You Know, America...”*
September 1	No Class: Labor Day
September 3	Public Opinion APT and InQuizitive, chapter 6 (Public Opinion portion)
September 5	Discussion: Public Opinion: Part I Pew, “Beyond Red vs. Blue: The Political Typology (Intro)”* Pew, “Political Typology Quiz”* (take the quiz) Weir, Politics is Personal”*
September 8 – 10	Public Opinion (continued)
September 12	Discussion: Public Opinion: Part II Klein, “A new theory for why Republicans and Democrats see...”* Chamberlin, “How Americans came to hate each other”* Kennedy, “Key things to know about election polling...”*
September 15 – 17	Mass Media APT and InQuizitive, chapter 6 (Mass Media portion)

September 19	<p>Discussion: Mass Media Leonhardt, “The six forms of media bias”[*] Klein, “Why the media is so polarized — and how it polarizes us”[*] Haidt, “Social Media is making us ungovernable?”[*] Paper #1 due in September 19 discussion section</p>
September 22	<p>Political Participation APT and InQuizitive, chapter 8 (part I)</p>
September 24	<p>Midterm Exam I</p>
September 26	<p>Discussion: Political Participation Wines, “The Surprising Impact of North Carolina’s New Voter ID...”[*] Symonds, “Why Don’t Young People Vote, and What Can Be Done...?”[*] Hasen, “The U.S. Lacks What Every Democracy Needs”[*] Gross, “What happens when the voting age is lowered?”[*]</p>
September 29 – Oct 1	<p>Political Parties APT and InQuizitive, chapter 7 Vox, “How the Republican Party went from Lincoln to Trump”[*] Vox, “From white supremacy to Barack Obama...”[*]</p>
October 3	<p>Discussion: Political Parties Chinoy, “Let Us Predict Whether You’re a Democrat or a Republican”[*] Drutman, “If America Had Six Parties, Which Would You Belong To?”[*] Wegman, “How to Fix America’s Two-Party Problem”[*]</p>
October 6 – 8	<p>Campaigns & Elections APT and InQuizitive, chapter 8 (remainder)</p>
October 10	<p>Discussion: Campaigns & Elections Wegman, “Gerrymander, USA”[*] Noel, “There Is a Better Way to Pick a Presidential Nominee”[*] Radiolab, “The Unpopular Vote”[*]</p>
October 13	<p>No Class: Fall Break</p>
October 15	<p>Campaigns & Elections continued</p>
October 17	<p>Discussion: Discussion: Campaigns & Elections, Part II The Economist, “How young voters helped to put Trump...”[*] Hartig, “Behind Trump’s 2024 Victory, a More Racially...”[*] Matthews, “The Great Money in Politics Myth”[*]</p>
October 20	<p>Congress APT and InQuizitive, chapter 10</p>

- October 22** **Congress/Presidency**
APT and InQuizitive, chapter 11
- October 24** **Discussion: Congress**
Klein, "The Senate Has Become a Dadaist Nightmare"*
Friedersdorf, "What Should Congress Be?"*
Feldman, "Congress Is Surrendering Its Last Real Power"*
- October 27** **Presidency Continued**
- October 29** **Midterm Exam II**
- October 31** **Discussion: Presidency**
Nyhan, "Joe Biden and 'The Green Lantern Theory'..."*
Hosein, "Donald Trump: A Green Lantern President, But at What Cost?"*
Goldsmith, "We Have to Deal with Presidential Power"*
Galston, "Is the growth of executive power a threat to constitutional..."*
- November 3** **The Judiciary**
APT and InQuizitive, chapter 13
- November 5** **Judiciary continued/Bureaucracy**
APT and InQuizitive, chapter 12
- November 7** **Discussion: Judiciary**
Johnson, "To avoid irrelevancy, the US Supreme Court must..."*
Serwer, "The Lie About the Supreme Court Everyone Pretends..."*
Amar, "Something Has Gone Deeply Wrong at the Supreme Court"*
- November 10** **Bureaucracy continued/Interest Groups**
APT and InQuizitive, chapter 9
- November 12** **Civil Liberties**
APT and InQuizitive, chapter 4
- November 14** **Discussion: Bureaucracy & Interest Groups**
Drutman, "What we get wrong about lobbying and corruption"* (Nov 17)
Davidson, "Money, Power, and Deer Urine"* (Nov 17)
Paper #2 due in November 14 discussion section
- November 17** **Civil Liberties continued**
- November 19** **Civil Rights**
APT and InQuizitive, chapter 5
Letter from the Birmingham Jail^
- November 21** **Discussion: Civil Liberties & Civil Rights**
Marcus, "Is This the End of the Separation of Church and State?"*
Horton, "How far have African-Americans come since the 1960s?"*
Huynh, "Conservatives and free speech advocates wanted colleges..."*

November 24

Public Policy

APT and InQuizitive, chapter 14

November 26 – 28

No Class: Thanksgiving

December 1

Public Policy continued

Scott, “9 things Americans need to learn from the rest of the world...”*

Demas, “The Abortion Policy Most Americans Want”*

Karma, “The Truth About Immigration and the American Worker”*

Lopez, “Why you can’t blame mass incarceration on the war on drugs”*

December 10, 10-11am

FINAL EXAM