

**POLS 10100**  
**INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS**  
**FALL 2020**

**Instructor Information**

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**Course Information**

Lecture: MW 12:45pm-2:00pm  
South Dining Hall 203

**Learning Outcomes**

This course introduces students to the fundamentals of American government and politics. The course frames the study of American government and politics in the extent to which it is democratic. Most Americans consider the U.S. a democracy, many as the world's leading democracy. And yet, many Americans are also frustrated with politics in the U.S., believing that it does not represent people like them, that it ignores the will of the people, and instead serves "special interests." So, does the U.S. live up to the standards of a democracy?

In this course, we will assess whether or not the United States of America truly is a democracy. To do so, we will discuss what we mean by democracy and the requirements that democracy places on citizens, political leaders, and the government. We will then examine the various components of the American political system—its constitutional foundations, the political involvement of citizens, the institutions that link citizens to government, and the formal institutions of government—and evaluate the degree to which they are democratic. At the end of the course, we will try to determine if the U.S. has too little democracy, or perhaps too much democracy.

After successfully completing this course, you will be able to:

- Understand the structures and processes of American government and politics and how they seek to balance the demands of democracy.
- Develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. In particular, developing the ability to integrate both theoretical arguments and empirical evidence.
- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of contemporary political debates.

**Course Readings**

Janda, Kenneth, Jeffrey M. Berry, Jerry Goldman, Deborah J. Schildkraut, and Paul Manna. 2019. *The Challenge of Democracy: American Government in Global Politics*, Enhanced 14<sup>th</sup> Ed. Boston: Cengage (ISBN-13: 9781337799812). Referred to as "Challenge" in course outline below.

An earlier edition of the textbook is fine, just please check with me to make sure you can match up the chapters appropriately.

Miscellaneous readings posted on the course's Sakai page and listed in the course outline below.

### **Course Requirements and Grade Distribution**

(1) Exams (60% total): There will be three exams, covering material from the lectures and readings. The dates of these exams are **September 23**, **November 2**, and **November 16-November 20** (see final exam schedule for exact day and time). Each exam will count for 20% of the final grade and the first two will ask questions only about the material covered during its third of the course (i.e. the exams will not be cumulative). The exams will consist primarily of identification and short answer questions but will include short essay questions.

(2) Essays (30% total): You will write three essays of approximately 4-5 pages. Essays will be worth 5%, 10%, and 15% of your final exam grade. The percentages are graduated to account for the learning curve of writing at a collegiate level. I will have the same expectations for each essay, but they will increase in percentage of your final grade as you develop your writing skills throughout the semester. You are encouraged to meet with me and go to the Writing Center for assistance with these essays. Essays are due **September 9**, **October 12**, and **November 20**. More details about the essays will be provided later in the class.

(3) Class Participation & Attendance (10%): It is imperative that you do all of the reading assigned for each week before the first class of the week. To ensure that everyone is doing the reading and thinking carefully about the material, I reserve the right to give unannounced quizzes on the reading at the beginning of discussion sections. Grades on the quizzes will be factored into your participation grades. Finally, it goes without saying (although I'm saying it) that in order to participate, you have to attend class. Your participation grade will be based on more than simple attendance, but attendance is the first step to participation. So, you should attend all class meetings and let me know before the class if you are going to need to miss a class.

Grading is based on the following distribution:

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Exam I                  | 20% |
| Exam II                 | 20% |
| Final Exam              | 20% |
| Essay #1                | 5%  |
| Essay #2                | 10% |
| Essay #3                | 15% |
| Discussion & Attendance | 10% |

The following scale will determine your final grade:

93% +            A

|        |    |
|--------|----|
| 90-92% | A- |
| 87-89% | B+ |
| 83-86% | B  |
| 80-82% | B- |
| 77-79% | C+ |
| 73-76% | C  |
| 70-72% | C- |
| 60-69% | D  |

## Course Policies

(1) No extensions or make-ups: There will be no extensions on papers or make-up exams except in the cases of serious illness (with a doctor's letter), deaths in the family, or university-sponsored activities (with a note from the particular university organization). Without such an excuse, anyone not taking an exam during the specified class time or not turning in a paper by the specified due date will receive a grade of zero on the exam or paper. If you are having trouble managing your time and worry you will not complete assignments on time, please come talk to me or seek resources from your academic advisor and the McDonald Center, which has resources to develop better time management skills.

(2) Academic honesty: As members of the academic community, we each have a responsibility to uphold rigorous standards of integrity. Every student is thus expected to abide by Notre Dame's Undergraduate Academic Code of Honor. Among other things, that means that all of the work you do (whether on exams or in the essays) is your own and solely your own, and that when you obtain any ideas or information from other sources, you provide full citation to those sources. Students should be thoroughly familiar with the Code of Honor, located at <http://honorcode.nd.edu>. If you have any questions about the Code of Honor or academic honesty, please contact me.

(3) Be a good class citizen: Good citizenship in the classroom calls for everyone to devote their full attention to the lectures and ensuing discussion. That means silencing your cell phones, no texting, and no surfing the web. I understand that many students use their laptops or tablets for taking notes, but many also use them to tweet, snapchat, surf the web, etc. This is both sort of rude and distracting to other students. If you are using a laptop or tablet, you must sit in the first two rows of the room and you are only to use it for note-taking and review of course materials

(4) Inclusiveness: "The University of Notre Dame is committed to social justice. I share that commitment and strive to maintain a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. In this class we will not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, economic class, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment will be appreciated and given serious consideration" (Statement borrowed from the Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning).

(5) Respect: We do not know what anyone else’s experience is or has been, listen and be kind.

(6) Be prepared: Read the material and be prepared to discuss beyond the surface level meaning. Before class, begin analyzing the material in context.

(7) Privacy Statement: Course materials (videos, assignments, readings, etc.) are for use in this course only. You may not upload them to external sites, share with another person, or post them for public commentary without my written permission.

We are recording class meetings to support remote students. These recordings will be available for review upon request. The University strictly prohibits anyone from duplicating, downloading, or sharing live class recordings with anyone outside of this course, for any reason.

If you need to join the class remotely via Zoom, please check surroundings first and use headphones to maintain the privacy of the course.

## Course Outline

| Date                                      | Topic                          | Readings (before Class)  |
|---|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>WEEK 1</b>                             |                                |  |
| Aug. 10<br>Aug. 12                        | What is Democracy?             | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Challenge</i>, chapters 1 &amp; 2</li> <li>2. Mounk, Yascha. 2018. “America Is Not a Democracy.” <i>The Atlantic</i>.</li> <li>3. Geltzer, Joshua A. 2018. “America’s Problem Isn’t Too Little Democracy. It’s Too Much.” <i>Politico Magazine</i>.</li> </ol>  |
| <b>Foundations of American Government</b> |                                |  |
| <b>WEEK 2</b>                             |                                |  |
| Aug. 17<br>Aug. 19                        | The Constitution<br>Federalism | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Challenge</i>, chapter 3</li> <li>2. <i>Challenge</i>, chapter 4</li> <li>3. Excerpts from Charles A. Beard’s <i>An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States</i>. (will be emailed to you)</li> <li>4. Griffin, Stephen M. 2020. “American Federalism, the Coronavirus Pandemic, and the Legacy of Hurricane Katrina.” <i>ConstitutionNet</i>.</li> </ol> |

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|--|---|---|
|  |   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Taylor, Steven L. 2016. “Greg Abbott, Anti-Federalist.” <i>Outside the Beltway</i>.</li> <li>6. Levinson, Sanford. 2016. “Greg Abbott’s right about one thing: We should amend the Constitution.” <i>TribTalk: Perspectives on Texas</i>.</li> </ol>  |
| <b>WEEK 3</b>  |   |   |
| <p>Aug. 24<br/>Aug. 26</p>                                     | <p>Civil Liberties<br/>Civil Rights</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Challenge</i>, chapter 15</li> <li>2. <i>Challenge</i>, chapter 16</li> <li>3. Explore the ACLU’s <i>Know Your Rights</i> Page: <a href="https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/">https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/</a></li> <li>4. Chilton et al. 2020. “Red and Blue America Agree That Now Is the Time to Violate the Constitution.” <i>The Atlantic</i>.</li> <li>5. Balz, Dan. 2020. “The politics of race are shifting, and politicians are struggling to keep pace.” <i>The Washington Post</i>.</li> <li>6. *Rauch, Jonathan. 1995. “In Defense of Prejudice.” PDF available in Sakai. Also searchable on Rauch’s website.* <i>Warning: This piece contains racial and other slurs in quotations as examples of hate speech.</i></li> <li>7. Optional: TEDx Talk video by Dr. Megan Ming Francis, 2016, “Let’s get to the root of racial injustice.” <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aCn72iXO9s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aCn72iXO9s</a></li> <li>8. Optional: McCollough Seletzky, Leta. 2020. “We Are Losing a Generation of Civil-Rights Memories.” <i>The Atlantic</i>.</li> </ol> |
| <b>Linkage Institutions: Connecting Citizens to Government</b> |   |   |
| <b>WEEK 4</b>  |   |   |
| <p>Aug. 31<br/>Sep. 2</p>                                      | <p>Political Parties</p>                | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Challenge</i>, chapters 8</li> <li>2. Azari, Julia. 2016. “Why Hasn’t the Republican Party Collapsed?” <i>Politico Magazine</i>.</li> <li>3. Cassese, Erin C. 2019. “Partisan Dehumanization in American Politics. <i>Political Behavior Blog</i>.</li> <li>4. Diamond, Larry. 2015. “Ending the Presidential-Debate Duopoly.” <i>The Atlantic</i>.</li> <li>5. Weese, Stephen. 2016. “Are we witnessing the end of the two-party system?” <i>Foundation for Economic Education</i>.</li> </ol>  |

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|---|--|--|
|   |  | 6. Optional: Birkhead, Nathaniel and Marjorie Randon Hershey. 2017. “Why it’s unfair to tar all party activists with the same brush of extremism.” <i>LSE US Centre’s USAPP Blog</i> .   |
| <b>WEEK 5</b>   |  |  |
| Sep. 7<br>Sep. 9  | Campaigns and Elections                                  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>**Essay #1 due** (September 9)</b></li> <li>2. <i>Challenge</i>, chapter 9</li> <li>3. Lenchner, Paul. 2020. “The Electoral College was designed for a much different voting environment. Let’s ditch it.” <i>The Dallas Morning News</i>.</li> <li>4. King, James D. 2020. “Wyoming had made important reforms to its nomination process even before Covid-19 disrupted the presidential primary.” <i>LSE US Centre’s USAPP Blog</i>.</li> <li>5. Posner, Richard A. 2012. “In Defense of the Electoral College.” <i>Slate</i>.</li> <li>6. Guelzo, Allen C. and James H. Hulme. 2017. “In Defense of the Electoral College” in <i>Picking the President: Understanding the Electoral College</i> edited by Eric Burin.</li> </ol> |
| <b>WEEK 6</b>   |  |  |
| Sep. 14<br>Sep. 16  | The Media and Political Communication<br>Interest Groups | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Challenge</i>, chapter 6</li> <li>2. <i>Challenge</i>, chapter 10</li> </ol>  |
| <b>WEEK 7—EXAM I WEEK</b>   |  |  |
| Sep. 21<br>Sep. 23  | Exam I Review<br><b>**EXAM I**</b>                       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Study chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16</li> <li>2. Bring Questions</li> <li>3. Exam on Foundations and Linkage Institutions</li> </ol>   |
| <b>Citizen Political Behavior: Are Americans “Good” Citizens?</b> |  |  |
| <b>WEEK 8</b>   |  |  |
| Sep. 28<br>Sep. 30  | Public Opinion   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Challenge</i>, chapter 5</li> <li>2. Schattschneider, E.E. 1960. <i>The Semisovereign People</i>. Hinsdale, IL: The Dryden Press. Chapter 8 (pp. 126-139). PDF in Sakai ‘Week 8’ folder.</li> <li>3. Somin, Ilya. 2016. “Time to start taking political ignorance seriously” <i>The Washington Post: The Volokh Conspiracy, Opinion</i>.</li> <li>4. Stanton, Zack. 2020. “Does Anyone Really Change Their Votes?” <i>Politico Magazine</i>.</li> </ol>   |

| <b>WEEK 9</b>                              |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Oct. 5<br>Oct. 7                           | Participation and<br>Turnout                    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Challenge</i>, chapter 7</li> <li>2. Victor, Jennifer N. 2019. "A simple model of political engagement." <i>Mischiefs of Faction</i>.</li> <li>3. Shenkman, Rick. 2019. "The Shocking Paper Predicting the End of Democracy" <i>Politico Magazine</i>.</li> <li>4. Farmer, Brit McCandless. 2020. "The Debate Over Poll Watchers in the 2020 Election." <i>CBS News</i>.</li> <li>5. Caputo, Angela, Geoff Hing, and Johnny Kauffman. 2019. "After the Purge." <i>American Public Media Reports</i>.<br/><a href="https://www.apmreports.org/story/2019/10/29/georgia-voting-registration-records-removed">https://www.apmreports.org/story/2019/10/29/georgia-voting-registration-records-removed</a> (Read or listen)</li> </ol> |
| <b>Institutions of American Government</b> |   |   |
| <b>WEEK 10</b>                             |   |   |
| Oct. 12<br>Oct. 14                         | Congress  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>**Essay #2 due**</b></li> <li>2. <i>Challenge</i>, chapter 11</li> <li>3. Sakai readings</li> </ol>  |
| <b>WEEK 11</b>                             |   |   |
| Oct. 19<br>Oct. 21                         | The President and<br>the Executive<br>Branch    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Challenge</i>, chapters 12 &amp; 13</li> </ol>   |
| <b>WEEK 12</b>                             |   |   |
| Oct. 26<br>Oct. 28                         | The Courts                                      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Challenge</i>, chapter 14</li> <li>2. Johnson, Ben and Logan Strother. 2018. "The Supreme Court hasn't followed public opinion for 50 years. Why would it start now?" <i>Washington Post, Monkey Cage</i>.</li> <li>3. Hamm, Andrew. 2018. "Forthcoming paper on influence of law clerks recalls Rehnquist article from 1957." <i>SCOTUSblog</i>.</li> <li>4. Vedantam, Shankar. 2014. "Research: Children of Judges May Influence Court Decisions." <i>WBUR News</i>. Read of listen (4:33):<br/><a href="https://www.wbur.org/npr/316552657/research-children-of-judges-may-influence-court-decisions">https://www.wbur.org/npr/316552657/research-children-of-judges-may-influence-court-decisions</a></li> </ol>               |
| <b>WEEK 13—Exam II Week</b>                |   |   |
| Nov. 2<br>Nov. 4                           | <b>** EXAM II**</b><br>Post-Election<br>Debrief | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Exam on Political Behavior and Institutions</b></li> <li>2. Review election results on ABC, NYT, FiveThirtyEight, RealClearPolitics</li> </ol>   |

**Democracy and the Future of American Politics**

**WEEK 14**

|                                 |   |   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Nov. 9                          | Democracy and<br>the Future of<br>American Politics | 1. Sakai readings<br>2. <b><u>**Essay #3 due by Nov. 20 at 5:00pm**</u></b> |
| <b>**FINAL EXAM—EXAM WEEK**</b> |   |   |