

SOSC3000I: American Politics

Division of Social Science
Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Spring 2024

Instructor Information

Primary Instructor

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Overview

This course provides an advanced overview of American politics and government. Course material is divided into three broad sections. The first section briefly covers the historical, philosophical, and constitutional foundations of the United States. The second section examines the major American formal governing institutions (e.g., the presidency, the Congress, the courts, and the bureaucracy) and organizations (e.g., political parties). The third section covers mass and elite political behavior and contemporary political issues. Throughout the course, there will be a strong focus on relating the modern American political environment to the country's founding principles and philosophies, as well the historical development that led to the current status quo. Most topics will be covered using both lectures and in-class discussions and activities.

Meeting Time and Place

Wednesdays and Fridays, 13:30 - 14:50

Room 2463, Main Academic Building

Office Hours

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00–12:00

Or by appointment

Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Describe the structure of the United States Constitution.
2. Explain the formal law/policy-making process at the national level of the United States.
3. Identify and describe the basic structure of the major formal governing institutions of the United States.
4. Explain the role of mass and elite political behavior in the policymaking and leader selection process.
5. Apply their understanding of formal decision-making processes and norms of political behavior to contemporary political issues.

Grading

20% Foundations Exam (September 30, In Class)

One week after completing the *Foundations* section, students will take an in-class exam covering all of the material for that section. The exam will be a mixture of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and short written answers. [ILOs 1 and 2]

20% Institutions Exam (November 4, In Class))

One week after completing the *Institutions* section, students will take an in-class exam covering all of the material for that section. The exam will be a mixture of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and short written answers. [ILOs 2 and 3]

35% Election Analysis Project

2024 is a Presidential election year in the United States. In November, the Presidency, all seats in the House of Representatives, and about one-third of seats in the Senate will be filled by an election on a constitutionally mandated schedule. During the Spring 2024 semester, various U.S. states will be holding Presidential and congressional primary elections. These are elections in which political parties choose the candidates that will appear under their party labels in the November election. Students will complete a two-part project focused on a primary election in a specific state or congressional district. The specific election that will be the focus of the project will be assigned by the instructor. The two parts of the project are as follows:

15% Election Analysis Group Presentation (May 10, In Class)

On the final day of class, student groups will deliver a presentation that details what happened in their assigned primary race. The material presented is expected to be largely descriptive, focusing on the characteristics of the candidates, the characteristics of the voters, the issues of the campaign, and details about the election itself in terms of voter turnout, election results, and demographic breakdowns. More details will be provided in class.

20% Election Analysis Individual Essay (Due May 24 by 11:59PM)

About two weeks after the final class session, students will submit an individual essay of 6–8 double-spaced pages that describes and analyzes what happened in their assigned primary race. The student writing for the individual assignment is expected to be far more analytical than the group presentation, drawing upon materials from the lectures and the readings to place the campaign and the election result in the broader context of the American political system. In other words, the individual essays will focus not only on what happened, but also why, and how it relates to the broader historical and cultural political context. More details will be provided in class.

The number of groups and group sizes will be contingent on the number of students in the course. After the specific primary races are assigned, students may begin gathering details about the constituency and the candidates and their campaigns. But the result of the election will not be known until the respective election day. [ILOs 4 and 5]

15% Class Participation

Class participation, particularly on activity days, will be very important for the smooth functioning of class. Appropriate participation will often require preparation outside of

class. After each class, the instructor will assess student contributions. [ILOs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5]

10% Attendance

Attendance is required. After the drop/add period, students can miss two class sessions for any reason without penalty. Any additional absences will only be exempted with a valid excuse backed up by documentation.

Readings

Required readings should be completed prior to the date they are listed on the schedule. All readings will be provided through Canvas. There is no text that is perfect for this course, and therefore there is no text that students are required to purchase. However, the following book is *highly* recommended:

- Kollman, Ken. 2019. *The American Political System*, Third Core Edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Schedule

Schedule is subject to change with advanced notice from the instructor. If any changes are made to the schedule or readings, said changes will be announced in class and an updated version of the syllabus posted to Canvas.

Wednesday, January 31

- Topic: Introduction and Overview I

Friday, February 2

- Topic: Introduction and Overview II

Foundations

Wednesday, February 7

- Topic: The American Political Tradition
- Required Readings:
 - Smith, Rogers M. 1993. “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America.” *American Political Science Review* 87(3): 549–566.
 - Kloppenborg, James T. 2010. “‘A Nation Arguing with Its Conscience’: Deliberative Democracy, Philosophical Pragmatism, and Barack Obama’s Conception of American Governance.” *Harvard Magazine* November–December: 34–40

Friday, February 9

- Topic: The Constitution I
- Required Readings:
 - U.S. Constitution.
 - Madison, James. 1787. *Federalist No. 10*.
 - Kollman, Ken. 2019. *The American Political System*, Third Core Edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. [pp. 33–46]

Wednesday, February 14

- Topic: The Constitution II
- Required Readings:
 - Dahl, Robert. 2001. *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* New Haven: Yale University Press. [Chapters 1–2]

Friday, February 16

- Topic: Federalism
- Required Readings:
 - Buchanan, James M. 1995. “Federalism as an Ideal Political Order and an Objective for Constitutional Reform.” *Publius* 25(2): 19–27.
 - Kettl, Donald F. 2010. “Federalism: Battles on the Front Lines of Public Policy.” In *Principles and Practice of American Politics: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 4th Edition Samuel Kernell and Steven S. Smith eds. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, pp. 82–102.

Institutions

Wednesday, February 21

- Topic: The Congress
- Required Readings:
 - Kollman, Ken. 2019. *The American Political System*, Third Core Edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. [pp. 147–186]

Friday, February 23

- Topic: In-class Activity (TBD)
- Required Readings:
 - TBD

Wednesday, February 28

- Topic: The Presidency
- Required Readings:
 - Kollman, Ken. 2019. *The American Political System*, Third Core Edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. [pp. 199–225]

Friday, March 1

- Foundations Exam

Wednesday, March 6

- Topic: The Judiciary
- Required Readings:
 - Kollman, Ken. 2019. *The American Political System*, Third Core Edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. [pp. 289–311]

Friday, March 8

- Topic: In-class Activity (TBD)
- Required Readings:
 - TBD

Wednesday, March 13

- Topic: The Bureaucracy
- Required Readings:
 - Kollman, Ken. 2019. *The American Political System*, Third Core Edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. [pp. 243–276]

Friday, March 15

- Topic: In-class Activity (TBD)
- Required Readings:
 - TBD

Wednesday, March 20

- Topic: Political Parties
- Required Readings:
 - Kollman, Ken. 2019. *The American Political System*, Third Core Edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. [pp. 449–474; 477–479; 482]
 - Aldrich, John H. 1995. *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [pp. 14–27]

Friday, March 22

- Topic: In-class Activity (TBD)
- Required Readings:
 - TBD

Wednesday, March 27

- Institutions Exam

Political Behavior

Wednesday, April 10

- Topic: Public Opinion
- Required Readings:
 - Asher, Herbert. 1998. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, 4th ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press. [pp. 141-169]
 - Kollman, Ken. 2019. *The American Political System*, Third Core Edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. [pp. 329–330; 350–362]

Friday, April 12

- Topic: In-class Activity (TBD)
- Required Readings:
 - TBD

Wednesday, April 17

- Topic: Campaigns and Elections
- Required Readings:
 - Sides, John, and Jake Haselswerdt. 2011. “Campaigns and Elections.” In *New Directions in Public Opinion*, Adam J. Berinsky ed. New York: Routledge, pp. 241–257.

Friday, April 19

- Topic: In-class Activity (TBD)
- Required Readings:
 - TBD

Wednesday, April 24

- Topic: Political Participation
- Required Readings:
 - Kollman, Ken. 2019. *The American Political System*, Third Core Edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. [pp. 373–397]

Friday, April 26

- Topic: Political Geography
- Required Readings:
 - Mayhew, David R. 2013. *Partisan Balance: Why Political Parties Don't Kill the U.S. Constitutional System*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [Chapters 1–2]

Friday, May 3

- Topic: Multiculturalism, Race, and Immigration
- Required Readings:
 - Kinder, Donald R., and Lynn M. Sanders. 1996. *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Chapter 1]
 - Putnam, Robert D. 2007. “*E Pluribus Unum*: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century—The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture.” *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30(2): 137–174.

Wednesday, May 8

- Topic: Wrap-up

Friday, May 10

- Election Analysis Group Presentations