

Midwestern State University
Department of Political Science

POLS 1333: AMERICAN GOVERNMENT I

Fall 2021

Section L16 MWF 9:00-9:50am (DB 329)

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Office Hours: TWR 2:00 pm-4:00 pm, and by appointment (via Zoom or Skype)
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Course Description

This course will introduce students to the American political system with a brief survey of the political dynamics of the state of Texas. By the conclusion of this course, students will have a basic understanding of some key components of American and Texas politics, such as political culture, the constitution, federalism, election, political parties, interest groups, and the media. To do that, we will look at historical evolution of the American political system and see how Texas state politics have developed in conjunction with the federal government. This course also provides students with opportunities to practice various analytical skills in a range of real-world cases. Classes will include lecture, debates, and presentations, which will help students stay up to date on current issues.

Course Objectives

By the completion of this course, students are expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes. They will be able to:

- describe the structure of federalism and the key features of the U.S. Constitution.
- understand the main ideas of the Founding Fathers and the philosophers and how their ideas influenced the creation of the Constitution.
- explain US political parties, their history and formation, and interest groups.
- articulate how campaigns and elections work in the United States and the state of Texas.
- discuss the media and how it influences political outcomes in the United States and the state of Texas.
- Outline how collective action by citizenry impacts policy outcomes and institutional rules in the United States and the state of Texas.

NOTE: The syllabus provides a general plan for the course, and changes may be necessary throughout the semester. Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor. Any changes made to this syllabus will be announced in class and posted on D2L.

Course Requirements

Completing ALL the readings and regular attendance will be required of all students. Active participation in discussions is critical for students to succeed in this course.

Assignment	Point	Notes
Final exam	30	Online format
Midterm exam	30	Online format
Current event presentation	20	Case studies & discussion leading
Movie reflection papers (2)	10 (5 x 2)	Over 500 words each
Engagement	10	Attendance & participation

- 1. Exams (Midterm: 30 points / Final: 30 points):** Each exam will consist of multiple-choice questions and some short answer questions. Questions will test your understanding of the key concepts of American and Texas politics that will be covered in class. For both exams, I will utilize the Respondus Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor. A study guide will be provided before the exams.
- 2. Current event presentation (20 points):** All students are required to sign up for an individual slide presentation (approximately 20 minutes) in the first week. The presentation should include an in-depth case study on a topical issue and some questions for class discussion. Each student will decide his/her own presentation topic and notify the instructor by the end of the first week. An effective and interactive presentation will earn extra credits.
- 3. Movie reflections papers (10 points):** During the semester, we will watch 2 movies on American politics. You will be expected to respond to each of the movies in a short reflection paper (more than 500 words). Your response must be critical and go beyond a summary or a description of those movies. Originality will be critical for your grade (similarity rate above 5% will be penalized). All papers should be submitted electronically via D2L.
- 4. Engagement with the course (10 points):** Your attendance and participation are vital to learning the material presented in this course. Without any change of university-wide COVID-19 policy, you will be expected to come to class prepared to engage thoughtfully, listen attentively, and interact with your peers respectfully. However, please do not come to class if you are feeling sick or think you might have been exposed to COVID-19. Contact me (via email) and provide details about your situation at your earliest convenience for your absence to be excused. Over the course of the semester, 6 excused absences will be allowed for all students. More than 6 absences and unexcused absences will lower your final grade. As the course instructor of record, I reserve the right to move the course online, either partially, or in full, in the event of a personal emergency that prohibits me from delivering the course fully in-person. More instructions will be given at that time.

Your final grade will be based on the quality of assignments listed above. It will be determined using the following percentage scale:

A = 100 – 90 B = 89 – 80 C = 79 – 70 D = 69 – 60 F < 60

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

All the material for this course will be located on the MSU D2L platform. Each student is expected to be familiar with this platform as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into D2L through the MSU homepage. If you experience any difficulties, please contact the IT technicians immediately and let me know your problems. DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO TAKE QUIZZES OR EXAMS..

For your midterm and final examinations, I will utilize the Respondus Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor. In order to install these programs, you will need the following:

- **A desktop computer or laptop** other than a Chromebook. Chromebooks are NOT compatible with the Respondus Lockdown Browser and Monitor. Apple iPads may be used for quizzes and exams, but these are not advised for any assignment with a written component. Mobile phones and similar devices are not compatible with the required programs.
- **A working webcam on the computing device** used for the exam.
- **Microsoft Office or a compatible program** for written assignments. Access to Microsoft Office 365 is available through the Office 365 for Students on the Microsoft website.

On Academic Honesty

Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work not the individuals to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the [Office of Student Conduct](#).

Student Disability Services

Any student having an education disability plan on file with the university needs to inform me within the first week of the class, so I make the appropriate arrangements to accommodate your situation. In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to Disability Support Services.

Textbooks

1. Benjamin Ginsberg, Benjamin, Margaret Weir, Theodore Lowi and Caroline Tolbert. 2019. *We the People*. 13th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. ["*We the People*"]
2. Champagne, Anthony, and Edward Harpham. 2019. *Governing Texas: An Introduction to Texas Politics*. 5th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. ["*Governing Texas*"]

Course Schedule

Week 1 – American Political Culture and the State of Texas

Why is government needed? What do Americans think about government? How has the social composition of the American population changed over time? Why does Texas' political culture matter?

Monday, August 23

- Introduction to the course

Wednesday, August 25

- *We the People*, Chapter 1 (2-33)

Friday, August 27

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-40)
- Presentation sign-up deadline

Week 2 – The Founding and the Constitution

What does government do and why does it matter? Why are taxes always controversial? Why has the Constitution changed over time? Is the American Constitution a model for the world?

Monday, August 30

- *We the People*, Chapter 2 (pp. 34-45)

Wednesday, September 1

- *We the People*, Chapter 2 (pp. 46-67)

Friday, September 3

- **Movie Watching: "Loving" (Netflix)**
- **A reflection paper should be submitted by September 7 (11:00 pm)**

Week 3 – Federalism

Which level of government has had the most influence over citizens' lives? How have Supreme Court decisions affected the balance of power between the federal government and the states? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of a unitary system?

Monday, September 6

- **Labor Day (No class)**

Wednesday, September 8

- *We the People*, Chapter 3 (pp. 68-97)

Friday, September 10

- Student presentation 1 & 2

Week 4 – The Texas Constitution

Why does the Texas Constitution matter? What are the main functions of state constitutions? What are the major provisions of the Texas Constitution? (Why) do we need to change it?

Monday, September 13

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 2 (pp. 41-58)

Wednesday, September 15

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 2 (pp. 59-80)

Friday, September 17

- Student presentation 3 & 4

Week 5 – Texas in the Federal System

Why and how does federalism matter to Texas? Why do certain states receive more funding than others at different time periods? How do federal funds flow to Texas? Should the federal government be allowed to impose unfunded mandates on the states?

Monday, September 20

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 3 (pp. 81-99)

Wednesday, September 22

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 3 (pp. 100-114)

Friday, September 24

- Student presentation 5 & 6

Week 6 – Political Participation and Voting

Why did the US government deny participation to so many for so long? What forces influenced the expansion of voting rights? Why are upper-income Americans more likely to be voters than lower-income Americans?

Monday, September 27

- *We the People*, Chapter 8 (pp. 264-288)

Wednesday, September 29

- *We the People*, Chapter 8 (pp. 389-303)

Friday, October 1

- Student presentation 7 & 8

Week 7 – Political Parties

What rules governing the American electoral process promote a two-party system? How do parties attract the popular support they need to win elections? Should Texas make it easier for minor parties to gain political power?

Monday, October 4

- *We the People*, Chapter 9 (pp. 304-329)

Wednesday, October 6

- *We the People*, Chapter 9 (pp. 330-343)

Friday, October 8

- Student presentation 9 & 10

Week 8 – Political Parties

Would people be more or less inclined to participate in politics if politicians did not identify with particular parties?

Monday, October 11 (Online lecture and discussion)

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 4 (pp. 115-150)

Wednesday, October 13

- Midterm Review

Friday, October 15

- Midterm
- Should be completed within the 24-hour window

Week 9 – Campaigns and Elections

How do district boundaries affect elections for the U.S. House and state legislatures? Is it fair that relatively small states, such as Iowa and New Hampshire have outsized influence in picking presidents? Do American political campaigns help voters make a decision?

Monday, October 18

- *We the People*, Chapter 10 (pp. 344-368)

Wednesday, October 20

- *We the People*, Chapter 10 (pp. 369-393)

Friday, October 22

- Student presentation 11 & 12

Week 10 – Campaigns and Elections in Texas

How do the rules for voting affect turnout among different group of Texans? Why voter participation in Texas is the lowest in the nation? What can we do to increase voter participation in the short term? In the long term?

Monday, October 25

- Governing Texas, Chapter 5 (pp. 151-168)

Wednesday, October 27

- Governing Texas, Chapter 5 (pp. 169-181)

Friday, October 29

- Student presentation 13 & 14

Week 11 – Groups and Interests

What are the major types of interest groups and whom do they represent? How do interest groups and social groups organize? Why do the number of interest and advocacy groups has grown in recent decades?

Monday, November 1

- *We the People*, Chapter 11 (pp. 394-418)

Wednesday, November 3

- *We the People*, Chapter 11 (pp. 419-427)

Friday, November 5

- *Movie Watching: "13th" (Netflix)*
- *A reflection paper should be submitted by November 9 (11:00 pm)*

Week 12 – Interest Groups and Lobbying in Texas

What are the major types of interest groups in Texas and how do they influence Texas government? How do ordinary individuals influence Texas government?

Monday, November 8

- Governing Texas, Chapter 6 (pp. 185-201)

Wednesday, November 10

- Governing Texas, Chapter 6 (pp. 201-214)

Friday, November 12

- Student presentation 15 & 16

Week 13 – Public Opinion

Questions: Why does the media focus on issues on which public opinion is sharply divided while there are in fact many issues on which Americans largely agree? Do liberals live in areas with other liberals and conservatives live in areas with other conservatives? What are the political consequences of geographic sorting?

Monday, November 15

- *We the People*, Chapter 6 (pp. 180-200)

Wednesday, November 17

- *We the People*, Chapter 6 (pp. 201-225)

Friday, November 19

- Student presentation 17 & 18

Week 14 – The Media

In recent years, a number of major media corporations have acquired numerous newspapers, television stations, and radio properties. Is media concentration a serious problem? Are there differences between how younger adults and older adults get their news?

Monday, November 22

- *We the People*, Chapter 7 (pp. 226-263)

Wednesday, November 24

- Thanksgiving break (no class)

Friday, November 26

- Thanksgiving break (no class)

Week 15 – The Media

Monday, November 29

- *We the People*, Chapter 7 (pp. 226-263)
- Student presentation 19 & 20

Wednesday, December 1

- Student presentation 21 & 22

Friday, December 3

- Final Exam Review

Week 16 – Final Exam (December 8)

- Should be completed within the 24-hour window