

Midwestern State University
Department of Political Science

POLS 1333: AMERICAN GOVERNMENT I

Spring 2022

Section 204 TR 8:00-9:20am (PY 200)

Instructor: Dr. Juheon Lee

Office: O'Donohoe Hall 203

Office Hours: Tuesday 2pm-4pm, Wednesday 10 am-12 pm, Thursday 2pm-4pm, and by appointment

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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 the 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 study 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, 4 excused absences will be allowed for all students. More than 4 absences and unexcused absences will lower your final grade. I may 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, Theodore Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline Tolbert, and Andrea Campbell. 2021. *We the People*. 13th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. ["*We the People*"]
2. Anthony Champagne, Edward Harpham, and Jason Casellas. 2021. *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

Discussion questions: 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? Is the American Constitution a model for the world?

Tuesday, January 11

- Introduction to the course
- *We the People*, Chapter 1 (pp. 2-33)
- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-40)
- Presentation sign-up

Thursday, January 13

- Southern Political Science Association Conference attendance (No class)

Week 2 – The Founding and the Constitution

Discussion questions: What does government do and why does it matter? Why are taxes always controversial? Why has the Constitution changed over time?

Tuesday, January 18

- *We the People*, Chapter 2 (pp. 34-67)

Thursday, January 20

- *We the People*, Chapter 2 (pp. 34-67)
- Presentation sign-up deadline

Week 3 – Federalism

Discussion questions: 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?

Tuesday, January 25

- *We the People*, Chapter 3 (pp. 68-97)
- Student presentation 1

Thursday, January 27

- *We the People*, Chapter 3 (pp. 68-97)
- Student presentation 2

Week 4 – The Texas Constitution

Discussion questions: 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?

Tuesday, February 1

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 2 (pp. 41-80)
- Student presentation 3

Thursday, February 3

- Movie Watching: *"Loving"* (Netflix)
- A reflection paper should be submitted by February 6 (11:00 pm)

Week 5 – Texas in the Federal System

Discussion Questions: 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?

Tuesday, February 8

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 3 (pp. 81-114)
- Student presentation 4

Thursday, February 10

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 3 (pp. 81-114)
- Student presentation 5

Week 6 – Political Participation and Voting

Discussion Questions: Why did the US government denied 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?

Tuesday, February 15

- *We the People*, Chapter 8 (pp. 264-303)
- Student presentation 6

Thursday, February 17

- *We the People*, Chapter 8 (pp. 264-303)
- Student presentation 7

Week 7 – Political Parties

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

Tuesday, February 22

- *We the People*, Chapter 9 (pp. 304-343)
- Student presentation 8

Thursday, February 24

- *We the People*, Chapter 9 (pp. 304-343)
- Student presentation 9

Week 8 – Political Parties (Midterm)

Tuesday, March 1

- Student presentation 10
- Midterm Review

Thursday, March 3

- Midterm (Online)
- Should be completed within the 24-hour window

Week 9 – Campaigns and Elections

Discussion Questions: 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?

Tuesday, March 8

- *We the People*, Chapter 10 (pp. 344-393)
- Student presentation 11

Thursday, March 10

- *We the People*, Chapter 10 (pp. 344-393)
- Student presentation 12

Week 10 – Spring Break (March 14 – March 18)

Week 11 – Campaigns and Elections in Texas

Discussion Questions: How do the rules for voting affect turnout among different groups 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?

Tuesday, March 22

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 5 (pp. 151-184)
- Student presentation 13

Tuesday, March 24

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 5 (pp. 151-184)
- Student presentation 14

Week 12 – Groups and Interests (Online Lecture & Discussion)

Discussion Questions: 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?

Tuesday, March 29

- *We the People*, Chapter 11 (pp. 394-427)

Thursday, March 31

- *We the People*, Chapter 11 (pp. 394-427)

Week 13 – Interest Groups and Lobbying in Texas

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

Tuesday, April 5

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 6 (pp. 185-214)
- Student presentation 15

Thursday, April 7

- *Movie Watching: "13th" (Netflix)*
- **A reflection paper should be submitted by April 10 (11:00 pm)**

Week 14 – Public Opinion

Discussion 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?

Tuesday, April 12

- *We the People*, Chapter 6 (pp. 180-225)
- Student presentation 16

Thursday, April 14

- *Holiday Break (April 13 – April 17)*

Week 15 – The Media

Discussion Questions: 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?

Tuesday, April 19

- *We the People*, Chapter 7 (pp. 226-263)
- Student presentation 17

Thursday, April 21

- *We the People*, Chapter 7 (pp. 226-263)
- Student presentation 18

Week 16 – The Media

Tuesday, April 26

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

Thursday, April 28

- Student presentation 20
- Final exam review

Week 17 – Final Exam (May 3)

- Should be completed within the 24-hour window (May 3, 9:00 – May 4, 9:00 am)