

Survey of American Political Behavior and Institutions

POLS 6309 | Spring 2026

University of Houston

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Class Meeting: Wednesday 1:00-4:00 PM **Location:** PGH 310

Course Description

This seminar surveys the scientific study of American politics, paying equal attention to mass political behavior and political institutions. We examine how institutions structure the choices citizens face and the consequences those choices produce. We integrate classic theoretical frameworks with contemporary empirical research. The course is designed to provide an advanced understanding of American politics through classic and cutting-edge scholarship, preparing students for comprehensive exams, original research, and teaching in American politics. No graduate class can adequately encompass all of the important literature on a subject, so the “Recommended” readings will provide you with a supplementary reading list for those who plan to pursue these topics as a field of study or those who are planning on taking comps in this area.

While the class focuses on American politics, many concepts apply to related questions in comparative politics, and class discussions will welcome those linkages.

Instructional Approach

This is a discussion-based seminar. I may lecture from time to time, but in general we will be discussing the readings and themes for the week, so active participation is a requirement.

Learning Objectives

Students should be able to understand, explicate, and do original research on American political behavior from the perspective of modern positive political science. Additionally, students should learn to value rigorous descriptive analysis, recognizing that gathering accurate data and understanding the landscape of political phenomena is a vital scientific contribution in its own right and a necessary prerequisite to causal explanation.

Course Requirements

Component	Weight
Seminar participation	25%
Weekly response memos (at least 4, drop lowest)	15%
Midterm exam (in-class)	15%
Final exam (in-class)	15%
Research proposal	30%

Participation (25%)

Preparation for and active participation in weekly discussions is of the utmost importance. **Why participation matters:** Graduate seminars are fundamentally different from undergraduate courses. The seminar format is designed to develop your capacity for scholarly discourse—the ability to engage critically with complex arguments, identify theoretical assumptions, evaluate empirical strategies, and synthesize across multiple works. These skills are essential for comprehensive exams, dissertation research, conference presentations, and your professional career as a scholar. You cannot develop these abilities passively. Learning to think on your feet, defend your interpretations, respond to challenges, and build on others’ insights requires active engagement in discussion.

To facilitate this learning environment, **I will call on students Socratic-style throughout the semester.** You should expect to be called on at any time to discuss any reading—including readings you may not have expected to discuss that day. This is not meant to be punitive, but rather to ensure everyone is prepared and to give each of you practice articulating ideas under pressure, a skill you will need for conference Q&A, job talks, and teaching.

Preparation involves more than just doing the readings—come to class having thought about the material and organized your thoughts. **Tips to get started:** - Pick up one or two themes or arguments from the readings and really analyze them. - Evaluate the readings rather than editorializing. - Think about the work in relation to other theories or empirical findings we’ve read. - Connect the work’s methodology to other methodologies. - Think about what “conventional wisdom” holds – does the work contradict this?

Each week, bring questions and points to discuss. The following questions may help organize your thoughts:

1. What is the main contribution of the reading to scholarly knowledge?
2. What theoretical tradition is the reading working within or in contrast to?
3. What hypotheses are offered for empirical evidence?
4. Are the data and measures appropriate for evaluating the theory and hypothesis?
5. What are the main findings?
6. What are the implications for understanding American politics?
7. What are your criticisms of the research?

Response Memos (15%)

Response memos are brief in-class writing assignments (15-20 minutes) designed to ensure engagement with the readings and facilitate discussion. You will complete at least four of these over the course of the semester. Your lowest memo grade will be dropped.

The topics will be given out on the day of the memo, which will not be known in advance. Memos are not to summarize the readings; rather, they are intended to assess the usefulness, strengths, and weaknesses of the research. Your papers should focus on a theoretical or methodological concern from the readings, discuss the issue, raise questions, and suggest answers.

Midterm Exam (15%)

An in-class exam administered during the last class of the behavior section (Week 7). The exam will require you to synthesize material from the first half of the course, covering public opinion, partisanship, polarization, and political behavior. Format: identifications and short essays. Closed book.

Final Exam (15%)

An in-class exam administered during the last class of the institutions section (Week 14). The exam will cover material from the institutions portion of the course and will not be cumulative. Format: identifications and short essays. Closed book.

Research Proposal (30%)

The research proposal is the capstone assignment, demonstrating your ability to develop an original research question rooted in the literature covered in this course. The proposal should be a **minimum of 10 pages** and a **maximum of 12 pages** (excluding references) and include the following components:

- 1. Research Question and Motivation (1-2 pages)** - A clear, answerable research question - Why does this question matter for understanding American politics? - What is the puzzle or gap in existing knowledge?
- 2. Literature Review (2-3 pages)** - Situate your question within the relevant scholarly debates - You must engage substantively with at least **5 readings from the syllabus** plus additional sources - Identify what we know, what we don't know, and where your project fits
- 3. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses (1-2 pages)** - What is your theoretical argument? - Derive at least two testable hypotheses from your theory
- 4. Research Design and Data (3-4 pages)** - What is your empirical strategy? - What data would you use? Identify specific datasets, or describe what you would collect - **Preliminary data work:** - For quantitative projects: Include at least one table or figure from your data—even if just descriptive statistics or a visualization showing variation in your key variables - For qualitative projects: Provide evidence of preliminary case selection, source identification, or archival exploration - What are the limitations of your design?

Note: While this course emphasizes quantitative empirical research, qualitative research proposals are welcome. If you plan to pursue a qualitative project, indicate this in your Week 5 research question memo.

Milestones:

Date	Deliverable
Week 5 (February 25)	Research question memo (1 page): State your question and its connection to course themes. If pursuing a qualitative project, indicate this here.
Week 12 (April 22)	Draft research design (3-4 pages): Submitted for review.
May 12	Final proposal due

Schedule of Classes

Week 1 (January 21): Introduction—Epistemology and the Study of American Politics

Required:

- Popper, Karl. “Falsification and the Criterion of Demarcation.” In *Philosophy of Science*, Sections 1-2.
- Almond, Gabriel A. 1996. “Political Science: The History of the Discipline.” In *A New Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Goodin and Klingemann.
- Gerring, John. 2012. “Mere Description.” *British Journal of Political Science* 42(4): 721–746.
- Samii, Cyrus. 2016. “Causal Empiricism in Quantitative Research.” *Journal of Politics* 78:941-55.
- Morris, Irwin L. *The American Presidency: An Analytical Approach*, Chapter 2.

Recommended:

- Friedman, Milton. 1953. “The Methodology of Positive Economics.” In *Essays in Positive Economics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 3-43.
- Riker, William H. 1990. “Political Science and Rational Choice.” In *Perspectives on Positive Political Economy*, ed. Alt and Shepsle.
- Freedman, David A. 1991. “Statistical Models and Shoe Leather.” *Sociological Methodology* 21: 291-313.
- King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*, Chapter 1.
- Pierson, Paul, and Theda Skocpol. 2002. “Historical Institutionalism in Contemporary Political Science.” In *Political Science: State of the Discipline*.
- Diermeier, Daniel and Keith Krehbiel. 2003. “Institutionalism as a Methodology.” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 15:123-144.
- Angrist, Joshua D., and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. 2010. “The Credibility Revolution in Empirical Economics: How Better Research Design is Taking the Con out of Econometrics.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 24(2): 3-30.
- Dunning, Thad. 2012. *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge University Press, Chapters 1-2.
- Fisher, R.A. *The Design of Experiments*, Chapters 1-2.
- North, Douglass C. *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*, Chapters 1-2.

- Shepsle, Kenneth A. *Analyzing Politics*, Chapters 1-2.
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Part I: Foundations of Public Opinion

Week 2 (January 28): Public Opinion—Concepts, Measurement, and Democratic Competence

Required:

- Page, Benjamin and Robert Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public*, Chapters 1-2. (72)
- Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Chapters 2-3. (48)
- Zaller, John and Stanley Feldman. 1992. “A Simple Theory of the Survey Response.” *American Journal of Political Science* 36:579-616. (39)
- Lupia, Arthur. 1994. “Shortcuts Versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections.” *American Political Science Review* 88:63-76. (15)
- Delli Carpini, Michael and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*, Chapters 2 (44)

Recommended:

- Lippmann, Walter. 1922. *Public Opinion*, Chapters 1-5.
 - Sniderman, Paul, Richard Brody, and Philip Tetlock. 1991. *Reasoning and Choice*, Chapters 1-5.
 - Althaus, Scott. 1998. “Information Effects in Collective Preferences.” *American Political Science Review* 92:545-58.
 - Lupia, Arthur and Mathew McCubbins. 1998. *The Democratic Dilemma*, Chapters 1-4.
 - Berinsky, Adam. 1999. “The Two Faces of Public Opinion.” *American Journal of Political Science* 43:1209-30.
 - Druckman, James. 2004. “Political Preference Formation: Competition, Deliberation, and the (Ir)relevance of Framing Effects.” *American Political Science Review* 98:671-86.
 - Huckfeldt, Robert, Paul Johnson, and John Sprague. 2004. *Political Disagreement*, Chapters 1-3.
 - Achen, Christopher and Larry Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists*, Chapters 1-2.
 - Cortina, Jeronimo. 2019. “From a Distance: Geographic Proximity, Partisanship, and Public Attitudes toward the U.S.–Mexico Border Wall.” *Political Research Quarterly* 72:600-14.
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Week 3 (February 4): Ideology and Belief Systems

Required:

- Converse, Philip E. 1964. “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics.” In *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David Apter.

- Feldman, Stanley. 1988. "Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: The Role of Core Beliefs and Values." *American Journal of Political Science* 32:416-40.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, Jonathan Rodden, and James Snyder. 2008. "The Strength of Issues: Using Multiple Measures to Gauge Preference Stability, Ideological Constraint, and Issue Voting." *American Political Science Review* 102:215-32.
- Jessee, Stephen. 2009. "Spatial Voting in the 2004 Presidential Election." *American Political Science Review* 103:59-81.
- Ellis, Christopher and James Stimson. 2012. *Ideology in America*, Chapters 1, 5.

Recommended:

- Achen, Christopher H. 1975. "Mass Political Attitudes and the Survey Response." *American Political Science Review* 69:1218-31.
- Nie, Norman, Sidney Verba, and John Petrocik. 1976. *The Changing American Voter*, Chapters 1-3.
- Kinder, Donald. 1983. "Diversity and Complexity in American Public Opinion." In *The State of the Discipline*, ed. Ada Finifter.
- Alvarez, R. Michael and John Brehm. 1997. "Are Americans Ambivalent Towards Racial Policies?" *American Journal of Political Science* 41:345-74.
- Baldassarri, Delia and Andrew Gelman. 2008. "Partisans without Constraint." *American Journal of Sociology* 114:408-46.
- Treier, Shawn and D. Sunshine Hillygus. 2009. "The Nature of Political Ideology in the Contemporary Electorate." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73:679-703.
- Jessee, Stephen. 2012. *Ideology and Spatial Voting in American Elections*. Cambridge University Press, Chapters 1-3.
- Carmines, Edward G. and Nicholas J. D'Amico. 2015. "The New Look in Political Ideology Research." *Annual Review of Political Science* 18:205-16.
- Freeder, Sean, Gabriel Lenz, and Shad Turney. 2019. "The Importance of Knowing 'What Goes with What.'" *Journal of Politics* 81:1232-45.

Part II: Partisanship and Polarization

Week 4 (February 18): The Nature of Party Identification

Required:

- Fiorina, Morris. 1977. "An Outline for a Model of Party Choice." *American Journal of Political Science* 21:601-25.
- MacKuen, Michael B., Robert S. Erikson, and James A. Stimson. 2002. *The Macro Polity*. Cambridge University Press, Chapters 1, 4.
- Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler. 2002. *Partisan Hearts and Minds*, Chapters 1-2.
- Lewis-Beck, Michael S., William G. Jacoby, Helmut Norpoth, and Herbert F. Weisberg. 2008. *The American Voter Revisited*, Chapters 6-7.

- Highton, Benjamin and Cindy Kam. 2011. “The Long-Term Dynamics of Partisanship and Issue Orientations.” *Journal of Politics* 73:751-63.

Recommended:

- Achen, Christopher. 1992. “Social Psychology, Demographic Variables, and Linear Regression.” *Political Behavior* 14:195-211.
- Miller, Warren and J. Merrill Shanks. 1996. *The New American Voter*, Chapters 6-8.
- Gerber, Alan and Donald Green. 1998. “Rational Learning and Partisan Attitudes.” *American Journal of Political Science* 42:794-818.
- Hetherington, Marc. 2001. “Resurgent Mass Partisanship: The Role of Elite Polarization.” *American Political Science Review* 95:619-31.
- Bartels, Larry. 2002. “Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions.” *Political Behavior* 24:117-50.
- Johnston, Richard. 2006. “Party Identification: Unmoved Mover or Sum of Preferences?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 9:329-51.
- Carsey, Thomas and Geoffrey Layman. 2006. “Changing Sides or Changing Minds?” *American Journal of Political Science* 50:464-77.
- Lenz, Gabriel. 2012. *Follow the Leader*, Chapters 1-4.
- Huddy, Leonie, Lilliana Mason, and Lene Aarøe. 2015. “Expressive Partisanship.” *American Political Science Review* 109:1-17.
- Barber, Michael and Jeremy Pope. 2019. “Does Party Trump Ideology?” *American Political Science Review* 113:38-54.

Week 5 (February 25): Mass Polarization and Affective Polarization

Required:

- Abramowitz, Alan and Kyle Saunders. 2008. “Is Polarization a Myth?” *Journal of Politics* 70:542-55.
- Levendusky, Matthew. 2009. *The Partisan Sort*, Chapters 1-3.
- Fiorina, Morris, Samuel Abrams, and Jeremy Pope. 2011. *Culture War?*, Chapters 1-3.
- Iyengar, Shanto, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes. 2012. “Affect, Not Ideology.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76:405-31.
- Broockman, David, Joshua Kalla, and Sean Westwood. 2022. “Does Affective Polarization Undermine Democratic Norms or Accountability? Maybe Not.” *American Journal of Political Science* 67:808-28.

Recommended:

- Layman, Geoffrey C., and Thomas M. Carsey. 2002. “Party Polarization and ‘Conflict Extension’ in the American Electorate.” *American Journal of Political Science* 46:786-802.
- Fiorina, Morris and Samuel Abrams. 2008. “Political Polarization in the American Public.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11:563-88.

- Druckman, James and Matthew Levendusky. 2019. “What Do We Measure When We Measure Affective Polarization?” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 83:114-22.
 - Gelman, Andrew, David Park, Boris Shor, Joseph Bafumi, and Jeronimo Cortina. 2008. *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do*. Princeton University Press, Chapters 1-3.
 - Bafumi, Joseph and Robert Shapiro. 2009. “A New Partisan Voter.” *Journal of Politics* 71:1-24.
 - Lelkes, Yphtach. 2016. “Mass Polarization: Manifestations and Measurements.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80:392-410.
 - Kinder, Donald and Nathan Kalmoe. 2017. *Neither Liberal nor Conservative*, Chapters 1-3.
 - Hetherington, Marc and Jonathan Weiler. 2018. *Prius or Pickup?*, Chapters 1-3.
 - Mason, Lilliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement*, Chapters 1-3.
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Part III: Political Behavior

Week 6 (March 4): Voter Turnout and Political Participation

Required:

- Aldrich, John. 1993. “Rational Choice and Turnout.” *American Journal of Political Science* 37:246-78.
- Rosenstone, Steven and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*, Chapters 1-3.
- Brady, Henry, Sidney Verba, and Kay Schlozman. 1995. “Beyond SES.” *American Political Science Review* 89:271-94.
- Gerber, Alan and Donald Green. 2000. “The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout.” *American Political Science Review* 94:653-63.
- Edlin, Aaron, Andrew Gelman, and Noah Kaplan. 2007. “Voting as a Rational Choice: Why and How People Vote to Improve the Well-Being of Others.” *Rationality and Society* 19:293-314.
- Fowler, Anthony. 2013. “Electoral and Policy Consequences of Voter Turnout.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 8:159-82.

Recommended:

- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Chapters 11-14.
- Riker, William and Peter Ordeshook. 1968. “A Theory of the Calculus of Voting.” *American Political Science Review* 62:25-42.
- Wolfinger, Raymond and Steven Rosenstone. 1980. *Who Votes?*, Chapters 2, 4.
- Putnam, Robert. 1995. “Tuning In, Tuning Out.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 28:664-83.
- Feddersen, Timothy. 2004. “Rational Choice Theory and the Paradox of Not Voting.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18:99-112.
- Highton, Benjamin. 2004. “Voter Registration and Turnout in the United States.” *Perspectives on Politics* 2:507-15.

- Sinclair, Betsy. 2012. *The Social Citizen*, Chapters 1-3.
 - Enos, Ryan, Anthony Fowler, and Lynn Vavreck. 2014. “Increasing Inequality.” *Journal of Politics* 76:273-88.
 - Fowler, Anthony. 2015. “Regular Voters, Marginal Voters, and the Electoral Effects of Turnout.” *Political Science Research and Methods* 3:205-19.
 - Gerber, Alan and Donald Green. 2019. *Get Out the Vote*, Chapters 1-6.
 - Cortina, Jeronimo and Brandon Rottinghaus. 2021. “The Quiet Revolution: Convenience Voting, Vote Centers, and Turnout in Texas Elections.” *Political Research Quarterly* 75:32-46.
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Week 7 (March 11): Vote Choice, Campaigns, and Retrospection

Required:

- Fiorina, Morris. 1981. *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*, Chapters 1, 4-5.
- Vavreck, Lynn. 2009. *The Message Matters*, Chapters 1-3.
- Kalla, Joshua and David Broockman. 2018. “The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections.” *American Political Science Review* 112:148-66.
- Sides, John, Chris Tausanovitch, and Lynn Vavreck. 2022. *The Bitter End: The 2020 Presidential Campaign and the Challenge to American Democracy*. Princeton University Press, Chapters 1-3.

Recommended:

- Key, V.O. 1966. *The Responsible Electorate*, Chapters 1-3.
 - Bartels, Larry. 1993. “Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure.” *American Political Science Review* 87:267-85.
 - Gelman, Andrew and Gary King. 1993. “Why Are American Presidential Election Campaign Polls So Variable?” *British Journal of Political Science* 23:409-51.
 - Prior, Markus. 2007. *Post-Broadcast Democracy*, Chapters 1-3.
 - Healy, Andrew, Neil Malhotra, and Cecilia Mo. 2010. “Irrelevant Events Affect Voters’ Evaluations.” *PNAS* 107:12804-09.
 - Lenz, Gabriel. 2012. *Follow the Leader*, Chapters 1-3.
 - Arceneaux, Kevin and Martin Johnson. 2013. *Changing Minds or Changing Channels?*, Chapters 1-3.
 - Healy, Andrew and Neil Malhotra. 2013. “Retrospective Voting Reconsidered.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 16:285-306.
 - Sides, John and Lynn Vavreck. 2013. *The Gamble*, Chapters 1-3.
 - Achen, Christopher and Larry Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists*, Chapters 6-8.
 - Fowler, Anthony and Andrew Hall. 2018. “Do Shark Attacks Influence Presidential Elections?” *Journal of Politics* 80:1423-37.
 - Coppock, Alexander. 2022. *Persuasion in Parallel*, Chapters 1-3.
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Midterm Exam: In-class Week 7 (March 11)

Part IV: American Political Institutions

Week 8 (March 25): Political Parties and Interest Groups

Required:

- Schattschneider, E.E. 1960. *The Semi-Sovereign People*, Chapters 1-3.
- Olson, Mancur. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action*, Chapters 1-2.
- Aldrich, John. 1995. *Why Parties?*, Chapters 1-3.
- Hall, Richard and Alan Deardorff. 2006. “Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy.” *American Political Science Review* 100:69-84.
- Cohen, Marty, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. 2008. *The Party Decides*, Chapters 1-3.
- McCarty, Nolan and Eric Schickler. 2018. “On the Theory of Parties.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 21:175-93.

Recommended:

- Moe, Terry. 1981. “Toward a Broader View of Interest Groups.” *Journal of Politics* 43:531-43.
- Walker, Jack. 1983. “The Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups.” *American Political Science Review* 77:390-406.
- Schlozman, Kay Lehman. 1984. “What Accent the Heavenly Chorus?” *Journal of Politics* 46:1006-32.
- Snyder, James and Michael Ting. 2002. “An Informational Rationale for Political Parties.” *American Journal of Political Science* 46:90-110.
- Strolovitch, Dara. 2007. *Affirmative Advocacy*, Chapters 1-3.
- Bawn, Kathleen et al. 2012. “A Theory of Political Parties.” *Perspectives on Politics* 10:571-97.
- Gillion, Daniel. 2013. *The Political Power of Protest*, Chapters 1-3.
- Hacker, Jacob and Paul Pierson. 2014. “After the ‘Master Theory.’” *Perspectives on Politics* 12:643-62.
- Anzia, Sarah. 2019. “When Does a Group of Citizens Influence Policy?” *Journal of Politics* 81:1-14.

Spring Break: March 16-22 — No Class

Week 9 (April 1): Congress I—The Electoral Connection and Committees

Required:

- Mayhew, David. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, Part I.
- Fenno, Richard. 1978. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*, Chapters 1-3.
- Arnold, R. Douglas. 1990. *The Logic of Congressional Action*, Chapters 1-3.
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, David Brady, and John Cogan. 2002. “Out of Step, Out of Office.” *American Political Science Review* 96:127-40.
- Grimmer, Justin. 2013. *Representational Style in Congress*, Chapters 1-3.
- Broockman, David. 2016. “Approaches to Studying Policy Representation.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41:181-215.

Recommended:

- Miller, Warren and Donald Stokes. 1963. “Constituency Influence in Congress.” *American Political Science Review* 57:45-56.
- Polsby, Nelson. 1968. “The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives.” *American Political Science Review* 62:144-68.
- Fenno, Richard. 1973. *Congressmen in Committees*.
- Fenno, Richard. 1977. “U.S. House Members and Their Constituencies.” *American Political Science Review* 71:883-917.
- McCubbins, Mathew and Thomas Schwartz. 1984. “Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms.” *American Journal of Political Science* 28:165-79.
- Krehbiel, Keith. 1987. “Why Are Congressional Committees Powerful?” *American Political Science Review* 81:929-35.
- Shepsle, Kenneth and Barry Weingast. 1987. “The Institutional Foundations of Committee Power.” *American Political Science Review* 81:85-104.
- Weingast, Barry and William Marshall. 1988. “The Industrial Organization of Congress.” *Journal of Political Economy* 96:132-63.
- Krehbiel, Keith. 1991. *Information and Legislative Organization*, Chapters 1-3.
- Stimson, James, Michael MacKuen, and Robert Erikson. 1995. “Dynamic Representation.” *American Political Science Review* 89:543-65.
- Lee, David, Enrico Moretti, and Matthew Butler. 2004. “Do Voters Affect or Elect Policies?” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 119:807-59.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen and Philip Jones. 2010. “Constituents’ Responses to Congressional Roll-Call Voting.” *American Journal of Political Science* 54:583-97.
- Carson, Jamie and Jason Roberts. “Examining the Electoral Connection Across Time.” *Annual Review of Political Science*.

Week 10 (April 8): Congress II—Parties, Lawmaking, Gridlock, and Polarization

Required:

- Krehbiel, Keith. 1998. *Pivotal Politics*, Chapters 1-3.
- Binder, Sarah. 1999. “The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock, 1947-96.” *American Political Science Review* 93:519-33.
- Cox, Gary and Mathew McCubbins. 2005. *Setting the Agenda*, Chapters 2, 3, 5.

- McCarty, Nolan, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2006. *Polarized America*, Chapters 1-3.
- Hall, Andrew. 2015. "What Happens When Extremists Win Primaries?" *American Political Science Review* 109:18-42.
- Lee, Frances. 2016. *Insecure Majorities*, Chapters 1, 3.

Recommended:

- Poole, Keith and Howard Rosenthal. 1984. "The Polarization of American Politics." *Journal of Politics* 46:1061-79.
- Mayhew, David. 1991. *Divided We Govern*, Chapters 1, 3-5.
- Krehbiel, Keith. 1993. "Where's the Party?" *British Journal of Political Science* 23:235-66.
- Aldrich, John and David Rohde. 2000. "The Consequences of Party Organization in the House." In *Polarized Politics*, ed. Bond and Fleisher.
- Schickler, Eric. 2000. "Institutional Change in the House of Representatives, 1867-1998." *American Political Science Review* 94:269-88.
- Snyder, James and Tim Groseclose. 2000. "Estimating Party Influence in Congressional Roll-Call Voting." *American Journal of Political Science* 44:193-211.
- Layman, Geoffrey et al. 2006. "Party Polarization in American Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 9:83-110.
- Lee, Frances. 2009. *Beyond Ideology*, Chapters 1, 3.
- Bafumi, Joseph and Michael Herron. 2010. "Leapfrog Representation and Extremism." *American Political Science Review* 104:519-42.
- Clinton, Joshua. 2012. "Using Roll Call Estimates to Test Models of Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15:79-99.
- Sinclair, Barbara. 2016. *Unorthodox Lawmaking*, Chapters 1-3.
- Bateman, David, Joshua Clinton, and John Lapinski. 2017. "A House Divided?" *American Journal of Political Science* 61:698-714.
- Clark, Jennifer Hayes. 2017. *Minority Parties in U.S. Legislatures*. University of Michigan Press, Chapters 1-3.
- Curry, James and Frances Lee. 2020. *The Limits of Party*, Chapters 1-3.

Week 11 (April 15): The Presidency

Required:

- Neustadt, Richard. 1990. *Presidential Power*, Chapters 1, 3-4.
- Cameron, Charles. 2000. *Veto Bargaining*, Chapters 1-2.
- Howell, William. 2003. *Power Without Persuasion*, Chapters 1-2.
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice. 2006. *Who Leads Whom?*, Chapters 1-2.
- Rudalevige, Andrew. 2006. *The New Imperial Presidency: Renewing Presidential Power after Watergate*. University of Michigan Press, Chapters 4-5.
- Kernell, Samuel. 2007. *Going Public*, Chapters 1-2.

Recommended:

- Moe, Terry. 1985. "The Politicized Presidency." In *The New Direction in American Politics*, ed. Chubb and Peterson.
 - Skowronek, Stephen. 1997. *The Politics Presidents Make*, Chapters 1-2.
 - Jacobs, Lawrence and Robert Shapiro. 2000. *Politicians Don't Pander*, Chapters 1-4.
 - Canes-Wrone, Brandice, Michael Herron, and Kenneth Shotts. 2001. "Leadership and Pandering." *American Journal of Political Science* 45:532-50.
 - Edwards, George C. 2003. *On Deaf Ears*, Chapters 1-3.
 - Lewis, David. 2008. *The Politics of Presidential Appointments*, Chapters 1-3.
 - Rottinghaus, Brandon. 2010. *The Provisional Pulpit: Modern Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion*. Texas A&M University Press, Chapters 1-2.
 - Berry, Christopher, Barry Burden, and William Howell. 2010. "The President and the Distribution of Federal Spending." *American Political Science Review* 104:783-99.
 - Bolton, Alex and Sharece Thrower. 2016. "Legislative Capacity and Executive Unilateralism." *American Journal of Political Science* 60:649-63.
 - Rogowski, Jon. 2016. "Presidential Influence in an Era of Congressional Dominance." *American Political Science Review* 110:325-41.
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Week 12 (April 22): The Judiciary

Required:

- Hamilton, Alexander. Federalist #78.
- Epstein, Lee and Jack Knight. 1998. *The Choices Justices Make*, Chapters 1-3.
- Segal, Jeffrey and Harold Spaeth. 2002. *The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited*, Chapters 1-3.
- Whittington, Keith. 2005. "Interpose Your Friendly Hand." *American Political Science Review* 99:583-96.
- Clark, Tom. 2009. "The Separation of Powers, Court-Curbing, and Judicial Legitimacy." *American Journal of Political Science* 53:971-89.
- Casillas, Christopher J., Peter K. Enns, and Patrick C. Wohlfarth. 2011. "How Public Opinion Constrains the U.S. Supreme Court." *American Journal of Political Science* 55:74-88.
- Cameron, Charles and Jonathan Kstellec. 2016. "Are Supreme Court Nominations a Move-the-Median Game?" *American Political Science Review* 110:778-97.

Recommended:

- Dahl, Robert. 1957. "Decision-Making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as a National Policy-Maker." *Journal of Public Law* 6:279-95.
- Brace, Paul and Melinda Gann Hall. 1997. "The Interplay of Preferences, Case Facts, Context, and Rules." *Journal of Politics* 59:1206-31.
- Martin, Andrew and Kevin Quinn. 2002. "Dynamic Ideal Point Estimation via Markov Chain Monte Carlo for the U.S. Supreme Court, 1953-1999." *Political Analysis* 10:134-53.
- Baum, Lawrence. 2003. "The Supreme Court in American Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 6:161-80.

- Frymer, Paul. 2003. “Acting When Elected Officials Won’t.” *American Political Science Review* 97:483-99.
 - Rosenberg, Gerald. 2008. *The Hollow Hope*, Chapter 1.
 - Clark, Tom. 2011. *The Limits of Judicial Independence*, Chapters 1-3.
 - Iaryczower, Matias and Matthew Shum. 2012. “The Value of Information in the Court.” *American Economic Review* 102:202-37.
 - Badas, Alex. 2019. “Policy Disagreement and Judicial Legitimacy: Evidence from the 1937 Court-Packing Plan.” *The Journal of Legal Studies* 48:377-408.
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Week 13 (April 29): State Politics—Institutions and Structures

Required:

- Lupia, Arthur and John G. Matsusaka. 2004. “Direct Democracy: New Approaches to Old Questions.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 7:463-82.
- Squire, Peverill. 2007. “Measuring State Legislative Professionalism: The Squire Index Revisited.” *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 7:211-27.
- Shor, Boris and Nolan McCarty. 2011. “The Ideological Mapping of American Legislatures.” *American Political Science Review* 105:530-51.
- Fowler, Anthony and Andrew Hall. 2017. “Long-Term Consequences of Election Results.” *British Journal of Political Science* 47:351-72.
- Hopkins, Daniel. 2018. *The Increasingly United States*, Chapters 1-3.
- Einstein, Katherine Levine, David Glick, and Maxwell Palmer. 2019. *Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America’s Housing Crisis*, Chapters 1-3.

Recommended:

- Key, V.O. 1949. *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, Chapters 1-3.
- Peterson, Paul. 1981. *City Limits*, Chapters 1-3.
- Berry, Christopher. 2009. *Imperfect Union*, Chapters 1-3.
- Lax, Jeffrey and Justin Phillips. 2009. “Gay Rights in the States: Public Opinion and Policy Responsiveness.” *American Political Science Review* 103:367-86.
- McCarty, Nolan et al. 2009. “Does Gerrymandering Cause Polarization?” *American Journal of Political Science* 53:666-80.
- Masket, Seth. 2009. *No Middle Ground*, Chapters 1-3.
- Alt, James, Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, and Shanna Rose. 2011. “Disentangling Accountability and Competence.” *Journal of Politics* 73:171-86.
- Gerber, Elisabeth and Daniel Hopkins. 2011. “When Mayors Matter.” *American Journal of Political Science* 55:326-39.
- Powell, Lynda. 2012. *The Influence of Campaign Contributions in State Legislatures*, Chapters 1-2.
- Tausanovitch, Chris and Christopher Warshaw. 2013. “Measuring Constituent Policy Preferences.” *Journal of Politics* 75:330-42.
- Caughey, Devin and Christopher Warshaw. 2016. “The Dynamics of State Policy Liberalism, 1936-2014.” *American Journal of Political Science* 60:899-913.

- Rogers, Steven. 2016. "National Forces in State Legislative Elections." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667:207-25.
 - Masket, Seth and Boris Shor. 2015. "Polarization Without Parties: The Rise of Legislative Partisanship in Nebraska's Unicameral Legislature." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 15:67-90.
 - Bagashka, Tanya and Jennifer Hayes Clark. 2016. "Electoral Rules and Legislative Particularism: Evidence from U.S. State Legislatures." *American Politics Research* 44:411-39.
 - Hacker, Jacob and Paul Pierson. 2020. *Let Them Eat Tweets*, Chapters 1-3.
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Week 14 (May 6): Democratic Representation

Required:

- Stimson, James A., Michael B. MacKuen, and Robert S. Erikson. 1995. "Dynamic Representation." *American Political Science Review* 89:543-65.
 - Lax, Jeffrey and Justin Phillips. 2012. "The Democratic Deficit in the States." *American Journal of Political Science* 56:148-66.
 - Caughey, Devin and Christopher Warshaw. 2022. *Dynamic Democracy: Public Opinion, Elections, and Policymaking in the American States*. University of Chicago Press, Chapters 1-3.
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Final Exam: In-class Week 14 (May 6)

Research Proposal Due: May 12

Minimum 10 pages, maximum 12 pages (excluding references)

Class Policies

Class Folder

You need to have a Google account to access the class shared Google Drive folder. We will be using that folder to distribute readings and class presentations. Use your Gmail account if you have one, or create a new one if you don't. As soon as you do so, send me an email from your Gmail, and I'll add you to the sharing list.

Readings

This is a survey course, and as such, it has a heavy reading load. This is typical of graduate survey courses, which aim to provide comprehensive coverage of a field's major debates, theories, and empirical findings. The reading load is designed to prepare you for comprehensive exams and to build a broad foundation in American politics.

Over the course of the semester, adjustments may be made to the reading list—typically swapping one reading for another or removing a reading. The goal of any adjustment is to improve the course, not to increase the reading load beyond what is already assigned.

I expect students to have done the assigned reading prior to class. You simply can't skate by on summaries you hear from other students. All articles are available on JSTOR or the class Google Drive folder.

AI and Reading Policy

All assigned readings must be read in full by you personally. The rise of large language models (LLMs) and AI tools presents a serious temptation to offload reading to these systems—asking an AI to summarize articles, extract key arguments, or answer questions about readings you haven't actually read. **Do not do this.**

Here's why this practice is academically harmful:

1. **You will not develop critical reading skills.** Learning to read academic work critically—to identify assumptions, evaluate evidence, spot logical gaps, and situate arguments within broader debates—requires direct engagement with the text. AI summaries cannot teach you how scholars construct arguments or how to evaluate research designs.
2. **AI summaries are often wrong or misleading.** LLMs hallucinate, misrepresent nuance, miss key qualifications, and cannot reliably distinguish between central claims and peripheral points. They may confidently summarize articles they were never trained on, inventing findings wholesale.
3. **You cannot participate meaningfully in discussion.** If you haven't read the actual article, you cannot engage with methodological details, respond to specific passages, or make connections to other readings. Your contributions will be shallow and obvious to everyone in the room.
4. **You are training yourself for failure.** Comprehensive exams, dissertation research, and professional scholarship all require the ability to read large volumes of complex work efficiently and critically. If you outsource this skill development now, you will be unprepared when it matters most.

Appropriate uses of AI: After you have read an article in full, AI tools can be helpful for clarifying concepts you didn't understand, exploring connections to other work, or checking your interpretation. Think of AI as a study aid for material you've already engaged with—not as a substitute for reading.

I reserve the right to ask specific, detailed questions about any reading during class discussion. If it becomes apparent that you have not actually read the material, this will be reflected in your participation grade.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance in class is expected. If you have to miss class for any reason, it is *your responsibility* to cover any missed material. I will not otherwise provide additional coverage of the material (e.g., in office hours). You should talk with a classmate to get notes to fill in the gaps. You need to be present and attentive if you plan to do well.

Please let me know if you have something unavoidable that causes you to miss class. I advise that you contact me and the Graduate Studies Chair if you have more than a minor disruption to your ability to attend class.

Do not be afraid of saying something “wrong,” and do not be afraid of asking questions. Most of the other students are probably thinking along similar lines as you.

Office Hours

These will be conducted by Microsoft Teams by appointment via Calendly. We can use these times to talk about the course material, about your experience in our department or at the university, or about your future plans.

Civility

You are free to disagree, even strongly, with each other, and with me. However, I expect and demand civility and kindness to each other in class. I study polarization but there’s no need to let its negative aspects affect the classroom learning environment.

Classroom Etiquette

I will endeavor to start and end class on time; please make every effort to do the same. Please refrain from distracting behaviors such as texting or using social media, talking to each other, as such activities not only affect your attention negatively, but diminish the learning environment for all.

Email

I frequently send out announcements via email so you should be sure to check your email account.

Letters of Recommendation

I am happy to write a letter of recommendation for any student who has done well in my course. I need at least three weeks’ notice, and it is your responsibility to provide any necessary supporting paperwork.

Excused Absences

Regular class attendance, participation, and engagement in coursework are important contributors to student success. Absences may be excused as provided in the University of Houston Undergraduate Excused Absence Policy and Graduate Excused Absence Policy for reasons including: medical illness of student or close relative, death of a close family member, legal or government proceeding that a student is obligated to attend, recognized professional and educational activities where the student is presenting, and University-sponsored activity or athletic competition.

Religious Observance

If you have religious holidays which conflict with the class, this is fine, but email me ahead of time.

Academic Honesty

All students are expected to adhere to the University of Houston's Policy on Academic Honesty. Cheating and plagiarism in this class will be punished to the maximum extent possible; failure of the course at the very least. See the University of Houston Studies handbook or uh.edu/provost/stu/stu_syllabsuppl.html for a full statement regarding UH's rules against cheating and plagiarism.

Students with Disabilities

Students seeking accommodation in this course should contact the instructor after obtaining the appropriate documentation through the UH Center for Students with Disabilities (713-743-5400). The University of Houston System complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Counseling and Psychological Services

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling 713-743-5454.

Recording of Class

Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor.

Syllabus Updates

Adjustments may be made as the semester progresses.