

Political Science 2041
American Government
Dr. Todd Makse
Spring 2020

Class Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00pm-3:15pm in AHC 3-215
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:30pm-4:30pm and Thursday 12:30pm-2:00pm
Office: SIPA 405; Phone: 305-348-8451; Email: tmakse@fiu.edu

TA Information: Ms. Bethany Bowra; Email: bbowr001@fiu.edu
Office Hours: Mondays 12:00-1:00pm in SIPA 213

Course Description:

This course is intended to introduce students to the way the political process works in contemporary America. We will begin by thinking about the context of modern politics, including the Constitution and its current interpretation by the courts, as well as the nature of modern American society. We will then look at mass political behavior, exploring how the American public thinks, acts, and votes. We will consider the roles of political parties, interest groups, and the media, which shape the relationships between the public and government actors. Finally, we will discuss the roles of the major political institutions: Congress, the executive branch, the courts, and state governments, and ascertain whether and how these institutions respond to the desires of the public.

This is not solely a lecture-based course. Many class sessions will be dedicated to group activities including group discussions, debates, and role-playing activities that illustrate political phenomena. You are expected to attend class, do the readings every day, and contribute to class discussion.

The course is also designed to enhance the skills that will help you understand the political world in a more critical and analytical manner. We will sometimes discuss the nature of evidence in the social sciences and the extent to which common beliefs about the political world are grounded in scientific research. We will consider the differences between how our institutions work on paper and how things work in the real world. Finally, we will consider the extent to which our institutions reflect democratic values and how reforms might enhance our democracy.

Students who successfully pass this course will also fulfill the state's civic literacy requirement. As a result, I expect the following learning outcomes to be achieved by the end of the course:

- *Students will develop and demonstrate an understanding of the basic principles and practices of American democracy and how they are applied in our republican form of government.
- *Students will develop and demonstrate an understanding of the United States Constitution and its application.
- *Students will develop and demonstrate knowledge of the founding documents and how they have shaped the nature and functions of our institutions of self-governance.
- *Students will develop and demonstrate an understanding of landmark Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation, and landmark executive actions and their impact on law and society.

Textbook

**Analyzing American Democracy*, Third Edition, by Jon Bond and Kevin Smith.

There is no other required reading, but you are expected to keep up with current events in American politics. I strongly recommend watching the news or browsing a newspaper or news website at least a few times each week, especially if you do not have a lot of background in the subject matter.

Grading components:

Midterm and Final 50% (25% each)

Quizzes 20%

Debate Memos 15% (three, 5% each)

Participation 15%

The grading scale for final grades will be as follows:

93-100 A	90-92 A-	87-89 B+	83-86 B	80-82 B-
77-79 C+	70-76 C	60-69 D	59 and below F	

Grading criteria:

Exams: The midterm and the final exam will be closed-book, in-class, and will draw heavily from lecture material. The final exam will *not* be cumulative. A review sheet with a list of key concepts and examples of question formats will be posted early in each half of the semester.

Quizzes: There will be a total of eleven quizzes: seven reading quizzes, to be completed on Canvas, and four in-class quizzes on important highlighted material. The reading quizzes are open-book, but **you must complete quizzes on your own**. Response patterns will be analyzed by error analysis software at the end of the semester, and evidence of collusion will be treated as academic misconduct. **Reading quizzes are due before class on the date listed on the syllabus.** The in-class quizzes are closed-book and will be done during the first five minutes of class. Answer keys will be posted online the same day, so make-up quizzes will not be allowed. Your two lowest grades will be dropped, and your final quiz grade will be curved by 15 points.

Debate Memos: Throughout the semester, we will have in-class discussions of several contemporary debates that speak to important democratic values. To prepare for these discussions, I will provide a package of reading materials that provide different perspectives on the issue. You will be asked to write a brief memo in response to the readings, as well as do a small amount of your own research on the topic. There are four memos throughout the semester; you must complete three of them. The debate memos are due on the following days: January 22, February 4, March 5, and April 2. **Please submit memos via email prior to class and bring yourself a printed copy to class.** Late submissions will receive half credit. The debate materials will be posted on Canvas one week before the due date. Complete instructions on writing the memo can also be found on Canvas.

Attendance and Participation: You are expected to participate in class discussions on a regular basis. This includes contributing to in-class activities and simulations and participating in debates and open class discussion. Obviously, you must also be present to participate. You have three “free” absences. Non-documented absences in excess of three will result in deductions from your participation grade: one point (out of 15) for each absence, up to a maximum deduction of ten points.

Lateness: If you arrive late but within the first 15 minutes of class, it will be treated as 1/2 of an absence. If you arrive more than 15 minutes late for class, you will be marked absent.

Class Policies:

Absences: Absences are only considered documented if you provide documentation (within one week) of either: (a) obligations such as athletic, military, or university-sponsored program obligations; (b) a serious medical condition that requires hospitalization or is deemed contagious (with an original, physical copy of a doctor's note specifying this; please do not email me these). I understand that you may have to miss the occasional class for other legitimate reasons (i.e. family issues, job interviews, minor illnesses), but you have three non-documented absences without penalty, so you are responsible to manage these situations accordingly. Absences for religious holidays will also be deemed excused; please inform me in advance if you plan to miss any classes for this reason.

Classroom conduct: I'm pretty lenient about the classroom. You don't need to ask permission to eat, use the restroom, get a drink, or use a laptop. I do ask that you refrain from doing anything clearly distracting to me or your classmates (e.g. texting, sleeping, watching videos on a laptop, incessant chatting, and **especially packing up before class is over**) and if you flagrantly disregard this request, it will be reflected in your participation grade.

Makeup Exams: I do not offer makeup exams without prior notice, except in **emergency** situations. If you have non-emergency reasons for missing an exam, please notify me at least one week ahead of time. If you have a genuine emergency, please inform me as soon as you can afterwards. Also, please note that the format of makeup exams may differ from the format of the regular exam. There are no makeup quizzes since you can drop two—if you miss more than two due to emergency situations, I may allow you to exclude the quiz from your grade rather than counting it as a zero.

Academic Misconduct: FIU is a community dedicated to generating and imparting knowledge through excellent teaching and research, the rigorous and respectful exchange of ideas, and community service. All students should respect the right of others to have an equitable opportunity to learn and to honestly demonstrate the quality of their learning. Therefore, all students are expected to adhere to a standard of academic conduct, which demonstrates respect for themselves, their fellow students, and the educational mission of the University. All students are deemed by the University to understand that if they are found responsible for academic misconduct, they will be subject to the Academic Misconduct procedures and sanctions, as outlined in the Student Handbook. Violations include cheating, plagiarism, academic negligence or dishonesty. Plagiarism results when students neglect to acknowledge in footnotes, endnotes or other forms of documentation their use of the words and ideas of others. If you have questions about proper citation, please speak to me.

Disability Accommodations: Students with disabilities, as defined by law, have the right to receive appropriate accommodations if their disabilities make it difficult to perform academic tasks in the usual way or in the allotted time frame. However, to receive accommodation, students must register with the Disability Resource Center. This office will keep the student's written request, notify faculty who have a student with a disability enrolled in his or her class, and indicate what kinds of arrangements should be made. Please contact the DRC at the beginning of the semester.

Availability: Students should contact me by email with any concerns about the class or course material. I will make every effort to respond to all messages within 24 hours. Please send emails from your FIU email and make a habit of checking both your FIU email and Canvas daily.

Schedule for Class Topics, Readings and Assignments

January 7-9: Foundations of American Democracy (Reading Quiz #1 due January 9)

*Bond and Smith, Chapters 1 and 2

Topics to cover: What is the nature of democracy in general and American democracy in particular? What is ideology and how does it reflect competing democratic values? How do culture, geography and demographics divide America in politically meaningful ways?

January 14-16: The Constitution (Reading Quiz #2 due January 16)

*Bond and Smith, Chapters 4 and 5

Topics to cover: What are the key features of our Constitution and why has it been amended? Which features of American government reflect “majoritarian” and “consensual” principles of democracy?

January 21-28: Civil Liberties/Civil Rights (In-Class Quiz on the Constitution January 21)

Topics to cover: What is the current state of civil liberties law in areas such as free speech, freedom of religion, and the rights of the accused? How do civil liberties controversies relate to debates over liberty and equality? What are some of the key legal standards with respect to civil rights? What role do voting rights controversies play in larger dialogues about civil rights?

January 28-30: Public Opinion (Reading Quiz #3 due January 30)

*Bond and Smith, Chapters 9 and 11

Topics to cover: How does the mass public view politics and make political decisions? What are some of the challenges scholars face in trying to understand public opinion?

February 4-6: Participation (Reading Quiz #4 due February 6)

*Bond and Smith, Chapters 7 and 10

Topics to cover: Why do individuals vote and participate in politics in other ways? What reforms have been proposed to increase political participation?

February 6-13: Elections & Voting Behavior (In-Class Quiz on Demographics February 11)

Topics to cover: What groups support the two political parties? How do the Electoral College and presidential primaries work? What considerations come into play when voters are deciding which candidate to support?

February 18: Midterm Review Session

February 20: Midterm Exam

March 3-March 5: Political Parties (Reading Quiz #5 due March 3)

*Bond and Smith, Chapter 6 and 8

Topics to cover: Why does America have such a strong two-party system? What role, if any, do third parties play in American politics? What do parties do to win elections, and what else do they do?

March 5-10: The Media

Topics to cover: How do the media influence voters, and in what ways is the media “biased?” How do debates, campaigns, and other political actions play out through the media?

March 12: Interest Groups (Reading Quiz #6 due March 12)

*Bond and Smith, Chapters 12 and 13

Topics to cover: How do interest groups influence government and politics? Why and how do such groups form in the first place and how do they educate and inform the mass public?

March 17-26: Congress (In-Class Quiz on The Electoral College March 17)

Topics to cover: How do representatives respond to their constituencies? How do congressional elections differ from presidential elections? How do the rules and norms of Congress shape the policy-making process?

March 19: NO CLASS

March 26-31: The Presidency & Executive Branch (Reading Quiz #7 due March 26)

*Bond and Smith, Chapters 14 and 15

Topics to cover: How do goals and constraints on the president change throughout the four or eight years of a presidency? What important roles do the political (The Cabinet) and non-political (the bureaucracy) segments of the executive branch play in the policymaking process?

April 2: The Judiciary

Topics to cover: What role do ideology, precedent, and constitutional doctrines play in judicial decision-making? How does the Supreme Court fit into the political landscape and why has the selection of the judicial branch become increasingly contentious? Should judges be appointed or elected?

April 7-14: Federalism and State Politics (In-Class Quiz on Political Figures April 7)

*Bond and Smith, Chapter 3

Topics to cover: What are the different conceptions of federalism, and what empirical evidence and normative arguments are presented by proponents of each? How do the institutions of state government (especially Florida's) differ from each other and from the federal government? What role does direct democracy play in modern American politics, and how do these institutions affect voting behavior and policy outcomes?

April 16: Final Review Session

Final Exam: TBA