

GOVERNMENT 110: POLITICS IN THE U.S.

American University, Spring 2026

Section 003

Instructor: Prof. Elizabeth Suhay, PhD

Time and Location: Monday & Thursday 2:30 – 3:45, Kerwin 4

Email: suhay@american.edu

Office Hours: Monday & Thursday 4:00 – 5:00 & by appointment, Kerwin 212

Course Description

Government 110 offers a broad introduction to U.S. politics, examining the structure of the national government as well as the methods by which citizens influence it. Students will learn about the following specific topics: the nation's founding; federalism and the separation of powers; the principal institutions of the U.S. government, including the Presidency, federal bureaucracy, Congress, and Judiciary; civil rights and civil liberties; and democratic politics, including elections, political parties, public opinion, and media. The course will proceed with an eye toward current political problems and avenues for reform.

Intended Student Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a basic understanding of the structure of our government, including its federal nature, the powers of each branch of government, the process of electing representatives, and the protections for civil rights and liberties in the Constitution
2. Use this understanding of the formal and informal institutions of American politics to explain how individuals, with and without authority, affect outcomes to their liking
3. Apply an understanding of politics to a controversial decision, election, or policy
4. Convey coherent analytical arguments about politics in the U.S. in writing and in speech
5. Locate and employ appropriate empirical evidence to evaluate claims and draw conclusions about phenomena in American politics

Academic Integrity

All students are required to follow the University's Academic Integrity Code. *Plagiarism, which includes the unacknowledged submission of AI generated text in assignments, is a violation of academic integrity.*

If you have not already done so, please familiarize yourself with the standards and requirements of the University's Academic Code of Conduct. Violations of the Code of Conduct will not be tolerated and will be reported appropriately. You can read the University's Academic Integrity Code here: <https://www.american.edu/policies/students/upload/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

Course Assignments and Expectations

Exams | 55% of grade

- Exam 1 (February 16): 15%
- Exam 2 (March 26): 20%
- Exam 3 (May 4): 20%

Note: Students must take exams in person at the designated time.

Reflections | 20% of grade

Each week, students will complete one in-class reflection on assigned reading. These reflections are graded pass (1) / fail (0). There are thirteen in total; however, the lowest grade will be dropped. Reflection grades are calculated as a straight-forward percentage (e.g., 11/12 is a 92%). Students with an unexcused absence on the day of a reflection will receive a zero.

Participation | 10% of grade

Students are expected to come to class having read and reflected on assigned readings. Students are graded on the quantity and quality of their in-class participation. A person engaging in high quality participation conveys knowledge of, and thoughtful reflections on, assigned readings; actively listens to lectures as well as perspectives of peers; and is respectful of others. Students are allowed one unexcused absence without any grade penalty. With each additional unexcused absence, the participation grade falls by one letter-grade level (e.g., B+ to B).

Presentation | 15% of grade

Students will work in groups of three to complete a final group project on political reform. These presentations will draw on high-quality research to support recommendations. Presentations will take place throughout the month of April.

Required Book (either purchase or obtain via Bender Library reserves)

- Theodore J. Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, Stephen Ansolabehere, and Hahrie Han. 2025. *American Government: Power and Purpose, Eighteenth Edition*. W.W. Norton.

All other readings are available via Canvas or are publicly available on the Internet.

Technology in the Classroom

To minimize distractions, please do not use your laptop or phone in class unless expressly permitted. Students may use tablets for notetaking purposes only – they must lay flat on the desk.

Please do not record any part of class without permission.

COURSE SCHEDULE

* In-class reflection

Unit 1: The Nation's Political Scaffolding

Monday, January 12: Introduction

*Thursday, January 15: Principles of Politics **

- Lowi et al., Chapter 1: Five Principles of Politics
- Thomas Paine. 1776. [*Common Sense: Addressed to the Inhabitants of America.*](#)
 - Chapter III Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs
 - Chapter IV Of the Present Ability of America, with Some Miscellaneous Reflections

Monday, January 19: Martin Luther King Day

*Thursday, January 22: Foundations of American Government (guest lecture) **

- Lowi et al., Chapter 2: Constructing a Government: The Founding and the Constitution
- Charles Beard. 1913. *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States.*
 - Chapter VI: The Constitution as an Economic Document; excerpt from Chapter X

Monday, January 26: Federalism & the Separation of Powers

- Lowi et al., Chapter 3: Federalism & the Separation of Powers

*Thursday, January 29: The Constitution & Federalism **

- Jill LePore. 2025. *We the People: A History of the U.S. Constitution.*
 - Chapter 1: The Constitution of a Clock
 - Chapter 2: All Men Would Be Tyrants

Monday, February 2: Civil Liberties

- Lowi et al., Chapter 4: Civil Liberties

*Thursday, February 5: The Constitution & Civil Liberties **

- Jill LePore. 2025. *We the People: A History of the U.S. Constitution.*
 - Chapter 3: Every Gentleman May Propose Amendments

Monday, February 9: Civil Rights

- Lowi et al., Chapter 5: Civil Rights

*Thursday, February 12: The Constitution & Civil Rights **

- Jill LePore. 2025. *We the People: A History of the U.S. Constitution.*
 - Chapter 5: The Whole Rebellion Is Beyond the Constitution

Monday, February 16: EXAM 1

Unit 2: American Political Institutions

Monday, February 23: Congress

- Lowi et al., Chapter 6: Congress: The First Branch

*Thursday, February 26: Congressional Committees **

- Maya Kornberg. 2023. *Inside Congressional Committees: Function and Dysfunction in the Legislative Process*.
 - Chapter 1: Setting Up a Hearing (available via Canvas Course Reserves)

Monday, March 2: Presidency

- Lowi et al., Chapter 7: The Presidency as an Institution

*Thursday, March 5: Trump's Second Term **

- [Savage, Gamio 2026 – How Trump Is Pushing to Expand Presidential Power \(NYT\)](#)
- [Gamio, Schoenfeld Walker 2025 – Trump's Tangled Web of Deal-Making, Policy, Riches \(NYT\)](#)
 - Log into AU library website/*New York Times* to access articles

Monday, March 9: SPRING BREAK

Thursday, March 12: SPRING BREAK

Monday, March 16: Executive Branch

- Lowi et al., Chapter 8: The Executive Branch

*Thursday, March 19: Technocracy **

- Stephen Macedo & Frances Lee. 2025. *In COVID's Wake: How Our Politics Failed Us*.
 - Chapter 9: Noble Lies? Public Health Mis- and Disinformation Under COVID (available via Canvas Course Reserves)

Monday, March 23: Courts

- Lowi et al., Chapter 9: The Federal Courts

Thursday, March 26: EXAM 2

Unit 3: Politics and the U.S. Public

Monday, March 30: Public Opinion

- Lowi et al., Chapter 10: Public Opinion

*Thursday, April 2: The MAGA Movement **

- Biko Koenig and Tali Mendelberg. 2025. The Symbolic Politics of Status in the MAGA Movement. *Perspectives on Politics*.

Monday, April 6: Elections

- Lowi et al., Chapter 11: Elections

*Thursday, April 9: Election Reform **

- Lee Drutman. 2024. *We Need More Parties*. (available via Canvas Course Reserves)

Monday, April 13: Political Parties

- Lowi et al., Chapter 12: Political Parties

*Thursday, April 16: A Changing Republican Party **

- Oren Cass, ed. 2025. *The New Conservatives: Restoring America's Commitment to Family, Community, and Industry*. (excerpt)

Monday, April 20: Groups & Interests

- Lowi et al., Chapter 13: Groups and Interests

*Thursday, April 23: Campaign Finance **

- Lawrence Lessig. 2014. *The USA is Lesterland: The Nature of Congressional Corruption*. (excerpt)

*Monday, April 27: Media **

- Lowi et al., Chapter 14: The Media
- Audrey Mir. 2025. *The Digital Reversal: Thread-saga of media evolution*. (excerpt)

Monday, May 4: EXAM 3

Short-Form Grading Criteria

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| A | Excellent/outstanding: met or exceeded the highest expectations <u>on all criteria</u> for the assignment or course. |
| A- | Excellent (somewhat): met very high expectations <u>on all criteria</u> , or the highest expectations <u>on all but one or two criteria</u> for the assignment or course. |
| B+ | Good (very): met high expectations <u>on all but one or two criteria</u> for the assignment or course. |
| B | Good: met standard expectations <u>all but one or two criteria</u> for the assignment or course. |
| B- | Good (somewhat)/fair: met standard expectations <u>on most criteria (>50%)</u> for the assignment or course while also falling short on one or two significant criteria or on a number of less important criteria. |
| C+ | Satisfactory (very): met minimum expectations <u>on all criteria</u> for the assignment or course. |
| C | Satisfactory: met minimum expectations <u>on most criteria (>50%)</u> for the assignment or course while falling short in some ways. For undergraduates, a grade of C or above is required to receive major, minor, or certificate course credit. |
| C- | Satisfactory (somewhat): fell short of meeting minimum expectations on most criteria (>50%) for the assignment or course. For undergraduates, a grade of C- is sufficient to receive elective course credit. |
| D | Poor: fell short of meeting minimum expectations <u>on most criteria</u> for the assignment or course. For undergraduates, a grade of D or above is required to receive elective course credit. |
| F | Academic failing; very poor performance. |

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