

## **GOVT 710: American Political Institutions**

Monday 5:30PM-8:00PM

Watkins Art Building Room G08

Spring 2025

Instructor: David Miller

Email address: dmiller@american.edu

Website: <http://www.davidryanmiller.com/>

Office location: Kerwin Hall Room 219

Office hours: Monday 3:00PM-5:00PM (in-person or virtual) ([reserve via Calendly](#))

### ***Cours Description***

American institutions, once regarded as perfect, unshakeable guardrails for a democratic system, have become the subject of swirling questions and controversies in recent years, both from those who seek to undermine those institutions and those who question whether those institutions best serve the American public in modern day. In order to participate in these contemporary debates and conduct research that might contribute to popular discourse, it is critical to understand how American institutions are structured, how these institutions function in light of internal and external pressures, and how they interact with one another. In this course, we will read and critique a selection of recent publications concerning a range of American institutions and develop the beginnings of our own research projects related to American institutions. In doing so, we will not only broaden our knowledge of American institutions, but also hone our social scientific analytical skills and advance our own independent research activity.

### ***Learning Objectives***

Students who complete this course successfully will be able to:

- Understand the general structure of key American institutions and how they interact with each other
- Read and critique high-quality contemporary publications on American institutions
- Develop an original, independent research design related to American institutions
- Cultivate general social scientific analytical skills that will enable you to better execute your own research and participate in key research-related activities in the discipline

### ***Required Texts, Materials, or Equipment***

There are no required texts, materials, or equipment for this class. All readings will be available through the American University Library or otherwise distributed by the instructor.

### ***Assignments and Grading***

Course grades will be determined by students' performance on the following assignments and

tasks:

- Research paper (50%): As a capstone to the class, students are expected to complete a research paper that could serve as the basis of a journal article with further work and revision and present it on the last day of the class. This research paper can take one of the following forms:
  - If a student is currently working on a research project related to American political institutions, that student may continue to work on that paper to fulfill the class requirement. The student must meet with the instructor early in the semester and share a copy of the last written iteration of this project. The student and the instructor will reach an agreement on what additional work is expected by the end of the semester on the project to satisfactorily complete this requirement.
  - If a student is not currently working on a research project related to American political institutions, that student may complete an original research design. This research design should resemble a combination of the “front half” of a journal article (introduction, theory, hypotheses) and a pre-analysis plan (detailed description of data will be collected, coded, and used to evaluate hypotheses). Students are advised to consult with the instructor early in the semester to make sure their ideas are suitable for the class.
- Discussion leads (15%): Each student will be responsible for leading discussion for two classes. On the week for which the student is responsible for leading discussion, the student should provide an overview of the material for the week. This overview should identify and describe key theories (especially those from canonical works cited in the week’s readings) and discuss linkages across readings (theoretical, methodological, or substantive). The student should also prepare a list of questions that will motivate discussion for the class period.
- Journal reviews (10%): Twice during the semester, each student must assume the role of a reviewer for one of the papers on the syllabus for that week’s class and write a mock journal review. Students may select any of the journal articles or working papers for this exercise. Reviews should be between 2 and 3 pages in length and should be emailed directly to the instructor before the class during which the manuscript reviewed is discussed.
- Short research designs (25%): Four times during the semester (February 17, March 3, March 24, and April 7), each student must prepare a short research design (3-5 pages) that builds off of one or more of the readings we completed for that class or for the prior class (i.e., something that fits within the substantive scope of that two-week period). This short research design should consist of a ~1-2 page overview of the extant research that motivates the idea and theoretical argument for a new or alternative expectation and a ~2-3 page description of how to execute a research design to evaluate that expectation.

Students should circulate their short research designs to all members of the class at least 24 hours in advance of the class period for which they are due.

Final grades will be assigned according to the following cutoffs:

Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade
≥ 94	A	≥ 83	B	≥ 73	C	≥ 60	D
≥ 90	A-	≥ 80	B-	≥ 70	C-	< 60	F
≥ 87	B+	≥ 77	C+	≥ 65	D+		

### *Course Policies*

- A link to the current version of the course syllabus will be posted on the course's Canvas page. Please refer to the most current version of the syllabus for information about the course schedule, course policies, etc.
- All other course readings will be made available through either the course syllabus, the American University Library, or otherwise distributed by the instructor at least one week in advance of the class for which they are expected to be completed.
- All readings and assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day specified on the course syllabus and/or by the instructor in class. Late assignments will be accepted, but will be assessed a 10% penalty for each 24 hour period the assignment is late.
- *Communication Outside of Class*
  - I encourage you to contact me to discuss topics we are covering in class, concerns about the course, or other related issues outside of class. The primary mode of communication outside of class will be email. When you email me, please include the course code in the subject line. I will do my best to reply to emails within 24 hours, and I will *not* respond to emails about assignments or exams sent less than 24 hours before they are due.
  - Office hours scheduling will take place via Calendly. If you would like to come to office hours, please [visit my Calendly schedule](#) and reserve an available time for us to meet. Drop-in visits are permitted during in-person office hours (if the slot is not already booked), but virtual office hours must be reserved at least 6 hours in advance. If there are no available appointments or if you are not able to see me during office hours, please contact me so that we can find an alternative time to meet.
- *Technology*
  - Phone/laptop computer/tablet use is permitted only for the purposes of taking notes and retrieving materials/resources relevant to the course. Please be mindful that when you use your devices.

- If any students would like to record lectures, please speak with me in advance to obtain permission.
- *Generative AI:* All work students submit should be their own. Students should generate their own ideas, words, and all elements of their work, unless appropriately acknowledged. Professors expect that students can discuss the contents of their work and the process of creating it. In some classes, the use of generative AI tools will be appropriate. However, in this course, such tools are not permitted at any stage of your work because they interfere with our learning goals. Use of these tools may constitute a violation of the university's Academic Integrity Code.
- *Academic Integrity:* Here at UCR we are committed to upholding and promoting the values of the Tartan Soul: Integrity, Accountability, Excellence, and Respect. As a student in this class, it is your responsibility to act in accordance with these values by completing all assignments in the manner described, and by informing the instructor of suspected acts of academic misconduct by your peers. By so doing, you will not only affirm your own integrity, but also the integrity of the intellectual work of this University, and the degree which it represents. Should you choose to commit academic misconduct in this class, you will be held accountable according to the policies set forth by the University, and will incur appropriate consequences both in this class and from Student Conduct and Academic Integrity Programs. For more information regarding University policy and its enforcement, please visit: [conduct.ucr.edu](http://conduct.ucr.edu).

### ***Information and Resources for Students***

- *Academic Integrity:* All students are required to follow the University's [Academic Integrity Code](#). 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 should be reported appropriately.
- *Misconduct:* American University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy or parenting, age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual's genetic information or any other bases under applicable federal and local laws and regulations (collectively "Protected Bases") in its programs and activities. The University expressly prohibits any form of discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, and stalking.

If you experience any of the above, you have the option of filing a report with the Assistant Vice President for Equity and Title IX Officer ([Office of Equity and Title IX](#), 202-885-8080). For complaints and reports for sexual misconduct, email

[TitleIX@american.edu](mailto:TitleIX@american.edu). For complaints and reports of other discrimination, email [equityoffice@american.edu](mailto:equityoffice@american.edu) for complaints and reports for other discrimination.

Please keep in mind that all faculty and staff – with the exception of counselors in the Counseling Center, staff in the Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence, medical providers in the Student Health Center, and ordained clergy in the Kay Spiritual Life Center – who are aware of or witness this conduct are required to report this information to the university, regardless of the location of the incident.

For more information, including a list of supportive resources on and off-campus, contact AU's [Wellbeing Center](#).

- *Emergency Preparedness:* In an emergency, AU will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail or Canvas, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site (<http://www.american.edu/emergency/>) and the AU information line at 202-885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/college-specific information.
- *Academic Support & Access Center:* The [Academic Support and Access Center](#) (ASAC) supports the academic development and educational goals of all American University students and is committed to providing access for individuals with disabilities within the university's diverse community. ASAC is located in Butler Pavilion 300 and can be reached at 202-885-3360 or [asac@american.edu](mailto:asac@american.edu).

### ***Disclaimer***

I reserve the right to make modifications to this information throughout the semester. In the event of a conflict between syllabus versions, the most recent version will always supersede previous versions.

## *Preliminary Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments*<sup>1</sup>

### **January 13—Introduction**

- [“How to Be a Better Reviewer \(JAWS Event Recap\)”](#)
- [“Asking the Right Questions”](#)
- [“A Decent Proposal”](#)
- [“Research is a Craft”](#)

### **January 20—NO CLASS**

### **January 27— American Democratic Institutions: Origins and Development**

- **The Declaration of Independence**
- **The Constitution**
- ***Federalist 10, 51, and 70***
- Dahl, Robert A. 2003. *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* Yale University Press. (Available through AU Library)
- Linz, Juan J. 1990. “The Perils of Presidentialism.” *Journal of Democracy*, 1(1): 51-69.

### **February 3— American Democratic Institutions: The State Of**

- Grumbach, Jacob M., 2023. “Laboratories of Democratic Backsliding.” *American Political Science Review*, 117(3): 967-984.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Crown. (Available through AU Library)
- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2023. *Tyranny of the Minority: Why American Democracy Reached the Breaking Point*. Crown. (Available through AU Library)
- Lieberman, Robert C., Suzanne Mettler, Thomas B. Pepinsky, Kenneth M. Roberts, and Richard Valelly. 2019. “The Trump Presidency and American Democracy: A Historical and Comparative Analysis.” *Perspectives on Politics*, 17(2): 470-479.
- Howell, William G., and Terry M. Moe. 2021. “America’s Crisis of Democracy.” *Political Science Quarterly* 136(1): 105-127.
- “What if Trump Does Everything He’s Promised—and the People Don’t Care?” *The New Republic*, December 26, 2024, <https://newrepublic.com/article/189233/trump-2025-second-term-agenda-democracy>.

### **February 10—The Presidency: Powers and Management**

- Beckmann, Matthew N. 2024. *The President’s Day: Managing Time in the Oval Office*. Columbia University Press. (Available through AU Library)

---

<sup>1</sup> All readings should be completed before the first class of the unit. All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified.

- Christenson, Dino P., and Douglas L. Kriner. 2017. "Mobilizing the Public Against the President: Congress and the Political Costs of Unilateral Action." *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(4): 769-785.
- Guenther, Scott M. and Samuel Kernell. 2021. "Veto Threat Bargaining with a Bicameral Congress." *Political Research Quarterly*, 74(3):628-644.
- Kaufman, Aaron R., and Jon C. Rogowski. 2023. "Divided Government, Strategic Substitution, and Presidential Unilateralism." *American Journal of Political Science*, 68(2): 816-831.
- Reeves, Andrew, and Jon C. Rogowski. 2018. "The Public Cost of Unilateral Action." *American Journal of Political Science*, 62(2): 424-440.

### **February 17—The Presidency: Representation & the Public**

- Clifford, Scott, D. J. Flynn, Brendan Nyhan, and Kasey Rhee. 2024. "Decider in Chief? Why and how the public exaggerates the power of the presidency." *Political Research Quarterly*, 77(2): 469-484.
- [Grimmer, Justin, Annie Franco, and Chloe Lim. n.d. "The Limited Effect of Presidential Public Appeals."](#)
- Howell, William G., Ethan Porter, and Thomas J. Wood. 2020. "Rethinking Public Appeals: Experimental Evidence on Presidential Performances." *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* 1(1): 137-158.
- Kriner, Douglas L., and Andrew Reeves. 2015. *The Particularistic President: Executive Branch Politics and Political Inequality*. Cambridge University Press. (Available through AU Library)
- [Noble, Benjamin S. n.d. "Presidential Negative Partisanship."](#)
- **SHORT RESEARCH DESIGN DUE**

### **February 24—The Bureaucracy: Structure and Personnel**

- Bednar, Nicholas R., and David E. Lewis. 2024. "Presidential Investment in the Administrative State." *American Political Science Review* 118(1): 442-457.
- Blasingame, Elise N., Christina L. Boyd, Roberto F. Carlos, and Joseph T. Ornstein. 2024. "How the Trump Administration's Quota Policy Transformed Immigration Judging." *American Political Science Review* 118(4): 1688-1703.
- Kinane, Christina M. 2021. "Control Without Confirmation: The Politics of Vacancies in Presidential Appointments." *American Political Science Review*, 115(2): 599-614.
- Lewis, David E. 2010. *The Politics of Presidential Appointments: Political Control and Bureaucratic Performance*. Princeton University Press. (Available through AU Library)
- [Potter, Rachel Augustine. n.d. "Privatizing Personnel: Bureaucratic Outsourcing & the Administrative Presidency."](#)

### **March 3—The Bureaucracy: Policymaking and Implementation**

- Chiou, Fang-Yi, and Jonathan Klingler. 2023. "Rule Significance and Interbranch Competition in Rulemaking Processes." *American Political Science Review*, 117(4): 1506-1521.
- Herd, Pamela, and Donald P. Moynihan. 2019. *Administrative Burden: Policymaking by Other Means*. Russell Sage Foundation. (Available through AU Library)
- Lowande, Kenneth, and Andrew Proctor. 2020. "Bureaucratic Responsiveness to LGBT Americans." *American Journal of Political Science* 64(3): 664-681.
- Potter, Rachel Augustine. 2017. "Slow-rolling, Fast-tracking, and the Pace of Bureaucratic Decisions in Rulemaking." *The Journal of Politics* 79(3): 841-855.
- **SHORT RESEARCH DESIGN DUE**

### **March 10—NO CLASS**

#### **March 17—Congress: Micro-level**

- Curry, James M. and Jason M. Roberts. 2024. "Interpersonal Relationships, Bipartisanship, and January 6th." *American Political Science Review*.
- Fenno Jr, Richard F. 1977 "US House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration." *American Political Science Review* 71(3): 883-917.
- Kaslovsky, Jaclyn. 2022. "Senators at Home: Local Attentiveness and Policy Representation in Congress." *American Political Science Review*, 116(2): 645-661.
- Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Yale University Press. (Available through instructor)
- Minozzi, William, and Gregory A. Caldeira. 2021. "Congress and Community: Coresidence and Social Influence in the US House of Representatives, 1801–1861." *American Political Science Review* 115(4): 1292-1307.

#### **March 24—Congress: Macro-level**

- Aldrich, John H. Gary W. Cox, Mathew D. McCubbins and David W. Rohde. 2024. "Party and Policy in Lineland: A Theory of Conditional Party Cartels." *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy*, 4(4): 479-495.
- Ban, Pamela. 2024. "Information and Party Influence in the US Congress." *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* 4(4): 497-521.
- Ban, Pamela, Ju Yeon Park, and Hye Young You. 2023. "How are Politicians Informed? Witnesses and Information Provision in Congress." *American Political Science Review*, 117(1): 122-139.
- Krehbiel, Keith. 1998. *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of US Lawmaking*. University of Chicago Press. (Available through instructor)
- Ritchie, Melinda N. 2023. *Backdoor Lawmaking: Evading Obstacles in the US Congress*. Oxford University Press. (Available through AU Library)
- **SHORT RESEARCH DESIGN DUE**



### **March 31—The Judiciary: Personnel and Internal Decisionmaking**

- Black, Ryan C., and Ryan J. Owens. 2009. "Agenda Setting in the Supreme Court: The Collision of Policy and Jurisprudence." *Journal of Politics* 71(3): 1062-1075.
- Cameron, Charles M., and Jonathan P. Kastellec. 2023. *Making the Supreme Court: The Politics of Appointments, 1930-2020*. Oxford University Press. (Available through AU Library)
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, Tom S. Clark, and Jason P. Kelly. 2014. "Judicial Selection and Death Penalty Decisions." *American Political Science Review* 108(1): 23-39.
- Nelson, Michael J., Morgan LW Hazelton, and Rachael K. Hinkle. 2022. "How Interpersonal Contact Affects Appellate Review." *Journal of Politics* 84(1): 573-577.
- Segal, Jeffrey A., and Harold J. Spaeth. 2002. *The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited*. Cambridge University Press.

### **April 7—The Judiciary: External Audiences and Legitimacy**

- Clark, Tom S. 2009. "The Separation of Powers, Court Curbing, and Judicial Legitimacy." *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(4): 971-989.
- [Davis, Nicholas, and Matthew P. Hitt. n.d. "Supreme Court Legitimacy Exhibits New Partisan Sorting."](#)
- Gibson, James L. 2024. "Losing Legitimacy: The Challenges of the *Dobbs* Ruling to Conventional Legitimacy Theory." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Hall, Matthew EK. 2014. "The Semiconstrained Court: Public opinion, the Separation of Powers, and the US Supreme Court's Fear of Nonimplementation." *American Journal of Political Science*, 58(2): 352-366.
- **SHORT RESEARCH DESIGN DUE**

### **April 14—Interest Groups: Formation and Organizational Maintenance**

- Furnas, Alexander C. and Timothy M. LaPira. 2024. "The People Think What I Think: False Consensus and Unelected Elite Misperception of Public Opinion." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Gunderson, Anna, Kirsten Widner, and Maggie Macdonald. "Pursuing Change or Pursuing Credit? Litigation and Credit Claiming on Social Media." *Journal of Law and Courts*, 12(1): 87-109.
- Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander. 2024. "Civic Organizations and the Political Participation of Cross-Pressured Americans: The Case of the Labor Movement." *American Political Science Review*.
- Li, Zhao. 2018. "How Internal Constraints Shape Interest Group Activities: Evidence from Access-Seeking PACs." *American Political Science Review*, 112(4): 792-808.
- Schlozman, Kay Lehman, Philip Edward Jones, Hye Young You, Traci Burch, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady. 2015. "Organizations and the Democratic Representation of

Interests: What Does It Mean When Those Organizations Have No Members?"  
*Perspectives on Politics*, 13(4): 1017-1029.

**April 21—Interest Groups: Lobbying & Policy Influence**

- Dwidar, Maraam A. 2025. *Power to the Partners: Organizational Coalitions in Social Justice Advocacy*. University of Chicago Press. (Available through instructor)
- Grose, Christian R., Pamela Lopez, Sara Sadhwani, and Antoine Yoshinaka. 2022. "Social Lobbying." *Journal of Politics*, 84(1): 367-382.
- Hall, Richard L., and Molly E. Reynolds. 2012. "Targeted Issue Advertising and Legislative Strategy: The Inside Ends of Outside Lobbying." *Journal of Politics*, 74(3): 888-902.
- Kalla, Joshua L., and David E. Broockman. 2022. "'Outside Lobbying' Over the Airwaves: A Randomized Field Experiment on Televised Issue Ads." *American Political Science Review*, 116(3): 1126-1132.
- Kroeger, Mary, and Maria Silfa. 2023. "Motivated Corporate Political Action: Evidence from an SEC Experiment." *Journal of Politics*, 85(3).
- Jungherr, Andreas, Alexander Wuttke, Matthias Mader, and Harald Schoen. "A Source Like Any Other? Field and Survey Experiment Evidence on How Interest Groups Shape Public Opinion." *Journal of Communication*, 71(2): 276-304.
- Meli, Amy. TBD.

**April 28—Class Presentations**

**May 5— RESEARCH PAPERS DUE AT 11:59 PM ET**