



**School of Public and International Affairs  
Department of Political Science**

**Pols 1101: Introduction to American Government  
Dr. Mark Leeper  
Spring 2025**

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**Course Description and Objectives**

Although many students wander away from high school civics with a mixture of boredom and horror, the study of American Government as an undergraduate should *never* be anything but intriguing and relevant. The Constitution, after all, persists as the reflection of our enduring and conflicting fundamental values—liberty, order, justice, participation, democracy, individualism, capitalism, equality, and due process, to name a few. The pleasure is that many of these values are highly desirable to citizens within a government. The pain is that many of them clash, are difficult to obtain, and sometimes are mutually exclusive. The United States’ system is always cranking through, and crackling with internal conflict—and as we will find out, by design.

Take for example the ability to vote (participation). Although clearly a *value* within our system, there is no absolute *right* to vote. States determine voter eligibility in the U.S. system. Thus, for decades and even centuries, denying the vote has been a tool of oppression against women, blacks, and many others. For example, measures have recently been proposed to bump the minimum voting age back to 21. States also attempt to constrict the vote for one party to maintain power. Sometimes states and discrimination prevail, but sometimes the countervailing value—*equality* and “equal protection”—opens access to the vote. In June 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court demanded Alabama redraw their district lines since it was clear they were constructed on the basis of race to deny representation for blacks.

More generally, consider the two pillars of U.S. society, liberty and equality, are in reality mutually exclusive. Perfect liberty will not yield economic equality; people are free to amass unlimited wealth. The United States undoubtedly favors more freedom than equality, but these values are always explored and compete through policy.

In this course, we will examine the powers conferred to institutions within the Constitution, as well as the liberties listed, and the processes and actors involved in the system (e.g. campaigns, candidates, money, media, etc.). Also, we will examine the big picture. What kind of system is the United States? And, as the media says every day, is our “democracy under attack?”

Maybe. Maybe not.

**Course Format.** Since this is a survey course, I arrive prepared to lecture for hours, days, even weeks on any given topic. However, discussion and insightful interruption is always welcome. I will post the outlines and supporting materials/links periodically on eLC. The path of this course is largely up to you—it can follow the planned outlines precisely, or veer in unintended directions. Either way it's learning.

**Required Text:** *We the People*, Fourteenth ESSENTIALS Edition, by Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline J. Tolbert, Andrea L. Campbell, and Megan Ming Francis (2022). This richly written text will provide all the basic information and is the source of some written assignments and test questions. I would recommend the e-text for affordability, quick access, and ease of use. In addition to the basic text, I will provide links to current events and other sources for assignments or discussion.

**I will periodically assign readings and post links on eLC. They will be announced IN CLASS and will guide our discussion some days. PAY ATTENTION.**

**Required Technology: eLC**

Make sure you have solid internet access and understand how to navigate eLC (as if I do). My primary means of communication outside of class will be through announcements posted in eLC. **Make sure you receive eLC updates for our class automatically via email (eLC > Click on your profile > Notifications > Instant Notifications).**

In addition, you are welcome to send me questions or information via e-mail, eLC, or any social media messaging tool, if you dare track me down (NOTE: any remarks on social media reflect my own thoughts and are NOT affiliated with UGA). I am not on Instagram presently because I do not understand it.

**Grade Breakdown.**

There will be **periodic written assignments** in response to current events, readings, course materials, and documentaries we view. **They will range in 10 points for in-class writings to 20-30 points for out of class assignments.** They will be announced in class and posted in “assignments” in eLC with due dates (typically with one week to complete). Some assignments, however, will be due the day we discuss a topic. **IT IS IMPERATIVE YOU ATTEND CLASS OR COMMUNICATE WITH ME REGARDING ASSIGNMENTS AND COURSE CONTENT.** Lastly, there will be a final essay worth around 100 points. It is likely we will land around 250 total points,

Grading Scale for Final Semester Grades (percent):

|        |    |       |    |       |    |       |    |       |    |       |    |
|--------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|
| 100-94 | A  | 89-87 | B+ | 83-80 | B- | 76-74 | C  | 69-67 | D+ | 63-60 | D- |
| 93-90  | A- | 86-84 | B  | 79-77 | C+ | 73-70 | C- | 66-64 | D  | 59-0  | F  |

**Attendance Policy. TBA.**

**OBIGATORY RESOURCES and ASSORTED POLICIES**

**Disability Resource Center**

If you anticipate needing accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with the Disability Resource Center. Additional

information can be found here: <http://drc.uga.edu/>

### **Withdrawal Policy**

Undergraduate students can only withdraw from four courses and receive a withdrawal-passing (WP) grade while enrolled at the University. Students can drop any class without penalty during the drop/add period at the beginning of every semester. Dropped courses during the drop/add period do not qualify as withdrawals. Instructors have the ability to withdraw a student from the class due to excessive absences (see course attendance policy). Please review the policy here:

<https://reg.uga.edu/general-information/policies/withdrawals/>

### **Culture of Honesty Policy**

You are responsible for knowing and complying with the policy and procedures relating to academic honesty. To understand what constitutes dishonest work, as defined by the University, please carefully review the policy here:

[https://honesty.uga.edu/\\_resources/documents/academic\\_honesty\\_policy\\_2017.pdf](https://honesty.uga.edu/_resources/documents/academic_honesty_policy_2017.pdf)

Of particular concern now is the introduction of “Artificial Intelligence” – please take note of UGA’s position on AI:

“Unless explicitly stated, artificial intelligence-based technologies, such as ChatGPT, must not be used to generate responses for student assignments. Use of artificial intelligence or word mixing software to complete assignments is considered unauthorized assistance in this course. We encourage you to use AI tools to explore the field and help you study. However, you must take full responsibility for any AI-generated materials you incorporate in your course products. Information must be verified, ideas must still be attributed, and facts must be true.”

**Mental Health and Wellness Resources.** If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit <https://sco.uga.edu>.

They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.

- UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga>).
- or crisis support (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/info/emergencies>).
- If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga>) for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center.
- Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.

**\*\*\* I TAKE MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES SERIOUSLY. IF COMFORTABLE, PLEASE DISCUSS THESE ISSUES WITH ME. \*\*\***

**Course Schedule** . Here’s the rough order of the subjects and cases. Events may dictate a change in order, so stay tuned. Cases are in the textbook unless marked with three asterisks (\*\*\*), which denotes they may be found on-line. I will announce, as the course goes along, where the cases can be found, but try <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct> or [Oyez.org](http://Oyez.org) or, just stick the case name in your google.

Here is the calendar of subjects and tests. Stay tuned – the schedule is subject to change.

## **Section 1: Democracy in Theory and Practice**

### **JANUARY 6-8-10**

- **Introductions**

### **JANUARY 13-15-17-22-24**

- **Democracy in the U.S.: A “High-Flying Kite?” ...or a “Sputtering Dirigible?”**
- **American Culture, Beliefs, and Citizen (In) Activity**  
--Ginsberg et al., Chs. 1, 6, 8

### **JANUARY 27-29-31**

- **Democracy and Dishonesty: Watergate (VIEW DOCUMENTARY)**
- **Democracy and Dishonesty: Libya, Iran/Contra, Clinton, and...Trump**

### **FEBRUARY 3-5-7**

- **Democracy, Inclusion, and the Right to Vote: The Systematic Denial of Voting Rights and Human Dignity**  
--Ginsberg et al., Ch. 5
- **King, Selma, and the Voting Rights Act (1965) (VIEW DOCUMENTARY)**

### **FEBRUARY 10-12**

- **The Failure of the First Two Reconstructions: Racial Inequality and Remedial Measures (that is, affirmative action)**

### **FEBRUARY 14-17-19**

## **Section 2: The Constitution: Formation and Application**

- **The American Revolution: Causes and Effect (VIEW DOCUMENTARY)**
- **The United States Constitution: Formation and Principles**
- **Defending the Constitution...the Federalists**  
--Ginsberg et al., Ch. 2

### **FEBRUARY 21-24**

- **Do States Matter? State Cultures and Georgia Politics**  
Ginsberg et al., Ch. 3.

### **FEBRUARY 26-28**

- **“Judicial Activism” and the Right to Privacy: Can the State Take Your IUDs?**
- **The Right to Terminate: *Roe. Hobbs.* and Abortion Today**
- **LGBTQ Rights: Under Attack?**

## **Section 3: Rights, Liberties, and the Constitution**

### **MARCH 10-12-14**

- **THE BILL of RIGHTS: FREEDOM of SPEECH CATEGORIES of UNPROTECTED SPEECH:**

- SEDITIONOUS SPEECH**
- FIGHTING WORDS, HATE SPEECH, and TRUE THREATS**
- SYMBOLIC SPEECH and RIGHTS of PUBLIC SCHOOLCHILDREN**
- OBSCENITY, PORNOGRAPHY, and LIBEL**
- Ginsberg et al., Ch. 6

#### **MARCH 17-19-21**

##### **\* RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: THE ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE**

- prayer in school
- government support of religious schools
- religious use of public property and public displays

##### **\* RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: FREE EXERCISE and the New Religious Liberty**

#### **ELECTION 2024**

#### **MARCH 24-26**

- **PARTIES, ELECTIONS, and REALIGNMENT: THE ELECTION of 2024**  
--Ginsberg et al., Chs. 9 and 10

#### **MARCH 28-31-APRIL 2**

- **MEDIA and POLITICS: The Rise of Information and the Demise of “News”**  
--Ginsberg et al., Ch. 7

#### **APRIL 4-7-9**

- \* **THE FOURTH AMENDMENT: Probable Cause v. Reasonableness**
- \* **The Fourth Amendment and Public Schools: Yeah, Right**
- \* **Policing, Order, and Individual Rights**

#### **APRIL 11**

- **THE DEATH PENALTY: Patterns, Effectiveness, and Methods**

#### **Section 4: U.S. Democracy in Action: Institutional and Citizen Practice**

#### **APRIL 14**

- **MONEY and US ELECTIONS: FECA, Citizens United, and the Failure to Regulate**  
Ginsberg et al., Ch. 11

#### **APRIL 16: IMMIGRATION**

#### **APRIL 18, 21, 23**

- **CONGRESS and the PRESIDENCY**  
--Ginsberg et al., Chs. 12 and 13

#### **APRIL 25, 28: TBA**