



UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA

School of Public and International Affairs
Department of Political Science
Pols 1101: Introduction to American Government
Dr. Mark Leeper
SPRING 2026

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Office Hours: 12:30-1:30 MWF (or by appointment, at UGA or virtually)

COURSE TIMES and LOCATIONS:

POLS 1101-22514 9:55-10:50 in Caldwell 302
POLS 1101-22517 12-12:55 in Caldwell 109
POLS 1101—22518 1:15-2:10 in Caldwell 109
POLS 1191—22521 2:55-3:50 in Caldwell 102

**NOTE: THIS IS A DRAFT SYLLABUS—changes will be made before the start of class
RE: POLICES and LINKS to RESOURCES**

Course Description

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. 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—they 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.

Primary Learning Objectives.

(1) Students will apply theoretical frameworks, such as federalism, separation of powers, and rights and liberties to analyze the organization and functioning of American government, its political institutions and processes.

(2) Students will learn the philosophical and constitutional foundations of the U.S. political system, including the state of Georgia, and examine primary sources over time, including the Declaration of Independence, Federalist Papers, the U.S. and Georgia Constitutions, among others. Study of the Georgia Constitution and politics will be woven into each section of the course (e.g. federalism, rights and liberties, elections, legislative process, etc.).

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 regularly 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: (1) *We the People*, Fifteenth ESSENTIALS Edition, by Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline J. Tolbert, Andrea L. Campbell, and Megan Ming Francis. 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. (2) I will require you to have an online subscription to the *Washington Post and the Atlanta Journal Constitution*. UGA provides free access; I will provide those details on eLC. We will continually tie news reporting and current events to our study, and the AJC will be used to deepen our understanding of Georgia government and politics.

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; Tik Tok scares me.

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. If you attend class and/or pay close attention to eLC, expectations will be clear.

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.

Although I do not carry an “official” attendance policy, I will monitor attendance and be forewarned even sporadic absences will affect your grade. It will be impossible to perform well on written assignments and keep up with the timeline. Further, poor attendance will affect marginal grades; that is, if you are between a “B-” and a “C+,” rampant truancy will certainly lower you into the “C” range. Contrarily, perfect attendance may lift a borderline grade. John Adams (our second President) wrote the “facts” we learn in college aren’t so important; they fade with the passing years. It’s *who we become* by virtue of the process. Obviously, time in class is at the core of that experience.

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

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.”

Prohibition on Recording Lectures

In the absence of written authorization from the UGA Disability Resource Center, students may not make a visual or audio recording of any aspect of this course. Students who have a recording accommodation agree in writing that they:

- Will use the records only for personal academic use during the specific course.
- Understand that faculty members have copyright interest in their class lectures and that they agree not to infringe on this right in any way.
- Understand that the faculty member and students in the class have privacy rights and agree not to violate those rights by using recordings for any reason other than their own personal study.
- Will not release, digitally upload, broadcast, transcribe, or otherwise share all or any part of the recordings. They also agree that they will not profit financially and will not allow others to benefit personally or financially from lecture recordings or other course materials.
- Will erase/delete all recordings at the end of the semester.
- Understand that violation of these terms may subject them to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct or subject them to liability under copyright laws.

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

Section 1: Democracy in Theory and Practice

- **Introductions**
- **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, and 9
--**GEORGIA EXERCISE: Whom Do GA Members of Congress Represent?**
- **Democracy and Dishonesty: Watergate (VIEW DOCUMENTARY)**
- **Democracy and Dishonesty: Clinton, Libya, Iran/Contra and...Trump**
- **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)**
- **GEORGIA FOCUS: The Atlanta Activists**
- **DISCUSSION: Letter From a Birmingham Jail**
- **The Failure of the First Two Reconstructions: Racial Inequality and Remedial Measures (that is, affirmative action and DEI)**
- **GEORGIA FOCUS: The Voting Rights Act (1982) and Majority-Minority Districts**

Section 2: The Constitution: Formation and Application

- **The American Revolution: Causes and Effect (VIEW DOCUMENTARY)**
Declaration of Independence: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration>
- **The United States Constitution: Formation and Principles**
The Articles: <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/articles-of-confederation>
U.S. Constitution: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution>
- * **Defending the Constitution...the Federalists**
--Ginsberg et al., Ch. 2

Federalist Papers: <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/full-text>
- **Do States Matter? State Cultures and Georgia Politics**
Ginsberg et al., Ch. 3.
- **GEORGIA FOCUS**
Georgia Constitution: <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/georgia-constitution/>

- **“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?**
- **GEORGIA FOCUS: abortion law and LGBTQ+ rights**

Section 3: Rights, Liberties, and the Constitution

- **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
- * **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**
- * **GEORGIA FOCUS: Ten Commandments in the Classroom**

NATIONAL AND STATE ELECTIONS

- **PARTIES, ELECTIONS, and REALIGNMENT**
 - Ginsberg et al., Chs. 9 and 10
- * **GEORGIA FOCUS: State and National Elections**
- **MEDIA and POLITICS: The Rise of Information and the Demise of “News”**
 - Ginsberg et al., Ch. 7
- * **THE FOURTH AMENDMENT: Probable Cause v. Reasonableness**
- * **The Fourth Amendment and Public Schools: Yeah, Right**
- * **Policing, Order, and Individual Rights**
 - **THE DEATH PENALTY: Patterns, Effectiveness, and Methods**
 - **GEORGIA FOCUS: The Central Role of Georgia in Death Penalty Law**

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

- **MONEY and US ELECTIONS: FECA, Citizens United, and the Failure to Regulate**
Ginsberg et al., Ch. 11
- **CONGRESS and the PRESIDENCY**
 - Ginsberg et al., Chs. 12 and 13

- **Presidential Power**
- **American Foreign Policy**