

POLITICS 3

Introduction to American Politics

Course Syllabus – Fall 2026

Instructor: Dr. Claudia Alegre (she/her)

Class Meetings: Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00 am – 12:15 pm

Classroom: Carnegie Hall 107

Instructor email: claudia.alegre@pomona.edu

Office: Carnegie Hall 09

Office Hours: By Appointment - [Link here](#) and on Canvas

Course Description

Welcome to Intro to AP! This course provides an in-depth introduction to American politics, exploring both the formal structures of government and the social and cultural forces that shape political life in the United States. Students will examine key institutions including Congress, the presidency, the judiciary, and federalism, as well as political processes such as elections, policy-making, and political participation. The course also addresses the role of public opinion, political identity, polarization, social movements, and media in influencing political outcomes.

This semester overlaps with the 2026 federal midterm elections, held on November 3, giving students a live case study in how campaigns, turnout, and party competition shape the composition of Congress and state governments. The course also arrives amid an ongoing constitutional fight over birthright citizenship: in June 2026, the Supreme Court struck down President Trump's 2025 executive order that had sought to strip citizenship from children born in the U.S. to undocumented parents, reaffirming that birthright citizenship is guaranteed by the Constitution. Weeks later, the president signed new executive orders targeting narrower categories, including so-called "birth tourism," and has pushed Congress to legislate further restrictions rather than pursue a constitutional amendment. Disputes like this one raise recurring questions about constitutional interpretation, the separation of powers, and the limits of executive authority. This course examines such developments through the lens of American political institutions, democratic norms, and competing public values.

Through a combination of lectures, discussions, and analytical writing assignments, students will learn to critically assess the relationship between democratic principles and real-world political practice. The course emphasizes active engagement with both contemporary and historical examples, encouraging students to draw connections between political theory, empirical research, and current events.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand the structure and function of American political institutions.
- Analyze political behavior, including voting, public opinion, protest, and activism.
- Interpret contemporary political events using social-scientific frameworks.
- Develop and refine research questions grounded in political science scholarship.
- Communicate political analysis clearly and effectively in writing.

Course Structure

Each class session will combine lecture and individual reading assignments. Lectures are designed to provide foundational context and enhance your understanding of the week's readings – they do not substitute for completing the assigned texts. The goal is for lectures and readings to complement each other, strengthening your grasp of key theories, concepts, and debates throughout the course.

This course emphasizes discussion, creating a space where students can actively engage with the material, ask questions, and exchange ideas during each class meeting.

Required Text

Primary Texts:

Ken Kollman, Readings in American Politics, 6th Edition [Reader]

[OpenStax American Government 4e](#) [Free Online Text]

Supplemental Texts (Optional, Available at Libraries or for Purchase):

No need to purchase any of these - I will be adding PDFs of all assigned readings on Canvas

1. Amy E. Lerman & Vesla M. Weaver. *Arresting Citizenship: The Democratic Consequences of American Crime Control* (2014).
 2. Katherine Tate. *Black Faces in the Mirror: African Americans and Their Representatives in the U.S. Congress* (2003).
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Grading

Participation – 10%

Regular attendance is expected. Participation involves active engagement with lectures, discussions, and group activities. Consistent attendance is crucial for keeping up with course content and for your success in group work and class discussions.

Reading Responses – 25%

You will complete six short reading responses (400–600 words) over the course of the semester, each connecting one of that week’s assigned readings to a course theme, a historical case, or a current political event. Responses are graded on engagement with the text and clarity of thought rather than polish — think low-stakes, frequent writing rather than a formal essay. Your lowest of the six scores is dropped; your best five each count for 5% of your final grade. Due dates are noted on the course calendar below.

Midterm Exam – 30%

Students will complete an in-class midterm exam covering readings, lectures, and class discussions from August 31 – October 12. The midterm will take place in class on October 14.

The exam will include:

- Multiple-choice and true/false questions
- Short-answer questions

The midterm will be graded on accuracy, clarity, and the ability to synthesize course concepts, rewarding thoughtful application of readings to political examples.

Final Paper – 35%

The final paper is a 10–12 page research essay responding to the current state of American democracy. You should draw on course readings, class discussions, and independent research to craft an analytical, evidence-based argument. The paper should demonstrate your ability to synthesize course material with broader social, political, and historical contexts.

Due: Friday, December 18, 2026, via Canvas.

Course Expectations

To foster a productive and supportive learning environment, all students are expected to adhere to the following standards throughout the course:

1. Academic Integrity and Honor Code

This course upholds the highest standards of academic honesty. All work submitted must be your own. Plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, or any form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action according to university policies. Proper citation of sources is required in all assignments.

2. Attendance and Participation

Class attendance is mandatory. Given that films will typically be watched during class and discussions are integral to the learning experience, consistent attendance is essential for success. If you must miss a class due to illness or emergency, please notify me in advance when possible and arrange to make up missed work.

3. Late Submission Policy

Timely submission of assignments is essential to maintain fairness and to help you stay on track with the course schedule. All assignments must be submitted by the stated deadline. If you anticipate needing an extension, you must contact me before the deadline to request an accommodation. Late submissions without prior approval will incur a penalty of 10% off the assignment grade per calendar day late. For example, an assignment submitted two days late without permission will lose 20% of the earned points. Assignments submitted more than five days late will not be accepted unless prior arrangements have been made.

4. Respectful Engagement

Our classroom is a space for open, thoughtful, and respectful dialogue. Please listen attentively and engage respectfully with your peers and instructor, even when viewpoints differ. Disrespectful behavior, including interruptions, dismissive remarks, or discriminatory language, will not be tolerated.

5. Preparedness and Professionalism

Come prepared by completing all readings and viewing assignments before class. Arrive on time and ready to participate actively. Use electronic devices appropriately and avoid distractions during class.

6. Communication and Emailing

If you have questions or concerns, please first consult the syllabus and course materials. When emailing me, please allow at least 48 hours for a response before sending a follow-up message, as I strive to give thoughtful and thorough replies. You are also encouraged to attend my office hours for more in-depth discussion or assistance. Office hours provide an excellent opportunity to engage directly and clarify any course material or concerns.

By following these expectations, we can maintain a positive, inclusive, and intellectually stimulating environment for everyone!

Student Resources

Pomona College is committed to helping every student succeed and thrive. Below are some of the academic, wellness, and peer-mentoring resources available to you. If you are ever concerned about a fellow student, it's always a good idea to reach out to the Dean of Students Office.

Mental Health and Wellness

Monsieur Counseling and Psychological Services ([MCAPS](#)) is the mental health resource for the five undergraduate Claremont Colleges, offering confidential, no-cost, in-person counseling to all enrolled undergraduates. [TimelyCare](#) also provides 24/7 on-demand medical care and “Talk Now” mental health support. If you need immediate support, you can reach the MCAPS Crisis Line 24/7 at 909-621-8202 (select option 1). See the [Wellness Resources](#) page for more.

Writing, Speaking, and Communication Support

The Center for Speaking, Writing, and the Image (CSWIM) offers free, one-on-one consultations with peer CSWIM Partners on writing, speaking, and multimodal communication projects at any stage — from brainstorming to a final draft. Open Sunday–Friday in Smith Campus Center 148. Schedule an appointment at pomona.mywconline.com or email cswim@pomona.edu.

Academic Coaching

The Sage Fellows Program offers peer academic coaches to help you become a more effective and efficient learner — individual coaching, weekly drop-in office hours (no appointment required), and workshops on time management, study strategies, and reading and note-taking skills. Email studentaffairs@pomona.edu to get connected with a Sage Fellow.

Quantitative Skills Center (QSC)

The [Quantitative Skills Center](#) provides one-on-one support for courses with a significant quantitative or scientific-reasoning component, as well as general help with quantitative skills. Located in Smith Campus Center 228. Schedule at pomona.mywconline.com or email qsc@pomona.edu.

Accessibility Resources and Services (ARS)

Pomona College is committed to fair and equitable treatment of all students, including access for students with specific needs or disabilities. If you may need academic accommodations, please submit documentation to [Accessibility Resources and Services](#) and engage in the interactive accommodations process (disability@pomona.edu). The 7C Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) offers additional support and assistive technology.

Additional Support

The 7Cs also offer a range of identity-based resource centers and peer-mentoring programs — including the Asian American Resource Center, Chicano/Latino Student Affairs, the Draper Center for Community Partnerships, DACA/Undocumented Student Resources, the Empower Center, FLI Scholars, International Student Services, the Native American Initiatives Office, the Office of Black Student Affairs, the Queer Resource Center, and the Women's Union, among others. See the full [peer-mentoring programs](#) list for details, or reach out to the Dean of Students Office with any concerns.

Health and Safety

- Campus Safety: 909-607-2000 (also Administrator on Call, available at all hours)
- Student Health Services: 909-621-8222 · After Hours Emergency: 909-607-2000
- National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988
- Project Sister Family Services (24/7 Sexual Assault Crisis Hotline): 800-656-4357

Course Calendar

Monday, August 31, 2026

Introduction to the Course

Readings

- No readings

Wednesday, September 2, 2026

Foundations of American Government and Democratic Crisis

Readings

- Kollman 1.4: Paul Musgrave, “Political Scientists Turned a Blind Eye to America’s Democratic Failures”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 1.1 What Is Government?](#)

Wednesday, September 9, 2026

The Constitution

Readings

- Kollman 2.2: Robert Dahl, “How Democratic Is the American Constitution?”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 2.3 The Development of the Constitution](#)

Monday, September 14, 2026

Federalism and the Separation of Powers

Readings

- Kollman 3.2: Pamela McCann et al., “Top-Down Federalism”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 3.1 The Division of Powers](#)

Wednesday, September 16, 2026

Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Readings

- Kollman 8.1: Gerald Rosenberg, “The Hollow Hope” (Excerpt)
- Kollman 4.4: Weaver and Prowse, “Racial Authoritarianism in U.S. Democracy”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 4.1 What Are Civil Liberties?](#)
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 5.1 What Are Civil Rights and How Do We Identify Them?](#)

Monday, September 21, 2026

Public Opinion

Readings

- Kollman 9.1: John Zaller, “The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 6.1 The Nature of Public Opinion](#)

Wednesday, September 23, 2026

Political Participation and Mass Behavior

Readings

- Kollman 9.2: Donald Kinder and Cindy Kam, “Us Against Them”

Reading Response 1 due (submit by 11:59 PM)

Monday, September 28, 2026

Political Parties

Readings

- Kollman 12.1: John Aldrich, “Why Parties?”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 9.1 What Are Parties and How Did They Form?](#)

Wednesday, September 30, 2026

Interest Groups and Lobbying

Readings

- Kollman 11.2: Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page, “Democracy in America?”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 10.1 Interest Groups Defined](#)

Monday, October 5, 2026

Media and Politics

Readings

- Kollman 14.2: Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 8.1 What Is the Media?](#)

Reading Response 2 due (submit by 11:59 PM)

Wednesday, October 7, 2026

Congress and Representation

Readings

- Kollman 5.1: David Mayhew, “The Electoral Connection”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 11.1 The Institutional Design of Congress](#)

Monday, October 12, 2026

The Presidency and Executive Power

Readings

- Kollman 6.1 & 6.5
- Christenson and Kriner, “The Myth of the Imperial Presidency” (Excerpt)
- Richard Neustadt, “Presidential Power”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 12.1 The Design and Evolution of the Presidency](#)

Wednesday, October 14, 2026

Midterm Exam

Readings

- In-class, 75 minutes — covers readings, lectures, and discussion from Aug. 31 through Oct. 12

No class — Fall Break (Monday, October 19 – Tuesday, October 20)

Wednesday, October 21, 2026

The Bureaucracy and Administrative Governance

Readings

- Kollman 7.1 & 7.4
- Napolio, “Pork During Pandemics”
- James Q. Wilson, “Bureaucracy”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 15.1 Bureaucracy and the Evolution of Public Administration](#)

Reading Response 3 due (submit by 11:59 PM)

Monday, October 26, 2026

The Courts and Judicial Power

Readings

- Kollman 8.2 & 8.4
- Lawrence v. Texas (2003)
- George & Epstein, “On the Nature of Supreme Court Decision Making”
- Rachel VanLandingham Keck, “Court Packing and Democratic Erosion”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 13.1 Guardians of the Constitution and Individual Rights](#)

Wednesday, October 28, 2026

Public Policy and Agenda Setting

Readings

- Kollman 5.2
- Gary Cox and Mathew McCubbins, “Setting the Agenda”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 16.1 What Is Public Policy?](#)

Monday, November 2, 2026

Voting, Elections, and Democratic Accountability

Readings

- Kollman 10.2 + 10.5
- Leighley and Nagler, “Who Votes Now?” (Excerpt)
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 7.1 Voter Registration](#)

Wednesday, November 4, 2026

The 2026 Midterm Elections: Applying Course Concepts in Real Time

Readings

- No pre-assigned reading — come ready to discuss the Nov. 3 election results; a short set of post-election news analyses will be posted on Canvas once results are known

Monday, November 9, 2026

Economic Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness

Readings

- Kollman 13.4
- Achen and Bartels, “Democracy for Realists”

Reading Response 4 due (submit by 11:59 PM)

Wednesday, November 11, 2026

Immigration, Race, and Political Behavior

Readings

- Kollman 13.5
- Stephens-Dougan, “Race to the Bottom”

Monday, November 16, 2026

Gender, Representation, and Political Ambition

Readings

- Kollman 13.3
- Fox and Lawless, “Gendered Perceptions and Political Candidacies”

Wednesday, November 18, 2026

Race and Representation

Readings

- Katherine Tate, *Black Faces in the Mirror*, Chapter 2

Reading Response 5 due (submit by 11:59 PM)

Monday, November 23, 2026

Political Polarization and Democratic Stability

Readings

- Kollman 12.3
- Liliana Mason, “Uncivil Agreement”
 - [OpenStax, American Government 4e — 9.4 Divided Government and Partisan Polarization](#)

No class — Thanksgiving Recess (Wednesday, November 25 – Friday, November 27)

Monday, November 30, 2026

Protest, Social Movements, and Democratic Participation

Readings

- Kollman 10.4 + 11.3
- “From Making Young Voters: Converting Civic Attitudes into Civic Action”
- “The Loud Minority: Why Protests Matter”

Wednesday, December 2, 2026

Criminal Justice and Democratic Citizenship

Readings

- Amy Lerman and Vesla Weaver, Arresting Citizenship, Chapters 1 & 2

Reading Response 6 due (submit by 11:59 PM)

Monday, December 7, 2026

Democratic Erosion and Institutional Stress

Readings

- Kollman 15.1
- Mettler, “The Submerged State” (Excerpt)

Wednesday, December 9, 2026

Final Paper Workshop & Course Reflections

Readings

- Students bring draft outlines for discussion and peer feedback; closing discussion on American democracy and course themes