

POLS 100: Principles of American Government

<https://pols100.f26.equezadallanes.com/>

Section 02: 12:30 PM – 1:45 PM WeFr

Section 03: 2:00 PM – 3:15 PM WeFr

Smith 210

Fall 2026

Instructor

Enrique Quezada-Llanes

Email: equ ezada@holycross.edu

Office: Fenwick Hall 323

Office hours: M 12:30-2:20 pm, W 3:30-5:30 pm, and (via Zoom) Th 1:00-3:00 pm and by appointment

Course Overview

This course will provide an overview of the major topics in the study of American politics. The course is arranged in three parts. In the first part of the course, we will talk about the foundations of the American system (the Constitution, federalism, civil rights and liberties). In Part II, we will cover the major institutions of American government (Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, and the judiciary). In Part III, we will examine the role of public opinion, political parties, elections, and the media in American politics. In addition to these topics, the course will also introduce you to the methods political scientists use.

Learning Outcomes

- Develop an understanding of the foundations, major institutions, and principal actors in American politics
- Think critically about the ways in which Americans interact with their political institutions
- Apply the theories and concepts from American politics to current events

Work and Assessment

Required Texts:

- Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy R. Johnson. 2025. *The Logic of American Politics, 12th Edition*. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press/SAGE.

- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2023. *Tyranny of the Minority: Why American Democracy Reached the Breacking Point*. New York: Crown.

Course Expectations

Students are expected to attend class and participate during class discussions. This course has both a lecture and a discussion component. The lectures will incorporate the readings assigned for that day/week. I expected you will have completed all readings prior to class and will come prepared with comments and questions. Unless noted otherwise, all readings will be made available on Canvas.

Course Workload

As a course with a course count of one, you are expected to spend 8-10 hours of work each week (not including our two 75-minute weekly course meetings).

Assignments and grades

Final course grades will be assigned as follows:

Grade	Range	Grade	Range
A	94–100%	C	74–76%
A–	90–93%	C–	70–73%
B+	87–89%	D+	67–69%
B	84–86%	D	64–66%
B–	80–83%	D–	60–63%
C+	77–79%	F	< 60%

Final grades will be calculated based on the following components:

In-class Participation (10%): All students are expected to be active participants in class discussions. Our learning experience will be enhanced if you come prepared and ready to share your comments, insights, and/or questions from the material covered in the lectures and readings with the rest of the class.

While attendance is a pre-requisite to participation, it is not all of it. If you attend every class but do not participate, expect to get only half of the points. It is up to you to increase this participation grade to get full points. You will earn participation points through in-class activities.

To accommodate unforeseeable circumstances, you have two *unexcused* absences in the semester that will not affect your participation grade. Please let the instructor know about any excused absences you anticipate during the semester. (Absences due to extenuating circumstances will be considered separately. Please refer to the [College's Class Attendance Policy](#) for the college-wide policy on absences and be in communication if a situation that will keep you from attending class for an extended period of time arises.)

Report of Campus Event (5%): There are some events on campus that touch on important topics relevant to our course. You are required to attend one of them and write a 1-2 page (double-spaced) reflection on the event. This report must briefly summarize the content of the event and then provide a reflection that connects the event to the topics of our course. Here are the three events that you can choose from:

1. Revolutionary America: Religion, Morality, and the Problem of Governance (Wednesday, September 16, at 4:30 pm in the Rehm Library)
2. Constitution Day lecture (Thursday, September 17, at 4:30 pm, Room TBD)
3. The American Revolution and the Case for Redemption (Thursday, November 5, at 4:30 pm in the Rehm Library)

Three Response Papers (15% each): Throughout the course, we will talk about the state of American democracy. After each of the major sections of the course (foundations, institutions, and the public) you will return to the question of whether American democracy is fragile or stable. In these short papers (about 3 double-space pages) you will discuss how the different foundations, institutions, or players in American politics contribute to the resilience or erosion of democracy in the United States.

- Papers must be submitted via Canvas. Late submissions will be penalized with one point off for each 24-hour period after the due date.

Midterm and Final Exam (20% each): There will be a midterm and a final exam that students will complete on Canvas. These exams will assess your familiarity with the terms and theories in the American politics literature that we will have covered in class.

Communication Policy

If you have questions about class in general or about a specific assignment, you can email me or come by my office. You can expect a response within 24 hours (unless you email me on Friday). Students are also more than welcome to attend office hours, as this is time set aside specifically for you. In addition, if my office door is open, feel free to stop by. Please note that I will not be “pre-grading” assignments, but I am happy to answer clarifying questions about them either via email or, preferably, during office hours.

Regrading Policy

If a student wishes to appeal a grade, they must do so in writing within one week of receiving their graded assignment back. The student must indicate clearly what part of the assignment’s grading they disagree with, making sure to respond to the instructor’s comments in that section and making their case for why they should not have been deducted points. These requests should be done via email and the subject name should read “POLS 204 Regrading request - [Name of assignment].”

Technology Policy

To avoid any distractions, cellphones are prohibited in class and must remain in your pocket or backpack. While some in-class activities will require you to use your laptop, these must remain closed until it is indicated you can open them. You are allowed to take notes on a tablet so long as the device is lying flat on your desk. If you require an exception to this policy, please see me during the first week of class to discuss an alternative.

Academic Integrity and Generative AI Policy

All education is a cooperative enterprise between faculty and students. This cooperation requires trust and mutual respect, which are only possible in an environment governed by the principles of academic integrity. As an institution devoted to teaching, learning, and intellectual inquiry, Holy Cross expects all members of the College community to abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any violation of academic integrity undermines the student-faculty relationship, thereby wounding the whole community. Students in this class are required to read the full text of the [College's Academic Integrity Policy](#) and to abide by its standards.

Unless otherwise noted, you are expected to complete all coursework independently without the use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini). Because this course emphasizes using writing as a tool for learning and a vehicle for developing a unique writerly voice, using AI tools runs counter to our goals for writing assignments. Because the assumption in this course is that all writing students submit is original to them, cases where students turn in AI-generated content will be considered cheating.

Course Accessibility and Academic Accommodations

The College of the Holy Cross is committed “to providing students with disabilities equal access to the educational opportunities and programs available at Holy Cross in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Massachusetts laws.”

Any student who feels the need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the [Office of Accessibility Services](#) to discuss support services available. Once the office receives documentation supporting the request for accommodation, the student would meet privately with Accessibility Services to discuss reasonable and appropriate accommodations.

The office can be reached by calling 508-793-3693. If you are already registered with Accessibility Services, please be sure to get your accommodation letters and deliver them to your instructors in a timely fashion. Instructors need at least 4-5 days advance notice to be able to facilitate the process of receiving testing accommodations.

Wellbeing and Mental Health

The wellbeing and mental health of students is important. If you are having trouble managing your coursework and are experiencing unusual amounts of stress, sadness, or anxiety, the

College has resources you may find useful. Please reach out to [Student Wellness Education](#) or the office of [Counseling and Psychological Services](#).

Title IX

If you have experienced any form of sexual harassment or violence, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, please talk to any faculty or staff member with whom you feel comfortable. Faculty and staff members want to support you and have been trained to help. They will also inform the Title IX office so that you learn about options available to you. If you do not want college administrators to know what you have experienced, you may speak to a chaplain or counseling services with complete confidentiality. They will not tell anyone what you share with them unless you give your express permission. You may contact the Title IX Office directly at titleix@holycross.edu.

Chosen Names and Personal Pronouns

Everyone has the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity. Rosters do not list gender or pronouns, so you may indicate the pronouns you use so that I don't make assumptions based on your name and/or appearance/self-presentation. If you use a chosen name, please let me know. Chosen names and pronouns are to be respected at all times in the classroom. Mistakes in addressing one another may happen, so I encourage an environment of openness to correction and learning. I will not however, tolerate repeated comments which disrespect or antagonize students who have indicated pronouns or a chosen name.

Center for Writing and Writer's Workshop

The Center for Writing offers one-on-one appointments with trained peer consultants through their Writer's Workshop who can help you improve your communication skills. You are encouraged to use this resource when working on your class assignments to make your arguments more compelling, your sentences clearer, and persistent grammatical errors nonexistent. You can schedule an appointment at <https://holycross.mywconline.com/>.

Recording of Classes

Please note that, consistent with applicable federal and state law, this course may be video/audio recorded as an accommodation *only* with permission from the Office of Accessibility Services. Students are not permitted to record the contents of this class under any other circumstances.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

Schedule

Week 1 - Introduction and Problems of Collective Action

During the first week, we will discuss the syllabus and talk about what it means for political science (or any social science, for that matter) to be a *science*.

Wednesday, August 26

- [Syllabus](#)
- Schulman, Jonathan, and Richard Wike. 2026. “Multiple indicators show a decline in the health of America’s democracy in 2025.” Pew Research Center, April 15. [🔗](#)
- Wondimu, Blen. 2026. “A majority of Americans say the country’s best years are behind us.” Pew Research Center, May 15. [🔗](#)

Friday, August 28

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 1. 

Week 2 - The State of American Democracy

Wednesday, September 2

- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. “How Wobbly Is Our Democracy?” *The New York Times*. 
 - As a Holy Cross student, you have access to *The New York Times*. If you haven’t done so, please sign up for an account via Ignite (it should appear under “Apps”)
- *Tyranny of the Minority*, chapters 1 and 2. 

Friday, September 4 - No in-person meeting

- See Canvas for an activity in lieu of class

Week 3 - Making a Constitution

Wednesday, September 9

- *Tyranny of the Minority*, chapters 5 and 6. 

Friday, September 11

- The Declaration of Independence. [🔗](#)
- Williams, Yohuru. 2020. “Why Thomas Jefferson’s Anti-Slavery Passage Was Removed from the Declaration of Independence”. [🔗](#)

- NPR. 2020. “‘What To The Slave Is The Fourth Of July?’: Descendants Read Frederick Douglass’ Speech.” 
- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 2: sections 2.1. and 2.2. 

Week 4 - Federalism

Wednesday, September 16

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 2: sections 2.3 to end. 
- Constitution of the United States. 
- Federalist Papers #10, 51. 

Friday, September 18

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 3. 
- Galston, William A. 2026. “Does President Trump have the authority to ‘nationalize’ voting?” Brookings Institution, February 11. 

Week 5 - Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Wednesday, September 23

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 5. 
- Hassan, Adeel. 2026. “U.S. Citizen Who Deleted Phone’s Data Says His Prosecution Puts Privacy at Risk.” *The New York Times*, August 21. 

Friday, September 25

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 4. 
- (skin:) Mazumder, Soumyajit. 2018. “The Persistent Effect of US Civil Rights Protests on Political Attitudes.” *American Journal of Political Science* 62(4): 922-935. 

Week 6 - Congress

Wednesday, September 30

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 6: sections 6.1-6.3. 
- Mayhew, David R., 2004. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Yale University Press. Introduction and Chapter 1. 

Friday, October 2

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 6: sections 6.4 to end. 

! Deadline

Response Paper 1 due due Friday, October 2, at 11:59pm on Canvas

Week 7 - Midterm Exam

Wednesday, October 7

- Review

Friday, October 9

- Midterm Exam

Week 8 - Fall Break

NO CLASS: 10/14 and 10/16

Week 9 - Presidency

Wednesday, October 21

- William G. Howell. 2003. *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 1. 
- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 7. 

Friday, October 23

- Greenberg, Jack B. 2024. “The Case for Agency: Three Dimensions of Discretion in Presidential Agenda Construction.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 54(3): 290–309.  available on Canvas.

Week 10 - The Bureaucracy and Judiciary

Wednesday, October 28

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 8. 

Friday, October 30

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 9. 
- NPR. “‘If You Can Keep It’: The Future Of The Federal Judiciary.” 2024. *NPR 1A* [podcast], December 16. 

Week 11 - Political Parties

Wednesday, November 4

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 12. 📖

Friday, November 6

- Election debrief (readings TBA)

! Deadline

Response Paper 2 due due Friday, November 6, at 11:59pm on Canvas

Week 12 - Public Opinion, Elections, and Campaigns

Wednesday, November 11

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 10. 📖
- (skim:) Dynes, Adam M., and John B. Holbein. 2020. “Noisy Retrospection: The Effect of Party Control on Policy Outcomes.” *American Political Science Review* 114(1): 237-257. 💎

Friday, November 13

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 11. 📖
- Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer. “Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment.” *American Political Science Review* 102(1): 33-48. 💎

Week 13 - Interest Groups and the Media

Wednesday, November 18

- *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 13. 📖
- Gilens, Martin, and Benjamin I. Page. 2014. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens.” *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3): 564–81. 💎

Friday, November 20

- CrashCourse. “Media Institution: Crash Course Government and Politics #44.” 2016. *CrashCourse* [video], January 16. ▶
- Darr, Joshua P, Matthew P Hitt, and Johanna L Dunaway. 2018. “Newspaper Closures Polarize Voting Behavior.” *Journal of Communication* 68(6): 1007–28. 💎

Week 14 - Thanksgiving Break

NO CLASS: 11/22 AND 11/24

Week 15 - The Future of American Democracy

Wednesday, December 2

- *Tyranny of the Minority*, chapters 7 and 8. 📖

Friday, December 4

- TBA

! Deadline

Response Paper 3 due due Friday, December 4, at 11:59pm on Canvas

Week 16 - Final Exam

Section 03: Saturday, December 12, 11:30 am - 2:00 pm

Section 02: Monday, December 14, 11:30 am - 2:00 pm