

DRAFT: Introduction to American Politics

Summer 2024, Session II

M, T, R | 1:50-4:20p

This course is delivered online. Please see pg. 2 for more information.

Daniel Ruggles, PhD Candidate
Department of Politics, Brandeis University

Instructor Contact

Daniel Ruggles

Office: Zoom

Email: danielruggles@brandeis.edu

Student Hours: Tuesdays from 12:30-1:30p or by appointment | calendly.com/danielruggles

Course Description

How do we make sense of American politics in an increasingly polarized world? How do the debates and challenges of the Founding inform our political conflicts today? This course addresses questions about the animating debates of American politics, the role of political institutions in managing these conflicts, and their implications for politics today. This course engages with foundational texts of American political thought as well as key insights from political leaders and observers since the Founding, providing students with a survey of the mechanisms and functions of American politics.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, students will:

1. Engage with historical and contemporary debates about the role and function of American political institutions, using core texts of American political thought.
2. Identify and explain sources of competition and tension in American politics.
3. Assess the impact of social movements, political thought, and political institutions on American democracy.

These objectives will contribute to students' career skills in:

1. Research and analysis: Students will translate ideas from original source materials and competing explanations into clear and concise analysis.
2. Effective Communication: Students will use discussion sessions, short memos, and essays to express their understanding and hone their arguments.
3. Critical-Thinking and Problem-Solving: Students will consider competing demands of policymakers, institutional norms, and popular pressure while using written assignments to articulate possibilities for change.

Prerequisites: There are no formal prerequisites for this course.

Credit Hours: This course is for 4 Credit Hours. Due to the accelerated summer term, students should anticipate spending approximately 12 hours outside of class each week on course readings and assignments.

Course Delivery

This course is delivered online and has both synchronous and asynchronous components, meaning that the lectures will be pre-recorded for you to watch at your own pace, but we will still have scheduled course meetings and discussions via Zoom.

Zoom fatigue is [real](#), and I do not want you to suffer from it! Therefore, this course is broken down between live discussions and recorded lectures to allow you to consume course content at your own pace.

Course Meeting Breakdown:

Each course day you will complete:

- Lecture, Part 1 (45 minutes, **recorded**, published on LATTE)
- Lecture, Part 2 (45 minutes, **recorded**, published on LATTE)
- Discussion (45 minutes, **live** on Zoom)

This is an example of what a course day would look like in our scheduled time block:

Lecture, Part 1 (recorded)	1:50-2:35p
Break	2:35-2:45p
Lecture, Part 2 (recorded)	2:45-3:30p
Discussion (live on Zoom)	3:30-4:15p

All lectures should be viewed *prior* to the discussion meeting, but you are not required to view them during the scheduled course block. Lectures will be published at least 24 hours prior to class. You are welcome to view the lectures at any point prior to our course discussion.

Zoom Meeting Policy

We will meet live, on Zoom on course days from 3:30-4:15p.

The Zoom link is posted on LATTE and will be emailed to enrolled students before class.

Attendance and Decorum:

- Students are expected to attend Zoom meetings as they would an in-person course.
- Please keep your camera “on” when possible.
- Consistent obvious distractions and multi-tasking will result in a lower participation score, as would be the case in an in-person course.

Essential Resources

Accommodations:

Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, I want to support you. In order to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting

a disability of requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS <https://www.brandeis.edu/accessibility/>) at 781.736.3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

Texts & Assigned Readings:

There are no textbooks for this course. I advise you to purchase an unannotated and unabridged physical copy of the Constitution, which is available at most bookstores. All other readings will be available to you to download as PDFs via LATTE.

You should anticipate spending 90-120 minutes per course meeting on assigned readings.

LATTE:

All assigned course materials are accessible via LATTE. All assignments are to be submitted as a PDF document via LATTE. Please contact help@brandeis.edu if you are having any difficulties accessing the course page in LATTE.

Student Support:

Brandeis University is committed to supporting all our students so they can thrive. The following resources are available to help with the many academic and non-academic factors that contribute to student success (finances, health, food supply, housing, mental health counseling, academic advising, physical and social activities, etc.). Please explore the many links on this Support at Brandeis page (<https://www.brandeis.edu/support/undergraduate-students/browse.html>) to find out more about the resources that Brandeis provides to help you and your classmates to achieve success.

Teaching Continuity:

In the case of a campus closure or similar disturbance that prohibits our meeting, I will announce an alternative meeting plan as soon as possible. If the course is moved to a synchronous Zoom meeting, students are still expected to attend the course meeting as scheduled.

Course Content and Class Conduct

On Course Content:

This course addresses many ideas and authors largely considered to be canonical within the study of American politics. This course is designed as a survey of the construction of American government and its functions today. As such, it makes many glaring omissions that reflect difficult choices over which dynamics to address and which to leave for your future coursework and independent study. Many viewpoints, important actors, and processes are not included.

Political polarization can be a formidable obstacle to classroom learning. Regardless of your personal political views, it is imperative that you understand the arguments of those whom you both agree and disagree with. As your instructor, I make an honest effort to present multiple viewpoints on contentious issues, citing texts and ideas from key figures, allowing students to

draw their own conclusions about the merits of each figure's claims. Please meet with me if you have any questions about course content.

On Decorum:

Contemporary politics are contentious, but this does not mean that our classroom has to be! I invite you to bring your political ideas, interests, and passions into the classroom. As a class, we will decide on community guidelines for engagement and dialogue at the start of the term and revisit them as needed. Students who repeatedly violate these guidelines will receive verbal and written warnings and can anticipate receiving a lower participation score.

On Generative A.I. and Other Tools:

All submissions must be original work prepared by the student. A.I. generated submissions are considered plagiarism and are not permitted in this course. This class is designed to exercise and grow your acumen, not to train artificial intelligence. If you are struggling to complete or understand assignments, please reach out to me and we will problem-solve together.

Note that A.I. is not a trustworthy or objective source, as LLMs can (and do) generate nonexistent citations, make false suppositions, and even fabricate dates and facts. You are smarter than A.I. because you are able to weigh the veracity of sources and consider alternative explanations.

On Illnesses & Extenuating Circumstances:

Your health and your well-being are my priority. If a health condition, emergency, or other extenuating circumstance is preventing you from full participation in the course, please communicate this to me as soon as possible so that we can decide together on the best next steps for you to complete the course. For any health emergencies or immediate safety concerns, please call **911**. Please also consider these campus resources:

- [Brandeis Health Center](#) (781-736-3677)
- [Brandeis Counseling Center](#) (781-736-3730)
- [Student Accessibility Support](#) (781-736-3470)
- [PARC \(Prevention, Advocacy, and Resource Center\)](#) (781-736-3371)

Assignments & Evaluation

Exams

Exam 1 (20%) (Due 07/22): This exam covers content in Part I of the course and includes several short answers. This exam is scheduled for 90 minutes and will be taken via LATTE.

Exam 2 (20%) (Due 07/31): This exam covers content in Part II of the course and includes several short answers. This exam is scheduled for 90 minutes and will be taken via LATTE.

Written Assignments

All written assignments should be double-spaced and use a 12-point font, with 1-inch margins and submitted as a PDF. Use a consistent serif font (e.g., Times New Roman). Format your paper in the MLA style (see the Purdue OWL guide [here](#)). Citations should be properly attributed and parenthetically cited in either Chicago Author-Date or MLA. All assignments should have a clear argument and use evidence from course materials. Outside sources are welcome but not necessary.

Memo 1 (10%) (Due 07/17):

In no more than 500 words, use at least two texts from Part I of the course to answer this question: “Is America a democracy and, if so, for whom?” Assignment due via LATTE as a PDF file by 11:59p.

Memo 2 (10%) (Due 07/26):

In no more than 500 words, use at least two texts from the course to answer this question: “What is at least one preventative measure that a governing political institution (Congress, Presidency, Courts, or the Bureaucracy) could adopt to combat rising polarization in government?” Use your own interpretations as well as course texts to make your argument. Assignment due via LATTE as a PDF file by 11:59p.

Essay (20%) (Due 08/09):

In no more than 1,200 words, write an essay addressing one of the following prompts, making a clear argument while relying on key concepts and at least 3 texts from the course:

1. Is America more or less democratic today than at the Founding?
2. Respond to this claim: “Social movements are beneficial for American democracy.”
3. Are civil rights and civil liberties distinct concepts? What are their similarities and differences? Use a case study example as evidence.
4. Respond to this claim: “Political participation is equally available to all Americans today.”
5. Is political polarization inevitable? If so, is there anything we can do to mitigate it?

Outside sources are not required, but you must provide citations and a bibliography if outside sources are used. Essay due via LATTE as a PDF file by 11:59p.

Participation

Participation (10%): Active listening, participation in small group discussions, and speaking when called during class are each forms of participation. If there are any factors inhibiting you from participating fully in the course, please let me know and we will work out an alternative form of evaluation.

You are expected to attend class. Your attendance and your learning are your responsibility, and thus I trust you to decide if you cannot attend a course meeting. Students who are chronically absent (missing more than 25% of course meetings) are less likely to receive high marks in the course. Students who miss more than 50% of course meetings are unlikely to pass the course.

Discussion (10%): Students will identify two readings for leading group discussions throughout the semester, starting in Week 2. You may sign-up for slots via LATTE and negotiate any changes with your classmates. Each discussion session is worth 5% of your total grade. In leading discussion, you should be able to summarize the reading, identify key takeaways, and provide 2-3 discussion questions. The instructor will provide an example framework in-class.

Assignment & Grading Policies

Late Assignment & Missed Work Policy: All assignments turned in after the time and date due are deemed late and subject to penalties. Assignments turned in within 1 calendar day of the original due date are subject to a 5-percentage point deduction, with each following calendar day receiving a 5-percentage point deduction, up to 20 points off. All outstanding assignments must be submitted by August 10 to be graded.

Extensions: Extenuating circumstances and emergencies happen. Please let me know ASAP if you are unable to submit an assignment or take an exam as scheduled and we will work out an alternative arrangement. I do not grant extensions from the original due date beyond 14 days for written assignments and 7 days for exams. Any further extensions or exemptions must be negotiated with Student Accessibility Services, the Health Center, or another relevant office on campus.

Grading Breakdown:

Item	Percent of Grade
Exam 1	20%
Exam 2	20%
Essay	20%
Memo 1	10%
Memo 2	10%
Discussion	10%
Participation	10%
<i>Total</i>	100%

Course Plan

Note: All assigned readings should be completed before the date of the course meeting.

*Due to the accelerated summer term,
there are more readings assigned per class than in a typical semester.*

PART 1: THE FOUNDING (AND RE-FOUNDING)

Week 1: Introduction and Founding Debates

07/08: Course Introduction

Readings:

- Course syllabus
- Course LATTE page
- Brandeis Library's Politics Guide ([link](#))
- King George III (1775), "Proclamation for Suppressing Rebellion and Sedition" (pdf)
- Declaration of Independence (1776) (pdf)

07/09: Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists

Readings:

- Paine (1776), *Common Sense* (63-71, pdf)
- Madison (November 1787), Federalist #10 (pdf)
- Madison (February 1788), Federalist #51 (pdf)
- Brutus (January 1788), Anti-Federalist #9 (pdf)
- Brutus (January 1788), Anti-Federalist #10 (pdf)

07/11: The Constitutional Convention and The Nature of Compromise

Readings:

- The Virginia Plan (May 1787) (pdf)
- The New Jersey Plan (June 1787) (pdf)
- Larson & Winship (2005) *The Constitutional Convention* (pp. 1-10, 13-51, 87-91, pdf)

Week 2: The Constitutional Framework and the American Ethos

07/15: The Constitutional Framework

Readings:

- The Constitution, Articles I-IV (1789) (pdf)
- The Bill of Rights, Amendments I-X (1791) (pdf)
- Dahl (2003), *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* (pp. 1-39, 141-57, pdf)

07/16: Who Is (and Isn't) an American?

Readings:

- Tocqueville (1835), *Democracy in America* (pp. 360-95, pdf)
- Douglass (1852), "What, to the Slave, is the Fourth of July?" ([link](#))
- Washington (1895), "Atlanta Exposition Address" (pdf)
- DuBois (1903), *The Souls of Black Folk* (pp. 41-60, pdf)
- Wood (1969), *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1786* (pp. 70-75) (pdf)
- Roberts (1997), "The Meaning of Blacks' Fidelity to the Constitution" (pdf)

Memo 1 due by 11:59p on 07/17 via LATTE.

07/18: Reconstruction and Revision

Readings:

- Amendments XIII, XIV, XV, and XIX ([link](#))
- Stanton (1848), "Address Delivered at Seneca Falls" (pdf)
- Foner (2004), "The Reconstruction Amendments: Official Documents as Social History" ([link](#))

- The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (pdf)

Exam 1 due by 12:00p on 7/22 via LATTE.

PART II: GOVERNING INSTITUTIONS

Week 3: The Legislative Branch

07/22: Congress

Readings:

- The Constitution, Article I
- Mayhew (1974), *The Electoral Connection and Congress* (pdf)
- Fenno (1977), *US Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration* (pp. 883-94, 898-917, pdf)
- Gershon et al. (2019), "Intersectional linked fate and political representation" (pdf)
- Klein (2015), "Congressional Dysfunction," *Vox* ([link](#))
- (Optional) *The Simpsons*, S. 3, Ep. 2: "Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington"

07/23: The Presidency

Readings:

- The Constitution, Article II
- Neustadt (1960), *Presidential Power* (pp. 3-9, 167-82, pdf)
- Milkis and Nelson (1994), *The American Presidency* (pp. 27-69, pdf)
- Klein (2012), "The Unpersuaded," *The New Yorker* ([link](#))
- Milkis and Tichenor (2019), *Rivalry and Reform* (pp. 1-32, pdf)
- (Optional): *Veep*, S. 1, Ep. 2: "Fundraiser"

Note on readings for class on July 25: You are expected to be able to summarize and generally explain the Supreme Court cases listed, but there is no requirement or expectation that you will read the texts of these cases in full.

07/25: The Supreme Court and its Powers

Readings:

- The Constitution, Article III
- Bornstein (2024), "How to read a Supreme Court case," *The Conversation* ([link](#))
- Dahl (1957), "Decision-Making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as a National Policy-Maker" (pdf)
- Hurley et al. (2021), "The 'shadow docket': How the U.S. Supreme Court quietly dispatches key rulings," *Reuters* ([link](#))
- *Marbury v. Madison* 5 U.S. 137 (1803) (opinion [link](#)) (summary [link](#))
- *McCulloch v. Maryland*, 17 U.S. 4 Wheat. 316 316 (1819) (opinion [link](#)) (summary [link](#))
- *Barron v. Mayor & City Council of Baltimore*, 32 U.S. 243 (1833) (opinion [link](#)) (summary [link](#))
- *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. ____ (2022) (opinion [link](#)) (summary [link](#))
- *Trump v. Anderson*, 601 U.S. ____ (2024) ([link](#))

Memo 2 due by 11:59p on 07/26 via LATTE.

Week 4, Pt. 1: The Bureaucracy

07/29: Article II and Its Consequences

Readings:

- The Constitution, Article II, Section 2
- Wilson (1991), *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (315-32, 376-78, pdf)
- Turley (2013), "The Rise of the Fourth Branch of Government," *WaPo* ([link](#))
- Heinzerling (2024), "The Judicial War on Governing," *Boston Review* ([link](#))

PART III: AMERICAN POLITICS IN PRACTICE

Week 4, Pt. 2: Government, Revisited

07/30: Should we be Governed? By Whom?

Readings:

- Hayek (1944), *The Road to Serfdom in Cartoons* (pdf)
- Schattschneider (1960), *The Semisovereign People* (pp. 1-15, 126-39, pdf)
- Boyd and Fauntroy (2000), "American Federalism, 1776 to 2000: Significant Events" (pdf)
- Raza (2010), *The Two Faces of American Freedom* (pp. 1-7, 20-23, 343-48, pdf)

Exam 2 due by 11:59p on 07/31 via LATTE.

08/01: Mobilizing and Organizing for Change

Readings:

- Olson (1965), *The Logic of Collective Action* (pp. 5-31, pdf)
- Morris (1995), "A Retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement: Political and Intellectual Landmarks" (pdf)
- Skocpol et al. (2000), "A Nation of Organizers: The Institutional Origins of Civic Voluntarism in the United States" (pdf)
- Francis (2016), "The Strange Fruit of American Political Development" (pdf)

Week 5: How Groups Organize Our Politics

08/05: Parties and Interest Groups

Readings:

- Bawn et al. (2012), "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics" (pdf)
- Klein (2014), "Why Democrats and Republicans don't understand each other," *Vox* ([link](#))
- Grossman and Hopkins (2016), *Asymmetric Politics* (pp. 70-128, pdf)
- Mason (2018), "Losing Common Ground: Social Sorting and Polarization," *The Forum* (pdf)

08/06: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Readings:

- King (1963), "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (pdf)
- Wallace (1963), "Segregation Now, Segregation Forever" ([link](#))
- Harper (2004), "Understanding Privacy – and the Real Threats to It," *Cato* (pdf)

- Funk (2019), "How ICE Picks Its Targets in the Surveillance Age," *NYT* ([link](#))

08/08: Public Policy, Participation, and You

Readings:

- Zaller (1991), "Information, Values, and Opinion" (pdf)
- Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995), "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation," (pdf)
- Mettler and Soss (2004), "The Consequences of Public Policy for Democratic Citizenship" (pdf)

Essay due by 11:59pm on 08/09 via LATTE

Course Policies and Campus Resources

Academic Integrity: All university community members are expected to maintain standards of academic integrity. Students shall not submit work that is falsified or is not the result of the student's own effort. Violations of the University's academic integrity policies, including plagiarism, are subject to penalties which may include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension from the University, or other sanctions per University policies. I take suspected plagiarism, cheating, and/or undue collaboration seriously and will work with the Department of Student Rights and Community Standards to pursue an appropriate response to any and all suspected plagiarism.

Please consult the [Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities](#) for all policies and procedures re. academic integrity.

We will review topics of academic integrity in-class prior to the submission of written assignments. If you have any questions about academic integrity, please ask.

Academic Services: All students are assigned an academic advisor by the University. Please contact your advisor (list available [here](#)) if you have any questions or concerns about your general academic performance or that cannot be addressed by your instructor. In the case of chronic absences or poor course performance, I may contact your advisor to ensure that you are receiving proper support and to work out any relevant alternate arrangements.

Classroom Health and Safety: Your health and well-being and our community's health and well-being are my priority. In the case of any life-threatening emergencies in-class, please notify the instructor and call **911**. We will review a classroom safety plan during the first course meeting.

Library: The [Brandeis Library](#) collections and staff offer resources and services to support Brandeis students, faculty, and staff. Librarians are available to assist you in identifying research sources, finding academic articles, and citing sources. Brandeis' librarian for political science is Aimee Slater (aslater@brandeis.edu).

Privacy: The recording of course Zoom discussions is prohibited to protect students' privacy. If you have any concerns about accessing content, please contact the instructor.

Writing Center: Brandeis' [Writing Center](#) provides assistance and resources for all students to aide in drafting and writing written assignments. I encourage all students to use the Writing Center's resources, especially those students who may feel less comfortable composing collegiate assignments in English.