American Government: Practices and Values

MSA 1101–40318- Fall 2025

Professor Stout (She/her/hers)
Email: kerriann.stout@baruch.cuny.edu
Email Response Time: 24-48 hours M-F

- No assignments accepted via email.

Office hours: appointment availability each week via Calendly

Course Description:

An analysis of democratic ideas and practices, with special reference to the American Constitution and the democratic process in the United States.

Modality:

Online Synchronous, Saturdays 11:10 am to 2:05pm EST

Camera Policy:

This course is conducted **live** and is designed to mirror the structure and expectations of an in-person college classroom. That means your active, visual presence is expected at every class meeting.

Having your camera on for the entire class is not just about etiquette, it is essential to how we engage with the material and with each other. In a class focused on American politics, discussion, nonverbal cues, and real-time interaction are crucial to understanding power, participation, and democratic processes. Being visually present also helps maintain focus, reduces distractions, and supports a more inclusive and connected learning environment.

What's expected:

- Your camera must be on and your face clearly visible for the full duration of each class.
- You should attend from a stable, appropriate setting (not while commuting, lying in bed, or multitasking**)**
- If you're too unwell to appear on camera or participate actively, you should not attend class that day. Think of it as you would an in-person class: if you wouldn't be well enough to attend in person, then you shouldn't be in class online either.
- If you're concerned about privacy in your environment, you may use Zoom's virtual background or background blur feature to protect your space while still being visually present.

What happens if your camera is off:

- If I notice your camera is off, I may ask you once to turn it on. If you don't, you may be removed from that class session and marked absent.
- You may be referred to your academic advisor for follow-up on your ability to meet course expectations.

If you are unable to meet this expectation for medical or accessibility reasons, you must request a formal accommodation through the appropriate campus office. I am not able to grant informal or day-to-day exceptions.
Please do not message me with explanations for why you cannot have your camera on for a particular class session. This policy is in place to support the integrity and effectiveness of our learning community.

A note on course conduct and professionalism:

In this course, we address topics related to race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, immigration status, ability, and other identities head-on. This is a brave space, and it is a safe space to be uncomfortable. We are here to learn, and learning often challenges things that we already know or believe. We should all seek to uphold high standards of respect and professionalism in our discussions. I look forward to learning and growing together this semester!

U.S. Experience in its Diversity Learning Outcomes:

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

1. Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view.
2. Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically.
3. Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions.
4. Analyze and explain one or more major themes of U.S. history from more than one informed perspective.
5. Identify and differentiate among the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government and analyze their influence on the development of U.S. democracy.
6. Analyze and discuss common institutions or patterns of life in contemporary U.S. society and how they influence, or are influenced by, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, belief, or other forms of social differentiation.

Course Learning Outcomes:

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

7. Describe the structure and functions of the American political system, including how power is shared between the national and state governments and how key institutions like Congress, the presidency, the courts, and the bureaucracy operate.
8. Explain core democratic values such as liberty, equality, legitimacy, and authority, and analyze how these values shape (and are shaped by) political debates, policies, and institutions.
9. Understand how people develop political beliefs and make political decisions**,** including the roles of family, education, media, and life experiences in shaping political identity and participation.
10. Analyze how elections, political parties, interest groups, and the media connect people to government**,** influence public opinion, and impact the policymaking process.

11. Compare different perspectives on political power and representation, and assess how political resources (like money, influence, and access) are distributed across American society.
12. Examine the evolution of civil rights and civil liberties in the U.S. and evaluate how the Constitution and the courts have been used to expand (or limit) individual freedoms and protections.
13. Apply course concepts to real-world issues and events, using evidence and critical thinking to interpret political developments in contemporary America.

Required Materials

American Government: Your Voice, Your Future (7th Edition, 2024 Election Update)
Author: Matthew R. Kerbel, Publisher: Academic Media Solutions
ISBN (Full-Color Paperback): 978-1-955543-91-0
ISBN (Black & White Paperback): 978-1-955543-88-0
ISBN (Loose-Leaf B/W): 978-1-955543-89-7
ISBN (eTextbook): 978-1-955543-77-4

Additional materials are posted to Brightspace.
I understand that textbooks (especially new editions) can be expensive, and I want to be transparent and flexible where possible. For this course, I am requiring the current edition of the textbook because up-to-date information and real-world examples are especially important in a class on American Politics. Political institutions, case studies, and data can change rapidly, and having access to the most recent developments is essential for your learning and success in this course.

To support you during the add/drop period, I have posted **PDFs of the first two chapters** of the textbook on Brightspace so that you can participate in class without needing to commit to the book immediately. I am not able to post additional chapters due to copyright restrictions, so please plan to secure access to the full textbook as soon as possible.
You are welcome to explore more affordable options such as renting or purchasing used. You may also choose to use an older edition of the text if that is more accessible to you. Please note, however, that the burden will be on you to match readings, page numbers, and content to the assigned version. I will be teaching from the current edition and do not have access to earlier versions, so **I will not be able to help you cross-reference or identify missing material**. You are encouraged to partner with another student in the class to fill in any gaps.

Please make your textbook decisions early so that you're set up to stay on track with the course.

GRADING POLICY

Your overall grade in this course will be determined by:

Assignments & Exams: - Class Notes (20 points) - Midterm + Final Guides (2x10 points) - Midterm (25 points) - Final (35 points)	**100 pts**

Grading scale (%) is as follows:

A-/A = 90-100

B-/B/B+= 80-89.99

C-/C/C+ = 70-79.99

D = 60-69.99

F = 0-59.99

Instructions for exams and assignments are posted to Brightspace and will be reviewed in class.

Policies/Rules:

Attendance and Punctuality Policy

You are expected to attend class regularly and arrive on time. I take attendance and note lateness for the following reasons:

- **Institutional Requirements**: I must certify attendance for the university.
- **Student Support**: Attendance patterns help me identify when a student may be experiencing challenges.
- **Academic Success**: Assignments, exams, and in-class exercises are built heavily around class discussions and material covered during our sessions. Students who miss class regularly tend to struggle on graded assessments.

I fully recognize that students may occasionally need to miss class, whether for illness, family obligations, religious observance, or other legitimate reasons. An occasional absence is not a problem. However, if something is happening in your life that will prevent you from attending class regularly, I strongly encourage you to reflect on whether this is the right semester to take this course. Because the material covered in class is highly tested and deeply integrated into your assignments and exams, regular attendance is essential to your success.

While I aim to support students experiencing challenges, **I am ultimately required to assess your work product only, not your effort, intent, or circumstances**. I cannot adjust grades to account for the reason behind poor performance.

Punctuality Expectations

- Please arrive on time. Students who arrive more than 15 minutes late may not be admitted unless prior arrangements have been made.
- If you are repeatedly late**,** even by a few minutes, I reserve the right to require you to be on time to be attend.
- Consistent punctuality is expected and appreciated, as it shows respect for your classmates and our collective learning experience.

If you're facing ongoing challenges that may affect your attendance, please reach out to me early in the semester and I am happy to help connect you with support resources.

Classroom Engagement and Participation Policy

This course is designed to be interactive, combining lecture, discussion, multimedia, small-group activities, and in-class exercises. I expect you to come prepared and ready to contribute meaningfully. Your engagement is not only important for your own learning but for creating a dynamic and enriching classroom environment for everyone.
While I don't assign points directly for attendance or participation, lack of preparation and engagement often correlates with poor performance on exams and assignments, which are built heavily around our class discussions.

The Socratic Method

To promote broader engagement and prevent discussions from being dominated by only a few voices, I may occasionally use a modified Socratic method. This means:

- If I observe a lack of broad participation (i.e., few students are speaking, or it becomes clear many have not done the reading) I will shift to cold calling.
- I will randomly select a few students before each class to call on if needed, but I will *not* announce in advance whose names have been selected. ***You should expect that you can be called on in any class at random.***
- If I call on you and you are not present or unable to respond in a meaningful way, I will make a note of it. While this does not affect your grade directly, it helps me identify who may be underprepared, which is often reflected in other aspects of performance.

This approach is not meant to embarrass you. It is intended to uphold standards of preparation and to give everyone an opportunity to participate. If you are unsure about a reading or topic, that's okay. Being confused is part of learning and I will always do my best to support someone who is trying. Being unprepared is a choice. Let's work together to build a classroom space that's serious, respectful, and intellectually alive.

Office Hours, Feedback Review, and Grade Concerns Policy

I encourage all students to make use of office hours. They are a valuable opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification, and engage more deeply with the course. To ensure that these meetings are productive and respectful of both our time, different types of meetings follow different guidelines.

1. Regular Office Hours

These are for general course support:

- Questions about course material
- Guidance on assignments or exam preparation
- Advising or academic skills support

2. Feedback Review Meetings

If you would like to discuss feedback you've received on an assignment or exam, you must schedule a Feedback Review Meeting through the link provided on Bb.

Before scheduling:

- You must observe a 24-hour "cooling off" period before emailing me about a grade or requesting a feedback meeting. Use this time to review the feedback thoroughly and reflect on any comments or patterns.
- If the assignment or exam will be reviewed during an upcoming class session, please wait until after that in-class review has occurred before scheduling your meeting. Many common questions are addressed during these sessions.
- You must complete a Reflection Form (linked in the scheduling portal) to be able to schedule the meeting. If this form is not submitted, or insufficiently completed, your appointment will be treated as a regular office hour session, and we will not review feedback at that time.

Note: Assignment feedback meetings are not for grade appeals. If you believe there is a factual error in grading or wish to formally appeal a grade, please follow the below policy. These policies are designed to promote fairness, thoughtful reflection, and responsible academic engagement. I'm here to support your learning, let's work together to use our time and resources wisely.

Grade Appeal Policy

I put significant time, care, and attention into grading student work. Before pursuing a grade appeal, I ask that you carefully and unemotionally review the feedback provided and reflect on whether an appeal is truly warranted.

If you choose to proceed, you must submit your appeal by email with the subject line: "**Grade Appeal for [Your Full Name]"**

The body of the email must include:

1. Course title
2. Assignment or exam in question
3. Grade received.
4. A specific, detailed, and evidence-based explanation of why you believe a grade change is necessary.
5. If the assignment or exam was handwritten and I've returned it to you, you must also include a scanned/photo version of the document (including my feedback)

The burden is on the student to demonstrate that a grading error or oversight occurred. Unsupported claims or vague dissatisfaction are not sufficient grounds for a re-evaluation.

If I grant a regrade, it will be a comprehensive reassessment of the entire assignment or exam, not just individual questions. As a result, your grade may stay the same, increase, or decrease based on the outcome.

If you are not satisfied with the result of the regrade, you have the right to appeal further by following the appropriate institutional process and contacting the department chair.

Technology: The appropriate use of laptops is, obviously, permitted in this class. Appropriate means to take notes or to conduct in class research as instructed by the professor.

Late Work Policy

Late work is not accepted unless you have received a pre-approved extension or are experiencing a true emergency. It is your responsibility to communicate with me proactively and professionally if you believe you will need additional time on an assignment. Extensions are not guaranteed and must be requested in advance of the due date. Last-minute requests will generally not be granted unless there is a documented emergency.

This policy also applies to missed in-class assignments, quizzes, or exercises. If you miss one of these due to illness or another conflict, you must provide documentation of an excused absence from the university to be eligible for a make-up.

Key Points:

- "Emergency" does not include poor planning, heavy workload, travel, day of submission tech-issues, etc.
- Communication after a deadline, without prior notice, will typically result in a zero.
- I cannot accommodate undocumented or unofficial excuses for missed in-class work.
- If you're dealing with an extended issue (medical, family, etc.), reach out early so we can explore potential solutions or accommodations.

Being proactive, respectful, and timely in your communication is a professional skill and one that's essential for success in this class and beyond.

I do not give "extra-credit" assignments *per student.* However, I reserve the right to give class-wide extra credit as I see fit and to give extra credit for exceptional class participation. This means consistent, high-quality contributions to the class discussion.

Plagiarism: Students must accept the responsibility to be honest and to respect ethical standards in fulfilling the requirements of their courses and assignments. Integrity in academic life requires that students demonstrate intellectual and academic achievement independent of all assistance except that authorized by the instructor. The use of an outside source, including electronic sources, in any paper, report or submission for academic credit without the appropriate acknowledgment is plagiarism. It is unethical to present as one's own work the ideas, words or representations of another without the proper indication of the source. Therefore, it is the student's responsibility to give credit for any quotation, paraphrase, summary, idea or data borrowed from an outside source.

Policy on Artificial Intelligence (ChatGPT3, for example): Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools can be powerful resources for brainstorming, generating ideas, outlining, and organizing your thoughts. I do not prohibit the use of these tools responsibly during the early stages of your work or for helping to format and organize exam preparation materials.
However, all final written submissions must be your own original work**.** Using AI to draft, rewrite, or complete your written assignments is not permitted, unless explicitly authorized for a specific assignment.
If you do use AI at any point in your process:

- You must cite the tool you used (e.g., "Generated using ChatGPT, OpenAI, May 2025") and specify what part of your process it assisted with.
- Failure to disclose AI use or submitting AI-generated work as your own will be treated as a violation of academic integrity policies.

Use these tools as support, not substitution. The goal is to develop your own voice, thinking, and skill.
Violations of academic integrity may include but are not limited to:

- Using Artificial Intelligence in violation of this syllabus
- Copying from another student's work.
- Presenting the work of another person as one's own.
- Allowing one's work to be copied by another person.
- Using others' words or ideas without proper indication of the source.
- Collaboration on a written assignment without permission of the instructor.
- Using unauthorized electronic devices to obtain information during a test.
- Supplying answers in verbatim from the textbook or other source.

These standards apply to all or any part of an assignment. These standards apply to all resources, whether hard copy, electronic or otherwise Internet-based. These standards apply to all courses, classroom or online.

Names & Pronouns

The school provides me with a class list that includes your legal name. If you prefer to be addressed by an alternate name and/or gender pronoun, please do not hesitate to let me know. You can do so in class, by email, or during an office hour appointment – whichever you prefer. Also, please correct me if I ever mispronounce your name or use an incorrect gender pronoun!

COURSE SCHEDULE

The following schedule may be revised as necessary during the semester. Any revisions to this schedule will be announced in class or posted on Brightspace.

Class # ***Date***	***Topic***	***Readings and assignments due at the beginning of class- Posted on Brightspace***	***In-class Assignments & Activities***
1 Saturday 9/6	Course Intro	**Read:** The syllabus, familiar yourself with Brightspace	**Course Notes Due**
2 Saturday 9/13	Should we care about politics?	**Read:** Ch.1 (posted to Brightspace), any additional materials in the "to be read" Ch.1 folder on Brightspace	**Ch. 1 Notes Due**
3 Saturday 9/20	The Constitution and Federalism	**Read:** Ch. 2 (posted to Brightspace), any additional materials in the "to be read" Ch.2 folder on Brightspace	**Ch. 2 Notes Due**
4 Saturday 9/27	Congress	**Read:** Ch. 9 ***-- must have textbook by this class--*** any additional materials in the "to be read" Ch.9 folder on Brightspace	**Ch. 9 Notes Due**
5 Saturday 10/4	The Presidency The Bureaucracy	**Read:** Ch. 10 & Ch. 11, any additional materials in the "to be read" Ch. 10 and	**Ch. 10 Notes Due** **Ch. 11 Notes Due**

		Ch. 11 folders on Brightspace	
6 Saturday 10/11	Midterm Review		**Midterm Guide 1st Draft Due**
Friday **10/17** **@11:59pm**			**Midterm Study Guide Final Draft Due** **Midterm Study Guide Reflection Due**
7 Saturday 10/18			**Midterm**
8 Saturday 10/25	The Judiciary	**Read:** Ch. 12, any additional materials in the "to be read" Ch.12 folder on Brightspace	**Ch. 12 Notes Due**
9 Saturday 11/1	Public Opinion Political Culture, Socialization, & Participation	**Read:** Ch. 3, any additional materials in the "to be read" Ch.3 folder on Brightspace **Read:** Ch. 4 any additional materials in the "to be read" Ch.4 folder on Brightspace	**Ch. 3 Notes Due** **Ch. 4 Notes Due**
10 Saturday 11/8	Mass Media	**Read:** Ch. 5, any additional materials in the "to be read" Ch.5 folder on Brightspace	**Ch. 5 Notes Due** **Extra Credit Assignment Due**

11 Saturday 11/15	Political Parties Campaigns & Elections	**Read:** Ch. 6, Ch.7 any additional materials in the "to be read" Ch. 6 and Ch. 7 folders on Brightspace	**Ch. 6 Notes Due** **Ch. 7 Notes Due**
12 Saturday 11/22	Interest Groups	**Read:** Ch. 8, any additional materials in the "to be read" Ch.8 folder on Brightspace	**Ch. 8 Notes Due**
11/29-No Class			
13 Saturday 12/6	Establish Civil Rights Protecting Civil Rights	**Read:** Ch. 13 & Ch. 14, any additional materials in the "to be read" Ch. 13 & Ch.14 folders on Brightspace	**Ch. 13 Notes Due** **Ch. 14 Notes Due**
14 Saturday 12/13	Final exam review		**Final Exam Study Guide 1st Draft Due**
Friday **12/19** **@11:59pm**			**Final Exam Study Guide Final Draft Due** **Final Exam Study Guide Reflection Due**
15 Saturday 12/20 **(Time TBD)**			**Final Exam**

Note: This schedule is aspirational! Things happen that may get us off track. We could have a great discussion that pushes us back, or bad weather causes a class to be canceled. Maybe the professor gets sick. I do my best to keep up with the plan, and at the end of each class, I will confirm where we are going next. If you miss a class, it is ***best to ask a classmate*** where we ended and where we will begin or send me an email.

Resources

Accommodations
Baruch has a continuing commitment to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities who may need some accommodation to participate in this class fully should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible at disability.services@baruch.cuny.edu or call 646-312-4590.

Academic Support
Visiting Baruch's academic support services is correlated with higher grades. I encourage students in this course to take advantage of the following support services: (1) visit the tutors at SACC (Student Academic Consulting Center), (2) work with the consultants at the Writing Center and Tools for Clear Speech, and (3) take advantage of office hours.

Student Academic Consulting Center (SACC)
SACC supports the academic success of undergraduates at Baruch College through small-group peer tutoring and other programs. It serves students in a wide variety of subjects across the curriculum .https://sacc.baruch.cuny.edu/

The Writing Center
The Writing Center offers free support to all Baruch students. Our professional consultants work collaboratively with students to improve their writing and English language skills. https://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/writingcenter/

Tools for Clear Speech (TFCS)
TFCS offers a broad range of free tutorial sessions, workshops, and online practice to enhance the oral communication skills of Baruch's non-native English speakers, multilingual and English language learners. https://tfcs.baruch.cuny.edu/
Early in the semester, I will receive a survey asking me to identify students who might be struggling in class. The students that I name will be prompted by email or text to visit one of our support services. Please respond to those invitations to meet with a tutor or consultant. Students who visit these services do better in their classes than students who don't.

There's no need to wait for an alert message to get help-you can start working with tutors from the start of the semester!

Counseling Center
The Counseling Center provides free and confidential Mental Health services to anyone currently enrolled and registered as an undergraduate or graduate student at Baruch College. https://studentaffairs.baruch.cuny.edu/counseling/

Sex-Based Violence and Harm
If you feel you have experienced a threat to your safety or if you have been sexually assaulted, there are resources available at the University to assist you. We are here to support you! *You should be aware that I, as faculty, am a* NON-CONFIDENTIAL *resource and have an obligation to report any information I become aware of about sexual assault with the University's Title IX office.* The Title IX Office is responsible for investigating violations of the sexual misconduct policy. For more information, please visit the Title IX website. https://president.baruch.cuny.edu/office-of-diversity/baruch-title-ix/

Grading Philosophy

Grades in this course reflect the quality of your work, not just the amount of effort you put in. While I value your time and commitment, grades are awarded based on whether your work meets the standards of academic excellence expected at the college level.
An **"A"** is not a participation reward. It indicates that your work is exceptional in quality, rigor, and execution. To earn an A on any assignment or in the course overall, your work must meet the following criteria:

Characteristics of A-Level Work:

- Complete and Precise: All parts of the assignment are addressed fully, accurately, and in detail. There are no major omissions or misunderstandings.
- Analytically Sophisticated: The work shows clear, original thinking and engages deeply with the material. It goes beyond summary or description to offer insight and analysis.
- Well-Supported: Claims are backed by appropriate evidence, citations, and examples. In legal or policy writing, the relevant rules or concepts are correctly applied to facts.
- Organized and Coherent: The structure is logical, easy to follow, and enhances the reader's understanding. Ideas are clearly developed and connected.
- Polished and Professional: The writing is carefully edited, mostly free from grammatical or stylistic errors, and formatted according to assignment instructions.
- Demonstrates Mastery: The work reflects a strong command of the relevant material and shows that the student has done the reading, reflected on it, and synthesized it into their own understanding.

Not every assignment will be an "A," and that's okay. Part of your growth as a student is learning from feedback and continuously improving. If you ever have questions about how to elevate your work to this level, I encourage you to use office hours or a feedback review session to discuss strategies.

B (Good Work)

Represents strong, competent work that meets the assignment requirements.

- Responds to all parts of the prompt, though some elements may be less developed.
- Demonstrates clear understanding of the material, with some analysis.
- Provides appropriate support for claims, though with less sophistication or precision.
- Writing is clear and organized but may include minor errors or uneven sections.
- Work shows effort and understanding but lacks the depth, clarity, or polish of A-level work.

C (Satisfactory or Adequate Work)

Represents basic competency in addressing the assignment, but with significant room for improvement.

- May omit or under develop key parts of the assignment.
- Demonstrates a surface-level understanding of the material.

- Contains unclear or unsupported arguments or conclusions.
- Writing may be disorganized, imprecise, or contain distracting errors.
- Meets the minimum standard for passing but does not reflect college-level excellence.

D (Poor or Incomplete Work)

Reflects significant issues in meeting the assignment expectations.

- Major elements of the prompt are misunderstood or missing.
- Shows limited understanding of the course material.
- Arguments are poorly reasoned**,** unsupported, or off topic.
- Writing may be disorganized, unclear, or consistently error prone.
- Suggests the student was unprepared or rushed in completing the work.

F (Failing Work)

Fails to meet the basic requirements of the assignment.

- Incomplete or substantially off-topic
- Demonstrates little to no understanding of the material.
- Lacks organization, clarity, and support.
- May be plagiarized, copied, or otherwise violate academic integrity.
- Reflects either non-submission or unacceptable quality of work.

This should guide both how you approach your assignments and how you interpret the feedback you receive. I'm always happy to work with you on improving your performance if you're willing to do the work!