

*Federal Government*  
*PS 2305-W01, Summer One 2019*

**Professor:** Mark Saka  
**Office Hours:**  
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**Required Text:**

**American Government and Politics Today: The Essentials (Enhanced Ninth Edition)** by Barbara A. Bardes, Mack C. Shelley II and Steffen W. Schmidt. Cengage Publications, ISBN # 978-1-337-79978-2.

I do not use the Sul Ross State University bookstore. The book is available directly from the publisher/ Go to [cengage.com](http://cengage.com) and buy the textbook, it is available to buy a hard copy, rent a copy, or buy the e-book.

**Course description**

This course is designed to be an introduction to American government, its philosophical and historical foundations, institutions, and political processes. We will examine how our political system was designed, how it has changed over time and how public opinion, the media and the "information age" have affected our government institutions and public policy. We will discuss the role and scope of government as the Founders conceived it and as it is viewed today. Finally, we will examine current issues, weigh the costs and benefits of actions and engage in thoughtful discussion of contemporary policies and actions with a view toward how those issues and actions impact the current political scene.

**Course learning outcomes:**

On successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Have a basic understanding of political philosophy and ability to articulate personal political philosophy
- Explain how government impacts your daily life;
- Recognize and evaluate the basic debates and issues in American government and American political history;
- Explain and critically assess the formal and informal political institutions and their respective roles in American politics;
- Identify and describe the key functions of the three branches of government; and
- Assess the causes and consequences of different forms of political participation, and outline the ways in which individuals and groups can affect political outcomes in the United States
- Critically analyze information to discern its meaning and validity

### **Program Learning Outcomes (Political Science):**

The graduating student will:

- Demonstrate knowledge of significant theoretical approaches of political science through written work and oral communication.
- Demonstrate the ability to analyze domestic and international political processes in written work.
- Demonstrate the ability to develop arguments about global equity and equality issues in politics through written work and oral communication.

### **Texas Domain III Competency 19:**

The teacher understands and applies social science knowledge and skills to plan, organize, and implement instruction and assess learning.

### **Texas Domain III Competency 23:**

The teacher understands and applies knowledge of concepts of government, democracy, and citizenship, including ways that individuals and groups achieve their goals through political systems.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

You will have fifteen written assignments. There will be three possible essays to choose from on each daily assignment. For instance, on June 3, there will three essays listed. You will choose one and write your essay about that topic. Do not do all three, just pick one. This way, you can have some choice as to the topic that appeals to you—and I want a one or two sentence explanation as to why you chose the topical essay and why it appealed to you.

Each written assignment is due at the date specified below. Your written essays/assignments must be submitted through Blackboard. Each written assignment is to be double spaced. Each essay should be five pages in length. Each assignment will address the theme of the chapter assigned.

Each written assignment is worth 200 points. 180-200=A; 160-179=B; 140-159=C; 120-139=D; 0-119=F.

Therefore, the total number of points possible will be 3000. At the end of the semester, I will add your points; 2700-3000=A; 2400-2699=B; 2100-2399=C; 1800-2099=D; 0-1799=F

What should an essay consist of?

**First**—original work—any plagiarism uncovered will result in an F for that assignment. Two cases of plagiarism will result in an F in the course. What is plagiarism?

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Doing and/or taking credit for someone else's work, presenting the ideas and work of others as your own, and/or not citing your sources when you utilize the ideas of others are all violations of academic integrity. It is your responsibility to read and understand the university's stance on academic dishonesty in the SRSU Student Handbook, as all violations will be taken seriously and handled through the university judicial process. In addition, please note that I will be using plagiarism software for all written assignments.

**Second**—correct punctuation and grammar, please proofread your essays—all considered part of a well-constructed essay.

**Third**—you must base your essay on facts, not opinions. We all have opinions. Your essay must be based on facts and concepts drawn from the textbook or credible academic sources. What do I mean from a credible academic source? Books or articles from an academic press or an official newspaper or web-site. Avoid statements in your essay such as “I think President Trump is a great president” or “I think President Trump is a terrible president.” Another example might be “I think that the Congress is corrupt.”

America has become a culturally and polarized society. Avoid excessive emotionally charged essays—keep them professional and scholarly and as objective as you can.

There is much good material online but there is much nonsense and conspiratorial theories out there—please do not include conspiratorial theories.

### **COURSE POLICIES**

**LATE WORK:** If you miss a due date, then each day your letter grade will be one letter lowered. For instance, if an assignment is due June 14, and you submit the work on June 15<sup>th</sup>, the highest grade possible would be a B. If that same assignment is submitted on June 16<sup>th</sup>, then the highest grade possible would be a C. If that same assignment is submitted on June 17<sup>th</sup>, then the highest grade possible would be a D. After, that, a grade of zero is permanent.

That said, I also accept **Early Work**. If you complete an assignment on June 12 and that assignment is not due until June 14—do not hesitate to turn the assignment in.

**STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:** It is Sul Ross State University policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. If you would like to request such accommodations because of a physical, mental, or learning disability, please contact the ADA coordinator for Program Accessibility located in FH 112 or call 837-8691.

### **DIS TANCE EDUCATION STATEMENT**

Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university’s academic support services, library resources, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should submit online assignments through Blackboard or SRSU email, which require secure login information to verify students’ identities and to protect students’ information. The procedures for filing a student complaint are included in the student handbook. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website.

## Course Outline

May 29—write me an email at [Msaka@sulross.edu](mailto:Msaka@sulross.edu) and let me know that you have read the syllabus and understand the requirements for the course and that you have obtained the book or are in the process of obtaining the textbook.

### Week One:

June 3-Chapter One: The Democratic Republic assignment is due

June 5-Chapter Two—the Constitution assignment is due

June 7-Chapter Three-the Federalism assignment is due

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### Week Two:

June 10-Chapter Four—the Civil Liberties assignment is due

June 12-Chapter Five-the Civil Rights assignment is due

June 14-Chapter Six: Public Opinion and Political Socialization assignment is due

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### Week Three:

June 17-Chapter Seven: Interest Groups assignment is due

June 19-Chapter Eight: Political Parties assignment is due

June 20—note!! Last day to drop the course with a grade of “W”

June 21-Chapter Nine: Campaigns and Elections assignment is due

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### Week Four:

June 24-Chapter Ten—The Media assignment is due

June 25-Chapter Eleven-the Congress

June 27-Chapter Twelve—The President assignment is due

June 28-Chapter Thirteen—The Executive Branch assignment is due

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**Week Five:**

**July 1—Chapter Fourteen-The Courts assignment is due**

**July 2-Chapter Fifteen-Domestic and Economic Policy assignment is due**

**Assignments**

**Essay One-The Democratic Republic**

**Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.**

- 1. Distinguish the major features of direct democracy and representative democracy and describe majoritarianism, elite theory, and pluralism.**
- 2. Summarize the conflicts that can occur between the principles of liberty and order and between liberty and equality.**
- 3. Discuss conservatism, liberalism, socialism, and libertarianism in American political thought.**

**Essay Two-The Constitution**

**Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.**

- 1. Discuss the most important compromises reached at the Constitutional Convention and the basic structures of the resulting government.**
- 2. Summarize the arguments in favor of and the arguments against adopting the Constitution and explain why the Bill of Rights was adopted.**
- 3. Describe the process of amending the Constitution and the informal ways in which Constitutional interpretation has changed over time.**

**Essay Three—Federalism**

**Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.**

- 1. Explain some of the benefits of the federal system for the United States.**
- 2. Describe how the various provisions of the U.S. Constitution provide a framework for federalism.**
- 3. Detail recent political developments and Supreme Court rulings that affect the distribution of power between the national government and the states.**

#### Essay Four—Civil Liberties

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Explain how the First Amendment's establishment clause and free exercise clause guarantee our freedom of religion.
2. Provide the constitutional basis of the right to privacy and explain how the principle has been applied to the abortion and right-to-die controversies.
3. Cite examples of how recent security concerns have affected our civil liberties.

#### Essay Five—Civil Rights

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Summarize the historical experience of African Americans, state how the separate but equal doctrine was abolished and describe the consequences of the civil rights movement.
2. Contrast the goals of the women's suffrage movement with the goals of modern feminism.
3. Describe the history and current status of Latinos, American Indians, and Asian Americans.

#### Essay Six—Public Opinion and Political Socialization

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Define *public opinion*, *consensus opinion*, and *divided opinion*, and discuss major sources of political socialization, including the family, schools, the media, and political events.
2. Identify the various influences on voting behavior, including education, income, religion, race/ethnicity, gender, and geography.
3. Describe the characteristics of a scientific opinion poll, and list some of the problems pollsters face in obtaining accurate results.

#### Essay Seven—Interest Groups

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Describe the basic characteristics of interest groups and provide three major reasons why Americans join them.
2. List the major types of interest groups, especially those with economic motivations.
3. Evaluate the factors that make some interest groups especially effective.

### **Essay Eight—Political Parties**

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Explain how the history of U.S. political parties has led to the two major parties that exist today.
2. Summarize key differences between the policies and supporters of the major parties.
3. Give reasons why the two-party system has endured in America, and evaluate the impact of third parties on U.S. politics.

### **Essay Nine—Campaigns and Elections**

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Discuss voter turnout in the United States and the types of people most likely to vote.
2. Summarize the process of choosing the president of the United States.
3. Describe the current state of campaign finance.

### **Essay Ten—The Media**

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Describe the different types of media and the changing roles that they play in American society.
2. Summarize the impact of the media of the political process.
3. Discuss the question of opinion and bias in the mainstream media and alternative media such as the radio.

### **Essay Eleven—The Congress**

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Describe the various roles played by Congress and the constitutional basis of its powers.
2. Explain some of the differences between the House and the Senate and some of the privileges enjoyed by members of Congress.
3. Examine the implications of apportioning House seats.

### Essay Twelve—The President

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Distinguish among the major roles of the president, including the head of state, chief executive, commander in chief, chief diplomat, chief legislator, party chief, and politician.
2. Describe some of the special powers of the president and how the president can be removed from power.
3. Evaluate the role of the vice president and describe what happens if the presidency becomes vacant.

### Essay Thirteen-The Executive Branch

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Describe the various types of agencies and organizations that make up the federal executive branch.
2. Discuss how federal agencies make rules and the role of Congress in this process.
3. Discuss the nature of the federal bureaucracy and identify the largest federal spending program.

### Essay Fourteen—The Courts

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Explain the main sources of American law, including constitution, statutes, and regulations, and the common law tradition.
2. Describe the structure of the federal court system and such basic judicial requirements as jurisdiction and standing to sue.
3. Evaluate the manner in which federal judges are selected.

### Essay Fifteen—Domestic and Economic Policy

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Define *unemployment, inflation, fiscal policy, public debt, and monetary policy*.
2. Describe the various taxes that Americans pay, and discuss some of the controversies surrounding taxation.
3. Describe recent developments in our crime rates and incarceration.