



**Introduction to American Government and Society**

205.5317

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Office Hours: Tuesday 12:00-13:00

**Course** **Description** **and Expectations**

This course is a concise overview of the American political system. During our meetings we will examine its constitutional framework (federalism, separation of powers, civil rights and liberties), the formal institutions which shape the public debate (the Presidency, Congress, and the Courts), the issues at the heart of this debate (both domestic and foreign policy), the other key players in the political arena (public opinion, parties, the media and interest groups) and the ways in which these issues are decided (legislation, campaigns and elections).

**Lecture Topics and Readings**

**Readings from:** Ansolabehere, Stephen, Ginsberg, Benjamin, Lowi, Theodore & Shepsle, Kenneth. 2019. American Government: Power and Purpose, Brief 15th Edition.

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| **Date** | **Topic** | **Content and Readings** |
| **1** | Conquest and independence | * A brief historical introduction to the American conquest and revolution and their lingering effects on the US   *Ansolabehere, et al., Chapter 2 (pages 22-51).* |
| **2** | The constitution | * The three pillars of the US government: federalism, checks and balances, civil rights and liberties   *The Constitution of the United States* |
| **3** | Congress | * Bicameralism, representation, power structure, committees * Guest lecture: Israel's former counselor for congressional affair. |
| **4** | The presidency | * The rise of the presidency, the executive presidency (National Security Council, Council of Economic Advisors, Office of Management and the Budget, etc) * Guest lecture: former US ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro |
| **5** | The courts and the supreme courts | * The premise of the US legal system, state v. federal courts, the US supreme court, the courts as vehicles for political and economic change |
| **6** | Who are the American people? | * The American creed and its contribution to American economic growth. * Overview of the various groups, identities that compose the American demographic landscape – from its inception till today. * The process of socialization. * How do these ethnicities and groups interact with the geographical landscape? |
| **7** | Political parties | * The parties' origin, evolution and where they stand today on key issues. * How American parties differ from most world parties? * Why are there only two main parties? * What is the social and attitudinal composition of the two parties? * Guest lecture: heads of the Israeli republican and Democratic parties |
| **8** | Interest groups | * Groups and the pluralist ideal and its flaws. * How do interest groups, like the National Rifle Association or the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, shape government and policy?   *Ansolabehere, et al., Chapter 12 (pages 366-393)*   * Guest lecture: Marvin Feuer (AIPAC) and/or Yael Patir (JStreet) |
| **9** | The Media | * The evolution of the American media industry. * The structure of the media market: print, talk radio, networks and cable * The conglomeration of the media market and the decline of the market of ideas * The polarized media environment * New media * Fake news |
| **10** | Elections | * What do elections in the US look like: House, Senate, governors and president * The presidential campaign * The electoral college * Political debates   *Ansolabehere, et al., Chapter 10 (pages 286-327)* |
| **11** | Israel and the United States | * Historical overview * The foundations of the "special" relationship: values and interests * Guest lecture – ambassador Michael Oren |
| **12** | Global challenges facing the US | * Guest lecture – Prof. Benny Miller – US and its global challenges. chapter to be assigned by Prof. Miller from his recent book * Guest lecture – Dr. Roger Kangas – US and Russia: a new cold war? |