

SYLLABUS SUMMER 2026

Pols 342: American Government (Cicekdag)

This course will examine the primary actors and processes of American political life. It will examine the American culture, key concepts, roots, and direction of the American government, and provide relevant case studies.

A special emphasis will be placed on the US presidential system, checks and balances, federalism, and civil rights and liberties. Students will be given opportunities to follow the US local politics of their choice and track the political activities of a member of the US Congress.

Students are expected to read the assigned chapters in advance and discuss key points in class, take weekly multiple-choice quizzes, write and present a term paper of their choice on American politics (instead of the midterm), and take a final examination.

Textbook: Steffen W. Schmidt, Mack C. Shelley II, Barbara A. Bardes, American Government and Politics Today, Brief, Cengage Advantage Books, 2019

Week 1, June 25, 27: The Democratic Republic; the Constitution

Why do we need government?

Types of government

What kind of democracy?

Fundamental values: Liberty vs. order; Equality vs. Liberty; Proper size of government

Political ideologies: Conservatism vs. Liberalism

Forging a new government: The Constitution

Declaration of Independence

Articles of Confederation

Drafting a new constitution

Bill of Rights

Constitutional Change

Judicial Review

Read: Ch. 1 & 2

Week 2, June 30, July 2, 4: Federalism; Civil Liberties

Why Federalism?

Powers of the national government

Powers of the state governments

Concurrent powers

Supremacy clause

Interstate relations

Civil Liberties

Bill of Rights

Freedom of Religion

Freedom of Expression
Right to privacy
Civil liberties vs. security
Read: Ch. 3, 4

Week 3, July 7, 9, 11: **Civil Rights; Public Opinion & Political Socialization**

Slavery; Separate but equal
School integration: Busing
King's philosophy of nonviolence
Civil Rights: Act of 1964
Voting Rights: Act of 1965
Women's rights
Politics of immigration
Affirmative Action
Reverse discrimination: Bakke case
Gays and lesbians
Public opinion; Political socialization and the media
Family and social environment
Measuring public opinion
Primacy of TV; Media bias
Read: Ch. 5, 6

Week 4, July 14, 16, 18: **Interest Groups; Political Parties; Campaigns, Elections, the Media**

Types of interest groups
What makes an interest group powerful?
Interest group strategies
Lobbying
Functions of political parties
Two-party system
Role of minor parties
Campaigns & Elections
Who is eligible? Who runs?
Effective campaigns
Presidential and congressional elections
Read: Ch. 7, 8

Week 5, July 21, 23, 25: **The Congress; the President**

Functions & powers
House & Senate
Filibustering; Gerrymandering
Committee structure
The Presidency
Roles & powers of the President
Emergency powers
Executive orders

Read: Ch. 9, 10

Week 6, July 28, 30, Aug. 1: **The Bureaucracy; the Courts**

Cabinet departments

Independent executive agencies

Independent regulatory agencies

Government corporations

The Judiciary

Common law tradition

Sources of American law

Federal court system

Supreme Court

Judicial review

Read: Ch. 11, 12

Week 7, Aug. 4, 6, 8: **Domestic and Economic Policy**

Health care

Immigration

Energy & environment

Politics of taxation

Course Review

Make-up quiz

Read: Ch. 13, 14

Week 8, Aug. 11: **Class wrap-up; Make-up Quiz**

Final Examination TBA