

## **POSC-4305: AMERICAN POLITICS**

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Faber Hall 667

Office Hours: Wednesday 11:15 AM – 12:15 PM (in person) and Thursday 9-10 AM (Zoom), and by appointment on other times

Class Location and Time:

Faber Hall 668

Wednesday, 8:30-11:15 AM

### **Course Description**

*Aim of the Course:* Political scientists engage in a variety of approaches to try and answer important questions about American politics. These questions can concern anything from the historical development of political institutions like the presidency, the effect of campaign activities in elections, the many ways that race, gender, or sexuality matter in American politics, how different institutions (such as electoral rules) can affect political outcomes, and many others. Designing and executing studies that try and answer such questions is not easy, but it is necessary to learn more about American politics. The goal of this course is for you to come up with an original research question, design a study that could answer this question, and subsequently execute that study. To help you figure out how to do this, we will spend the first half of the semester looking at different methodological approaches political scientists rely on from a practical perspective. We will subsequently use much of our class time to help you workshop your ideas and get feedback from other students and the instructor. Finally, we will be engaging in several 'Author-Meets-Student' classes – for which you will read a recent political science book, and subsequently meet the author in class and engage in conversation about how they executed their research project.

### **Covid Policies**

Note: At the time of writing we are facing a resurgence of the Covid pandemic due to the Omicron variant. Because of this, there is a possibility that any of the rules outlined below may change at the direction of the university. Make sure you stay up to date on any changes in Covid policies from the university.

This class is scheduled to be taught in-person. Currently, the university requires all students and staff to provide evidence of full vaccination against Covid, including a booster shot. Additionally, everybody is **required to wear masks** while indoors.

In class, you are not allowed to take off your mask at any time – including to eat or drink. If you remove your mask, I will ask you to leave class. Additionally, I strongly recommend [using \(K\)N95 masks](#) as [there is plenty of evidence](#) that these masks are much more effective than cloth or general surgical masks in slowing the spread of Covid. The more we prevent spread, the higher the likelihood that we can remain in person.

If during the semester you find yourself experiencing symptoms of a possible Covid infection, or if you were in close contact with someone who has Covid, **you should not come to class**. You will not be penalized in any way for missing class for health reasons. If you find yourself symptomatic or exposed, you should contact Fordham student health services ([health@fordham.edu](mailto:health@fordham.edu) or at 718-817-4160) and get tested. Just let me know you will be absent through email. I am happy to meet with you on Zoom to discuss any material you missed in class.

The pandemic has thus far affected all of us in some way, though the extent to which it has is likely to be different for each of us. However, at this point we are all, if nothing else, tired, frustrated, and facing all types of motivational issues. This is completely understandable. And, of course, some of us may be dealing with much more serious possible issues caused by Covid-19 – including its effect on our own (long and short term) physical and mental health, that of our family and other loved ones, as well as any economic struggles caused by the pandemic. If you are facing issues limiting your ability to participate and perform fully in this course, please do not hesitate to reach out so we can work on solving those problems.

### Basic Rules

*In-Class:* You are expected to be present in class every session, and to participate in Q&A during class. You should make sure that you come to class having carefully read all the readings for each day, and you should participate actively in our conversations.

To create an atmosphere in which all students feel comfortable participating and have the ability to achieve their full potential, civility during the discussions is vital. During our conversations we will inevitably come to talk about day-to-day politics, and it is very much possible that you will find yourself disagreeing strongly with points put forward by your fellow students (and, they with you!). While you should absolutely feel free to challenge other students, it is crucial that you should do so in a respectful way (and, of course, you can expect the same of your fellow students towards you). Also note that this class is not concerned with presenting normative arguments (that is, opinions) – we are trying to study politics.

*Absences:* If for some reason you cannot be present for understandable reasons (illness, personal circumstances clearly beyond your control, etc.) you should contact me as soon as you can (if at all possible, before the start of class). In line with Fordham's attendance policy you should report any excused absences with documentation by filling out the [Excused Absence Form](#). I keep attendance and unexcused absences result in a lowering of your participation grade. Note that Fordham's official attendance policy is that for courses that meet once a week it is not allowed to have more than two absences in total across the course

– while having more than two unexcused absences does not automatically result in failing this course, excessive absences make it very difficult to receive a passing grade.

### Office Hours

If you have any questions or want to chat about the course, you can meet me during office hours on **Wednesday between 11:15 AM and 12:15 PM** (in person) or **Thursday between 9:00 and 10:00 AM** (on Zoom). My office is in 667 Faber Hall. I will send out a Doodle to sign up for meetings at the beginning of each week. If you want to meet in person, please make sure you wear a mask while you are anywhere in the political science department and/or my office.

If you want to meet but cannot make my office hours, send me an e-mail and we will schedule a meeting. You can also e-mail any questions or concerns – I try to respond to every e-mail within 24 hours. Office hours do not require an appointment so if you want to chat feel free to drop by. Also, you should not feel like you can only stop by if you have really specific questions: it's fine to stop by if you want to talk about the course more broadly.

### Grade

*Components:* Your grade is based on participation in class (20%), three book discussion papers (10% each), and a research paper (50%, divided across multiple assignments).

The book discussion papers require you to write a three to four double-spaced page paper assessing the books we will be reading for class on **March 23, April 6, and April 20**. The paper should summarize (parts of) the book and include a response from you. It also needs to include 4 questions you would like to ask the author about the book or the research process that led to it. You must submit each paper **the Monday before that week's class** on Blackboard. Note that reading a complete book takes time – you should not start reading the book the day before the discussion paper is due.

Your research paper project consists of multiple assignments. The final research paper (worth 70% of your research paper grade) is due on **May 6**. The paper must be 20-25 double-spaced pages, present a clear research question, and original research done to answer this question. You are free to pick the topic, the question, and the methodological approach. To help you in the process of designing and executing the paper, you will prepare a one-page summary of your research question and proposed methodological approach which you will share with other students on **March 6**. In class on **March 9** you will receive feedback from students on that paper. You will submit the one-pager (worth 10% of your paper grade) to me on **March 10**. On **March 31** you will submit a three-page paper (worth 20% of your paper grade) including an updated research question, and a detailed description of how you plan to answer it in your final paper. On **April 29** you will be discussing full drafts of your paper with fellow students.

*Grading Scale and Calculation of Final Course Grade:* For your book response and research paper assignments and participation you will receive a single letter grade which follows the point value outlined below.

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Points Towards Final Grade</b>
A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
D	1.0
F	0.0

Your final grade is based on a weighted average of each of the points earned towards your final grade based on the percentages outlined above. For example, if you received a B+ for your first book response paper, that earns you  $3.3 * 0.10 = 0.33$  points towards your final grade. If you earn an A- for participation this would earn you  $3.7 * 0.20 = 0.74$  points towards your final grade. Your final grade is calculated by counting up all those earned points and translated into a letter grade based on the following scale:

<b>Total Earned Final Grade Points</b>	<b>Final Letter Grade</b>
4.0 – 3.84	A
3.83 – 3.50	A-
3.49 – 3.17	B+
3.16 – 2.84	B
2.83 – 2.50	B-
2.49 – 2.17	C+
2.16 – 1.84	C
1.83 – 1.34	C-
1.34 – 1.0	D
0.99 and below	F

*Grade Complaints:* I will grade your performance in this course in comparison to your fellow students as well as predetermined expectations. This means that the grade you earn should be a fair representation of how you have performed in comparison both to my general expectations of all participants, as well as your fellow classmates' work in this course.

It is possible that you may be unhappy with a grade, and I am always willing to discuss your progress during the course to help you improve. If you believe the grade you received is an **incorrect** assessment of the quality of the work you produced, you can challenge your grade. If you want to do so, please email me to set up an appointment and send me a copy of your work and a written description explaining in detail why you believe your grade does not

accurately represent the quality of the work you submitted. We will subsequently discuss your work and I will assess whether I believe your grade should be changed.

Before you contact me about your grade(s), consider the following things. First, the goal of a grade reassessment is to produce a grade that is a fair representation of your performance: this means that any errors that lowered your grade will be corrected, but any potential errors that *increased* it will also be adjusted. A re-grading process can thus result in a higher grade, the exact same grade, or a lower grade than what you received through the original grading process.

Second, a grade challenge means you must make a **specific argument** about why you think the grading does not reflect the **quality** of your work. It is not enough to state that you are confused by your grade, or that you feel that it does not reflect the amount of time and effort you put into the course. I understand that both of those feelings can be very frustrating. But they are not arguments for why a grade is not correct, and I will not entertain grading challenges based solely on these arguments.

Third, as you are assessing your work in comparison to the answer keys or my comments, make sure you do not just look at the things you did right. You also have to incorporate those things you missed or got wrong. It is quite common for students who received, for example, an A- to list the things they did well. But those things are what earned you the A-. The question is whether there were things that reasonably cost you enough points to keep you below an A.

Fourth, students sometimes try to 'challenge' their grade through a roundabout way – effectively having the instructor defend why they graded the work the way they did. Often, those students do not provide arguments for why they disagree with the grade. If you are unsure what you did wrong and you'd like me to clarify, I am of course always happy to do so. But I will not engage the 'roundabout grade challenge': if you think the grade is incorrect, you have to identify what it is you think I did wrong and engage with me on that basis. If you cannot articulate why you think the grade is wrong, then that might just mean it is in fact a correct assessment of your performance.

Finally, grades are not a negotiation. They should reflect the quality of the work you produced. If you believe I made a mistake, you should feel free to challenge the grade. But the correct use of this process is not to look at your different grades at the end of the semester and to try to up one, or multiple, grade(s) with the sole goal of collecting enough points to increase your final letter grade. If you want to ensure you get the highest grade possible I would advise you to spend your time reaching out to me with questions *before* assignments are due, and not on trying to haggle about a grade afterwards.

*Plagiarism and Other Violations of Code of Conduct:* All assignments in this course fall under Fordham University's code of conduct. Any violation (including, but not limited to, cheating on exams, and plagiarism) will result in the student being held accountable to the full extent of university guidelines. Note that this includes self-plagiarism – that is, taking (parts of) assignments you did for other courses and resubmitting them for this course. While self-

plagiarism might seem like an innocent act, it means you did not do original work as required for this course. It too can lead to negative consequences, including failing this course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university. If you aren't sure whether what you are doing is right or not, check in with the writing center or with me!

### Notes

Fordham generally 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 mispronounce your name or use the incorrect gender pronoun!

Fordham's Writing Center (in Walsh Library at Rose Hill and in Quinn Library at Lincoln Center) provides individualized assistance to students for writing assignments. You can make an appointment – free of charge! – to meet with someone who will read your paper and discuss it in detail with you. I strongly recommend using this system. You can sign up for an appointment at [https://www.fordham.edu/info/20126/writing\\_center](https://www.fordham.edu/info/20126/writing_center).

As a faculty member, I am – by law – a mandatory reporter and I am required to contact and provide information to Public Safety, the Dean of Students, or Fordham's Title IX Coordinator if I am provided with any information indicating that a Fordham student has been sexually harassed (verbally or physically), sexually assaulted, stalked, had domestic violence or dating violence occur in a relationship, or been a victim / survivor of any behavior that is prohibited by Fordham's Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures. Once reported, Fordham will seek to support any student and make efforts to stop the negative behavior, prevent it from recurring, and remedy its effects. It is important for you to be aware that there are three confidential places on campus where you can seek support or guidance from Fordham staff members who are **not** mandatory reporters: clinical counselors in Counseling & Psychological Services, pastoral counselors in Campus Ministry, and medical service providers in University Health Services. You can read more about this in the Student CARE brochure or visit [www.fordham.edu/care](http://www.fordham.edu/care) or [www.fordham.edu/sexualmisconduct](http://www.fordham.edu/sexualmisconduct) for more information.

If you or someone you know is struggling with emotional or mental health concerns, and/or gender, sexual, or domestic violence, Fordham's Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) can provide (free) assistance. The Rose Hill office of CPS is open Monday through Friday and can be reached by phone at 718-817-3725. If you, or a student you know, is experiencing a mental health crisis or emergency that requires immediate attention contact Fordham's office of Public Safety at Rose Hill at 718-817-2222 (available 24/7). If you prefer to access mental health services outside of Fordham, New York City provides free mental health support through NYC Well (<https://nycwell.cityofnewyork.us/en/>).

## Course Materials

Nearly all readings for this course will be made available online as PDFs through Blackboard. The three books we will be reading are available for purchase at the university book store or at online book stores. All three books should also become available online as a free e-book through the Fordham library website. The Sydnor book is already available now (click on the link below or search for the book title on the Fordham library website), the other two are currently on order.

Boris Heersink and Jeffery A. Jenkins, *Republican Party Politics and the American South 1865-1968* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

Matthew J. Lacombe, *Firepower: How the NRA Turned Gun Owners into a Political Force* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

[Emily Sydnor, \*Disrespectful Democracy: The Psychology of Political Incivility\* \(New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019\).](#)

Note that the Fordham bookstore price matches textbooks with Amazon and Barnes and Noble on rentals and purchases (and that on Amazon the book might be cheaper than the price charged by the Fordham bookstore).

## Course Syllabus

*January 19*

Topic: Introduction to Political Science

Goal: This class will serve as a general introduction to the course. We will discuss the basic outline of the class and the research paper assignment. We will also focus on what political science is, and how causal inference works (and why it is difficult!), and how social scientists try and answer their research questions.

Readings:

Amelia Hoover Green, "How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps."

Lisa Baglione, *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science* (CQ Press, 2019), Chapters 1 and 2.

*January 26*

Topic: Methodological Approaches – Experiments

Goal: In this class we will learn how political scientists can use experiments to answer specific types of research questions. We will discuss why experiments are helpful, what kind of questions in political science they can answer, what kinds of different experiments there are, how to design an experiment, and how to interpret its results.

Readings:

Ted Brader, "Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions," *American Journal of Political Science* vol. 49, no. 2 (2005) 388-405.

Camille D. Burge, Julian J. Wamble, and Chryl N. Laird, "Missing the Mark? An Exploration of Targeted Campaign Advertising Effect on Black Political Engagement," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* vol. 8, no. 2 (2020) 423-438.

Alan Gerber and Donald Green, "The Effects of Personal Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment," *American Political Science Review* vol. 94 (2000) 653-663.

*February 2*

Topic: Methodological Approaches – Experiments Workshop

Goal: In this class you will work in small groups to come up with a simple research question and design a basic experiment that could help answer it. You will present this design to the full class and we will discuss the pro's and con's to each design.

Readings:

No readings.

*February 9*

Topic: Methodological Approaches: Quantitative Analysis of Observational Data

Goal: While experiments may be the 'gold standard' in causal inference, they are not a (realistic) option to answering many research questions. An alternative approach is to rely on observational data – that is, data not affected by researchers. In this class, we will learn how to collect observational data, how analyzing it is different from experimental data, and how scholars use statistical analysis to make causal claims.

Readings:



Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, "Blind Retrospection: Why Shark Attacks Are Bad for Democracy," working paper (2013).

Anthony Fowler and Andrew B. Hall, "Do Shark Attacks Influence Presidential Elections? Reassessing a Prominent Finding on Voter Competence," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 80, no. 4 (2018).

Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, "Statistics as If Politics Mattered: A Reply to Fowler and Hall," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 80, no. 4 (2018).

*February 16*

Topic: Methodological Approaches: Quantitative Analysis Workshop

Goal: using a set of basic instructions, you will work with group members to expand a quantitative data set and propose a test between an independent and dependent variable in that new data set. We will then test whether or not there is a statistically significant correlation between those variables.

Readings:

No readings.

*February 23*

Topic: Methodological Approaches - Qualitative Methods

Goal: While most political scientists answer their research questions through large N data analysis (whether collected through experiments or as observational data), many scholars rely on qualitative case studies. In this class we will learn what differentiates qualitative methods from experimental and quantitative analysis, and we will look at ways scholars rely on qualitative methods to both test theories and create new ones.

Readings:

Stephen van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997) Chapter 2.

Richard Benschel, "The American Ballot Box: Law, Identity and the Polling Place in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Studies in American Political Development* vol. 17 (Spring 2003) 1-27.

Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (The University of Chicago Press, 2016), Chapters 1, 2 and 3.

*March 2*

Topic: Paper Workshop I – Identifying a Research Question

Goal: We will use our class time this week to work together to identify workable research questions. Often, research questions can be very broad and difficult to turn into projects that can actually be executed. In this class we will workshop different ideas in small groups and with the whole class to identify what makes a research question manageable but still interesting.

Readings:

No readings.

*March 6*

Assignment: Share one-pager with other students

*March 9*

Topic: Paper Workshop II – One-Pager

Goal: In this class we will use our class time to discuss each student's one pager, and work on improving / editing the assignment.

Readings:

No readings.

*March 10*

Assignment: Submit one-pager on Blackboard

*March 16*

Topic: No class (spring break)

Readings:

No readings.

*March 21*

Assignment: Submit book discussion paper I.

*March 23*

Topic: Author Meets Students I: Republican Party Politics and the American South

Goal: In class we discuss the book in groups and come up with questions for the author. In the second half of the class we will be talking with the author about the work they did, the choices they made, the issues they ran into executing the work, etc.

Readings:

Boris Heersink and Jeffery A. Jenkins, *Republican Party Politics and the American South 1865-1968* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

*March 30*

Topic: Paper Workshop III - Developing Research Questions

Goal: This class we will use in-class discussion to narrow down the methodological approach you will take to answer your research question. We will focus on identifying what data you would need to collect and how you'd go about collecting it?

Readings:

No readings.

*March 31*

Assignment: Submit Three-Pager on Blackboard

*April 4*

Assignment: Submit book discussion paper II.

*April 6*

Topic: Author Meets Students II: Firepower: How the NRA Turned Gun Owners into a Political Force

Goal: In class we discuss the book in groups and come up with questions for the author. In the second half of the class we will be talking with the author about the work they did, the choices they made, the issues they ran into executing the work, etc.

Readings:

Matthew J. Lacombe, *Firepower: How the NRA Turned Gun Owners into a Political Force* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

*April 13*

Topic: Paper Workshop IV – Paper Work

Goal: This week you will work on your paper individually in class. You will receive individual assistance with any issues or questions you are facing in the process.

Readings:

No readings.

*April 18*

Assignment: Submit book discussion paper III.

*April 20*

Topic: Author Meets Students III: Disrespectful Democracy: The Psychology of Political Incivility

Goal: In class we discuss the book in groups and come up with questions for the author. In the second half of the class we will be talking with the author about the work they did, the choices they made, the issues they ran into executing the work, etc.

Readings:

Emily Sydnor, *Disrespectful Democracy: The Psychology of Political Incivility* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019).

*April 25*

Assignment: Share full draft paper with other students

*April 27*

Topic: Paper Workshop V: Feedback from Students

Goal: Share your draft paper with students in your group and read those of the other students. In class, we discuss

Readings:

No readings.

*May 4*

Topic: Paper Workshop VI: Final Adjustments

Goal: This week you will work on your paper individually in class. You will receive individual assistance with any issues or questions you are facing in the process.

Readings:

No readings.

*May 6*

Assignment: Submit final paper on Blackboard.