

**PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS**

**American Politics – Subfield Guide**

American Politics focuses on the U.S. political system and includes the study of the development of the American system of governance, American political institutions, the attitudes and behaviors of U.S. residents, and the relationship between institutions and people.

POL 220 (American Politics) provides a survey of the entire American Politics subfield. It is recommended that students who are considering American Politics as their primary field take POL 220 before their junior year. POL 220 also offers an efficient and accessible summary of the subfield for students specializing in other areas and highlights several approaches to the study of politics.

**Core courses in American Politics**

The American Politics subfield offers a variety of 300-level courses that focus on different areas. Courses in ***political institutions*** cover specific branches of government (e.g., Congress) or types of institutions (e.g., the courts). Courses in ***political behavior*** examine how ordinary people feel and think about politics and whether and how they participate in politics. Most topics in American Politics involve the interplay of institutions and behavior, so many courses cover aspects of both (e.g., electoral rules and voting behavior in POL 330; Congress and congressional elections in POL 324; public opinion and the judiciary in POL 320). A third set of courses examines ***American political development*** and ***Public Law***. Courses in this area cover the intersection of the American Politics and Political Theory subfields. Several other 300-level courses offer links between other subfields (e.g., Comparative Politics in POL 348; International Relations in POL 392).

An undergraduate specializing in American Politics should develop competence in more than one of these core areas. In preparation for a successful senior thesis, it is often a good idea, however, to focus on building special expertise in one particular area or the intersection of two related areas. Undergraduates whose primary field is American Politics should aim to take at least two 300-level courses in American Politics by the end of their junior year.

The American Politics subfield also offers 400-level courses which are conducted as small seminars and cover varying topics. The list of courses below includes recent and current examples. Seminars are recommended for juniors and seniors who have already taken several Politics courses, including in their subfield. They tend to offer a more focused, often more challenging reading list, small-group discussions, and close work relationship with professor and fellow students.

American Politics students who choose to use statistical analysis in their senior thesis are encouraged to gain the necessary skills by taking POL 345 and POL 346. Those with interest in applying formal models to topics of American Politics should take POL 347.

## **Regular courses in American Politics**

### ***Political Behavior***

POL 311 Political Psychology  
POL 322 Public Opinion (Mendelberg)  
POL 327 Mass Media and American Politics (Gilens)  
POL 330 Electing the President: Voter Psychology and Candidate Strategy (Prior)  
POL 421 Seminar: Racial Politics in the U.S. (Mendelberg)  
POL 421 Seminar: The Tea Party and the History of Populist Movements in America (Achen)  
POL 422/GSS 422: Seminar American Seminar: Gender and American Politics (Mendelberg)  
POL 423/LAS 423/LAO 423 Seminar: Latino Politics in the U.S. (Valenzuela)

### ***Political Institutions***

POL 320 Judicial Politics (Kastellec)  
POL 365 Democracy (Boix)  
POL 420 Seminar: Presidential Power – Strategies of Governance (Cameron)

### ***Formal Study of Political Institutions (with links to Comparative Politics)***

POL 349 Political Economy (Londregan, Romer)  
POL 348 Analyzing Legislatures (Iaryczower)

### ***American Political Development and Public Law (with links to Political Theory)***

POL 314 American Constitutional Development (Whittington)  
POL 315 Constitutional Interpretation (George)  
POL 316 Civil Liberties (George, Whittington)  
POL 318 Law and Society (Frymer)  
POL 321 American Political Thought  
POL 328 American Politics and Democratic Theory (Achen)  
AMS 305/POL 425 Seminar: Law and Work (Frymer)

### ***Link to International Relations***

POL 392 American Foreign Policy (Friedberg, Ikenberry)