

PSCI 3210 A
Electoral Politics in the U.S.
Tuesday 2:35 a.m. – 5:25 p.m.

Instructor: Steven Orr **Office:** <https://calendly.com/stevenrayorr>
Email: steven.orr@carleton.ca **Office Hours:** Wednesdays 12:00-1:30pm
(or by appointment)

Course Description

Although the United States has some institutions and electoral mechanisms in common with other liberal democracies, there are many unique elements that distinguish America from even its closest allies: a fairly rigid two-party system; a strong emphasis on individual freedom; the Electoral College; the prominent role of morality in shaping political debates; the place of polling and media, both social and traditional; the length (and frequency) of campaigns; a variety of democratic and geographic factors; and the role of money in politics and government. As we have seen over the last few years, an added complexity to understanding American electoral politics is the speed with which its rules and norms can change – and have changed. Anyone who says they have all the answers is almost certainly selling something. What we can do, however, is provide a strong foundation to better understand how things got to this point so that you can appreciate the nuances of current (and future) situations with regards to politics and government in the United States.

Course Texts

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.
Each individual essay is available online: see links below
- Pakula, A. J. (Director), & Goldman, W. (Screenwriter). (1976). *All the president's men* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.
Available online through the Carleton Library: <https://media3-criterionpic-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/htbin/wwform/006?T=W76502>

Office Hours

All office hours appointments will be online. To cut down on the number of emails, we'll be using Calendly to book those meetings: <https://calendly.com/stevenrayorr>. Calendly is just to help arrange the office hours schedule, so we'll be meeting on Zoom. I'll be on video, but there's no need for you to do so.

Technology Statement

Given that ensuring the health and safety of students is an essential part of education, attendance for PSCI 3210 will be **wholly optional**. You will, at no point, be required to come to campus in order to complete this course. In order to make that work, I will be posting pre-recorded lectures on Brightspace each week for you to listen along with throughout the course. Additionally, that is where all assignments will be posted and submitted. Given that this will be the primary course space, you are responsible for checking it regularly and setting up your email to receive course announcements.

During our regularly scheduled class time (Tuesdays, starting at 2:35pm) I will be holding a discussion of the reading for the week, as well as discuss current events that shape American electoral politics. Again, this is entirely optional and none of the content covered here will be required for the Final Exam. While those who come might choose to incorporate these conversations into their answers, it will not be required.

Learning Outcomes

- Identify, understand, and navigate key aspects of the rapidly changing norms and institutions of American politics, including electoral processes and governing mechanisms;
- Expose students to a diverse range of ideas and views about American politics;
- Use this knowledge to analyze current events;
- Develop historical and critical understandings of popular and conventional wisdom in relation to American government;
- To provide an informed perspective that better enables you to clearly and carefully articulate your own ideas about US politics, in relation to both historical and current events.

Evaluation

Due Date	Assignment	%
28 September	Election Reflection	10%
12 October	Paper Preparation	10%
23 November	Term Paper	40%
23 December	Take Home Exam	40%

- Missed Term Work: Late assignments will be subject to a late penalty of 5% per day (including weekends) of the total marks for the assignment. Assignments submitted more than a week beyond the due date will be assigned a grade of zero.

A Note on Assignments: Title pages, citations/footnotes, bibliography do not count towards the overall length. The length requirements mean that you are expected to have that amount of *content*. While you are not required to have a title page, you do need to have a complete bibliography. Additionally, please double space your papers and use 12 point Times New Roman with one inch margins.

Election Reflection (10% — *Due 28 September, 2:30pm*)

In approximately 500 words, why do you think that Joe Biden won the 2020 presidential election? This is not a trick question, nor should you take it as a *test* of your knowledge. I am asking for you to, with the knowledge that you have walking into the class at the start of the semester, to present your opinion – whether it is informed by an in-depth knowledge of American politics or not.

Paper Preparation (10% — *Due 12 October, 2:30pm*)

To help you get started on your paper assignment (see below), you are going to begin working on it in February with this preparatory assignment. For this assignment you will need to come up with a preliminary thesis statement (2-3 sentences) and an annotated bibliography (including at least 2 academic sources, 2 credible journalism sources) to show you've started the research for your paper.

NOTE: While I recommend getting a head start on your paper to help manage your workload, this assignment is optional. Anyone who doesn't do this assignment will have the 10% moved to their term paper grade.

Term Paper (40% — *Due 23 November, 2:30pm*)

3500 words. Throughout the term, we will be discussing several key aspects of the American electoral process, some of which are long established and some of which are newer developments. In recent years, questions have been raised about the strength of that process and whether American democracy is truly as healthy as it is claimed to be. In this paper, you will identify and analyze a threat, either actual or potential, to the US electoral process. This assignment does not demand that you believe American elections are in crisis – or even that a crisis is likely – but you are expected to be able to identify weaknesses or situations that could become worse.

Key questions to address:

- What are the **specific** institutions, processes, or ideals that are threatened? Are there particular actors that are disproportionately affected? And is this unique to the United States or is this a problem faced in other democracies around the world?
- How plausible is the threat? How seriously is it being taken by the people and institutions affected and by society at large?

- What potential solutions are there to this problem? While you are not expected to offer in depth policy paper on all the nuances involved, you should be able to speak to the kinds of steps that could either help neutralize an ongoing threat or prevent a budding one from emerging.

Take Home Exam (40% — Due 23 December, 2:30pm)

Questions to be distributed in early October. These questions will not be a test of your ability to memorize course content, nor will I be expecting you to repeat lecture material back at me. Instead, they take seriously the idea that writing is a form of thinking. Keep in mind that, because the exam is weighted equally to the Term Paper, doing well will require at least as much effort as the Term Paper – perhaps more, given how flexible the topics were for that assignment and how varied these exam questions are.

Schedule

Week 1: 14 September – First Class

Week 2: 21 September

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “The First White President.” *The Atlantic*, 2018.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/>

Week 3: 28 September

Election Reflection Due (2:30pm)

Readings:

- Pakula, A. J. (Director), & Goldman, W. (Screenwriter). (1976). *All the president's men* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.
<https://media3-criterionpic-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/htbin/wwform/006?T=W76502>

Week 4: 5 October

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “‘This Is How We Lost to the White Man’.” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/05/-this-is-how-we-lost-to-the-white-man/306774/>

Week 5: 12 October

Paper Preparation Assignment Due (2:30pm)

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “I’m Not Black, I’m Kanye.” *The Atlantic*, 2018.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/05/im-not-black-im-kanye/559763/>

Week 6: 19 October

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “American Girl.” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/01/american-girl/307211/>

Week 7: 26 October – Reading Break

Week 8: 2 November

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “The Legacy of Malcolm X.” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/05/the-legacy-of-malcolm-x/308438/>

Week 9: 9 November

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “Fear of a Black President.” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/09/fear-of-a-black-president/309064/>

Week 10: 16 November

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “The Case for Reparations.” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

Week 11: 23 November

Term Paper Due (2:30pm)

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/10/the-black-family-in-the-age-of-mass-incarceration/403246/>

Week 12: 30 November

Readings:

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “My President Was Black” In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World Publishing, 2017.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/01/my-president-was-black/508793/>

Week 13: 7 December – Final Class

No Readings

23 December – Exam Period

Take Home Exam Due (2:30pm)

Appendix

Covid-19 Information

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow COVID-19 prevention measures and all mandatory public health requirements (e.g. wearing a mask, physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory and cough etiquette) and [mandatory self-screening](#) prior to coming to campus daily.

If you feel ill or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms while on campus or in class, please leave campus immediately, self-isolate, and complete the mandatory [symptom reporting tool](#). For purposes of contact tracing, attendance will be recorded in all classes and labs. Participants can check in using posted QR codes through the cuScreen platform where provided. Students who do not have a smartphone will be required to complete a paper process as indicated on the [COVID-19 website](#).

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow guidelines regarding safe movement and seating on campus (e.g. directional arrows, designated entrances and exits, designated seats that maintain physical distancing). In order to avoid congestion, allow all previous occupants to fully vacate a classroom before entering. No food or drinks are permitted in any classrooms or labs.

For the most recent information about Carleton's COVID-19 response and required measures, please see the [University's COVID-19 webpage](#) and review the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#). Should you have additional questions after reviewing, please contact covidinfo@carleton.ca

Please note that failure to comply with University policies and mandatory public health requirements, and endangering the safety of others are considered misconduct under the [Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy](#). Failure to comply with Carleton's COVID-19 procedures may lead to supplementary action involving Campus Safety and/or Student Affairs.

Requests for Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy accommodation: Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf.

Religious accommodation: Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible

after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf.

Accommodations for students with disabilities: If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, reach out to your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. For more information, please visit carleton.ca/pmc.

Accommodation for student activities: Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who engage in student activities at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>.

For more information on academic accommodation, please contact the departmental administrator or visit: students.carleton.ca/course-outline.

Sexual Violence Policy

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated. Survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support.

Plagiarism

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, art works, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and

the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one's own; and
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence which cannot be resolved directly with the course's instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They may include a mark of zero for the plagiarized work or a final grade of "F" for the course.

More information on the University's Academic Integrity Policy can be found at: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>.

Intellectual property

Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s).

Submission and Return of Term Work

Papers must be submitted directly to the instructor according to the instructions in the course outline. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the departmental office will not accept assignments submitted in hard copy.

Grading

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the faculty Dean. Final standing in courses will be shown by alphabetical grades. The system of grades used, with corresponding grade points is:

Percentage	Letter grade	12-point scale	Percentage	Letter grade	12-point scale
90-100	A+	12	67-69	C+	6
85-89	A	11	63-66	C	5
80-84	A-	10	60-62	C-	4
77-79	B+	9	57-59	D+	3
73-76	B	8	53-56	D	2
70-72	B-	7	50-52	D-	1

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by an instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Carleton E-mail Accounts

All email communication to students from the Department of Political Science will be via official Carleton University e-mail accounts and/or Brightspace. As important course and university information is distributed this way, it is the student's responsibility to monitor their Carleton University email accounts and Brightspace.

Carleton Political Science Society

The Carleton Political Science Society (CPSS) has made its mission to provide a social environment for politically inclined students and faculty. By hosting social events, including Model Parliament, debates, professional development sessions and more, CPSS aims to involve all political science students at Carleton University. Our mandate is to arrange social and academic activities in order to instill a sense of belonging within the Department and the larger University community. Members can benefit through our networking opportunities, academic engagement initiatives and numerous events which aim to complement both academic and social life at Carleton University. To find out more, visit us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/CarletonPoliticalScienceSociety/>.

Official Course Outline

The course outline posted to the Political Science website is the official course outline.