

POL 1065: US Democracy
Spring 2026
MWF 12:15 -1:20 pm, Colt Hall Forum

Dr. Linda Beail
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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 2:45-4:15 pm and by appointment

Getting in touch with me: For short questions – email me at lbeail@pointloma.edu. As a general rule, I answer emails during the work day (9-4), and I try to answer emails within 24 hours, except on weekends. If I happen to miss your email, please follow up again with me. I want to make sure I get back to you! For everything else – come to office hours or make an appointment. Office hours are a chance for you to get help on class assignments; go over material covered in class; talk about connections between class material and other ideas; talk about the political science major/possible careers/vocation; and so on. I would love to get to know each of you better and help you succeed in this course, so I encourage you to take advantage of this time.

PLNU MISSION: To Teach – To Shape – To Send. Point Loma Nazarene University exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service becomes an expression of faith. Being of Wesleyan heritage, we aspire to be a learning community where grace is foundational, truth is pursued, and holiness is a way of life.

POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT MISSION

As followers of Christ, the Department of History and Political Science promotes wisdom and scholarship about historical contexts and political systems, so that graduates can become local and global leaders in the service of Christ and humanity.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is an interactive introduction to the American government, its historical foundations, institutions, and political processes. We will examine how our political system was designed, how it has changed, and how public opinion, the media, and the digital information age have affected our government institutions and public policy. We will discuss the role and scope of government as it was conceived by the Founders and is viewed today. We will evaluate how political parties, interest groups and elections help citizens have democratic voice influencing their government, and how the governmental branches of our democratic system – Congress, the Presidency, and the Courts – reflect and embody American values.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Student Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Explain how the government impacts your daily life;
- Recognize and evaluate the primary debates and issues in American government and American political history;
- Explain and critically assess the formal and informal political institutions and their respective roles in American politics;
- Identify and describe the critical functions of the three branches of government ▪ Assess the causes and consequences of different forms of political participation and outline how individuals and groups can affect political outcomes in the United States.

Program Learning Outcomes:

- Students will develop an appreciation of politics (short, applied writing assignments).
- Develop and express ideas in written communication in an effective and scholarly manner (short writing assignments).

SPIRITUAL CARE

PLNU strives to be a place where students grow as whole persons. To this end, we provide resources for our students to encounter God and grow in their Christian faith.

If you have questions, a desire to meet with the chaplain, or if you have prayer requests, you can contact the [Office of Student Life and Formation](#).

PLNU ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION POLICY

Regular and punctual attendance at all class sessions is considered essential to optimum academic achievement. If the student is absent for more than 10 percent of class sessions, the faculty member will issue a written warning of de-enrollment. If the absences exceed 20 percent, the student may be de-enrolled without notice until the university drop date or, after that date, receive the appropriate grade for their work and participation.

INCOMPLETES AND LATE ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments are to be submitted/turned in by the beginning of the class session when they are due— including assignments posted in Canvas. Incompletes will only be assigned in extremely unusual circumstances.

PLNU COPYRIGHT POLICY

Point Loma Nazarene University, as a non-profit educational institution, is entitled by law to use materials protected by the US Copyright Act for classroom education. Any use of those materials outside the class may violate the law.

PLNU ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY

Students should demonstrate academic honesty by doing original work and by giving appropriate credit to the ideas of others. Academic dishonesty is the act of presenting information, ideas, and/or concepts as one's own when in reality they are the results of another person's creativity and effort. A faculty member who believes a situation involving academic dishonesty has been detected may assign a failing grade for that assignment or examination, or, depending on the seriousness of the offense, for the course. Faculty should follow and students may appeal using the procedure in the university Catalog. See [Academic Policies](#) for definitions of kinds of academic dishonesty and for further policy information.

AI POLICY

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., ChatGPT, iA Writer, Marmot, Botowski, GrammarlyGo, Perplexity, etc.) is prohibited in this course for any aspect of your work, including idea generation, drafting, editing, or final submissions. This course is designed to assess your independent critical thinking, writing, and research skills without the assistance of AI technologies.

PLNU ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS POLICY

PLNU is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all its programs, services, and

activities. Students with disabilities may request course-related accommodations by contacting the Educational Access Center (EAC), located in the Bond Academic Center (EAC@pointloma.edu or 619-849-2486). Once a student's eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, the EAC will work with the student to create an Accommodation Plan (AP) that outlines allowed accommodations. Professors are able to view a student's approved accommodations through Accommodate.

PLNU highly recommends that students speak with their professors during the first two weeks of each semester/term about the implementation of their AP in that particular course. Accommodations are not retroactive so clarifying with the professor at the outset is one of the best ways to promote positive academic outcomes.

Students who need accommodations for a disability should contact the EAC as early as possible (i.e., ideally before the beginning of the semester) to assure appropriate accommodations can be provided. It is the student's responsibility to make the first contact with the EAC. Students cannot assume that because they had accommodations in the past, their eligibility at PLNU is automatic. All determinations at PLNU must go through the EAC process. This is to protect the privacy of students with disabilities who may not want to disclose this information and are not asking for any accommodations.

LANGUAGE AND BELONGING

Point Loma Nazarene University faculty are committed to helping create a safe and hospitable learning environment for all students. As Christian scholars we are keenly aware of the power of language and believe in treating others with dignity. As such, it is important that our language be equitable, inclusive, and prejudice free. Inclusive/Bias-free language is the standard outlined by all major academic style guides, including MLA, APA, and Chicago, and it is the expected norm in university-level work. Good writing and speaking do not use unsubstantiated or irrelevant generalizations about personal qualities such as age, disability, economic class, ethnicity, marital status, parentage, political or religious beliefs, race, gender, sex, or sexual orientation. Inclusive language also avoids using stereotypes or terminology that demeans persons or groups based on age, disability, class, ethnicity, gender, race, language, or national origin. Respectful use of language is particularly important when referring to those outside of the religious and lifestyle commitments of those in the PLNU community. By working toward precision and clarity of language, we mark ourselves as serious and respectful scholars, and we model the Christ like quality of hospitality.

If you (or someone you know) have experienced other forms of discrimination, you can find more information on reporting and resources at www.pointloma.edu/nondiscrimination.

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND DISCRIMINATION

In support of a safe learning environment, if you (or someone you know) have experienced any form of sexual discrimination or misconduct, including sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, know that accommodations and resources are available through the Title IX Office at pointloma.edu/Title-IX. Please be aware that under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, faculty and staff are required to disclose information about such misconduct to the Title IX Office. If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can contact Counseling Services at counselingservices@pointloma.edu or find a list of campus pastors at pointloma.edu/Title-IX.

If you (or someone you know) have experienced other forms of discrimination or bias, you can find more information on reporting and resources at www.pointloma.edu/bias

CAMPUS RESOURCES

The [PLNU Tutoring Center](#) offers support with everything you need to succeed — whether it's learning study strategies and test-taking techniques, getting help from a tutor, using technology to read and write, or editing a research paper. They also offer individual or small group tutorial sessions and special review sessions before exams for several courses. These services are **free** for PLNU undergraduate students. Some helpful **study strategies** that may assist you in this course can be found [here](#).

Research librarians are available to help you with your research papers and projects in Ryan Library. You can reach them by phone at (619) 849-2337, by text at (619)592-8884, or by [email](#). To search the library's databases for books and articles, or to find quick and easy reference to our citation style guide and resources in political science, please visit our department's excellent [research guide](#) from Ryan Library.

[The Wellness Center](#) is available for medical, counseling and nutrition services to students. Many college students experience strained relationships, stress, anxiety, depression, physical health challenges, and other barriers to learning. The Wellness Center offers help and resources to deal with these kind of issues.

STYLE GUIDELINES

In political science, the most common form of citations is the “**author-date**” format from the [Chicago Manual of Style](#). Please use this style if using citations in this class – examples are available at the hyperlink. For our short response papers and in-class exams, if you are referring to something from our shared syllabus, simply indicate the author's name or title and where to find the idea/quote in your text – you do not need formal footnotes or works cited. For example: “As Plato says in the *Apology*, “it really is the greatest benefit for a person to converse every day about goodness” (paragraph 38a, p. 19).

CLASS EXPECTATIONS

Class time is precious. It is our opportunity to interact, discuss, and create knowledge together. It is not a passive experience, but one that you should be ready to participate actively in. Whether face-to-face or via Zoom, I hope our time together will be lively, valuable, energizing and irreplaceable. In this spirit, I'd ask for your respectful behavior and engaged attention at all times during class, in person or virtually.

There is a lot of polarization, controversy, miscommunication and misunderstanding involved in discussions of American politics these days. We all bring different backgrounds, experiences and opinions with us into this semester. You are each situated at different places across the political spectrum – or may not be sure where you fit on that spectrum of issues, ideologies and partisanship! That's normal and good. My hope is that you enter this class with an open heart and mind, curious about the experiences and opinions of others even as you value and think through your own. My goal is to share historical information and political science research that can help you become more knowledgeable and better able to understand, evaluate and form opinions on political issues and policies. I want to give each of you the context and background to enter these conversations wisely and well.

Given the polarization, fear, anger and mistrust in our civic discourse right now, I want to remind you that our goal this semester is not to debate or demonize one another's partisanship or ideology, but to learn more about how American politics works & why. Our political system has, from its inception, been one of continually contested ideas – about the size and scope of government, who counts as a citizen, what equality and freedom mean in practice, the role of religion in public life, and more. It is important to hear and understand this unfolding conversation, to know how we have ended up at this moment and think about how we want our system to look moving forward, shaped by our own voices and contributions. I want you to see how none of these issues has been “settled” or taken for granted, but always critiqued & debated. I also want you to understand how many of our current dilemmas and conflicts could be better addressed and resolved by putting them into some context – where these conflicts come from, what's been tried before,

why certain ideas/policies/alliances are trusted or mistrusted by political actors today.

I don't want anyone to feel silenced – or to dominate the conversation – but to collaborate in gaining knowledge and insight. There is much to learn by wrestling with ideas, but not from attacking or belittling one another on a personal level. We are not here to doubt one another's intelligence, morality, or good faith. My expectation is that we will all strive to treat one another with respect, kindness and professionalism, which includes listening carefully and responding thoughtfully and with grace to the thoughts and opinions of our colleagues. Our opportunity and privilege this semester is to help one another grow intellectually, hold one another accountable in love, and emerge with more knowledge, tools and practice at speaking & thinking about divisive but important topics.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

There are a variety of assignments and activities required for successful completion of this course. The most basic, but most important, is regular attendance and participation in class sessions. Regular attendance is probably the single best predictor of success in completing the assignments, and much of what you learn in this course will be as a result of discussion and interaction with your peers; thus it is in your own best interest to come to class well-prepared each day.

Due dates are noted on the syllabus. *InQuizitive activities and Government in the News presentations/paper MUST be turned in on time or they will not receive any credit.* You may have 2 days of grace period for turning in any of the short papers (2 days per the entire semester, not 2 days per each assignment). You may use the 2 days together, or 1 day for one project, 1 for another – and you do not need to ask me for permission to use that extension. However, once you have used a total of 2 days' worth of extensions, you will lose 5% for each calendar that paper is late.

INQUIZITIVE ASSIGNMENT (WEEKLY ON MONDAYS)

As a student of American Government, it is vital that you comprehend our readings and bring your critical thinking and discussion skills to each class session throughout the semester. Therefore, you will complete the InQuizitive module associated with our *We the People* textbook before Monday's class to support you in comprehension, critical thinking, and to bolster class discussion.

TOP THREE ASSIGNMENT (WEEKLY ON FRIDAYS)

After you have listened to/watched/read all of the week's content, answer the TOP THREE and submit to Canvas. This assignment is due before class starts on Fridays.

1. What are your main takeaways from this content? (Focus on concepts, ideas, and themes, not on individual facts. You do not need to summarize the content!)
2. What would you like to explore further or gain clarity on?
3. What was new to you, and did it change how you think about or perceive democracy in the U.S.?

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (5)

Students will submit 5 short writing assignments during the semester that allow you to analyze and apply what we are learning. These five papers will be 4 pages double spaced in APA or Chicago Author-Date format, using headings and subheadings with standard one-inch margins in 12-point font. Papers should include a reference page if you refer to texts from class or other outside sources, using correct formatting to create in text citations within the body of the paper.

GOVERNMENT IN THE NEWS TEAM PRESENTATION (1)

Another goal of this class is to familiarize students with how we can see different elements of the American

Government at work in our contemporary times. This activity allows you to check your learning, understanding, and ability to apply course concepts to current events outside our course readings.

During the semester, you will work in pairs to produce **one written analysis and presentation of a category of American Politics** to bring to light how an important concept of US politics & democracy is currently relevant/affected in the United States.

Government in the News Presentations are two-part:

1. **A 2-page paper** (Chicago Author-Date format) that analyzes a current (within the last 30 days) news article. The purpose of asking you to analyze a story from the last month is that I want you to read quality news articles *throughout this course*, continuously exploring how the course relates to current events. Your write-up should link the news story to the week’s assigned topic and give a critical analysis (*not* just a summary) of the article, drawing on lessons from lectures, readings, and class discussions. Please attach the article to your analysis. The article must come from one of the following approved sources: the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, *Newsweek Magazine*, or *Time Magazine*. *If you find an article from another credible source and wish to use it, clear it with Dr. Beail first. ***Papers must be submitted before presenting in class.***
2. **A 15-minute in-class presentation consisting of: 8-minutes on the content of your analysis.** (No PowerPoint is necessary unless you have visuals to share with the class.) **You will then engage your classmates in a 7-minute discussion** (2-3 prepared questions should suffice). ***You must present with your teammate(s) to receive points for this assignment.***

DEMYSTIFYING DEMOCRACY VIDEO (FINAL EXAM)

Based on what you have learned this semester, what would you say is one of the most important concepts for the average person to better understand how government/politics works that is, in fact, widely misunderstood by the American public? How might U.S. democracy work better if more people properly understood this concept?

For this final assignment, you will write a short script and create a 3-minute video explaining the reality of this concept versus how it is commonly misused/misunderstood. You must cite credible sources to make your case and give interesting examples to keep your audience engaged.

Course requirements include:

<i>We the People</i> InQuizitive activities for each assigned chapter	15%
“Top Three” Assignments	15%
Government in the News team presentation (1)	10%
“Analyzing American Politics” papers (5)	45%
Final Project: Demystifying Democracy Video & Presentation	15%
TOTAL	100%

Grading Scale:

A 93-100% A- 90-92%
 B+ 87-89%
 B 83-86%
 B- 80-82%
 C+ 77-79%

REQUIRED TEXTS:

C 73-76% C- 70-72% D+ 67-69% D
 63-66% D- 60-62% F 0 -59%

Benjamin Ginsberg et. al., *We the People* (15th essentials edition), WW Norton, 2025 – Digital with integrated InQuizitive course material, required as part of course grade.

Articles, podcasts and films as assigned, available online via links in syllabus. Please visit libguides.pointloma.edu/NYT for more information and instructions about creating your free New York Times subscription, which you will use at times for articles on the syllabus.

This course is part of our course material delivery program, **LomaBooks**. The bookstore will provide each student with a convenient package containing all required physical materials; all digitally delivered materials will be integrated into Canvas.

You should have received an email from the bookstore confirming the list of materials that will be provided for each of your courses and asking you to select how you would like to receive any printed components (in-store pickup or home delivery). If you have not done so already, please confirm your fulfillment preference so the bookstore can prepare your materials. For more information about **LomaBooks**, please go [HERE](#).

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS (subject to revisions as semester unfolds):

	DATE	PREPARATION FOR CLASS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
WEEK 1 The Roots of Our Democratic Republic	January 12	Introduction	
	January 14	The Key to Success in College Is So Simple. It's Almost Never Mentioned , James Malesic, January 3, 2023 How Americans Can Tackle Political Division Together , Coleman & Godwin	How to Use InQuizitive (requires book with code for online access) (due Sunday midnight)
	January 16	Listen to the Constitutional Podcast, Framed (60 minutes)	

WEEK 2	January 19	Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday – no class meeting	
The US Constitution	January 21	<i>We the People</i> chapter 2	InQuizitive chapter 2 (due before class)

	January 23	Listen to Podcast Episode: Founding Documents: The Federalist and Anti Federalist Papers , Civics 101 (33 min) Read Federalist #10 annotated	Top Three (due before class)
WEEK 3 Federalism	January 26	<i>We the People</i> chapter 3 Watch Crash Course Federalism (9 minutes)	InQuizitive chapter 3 (due before class)
	January 28	Mallory SoRelle & Alexis N. Walker, <i>MonkeyCage</i> , “Both Dems & Reps care about ‘states rights’—when it suits them” Darrell West, “Why Federalism Has Become Risky for American Democracy,” Brookings, September 23, 2022	
	January 30		Top Three (due before class) Government in the News Presentation (Group 1)
WEEK 4	February 2	<i>We the People</i> chapter 4	InQuizitive chapter 4 (due before class)
Civil Liberties	February 4	Watch Korematsu and Civil Liberties (26 minutes)	

	February 6	Listen Podcast Episode: 14th Amendment, Civics 101 (41 min)	<p>Top Three (due before class)</p> <p>Government in the News Presentation (Group 2)</p> <p>Paper #1: Federalism Analysis due in Canvas no later than 11:59 pm on Saturday February 7</p>
WEEK 5	February 9	<i>We the People</i> chapter 5	InQuizitive chapter 5 (due before class)
Civil Rights	February 11	Read " Voter Suppression, Then and Now ," Marketplace, 2020	

		<p>Listen to podcast episode: The 1965 Voting Rights Act: Where Does It Stand?, Civics 101 (38 min)</p> <p>Listen to podcast episode: The Native American Voter, a Group Plagued by Voter Marginalization, Viewpoints Radio (14 min)</p>	
	February 13		<p>Top Three (due before class)</p> <p>Government in the News Presentation (Group 3)</p>
WEEK 6	February 16	<i>We the People</i> chapter 6	InQuizitive chapter 6 (due before class)
Political Socialization and Public Opinion	February 18	<p>Watch Pew Research Center, Random Sampling (3 min)</p> <p>Read Gallup: Crisis in Confidence 2023</p> <p>Gallup: Historically Low Faith in U.S. Institutions Continues</p>	

	February 20		<p>Top Three (due before class)</p> <p>Government in the News Presentation (Group 4)</p> <p>Paper #2: Voting Rights Today Analysis due in Canvas no later than 11:59 pm on Saturday February 21</p>
WEEK 7	February 23	<i>We the People</i> chapter 7	InQuizitive chapter 7 (due before class)
Media	February 25	<p>Watch “Social Media and Political Polarization in America,” 60 Minutes, 2022 (13 minutes)</p> <p>Check out news sources. You use on Ad Fontes interactive media bias chart</p>	

	February 27		<p>Top Three (due before class)</p> <p>Government in the News Presentation (Group 5)</p> <p>Paper #3: Political Socialization Analysis due in Canvas no later than 11:59 pm on Saturday February 28</p>
WEEK 8	March 2	<i>We the People</i> chapter 8	InQuizitive chapter 8 (due before class)

Political Parties and Interest Groups	March 4	<p>Watch "How the Two Parties Formed" (6 minutes), PBS</p> <p>Watch "How to Break the Two-Party System," Vox (3 minutes)</p> <p>"Science is revealing why American politics are so intensely polarized," Joel Achenbach, Washington Post, January 20, 2024</p> <p>Podcast: The Age of Mega-Identity Politics (75 minutes)</p>	
	March 6	Listen to <i>This American Life</i> , " Take the Money and Run for Office " (53 minutes)	<p>Top Three (due before class)</p> <p>Government in the News Presentation (Group 6)</p>
	March 9-13	SPRING BREAK, no class meetings	
WEEK 9	March 16	<i>We the People</i> chapter 9	InQuizitive chapter 9 (due before class)
Participation and Elections	March 18	<p>Why Millions of Americans Don't Vote, Gary Fields, Associated Press, October 8, 2024</p> <p>Public Policy Institute of CA, Five Fast Facts on California Voters, November 2024</p>	

		Melissa Deckman, " The gender dimensions of the Gen Z vote: What both parties can learn ," <i>The Hill</i> , November 13, 2024	
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	March 20	<p>Listen to "A Peculiar Way to Pick a President" (30 min, transcript available)</p> <p>Read "The Electoral College Explained"</p>	<p>Top Three (due before class)</p> <p>Government in the News Presentation (Group 7)</p> <p>Paper #4: Interest Group Analysis due in Canvas no later than 11:59 pm on Saturday March 21</p>
WEEK 10	March 23	<i>We the People</i> chapter 10	InQuizitive chapter 10 (due before class)
Congress	March 25	<p>Find your home Congressional district's House Member. Find out what their committee assignments are, as well as 2 recent pieces of legislation they have sponsored or supported. Bring that info to class with you.</p> <p>Listen to Civics 101, Congressional Committees (11 minutes)</p> <p>Watch Ron Elving, The Secret Strategy of Congressional Seniority, NPR (4 minutes)</p>	
	March 27	<p>Listen to NPR, Throughline: The Battle Over the Filibuster's Future is a Battle Over Its Past (7 min)</p> <p>Fresh Air interview, Inside the "Mad House" of Congress (minute 1-minute 39)</p> <p>Amanda Ripley, These Radically Simple Changes Helped Lawmakers Actually Get Things Done, Convergence Policy, February 9, 2023</p>	<p>Top Three (due before class)</p> <p>Government in the News Presentation (Group 8)</p>
WEEK 11	March 30	<i>We the People</i> chapter 11	InQuizitive chapter 11 (due before class)

Presidency	April 1		Government in the News Presentation (Group 9)
	April 3	Easter Break – no class meeting	Top Three (due before class)
WEEK 12	April 6	Easter Break – no class meeting	
	April 8		
	April 10		Top Three (due before class) Government in the News Presentation (Group 10) Paper #5: US House Member Analysis due in Canvas by 11:59 pm, Saturday April 11
WEEK 13 Bureaucracy	April 13	<i>We the People</i> chapter 12	InQuizitive chapter 12 (due before class)
	April 15	Podcast: The Politics of School Lunch , Civics 101 (33 min)	
	April 17		Government in the News Presentation (Group 11)
WEEK 14 Courts	April 20	<i>We the People</i> chapter 13	InQuizitive chapter 13 (due before class)

	April 22	<p>Watch Vox News How a Case Gets to the Supreme Court (5 min)</p> <p>Read The Conversation Sandra Day O'Connor's experience as a legislator guided her consensus-building work on the Supreme Court</p> <p>Listen to All Things Considered "The Roots of Judicial Activism" 2009 (4 minutes)</p>	
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	April 24	Workshop Demystifying Democracy final projects in class today	Top Three (due before class)
WEEK 15 Courts	April 27	Listen to Civics 101, The Shadow Docket (22 minutes)	Government in the News Presentation (Group 12)
	April 29		
	May 1	Demystifying Democracy Video Presentation	<p>Video projects due before start of class in Canvas</p> <p>Presentation during class time</p>