

PIA4130: U.S. POLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

U.S. Politics and Foreign Policy

Subject Code

PIA - Public and International Affairs

Course Number

4130

Academic Unit

Public and International Affairs (PIA)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

AIS4130 U.S. Politics and Foreign Policy
PIA3130 U.S. Politics and Foreign Policy

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This course introduces students to major political issues and institutions of U.S. politics within a broader societal context. It analyses the global impact of the U.S.'s foreign policy, its economic and environmental policies as well as its cultural influence. It will examine how U.S. politics has become strikingly disharmonious and its politics increasingly polarized. Students in the course will explore how American society became increasingly divided after the civil rights, anti-Vietnam war, and countercultural movements of the 1960s (with the Democratic Party moving left) as well as the resurgence of the religious right and economic libertarians in the 1970s and 1980s (leading the Republicans to become more conservative). Such political and party divisions, in turn, reflect deep social cleavages along class, racial, gender, generational, regional, and religious lines. The course will also explore how the U.S. as a 'lonely' superpower confronts increasingly assertive regional powers. Particular focus will be put on U.S.-Chinese relations. Theories of social cleavages, of key American political institutions (the presidency, Congress, the judiciary, political parties, etc), and well as of international relations will be applied by students to engage in problem solving exercises of problems facing the U.S. that are relevant to many other economically advanced societies, including Hong Kong.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Identify and critically evaluate key issues in U.S. politics and society	20	x	x	x
2	Explain political behaviour, institutional processes, social developments, and policy outcomes using relevant theories and models.	20	x	x	x
3	Appraise and critique arguments about political processes and social change in the U.S.	20	x	x	x
4	Discover and innovate by demonstrating an ability to apply factual and theoretical knowledge to a problem-based activity.	20	x	x	x
5	Analyse and synthesise information and communicate it effectively.	20	x	x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	CILO 1-3, 5	Lectures and class discussions	1, 2, 3, 5	
2	CILO 4	Memorandum (to a leading politician, policy maker, social activist, etc.)	4	
3	CILO 3-4	Group presentations	3, 4	

4	CILO 1-5	Quiz	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
5	CILO 2-5	Short written assignment	2, 3, 4, 5	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs		CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("-" for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Attendance and participation in group discussions	1, 2	10	-	Yes
2	Short reports and presentations	2, 3, 4	30	-	No
3	Memorandum	4	30	-	No
4	Quiz	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	30	-	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

Attendance and participation in group discussions

Criterion

Students are expected to attend all lectures and tutorials. Failure to do so will deduct marks. Participating in class discussions with quality interventions will add marks.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Excellent participation in lecture and tutorial discussions.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Good participation in lecture and tutorial discussions.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Adequate participation in lecture and tutorial discussions.

Marginal (D)

Limited participation in lecture and tutorial discussions.

Failure (F)

Inadequate participation in lecture and tutorial discussions.

Assessment Task

Short reports and presentations

Criterion

Need to show capacity to persuade, critical thinking, and detailed research of a topic.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Excellent capacity to persuade, critical thinking, and detailed research of a topic.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Good capacity to persuade, critical thinking, and detailed research of a topic.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Adequate capacity to persuade, critical thinking, and detailed research of a topic.

Marginal (D)

Limited capacity to persuade, critical thinking, and detailed research of a topic.

Failure (F)

Inadequate capacity to persuade, critical thinking, and detailed research of a topic.

Assessment Task

Memorandum

Criterion

Need to show capacity to persuade, critical thinking, and detailed research of a topic.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Excellent capacity to persuade, critical thinking, and detailed research of a topic.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Good capacity to persuade, critical thinking, and detailed research of a topic.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Adequate capacity to persuade, critical thinking, and detailed research of a topic.

Marginal (D)

Limited capacity to persuade, critical thinking, and detailed research of a topic.

Failure (F)

Inadequate capacity to persuade, critical thinking, and detailed research of a topic.

Assessment Task

Quiz

Criterion

Need to master the topics covered in class, and a capacity to critically reflect on them.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Excellent knowledge of the topics covered in class, and a capacity to critically reflect on them.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Good knowledge of the topics covered in class, and a capacity to critically reflect on them.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Adequate knowledge of the topics covered in class, and a capacity to critically reflect on them.

Marginal (D)

Limited knowledge of the topics covered in class, and a capacity to critically reflect on them.

Failure (F)

Inadequate knowledge of the topics covered in class, and a capacity to critically reflect on them.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

U.S. politics, international studies, comparative politics, social cleavages, race, class, gender, religion, region, political parties, the presidency, Congress, the Supreme Court, the judiciary, interest groups, social policy, environmental policy, gay rights, abortion, multiculturalism, foreign policy.

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

	Title
1	Aldrich, J. H., 1995. <i>Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, introduction.
2	Abramowitz, A. 2018. <i>The Great Alignment: Race, Party Transformation, and the Rise of Donald Trump</i> . Yale University Press.
3	Allison, G. 2017. <i>Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' s Trap?</i> New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
4	Bailey, M. A. & Maltmann, F., 2011. <i>The Constrained Court: Law, Politics, and the Decisions Justices Make</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press introduction
5	Bartels, L. M., 2008. <i>Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age</i> . Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
6	Black, E. & Black, M., 2008. <i>Divided Government: The Ferocious Struggle for Power in American Politics</i> . New York: Simon and Schuster.
7	Chhabra, T. 2021. <i>The China Challenge, Democracy, and U.S. Grand Strategy</i> . Foreign Policy at Brookings: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/FP_20190311_us_grand_strategy_chhabra.pdf
8	Cox, M. & Stokes, D. 2018. <i>US Foreign Policy, Third Edition</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press.
9	Gelman, A., et al., 2008. <i>Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way they Do</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press.
10	Graham, M. & Svobik, M. 2020. <i>Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States</i> . <i>American Political Science Review</i> 114, 2, 392–409.
11	Huntington, S. P., 1999. <i>The Lonely Superpower</i> . <i>Foreign Affairs</i> , 78(2), pp. 35-49.
12	Levitsky, S. & Ziblatt, D. 2018. <i>How Democracies Die</i> . New York: Crown.
13	Lipset, S. M. & Marks, G., 2001. <i>Why it Didn' t Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States</i> . New York: W.W. Norton.
14	McGhee, H. 2021. <i>The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together</i> . New York: One World
15	Mayhew, D., 2002. <i>America' s Congress: Actions in the Public Sphere, James Madison through Newt Gingrich</i> . New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.
16	Menza, J. & Brooks, C., 1999. <i>Social Cleavages and Political Change: Voter Alignment and U.S. Party Coalitions</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press.
17	Skowronek, S., 2008. <i>Presidential leadership in political time: Reprise and reappraisal</i> . Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas.
18	Zakaria, F. 2008. <i>The Post-American World</i> . New York: Norton.

19	Zhao, M. 2019 Is a New Cold War Inevitable? Chinese Perspectives on US–China Strategic Competition. The Chinese Journal of International Politics, Volume 12, Issue 3, Autumn 2019, Pages 371–394, https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poz010
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Additional Readings

	Title
1	Frank, T., 2004. What' s the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America. New York: Henry Holt.
2	Holbrook, T. M., 1996. Do Campaigns Matter? Thousand Oaks: Sage.
3	Huntington, S. P., 1983. American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University.
4	Lim, E., 2014. The Lovers' Quarrel: The Two Foundings and American Political Development Oxford: Oxford University Press.