

Sample Syllabus: Women in American Politics

Amanda Loehrke

Term and Year

E-mail: TBD

Office Hours: TBD

Office: TBD

Teaching Assistant: TBD, Office Hours TBD, Offices TBD

Term: TBD

Class Hours: TBD

Class Room: TBD

Course Description

Why are women underrepresented in political office, and does it matter? This course examines gender politics in the United States across institutions and time. We will investigate the individual, structural, and institutional factors that shape women's political participation and representation in American politics. The course considers both the empirical and substantive dimensions of these questions, asking what the data show and what they mean. What counts as representation? Whose interests are served and what would a more equitable democracy look like? Students will engage with a range of perspectives and develop evidence-based arguments about gender, power, and American democracy.

Over the quarter, we'll investigate why fewer women run for office in the first place, whether media and party structures disadvantage women candidates, and whether having more women in office changes what government does. We will also ask how race and ethnicity intersect with gender to shape the dynamics for women of color. By the end of the course, you should be equipped to move from questions of whether women are underrepresented to questions of why and what should be done about it.

Course Objectives

Successful students will be able to:

- Identify and explain core concepts in the study of women and American politics, including descriptive and substantive representation, political ambition, and candidate emergence
- Analyze individual, structural, and institutional barriers that shape women's pathways to political office.

- Evaluate theoretical arguments and assess their relationship to empirical research in gender politics.
- Construct evidence-based arguments about gender and American politics, drawing on course concepts and empirical evidence.
- Read and critically evaluate both primary sources and empirical political science research.
- Synthesize concepts across historical and contemporary contexts to build an original, evidence-based argument.

How to Succeed in this Course

This class is more than just being able to recite historical facts. It asks you to think critically about gender, power, and democracy in America. To do well in this course, engage with the readings, attend lecture, complete assignments, think critically, and ask questions. You do not need to fully understand the material before class, but you should arrive having read carefully enough to ask a question or make an observation. Keep up with the weekly readings, take notes in your own words, and use office hours early and often. Discussion section is one of the best resources this course offers, giving you an opportunity to engage with your peers about the course materials. Some material in the course touches on topics that may be personal to you. You are encouraged to bring your own perspectives and experiences and discuss these with peers. Disagreement is okay so long as the intellectual exchange of ideas is done respectfully at the proper times. Your TAs and I want you to succeed. If you are struggling with the material, writing, or anything else, please reach out to me and your TA.

Required Materials

There is no required textbook for this course. Copies of the weekly readings will be provided on the course webpage. There will be a mix of excerpts from books and academic articles assigned. Optional readings are also included to provide either more information about a topic, an updated description of the theory, or an extension of the topic.

Here are some useful guides for [reading primary vs. secondary sources](#), [reading from books vs. articles vs. websites](#), and, a slightly more science-heavy but still useful, [article on the rules for reading a scientific paper](#). We will spend time in class talking about how to succeed in reading for this course.

You should have materials to take notes in class, either electronically or on paper. If using a laptop or tablet, please use it for class purposes only. Writing notes by hand may be a way to avoid electronic distractions. We will also take some time on day one to discuss successful note-taking. [Here is a useful guide on note-taking](#).

Course Structure

Lecture

We will have lectures for each week's topic. Lectures are not a substitute for readings and readings are not a substitute for lecture. They both are an integral part of learning course topics. Be prepared to come to lecture with a question, comment, or critique about that week's readings.

Assignments

Participation

- You are expected to attend lecture and participate in group activities. Attendance will be assessed through active learning exercises (group discussions, minute papers, reflections, etc.) and periodic attendance taking. Absences, arriving late or leaving early, or being disruptive will count against your participation grade.

Reading Discussions

- In weeks without exams or presentations (1-4, 6-9), you will be required to share a short (3-5 sentences) discussion post on the course page prior to that week's class and respond to two other posts (if class meets twice a week, be specific about date/time it is due). This is a place to gauge your understanding of the readings and prepare you for class discussions. These will not be graded for content, but for completion. Details can be found on the discussions page.

Exams

- There will be a midterm in Week 5. The exam will be in-person, closed note, and during class time. The midterm will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions. A study guide will be provided the week before the exam. In lieu of a final exam, you will be required to do a research paper.

Research Paper

- The final assessment in this course will be a research paper examining a topic in women and politics of your choosing. You will develop and defend an original argument using course concepts and scholarly sources. More details will be provided throughout the course. The project will consist of four components with deadlines throughout the quarter:
 - Topic proposal due Week 4
 - Annotated bibliography due Week 7
 - Project presentation in Week 10
 - Final paper due during finals week

It is required to attend both days of presentations during Week 10. The project presentations will be done in class with an alternative one-on-one presentation time that can be selected with my permission. The final paper submission should take into account feedback received from the presentation. Additional details, guides, and grading rubrics can be found on the course page.

Discussion Section

Keep this if it is relevant to the specific course, or delete. Each week, TAs will hold a discussion section. These are a place to review course content, ask questions, and engage with peers. Attendance in discussion will contribute to your participation grade and benefit your understanding of the content beyond lecture and readings.

Course Policies

Communication

If you have questions, please first read the syllabus and Course page as most answers will be found here. For questions that cannot be answered with the syllabus or Course page, please email me or your TA, attend office hours, or (for quick questions) ask before or after class. Your email must indicate that you are in this course and the section you are assigned. Write in a respectful, professional manner. Here is a useful [guide](#).

During Class

You will be expected to come to class having done the readings, participate in group discussions, and take notes. For resources on note-taking, see the course Canvas page. Note taking can be done on laptops/tablets, but please refrain from using computers for anything other than class-related activities. Phones are prohibited as they are rarely useful for anything in the course. Lecture presentation slides will be posted after class. Recording and photographic materials is not permitted unless permission is explicitly provided in class. (Build in short breaks during lecture and make note of them based on the schedule course lecture time period?)

Attendance Policy

Attending class will aid in your understanding of course materials and is the primary place to participate in active learning activities, get instructions for assignments, engage with your peers, and stay informed of any course updates. Attendance is expected with periodic attendance checks throughout the quarter. If you will be missing class, please communicate prior to class meeting.

Late Assignments and Extensions

Assignments turned in after the deadline will receive one full letter grade deduction for each day late. Assignments turned in after 3 days will receive a 0. If you have a medical or personal crisis that requires an extension on submission deadlines, exam dates, or a significant absence from class, please communicate this proactively for coordination with me and the TAs. Failure to communicate prior to missing a deadline may result in a 0. Documentation may be required for an excused late assignment, extension, or absence.

Grading

Grading will be divided among TAs in coordination with the instructor. Grades are likely to be posted within one week of an assignment deadline (please refrain from asking when grades will be posted; I assure you the teaching team is working diligently to distribute scores). If you have questions about a grade, please first meet with the TA the week the grade is posted. If you still disagree with the grade, you must submit a one page grade appeal within one week of the grade being posted. If questions persist, the grade can be appealed to me within two weeks of the grade being posted. This carries the possibility of the grade remaining the same, increasing, or decreasing.

The grading breakdown is as follows:

- Participation 10%
- Reading Discussions 15%
- Midterm Exam 25%
- Research Paper
 - Topic proposal 5%
 - Annotated bibliography 10%
 - Project presentation 10%
 - Final paper 25%

Grading scale:

A+	97-100%	B+	87-89.9%	C+	77-79.9%	D+	67-69.9%	F	Below 60%
A	93-96.9%	B	83-86.9%	C	73-76.9%	D	63-66.9%		
A-	90-92.9%	B-	80-82.9%	C-	70-72.9%	D-	60-62.9%		

Artificial Intelligence Policy

Artificial intelligence (AI) can only be used to check grammar, review concepts, or create study guides. AI may not be used to draft, outline, or substantially generate any portion of written assignments. All work submitted must reflect your own analysis and demonstration of course concepts. The goal of the assignments is to develop and demonstrate your critical engagement with course content and requires your own thinking and problem solving. AI is not a substitute for human critical thinking and often is incorrect in its citations or conclusions.

If AI is used at any stage of an assignment, you must disclose how and where it was used in an AI appendix. See the Course page for guidelines. Here is a [general guide for citing AI usage](#), but please use the Canvas course page for direct instructions for this course. If you have questions about proper AI use, ask me or the TAs as soon as possible. Additionally, you can refer to university policy on AI use. The teaching team reserves the right to use AI-detection tools, compare submissions, and/or follow up with a short oral check-in if AI misuse is suspected. If improper AI use is suspected, you risk receiving a 0 for the assignment, a 0 in the course, or referral to judicial affairs to hold an independent review for violating academic integrity.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

Students must comply with the university policy on academic integrity. All students must submit the form found here ([link to a google form that shows that students read and agreed to understanding the academic integrity university policy and course AI policy](#)) within the first week of class.

Accommodations, Accessibility, Inclusivity, and Equity

I am committed to creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment. Course content at times may discuss political violence, discrimination, and harassment in regard to women in politics. If you are concerned about difficult material, please discuss with me or feel free to respectfully remove yourself from class lecture and send a follow-up email about your departure. You are welcome to speak with me directly about any concerns about accessibility throughout the quarter over email, in office hours, or after class. Please let me know how I may help create an inclusive and safe learning environment for everyone.

Regardless of disability status, we all have access needs from time to time. Access needs are anything you require of your community or environment in order to participate fully, healthfully, and meaningfully. Students requiring accommodations must contact the university disability center ([insert link](#)).

It is okay to not feel okay and there are many campus resources to support your health and well-being ([insert link](#)). Campus counselors or after-hours clinicians are available 24/7.

Discrimination based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation is a violation of state and federal law (Add details of specific discriminatory practices that are not allowed; harassment, retaliation, etc.) ([insert link](#)).

Please be aware that I have a legal responsibility to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can find a list of support here ([insert link to ombuds office or similar](#)).

Please respect other students' decisions and preferences around masking. If you have symptoms of a contagious illness, please do not come to class and communicate your absence prior to class time and we will make a plan so you do not fall behind.

Schedule and Weekly Learning Goals

The schedule is tentative and subject to change.

Week 1: Women in American Democracy

Learning goals:

- Describe the current state of women's representation across levels of government.
- Identify the central research questions motivating the study of women in politics.
- Understand the big picture of where women stand in American politics and why it matters.

Readings:

- Carroll, Susan J. & Richard L. Fox (2021). *Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics*, selections.
- Dittmar, Kelly (2023). "Increasing Women's Political Power is a Multi-site, Multiracial, and Bipartisan Endeavor." *Center for American Women and Politics*.
- *Optional*: Sanbonmatsu, Kira. (2020). "Women's Underrepresentation in the U.S. Congress."

Assignment(s):

- Academic integrity and AI policy form due.
- Reading discussion post due before class.

Week 2: History of Women in Politics: Suffrage and Citizenship

Learning goals:

- Describe the major phases and strategies of the American suffrage movement.
- Analyze how race shaped the suffrage movement's priorities.
- Connect the history of women's political exclusion to modern underrepresentation.

Readings:

- Ware, Susan (2019). *Why They Marched: Untold Stories of the Women Who Fought for the Right to Vote*, selections.
- Terborg-Penn, Rosalyn (1998). *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920*, selections
- *Optional*: Cott, Nancy F. (1998). "Marriage and Women's Citizenship in the United States, 1830-1934." *American Historical Review*.
- *Optional*: Conway, Danielle M. (2021). "Black Women's Suffrage, the Nineteenth Amendment, and the Duality of a Movement." *Alabama Civil Rights & Civil Liberties Law Review*.

Assignment(s):

- Reading discussion post due before class.

Week 3: Political Ambition and Candidate Emergence

Learning goals:

- Define political ambition and explain the evidence for the gender gap in candidate emergence.
- Evaluate how socialization, recruitment, and opportunity structure lead to the ambition gap.
- Distinguish supply-side from demand-side explanations for women's underrepresentation.

Readings:

- Lawless, Jennifer L. & Richard L. Fox (2010). *It Still Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run For Office*, selections.
- Schneider, Monica C. et al. (2015). "Power, Conflict, and Community: How Gendered Views of Political Power Influence Women's Political Ambition." *Political Psychology*.
- *Optional*: Thompsen, Daniel M. (2015). "Why So Few (Republican) Women? Explaining the Partisan Imbalance of Women in the U.S. Congress" *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.
- *Optional*: Piscopo, Jennifer M. & Meryl Kenny (2020). "Rethinking the Ambition Gap: Gender and Candidate Emergence in Comparative Perspective." *European Journal of Politics and Gender*.

Assignment(s):

- Reading discussion post due before class.

Week 4: Structural Barriers: Parties, Media, and Campaigns

Learning goals:

- Evaluate gender differences in media coverage and party support for candidates.
- Assess if disparities translate into electoral disadvantages for women candidates.
- Distinguish between stereotyping as a barrier and strategy.

Readings:

- Dittmar, Kelly (2015). *Navigating Gendered Terrain*, selections.
- Falk, Erika (2010). *Women for President: Media Bias in Nine Campaigns*, selections.
- *Optional*: Krupnikov, Yanna & Nichole M. Bauer (2014). "The Relationship Between Campaign Negativity, Gender and Campaign Context." *Political Behavior*.

Assignment(s):

- Reading discussion post due before class.
- Research paper topic proposal due.
- Midterm study guide posted.

Week 5: Midterm Exam

In-class review on day 1 of the week, exam on day 2 (make edits based on actual class structure).

Week 6: Descriptive and Substantive Representation

Learning goals:

- Distinguish between types of representation and why they matter.
- Analyze evidence for and against claims of women pursuing distinct policy priorities.
- Assess conditions where women's presence translates to policy change.

Readings:

- Swers, Michelle (2002). *The Difference Women Make*, selections.
- Volden, Craig, Alan Wiseman, & Dana E. Wittmer (2013). "When Are Women More Effective Lawmakers Than Men?" *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Pitkin, Hanna F. (1967). *The Concept of Representation*, selections.

Assignment(s):

- Reading discussion post due before class.
- Sign-ups for final presentation dates.

Week 7: Intersectionality: Gender, Race, and Ethnic Politics

Learning goals:

- Define intersectionality and explain its importance to studying women in politics.
- Compare the political experiences and electoral environments of various groups of women in office.
- Evaluate evidence of women of color's distinct priorities and barriers.

Readings:

- Crenshaw, Kimberle (1989). "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*.
- Bejarano, Christina E. *The Latina Advantage: Gender, Race, and Political Success*, selections.
- Brown, Nadia (2014). *Sisters in the Statehouse*, selections.
- *Optional:* Wong, Janelle S. & Karthick Ramakrishnan. (2023). "Asian Americans and the Politics of the Twenty-First Century." *Annual Review of Political Science*.

Assignment(s):

- Reading discussion post due before class.
- Research paper annotated bibliography due.

Week 8: Social Movements and Electoral Politics

Learning goals:

- Analyze the relationship between feminist social movements and electoral politics.
- Evaluate whether and how movements like #MeToo and the Women's March translated to changes in women's representation
- Connect contemporary activist politics to the broader history of political organization from Week 2.

Readings:

- Castle, Jeremiah J., et al. (2018). "The Effect of the #MeToo Movement on Political Engagement and Ambition in 2018." *Political Research Quarterly*.
- Gordon, Katie M. (2021). "Candidate Emergence as Movement Mobilization: An Analysis of Women's post-2016 Electoral Engagement." *Sociology Compass*.

Assignment(s):

- Reading discussion post due before class.
- Optional meeting in office hours to discuss paper draft.

Week 9: Voters, Stereotypes, and Public Opinion

Learning goals:

- Evaluate when voters apply gender stereotypes in evaluating candidates.
- Distinguish between forms of bias in vote choice.
- Assess how gender stereotypes have shifted across contexts and time, drawing on evidence from across the course.

Readings:

- Sanbonmatsu, Kira (2002). "Gender Stereotypes and Vote Choice." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Bauer, Nichole M. (2020). *The Qualification Gap*, selections.
- *Optional*: Dolan, Kathleen (2014). "Gender Stereotypes, Candidate Evaluations, and Voting for Women Candidates." *Political Behavior*.

Assignment(s):

- Reading discussion post due before class.

Week 10: Project Presentations

Learning goals:

- Communicate an original research argument.
- Practice giving constructive, substantive feedback to peers.

Assignment(s):

- Attendance required during presentations.
- Present research paper draft.

Finals Week: Final Research Paper Due