

FINAL ESSAY

Choose one of the topics below for your essay.

1. **Voting.** “Voting should be made mandatory, like jury duty, so that every eligible person participates.” Agree or disagree, and defend your argument with reference to American political history, what we know about who votes and why.
2. **Political parties.** “The Founding Fathers were right – political parties are bad for representative government.” Agree or disagree, and defend your argument with reference to American political history, what we know about how political parties affect political outcomes.
3. **Constitutional reform.** Suggest and defend one major reform to our Constitution. Your essay should carefully consider what impact this reform would have on political participation and political outcomes, at least one potential negative consequence, and why, on balance, you think the Constitution should be amended in this way.

FORMAT: Your essay should be 1200-1500 words long, or 4-5 pages. I recommend that you follow the typical format of a persuasive essay.

- The first paragraph should open with a ‘hook,’ something to draw the reader in to your paper, and should include a thesis statement that tells me what your argument is. It should also prepare the reader for the essay’s structure via a “road map” sentence that sets up the supporting arguments.
- Each paragraph should make a single point in support of your thesis, and you should address at least one counter-argument to your main argument at some point in your paper.
- Your conclusion should sum up the paper, and put your paper in broader context.

CITATIONS: This is not a formal research paper, and so I do not require a bibliography or formal citation system. You do not need to cite the textbook or my lectures if you use facts you learned from these sources. If you would like to cite a particular reading, you are welcome to do so, and can mention the author and text in the normal course of your paragraph. For example: “As Madison said in *Federalist 51*, ‘Ambition must be made to counteract ambition.’” No need for footnotes or parenthetical citations for these sources.

In general, I discourage students from relying heavily on outside sources. This is not a research paper. If you would like to use outside sources, please discuss it with me in office hours. For such citations, please use the following simplified format. After quoting your source, simply put in parentheses the author’s name, the title of the work, and the page of the quote. For instance: “As Lincoln said at Gettysburg, “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”” (Abraham Lincoln, *Complete Writings*, p. 257)”

GRADING: Over the next few weeks you must submit an outline and then a draft, upon which you will receive comments and suggestions. The outline and the draft will not be graded, but you will lose ½ a letter grade on your final paper if you fail to submit either an outline or a draft. Your final essay will be graded and is worth 40% of your final grade.

EXAMPLE

- I. **THESIS:** The Senate should be abolished because it is undemocratic and prevents effective governance.

- II. **FIRST MAJOR ARGUMENT:** The Senate is undemocratic.
 - a. Having two Senators per state violates the principle of “one man, one vote.”
 - b. Within the Senate, the filibuster allows a small minority, even a single Senator, to prevent policies preferred by an overwhelming majority of Americans.
 - c. Senators themselves are not representative of the American people – the Senate is much older, richer, whiter and more male.

- III. **SECOND MAJOR ARGUMENT:** The Senate is ineffective and redundant.
 - a. The Senate has regularly delayed confirmations of important executive branch officials, preventing important agencies from operating effectively.
 - b. The inability of the federal government to respond to pressing crises has reduced Americans’ confidence in their government.
 - c. Almost no democratic countries have bicameral legislatures, and these countries are doing just fine.

- IV. **COUNTER ARGUMENT:** One could argue that the delays caused by the Senate prevent “tyranny of the majority,” but this argument is spurious.
 - a. Arguments from Madison 51.
 - b. Madison’s arguments were perhaps reasonable at a time when there were no functioning democracies. But history shows us that there are plenty of checks and balances between the three branches, whether or not we have a bicameral legislature.
 - c. The bicameral nature of the legislature has also reduced the power of the legislative branch relative to the Presidency, which is contrary to the intentions of the Founders.

- V. **CONCLUSION**