

# **Government 358: Introduction to Public Policy**

TTH 12:30 – 2:00pm

CAL 100

Fall 2021

**Instructor:** Derek Epp

**Office:** BAT 3.126 (office hours on zoom)

**Office Hours:** TTH, 2:15 – 3:45pm

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This course will examine the politics and history of public policymaking in America. We will examine how policy is made, and whether LBJ's dicta that "good policy is good politics" holds. We will study contemporary policy challenges, especially focusing on financial and budgetary challenges, and health care. We will also examine education, environment, and criminal justice policy.

Some policies are based on general goals that everybody recognizes. Others are based on values. All involve some sort of trade-offs. But some of these can be reduced if we recognize that even goals based in values can be subject to factual analyses.

Since good policies can only come about with good information, properly interpreted, the course will emphasize the roles of ***ideas and information*** in the policy process: how elected and appointed political leaders use it to formulate and implement public policies.

## **Course Objectives**

- (1) Survey the approaches used by political scientists to understand the public policymaking process.
- (2) Integrate current public affairs into our understanding of public policy.
- (3) Survey the use, history, and success of the major tools used by governments in the US to address policy problems in several major issue areas.
- (4) Further the development of analytical skills in policy analysis through brief exercises and a major paper employing library and web-based sources. Students will use the Policy Agendas Project's datasets located at the University of Texas to trace public policy activity across time.

## Covid-19 Protocols

Our course is scheduled as an “in-person” course, which means there are a few recommendations we should be aware of:

- 1) CDC (and UT) strongly recommends wearing a mask that covers your nose and mouth at all times while inside the classroom even if you’re vaccinated.
- 2) Common courtesy (always important) is extra important this semester. That means that under no circumstances should you come to class if you’re feeling under the weather or anyone you’ve been near is feeling under the weather.

Our classroom has lecture capture technology, meaning you will be able to watch recordings of lectures on the Canvas page almost immediately after class has concluded. If you feel uncomfortable about coming to class in-person, then don’t. Simply follow along with the recordings.

- 3) Communication with me is extra important this semester. If you are experiencing adverse circumstances, then I can be flexible in terms of due dates and assignments. But the sooner I know about it, the smoother everything will go.
- 4) Office hours will be exclusively virtual, meaning no in-person meetings.

## Required Texts & Readings

- (1) Ruth Wodak. *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. 1<sup>st</sup> edition. Sage Publishing.
- (2) Lee Drutman. *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop: The Case for Multiparty Democracy in America*. Oxford University Press.
- (3) Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David C. Kimball and Beth L. Leech. 2009. *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*. University of Chicago Press.

In addition to these books, there will be a wide variety of outside readings. These will be available on the Canvas page.

## Grades

Make-up exams are available to students in the event of personal emergencies or religious observances. **However, arrangements to take a make-up must be made prior to the exam date.** After-the-fact emergencies will not be considered. Late papers or assignments will be deducted a full letter grade for each day that they are late.

**Exams (50%):** A midterm and a final, each worth 25% of the total grade.

**Policy Paper (50%):** The paper will ask you to use the analytic skills that you are learning in the course to study the course of policy development in a major policy area. Students will prepare a paper on a current **specific** policy topic. The paper should analyze the development of policy within a policy area. It must use a theoretical perspective discussed in the class to develop an understanding of the history and recent developments of a particular public policy, and should rely on the Policy Agendas Datasets and other web-based material as well as traditional library resources.

The objective of this assignment is to try to get students to master the following: 1) develop an intensive understanding of a specific policy area; 2) apply a theoretical framework for it; 3) gain experience in developing policy histories; 4) gain skills in graphical presentations; and 5) be able to explain this to policymakers.

Grades for the policy paper will be broken out into five components, each due at a different time (see the course schedule below). These are:

- 1) a topic and justification (5%)
- 2) a literature review (5%)
- 3) a graphical figure (5%)
- 4) an outline (5%)
- 5) the final paper (30%)

The grading scale in percentages is as follows:

93-100 (A)  
90-92.99 (A-)  
87-89.99 (B+)  
83-86.99 (B)  
80-82.99 (B-)  
77-79.99 (C+)  
73-76.99 (C)  
70-72.99 (C-)  
67-69.99 (D+)  
63-66.99 (D)  
60-62.99 (D-)  
0-59.99 (F)

## **Disabilities**

Any student with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the office of Services for Students with Disabilities (512-471-6259) or

<http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/accommodations-and-services/>

Those with documentation for accommodations should contact me as soon as possible.

## **Academic Integrity**

By taking this class, the student agrees to abide by the University of Texas regulations concerning cheating. Simply put, all submitted materials (homework assignments, written papers, and exams) must be original and done exclusively by the student whose name is attached to it. If students observe others cheating, they are honor bound to contact the TAs or professor. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information please visit the Student Judicial Services website: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs>.

## **Office hours**

Here are the links to sign up for office hours, which will be conducted over Zoom. These links are also available under the Announcements page on Canvas.

Derek Epp (professor) – TTH, 2:15 – 3:45pm

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ImJ6STdph7BkZXJz9Idt6Y-Vn5iAIpCwBqzWPAD42zA/edit#gid=0>

Chris Cassella (TA) –

Nicole Eversmann (TA) –

What are some of the most common reasons to attend office hours?

- 1) Clarify and ask questions about course content
- 2) Get study ideas
- 3) Ask questions about the syllabus, upcoming assignments, and due dates
- 4) Prepare for an upcoming assignment
- 5) Review an exam or a paper you wrote
- 6) Talk about grades
- 7) Work through practice problems

## **Schedule**

### **Week 1 – Motivating ideas**

#### **August 26<sup>th</sup>: Policymaking in a democracy**

1. David Leonhardt. 2017. A Summer Project to Nourish Your Political Soul. *The New York Times*.
2. Amartya Sen. 1999. Democracy as a Universal Value. *Journal of Democracy*.

### **Week 2 – Policy inputs**

#### **August 31<sup>st</sup>: The public**

1. James A. Stimson, Michael B. MacKuen, and Robert S. Erikson. 1995. Dynamic Representation. *American Political Science Review*.

2. Deborah A. Stone. 1989. Causal Stories and the Formation of Policy Agendas. *Political Science Quarterly*.
3. Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram. 1993. Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy. *American Political Science Review*.

**September 2<sup>nd</sup>: The public (organized)**

1. Frank R. Baumgartner et.al. 2009. *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*. University of Chicago Press. Read Chapters 1 – 6.

**Week 3 – The political system**

**September 7<sup>th</sup>: Institutions: Elected**

1. Frank R. Baumgartner et.al. 2009. *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*. University of Chicago Press. Read Chapters 7 – 12.

**September 9<sup>th</sup>: Institutions: Un-elected**

1. Rachel Augustine Potter. 2017. Slow-Rolling, Fast-Tracking, and the Pace of Bureaucratic Decisions in Rulemaking. *The Journal of Politics*.

**Week 4 – Theory**

**September 14<sup>th</sup>: Information processing**

1. Herbert A. Simon. 1985. Human Nature in Politics: The Dialogue of Psychology with Political Science. *The American Political Science Review* 79 (2): 293-304.
2. Charles E. Lindblom. 1959. The Science of “Muddling Through.” *Public Administration Review* 19 (2): 79-88.

**September 16<sup>th</sup>: Popular frameworks**

1. James L. True, Bryan D. Jones, and Frank R. Baumgartner. 1999. Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory. In *Theories of the Policy Process* by Paul Sabatier.

**Week 5 – Applications**

**September 21<sup>st</sup>: Honest numbers and policy evaluation**

1. Noah Smith. 2017. Supply-Siders Still Push What Doesn’t Work. *Bloomberg Opinion*.
2. Review <https://www.comparativeagendas.net/us>

**September 23<sup>rd</sup>: Bad ideas and policy bubbles**

**Due: a topic and justification**

1. Bryan D. Jones, Herschel F. Thomas III, Michelle Wolfe. Policy Bubbles. *Policy Studies Journal*.

2. Frank R. Baumgartner et.al. 2021. Throwing Away the Key: The Unintended Consequences of “Tough-on-Crime” Laws.

## Week 6 – Pathologies

### September 28<sup>th</sup>: Cognitive biases

1. Ruth Wodak. *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. Sage Publishing. Read Chapters 1 – 4.

### September 30<sup>th</sup>: Polarization

1. Ruth Wodak. *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. Sage Publishing. Read Chapters 5 – 8.

## Week 7 – Midterm Week

### October 5<sup>th</sup>: Midterm Review

### October 7<sup>th</sup>: Midterm

## Week 8 – Economic policy

### October 12<sup>th</sup>: Economic Policy

1. Amartya Sen. 2011. Uses and Abuses of Adam Smith. *History of Political Economy*.

### October 14<sup>th</sup>: Income Inequality

#### Due: literature review

1. Jared Bernstein and Ben Spielberg. 2017. The whys of increasing inequality: A graphical portrait. *The Washington Post*.

2. Bruce M. Boghosian. 2019. Is Inequality Inevitable? *Scientific American*.

## Week 9 – Health & foreign policy

### October 19<sup>th</sup>: Health Policy

1. John Tozzi and Emma Ockerman. 2018. What’s it Like Living in Without Health Insurance in America. *Bloomberg*.

2. Sean Illing. 2017. I think health care is a right. I asked an expert to tell me why I’m wrong. *Vox*.

### October 21<sup>st</sup>: Foreign Policy

#### Due: graphical figure

1. Jeffrey A. Friedman, Joshua Baker, Barbara Mellers, Philip Tetlock, and Richard Zeckhauser. 2018. The Value of Precisions in Probability Assessment: Evidence from Large-Scale Geopolitical Forecasting Tournament. *International Studies Quarterly*.

## **Week 10 – Elections and welfare**

### **October 26<sup>th</sup>: Elections and Public Policy**

1. Zeynep Somer-Topcu. 2009. Timely Decisions: The Effects of Past National Elections on Party Policy Change. *Journal of Politics*.

### **October 28<sup>th</sup>: Welfare**

#### **Due: outline**

2. Max Rose and Frank R. Baumgartner. 2013. Framing the Poor: Media Coverage and US Poverty Policy, 1960-2008. *Policy Studies Journal* 41 (1): 22-53.

## **Week 11 – Budgets and environmental policy**

### **November 2<sup>nd</sup>: Budgets**

1. Federal Budget 101. [<https://www.nationalpriorities.org/budget-basics/federal-budget-101/>]. *National Priorities Project*.
2. Derek A. Epp, John Lovett, Frank R. Baumgartner. 2014. Partisan Priorities and Public Budgeting. *Political Research Quarterly*.

### **November 4<sup>th</sup>: Environment**

1. Sarah B. Pralle. 2009. Agenda-Setting and Climate Change. *Environmental Politics*.
2. McClenachan, Loren. 2009. Documenting Loss of Large Trophy Fish from the Florida Keys with Historical Photographs. *Conservation Biology*.
3. Moore, Frances C., Nick Obradovich, Flavio Lehner, and Patrick Baylis. 2019. Rapidly declining remarkableability of temperature anomalies may obscure public perception of climate change. *PNAS*.

## **Week 12**

### **November 9<sup>th</sup>: Criminal Justice**

1. Roland Neil and Robert J. Sampson. 2021. The Birth Lottery of History. *American Journal of Sociology* 126 (5).

### **November 11<sup>th</sup>: Racial Justice**

1. Campbell Robertson. 2018. A Lynching Memorial is Opening. The Country Has Never Seen Anything Like It. *The New York Times*.
2. Raphael et.al. 2021. Student Debt Forgiveness Options: Implications for Policy and Racial Equity.

## **Week 13**

### **November 16<sup>th</sup>: International comparisons**

1. Lee Drutman. 2020. *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop*. Oxford University Press.  
Read Chapters 1 – 6.

### **November 18<sup>th</sup>: Reforms**

1. Lee Drutman. 2020. *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop*. Oxford University Press.  
Read Chapters 7 – 12.

## **Week 14**

**November 23<sup>rd</sup>:** No class – policy paper due

### **Due: policy paper**

**November 25<sup>th</sup>:** Thanksgiving

## **Week 15**

**November 30<sup>th</sup>:** Final Review

**December 2<sup>nd</sup>:** Final Exam