

Government 358: Introduction to Public Policy

TTH 12:30 – 2pm
WAG 201
Fall 2023

Instructor: Derek Epp
Office: BAT 4.104 (office hours on zoom)
Office Hours: TTH 1030am – 12pm
Email: depp@austin.utexas.edu

Teaching Assistant: Diego Vega
Office: Zoom
Office Hours: Wednesday 930am – 1230pm
Email: diegovega@utexas.edu

This course will examine the politics and history of public policymaking in America. We will explore how policy is made, and whether LBJ's dicta that "good policy is good politics" holds true. 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-off. But some of these can be reduced if we recognize that even goals based on 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.

Required Texts & Readings

- (1) Jonathan A. Rodden. 2019. *Why Cities Lose: The Deep Roots of the Urban-Rural Political Divide*. Basic Books.

(2) Lee Drutman. 2019. *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 book, 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 (10%)
- 5) the final paper (25%)

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) –

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ImJ6STdph7BkZXJz9Idt6Y-Vn5iAlpCwBqzWPAD42zA/edit#gid=0>

Diego Vega (TA) –

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1GtVfEwJjTObzWGYObY6sas1biBTetaycsV9EJon8lW0/edit?usp=sharing>

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 22nd: Policymaking in a democracy

1. David Leonhardt. 2017. A Summer Project to Nourish Your Political Soul. *The New York Times*.

August 24th: Policy history and evaluation

1. Amartya Sen. 1999. Democracy as a Universal Value. *Journal of Democracy*.

Week 2 – Policy inputs

August 29th: The public

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

August 31st: 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 I

September 5th: Labor Day

September 7th: 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.

Week 4 – The political system II

September 12th: Institutions: Un-elected

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

September 14th: Working with empirical data

1. Review <https://www.comparativeagendas.net/us>.

Week 5 – Theory

September 19th: 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.

September 21st: 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.
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*.

Week 6 – Pathologies

September 26th: Cognitive biases 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. *Perspectives on Politics* 19 (4): 1233-1246.

September 28th: Polarization

1. Shanto Iyengar and Sean J. Westwood. 2014. Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization. *American Journal of Political Science* 59 (3): 690-707.

Week 7 – Midterm Week

October 3rd: Midterm Review

October 5th: Midterm

Week 8 – Economic policy

October 10th: Economic Policy

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

October 12th: 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 17th: 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 19th: 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 – Urban politics and social welfare

October 24th: Elections and Public Policy

1. Jonathan A. Rodden. 2019. *Why Cities Lose*. First half of the book.

October 26th: Welfare

Due: outline

2. Jonathan A. Rodden. 2019. *Why Cities Lose*. Second half of the book.

Week 11 – Budgets and environmental policy

October 31st: 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 2nd: Environment

1. McClenachan, Loren. 2009. Documenting Loss of Large Trophy Fish from the Florida Keys with Historical Photographs. *Conservation Biology*.
2. Moore, Frances C., Nick Obradovich, Flavio Lehner, and Patrick Baylis. 2019. Rapidly declining remarkability of temperature anomalies may obscure public perception of climate change. *PNAS*.

Week 12 – Justice

November 7th: Criminal Justice

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

November 9th: Racial Justice

1. Campbell Robertson. 2018. A Lynching Memorial is Opening. The Country Has Never Seen Anything Like It. *The New York Times*.

Week 13 – Comparisons

November 14th: International comparisons

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

November 16th: Reforms

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

Week 14 – Thanksgiving

Week 15 – What did we miss?

November 28th: Extra Credit Bonus Article Discussion

Due: final paper

November 30th: Final Exam Review

Week 16

December 5th: Final Exam