Government 358: Introduction to Public Policy

TTH 9:30am – 11:00am
JES A121A
Spring 2021

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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 justice.

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 Requirements

Our course is scheduled as an "in-person" course, which means there are a few rules we all must follow:

1) Wearing a mask that covers your nose and mouth is required of everyone at all times while in the classroom. No exceptions.

2) We also have to space ourselves out physically within the classroom. Don't sit next to anyone.

3) 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 should be able to watch recordings of lecture 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. If you're worried about falling behind if you're not attending in person, we can work together during office hours to make sure that doesn't happen.

4) 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.

5) Office hours will be exclusively virtual, meaning no in-person meetings. During my office hours (Wednesday 10am – 1pm), I will be available to meet over Zoom. Email me to schedule a meeting within those times.

Required Texts & Readings

(1) Ruth Wodak. *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. Sage Publiishing.

(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 the 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 (including critical responses) 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 disabled student 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 Web site: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs.

Schedule

Week 1 – Motivating ideas

January 19th: Introduction
1. David Leonhardt. 2017. A Summer Project to Nourish Your Political Soul. *The New York Times*.

January 21st: Policymaking in a democracy
1. Amartya Sen. 1999. Democracy as a Universal Value. *Journal of Democracy*.

Week 2 – Policy inputs

January 26th: 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*.

January 28th: 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

February 2nd: 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.

February 4th: Institutions: Un-elected
1. Kenneth Lowande, Melinda Ritchie, and Erinn Lauterbach. 2019. Descriptive and Substantive Representation in Congress: Evidence from 80,000 Congressional Inquiries. American Journal of Political Science.

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

Week 4 – Theory

February 9th: 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.

3. Michael Cohen, James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen. 1972. A Garbage Can Theory of Organizational Choice. Administrative Science Quarterly 17: 1-25.

February 11th: 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

February 16th: Policy histories
Due: a topic and justification

1. Kelly Ayotte et.al. *Moneyball for Government*. Disruption Books. Read chapters 1 – 3.

February 18th: Policy evaluation
1. Kelly Ayotte et.al. *Moneyball for Government*. Disruption Books. Read chapters 4 – 6.

Week 6 – Pathologies (bad ideas)

February 23rd: Data workshop
1. Review: https://www.comparativeagendas.net/us

February 25th: Bad Ideas
1. Noah Smith. 2017. Supply-Siders Still Push What Doesn't Work. *Bloomberg Opinion*.

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

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

Week 7 – Pathologies (acute polarization)

March 2nd: Cognitive biases
    1. Ruth Wodak. *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. Sage Publishing. Read Chapters 1 – 4.

March 4th: Polarization and Policymaking
Due: literature review
1. Ruth Wodak. *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. Sage Publishing. Read Chapters 5 – 8.

Week 8 – Midterm Week

March 9th: Midterm Review

March 11th: Midterm

Week 9 – Spring Break

Week 10

March 23rd: Economic Policy
    1. Amartya Sen. 2011. Uses and Abuses of Adam Smith. *History of Political Economy*.

March 25th: Income Inequality
Due: graphical figure
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 11

March 30th: Health Policy
1. Margot Sanger-Katz. 2017. Grading Obamacare. *The New York Times*.

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

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

April 1st: Foreign Policy
Due: outline
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 12

April 6th: Elections and Public Policy

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

April 8th: Welfare

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 13

April 13th: 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 remarkability of temperature anomalies may obscure public perception of climate change. *PNAS*.

April 15th: Policy Paper Workshop

Week 14

April 20th: 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.

April 22nd: 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*.

Week 15

April 27th: Reforms & Internationals Comparisons

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

April 29th
    Due: policy paper
    1. Lee Drutman. 2020. *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop*. Oxford University Press. Read Chapters 7 – 12.

Week 16

May 4th: Final Review

May 6th: Final Exam