

PLSC 214/810: The Politics of Public Policy

Spring 2014

M 1:30-3:20, 77 Prospect Street, A001

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This is a course about *governance*—what government does, why it does it, and what difference it makes. More specifically, it is a course about contemporary American governance. It has three goals: (1) to introduce students to the political science study of policy, (2) to provide analytic and theoretical tools for analyzing the two-way connection between politics and policy, and (3) to better understand key aspects of American governance, particularly those that provoke concern about the health of our democracy.

The design of the course is grounded in a simple premise: Much of political life revolves around the efforts of competing actors to use the coercive power of the state to change society in enduring ways. Public opinion, elections, voting cleavages in Congress, and other common objects of political analysis are difficult to understand or analyze without some grasp of the substantive content and real-world stakes of policy changes.

Structurally, the course is divided into two parts. In the first, we fill up our “toolkit,” considering policy typologies and preferences (Session 2), agenda-setting (3), path dependence and temporality (4), and the conceptualization and measurement of power (5). In the second part, we apply these tools to perceived problems of contemporary governance: polarization and gridlock (6), the nationalization of political conflict and cleavages (7), unchecked delegation and drift (8), complex and ineffective policies (9), the rise of the “carceral state” of mass imprisonment (10), growing inequality (11), and declining responsiveness to voters vs. dollars (12). We close by considering the prospects for reform in light of these theoretical and substantive insights (13).

The requirements for this course are (1) to read all the required reading for each session and contribute to seminar discussion; (2) to write a research paper, substantial literature review, or dissertation proposal related to the themes of the course, due at the end of the semester; and (3) in any two of the first seven weeks of the course, to write a short (no more than 1,000 words) reaction piece on the readings. Class participation will represent one-third of the final grade, the final paper half, and each paper approximately 8 percent.

Academic integrity is a core institutional value at Yale. It means, among other things, truth in presentation, diligence and precision in citing works and ideas, and acknowledging collaborations with others. The Graduate School Code of Conduct specifically prohibits the following forms of behavior: *falsification or fabrication of data*; *plagiarism*, that is, the failure in a dissertation, essay or other written exercise to acknowledge ideas, research, or language taken from others; and *multiple submission of the same work* without obtaining explicit written permission from both instructors before the material is submitted. Students found guilty of violations of academic integrity are subject to one or more of the following penalties: written reprimand, probation, suspension (noted on a student's transcript) or dismissal (noted on a student's transcript).

Readings

The following books are required for the course; they are available at the Yale bookstore (77 Broadway Street, (203) 777-8440) as well as on course reserve:

1. Frank Baumgartner and Byran Jones, *The Politics of Attention* (2005).
2. Martin Gilens, *Affluence and Influence* (2012).
3. Suzanne Mettler, *The Submerged State* (2011).
4. Eric Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk* (2008).
5. Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time* (2004).

Part I: Analytic Tools

Readings that do not have an embedded link are available on the classes server.

Session 1 (1/13): Course Overview

- Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, “The Case for Policy-Focused Political Analysis” (2012).

Session 2 (1/17): Policy Typologies and Policy Preferences

- [Aaron Wildavsky, “Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions,” APSR \(1987\).](#)
- [James Druckman, “Political Preference Formation,” APSR \(2004\).](#)
- James Q. Wilson, *Political Organizations* (1973), Ch. 16.
- R. Douglas Arnold, *The Logic of Congressional Action*, Chs. 1, 4.

Session 3 (1/27): Agenda-Setting

- John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (1984), Ch. 9.
- Baumgartner and Jones, *The Politics of Attention*.

Session 4 (2/3): Path Dependence and Temporality

- Pierson, *Politics in Time*.
- [Christoper Berry, Barry Burden, and William Howell, “After Enactment: The Lives and Deaths of Federal Programs,” AJPS \(2010\).](#)

Session 5 (2/10): Power

- [Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, “The Two Faces of Power,” APSR \(1962\).](#)
- [Terry Moe, “Power and Political Institutions,” POP \(2005\).](#)
- [Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, “Business Power and Social Policy,” P&S \(2000\).](#)

Part II: Contemporary Governance

Session 6 (2/17): Polarization and Gridlock

- [Michael Barber and Nolan McCarty, “Causes and Consequences of Polarization” \(2013\).](#)
- [Sarah Binder, “The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock, 1947-96,” APSR \(1999\).](#)
- [Jesse Richman, “Parties, Pivots, and Policy,” APSR \(2011\).](#)
- Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, “Confronting Assymmetric Polarization,” December 2012.

Session 7 (2/24): The Nationalization of American Politics

Last Week for Discussion Papers

- Paul Pierson, “Madison Upside-Down,” in Jeffrey Jenkins and Sidney Milkis, *The Politics of Major Policy Reform in Postwar America* (forthcoming).
- [Vanessa Williamson, Theda Skocpol, and John Coggin The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism Perspectives on Politics 9:1 \(March 2011\): 25-43.](#)
- Fiorina vs. Abramowitz in *The American Interest*: <http://www.the-american-interest.com/articles/2013/2/12/americas-missing-moderates-hiding-in-plain-sight/>; <http://www.the-american-interest.com/articles/2013/03/11/polarized-or-sorted-just-whats-wrong-with-our-politics-anyway/>

Session 8 (3/3): Delegation, Drift, and Democracy

Proposal for Final Paper Due

- [William Howell and Terry Moe, “The Presidential Power of Unilateral Action,” JLEO \(1999\).](#)
- Jacob Hacker, Paul Pierson, and Kathleen Thelen, “Drift and Conversion” (2014).
- [Robert Kagan, “Adversarial Legalism and American Government,” JPAM \(1991\).](#)

—Spring Break—

Session 9 (3/24): “Kludgeocracy”

- [Steven Teles, “Kludgeocracy in America,” National Affairs \(2013\).](#)
- Terry Moe, “The Politics of Structural Choice,” in Oliver Williamson, ed., *Organization Theory from Chester Barnard to the Present and Beyond* (1990).
- Mettler, *The Submerged State*

Session 10 (3/31): The Carceral State

- [Bruce Western, “The Prison Boom and the Decline of American Citizenship,” Society \(2007\).](#)
- Marie Gottshalk, *The Prison and the Gallows* (2006), Chs. 1-3, 10
- [Vesla Weaver and Amy Lerman, “Political Consequences of the Carceral State,” APSR \(2010\).](#)

Session 11 (4/7): Inequality and American Democracy

- Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, Ch. 2.
- [Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, “Winner-Take-All Politics,” P&S \(2010\).](#)
- [Nathan Kelly, et al., “Conditional Status Quo Bias and Top Income Shares” \(2013\).](#)

Session 12 (4/14): Trust and Responsiveness

- Marc Hetherington, *Why Trust Matters* (2005), Chs. 1-3, 5.
- Gilens, *Affluence and Influence*.
- [Clayton Peoples, “Contributor Influence in Congress,” *Sociological Quarterly* \(2010\).](#)

Session 13 (4/21): Prospects for Enduring Reform

- Eric Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk*.
- [Francis Fukuyama, “The Decay of American Political Institutions,” *American Interest*, December 8, 2013.](#)