

PP478E Political Science and Public Policy

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Course Overview

This course introduces students to core political science debates and questions, focusing on understanding the creation and implementation of public policy. The course discusses approaches to conducting political science research and evaluating policy interventions. We discuss electoral accountability as the cornerstone of democracy and the welfare and preferences of the general public as the impetus for public policy. We consider the influence of organized actors on policy creation and regulation and how insufficient bureaucratic autonomy or resource constraints can undermine policy implementation. The readings in the course include cutting-edge empirical studies, overview chapters, and classic texts. The geographic focus of the readings is purposefully broad, intending to stimulate deeper thinking on the similarities and differences in political processes across countries.

Faculty

[Dr Sarah Brierley](#) is an Associate Professor of Comparative Politics. Her research focuses on the state, corruption, and electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa. Her book – *The Co-opted State* – explores the limits of meritocracy and seeks to understand how politicians' control over bureaucrats' careers can threaten governance. In her research, she uses a range of methods, including original surveys, field experiments, and in-depth interviews. Brierley's research has been published in the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Electoral Studies* and the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. Before working at the LSE, she was an Assistant Professor at Washington University in St Louis. She received her Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Los Angeles.

[Dr Victoria Paniagua](#) is an Assistant Professor of International Political Economy. Her work centers on the historical role of economic elites in state building, early development, and redistribution, with a regional focus in *Latin America*. Her research has been published in the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Politics*, and *World Development*, among others. Her book manuscript studies why, how, and to what extent economic elites influence developmental and redistributive policies. Empirically, it examines the long history of elites in Argentina and Chile, drawing on over a century of original individual- and subnational-level archival data on economic elites. At LSE, she teaches undergraduate and postgraduate level courses, including International Political Economy; Politics of Inequality and Development; and Trade, Development and the Environment. Before joining the LSE, Victoria was a Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute. She received her PhD in Political Science from Duke University.

Topics

Day 1

Asking Questions and Understanding Outcomes

Elections and Representation

Political Parties

Guest Speaker: Vanessa Rubio Marquez, Professor in Practice (and previously Undersecretary of Finance and Public Credit, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, and Senator in Mexico).

Day 2

Voters, Preferences and Policymaking

Interest Groups and Policymaking

Case Study: Climate Change: Paris and the Road Ahead

Guest Speaker: Prof. Helen Margetts, OBE FBA.

Day 3

Policy Implementation: Bureaucratic Autonomy

Policy Implementation: Resources and Roadblocks

Case Study: Representation and the Reapportioning of Electoral Seats in India

Assessment guidance session

Day 4

Political Polarization

The Rise of Populism

Technological Change and the Future of Democratic Capitalism

Guest Speaker: Sam Freedman, author of "Failed State: Why Britain Doesn't Work and How to Fix it"

Day 5

Public Policy Simulation

Schedule

0900-1030 Lecture 1
1030-1100 Break
1100-1230 Lecture 2
1230-1330 Lunch
1330-1500 Lecture 3 or Case Study
1500-1530 Break
1530-1700 Guest Speaker or Exam Guidance

NB: The policy simulation on Friday will follow a different schedule and will last the whole day. We will break for lunch at 1pm-2pm.

Reading list

- Essential reading: those that students should have completed before class and come prepared to discuss.
- Background reading: those pertaining to a given topic/session but which are not essential for students to have read.

Day 1

1. Asking Questions and Understanding Outcomes

Essential

Llaudet, E.I. (2023) Data analysis for social science: a friendly and practical introduction. In: K. Imai (ed.). Data analysis for social science: a friendly and practical introduction. Princeton University Press. **Student note:** Chapter 2 (sections 2.1-2.4 and 2.6). NB: there is no expectation that you learn how to code in R.

Background

Lijphart, A. (1971) Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method. *American Political Science Review*. 65 (3), 682–693.

Pepinsky, T.B. (2019) The Return of the Single-Country Study. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 22 (1), 187–203.

Laura Haynes, O.S. (2012) Test, Learn, Adapt: Developing Public Policy with Randomised Control Trials. Cabinet Office.

2. Elections and Representation

Essential

Przeworski A., Stokes S.C., & Manin B. (eds.) (1999) Democracy, accountability, and representation. Cambridge University Press. **Student note:** Chapter 1 (pp. 29-54).

Background

Harding, R. & Stasavage, D. (2014) What Democracy Does (and Doesn't Do) for Basic Services: School Fees, School Inputs, and African Elections. *The Journal of Politics*. 76 (1), 229–245.

Fujiwara, T. (2015) Voting Technology, Political Responsiveness, And Infant Health: Evidence From Brazil. *Econometrica*. 83 (2), 423–464.

3. Political Parties

Essential

De Vries, C.E. (2020) Political entrepreneurs: the rise of challenger parties in Europe . 1st edition. Princeton University Press. **Student note:** Chapter 2 (pp. 40-60)

Background

Catalinac, A. (2016) From Pork to Policy: The Rise of Programmatic Campaigning in Japanese Elections. *The Journal of Politics*. 78 (1), 1–18.

Keefer, P. (2007) Clientelism, Credibility, and the Policy Choices of Young Democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*. 51 (4), 804–821.

Day 2

4. Voters, Preferences, and Policymaking

Essential

Brandice Canes-Wrone (2015) From Mass Preferences to Policy. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 18, 147–165.

Background

Gilens, M. & Page, B.I. (2014) Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens. *Perspectives on Politics*. 12 (3), 564–581.

Gimpelson, V. & Treisman, D. (2018) Misperceiving inequality. *Economics and Politics*. 30 (1), 27–54.

Holland, A.C. (2018) Diminished Expectations. *World Politics*. 70 (4), 555–594.

5. Interest Groups and Policymaking

Essential

Naoi, M., & Krauss, E. (2009). Who lobbies whom? Special interest politics under alternative electoral systems. *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(4), 874-892.

Background

Olson, M. (1965) The logic of collective action: public goods and the theory of groups. Harvard University Press. **Student note:** Chapter 1 selections (pp. 5-21 and 34-52).

Przeworski, A. & Wallerstein, M. (1988) Structural Dependence of the State on Capital. *American Political Science Review*. 82 (1), 11–29.

Markus, S. & Charnysh, V. (2017) The Flexible Few: Oligarchs and Wealth Defense in Developing Democracies. *Comparative Political Studies*. 50 (12), 1632–1665.

6. Case Study: Climate Change: Paris and the Road Ahead

Essential

Pons, V., Migdal, A., Lynch, M. Climate Change: Paris, and the Road Ahead. 23 January 2019, Harvard Business School. Student note: Case has been purchased. Use the link provided.

Day 3

7. Policy Implementation: Bureaucratic Autonomy

Essential

Carl Dahlström, V.L. (2021) Chapter 30: Bureaucracy and Government Quality. In: A. Bågenholm, M. Bauhr, M.L. Grimes, & B. Rothstein (eds.). The Oxford Handbook of the Quality of Government. Oxford University Press. **Student note:** Chapter 30.

Background

Rasul, I. & Rogger, D. (2018) Management of Bureaucrats and Public Service Delivery: Evidence from the Nigerian Civil Service. *The Economic Journal* (London). 128 (608), 413–446.

Katherine Bersch, F.F. (2023) Defining Bureaucratic Autonomy. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 26, 213–232.

8. Policy Implementation: Resources and Roadblocks

Essential

Dasgupta, A. & Kapur, D. (2020) The Political Economy of Bureaucratic Overload: Evidence from Rural Development Officials in India. *American Political Science Review*. 114 (4), 1316–1334.

Background

Hill, M. (1997) Why “perfect implementation” is unattainable. In: M.J. Hill (ed.). *The policy process: a reader*. 2nd ed. Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf. pp. 229–237.

9. Case Study: Representation and the Reapportioning of Electoral Seats in India

Essential

Brierley, S, and Vasu T (2026): Representation and the Reapportioning of Electoral Seats in India, case study document.

Day 4

10. Political Polarisation

Essential

McCoy, J., & Somer, M. (2019). Toward a theory of pernicious polarization and how it harms democracies: Comparative evidence and possible remedies. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 681(1), 234-271.

Background

Thomas Carothers, A.O. (2019) Democracies divided: the global challenge of political polarization. Brookings Institution Press. **Student note:** pp. 17-37 (Turkey) and pp. 228-254 (Brazil).

Italo Colantone and Piero Stanig (2018) Global Competition and Brexit. *American Political Science Review*. 112 (2), 201–218.

Mettler, S. & Brown, T. (2022) The growing rural-urban political divide and democratic vulnerability. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 699 (1), 130-142.

11. The Rise of Populism

Essential

Berman, S. (2021) The Causes of Populism in the West. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 24 (1), 71-88.

Background

Milner, H.V. (2021) Voting for Populism in Europe: Globalization, Technological Change, and the Extreme Right. *Comparative Political Studies*. 54 (13), 2286–2320.

Margalit, Y. (2019) Political responses to economic shocks. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 22 (1), 277-295.

Hunter, W. & Power, T.J. (2019) Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash." *Journal of Democracy*. 30 (1), 68-82.

12. The Future of Democratic Capitalism

Essential

Boix, C. (2019) *Democratic Capitalism at the Crossroads: Technological Change and the Future of Politics*. Princeton University Press. **Student note:** Chapters 1 and 6.

Background

Milanović, B. (2019) *Capitalism, Alone: The Future of the System that Rules the World*. 1st edition. Harvard University Press. **Student note:** Chapters 1 and 5.

Iversen, T. (2019) *Democracy and prosperity: the reinvention of capitalism in a turbulent century*, Princeton University Press. **Student note:** Chapter 1.

Rodrik, D. (2011) *The globalization paradox: why global markets, states, and democracy can't coexist*. Oxford University Press. **Student note:** Chapters 11 and 12.

Assessment

There are two components of the assessment for this course (they count equally for your final mark).

- An online exam will take place between **27 – 30 Nov 2026**. It will consist of a combination of short-answer questions and longer-answer questions.
- A 2,000-word essay due on **3 January 2027**.

Key Questions

Day 1:

- What is a counterfactual?
- How can we tell if a policy is working?
- What is mandate representation?
- What is retrospective voting?
- Do democratic institutions improve voter welfare?
- What can lead to the breakdown of electoral accountability?
- Why do new parties form?
- What factors inform the strategies that parties adopt to attract voters?

Day 2:

- How are policy preferences formed?
- How do “misperceptions” affect policy preferences?
- How do voters’ policy preferences translate into voting behavior?
- Why do citizens across countries have divergent preferences on the same policy issue?
- Are policies aligned with the preferences of voters or those of organized interest groups?
- What is an interest group?
- What are the collective action challenges to organizing interests?
- What are the mechanisms via which interest groups influence the policy making process?
- What are the benefits and risks of having influential interest groups?

Day 3:

- How does principal-agent theory apply to models of bureaucracy?
- What is moral hazard?
- What are the main risks of a highly autonomous bureaucracy?
- Through what mechanisms can autonomous bureaucrats promote high quality governance?
- Why do politicians underinvest in local bureaucracy?
- Under what conditions can politicians claim credit for resourcing bureaucracies?

Day 4:

- What is political polarization?
- How has political polarization evolved in the developed and developing world over the last 50 years?

- What explains the most recent incremental trends in political polarization across the globe?
- What is populism?
- Has political polarization fueled the emergence of populism?
- Does populism foster democratic backsliding?
- What is the relationship between technological change, economic inequality, and political polarization?
- What are the main challenges of contemporary democratic capitalism?
- How can states address such challenges?