

How Public Policy Works

PIA 0101, Fall 2024

MW 3-4:15 pm, 3911 Posvar Hall

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 4:15-6:15 pm

Course Description

This course introduces the study of the policymaking process, which involves the creation and implementation of public policy. We will seek to answer questions like: *What various factors influence policy decisions? What is the role of government in shaping policy? What role do interest groups and social movements play?* We will have an empirical focus on different social policy issues from a comparative perspective in order to apply the concepts and theories learned. Students will examine a policy issue of their choice through different in-class and take-home assignments throughout the term.

The course is aimed at students with no prior knowledge of the area of study, but a desire to understand how policies are made and implemented. The scope of the course is broad, hence mastering the minutiae of individual topics is not our objective. We will develop and apply critical thinking skills, questioning assumptions and deconstructing concepts often taken for granted. Our goal is to learn **how**, not what, to think about public policy. The course is ideal for students interested in pursuing careers in public policy or related fields, or for anyone interested in understanding how policy impacts people's lives.

Course Objectives

- Define the different stages of the policymaking process.
- Gain a deeper substantive understanding of leading theories in the field.
- Apply the theories learned throughout the course to current and past policy issues.
- Critically examine the course material presented. Critical thought does not necessarily imply criticism, but a careful and creative consideration of the subject matter and awareness of multiple viewpoints.
- Improve creative thinking, writing and oral skills, advancing logical arguments supported with evidence and communicating thoughts clearly and concisely.

Required Texts

1. Birkland, Thomas A. 2020. *An Introduction to the Policy Process: Theories, Concepts, and Models of Public Policy Making*, 5th ed. New York: Routledge.
2. Kingdon, John W. 1995. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. 2d. ed. New York: HarperCollins.

All the other required readings will be posted on Canvas.

Course Requirements

The course will meet twice a week. The requirements for the course are class **attendance**, **reading** of the assigned materials, and **active participation** in class discussions.

If you need to miss class, send me a quick email ahead of the class session. Classes missed immediately before and after holidays are particularly noticed. I expect everyone to **arrive on time**. Late arrivals are extremely disruptive.

Contact me if you have questions or concerns. If you have any kind of problem with the course or with life, please **communicate** with me (no need to give me any specific details regarding the situation you are going through). Let me know if my **office hours** are not at a convenient time for you and we will set an appointment. I am willing to work with you to help you succeed, but I cannot do so retroactively at the end of the term.

You are required to have all course-related files saved on an **online drive** of your preference (i.e., Dropbox, OneDrive, or others).

Students are expected to come to each session **ready for a lively discussion**. The following are some guidelines to help you get started:

- **Speak up!** Ask the second you have a question or a comment. Others may have the same queries you do.
- **Respect** one another. Differences of opinion are likely and desirable. **Listen** to your peers' questions and comments and express your disagreements with respect.
- **No cell phones in class.**
- **Stick to pen and paper** to take notes. In exceptional cases, tablets or laptops may be employed only for valid educational reasons related to the course. Violations will affect your grade and preclude further use of the device in class.

Course Evaluation

Participation	20%	Policy memo	20%
Expert post 1	15%	Final exam	30%
Expert post 2	15%		

Grade Assessment

I do not discuss grades via email. Please take 24 hours to review the initial feedback. Then, bring to my office a written note explaining the error that you think I made.

There are no extra credit assignments in this course. If you have concerns about your grade in the course, come talk to me as soon as possible about strategies to improve your performance.

Participation

Participation is key for this course. Forget about the percentage of your overall grade it counts towards, the actual value of participation is much greater than this because it will help you to do better on all the assignments in this course.

Class meetings will combine short lectures and group discussions. **Students are expected to read the assigned materials before each class** and **participate actively**. It is essential that you come to class prepared so that you can engage in discussion and ask questions. We will also integrate current events. Occasionally, I will send links to a short news article to read before class. After reading anything, you should be able to answer at least the following questions: *What is the main argument? Does it make sense logically? What is the evidence for it? What are the strengths and weaknesses?*

Participation performance is not based on the number of times you speak up during class but on the **quality** of your input. By no means, this should be understood as having to “be right” every time. Comments or questions that contribute to our analysis of course contents and discussion are highly regarded. Questions are an excellent way to participate; they show your interest in the course and your ability for critical thought.

To achieve an **A** for participation, your engagement in class discussions must be exceptional, contributing to a lively conversation consistently and displaying that you have mastered the material. You must be active in both class-wide and small-group discussions regularly.

We will deal with interesting and controversial issues, and I hope that we will have lively debates. We must respect one another. Differences of opinion can lead to intellectual growth.

Expert Posts

Each student must select a policy issue of study in any country of their choice for both expert posts. Your posts will apply class concepts to your selected case of study. Each post should be three paragraphs long and posted on **Canvas**. You will consult a minimum of **two scholarly sources** other than the materials presented in class for each post. I strongly encourage you to seek the help of the [Writing Center](#).

The first one is due in **Week 4**. This first post should start with a short reflection on why you picked this case study. The second post is due in **Week 8** and should end with a short reflection on what you learned about your case study throughout the term and what surprised you. I will penalize **late posts** with one letter grade per day late.

You will be evaluated based on the clarity and precision of your application of concepts, the organization and clarity of your writing, and the quality of supporting evidence you provide.

Policy Memo

You will pick a specific policy issue (I encourage you to continue with a policy issue you selected for your expert posts, but you may choose a different one). You must analyze the inherent problem the policy is trying to fix and analyze at least one policymaking process stage using a theoretical framework learned in class.

The memos have to be 4-pages long, double-spaced and 12-point font. You will consult a minimum of **four scholarly sources** other than the materials presented in class. This assignment is due in **Week 12** via **Canvas**.

If you use **AI** language models, such as ChatGPT to support your writing, you are fully responsible for its lack of accuracy and bias. I strongly encourage you to avoid relying on these

tools as sources of information and critical thinking. If you choose to use them, I will expect you to clearly state your use of AI and exactly *how* you used it.

Final Exam

The final will be a Canvas self-timed exam and consist of multiple choice, short-answer questions, and essay questions. It will take place during finals week.

For all coursework, the [Academic Integrity Guidelines](#) apply. You need to familiarize yourself with the concept and practice of plagiarism to make sure that you avoid it. The university has helpful advice on [avoiding plagiarism](#).

Disability Accommodations

Please let me know in the first two weeks of class if you need any accommodation for a disability. <https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/disability-resources-services/disability-resources-services>

Diversity Statement

A strong commitment to diversity and inclusion is a fundamental value of the University of Pittsburgh and is critical to achieving our mission as a public research university. Diversity encompasses a broad range of differences and evolves over time. The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), of which Pitt is a member, defines [diversity](#) as *Individual differences (e.g., personality, prior knowledge, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations)*.

Policy of Nondiscrimination

The University of Pittsburgh, as an educational institution and as an employer, does not discriminate on the basis of disability, race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, genetic information, marital status, familial status, sex, age, sexual orientation, veteran status or gender identity and expression in its programs and activities. The University does not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or retaliation on these bases and takes steps to ensure that students, employees, and third parties are not subject to a hostile environment in University programs or activities.

Sexual Misconduct Policy

Sexual misconduct that affects the educational or employment environment is a form of sexual discrimination. Such conduct violates University Policy, and generally also violates federal, state, or local laws. The University of Pittsburgh is committed to the maintenance of a community free from all forms of sexual misconduct, and this University Policy extends to the entire University community, including all faculty, researchers, staff, students, vendors, contractors, and visitors to the University.

Course Schedule

The listed readings are required to be completed **before** each class. If you don't understand parts of them, come with questions. Bring your readings to class so you can refer to them during our discussion.

I reserve the right to make changes to the schedule when unforeseen circumstances occur.

Week 1

M 8/26: Course Overview & Introductions

- Read the course syllabus

W 8/28: What is Public Policy?

- Birkland, Ch1 Introducing the Policy Process

Week 2

W 9/4: The Politics of Policymaking

- Birkland, Ch2 Elements of the Policy-Making System

Week 3

M 9/9: Rationality

- Jones, Bryan D. 2001. *Politics and the Architecture of Choice: Bounded Rationality and Governance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Ch1 Traces of Eve.

W 9/11: Policymaking in the U.S.

- Birkland, Ch3 The Contexts of Public Policy Making

Week 4

M 9/16: Policy Ideas & Agendas

- Kingdon, John W. 1995. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. 2d. ed. New York: HarperCollins. Ch1 How Does an Idea's Time Come?

W 9/18: Actors Inside of Government

- Kingdon, John W. 1995. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. 2d. ed. New York: HarperCollins. Ch2 Participants on the Inside of Government
- Birkland, Ch4 Official Actors and Their Roles in Public Policy

Upload 1st Post

Week 5

9/23: Actors Outside of Government

- Kingdon, John W. 1995. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. 2d. ed. New York: HarperCollins. Ch3 Outside of Government, But Not Just Looking In
- Birkland, Ch5 *Unofficial Actors and their Roles in Public Policy*

9/25: Agenda-setting I

- Birkland, Ch6 Agenda Setting, Groups, and Power

Week 6

9/30: Agenda-setting II

- Baumgartner, Frank R., Bryan D. Jones, and Peter B. Mortensen. 2023. "Punctuated Equilibrium Theory: Explaining Stability and Change in Public Policymaking," in Weible, Christopher M., ed. *Theories of the Policy Process*.

10/2: Policy Types

- Birkland, Ch7 Policies & Policy Types

Week 7

10/7: Policy Feedback

- Mettler, Suzanne and Mallory SoRelle. 2023. "Policy Feedback Theory," in Weible, Christopher M., ed. *Theories of the Policy Process*.

- Pacheco, Julianna. 2013. Attitudinal Policy Feedback and Public Opinion. *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 77 (3): 714-34.

10/9: Expert Post Workshop

Week 8

10/16: Policy Diffusion

- Porto de Oliveira, Osmany, Giulia C. Romano, Craig Volden, and Andrew Karch. 2023. "Policy Diffusion and Innovation," in Weible, Christopher M., ed. *Theories of the Policy Process*.

Upload 2nd Post

Week 9

10/21: Information

- Lohmann, Susanne. 1994. The Dynamics of Informational Cascades: The Monday Demonstrations in Leipzig, East Germany, 1989–1991. *World Politics* 47: 42–101.
- Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. 2014. The Politics of Information. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Ch1 Search, Information, and Policy Agendas

10/23: Advocacy & Interest Groups

- Baumgartner, Frank R., Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David C. Kimball, and Beth L. Leech. 2009. *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Ch1 Advocacy, Public Policy, and Policy Change
- Gibson, C. L. 2019. *Movement-driven Development: The Politics of Health and Democracy in Brazil*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. Ch1 Subnational Democratization of Health

Week 10

10/28: Policy Memo Workshop

10/30: Windows of Opportunity

- Kingdon, John W. 1995. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. 2d. ed. New York: HarperCollins. Ch8 The Policy Window, and Joining the Streams

Week 11

11/4: Framing I

- Jones, Michael D., Aaron Smith-Walter, Mark K. McBeth, and Elizabeth A. Shanahan. 2023. "The Narrative Policy Framework," in Weible, Christopher M., ed. *Theories of the Policy Process*.
- Rose, Max, and Frank R. Baumgartner. 2013. Framing the Poor: Media Coverage and US Poverty Policy, 1960–2008. *Policy Studies Journal* 41 (1): 22–53

11/6: Framing II

- Haynes, Chris, Jennifer Merolla, and S. Karthick Ramakrishnan. 2016. *Framing Immigrants: News coverage, Public Opinion, and Policy*. Russell Sage Foundation. Chapters 1 & 2

Week 12

11/11: Design

- Birkland, Ch9 Policy Design and Policy Tools

11/13: Implementation

- Birkland, Ch10 Policy Implementation, Failure, and Learning

Upload Policy Memo

Week 13: Theory Application

11/18: Healthcare

- Morgan, Kimberly J., and Andrea L. Campbell. 2011. Delegated governance in the Affordable Care Act. *Journal of Health Politics, Policy, and Law*. 36 (3): 387-91.

11/20: Education

- Wolbrecht, Christina, and Michael Hartney. 2014. "Ideas about Interests": Explaining the Changing Partisan Politics of Education. *Perspectives on Politics* 12: 603-30.

Week 14: Comparative Policy Analysis

12/2: Welfare State

- Esping-Andersen, Gøsta, ed. 2002. *Why We Need a New Welfare State*. Oxford University Press. Ch1 Towards the Good Society, Once Again?

12/4: Reproductive Rights

- Borland, Elizabeth. 2017. Cultural Opportunities and Tactical Choice in the Argentine and Chilean Reproductive Rights Movements. *Mobilization: An International Journal* 9 (3): 327-39.

Week 15

12/9: Final Exam Review

Final Exam (December 11-15)