

GOVT S-1507 Introduction to Public Policy
Harvard Summer School – 7-week session
Syllabus DRAFT: June 28, 2021

Professor: Viridiana Ríos, Ph.D.

Email: vrios@post.harvard.edu

Online sessions: T-Th, 6:30 pm - 9:30 pm (EST)

Office hours: By appointment

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Course description

With political polarization fastly becoming the defining issue of our time, there is a pressing need to develop a more precise understanding of the actions of the government and the intentions that determine such actions. In this class, we will develop an in-depth understanding of what public policy is and why we sometimes justify government involvement in solving social problems. We will learn how to identify the characteristics of effective and ineffective policies by examining the conditions under which government actions may stifle intergenerational mobility, equal opportunity, and better social and economic outcomes. We will also examine the environments in which poorly designed public policies may create unexpected consequences and negative outcomes, such as exclusion or political capture. This course will explore many of the paradoxes inherent in public policy research by focusing on the topics that animate today's most meaningful public debates, such as gun ownership, homelessness, education, health care, and welfare policies.

Skills to be developed

Students will be required to critically engage with qualitative and quantitative academic literature, identifying the implicit assumptions, veiled ideology, or measurement choices that drive different policies. By the end of this course, students will be able to elucidate the scholarly theories behind policy design, and know how to formulate, implement, and evaluate a policy. To put theory into practice, students will work in small teams to design and conduct their own policy analysis on a topic of their choosing. Policy analyses will be presented during the course and should stimulate a thoughtful and informed debate about the challenges of a relevant policy.

Attendance

Summer School policy requires attendance in all classes. Each missed class without a medical excuse reduces grades by 8 points (out of 100). Visit [Summer School policies around Student Responsibilities](#) to learn more.

Structure

- I. Basic definitions and concepts (sessions 1-3).
- II. The policy process (session 4-10).
- III. Wrapping up (session 11-12).

Required materials

To succeed in this course, you must read the required readings before class. In each class, I will generally tell you a bit about how to prepare for the next class. Expect to read an average of 65 pages per week and 30 minutes of audiovisual material. All required materials have been uploaded to our website and will remain there for the length of the course. In addition, you will have a list of optional (not required) additional readings that provide you with further knowledge and alternative interpretations of the topics we study. You do not have to read the not required readings.

Grading

- *Policy Recommendation (20%)*: Each student will submit, individually, a separate policy recommendation intended to solve (or mitigate) the challenges presented by their team during their policy analysis. Creativity and feasibility will be rewarded. Policy recommendations should be delivered in the form of a memo (1,500 words max.). Due on August 6, 2021 before 8:00 pm (EST).
- *Policy Analysis Presentation (30%)*: Students will sort themselves in one of seven teams. Each group will prepare a 30-minute professional presentation to inform the audience about the main policies that have been implemented in

a policy area, as well as the major challenges that remain to be solved. The possible policy areas are: (1) welfare & social policy, (2) education, (3) healthcare, (4) housing policy, (5) the environment and energy, (6) foreign policy & homeland security, or (7) technology and personal data.

– *Participation (20%)*: Students are expected to complete all assigned readings prior to class, actively engage in discussions, and link assigned materials to relevant debates in the media and politics. Readings marked as ‘additional readings’ are not required. Note that 75% of the participation grade (15 percentage points) will depend on the weekly participation in a 45-minute discussion session led by a teaching assistant. The schedule will be determined according to the availability of students.

– *Reading Quizzes (20%)*: Students will be given quizzes; dates won’t be provided in advance. A non-graded quiz will be assigned to diagnose potential English-language proficiency problems during the first meeting.

– *Homework (10%)*: Students will be given assignments to reinforce concepts learned in class.

Special requirements for graduate students: Participation (15%), policy recommendation (35%). The quality of the policy recommendation is expected to be significantly higher.

Late policy

Barring an extraordinary excuse, late papers will be marked down one-third of a grade (e.g., A to A-minus) per day.

Academic integrity

This course follows the policies on academic integrity of the Harvard Summer School. Please carefully read the [Harvard Summer School policies on academic integrity](#). For help with citing your sources correctly, please also visit the [Resources to Support Academic Integrity](#). Summer School assumes that collaboration on assignments is prohibited unless permitted by the instructor. Please, take a look at [Harvard Guide to Using Sources](#).

Accessibility

The Summer School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Accessibility Office offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. Please visit [here](#) for more information.

Collaboration in written work

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, professional editing, etc.), you must also acknowledge this assistance.

Detailed syllabus

I. Basic definitions and concepts.

Session 1. Definitions of public policy & policy context (June 22)

Understand the nature of public policy and identify the key concepts associated with it.

Required readings

– Kraft, M. E. & Furlong, S. R. (2019). *Public policy: Politics, analysis, and alternatives*. Seventh edition. Sage and CQ Press. Chapter 1, (pp. 2-11; 15-22).

– Pushkin Industries & The Rockefeller Foundation (2018). *Revisionist History presents: Solvable* [\[Podcast\]](#).

Additional readings

- Fan, L. L. (2013). Canon texts in public policy studies: A quantitative analysis. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 19(4), (pp. 681-704).
- Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2018). Why context matters: a comparative perspective on education reform and policy implementation. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 17(3), (pp. 195-207).
- Hausman, D. (2016). *Economic analysis, moral philosophy, and public policy*. Third edition. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 7-9.
- McConnell, A. & ‘t Hart, P. (2019). Inaction and public policy: understanding why policymakers ‘do nothing’. *Policy Sciences*, 52, (pp. 645–661).
- Mead, L. M. (2013). Teaching public policy: Linking policy and politics. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 19(3), (pp. 389-403).

Session 2. Actors & working with sources (June 24)

Define a policy actor and the different goals she may pursue; explore governmental and nongovernmental actors involved in the policy process. In this session, students will be required to sort themselves into one of seven policy areas.

Required readings

- Weimer, D. L. & Vining, A. R. (2017). *Policy analysis: Concepts and practice*. Sixth edition. Routledge. Chapter 14, (pp. 325-339).
- Dente, B. (2014). *Understanding policy decisions*. First edition. Springer. Chapter 2, (pp. 29-52).

Additional readings

- Ganghof, S. (2017). The empirical uses of theoretical models: The case of veto player theory. *Political Studies Review*, 15(1), 49-59.
- Haelg, L., Sewerin, S., & Schmidt, T. S. (2019). The role of actors in the policy design process: Introducing design coalitions to explain policy output. *Policy Sciences*, (pp. 1-39).
- Haselswerdt, J. & Bartels, B. L. (2015). Public opinion, Policy tools, and the status quo: Evidence from a survey experiment. *Political Research Quarterly*, 68(3), (pp. 607-621).
- Hendren, K., Luo, Q. E., & Pandey, S. K. (2018). The state of mixed methods research in public administration and public policy. *Public Administration Review*, 78(6), (pp. 904-916).
- Hertel-Fernandez, A. (2019). *State capture: How conservative activists, big businesses, and wealthy donors reshaped the American states--and the nation*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Session 3: Theories & types of public policy (June 29)

Identify typologies of public policies to understand how and why policies are implemented, and why some groups may benefit more than others.

Required readings

- Birkland, T. A. (2019). *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts and models of public policy making*. Fifth edition. Routledge. Chapter 7 (pp. 202-218).
- Kraft, M. E. & Furlong, S. R. (2019). *Public policy: Politics, analysis, and alternatives*. Seventh edition. Sage and CQ Press. Chapter 3, (pp. 82-89).
- The Weeds (2017). *Weeds in the Wild: Free Money for Everyone!* [\[Podcast\]](#) May 12.

Additional readings:

- Birkland, T. A. (2019). *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts and models of public policy making*. Fifth edition. Routledge. Chapter 10.
- Hein, J. E., & Jenkins, J. C. (2017). Why does the United States lack a global warming policy? The corporate inner circle versus public interest sector elites. *Environmental Politics*, 26(1), (pp. 97-117).

- Howlett, M. (2019). *Designing public policies: Principles and instruments*. Routledge.
- Sefton, T. (2006). *Distributive and redistributive policy*. In R.E. Goodin, (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*. Oxford.

II. The policy process

Session 4: Roles (July 1)

Understand the roles that actors may play during the decision-making process. Learn how to efficiently gather information about a policy area.

Required readings

- Dente, B. (2014). *Understanding policy decisions*. First edition. Springer. Chapter 2, (pp. 52-59).
- Kraft, M. E. & Furlong, S. R. (2019). *Public policy: Politics, analysis, and alternatives*. Seventh edition. Sage and CQ Press. Chapter 3, (pp. 22-27, 89-106).
- Bardach, E. (2012). *A practical guide for policy analysis*. CQ Press. Fourth edition, (pp. 11-16).
- Gov Innovator (2016). *How Mexico took on the soda industry and won, passing a soda tax: An interview with Tina Rosenberg*. *New York Times and Solutions Journalism Network* – Episode 106 [[Podcast](#)] February 2.
- Wall Street Journal (2021). Why Biden’s Infrastructure Plan Calls for Highway Teardowns [[Video](#)] June 1.

Additional readings

- Jann, W. & Wegrich, K. (2017). Theories of the policy cycle. *Handbook of public policy analysis* (pp. 69-88). Routledge.
- Nelson, K. L. & Svara, J. H. (2015). The roles of local government managers in theory and practice: A centennial perspective. *Public Administration Review*, 75(1), (pp. 49-61).
- Roman, A. (2015). The roles assumed by public administrators: The link between administrative discretion and representation. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 39(4), (pp. 595-644).
- Weible, C. M., & Carter, D. P. (2017). Advancing policy process research at its overlap with public management scholarship and nonprofit and voluntary action studies. *Policy Studies Journal*, 45(1), (pp. 22-49).

No class (July 6)

Session 5: Rationales for public policy (July 8)

Become aware of how a problem is identified and defined as a policy issue.

Group presentation #1: Education

Required readings

- Weimer, D. L. & Vining, A. R. (2017). *Policy analysis: Concepts and practice*. Sixth edition. Routledge. Chapter 5, (pp. 71-112).
- Inquiring minds (2017). *Jerry Taylor – A Paid Climate Change Skeptic Switches Sides* [[Podcast](#)] October 30.

Additional readings

- Bethune, Z. A., & Korinek, A. (2020). *Covid-19 infection externalities: Trading off lives vs. livelihoods* (No. w27009). National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Dudley, G., Banister, D., & Schwanen, T. (2017). The rise of Uber and regulating the disruptive innovator. *The political quarterly*, 88(3), (pp. 492-499).
- Kertzer, J. D., & Zeitzoff, T. (2017). A bottom-up theory of public opinion about foreign policy. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(3), (pp. 543-558).
- Manes, E., & Tchetchik, A. (2018). The role of electronic word of mouth in reducing information asymmetry: An empirical investigation of online hotel booking. *Journal of Business Research*, 85, (pp. 185-196).
- Wlezien, C. (2017). Public opinion and policy representation: on conceptualization, measurement, and interpretation. *Policy Studies Journal*, 45(4), (pp. 561-582).

Session 6: Market policies (July 13)

Learn basic concepts such as agenda-setting, and the different market failures that justify government intervention. Identify the different market instruments that governments may use to satisfy policy goals.

Group presentation #2: Housing Policy

Required readings

- Mazzucato, M. (2016). From market fixing to market-creating: a new framework for innovation policy. *Industry and Innovation*, 23(2), (pp. 140-149).
- Birkland, T. A. (2019). *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts and models of public policy making*. Fifth edition. Routledge. Chapter 6, (pp. 169-181; 184-192).
- Weimer, D. L. & Vining, A. R. (2017). *Policy analysis: Concepts and practice*. Sixth edition. Routledge. Chapter 10, (pp. 209-235).

Additional readings

- Crépon, B. & Van Den Berg, G. J. (2016). Active labor market policies. *Annual Review of Economics*, 8, (pp. 521-546).
- Jenkins, J. A. & Monroe, N. W. (2016). On measuring legislative agenda-setting power. *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(1), (pp. 158-174).
- Rotemberg, M. (2019). Equilibrium effects of firm subsidies. *American Economic Review*, 109(10), (pp. 3475-3513).
- Muller, L., Lacroix, A., Lusk, J. L., & Ruffieux, B. (2017). Distributional impacts of fat taxes and thin subsidies. *The Economic Journal*, 127(604), (pp. 2066-2092).

Session 7: Rules & non-market policies (July 15)

Learn the different non-market instruments that governments may use to satisfy policy goals. Develop the ability to write an Op-Ed to bring attention to a relevant issue-

Group presentation #3: Welfare & Social Policy

Required readings

- Weimer, D. L., & Vining, A. R. (2017). *Policy analysis: Concepts and practice*. Sixth edition. Routledge. Chapter 10, (pp. 235-255).
- Harvard Kennedy School. *How to Write an Op-Ed or Column*. Retrieved from [here](#).
- Safire, William (2005). How to Read a Column. *New York Times*. January 24. Retrieved from [here](#).
- Stephens, Bret (2007). Tips for Aspiring Op-Ed Writers. *New York Times*. August 25. Retrieved from [here](#).

Additional readings

- Madonna, A. J. (2016). Confirmation wars, legislative time, and collateral damage: The impact of Supreme Court nominations on presidential success in the U.S. Senate. *Political Research Quarterly*, 69(4), (pp. 746-759).
- Morse, D. & Delbanco, E. (n.d.). *Examples of policy writing*. Retrieved from [here](#).
- Lazer, D. M., Baum, M. A., Benkler, Y., Berinsky, A. J., Greenhill, K. M., Menczer, F., ... & Zittrain, J. L. (2018). The science of fake news. *Science*, 359(6380), (pp. 1094-1096).

Session 8: Insurance policies & policy memos (July 20)

Explore strategies and mechanisms to make effective policy recommendations about real-world problems.

Group presentation #4: Healthcare

Required readings

- Weimer, D. L., & Vining, A. R. (2017). *Policy analysis: Concepts and practice*. Sixth edition. Routledge. Chapter 10, (pp. 255-262)
- Herman, L. (n.d.). *Policy memos*. Retrieved from [here](#).
- Hayden, M.E. (2015). [Kashmir's war, on drugs](#). *Foreign Policy*.

Additional readings

- Bhargava, S. & Loewenstein, G. (2015). Behavioral economics and public policy 102: Beyond nudging. *The American Economic Review*, 105(5), (pp. 396-401).
- Crow, D. & Jones, M. (2018). A guide to telling good stories that affect policy change. *Policy & Politics*, 46(2), (pp. 217–340).
- Ganong, P., Noel, P., & Vavra, J. (2020). U.S. unemployment insurance replacement rates during the pandemic. *Journal of Public Economics*, 191, (pp. 104-273).

Session 9: Strategy & adoption (July 22)

Understand the process from policy proposal to adoption.

Group presentation #5: Technology and Personal Data

Required readings

- Dente, B. (2014). *Understanding policy decisions*. First edition, (pp. 99-127).
- Weimer, D. L. & Vining, A. R. (2017). *Policy analysis: Concepts and practice*. Sixth edition. Routledge. Chapter 11, (pp. 274-285).
- Pulitzer Center. (2011). Too young to wed [\[Video\]](#) June 14.

Additional readings

- Freedman, L. (2015). *Strategy: A history*. Oxford University Press.
- Mergel, I. & Bretschneider, S. I. (2013). A three-stage adoption process for social media use in government. *Public administration review*, 73(3), (pp. 390-400).
- Minkman, E., van Buuren, M. W. & Bekkers, V. J. J. M. (2018). Policy transfer routes: an evidence-based conceptual model to explain policy adoption. *Policy Studies*, 39(2), (pp. 222-250).
- Kreitzer, R. J., Hamilton, A. J. & Tolbert, C. J. (2014). Does policy adoption change opinions on minority rights? The effects of legalizing same-sex marriage. *Political Research Quarterly*, 67(4), (pp. 795-808).
- Kugiel, P. (2017). *India's soft power: A new foreign policy strategy*. Taylor & Francis.

Session 10: Implementation (July 27)

Understand what happens to a policy after it has been formulated.

Group presentation #6: The Environment and Energy

Required readings

- Weimer, D. L. & Vining, A. R. (2017). *Policy analysis: Concepts and practice*. Sixth edition. Routledge. Chapter 12, (pp. 287-306).
- Kraft, M. E. & Furlong, S. R. (2019). *Public policy: Politics, analysis, and alternatives*. Seventh edition. Sage and CQ Press. Chapter 6, (pp. 181-192).
- The Impact (2018). *Denmark's paternity leave problem* [\[Podcast\]](#) December 14.

Additional readings:

- Hupe, P. & Saetren, H. (2015). Comparative implementation research: Directions and dualities. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*, 17(2), (pp. 93-102).
- Ku, M. (2016). Using a simulation-based learning environment for teaching and learning about complexity in public policy decision making. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 22(1), (pp. 49-66).
- Weimer, D. L. & Vining, A. R. (2017). *Policy analysis: Concepts and practice*. Sixth edition. Routledge. Chapter 17.

III. Wrapping up

Session 11: Policy evaluation (July 29)

Evaluate different criteria for judging the value of real-world policies.

Group presentation #7: Foreign Policy & Homeland Security

Required readings

- Kraft, M. E. & Furlong, S. R. (2019). *Public policy: Politics, analysis, and alternatives*. Seventh edition. Sage and CQ Press. Chapter 6, (pp. 192-212).
- Gov Innovator (2016). *Determining if your program is having a positive impact (i.e., impact evaluation 101): An interview with David Evans, Senior Economist, The World Bank* – Episode 122 [\[Podcast\]](#) May 2.
- Bovens, M. (2006). *The politics of policy evaluation*. In R.E. Goodin, (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*. Oxford, (pp. 323-332).
- Yglesias, Matthew (2019). *The push to break up Big Tech, explained*. Vox. May 3. Retrieved from [here](#).

Additional readings

- Athey, S. & Imbens, G. W. (2017). The state of applied econometrics: Causality and policy evaluation. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), (pp. 3-32).
- Birkland, T. A. (2019). *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts and models of public policy making*. Fifth edition. Routledge. Chapter 9, (pp. 272-277).
- Gertler, P. J., Martinez, S., Premand, P., Rawlings, L. B. & Vermeersch, C. M. (2016). *Impact evaluation in practice*. The World Bank.
- Van der Heijden, J., Kuhlmann, J., Lindquist, E., & Wellstead, A. (2021). Have policy process scholars embraced causal mechanisms? A review of five popular frameworks. *Public Policy and Administration*, 36(2), (pp. 163-186).

Session 12: The limits of policy making (August 3)

Classify government failures into four general categories and understand the factors that may inhibit a policy from being successful that are not controlled by policymakers.

Required readings

- Weimer, D. L. & Vining, A. R. (2017). *Policy analysis: Concepts and practice*. Sixth edition. Routledge. Chapter 8, (pp. 156-190).
- Rules of the game (2021). *Basic principles of direct democracy* [\[Podcast\]](#) March 21.
- Kolbert, Elizabeth (2018). Gospels of giving for the new gilded age. *The New Yorker*. August 20. Retrieved from [here](#).

Additional readings

- Bardach, E. (2012). *A practical guide for policy analysis*. CQ Press. Fourth edition. Appx. B.
- Ciccarone, G. (2020). Market versus government failures under risk and under uncertainty. *Journal of Public Finance and Public Choice*, 35(1), (pp. 81-106).
- Meyer, E. (2014). *The culture map: Breaking through the invisible boundaries of global business*. Public Affairs.
- Weimer, D. L. & Vining, A. R. (2017). *Policy analysis: Concepts and practice*. Sixth edition. Routledge. Chapter 9.