

PUBPOL 202: Politics and Policymaking

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2024-05-14

PUB AFF 6341

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(310) 825-7196

1 Course Information

- Lecture: TR 9:30-10:45 am, FOWLER A139
- Course Website: <https://bruinlearn.ucla.edu/courses/186882>
- Teaching Team:
 - Darin Christensen (darinc@luskin.ucla.edu)
 - Daniel Carnahan (danielcarnahan@g.ucla.edu)

2 Course Overview

Many MPP students are eager to reform policies and overhaul programs. Fair enough: we told you this was a good place to “become an agent of change” who can “transform the world to come.” This class is about how you can try to change politics and policymaking.

First, we need to be precise about what it means to affect change. We’ll use logic to think through why a particular approach may succeed or fail. We’ll use tools from causal inference to assess whether a theory of change is supported by evidence. In some cases, we’ll find that the existing evidence

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cannot tell us much without making heroic (read: incredible) assumptions.

Second, we'll use this social science toolkit to assess different approaches to influencing politics and policymaking. How, for example, can we persuade people or turn them out to vote? Can we change who runs for office, or how they use their time in office? Prepare yourself: the evidence will often be discouraging. It is hard to affect change.

Finally, I want you to apply what you're learning. Several assignments give you an opportunity craft plans to influence politics or policy and consider how you'll assess whether your plan worked.

3 Learning Objectives

By the end of the quarter, you should:

1. **Appreciate the inferential challenge:** why is it so hard to figure out what works?
2. **Differentiate methods:** how do different methods try to evaluate what works, and what do they ask us to assume?
3. **Assess evidence:** what do we know about the effectiveness of different approaches for influencing politics and policymaking?
4. **Apply insights:** how can you use (and expand) the existing evidence in your own efforts to influence policy?

4 Assessment

Participation (10%)

I expect you to be in class and section and engage in both. Your peers (and I) benefit from hearing your perspective, and you theirs. Your participation grade will not track attendance;

rather, it will be assessed by the instructor and TAs based on your engagement in class, section, office hours, and on our course website.

Problem Set (10%)

I will circulate a single problem set to solidify your understanding of some social science concepts that we will use during the course.

Due date for problem set: 4/18

Midterm Exam (15%)

An in-class midterm exam will take place on 5/9 at 9:30 am.

Information Campaign (25%)

Part I: Your group will propose a campaign to persuade voters about a topic of your choosing.¹ Applying insights from the course readings (and other research), you will need to explain (read: justify) (1) your proposed messages, (2) your proposed delivery method, and (3) your decision about what population of voters to target with the campaign. *Each group will submit a 5-page memo describing their campaign.*

Due date for part I: 05/05

Part II: You will review and present *another group's* campaign.² Your short presentation should focus on (1) outlining the proposal and *constructively* critiquing its theory of change; and (2) proposing a study to evaluate its effectiveness. *Each group will prepare a 5-7-minute presentation.*

Due date for part II: 5/14

¹ Your group should be 4-5 students. All students in a group should be in the same section.

² We will randomly select some groups to present during section. Others will be asked to record their presentations given limited class time.

Reform Strategy (25%)

Common Policy objective: Increase the supply of affordable housing in the United States

Maximum Annual Budget: \$1 million

Part I: Your group will propose a strategy for accomplishing the common policy objective that does not exceed the maximum annual budget of \$1 million.

We are not looking for a list of possible approaches. Rather, we want you to argue for a specific approach, explain why you expect it to be effective based on existing evidence, and identify dynamics that could undermine your campaign. You will need to identify what political actor(s) your strategy targets (e.g., a US senator, city councilor, group of voters), explain how you will influence their behavior, and articulate how that behavioral change satisfies the policy objective. Each group will submit a completed grant template and ~~prepare a 7-10-minute presentation.~~

Due dates for part I: grant template, 5/31; ~~presentation, 5/28.~~

Part II: *Each student* will be randomly assigned three (anonymized) grant proposals. You will review these proposals' value-for-money and decide how to allocate a budget of \$1 million. You can award the full budget to one proposal or, alternatively, divide the funds among multiple proposals. You will need to justify your allocation based on the arguments presented in the proposals and your own knowledge of the effectiveness of different approaches to influencing politics and policymaking. *Each student will submit a memo (max: 2 pages) describing their allocation.*

Due date for part II: 6/7

Final Exam (15%)

A cumulative final exam will take place on 6/10 at 3 pm.

5 Course Policies

Statement of Affirmation

I intend to make this classroom a space that affirms all identities and perspectives. Regardless of background, all students have a right to an equitable education. I encourage all members to embrace and learn from the diversity in this classroom, school, and university. I want to highlight that discrimination, harassment, or forms of hateful conduct will not be tolerated in our learning environment. If you have any recommendations about how to make our environment more inclusive, please let me know.

Note-taking

Computers, tablets, and phones may not be used during class. This does not apply to students with a relevant accommodation through CAE. You can contact me to request an exception to this policy.

Office Hours

Each member of the teaching team will hold drop-in office hours. The schedule and location for those office hours will be posted to the course website. We are also available for one-on-one meetings; please email to schedule a time.

Extensions

You should contact your TA at least 24 hours before any due date to request an extension and provide cause. Makeup exams are generally not permitted.

Re-grades

If you feel that your grade on an assignment does not reflect the quality of your work, you may appeal through the following procedure:

- Write a short (one-page) memo that explains, in as much detail as possible, why you should receive a different grade.
- Send that memo and your graded assignment to the TAs *within 1 week of the assignment being returned* and schedule a meeting to discuss.
- If you and the TA who graded the assignment cannot reach an agreement, the assignment will be re-graded by another member of the teaching team.
- This second grade will be the final grade assigned, and it can be lower than your original grade.

Academic Accommodations

Academic Accommodations. Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the [Center for Accessible Education](#) (CAE) at (310) 825-1501 or in person at Murphy Hall A255. Students should contact the CAE by Week 2 as notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information visit <http://www.cae.ucla.edu>. **Students with accommodations related to exams will take their midterm and final exams at the CAE Testing Center.**

Academic Integrity

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. I encourage you to review the [University's policies regarding academic honesty](#).

Specific rules for this course:

- You may collaborate on the **problem set**. However, you must write every line of text or code that appears in the assignment you submit. In short, never copy and paste another student's work, even if you worked together.
- Written work must be properly cited. Please review [UCLA's definition of plagiarism](#). You may not re-use material that was submitted in a different class without instructor permission.
- You may use generative AI to help with coding or to proofread assignments. You are ultimately responsible for the content you submit: if you submit work that does not cite valid sources (i.e., plagiarizes) or is factually incorrect, you will be held responsible.
- The **exams** will be "closed book." You may only consult the TA or Professor during exams.

Religious Observances

If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with your TA before the end of Week 2 to discuss accommodations.

6 Student Resources

Mental Health

There are resources on campus for students to help with study habits, anxiety, stress, and depression. Please check out the [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\) center at UCLA](#).³ In addition to counseling and other psychological and mental health services, they provide additional resources such as readings on dealing with stress and anxiety, group counseling sessions, mindfulness trainings, and other behavioral services. CAPS services are often covered by UC SHIP.

³ Crisis counseling is also available 24 hours/day at (310) 825-0768.

Title IX Resources

UCLA prohibits gender discrimination, sexual harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. If you have experienced any of these, there are a variety of campus resources to assist you, including a confidential hotline where you can talk to someone 24/7: (310) 825-0768. International students have access to the same services at the Title IX office as non-international students.

Please note that faculty and TAs are responsible employees, which means faculty, TAs, and other UC employees are required under the UC Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment to inform the Title IX Coordinator — a non-confidential resource — should they become aware that you or any other student has experienced sexual violence or gender discrimination.

Confidential Resources: You can make an appointment with a [CARE Advocate](#) or call their 24/7 hotline: (888) 200-6665. CARE offers free and confidential services for students, staff and faculty impacted by sexual assault, relationship violence and stalking. CAPS also offers confidential crisis counseling and 24/7 support. You can also receive confidential off-campus emergency medical services, advocacy, and counseling at the Rape Treatment Center UCLA Medical Center Santa Monica. Their 24/7 hotline is (424) 259-7208.

Non-Confidential Reporting: You can report sexual violence or sexual harassment directly to the University's Title IX Office, 2255 Murphy Hall, titleix@conet.ucla.edu, (310) 206-3417. Reports to law enforcement can be made to UCPD at (310) 825-1491. Please note that any appointment you make with a Title IX counselor is NOT confidential.

Immigration

The [Bruin Resource Center's \(BRC\) Undocumented Student Program](#) supports undocumented students and students who are part of a mixed-status family.

Even if you are not undocumented, you may be able to get legal help for a family member. The USP office provides immigration legal services to students and their family members through a partnership with the [UC Undocumented Legal Services Center](#).

7 Course Schedule

Links to materials are provided on the course website. I expect to update the readings during the quarter, so treat this schedule as provisional. If we assign any cases, these will have to be purchased.

How do we predict and attribute change?

C1: Game theory

Ch 12. Goolsbee A, Levitt S, Syverson C (2016). *Microeconomics*. Macmillan Learning. *Note: Ignore the sections on “Mixed Strategies” and “Repeated Games.”*

(Optional) Ch 1-3. Kreps DM (1990). *Game theory and economic modelling*. Oxford University Press.

C2: Causal inference

Ch 3 & 9. Bueno de Mesquita E, Fowler A (2021). *Thinking clearly with data: A guide to quantitative reasoning and analysis*. Princeton University Press.

(Optional) Ch. 3. Gertler PJ, Martinez S, Premand P, Rawlings LB, Vermeersch CM (2016). *Impact evaluation in practice*. World Bank Publications.

C3: Randomized experiments

Ch 11. Bueno de Mesquita and Fowler (2021).

(Optional) Ch. 4. Gertler et al. (2016).

Change through beliefs

C4: Models of persuasion

Druckman JN, McGrath MC (2019). “The evidence for motivated reasoning in climate change preference formation.” *Nature Climate Change*, 9(2), 111-119.

Ch 1 & 7. Coppock A (2023). *Persuasion in Parallel: How Information Changes Minds about Politics*. University of Chicago Press.

C5: Persuading voters

Kalla JL, Broockman DE (2023). “Which Narrative Strategies Durably Reduce Prejudice? Evidence from Field and Survey Experiments Supporting the Efficacy of Perspective-Getting.” *American Journal of Political Science*, 67(1), 185-204.

Focus on Section 6. Lieberman ES, Posner DN, Tsai LL (2014). “Does information lead to more active citizenship? Evidence from an education intervention in rural Kenya.” *World Development*, 60, 69-83.

C6: Combatting misinformation

Vraga EK, Bode L (2020). "Defining misinformation and understanding its bounded nature: Using expertise and evidence for describing misinformation." *Political Communication*, 37(1), 136-144.

Nyhan B, Porter E, Wood TJ (2022). "Time and skeptical opinion content erode the effects of science coverage on climate beliefs and attitudes." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(26).

Carey JM, Guess AM, Loewen PJ, Merkley E, Nyhan B, Phillips JB, Reifler J (2022). "The ephemeral effects of fact-checks on COVID-19 misperceptions in the United States, Great Britain and Canada." *Nature Human Behaviour*, 6(2), 236-243.

(Optional) Nyhan B (2020). "Facts and Myths about Misperceptions." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 34(3), 220-36.

(Optional) Badrinathan S (2021). "Educative interventions to combat misinformation: Evidence from a field experiment in India." *American Political Science Review*, 115(4), 1325-1341.

Change through elections

C7: Turnout

Gerber AS, Green DP (2017). "Field experiments on voter mobilization: An overview of a burgeoning literature." *Handbook of economic field experiments*, 1, 395-438.

Citrin J, Green DP, Levy M (2014). "The effects of voter ID notification on voter turnout: Results from a large-scale field experiment." *Election Law Journal*, 13(2), 228-242.

(Focus on Section II) Zhang ER (2022). "Questioning Questions in the Law of Democracy: What the Debate over Voter ID Laws' Effects Teaches about Asking the Right Questions." *UCLA Law Review*.

C8: Political Selection

Besley T (2005). "Political selection." *Journal of Economic perspectives*, 19(3), 43-60.

Bonica A (2020). "Why Are There So Many Lawyers in Congress?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 45(2), 253-289.

Karpowitz CF, Monson JQ, Preece JR (2017). "How to elect more women: Gender and candidate success in a field experiment." *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(4), 927-943.

(Optional Review). Gulzar S (2021). "Who enters politics and why?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24, 253-275.

(Optional) Casey K, Kamara AB, Meriggi NF (2021). "An experiment in candidate selection." *American Economic Review*, 111(5), 1575-1612.

(Optional) Gulzar S, Khan MY (2021). "'Good Politicians': Experimental Evidence on Motivations for Political Candidacy and Government Performance." Available at SSRN 3826067.

C9: Political Accountability

Ch 1. Vaishnav M (2017). *When crime pays: money and muscle in Indian politics*. Yale University Press, New Haven.

Dunning T et al. (2019). "Voter information campaigns and political accountability: Cumulative findings from a preregistered meta-analysis of coordinated trials." *Science Advances*, 5(7), eaaw2612.

Bidwell K, Casey K, Glennerster R (2020). "Debates: Voting and expenditure responses to political communication." *Journal of Political Economy*, 128(8), 2880-2924.

C10: Midterm (5/7)

Change through legislation

C11: Evidence-based policymaking

Intro, Ch 7-8. Stone DA (2012). *Policy paradox: the art of political decision making*. Third Edition. W.W. Norton.

Coughlin CN, King NM (2020). “The Stories We Tell: Narrative, Policymaking, and the Right to Try.” *Wake Forest Journal of Law & Policy*, 11, 17.

DellaVigna S, Kim W, Linos E (2022). “Bottlenecks for Evidence Adoption.” *NBER Working Paper*.

(Optional) Mehmood S, Naseer S, Chen DL (2021). “Training policymakers in econometrics.” *NBER Working Paper*. [VoxDev brief](#).

(Optional) Hjort J, Moreira D, Rao G, Santini JF (2021). “How research affects policy: Experimental evidence from 2,150 Brazilian municipalities.” *American Economic Review*, 111(5), 1442-80. [VoxDev brief](#).

C12: Lobbying

Hertel-Fernandez A, Mildenerger M, Stokes LC (2019). “Legislative staff and representation in Congress.” *American Political Science Review*, 113(1), 1-18.

Camp MJ, Schwam-Baird M, Zelizer A (2023). “The Limits of Lobbying: Null Effects from Four Field Experiments in Two State Legislatures.” *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, 1-12.

(Optional Review) De Figueiredo JM, Richter BK (2014). “Advancing the empirical research on lobbying.” *Annual review of political science*, 17, 163-185.

(Optional) Grose CR, Lopez P, Sadhwani S, Yoshinaka A (2022). “Social lobbying.” *The Journal of Politics*, 84(1), 367-382.

Change through movements

C13: Civil resistance

Ch 2. Chenoweth E (2021). *Civil resistance: What everyone needs to know*. Oxford University Press.

Madestam A, Shoag D, Veuger S, Yanagizawa-Drott D (2013). “Do Political Protests Matter? Evidence from the Tea Party Movement.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 128(4), 1633-1685.

Wasow O (2020). “Agenda seeding: How 1960s black protests moved elites, public opinion and voting.” *American Political Science Review*, 114(3), 638-659.

C14: Boycotts and politicized consumption

Peña PA, Salazar S, Serrano C (2022). “Trump’s wall and gourmet coffee sales: The effect of a consumer boycott in Mexico.” *Economics & Politics*, 34(1), 113-141.

Hainmueller J, Hiscox MJ, Sequeira S (2015). “Consumer demand for fair trade: Evidence from a multistore field experiment.” *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 97(2), 242-256.

Dragusanu R, Giovannucci D, Nunn N (2014). “The Economics of Fair Trade.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 28(3), 217-36. [Vox brief](#).

Malhotra N, Monin B, Tomz M (2019). “Does Private Regulation Preempt Public Regulation?” *American Political Science Review*, 113(1), 19-37.

C15: Change through bureaucracy

Ch 3 and 4. World Bank (2003). *World development report 2004: making services work for poor people*. The World Bank.

Banerjee A, Duflo E (2006). "Addressing Absence." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20(1), 117-132.

Khan AQ, Khwaja AI, Olken BA (2016). "Tax farming redux: Experimental evidence on performance pay for tax collectors." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 131(1), 219-271.

Blair G et al. (2021). "Community policing does not build citizen trust in police or reduce crime in the Global South." *Science*, 374(6571), eabd3446. [EGAP policy brief](#).

(Optional) Christensen D, Dube O, Haushofer J, Siddiqi B, Voors M (2020). "Building Resilient Health Systems: Experimental Evidence from Sierra Leone and The 2014 Ebola Outbreak." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 136*(2), 1145-1198. [VoxDev brief](#).

C16: Final Review

Final Exam (6/10 at 3 pm; Location: TBD)