

POLISCI 1 – The Science of Politics

Course Information

Fall Quarter 2025

5 Units

Monday-Wednesday 9:30am-10:50am

Location Hewlett 201

Course Instructors

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Course Teaching Assistants

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Jiehan Liu
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Vladimir Novikov
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Course Overview

In this class, we face a heroic task: making sense of the messy, contradictory, and immensely influential political world. Politics seemingly affects all aspects of contemporary life, from the institutional setup of our society to discourses animating public debates and private conversations. Democracy and autocracy, Congress and the judiciary, partisanship and polarization, war, inequality, identity, the environment... Political science tries to understand the essential patterns behind macro-structures and micro-behaviors alike, employing the scientific method, theoretically grounded and empirically tested. This course will survey a diverse array of topics and equip students with fundamental analytical skills.

Course Timeline (Short Version)

Week 1 – Introduction

Session 1.a **What is Political Science?**

Session 1.b **What's in a Science: Science as Method and Culture**

Week 2 – The Gender Gap

Session 2.a **Examining the Gender Gap in Representation**

Session 2.b **Do Women Represent Differently?**

Week 3 – Economic Inequality

Session 3.a **Why Does Inequality Persist in Democracies?**

Session 3.b **The Politics of Income Redistribution**

Week 4 – War: Causes and Consequences

Session 4.a **Interstate War**

Session 4.b **Civil War**

Week 5 – Midterm & Game-Theory Primer

Session 5.a **Midterm Exam**

Session 5.b **Intro to Game Theory & Collective Action**

Week 6 – Political Institutions

Session 6.a **The Emergence of the State**

Session 6.b **Institutions and Growth**

Week 7 – Democracy and Representative Institutions

Session 7.a **Democracy**

Session 7.b **Electoral Politics**

Week 8 – Political Regimes: Democracy vs. Autocracy

Session 8.a **Partisanship & Polarization**

Session 8.b **Autocracy**

Week 9 – Identity & Politics

Session 9.a **Identity & Politics in the US**

Session 9.b **Identity & Politics Non-US**

Week 10 – Environment

Session 10.a **The Politics of the Environment**

Session 10.a **Wrap-up**

Course Learning Goals



Recognize how politics impacts society, determining key outcomes across policy and social domains.



Identify fundamental political patterns shaping the functioning of institutions as well as individual and collective behavior.



Evaluate theoretical arguments from political science studies, understanding their building blocks and implications.



Assess the validity of empirical evidence supporting scientific hypotheses, identifying alternative explanations and pitfalls.

Course Pre-requisites

No formal requirements. An enthusiastic and curious attitude is always welcome!

Evaluations

- **Weekly Preparation**

Each week, there will be material to review in preparation for class. This may include academic papers, news articles, reports, podcasts, or YouTube videos. All **materials indicated with an asterisk * should be considered mandatory.**

- **Lecture Participation**

Some class time will be devoted to conversations and activities about the course content. Students are expected to engage actively. **Attendance is mandatory and graded.**

- **Section Participation**

Students will participate in a weekly section, led by a TA, which will cover the week's topic, offer opportunities for more in-depth discussion, activities, and debriefing about assignments and exams. **Section attendance is mandatory and graded.**

- **Weekly Homeworks (due Tuesdays at 11:59pm)**

Each week students will complete homework based on the reading. Homework assignments facilitate preparation for class and for the exams. Homework will be graded on a credit/half-credit/no-credit basis. Details will be available on Canvas.

- **Midterm and Final Exam**

On week 5 and during finals week, students will take the midterm and final exams. The exams will draw from all course materials, including lectures, section activities, readings and homework. The midterm will cover all topics from week 1 to 5. The final will cover topics from week 1 to 10, with an emphasis on weeks 6 through 10. More information will be provided in class.

Grading

Lecture Participation	15%
Section Participation	15%
Homework	20%
In-class Midterm Exam	25%
In-person Final Exam	25%

Letter Grade Conversion Scale												
F	D-	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A	A+
>60	60-62	63-66	67-69	70-72	73-76	77-79	80-82	83-86	87-89	90-92	93-97	98+

Course Policies

Absences

The course is highly interactive, and participation is key to its teaching approach and learning objectives. As such, **attendance** in both lectures and weekly sections is **mandatory and graded**. Some absences may be excused on a case-by-case basis. Students with excused absences are responsible for notifying the teaching team and completing relevant make-up assignments. If you must miss a lecture, please email the instructors and your TA as soon as you know you will be absent, and include any appropriate documentation. If you must miss a section, please email your TA. If you miss more than two classes - even if they are excused absences - you **MUST** schedule a meeting with one of the instructors or your TA. This policy applies to absences related to disability and to varsity athletics (see the relevant policies below).

Extensions

The course follows a steady pace and assignments are structured to even out work and ensure that students get the most out of classes. Therefore it is important for students to complete homework on time. On rare occasions we may grant extensions requested in advance of the due date based on students' personal circumstances.

Re-Grading

Each graded assessment has clearly stated expectations and grading rubrics shared across all sections to ensure consistency and fairness. As such, the margin for re-grading will be slim. However, students who believe that their work deserves a major grade change (letter-grade), can contact the instructors to discuss their grade and in rare cases may request a re-grade with the understanding that the final grade may go up or down.

Creating a respectful environment

This course encourages lively and earnest discussion on political topics. As such, it is inevitable that people may disagree and hold starkly different opinions. However, without mutual respect, there is no hope for meaningful intellectual exchanges and conversations. We will briefly discuss classroom norms in our first session, but here are a couple of general guidelines we would like to adhere to: listen attentively to others, signal your wish to enter the conversation, critique ideas and not persons.

Inclusivity

As an instructor, we wish to recognize, celebrate and leverage a multitude of views and identities, coming together both in the syllabus and in the classroom. Our course strives to include a diverse array of authors, opinions, cultural and intellectual backgrounds. Similarly, our assessment strategy offers a diverse structure of graded activities, recognizing that students may hold different strengths, due to individual and/or cultural differences.

Using Technology in the Classroom

During most of class time, including lectures, presentations, and class discussion, the use of laptops and electronics is allowed for viewing course-related material only. During specific activities, students may be asked to close laptops to focus on discussion. The use of laptops and other electronic devices during exams will not be permitted.

Generative AI

Depending on the context, artificial intelligence (AI) can either enhance and impede learning. There are times when these tools might provide us with new ideas and understandings (e.g., brainstorming or getting feedback). At other points, practicing skills and synthesizing ideas on our own is crucial for the learning process.

Given the foundational nature of this class, the use of GenAI (LLMs, chatbox, generative writing tools) is **not allowed**, unless explicitly integrated in the activity. Most of the assignments (including reading assignments) are designed to help you develop and deepen critical thinking and reading skills, and using GenAI will defeat the purpose of these assignments. In some assignments later in the quarter, we will explore how to employ GenAI tools effectively and allow their guided use.

For this class, all assignments should be written in your own words. Just as you cannot take credit for others' writing in your assignments, you cannot use paraphrasing software ("spinbots") or AI writing software (like ChatGPT) and submit the output as your own. Doing so in this is a violation of the [Stanford Honor Code](#). At the beginning of the quarter, we will identify examples of AI tools and discuss what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, and academic dishonesty. This will help to ensure that we are all on the same page about the policies for this course and how they connect to our learning outcomes.

Academic Integrity

This class aims at creating a supportive and engaging learning environment.

Academic integrity is vital to this goal, both in spirit and in practice.

Please review [Stanford's Honor Code](#), and [documentation and citation resources](#) from the Hume Center for Writing and Speaking. When in doubt, contact your section leader.

Disability Accommodations

Students who may need academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). SDRC staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the SDRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations.

The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (723-1066). For more information, refer to: <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae>

If you already have an Academic Accommodation Letter, we invite you to share your letter with us. Academic Accommodation Letters should be shared at the earliest possible opportunity so we may partner with you and OAE to arrange appropriate accommodations and identify any potential barriers to your full participation in the course and success in meeting the learning objectives.

Student Athletes

Student athletes who anticipate challenges in being able to participate in class or submit assignments on time should speak to a course instructor or teaching assistant as soon as possible about available alternatives or allowances. Students who will miss class due to travel and competition should share their schedule with instructors and TA at the beginning of the quarter and arrange appropriate make-up assignments.

Title IX

Title IX is a federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and gender, including sexual harassment and sexual violence, in educational programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. Stanford is committed to providing a campus environment that is free of such discrimination. If you are experiencing a Title IX-related concern, please be aware of the following confidential and non-confidential resources available to Stanford students.

Please note that many employees of Stanford, including course instructors and teaching assistants, are required to report Title IX-related concerns to the Title IX Office.

Confidential Resource:

The Confidential Support Team (CST) is reachable via a 24-7 hotline at 650-725-9955 for urgent support for at 650-736-6933 for non-urgent questions and appointments.

Non Confidential Resource:

The Title IX Office is reachable at 650-397-4955 or via email at titleix@stanford.edu. The Office of Sexual Assault and Relationship Abuse Education and Response (SARA) is reachable at 650-725-1056 and saraoffice@stanford.edu.

Much more information, including full lists of both confidential and non-confidential resources, is available online at: sexualviolencesupport.stanford.edu, relationshipviolencesupport.stanford.edu, transgendersupport.stanford.edu.

Academic Support and Learning Resources

If you find yourself struggling with any components of the course (readings, assignments, participation, etc.), please reach out to one of the instructors or consult the list of campus resources below.

- [Writing tutors](#) from the Hume Center for Writing and Speaking
- [Academic coaches](#) from the Center for Teaching and Learning
- [Study halls](#), organized by the Center for Teaching and Learning
- [Study Tips and Tools](#), from the Center for Teaching and Learning
- [Undergraduate Advising Directors](#), Academic Advising
- [Well-Being services](#), including [well-being coaches](#), Vaden Health Center
- [Subject Matter Tutoring](#), Center for Teaching and Learning
- [Language Conversation Partner Program](#), Center for Teaching and Learning
- [English as a Second Language \(ESL\) courses](#) for international graduate students
- [Student Tech Resources & Support](#), includes support for personal devices and Stanford services

Course Schedule with Readings

September 22nd – Session 1.A – What is Political Science?

September 24th – Session 1.B – What’s in a Science: Science as a Method and a Culture

Readings

- *Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder, 2018. “What is Science?” *Principles of Comparative Politics*, pp. 15-27; 39-40.
- *Pan, Jennifer, Xu Xu, Yiqing Xu, 2024. “Disguised Repression: Targeting Opponents with Non-Political Crimes to Undermine Dissent” *Journal of Politics* (accepted version; with annotations)

September 29th – Session 2.A – Examining the Gender Gap in Representation

Readings

- *Lawless, Jennifer. “Female Candidates and Legislators.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015): 34-366
- *short selection (pgs. 307-310) from Dovi, Suzanne. “Theorizing Women’s Representation in the United States. *Politics and Gender* 3 (2007) 297-319
- Prillaman, Soledad Artiz. "Strength in numbers: how women's groups close India's political gender gap." *American Journal of Political Science* 67.2 (2023): 390-410.

October 1st – Session 2.B – Do Women Make Better Representatives?

Readings

- *Thomsen, Danielle M. Sanders, Bailey K. “Gender Differences in Legislator Responsiveness.” *Perspectives on Politics*. 2020; 18(4):1017-1030
- Pamela Ban, Justin Grimmer, Jaclyn Kaslovsky and Emily West (2022), "How Does the Rising Number of Women in the U.S. Congress Change Deliberation? Evidence from House Committee Hearings", *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*: Vol. 17: No. 3, pp 355-387

October 6th – Session 3.A – Why Does Inequality Persist in Democracies?

Readings

- *Bonica, Adam, et al. "Why hasn't democracy slowed rising inequality?." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27.3 (2013): 103-124.
- *Scheve, Kenneth, and David Stasavage. "Wealth inequality and democracy." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20.1 (2017): 451-468.

October 8th – Session 3.B – The Politics of Income Redistribution

Readings

- *Kasara, Kimuli, and Pavithra Suryanarayan. "Bureaucratic capacity and class voting: Evidence from across the world and the United States." *The Journal of Politics* 82.3 (2020): 1097-1112.
- Rueda, David, and Daniel Stegmueller. "The externalities of inequality: Fear of crime and preferences for redistribution in Western Europe." *American Journal of Political Science* 60.2 (2016): 472-489.

October 13th – Session 4.A – Interstate War

Readings

- *Fearon, J. D. (1995). Rationalist Explanations for War. *International Organization*, 49(3), 379–414.
- *Tomz, Michael R., and Jessica LP Weeks. "Public opinion and the democratic peace." *American political science review* 107.4 (2013): 849-865.
- Sagan, Scott D. "The causes of nuclear weapons proliferation." *Annual Review of Political Science* 14.1 (2011): 225-244.

October 15th – Session 4.B – Civil War

Readings

- *Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. "Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war." *American political science review* 97.1 (2003): 75-90.
- Davenport, Christian, et al. "The consequences of contention: Understanding the aftereffects of political conflict and violence." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22.1 (2019): 361-377.

October 20th – Session 5.A – Midterm Exam

October 22nd – Session 5.B – Intro to Game Theory & Collective Action

Readings

- Handout available on canvas

October 27th – Session 6.A – The Emergence of the State

Readings

- *Acharya, Avidit, and Alexander Lee. *The cartel system of states: an economic theory of international politics*. Oxford University Press, 2022. Chapter 1.
- *Grzymala-Busse, Anna. "Tilly goes to church: the religious and medieval roots of European state fragmentation." *American Political Science Review* 118.1 (2024): 88-107.

October 29th – Session 6.B – Institutions and Growth

Readings

- *Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. "The colonial origins of comparative development: An empirical investigation." *American economic review* 91.5 (2001): 1369-1401.
- Leonardi, Robert, Raffaella Y. Nanetti, and Robert D. Putnam. *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton university press, 2001. Chapter 1.

November 3rd – Session 7.A – Democracy

Readings

- *Selected excerpts from writings about democracy
- *Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder, 2018. "Chapter 5: Democracy and Dictatorship: Conceptualization and Measurement" in *Principles of Comparative Politics*

November 5th – Session 7.B – Modern Democracy and Party Systems

Readings

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- *Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder, 2018. "Chapter 11: Problems with Group Decision-Making" *Principles of Comparative Politics* (pgs. 409-417; 420-422; 434-442)
- *Carey, John M. and Simon Hix "The Electoral Sweet Spot: Low-Magnitude Proportional Electoral Systems" *American Journal of Political Science* 55.2 (2011): 383-397
- Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder, 2018. "Chapter 13: Elections and Electoral Systems" in *Principles of Comparative Politics*
- Salas, Christian, Frances McCall Rosenbluth, and Ian Shapiro "Political Parties and Public Policy" *Nomos* 63 Democratic Failure (2020): pp. 180-204

November 10th – Session 8.A – Partisanship and Polarization

Readings

- *McCarty, Nolan *Polarization: What Everyone Needs to Know* Oxford: Oxford University Press 2019, Ch. 2 (pgs. 8-21)
- *Iyengar and Westwood "Fear and Loathing Across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization" *American Journal of Political Science* 59.3 (2015): 690-707
- Westwood, Sean J., et al. "Current research overstates American support for political violence." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119.12 (2022): e2116870119.

November 12th – Session 8.B – Autocracy

Readings

- *Blaydes, Lisa. *Elections and distributive politics in Mubarak's Egypt*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. Chapter 1.
- *Magaloni, Beatriz. "Credible power-sharing and the longevity of authoritarian rule." *Comparative political studies* 41.4-5 (2008): 715-741.
- Svobik, Milan W. *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press, 2012. Chapter 1.

November 17th – Session 9.A – Identity Inside the US

Readings

- *Anoll, Allison P., Lauren D. Davenport, and Rachel Lienesch "Racial Contexts in American Political Behavior" *American Political Science Review* 119.3 (2025): 1497-1513
- Davenport, Lauren. "The fluidity of racial classifications." *Annual Review of Political Science* 23.1 (2020): 221-240.

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- Jefferson, Hakeem. "The politics of respectability and Black Americans' punitive attitudes." *American Political Science Review* 117.4 (2023): 1448-1464.

November 19th – Session 9.B – Identity Outside the US

Readings

- *Posner, Daniel N., 2004. "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi." *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 529–545.
- *Fouka, Vasiliki. "State policy and immigrant integration." *Annual Review of Political Science* 27 (2023).

Thanksgiving Break

December 1st – Session 10.A – The Politics of the Environment

Readings

- *Kennard, Amanda. "My Brother's Keeper: Other-regarding preferences and concern for global climate change." *The Review of International Organizations* 16.2 (2021): 345-376.
- *McQueen, Alison. "The wages of fear?." *Philosophy and climate change* 152 (2021).
- Mach, Katharine J., et al. "Climate as a risk factor for armed conflict." *Nature* 571.7764 (2019): 193-197.

December 3rd – Session 10.B – Wrap-up and Review

Readings

TBD

December 8th – 12th – Finals Week