



NYU

**ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE**

UPADM-GP 101

The Politics of Public Policy

Spring 2023

Instructor Information

- Kristina Arakelyan
- Email: kristina.arakelyan@nyu.edu
- Office Hours: by appointment

Course Information

- Class Meeting Times: Tuesdays, 1/24 – 5/9, 6:20 – 8:50 pm
- Class Location: 194 Mercer, Room 204

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the political institutions and the processes through which public policy is made and implemented in the United States. We begin by exploring the Constitutional foundations of public policy in the U.S. and proceed to examine the enduring and changing roles of political institutions—predominantly at the federal but also state and municipal levels—in shaping policy; and, we analyze the structural, political, and social factors supporting and hindering those political institutions. We also look at how citizens, residents, interests groups, lobbyists, and the media influence both public policy and political institutions, discussing social and economic power dynamics—both emerging and entrenched. In the process, we analyze voting, welfare, health, education, labor, fiscal and monetary, national security, environmental, and trade policy.

Course and Learning Objectives

1. To understand the politics of the policy process
2. To develop conceptual tools to analyze and assess political institutions
3. To understand the powers and limitations of political institutions to shape policy
4. To understand the effect of the structure of political institutions on policy
5. To understand the role of individuals and organized interests in the policy process
6. To deconstruct and analyze federal, state, and local policies

Learning Assessment Table

Course Learning Objective Covered	Corresponding Assignment Title
#1, 3	Op-Ed
#1, 2, 3	Midterm Exam
#1, 2	Group Policy Presentation
#1, 3, 4	Final Exam
#1, 2, 4	Class Participation

Materials and Assignments

All of the readings listed on the syllabus are found online (hyperlinked in the syllabus and on Brightspace).

Course assignments will include:

- **Op-Ed (15%):** Students will write an op-ed on a policy topic. **Due: Monday, February 13 (week 4) via Brightspace by 11:59 pm ET**
- **Midterm Exam (20%):** In class exam covering the material up to this date. **Date: Tuesday, March 7 (week 7)**
- **Group Policy Presentation (20%):** Students will work in groups to argue in support of a municipal bill (in class presentation). **Date: Tuesday, April 25 (week 13)**
- **Final Exam (30%):** The final exam will take place during finals period. It will be cumulative, but focused on the second half of the course. **Final exam date: TBD**
- **Class Participation (15%):** You are expected to be prepared for class discussions and to participate fully. You are encouraged to share your experiences relevant to the topics and cases being explored. Not attending class (barring excused absences) and failing to participate will hurt your participation grade.

Attendance Policy:

Since we only meet once a week, I expect everyone to attend every class. If for any reason you will be unable to attend class, please let me know in advance.

If you are feeling unwell, please rest and focus on your health. Absences on account of illness, quarantine, travel disruptions, and other extenuating circumstances will, of course, be excused.

Late Policy:

Please let me know in advance if you are having difficulty completing an assignment on time so that we can discuss your situation. Assignments that are late without notification will automatically be downgraded 10% per day.

Syllabus Modification:

I reserve the right to modify the syllabus based on input, class pace, and other factors as the term progresses.

NYU Brightspace:

Class announcements, updated assignments, syllabus modifications, etc., will all be made via NYU Brightspace, so please check the website regularly.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by [Wagner's Academic Code](#). All Wagner students have already read and signed the [Wagner Academic Oath](#). Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at NYU

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities \(CSD\) website](#) and click on the Reasonable Accommodations and How to Register tab or call or email CSD at (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

NYU's Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

[NYU's Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#) states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.

NYU/Wagner Grading Policy

Per the Wagner grading policy, students will receive grades according to the Wagner grading scale. This information is [posted here](#).

Course Schedule

Readings are due the day they are listed

Week 1: Tuesday, January 24: Let's talk policy!

Learning Objective:

- This week, we will cover political culture, looking at education and welfare policy. We will discuss what policy means to individuals and communities as well as municipal, state, and federal institutions. We will also talk about how we learn of policy changes, how we formulate opinions on these changes, and how we might influence policy. Lastly, we will

begin to look at public policy rhetoric, to which we will regularly return throughout the course.

Readings:

- Inaugural Address of John F. Kennedy. Retrieved [here](#).
- Carnegie, Megan. (8 August 2022). Generation Z Looks a Lot Like Millennials on Key Social and Political Issues. BBC. Retrieved [here](#).
- Wike, Richard, et al. (6 December 2022). Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier. Pew Research Center. Retrieved [here](#).
- Kolbert, Elizabeth. (27 December 2021). How Politics Got So Polarized. New Yorker. Retrieved [here](#).
- Rose, Joel and Liz Baker. (3 January 2022). 6 in 10 Americans say U.S. democracy is in crisis as the 'Big Lie' takes root. NPR. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 2: Tuesday, January 31: The Constitutional Foundations of Public Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week, we will examine the Constitution, the powers to shape policy that it grants elected officials, the provisions it includes to curb those officials, and the safeguards in place to prevent abuses of power. To reinforce these topics, we will analyze national security policy. We will also look at how voters and popular influence impact public policy, examining voting and redistricting policies. Lastly, in looking at healthcare policy, we will explore how the Constitution and history have weighed in on whether federal or state institutions have the upper hand in directing policy.

Readings:

- Constitution of the United States. Retrieved [here](#).
- Hartig, Hannah and Carroll Doherty. (2 September 2021). Two Decades Later, the Enduring Legacy of 9/11. Pew Research Center. Retrieved [here](#).
- Miyake, L. C. (2002). Forsaken and Forgotten: The US Internment of Japanese Peruvians During World War II. Asian Law Journal. Retrieved [here](#).
- Fandos, Nicholas. (12 December 2022). The Election Is Over. The Fight Over Voting Rules and Gerrymanders Isn't. New York Times. Retrieved [here](#).
- Voting Rights Act (1965). Retrieved [here](#).
- Tang, Terry. (15 January 2022). King family rally in Arizona for voting bills for MLK Day. PBS. Retrieved [here](#).
- Mathews, Anna. (17 June 2021). Why Is ACA Still Controversial 11 Years After Healthcare Law Known as Obamacare Was Passed? Wall Street Journal. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 3: Tuesday, February 7: Civil Rights Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week, we will explore civil liberties in the U.S.—past and present. We will review major Supreme Court decisions on civil rights, along with the 14th Amendment and the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Looking at civil rights enforcement, we will discuss the ways in which people do or do not receive equal treatment. And, we will examine policies that

help or hinder access to political and social institutions, including university admissions policies.

Readings:

- Civil Rights Act (1964). Retrieved [here](#).
- Cohen, Alex and Wilfred U Codrington III. (23 January 2020). T Stop Making Women's Equality a Political Question Mark. Ms. Magazine. Retrieved [here](#).
- Joseph McCarthy's "Enemies from Within" Speech (1950). Retrieved [here](#).
- Hamilton, Isobel Asher. (10 July 2020). Instagram is banning all content promoting LGBT conversion therapy. Business Insider. Retrieved [here](#).
- Chappell, Bill. (15 January 2020). Virginia Ratifies The Equal Rights Amendment, Decades After The Deadline. NPR. Retrieved [here](#).
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Enforcement and Litigation Statistics. Retrieved [here](#).
- NYC Commission On Human Rights (2022). Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report. Retrieved [here](#).
- Watkins, Matthew and Neena Satija. (23 June 2016). Supreme Court Ruling Could Spur Changes to Top 10 Percent Rule. Texas Tribute. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 4: Tuesday, February 14: The President and Congress on Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week, we will explore the roles of the executive and legislative branches in shaping policy and how the power dynamic between the two branches has shifted over the years. We will also look at the impact of partisanship, economic and social factors, and bureaucracy on the policy process. To illustrate these topics, we will examine food and welfare policy.

Readings:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture. Agricultural Act of 2014: Highlights and Implications [peruse the links]. Retrieved [here](#).
- Matthews, Dylan. (12 January 2019). All 20 previous government shutdowns, explained. Vox. Retrieved [here](#).
- Lyndon B. Johnson's Remarks Upon Signing the Food Stamp Act. Retrieved [here](#).
- Klein, Christopher. (27 August 2019). How Did Food Stamps Begin? HISTORY. Retrieved [here](#).
- Edin, Kathryn J. and H. Luke Shaefer. (20 August 2016). 20 Years Since Welfare 'Reform'. Atlantic. Retrieved [here](#).
- Sherman, Naralie. (14 January 2022). US Supreme Court blocks Biden's workplace vaccine mandate. BBC. Retrieved [here](#).
- Jones, Dustin (1 January 2023). Despite infighting, it's been a surprisingly productive 2 years for Democrats. NPR. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 5: Tuesday, February 21: The Courts and the People on Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week, we will explore how the judiciary branch impacts public policy and how the magnitude of that impact has changed over the past 200 years. As a case study, we will examine campaign financing policy. We will also look at how public opinion impacts the

courts and policymakers. And, we will examine political movements that contributed to policy change and those that were unable to achieve sustained advocacy.

Readings:

- Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2010). Retrieved [here](#).
- Wheeler, Russell. (2 March 2020). Should we restructure the Supreme Court? Brookings. Retrieved [here](#).
- Supreme Revenge: Battle for the Court (2020). Frontline. Retrieved [here](#).
- Stratford, Michael. (5 January 2023). Biden launches defense of student debt relief at Supreme Court. Politico. Retrieved [here](#).
- Issenberg, Sasha. (26 June 2021). 6 Years After Same-Sex Marriage, Now What? Politico. Retrieved [here](#).
- Westerman, Ashley. (30 December 2020). In 2020, Protests Spread Across The Globe With A Similar Message: Black Lives Matter. NPR. Retrieved [here](#).
- Anderson, James A. (15 November 2021). Some Say Occupy Wall Street Did Nothing. It Changed Us More Than We Think. Time. Retrieved [here](#).
- Cohen, Tom. (28 February 2014). 5 years later, here's how the tea party changed politics. CNN. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 6: Tuesday, February 28: Interests Groups, Lobbyists, and the Media on Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week, we will explore the impact of interests groups and lobbyists on public policy by examining consumer protection and gun policy. We will also look at how 24-hour news coverage, online media, and misinformation sway public opinion and policy.

Readings:

- Page, Benjamin I. (18 September 2014). Theories of American politics. Elites, interest groups, and average citizens. Perspectives on politics (12) 3. Retrieved [here](#).
- Drutman, Lee. (20 April 2015). How corporate lobbyists conquered American democracy. Atlantic. Retrieved [here](#).
- Evers-Hillstrom, Karl. (5 January 2023). Lobbyists relish return to Capitol after years of COVID restrictions. The Hill. Retrieved [here](#).
- Dodd-Frank Act. HISTORY. Retrieved [here](#).
- Sarah Brady's 1996 Democratic National Convention keynote. Retrieved [here](#) (2:27-2:40).
- Charlton Heston's speech on the future of the National Rifle Association. Retrieved [here](#) (0:00-16:00).
- Achenbach, Joel, Scott Higham, and Sari Horwitz. (12 January 2013). How NRA's true believers converted a marksmanship group into a mighty gun lobby. Washington Post. Retrieved [here](#).
- Lipton, Eric and Alexander Burns. (24 February 2018). The true source of the NRA's clout: mobilization, not donations. New York Times. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 7: Tuesday, March 7: MIDTERM EXAM

NB:

- Please make sure to bring a pen or pencil to class.

- Please try to be on time to have as much time as possible for the exam.

TUESDAY, MARCH 14: NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

Week 8: Tuesday, March 21: Municipal and Labor Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week we will explore the municipal policies that affect our day-to-day lives as well as the formal and informal ways in which those policies came into existence. We will discuss case studies from recent labor rights policymaking in New York City, focusing on the shifting alliances of various stakeholders depending on the policy at issue, with guest speaker Steven Kelly, former Associate Commissioner for the Office of Labor Policy and Standards.

Readings:

- Handout with readings to be circulated prior to Spring Break.

Week 9: Tuesday, March 28: Monetary and Fiscal Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week, we look at how the Federal Reserve and the executive and legislative branches shape monetary and fiscal policy through interest rates, taxes, and spending decisions. We will discuss case studies from recent economic downturns.

Readings:

- The Power of the Fed (2021). Frontline. Retrieved [here](#).
- Van Riper, Frank. (30 October 1975). Ford to City: Drop Dead in 1975. New York Daily News. Retrieved [here](#).
- Schanzenbach, Diane Whitmore, Ryan Nunn, Lauren Bauer, David Boddy, and Greg Nantz. (23 May 2016). Nine facts about the Great Recession and tools for fighting the next downturn. Brookings. Retrieved [here](#).
- Rugaber, Christopher (4 January 2023). Officials cited strong hiring to justify raising interest rates, Fed minutes reveal. PBS. Retrieved [here](#).
- Lindon, Paul L. (7 January 2023). The US needs fast growth: The Fed is against it. The Hill. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 10: Tuesday, April 4: Welfare Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week, we will explore policies intended to alleviate poverty and support individuals and families in attaining financial independence. We will discuss how these policies evolved over time in the U.S. and the complex web of federal, state, and municipal jurisdictions in the welfare and tax systems.

Readings:

- Bay, Ann-Helen. (January 2022). Why is it so hard to escape poverty? TED-Ed. Retrieved [here](#).
- Elliott, Andrea. (9 December 2013). Invisible Child [parts 1-5]. New York Times. Retrieved [here](#).

- Elliott, Andrea. (28 September 2021). When Dasani Left Home. New York Times. Retrieved [here](#).
- Ripley, Amanda. (11 September 2018). Why is college in America so expensive? Atlantic. Retrieved [here](#).
- Stanley, Tiffany. (7 January 2019). Life, death, and insulin. Washington Post. Retrieved [here](#).
- Golshan, Tara. (22 January 2020). The answer to America's healthcare cost problem might be in Maryland. Vox. Retrieved [here](#).
- Brand, David. (23 December 2022). As NYC's Food Stamp Crisis Worsens, State Agency Withholds Relief. City Limits. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 11: Tuesday, April 11: Policy and Religion

Learning Objective:

- This week, using both historical and modern-day lenses, we will explore how religion shapes policy in the U.S. and vice-versa. We will discuss party politics and analyze abortion and same-sex marriage policies.

Readings:

- Religion in American History: Moments of Crisis & Opportunity (2017). Library of Congress. Retrieved [here](#).
- David, Kenneth C. (October 2010). America's True History of Religious Tolerance. Smithsonian Magazine. Retrieved [here](#).
- Roe v. Wade. HISTORY. Retrieved [here](#).
- Dwyer, Davin. (28 December 2021). 2021 was pivotal year for abortion laws in America. ABC News. Retrieved [here](#).
- Horton, Jack. (10 December 2021). Who could be most affected by US abortion changes? BBC. Retrieved [here](#).
- McCarthy, Justin (8 June 2021). Record-High 70% in U.S. Support Same-Sex Marriage. Gallup. Retrieved [here](#).
- Leppert, Rebecca and Dalia Fahmy. (5 July 2022). 10 facts about religion and government in the United States. Pew Research Center. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 12: Tuesday, April 18: Regulatory and Environmental Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week, we examine regulatory policy, focusing on domestic environmental policies. We will discuss how regulatory policies are formulated and enforced and how partisanship impacts regulatory changes. We will also look at what happens when regulatory policies and enforcement practices diverge.

Readings:

- Rinde, Meir. (Spring 2017). Richard Nixon and the rise of American environmentalism. Science History. Retrieved [here](#).
- Thunberg, Greta. (November 2018). The disarming case to act right now on climate change. TEDx. Retrieved [here](#).
- Neubauer, Luisa. (July 2019). Why you should be a climate activist. TEDx. Retrieved [here](#).
- Newburger, Emma. (30 December 2022). The U.S. passed a historic climate deal this year — here's a recap of what's in the bill. MSNBC. Retrieved [here](#).

- Roberts, David. (13 December 2018). California's cap-and-trade system may be too weak to do its job. Vox. Retrieved [here](#).
- Chariton, Jordan and Charlie LeDuff. (17 January 2022). Revealed: the Flint water poisoning charges that never came to light. Guardian. Retrieved [here](#).
- NYC Climate Goals & Legislation. NYC Accelerator. Retrieved [here](#).
- Carrns, Ann. (10 September 2021). Flood Damage From Ida? Your Homeowner's Policy Probably Won't Cover That. New York Times. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 13: Tuesday, April 25: GROUP POLICY PRESENTATIONS

NB:

- Please make sure to e-mail me your slides the night before class.

Week 14: Tuesday, May 2: Foreign Policy and Final Thoughts

Learning Objective:

- This week, we will wrap up by examining U.S. foreign policy, focusing on trade and environmental policy. We will also review key topics from the course and reflect on the dynamics of U.S. public policy.

Readings:

- Chatzky, Andrew, James McBride, and Mohammed Aly Sergie. (1 July 2020). NAFTA and the USMCA: Weighing the Impact of North American Trade. Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved [here](#).
- Trump's Trade War (2019). Frontline. Retrieved [here](#).
- Mai, H. J. (19 February 2021). U.S. Officially Rejoins Paris Agreement On Climate Change. NPR. Retrieved [here](#).
- Vasquez, Maegan et al. (6 January 2023). American aid to Ukraine ramps up but House GOP drama causes worry over future military help. CNN. Retrieved [here](#).
- Mai, H. J. (6 January 2023). Biden's national security adviser is hopeful war over Taiwan can be prevented. NPR. Retrieved [here](#).