



**NYU**

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

## **UPADM-GP 101**

# **The Politics of Public Policy**

## **Fall 2023**

### **Instructor Information**

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

### **Course Information**

- Class Meeting Times: Thursdays, 9/5 – 12/15, 6:20 – 8:50 pm
- Class Location: GCASL (238 Thompson Street), Room 269

### **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, September 25 (week 4) via Brightspace by 11:59 pm ET**
- **Midterm Exam (20%):** In class exam covering the material up to this date. **Date: Thursday, October 19 (week 7)**
- **Group Policy Presentation (20%):** Students will work in groups to argue in support of a municipal bill (in class presentation). **Date: Thursday, December 7 (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 5% 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](mailto: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: Thursday, September 7: 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](#).
- Pazzanese, Christina. (14 April 2023). Rising political tide of young adults, Gen Z. Harvard Gazette. 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](#).
- Galston, William. (20 January 2023). The polarization paradox: Elected officials and voters have shifted in opposite directions. Brookings. Retrieved [here](#).
- Richardi, Nichoals and Linley Sanders. (14 July 2023). Americans are widely pessimistic about the state of democracy in the U.S., AP-NORC poll finds. PBS. Retrieved [here](#).
- Erickson, Megan. (8 September 15). Children don't live in a vacuum: why US education is not the 'great equalizer'. The Guardian. Retrieved [here](#).

## Week 2: Thursday, September 14: 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](#).
- Massie, Betsy. Use it or lose it...The Constitution belongs to the citizens. TEDx. Retrieved [here](#) [video].
- 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](#).
- Corasaniti, Nick. (2 August 2023). Left-Leaning Wisconsin Groups Challenge the State's Political Maps. New York Times. Retrieved [here](#).
- Voting Rights Act (1965). Retrieved [here](#).
- Voting Laws Roundup: June 2023. Brennan Center for Justice. Retrieved [here](#).
- National Uninsured Rate Reaches an All-Time Low in Early 2023. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Retrieved [here](#).

## Week 3: Thursday, September 21: 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](#).
- Smithsonian Learning Lab Collection: The Changing Same: Legislation and Activism [peruse the collection]. Smithsonian Learning Lab. Retrieved [here](#).
- Transcending and thriving: Civil rights in Black America. Brookings. Retrieved [here](#) [video].
- Joseph McCarthy's "Enemies from Within" Speech (1950). Retrieved [here](#).
- Karni, Annie. (13 July 2023). Democrats Try a Novel Tactic to Revive the Equal Rights Amendment. New York Times. Retrieved [here](#).
- Enforcement and Litigation Statistics. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Retrieved [here](#).
- Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report. NYC Commission on Human Rights. Retrieved [here](#).
- Debusmann, Bernd. (29 June 2023). Affirmative action: US Supreme Court overturns race-based college admissions. BBC. Retrieved [here](#).
- Meyet, Katharine and Adrianna Pita. (30 June 2023). How will the Supreme Court's affirmative action ruling affect college admissions? Brookings. Retrieved [here](#) [podcast].

## Week 4: Thursday, September 28: 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:

- Agricultural Act of 2014: Highlights and Implications [peruse the links]. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Retrieved [here](#).
- Shear, Michael. (7 February 2014). In Signing Farm Bill, Obama Extols Rural Growth. New York Times. 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](#).
- Brennan, Megan. (28 July 2023). Biden Averages 40.7% Job Approval in 10th Quarter. Gallup. Retrieved [here](#).

## Week 5: Thursday, October 5: 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](#).
- Supreme Revenge: Battle for the Court (2020). Frontline. Retrieved [here](#) [video].
- Chemin, Matthieu. (22 May 2023). The Supreme Court Needs the Judicial Reforms We Champion for Everyone Else. Scientific America. Retrieved [here](#).
- Greve, Joan and Ed Pilkington. (9 July 2023). 'Democracy is at risk': inside the fight for supreme court reform. Guardian. Retrieved [here](#).
- Smithsonian Learning Lab Collection: Motivating Agency with Posters (Smithsonian Summer Sessions) [peruse the collection]. Smithsonian Learning Lab. Retrieved [here](#).
- Millennials, Gen Z, and Civic Engagement. Brennan Center for Justice. Retrieved [here](#) [video].
- 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: Thursday, October 12: 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: Thursday, October 19: 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.

## Week 8: Thursday, October 26: 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.

Readings:

- Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives: A Pictorial History of Working People in New York City [peruse the collection]. NYC Archives. Retrieved [here](#).
- City Administrative Procedure Act (CAPA). Retrieved [here](#).
- The State of Workers' Rights in New York City (2022). NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP). Retrieved [here](#).
- A Minimum Pay Rate for App-Based Restaurant Delivery Workers in NYC. NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP). Retrieved [here](#).

## Week 9: Thursday, November 2: 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](#) [video].
- Van Riper, Frank. (30 October 1975). Ford to City: Drop Dead in 1975. New York Daily News. Retrieved [here](#).
- McGahey, Richard. (28 June 2023). When Unions Saved New York City From Bankruptcy. Forbes. 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](#).
- Rising Oil Prices, Loose Monetary Policy, and US Inflation (20 July 2023). National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved [here](#).

- Matthews, Barbara. (20 March 2023). The Federal Reserve's dilemma: Choosing between monetary policy and financial stability. Atlantic Council. Retrieved [here](#).
- Kelton, Stephanie. The big myth of government deficits. TEDx. Retrieved [here](#) [video].

## Week 10: Thursday, November 9: 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](#) [video].
- Parrott, James. (11 May 2023). Cash Assistance rolls have risen sharply in New York City as a result of the uneven employment recovery and the end of various forms of pandemic economic assistance. The New School. 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](#).
- Deputy Mayor Anne Williams-Isom Makes Asylum Seeker Related Announcement. NYC Mayor's Office. Retrieved [here](#) [video].
- 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](#).
- Case, Anne & Angus Deaton. (20 February 2020). How Healthcare Costs Hurt American Workers and Benefit the Wealthy. Time. Retrieved [here](#).
- Grover, Atul. (17 August 2022). Health Care Costs: What's the Problem? Association of American Medical Colleges. Retrieved [here](#).

## Week 11: Thursday, November 16: 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](#).
- Tracking Abortion Bans Across the Country. New York Times. Retrieved [here](#).
- James, Noel. (22 June 2023). Women This Week: Women's Health a Year After the Dobbs v. Jackson Ruling. Council on Foreign Relations. 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](#).
- Weinstein, Aaron. Rediscovering Civil Religion in America. TEDx. Retrieved [here](#) [video].

## THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23: NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING BREAK)

### Week 12: Thursday, November 30: 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:

- Isaacs-Thomas, Bella. (3 August 2023). Climate change is hitting close to home for nearly 2 out of 3 Americans, poll finds. PBS. Retrieved [here](#).
- 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](#) [video].
- Neubauer, Luisa. (July 2019). Why you should be a climate activist. TEDx. Retrieved [here](#) [video].
- 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](#).
- Fortinsky, Sarah. (7 August 2023). Most in new poll disapprove of Biden's handling of climate change. The Hill. Retrieved [here](#).
- Chariton, Jordan and Charlie LeDuff. (17 January 2022). Revealed: the Flint water poisoning charges that never came to light. Guardian. 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: Thursday, December 7: GROUP POLICY PRESENTATIONS

#### NB:

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

### Week 14: Thursday, December 14: 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:

- The Foreign Policy Legacy of the Founding Fathers. Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved [here](#) [video].
- 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](#) [video].
- Mai, H. J. (19 February 2021). U.S. Officially Rejoins Paris Agreement On Climate Change. NPR. Retrieved [here](#).
- Ismay, John. (19 July 2023). The Pentagon unveils \$1.3 billion for Ukraine, bringing total new U.S. aid this week to \$2.3 billion. New York Times. Retrieved [here](#).
- Agiesta, Jennifer. (4 August 2023). CNN Poll: Majority of Americans oppose more US aid for Ukraine in war with Russia. CNN. Retrieved [here](#).
- Liebermann, Oren and Natasha Bertrand. (29 July 2023). Biden admin announces new weapons assistance package for Taiwan. CNN. Retrieved [here](#).