



Hobby School of Public Affairs
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

POLC 6320 – SPRING 2026
POLICY ANALYSIS II: POLITICAL ANALYSIS

DAY, TIME; LOCATION: Tuesday 5:30–8:30pm; 215 Teaching Unit 2
INSTRUCTOR: Pablo M. Pinto; ppinto@central.uh.edu
OFFICE: 212 Bates Building
OFFICE HOURS: Tuesday 3:30–5:00 pm, or by appointment
TEACHING ASSISTANTS: Michael King; mjking2@cougarnet.uh.edu
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COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course offers an introductory survey to methods and models of political analysis. Political analysis is the discipline that studies how the interaction between political demand and supply results in different patterns of policy-making and policies. Taxes, regulations and policies in general are the main output of the political system. Explaining the design, adoption and implementation of policies, thus, requires an analytical framework for understanding the main issues involved in aggregating individual preferences into collective political choices. The translation of preferences into policies results from the interaction of the demand and supply sides of politics. Individual and group preferences expressed through voting, mobilization and lobbying, are central features of the demand side of politics. Supply-side conditions are framed by political institutions, namely the structures that shape the aggregation of political preferences into policy outcomes.

Throughout the semester we will study the fundamental analytical models of politics applied to such topics as collective action, majority rule, coalition formation and the functioning of government. The course will also help you develop an understanding of how political systems operate, and acquire tools to critically analyze policy issues and problems, evaluate the effectiveness of existing policy programs, and learn to communicate effectively your analyses to others.

BOOKS AND READINGS:

The required textbooks for this class are:

- Kenneth A. Shepsle (2010). *Analyzing Politics. Rationality, Behavior and Institutions*. 2nd Edition. W. W. Norton
- David L. Weimer and Aidan R. Vining (2011). *Policy Analysis*, 5th edition. Longman.

Recommended books include the following:

- Ethan Bueno de Mesquita (2016). *Political Economy for Public Policy*. Princeton University Press.
- Avinash K. Dixit and Barry J. Nalebuff (2008). *The Art of Strategy. A Game Theorist's Guide to Success in Business and Life*. W. W. Norton.
- Charles Wheelan (2011). *Introduction to Public Policy*. W. W. Norton.

All readings listed on the syllabus are available in the textbooks or can be obtained through UH Library resources in hard copy or digital form. The main readings for each session are marked with a bullet (●) on the syllabus. Importantly, before each meeting ALL students are expected to have completed ALL readings, including those marked with a bullet (●), those marked with a box (□), as well as the background readings marked with the symbol (*).

GRADING

Students will be graded for completion and performance in homework, problem sets, exams, participation and other class assignments. Specific grading rubrics will be provided for each assignment. Course grades will be based on the following (percent of final grade in parentheses):

1. **PARTICIPATION, PROBLEMS SETS AND QUIZZES (30%):** Contribution to class discussion is a substantial component of the final grade for this class. Student are expected to complete ALL required readings (●), readings for class discussion (□) and background readings (✱) prior to class and actively participate in discussions, case assignments, and other class activities, including online discussion board. There will be two problem sets during the semester; you may work in small groups, no larger than four people, on a problem set. If you turn in an individual problem set, it may not be identical to another student's or group's problem set. Periodically there will be an unannounced short quiz related to that day's readings and topics. These brief quizzes will be graded for correctness and will assess students' basic understanding of the topics and readings at hand.
2. **PRESENTATION OF READINGS (20%):** Each student is expected to participate in the presentation of readings marked with a (□) at least twice during the semester. The distribution of reading assignments for each reading will be made by the end of the second week of class. The presenting teams will upload their presentations and questions to the corresponding discussion board by noon on the day of the presentation. All members of a group assigned to present a specific reading are expected to contribute to the presentations. In addition to the presentations, we will distribute questions about the readings for a seminar-style discussion in class.
3. **POLICY DEBATE (10%):** on **April 21** we will hold an in-class debate on one of the following public policy topics: (i) trade policy; (ii) immigration policy; (iii) healthcare; (iv) sustainable energy policy. Each student will be assigned to groups representing a relevant stakeholder in the debate. In preparation for the debate each group is expected to conduct supplementary research about the policy under consideration. Prior to the debate each group will post on Canvas a slide deck with their opening statement, a list of relevant readings, publications, data sources and other relevant resources identified in their research.
4. **POLICY MEMO (10%):** The background research, materials and conclusions from the in-class debate will inform the writing of a policy memo which will be due at **11:59pm on May 1**. Instructions on how to write policy memos will be provided in class.
5. **FINAL EXAM (30%):** there will a comprehensive final in-class exam on **May 5**.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING LIST

PART I – INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL ANALYSIS

WEEK 1: JANUARY 20 – POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

- Shepsle 2010, Chapter 1. It isn't Rocket Science, but ...
- Wheelan 2011, Chapter 2, pp. 39–59: What is public policy?
- Matthew Grossman (2024). The World is Hard to Change. Vital City, March 24, 2004: <https://bit.ly/4ae5KyN>

WEEK 2: JANUARY 27 – MARKETS AND GOVERNMENTS I

- Weimer and Vining 2011, Chapter 4: Efficiency and the Idealized Competitive Market
- Weimer and Vining 2011, Chapter 5: Rationales for Public Policy – Market Failures

WEEK 3: FEBRUARY 3 – COLLEGE DEBATES & DISCOURSE ALLIANCE GUIDED DEBATE

CLASS DISCUSSION:

- Topic of debate selected by class; instructions will be distributed prior to the session.

WEEK 4: FEBRUARY 10 – MARKETS AND GOVERNMENTS II

- Weimer and Vining 2011, Chapter 6: Rationales for Public Policy – Other Limitations of the Competitive Framework
- Weimer and Vining 2011, Chapter 7: Rationales for Public Policy – Redistribution and Other Goals
- Wheelan 2011, Chapter 3, pp. 80–104: Moral Hazard, Adverse Selection, and Incomplete Information

CLASS DISCUSSION:

- Levitt and Dubner 2005, Chapter 4: Where Have all the Criminals Gone? *Freakonomics*.

PART II – POLITICAL ANALYSIS: UNDERSTANDING COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR

WEEK 5: FEBRUARY 17 – RATIONALITY AND STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR

- Shepsle 2010, Chapter 2: Rationality – The Model of Choice
- Shepsle 2010, Chapter 8: Cooperation
- Bueno de Mesquita 2016. Appendix A

CLASS DISCUSSION:

- Dixit and Nalebuff 2008, Chapter 3 [pp. 64–101]

WEEK 6: FEBRUARY 24 – COOPERATION, COLLECTIVE ACTION, AND PUBLIC GOODS

- Shepsle 2010, Chapter 9: Collective Action
- Shepsle 2010, Chapter 10: Public Goods, Externalities, and the Commons

ADDITIONAL READINGS:

- ✱ Mancur Olson 1971, The Logic of Collective Action [pp. 1–22, 33–65]

CLASS DISCUSSION:

- Ostrom et al. 1999, Revisiting the Commons: Local Lessons, Global Challenges
- Buttorff et al. 2025, Natural Disasters and Willingness to Pay for Public Goods

WEEK 7: MARCH 3 – GROUP CHOICE

- Shepsle 2010, Chapters 3 and 4: Group Choice and Majority Rule
- Shepsle 2010, Chapter 5: Spatial Models of Majority Rule

CLASS DISCUSSION:

- Bartels 2005, Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy
- Lupia et al. 2006, Were Bush Tax Cut Supporters Simply Ignorant?

WEEK 8: MARCH 10 – ANALYZING STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR

- Shepsle 2010, Chapter 6: Sophistication, Misrepresentation, and Manipulation
- Bueno de Mesquita 2016, Appendix B
- Dixit and Nalebuff 2008, Chapters 2 and 4

CLASS DISCUSSION:

- Cox 1994, A Note on Crime and Punishment

WEEK 9: MARCH 17 – SPRING BREAK

PART III – THE POLITICAL PROCESS

WEEK 10: MARCH 24 – ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS

- Shepsle 2010, Chapter 7: Voting Methods and Electoral Systems
- Wheelan 2011, Chapter 6: The Political Process
- Grofman 2016, Perspectives on Comparative Electoral Systems

CLASS DISCUSSION:

- Park and Jensen 2007, Electoral Competition and Agricultural Support

WEEK 11: MARCH 31 – LEGISLATURES AND REPRESENTATION

- Shepsle 2010, Chapter 11: Institutions and Chapter 12: Legislatures

CLASS DISCUSSION:

- Bailey et al. 1997, The Institutional Roots of American Trade Policy

WEEK 12: APRIL 7 – IMPLEMENTING POLICIES: DELEGATION AND AGENCY

- Shepsle 2010, Chapter 13: Bureaucracy and Intergovernmental Relations

ADDITIONAL READINGS:

- ✱ Bueno de Mesquita 2016, Chapter 9: The Need for Information
- ✱ Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991, The Logic of Delegation

CLASS DISCUSSION:

- McCubbins and Schwartz 1984, Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms

WEEK 13: APRIL 14 – POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

- Shepsle 2010, Chapter 14: Leadership
- Shepsle 2010, Chapter 16: Cabinet Government and Parliamentary Democracy

CLASS DISCUSSION:

- Gerber and Hopkins 2011, When Mayors Matter

PART IV – ANALYZING AND DEBATING POLICY

WEEK 14: APRIL 21 – DEBATING POLICY

- In-class discussion on one of the following topics: (i) trade policy; (ii) immigration policy; (iii) healthcare; (iv) sustainable energy policy.
- Readings, background materials and instructions will be distributed prior to the class.

ADDITIONAL READINGS:

- * Lupia. 2013. Communicating Science in Politicized Environments

WEEK 15: APRIL 28 – EVALUATING POLICY

- Weimer and Vining 2011, Chapter 16: Cost Benefit Analysis
- Shadish et al. 2002, Chapter 8: Randomized Experiments

CLASS DISCUSSION:

- McDavid and Hawthorn. 2005. Research Designs for Program Evaluations [Chapter 3]
- Weimer and Vining 2011. Chapter 1: The Canadian Salmon Fishery
- Boardman, Vining and Waters, 2007. Costs and Benefits through Bureaucratic Lenses: Example of a Highway Project

WEEK 16: MAY 5 – IN-CLASS FINAL EXAM

ANNOUNCEMENTS, UH POLICIES AND RESOURCES:

SYLLABUS CHANGES: Please note that the instructor may need to make modifications to the course syllabus. Such changes will be announced as quickly as possible through email and Canvas. You should check UH email and Canvas periodically for announcements and updates.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: High ethical standards are critical to the integrity of any institution, and bear directly on the ultimate value of conferred degrees. All UH community members are expected to contribute to an atmosphere of the highest possible ethical standards. Maintaining such an atmosphere requires that any instances of academic dishonesty be recognized and addressed. The [UH Academic Honesty Policy](#) is designed to handle those instances with fairness to all parties involved: the students, the instructors, and the University itself. All students and faculty of the University of Houston are responsible for being familiar with this policy.

USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: Generative artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models (LLM) such as ChatGPT, Claude, Bard, Bing AI, etc. are powerful tools for assisting with tasks such as generating content, answering questions, providing real-time research, analyzing documents and analyzing data, complex concepts and text. The use of generative AI in the workplace and in research is growing at a fast pace. The ability of leveraging AI tools to tackle complex issues will likely define employment prospects and professional success. Nevertheless, a solid training in a substantive or technical field, and careful understanding of concepts, theories, and tools is essential for a successful use of AI and LLMs. It provides a foundation to critically assess AI-generated content, apply knowledge to use AI effectively, and avoid blindly accepting incorrect, misleading or biased outputs, ultimately fostering deeper learning and responsible use of technology. For these reasons the use of AI and related LLM tools during an exam or to generate content for problem sets, assignments and policy memos is strongly discouraged unless explicitly stated in the prompt for the assignment. Submissions will be checked on Turnitin and other tools; any passages identified as generated with AI and related LLM tools will be considered plagiarism and result in a failing grade for the whole assignment.

EXCUSED ABSENCE POLICY: Regular class attendance, participation, and engagement in coursework are important contributors to student success. Absences may be excused as provided in the University of Houston [Graduate Excused Absence Policy](#) for reasons including: medical illness of student or close relative, death of a close family member, legal or government proceeding that a student is obligated to attend, recognized professional and educational activities where the student is presenting, and University-sponsored activity or athletic competition. Under these policies, students with excused absences will be provided with an opportunity to make up any quiz, exam or other work that contributes to the course grade or a satisfactory alternative. Please read the full policy for details regarding reasons for excused absences, the approval process, and extended absences. Additional policies address absences related to [military service](#), [religious holy days](#), [pregnancy and related conditions](#), and [disability](#).

USE OF CELL PHONES, TABLETS AND LAPTOPS: Since they cause interruptions and distractions, phones should be turned off during class time. Please do not use any Instant Messaging software if you bring your laptop to take notes. In particular, cell phones, portable devices and laptops may not be accessible during exams or quizzes.

RECORDING OF CLASS: You may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the [Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center](#). If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor's recordings for their own studying and notetaking. Instructor's recordings are not authorized to be shared with anyone without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.

REASONABLE ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENTS/AUXILIARY AIDS: The University of Houston is committed to providing an academic environment and educational programs that are accessible for its students. Any student with a disability who is experiencing barriers to learning, assessment or participation is encouraged to contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center (Dart Center) to learn more about academic accommodations and support that may be available to them. Students seeking academic accommodations will need to register with the Dart Center as soon as possible to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations. Please contact the Dart Center by visiting the website <https://uh.edu/accessibility/>; calling (713) 743-5400; or emailing jdcenter@Central.UH.EDU.

The **Student Health Center** offers a Psychiatry Clinic for enrolled UH students. Call 713-743-5149 during clinic hours, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. to schedule an appointment.

The **A.D. Bruce Religion Center** offers spiritual support and a variety of programs centered on well-being.

The **Center for Student Advocacy and Community (CSAC)** is where you can go if you need help but don't know where to start. CSAC is a "home away from home" and serves as a **resource hub** to help you get the resources needed to support academic and personal success. Through our **Cougar Cupboard**, all students can get up to 30 lbs of FREE groceries a week. Additionally, we provide 1:1 appointments to get you connected to on- and off-campus resources related to essential needs, safety and advocacy, and more. The **Cougar Closet** is a registered student organization advised by our office and offers free clothes to students so that all Coogs can feel good in their fit. We also host a series of cultural and community-based events that fosters social connection and helps the cougar community come closer together. Visit the CSAC homepage or follow us on Instagram: **@uh_CSAC** and **@uhcupbrd**. YOU belong here.

WOMEN AND GENDER RESOURCE CENTER (WGRC): The mission of the **WGRC** is to advance the University of Houston and promote the success of all students, faculty, and staff through educating, empowering, and supporting the UH community. The WGRC suite is open to you. Stop by the office for a study space, to take a break, grab a snack, or check out one of the WGRC programs or resources. Stop by Student Center South room B12 (Basement floor near Starbucks and down the hall from Creation Station) from 9 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday.

TITLE IX/SEXUAL MISCONDUCT: Per the UHS Sexual Misconduct Policy, your instructor is a "responsible employee" for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which they become aware to the Title IX office. Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report in confidence. You can find more information about resources on the Title IX **website**.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCES: The University of Houston has a number of resources to support students' mental health and overall wellness, including **CoogsCARE** and the **UH Go App**. **UH Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)** offers 24/7 mental health support for all students, addressing various concerns like stress, college adjustment and sadness. CAPS provides individual and couples counseling, group therapy, workshops and connections to other support services on and off-campus. For assistance visit **uh.edu/caps**, call 713-743-5454, or visit a **Let's Talk** location in-person or virtually. **Let's Talk** are daily, informal confidential consultations with CAPS therapists where no appointment or paperwork is needed.

Need Support Now? If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call CAPS crisis support 24/7 at **713-743-5454**, or the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or **text 988**, or chat **988lifeline.org**.