

POLI 110

Investigating Politics: An Introduction to Scientific Political Analysis

Winter T2, 2024-2025

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Summary/Learning Outcomes:

This course prepares students to engage with the field of political science by introducing them to the basic logic and tools used by political scientists to understand and explain the political world. The course will teach students how science differs from other ways of seeing the world; how to ask answerable questions; how to define key political concepts; how to formulate hypotheses and theories about political dynamics; how to measure the phenomena we want to study; how to think about and assess relationships of cause-and-effect; and how to communicate about these issues clearly and precisely. We will consider these issues by examining how political scientists have investigated major questions in domestic and international affairs, including the nature of political power, the relationship between public opinion and public policy, the roots of ethnic prejudice, and the psychology of suicide terrorism.

Your Immediate To-Do Checklist:

- Read this syllabus carefully and ask any questions you have (by email)
- Register for a discussion (tutorial) section (tutorials begin in Week 2)
- Make sure you have a system set up to automatically, frequently back up your computer files

Class Meetings:

This is nominally an in-person course. However, instances may arise where we might either necessarily or more fruitfully meet online. Whenever we are not in person we will meet on Zoom. I have established a single link you can use for all of our meetings through the end of the semester:

<https://ubc.zoom.us/j/63880612806?pwd=hjeIu8rUJ6gat5gU4gw6gywAsDENFS.1>

The course also includes a weekly tutorial, starting in Week 2, led by your teaching assistant in which your attendance and participation is required. The specific parameters of these tutorial sessions will

be determined by your TA. See the section below on “Grading and Assessed Coursework” for further details on the grading of tutorial attendance and participation.

Other Points on How the Class Will Be Conducted When on Zoom

- To avoid disruption, keep your mic muted at all times unless I have invited you to speak.
- Whether or not you want to show yourself in video is completely optional.
- In general I will monitor the chat window, and *not* the participants window.
- I encourage you to ask questions throughout the lecture if anything requires clarification. To “raise your hand”, just let me know in the chat window that you’d like to speak. When I give you the floor, you can either unmute and speak or type in your question in chat.
- You will not be permitted to record the lecture. However, I will post the day’s lecture slides on Canvas in the appropriate folder.
- In the event of unwanted Zoom incursion, I will end the meeting immediately and send you instructions (through Canvas, by email) about how to proceed as soon as I can.

“Office Hours”

Please feel free to communicate with me by email with any questions you might have, and I will respond as quickly as I can. Ultimately this is my preference, since I can reply quickly and thoroughly to either individual or group questions.

If you prefer a live chat of some kind, we can arrange for a time to do that on Zoom or in-person. Just email me to set it up and we will work to find an appropriate time.

Required Readings

Readings: There is no textbook for this course. All required readings are available via the course’s Canvas page and, specifically, the link “Library Online Course Reserves.” I will also occasionally provide direct links to publicly-available online materials. All readings must be completed *prior to* the lecture with which they are assigned (see below).

Grading and Assessed Course Work:

Midterm Exam (25%) & Final Exam (35%):

There are two exams. The exams will test you on material in the lectures, tutorials, and readings for the weeks that they cover. The midterm is scheduled for February 26th and will assess materials covered up to that point (inclusive). The final, for which a date and time will be set by the registrar, will cover the entire course but emphasize the second half of the course.

Weekly Tutorial Attendance and Participation, starting Week 2 (15%):

Attendance and active participation in the weekly tutorial led by your teaching assistant is required and will be worth a total of 15% of your overall grade. Some portion of this will be purely based on attendance, and the rest will be for active participation (see more below). The balance and your

overall grade will be determined by your TA. The terms should be made clear to you at the beginning of the semester.

In general, tutorials will address and expand upon the topic that was covered the previous week in lecture. Prior to each tutorial, you must have carefully read all required readings for the previous week's topic.

Tutorials are discussion-based. Your Tutorial Attendance and Participation mark will be based not just on whether you show up to tutorial but also whether you actively participate in discussions in a constructive manner. Your participation should reflect solid preparation – having attended lectures, done the required readings, thought about the material and done your best to understand it, and made a serious effort on the homework assignment (if one was assigned for that week). Note that constructive participation can include not only providing thoughtful answers to questions posed by your TA but also asking questions about material that you have struggled to understand. This means that, before coming to tutorial, you should think carefully about what you do not understand about the concepts and issues covered in lectures and readings and try to formulate your questions as clearly as you can.

NOTE: If a statutory holiday falls on the regular meeting day of your tutorial section, you must still attend tutorial that week on a different day. It is your responsibility to choose an alternative tutorial to attend and to give the TA teaching that section your name and student number when you arrive, so that you receive credit for attendance.

Tutorial participation will be marked based on both how regularly you participate in tutorial discussions and on the quality of that participation. We do not expect each student to make several comments in each session. However, achieving a high participation mark will typically mean participating at least once or twice in each session. The quality of comments or questions (do they reflect solid preparation, thoughtful engagement with the material, etc.) is as important as the quantity of participation.

Homework Assignments ($5 \times 5\% = 25\%$):

There will be 5 Homework assignments. All Homework assignments have associated due dates posted below. They must be submitted through the course's Canvas website.

The Homework assignments are intended to help you work through the material presented in lecture and in course readings by applying key concepts, arguments, and methods to real-world political issues.

For each assignment, you will choose one of the following “explainers” from the website vox.com. (NOTE: There is nothing sacred about Vox or their ideological line; it's just that their “explainer” articles tend to be well-suited to the kinds of analysis the homework assignments are designed around.) You are welcome to choose different topics for different homework assignments, or to use the same topic repeatedly: it is entirely up to you. Your choices must be restricted to this list, however, to facilitate the grading process:

1. “The Republican power grab in North Carolina, explained”

<https://www.vox.com/politics/391077/north-carolina-josh-stein-roy-cooper-general-assembly>

2. “Why protests in the country of Georgia matter”

<https://www.vox.com/world-politics/389362/georgia-protests-eu-georgian-dream-russia>

3. “How the Los Angeles fires highlight the challenge of disaster relief” (I have no idea why the link has something else written but it works for me).

<https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2018/10/15/17927688/turkey-syria-earthquake-how-to-help-donate>

4. “America’s unique, enduring gun problem, Explained”

<https://www.vox.com/23142734/las-vegas-unlv-mass-shooting>

5. “The many, many times Israelis and Palestinians tried to make peace – and failed”

<https://www.vox.com/world-politics/2023/11/22/23971375/israel-palestine-peace-talks-deal-timeline>

6. “Germany’s political upheaval, explained”

<https://www.vox.com/world-politics/383748/germany-scholz-crisis-bundestag-economy>

Grading Rubric

Following standard UBC guidelines, my translation of your numeric grades into letter grades at the end of the course will follow this rubric:

Percentage (%)	Letter Grade
90–100	A+
85–89	A
80–84	A-
76–79	B+
72–75	B
68–71	B-

64–67	C+
60–63	C
55–59	C-
50–54	D
0–49	F (fail)

This translation will happen once: at the end of the semester, when all grades are in. Your average grade will be rounded to the nearest integer, meaning that, for example, 79.4 will translate to a B+ whereas 79.6 will translate to an A-. Barring any logistical error on my part (or the TAs'), the grade entered for you at the end of the semester will be final. I will not engage in any end-of-semester litigation or negotiation about bumping your grade for any reason.

Other Grading Policies

The body of work upon which I will determine your course grade is clearly outlined above. I will not, as rule, entertain the following kinds of accommodations:

- dropping assignments from your grade that are especially poor relative to your other work, because they are somehow “not representative” of your abilities.
- allowing you to resubmit a “corrected” version of an assignment that has been graded in order to boost your score
- generating “bonus assignments” that you can then do and submit with the aim of bringing your grade up

In the event that you receive written work that has been, in your estimation, graded unfairly, you will have a grading rubric to consult that your TA was obliged to follow. If consulting the rubric does not clarify things, you may then communicate with your TA in order to better understand the basis of the grade.

If this is unsatisfactory, you may follow up with me. However, I am unwilling to offer “blanket” or general re-grades of any assignment, exam, or element thereof, without a detailed explanation of why you feel the grading on said element was unfair. This must go beyond general dissatisfaction, and include an explicit rationale that matches your answer to the appropriate grading rubric.

In general, neither your TA nor I will entertain open-ended attempts to litigate grades. When it comes to specific grievances, the presumption is that any given student has been graded fairly. The burden at stages 2 and 3 is on you to make a compelling case for unfair grading. The burden is not on the TA or myself to make sure that you are satisfied with your grade.

Finally, some of you may wind up at the end of the course staring at a grade that you find unsatisfying, or that fall just below some letter grade cutoff. It is important to remember that when you engage with this class you do so on the bases set out in this syllabus, which includes a complete description of all the elements of your final grade. Accordingly, I will not entertain requests to increase your grade because of some extrinsic cutoff or requirement (ie “I really need this grade to be an X to get into Y”). And, to repeat, I will not offer you the opportunity to do “extra work” or

“make up” already-graded work for more points. In response to any inquiry about this I will redirect you to this paragraph of the syllabus.

Technology in the Classroom

Unanticipated technological issues that arise with your phones, tablets, or computers are your responsibility. This includes internet connectivity issues, problems with access Googledocs or other “cloud” platform, loss of saved materials off a hard drive, running out of battery power and not having an adaptor to plug in or an outlet to plug it into, etc... These kinds of issues arise from time to time with every user of technology, and it is your responsibility to minimize your vulnerability to them. The *only* exception to this general principle is a technical problem that effects the entire class, or problems that are explicitly caused by myself or your TA.

Policy on Timed Exams Posted Online

Some assignments – e.g. long essays and things of that nature – will have instructions posted online that are freely available throughout the course. Timed exams, if administered online, will be posted for download, but these are not supposed to be viewed prior to the established start time. (I will try to make them “unavailable” but Canvas occasionally screws this up.) In the event that a timed assignment can be viewed before the intended start time, you are expected not to view it in ANY way, including just opening it up in a tab and not looking at it.

I reserve the right to change the content of the exam up until the exam’s stipulated start time. Any consequences of this (ie wasted time working on a previous exam, or answering questions that are no longer applicable) are yours to bear.

Missed Class Sessions, Late Assignments, & Missed Examinations

Late Homework assignments will incur penalties, except in the event of an accommodation from me (see section on Accommodation below). Each Homework assignment is worth 5 points of your total course grade:

- The loss of half credit (2.5 points off out of 5) for assignments turned in within the first 24 hours after the time they are due
- No credit for assignments turned in more than 24 hours late

Missed examinations will result in a grade of zero except in the event of an accommodation from me.

Accommodations for Emergency Situations

Students who need additional time for an assignment or will miss a lecture, tutorial, or exam for a medical or serious personal reason must contact me before the due date or exam/lecture/tutorial date and as soon as the problem arises. Requests for accommodation made after an assignment’s due date or after the missed exam, tutorial, or lecture will not generally be considered.

For tutorials missed for an emergency, the first form of accommodation that we will offer you is the opportunity to attend another tutorial section on a different day in the same week. (There is no

point attending two the following week because all tutorials in the same week cover the same topic.) Note that you must still notify your TA and the TA of the alternate section (in case they are different) to let them know about the switch. We will fully excuse a missed tutorial week only where it is not possible for you to attend an alternative session in that week.

Please note that accommodations will not be made for foreseeable circumstances, such as having multiple papers due in the same week, or multiple exams on a given day. Accommodations are reserved for unforeseeable events that are outside a student's control (e.g., illness, a death in the family). When there is a difficult situation that is foreseeable, it is your responsibility to organize your work for this course so that you can nonetheless turn in the assignment on time.

Due date extensions will usually not be granted for work lost due to computer crashes or the loss of a computer file. The reason for this is that there are simple and free ways of regularly and automatically backing up your work. It is recommended that all students subscribe to an automatic online backup service (many of which are free). These services will ensure that your files are backed up to a remote server at least once a day. Some services even backup the current version of your work every time you hit "Save." Thus, even if your computer dies, there is no reason you should not be able to retrieve a quite current copy of your work.

The University accommodates students with disabilities who have registered with the Disability Resource Centre. The University also accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled tests and examinations. Please let me know in advance, preferably in the first week of class, if you will require any accommodation on these grounds. Students who know in advance that they will have difficulty completing assignments because of varsity athletics, family obligations, or other similar commitments, cannot assume that they will be accommodated, and should discuss their commitments with me before the course drop date.

Read the university calendar so that you are aware of no-penalty drop dates, requirements for medical authorization (to defer an exam, for example) and other procedures that may affect you: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?page=deadlines>

Cheating & Plagiarism

Academic dishonesty in the form of cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated. The University considers plagiarism to be the most serious academic offence that a student can commit. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the presentation or submission of the work of another person, without citation or credits, as the student's own work. It also includes use of AI-based resources unless this is explicitly part of the assignment in question. Whether intentional or accidental, instances of plagiarism will have serious academic consequences.

In my experience, many students who believe they know what plagiarism is do not actually have a clear understanding of where the line between proper and improper use of sources lies. I thus strongly encourage you to read the UBC library's excellent online resources at

<http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/resource-guides/avoiding-plagiarism/>.

If you have any doubts about how and when to properly acknowledge another person's work, please discuss these with the course instructor.

Punishment for cheating or plagiarism will include a grade of zero and other disciplinary action. Please refer to the University policies on cheating and plagiarism for examples of what constitutes academic misconduct and the extent of disciplinary action that could be taken.

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/?tree=3,54,111,959>

Communication With Teaching Staff

For any questions or concerns about the course as a whole, please contact the course instructor via e-mail. Any questions about the material covered in lectures may be directed to the course instructor or to your TA. Questions about the tutorial should be directed to your TAs, whose email addresses are listed on the first page of this syllabus. Your TAs will make themselves available for individual consultation, and further information will be provided in tutorial. As discussed above, requests for an excused absence from lecture or tutorial, or for an assignment extension, should be addressed to your TA.

Emails with course announcements, details on required readings and other important information will often be sent to registered students via Canvas. It is your responsibility to make sure that the email address you have registered with UBC is valid and to check your email at this address regularly so that you do not miss these announcements.

Course Webpage & Emails

There is a course webpage for POLI 110 on Canvas. You can log in with your CWL username and password. I will use this page to post important course documents (readings, syllabus, assignments, lecture slides etc.) throughout the term. You will also be instructed to use this system to upload your written assignments.

UBC Values & Policies

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available here (<https://senate.ubc.ca/policiesresources-support-student-success>).

Topics, Dates, & Readings

M, 1/6 *Introduction*

- Watch Zimbardo film [here](#)

W, 1/8 *Types of Questions and Claims*

- No readings

M, 1/13 & W, 1/15 *Causality/Types of Causal Claims*

- Readings
 - For next week's Tutorial, read Wikipedia entry: [Causes of the French Revolution](#)
 - For next week's Tutorial, read Wikipedia entry: [Russian Revolution](#) (ONLY "Background")
- **Homework 1 "Types of Claims" Assigned (M 1/13)**

M, 1/20 *Prediction v. Explanation*

- Readings
 - There is a symposium in the journal *PS: Political Science & Politics* every year prior to a U.S. Presidential election where political scientists deploy forecasting models to predict the winner. Read the introduction "Introduction to Forecasting the 2020 U.S. Elections," posted on LOCR, then go and read any ONE of the actual articles in that symposium.
 - Sides, Tesler & Vavreck (2018). *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp.154-200.
- **Homework 1 "Types of Claims" DUE**

W, 1/22 *What is Science and Social Science?*

- Readings
 - Babbie, E. (2016). *The Basics of Social Research*, 7th Edition. Boston: Cengage Learning. Chapter 1 "Human Inquiry and Science," pp.1-29

M, 1/27 *What isn't Social Science? Conspiracy & Conspiracism*

- Readings
 - Hofstadter, R. (1964). "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine*. Available at <https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/>
 - Oppenheimer, D. M., & Monin, B. (2009). The retrospective gambler's fallacy: Unlikely events, constructing the past, and multiple universes. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 4(5), 326-334
- **Homework 2 "Causal Claims" Assigned**

W, 1/29 *Theories & Models of Behavior*

- Readings
 - Schelling, T.C. (2006[1978]). *Micromotives and Macrobehavior*. New York: W.W. Norton. 81-133
 - For next week's tutorial, watch the film [*Zeitgeist*](#)

M, 2/3, W 2/5 *Concepts & Measurement*

- Readings
 - Dahl, R. 1958. "A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model," *American Political Science Review* (52): 463-469.
 - Bachrach, P., and Baratz, M. 1962. "Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review* (56): 947-952.
 - Isaac, J. 1987. "Beyond the Three Faces of Power: A Realist Critique," *Polity* (20): 4-31.
 - Wong, C., Bowers, J., Rubenson, D., Frederickson, M., & Rundlett, A. (2018). "Maps in Peoples' Heads: Assessing a New Measure of Context," unpublished mimeo available at: <http://www.jakebowers.org/PAPERS/MeasurementCanada.pdf>
- **Homework 2 "Causal Claims" DUE Monday, February 3rd**
- **Homework 3 "Measurement Bias" ASSIGNED Wednesday, February 5th**

M 2/10 *Hypothesis-Testing*

- Readings
 - Kellstedt, P.M., & Whitten, G.D. (2018). *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*, 3rd edition. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp.134-156.

W, 2/12 *Case Selection: Large-n and Evolution of Random Sampling*

- Readings
 - Igo, S.E. (2008). *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp.23-67.
 - **Homework 3 "Measurement Bias" DUE**

M, 2/17, W 2/19 **SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS**

M, 2/24 *Case Selection: Small-n and purposive sampling*

- For Tutorial, read: Malcolm Gladwell, "The 10,000 Hour Rule," *Outliers* (Chapter 2)

W, 2/26 **Midterm Exam**

M, 3/3 *Covariation as a Means of Assessing Causation*

- Readings
 - For next week's tutorial, read: Floyd. "The Super Bowl Predicts the Market, and Vice Versa." *The New York Times*. Jan. 24, 1997.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/01/24/business/the-super-bowl-predicts-the-market-and-vice-versa.html>

- **Homework 4 “The Trouble With Correlation” ASSIGNED**

W, 3/5 *Why Covariation Doesn’t Always Mean Causation*

- Readings
 - “Regression Toward the Mean: An Introduction with Examples,” available at: <https://fs.blog/2015/07/regression-to-the-mean/>
- **Homework 4 “The Trouble With Correlation” DUE Monday, 3/10**

M, 3/10 **NO CLASS**

W, 3/12, M 3/17 *Experiments and Causation*

- Readings
 - Smith, G., & Pell, J. 2003. “Parachute use to prevent death and major trauma related to gravitational challenge: systematic review of randomised controlled trials,” *BMJ* (327): 1459-1461.

W, 3/19 & M, 3/24 **ONLINE CLASS** *Non-Experimental Studies & Causation*

- Readings:
 - Lawless, J., & Fox, R., “He Earns, She Earns (Less): The Wage Gap and Pay Equity in the United States,” chapter 8 in *Women, Men & U.S. Politics: Ten Big Questions*. New York: W.W. Norton, pp.119-135.
 - For Tutorial, week of the 18th read: <https://splinternews.com/the-trump-administration-is-screwing-poor-mexicans-out-1837035842>
 - For tutorial, week of the 25th, read: <https://www.american.edu/media/news/092616-13-keys-prediction.cfm>

- **NO CLASS on W, 3/26**
- **Homework 5 “Designing Research for Causal Inference” Assigned Wednesday, March 19th**
- **Homework 5 “Designing Research for Causal Inference” Due Wednesday, March 26th**

M, 3/31 *Deterministic Causation Process Tracing and Reasoning with Evidence*

- Readings
 - Doyle, A.C. “The Silver Blaze” <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/834/834-h/834-h.htm>

W, 4/2 *Research Ethics*

- Readings
 - LaCour, M. & Green, D.P. 2014. “When Contact Changes Minds: An Experiment on Transmission of Support for Gay Equality,” *Science* (346): 1366-136
 - Broockman, D., Kalla, J., & Aronow, P. 2015. “Irregularities in LaCour (2014)”, unpublished m.s
 - Gelman, A. 2015. “Fake Study on Changing Attitudes: Sometimes a Claim That is Too Good To Be True, Isn’t” *The Monkey Cage* (May 20)
 - Carey, B., & Belluck, P. 2015. “Maligned Study on Gay Unions is Shaking Trust,” *New York Times* (May 25).

M, 4/7

Course Wrap-Up

FINAL EXAM DATE: TBD.