Course description
With political polarization fastly becoming the defining issue of our time, there is a pressing need to develop a more precise understanding of the actions of government and the intentions that determine such actions. In this class, we will develop an in-depth understanding of what public policy is and why we sometimes justify government involvement in solving social problems. We will learn how to identify the characteristics of effective and ineffective policies by examining the conditions under which government actions may stifle intergenerational mobility, equal opportunity, and better social and economic outcomes. We will also examine the environments in which poorly designed public policies may create unexpected consequences and negative outcomes, such as exclusion or political capture. This course will explore many of the paradoxes inherent in public policy research by focusing on the highly controversial topics that animate today’s most meaningful public debates, such as gun ownership, homelessness, education, health care, and welfare policies.

Skills to be developed
Students will be required to critically engage with qualitative and quantitative academic literature, identifying the implicit assumptions, veiled ideology, or measurement choices that drive different policies. By the end of this course, students will be able to elucidate the scholarly theories behind policy design, and know how to formulate, implement, and evaluate a policy. To put theory into practice, students will work in small teams to design and conduct their own policy analysis on a topic of their choosing. Policy analyses will be presented during the on-campus session and should stimulate a thoughtful and informed debate about the challenges of the policy area.

Attendance and mandatory on-campus session
Summer School policy requires attendance in all classes. Each missed class without medical excuse reduces grades by 9 points (9%). Visit Summer School policies around Student Responsibilities to learn more.

The mandatory on-campus session meets on Saturday-Sunday, July 27-28, 9:00 am - 5:00 pm (EST) at 1 Brattle Square 201; Cambridge, MA. Attendance is required during the entire weekend to earn credit and pass the course. You cannot arrive late or leave early. If you are traveling, please plan accordingly to give yourself plenty of time to arrive by the start of class. No exceptions can be granted.

Structure
I. Basic definitions and concepts (sessions 1-3).
II. The policy process (session 4-6; on-campus session).
III. Wrapping up (session 7).

Course materials
All required materials will be uploaded to our website and will remain there for the entire course. The only book that I recommend you buy (not required) is:
Grading
– Policy Analysis Presentation (30%): Each student will choose one of 6 policy areas to conduct original research linking theoretical arguments explored in class with the policy area.⁴ Students will be assigned into teams. Each team will prepare a 30-minute professional presentation that will inform the audience about the main policies that have been implemented in their chosen area, as well as the major challenges that remain to be solved. Presentations will take place during the on-campus session. During this session, students will receive feedback to incorporate to their policy recommendation.
– Policy Recommendation (20%): Each student will submit, individually, a separate policy recommendation intended to solve (or mitigate) the challenges presented by their team during their policy analysis. Creativity and feasibility will be rewarded. Policy recommendations should be delivered in the form of a memo (1,500 words max.). Due on August 8 before 11:59 pm (EST).
– Reading Quizzes (20%): Students will be given quizzes, dates won’t be provided in advance.
– Participation (20%): Students are expected to complete all required readings prior to class, actively engage in discussions, and link assigned materials to relevant debates in the media and politics. Readings marked as “further readings” are not required.
– Homework (10%): Students will be given assignments to reinforce concepts learned in class.

Special requirements for graduate students: Participation (10%), policy recommendation (30%). The quality of the policy recommendation is expected to be significantly higher.

Academic integrity
This course follows the policies on academic integrity of the Harvard Summer School. Please carefully read the Harvard Summer School policies on academic integrity. For help with citing your sources correctly, please also visit the Resources to Support Academic Integrity. Summer School assumes that collaboration on assignments is prohibited unless permitted by the instructor. Please, take a look at Harvard Guide to Using Sources.

Accessibility
The Summer School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Accessibility Office offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. Please visit here for more information.

Late Policy
Barring an extraordinary excuse, late papers will be marked down one-third of a grade (e.g., A to A-minus) per day.

⁴They will select among: (1) welfare & social policy, (2) education, (3) healthcare, (4) economics & the budget, (4) the environment and energy, or (6) foreign policy & homeland security.
Detailed syllabus

I. Basic definitions and concepts.

Session 1. Definitions of public policy & policy analysis (June 25, 2019)
Explain the nature of public policy and identify the key concepts associated with it, define policy analysis and its components.

Required readings:

Additional readings:

Session 2. Actors (June 27, 2019)
Define a policy actor and the different goals she may pursue; explore governmental and nongovernmental actors involved in the policy process. In this session, students will be required to sort themselves into one of six policy areas.

Required readings:

Additional readings:

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2These are (1) welfare & social policy, (2) education, (3) healthcare, (4) economics & the budget, (4) the environment and energy, or (6) foreign policy & homeland security.
of Supreme Court nominations on presidential success in the U.S. Senate. Political Research Quarterly, 69(4), (pp. 746-759).

Session 3: Theories & types of public policy (July 2, 2019)
Identify typologies of public policies to understand how and why policies are implemented, and why some groups may benefit more than others.

Required readings:

Additional readings:

III. The policy process

Session 4: Roles & working with sources (July 11, 2019)
Understand the roles that actors may play during the decision-making process. Learn how to efficiently gather information about a policy area.

Required readings:

Additional readings:

Session 5: Rationales for public policy & agenda setting (July 18, 2019)
Become aware of how a problem is identified and defined as a policy issue. Learn basic concepts such as agenda-setting, elite theory, and the different market failures that justify government intervention.
Required readings:
Further readings:

Day 1
Decision making & policy tools; writing a policy memo.
Identify how policy decisions are made and what factors can influence them. Learn the different instruments that governments may use to satisfy policy goals. Explore strategies and mechanisms to make effective policy recommendations about real-world problems.
Required readings:
Additional readings:

Day 2
Adoption & implementation; Op-Ed
Understand the process from policy proposal to actual policy adoption. Understand what happens to a policy after it has been formulated. Develop the ability to write an Op-Ed to bring attention to a relevant issue.
Required readings:
- Harvard Kennedy School. *How to Write an Op-Ed or Column*.

Additional readings:

**Session 6: Policy evaluation** *(July 30, 2019)*
Evaluate different criteria for judging the value of real-world policies.

Required readings:

Additional readings:

**IV. Wrapping up**

**Session 7: The limits of policymaking** *(August 1, 2019)*
Classify government failures into four general categories and understand the factors that may inhibit a policy from being successful that are not controlled by policymakers.

Required readings:

Additional readings:
