Government 1790: American Foreign Policy

Autumn 2020
Tues/Thurs 1:30 PM - 2:45 PM ET
Alternative session TBD
Harvard University

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Preliminary syllabus – contents may change (August 8, 2020)

Video trailer

To get a chance for the feel and personality of the class, you can check out the video trailer for the course, which is also posted on the front page of the course website.

Open office hours during shopping week

Have questions about the class that aren’t answered in the video trailer or on the syllabus? I’ll be holding open office hours during shopping week on Tuesday, August 18 from 8:30-9:00 AM ET and 8:30-9:00 PM ET. You can find the Zoom link for these sessions on the course website.

Course description

This course explores America’s role in international politics, aiming to teach students some of the major theoretical perspectives in International Relations, and how to critically analyze the major dynamics shaping American foreign policy today. What would happen if the United States stopped trying to play such an active role in world politics, and focused more on problems at home, as Donald Trump seemed to suggest on the campaign
trail? Is China on the rise, and what does Chinese growth mean for the United States? How much of an effect does the media have on how Americans think about the world around them? Do nuclear weapons make us safer? How can we best understand Donald Trump’s foreign policy agenda? What effect is the current COVID-19 pandemic having on national security and the international order?

**Should I take this class?**

Ultimately, the question of America’s role in global politics is an enormous one, and deserves far more time than the twelve weeks allotted to us: an entire semester could be spent on each and every one of the issues we’ll look at. Accordingly, the class is structured as a *survey class*, and is thus similar to a buffet, presenting a smorgasbord of topics in the hopes that you may decide to study some of them further in one of the many other Government courses offered here at Harvard. Because the class is structured as a survey, there are no prerequisites, apart from an interest in the subject matter. In previous years, the class has attracted a mix of students ranging from first-years who have never taken an IR class before, to senior Government concentrators with a diverse repertoire of classes under their belt.

Although we’ll frequently turn to historical examples to make sense of the current political situation, this class *is not* a course on the history of American foreign relations. Similarly, although we’ll analyze some of the most pressing issues facing US foreign policy today, the class *is not* simply a discussion of current events or a rehashing of the previous night’s tweets. Our focus with the class is less on memorizing details of particular cases, and more about acquiring a vocabulary and set of theoretical frameworks we can use to make sense of the world around us as political scientists. Contemporary decision-makers in Washington face a large number of normative questions about how the United States should conduct its foreign affairs, but underlying many of these debates are sets of assumptions about how the world works. By the end of the semester, my hope is that you’ll be able to interrogate those assumptions directly.

The class has been set up in two parts. The first half of the course begins with an introduction to International Relations (IR) theory and American grand strategy, before exploring the inputs of the American foreign policy process: the President and Congress, bureaucratic politics, public opinion, the media, and interest groups. This half of the class will foster an understanding of why the United States behaves the way it does, all the while exploring questions like the conditions under which leaders matter, the institutional causes of “intelligence failure,” and why some interest groups exert more sway than others.

If the first half of the class focuses on the inputs to US foreign policy, the second half focuses on the outputs, as we analyze some of the most pressing issues in US foreign policy today. This portion of the course begins with questions about international order and the rise and fall of great powers. We’ll look at the challenges associated with American hegemony, and one potential reaction to it, anti-Americanism. We’ll also
examine another great power that may or may not pose a challenge to the American-led order: the rise of China. We’ll then turn to an exploration of political violence: terrorism, (counter)insurgency, and asymmetric conflict, all of which loom especially large on the American foreign policy agenda in the wake of the war on terror, the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Finally, having explored a number of ways in which the world is a mess, we’ll then turn to two domains where there are glimmers of cooperation, but where challenges remain: cybersecurity, and nuclear (de)proliferation. We’ll then conclude by bringing everything together, and asking what the future of US foreign policy holds. Every year we bring in a number of guest speakers to share their expertise in the second half of the semester, so that you have a chance to hear directly from the experts whose work you’re reading in the class. The list of guest speakers this year is included in the class schedule below.

The class format

Normally, Gov 1790 is a lecture class that meets in person (usually in either CGIS South, or Sever Hall, which are words that will make sense for those of you who are sophomores or above). I love lecture classes! When they’re done well, they can be a lot of fun, and a great way to build an intellectual community and wrestle with engaging material. Due to the current pandemic, however, Harvard is only able to hold classes online instead. So, my goal is to take all of the things that make Gov 1790 great in person, and find ways for it to translate online instead. There are some ways in which the online experience won’t be the same as meeting face-to-face. But there are other ways in which I think we can make it even better (and not just because the seats in Sever really aren’t very comfortable — first-years, you’ll have to trust me on this one).

Gov 1790 will be held in a flex live lecture format with an additional alternative session for international students, along with a weekly discussion section:

• The class will be taught live at 1:30 PM-2:45 PM ET on Tuesdays and Thursdays via Zoom, with participation and activities built into the class to maximize engagement and build community. We chose this time so that it can work for as many students as possible based on time zone information supplied by the Registrar’s office.

• I will also teach an alternative session for international students who cannot attend the Tuesday/Thursday session; students in this alternative session will watch recordings of the Tuesday/Thursday lectures asynchronously before participating in these alternative sessions. We’ll schedule this session when we know more about the time zones of the international students enrolled in the class.

• Additionally, there will also be a weekly hour-long discussion section in small groups of 12 or less with the Teaching Fellows. These will be scheduled so that students in any time zone will be able to participate. More information about the section times will be made available after the course registration deadline.
• I’m also going to be holding Gov 1790 Happy Hours several times a week throughout the semester so I can get to know each of you outside of class — more on this below.

• The course does not have an enrollment cap, so anyone can enroll without needing to run a lottery.

Technology

We’ll be using three different platforms for the course, each for a different purpose.

Canvas

• The course website (https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/75093), which includes copies of all of the course materials (syllabus, readings, reading guides, lecture recordings, etc.).

• There are no required texts to purchase for this class; all readings are available electronically on the course website as PDFs, and consist of a mix of academic and policy articles and book chapters.

• For each class, you’ll find a reading guide posted on course website, which contains both general strategic advice about how to read for Gov 1790, and guiding questions for each week. These guiding questions for each set of readings will be posted on the course website in advance of each class, to help you prioritize and focus on what you should be taking away from each piece.

Zoom

• The video chat software we’re using for lectures/sections.

• The links to each Zoom session will be made accessible through Canvas.

• We’ve prepared a guide on how to learn effectively over Zoom (along with a description of the Zoom procedures we’ll be using this semester), which you can access in the Files section on the course website.

Slack

• Used for all class communication and asynchronous participation/discussion about course material.

• The Gov 1790 Slack workspace has three channels.

  – #announcements. All class announcements from the teaching staff will appear here. (e.g. if there’s a technical glitch with one of our Zoom meetings, we’ll send an update about it in this channel).
— **#general**. This channel is for general discussion about the course material. If you have a question about material presented in the lecture or the readings, or found a news story that relates to material we discussed in class, post it here! Participation in this channel counts towards your participation grade in the class (see below for details).

— **#readingresponses**. Every week we’ll post a discussion prompt in this channel asking your reaction to something from the week’s readings. Participation in this channel counts towards your participation grade in the class (see below for details).

If you have technical difficulties with any of these platforms, more detailed information is available via HUIT.

### Course requirements and grading

**25% Active participation in sections (synchronous) and Slack discussion threads (asynchronous)**

**15% In-class written exam on IR theory and US grand strategy: September 22, 2020**

**15% In-class written exam on sources of US foreign policy: October 15, 2020**

**22% Research/policy paper: due 1:30 PM ET on November 12, 2020**

**23% Final exam on contemporary issues in US foreign policy: date TBD**

Lectures will be held from 1:30 - 2:45 PM ET on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I’ll typically open things up on Zoom about 15 minutes early so that we can chat before the class begins, and so that we can start exactly at 1:30 PM. The class will also have an alternative session for students located in timezones that can’t make the main lecture. We’re holding off on scheduling this alternative session until we know the timezone distributions of the students in the class.

Given the shift to the new online format and the unique circumstances we now find ourselves in, we have revised the course requirements for the class this year compared to its in-person predecessor. The largest single proportion of the final grade (25%) will be allocated based on active participation in the class’s discussion sections, and asynchronous participation in the Gov 1790 Slack channels, described in further detail below. Otherwise, the class is set up so that there will be one assignment per month: two in-class written exams (in September and October), a research or policy paper (in November), and a final exam (in December). The exams will consist of a combination of short answers and essays, based on the readings and the material presented in class. The first exam will cover the introduction to IR theory and American grand strategy from the first two and a half weeks of class; the second exam will cover the sources of US foreign policy presented over the next four weeks. The final exam will cover the material on the contemporary sources of foreign policy presented in the second half of the semester. Practice exam questions will be circulated the week before each exam.
There will be an 10 page paper due for all undergraduate students in the course. There are two types of papers students can submit. The first is a 10 page research paper, in which you'll critically engage with an issue in US foreign policy and analyze it from a number of theoretical perspectives. The paper (to be submitted online through the course website, before the start of class) will give you the opportunity to research an issue that interests you about the US in world politics, and demonstrate understanding of the different schools of thought on the issue amongst political scientists. The second is a 10 page policy paper, which will give you the chance to write a more policy-focused paper. More information on the paper will be presented several weeks into the course.

Finally, note that undergraduate classes at Harvard College are back on an A-F grading system (not the emergency SAT-UNSAT system temporarily implemented in SP 2020).

Flexibility

2020 has been.... a lot. These aren’t the circumstances in which any of us thought we would be in, and there will undoubtedly be unexpected developments that will arise throughout the term. Two of our guiding principles this semester will therefore be flexibility and communication. If you’re facing challenges, whether at home or on campus, please let us know, so we can work with you to find potential solutions. Just please keep us in the loop!

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<tr>
<th>Key dates for the semester</th>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, August 10</td>
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<td>Monday, August 17</td>
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<td>Friday, August 21</td>
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<td>Wednesday, August 26</td>
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<td>Friday, August 28 - Tuesday, September 1</td>
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<td>Saturday, September 5</td>
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Participation information

25% of the final grade will be based on participation: a mix of synchronous participation in discussion sections, and asynchronous participation on Slack.

Synchronous participation: discussion sections

Half of the participation grade comes from active participation in sections, which will meet every week for an hour beginning after the first week of the class. Once we know how many students are in the class, Harvard will tell us how many discussion sections our class will get, whereupon we’ll begin the sectioning process, which will begin on Friday,
August 28 and end on Tuesday, September 1. (This is when you’ll indicate your discussion section time preferences, based upon each of your schedules). Section assignments will then be announced via Slack on Saturday, September 5, and the first sections will take place the following week. Sections will be capped at 12 students, to facilitate small group conversations, and will each be led by a teaching fellow (TF). When we announce your section, we’ll also provide additional information on section times and locations. Note that because of how Harvard’s new sectioning system works, we may not be able to accommodate ex-post sectioning switching requests apart from exceptional circumstances.

The participation grade in section will be based on a number of factors: showing up to section, but also having completed the readings, and being ready to ask questions, provide reactions, and critically engage with the course material. Participation grades will be based on the quality of participation rather than quantity, but you can’t participate if you aren’t there, so not only will multiple absences affect your participation grade negatively, but material discussed in class will feature prominently in the exams, so it is crucial for students to do the readings and come to class prepared to discuss the material. Some students tend to be less comfortable with speaking up in class than their peers; if this is something you’re worried about, please contact your TF so that we can find other ways of calculating your participation grade.

Asynchronous participation: Slack

The other half of the participation grade comes from asynchronous participation. As noted above, we’ve set up a Slack workspace to allow us to continue the conversation outside of the class and help build community. Your participation will be graded weekly based on one of two options.

- Option 1: at the beginning of each week we’ll post a prompt in the #readingresponses channel, soliciting reactions to material presented in that week’s readings. Students will have until 10 PM ET on the Monday of the following week to respond to each prompt in order to earn participation grades through this option. These short responses (no longer than 1-2 paragraphs) will be graded on the basis of participation (complete/incomplete).

- Option 2: students can also earn participation grades each week by helping answer other students’ questions about the material presented in lecture and readings in the #general channel. Like with the #readingresponses channel, these will be graded on the basis of participation, and will be recorded weekly at 10 PM ET on the Monday of the following week.

Students should feel free to both respond in the #readingresponses channel and help answer questions in the #general channel, but our expectation is that each student will complete at least one of these two forms of participation each week.

We expect you to treat discussions on Slack the same way that you would treat in-person interactions in class. This means engaging with one another other respectfully and
Asynchronous participation through Slack can also be supplementary to synchronous participation in the discussion sections: students who may not be as comfortable speaking during section can make up for it by being more active in asynchronous participation over Slack, provided they have the preapproval of their TF. Students interested in this arrangement should speak to their TF.

Finally, there will be a small number of other forms of asynchronous participation (e.g. an entrance survey at the beginning of the semester, submitting questions to our guest speakers later on in the semester) that will also contribute to your asynchronous participation grade.

Gov 1790 happy hours

Gov 1790 has traditionally been a bigger class. Its size has advantages: more of you can bring your energy, ideas, and enthusiasm to class, and we don’t need to resort to a lottery to determine who’s allowed in. Its size also has its disadvantages, though, in that bigger classes often tend to be more impersonal, and afford less of an opportunity for one-on-one interaction.

To try to retain the accessibility associated with a smaller, in-person class experience, I’ll be holding regular Zoom “happy hours” throughout the semester, typically in small groups of 3-5. The purposes of the happy hours are simply for me to find out more about you, to help you better get to know some of the other students in the class, and to give you the chance to chat about the class, International Relations, and whatever you might be interested in.

These informal sessions are, of course, entirely optional, but for those of you who want the chance to break out of the large online lecture model of classroom interaction, these happy hours are one way of doing so.

More information will be circulated about how to sign up for happy hours early in the semester.

Office hours, and questions?

Suppose you have a question about the class. There are three ways you can get it answered:

1. Have questions about the material featured in the readings or presented in the lectures? Or, saw something in the news that relates to the theories and topics we discussed in class? Post it to the #general Slack channel. (And, you should feel free to help answer questions you see in the channel. This will not only help build
community for the course, but as noted above, also counts for your participation grade).

2. Alternately, come to open office hours. I’ll be hosting office hours immediately after the class ends at 2:45 PM ET on Tuesdays and Thursdays. If you have questions about things that came up in lecture or the readings, stick around after class, so we can talk through them as a group. The TFs will also be hosting office hours as well (see the front page of the syllabus for information).

3. There are some kinds of questions that are more private, which aren’t really conducive to being discussed in a group setting. For those, send me or your TF a private message on Slack, and we’ll set up a meeting.

Collaboration and academic integrity policy

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to discuss the material presented in the course with your classmates. However, there will be no collaboration in the in-class exams, and you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation – whether in the research/policy paper, or the exams – is the result of your own research and writing and reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in political science and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc), you must also acknowledge this assistance. Additional information on citation practices will be made available with the research paper instructions.

Advice from last semester’s Gov 1790 students

At the end of every semester of Gov 1790, I ask some of the students whose performance placed them amongst the top of the class to write a short paragraph of advice to be handed out to students who will be taking Gov 1790 next year, with advice on how to study for the exams and write the research paper. Even though the course isn’t identical each time it’s offered (e.g this year, the class is online, the grading setup is different, and the nature of the exams are different), their advice tends to be quite helpful, and I’ve posted their recommendations on the course website.

Special accommodations

Harvard has an office dedicated to students seeking accessibility accommodations, the Accessible Education Office (AEO). They’re happy to help with any accommodation requests you require. Students requesting academic accommodations are requested to present their letter from the AEO by September 17. Failure to make these arrangements by this date may negatively affect our ability to implement the arrangements on time.

1There are some Tuesdays where I’ll have to end open office hours early because of faculty meetings; I’ll let you know in advance when this arises.
Learning effectively on Zoom

The shift to learning online can be challenging for many students. We’ve prepared a guide on how to learn effectively over Zoom (along with a description of the Zoom procedures we’ll be using this semester: how will we be answering questions in class? etc.), which you can access in the Files section on the course website.

Tentative Class Schedule

Part I: Theories of International Politics and Sources of Foreign Policy

Thursday, September 3: Introduction to the class

Review of the syllabus and overview of the semester

A. IR theory and American grand strategy

Tuesday, September 8 and Thursday, September 10: An introduction to IR theory


Tuesday, September 15 and Thursday, September 17: Continuity and Change in US Foreign Policy


Tuesday, September 22

In-class exam on IR theory and American grand strategy
B. Sources of American foreign policy

Thursday, September 24: The President and Congress


Tuesday, September 29 and Thursday October 1: Bureaucratic Politics


Tuesday, October 6: Public Opinion


Thursday, October 8: The Media


Tuesday, October 13: Interest Groups


Thursday, October 15

⚠️ In-class exam on sources of US foreign policy

**Part II: Contemporary Issues in US Foreign Policy**

C. Unipolarity and its discontents

Tuesday, October 20: Hegemony and the Liberal International Order


Thursday, October 22: Anti-Americanism


Tuesday, October 27 and Thursday, October 29: The Rise of China

⚠️ Guest speaker: Dr. Oriana Skylar Mastro, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University


D. The logics of political violence

Tuesday, November 3 and Thursday, November 5: Terrorism


Tuesday, November 10: Counterinsurgency and Asymmetric Conflict


Thursday, November 12:

▲ Paper due, to be submitted via the course website

Thursday, November 12. Topic TBD

Topic as selected by class vote as part of the entrance survey.

E. Arms control-alt-delete?

Tuesday, November 17: Cyberwar

▲ Guest speaker: Dr. Anita R. Gohdes, Professor of International and Cyber Security, Hertie School of Governance

Thursday, November 19. Nuclear Weapons

▲ Guest speaker: Dr. Vipin Narang, Associate Professor of Political Science at MIT


Tuesday, December 1. Conclusion

The Future of US Foreign Policy

TBD. Final exam

Final exam on contemporary issues in US foreign policy. Time: TBA, Location TBA.