Welcome video

To get a chance for the feel and personality of the class, you can check out the welcome video, which has an overview of what the class is about. The video is also posted on the front page of the course website.

Course description

For nearly a decade now, I’ve taught an undergraduate American Foreign Policy class at Harvard called Gov 1790. It’s become one of the Government department’s more popular international relations classes, and we’ve always had students and visitors from outside Harvard College ask about taking or sitting in on the class, but it’s never been possible due to space constraints. This year, we’re excited to expand access and make the class available for the first time to a wider audience through the Harvard Extension School, as GOVT E-1897.

GOVT E-1897 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? 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 and Joe Biden’s foreign policy agendas? What caused the war in Ukraine, and why has the conflict shaped up the way it has?
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 courses offered at the Harvard Extension School. Because the class is structured as a survey, there are no prerequisites, apart from an interest in the subject matter. In previous years, the Harvard College version of 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, we turn to the question of emerging technology in conflict, focusing on the domains of nuclear proliferation, and drones. 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. Once all our guests have been confirmed, we’ll include them in the class schedule below.

The class format

• This class is the online, Harvard Extension School version of Gov 1790. Lectures will be recorded live on Mondays and Wednesdays at 10:30 AM-11:45 AM. Harvard Extension School students can either watch the lectures online live, or watch recordings of the lectures that will be posted to the course website shortly after each class, at a time convenient to them.

• The content of the lectures, and the course readings, are identical for both GOVT E-1897 and Gov 1790, but the course requirements differ, described below, including how students receive participation credit.

• GOVT E-1897 students can participate in two different “tracks”: an asynchronous participation track, and a synchronous participation track.
  – Students in the synchronous track will receive participation credit by participating in a weekly hour-long discussion section led by a Teaching Fellow, which will take place via Zoom each week. These will be scheduled at a range of times, in light of students’ other schedule commitments. The synchronous track gives students a chance to discuss the course material with one another in a live setting.
  – Students in the asynchronous track will receive participation credit by participating in the course’s online discussion board via Yellowdig. This track is intended for students who have schedule constraints that prevent them from being able to participate in live discussion sections, or who simply prefer interacting with their peers in writing rather than live conversations. More detail about each track is presented below.

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/111258), 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 the class, 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’ll use for the discussion sections in the synchronous track, as well as office hours.

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

**Yellowdig**

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

• The GOVT E-1897 Yellowdig workspace has three main tags. These tags are labeled in green.
  
  – **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 tag).

  – **questions.** If you have a question about material presented in the lecture or the readings, post it here! Chances are if you have a question, other students in the class might have it too! If you think you know the answer to a question posted in the channel, feel free to answer it!

  – **discussion posts.** For students in the asynchronous participation track every week we’ll post a discussion prompt in this tag asking your reaction to something from the week’s readings. Participation in this tag counts towards participation for students in the asynchronous track.

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

20% Participation: either through active participation in sections (synchronous track) or though Yellowdig discussion threads (asynchronous track)

18% Response paper 1: due Friday, September 23, 2022 at 11:59 PM ET
18% Response paper 2: due Friday, October 21, 2022 at 11:59 PM ET
22% Response paper 3: due Friday, November 18, 2022 at 11:59 PM ET
22% Response paper 4: due Thursday, December 1, 2022 at 11:59 PM ET

While the lecture material and course readings in GOVT E-1897 are identical to that covered in its Harvard College counterpart, its course requirements are significantly less intensive, consisting of active participation (either through the synchronous or asynchronous track, described below), and four short response papers (one due per month). For undergraduate students, the papers are each either 4-6 or 5-8 pages in length (double-spaced), whereas for graduate students, the papers are either 6-8 or 8-10 pages in length (double spaced). All response papers and submitted via the course website. There are no exams in the Harvard Extension School version of the class.¹

Participation

20% of the course grade comes from active participation. All GOVT E-1897 students will decide during the first week of class which participation track they would like to select.

Synchronous track

Students in the synchronous track will receive participation credit by participating in a weekly hour-long discussion section. Once we know how many students are in the class (and how many of those students will be selecting the synchronous track), we will announce how many discussion sections our class will have, whereupon we’ll begin the sectioning process, which will begin on Wednesday, August 31 and end at 10 PM ET on Friday, September 2. (This is when you’ll indicate your discussion section time preferences, based upon each of your schedules). Section assignments will then be announced via Yellowdig on Sunday, September 4, and the first sections will take place the following week (no sections will meet on Monday, September 5 due to the Labor Day holiday). Sections will be capped at 18 students, to facilitate small group conversations, and will each be led by a teaching fellow (TF). Note that because of how Harvard’s sectioning system works, we may not be able to accommodate sectioning switching requests after the fact apart from exceptional circumstances.

The participation grade in the synchronous track 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

¹When you look at the course schedule, you’ll notice there are a couple of days where there aren't any classes. That’s because the Gov 1790 students will be writing in-class exams those days! Wish them luck!
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 be useful for writing the response papers as well, so it is crucial for students to do the readings and come to class prepared to roll up their sleeves and discuss the material.

Asynchronous track

Not all students are as comfortable with speaking up in class, and others may have schedule constraints that make attending weekly discussion sections difficult. That’s why we also have an asynchronous track. Students in this track will receive participation credit by participating in the course’s online discussion board via Yellowdig.

At the beginning of each week we’ll post a prompt in the discussion posts tag on Yellowdig, soliciting reactions to material presented in that week’s readings. Students will have until 9 AM ET on the Monday of the following week to participate in the discussion. In order to receive full participation credit, students in the asynchronous track must not only respond to the prompt (1-2 paragraphs) but also respond to at least one other’s student’s prompt, to help facilitate a back-and-forth (since the aim of the track is to recreate some of the engaged discussion of on in-person section, even though the discussion is all online). Students in the synchronous track are of course also welcome to respond to these prompts and participate in the discussion as well, but participation credit for students on the synchronous track will be based on the live sections. We expect you to treat discussions on Yellowdig the same way that you would treat in-person interactions in class. This means engaging with one another other respectfully and constructively.

Since students’ decisions the first week of class about which participation track they select will determine how many discussion sections we’ll run and when they’ll be scheduled, we unfortunately will not be able to accommodate switching between the two tracks once the semester begins (that is, if you sign up for the synchronous track, you’ll be graded based upon your participation in the live discussion sections, and if you sign up for the asynchronous track, you’ll be graded based upon your participation in the Yellowdig discussion threads.

Response papers

The remaining 80% of the course grade comes from four response papers. The first two response papers (4-6 double-spaced pages in length for undergraduate students in HES, 6-8 double-spaced pages in length for graduate students in HES) are each worth 18% of the total grade, while the second two response papers (5-8 double-spaced pages in length for undergraduate students in HES, and 8-10 double-spaced pages in length for graduate students in HES) are each worth 22% of the total grade. For each response paper, students will be presented with 2-3 prompts, and asked to choose to answer one of them. These
response papers are a chance for students to demonstrate mastery of the course material by taking theoretical frameworks and concepts from lecture and the readings, and use them to weigh in on and critically engage with debates about contemporary American foreign policy.

The first response paper covers material presented in the first unit of the semester about international relations theory and continuity and change in American foreign policy, presenting students with a current event on the international stage and asking them to analyze it through the prism of the frameworks discussed in class.

The second response paper covers material presented in the second unit of the semester about the domestic inputs into the American foreign policy-making process. In it, students will be presented with a recent decision in American foreign policy, and will be asked to make an argument about what factors they think led the United States to make the decision that it did.

The third response paper covers material relating to the third unit of the semester about the rise and fall of great powers. In it, students will be given a set of prompts exploring some of the debates we discuss in that section of the class, and are asked to analyze one of them.

The final response paper covers material relating to the fourth and fifth units of the semester about political violence and nuclear weapons. Whereas the other response papers ask students to utilize the tools they’ve acquired in the class to help understand why the world works the way it does, or why the United States makes the decisions it makes, this response paper will ask students to make a policy recommendation, asking students what they think the United States should do in response to one of the situations covered in the prompt.

Each of these response papers should be either 4-6 or 5-8 double-spaced pages in length (not including the bibliography), and utilize material from the lectures and readings. More information about each response paper will be included on the response paper assignment sheets, which will be circulated at the beginning of each unit of the term – such that students will receive each assignment at least two weeks before the deadline. All papers will be submitted electronically using the course website; late submissions will receive lateness penalties as documented on the assignment sheets.

The class will be graded on an A-F grading system, using the letter scale below. The class is not open to outside visitors.

Office hours, and questions?

Suppose you have a question about the class. There are three ways you can get it answered:
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<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>A</td>
<td>≥ 92.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
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<td>B+</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
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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 Questions Yellowdig tag. Chances are if you have a question, others have it too! (And, you should feel free to help answer questions you see in the channel, which will help build community for the course).

2. If you’re in the synchronous participation track, you should feel free to bring the question with you to discussion section that week.

3. You can also reach out to one of the Teaching Fellows for an office hours appointment over Zoom. We recommend contacting the teaching staff via Yellowdig, which will solicit a quicker response than email will. During the week, the teaching staff will respond to your message on Yellowdig within 24 hours.

**Academic integrity policy**

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Extension School policies on academic integrity and how to use sources responsibly. Violations of academic integrity are taken very seriously. Review important information on academic integrity and student responsibilities here: https://extension.harvard.edu/for-students/student-policies-conduct/academic-integrity; for more on academic citation rules, visit Using Sources Effectively and Responsibly (https://extension.harvard.edu/forstudents/support-and-services/using-sources-effectively-and-responsibly) and review the Harvard Guide to Using Sources (https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu).

**Accessibility services**

The Division of Continuing Education (DCE) is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Accessibility Services Office (ASO) is responsible for providing accommodations to students with disabilities. Students must request accommodations or adjustments through the ASO. Instructors cannot grant accommodation requests without
prior ASO approval. It is imperative to be in touch with the ASO as soon as possible to avoid delays in the provision of accommodation. DCE takes student privacy seriously. Any medical documentation should be provided directly to the ASO if a substantial accommodation is required. If you miss class due to a short-term illness, notify your instructor and/or TA but do not include a doctor’s note. Course staff will not request, accept, or review doctor’s notes or other medical documentation. Please visit https://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/accessibilityservices-office-aso for more information, or contact accessibility@extension.harvard.edu.

Publishing or Distributing Course Materials

Students may not post, publish, sell, or otherwise publicly distribute course materials without the written permission of the course instructor. Such materials include, but are not limited to, the following: lecture notes, lecture slides, video, or audio recordings, assignments, problem sets, examinations, other students’ work, and answer keys. Students who sell, post, publish, or distribute course materials without written permission, whether for the purposes of soliciting answers or otherwise, may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including requirement to withdraw. Further, students may not make video or audio recordings of class sessions for their own use without written permission of the instructor.

Tentative Class Schedule

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

Wednesday, August 31: Introduction to the class
Review of the syllabus and overview of the semester

A. IR theory and American grand strategy

Wednesday, September 7 and Monday, September 12: An introduction to IR theory
Wednesday, September 14 and Monday, September 19: Continuity and Change in US Foreign Policy


Friday, September 23

Response paper 1 due

B. Sources of American foreign policy

Monday, September 26: The President and Congress


Wednesday, September 28 and Monday October 3: Bureaucratic Politics


Wednesday, October 5: Public Opinion

Joshua D. Kertzer, Brian C. Rathbun, and Nina Srinivasan Rathbun, “The Price of Peace: Motivated Reasoning and Costly Signaling in International Relations”, International


Monday, October 31 and Wednesday, November 2: The Rise of China

Guest speaker: Dr. Meg Rithmire, F. Warren McFarlan Associate Professor, Harvard Business School


Monday, November 7. Topic to be decided by class vote on the entrance survey

D. The logics of political violence

Wednesday, November 9 and Monday, November 14: Terrorism


Wednesday, November 16: Counterinsurgency and Asymmetric Conflict


Friday, November 18

E. Response paper 3 due

Monday, November 21. Nuclear Weapons

Guest speaker: Dr. Eleonora Mattiacci, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Amherst College


**Monday, November 28. Drones and Emerging Technologies**

- **Guest speaker: Dr. Joshua Schwartz**, Grand Strategy, Security and Statecraft Postdoctoral Fellow at Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Joshua A. Schwartz, Matthew Fuhrmann, and Michael C. Horowitz, ”Do Armed Drones Counter Terrorism, Or Are They Counter Productive? Evidence from 18 Countries”, International Studies Quarterly, Forthcoming.


**Wednesday, November 30. Conclusion**

The Future of US Foreign Policy

**Thursday, December 1**

- Response paper 4 due