Welcome video

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.

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? 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 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, 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 has two parts. The lecture portion of the class will be offered at 10:30 AM - 11:45 AM on Mondays and Wednesdays.

• For the first three weeks of the semester we’re meeting in a temporary location because of ongoing renovations in Sever Hall. As of this writing, that temporary location is Maxwell Dworkin G115, but last week it was Yenching Auditorium, so there’s a good chance the Registrar will change things up on us again (we’ll keep you posted!). In any case, as soon as the renovations are finished, we’ll then move to Sever Hall room 113 for the remainder of the term (when we get permission to move back to Sever, we’ll let you know!).

• Additionally, there will also be a weekly hour-long discussion section in small groups with the Teaching Fellows. These will be scheduled so that students will be able to participate regardless of their other course commitments. 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.

• Lectures will be open to enrolled students only (e.g. visitors can’t sit in on the class). Non-Harvard students can watch the lecture videos offered through the Harvard Extension School version of the class, GOVT E-1897.

COVID-19 protocols

As a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the class will be taught in accordance with Harvard’s pandemic health and safety protocols regarding masking, social distancing, testing and tracing, and so on — as well as providing academic continuity for students required to isolate. Since the pandemic is evolving, the guidelines may change; information about Harvard College’s current policies are available here.

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/106787), 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 may use for some guest lectures/online office hours, depending on the state of the pandemic
- The links to each Zoom session, if applicable, will be made accessible through Canvas.

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, 2022

15% In-class written exam on sources of US foreign policy: October 19, 2022

22% Research/policy paper: due 10:30 AM on November 16, 2022

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

Lectures will be held from 10:30 AM - 11:45 AM ET on Mondays and Wednesdays. When the pandemic hit, we revised the course requirements for the class compared to its pre-pandemic 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.

The class will be graded on an A-F grading system, and is not normally offered pass/fail unless there are extenuating circumstances. The class is not open to outside visitors.

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.
### Key dates for the semester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, August 15</td>
<td>Crimson cart opens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, August 17</td>
<td>Course registration opens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, August 26</td>
<td>Course registration deadline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, August 31</td>
<td>First lecture of this class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, August 31 - Friday, September 2</td>
<td>Electronic sectioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, September 4</td>
<td>Sections announced online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of September 5</td>
<td>First section meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Discussion sections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>TF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**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 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 Slack 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 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 9 AM 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 9 AM 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 constructively.

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 class experience, I’ll be holding regular “happy hours” throughout the semester, typically in small groups of 3-5 (in both Annenberg and the undergraduate house dining halls, though if things take a turn in the pandemic we can also hold these via Zoom!). The purposes of the happy hours are simply for me to learn 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 11:45 AM ET on Mondays and Wednesdays. You're welcome to attend these either in person, or over Zoom by appointment. 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.

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


**Wednesday, September 21**

* In-class exam on IR theory and American grand strategy

**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**


Wednesday, October 12: The Media


Monday, October 17: Interest Groups


Wednesday, October 19

In-class exam on sources of US foreign policy

Part II: Contemporary Issues in US Foreign Policy

C. Unipolarity and its discontents

Monday, October 24: Hegemony and the Liberal International Order


Wednesday, October 26: Anti-Americanism


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:**

✏ Paper due, to be submitted via the course website

**Wednesday, November 16: Counterinsurgency and Asymmetric Conflict**


**E. Arms control-alt-delete?**

**Monday, November 21. Nuclear Weapons**

 водо 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


Wednesday, November 30. Conclusion

The Future of US Foreign Policy

TBD. Final exam

▲ Final exam on contemporary issues in US foreign policy. Time: TBD