Age and Power

PLSC 2262

Instructor: Charles McClean

Spring 2027 (Updated 11.05.26)

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Office Hours: TBD

Room: TBD
Meeting Time: MW 2:35–3:25 p.m.

Course Description

Younger people often have less political power than older people, yet they will live longer with the consequences of decisions made today. This imbalance takes on new urgency as declining birth rates and population aging transform societies around the world. In this course, we will explore the relationship between age and power in the United States and other countries through topics including political participation, representation, climate change, education, technology, work, housing, inequality, fertility, immigration, retirement, and healthcare. Throughout, we will analyze how political decisions shape our opportunities and security across the life course.

Course Requirements

All students participate in lectures and weekly discussion sections, take quizzes in section, and complete the Midterm Exam (60% of the final grade). After completing Part I, students can then choose one of two assignment tracks—a **policy track** or **research track**—based on their interests (40% of the final grade).

Common Requirements (60%)

1. Participation (20%)

Although this is a lecture course, there will be plenty of opportunities for questions, discussion, and small-group activities. Our experience will be enriched when every member of the class is familiar with the readings, has thought about them seriously, and shares their reactions with the class. Your participation grade is based on your contributions to weekly discussion sections led by a teaching fellow. Attendance itself is not graded.

2. Section Quizzes (20%) – Nine Quizzes, Best Seven Count

You will complete nine short quizzes in section during Weeks 2–12 covering the readings and lectures. Questions will emphasize understanding the main arguments and evidence, rather than recalling trivia. Your seven highest quiz scores will count equally toward this portion of your grade. The two lowest scores will be dropped.

3. Midterm Exam (20%) – Monday, February 22 (In Class)

This paper-based exam will feature a mix of multiple-choice and short-answer questions covering the readings, lectures, and class discussions from Part I: Age and Political Voice. To do well,

you should read the assigned materials carefully, critically assess their main arguments, and participate fully in class discussions. The exam will ask you to assess competing explanations and apply course concepts to political questions.

Policy Track (40%)

1. Age and Opportunity Policy Memo (20%) – Due Wednesday, March 24

You will write a 5–7-page, double-spaced policy memo recommending how a government or other decision maker should respond to a challenge involving education, work, housing, or family wealth. Draw on course evidence to explain how your recommendation would affect people at different stages of life and what tradeoffs the decision maker would face.

2. Demographic Change Policy Memo (20%) – Due Tuesday, May 11

You will write a 5–7-page, double-spaced policy memo recommending how a government or other decision maker should respond to a challenge involving fertility, population aging, or migration. Draw on course evidence to explain how your recommendation would affect people at different stages of life and what tradeoffs the decision maker would face.

Research Track (40%)

1. Research Proposal (10%) – Due Wednesday, March 3

This preliminary, 2–3 page (double-spaced) proposal for your final research paper should include your research question, tentative argument, at least five citations, and your empirical strategy. Your question should concern age and politics. You should incorporate feedback on the proposal into your research project.

2. Research Paper (30%) – Due Tuesday, May 11

You will write a 12–15 page (double-spaced) original research paper. The paper should develop a clear argument about age and politics and evaluate it using evidence. Qualitative or quantitative approaches are welcome. The use of primary sources is encouraged but not required. Please do not "recycle" research papers that you have submitted for other classes.

Course Policies

Diversity and Inclusion in This Classroom

I am personally committed to making sure this classroom is a safe space where everyone feels welcome and comfortable expressing their views. While I expect us to have rigorous discussions and even disagreements, I ask that you engage each other with empathy and respect.

Accessibility

If you anticipate requiring academic accommodations for a disability, please contact Yale's Student Accessibility Services. In an effort to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible,

you are also welcome to privately discuss options with me as soon as possible to establish mutually agreeable accommodations in a timely fashion. I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive and every effort will be made to be supportive.

Assignment Due Dates

If an important change in circumstances makes it impossible to meet a due date, please email me and contact your residential college dean as soon as possible. Unless covered by a Dean's Extension, the grade for late work will be lowered one grade step for each calendar day late (e.g., an A becomes an A-).

Academic Honesty

You must document all of your source material. If you take any text from somebody else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas, or other material. If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, ask! Plagiarism is a serious offense and will not be treated lightly. For more information, please consult the Poorvu Center.

Generative AI

You may use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude) as a companion to your reading and writing process, but not as a replacement for your own judgment. Appropriate uses include conducting preliminary research, identifying possible sources or questions, and copyediting what you have already written. However, the arguments, analysis, and substantive writing in your work must be your own. It is your responsibility to ensure the accuracy and validity of anything you submit in this class. If you do use AI in preparing your work, include a brief note describing how you used it. In describing these uses, please distinguish between uses that directly shape your research or the content of the assignment (e.g., collecting data) and uses that supported the writing process (e.g., proofreading).

Course Schedule

Part I: Age and Political Voice

01.20 - Introduction

How does age shape who gets heard, who gets what, and what societies invest in?

01.25 - Political Socialization

Do people become more conservative as they age?

- Peterson, Johnathan C., Kevin B. Smith, and John R. Hibbing. 2020. "Do People Really Become More Conservative as They Age?" *The Journal of Politics* 82(2): 600–611.
- Burn-Murdoch, John. 2022. "Millennials Are Shattering the Oldest Rule in Politics." *Financial Times*, December 30.

01.27 - Information and Misinformation

How does age shape where people get political news, which sources they trust, and what they share?

- Lyons, Benjamin, Jacob M. Montgomery, and Jason Reifler. 2024. "Partisanship and Older Americans' Engagement with Dubious Political News." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 88(3): 962–990.
- Forman-Katz, Naomi, et al. 2025. "Young Adults and the Future of News." *Pew Research Center*, December 3.

01.29 - Political Discontent and Polarization

⋆ **We meet this Friday because Yale follows the Monday schedule.**

Are younger and older generations pulling politics in different directions?

- O'Grady, Tom. 2023. "Is Ideological Polarisation by Age Group Growing in Europe?" *European Journal of Political Research* 62(4): 1389–1402.
- Cummings, Mike. 2017. "Do Political Beliefs Affect Online Dating? Q&A with Political Scientist Gregory Huber." *Yale News*, February 24.

02.01 - Protest

How does age shape who protests and whose protests get heard?

- Trachtman, Samuel, Sarah F. Anzia, and Charlotte Hill. 2023. "Age-Group Identity and Political Participation." *Research & Politics* 10(2): 1–8.
- Ndung'u, Kinuthia, and Wanjira Wanjiru. 2026. "What 'Leaderless' Actually Means." *Journal of Democracy*, The Frontline.

02.03 - Voter Turnout

Why does the turnout gap between younger and older voters vary across countries?

- Holbein, John B., and D. Sunshine Hillygus. 2016. "Making Young Voters: The Impact of Preregistration on Youth Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(2): 364–382. See the first page of the 2017 correction for the revised turnout estimate.
- Eichhorn, Jan, and Christine Huebner. 2022. "Evidence from Germany: Does Reducing the Voting Age to 16 Lead to Higher Turnout at Elections?" *LSE European Politics*.

02.08 - Is There a Youth Vote?

What do young voters agree on, and what divides them?

- Nennstiel, Richard, and Ansgar Hudde. 2025. "Is There a Growing Gender Divide among Young Adults in Regard to Ideological Left–Right Self-Placement? Evidence from 32 European Countries." *European Sociological Review* 41(6): 862–883.
- Yale Youth Poll. 2026. "Spring 2026 Results."

02.10 - Young People and Political Parties

When do party leaders listen to younger members?

- Seeberg, Henrik Bech. 2026. "Do Politicians Listen to Youth Wings? Evidence from an Elite Experiment." *The Journal of Politics* 88(2): 586–600.
- Rainsford, Emily. 2017. "A Glance at the Future of British Politics: What We Know about Parties' Youth Factions." *LSE British Politics and Policy*, November 14.

02.15 - Candidate Entry

Why don't more young people run for office, and how do voters respond when they do?

- Lawless, Jennifer L., and Richard L. Fox. 2015. *Running from Office: Why Young Americans Are Turned Off to Politics*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 2.
- McClean, Charles T., and Yoshikuni Ono. 2024. "Too Young to Run? Voter Evaluations of the Age of Candidates." *Political Behavior* 46(4): 2333–2355.

02.17 - Gerontocracy

Do younger and older politicians govern differently?

- McClean, Charles T. 2026. "Does Youth Representation Matter for Social Spending?" *The Journal of Politics*.
- Moyn, Samuel. 2026. "The Old Guard." *Harper's*, May.

02.22 - Midterm Exam

⋆ **Midterm Exam (In Class)**

Part II: Age and Public Policy

02.24 - Climate Policy

How does age shape climate attitudes and political action?

- Inwald, Joshua F., Wändi Bruine de Bruin, and Christopher D. Petsko. 2024. "Younger Americans Are Less Politically Polarized Than Older Americans about Climate Policies (but Not about Other Policy Domains)." *PLOS ONE* 19(5): e0302434.
- Tyson, Alec, Brian Kennedy, and Cary Funk. 2021. "Gen Z, Millennials Stand Out for Climate Change Activism, Social Media Engagement with Issue." *Pew Research Center*, May 26.

03.01 - Education and Debt

Who should pay for the next generation's education?

- Garritzmann, Julian L. 2015. "Attitudes towards Student Support: How Positive Feedback-Effects Prevent Change in the Four Worlds of Student Finance." *Journal of European Social Policy* 25(2): 139–158.
- Looney, Adam. 2022. "Student Loan Forgiveness Is Regressive Whether Measured by Income, Education, or Wealth." *Brookings*.

03.03 - Technology and Work

⋆ **Research Track: Research Proposal Due**

How does technological change reshape opportunities for younger and older workers?

- Chueri, Juliana. 2026. "AI, the Future of Work, and the Politics of the Welfare State." *Perspectives on Politics*, First View: 1–13.
- Brynjolfsson, Erik, Bharat Chandar, and Ruyu Chen. 2026. "No Widespread Displacement, but the AI Employment Gap for Young Workers Has Widened to 19%." *Stanford Digital Economy Lab*, August 12.

03.05–03.21 - Spring Recess

⋆ **No Class.**

03.22 - Housing

How does age shape who can find housing and who has a say in what gets built?

- Einstein, Katherine Levine, Maxwell Palmer, and David M. Glick. 2019. "Who Participates in Local Government? Evidence from Meeting Minutes." *Perspectives on Politics* 17(1): 28–46.
- Demsas, Jerusalem. 2024. "The Labyrinthine Rules That Created a Housing Crisis." *The Atlantic*, September 2.

03.24 - Inheritance and Family Wealth

⋆ **Policy Track: Age and Opportunity Policy Memo Due**

How does financial help from parents and grandparents affect inequality among young adults?

- Grant, Zack, Jane Green, and Geoffrey Evans. 2025. "Family Matters: How Concerns about the Financial Wellbeing of Young Relatives Shape the Political Preferences of Older Adults." *British Journal of Political Science* 55, e63: 1–25.
- Burn-Murdoch, John. 2024. "Forget Boomers vs Millennials, the Next Conflict Is Millennials vs Each Other." *Financial Times*, April 12.

03.29 - Family Formation and Fertility

Why are people having fewer children, and what can governments change?

- Schoppa, Leonard J. 2020. "The Policy Response to Declining Fertility Rates in Japan: Relying on Logic and Hope over Evidence." *Social Science Japan Journal* 23(1): 3–21.
- Sussman, Anna Louie. 2019. "The End of Babies." *The New York Times*, November 16.

03.31 - Childcare and Family Policy

How does policy distribute the costs of raising the next generation?

- Tavits, Margit, Petra Schleiter, Jonathan Homola, and Dalston Ward. 2024. "Fathers' Leave Reduces Sexist Attitudes." *American Political Science Review* 118(1): 488–494.
- Miller, Claire Cain. 2021. "How Other Nations Pay for Child Care. The U.S. Is an Outlier." *The New York Times*, October 6.

04.05 - Population Aging

How does an aging electorate change economic policy?

- Vlandas, Tim. 2026. "Aging Advanced Capitalist Democracies: The New Electoral Politics of Economic Stagnation." *World Politics* 78(1): 48–90. Full article.
- Scott, Andrew, and Peter Piot. 2025. "The Longevity Dividend." *Finance & Development*, June.

04.07 - Youth Bulges

How do governments respond when a large generation comes of age?

- Nordås, Ragnhild, and Christian Davenport. 2013. "Fight the Youth: Youth Bulges and State Repression." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(4): 926–940.
- Simpson, Graeme. 2018. *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*. UNFPA/PBSO. Executive summary only.

04.12 - Immigration

Does population aging make immigration reform easier or harder?

- Gigante, Michael J., and Justin Gest. 2026. "Gray Area: Population Aging and Immigration Attitudes in Japan." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 59(2): 312–319.
- Chung, Erin Aeran, and Yunchen Tian. 2025. "Immigration Systems in Labor-Needy Japan and South Korea Have Evolved—but Remain Restrictive." *Migration Policy Institute*.

04.14 - Internal Migration and Shrinking Communities

How does young adults' movement toward cities reshape political power and public services?

- Dancygier, Rafaela, Sirus H. Dehdari, David D. Laitin, Moritz Marbach, and Kåre Vernby. 2025. "Emigration and Radical Right Populism." *American Journal of Political Science* 69(1): 252–267.
- OECD. 2025. *Shrinking Smartly and Sustainably: Strategies for Action*. Executive summary only.

04.19 - Social Spending

Why do governments distribute resources differently across age groups?

- Lynch, Julia. 2006. *Age in the Welfare State: The Origins of Social Spending on Pensioners, Workers, and Children*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1, "Introduction," pp. 1–14.
- Nikolopoulos, Elli. 2026. "Federal Budget Priorities Overlook Our Greatest Investment—Children." *Urban Institute*.

04.21 - Retirement and Pensions

Who gets to retire, and who bears the costs of pension reform?

- Jacobs, Alan M. 2008. "The Politics of When: Redistribution, Investment and Policy Making for the Long Term." *British Journal of Political Science* 38(2): 193–220.
- Varma, Tara. 2023. "Unrest in France Challenges Macron's Ambitions." *Brookings*.

04.26 - Health and Longevity

Who gets to grow old?

- Montez, Jennifer Karas, et al. 2022. "U.S. State Policy Contexts and Mortality of Working-Age Adults." *PLOS ONE* 17(10): e0275466.
- Lynch, Julia. 2016. "Why Framing Inequality as a Health Problem May Make It Harder to Fight." *Items*, Social Science Research Council.

04.28 - Eldercare

Who pays for independence and care in later life?

- Campbell, John Creighton, Naoki Ikegami, and Soonman Kwon. 2009. "Policy Learning and Cross-National Diffusion in Social Long-Term Care Insurance: Germany, Japan, and the Republic of Korea." *International Social Security Review* 62(4): 63–80.
- Abelson, Reed, and Jordan Rau. 2023. "Facing Financial Ruin as Costs Soar for Elder Care." *KFF Health News / The New York Times*, November 14.

05.11 - Final Written Assignments

⋆ **Policy Track: Demographic Change Policy Memo Due**

⋆ **Research Track: Research Paper Due**