

PLSC 7435: Advanced Democracies

Instructor: Charles McClean

Fall 2026 (Updated 10.06.26)

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Office Hours: Thurs. 3–4:30pm ([scheduler.zoom.us/charles-mcclean](https://scheduler.zoom.us/j/charles-mcclean))

Room: Rosenkranz 301

Time: Tue. 1:30–3:25pm

This course examines political challenges facing advanced democracies in the 21st century. Rather than focusing on democratic transitions or regime stability, we will investigate what political problems emerge *after* democracy consolidates. Topics include the puzzle of redistribution, unequal political representation, welfare state restructuring, globalization's winners and losers, migration and membership, populism and democratic backsliding, demographic change, gender and care policy, and climate change. The course emphasizes both foundational theoretical frameworks and cutting-edge empirical research in comparative political economy.

Admission

Priority is given to PhD students in Political Science.

Requirements

Participation (10%)

Students are expected to complete all the required readings before class and actively contribute to discussion.

Reading Questions (10%)

Each week between Weeks 2–12, you will post two discussion questions about the readings on Canvas (no longer than 250 words total). Questions should critically engage with the readings and may focus on an individual reading or connections across them. Include a brief explanation of the issue each question raises. Reading Questions are due by 11:59pm the day before class.

Discussion Leadership (10%)

Each student will sign up to lead the first 15–20 minutes of discussion once during the semester. You should identify common threads and tensions across the readings, pose questions, and help your classmates engage with one another's ideas. This is an opportunity to practice teaching.

Response Paper (10%)

Each student will write one response paper (~1,000 words) over the course of the semester. A response paper should critically engage with the week's readings—synthesizing arguments, identifying tensions, or proposing extensions. You may write your response paper for any week of your choosing. Papers are due on Canvas at the start of class, before discussion begins.

Referee Report (10%)

Each student will write one referee report (~1,000 words) on a paper listed on the syllabus. Your report should explain what the paper contributes, assess how well its argument and evidence support its claims, and suggest concrete ways to improve it. Reports are due on Canvas at the start of the relevant class, before discussion begins.

Final Paper (50%)

Students will write an original research paper related to the themes of the course. The final paper should have a clear research question, engage with relevant literature, and propose (or execute) a research design. The paper should be approximately 10–15 double-spaced pages, excluding references and appendices.

- **Proposal (10%):** A 2–3 page proposal outlining your research question, its contribution to the existing literature, and your proposed approach. Due on Canvas at the start of class on October 20, before discussion begins.
- **Presentation (10%):** During the final class session, students will present their research to the class (~10 minutes) and receive feedback from peers.
- **Final Paper (30%):** The complete paper is due on Canvas by 5:00pm on December 22.

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 as soon as possible. The grade for late work will be lowered one grade step for each calendar day late (e.g., an A becomes an A-). For undergraduates, a Dean's Extension supersedes this penalty. Because Reading Questions are designed to be submitted before class, they cannot be submitted after the relevant class has met.

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 including 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

09.08 Week 1: What Is an Advanced Democracy—and Why Study It Separately?

What political problems emerge after democracy consolidates?

- Foa, Roberto Stefan and Yascha Mounk. 2016. "The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect." *Journal of Democracy* 27(3): 5–17.
- Inglehart, Ronald F. 2016. "The Danger of Deconsolidation: How Much Should We Worry?" *Journal of Democracy* 27(3): 18–23.
- Przeworski, Adam. 2024. "Who Decides What Is Democratic?" *Journal of Democracy* 35(3): 5–16.

09.15 Week 2: Inequality and Redistribution

Why do advanced democracies respond differently to inequality?

- Iversen, Torben and David Soskice. 2006. “Electoral Institutions and the Politics of Coalitions: Why Some Democracies Redistribute More Than Others.” *American Political Science Review* 100(2): 165–181.
- Rehm, Philipp, Jacob S. Hacker, and Mark Schlesinger. 2012. “Insecure Alliances: Risk, Inequality, and Support for the Welfare State.” *American Political Science Review* 106(2): 386–406.
- Elkjær, Mads Andreas and Torben Iversen. 2023. “The Democratic State and Redistribution: Whose Interests Are Served?” *American Political Science Review* 117(2): 391–406.
- Lupu, Noam and Jonas Pontusson. 2011. “The Structure of Inequality and the Politics of Redistribution.” *American Political Science Review* 105(2): 316–336.

09.22 Week 3: Representation and Political Inequality

When and how does economic inequality translate into unequal political influence?

- Gilens, Martin and Benjamin I. Page. 2014. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens.” *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3): 564–581.
- Schakel, Wouter and Brian Burgoon. 2022. “The Party Road to Representation: Unequal Responsiveness in Party Platforms.” *European Journal of Political Research* 61(2): 304–325.
- Mathisen, Ruben B. 2023. “Affluence and Influence in a Social Democracy.” *American Political Science Review* 117(2): 751–758.
- Carpenter, Daniel P. et al. 2026. “Inequality in Agency Rulemaking.” Working paper, May 20.

09.29 Week 4: Who Governs and Does It Matter?

Why are some groups underrepresented in office, and how does their inclusion affect policy and legitimacy?

- Kage, Rieko, Frances M. Rosenbluth, and Seiki Tanaka. 2019. “What Explains Low Female Political Representation? Evidence from Survey Experiments in Japan.” *Politics & Gender* 15(2): 285–309.
- Broockman, David E. 2013. “Black Politicians Are More Intrinsically Motivated to Advance Blacks’ Interests: A Field Experiment Manipulating Political Incentives.” *American Journal of Political Science* 57(3): 521–536.
- McClean, Charles T. 2026. “Does Youth Representation Matter for Social Spending?” *Journal of Politics* (forthcoming).
- Clayton, Amanda, Diana Z. O’Brien, and Jennifer M. Piscopo. 2026. “Electoral Gender Quotas and Democratic Legitimacy.” *American Political Science Review* 120(1): 123–140.

10.06 Week 5: Globalization, Openness, and Distributional Conflict

Why does trade openness generate political backlash, and when can governments sustain support for it?

- Margalit, Yotam. 2011. “Costly Jobs: Trade-related Layoffs, Government Compensation, and Voting in U.S. Elections.” *American Political Science Review* 105(1): 166–188.
- Colantone, Italo and Piero Stanig. 2018. “The Trade Origins of Economic Nationalism: Import Competition and Voting Behavior in Western Europe.” *American Journal of Political Science* 62(4): 936–953.
- Rickard, Stephanie J. 2023. “The Electoral Consequences of Compensation for Globalization.” *European Union Politics* 24(3): 427–446.
- Kim, In Song, Megumi Naoi, and Tomoya Sasaki. 2026. “Domestic Institutions, Geographic Concentration, and Agricultural Liberalization.” *American Political Science Review* 120(1): 55–71.

10.13 Week 6: Migration and the Politics of Membership

How do economic interests and cultural boundaries shape immigrants' acceptance and rights?

- Hainmueller, Jens and Michael J. Hiscox. 2010. “Attitudes toward Highly Skilled and Low-Skilled Immigration: Evidence from a Survey Experiment.” *American Political Science Review* 104(1): 61–84.
- Devaux, Martin. 2025. “Business as (Un)usual: Immigrant Entrepreneurship and Native Backlash.” Working paper, October 14.
- Alesina, Alberto, Elie Murard, and Hillel Rapoport. 2021. “Immigration and Preferences for Redistribution in Europe.” *Journal of Economic Geography* 21(6): 925–954.
- Chung, Erin Aeran, Darcie Draudt, and Yunchen Tian. 2024. “The Developmental Migration State.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50(3): 637–656.

10.20 Week 7: Populism and Anti-Establishment Politics

Who supports populist challengers, and how do established parties respond?

- Gidron, Noam and Peter A. Hall. 2020. “Populism as a Problem of Social Integration.” *Comparative Political Studies* 53(7): 1027–1059.
- 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.
- Daur, Valentin. 2025. “Legitimize or Delegitimize? Mainstream Party Strategy toward (Former) Pariah Parties and How Voters Respond.” *American Political Science Review* 119(3): 1514–1529.
- Kates, Sean, Eric Manning, Tali Mendelberg, and Omar Wasow. 2026. “Plutopopulism: Wealth and Trump’s Financial Base.” *American Political Science Review* 120(1): 92–109.

10.27 Week 8: Democratic Backsliding

Why do citizens tolerate democratic erosion, and what can sustain democratic constraints?

- Graham, Matthew H. and Milan W. Svolik. 2020. "Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States." *American Political Science Review* 114(2): 392–409.
- Ogura, Ikuma, Hirofumi Miwa, and Yuko Kasuya. 2026. "Support for Executive Aggrandizement under Weak Polarization." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*. Advance online publication: 1–24.
- Grumbach, Jacob M. 2023. "Laboratories of Democratic Backsliding." *American Political Science Review* 117(3): 967–984.
- Wuttke, Alexander and Florian Foos. 2025. "Making the Case for Democracy: A Field-Experiment on Democratic Persuasion." *European Journal of Political Research* 64(2): 559–579.

11.03 Week 9: The Welfare State Under Pressure

Who gets protected as welfare states adapt to aging populations and changing work?

- Palier, Bruno and Kathleen Thelen. 2010. "Institutionalizing Dualism: Complementarities and Change in France and Germany." *Politics & Society* 38(1): 119–148.
- Hacker, Jacob S. 2004. "Privatizing Risk without Privatizing the Welfare State: The Hidden Politics of Social Policy Retrenchment in the United States." *American Political Science Review* 98(2): 243–260.
- Lynch, Julia. 2006. *Age in the Welfare State: The Origins of Social Spending on Pensioners, Workers, and Children*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 3 (pp. 1–14 and 41–69).
- Vlandas, Tim. 2026. "Aging Advanced Capitalist Democracies: The New Electoral Politics of Economic Stagnation." *World Politics* 78(1): 48–90.

11.10 Week 10: Gender, Family, and Care Policy

How do gender inequalities shape politics, and when can policy change them?

- Iversen, Torben and Frances Rosenbluth. 2006. "The Political Economy of Gender: Explaining Cross-National Variation in the Gender Division of Labor and the Gender Voting Gap." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(1): 1–19.
- Morgan, Kimberly J. 2013. "Path Shifting of the Welfare State: Electoral Competition and the Expansion of Work-Family Policies in Western Europe." *World Politics* 65(1): 73–115.
- Naurin, Elin, Dietlind Stolle, and Elias Markstedt. 2023. "The Effect of Pregnancy on Engagement with Politics. Toward a Model of the Political Consequences of the Earliest Stages of Parenthood." *American Political Science Review* 117(1): 311–317.
- Tavits, Margit, Petra Schleiter, Jonathan Homola, and Dalston Ward. 2024. "Fathers' Leave Reduces Sexist Attitudes." *American Political Science Review* 118(1): 488–494.

11.17 Week 11: Housing, Wealth, and Generational Divides

How does housing wealth shape political conflict, and why is reform so difficult?

- Ansell, Ben. 2014. “The Political Economy of Ownership: Housing Markets and the Welfare State.” *American Political Science Review* 108(2): 383–402.
- Dancygier, Rafaela and Andreas Wiedemann. 2025. “The Financialization of Housing and Its Political Consequences.” *American Journal of Political Science* 69(4): 1354–1373.
- Elkjær, Mads Andreas, Ben Ansell, Laure Bokobza, Asli Cansunar, Matthias Haslberger, and Jacob Nystrup. 2025. “Why Is It So Hard to Counteract Wealth Inequality?” *World Politics* 77(3): 515–561.
- Heddesheimer, Vincent. 2026. “Electoral Risk and Housing Supply.” Working paper, August 26.

11.24 No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

12.01 Week 12: Climate Change and the Challenge of Long-Term Policy

When can democracies pursue long-term climate goals despite immediate political costs?

- Aklin, Michaël and Matto Mildemberger. 2020. “Prisoners of the Wrong Dilemma: Why Distributive Conflict, Not Collective Action, Characterizes the Politics of Climate Change.” *Global Environmental Politics* 20(4): 4–27.
- Stokes, Leah C. 2016. “Electoral Backlash against Climate Policy: A Natural Experiment on Retrospective Voting and Local Resistance to Public Policy.” *American Journal of Political Science* 60(4): 958–974.
- Finnegan, Jared J. 2022. “Institutions, Climate Change, and the Foundations of Long-Term Policymaking.” *Comparative Political Studies* 55(7): 1198–1235.
- Baehr, Christian, Fiona Bare, and Vincent Heddesheimer. 2026. “Climate Exposure Drives Firm Political Behavior: Evidence from Earnings Calls and Lobbying Data.” *American Journal of Political Science*, Early View, 1–18.

12.08 Week 13: Final Presentations

Students will present their research papers to the class (~10 minutes each), followed by discussion and feedback. Come prepared to engage constructively with your colleagues’ work. Final papers are due on Canvas by 5:00pm on December 22.