

Age and Power

PLSC [TBD]

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Spring 2027 (Updated 10.09.26)

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Office Hours: TBD

Room: TBD

Meeting Time: TBD

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 are responsible for participating in the class, completing in-class quizzes, and taking the Foundations Exam (50% 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 (50% of the final grade).

Common Requirements (50%)

1. Class Participation (10%)

Although this is a lecture course, there will be 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. Participation reflects thoughtful engagement in these activities. Attendance itself is not graded.

2. In-Class Quizzes (20%) – Nine Quizzes, Best Seven Count

You will complete nine short quizzes 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. Foundations Exam (20%) – Week 5 (In Class)

This paper-based exam will include 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 (50%)

1. Age and Opportunity Policy Memo (20%) – Due Week 8

You will write a 5–7 page (double-spaced) policy memo directed to a government or other specified decision maker that recommends how it should respond to a challenge concerning opportunity across the life course. The memo will draw on our classes on education, work, housing, or family wealth. Your recommendations should draw on evidence and consider political feasibility and tradeoffs.

2. Policy Presentation (10%) – Week 13

You will give a short presentation on your demographic change analysis. Presentation dates will be assigned. You should incorporate feedback from the presentation into your final written analysis.

3. Demographic Change Analysis (20%) – Due on Final Exam Date

You will select a puzzling political development or policy outcome related to demographic change and write a 5–7 page (double-spaced) analysis explaining its causes, significance, and implications to a public audience. Your analysis should draw on course readings and other credible evidence to evaluate competing explanations. Topics may concern fertility, population aging, migration, or policies that support people across generations.

Research Track (50%)

1. Research Proposal (10%) – Due Week 7

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 Presentation (10%) – Week 13

You will give a short presentation on your research paper. Presentation dates will be assigned. You should incorporate feedback from the presentation into your final paper.

3. Research Paper (30%) – Due on Final Exam Date

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

Week 1 / Week of January 18

Class 1: Introduction

Class 2: 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*.

Week 2 / Week of January 25

Class 3: Information and Misinformation

How does age shape where people get political news—and what they trust and 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. Sections “Young Adults Are Less Likely to Follow the News” and “Where Young Adults Get News.”

Class 4: Political Discontent and Polarization

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.

Week 3 / Week of February 1

Class 5: 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.

Class 6: Voting

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. Read with the 2017 correction.
- 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*.

Week 4 / Week of February 8**Class 7: Candidate Entry and Gerontocracy**

Why don't more young people run for office?

- McClean, Charles T., and Yoshikuni Ono. 2024. [“Too Young to Run? Voter Evaluations of the Age of Candidates.”](#) *Political Behavior* 46(4): 2333–2355.
- Moyn, Samuel. 2026. [“The Old Guard.”](#) *Harper's*, May.

Class 8: Representation

Would younger politicians govern differently?

- McClean, Charles T. 2026. [“Does Youth Representation Matter for Social Spending?”](#) *The Journal of Politics*. Main text; omit the online appendix.
- Rothman, Joshua. 2026. [“Are Americans Too Old?”](#) *The New Yorker*.

Week 5 / Week of February 15**Class 9: Foundations Exam**

★ **Foundations Exam (In Class)**

Part II: Age and Public Policy**Class 10: 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. Opening overview only (first webpage).

Week 6 / Week of February 22

Class 11: 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*.

Class 12: Technology and Work

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.

Week 7 / Week of March 1

★ Research Track: Research Proposal Due

Class 13: Housing

How does age shape access to housing—and influence over 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*.

Class 14: Inheritance and Family Wealth

Can support across generations deepen inequality within a generation?

- 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*, republished by CNA.

Spring Recess / Weeks of March 8 and March 15

No meetings. Classes resume the week of March 22.

Week 8 / Week of March 22

★ Policy Track: Age and Opportunity Policy Memo Due

Class 15: 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*; available from the Pulitzer Center.

Class 16: 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*.

Week 9 / Week of March 29

Class 17: 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.

Class 18: 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.

Week 10 / Week of April 5

Class 19: 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*.

Class 20: 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.

Week 11 / Week of April 12**Class 21: 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*.

Class 22: Retirement and Pensions

Who gets to retire—and who bears the costs of 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*.

Week 12 / Week of April 19**Class 23: 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.

Class 24: 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*.

Week 13 / Week of April 26

Class 25: Student Presentations 1

- ★ **Policy and Research Tracks: Presentations (Round 1)**

Class 26: Student Presentations 2

- ★ **Policy and Research Tracks: Presentations (Round 2)**

Final Exam Date

- ★ **Policy Track: Demographic Change Analysis Due**
- ★ **Research Track: Research Paper Due**