

**POLA 4011**  
**Activism and Lawmaking in the United States**  
Spring 2024

Professor: Josh Basseches (he/him/his)  
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504-862-8319

Class Meets: TTh, 2:00pm-3:15pm

Classroom: Norman Mayer, Room 101

Office Hours/Location: Tuesdays, 10:00am-12:00pm or by appointment, Norman Mayer Building 305<sup>1</sup> (or via Zoom)

### **Course Catalog Information**

Prerequisite(s): POLA 2100 and POLS 2010.  
Credit Hours: 3

### **Course Description and Goals**

The vast majority of Americans favor comprehensive federal climate legislation and comprehensive gun control legislation. Our planet is burning and children are dying. Yet Congress has failed to pass either one.<sup>2</sup> Why? The public also supports codifying *Roe vs. Wade* to provide federal, constitutional protection of a woman’s choice about her own reproductive health, yet the issue remains in the hands of the states—many of which are governed by ideological extremists who support policies that are out of touch with majority opinion.

Political change has never been easy nor a simple matter of majority sentiment. Social movement mobilization is often necessary to bring attention and pressure to a particular issue to compel elected officials to act. But is majority sentiment plus social movement mobilization sufficient?

Surely, sometimes it is. In 1964, for instance, the U.S. Congress passed the historic Civil Rights Act, responding to the demands of the public and the mobilization of the civil rights movement. Yet even in this often-cited case of social movement success, results were somewhat disappointing to activists. For instance, one important provision of this law was to prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex or national origin. But this provision was written in such a vague way that it was left to individuals to pursue litigation to

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<sup>1</sup> Regrettably, the upper floors of the Norman Mayer building are inaccessible for persons with certain physical disabilities. I’m always happy to meet you on Zoom if my office is not accessible to you.

<sup>2</sup> In Fall of 2022, Congress passed and President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act, with significant funding for climate-related priorities, but this falls short of “comprehensive legislation.”

determine, after the fact, whether or not employers had indeed discriminated against them. For decades after the law was enacted, employers won more than 75% of these court cases.

In 2010, Congress passed and President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act, responding to majority sentiment and social movement pressure to reform the American healthcare system. But rather than enact a single-payer system, or at least a “public option” to compete with private insurance as the movement had been pushing for, the law ended up increasing the profits of America’s largest private health insurance companies.

In this course, we will explore what the obstacles are that social movement activists and organizers face, not only in terms of getting their issue(s) on the formal political agenda, but also in terms of crafting laws that uphold the values underpinning the movement, rather than laws that are “watered down” to appease movement opponents.

Then, we will explore how movements might overcome these obstacles, and what tradeoffs are associated with overcoming them. In other words, we will grapple with the question of what social movement “success” means in the policymaking arena, and how such success is most likely to be achieved.

These are questions for which there are no easy answers, and also no “right” or “wrong” answers. But the objective of the course is for students to leave with a better understanding than they came in with of what sorts of tactics are likely to result in what sorts of outcomes, given the other sources of political power that social movements must routinely contend with in the U.S. political system.

This is a small, participatory class that will be conducted like a graduate-style seminar (but rest assured, the reading and workload will be far less). Although I will occasionally lecture, much of class time will be spent in a group discussion format, based in part on the questions you all will post on Canvas (more on those below).

We will also hear from a few guest speakers, who will share their first-hand experiences working to advance progressive goals through our political system.

## **Learning Objectives**

After successfully completing this course, students should be able to:

- Read scholarly writing efficiently, recognizing key points and avoiding getting bogged down by unimportant details
- Better understand the mechanics of the U.S. policymaking process, including both its formal and informal aspects
- Better understand the obstacles social movements and public interest groups face as they try to influence U.S. policymaking
- Communicate strategies that social movements and public interest groups can attempt in pursuit of more optimal policy outcomes (in this regard, students will learn a form of writing that is different than a traditional research paper)
- Think critically about policy design rather than mere passage/adoption

## Course Materials:

The readings assigned in this course will be a mix of academic articles, chapters from academic books, and newspaper/journalistic articles. **Students are not required to purchase any books. All readings can be found on Canvas.** However, please keep in mind these are copyrighted materials and it is unlawful to distribute them outside of the class.

## Course Requirements and Grading Policies:

There are five elements of the final grade you will receive in this course.

**Questions on Canvas (15% of final grade):** Once per week, you are asked to make a short (1 paragraph max.) post on Canvas, asking a question or two based on one or more of the readings assigned for a given class. I will sometimes incorporate these questions into our class discussions. These question posts are an opportunity to demonstrate that you've completed the reading and have thought about it critically. Questions must be posted by no later than the midnight before class meets. Each student will be allowed one "make-up" Canvas post; that is, if you miss a post in a given week, you will be permitted to post twice in one future week and receive credit for both posts, thus recovering the lost points from your missed or incomplete post in a prior week.

**Pop Quizzes/Attendance Checks (10% of final grade):** An undisclosed number of times throughout the semester, class will begin with a single-question "pop quiz" that will also serve as an attendance check, to motivate you to attend class regularly and arrive on time. The degree to which you answer the question correctly will NOT affect this portion of your grade, as its main purpose is to encourage attendance without my having to take attendance each class. That said, your answers will also serve as an indication to me as to whether or not you are keeping up with and properly comprehending the course material, enabling me to identify and provide extra support to students who may be struggling with the course material. Each student is permitted one "unexcused absence," meaning you can miss one of these pop quizzes without any negative repercussions for your grade.

**Guest Speaker Memo (10% of final grade):** During the semester, we will have guest speakers join our class. For this assignment, you will choose any one speaker and write a 1-2 page (double-spaced) memo analyzing the speaker's comments in relation to the material we have read for class. More specific guidelines will follow separately.

**Midterm Writing Assignment (30% of final grade):** There are two components of the midterm writing assignment. The first component, worth 20% of your final grade, is a 4-6 page paper (double-spaced) that will ask you to respond to a prompt provided by the instructor. The goal of this paper is for you to demonstrate a mastery of the readings/lectures/discussions we have had to date, so you will be asked to cite specific course readings/lectures/discussions in your responses. The second component, worth 10% of your final grade, is a 2-3 page (double-spaced) memo that asks you to think ahead to the Final Writing Assignment (described below) by proposing two different topics (i.e. policy changes) you could potentially choose to focus on.

You will receive prompt feedback from me on which one I think is most viable (or I might think both are equally viable, or neither are viable, in which case I will say so).

**Final Writing Assignment (35% of final grade):** The final assignment is for you to produce a 10-14 page (double-spaced) “strategic plan” for how to get a policy change of your choice enshrined into American law. More information on the specific requirements of this assignment will be posted on Canvas and we will discuss it further throughout the semester, as the course progresses.

The course has no in-class exams.

The numerical score-to-letter-grade conversion used for your final grade in this course is:

A: 93-100  
A-: 90-92  
B+: 88-89  
B: 83-87  
B-: 80-82  
C+: 78-79  
C: 73-77  
C-: 70-72  
D: 60-69  
F: 0-59

### **ADA/Accessibility Statement:**

Tulane University is committed to offering classes that are accessible. If you anticipate or encounter disability-related barriers in a course, please contact the Goldman Center for Student Accessibility to establish reasonable accommodations. If approved by Goldman, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. I will never ask for medical documentation from you to support potential accommodations needs.

#### **Goldman Center Contact Information:**

Email: [goldman@tulane.edu](mailto:goldman@tulane.edu); Phone: (504) 862-8433; Website: <https://accessibility.tulane.edu>

### **Code of Academic Conduct:**

The Code of Academic Conduct applies to all undergraduate students, full-time and part-time, in Tulane University. Tulane University expects and requires behavior compatible with its high standards of scholarship. By accepting admission to the university, a student accepts its regulations (i.e. [Code of Academic Conduct](#) and [Code of Student Conduct](#)) and acknowledges the right of the university to take disciplinary action, including suspension and expulsion, for conduct judged unsatisfactory or disruptive.

**Academic Integrity:** You are expected to produce work that is entirely your own (unless otherwise indicated, such as a group project). Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated under any circumstances. All student work in this class may be analyzed electronically for violations of the University's Code of Academic Conduct and may also be included in a database for the purpose of testing for plagiarized content. Students who plagiarize will automatically fail the course and be referred to the Dean's office for consideration of further disciplinary action.

### **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Statement:**

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are important Tulane values that are key drivers of academic excellence. I hope and expect that the students enrolled in this class will come from a variety of backgrounds, and have a variety of views about the topics we will discuss. All students must feel comfortable and safe expressing their perspectives in class. Any student who feels disrespected due to the views they choose to express in class, or on the basis of their race/ethnicity, religion, gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, or socio-economic status, is strongly encouraged to reach out to me to discuss their concerns confidentially.

### **Religious Accommodation Policy:**

Per Tulane's religious accommodation policy as stated at the bottom of Tulane's [academic calendar](#), I will make every reasonable effort to ensure that students are able to observe religious holidays without jeopardizing their ability to fulfill their academic obligations. Excused absences do not relieve students from responsibility for any course work required during the period of absence. Students should notify me within the first two weeks of the semester about their intent to observe any holidays that fall on a class day or during the final exam period.

### **Title IX:**

Tulane University recognizes the inherent dignity of all individuals and promotes respect for all people. As such, Tulane is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination including sexual and gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence like sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or is experiencing these types of behaviors, know that you are not alone. Resources and support are available; you can learn more at <https://allin.tulane.edu>. Any and all of your communications on these matters will be treated as either "Confidential" or "Private" as explained in the chart below. Please know that if you choose to confide in me I am required by the university to share your disclosure in a Care Connection to the Office of Case Management and Victim Support Services to be sure you are connected with all the support the university can offer. The Office of University Sexual Misconduct Response and Title IX Administration is also notified of these disclosures. You choose whether or not you want to meet with these offices.

You can also make a disclosure yourself, including an anonymous report, through the form at <https://tulane.edu/concerns>.

Confidential	Private
<p><i>Except in extreme circumstances, involving imminent danger to one's self or others, nothing will be shared without your explicit permission.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Counseling &amp; Psychological Services (CAPS)   (504) 314-2277</li> <li>▪ The Line (24/7)   (504) 264-6074</li> <li>▪ Student Health Center   (504) 865-5255</li> <li>▪ Sexual Aggression Peer Hotline and Education (SAPHE)   (504) 654-9543</li> </ul>	<p><i>Conversations are kept as confidential as possible, but information is shared with key staff members so the University can offer resources and accommodations and take action if necessary for safety reasons.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Case Management &amp; Victim Support Services   (504) 314-2160 or <a href="mailto:srss@tulane.edu">srss@tulane.edu</a></li> <li>▪ Tulane University Police (TUPD)   Uptown - (504) 865-5911   Downtown – (504) 988-5531</li> <li>▪ Office of University Sexual Misconduct Response and Title IX Administration   (504) 865-5611 or <a href="mailto:titleix@tulane.edu">titleix@tulane.edu</a></li> <li>▪ Student Affairs Professional On-Call (24/7)   (504) 920-9900</li> </ul>

## Emergency Preparedness and Response:

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATIONS: TU ALERT	SEVERE WEATHER
<p>In the event of a campus emergency, Tulane University will notify students, faculty, and staff by email, text, and/or phone call. You were automatically enrolled in this system when you enrolled at the university.</p> <p>Check your contact information annually in Gibson Online to confirm its accuracy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Follow all TU Alerts and outdoor warning sirens</li> <li>▪ Seek shelter indoors until the severe weather threat has passed and an all-clear message is given</li> <li>▪ Do not use elevators</li> <li>▪ Do not attempt to travel outside if weather is severe</li> </ul> <p>Monitor the Tulane Emergency website (<a href="http://tulane.edu/emergency/">tulane.edu/emergency/</a>) for university-wide closures during a severe weather event</p>
ACTIVE SHOOTER / VIOLENT ATTACKER	EVERBRIDGE APP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>RUN</b> – run away from or avoid the affected area, if possible</li> <li>▪ <b>HIDE</b> – go into the nearest room that can be locked, turn out the lights, and remain hidden until all-clear message is given through TU ALERT</li> <li>▪ <b>FIGHT</b> – do not attempt this option, except as a last resort</li> <li>▪ For more information or to schedule a training, visit <a href="http://emergencyprep.tulane.edu">emergencyprep.tulane.edu</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Download the Everbridge app from the App Store or Google Play store</li> <li>▪ The Report feature allows you to silently and discreetly communicate with TUPD dispatchers</li> <li>▪ The SOS button allows you to notify TUPD if you need help</li> <li>▪ The Safe Corridor button serves as a virtual escort and allows you to send check-in notifications to TUPD</li> </ul>

## **Other Course Policies:**

**Attendance:** I expect you to attend every class meeting unless formally excused. Excused absences can be due to reasons that include religious observances, university-sponsored athletic competition, and family emergencies and health. Please let me know if you are unable to attend class, and keep in mind it is your responsibility to make up anything you have missed.

**Assignment Deadlines:** You are expected to submit all written work on time. Submitting writing assignments late will result in a five-point grade drop (out of 100 possible points) for each day the assignment is late, and no assignments will be accepted more than three days late. Extensions are discouraged but possible in extenuating circumstances, and must be negotiated with me **in advance of the deadline**, on a student-by-student basis, and through written (email) communication.

**Electronic Devices:** Please use them only for class-related purposes. I reserve the right to ask you not to use them (unless required as a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability), though I do not plan to do so.

**Office Hours and Appointments:** My office hours are listed at the top of the syllabus, and I'm also available by appointment if they do not work with your schedule. In general, I would appreciate you letting me know in advance via email if you plan to attend my office hours on a given day. If multiple students plan to visit office hours that day, letting me know in advance can also minimize your wait time. Please keep in mind that, while I am happy to meet outside of office hours, it is important that you request such a meeting as far in advance as possible to ensure we are able to find a mutually convenient time to meet.

**Tweaking the Readings:** Unless otherwise stated, you are responsible for completing all of the required reading listed on this syllabus. However, it is important to note that, in the case of certain readings, I am only asking you to read selected pages rather than the whole thing—even if the whole thing is available on Canvas. Therefore, it is important that you read the syllabus carefully before setting out to complete the reading. In addition, while I will not add readings, I *may* remove readings, based on how the course is going and feedback I receive throughout the semester. If/when readings are removed, this information will be announced during class—another reason why coming to class is important!

## **Important Dates:**

**January 19:** Last Day to Confirm Enrollment

**January 26:** Last Day to Register/Add. Last Day to Drop with 100% Tuition Refund

**February 2:** Last Day to Drop with 75% Tuition Refund

**February 9:** Last Day to Drop with 50% Tuition Refund

**February 16:** Last Day to Drop with 25% Tuition Refund; Last Day to Drop Without Record; Last Day to Change Grading Rules for Audit.

**March 6:** Midterm Writing Assignment Due at 5:00pm CT

**March 9 and 10:** Designated Make-Up Days (only in the event of a university closure)

**April 26:** Guest Speaker Memo Due at 5:00pm CT

**May 7:** Final Writing Assignment Due at 5:00pm CT

## **Class Schedule:**

### **Unit 1: What are Social Movements and Why Do They Matter?**

#### *Week 1*

Tuesday, January 16: Introduction to the Course

*Readings Due:* None

*Assignment Due:*

- Find and share an article about a social or political problem you care about that has been inadequately addressed through public policy, despite activists' efforts.

Thursday, January 18: What are Social Movements?

*Readings Due:*

- Staggenborg (2022), *Social Movements*. Chapters 1 and 2.

#### *Week 2*

Tuesday, January 23: Social Movement Organizations, Tactics and Political Consequences

*Readings Due:*

- Amenta et al. (2010), "The Political Consequences of Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology*.
- Johnson et al. (2010), "Movement Organizations, Synergistic Tactics, and Environmental Public Policy," *Social Forces*.

Thursday, January 25: Celebrating Social Movement Success

*Readings Due:*

- Crutchfield (2018), *How Change Happens*. Intro Chapter, p. 1-14.
- Myers (2022), "'This Feels Different:' Why Advocates Have Real Hope for Gun Reform After Buffalo, Uvalde Shootings." *USA Today*.

### **Unit 2: When and How Movements Fall Short**

#### *Week 3*



Tuesday, January 30: Partial Success, Part 1

*Readings Due:*

- King et al. (2005), “Winning Woman Suffrage One Step at a Time: Social Movements and the Logic of the Legislative Process.” *Social Forces*.
- Basseches (2019). “‘It Happened Behind Closed Doors: Legislative Buffering as an Informal Mechanism of Political Mediation.’” *Mobilization*.

Thursday, February 1: Partial Success, Part 2

*Readings Due (Light Reading Day):*

- Osaka (2022), “Where Have All the Climate Activists Gone?” *Grist*.
- Coleman et al. (2022), “‘Holy s—t:’ Surprise Senate Deal Sets Stage for Record Climate Change Package. *Politico*.

**Week 4**

Tuesday, February 6 (No Class; Still Reading): Affordable Care Act Case Study, Part 1

*Readings Due:*

- Jacobs & Skocpol (2010). *Health Care Reform and American Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Chapter 2 (skip section on p. 82-88).
- Navarro (2009). “Obama’s Mistakes in Health Care Reform.” *Physicians for a National Health Program*.

Thursday, February 8: Affordable Care Act Case Study, Part 2

*Readings Due:*

- Alonso-Zaldivar (2012). “Insurers Nervous Over Prospect of Romney Victory.” *Associated Press*.
- Béland et al. (2016). *Obamacare Wars: Federalism, State Politics, and the Affordable Care Act*. Intro Chapter.

**Week 5**

Tuesday, February 13 – NO CLASS; Mardi Gras

### **Unit 3: Obstacles to Social Movement Policy Influence**

Thursday, February 15: Does Money Equal Power? Part 1

*Readings Due:*

- Gilens and Page (2014). “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens.” *Perspectives on Politics*.

- Page et al. (2018). *Billionaires and Stealth Politics*. Intro Chapter.

### ***Week 6***

Tuesday, February 20: Does Money Equal Power? Part 2

*Readings Due:*

- Page et al. (2018). *Billionaires and Stealth Politics*. Chapters 2 and 4.

Thursday, February 22: Institutional Inequality Within Legislatures, Part 1

*Readings Due:*

- Curry (2015). *Legislating in the Dark*. Chapter 1 (p. 1-14).
- Cox and Terry (2008). “Legislative Productivity in the 93<sup>rd</sup>-105<sup>th</sup> Congresses. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.

### ***Week 7***

Tuesday, February 27: Institutional Inequality Within Legislatures, Part 2

*Readings Due:*

- Curry (2015). *Legislating in the Dark*. Chapters 2 and 3.

Thursday, February 29: Institutional Inequality Within Legislatures, Part 3

*Readings Due:*

- Curry (2015). *Legislating in the Dark*. Chapter 4.
- Metzger (2019). “Ex-Rep: DeLeo Told Me, Vote for Transpo Bill or Lose Chairmanship.” *Commonwealth Beacon*. Listen to Jay Kaufman Interview (<https://commonwealthbeacon.org/politics/ex-rep-deleo-told-me-vote-for-transpo-bill-or-lose-chairmanship-2/>)

### ***Week 8***

Tuesday, March 5: Other Institutional Obstacles

*Readings Due:*

- Ritchie (2023), *Backdoor Lawmaking*. Chapters 1 and 2.

***Midterm Writing Assignment is Due Wednesday, March 6 at 5:00pm CT (submit as Word file via Canvas)***

Thursday, March 7: Legislative Complexity

*Readings Due:*

- Drutman (2015). *The Business of America is Lobbying: How Corporations Became Politicized and Politics Became More Corporate*. Chapter 2.
- Sinclair (2017). *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress*. Chapter 5.

### ***Week 9***

Tuesday, March 12: Administrative Complexity

*Readings Due:*

- Potter (2019), *Bending the Rules*. Chapters 1 and 2.

Thursday, March 14: Business Actors and the Lobbying Game, Part 1

*Readings Due:*

- Hall and Deardorff (2006). “Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy.” *American Political Science Review*.
- LaPira and Thomas (2017). *Revolving Door Lobbying: Public Service, Private Influence and the Unequal Representation of Interests*. Chapter 1 (p. 1-21).

### ***Week 10***

Tuesday, March 19: Business Actors and the Lobbying Game, Part 2

Guest Speaker: Phil Sego

*Readings Due:*

- LaPira and Thomas (2017). *Revolving Door Lobbying: Public Service, Private Influence and the Unequal Representation of Interests*. Chapter 2 (p. 24-28, p. 34-41) and Chapter 3 (p. 52-81).
- Sego (2018). “Ex-Lobbyist Reveals How the House Really Works.” *Commonwealth Beacon*.

Thursday March 21: Business Actors and the Lobbying Game, Part 3

*Readings Due:*

- Chen (2019), “In the Private Interest? Business Influence and American Democracy.” In Lee and McCarty (editors), *Can American Govern Itself?* (p. 15-16, p. 22-39).
- Basseches (2023), “Who Pays for Environmental Policy?” *Politics and Society*.

Tuesday, March 26: NO CLASS; Spring Break.

Thursday, March 28: NO CLASS; Spring Break.

### ***Week 11***

Tuesday, April 2: Business Actors and the Lobbying Game, Part 4

*Readings Due:*

- Hertel-Fernandez (2019). *State Capture: How Conservative Activists, Big Businesses, and Wealthy Donors Reshaped the American States—and the Nation*. Preface, Chapters 2 and 3.

Thursday, April 4: Right-Wing Social Movements, Part 1

*Readings Due:*

- Skocpol and Williamson (2012), *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, Intro Chapter and Chapter 3

***Week 12***

Tuesday, April 9: Right-Wing Social Movements, Part 2

*Readings Due:*

- Blum (2020), *How The Tea Party Captured the GOP*, Chapters 1-3.

## **Unit 4: Can and Should Movements Adapt?**

Thursday, April 11: Coalitions, Part 1

Guest Speaker: Brandon Davis

*Readings Due:*

- Phinney (2017). *Strange Bedfellows: Interest Group Coalitions, Diverse Partners, and Influence in American Social Policy*. Chapter 1.
- Heaney and Lorenz (2013). “Coalition Portfolios and Interest Group Influence over the Policy Process.” *Interest Groups and Advocacy*.

***Week 13***

Tuesday, April 16: Coalitions, Part 2

*Readings Due:*

- Phinney (2017). *Strange Bedfellows: Interest Group Coalitions, Diverse Partners, and Influence in American Social Policy*. Chapter 2.
- Lorenz (2020). “Prioritized Interests: Diverse Lobbying Coalitions and Congressional Committee Agenda Setting.” *Journal of Politics*.

Thursday, April 18: Pros/Cons of Adapting Movement Strategy

*Readings Due:*

- Bartosiewicz & Miley (2013). “The Too Polite Revolution? Why the Recent Campaign to Pass Comprehensive Climate Legislation in the U.S. Failed.”
- Cama (2021). “LCV Debuts Campaign to Push Vulnerable Dems on Climate.” *E&E News*.

#### ***Week 14***

Tuesday, April 23: NO CLASS; Passover.

Thursday, April 25: Course Wrap-Up

*Readings Due:*

- TBD

***Guest Speaker Memo is Due Friday, April 26 at 5:00pm CT (submit as Word file via Canvas)***

#### ***Week 15***

Tuesday, April 30: Course Wrap-Up

*Readings Due:*

- TBD

***Final Writing Assignment (“Strategic Plan”) is Due Tuesday, May 7 at 5:00pm CT (submit as a Word file via Canvas)***