

Policy and Power: How Campaigns Work (ESM 297)

Course Syllabus, Spring 2025

Instructors: Leah Stokes, Matto Mildenberger, Paasha Mahdavi, Lucas Boyd

Office hours: Thursday 3-5pm in Henley Hall 1013 (Lucas Boyd)

Class: Thursdays 5:00-6:15pm

Climate advocacy is increasing in importance as communities and organizations around the world advance solutions to limit global warming. While there are instances of advocacy successfully leading to enacted climate policy, the current global patchwork of commitments and policies illustrates the limited success of these efforts. Understanding the forces that have opposed climate policy requires an evidence-grounded analysis of how political power is generated, distributed and wielded in the energy system.

This is a skills-based course that examines strategies of advocacy from the perspective of political science and related disciplines. To make durable policy change, we need to know: under what conditions will advocates gain power, and opponents lose power? What strategies and interventions can organizations use to create these conditions? Answering these questions requires us to think precisely about how political power works, who wields it, and how it can be harnessed by organizations seeking change.

Course Structure

This course will teach evidence-based strategies for how groups build power, shift politics, and create the conditions for policy change, drawing on a combination of case studies and academic research to understand the factors that drive successful versus unsuccessful advocacy campaigns in general. Then we will dive into one case of a climate policy campaign and one case of a biodiversity policy campaign, and apply these strategies to create policy products and design advocacy campaigns.

Lectures: There will be a lecture each week from one of the instructors or a guest. Students should show up having completed the readings, ready to ask questions and engage in thoughtful discussion.

Readings: We will read canonical theories and case studies of advocacy and social movements, posted to the course website. The “textbook” for this course is an Evidence Review, *Strategies for Building Power to Shift Climate Politics and Policy*, publicly available on The 2035 Initiative’s website. We will read sections of this report throughout the quarter. In addition, there are assigned articles, papers, briefs, or reports each week that illustrate the strategy in the Evidence Review.

Further readings (optional): The Evidence Review has hundreds of citations to articles, papers, books, and reports. As you’re reading through, we encourage you to take a look at any of these resources that interests you or that you think would help complete the assignments.

Grading: The course is to be taken for a letter grade. On each assignment, you will receive a standard letter grade; if the work does not meet standards, you will be asked to revise it and resubmit the assignment.

Assignments

1. *Public opinion brief* – Draft a brief communicating public opinion to an official, advocating for a policy or action of your choosing
2. *Implementation memo* – Draft a mock public comment to a federal agency that is currently implementing an environmental program.

Advocacy campaign – Work in small groups to develop a plan to support a client that is advocating for a policy outcome. Your plan will:

- Identify a target policy outcome and justify why it is important
 - Do a landscape analysis [power mapping] to determine the power structures in play, including:
 - Who are the decision makers? Whom would your client need to influence?
 - Who are your client's allies? How will you leverage them to achieve your client's goal?
 - Who are your client's opponents? How will you advise your client to deal with them?
 - Describe the challenges that your client's campaign will face and how it could overcome them
 - Lay out a timeline and identify key policy intervention moments
 - Draw on at least one of the interventions listed in the Evidence Review
 - Create something that you could use as part of your campaign. This can be a policy brief, op-ed, communications material, etc.
3. *Campaign outline* – An outline of your campaign strategy that addresses each of the bullets above is due Week 8 of the course. You will receive feedback on your outline with time to make changes before your final plan and presentation are due.
 4. *Campaign presentation* – Your group will present your campaign during finals week.
 5. *Final campaign plan* – Your final campaign plan will be due when you deliver your presentation during finals week.

*Assignments are due before class on the day listed, unless otherwise noted.

Assignment	Grade
Public opinion brief	15%
Implementation memo	15%
Campaign plan	25%
Campaign presentation	25%
Class participation	20%

Schedule

Week	Lecturer	Topics	Reading	Assignment
1	Leah	Course introduction: What is political power?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence Review p. 1-9 (Intro) <p><i>Further reading:</i> Selections from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dahl, R. A. (1961). <i>Who governs?: Democracy and power in an American city</i>. Yale University Press. Gaventa, J. (1982). <i>Power and powerlessness: Quiescence and rebellion in an Appalachian valley</i>. University of Illinois Press. Pierson, P. (1993). When effect becomes cause: Policy feedback and political change. <i>World Politics</i>, 45(4), 595-628. 	
2	Matto	<i>Advocacy Strategy:</i> Shift Public Opinion, Culture & Narrative through Organizing, Communications and other Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence Review p. 10-20 (Strategy 1) Executive summary: Climate Change in the American Mind: Beliefs & Attitudes, Fall 2024 Reporting: What Exxon knew about the Earth's melting Arctic Los Angeles Times <p><i>Further reading:</i> Selections from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Han, H. (2014). <i>How organizations develop activists: Civic associations and leadership in the 21st century</i>. Oxford University Press Lax, J. R., & Phillips, J. H. (2009). Gay rights in the states: Public opinion and policy responsiveness. <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 103(3), 367-386 Assessing ExxonMobil's global warming projections Science 	Public Opinion Brief Assigned
3	Paasha	<i>Advocacy Strategy:</i> The Role of Organizing and Campaigns in Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence Review p. 21-29 (Strategy 2) Reporting: Petro's Government One Year In NACLA Research letter: A political experiment may have extracted Australia from the climate wars. <i>Nature Climate Change</i>, 12(8), 695-696. <p><i>Further reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Podcast: Using a Moneyball approach to elect state & local climate champions 	
4	Matto	<i>Advocacy Strategy:</i> Influence Institutions, Regulations, and Bureaucrats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence Review p. 26-29 (Strategy 3) Before We Invest Billions in This Clean Fuel, Let's Make Sure It's Actually Clean - The New York Times What are public utility commissions? A beginner's guide Canary Media <p><i>Further reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper: Mildenberger, M. (2021). The development of climate institutions in the United States. <i>Environmental Politics</i>, 30(sup1), 71-92. Book chapter: Chapter 7 (p. 164-193) of Stokes, L.C – Short circuiting policy 	DUE: Public Opinion Brief Implementation Memo Assigned

5	Leah	<i>Advocacy Strategy:</i> Building the Power of the Clean Economy to Lobby and Organize Power Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence Review p. 30-34 (Strategy 4) [Additional readings TBD] 	
6	Paasha	<i>Advocacy Strategy:</i> Weaken and Isolate the Fossil Fuel Industry Litigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence Review p. 41-49 (Strategy 5) Brief: InfluenceMap – The World’s Most Obstructive Companies on Climate Policy Press Release: Engine No. 1 Releases Presentation Highlighting Need for Change at ExxonMobil Reporting: SoCalGas billed customers millions to fight clean energy, The Bee found. This bill could stop that [Additional readings TBD] 	DUE: Implementation Memo Advocacy Campaign Groups Assigned
7	Leah	Case Study: Why The Inflation Reduction Act Passed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Op-ed: What Joe Manchin Cost Us [Additional readings TBD] 	
8	Guest lecture (Paasha hosts)	Case Study: Campaigner (TBD)	[Readings TBD]	DUE: Campaign Outlines
9	Guest lecture (Matto hosts)	How Organizations Fund Advocacy	[Readings TBD]	
10	Lucas	What’s next for climate policy and politics	[Readings TBD]	
Finals Week	Lucas	Campaign Presentations		DUE: Final Campaign Plan

Instructors:

Dr. Leah Stokes is the Anton Vonk Associate Professor of Environmental Politics in the Department of Political Science at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She works on energy, climate and environmental politics. Within American Politics, her work focuses on representation and public opinion; voting behavior; and public policy. Within environmental politics, she researches climate change, renewable energy, water and chemicals policy. In 2022, Leah was named an advocate on [TIME100 Next](#), and as one of [Business Insider's top 30](#) global leaders working toward climate solutions. Her award-winning book [Short Circuiting Policy: Interest Groups and the Battle over Clean Energy and Climate Policy in the American States](#) examines why we are behind on climate action, telling the history of fossil fuel companies and electric utilities promoting climate denial and delay.

Dr. Matto Mildenberger is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California Santa Barbara. His research explores the political drivers of policy inaction in the face of serious social and economic threats posed by global climate change. Straddling comparative political economy and political behavior, Mildenberger's work focuses on comparative climate policymaking and the dynamics of US climate opinion. At UCSB, he runs [The 2035 Initiative](#), and the the Energy and Environment Transitions ([ENVENT](#)) Lab. He is also the author of [Carbon Captured](#): How Labor and Business Control Climate Politics.

Dr. Paasha Mahdavi is an Associate Professor and Vice Chair of Political Science at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His research focuses on the impact of oil and gas resources on governance and environmental politics, and is driven by core questions about the role of government in industry and the design of firm strategies and government policies that will mitigate rather than exacerbate climate change. He also directs the Energy Governance and Political Economy ([EGAPE](#)) Lab, and is a co-founder of The 2035 Initiative at UCSB. He is the author of [Power Grab](#): Political Survival Through Extractive Resource Nationalization, which shows how leaders maintain power by seizing control of oil, metals, and minerals production.

Lucas Boyd is the Staff Executive Director of [The 2035 Initiative at UCSB](#). Previously, he worked at Evergreen Action, and he holds a Masters from the Bren School of Environmental Science & Management.