

The Politics of Crime and Punishment in American Cities¹

Summer 2021 • Zoom Online • T. & Th. 1:00 PM-4:15PM

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Office Hours: TBD
Use link for office hours appointments.

Course Description

What types of political decisions lead to some communities being more policed than others? What is the relationship between descriptive representation in state and local government institutions and criminal justice outcomes? How does contact with the criminal justice system affect individuals' future political participation? This course explores the relationship between politics and crime and punishment. We review literature focused on political behavior and political institutions to better understand the phenomena we hear about in the news from sentencing algorithms, to felon (dis)enfranchisement, to stop-and-frisk, and police use of force. In better understanding the relationship between politics and crime and punishment, this course examines why debates in this area are so often focused on urban environments, and what it is about cities, specifically, that makes us associate them with crime. This course does not—nor could it in one semester—provide a comprehensive review of any of the literatures it covers, but it does provide students with the necessary foundation to engage in current debates and identify where to look for more information.

This course is organized into five parts. 1) “Foundations” provides the necessary framework for understanding and analyzing crime and punishment in U.S. cities. We begin with an overview of crime in the U.S. and the structure of the criminal justice system. We identify important themes to guide us through the semester as well as what about cities, in particular, is important for these topics. 2) “Where Are We and How Did We Get Here” offers an overview of crime and punishment today and key historical moments that shape what we observe today. 3) “The Politics of Carceral Contact: Police, Courts, and Custody” covers the role of politics in the three key phases of the criminal justice system. 4) “Political Consequences of Carceral Contact” covers the political consequences of contact with the carceral state. 5) “What Could It All Mean?” asks students to take what they’ve learned throughout the semester and apply it to the analysis of current policy issues.

Course Goals

¹ The syllabus is subject to change. Canvas will always have the most up-to-date version. It is your responsibility to check the Canvas site regularly and refer to the most recent version of the syllabus.

At the end of this class students should have developed/be able to:

- A general understanding the U.S. criminal justice system
- An understanding of the importance of cities in debates about crime and punishment
- Identify how politics influences crime and punishment
- Identify the ways in which the criminal justice system affects political behavior
- Understand and critically assess relevant social science research
- Effective written and verbal communication skills

Course Requirements and Evaluations

All assignments must be submitted electronically, in the designated Canvas drop box by 11:59PM on the due date, unless otherwise noted.

1. Discussion questions (15%)

Beginning with the second class meeting, all students must submit a set of two discussion questions by 7PM the night before class (except for the first and last classes of the session and the day of the midterm). Each student will be excused from submitting questions for one class of their choosing and on the day of their in-class presentation. This means that each student must submit a total of five sets of discussion questions throughout the course of the session.

2. Midterm (30%)

There will be a short-essay midterm during class time on **June 9th**.

3. Presentation and class discussion (15%)

Each student will give an in-class presentation of the readings. There will be two student-presentations during each class meeting. This presentation should provide a summary of the assigned readings and discuss how they are related to the overall theme of the course. Presenters will, then, lead a class discussion with a set of prepared discussion questions. The final grade for this assignment will be based on the presentation and discussion leading as well as participation in the discussions that classmates lead.

4. Research paper (40%): introduction and outline (5%), final paper (35%)

Students will investigate a policy issue (selected from a provided list) related to crime and punishment in American cities. Papers should be 8-10 pages long and follow the assignment instructions posted on the class website. This assignment will be completed in two parts:

- The introduction, an outline for the rest of the paper, and a bibliography **are due by the beginning of class on June 16th at 11:59PM.**
- The final paper is **due TBD at 11:59PM**
- Note: You will share your paper topics and progress with your classmates during the last class on **June 30th.**

Attendance and Participation

All classes will meet online using Zoom. This is a seminar, and participation is an important part of this class. Additionally, attendance is required for summer classes. I will occasionally give brief lectures at the beginning of class, but your reactions to and critiques of the readings and other course content are the most important parts of each class meeting. Participation entails several components: active listening, responding to classmates' comments, and arriving with notes and points to share in class.

Email Policy

I do my best to respond to all emails within two days during **regular business hours**. I will not respond to emails about assignments less than 24 hours before they are due.

Grading Standard

93-100 A	90-92 A-	87-89 B+	83-86 B	80-82 B-	77-79 C+
73-76 C	70-72 C-	63-69 D	60-62 D-	< 60 F	

Grades in this class are based on mastery of the class material. This doesn't just mean attending class and reading the material, it means analyzing and articulating the material—and being able to discuss the material thoughtfully and precisely in assignments and discussion.

If you do not meet these guidelines in mastering the material, then your grade will be penalized. I encourage you to regularly check your grades on Canvas, and calculate your grade based on the grading scale in this syllabus. Lastly, at the end of the semester, I do not allow late work or extra credit, “round up,” barter, or additional work to improve your final grade.

A Note on Course Content and Respect

This class contains challenging material, including images, graphic descriptions of violence, and strong language. Success in the class also requires grappling with questions about class, race and racism, which can be emotionally challenging in themselves. Please speak with me if you have concerns about any course materials or discussions.

We all may have different opinions and interpretations of the material covered in this class. That is fine, and debate is encouraged! Disrespect is not. Disrespectful and dismissive comments to classmates is prohibited. Students who violate this policy will be asked to leave class.

Yale University supports and wants to foster a civil, respectful, and open-minded climate so that all of us can live and work in an environment free of harassment, bias-motivated behaviors, unfair treatment, and fear. By committing to working with our better selves, we can work, in all our communities, towards greater mutual understanding of the questions that guide our inquiries. The university expects all members of our community to refrain from actions or behaviors that

intimidate, humiliate, or demean persons or groups or that undermine their security or self-esteem based on traits related to race, ethnicity, country of origin, religion, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, age, or physical or mental ability, including learning and/or developmental disabilities and past/present history of mental disorder or other category protected by state or federal law.

Academic Integrity

Academic honesty is a core institutional value at Yale. It means, among other things, truth in presentation, diligence and precision in citing works and ideas we have used, and acknowledging our collaborations with others. In view of our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of academic integrity, the Undergraduate Regulations (<http://catalog.yale.edu/undergraduateregulations/policies/definitions-plagiarism-cheating/>) and the Graduate School Code of Conduct specifically prohibit the following forms of behavior: cheating on examinations, problem sets and all other forms of assessment; falsification and/or fabrication of data; plagiarism, that is, the failure in a dissertation, essay or other written exercise to acknowledge ideas, research, or language taken from others; and multiple submission of the same work without obtaining explicit written permission from both instructors before the material is submitted. Students found guilty of violations of academic integrity are subject to one or more of the following penalties: written reprimand, probation, suspension (noted on a student's transcript) or dismissal (noted on a student's transcript).

Resource Office on Disabilities

Your experience in this class is important to me. If you have already established accommodations with the Resource Office on Disabilities, please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you have not yet established services through ROD, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but are not limited to: mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact ROD at 203-432-2324 to make an appointment. General information for students can be found on the Student Information page of the Resource Office on Disabilities' website (<https://rod.yale.edu/student-information>). ROD offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s), and ROD. It is important to Yale University to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law.

Readings

The readings for this course can be accessed electronically. There are links to many of the news articles in this syllabus. Book sections and unpublished articles will be available in the readings folder on the course site. Academic journal articles can be downloaded from the library

website—search the article then you can select the article from the search returns and download it.

All readings must be completed for the day they are assigned.

Week 1: Foundations

May 31st: What is it about cities?

- The Syllabus
- Sign up for an in-class presentation slot
- *There Are No Children Here* (as much as you are able)

June 2nd: What is it about cities?

- *There Are No Children Here* (at least the first 6 chapters, which are available online)

Week 2: Where Are We and How Did We Get Here?

June 7th: Making sense of where we are; the wars on drugs and crime

- David Frum, "[The Cultural Roots of Crime](#)," *The Atlantic*.
- German Lopez, "[Confronting the myth that “black culture” is responsible for violent crime in America](#)," *Vox*.
- Jonathan Simon, *Governing Through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Created a Culture of Fear* (2007), Introduction.
- Ilyana Kuziemko and Steven D. Levitt, "An empirical analysis of imprisoning drug offenders," *Journal of Public Economics* (2004), pp. 2043-2066.
- James Forman, *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (2017), selections.

June 9th: Midterm

Week 3: The Politics of the Carceral State: Police and the Courts

June 14th: Policing

- Robert Reiner, *The Politics of the Police* (1984), pp. 1-38
- George Kelling and James Q. Wilson, "[Broken Windows](#)," *The Atlantic* (1982).
- Daniel Bergner, "[Is Stop-and-Frisk Worth It?](#)" *The Atlantic* (2014)
- *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department*, U.S. Department of Justice, Sections I, II, and III. (**Available online.**)

- Laurel Eckhouse, “Everyday Risk: How the Distribution of Police Contact Produces Racial Disproportion in Police Shootings.”

June 16th: Criminal Courts—Judges

- Listen to *Serial* podcast, Season 3, Episodes 1-2.
- Gregory A. Huber and Sanford Gordon, “Accountability and Coercion: Is Justice Blind when It Runs for Office?” *American Journal of Political Science* (2004), pp. 247-263.
- Allison P. Harris and Maya Sen, “Bias and Judging,” *Annual Review of Political Science* (2019).
- “[Machine Bias](#),” *ProPublica* (2016)

Week 4: Courts (con.), and Political Consequences of Carceral Contact

June 21st: Criminal Courts—Lawyers

- Listen to *Serial* podcast, Season 3, Episode 3.
- Ben Austen, “[In Philadelphia, a Progressive D.A. Tests the Power — and Learns the Limits — of His Office](#),” *New York Times* (2018)
- Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve, *Crook County: Racism and Injustice in America’s Largest Criminal Court* (2016), selections.

June 23rd: Political Consequences of Contact

- Vesla M. Weaver and Amy E. Lerman, “Political Consequences of the Carceral State,” *American Political Science Review* (2010), pp. 817-833.
- Ariel White, “Misdemeanor Disenfranchisement? The Demobilizing Effects of Brief Jail Spells on Potential Voters,” *American Political Science Review* (2019), pp. 311-324.
- Gerber et al., “Does Incarceration Reduce Voting? Evidence about the Political Consequences of Spending Time in Prison,” *The Journal of Politics* (2017), 1130-1146.

Week 5: Political Consequences of Carceral Contact (con.)

June 28th: Unexpected Consequences of Contact

- Hannah Walker, “Extending the Effects of the Carceral State: Proximal Contact, Political Participation, and Race,” *Political Research Quarterly* (2014), pp. 1-14.
- Traci Burch, *Trading Democracy for Justice: Criminal Convictions and the Decline of Neighborhood Political Participation* (2013), selections.

June 30th: Introduction and Outline, In-Class Peer Review