This course surveys key issues and topics in American political economy. It analyses how firms, interest groups, voters, political parties, and electoral institutions shape important policy outcomes. It also helps students make sense of contemporary issues such as deindustrialization, rural resentment, the backlash against globalization, and increasing political polarization.

Course requirements

25% of your course grade will be based on short weekly quizzes starting week 4 (approximately 10 minutes each). The quizzes are meant to test if you understand the main argument of the readings and not their details. These should be very straightforward if you’ve done the readings. I will drop your 3 lowest scores.

60% of your course grade will jointly come from your take-home midterm (35%) and final (25%) examinations.

Finally, a short essay will constitute 15% of your grade. This essay should be roughly 500-600 words. This assignment requires that you (1) attend a US-related public event on campus (in-person or remotely) or watch a documentary (from a list) (2) write a paper summarizing key arguments, relating it to the course and/or reflecting on the key takeaways of the presentation or documentary.

Readings


Other readings will be made available on Quercus or through the University Library.

Documentary list (choose any one)

- American Factory (requires Netflix subscription)
- America’s Great Divide (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l5vyDPN19ww)
- The Healthcare Divide (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVvEkeH4O8o)
- Trump’s Trade War (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_xQ5JisFuo)
- Money, Power, and Wall Street (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-Q9AOp2FW8)
- American Insurrection (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcGi4maiJW8&list=PL_pPc6-qR9ZyNGtWHN2RG6z6oGF8QsnPD&index=7)
- Amazon Empire (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVVeJVj5z8s)

Event list (to be announced)
- Subject to change due to COVID

COVID-19 etiquette and safety measures
   According to U of T policy, face masks have to be worn in indoor spaces on campus. If you refuse to do so, you will be asked to leave for the protection of you and others. Absences due to illness or quarantine/self-isolation restrictions will not be penalized.

Inclusion and special accommodation
   Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach Accessibility Services (accessibility.services@utoronto.ca) and/or me as soon as possible. Developed jointly by you and your accessibility advisor, a letter of accommodation maintains confidentiality about the nature of your disability but informs me about relevant accommodations needed to help you be successful in the course.

Religious observances
   Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during the academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please contact me to discuss appropriate arrangements.

Academic integrity
   The University treats cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences. Normally, students will be required to submit their course assignments to the University’s plagiarism detection tool website for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their material to be included as source documents in the University’s plagiarism detection tool reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of the University’s plagiarism detection tool service are described on the company web site.

Copyright and privacy in instructional settings
If students wish to audio record, video record, photograph, or otherwise reproduce lectures, course notes or other similar materials provided by instructors, they must obtain the instructor’s written consent beforehand. Otherwise, all such reproduction is an infringement of copyright and is prohibited. In the case of private use by students with accommodation needs, they must have registered for the accommodation through AccServ.

Reading list

Week 1: Overview (Jan 10)

I. Political arenas and actors
Week 2: Institutional hurdles to shared prosperity (Jan 17)

Week 3: How voters reason and what voters know (Jan 24)

II. The Great Risk Shift
Week 4: Risking it all – America in comparative perspective (Jan 31)

Week 5: Organized labor’s rise and fall (Feb 7)

Week 6: Corporate influence (Feb 14)

Week 7: Reading week (Feb 21)

Week 8: Mid-term exam (questions released on Feb 28 at 12:00 a.m.; due March 1 at 11:59 p.m.)
- No class on Feb 28
- You may pick any 2-hour window to complete exam within those 48 hours
- This is an *individual* assignment, see academic integrity note

III. Space and race
Week 9: Political geography of economic decline (March 7)

Week 10: Inequality in urban America (March 14)

Week 11: Rural resentment
IV. Knowledge economy

Week 12: American dynamism – a country of radical innovation?

Week 13: Final exam (25%)