

**Women and Public Policy From an Evolutionary
Perspective.
PPHA 47400 1 (Fall 2025)**

The Harris School of Public Policy
Fall 2025

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Office: Keller Center Room 2013
Office Hours: Request meetings by email

Meeting Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2-3:20pm Keller Center Room 0007.

Course materials: canvas.uchicago.edu

Course Description

Although the inequities between men and women have diminished during the last decades, large gaps are still evident and resistant to change. Throughout this course, we will explore the origins of these disparities which are all fundamentally rooted in the patriarchal nature of society. Understanding how patriarchy came to be the dominant order requires a multidisciplinary and historical approach. The first lectures will cover debates in biology, human evolution, history and archeology that explain the deep roots and the spread of this order throughout the centuries. The next set of lectures will cover how current cultural practices and social norms facilitate the reproduction of the patriarchy and will also examine alternative ways in which societies have organized themselves where women have powerful roles or live in matriarchies. The class will also capture how women from the Global South contest this order within their societies and on their own terms. Finally, we will evaluate policies that have aimed to close the gap between men and women around the world. A central theme of the course is that to understand how to craft effective policies one needs to comprehend the mechanisms which created patriarchy and led it to persist. The students produce a podcast introducing their project to an audience and making sure they revise their policies or topics from a critical perspective based on the material we covered throughout the quarter.

During the first week we will have a special guest, Biology Professor Shauna Price from Loyola University. Along the rest of the class we will have other special guest speakers to be confirmed.

Course Goals or Objectives:

The students will develop a strong foundation of the origins, reproduction and spread of the patriarchy. This will allow the students to identify the deeply rooted social norms that shape the role of women in different societies and also to develop a critical framework to evaluate general policies or those which aim at improving women's parity status.

Course Requirements:

All students are expected to have completed the relevant readings before the class meeting. Weekly readings will be drawn from a collection of articles and book chapters (whenever possible, these readings will be posted on the UChicago Canvas course site). You should aim to critically evaluate the theoretical argument and the evidence advanced in each reading. Some of the readings contain sections that use econometrics to support empirical tests of their arguments.

We will regularly update the syllabus online and mark the required readings at least one week in advance of each respective lecture. Check the course site in Canvas before every lecture for announcements of updated versions of the syllabus and required readings.

Required books:

All readings will be available online through UChicago library catalogue or at the Canvas Website. However, "The Patriarchs: The Origins of Inequality" by Saini, Angela (2023) will be a central book throughout the course and students should acquire it.

Grading:

Research Paper or Policy Evaluation Report (50%): Students can decide to work with another student or individually. Students have the following options for their main project:

Conduct a research project by developing a research question, literature review, methodology and develop a plan for data collection. The topic is open to the student but it should be related to the class material or topics. Rubric here [Download here](#)

Evaluate a policy aimed at improving women's well-being implemented in the Global South or marginalized communities in the Global North. Rubric here [Download here](#)

There will be a handout for both options available in Canvas for guidance on the main parts of each option.

There will be two deliverables for this final project, the first one is due in the 6th week and the second and last version of the project is due in the finals week. Each submission is 30% of your final grade.

The length of the research project or policy report: for the first version, the report should be at least 6 pages without references and the final one at least 12 pages.

Podcast (30%) : Students will produce a podcast based on their research or policy evaluation and will share it in Week 9 to their peers so they can listen to it and evaluate it. Their peers will give feedback and provide a grade that will be accounted for in the grade that the TA and Professor Bautista assign to the Podcast.

Class Participation (20%): Students are encouraged and expected to attend and participate actively in class. Harris has adopted a mandatory attendance policy. Our class is pretty small so it will be easy for me or our TA to notice who will be missing. In terms of participation, it is important to raise questions about the material and about the different theories presented during the lectures. Our TA will take note of who is engaged in and outside of class. We will have discussion groups where students present to their classmates a reading assigned to the class and promote a conversation on the content.

Late Work: All assignments are expected to be turned in on time. Late assignments will be downgraded one half-grade (A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) per day late. This includes weekends. The only exceptions will be made for serious medical or family problems with documentation.

Accommodations

ADA student accommodations: “Any student who believes they may need assistance should inform the Office of Student Disability Services by the end of the first week of class. Once you have received an accommodation letter, it should be presented to the course instructor immediately.”

<https://disabilities.uchicago.edu/>

The disability liaison at Harris is Marley Mandelaro mbmandelaro@uchicago.edu

Academic Integrity:

This is the link for Harris SPP and the University's principles on academic integrity:

<https://harris.uchicago.edu/student-life/dean-of-students-office/policies>

Any violation of these principles will result in a F as the final grade in this course.

Use of AI

The use of AI tools for this course is allowed for the Research Paper or Policy Evaluation and for the podcast only when determined to be in support of the course learning goals. You are not required to use AI tools, but if you choose to use them for any part of the assignment (from brainstorming to text editing), you must use proper citation (please use APA citation format). Failure to properly cite AI tools is considered a violation of the University of Chicago's Academic Honesty and Plagiarism policy.

Course Schedule

Lecture 1 - September 30th - Data

- Criado Perez, Caroline (2019) "Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Design for Men" USA. Abrams Press. Read: Introduction

Lecture 2 - October 2nd - Biology - Guest Lecturer Professor Shauna Price

- Bohannon, Cat (2023) "Eve: How the Female Body Drove 200 Million Years of Human Evolution" New York, Alfred A. Knopf. Read: Introduction
- Cook, Lucy (2022) "Bitch: On the Female of the Species" New York, Basic Books. Read: Introduction and Chapter 1

Lecture 3 - October 7th - Hypotheses on the Origins

- Bohannon, Cat (2023) "Eve: How the Female Body Drove 200 Million Years of Human Evolution" New York, Alfred A. Knopf. Read: Introduction
- Saini, Angela (2023) "The Patriarchs: The Origins of Inequality" Read: Introduction and Chapter 1.

Lecture 4 - October 9th Early Human History

- De Waal, F. (2022). "Different: Gender through the eyes of a primatologist". First edition. New York, NY, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Read: Chapter 5
- Bohannon, Cat (2023) "Eve: How the Female Body Drove 200 Million Years of Human Evolution" New York, Alfred A. Knopf. Read: Chapter 5 (Tools)

Lecture 5 - October 14th Early Human History Continuation

- Hrdy, S. B. (2009). Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding. Harvard University Press. Read: Chapter 8
- Zihlman, A. (1981) "Chapter 2: Women as Shapers of the Human Adaptation" in Woman the Gatherer. Pgs 91-97 and 104 to 111

Lecture 6 - October 16th Early Human History Continuation

- Saini, Angela (2023) "The Patriarchs: The Origins of Inequality"
- Hodder, I. (2004). Women and Men at Çatalhöyük. Scientific American, 290(1), 76–83.

Lecture 7 - October 21st Origins of the Patriarchy

- Saini, Angela (2023) "The Patriarchs: The Origins of Inequality" Read: Chapter 4 and 5.

Lecture 8 - October 23rd Origins of the Patriarchy Continuation

- Wiesner-Hanks, Merry (2022) "Gender in History: Global Perspectives" Wiley-Blackwell. Read Chapter 3
- David Reich on Who are we and How we got Here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-vHByC14bc>

- Lord Colin Renfrew | Marija Redivia: DNA and Indo-European Origins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmv3J55bdZc>

Lecture 9 October 28th - The Spread of the Patriarchy

- Olsen K. and Stothert K. "Women in Ancient America" University of Oklahoma, Chapter 8.
- Karen Vieira Powers "Women in the Crucible of Conquest" The Gendered Genesis of Spanish American Society, 1500-1600 Read: Chapter 1 and 2

Lecture 10 October 30th - The Spread of the Patriarchy

- Saini, Angela (2023) "The Patriarchs: The Origins of Inequality" Read: Chapter 2.

Lecture 11 - November 4th - Reproduction of the Patriarchy

- Saini, Angela (2023) “The Patriarchs: The Origins of Inequality” Read: Chapter 6

Lecture 12 - November 6th - Reproduction of the Patriarchy Continuation

- Hrdy (2024) “Father time : a natural history of men and babies” Princeton University Press.
Read: Chapter 10

Lecture 13th - November 11th Women in Power - Guest Speaker James A Robinson

- Anderson, et. al “The Persistence of Female Political Power in Africa”
<https://thepearsoninstitute.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/2024-06%20The%20Persistence%20of%20Female%20Political%20Power%20in%20Africa.pdf>

Lecture 14th - November 13th

- Amadiume, Ifi (1987) “Male Daughters and Female Husbands” London. Read: Introduction, Chapter 1 and Chapter 3
- Professor Bautista will present her research on Women in Nigeria

Lecture 15th - November 18th Social Norms and Public Policy

- Jayachandran, S. Social Norms as a Barrier to Women’s Employment in Developing Countries. IMF Econ Rev 69, 576–595 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41308-021-00140-w>

Lecture 16th - November 20th - TBD Guest Speaker

Week 9 - November 22nd-17th Thanksgiving

Week 10 - December 1st - 5th Final Week - Podcast sharing

Listen to the podcast of your assigned peer to give them feedback. This feedback should be incorporated into the final research project. All podcasts should include an abstract that will be published on canvas for everyone to read and leave comments.