POLS 4580 Special Topics: AI, Politics & the Economy

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Class Room: Forsyth Building 242

Course Description

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping our economy, politics, and society in unprecedented ways. This course explores the real-world impacts of AI through the lens of political economy, examining who benefits and who loses as AI transforms work, power, and democratic participation.

We will investigate pressing questions: Will AI eliminate your future job or create new opportunities? Why do some people embrace AI while others fear it? How does AI influence elections and political beliefs? Should governments regulate AI, and if so, how? Why might AI increase inequality, and what can we do about it?

Through case studies, hands-on experiments with AI tools, and analysis of current events, the course offers students opportunities to practice critically evaluating claims about AI and its political and economic impacts. No technical background required, just curiosity about how technology shapes society and politics.

Learning Goals

This course offers students the opportunity to:

- Explain how AI works in basic terms and identify its applications in daily life

- Analyze AI's impact on jobs, wages, and inequality using political economy frameworks

- Evaluate how technological change influences voting behavior and political attitudes

- Compare public and policy responses to AI across different countries and communities

- Develop informed opinions on AI governance and regulation debates

- Use AI tools effectively in academic and professional contexts

Class Format and Organization

Canvas

We will use Canvas as the main site for this class. I will post announcements, materials, readings, assignments, and other resources on Canvas. Please check Canvas regularly.

Course Requirements & Grading

Participation and Engagement during Discussions and Activities:	15%
Student-Led Discussion as Facilitator:	20%
Group Podcast Project:	25%
Final Research Paper:	40%

Final grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

A	93–100	**A–**	90–92	**B+**	87–89	**B**	83–86	**B–**	80–82		
C+	77–79	**C**	73–76	**C–**	70–72	**D+**	67–69	**D**	63–66	**D–**	60–62
F	<60										

Assignments

Student-led Discussions

Discussion Leadership Structure: Every week, students will serve as discussion facilitators individually or in pairs, with each student (or pair) responsible for leading discussion on ONE assigned reading (approximately 30 minutes).

Facilitator Responsibilities (20%):

- Provide a 5-minute critical summary of your assigned reading

- Prepare 4-5 substantive discussion questions that connect the reading to broader course themes

- Lead a 25-minute seminar discussion on your paper

- Be prepared to draw connections to other readings when relevant

- Slides are optional (2-3 maximum) to display key figures, tables, or quotes

Non-Facilitator Responsibilities (15%):

- Complete all assigned readings before class

- Actively participate in all discussions

- Help sustain discussion momentum with questions, critiques, and connections

- Be prepared to engage substantively with each paper presented

Group Podcast Project (25%)

Create a 10-15 minute podcast episode featuring an "interview" with a political/business/policy figure about AI policy, using Claude to help generate responses. Groups of 3-4 students.
Timeline:

- Week 1: Form groups

- Week 4: Select figure and submit one-page document with research plan (5%) – due Sunday, February 1 at 11:59pm

- Week 8: Final podcast presented in class (20%)

Final Research Paper (40%)

3,000-4,000 word paper on an AI governance topic. Options include policy analysis, case study, comparative analysis, or original research.
Timeline:

- Week 6: Paper proposal due (5%) – Sunday, February 15 at 11:59pm

- Week 15: Research presentation (10%)

- Finals Week: Final paper due (25%) – Tuesday, April 21 at 11:59pm

Additional Resources

Detailed guidelines for major assignments are provided in separate documents:

- Facilitation Guide and Activities

- Group Podcast Project Guidelines

- Final Research Paper Guidelines

Schedule and Weekly Topics

The following schedule provides a general framework for the course. Adjustments may be made based on the progression of the class.

Reading guidance: Focus on key claims; you may skim dense technical sections or use AI assistance for clarification.

⋆ = eligible for **student-led facilitation (pairs)**;

Week 1: What is AI? Why Do Its Political and Economic Consequences Matter?, 01/05 - 01/09:

Day 1: Introduction to AI and Political Economy

- **Focus**: Introduction to political economy as a framework for analyzing AI's impacts, and why AI will become a major political issue.

- **Reading 1:** Frieden, J. (2020). *The Political Economy of Economic Policy*.

  https://www.imf.org/en/publications/fandd/issues/2020/06/political-economy-of-economic-policy-jeff-frieden

- **Reading 2:** Nobel Prize Committee (2025). *From Stagnation to Sustained Growth* (Popular Science Background).

  https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/2025/popular-information/

- **Reading 3:** Magistro, Borwein, Alvarez, Bonikowski, and Loewen (2025). *The Coming AI Backlash: How the Anger Economy Will Supercharge Populism*. Foreign Affairs.

- **Entry Ticket (pre-class, 100 words):** One reason to study AI as political economy + one question you have about the course.

- **Sign-up for facilitation slots and form podcast groups**

Day 2: Introduction to Claude

- **Reading 1:** The Economist (2023), *Large, creative AI models will transform lives and labour markets*. Available at:

  https://www.economist.com/interactive/science-and-technology/2023/04/22/large-creative-ai-models-will-transform-how-we-live-and-work

- **Reading 2:** Ethan Mollick (2025), *Mass Intelligence*. One Useful Thing. Available at: https://www.oneusefulthing.org/p/mass-intelligence

- **In-Class Activity: Testing AI Capabilities with Claude**

Week 2: The Political Economy of Technological Change, 01/12 - 01/16:

Day 1: Broader Implications of AI for Politics and Society

- **Focus**: Discussion on how AI might influence political and social systems, and the broader risks and opportunities AI presents.

- **Reading 1:** Ian Bremmer (2023), *How the World Must Respond to the AI Revolution*. Available at: https://time.com/6283716/world-must-respond-to-the-ai-revolution/

- **Reading 2:** Simon Johnson & Daron Acemoglu (2024), *Choosing AI's Impact on the Future of Work*. Available at: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/ai-impact-on-jobs-and-work

- **Reading 3:** Philippe Aghion, Simon Bunel & Xavier Jaravel (2025), *What AI Means for Growth and Jobs*. Project Syndicate. Available at: https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/ai-will-boost-productivity-growth-without-harming-jobs-by-philippe-aghion-et-al-2025-10

- **Mini In-Class Activity: The Great AI Jobs Debate**

Day 2: Comparing AI to Historical Technological Shifts

- **Focus:** Overview of past industrial revolutions: What were their impacts on labor and economies, and how does AI compare?

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Autor, D. H. (2015), Why are there still so many jobs? The history and future of workplace automation. Journal of Economic Perspectives, 29(3), 3–30.

- **In-Class Activity: Historical Technology Parallels Sprint**

Week 3: Employment Effects of Technological Change, 01/19 - 01/23:

Day 1: Automation's Impact on Jobs

- **Focus:** Explore the direct and indirect effects of automation on employment, how automation creates or displaces jobs.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** James Bessen (2019), Automation and Jobs: When Technology Boosts Employment. 34 Economic Policy 585.

- ⋆ **Reading 2:** Philippe Aghion, Antonin, C., Bunel, S., & Jaravel, X. (2022), The Effects of Automation on Employment: A Survey of the Recent Literature. In Robots and AI (1st ed., pp. 1–25). Routledge.

Day 2: The Future of Work

- **Focus:** Investigate how AI can extend human expertise to rebuild middle-skill jobs, examining both automation risks and augmentation opportunities in the labor market.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** David Autor (2024), Applying AI to Rebuild Middle Class Jobs. Working Paper 32140 http://www.nber.org/papers/w32140

- **In-Class Activity: Job Redesign Sprint**.

Week 4: Distributional Effects of AI, 01/26 - 01/30:

Day 1: AI and Inequality

- **Focus:** This session will explore how AI technologies affect inequality, both within and across different labor markets.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Noy, Shakked and Zhang, Whitney (2023), Experimental Evidence on the Productivity Effects of Generative Artificial Intelligence. Science 381(6654): 187-192.

- ⋆ **Reading 2:** Brynjolfsson, Erik, Li, Danielle, & Raymond, Lindsey R. (2023), Generative AI at Work. The Quarterly Journal of Economics 140(2): 889-942.

Day 2: Who Wins and Who Loses from AI Adoption?

- **Focus:** Analyze the differential impacts of AI adoption on various demographic groups, sectors, and regions. This session will emphasize identifying the winners and losers from AI's economic and social impacts.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Tyna Eloundou, Sam Manning, Pamela Mishkin, Daniel Rock (2023), GPTs are GPTs: An Early Look at the Labor Market Impact Potential of Large Language Models. Science 384(6702): 1306-1308.

- **In-Class Activity: Stakeholder Impact Analysis**

Week 5: Political Behavior and Technological Change, 02/02 - 02/06:

Day 1: How Technology Shapes Political Attitudes

- **Focus**: Explore how exposure to technological change influences political attitudes and voting behavior.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Gallego, Aina and Kurer, Thomas (2022), *Automation, Digitalization, and Artificial Intelligence in the Workplace: Implications for Political Behavior*. Annual Review of Political Science 25: 463-484.

- ⋆ **Reading 2:** Anelli, Massimo et al. (2021), *Individual Vulnerability to Industrial Robot Adoption Increases Support for the Radical Right*. PNAS 118 (47) e2111611118.

Day 2: From Technological Threat to Populism

- **Focus**: Examine how technological threat may translate into right-wing or left-wing populism.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Borwein, Bonikowski, Loewen, Lee-Whiting and Magistro (2024), *Perceived Threat of Technology, Populism, and Vote Choice: Evidence from 15 European Democracies*. West European Politics 48(3): 534-561.

- **In-Class Activity: Tech → Populism?**

Week 6: Political Backlash and Anti-Technology Politics, 02/09 - 02/13:

Day 1: Understanding Potential AI Backlash

- **Focus**: Analyze the conditions under which AI may generate political backlash and resistance movements.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Sophie Borwein, Beatrice Magistro, R. Michael Alvarez, Bart Bonikowski and Peter Loewen (2024), *The potential for political backlash against AI*. Forthcoming at Public Opinion Quarterly.

- ⋆ **Reading 2:** Green, J., Grant, Z., Evans, G., & Inglese, G. (2025), *Linking artificial intelligence job exposure to expectations: Understanding AI losers, winners, and their political preferences*. Research & Politics 12(2).

Day 2: Anti-Tech Movements

- **Focus**: Explore how anti-technology sentiments form and influence political discourse.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Zilinsky, J. and Zeitzoff, T. (2025), *Artificial Intelligence, Social Media, and the Politics of Anti-Technology*. Forthcoming at the American Journal of Political Science.

- **In-Class Activity: Anti-tech Movements**

Week 7: Geography of Technological Change: Winners and Losers Across Space, 02/16 - 02/20:

Day 1: Regional Winners and Losers

- **Focus**: Examine how technological change creates geographic disparities and influences regional political dynamics.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Gallego, Aina, Kurer, Thomas, and Schöll, Nikolas (2022), *Neither Left-Behind nor Superstar: Ordinary Winners of Digitalization at the Ballot Box*. The Journal of Politics 84:1, 418-436.

- ⋆ **Reading 2:** Baccini, Leonardo and Weymouth, Stephen (2021), *Gone for Good: Deindustrialization, White Voter Backlash, and US Presidential Voting*. American Political Science Review, 115(2), 550–567.

Day 2: Migration and the Knowledge Economy

- **Focus**: Analyze how technological change drives migration patterns and reshapes local political coalitions.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Schöll, Nikolas and Kurer, Thomas (2024), *How technological change affects regional voting patterns*. Political Science Research and Methods, 12(1), 94–112.

- **In-Class Activity:"Should I Stay or Should I Go?"**

Week 8: Mid-Semester Student Presentations, 02/23 - 02/27:

Day 1: Podcast Expo

- **Format:** In-class podcast presentations; all groups present across both days.

- **What to bring:** 10–15 min audio file + a one-page handout (Question, Why it matters, Two key takeaways, One policy implication).

- **Peer Review:** Rubric cards on Teams; vote for "Best Narrative" and "Best Evidence Use."

- No readings this week.

Day 2: Podcast Expo (Part 2) & Synthesis

- **Format:** Remaining groups present in the same expo format.

- **Synthesis:** Whole-class discussion of recurring themes and gaps for the second half of the course.

Week 9: No class SPRING BREAK, 03/02 - 03/06:

Week 10: Gender, Race, and AI, 03/09 - 03/13:

Day 1: Gender and Technological Change

- **Focus**: Examine gendered impacts of AI adoption and differences in attitudes toward technological change.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Mauro Cazzaniga, Augustus Panton, Longji Li, Carlo Pizzinelli, and Marina M. Tavares (2025), *A Gender Lens on Labor Market Exposure to AI*. AEA Papers and Proceedings 115: 56-61.

- ⋆ **Reading 2:** Borwein, Sophie, Magistro, Beatrice, Loewen, Peter J., Bonikowski, Bart, Lee-Whiting, Blake (2024), *The Gender Gap in Attitudes Toward Workplace Technological Change*. Socio-Economic Review 22(3): 993-1019.

Day 2: AI and Racial Equity

- **Focus**: Analyze how AI systems can perpetuate or challenge racial inequalities in employment and governance.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Anastasopoulos, Jason, et al. (2024), *Are Aisha and Darnell Better Civil Servants Than Emily and Greg? Evaluating Racial and Gender Bias in Generative AI-Based Civil Servant Assessments*. Working Paper.

- **In-Class Activity: Bias Audit Exercise**

Week 11: AI Governance and Regulation, 03/16 - 03/20:

Day 1: Public Preferences for AI Governance

- **Focus**: Understand what types of AI regulation citizens support and why.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Kuo, Alexander and Gallego, Aina (2024), *Balancing Progress and Protection: Do Citizens Want Governments to Shape Technological Adoption?* Working Paper.

- ⋆ **Reading 2:** Bürgisser, R., Kurer, T., Häusermann, S. and de Pinho Tavares, S. (2025). Can Government Policies Moderate Political Backlash to Structural Change? URPP Equality of Opportunity Discussion Paper Series No. 67.

Day 2: Implementation Challenges

- **Focus**: Explore the political and practical challenges of implementing AI governance.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Margalit, Yotam and Raviv, Shir (2025), *The Politics of Using AI in Policy Implementation: Evidence from a Field Experiment*. Forthcoming at British Journal of Political Science

- **In-Class Activity: Mock Legislative Hearing**

Week 12: Policy Preferences in Response to Technological Change, 03/23 - 03/27:

Day 1: What Policies Do People Want?

- **Focus**: Analyze how self-interest and values shape preferences for policies addressing technological change.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Heinrich, T. and Witko, C. (2025), *Self-interest and preferences for the regulation of artificial intelligence*. Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 22(3): 306-321.

- ⋆ **Reading 2:** Busemeyer, Marius R., and Tobias Tober. (2023), *Dealing with technological change: social policy preferences and institutional context*. Comparative Political Studies 56(7): 968–999.

Day 2: Risk Perception and Policy Support

- **Focus**: Examine how different types of technological risks influence policy preferences.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Raviv, Shir (2025), *When Do Citizens Resist The Use of AI Algorithms in Public Policy? Theory and Evidence*. Forthcoming at the Journal of Politics.

- **In-Class Activity: Survey Design Activity**

Week 13: Automation, Trade, and Nationalism, 03/30 - 04/03:

Day 1: Blaming Robots vs. Foreigners

- **Focus**: Analyze how citizens attribute job losses to different causes and the political implications.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Mutz, Diana C. (2021), *Mis-attributing the Causes of American Job Loss*. Public Opinion Quarterly 85(1): 101-122.

- ⋆ **Reading 2:** Wu, Nicole (2021), *Misattributed Blame? Attitudes toward Globalization in the Age of Automation*. Political Science Research and Methods, 10(3), 470–487.

Day 2: Political Responses to Economic Threats

- **Focus**: Compare policy responses to automation versus immigration and trade.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Wu, Nicole (2022), *Restrict Foreigners, Not Robots: Partisan Responses to Automation Threat*. Economics & Politics 35(2): 505-528.

- **In-Class Activity: Attribution Game**

Week 14: AI vs. Other Economic Disruptions, 04/06 - 04/10:

Day 1: Comparing Economic Shocks

- **Focus**: Compare public and political responses to AI, trade shocks, and other economic disruptions.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Di Tella, Rafael and Rodrik, Dani (2020), *Labour Market Shocks and the Demand for Trade Protection: Evidence from Online Surveys*. The Economic Journal 130(628): 1008-1030.

- ⋆ **Reading 2:** Gallego, Aina, Kuo, Alexander, and Manzano, Dulce (2023), *Automation Versus Openness: Support for Policies to Address Job Threats*. Journal of Public Policy, 44(1), 1–23.

Day 2: Common Patterns and Differences

- **Focus**: Synthesize insights about how AI compares to other sources of economic disruption.

- ⋆ **Reading 1:** Magistro, Beatrice, Borwein, Sophie, Alvarez, R. Michael, Bonikowski, Bart, and Loewen, Peter (2025), *Attitudes Toward Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Globalization: Common Microfoundations and Political Implications*. American Journal of Political Science 1–18.

- **In-Class Activity: Synthesis Discussion**

Week 15: Final Student Showcase, 04/13 - 04/17:

Day 1: Research Presentations (Cohort A)

- **Format:** 5-minute presentations + 2-minute Q&A; half of students present.

- **Slides:** 3–5 slides covering: Research question, Why it matters, Approach, Key finding(s), Policy takeaway.

Day 2: Research Presentations (Cohort B) & Course Wrap-Up

- Remaining students present in the same format.

- **Course Synthesis:** What changed your mind? What open questions should policymakers and scholars prioritize next?

Northeastern and Classroom Policies

Academic Integrity

All students enrolled in this course must adhere to Northeastern University's policy on "Academic Integrity." Those of you who are unfamiliar with this policy are expected to read it online at: https://osccr.sites.northeastern.edu/academic-integrity-policy/. Violations of the academic integrity policy will not be tolerated, and will be reported to university officials.

Artificial Intelligence

AI tools like ChatGPT and Claude are powerful resources for enhancing research and writing when used appropriately. In this seminar, AI should complement—not substitute for—your own thinking and analysis.

Appropriate use of AI:

- Grammar checking, spell checking, and style improvement suggestions

- Brainstorming and organizing ideas you have developed

- Finding relevant sources and literature (always verify independently)

- Checking clarity and coherence of your arguments

- Generating counter-arguments to test your thesis

- Clarify the methods sections of each reading (or any other parts that you're unfamiliar with)

Inappropriate use of AI:

- Having AI write any portion of your assignments

- Using AI-generated analysis or arguments without attribution

- Submitting AI-generated content as your own work

- Only using AI to summarize readings instead of engaging with them directly

Citation requirements: If you include large chunks of text copied from AI you must include a statement at the end of your work describing how you used the AI tool. Direct quotes from AI must be cited as:

- OpenAI, ChatGPT. Response to prompt: "[your prompt]" (Date, https://chat.openai.com/).

- Anthropic, Claude. Response to prompt: "[your prompt]" (Date, https://claude.ai/).

Inclusion and Diversity

I value all students regardless of their background, country of origin, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or disability status, and am committed to providing a climate of excellence and inclusiveness within all aspects of the course. All University policies related to inclusion and diversity can be found at https://policies.northeastern.edu/.

Title IX

Title IX protects individuals from sex or gender-based discrimination in educational programs. Northeastern's Title IX Policy prohibits sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship or domestic violence, and stalking. In emergencies, call 911. For reporting options and resources: https://www.northeastern.edu/ouec. Please note that I am a university-mandated reporter, meaning that if I am made aware of an incident related to sexual assault, sexual harassment, gender-based harassment, dating or domestic violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking, I am required to report it to the Northeastern University's Office of University Equity and Compliance/Title IX Coordinator.

Support Services (*indicates confidential resource)

- ***University Health and Counseling Services:** Confidential medical and mental health services

- ***Find@Northeastern:** 24/7 mental health support (877.233.9477 US / +1.781.457.7777 International)

- **We Care:** Support network for various student concerns

- **Disability Resource Center:** Ensures equal access for students with disabilities

- ***OPEN:** Confidential support for alcohol, drugs, and sexual violence

- ***Center for Spirituality, Dialogue, and Service:** Spiritual support and guidance

- **Office for University Equity and Compliance:** Investigates discrimination reports

Challenges and Accommodations

Learning is most easily accomplished when you are physically and emotionally at your best. If you are struggling, know that there are resources on campus to help you. If you'd like to share any concerns with me, I'm happy to listen, support you, and help direct you to resources.

The Disability Access Services (DAS) at Northeastern ensures that students with disabilities have equal access to the academic experience at Northeastern and advocates for students with learning differences. Please share any formal DAS-approved accommodations with me as early in the semester as possible so I can make sure to put those accommodations in place. You can do so by requesting a "professor notification letter" through your DAS portal and following up with me via email. More information can be found here: https://disabilityaccessservices.northeastern.edu/. If you do not have formal accommodations through DAS but would like to request them, you can register here https://disabilityaccessservices.northeastern.edu/incomingandsunregisteredstudents/.