Syllabus 2: Political Economy of Development

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Course Description

This course examines how historical trajectories, institutions, political incentives, and social groups shape political and economic outcomes. The course focuses on contemporary democratic institutions in the developing world, while also drawing on evidence from authoritarian regimes and cases of regime change and institutional reform. Readings span multiple regions, especially Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The first module introduces the historical and institutional origins of development. We analyze how colonialism, slavery, and early regime formation shaped long-run state capacity, political institutions, and economic growth.

The central focus of the second module is to understand how democratic institutions operate in practice. We will discuss the conditions under which democratic elections are responsive to voters' interests and needs and when they fail, covering topics such as corruption, state capture, distributive politics, and electoral accountability.

The third module covers how social groups interact with the political system, including identities such as gender and ethnicity. We study how ethnic divisions and gender inequality translate into political representation, and how bureaucratic politics and interest groups can exacerbate political and economic inequalities. Finally, the module discusses political violence, focusing on its impact on elections.

Readings and Class Structure

There is no textbook for this course. Readings consist of journal articles and book chapters, mostly drawn from recent political economy research. No prior background in statistics or quantitative methods is required. When readings use statistical analysis, lectures will focus on explaining the intuition of the empirical strategy and the substantive implications of the findings. All required materials will be available through the library or posted on the course platform.

Students are expected to complete the main assigned readings before class and be prepared to discuss the material analytically in class, which counts as part of their evaluation. Additional readings are optional, but they provide useful background and may serve as complements to presentations or written assignments. Lectures will synthesize the main concepts and situate the readings within broader theoretical and empirical debates rather than simply describe the texts.

When reading, identify the central research question, the core theoretical concepts, the outcome, and the explanatory variables. Consider how the case under study advances broader claims about institutions, political incentives, or development. Pay particular attention to the strengths and limitations of the design: What assumptions sustain the argument? What alternative explanations remain plausible?

When reading the academic literature for this course, students should focus on understanding the structure of the argument rather than the technical details of the methods. Some readings include statistical analysis or formal models, but students are not expected to work through the mathematics or technical notation. Instead, focus on the intuition of the argument and how the evidence supports the author's claims.

In particular, pay attention to the following elements:

- The central research question: What puzzle or political phenomenon is the author trying to explain?
- The theoretical argument: What mechanism or causal logic does the author propose?
- The evidence used: What cases, data, or examples are used to evaluate the argument?
- The strengths and limitations of the evidence: What assumptions are necessary for the argument to hold, and what alternative explanations remain plausible?

Evaluation and Requirements

The evaluation emphasizes analytical reasoning and the ability to develop evidence-based policy arguments. Final grades will be based on four components: an in-class midterm policy proposal (25%), a 20-minute article presentation (15%), a final research paper (40%), and active participation in class discussions (20%).

Component	Weight
Midterm Exam (Policy Proposal)	25%
Article Presentation (20 minutes)	15%
Final Research Paper (10 pages)	40%
Class Participation	20%

Midterm Exam (Policy Proposal): Students will complete an open-book, in-class exam. Rather than answering short factual questions, students will write a structured policy proposal grounded in the course readings and empirical evidence. Students will be presented with a political economy problem and act as consultants to propose a solution, thinking critically about possible trade-offs and unintended consequences. The prompt could be, for example, an electoral reform or an administrative reform. Students will be expected to:

- Identify a political or institutional problem discussed in class;
- Propose a policy intervention;
- Justify it using relevant theoretical arguments and empirical findings from the readings;
- Anticipate potential unintended consequences.

Article Presentation: Each student will lead one 20-minute presentation of an assigned article. We will define the schedule of presentations in the first class. The presentation must:

- Clearly identify the research question and theoretical contribution;
- Evaluate strengths and limitations of the evidence used to support the argument.

Research Project: By the end of the semester, students will complete a research paper (maximum 10 pages). The project will consist of an analytical essay based on one or more case studies related to the themes of the course. Students are expected to engage with the academic literature and develop a clear argument grounded in course readings. Each student is expected to discuss their project ideas with the instructor no later than **Week 4**. A 3-page intermediate project report is due in **Week 10**. The final paper is due in the final week.

Projects will be evaluated on:

- Clarity of research question;
- Theoretical grounding in the academic literature;
- Quality of evidence and use of case studies to support the argument.

Participation: Active participation is essential. Students are expected to complete readings before class and engage with the discussion based on the readings.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

Students are required to comply with the university's policy on academic integrity. All submitted work must reflect the student's own reasoning and proper citation of sources. Generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools may be used in a limited capacity, for example, for proofreading

or preliminary information search. However, grading is entirely based on students' independent analysis, argument development, and original data work. Students must disclose when and how AI tools were used in preparing their assignments. Failure to comply with academic integrity policies may result in sanctions in accordance with university regulations.

Schedule

The schedule is subject to change.

Module I: Institutions and Development

Week 1: Colonialism and Slavery

- Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A Robinson. "Reversal of fortune: Geography and institutions in the making of the modern world income distribution". *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117, no. 4 (2002): 1231–1294
- Nathan Nunn. "The long-term effects of Africa's slave trades". *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123, no. 1 (2008): 139–176

Additional Readings:

- Lakshmi Iyer. "Direct versus indirect colonial rule in India: Long-term consequences". *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 92, no. 4 (2010): 693–713
- Melissa Dell. "The persistent effects of Peru's mining mita". *Econometrica* 78, no. 6 (2010): 1863–1903

Week 2: Institutions and Development

- Douglass C North. "Institutions and economic growth: An historical introduction". *World development* 17, no. 9 (1989): 1319–1332
- Stephen Orvis and Carol Ann Drogus. *Introducing Comparative Politics: Concepts and Cases in Context*. 6th ed. CQ Press, 2024. **Chapter 11**.

Additional Readings:

- Thomas Oatley. *International political economy*. Routledge, 2022. **Chapter 3**.

Week 3: Institutional Change

- Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson. "The rise of Europe: Atlantic trade, institutional change, and economic growth". *American Economic Review* 95, no. 3 (2005): 546–579

- Beatriz Magaloni. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006. **Chapter 1**.

Additional Readings:

- Alexander Lee and Jack Paine. *Colonial origins of democracy and dictatorship*. Cambridge University Press, 2024. **Chapter 2** and **Conclusion**.
- Alessandro Lizzeri and Nicola Persico. "Why did the elites extend the suffrage? Democracy and the scope of government, with an application to Britain's 'Age of Reform'". *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 119, no. 2 (2004): 707–765
- Monica Martinez-Bravo et al. "The rise and fall of local elections in China". *American Economic Review* 112, no. 9 (2022): 2921–2958

Week 4: State Capacity

- Mark Dincecco and Yuhua Wang. "State Capacity in Historical Political Economy". In *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Political Economy*, ed. by Jeffrey Jenkins and Jared Rubin, 253–269. Oxford University Press, 2024
- Pavithra Suryanarayan and Steven White. "Slavery, reconstruction, and bureaucratic capacity in the American south". *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 2 (2021): 568–584

Additional Readings:

- Melissa M Lee and Nan Zhang. "Legibility and the informational foundations of state capacity". *The Journal of Politics* 79, no. 1 (2017): 118–132

Module II: Elections, Accountability, and Responsiveness

Week 5: Accountability and Responsiveness

Students are expected to discuss their final research project with the instructor no later than this week.

- Robin Harding and David Stasavage. "What democracy does (and doesn't do) for basic services: School fees, school inputs, and African elections". *The Journal of Politics* 76, no. 1 (2014): 229–245
- Christopher H Achen and Larry M Bartels. *Democracy for realists: Why elections do not produce responsive government*. Princeton University Press, 2017. **Chapter 10**.

Additional Readings:

- James D Fearon. "Electoral accountability and the control of politicians: selecting good types versus sanctioning poor performance". In *Democracy, accountability, and representation*, ed. by Adam Przeworski, Susan C. Stokes, and Bernard Manin, 55–97. Cambridge University Press, 1999

Week 6: Distributive Politics and Clientelism

- Susan C Stokes, Thad Dunning, and Marcelo Nazareno. *Brokers, voters, and clientelism*. Cambridge University Press, 2013. **Chapter 1**.
- Jordan Gans-Morse, Sebastian Mazzuca, and Simeon Nichter. "Varieties of clientelism: Machine politics during elections". *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 2 (2014): 415–432

Additional Readings:

- Thomas Fujiwara and Leonard Wantchekon. "Can informed public deliberation overcome clientelism? Experimental evidence from Benin". *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 5, no. 4 (2013): 241–255
- Natália S Bueno, Cesar Zucco, and Felipe Nunes. "What you see and what you get: direct and indirect political dividends of public policies". *British Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 4 (2023): 1273–1292

Week 7: Corruption and Vote Buying

- Frederico Finan and Laura Schechter. "Vote-buying and reciprocity". *Econometrica* 80, no. 2 (2012): 863–881
- Luigi Manzetti and Carole J Wilson. "Why do corrupt governments maintain public support?" *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 8 (2007): 949–970

Additional Readings:

- Claudio Ferraz and Frederico Finan. "Exposing corrupt politicians: the effects of Brazil's publicly released audits on electoral outcomes". *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123, no. 2 (2008): 703–745
- Ashlea Rundlett and Milan W Svolik. "Deliver the vote! Micromotives and macrobehavior in electoral fraud". *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 1 (2016): 180–197

Week 8: Elections, Fraud, and Monitoring

- Saad Gulzar, Thomas S Robinson, and Nelson A Ruiz. "How campaigns respond to ballot position: A new mechanism for order effects". *The Journal of Politics* 84, no. 2 (2022): 1256–1261
- Sergio J Ascencio and Miguel R Rueda. "Partisan poll watchers and electoral manipulation". *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 3 (2019): 727–742
- Miguel R Rueda, Guy Grossman, and Shuning Ge. "Do More Disaggregated Electoral Results Deter Aggregation Fraud?" *British Journal of Political Science* 55 (2025): e140

Week 9: Party Machines

The intermediate short project report is due this week.

- Mathias Poertner. "Building the party on the ground: The role of access to public office for party growth". *The Journal of Politics* 85, no. 4 (2023): 1516–1528
- Virginia Oliveros. "Working for the machine: patronage jobs and political services in Argentina". *Comparative Politics* 53, no. 3 (2021): 381–427

Additional Readings:

- Marko Klašnja and Rocío Titiunik. "The incumbency curse: Weak parties, term limits, and unfulfilled accountability". *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (2017): 129–148
- Alison E Post. "Cities and politics in the developing world". *Annual Review of Political Science* 21, no. 1 (2018): 115–133

Week 10: Midterm Exam

Module III: Society and Politics

Week 11: Bureaucracy

- Aditya Dasgupta and Devesh Kapur. "The political economy of bureaucratic overload: Evidence from rural development officials in India". *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 4 (2020): 1316–1334
- Jeffrey Kopstein et al. "Governments and Bureaucracies". In *Comparative Politics: Interests, Identities, and Institutions in a Changing Global Order*, 4th ed., 141–170. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014

Additional Readings:

- Abhijit Banerjee et al. "Improving police performance in Rajasthan, India: Experimental evidence on incentives, managerial autonomy, and training". *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 13, no. 1 (2021): 36–66
- Guy Grossman and Tara Slough. "Government responsiveness in developing countries". *Annual Review of Political Science* 25 (2022): 131–153

Week 12: Ethnic Politics

- Kanchan Chandra. "Ethnic parties and democratic stability". *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 2 (2005): 235–252
- James Habyarimana et al. "Why does ethnic diversity undermine public goods provision?" *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 4 (2007): 709–725

Week 13: Gender and Politics

- Seema Jayachandran. "The roots of gender inequality in developing countries". *Annual Review of Economics* 7, no. 1 (2015): 63–88
- Amanda Clayton. "How do electoral gender quotas affect policy?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 24, no. 1 (2021): 235–252

Additional Readings:

- Varun Karekurve-Ramachandra and Alexander Lee. "Do gender quotas hurt less privileged groups? Evidence from India". *American Journal of Political Science* 64, no. 4 (2020): 757–772
- Andrew B Whitford, Vicky M Wilkins, and Mercedes G Ball. "Descriptive representation and policymaking authority: Evidence from women in cabinets and bureaucracies". *Governance* 20, no. 4 (2007): 559–580
- Jane Mansbridge. "Should blacks represent blacks and women represent women? A contingent 'yes'". *The Journal of Politics* 61, no. 3 (1999): 628–657

Week 14: Media and Interest Groups

- Ruben Enikolopov, Maria Petrova, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya. "Media and political persuasion: Evidence from Russia". *American Economic Review* 101, no. 7 (2011): 3253–3285
- Nathan Canen and Leonard Wantchekon. "Political distortions, state capture, and economic development in Africa". *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 36, no. 1 (2022): 101–124

Additional Readings:

- Melani Cammett, Lucas Novaes, and Guadalupe Tuñon. "Special Interest Trade-Offs: Campaign Finance Reforms and Religious Influence in Politics in Brazil". *Working Paper* (2025)
- Saad Gulzar, Miguel R Rueda, and Nelson A Ruiz. "Do campaign contribution limits curb the influence of money in politics?" *American Journal of Political Science* 66, no. 4 (2022): 932–946

Week 15: Political Violence

- Paul Collier and Pedro C Vicente. "Votes and violence: Evidence from a field experiment in Nigeria". *The Economic Journal* 124, no. 574 (2014): F327–F355
- Alberto Alesina, Salvatore Piccolo, and Paolo Pinotti. "Organized crime, violence, and politics". *The Review of Economic Studies* 86, no. 2 (2019): 457–499

Additional Readings:

- Daron Acemoglu, James A Robinson, and Rafael J Santos. "The monopoly of violence: Evidence from Colombia". *Journal of the European Economic Association* 11, no. suppl_1 (2013): 5–44
- Dawn Brancati and Jack L Snyder. "Rushing to the polls: The causes of premature postconflict elections". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 3 (2011): 469–492