POLS UN3535: Comparative Political Economy
Department of Political Science, Columbia University

Fall 2016
Lectures: Mondays and Wednesdays, 4:10pm-5:25pm
Location: 503 Hamilton Hall

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COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Like any rapidly growing field, comparative political economy means different things to different people. This particular course aims to illuminate how political institutions and behavior shape economic outcomes, and vice versa, across the world today. To do so, we will use economic modes of analysis to draw comparisons both within and across a diverse set of nations ranging from established democracies like the U.S. to nascent democracies like Afghanistan.

We will focus on how the incentives facing individuals drive differences in economic development, democratic representation and voter participation in both developed and developing contexts. Starting at the level of national political systems, before analyzing the internal workings of institutions and the behavior of voters that underpin democratic systems, students will grapple with major contemporary debates including:

- Does economic development cause nations to become democratic?
- Can democratic institutions explain why some nations are rich and others are poor?
- What shapes the policies democratic governments implement?
- How do voters decide who to vote for?
- When and why will voters even participate in politics?

By studying these questions, the course will familiarize students with central political economy concepts – such as credible commitment, rent-seeking, principal-agent problems and collective action problems – as well as frontier empirical findings and methods shaping how we think about the interrelation of politics and economics. These powerful concepts and tools will empower students to think analytically, analyze macro phenomena in terms of micro-level incentives, and apply theoretical frameworks to answer specific questions in this course and beyond.

This course will cover arguments and evidence from both political science and economics. There are no formal prerequisites for this course. However, familiarity with introductory economics and econometrics/statistics will significantly aid students. Enrollment will be capped at 40.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Grades will be assigned according to the following components of the course:

- Midterm exam (25%). This will be in-class on 10/19, and cover material up to (and including) Lecture 11.
- Final exam (45%). The final exam will cover material from the entire course.
- 10-15 page research paper (30%). A typical research paper will use the theories and/or methods learned in the course to either (1) analyze a specific event in a country of their choice, such as an election outcome, policy outcome, or democratic transition, or (2) explain variation in political or economic outcomes between countries or subnational units. Original data analysis is not necessary but encouraged. This research paper will be due electronically on 12/23. One third of a grade will be dropped for each unexcused day that it is late.

If you have any concerns over a grade that you received, please write a one-page memo to the TA, copying the Professor. This memo should explain why the grade should be reappraised. Upon reappraisal, grades may be revised both up and down.

DISCUSSION SECTIONS

Discussion sections are an integral component of this course for consolidating understanding and honing analytic skills. Starting in the second week, Jacob Kopas will hold a weekly section discussing key debates arising from the week’s readings and illustrating some theoretical arguments with games. To best ensure that everyone can attend section, section will be held twice each Thursday: 12:10pm-1:00pm in 652 Schermerhorn Hall and 5:10pm-6:00pm in 602 Northwest Corner. Students are expected to have completed readings in advance of section.

READINGS

This course will not follow specific textbooks, but rather draw from many major contributions to comparative political economy. The course outline below provides references for the articles and chapters corresponding to each lecture, all of which will be available online on CourseWorks.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Columbia University does not tolerate cheating or plagiarism in any form. Students violating the code of academic and professional conduct will be subject to disciplinary procedures. Guidelines on academic integrity are available at [http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/integrity](http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/integrity), and all students are expected to be familiar with and abide by them.
COURSE OUTLINE

Introduction

Lecture 1, 9/7: What is comparative political economy (for us)?


Freedman, David A. 2005. Statistical Models. Cambridge University Press. [Chapter 1 only; Optional, but advised for students without a statistical background]


Part 1

The big picture: political institutions and economic development

Economic causes of democracy

Lecture 2, 9/12: Levels of development – does modernization necessitate democratization?

Dahl, Robert. 1971. Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition. [Pages 1-10 only]


Lecture 3, 9/14: Distribution of development – does conflict over resources produce democracy?


Political causes of economic development

Lecture 4, 9/19: How might political institutions support economic development?


Lecture 5, 9/21: Do political institutions cause economic development?


Dell, Melissa. 2010. “The Persistent Effects of Peru’s Mining Mita.” *Econometrica* 78(6):1863–1903. [Focus on Sections 1, 2 and 4]

Lecture 6, 9/26: Political institutions or “culture”?


Lecture 7, 9/28: Is everything historically predetermined?


Part 2

The inner workings of democracy: explaining political and policy outcomes

Political competition and policy outcomes: electing or affecting?

Lecture 8, 10/3: In theory, how do democratic societies select policies?


Lecture 9, 10/5: Does the median voter theorem explain policy outcomes?


Influences beyond the electorate: imperfect political competition

Lecture 10, 10/10: Electoral fraud and vote buying


Lecture 11, 10/12: Whose votes should you buy?


Lecture 12, 10/17: Responsiveness to special interests – is it any different in consolidated democracies?


In-class midterm exam, 10/19

*Inefficient policy implementation*

Lecture 13, 10/24: Do politicians stimulate the economy before elections?


Lecture 14, 10/26: How does corruption work? Is it always bad for economic efficiency?


Policy-making in a globalized world

Lecture 15, 10/31: Does economic globalization limit the policies developed countries adopt?


Lecture 16, 11/2: How does economic globalization impact policies in developing countries? [Special lecture by Jacob Kopas]


University holiday, 11/7
Part 3

Voters: determinants of voting preferences and participation

Determinants of vote choice

Lecture 17, 11/9: Voting for policy – do voters vote in line with their redistributive interests?


Lecture 18, 11/14: Voting for competence – do voters reward strong economic performance?


Lecture 19, 11/16: Voting for competence – do voters punish corruption?


Lecture 21 (optional pre-Thanksgiving lecture), 11/23: What types of information influence voters?


Collective action in politics

Lecture 22, 11/28: The collective action problem


Lecture 23, 11/30: Collective action problems in practice


Lecture 24, 12/5: The paradox of voting: why do people turn out to vote?


Downs, Anthony. 1957. An Economic Theory of Democracy. [Chapter 14 only]
Lecture 25, 12/7: A social sense of duty to participate?


**Conclusions**

Lecture 26, 12/12: What have we learned?

No assigned reading!