1 Course description

This course has three goals: First, to introduce you to the foundational theoretical perspectives and empirical results that inform contemporary work in the field. Second, to provide a sense of where the ‘research frontiers’ in political economy are today, so that you are able to develop your own research questions and contributions. Third, we will try to strike a balance between doing research competently and asking interesting and questions. Most of you are building up your technical skill set. These skills are only productive if you have the ability to identify core substantive problems to which to apply them. To this end, we will pay close attention to linkages between theory, research strategy, and data throughout the seminar.

The course is organized in three sections: The first section (Foundations) introduces key concepts in political economy, examines states and markets as means of allocating resources, and addresses some basic methodological issues. The second section (PE of Democracy) turns to analyze the origins and politico-economic implications of different forms of organizing political authority in society. We study the political economy of regime change, how preferences are formed and how diverse interests are aggregated into collective choices. The third section (Applications) focuses on how these institutional differences play out in a number of policy spheres, including macroeconomic outcomes, trade, and distributive politics.

Each week we will focus on about 5 readings, which we will discuss in detail. The readings try to combine classics, standard, and frontier pieces within each subfield to convey a sense of the intellectual evolution of specific research programs. The success of the course depends on you having engaged with the readings in depth.

2 Meeting schedule

January 9th: Inaugural meeting. [Wednesday]

1. Part I: Foundations:

   (a) January 14th: What is PE? Theory, Evidence, and Policy
January 21st: no class [MLK day]
(b) January 28th: States, Markets, and Economic Growth
(c) February 4th: State Authority and Fiscal Capacity

2. Part II: PE of Democracy
(a) February 11th: Democratization
(b) February 18th: Preference Formation
(c) February 25th: Democratic Competition & Preference Aggregation
(d) March 4th: Interest Representation, Bureaucracy, Capture
March 11th: no class [Spring Recess]

3. Part III: Applications
(a) March 18th: Politics and the Macroeconomy
(b) March 25th: Trade and its Political Effects
(c) April 1st: Inequality & Politics I: Redistribution and Social Mobility
(d) April 8th: Inequality & Politics I: Political Effects
(e) April 15th: Closing session: Paper Presentation

3 Requirements

3.1 Research paper [65%]

Discussion and Set-up [25%] The very first task in producing new research is to motivate it. This involves identifying a gap in a literature or set of literatures, and justifying the expected payoff of the research efforts you are about to undertake. Typically, this involves identifying a puzzle. A puzzle could take the form of a logical inconsistency in an argument or, more commonly, a discrepancy between a theoretical expectation and an observable empirical pattern. To get to this point requires: (1) to master the literature you are engaging with, and (2) to establish the unexplained empirical phenomena worthy of explanation. These are the tasks you are expected to perform in this first iteration of the final paper. The goal is for you to learn by doing how to write a research paper. If you are a PhD student, this effort might get you started on your prelim paper (due in the third year). The discussion and set-up paper is due on March 7th 2019, right before Spring break.

Argument and Empirical Strategy [40%] Beyond the stage of formulating innovative research questions, you have to be able to lay out a strategy to answer them, both theoretically and empirically. To this end, you will devote the second half of the semester to develop your argument to answer the puzzle previously identified and to think about a strategy to assess the empirical implications that follow. Coming up with a research design means linking theory and data: What is the exogenous variable of interest? What is to be held constant? How? What are the advantages and limitations of the data and empirical strategy you employ? What possible alternative strategies could help you address the most pressing problems you are facing? You should be clear about your theory, data availability/collection, and your empirical strategy.
In writing proposals, both substance and style matter. Be focused, and selective. Use active voice. Spell-check & proofread. The following three pieces (all available online) provide inspiration on how to approach and structure your writing:

- James A. Stimson (n.d.): Professional Writing for Political Science: A Highly Opinionated Essay
- Paul Krugman (1993): How I Work

Your final research paper is due on May 1st 2019.

3.2 A journal referee report [10%]

A two-page, single-spaced “referee report” reviewing an article either (i) chosen from this syllabus, (ii) chosen by you (please consult with me beforehand). Your review should eschew summary in favor of critically evaluating the paper. The basic goal is to make a motivated recommendation as to whether or not the paper should (have been) published. You should support your evaluation with a discussion of theory, method, data, etc. This review paper is due on March 25th. For some advice on how to write a peer review, see: Miller, Pevehouse, Tingley, Rogowski and Wilson: ‘How to be a Peer Reviewer: A Guide for Recent and Soon-to-be Ph.Ds’. PS: Political Science and Politics, January 2013. Those who received a grade lower than A- need to write a second referee report on a different article.

3.3 One replication exercise [25%]

You will conduct a replication and extension of an empirical analysis in the literature. Replications/extensions should replicate results from a paper, check for robustness (by, for instance, analyzing subsamples, estimating models using different assumptions, etc), and engage in at least one extension. You will provide 10-minute presentations of these exercises. Your replication report is due on April 8th.

3.4 Participation

You will be expected to have done all the required readings in advance of each class. Though sessions will begin with a short lecture, class sessions will be conducted in a highly participatory seminar format. To ensure full participation, you are required to send discussion points/questions bearing on the week’s readings to everyone by 8 PM Sunday (length: about half a page). You can raise questions about theory, method, point out conflicts between readings, develop links with previous weeks' readings, etc.

4 Policy

You are required to attend class and have done the readings in advance. Unless you have a well-documented reason (e.g., hospitalization over a week), absence in two or more classes will result in a B+ or lower grade. Turning in late assignments is not acceptable unless extenuating circumstances apply and those are previously discussed with me. In any event of academic dishonesty, Duke’s policies apply.
5 Readings

I. Foundations

[1a] Theory, Evidence, and Policy (January 14th)

- Teele, D.L. (ed.) 2014 Field Experiments and their Critics, Yale University Press (chapters by Gerber, Green, and Kaplan; Stokes; Deaton; Gelman; Imai)

[1b] States, Markets, and Economic Growth (January 28th)


[1c] State Authority and Fiscal Capacity (February 4th)

II. PE of Democracy

[2a] Democratization (February 11th)


[2b] Preference Formation (February 18th)


[2c] Democratic Competition & Preference Aggregation (February 25th)

[2d] Interest Representation, Bureaucracy, and Capture (March 4th)

- Ch. 6 and 7 in A. Przeworski. States and Markets (background)

III. Applications

[3a] Politics and the Macroeconomy (March 18th)


[3b] Trade and its Political Effects (March 25th)


[3c] Inequality & Politics I: Redistribution and Mobility (April 1st)


• Atkinson, A. B. 2015. *Inequality: What can be done?*. Harvard University Press. (background)

• Przeworski, Chapters 10 in States and Markets (background)

[3d] Inequality & Politics II: Political Effects (April 8th)


