Reading Seminar: State, Society, and Political Behavior in Developing Contexts

Political Science 17.524
Spring 2017

Instructor
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Class
Fridays 2-4pm
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Overview

Why do people in developing countries make the political choices that they do? Under what conditions can citizens get elites to do what they want, and when are elites able to exert control over citizens? Why does governmental performance remain so poor in many developing contexts, despite citizen efforts, international aid, and civil society initiatives? This seminar tackles these questions by drawing on new and old literatures from institutional, sociological, psychological, and political economy perspectives.

The objectives of this course are, first, to evaluate what we know about political behavior and state-society relations in contexts where democratic institutions are weak, state capacity is low, and/or regimes are changing; and second, to think collectively about how to move empirical research and theoretical understanding of these questions forward. We will use our discussions to identify the common themes and questions that we think should define the emerging research agenda on the political behavior of development (PBD).

Course requirements

It is very important that you complete all the required readings before each class and to come to class prepared to discuss them. Because PBD is still emerging as a field, there will be little imparting of received wisdom from me. Instead, we will be working collectively to summarize the current state of theoretical knowledge and to identify future directions for research.

As a result, the usual shortcuts we use to get through articles and books are likely to be
counter-productive because we will need to have a detailed understanding of both the ideas and the empirics put forward in the readings.

In addition to reading the assignments thoroughly, students will be required to write five response memos. Each student will select three weeks for which they will write individual one-page response memos that elaborate critically and creatively on an idea or question suggested by their synthesis of the week’s readings. In addition, students will also select two weeks for which they will work in pairs to write shared one-page response memos. In other words, each student will work on a total of five response memos during the course of the semester. All five memos will be due on **Wednesdays at 12 noon via email**, and no extensions will be permitted.

For a final paper, students will also be required to write a ten-page research proposal. This paper will be due on the last day of class, **May 12th**.

Note: Students may also elect to write a research paper. If you are interested in pursuing this option, please let me know by **March 1st**.

**Readings by week**

**WEEK 1 Motivations**
Feb 10


**WEEK 2 Context**
Feb 16


Additional reading:


Week 3 Voting and “representation”
TBC


Additional reading:


WEEK 4 Accountability and public goods provision
Mar 3


*Additional reading:*


**WEEK 5 Information and accountability**

**Mar 10**


WEEK 6 Citizen beliefs and expectations
Mar 17


Additional reading:


Adam Berinsky, TBD

WEEK 7 Clientelism
Mar 24


Additional reading:

Auyero, Javier. "“From the client's point (s) of view”: How poor people perceive and evaluate


**S** **P** **R** **I** **N** **G** **B** **R** **E** **A** **K**

**WEEK 8 Traditional institutions**

**Apr 7**

Kate Baldwin, *The Paradox of Traditional Chiefs in Democratic Africa*

**WEEK 9 Intermediaries**

**Apr 14**


Baldwin, Kate, “Impact evaluation of supporting traditional leaders and local structures to mitigate community-level conflict in Zimbabwe.” USAID (2014).

**Additional reading:**

Baldwin, Kate, and Eric Mvukiyehe. "Elections and collective action: Evidence from changes in
WEEK 10 Compliance and cooperation with the state
Apr 21


WEEK 11 Political behavior in authoritarian and hybrid regimes (TBC)
Apr 28


Supplementary:


**WEEK 12 Participation in violence and insurgency (TBC)**  
May 5

**WEEK 13 Toward a future research agenda for the political behavior of development**  
May 12