

17.869
Political Science Scope and Methods
Fall 2002

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:00-4:30 PM
E51-390

Instructor: Jonathan Rodden

Phone: 617-253-6261

Email: jrodden@mit.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday, 1-3 (See sign-up sheet posted outside office, E53-433)

T.A.: Zak Taylor

Email: mzak123@yahoo.com

Office: TBA

Office Hours: TBA

This course introduces political science majors and minors to the scope and methods of the discipline. It is the first in a sequence of courses designed to prepare students to conduct their own original research. The course is not a thematic overview of the many sub-fields and research questions in political science, but rather a systematic examination of the research process—the selection of a research question, the development of hypotheses, and the selection of appropriate measures and evaluation methods. Some of the readings and discussions will address practical issues of research design and hypothesis testing. Others deal directly with recent applied research in political science. We will pay special attention to the works of MIT faculty members and get their first-hand insights on each step of the research process.

In addition to readings, the first part of the course will involve research assignments and in-class exercises. The second section of the course involves visits from guest professors. Students will be responsible for preparing questions about the professor's research design and approach. The third part of the course will be taken up with presentations of work that students will be preparing throughout the semester. First, students will submit a two-page statement describing their research question and explaining why it was selected. Next, students will submit a list of at least 10 articles or three books on the topic and a brief abstract for each that presents the basic argument, findings, and relevance for the student's question. Next, students will submit a critical literature review (15 pages). This will serve as the basis for a 15-minute in-class presentation, which will be followed by a 15-minute group discussion of research strategies. Finally, building on this discussion, students will submit a 20-page research proposal that includes a revised version of the literature review and a new five-page section that proposes an original research project.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Class participation:	25%
Measurement project:	05%
Hypothesis/analysis project:	10%
Explanation/defense of research topic:	05%
Literature review:	25%
Presentation:	10%
Final research proposal:	20%

The following books will be available for sale at the Coop and on reserve at Dewey Library:

- Jarol Manheim, Richard Rich, and Lars Willnat, *Empirical Political Analysis* (Longman, 2002).
- Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics* (Stanford, 2000).

Other readings will be handed out in class, available on line, or in a course packet available at Copytech.

Sept. 5: Introduction and course overview

Introduction to the scope and methods of political science

Sept. 10: *Scope: What is politics?*

- W. Phillips Shively, *Power and Choice: An Introduction to Political Science* (McGraw Hill, 2001), chapter 1.
- William Riker and Peter Ordeshook, *An Introduction to Positive Political Theory* (Prentice Hall, 1973), chapter 1.
- *Empirical Political Analysis* Chapters 1-2.

Assignment: Come to class with (tentative) answers to the following questions:

- What is politics?
- Is political science primarily about government? Is so, why not call the field “government?” Or what about “public administration” or “public policy?”
- How is political science different from economics? Sociology? Anthropology? History? Journalism? Or are these distinctions not helpful?

Sept. 12: *Method: What is science?*

- Gabriel Almond and Stephen Genco, “Clocks, Clouds, and the Study of Politics,” *World Politics* 29, 4 (July 1977), 489-522.

Assignment:

- Come to class with your own definition of science.
- Can there be a science of politics?
- What are the most important questions addressed (or that should be addressed) by political scientists? Write down a list of five. Which of these subjects are more like clouds and which are more like clocks?

Theme I: Federalism, corruption, and government spending

Explanation and Theory

Sept. 17: *Tractable questions and theories that can be falsified: federalism and decentralization as independent variables*

- *Empirical Political Analysis*, chapter 5
- Weingast, Barry, “The Economic Role of Political Institutions: Market-Preserving Federalism and Economic Development,” *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 11: 1, (1995).
- Friedrich Hayek, “The Economic Conditions of Interstate Federalism,” in Friedrich Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (U. of Chicago, 1948).
- Buchanan, James. 1995. “Federalism as an Ideal Political Order and an Objective for Constitutional Reform,” *Publius* 25, 2.
- Jonathan Rodden, “Decentralization and Federalism: On Meaning and Measurement,” unpublished paper.

Assignment: These readings imply some rather clear arguments about the effects of federalism and decentralization. Lay out the arguments, be prepared to explain and critique the logic, and develop ideas about how one might go about testing them.

Sept. 19: *Starting with a puzzle and looking for explanations: the size of government as a dependent variable*

- Alesina, Alberto, Edward Glaeser and Bruce Sacerdote, "Why Doesn't the United States Have a European-Style Welfare State?"

Assignment: What is the dependent variable in this paper? Why should we care about it? Which explanation do you find most convincing? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the empirical techniques used in this paper?

Testing

Sept. 24: *Measurement I*

- *Empirical Political Analysis*, chapters 4, 9, and 10.
- Transparency International *Global Corruption Report 2001*, "Data and Research": http://www.globalcorruptionreport.org/download/data_and_research.pdf

Assignment: Come to class prepared to answer the following questions: What is corruption? Is it a good idea to come up with quantitative indicators of corruption across countries? How reliable are these measures?

Sept. 26: MEASUREMENT ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS

Oct. 1: *Putting the pieces together: decentralization, the size of government, and corruption*

- Jonathan Rodden, "Reviving Leviathan: Fiscal Federalism and the Growth of Government," unpublished paper.
- Daniel Treisman, "Decentralization and the Quality of Government" available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/seminar/2000/fiscal/treisman.pdf>

Oct 3: HYPOTHESIS/ANALYSIS PROJECT DUE IN CLASS.

Theme II: Ethnic identity and politics

Comparative method, participant observation, and interviews

Oct. 8: *Comparative method*

- *Empirical Political Analysis*, chapter 11.

What is ethnic identity and how can it be measured?

- Lawrence Wright, "One Drop of Blood," *The New Yorker*

Oct. 10: Visit from Melissa Nobles, discussion of comparative research on identity and politics

- Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship*, entire book.

Assignment: Prepare questions for Prof. Nobles in the substance and methodology of her work. Think of some alternative research designs that might be used to address this question.

Oct. 15: No class

Oct. 17: RESEARCH TOPIC AND EXPLANATION DUE IN CLASS

Oct. 22: *Participant observation and interviews*

- *Empirical Political Analysis*, pages 313-319, chapters 18-19

Ethnic identity and violence, visit from Roger Petersen.

- Readings TBA

Assignment: same as Oct. 10

Oct. 24: *Ethnic parties and ethnic politics*

- Readings TBA

Oct. 29: Visit from Kanchan Chandra, discussion of comparative research on ethnic politics.

- Readings TBA

Assignment: same as Oct. 10

Quantitative analysis

Oct. 31: *Quantitative approaches to ethnic politics*

- Readings TBA

LITERATURE LIST AND ABSTRACTS DUE IN CLASS

Theme III: Parties in American politics

Nov. 5: *The traditional view: Parties don't matter in the U.S. Legislature*

- Morris Fiorina, "The Decline of Collective Responsibility in American Politics," *Daedalus*, 1980.

An alternative perspective:

- Gary Cox and Mathew McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House* (1993, U. of Cal. Press), Chapters 1, 4-7.

Nov. 7: *A new quantitative approach* (visit from Stephen Ansolabehere)

- Stephen Ansolabehere, James Snyder, and Charles Stewart, "The Effects of Party and Preferences on Congressional Roll Call Voting," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* (forthcoming).

Nov. 12: *A new historical approach* (visit from Charles Stewart III)

- Charles Stewart III: "Speakership Elections and Control of the U.S. House: 1839-1859," unpublished paper, available at:
<http://web.mit.edu/cstewart/www/papers/midwest2000.pdf>

Presentations of student work

Nov. 14: Student presentations

COMPLETE LITERATURE REVIEW DUE IN CLASS

Nov. 19, 21, 26: Student presentations

Nov. 28: Thanksgiving Break

Dec. 3, 5, 10: Student presentations

FINAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE IN CLASS