Course Description

This course functions as an introduction to political science research across the subfields of the discipline as represented by Harvard. Our discipline is a vast one and incredibly varied; it is difficult to think of another academic discipline (at least in the social sciences, as well as beyond) in which so many different methods and approaches are employed. There are people who, in other lives, would be called philosophers, economists, historians, statisticians, psychologists, ethnographers, regional specialists, sociologists, and so on. Hence a one-semester, time-bound introduction to inquiry and research in political science must be focused.

To focus our efforts, we will examine the intersection of democratic politics and the state, or “power and democracy.” We will examine theoretical reflections on power and its meaning and measurement, and upon democracy and its meaning and measurement. We will examine various empirical instantiations of democracy and power (or policy) – democratic politics and human rights treaties, democratic politics and economic growth, democratic politics and government expenditures, democratic politics and government regulation. In covering this thematic turf, we will examine the following three dimensions of modern political science research.

1. Theoretical Concepts. There are dozens of different courses that one could take to learn “theory” in political science, ranging from political theory courses proper, to comparative politics and institutions courses, to courses in decision theory and game theory, and even courses on networks and political psychology. This course will function as a partial conceptual introduction to a number of the terms you are likely to hear over the next 4 or more years in graduate school. Concepts from political theory on democracy and power will be central to our investigation, and we will begin with them. We will then turn to concepts used to understand or measure empirical politics (electoral competition, incumbency advantage, capture or rent-seeking), and we will supplement this discussion over the course of the semester with concepts commonly used in rational choice analyses of politics (costly signaling, principal-agent problems
Government 3001: Approaches to Politics, Course Syllabus [Fall 2010] [Carpenter]

[including adverse selection and moral hazard concepts, commitment problems, and the like]. We will also examine theoretical concepts used in comparative and historical inquiry (state autonomy, policy feedback, civic engagement) and international relations (realism versus liberalism versus constructivism, commitment, etc.).

2. **Methods.** In addition to theoretical concepts, there are various methods used to study empirical politics, and we will examine some of these in our reading as well. These range from experimental approaches to deliberation, to observational approaches to elections and competition [including differences-in-differences estimators and regression discontinuity designs], historical approaches to civic engagement [including archival research, narratives and causal process tracing, and temporal comparisons], formal and quantitative approaches to the economic consequences of democracy [including instrumental variables approaches], and quantitative and case-study approaches to human rights policy.

Let me be clear that this course will not function as a methods course, and that there are excellent methods courses taught in the Department (Gov 2009, taught by Professor Peter Hall, and Gov 2010, taught by Professor Michael Hiscox), as well as particular qualitative and quantitative methods sequences available within the Department and elsewhere. This is an introduction to political science research, where different methods are surveyed but not systematically investigated. All written assignments will be conceptual in form, and I will usually ask you to apply a concept or method (understood conceptually) to a particular thematic problem.

3. **Research Agendas.** In your career as a scholar, you will be judged not simply by the individual products you produce but by the way they are connected. You will also be judged by whether you have established something of an identity or ‘brand,’ namely what intellectual contributions you have made. You will undoubtedly be judged on other dimensions as well (whether your work is interesting, whether your methods of inquiry are sufficiently rigorous [however rigor is defined], and what impact your research has had upon others). When scholars in our Department visit the course, or when we read a set of papers from a scholar (like Diana Mutz), I want you to think about how a series of papers or a book add up to more than the individual chapters or articles themselves, and how scholars are able to take a multifaceted attack upon a problem or theme.

There is, in any course such as this, an inevitable tradeoff between cogency and comprehensiveness. There is much left out of this course, for instance a discussion of republicanism versus liberalism versus social democracy in political theory. There is little mathematical development of either statistical estimators or formal theoretic concepts (though I might be able to go over some of this in “breakout sessions” from time to time). There is very little if anything on the politics of China, Eastern Europe, the Middle East or Latin America. Canadian specialists will be similarly disappointed except for a brief visit to British Columbia (which, by the way, has excellent fishing in addition to some interesting deliberative institutions). None of our visitors is a full-time practitioner of experimental methods. And there is an
immense literature on race, ethnicity and gender in politics that we will visit only tangentially. I have not even begun to touch on the omissions from a course like this. For circumspection’s sake alone, you should be aware of them at the outset and throughout.

**Readings**

By design, there is an intensive reading and assignment load for this course. The following books are available for purchase at the Harvard Coop, and of course you may avail yourselves of Internet-based sellers or independent bookstores (such as Harvard Bookstore) as well for these volumes. In addition to these books, a packet of reading (selections from non-purchased books, or chapters from edited volumes of compendia) will be made available, and there will be many electronic articles and papers assigned. See below for the particular list of weekly reading assignments.


**Assignments**

The course can be interpreted as having six different modules. For each of these modules, there will be a 4-5 page paper required of you. In each paper, you will elaborate a response to a particular question or questions that are chosen and released beforehand. In some questions I will ask you to apply an “approach” (a concept or method of thinking) to a new problem – such as how deliberative democracy might be designed to shape decisions in a technical field like health or environmental policy; whether a particular institution satisfies the demands of deliberative democracy or electoral competition; whether
a particular institution (professional diplomats) might be interpreted or modeled as a principal-agent problem, and how to test such a model; how an experiment or historical study might be designed to measure social pressure or network influences in civic engagement. In other cases, sometimes along with the kind of application just discussed, I will ask for a critique of some concept or method of thinking as represented in a paper or book.

Hence the assignments in this course are continual, episodic and there is no final research product. There is no research paper in which you will apply a particular statistical estimator, nor an empirical exercise where you are asked to gather data or conduct archival or interview research, nor a problem set where you are asked to prove some mathematical result. All of these assignments must be completed punctually in order for you to pass this course, and there will be no incomplete grades for this course.
Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Module One: Introduction: Democracy, Power and Method

Concepts: power and its faces; evidence for power; measurement of power; ethnography and narrative as approaches; countability of politics and power outcomes; internal versus external validity and generalization; historical contingency as a form of external validity; social/economic/health consequences of politics and exercise of power; redistribution versus regulation; taxation versus regulation.

Thursday, September 9th – CLASS INTRODUCTION: Democracy and Power in Political Analysis


S. Lukes – *Power: A Radical View*, Introduction and Chapter 1.

Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), Chapter 1, Chapter 4 [skim]. [P]


Additional Reading (not required):

Billingsley, *Probability and Measure*, small selection. [P]

Sunday, September 12th – The Power of the Democratic State and Approaches Towards Its Study
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Carpenter, Reputation and Power: Organizational Image and Pharmaceutical Regulation at the FDA, Introduction, Chapters 3-5, 7, 10-11 [B]


Additional Readings (not required):


Carpenter, “Groups, the Media, Agency Waiting Costs and FDA Drug Approval,” American Journal of Political Science 46 (3) (July 2002) 490-505. [E]

Carpenter, “Protection without Capture: Product Approval by a Politically Responsive, Learning Regulator,” American Political Science Review 98 (4) (November 2004), 613-631. [E]

First Paper due Tuesday, September 14th, 9PM, by deposit at course website.
Module Two: Democracy and Deliberation

Concepts and Methods: deliberation, deliberative democracy, reasonability. Representation and its ethics. Deliberative polls, deliberative experiments; the political consequences and ethical implications of emotion; cross-cutting political exposure/discourse; laboratory experiments, including with bio-feedback.

Thursday, September 16th – Normative and Experimental Approaches to Democracy and Deliberation
[visitor: Dennis Thompson]

Gutmann and Thompson, Why Deliberative Democracy? Princeton University Press, 2004 [selections assigned] [B]


Beerbohm, "The Dilemma of Democratic Representation," Revise/Resubmit, American Political Science Review [E]


Additional Readings (not required for discussion but may be drawn upon for assignment):

Beerbohm, "Is Deliberative Democracy Supererogatory?" Under Review, Ethics [E]


Thursday September 23rd – Normative and Experimental Approaches to Democracy and Deliberation
[visitor: Eric Beerbohm]


Richard Tuck, “Voting,” and Chapter 1 (Prisoners’ Dilemma) in *Free Riding* [B].

Beerbohm, *In Our Name: The Ethics of Representative Democracy*, forthcoming Princeton University Press. [E, provided by author]

- Table of Contents
- Chapter 1, "Auditing Democracy"
- Chapter 2, "Paper Stones: The Ethics of Participation"
- Chapter 9, "Democratic Complicity"

Second Paper [for Modules Two and Three] due Monday, October 4th, 9PM, by deposit at course website.
Module Three: Elections and Representation

Concepts and Methods: representation (principal-agent approach, identity/demographic approach; trustee concept); electoral competition; “free, just and fair” elections and how to measure their attainment; incumbency advantage and its consequences; instrumental variables approaches; regression discontinuity design (RDD); historical analysis of institutional change in electoral rules.

Thursday, September 30th – Elections and Representation [visitors: Steve Ansolabehere and Jim Snyder]

Ansolabehere and Snyder, The End of Inequality: One Person, One Vote and the Transformation of American Democracy (W.W. Norton, 2008).


Additional Readings (not required):


Thursday, October 7th – Elections and Representation – Electoral Competition and Fairness


Additional Readings (not required):


Module Four: Civic Engagement and Democracy

Concepts and Methods: The difference between civic engagement and participation; the centrality of organizational context and organization building; “social capital” and whether capital-based concepts are helpful for political analysis; electoral versus non-electoral participation; state-society relations and policy feedback for participation; field experiments and turnout; long-term temporal comparisons of civic organizations and engagement.

Thursday, October 14th – Civic Engagement and Its Political Analysis [reading]


Tuck, Free Riding, Chapters 3-5.


Thursday, October 21st – Civic Engagement and Its Political Analysis [visitor: Theda Skocpol]

Skocpol, From Membership to Management (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press). [B]

Module Five: Domestic Politics, International Politics and Human Rights

Concepts and Methods: Commitment problems; signaling and signal-based theories of international action; rational expression versus non-rational expression; promises and limits of cross-country analysis; what is countable across nations and geographies and what is not?

Thursday, October 28th – Domestic Politics and International Politics


Paper for Module Four Due Friday, October 29th, 9PM, by deposit at course website.
Thursday, November 4th – Domestic Politics and Human Rights [visitor: Beth Simmons]


Paper for Module Five due Tuesday, November 8th, 9PM, by deposit at course website.

Module Six: Democracy, Identity and Growth

Concepts: economic growth, commitment problem and state confiscation, growth and democracy; which institutions foster democracy and growth, and why; problem of endogeneity; instrumental variables approaches; promises and limits to cross-country analysis.

Thursday, November 11th – Democracy and Economic Outcomes


Przeworski, et al, Democracy and Development, Chapters 1 and 2. [P]


Thursday, November 18th – Democracy and Growth [visitor: Jim Robinson]


Acemoglu, Robinson, Querubin, “Economic and Political Inequality in Development: The Case of Cundinamarca, Colombia.” [E]


Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson, “Institutions as the Fundamental Cause of Long-Run Economic Growth,” in Aghion and Durlauf, Handbook of Economic Growth [preprint available at http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~chad/handbook9sj.pdf] [E or P]

Thursday, November 25th – GIVE THANKS

Thursday, December 2nd – Ethnic Identity in a Democratic State [visitor: Prerna Singh]

Singh, book manuscript, Subnationalism and Social Development: A Comparative Analysis of Indian States [selections, E]


Singh and Lieberman, “Institutionalized Ethnicity: The Development of a Concept and a Measure” [E]


Paper for Module Six Due Monday, December 6, 9PM, by deposit at course website.