GOV 94YW: COMPARATIVE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Professor Yuhua Wang

Spring 2021

Monday 3:00-5:00 PM (US Eastern Time)

Contact Information

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Office Hours: TBA

Course Description

This course examines the historical development of different political systems in the world. How were states formed? Why did they take different paths of development? Why are some states strong, and others weak? Why are some states ruled by a democratically elected leader, while others are ruled by an autocrat? How did different political institutions influence economic development in the long term? We explore these big questions drawing materials from political science, history, sociology, anthropology, and economic history. A major course objective is to evaluate competing explanations and understand the roots of political development in Africa, China, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East.

Format

Gov 94yw will be held in a live seminar format. The class will meet live at 3-5 PM ET on Mondays via Zoom, with participation and activities built into the class to maximize engagement and build community.

Course Requirements

1. Class Participation: 60%. Each student is expected to attend class regularly and to contribute to the discussion based on assigned readings. In addition, each student is responsible for leading
The readings will be the focus of our weekly discussions, so I expect everyone to read them carefully. After reading each article or book, you need to be able to do the following:

- Describe the main themes of the reading
- Explain what its contributions are to our understanding of politics
- Provide specific criticisms of the study (e.g., its theoretical argument, hypotheses, evidence, analysis, etc.) and think about how you would do it differently
- Raise questions and alternative explanations about a specific argument

The success of our class discussions is heavily dependent on your doing all of these things for each of the assigned readings. This means that when we meet as a class, you should be prepared to discuss the themes, contributions, criticisms, and questions, and that you will be able to do so without having to flip through the readings during class. This may take some effort, especially at first. But the ability to summarize readings in this way is one of the most important skills you can learn in college, one that will help you in all of your other classes.

2. Paper(s): 40%. Students are responsible for 4 short response papers (2 pages each), due the day before class at 5pm. Two of those papers should be submitted in the weeks that you serve as discussant.

Readings

There are no required texts to purchase for this class; all readings are available electronically on the course website as PDFs, and consist of a mix of academic articles and book chapters.

Flexibility

All of us have been overwhelmed during the pandemic. These aren’t the circumstances in which any of us thought we would be in, and there will undoubtedly be unexpected developments that will arise throughout the term. Two of our guiding principles this semester will therefore be flexibility and communication. If you are facing challenges, whether at home or on campus, please let me know, so I can work with you to find potential solutions. Just please keep me in the loop!
Academic Integrity Policy

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your response paper with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc.), you must also acknowledge this assistance.

Zoom Policies

Harvard University Honor Code applies to online behavior as well as in-person or classroom behavior. You are expected to be professional and respectful when attending class on Zoom.

Course Schedule

Monday, January 25, 2021

[Introduction]


Monday, February 1, 2021

[State Formation]


Monday, February 8, 2021

[Geography and Political Development]


Monday, February 15, 2021 - PRESIDENT’S DAY (NO CLASS)

Monday, February 22, 2021

[External War and Political Development]


Monday, March 1, 2021 - WELLNESS DAY (NO CLASS)

Monday, March 8, 2021

[Civil Conflict and Political Development]


Monday, March 15, 2021

[Capital and Political Development]


Monday, March 22, 2021

[Colonialism, Slave Trade, and Political Development]


Monday, March 29, 2021

[Social Forces and Political Development]


- Excerpt from Yuhua Wang’s book ms.
Monday, April 5, 2021

[Strong States, Weak States]


Monday, April 12, 2021

[Informal Institutions]

- Excerpt from Yuhua Wang’s book ms.

Monday, April 19, 2021

[The Great (Economic) Divergence]


Monday, April 26, 2021

[The Great (Political) Divergence]
