Part I

Course information

How detailed and anal retentive can a syllabus be? You’re about to find out! Please read Part I thoroughly.

Lecture time and location
Mondays and Wednesdays 9:30–10:50 pm in TBA

Certificate eligibility
This class fulfills both the international development and the conflict certificates at Harris.

Prerequisites
The Harris core classes are recommended, especially the analytical politics sequence. Non-Harris students should have some familiarity with introductory economics and game theory. Mastery of these concepts will be assumed.

Who should take this class?
This class is designed for Master’s students across Harris and the social sciences at UChicago. My Political Economy of Development class with James Robinson is for PhD and MACRM students only (no exceptions). Undergraduates interested in taking this class should contact me.
Pass/fail and auditor policies

I am happy for people to audit the class so long as there are extra seats. I am also happy for students to take the class pass/fail provided there is no excess demand for the class above the current class limit. If there is excess demand, then I will prioritize students taking the course for a letter grade. Note that the class will not qualify for the conflict or development certificates if you take the class pass/fail.

What this course is about

Over the past few decades, most low- and middle-income countries have enjoyed growing economies, more order, and greater freedom. Some countries, however, remain poor, violent, or unfree. What explains why some countries have moved along a path of “political development” while others have not?

Moreover, fifty years on, a lot of smart people are genuinely surprised that these countries’ leaders have not been able to make more progress in implementing good policies. With so many good examples to follow, why haven’t more countries adopted the policies of the high performers and achieved similar peace and prosperity?

Finally, decades of outside intervention have had mixed results. Did foreign aid, democracy promotion, peacekeeping, and maybe even military intervention have promote at least some order and growth? If not, why not, and what can you do about it as citizens or future policymakers?

This class is going to try to demystify what’s going on. There are good explanations for violence, weak states, and undemocratic regimes. There are some good reasons leaders don’t make headway, bureaucrats seem slothful, and programs get perverted. The idea is to talk about the political, economic, and other social scientific logics that lead to function and dysfunction.

To understand the politics of weak or unstable states, we are going to start with some theory and history. We need a theory of violence, and theories of how states, institutions, and societies develop to curb violence. And we also want to look at the impacts of Western nations and their own development on the world, over a wide sweep of history. So in part this class is a history of world development, especially political development.

We will also talk about policies, and how order and development can be fostered. This course will not tell you what specific programs or reforms to focus on, or how to implement them. What we can do is try to understand some of the big ideas about why some paths lead to success or failure, as well as why the best plans so often go awry—ideas that surprisingly few development practitioners ever acquire.

I designed this course to give students an appreciation for big ideas and theories in comparative politics, international relations, political economy, sociology, geography, and development economics. This class involves reading a lot of material, and building your conceptual and historical sense of development and politics. Reading = success, and more interesting class discussions.

This is a global class, but a slightly unbalanced one. A lot of the examples are going to draw on Africa and Latin America, with a good deal on historical European and U.S.
development, plus a little material on the Middle East and Asia. This balance is determined mostly by what I know well, and what I am ignorant of.

I won’t have the concrete policy answers in many cases. Actually, no one does, and one of my big aims in this class is to help you learn enough and think critically enough to know why everyone with a clear solution is wrong, and why “peace-building” and “development” are the hardest things in the world. There is no single answer. But there are some principles to finding the right answer in the right situation, and history to learn from. That’s what you’re signing up for in this class.

Grading

Because this is a spring course and most of you are graduating, I need to submit your grades the final week of class! Therefore I cannot offer a real final exam. Instead I am going to try a set of weekly assignments and essays. This will spread the work across the full quarter, and you will need to keep up.

There is a simple way to get a good grade in this course:

- **Read the readings.** All of the grading is designed to incentivize you to read and understand the material. The reason I do this is that I think reading and writing are the main way we all change how we understand the world and influence others. Virtually every reading in this course is one that deeply influenced my own perspective.

- **Think critically about what you read.** Every paper is wrong in some way. Usually it has major flaws or oversights. Your job is to figure out what the problems are and the limits of the argument. For the rest of your career, approach every paper or book with the idea that your job is partly to figure out why it is wrong.

- **Make notes and think about your essay answers along the way.** You will have some of the essay questions quite early. When reading the readings and taking class notes, write down your ideas and thoughts in real time.

Grading scheme

After the first week, there will be a weekly assignment nearly every week. Eight submissions will make up the majority of your grade along with participation. Assignments in this class are very important. Missing an assignment is similar to not answer 1/3 of an exam. I advise you not to miss them.

Your TAs will grade your assignments, in consultation with me. I ask my TAs to limit the number of perfect assignment grades to about 10%. All grading is relative.

Note that Harris asks its faculty and TAs to stick as closely as possible to a specific distribution of final grades. This means final grades reflect performance relative to your peers in class. As a result, your final letter grade may not be the sum of your assignment grades over the semester. We will try to maintain a similar distribution throughout the quarter, to be as transparent and fair as possible, but please understand this is difficult to do with any precision. This is a major reason why I limit the number of high grades that the TA grant on an essay.
**Lecture attendance (10%)**  Attending lecture is not require, but it is rewarded since it is such an important part of the class. Your TAs will circulate an attendance sheet during class. You are responsible for ensuring you sign it. You will not be penalized for missing one or two lectures, since everyone falls sick, has family circumstances, or religious observances. Please consult your TA if you have more frequent absences. Note that we have this policy because we expect everyone to fall sick or have religious or personal obligations.

Do not sign on behalf of others.

**Game theoretic assignments (20%)**  Twice during the semester you will have a very short assignment that requires you to work out the logic of a simple game theoretic model of the material we are discussing in class. Each one is worth 11% of your grade. These are designed to be challenging but feasible for Harris MPP students who have done the analytical politics core classes. Non-Harris students who do not have this background: do not freak out or drop the class. The goal is not to give non-mathematical class-takers a zero. It’s to walk you through the ideas step by step, so you get a sense of what it is all about. Your classmates and your TAs will be a resource for you.

**Essays (70%)**  Six times during the semester I will ask you to submit a short essay in response to a question. We will grade you on the best five, dropping your lowest grade. You can hand in all six if you want. If you hand in just five, that is fine. But note that, in the past, it is difficult to earn an A in the class if you don’t hand in one of the six assignments and drop your lowest grade.

- I will provide the questions at least 1–2 weeks in advance.
- The questions draw on the required readings and the lecture material. You should feel free to bring in other material you know, but be sure to cite as well as you can. (e.g. “According to so-and-so in their book Great Thoughts, the reason for the war is...”). Cite well. It is rewarded.
- When grading, we will reward original insights, citing relevant work, critical thinking, and knowledge of the class material.
- You should prepare your answers mostly independently. You may discuss answers to the questions with classmates, and discuss the readings, but you should not prepare answers jointly, and you should not ask others to share their notes or detailed ideas. If you are asked to share your notes or detailed ideas, you should decline. In the past, sharing detailed answers has led to students have nearly identical exam answers, which at a minimum has meant a zero grade for both the giver and the recipient of answers.

**Other considerations**

Grading is relative in this class. Therefore, to be fair to all students, I have a clear policy that I apply consistently, one that rewards people who hand in assignments on time, but makes reasonable allowances for students with legitimate and documented excuses that they raise at the time of the lateness or missed assignment.
Late policy

The late penalty is one grade level per day. I can waive the penalty if you have a timely, legitimate, and documented excuse.

- If you are missing classes or have a late assignment because of sickness or religious observance (e.g. Ramadan), we can accommodate you. Please alert the TA by email in advance or shortly afterwards. Please make specific arrangements for extensions of any assignments.

- In general, please do not wait until weeks after a missed assignment to talk to us. I especially advise against waiting to contact us until the last week of classes or after final grades have been submitted. It is easier to accommodate timely requests.

- I am very accommodating to mental and physical illness. Please feel free to come speak with me personally. Per Harris policy, however, late or missed assignments/exams due to mental health and physical health issues require a doctor’s note. Typically this is a doctor’s note with specific dates of illness mentioned. One reason for this policy is to ensure students are getting professional help, and to ensure that their student advisor is aware. It is also to be fair to other students and avoid dishonesty. You can submit this to me and your TA by email, and cc your Harris student advisor so they are aware and can help you coordinate with your other classes. We do not need to know personal details of your illness, if you do not want to share. You can also decide to share details with your Harris advisor only. But we do need at least a note from your Harris advisor that relate to the dates of an assignment.

Re-grading policies

Feel free to discuss your grades with your TAs to get clarification. If, following such a conversation, you feel that an error was made, please submit a re-grade request in writing to both TAs, by email, within two weeks of the assignment being handed back. Please include an explanation or justification for the re-grade request. A really bad way to ask for a re-grade is to lobby for a better grade, or to explain there is some reason you need to maintain a certain grade level. A good way to ask for a regrading is to substantively discuss why you thought you answered the question well, ask for clarification, and if a mistake was made we can correct it. Or, if you have a legitimate medical or related excuse, please follow the instructions above.

Developing reading & writing skills

Harris has some resources for students who feel they need help developing their academic reading and writing skills.

- For a reading assessment (and academic skills assessment in general), the best option at the University would be the Academic Skills Assessment Program (ASAP).
• We also have the Harris Writing Program, which does not particularly focus on reading, but might indirectly help students get a better grasp of the written word and academic text comprehension.

• The English Language Institute also offers workshops and courses to help ESL students. Some are free, some are not.

If you have personal problems

I understand that tragedy can unexpectedly befall people, and that personal lives and sickness intervene with normal life. I will do my best to accommodate you. I like to keep your program adviser in the loop. So any emails about missed exams, sickness, and related issues, please discuss this with your advisor and cc your advisor on any correspondence with me (or the TA you are talking to). Please alert us as immediately as possible.

Plagiarism

From the University of Chicago student manual:

It is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another’s statements or ideas as one’s own work. To do so is plagiarism or cheating, offenses punishable under the University’s disciplinary system. Because these offenses undercut the distinctive moral and intellectual character of the University, we take them very seriously.

Proper acknowledgment of another’s ideas, whether by direct quotation or paraphrase, is expected. In particular, if any written or electronic source is consulted and material is used from that source, directly or indirectly, the source should be identified by author, title, and page number, or by website and date accessed. Any doubts about what constitutes "use" should be addressed to the instructor.

The Office for International Students has some excellent additional discussion of academic honesty.

In the context of this course, this means that you should prepare your exam answers mainly on your own. You should not prepare your answers directly from another person’s notes. If someone asks you to share your notes, you should not do so, since this too carries consequences. Finally, in any exam answers, you should credit any ideas to their sources, even if this is relatively informal. For example, “As Acemoglu and Robinson argue...”
Part II
Weekly schedule and readings

This is a reading-intensive course. Each week I assign about 3–4 required book chapters or papers. There is no good textbook for the subject of political development. A selection of social science articles is the way that most Master’s classes are taught in this subject. Most of these are “classic” articles or otherwise very influential social science pieces. Some readings relate more closely to the lectures, assignments, and essays than others. But all come from some of the most influential thinkers and contributions to the political economy of development, and I’ve selected them for this broader importance.

Some additional notes:

• You should read all required readings before coming to class. If people are not reading in advance, I will tend to lecture more and have less discussion over the quarter.

• Required readings are marked with *’s, where more *’s imply more importance. I list other papers because I may discuss them in the lecture, or in case you are interested in reading deeper on the topic.

• All readings are downloadable online through UChicago’s network or from home on UChicago’s VPN. The book chapters that are not on the Internet have Dropbox links. Please let me know if any links are broken and I will fix them.

1  [1 class] What is political development? Why is it important?

• **Pages 23-65 of Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. “Political order and political decay: From the industrial revolution to the globalization of democracy.” Farrar, Straus and Giroux.


2 [3 classes] War and peace


3 **[2.5 classes] Weak and strong states**

- **Pages 1-22** of Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. “Political order and political decay: From the industrial revolution to the globalization of democracy.” Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- **Chapter 1** (please read up to at least The challenges of the de facto state): Dipali Mukhopadhyay. 2014. “Warlords, strongman governors, and the state in Afghanistan.” Cambridge University Press.
  - A Kindle version of Chapter 1 is available on Amazon for free by clicking on “Send a free sample”
- **p. 91-93** of Ekeh, Peter P. 1975. “Colonialism and the two publics in Africa: A theoretical statement.” Comparative studies in society and history 17(1): 91-112. (We will read remainder of article later in the class).
- **Subrick, J. Robert.** 2017 “The Political Economy of Black Panther’s Wakanda”

4 **[2 classes] Free and unfree societies**

- **Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson.** 2005. “Institutions as a fundamental cause of long-run growth.” Handbook of Economic Growth 1: 385-472. (Focus on Sections 5 to 10)


5 [2.5 classes] Society and the state


• **Acemoğlu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. 2016. "Paths to inclusive political institutions."


• *Blog post by Tabarrok, Alex. 2015. “The Ferguson Kleptocracy,” Marginal Revolution (blog post, March 5).


  – Elinor Ostrom interviewed on NPR Planet Money


• Acemoğlu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. 2017. “The Emergence of Weak, Despotic and Inclusive States.”


6  [2.5 classes] A short history of world development and Western intervention

- **Chapters 2 and 8 of Migdal, Joel S. 1988. “Strong societies and weak states: state-society relations and state capabilities in the Third World.” Princeton University Press.**
- **Ekeh, Peter P. 1975. “Colonialism and the two publics in Africa: A theoretical statement.” Comparative studies in society and history 17(1): 91-112.**
- **Chapter 2 of Samuels, David J. 2012. “Comparative Politics.” Pearson Higher Education. (especially second half of chapter on late state development)**

7  [2 classes] Ending violence and establishing order


• This debate on intervention in Sudan:


8 [2 classes] State building from inside and outside


Mwenda, Andrew. Africa and the Curse of Foreign Aid (Video)


9 [1.5 classes] Fostering freedom


10  [0.5 classes] Conclusions

  - If interested, see this interview with Ferguson


- Easterly, William. 2006. “The white man’s burden: why the West’s efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good.” Penguin Group USA.