DPI 101K Political Institutions and Public Policy
Spring 2015, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:10 – 11:30 AM, RG-20

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Course Description

This is a course about the effects of major political factors on public policy. It addresses central debates in comparative politics to inquire about critical real-world questions. Why are some states able to produce stable institutions while others fail? Why do some countries provide universal health care while others do not? What institutional arrangements help negotiation and cooperation in deeply divided societies? We examine these questions through the lens of comparative politics in order to understand the conditions under which different political regimes, institutional designs (such as systems of government, electoral systems, power-sharing arrangements), and public policies (especially social policies) are adopted, and to learn about their political and distributive effects. We further analyze critical political actors involved in policy making (political parties, social movements, labor unions) in order to understand under what conditions they pursue different goals, adopt different strategies (i.e., form mass organizations, extend programmatic linkages to voters/members, etc.), and how they influence policy outcomes.

Aside from exploring political aspects that shape public policies, an important additional aim of this course is to help you hone your analytical skills and presentational abilities. In your professional lives, you will often be required to explain complex policy choices with verbal economy and analytical precision. The in-class exercises and assignments for this course are designed to help you learn these skills. They will also help to prepare you for Spring Exercise, the policy simulation that is the capstone of the first year of the Master in Public Policy program.
Course Expectations, Assignments, and Grading

Class Preparation
The quality and value of our meetings are crucially dependent on your coming to class prepared and willing to discuss the assigned readings and actively engage with the larger themes and questions they address. My expectation is that, in preparation for class, you will think hard both about individual readings and the topics being addressed in individual sessions as well as issues that cut across readings and sessions.

Grading
Your final grade will be based on: (1) your participation and engagement in class; (2) a team presentation, (3) two policy memos; and (4) a final examination.

1. Participation and Engagement (20%)
Your participation-and-engagement grade will depend on your contribution to the collective learning during class discussions and in-class activities and exercises. The quality of your contributions relates to the content as well as the delivery and timing of your comments within the flow of class discussion. The following types of class participation are particularly welcome: bringing in specific evidence from assigned readings; using concrete examples from case(s) to elaborate more abstract, general ideas; building on and responding to the comments of other students; and linking your professional experience to the material being discussed. Comments that are off-topic, excessive in length, or disrespectful of the opinions of others will negatively affect your participation-and-engagement grade.

2. Team presentation (20%)
You will be assigned to a team by Tuesday, February 3. Your task as a team will be to prepare and give an in-class presentation, with accompanying slides and a précis, on a set of readings related to the issue of how regime type (for example, whether a country is a democracy or not) affects the provision of public goods. A more detailed description of this assignment, along with each team’s readings, will be posted on KNet by February 3, and the team presentations will take place in Sessions 5 (on February 17) and 6 (February 19). Teams should email their slides to Laurence by 9:00 AM on the date of their presentation. Précis should be uploaded to KNet by midnight on February 22 by teams presenting on February 17 and by midnight on February 24 for teams presenting on February 19.

3. Two policy memos (15% each)
You will write two 1,000-word policy memos addressing a specific issue arising from the extended in-class exercises that will take place on Thursday, March 5 (Sessions 12) and Tuesday, March 31 (Session 17). Your first policy memo should be uploaded to KNet by midnight March 9; the second by midnight April 5. Detailed instructions for each policy memo, along with all relevant briefing materials, will be posted on KNet two weeks in advance of the date of each in-class exercise.
4. **Take-home Final Examination (30%)**
   The final assignment for the course will be a take-home examination, distributed at noon on Thursday, April 9. Your completed examination will be due by midnight Sunday, April 12. The take-home examination will be an opportunity for you to reflect on overarching topics and themes that cut across the course as a whole. You may consult your class notes and course readings as well as other reference materials. You may NOT consult any person other than me about any aspect of this examination, and I will hold office hours on Thursday, April 9 and additional office hours on Friday, April 10 to answer any questions you might have. The rules of attribution apply to your take-home examination: all sources should be cited, including other students’ written work.

Your final grade will not be based on your absolute score on any of the graded components of the course but rather on how well you perform overall relative to other students in the class. In other words, the course is graded on a curve. I will apply the most liberal curve allowable by Kennedy School guidelines. The top 15 to 20% of the class will receive a grade of A; the next 20 to 30% will receive a grade of A-; the next 20 to 30% will receive a grade of B+; the next 20 to 25% will receive a grade of B; and the lowest 5 to 10% will receive a grade of B- or lower.

**Readings**
Prior to most course sessions, you will need to read two academic works. For two sessions (on February 5 and March 3), each student will be assigned a single reading. For Sessions 5 and 6 (February 17 and 19), each team will be assigned three readings. I will tell you well in advance which piece you have been assigned to read. All the academic readings will be available online through links provided below and/or the course’s KNet page.

**Missed classes**
Class attendance is mandatory. Please plan your schedule around the class meeting; avoidable conflicts such as doctor’s appointments or job interviews are not excused absences. Students who miss class due to minor illness, such as a cold, or a non-emergency and/or avoidable reasons (including travel and training) may be asked to complete a make-up assignment, such as a short paper, to receive credit for the class.

**Academic Honesty**
Given the writing you will do in this course, it is important that you familiarize yourself with and adhere to the Kennedy School’s policies regarding proper academic practice. The academic code can be found [here](#). I urge you to read it. Please pay particular attention to the section on plagiarism, which is the appropriation of others’ words and ideas without proper attribution. The disciplinary consequences of plagiarism are severe, so please take care to quote and cite your sources. It is your responsibility to make sure that the words and ideas that appear in your work are your own, and that you give credit where credit is due.

**Policy on laptops, cell phones, and smart phones**
The use of cell phones and smart phones is strictly prohibited in class except for emergencies.
Students may use their laptops or tablet PCs to take notes in class or to refer to the readings. You may not however surf the web or check your email. Being caught doing this will directly and negatively affect your participation-and-engagement grade.

Office Hours
I would like to meet with teams due to present on February 17 during my regular office hours on Thursday, February 5 and, if necessary, during additional office hours on Friday, February 6. I would like to meet with teams due to present on February 19 during my regular office hours on Thursday, February 12 and, if necessary, during additional office hours on Friday, February 13. In addition to these team meetings, I encourage you to see me throughout the semester (individually or in your teams) during office hours to discuss any questions you might have related to the course. I ordinarily hold office hours on Thursday afternoons, and you can sign up for a time slot online at http://wejoinin.com/QuintonMayne. Please be sure to cancel your reserved time if you cannot come so that the same time slot can be made available to other students.
## Schedule and Assignments Overview

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Schedule of Meetings and Readings

1 - Thursday, January 29: Introductory Lecture

2 - Tuesday, February 3: Political Regimes

What makes a democracy a democracy? What factors promote democratic deepening?


3 - Thursday, February 5: Political Culture

What exactly is political culture? How can we distinguish between different types of political culture? How do these differences matter and what forces are shaping them?


4 - Thursday, February 12: Regime Change

Why do some countries transition from authoritarianism to democracy? Does economic development increase the likelihood of democratization? Are mass social movements necessary to produce democratic transitions?

**NOTE:** You will be assigned to read only one of the following:


5 and 6 - Tuesday, February 17 and Thursday, February 19: Regime Type and Public Policy

*Does regime type really matter for public goods provision? Do authoritarian and democratic regimes produce different types of policies? Is democracy really better than authoritarianism in promoting human welfare?*

• Readings will be available on KNet from February 3.

7 - Tuesday, February 24: Electoral Rules

*What are the key differences in electoral rules? What criteria should we use to evaluate different types of electoral rules? What factors and conditions drive electoral reform?*


8 - Thursday, February 26: Parties and Party Systems

*Why is it important to differentiate between different types of parties? How do we know a party “system” when we see it?*


9 - Tuesday, March 3: Executive-legislative Relations

*In what ways is presidentialism different from parliamentarism? What are the pros and cons of concentrating policy-making powers?*


10 - Thursday, March 5: In-class Exercise

• Briefing materials will be available on KNet from February 19.
11 - Tuesday, March 10: Voting Behavior

Why do some citizens and groups turn out to vote more than others? What factors influence how citizens vote? Should we worry about low electoral participation rates?

NOTE: You will be assigned to read only one of the following:

12 - Thursday, March 12: Social Movements and Organized Interests

Why do ordinary people come together and push collectively for change in some places but not others? What factors help socio-economic groups and interests to organize? Why are some social movements and organized interests more successful than others?


SPRING BREAK

13 - Tuesday, March 24: Clientelism

What is clientelism? Who benefits and suffers as a result of clientelism? Under what conditions does clientelism survive and decline?


14 - Thursday, March 26: Decentralization

What are different ways in which power can be vertically dispersed within a political system? When and why is decentralization worth pursuing?

15 - Tuesday, March 31: In-class Exercise
• Briefing materials will be available on KNet from March 17.

16 - Thursday, April 2: Varieties of Capitalism
What characteristics distinguish one type of capitalism from another? What are the costs and benefits of having strong labor unions?

17 - Tuesday, April 7: Welfare State in High-income Countries
What exactly is the welfare state? How do countries differ from each other from the perspective of welfare commitments? What factors influence the levels and types of public welfare investments made by politicians?

18 - Thursday, April 9: Welfare State in Developing Countries
What factors drive welfare investments in developing countries? Is a uniform model of welfare emerging in the developing world?

19 - Tuesday, April 14: Final Review