

"The mind is not a vessel to be filled,  
but a fire to be kindled."

Plutarch

PSC 355M  
**POLITICAL ECONOMY**  
Online Class

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Introduction:

This course introduces students to economic reasoning about politics. It examines how economic and political structure and behavior shape each other and how each shape central features of political systems. The course begins by discussing the role that economic factors play in voting decisions. It then examines some central theoretical issues in political economy before examining why developed economies have differently sized welfare states. It concludes by examining how material structures and governance problems shape development.

Learning Objectives:

Students who enroll in this class will practice:

1. identifying evidence relevant for evaluating rival explanations of political outcomes;
2. interpreting events and trends from alternative national or cultural perspectives;
3. analyzing differences and similarities among nation-states;
4. writing effective arguments, ones whose conclusions are clear and well-defended.

Course Requirements:

The class requires students:

1. To take regular quizzes, which account for 30 percent of the class grade.
2. To take three exams, each of which is worth 15 percent of the class grade (for a total of 45 percent of the class grade). The quizzes and exams will assess students on their grasp of course readings and materials.
3. To keep (a word processed) log of *The Economist*, the *Financial Times*, or *The New York Times* that focuses on political economic issues (25 percent of the class grade). For 25 entries spread throughout the semester, each student will record the author, title, and date of his or her articles on foreign domestic politics. Appendix 1 contains more information about this assignment.

Course Policies:

Though this class does not have any formal prerequisites, students should have taken PSC 260 ("Introduction to Comparative Politics") or another class in Political Science and/or Introductory Micro or Macro-Economics. We are learning how to put two fields together to reach important conclusions about politics and economics, the course will be much easier if you have some background in each field.

This class assumes that students will carefully read assignment texts, answer key questions on their own, create detailed notes about the readings, and also link these notes with the tables and charts available at course website. Students will need at least 4 hours per module (=per day) to accomplish these objectives in addition to the time spent at the course website.

Books for Purchase:

Alberto Alesina and Edward L. Glaeser, *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe: A World of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 2008).

Andrew Gelman, *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do*, expanded edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008, 2010).

Course Topics and Reading Assignments:

Modules	Topics and Reading
1-2	What is Political Economy?  Reading: Kenneth Shepsle, <i>Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions</i> (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), chaps. 1-2.  <b>1<sup>st</sup> Quiz – See Canvas Site</b>
3, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8	Interests and Voting Behavior  Reading: <i>Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State</i> , pp. 1-239.  <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Quiz – See Canvas Site</b>
9	<b>First Exam – See Canvas Site</b>
10 & 11	Economic Goods and Collective Dilemmas  Reading: Shepsle, <i>Analyzing Politics</i> , chaps. 10, 8 & 9 (in this order).  <b>3<sup>rd</sup> Quiz – See Canvas Site</b> <b>4<sup>th</sup> Quiz – See Canvas Site</b>
12, 13, 14, 15, 16 & 17	Welfare State Diversity  Readings: Alesina and Glaeser, <i>Fighting Poverty</i> , pp. 1-222.  <b>5<sup>th</sup> Quiz – See Canvas Site</b>
18	<b>Second Exam – See Canvas Site</b>
19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 & 27	Development  Reading: Collier, <i>The Bottom Billion</i> , pp. 1-192.  <b>6<sup>th</sup> Quiz – See Canvas Site</b> <b>7<sup>th</sup> Quiz – See Canvas Site</b>
28	<b>Third Exam – See Canvas Site</b>
29	<b>Newspaper Log Due – See Canvas Site</b>

Appendix 1 -- Guidelines for Newspaper Log

Articles should focus on political economy. Entries should relate newspaper articles to class themes. Simply summarizing events and trends the article describes is unacceptable.

Avoid passing easy judgments on individuals or groups in other countries. It is not a good idea to suggest that Prime Minister x of country y is poorly informed or has malevolent intentions. Nor is it advisable to say that the political system of country x is a failure because its leaders cannot reach agreements that an observer deems easy to establish. Instead, use the assignment to learn about the internal politics of other countries and to relate them to central class issues.

Discussions should not exceed two or three paragraphs (or not more than one-half of a single-spaced, typed page). This assignment is due on the last day of class.