

POLI 7903
Special Topics in American Politics:
Seminar in American Political Economy

Fall 2011

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The purpose of this seminar is to survey the extensive and growing literature on domestic political economy. A wide range of questions has been raised in this body of research. What are the effects of economic conditions on mass political behavior? How do political elites and masses influence macroeconomic outcomes? Is there evidence that economic conditions are (or can be) manipulated by political elites for electoral gain in democratic societies? To what extent does the public (governmental) sector draw resources from the private (economic) sector, and what explains such patterns? Once government has drawn resources from the private sector, how are these resources allocated among competing claimants? What explains distributions of government expenditures among different programs, agencies, and expenditure categories? Finally, what is the role of government in shaping levels of income inequality and poverty in democratic societies? What are the implications of income inequality and poverty for politics and policy?

The field of political economy is very broad, and it is impossible to cover all relevant topics in a single seminar. Given this, in this seminar we focus on three major issues. First, we will explore the interaction between the political and economic spheres in the United States and, to a lesser extent, in other advanced industrial countries. In this section of the course we will examine the demand for economic outcomes in the United States and other western democracies by discussing the literature on economic determinants of mass political behavior and attitudes. We will also examine the supply of macroeconomic policies and outcomes by focusing on the political (electoral) business cycle and the political determinants of macroeconomic policy.

Second, we will explore the literature on government growth and expenditure determinants. We will examine the macro-level literature on the relative sizes of the public and private sectors, as well as how governmental expenditures are distributed. We will also explore the micro-level foundations of the public sector by considering the scholarly literature relating to the views of the mass public toward government spending, taxation, and the relative size of the public and private sectors.

Third, we will explore the political determinants and effects of income inequality and poverty. There is widespread agreement that income inequality has increased in the United States over the past several decades, and this has spawned scholarly efforts to understand the political and policy determinants of income inequality, as well as the political implications of income inequality. Poverty is also a matter of concern, so we will investigate the political determinants of poverty in Western democracies, including the United States.

Prerequisites

There are no formal prerequisites for this seminar. However, because this is an advanced seminar with a heavy focus on empirical research, students are expected to have some training in research methodology and statistics. Ideally, students should have completed (or be in the process of completing) the required research methodology sequence (POLI 7961-7962) or its equivalent. It is possible that students without adequate methodological training will have difficulty in meeting the minimum requirements of the seminar.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Each student will be evaluated on the basis of the following:

Research paper	50%
Final examination	25%
General class participation	25%

1. **Research Paper.** Each student will complete a major research paper. This paper will involve original empirical research on a topic of each student's own choosing that addresses a theoretically-grounded research question of interest to political scientists studying domestic political economy. Students will be expected either to (1) develop and provide an empirical test of some hypothesis(es) pertaining to domestic political economy, or (2) where data are not readily available, develop a research design to evaluate the empirical validity of a (set of) hypothesis(es) pertaining to domestic political economy. It is expected that the finished research papers will be, subject to modest revision, of a quality suitable for presentation at a professional conference or submission to (and, hopefully, publication in) a refereed, scholarly political science journal.

Each student should begin to consider possible research topics as soon as possible, and should consult frequently with the instructor about potential topics and relevant literature. Further, each student is expected to clear the selected topic with the instructor before beginning work, and should be prepared to work closely with the instructor in fine-tuning the proposed research.

All research papers are due on Friday, December 9 by 2:00 P.M. Late papers will be penalized 10 points per day. Furthermore, the papers should be (1) typed (one and one-half or double-spaced preferred), (2) written in accordance with the APSA style manual, (3) proofread for mistakes, and (4) neat and professional presented.

In order to facilitate the completion of papers by the end of the semester, the following timeline for various components of the paper should be met:

September 30	Selection of paper topic
October 21	Draft of introduction and literature review completed
November 11	Draft of theory and research design sections
November 25	Draft of tables and figures for empirical results
December 9	Final paper completed

Detailed information pertaining to the research paper will be provided in a separate handout.

2. **Final Examination.** A comprehensive final examination will be required of all students. Information pertaining to the format of the final examination will be provided to all students later in the semester.
3. **Class Participation.** Class participation and preparedness are major components of evaluation in graduate seminars. Each student will be evaluated on the basis of the quality of informed participation and contribution to seminar discussion. Specifically, each student is expected (1) to attend every seminar meeting, (2) to have read and reflected upon all assigned readings before class, and (3) to be prepared to discuss critically the issues raised in the literature during the seminar meeting. Contributions to seminar discussion will be evaluated on the basis of both quantity and quality of informed discussion. A class participation grade of 0 will be assigned to students who have an unexcused absence from class on a given day.

Readings

The following books have been ordered and are available at the University Bookstores. These books will be read in the following order during the semester:

Michael S. Lewis-Beck

Economics and Elections: The Major Western Democracies

ISBN 0-472-08133-0

University of Michigan Press

David Brady

Rich Democracies, Poor People: How Politics Explains Poverty

ISBN 978-0-19-538591-5

Oxford University Press

Larry Bartels

Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age

ISBN 978-0-691-13663-9

Princeton University Press

Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal

Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches

ISBN 978-0-262-63361-1

MIT Press

In addition to the books ordered for the seminar, there is a sizable set of additional articles and book chapters that will be required reading for the seminar. All additional readings are listed on the following semester outline. These readings will be made available to students electronically so that arrangements can be made for downloading and printing. Readings on the seminar outline are divided into two categories. First are those readings required of all students; these are denoted with an asterisk (*). Second are supplemental readings, which may be read depending on each student's interest and inclination. In particular, these supplemental readings can be particularly helpful in providing a good start on relevant literature for the required seminar paper.

Academic Misconduct Statement

Academic misconduct is defined by the Code of Student Conduct. You are encouraged to familiarize yourself with the LSU policy on academic misconduct, particularly regarding plagiarism. The LSU Code of Student Conduct can be found on the web site for the LSU Dean of Students:

<http://saa.lsu.edu/Code%20of%20Student%20Conduct%20August%202009.pdf>

Academic misconduct is a serious violation of university policy, but more importantly it is a significant scholarly violation for political scientists. Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated in this course. Charges of academic misconduct will be turned over to the Dean of Students for appropriate disciplinary action. **I am serious about this.**

Schedule of Class Meetings

August	24	Introduction to American Political Economy
	31	APSA conference (no class meeting)
September	7	Politics and Macroeconomic Outcomes
	14	Politics and Macroeconomic Outcomes
	21	Public Reactions to the Economy
	28	Public Reactions to the Economy
October	5	Public Reactions to the Economy
	12	The Size and Growth of the Public Sector
	19	The Size and Growth of the Public Sector
	26	The Size and Growth of the Public Sector
November	2	The Politics of Income Inequality and Poverty
	9	The Politics of Income Inequality and Poverty
	16	The Politics of Income Inequality and Poverty
	23	The Politics of Income Inequality and Poverty
	30	The Politics of Income Inequality and Poverty
December	9	Final exam and seminar paper due