

Space Matters: How Geography Affects Politics
Harvard Pre-College Program
Summer 2018 Session I: 3:15PM – 6:15PM
Course Location: CGIS K107

Contact Information

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Course Description

Can geography explain why some countries are rich and others poor? Why some countries go to war more than others? Or why some neighborhoods have higher crime rates than others? In this course, we analyze how *political geography*, meaning both physical divisions and administrative divisions, has influenced political, economic, and social development, from the large scale (Why have some countries been richer than others throughout history?) to the micro scale (Why are crime rates so different in two neighboring communities?).

This class will be focused on two main components: one providing an introduction to the study of political geography where the students will be able to analyze and discuss well-known, often provocative arguments about the role of geography in historical and modern political development. The second component of the class will involve hands-on lectures on how to use a professional, open source geographic analysis tool, QGIS. The final product of the class will be a written report and a collection of analytical maps exploring an issue of the student's choosing using these tools.

The content of this class will be coupled with lab sessions introducing the software QGIS and with in-class lectures on how to choose a research topic, define a research question, and make hypotheses. Drawing on literature from political science, economics, sociology, and criminology, this course will provide students with the most famous geography-based arguments and provide ample opportunities for students to discuss and critique these works. Students will have the opportunity to develop original research questions and hypotheses and present them, along with geographic evidence, to the class.

In the first week of the class, we begin each class with a discussion about the assigned readings, many of which are foundational arguments about the role of geography in explaining modern political, social, or economic development. After a short break, we will closely analyze more contemporary research on a related topic, either supporting the initial paper or contradicting it. This second part of the class will use these contemporary works as examples and be accompanied by instructions on how to conduct independent research. Topics covered include how to ask research questions, form hypotheses, define quantities of interest, and summarize data. This should serve as a template for conducting original research.

In the second week of the class, after one full-day introduction session to QGIS, we will continue the same format discussing papers in the first part of class, but spend the latter half of the day learning new skills and completing exercises using QGIS. These analytical skills will help the students conduct their own geographic analysis and explore a social science question of interest to

them. We will conclude on the final day by presenting our work to other students in the class. **Note that a laptop is required to participate in the course; however if access to a laptop will be an issue, please contact me and we can work out a plan to provide technology for students who may need it.**

Motivating Questions

- What is political geography? What are territorial boundaries, administrative boundaries, and when do they matter?
- How does geography affect war? What about economic development or a country's wealth?
- Can political geography ever change? If so, how does the government go about changing it?
- How does political geography affect neighborhoods? Everyday people?

Requirements

The workload and structure of this course is similar to that of a college style seminar in political science. This course should serve as a compass for understanding the main geography-based arguments in the literature. I expect all assignments by the assigned deadline. Failure to meet deadlines will be reflected in your final course evaluation. This class has 4 main components:

- **Readings.** I expect you to complete all required readings before the start of class and come prepared to actively participate in class to demonstrate that you have done the readings. (20% of grade)
- **In-class assignments.** During the QGIS hands-on part of class, students will have small assignments to check their understanding and that they will be able to complete in class. There will be 1-2 per day of the second week. (20% of grade)
- **Research design summary.** On the fifth day of class, students will submit a topic they are interested in researching for their final assignment. It should be related to political geography and have a motivating question, along with a preliminary hypothesis. On the sixth day of class, the students should turn in a neatly formatted, 2-3 page document stating the topic, research question, hypotheses, some background history and literature on the issue, and the data sources the student plans to use. (20% of grade)
- **Final project.** Using the topic chosen at the end of the first week, the students will build their final presentation and report for the last day of class. They will use their new tools (both in research design and in geographic analysis) to analyze the question and provide original research on the topic. They will present these results to the rest of the class on the last day of class and turn in a report summarizing their question, hypotheses, a brief review of the literature, and findings. (40% of grade)

Important Deadlines

There will be specific guidelines for all assignments provided in class.

- Research topic: June 29
- Research design: July 2
- Final presentation and report: July 6

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is the theft of someone else's ideas and work. It is the incorporation of facts, ideas, or specific language that are not common knowledge, are taken from another source, and are not properly cited.

Whether you copy verbatim or simply rephrase the ideas of another without properly acknowledging the source, the theft is the same. A computer program written as part of your academic work is, like a paper, expected to be your original work and subject to the same standards of representation. In the preparation of work submitted to meet course, program, or school requirements—whether a draft or a final version of a paper, project, take-home exam, computer program, placement exams, application essay, oral presentation, or other work—you must take great care to distinguish your own ideas and language from information derived from sources. Sources include published and unpublished primary and secondary materials, the Internet, and information and opinions of other people.

You are expected to follow the standards of proper citation and to avoid plagiarism. Please consult the [Harvard Guide to Using Sources](#), prepared by the Harvard College Writing Program, for a helpful introduction to all matters related to source use: identifying and evaluating secondary sources, incorporating them into your work, documenting them correctly, and avoiding plagiarism.

Accommodation Policy

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the instructor by the end of the second day of the term, June 26. Failure to do so may result in the instructor's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although the instructor may contact the AEO to discuss appropriate implementation. For more information on contacting the AEO and possible accommodations, refer to their [website](#).

Readings & Course Schedule

Part 1: The study of political geography: The first part of this class is about important concepts in political geography: how to define political geography, how it is related to war, economic growth, and the governing politics within a country. These are the building blocks for defining and analyzing problems where geography is a central explanatory variable.

Day 1: Defining political geography

Monday, June 25

There are no required readings for the first day of class. We will be going over the course syllabus and course expectations, and will begin with a lecture on the definition of political geography.

Day 2: Concepts in Political Geography: Borders

Tuesday, June 26

Herbst, Jeffrey. 2000. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Statebuilding*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Introduction and Chapter 1.

*MacMillan, Margaret. 2007. *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*. New York: Random House. Introduction, Chapters 15 – 16, Conclusion.

Miguel, Edward. 2004. "Tribe or Nation? Nation Building and Public Goods in Kenya versus Tanzania." *World Politics*, 56: 327-62.

Day 3: Concepts in Political Geography: Economics

Wednesday, June 27

Acemoglu, Daron et al. 2001. "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation." *American Economic Review* 91(5): 1369-1401.

Dell, Melissa. 2010. "The Persistent Effects of Peru's Mining Mita." *Econometrica*, 78(6): 1863-1903.

*Diamond, Jared. 1997. *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. New York: Random House. Chapters 1 – 2, Afterword.

Day 4: Concepts in Political Geography: Democracy

Thursday, June 28

Huntington, Samuel. *The Third Wave*. Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press. Chapters 1 – 2.

Kopstein, Jeffrey, and Reilly, David. 2000. "Geographic Diffusion and the Transformation of the Postcommunist World." *World Politics* 53(1):1-37.

Ross, Michael. 2001. "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53(3): 325-61.

Day 5: What is QGIS? How do experts use maps to explain politics?

Friday, June 29

Topic for final paper due

Cho, Wendy K. Tam, and Gimpel, James G. 2012. "Geographic Information Systems and the Spatial Dimensions of American Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15:443-460.

*Min, Brian. 2015. *Power and the Vote: Elections and Electricity in the Developing World*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 4.

Part 2: Consequences of Political Geography: The second part of this class is all about applications of geographic analysis to modern social science problems that research and policymakers alike care about. The papers selected for the second part of this class include both theoretically grounded research questions and innovative methods that use spatial data and geography to analyze the question at hand.

Day 6: Elections

Monday, July 2

Research design due

Chen, Jowei., and Rodden, Jonathan. 2013. "Unintentional Gerrymandering: Political Geography and Electoral Bias in Legislatures." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 8:239-269.

*Gelman, Andrew. 2008. *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1 – 3.

Day 7: Identity Politics and Segregation

Tuesday, July 3

*Enos, Ryan. 2017. *The Space Between Us: Social Geography and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-4.

Day 8: US INDEPENDENCE DAY – NO CLASS

(Use this time to work on your final project!)

Day 9: Political Violence

Thursday, July 5

Balcells, Laia, and Steele, Abbey. 2015. "Warfare, Political Identities, and Displacement in Spain and Colombia." *Political Geography* 51: 15-29.

*Zukerman-Daly, Sarah. 2016. *Organized Violence after Civil War: The Geography of Recruitment in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 4.

Day 10: Class Presentations

Friday, July 6

Final presentation due

*You are not required to complete all readings marked with an asterisk. Students must complete two out of the six readings and the rest are optional. Signup for the two mandatory ones will be on the first day of class.