Political Science 210: Politics in Historical Perspective

Wednesday 9-11am
291 Barrows

Professor Jason Wittenberg
732 Barrows Hall
Office Hours: Tuesday 9:30-11:30
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Course Description

According to William Faulkner, the past is never dead, it is not even past. Nearly everyone agrees that history somehow matters for understanding political life, but there are many disagreements concerning how much, how we would know, and the mechanisms of history’s influence. What role do historical legacies, path dependence, and past critical junctures play in contemporary politics? What are the best methods for illuminating the influence of the past? What does it mean for a political phenomenon to persist? We explore these and related questions through close examination of an eclectic array of scholarly materials.

Course Requirements

Two-thirds of your grade will be based on a term paper, due in my mailbox by Monday, May 12, 5:00pm. You are free to choose any topic you wish, provided that it is relevant to the course. Be sure you discuss the topic with me in advance. A one-page synopsis of your proposed paper is due in class on March 12. One-third of your grade will be based on class participation and some short writing assignments that I will announce in class the week before they are due. These papers (usually no more than a few pages long) should be circulated to me and the other class members no later than 5:00pm on the Tuesday before class meets. Please come to class prepared to critically discuss issues raised in the readings.

Course Reader: The reader for this course is available at University Copy, 2425 Channing Way (549-2335). Readings available on bSpace are marked as such.

Note on Readings: I am always discovering new and better readings. Therefore I reserve the right to add or subtract readings as the course progresses.
TENTATIVE Course Outline

Jan 22: Introduction and Overview

Jan 29: An Example of History Mattering


Feb 5: Temporality and Political Life: An Overview

- Nathan Nunn, “Historical Development,” forthcoming in Aghion et al., Handbook of Economic Growth. (bSpace)
- Paul Pierson, “Big, Slow-Moving, and ... Invisible: Macrosocial Processes in the Study of Comparative Politics,” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences. (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 177-207. (bSpace)
- Symposium, “Conceptions of Historical Time: Looking Beyond Time on the Clock,” Qualitative & Multi-Method Research, Fall 2013. (bSpace)

Feb 12: Historical Institutionalism and Path Dependency

Feb 19: Critical Junctures


Feb 26: Historical Legacies: Observational Research

- Timothy Frye, “The Limits of Legacies: Property Rights in Russian Energy.” Unpublished manuscript. (bSpace)
- Grigore Pop-Eleches and Joshua A. Tucker, “Associated with the Past? Communist Legacies and Civic Participation in Post-Communist Countries,” East European Politics & Societies and Cultures, Vol. 27, No. 1, February 2013, pp. 45-68. (bSpace)

Mar 5: Historical Legacies: Experimental (and “Experimental”) Research

Mar 12: Historical Legacies: A Critical Reappraisal

- Irena Grosfeld and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya, “Persistent effects of empires: Evidence from the partitions of Poland.” Paris School of Economics Working paper no. 2013-05, version February 2012. (bSpace)

Mar 19: Class Presentations

Mar 26: Spring Break

Apr 2: Continuity: Empirical Analyses

-5-

Apr 9: Continuity: Conceptualization

- Eviatar Zerubavel, Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past. (University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 37-54. (bSpace)

Apr 16: What Counts as Discontinuity?

- Eviatar Zerubavel, Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past. (University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 82-100. (bSpace)
- Ruth Berins Collier and Sebastian Mazzuca, “Does History Repeat?,” The Oxford handbook of Contextual Political Analysis, 2013. (bSpace)
Apr 23: Paradoxes of Continuity and Change


Apr 30: Wrap-up

May 7: Reading Period

May 12: Paper due by 4pm in mailbox in 210 Barrows