Political Geography
Tutorial – Sophomore Year
Government 97

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Urban-rural divisions in political behavior are increasingly framed as the defining electoral cleavage of the 21st century. Debates on the role of space and politics also ascribe substantial importance to geographical underpinnings in the transitions from hunting-gathering to agriculture and in turn industrialization and knowledge production; to the Great Divergence of Western Europe; to the long-run roots of attitudes observed today; and more. In this course, we will examine the role of spatial context in explaining contemporary political behavior and historical political development, starting from the dawn of human history and ending with the global elections of today. We will critically evaluate geographic determinism in economic growth; consider the precise mechanisms underlying how and why urban voters are more left-wing in the United States and Denmark but more right-wing across Asian democracies; and theorize causally identifiable contextual, or simple compositional, explanations for geographic pillarization in attitudes.

1   Course Details

Meetings: Mondays 3-5pm (CGIS K354), Tuesdays 9:45-11:45am (CGIS K107)
Instructor: Noah Dasanaike
Email: noahdasanaike@g.harvard.edu
Office Hours: 9:45-11:45am by appointment here (CGIS K415)

2   Course Components

This course begins the first week. Students are expected to attend all sessions and actively participate in all class discussions and activities. Students are also expected to substantively engage with the readings.

3   Assignments and Grading

3.1   Weekly Hypothesizing (15%)

Each week, you should come up with and write down (1) a question related to the subject and readings for that week, (2) a corresponding hypothesis, and (3) a potential data source and research design for testing the hypothesis. Students will be randomly selected to read aloud and workshop these.

3.2   Written Assignments (65%)

Pre-Prospectus (15%) - Due March 5th
The pre-prospectus paper will propose a research question and review the literature related to that question. It will allow you to make a first attempt at writing a compelling introduction and will provide practice with tying a specific research question to a broader theory in the surrounding social science literature. In the pre-prospectus, you will also build from the literature to articulate preliminary hypotheses about the answer to your research question. The pre-prospectus will be 4 to 5 pages in length. You will meet with your Teaching Fellow at some point in this process, before the due date of the pre-prospectus.

Analysis Reflection Paper (15%) - Due April 2nd
The analysis reflection paper will allow you to explore the strengths and drawbacks of various methodological approaches to answering your proposed research question. In the reflection paper, you will propose two potential methodological approaches to answering your research question. You will identify potential data sources and describe preliminary plans for using them to generate evidence for your hypotheses. You will then discuss the limitations of each approach. This assignment will be 3 to 4 pages in length.

Final Prospectus (35%) - Due May 7th
The prospectus will be 6 to 7 pages, and will lay out your research question, review the relevant literature, describe your planned methodology to answer the question, and address any limitations with this methodology. You will essentially combine an edited version of the pre-prospectus and a portion of the analysis reflection paper to generate the prospectus. The prospectus will allow you to refine your presentation of the research question and literature review based on your TF's feedback and your growing knowledge of the topic. You will also propose a refined version of one of the methodological approaches described in your analysis reflection paper and broaden your discussion of the limitations of your chosen methodology. You will meet with your Teaching Fellow at some point in this process, before the due date of the prospectus.

3.3   Class Participation (20%)

Participation in both discussion section (15%) and skill-building activities (5%).

4 Course Schedule and Readings

4.1 Introduction (1/27, 28)

4.1.1 Skills Objectives

- Identify how political science is different from other social sciences and explain the political science subfields.

- Learn the basics of linear regression and the interpretation of regression coefficients.

- Identify and use strategies for reading a political science article.

- Explain the expectations for the course.

4.1.2 Reading Objective

This week's readings introduce the concept of political geography and its relevance to contemporary political science.

4.1.3 Readings

- Graham, Paul. "Cities and Ambition." (2008).

- King, Gary. "Why Context Should Not Count." *Political Geography* 15 (1996): 159-164.

- Wallace, Tim, and Krishna Karra. "The True Colors of America's Political Spectrum Are Gray and Green." *The New York Times* (2020).

4.2 Economic Development (2/3, 4)

4.2.1 Skills Objectives

- Identify the characteristics of research questions.

- Explain the difference between normative and empirical research.

- Explain the difference between causal and descriptive research questions.

- Identify the dependent and independent variable in a research question.

4.2.2 Reading Objective

This week's readings examine the relationship between geography, institutions, and economic development. Students will be exposed to debates on how and whether geographical factors supplant or interact with historical and institutional variables to shape economic outcomes across different regions.

4.2.3 Readings

- Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation." *American Economic Review* 91, no. 5 (2001): 1369-1401.

- Gallup, John Luke, Jeffrey D. Sachs, and Andrew D. Mellinger. "Geography and Economic Development." *International Regional Science Review* 22, no. 2 (1999): 179-232.

- Rodrik, Dani, Arvind Subramanian, and Francesco Trebbi. "Institutions Rule: The Primacy of Institutions Over Geography and Integration in Economic Development." *Journal of Economic Growth* 9 (2004): 131-165.

4.3 Historical Legacies: Attitudes and Preferences (2/10, 11)

4.3.1 Skills Objectives

- Identify the expectations for the first assignment.

- Identify the characteristics of social science theories.

- Form a research question to test a political science theory or some aspect of political science theory.

4.3.2 Reading Objective

This week focuses on how historical events shape contemporary attitudes and preferences. Students will explore the long-term impacts of cultural practices, frontier experiences, and historical persecution on present-day social and political behaviors, emphasizing the explicitly spatial persistence of cultural norms and political attitudes.

4.3.3 Readings

- Alesina, Alberto, Paola Giuliano, and Nathan Nunn. "On the Origins of Gender Roles: Women and the Plough." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 128, no. 2 (2013): 469-530.

- Bazzi, Samuel, Martin Fiszbein, and Mesay Gebresilasse. "Frontier Culture: The Roots and Persistence of 'Rugged Individualism' in the United States." *Econometrica* 88, no. 6 (2020): 2329-2368.

- Voigtländer, Nico, and Hans-Joachim Voth. "Persecution Perpetuated: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Semitic Violence in Nazi Germany." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 127, no. 3 (2012): 1339-1392.

4.4 Historical Legacies: Politics and Economics (2/17, 18)

4.4.1 Skills Objectives

- Use literature to explain a theory.

- Cite when referring to literature and making empirical statements.

- Distinguish and appropriately choose between quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing literature.

- Explain ways to use literature.

- Use literature to develop testable hypotheses.

- Identify the expectations for the first assignment.

4.4.2 Reading Objective

While the previous week focused on attitudes and preferences, this week's readings examine how historical geographical factors continue to influence modern political and economic outcomes. Students will examine case studies of how past events, such as slavery, serfdom, and war, have left spatially varying imprints on political behaviors and patterns of economic development.

4.4.3 Readings

- Acharya, Avidit, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen. "The Political Legacy of American Slavery." *The Journal of Politics* 78, no. 3 (2016): 621-641.

- Buggle, Johannes C., and Steven Nafziger. "The Slow Road from Serfdom: Labor Coercion and Long-Run Development in the Former Russian Empire." *Review of Economics and Statistics* 103, no. 1 (2021): 1-17.

- Fontana, Nicola, Tommaso Nannicini, and Guido Tabellini. "Historical Roots of Political Extremism: The Effects of Nazi Occupation of Italy." *Journal of Comparative Economics* 51, no. 3 (2023): 723-743.

- Lin, Erin. "How War Changes Land: Soil Fertility, Unexploded Bombs, and the Underdevelopment of Cambodia." *American Journal of Political Science* 66, no. 1 (2022): 222-237.

4.5 Chance Events (2/24, 25)

4.5.1 Skills Objectives

- Craft an introduction that logically and compellingly builds to the research question by laying out a theoretical or practical problem raised by the readings, and then previews the argument.

4.5.2 Reading Objective

This week explores how seemingly random geographical events can have significant impacts on political outcomes. Students will consider how natural disasters, weather patterns, and other chance occurrences shape voting behavior and institutional development.

4.5.3 Readings

- Belloc, Marianna, Francesco Drago, and Roberto Galbiati. "Earthquakes, Religion, and Transition to Self-Government in Italian Cities." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 131, no. 4 (2016): 1875-1926.

- Fowler, Anthony, and Andrew B. Hall. "Do Shark Attacks Influence Presidential Elections? Reassessing a Prominent Finding on Voter Competence." *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 4 (2018): 1423-1437.

- Gomez, Brad T., Thomas G. Hansford, and George A. Krause. "The Republicans Should Pray for Rain: Weather, Turnout, and Voting in US Presidential Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 69, no. 3 (2007): 649-663.

- Healy, Andrew J., Neil Malhotra, and Cecilia Hyunjung Mo. "Irrelevant Events Affect Voters' Evaluations of Government Performance." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107, no. 29 (2010): 12804-12809.

- Hilbig, Hanno, and Sascha Riaz. "Natural Disasters and Green Party Support." The *Journal of Politics* 86, no. 1 (2024): 241-256.

4.6 Environment and Contact (3/3, 4)

4.6.1 Skills Objectives

- Explain the expectations for the second assignment.

- Explain the difference between qualitative and quantitative data.

- Explain how to support an argument using qualitative and quantitative data.

- Identify different types of data (e.g., survey data, interview data, historical data, large datasets etc.) and determine which type(s) of data are most appropriate for different research questions.

4.6.2 Reading Objective

These readings focus on how geographical environments and spatial proximity influence political behavior and social mobility. Students will examine how neighborhood effects and relocation impact political attitudes and economic outcomes, highlighting the importance of local context in shaping individual opportunities and preferences.

4.6.3 Readings

- Brown, Jacob R., Enrico Cantoni, Sahil Chinoy, Martin Koenen, and Vincent Pons. "The Effect of Childhood Environment on Political Behavior: Evidence from Young US Movers, 1992–2021." No. w31759. *National Bureau of Economic Research*, 2023.

- Cantoni, Enrico, and Vincent Pons. "Does Context Outweigh Individual Characteristics in Driving Voting Behavior? Evidence from Relocations Within the United States." *American Economic Review* 112, no. 4 (2022): 1226-1272.

- Chetty, Raj, and Nathaniel Hendren. "The Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility I: Childhood Exposure Effects." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 133, no. 3 (2018): 1107-1162.

- Dancygier, Rafaela, Sirus H. Dehdari, David D. Laitin, Moritz Marbach, and Kåre Vernby. "Emigration and Radical Right Populism." American Journal of Political Science 69, no. 1 (2025): 252-267.

- Elder, Elizabeth Mitchell, Ryan D. Enos, and Tali Mendelberg. "The Long-Term Effects of Neighborhood Disadvantage on Voting Behavior: The Moving to Opportunity Experiment." American Political Science Review 118, no. 2 (2024): 988-1004.

- Sampson, Robert J., and Stephen W. Raudenbush. "Systematic Social Observation of Public Spaces: A New Look at Disorder in Urban Neighborhoods." *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 3 (1999): 603-651.

4.7 Inter-Group Contact (3/10, 11)

4.7.1 Skills Objectives

- Identify the purpose of operationalizing a variable.

- Operationalize a variable.

- Identify and workshop which data sources can answer your research question.

- Understand and use codebooks to operationalize your variables.

4.7.2 Reading Objective

This week examines how geographical proximity and interaction between different groups affect political attitudes and social cohesion. Students will explore how spatial integration or segregation influences inter-group relations, voting patterns, and support for various policies, emphasizing the role of place in shaping social and political dynamics.

4.7.3 Readings

- Enos, Ryan D. "Causal Effect of Intergroup Contact on Exclusionary Attitudes." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 10 (2014): 3699-3704.

- Hangartner, Dominik, Elias Dinas, Moritz Marbach, Konstantinos Matakos, and Dimitrios Xefteris. "Does Exposure to the Refugee Crisis Make Natives More Hostile?." *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 2 (2019): 442-455.

- Mousa, Salma. "Building Social Cohesion Between Christians and Muslims Through Soccer in Post-ISIS Iraq." Science 369, no. 6505 (2020): 866-870.

- Sands, Melissa L. "Exposure to Inequality Affects Support for Redistribution." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 4 (2017): 663-668.

4.8 Communities (3/24, 25)

4.8.1 Skills Objectives

- Explain internal validity.

- List potential problems with qualitative and quantitative sources.

- Identify sources potentially possessing such problems.

4.8.2 Reading Objective

These readings focus on how local community structures and cultural geographies influence political behavior and social capital. Students will analyze how spatial variations in community characteristics contribute to differences in political engagement, social trust, and ideological disposition across regions.

4.8.3 Readings

- Bolet, Diane. "Drinking Alone: Local Socio-Cultural Degradation and Radical Right Support–The Case of British Pub Closures." Comparative Political Studies 54, no. 9 (2021): 1653-1692.

- Ruffini, Patrick. "Forget Swing States. It's These 21 Microcommunities That Could Decide the Election." *The New York Times* (2024).

- Tarrow, Sidney. "The Urban-Rural Cleavage in Political Involvement: The Case of France." *American Political Science Review* 65, no. 2 (1971): 341-357.

- Vance, James D. *Hillbilly Elegy*. 2016. [excerpts]

4.9 Place-Based Attitudes (3/31, 4/1)

4.9.1 Skills Objectives

- Explain the expectations for the prospectus assignment.

- Explain and apply the concept of generalizability.

4.9.2 Reading Objective

This week explores how specific geographical contexts shape political attitudes and voting behaviors. Students will examine how local economic conditions, cultural identities, and historical experiences tied to particular places contribute to the formation of distinct electoral preferences, with a focus of thinking *outside* the urban and rural.

4.9.3 Readings

- Broz, J. Lawrence, Jeffry Frieden, and Stephen Weymouth. "Populism in Place: The Economic Geography of the Globalization Backlash." *International Organization* 75, no. 2 (2021): 464-494.

- Cremaschi, Simone, Paula Rettl, Marco Cappelluti, and Catherine E. De Vries. "Geographies of Discontent: How Public Service Deprivation Increased Far-Right Support in Italy." OSF Preprints 26 (2022): 17-132.

- Ziblatt, Daniel, Hanno Hilbig, and Daniel Bischof. "Wealth of Tongues: Why Peripheral Regions Vote for the Radical Right in Germany." *American Political Science Review* 118, no. 3 (2024): 1480-1496.

4.10 Rurality (4/7, 8)

4.10.1 Skills Objectives

- Explain the distinction between correlation and causation, as well as the meaning and importance of confounders.

- Identify the fundamental problem of causal inference.

- Explain how randomization overcomes the problem.

4.10.2 Reading Objective

These readings focus on the unique political dynamics of rural areas. Students will explore how geographical isolation, economic structures, and cultural factors specific to rural environments shape political preferences, both independent of and with respect to urban areas.

4.10.3 Readings

- Carr, Patrick and Maria Kefalas. "The Rural Brain Drain." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2009).

- Cramer, Katherine J. "Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective." *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 3 (2012): 517-532.

- Dasgupta, Aditya, and Elena Ramirez. "Explaining Rural Conservatism: Political Consequences of Technological Change in the Great Plains." *American Political Science Review* (2020): 1-23.

- Goldberg, Emma. "How 'Rural Studies' Is Thinking About the Heartland."" *The New York Times* (2024).

4.11 Urbanicity (4/14, 15)

4.11.1 Skills Objectives

- Identify the sections of a research paper.
- Review basic methods for organizing sources and arguments.

4.11.2 Reading Objective

This week examines the political geography of urban areas. Students will consider the role of density in constructing or sorting political preferences.

4.11.3 Readings

- Badger, Emily. "What Happens When the Richest US Cities Turn to the World?." *The New York Times* (2017).

- Maxwell, Rahsaan. "Cosmopolitan Immigration Attitudes in Large European Cities: Contextual or Compositional Effects?" *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 2 (2019): 456-474.

- Wirth, Louis. "Urbanism as a Way of Life." *American Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (1938): 1-24.

- Florida, Richard. "The Rise of the Creative Class." *Washington Monthly* (2002).

4.12 Urban-Rural Divides (4/21, 22)

4.12.1 Skills Objectives

- Workshop paper drafts to strengthen final product.

- Craft a conclusion that summarizes the proposed research, including the research question, hypotheses, methodology, and suggestions for future research.

4.12.2 Reading Objective

The final week synthesizes the course themes by examining the growing political divide between urban and rural areas. Students will explore how geographical sorting, economic divergence, and cultural differences between urban and rural spaces contribute to political polarization and electoral outcomes.

4.12.3 Readings

- Brown, Jacob R., and Ryan D. Enos. "The Measurement of Partisan Sorting for 180 Million Voters." *Nature Human Behaviour* 5, no. 8 (2021): 998-1008.

- Dasanaike, Noah. "Discordant Composition: Why Urban-Rural Cleavages Do Not Generalize." Working Paper.

- Badger, Emily. "How the Rural-Urban Divide Became America's Political Fault Line." *The New York Times* (2019).

4.13 Conclusions (4/28, 29)

4.13.1 Readings

- To be determined according to student interest

5 Course Policies

5.1 Attendance

Students are expected to attend all classes. Appropriate excuses for missing class (e.g., health or family emergencies) will be permitted with documentation from HUHS or your Dean.

5.2 Late Assignments

Assignments turned in after the due date will not be accepted and will receive zero credit. In the extraordinary event of an unforeseen and unavoidable circumstance that prevents you from turning in an assignment on time, you must provide documentation to your Teaching Fellow.

5.3 Laptop Policy

Laptop use is acceptable so long as you are actively participating in class discussions and activities. However, use of laptops for non-course related activities during class time is prohibited and may result in a deduction from your participation grade.

5.4 LLMs and Generative AI

Certain assignments in this course will permit or even encourage the use of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) tools such as ChatGPT. The default is that such use is disallowed unless otherwise stated. Any such use must be appropriately acknowledged and cited. It is each student's responsibility to assess the validity and applicability of any GAI output that is submitted; you bear the final responsibility. Violations of this policy will be considered academic misconduct. We draw your attention to the fact that different classes at Harvard could implement different AI policies, and it is the student's responsibility to conform to expectations for each course.

5.5 Accessibility

Please let me know as soon as possible and not later than the 3rd week if you are registered with the Accessible Education Office so we can work together to make any and all alterations necessary.

5.6 Collaboration

The exchange of ideas is essential to strong academic research. You may find it useful to share sources or discuss your thinking for any of these papers with peers, particularly if you are working on similar topics. You may even read each other's drafts and provide feedback. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own thinking and approach to the topic. You must be sure to cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that you draw on. Furthermore, while you may seek the advice or help of your peers, your data analysis must be performed on your own and you should consult with your Teaching Fellow to make sure you are not duplicating the analysis of any other student in your section.