

PSCI 3894 – Political Economy of Development

Vanderbilt University
Spring 2021

Instructor:	Guillermo Toral (he/him)	Meeting time:	Mon, Wed, Fri 10.20 – 11.10am
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Office hours:	Wednesday 5 – 7.30pm	Course page:	Brightspace link

1 Course description

What do we mean when we talk about a country being more or less developed? What are the main political drivers of development in the long term? How can interventions improve development outcomes in the short term, and how is their effectiveness mediated by politics? In this course we will examine these and other important questions on the political economy of development.

The course is organized in four blocks. The first block, *Fundamentals of development*, introduces students to the theoretical and empirical study of international development, with 4 sessions on definitions, patterns, measures, and theories. The second block, *Tools for development*, introduces students to how researchers and practitioners leverage data to learn about development and about the impact of interventions, with 5 sessions on the basics of monitoring and evaluation, linear regression, randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, and case studies. The third block, *Forces of development*, presents some of the classic explanations of variation in countries' development, with 13 sessions on state building, state capacity, rule of law, autocracy, democracy, distributive politics, leadership, endowments, geography, colonialism, slavery, foreign aid, and societal divisions. The fourth and last block, *Domains of development*, focuses on different realms of development policy, through 17 sessions where we will consider the politics and policies of specific policy areas (e.g., cash transfers, education, healthcare, commodities) and hold live discussions with practitioners working on international development in a variety of organizations and roles.

The sections below detail the course's [learning objectives](#), [expectations](#), and [schedule](#). A final section reminds students about important [campus resources](#).

2 Learning objectives

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

1. Reflect critically about the variation in development outcomes across time and space, and the leading explanations for it.
2. Analyze scholarly and policy arguments about the political economy of development, pointing to potential weaknesses and alternative explanations.
3. Apply key concepts and theories of political science and economics to debates about the political economy of development.
4. Explain the fundamental aspects of empirical designs used for evaluating the success of development programs and policies.

3 Course expectations

3.1 Prerequisites

This class assumes that students have some prior exposure to political science.

3.2 Requirements

Attendance and participation (10%). Students are expected to attend all sessions (in person or over Zoom) and actively participate in the discussions and activities therein. In-class activities and discussions are designed to help students assimilate key concepts, connect ideas, and think critically about development.

Book review (20%). Students are expected to write a review of one of the four books marked with a star (★) in the reading list. One chapter of each of these books is assigned for all to read in the second half of March, but I encourage students to choose and start reading one book earlier on the semester. Online copies of all four books are available for free through the [Library](#). The book review should have 5 pages of text using a 12-point font, 1.5-point line spacing, and 1-inch margins. Only one paragraph of the review should be dedicated to a synthesis of the book; the rest of the review should be a well-reasoned critique of the authors' argument, their evidence, the connection between the two, and/or the implications of the book. The review is due on April 16, and in February I will provide a guide on how to write a good review. Students are encouraged to email me their outline (up to 1 page of bullet points) by April 1st for preliminary feedback.

Mid-term exam (25%). The mid-term exam will cover all the material in blocks I, II and III of the semester (including lectures as well as readings). The exam will be “open book”, but designed in a way that students will not have time to read material for the first time or find answers quickly on the Internet – relying on good notes taken throughout the semester is key. The mid-term exam will be held during class time on March 19.

Final exam (45%). The final exam will cover all the material of the semester (including lectures, readings, and in-class discussions with practitioners). The exam will be “open book”, but designed in a way that students will not have time to read material for the first time or find answers quickly on the Internet – relying on good notes taken throughout the semester is key. The final exam will be held online on Saturday May 8 from 3 to 5pm, as [scheduled by Vanderbilt](#).

3.3 Grading

Grading scale. Assignments will be graded in a 0-100 scale. Students who do not submit a given assignment will receive a 0 for it. Final numeric grades will be calculated through a simple weighted average, using the weights detailed in [3.2](#), and then transformed to letter grades using the following system: 94 or above → A; 90 to 93.99 → A-; 87 to 89.99 → B+; 83 to 86.99 → B; 80 to 82.99 → B-; 77 to 79.99 → C+; 73 to 76.99 → C; 70 to 72.99 → C-; 67 to 69.99 → D+; 63 to 66.99 → D; 60 to 62.99 → D-; 59.99 or below → F.

Late submission policy. Book reviews submitted after the deadline will incur in an automatic penalty. 10 points will be deducted if the delay is shorter than 24 hours, 20 if it is between 24 and 48 hours, and so on. Students who submit it late due to extenuating circumstances may request a penalty waiver by sending me an email with documentation for the delay's motives.

Grade revisions. If a student is unhappy with their grade on an assignment, they should feel free to email me or come to office hours. I am happy to explain the grade and suggest ways to get a better grade next time around. Students may also request a review of any graded assignment. To do so, they must send me an

email with a reasoned argument to motivate the request no later than 3 days after the assignment has been returned. I will examine the argument and determine whether the grade should be revised. As a result of the review, the grade may be raised, lowered, or left unchanged. Any revised grades will be final.

3.4 Important dates

These are the most important dates with regards to assignments. All hours are in Nashville time (CT).

Mid-term exam	March 19, 10.20 - 11.10am
Book review outline (optional)	April 1, 11.59pm
Book review due	April 16, 11.59pm
Final exam	May 8, 3.00 - 5.00pm

3.5 Academic integrity

Students are expected to have read and agreed to Vanderbilt University's [Honor System](#). Any case of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty would be taken very seriously, in agreement with Vanderbilt policy. Consequences of academic dishonesty can include a 0 grade in the assignment, failure of the course, or disciplinary action.

3.6 Diversity and inclusion

I am committed to making this course a safe and productive learning environment for all students, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, abilities, or religion. I see people's diverse backgrounds and worldviews not merely as differences to tolerate but as valuable assets to recognize and celebrate. When in the classroom, I expect students to treat each other with kindness, openness, and respect. Any student who feels they need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should email me as soon as possible to discuss their needs. We will work with Vanderbilt's [Student Access Services](#) to accommodate their needs.

3.7 One-on-one support

Students are welcome to meet with me to discuss any questions or concerns they may have. I hold office hours on Wednesday between 5 and 7.30pm over Zoom – to sign up, simply choose an available slot at www.calendly.com/guillermo-toral/office-hours. Students who cannot find a slot that suits them should feel free to email me so we can find an alternative time. Students are also welcome to email me with any questions, comments or concerns; I typically respond within 48 hours.

3.8 Brightspace and syllabus

The course's Brightspace page is <https://brightspace.vanderbilt.edu/d2l/home/272042>. I will post readings, grades, and announcements on Brightspace. All assignments will be submitted through Brightspace. This syllabus remains the main guiding document for the class. I reserve the right to amend the syllabus throughout the semester, but I will alert students of any changes should they be necessary. This version of the syllabus is dated March 19, 2021.

4 Schedule and readings

Each session has one topic and one related reading assigned. I expect students to do these required readings before class. All of them will be available on Brightspace.

4.1 Introductions (January 25)

- No readings for this session.

I. Fundamentals of development

4.2 Definitions of development (January 27)

- Sen, Amartya. "The concept of development." *Handbook of development economics* 1 (1988): 9-26.

4.3 Patterns of development (January 29)

- Acemoglu, Daron. *Introduction to modern economic growth*. Princeton University Press, 2009. Chapter 1.

4.4 Measures of development (February 1)

- Deaton, Angus. "Measuring poverty." Chapter 1 In *Understanding poverty*, edited by Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee, Roland Bénabou and Dilip Mookherjee. Oxford University Press, 2006.

4.5 Theories of development (February 3)

- Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. *Why nations fail: The origins of power, prosperity, and poverty*. Currency, 2012. Chapter 2.

II. Tools for development

4.6 Introduction to monitoring and evaluation (February 5)

- Khandker, Shahidur, Gayatri B. Koolwal, and Hussain Samad. *Handbook on impact evaluation: quantitative methods and practices*. The World Bank, 2009. Chapters 1 and 2.

4.7 Linear regression (February 8)

- Long, Abby. "10 things to know about reading a regression table." EGAP.

4.8 Randomized control trials (February 10)

- Humphreys, Macartan, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. "Field experiments and the political economy of development." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 367-378.

4.9 Quasi-experiments (February 12)

- Rosenbaum, Paul R. *Design of observational studies*. New York: Springer, 2010. Chapter 1.

4.10 Case studies (February 15)

- Gerring, John. *Case study research: Principles and practices*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. Chapter 3.

III. Forces of development

4.11 State building (February 17)

- Tilly, Charles. *Coercion, capital, and European states, AD 990-1992*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. Chapter 1.

4.12 State capacity (February 19)

- Bates, Robert H. *When things fell apart: State-failure in late-century Africa*. Cambridge University Press, 2015. Chapters 1 and 2.

4.13 Rule of law (February 22)

- Besley, Timothy, and Torsten Persson. *Pillars of prosperity: The political economics of development clusters*. Princeton University Press, 2011. Chapter 1.

4.14 Autocracy (February 24)

- No readings for this session, in observance of the Vanderbilt-designated in-class reading day.

4.15 Democracy (February 26)

- Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. *Why nations fail: The origins of power, prosperity, and poverty*. Currency, 2012. Chapter 11.

4.16 Distributive politics (March 1)

- Stokes, S. C., Dunning, T., Nazareno, M., Brusco, V. (2013). *Brokers, voters, and clientelism: The puzzle of distributive politics*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

4.17 Leadership (March 3)

- Besley, Timothy. "Political selection." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19.3 (2005): 43-60.

4.18 Endowments (March 5)

- Ross, Michael L. *The oil curse: How petroleum wealth shapes the development of nations*. Princeton University Press, 2013. Chapter 1.

4.19 Colonialism (March 8)

- Mahoney, James. *Colonialism and postcolonial development: Spanish America in comparative perspective*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. Chapter 1.

4.20 Slavery (March 10)

- Nunn, Nathan. "The long-term effects of Africa's slave trades." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123.1 (2008): 139-176.

4.21 Foreign aid (March 12)

- Moyo, Dambisa. *Dead aid: Why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa*. Macmillan, 2009. Chapters 1-3.

4.22 Societal divisions (March 15)

- ★ Ansell, Ben W., and Johannes Lindvall. *Inward Conquest: The Political Origins of Modern Public Services*. Cambridge University Press, 2021. Chapter 2

4.23 Review session (March 17)

- No readings for this session.

4.24 Mid-term exam (March 19)

- No readings for this session. Mid-term exam to be taken on Brightspace during class time.

IV. Domains of development

4.25 Guest speaker: Tim Cheston, Harvard Growth Lab (March 22)

- *No readings for this session.*
- Tim Cheston is a Senior Manager at Harvard's Growth Lab and will talk about their work promoting economic growth.

4.26 Healthcare (March 24)

- ★ Niedzwiecki, Sara. *Uneven social policies: The politics of subnational variation in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press, 2018. Chapter 1.

4.27 Education (March 26)

- Kosack, Stephen. *The education of nations: How the political organization of the poor, not democracy, led governments to invest in mass education*. Oxford University Press, 2012. Chapter 1.

4.28 Guest speaker: Barbara Bruns, Center for Global Development (March 29)

- *No readings for this session.*
- Barbara Bruns is a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Global Development, following a 30-year career at the World Bank. She will talk about the politics of education reform.

4.29 Commodities (March 31)

- Riofrancos, Thea. *Resource radicals: From petro-nationalism to post-extractivism in Ecuador*. Duke University Press, 2020. Chapter 1.

4.30 Taxation (April 2)

- Lieberman, Evan S. *Race and regionalism in the politics of taxation in Brazil and South Africa*. Cambridge University Press, 2003. Chapter 1.

4.31 Water and sanitation (April 5)

- ★ Auerbach, Adam Michael. *Demanding development: The politics of public goods provision in India's urban slums*. Cambridge University Press, 2019. Chapter 1.

4.32 Guest speaker: Alejandra López, Mexico City Government (April 7)

- *No readings for this session.*
- Alejandra López is a Director for Planning and Public Policy Coordination at the Environment Secretariat of the City of Mexico, and will talk about the challenges of water management in the largest city of the Americas.

4.33 Gender (April 9)

- Brulé, Rachel E. *Women, Power, and Property: The Paradox of Gender Equality Laws in India*. Cambridge University Press, 2020. Chapter 1.

4.34 Order (April 12)

- Lessing, Benjamin. *Making peace in drug wars: Crackdowns and cartels in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press, 2017. Chapter 1.

4.35 Guest speaker: Alexandra González, World Food Program (April 14)

- *No readings for this session.*
- Alexandra González is a Program Policy Officer at the World Food Program and will talk about the WFP's work on food systems.

4.36 Cash transfers (April 16)

- ★ Diaz-Cayeros, Alberto, Federico Estévez, and Beatriz Magaloni. *The political logic of poverty relief: Electoral strategies and social policy in Mexico*. Cambridge University Press, 2016. Chapter 1.

4.37 Guest speaker: Paula Cerutti, World Bank (April 19)

- *No readings for this session.*
- Paula Cerutti is Senior Social Protection Specialist with the World Bank in Cameroon, and will talk about the challenges of social protection in Africa, Latin America, and the OECD countries

4.38 Land (April 21)

- Albertus, Michael. *Autocracy and redistribution: The politics of land reform* Cambridge University Press, 2015. Chapter 1.

4.39 Guest speaker: Stamatis Kotouzas, World Bank (April 23)

- *No readings for this session.*
- Stamatis Kotouzas is a Senior Land Administration and Geospatial Specialist with the World Bank in South Korea, and will talk about land management.

4.40 Guest speaker: Alisa Zomer, MIT Governance Lab (April 26)

- *No readings for this session.*
- Alisa Zomer is Assistant Director at the MIT Governance Lab (MIT GOV/LAB) and will talk about governance challenges and strategic partnerships.

4.41 Corruption (April 28)

- Szakonyi, David. *Politics for Profit: Business, Elections, and Policymaking in Russia*. Cambridge University Press, 2020. Chapter 1.

4.42 Conclusions (April 30)

- *No readings for this session.*

5 Campus resources

5.1 Academic writing

Writing well is by no means an innate skill. It takes practice, feedback, and reflection to become a good writer. This class will provide students with an opportunity to improve their writing through those three channels. Additional support can be obtained from Vanderbilt's [Writing Studio](#).

5.2 Mental health

Staying emotionally and mentally healthy is critical for personal, academic, and professional success. The ongoing public health, economic and political crises can make this more of a challenge. I encourage students who are struggling with any mental health issues, and/or want to build their emotional and mental wellbeing, to consider using the resources offered by the office of Vanderbilt's [Dean of Students](#), including the [University Counseling Center](#) and the [Center for Student Wellbeing](#). Any student who is dealing with difficulties that hinder their ability to succeed in this class should feel free to reach out to me by email or in office hours to discuss their situation.

5.3 Equity, diversity and inclusion

I am committed to making this class an open and inclusive environment for all. I am available to discuss matters of equity and diversity and will keep those conversations as confidential as possible. Students should be aware however that all faculty are “mandated reporters” who are legally obligated to report any allegations of sexual misconduct and any suspected discrimination to Vanderbilt’s [Title IX Coordinator](#). In addition, Vanderbilt has a number of centers that can provide useful resources, including the [Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#), the [Black Cultural Center](#), the [Women’s Center](#), and the [Office of LGBTQI Life](#).

5.4 Career guidance

I encourage all students to think hard about what they want to do after graduation and about what they want to do in the long term. Vanderbilt’s [Career Center](#) offers a number of useful resources, including coaching, ads on job and internship opportunities, and advice for fellowships and graduate schools. I hope that this class will motivate students to take more classes in political science and related fields, and to consider careers related to international development, public policy, and research. I am always happy to meet students to discuss their post-graduation plans, and I can offer first-hand advice on careers in academia and in international organizations.