The ECONOMIC and POLITICAL PERFORMANCE of CIVILIZATIONS
Duke University
Economics 351S, Political Science 327S

Fall 2018

Timur Kuran

Classes: Wednesday, 8:45–11:15, Allen 306
Offices: 234 Social Sciences Building and 215 Gross Hall
Office hours: Wednesday, 1:30 - 3:30 (Gross office through week 7, SS office after that)
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Objectives

This course offers a critical survey of theories concerning the economic and political performance of major civilizations. The emphasis is on the metrics used to measure performance, and especially on the causes of differences that took shape and persisted over long time periods. The theories that we shall cover address the roles of institutions, cultures, legal systems, beliefs, family structures, class structure, religions, technologies, geography, and natural resources. Interactions between economic and political development will also constitute a core theme.

The course will familiarize students with the institutions that have determined the pace and characteristics of economic and political development in various civilizations. It will examine certain institutional transformations and selected cases of institutional stagnation to derive lessons about the mechanisms that govern development in general, including democratization and economic modernization. As such, the course will provide insights applicable to all regions of the world, both in the past and in the present.

The course is organized around topics that present focused intellectual puzzles, including ones that have preoccupied scholars for generations. Within each topic the goal is to learn not just what happened but also, and more important, why economic and political history unfolded as it did. In other words, the emphasis is on analysis rather than description.
Class sessions

The class will meet once a week for two back-to-back sessions separated by a 10-minute break. Regular attendance is essential to success in the course. Because there is no main textbook, only by attending class regularly will you be able to master the topics to be discussed and grasp the connections between readings. In any case, class presentations will go beyond the readings, and they will contain ideas unavailable through published sources. By the same token, keeping up with the readings is essential to following discussions.

Audiotaping or videotaping of the class sessions is not allowed.

Tests

Requirements include four hour-long in-class tests [September 26, October 17, November 7, December 5], nine quizzes lasting 10 minutes each (each at the start of a class without a test), and a research paper due on December 10.

The first three tests will take place during the initial hour of the class period (8:45-9:45). Each will include two questions, one involving material already discussed, and the other about the readings scheduled to be discussed that day. The last test will span the final hour of our last class period (10:15-11:15).

The quizzes will take place at the beginning of the class period (8:45-8:55). Each will involve a single basic question designed to test comprehension of the day’s reading assignment.

Except in cases of medical necessity, students will take exams and quizzes through Sakai, using a laptop, through a lockdown browser.

Taking the tests and quizzes is mandatory. Their times cannot be moved for anyone, except in the event of a documented grave emergency (e.g., death in the family, hospitalization, illness requiring immediate attention of a physician). Unacceptable excuses for missing a test include: malfunctioning automobile, temperamental alarm clock, non-refundable airline ticket, social event, and uncooperative weather. Missed quizzes will count toward the three to be dropped in computing the class grade.

Special arrangements may be made for disabled students working through Disabilities Services (668-1267).

Grading

All written work will be graded for analytical sophistication, originality, accuracy, coherence, clarity, and comprehensiveness. In the tests no credit will be given for repeating a question, and penalties will be imposed for invoking facts or theories irrelevant to the question at hand. Requests
for regrading will be accepted only if accompanied by a clear and written justification for the request. Regrading will not be limited to the specific question whose scoring is being challenged. The entire exam will be regraded, and the exam score may go up or down.

The course grade will be based on a weighted average of three best tests (lowest grade will be dropped), the six best quizzes (three lowest grades will be dropped), paper, and class performance: 15% for each of the three best tests + 30% for research paper + 2% for each of the six best quizzes + 13% for class performance.

Readings

The selected readings consist of journal articles, book chapters, and books. Ten books, to be covered in part or in full, are available for purchase at the Textbook Store. Other books are on 1-day reserve at Perkins. Articles are posted on Sakai.

Authors of the readings include not only political scientists and economists but also legal scholars, and historians. The readings have been selected to familiarize you with substantive controversies, but also to expose you to various research techniques used to study the past: (1) archival data collection, (2) empirical testing, (3) textual criticism, and especially (4) institutional analysis.

Certain readings address politically controversial and socially sensitive issues from multiple angles. Within the time constraints of the course, you will gain exposure to competing perspectives through influential writings of their leading exponents.

The required readings are starred. The rest are recommended. Depending on student interest, minor adjustments may be made to this reading list.

Paper requirement

Each student will write a 5000-6250-word paper (20-25 pages in 12 pt. Times-Roman font) analyzing comparatively the development of two civilizations in one carefully specified and appropriately narrow dimension. The development of the topic itself will be tied to the readings, and the student will be expected, as part of the project, to evaluate critically at least two theories (or classes of theories) considered in depth in the course. A proposal will be due by week 7, a partial draft by week 10, and the full paper at the end of reading period.

KEY DEADLINES

October 10, 11:30 PM: 2-page proposal in MS word due in Sakai Dropbox
November 1, 11:30 PM: 1250-1500 word draft in MS word due in Sakai Dropbox
December 10, 4:30 PM: Final paper due in MS word in Sakai Dropbox

Except in case of documented grave emergency, missing a deadline will result in a grading penalty, which will be proportionate to the length of the delay.
Course outline

L: On reserve at Perkins Library ● *: Required reading ● T: Available at Textbook Store

1. The STUDY of CIVILIZATIONS (August 29)


2. GEOGRAPHY and the ENVIRONMENT (September 5, with 10 min. quiz)


3. RESOURCES (September 12, with 10 min. quiz)


4. INSTITUTIONS (September 19, with 10 min. quiz)


5. INSTITUTIONS (September 26, with first one-hour test)


6. INSTITUTIONS of the PRIVATE ECONOMY (October 3, with 10 min. quiz)

7. INSTITUTIONS of the PRIVATE ECONOMY (October 10, with 10 min. quiz)

* Kuran, Long Divergence, chaps. 9-12.

October 10: Research paper proposal due at 11:30 PM (upload to Sakai Dropbox with filename format “Lastname-Firstname-Proposal.doc”)

8. CIVIC CULTURE (October 17, with second one-hour test)


9. CIVIC CULTURE (October 24, with 10 min. quiz)


10. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS (October 31, with 10 min. quiz)


November 1: Organizational draft of paper due at 11:30 PM (upload to Sakai Dropbox with filename format “Lastname-Firstname-OrgDraft.doc”)

11. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS (November 7, with third one-hour test)

*Acemoglu and Robinson, Why Nations Fail, chaps. 9-12.

12. CLASS STRUCTURE (November 14, with 10 min. quiz)

T* Piketty, Capital in the Twenty-First Century, chaps. 7-12.
13. TECHNOLOGY (November 28, with 10 min. quiz)


14. ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS (December 5, with last one-hour test, 10:15-11:15)


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December 10: Final draft of research paper due at 4:30 PM (upload to Sakai Dropbox with filename format “Lastname-Firstname-FinalDraft.doc”). Hardcopy of paper due in my mailbox at Economics or Political Science by next day. These offices close at 5:00 PM.