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

Fall 2020

Timur Kuran

Classes: Tuesday, 5:15–7:45 PM, Perkins LINK 071 (Classroom 5)
Offices: 234 Social Sciences Building and 215 Gross Hall
Office hours: To be determined (it will depend on class composition & student locations)
Sakai site for course: ECON.351S.01.F20
Electronic mail: t.kuran@duke.edu
Telephone: (919) 660-1872 (SS), (919) 660-4302 (Perkins) [neither monitored during pandemic]
Personal website: https://sites.duke.edu/timurkuran/
Twitter: @timurkuran

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 three back-to-back sessions separated by two 7-minute breaks. 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 of the course 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.

Whether remote or in-class, classes will be recorded by the university if even one student cannot be present for reasons due to Covid-19.

All participants in discussions must be free of worries that their comments might be seen by people outside the course. For that reason, official recordings are for use by registered students only. Sharing the recordings with others, even in part, is strictly prohibited and will be considered a violation of (1) the trust between student and professor, (2) the trust among students, and (3) intellectual property rights of class participants, and (4) privacy rights of class participants.

Audio or video recording by students themselves is prohibited. It would constitute a violation of the Duke University Honor Code.

Except for the first class (August 18), students are expected to do the readings for each week ahead of the class period. During every lecture, I will stop periodically to ask a selected student a question about the reading under consideration; the question might concern a theme of the reading; or a basic fact (e.g., the puzzle at hand, the author’s reason for choosing one methodology over another), or the interpretation of some pattern. They will vary in difficulty; often they will be very easy for anyone who has read the work. Answers to my pre-prepared questions will contribute to the participation component of the course grade. The participation grade will depend also on contributions to general discussions during the flow of the course.

The initial classes will be remote, through Zoom [see Sakai for recurring meeting link (meeting id: 94115138174)]. After the end of the drop-add period, when the class roster is finalized, if possible and prudent classes will be held in person, with remote access for anyone unable to be present physically. The health environment as well as student locations will determine the extent of in-person teaching.

Every remote participant is expected to keep his or her camera on, except during periodic breaks. Typically, each class will break twice for seven-minute intervals. The purpose is to enhance the sense of intellectual community by helping participants come to know each other. Knowing each other will foster trust; it will encourage students to raise questions and offer alternative explanations comfortably.
In remote sessions via Zoom, students are asked to pose questions and offer ideas orally. I will not keep track of the chat feed.

During in-person classes and consultations, students must be masked and observe social distancing.

Tests

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the course requirements included four hour-long in-class tests and nine ten-minute quizzes. These have been replaced by pre-prepared oral questions that will appear during class discussions.

The only written test will be the final, which will be conducted online, through Sakai. It will be on November 20 (Friday), 7-10 PM.

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 final, 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 score may go up or down.

The course grade will be based scores on the research paper (45%), class performance (30%), and final (25%).

Readings

The selected readings consist of eleven books and a few articles or book chapters. All the articles and most of the eleven books, most to be covered in part, are available through Sakai. It may be necessary for students to purchase a few items through online booksellers, in paper format. The syllabus will be updated as more information becomes available.

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- to 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. In particular, the student will be expected, as part of the project, to evaluate critically at least two theories (or classes of theories) that the course considers in depth. A proposal will be due by week 7, a partial draft by week 10, and the full paper after classes end.

**KEY DEADLINES**

September 30, 11:30 PM: 2-page proposal in MS word due in Sakai Dropbox
October 21, 11:30 PM: 1250- to 1500-word draft in MS word due in Sakai Dropbox
November 14, 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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>:</th>
<th>Required reading</th>
<th>S: Available on Sakai, under section folder or “Library resources” folder</th>
<th>R?: Status to be announced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. **The STUDY of CIVILIZATIONS** (August 18)


2. **GEOGRAPHY and the ENVIRONMENT** (August 25)


3. **RESOURCES** (September 1)

4. INSTITUTIONS (September 8)


5. INSTITUTIONS (September 15)


6. INSTITUTIONS of the PRIVATE ECONOMY (September 22)


7. INSTITUTIONS of the PRIVATE ECONOMY (September 29)


---

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

8. CIVIC CULTURE (October 6)

9. CIVIC CULTURE (October 13)


10. CIVIC CULTURE (October 20)


October 21: Organizational draft of paper due at 11:30 PM (upload to Sakai Dropbox with filename format “Lastname-Firstname-OrgDraft.doc”)

11. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS (October 27)


12. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS (November 3)


13. TECHNOLOGY (November 10)


November 14: 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.