This class is open to Ph.D. students in Political Science. Others can enroll, with the permission of the instructor, as space permits. The prerequisite is statistics up to the level of PS 200C, or the equivalent. At least one year of introductory (undergraduate) economics is strongly recommended.

There are two parts to this course – a reading/discussion part, and a data analysis part. The readings are designed to introduce you to some prominent debates on the political economy of development, both old (modernization theory, dependency theory) and new (on democracy, economic growth, inequality, poverty, civil war, and government performance). All of the readings are required.

You must do five out of nine possible weekly assignments. You may work in pairs. The assignments are due at noon on Mondays, before class. Please place one hard copy under my door; I will not accept electronic copies.

The class will be divided into two 80-minutes halves. In the first half, we will have a brief summary (two to three minutes), from each student, of their reactions to the readings, along with any questions they wish to raise for discussion. This will usually be followed by a short lecture and discussion. In the second half, a pair of students will present their findings from the assignment; a discussant will then comment on the presentation. I will randomly assign presentation duties, and discussant duties, the prior week.

Grades will be based on the five assignments (each worth 15 percent of your grade) and class participation (worth 25 percent).

All the readings are available either on the web (mostly via JSTOR, various journal websites, or the personal home pages of the authors), or through PDF files that are posted on the course web page.
Introduction to the course
Please read the Achen article prior to class. You can skim pp 425-435, but read the rest carefully. Bear in mind that Achen is one of our discipline’s top methodologists.


January 14

Reading: Modernization Theory
This week we will read the work of some of the most important early scholars who studied the politics of non-Western states. We can only sample Weber’s sprawling insights into pre-modern societies; this excerpt is perhaps his most influential, and forms the basis of what we mean when we discuss a ‘Weberian bureaucracy’ or a ‘Weberian state. McClelland and Deutsch were considered pathbreaking scholars in the 1950s and 1960s, in applying social science to the problems of the developing world. And the Huntington article encapsulates the central argument in his seminal book, which was a critique of modernization theory and is one of the key books in the field.

Among the questions you should bear in mind while reading are: what were these scholars trying to explain? What were their independent and dependent variables? What type of evidence did they use? Were there important variables they overlooked?


Assignment: Describe Economic Performance by Region
Examine the six major regions in the developing world (Africa, Latin America, Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia), between 1970 and 2005, using data from the World Development Indicators. Describe which regions
performed well, and which poorly, along whatever you believe are the most salient dimensions. How did performances change over time? You should a) summarize the important dimensions of these economies in both table and graph forms, and b) in a short essay (three-five pages) explain the most salient features in your comparisons. The group with the best figure or graph – that which explains the most with the least – will win a prize.

January 28

Readings: Dependency Theory
These readings constitute a brief introduction to dependency theory, which was influential in the 1960s and 1970s in political science, and which is still predominant in many universities in Europe and the non-Western world, and in the US, in other academic disciplines (notably anthropology). Think carefully about the merits of this neo-Marxist approach to development. Did it correctly diagnose the problems of the developing world? How did the arguments change over time? Why did dependency theory die out in political science in the US but live on elsewhere? In addition to the readings, you may find it helpful to explore other material on dependency theory – on the web, in various encyclopedias, or in other readings.


Assignment: Design a Test of Dependency Theory
Identify what you believe are the one or two most important hypotheses at the core of dependency theory; then write a model, and describe a series of cross-national estimations, that would test these hypotheses. You are not expected to carry out the actual tests, but to tell us how – using indicators that are available in the real world – you could confirm or disconfirm the central tenets of dependency theory. Avoid ‘straw men’; instead, try to find hypotheses that advocates of dependency theory would agree with.
Turn in a three-to-five page essay describing the hypotheses, explaining how you derived them, defining your variables, specifying the model, and telling us what results would confirm or falsify dependency theory. Bear in mind the admonitions in the Achen article from the first week.

February 4

Readings: the New Institutional Economics
Perhaps the most influential ‘theory’ of development today is that ‘institutions matter.’ This belief has been strongly influenced by the work of Douglass North, and has become widely accepted among economists. The readings for this week include North’s Nobel address (a good summary of his world view) and one of his most influential articles, plus a summary of recent work, and two quite different efforts to measure and study institutions.

Pay close attention to what these authors mean by “institutions.” Are they all referring to the same institutions? Do they have the same meaning as the “institutions” that political scientists focus on?


Assignment: Using Data to Understand Institutions
Download indicators of institutional quality from at least three different sources. Use tables and figures to compare them along any dimensions you wish. Write a brief essay explaining what these indicators measure, and comparing their utility. How well do they measure institutional quality?

February 11
Readings: Democracy
This week we take a quick look at studies of democracy, focusing on economic factors that seem to make democracy more likely. Readings include Lipset’s classic piece (which represents a 'modernization’ view); a number-crunching exercise from Barro; my own piece on democracy and income from oil; an excerpt from Boix’s powerful study; and an iconoclastic analysis by Acemoglu et al.


Assignment: Country Case Studies of Regime Type
You will be randomly assigned a country. Is the history of regime type, and regime change, in this country more consistent with the Barro, Ross, Boix, or Acemoglu et al. argument? Can you identify additional variables from your case study that should be placed in the Barro or Acemoglu models? Write a brief essay explaining your answers.

February 18 (President’s Day)

Readings: Civil Wars
Since about 2000, the problem of civil war has become one of the most active areas of new research. This week we read the article that started it all (Collier and Hoeffler), and four state-of-the-art contributions.


Assignment: Replicate the Fearon-Laitin Model and Evaluate its Robustness
The model used by Fearon and Laitin to explain civil wars has become highly influential. Find the dataset they use and replicate their main model (i.e., Table 1, Column 1); then evaluate its robustness along several dimensions: model specification, sensitivity to outliers, and sensitivity to other measurements of the key variables. Report your results in a brief essay.

February 25

Readings: Economic Growth
This week we read six articles that serve as an introduction to the study of economic growth, and how economists see the role of the state.


Assignment: Evaluate Prior Research
Create a list of the 10 most important studies, written in the last ten years, on economic growth. Produce a table that compares the studies to each other along whatever dimensions you find salient. Summarize in a paragraph what each study finds about the role of political factors in explaining economic growth. Be sure to include the work of Sala-i-Martin. You may also find Jonathan Temple’s website on economic growth helpful.
March 3

Readings: Poverty
Too often we focus on growth, not poverty alleviation. The essays this week look at a broader set of social indicators, paying special attention to the needs of the poor. Note the debate between those who think democracy matters (Lake and Baum, Blaydes and Kayser), and at least one who does not (Ross). How could this dispute be (peacefully) resolved?


Assignment: Evaluate the validity and completeness of inequality measures
Locate, download, and evaluate the data quality of at least two measures of country-level inequality since 1970. Which of the measures appear to be the most accurate and why? Are they comparable cross-nationally? What is the pattern of missing data? Write a brief essay describing your findings.

March 10

Readings: Government Performance
Recently scholars have turned back to an issue raised by Max Weber: the importance of high-quality government. The essays for this week look at how and why the quality of government varies cross-nationally, and how much this variation really matters. The first four articles address this issue with macro data; the final three use micro data.


Assignment: The final three papers point to a recent trend among younger development economists towards using ‘randomized evaluations’ to assess the effectiveness of government programs. Write a brief paper explaining the rationale for this new approach, and summarizing both its strengths and weaknesses.

March 17

Readings: Geography, Natural Resources, and Colonial Origins
Our final set of readings cover a recent debate over how a cluster of factors – geography, natural resources, colonialism, and institutions – have influenced the development trajectories of non-Western countries.


*Assignment: Adjudicate the Dispute*

Write a brief essay summarizing the debate among these scholars; then design a test – one that would use data that is obtainable – that would give us a better idea if, and how, political institutions matter in producing the variation in economic outcomes that we observe around the world.