

SOSC1300 - The World of Politics

Fall 2021

Tuesdays and Thursdays 15:00-16:20, LTJ

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Office Hours (online or in person): Tuesdays, 16:30-18:00 / by appointment

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Course Description:

The course introduces you to the discipline of Political Science. You will get to know its main subfields (political theory, comparative politics and international relations) and basic concepts and theories that will help you better understand political phenomena. There are no pre-requisites for this course.

Intended Learning Outcomes / Course Objectives:

After taking this course, you should be better equipped to do the following:

- Separate definitions from normative and from empirical claims with regards to politics
- Explain key ideas and issues in Political Science
- Analyze political events and political ideologies using appropriate terminology
- Explain how countries differ in their political structure and how this may influence outcomes such as economic growth, wellbeing, etc.
- Exercise independent and critical judgements in politics, as well as communicate claims and arguments more effectively

Teaching and Learning Activities:

Lectures, in-class discussions, group memo

Important notice: because of the current political and legal situation, and in order to allow students to discuss sensitive topics freely, the lectures will be face-to-face only, and we will not record or distribute them in any way. If a change to this policy will be necessary (e.g. in case of a lockdown), it will be announced in class.

You will, however, have online access to all the power point slides and other course material, and we will try our best to help those who are unable to attend a specific lesson because of quarantine requirements (by offering extra office hours to ask

questions, helping students find others who have taken notes during a lecture, etc). There are two reasons for this rule:

1. **Discussions, asking questions and providing input during class are an important part of the learning process** - both for you and your classmates. We will have in-class discussion sessions where you can share your analysis with your classmates and other forms of participation in every lecture, and there is an in-class mini-exam (see weekly in-class test below) every Thursday after the first two weeks. If you are not sure if you can attend all courses in person, then you might want to consider taking a different course.
2. **We will discuss topics that some people may consider to be politically sensitive.** I want everyone to feel comfortable discussing their views in the classroom in accordance with the principles of [Academic Freedom](#). As it has become increasingly clear that the inherent tension between Academic Freedom as guaranteed in article 137 of Hong Kong's Basic Law and the National Security Law is being resolved in favor of the latter, I do not want to widely share and store conversations taking place in class.

This also means that you should not record parts of or whole classes on your own devices - this would in fact be a violation of university rules and will result in expulsion from the course when discovered.

Textbook:

There will be no textbook used for this class, but some of the material is based on the following textbook. We will post relevant chapters on CANVAS, but they are not required reading and will not be covered in any test:

Robert Garner, Peter Ferdinand and Stephanie Lawson (2016): Introduction to Politics (3rd edition), Oxford: Oxford University Press. [JA71 .G376 2016]

There will be short texts written by famous Political (or Social) Scientists posted on CANVAS. You only need to read the pages indicated in this syllabus. These texts may not always be easy to understand, but do read them before coming to class. We will discuss them in class as well, and they will be covered in the tests. You may also be assigned to read short newspaper articles or editorials about current events – these will be announced in class and are not yet on the syllabus.

Assessments:

Weekly in-class tests (40%): Because of the possibility of a lockdown, we will have neither a midterm nor a final exam. Instead, starting with week 3, we will have small in-class tests on CANVAS that check your understanding of the material covered in the week before. These roughly 10 weekly tests will each make up about 4% of your grade. These exams are open-book, but you will have limited time to look up your answer and are not allowed to cooperate with other students.

Suggesting exam questions (10%): you will twice be asked to come up with one multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank question for the material covered in the previous week.

In-class participation (10%): You can ask questions by raising your hand, posting the question on the Q&A forum about substance on CANVAS or sending me an e-mail (but only if you feel that your question is sensitive). I may also ask questions and you can volunteer to answer. At the end of class, we will assign a participation score according to the quantity and quality of these in-class contributions. Note that questions about the logistics of the course (“when do we have to turn in this assignment?”) do not count.

Relating concepts to events in a country/region of your choice (10%): Starting with week 3, you will be expected to select a government for which you will become specialist (this can be a national or a subnational government, such as Hong Kong). You should follow political events in this country or region by reading the news. Every week, you should post on CANVAS links to two news stories that you find interesting and indicate at least one concept discussed in class that is relevant to each story. Possible sources could be the online versions of newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *South China Morning Post*, *The Financial Times*, *The Washington Post*, or *The Economist*, or local newspapers (preferably in English or Chinese).

Memo (30%) on the government of your choice (group project): You will form a group with some of the other people who have selected the same country/region as experts. The group submit a four-page memo. Topic: What the biggest problem facing the country/region that you have selected? Using what you’ve learned in class, how would you analyze and solve the problem?

Bonus points (+5%): For many sessions, you will be expected to have read a short text posted on CANVAS. For those readings, I will pose several (multiple choice / fill the blank) questions during class. Answering most of these questions correctly can earn you bonus points.

Course Schedule

Note that this is preliminary and may change depending on the final enrollment in class and on how interested students are in participating in in-class debates

1. September 2nd: Introduction, course logistics

Assignments: none

Part 1: Political Theory

2. September 7th: Definitions: What is politics? How is it different from political science? What is the difference between definitions, empirical claims and normative claims?

Readings:

1. Max Weber: "Politics as vocation", Chapter 7 from Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society, ed. By Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters. Palgrave Macmillan (2015), pages 8-11

Additional resources:

2. Garner et al (2016): "Introduction"

3. September 9th: The basic concepts: politics, state, power

Readings:

1. Max Weber: "Politics as vocation", Chapter 7 from Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society, ed. By Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters. Palgrave Macmillan. (2015), pages 12-13, 79-85, 94-99

Additional resources:

2. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 2, pages 48-62 (top few lines)

4. September 14th (end of add/drop period): Power and Legitimacy

5. September 16th: Could we ever agree on what is right, or what the state should do with its power? (Normative political theory)

Assignments: decide which country/region you would like to become an expert on (submit three choices on CANVAS)

Group 1: submit mini-exam question

Readings:

1. Daniel McDermott: "Analytical Political Philosophy", in David Leopold & Marc Stears (eds.), Political Theory: Methods and Approaches. Oxford University Press (2008), pages 11-15 (third paragraph), pages 18-21, pages 24-27.

Additional resources:

2. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 1, pages 27– 42

6. September 21st: Social Contract Theory: Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Rawls

Assignments: You should now know the country/region that you will be an expert on for this class. From now on, you will be expected to post two news links on the country you've selected every week.

7. September 23rd: Democracy: an introduction

Assignments:

Post your first two news links related to concepts discussed in class.

Group 2: submit mini-exam question

- 1st in-class test

Readings:

1. Adam Przeworski: 'Minimalist conception of democracy: a defense', in Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordon (eds), *Democracy's Value*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1999), pages 23-27 and 43-50 (In defense of minimalism)

Additional resources:

2. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 3, pages 68-83.

8. September 28th: Democracy: a rational choice argument

Readings:

1. Interview of Adam Przeworski in Washington Times
2. Ziblatt and Levitsky's Op-Ed in the New York Times: Why Republicans play dirty.

Additional resources:

3. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 4

9. September 30th: Representative vs Direct Democracy

Assignments:

Submit two news links about "your" country/region related to your country and concepts discussed in class

Group 3: submit mini-exam question

- 2nd in-class test

10. October 5th: Liberalism: rights and freedom

Readings:

1. Mill, J. S. [1859] (2001). On liberty. Batoche Books, Kitchener, pages 18-23 (first paragraph), 34-36, 49-53.

Additional resources:

1. Franziska Keller (2020): “‘Appropriating’ Democracy: a Comparison between Argumentative Strategies for Confucian and Islamic Democracy’ in Journal of Intercultural Studies 41 (2), 180-196.

Part 2: Comparative Politics

11. October 7th: Institutions and State

Assignments: submit two news links about “your” country/region related to your country and concepts discussed in class

Group 4: submit mini-exam question

- 3rd in-class test

Readings:

1. Benedict Anderson (1991). Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. Verso Books, pages 5-7, 9-15, 19-21, 32-36

12. October 12th: Separation of Powers

Additional resources

1. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 7
2. Stephan Ortmann (2020): Hong Kong’s Constructive Identity and Political Participation: Resisting China’s Blind Nationalism

October 14th: Chung Yeung Festival

Assignments: Group 5: submit mini-exam question

Assignments: submit two news links about “your” country/region related to your country and concepts discussed in class

Find your group members and discuss what you consider to be “your” government’s biggest problem. Submit it to me for feedback.

13. October 19th: The state and separation of powers

- 4th in-class test

Readings:

1. Charles De Montesquieu: The Spirit of the Laws. Cambridge University Press, 1989, pages 156-161

Additional resources

2. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 8, pages 185-191 (top two lines), 194-199.

14. October 21st: Federalism and the Judiciary, laws and the constitutions

Assignments: submit two news links about “your” country/region related to your country and concepts discussed in class

Group 1: submit mini-exam question

- 5th in-class test

Readings:

1. David Law: What really is separation of powers?
<https://www.hkcnews.com/article/33645/david-law-separation-of-powers-%E5%8A%89%E5%B2%B1%E5%81%89-33645/what-really-is-separation-of-powers>

15. October 26th: The Legislature and Electoral Systems

Additional resources:

1. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 9

16. October 28th: The Legislature and Electoral Systems, continued

Assignments: submit two news links about “your” country/region related to your country and concepts discussed in class

Group 2: submit mini-exam question

- 6th in-class test

Additional resources:

1. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 9

17. November 2nd: The Executive: The head of state

Readings:

1. Jose Cheibub: Systems of Government: Parliamentarism and Presidentialism
https://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/stm103%20articles/Cheibub_Pres_Parlt.pdf

Additional resources:

2. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 11, pages 249-256.

18. November 4th: The Executive: The bureaucracy, policy studies and governance

Assignments: discuss my feedback on “your” government’s problem with your group members. Find one solution to the problem and submit this to me for feedback.

Group 3: submit mini-exam question

- 7th in-class test

Readings:

1. Michael Lipsky (1983). Street-Level Bureaucracy: The Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service. Russell Sage Foundation, pages xi-xvi, 4-12.

19. November 9th: Political parties

Readings:

1. Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan: “Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments: and introduction” in Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan (eds): Party Systems and Voter Alignments: cross-national perspectives. New York: Free Press, 1967, pages 1-5, 14, 50.

Additional resources:

1. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 10, pages 228-241.

20. November 11th: Political parties (and other “democratic” institutions) in authoritarian regimes

Assignments: submit two news links about “your” country/region related to your country and concepts discussed in class

Group 4: submit mini-exam question

- 8th in-class test

Readings:

1. Beatriz Magaloni and Ruth Kricheli. 2010. ‘Political Order and One-Party Rule’. Annual Review of Political Science 13: 123-130.

21. November 16th: Civil society: social movements and revolutions

Readings:

1. Joshua Tucker (2007). Enough! Electoral fraud, collective action problems, and post-communist colored revolutions. Perspectives on Politics, 5(03), 535-543.

Additional resources:

2. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 12, pages 273-283.

22. November 18th: Civil society, interest groups and the media

Group 5: submit mini-exam question

- 9th in-class test

Additional resources:

1. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 12, pages 273-283.

Part 3: International Relations

23. November 23rd: Security and insecurity

Additional resources:

1. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 17, pages 380-388, 392-396

22. November 25th: International organizations in global politics

- 10th in class test

Additional resources:

1. Garner et al (2016): Chapter 19

23. November 30th: wrap-up / reserve

Assignments: submit the four-page group memo about “your” government’s biggest problem and how you propose to solve it.

December 1-3rd: individual group meetings to discuss the memo

December 6th: submit group memo incorporating feedback received