Political Science 862: Graduate Seminar
State and Society in Comparative Perspective

Objectives

This course examines a variety of approaches to understanding state-society interactions and how state and society constitute one another. The course examines problems of state building, state strength/weakness, clientelism, problems of governance, creating state-society synergies, and the role of institutions in preventing state collapse, promoting growth and equality and providing services. It also looks at societal influences on regime change and problems with the persistence of authoritarianism. It reviews a range of approaches to the study of civil society, social movements, transnational social movements, ethnic and religious based mobilization, as well as gender and class based approaches to state-society relations. The course builds on longstanding debates regarding these topics as well as current debates.

The goal of this class is 1) to familiarize oneself with key debates and authors in the subfield of comparative politics as they relate to state-society relations; 2) to learn how to evaluate, critically engage, and build on existing scholarship; 3) to explore problems of research design, methods, evidence, writing style, and other elements of research and writing; and 4) to consider what constitutes an interesting research question.

Requirements

Participation: Participation in the class discussion is critical to being engaged in the course.

You should come to class every week prepared to discuss the readings:

- What is useful about this week’s approaches?
- What are some of the dilemmas raised by these approaches?
- Are there problems with the use of evidence, selection of variables, use of comparison, overgeneralization, lack of historical reference or contextualization, etc.?
- What are the consequences of adopting one approach, methodology, or theory over another?
- What other questions do the readings raise?

All participants in the discussion have the responsibility to do the required readings for the week.

Leading class discussion: One student will be assigned responsibility to lead the discussion on each week’s readings, reflect critically on the readings, evaluate the approaches adopted, and be prepared with questions. All written commentary will be posted on the course wiki (http://sites.google.com/site/ps862coursewiki/). The discussion leaders can help get the wiki started by contributing to questions I-V. The rest of the class can then add to this text or modify it and add critiques in section VI. The leader’s commentary can be roughly 1,500-2,000 words and should be posted on the wiki by Monday 8 am of the week you are leading the discussion.

The discussion leader should meet with Aili to plan the seminar ahead of time. In your presentation, which should be no longer than 15 minutes, you should select a few
issues/problems/questions to orient your comments. It is tempting to try to deal with all of the
points raised in the readings, but this will be too broad of an agenda. Remember, the purpose of
your presentation is to introduce a discussion and provide an agenda that will facilitate a
coherent and focused discussion, not to provide the final word on every conceivable topic relating
the readings. Some summary of the material in the required reading may be necessary to refresh
people’s minds and orient the discussion, but your presentation should not contain a long and
elaborate capitulation of the readings. You should assume that everyone in the class has read all
the required readings for the week.

Commentary: All written commentary will be posted on the course wiki
(http://sites.google.com/site/ps862coursewiki/). Students should post their contributions no later
than Monday 4 pm. The later you post, the harder it will be to come up with new things to say, so
post early. Eight (8) such roughly 500-700 word wiki entries are required. You may edit the
postings of other individuals but do so judiciously and in the spirit of improving what is there for
the benefit of all. The goal is to end up with a somewhat coherent non-repetitious summary and
critique of the readings. Less is often more and quality matters, so there is no need to outdo your
fellow students in quantity of output. You may add other categories.

Research paper: One major research paper is required. The paper will provide you with an
opportunity to explore in greater depth a substantive area of debate within state-society relations
and to begin working on a research agenda which links the central issues in the debate to
empirical research. A paper proposal in abstract form will be due in advance. Your paper
(excluding bibliographic references) should be about 20 pages in length, double-spaced with one-
inch margins (note the earlyish deadline). See website wiki for additional suggestions regarding
the paper. Coming up with an interesting research puzzle will be one of the main goals of this
exercise. It is not necessary for this paper to do primary research nor will such research boost
one’s grade.

Grade Criteria

Participation, including class discussion, wiki contributions (20%); seminar presentation and wiki
contribution for week (10%); wiki commentaries (35%); research paper (35%).

Special Accommodations

People with disabilities will be fully included in this course. Please inform the professor if you
need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessments of this course to
enable you to participate fully. Confidentiality of the shared information will be strictly
maintained. Certain accommodations may require the assistance of the McBurney Disability Office
on campus. The McBurney Disability Center can be reached at (608) 263-2741 or via email at
mcburney@odos.wisc.edu.

Readings

Required articles are linked to the wiki Articles page. If you have already read one of the required
books, then you should read another on the optional reading list. Although it is advisable to
purchase the required books, you may find the cost prohibitive and therefore may want to buy
some and borrow others from the library. The books listed below will be available from the
following places:
  • Somers Social Science Library in the Sewell Social Science Building, 1180 Observatory Dr.
  • Some will be placed in the Dean Reading Room on the 3rd floor of North Hall.
  • University Bookstore for purchase
• Second hand through a website like www.book-cycle.org, amazon.com, cheapesttextbooks.com, abebooks.com, campusbooks.com, bestbookbuys.com, textbooks.com, etc.
• Kindle versions are yet another option for cheaper versions of the books.


**Week 1: Introduction to Course (September 3)**

*How States and Societies Constitute and Transform One Another*


**Optional**


**Week 2: State Building (September 10)**


**Optional**


**Week 3: State Building (September 17)**


**Optional**


Week 4: Problems of Governance: State-Society Pathologies and Synergies (September 24)


Optional


Gilley, Bruce "Legitimacy and Institutional Change," *Comparative Political Studies* March 2008 41: 259-284


Week 5: Why do Countries Democratize and What Makes Democracies Endure (October 1)


Optional


Week 6: Stability and Change in Authoritarian Regimes (October 8)


**Week 7: State Crisis and Collapse (October 15)**


**Optional**


**Week 8: State Strength and Legitimacy (October 22)**


**Week 9: States, Equality and Inclusivity (October 29)**


**Week 10: The State and Modernity (November 5)**


**Week 11: Social Movements (November 12)**


**Optional**


**Week 12: Civil Societies and the State (November 12)**


**Optional**


Ekiert, Grzegorz and Jan Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society*, University of Michigan Press, 1999


**Week 13: Divided Societies and States: Gender (November 26)**


**Optional**


**Week 14: Divided Societies and States: Ethnicity (December 3)**


**Optional**


**Week 15  Concluding Session (December 10)**