PS 389.202: Historical Political Economy
The University of Michigan. Summer 2021.

Instructor: Htet Thiha Zaw (htzaw@umich.edu)
Weekly Meetings: Mon-Wed-Thurs 12–2 pm EST
Office Hours: Fri 12–2 pm EST or by appointment

Zoom Links: here for online meetings (ID: 957 4552 8977, Password: 990807)
here for office hours (ID: 997 5284 8086, Password: 884854)

Description
How did states emerge throughout history? What legacies did colonial rule leave for political and economic development in former colonies? How did political events shape human behavior in the long run?

Historical political economy (HPE) is a thriving inter-disciplinary field that investigates such questions by bringing together elements from economics, history, and political science. It also answers the questions with original quantitative data built from archival resources, qualitative case knowledge, and causal inference econometrics. Rather than focusing on short-term causes and outcomes, it allows researchers to understand how the variations in important political and economic outcomes have their roots in history or to understand today’s important questions by going back to history.

We will start our first week with an introduction to HPE, discussing the field’s history, present state, and important concepts such as persistence and path dependence. In the following weeks, we will cover both substantive topics and methods topics for research in HPE. The latter will give you some insights into different stages of research in the field; this will be especially useful for those who are planning to write a research proposal in this course (see “Assignments”) and in the future.

After the introduction week, we will delve into the history of state development, investigating its origins and evolution over time as well as their consequences for later development. We will first focus on the rise of states in Europe and try to understand its divergence from the rest of the world in economic and political power throughout the latter half of the second millennium. We will then move outside Europe to better understand how states developed in vastly different contexts such as the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia; this serves as a corrective for an often-missing narrative about state development outside Europe and their legacies during colonial rule or even after independence.

As the previous section serves as an important reminder of how pre-colonial state development may persist or interact with colonization, we will delve into the history of colonialism and its consequences on later developmental outcomes, bringing in examples from Africa, Latin America, and India.

In the following weeks, we will focus on existing HPE findings on five specific outcomes: democratization, inequality, slavery, education, and violence, and political behavior. We will explore
their history and their influence on later development patterns as we see today across and within states around the world. We will also discuss the history of these outcomes in the context of the United States’ history with race throughout the course.

**Learning Goals**

After taking this course, you can expect to:

- Be familiar with research in historical political economy, including seminal studies as well as the frontiers of research.
- Read critically and evaluate research in historical political economy and social science research in general.
- Understand the basics of producing quality political science research with effective arguments and supporting evidence.

**On Zoom**

All sections and office hours are online via Zoom. All sections will be automatically recorded and later shared on Canvas. Passwords are required for all meetings. Please do not share the meeting links and passwords with those outside the class. Please check your canvas announcements for Zoom links to sections and office hours.

Your audio is automatically muted upon entering. If you want to speak up, please use the “Raise Hand” feature to let me know (Instructions on how to use the feature [here](#)). You can also use the chatbox to share your questions and comments.

**Recordings**

As with the lecture, the synchronous online meetings will be audio/video recorded and made available to all students in this course (and only students in this course) via Canvas, under “Modules,” along with lecture slides. As part of your regular course participation, you may be recorded. If you do not want to be recorded, then please contact me during the first week of the semester to discuss an alternative arrangement.

Please do not record or distribute any class activity, including the synchronous online meetings and the pre-recorded lectures, without explicit written permission from me, except as necessary as part of the approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student’s own private use.

**Office Hours and Email Policy**

The best way to get in touch with me is via office hours. My office hours are on Fridays 12–2 pm EST via Zoom. If you cannot make it to office hours due to a class conflict or another unavoidable circumstance, please contact me for an appointment. I will do my best to accommodate.
If you cannot come to office hours, email is the best way to contact me with quick questions. I will do my best to respond to your emails within 24 hours, from 9 am - 5 pm EST Monday through Friday. If I have not responded within 24 hours, please send a follow-up. An email sent to me at 5:01 pm EST on Friday can expect a response by 5:00 pm EST Monday. All emails should begin the subject line with [POLSCI389].

**Canvas**

I will use Canvas announcements to communicate with you regularly. This is in addition to the course canvas site. It is your responsibility to keep up with these updates.

**Grading**

Grading will be distributed as follows:

- **Attendance and Participation** (20 percent)
- **Perusall readings** (25 percent)
- **Final Research Proposal** (55 percent)
  - Research Question (5 percent)
  - Literature Review (10 percent)
  - 5-minute Presentation (10 percent)
  - Proposal Draft (10 percent)
  - Final Proposal (20 percent)

**Attendance and Participation (20 percent)**

Attendance in the section is mandatory because it gives our class a chance to discuss the readings and share our thoughts from diverse viewpoints. *You have three unexcused absences.* You are responsible for any material you miss due to an unexcused absence; office hours do not replace sections missed due to unexcused absences. A note from a doctor or some other person of authority (documenting a family emergency or medical attention for an illness) is suggested (but not required) for an excused absence. Students with family responsibilities, athletic commitments, or religious conflicts should discuss those with me as soon as possible. Any further absences will halve your section grade.

There will be one quiz during each section, based on the required readings for the day. Grading is on a participation basis (no/full credit), and the questions cover basic facts about the arguments, data, and findings. These quizzes will also serve as a jumping-off point for discussion.

While video presence is encouraged for an engaging discussion, it is not required. We will also adjust this policy after a few sections if needed. If you are unavailable to attend sections for reasons other than above (or if you plan to take the course asynchronously), please contact me in advance so that we can try to make other arrangements.
Perusall readings (25 percent)

Reading is the key ingredient in this course for us to actively participate in the course and meet the learning goals. Each week, you can expect to spend 4-8 hours on the readings (around 4 for most of the week, including recommended readings). A reading load not so different from graduate program seminars should not only improve your skills to critically engage with readings but also your ability to handle situations with a substantial reading load (be it grad school or workplace).

Throughout the course, we will use Perusall, which automatically evaluates your understanding and comprehension of the reading based on the criteria that I have set (1-3 points for each assignment). While many factors go into the evaluation algorithm, you should receive full credit for each reading assignment if you adhere to the following points:

- Read the assignment before the deadline.
- Carefully read (not just scan) the required reading.
- Provide at least three substantive annotations.
- Respond to at least one comment.

All the Perusall assignments in the first week are on a participation basis, meaning you will get full credit for them as long as you open and read through the assignments. You are, however, encouraged to read through them before the section and share your thoughts and comments. The same rules apply to recommended readings. Starting from the week of July 5, you need to do the two required Perusall assignments for each section; only the better score among the two readings will be counted. They are due at midnight before we meet for the class (11:59 p.m. EST); they will, however, be available to be completed for the next day. This will give me sufficient time to read through the comments and engage with them in class. (If you want to learn more about Perusall, you can do so here.)

Additionally, if you are not familiar with statistical analyses (e.g., regressions), you do not need to read and understand the details as long as you grasp the main findings (usually available from the introduction and conclusion).

Final Research Proposal (55 percent)

Each student will write a research proposal related to historical political economy (10-15 pages long, double-spaced, 12-pt font, and 1-inch margins). I strongly encourage you to work on the topic that you find to be of the most interest. This Research Proposal may form the basis of a research paper, an honors thesis, or even a bigger project if you decide to pursue a career in research.

Ideally, you will identify a puzzle that derives from one or more of the course readings. If you want, then you may co-author your paper with up to two other classmates. Each co-author will receive the same grade for each assignment under this project.

The paper will be completed in five parts. The first three parts will be a draft of the paper’s front end, including the motivation and/or puzzle, a review of the relevant literature, your argument,
and a description of your proposed data and empirical strategy. The last two parts will strengthen the ideas and eventually produce the final draft.

The components for this project are as follows. All components are due by 11:59 p.m. EST. Unless otherwise specified, all assignments should be formatted as a double-spaced, 12-pt font document with 1-inch margins.

Research Question (5 percent, due Jul 18, 2021): Based on our discussion about writing a research question on July 8, write two research questions that are of interest to you (maximum 150 words each for each stating the research question and elaborating the relevant ideas). In the following week, we will chat over an office hour appointment, and I will share my thoughts about which one sounds more promising and feasible for the final Proposal. Here we will also discuss the readings that will be useful for your next assignment (four minimum).

Literature Review (10 percent, due Jul 25, 2021): Here, you will write a 2–3-page literature review, where you detail the existing research and findings that are relevant to your question and explain the new knowledge or insights you can gain from the project. You will use this assignment as a basis for the presentation assignment.

5-minute Presentation (10 percent, due during class either Jul 29 or Aug 2, 2021): This is the presentation version of the previous assignment, with more explanation on your plan. On either of the days, you will give a 5-minute presentation, followed by 5 minutes of a Q&A session. You should have a maximum of three slides: the first detailing the research question and the project, the second providing a brief overview of the literature, and the third describing the next steps that you plan to take (data, methodology, etc.) You do not need to take all of these steps in the final project. I will explain more about this in due course.

Proposal Draft (10 percent, due Aug 8, 2021): The proposal draft is the version you have of the final Proposal so far. This will give me an opportunity to have a look at it and provide final feedback. In this week, we will chat over an office hour appointment, where we will go over the draft and discuss the improvements we can make at this point.

Final Proposal (20 percent, due Aug 17, 2021): Final Proposal is due on August 17. Please make sure that you follow the format specifications before uploading it to Canvas.

(Note: I may update the syllabus with additional readings for substantive content and Proposal prep, but none of them will be required. I will cover their key ideas during the sections.)
Course Timeline

**June 30**

Introduction to Historical Political Economy

**Required Readings**

PS 389.2 Course Syllabus.

Gailmard, Sean. “What are we doing in Historical Political Economy?” In *Broadstreet*, 2021. (Link [here](#))


**July 1**

Triumphs and Challenges of HPE

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**July 5**

No Class. Independence Day Holiday.

**July 7**

The Emergence of States in Europe

**Required Readings**


Recommended Readings


**July 8**

**The Great Divergence**

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


**July 12**

**State Development Outside Europe**

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


July 14

**Colonialism and Pre-colonial History**

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


July 15

**Proposal Prep: Research Question and Literature Review**

Required Readings


July 18

Final Research Proposal: Research Question Due.
July 19  
State-building under Colonialism

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


July 21  
Legacies of Colonialism

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


July 22  
Proposal Prep: Data Collection

**Required Readings**


**July 25**
Final Research Proposal: Literature Review Due.

**July 26**
**Democracy and Its Struggles**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**July 28**
**Inequality and Redistribution**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**

July 29 5-minute Presentation Day 1.

August 2 5-minute Presentation Day 2.

August 4 **Origins of Slavery**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


August 5 **Persistent Effects of Slavery**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


August 8  Final Research Proposal: Proposal Draft Due.

August 9  The Rise of Mass Education

Required Readings

Recommended Readings

August 11  Education in the United States

Required Readings

Recommended Readings
August 12  

**Violence and Repression**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


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August 16  

**Political Behavior**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


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August 17  

**Final Research Proposal: Final Proposal Due.**