Course description

This course examines key political issues in contemporary societies through engaging with a mix of classical and contemporary social and political thought. Note that this is not a standard course in Political Sociology. Rather than giving you an overview of authoritative texts about political institutions, organizations, and processes, I organized the course around some salient features of the current political moment related to state sovereignty, capitalism, and violence. The course is organized in two parts: The first part examines ideas and concepts around ‘the state’ and ‘politics;’ and the second part is dedicated ‘the economy’ and capitalism, and how these relate to contemporary political issues. Some of the questions we will discuss revolve around: The resurgence of concerns about state sovereignty vis à vis a globalized and networked economy; the relationships between economic crises and the resurgence of nationalisms; the renewed visibility of race and racisms in global politics; shifting understandings of citizenship; the legacies of violence on which modern political and economic orders have been built and the ways in which this matters for (understanding) the present; and finally, possibilities of imagining different economic and political organization.

Learning objectives

Through this course, you should gain core research skills related to understanding and using theory:

- Knowledge and understanding: By the end of this course, you should have an appreciation of how salient features of contemporary political issues are tied to larger
processes of social transformation which sometimes stretch deep into the past; as well as an understanding of major lines of social thought on these issues and how they have developed over time. (Wherever possible, I combine contemporary pieces with ‘classical’ texts to help you construct a mental map of intellectual traditions and lines of thought.)

• **Conceptual skills**: One of the main things I hope this course will accomplish is for you to learn how to think about your own research in relation to some of the biggest questions social and political theorists have asked about politics. Your own research, no matter how ‘small’ the question is, is always part of a bigger picture – understanding how so, and training you to bridge the scales between the puzzle piece you’re working on and that bigger picture is what this course is centrally about.

• **Technical skills**: Finally, I designed the assignments to train you in some basic technical skills related to understanding, evaluating, using, and modifying theory.

### Expectations & assignments

I expect you to read the texts listed under “required readings” and to complete the assignments. The reading workload amounts to about half a book (3–4 chapters or articles) per week. In addition, there are 4 grade components:

• **Reading group**: At the beginning of the term, I will split you up into reading groups of 2–3 and you will meet ahead of each week’s meeting for about 30–60 minutes to prepare the readings and submit a summary of the readings in a structured form. The purpose of this assignment is twofold: on the one hand, it is supposed to address the sense of isolation that is permeating our everyday pandemic lives. Virtual reading groups are an imperfect way to mimic ‘normal’ grad school life, but at least you’ll be able to vent about how awful this pandemic is with people who are in the same boat. On the other hand, the weekly summaries will teach you technical research skills related to understanding, evaluating, using, and modifying theory. Each week, you will document your engagement with the texts you read in this course in a structured format. You will complete one journal entry for each text I assign. Each journal entry is very brief—max. 1 page per text (single-spaced), bullet points for the first section are ok. In your group meetings, you will compare notes, and submit one summary for the entire group (you may wish to rotate note-taking each week). I will grade the assignment on a pass/fail basis (i.e. if you submit it you’ll get full points). The summary should capture the architecture of the author’s argument. It should have the following structure (which social scientists usually use to evaluate arguments):

1. **Main claim**: What’s the author’s main claim? How does the author arrive at their claim?
2. **New concepts**: What new concepts and terms does the author develop? Name and define them, and state how they relate to the author’s main claim. Only record the concepts that the author coins, not concepts they use in order to develop their theory/argument.


4. **Research application**: Discuss in your group how your research relates to the questions the author poses. Did the author develop concepts which could be useful for your own research, and if so, how would they help understanding some aspect of your research topic? Record briefly for each group member in 1–2 sentences.

5. **Open questions**: The last point is dedicated to everything you’d like to discuss in class. For example: What open questions did you have after reading the text? What would you like me to explain in more detail? What disagreements did you have during group discussions? How did the text make you think differently about the topic? What are your critiques?

- **Presentation**: You will analyze a contemporary issue (ideally related to your research) through the lens of one of the readings we discuss that week. You have the choice of holding the presentation in class or pre-recording it so we can listen to it during our in-class discussion.
- **Paper outline**: To prepare your final paper, you will submit an outline which sketches your argument. The purpose of this assignment is to get feedback and have the chance to strengthen your paper before submitting it. Your final paper should be related to your own research, and it can have a format which is most helpful to your own project; for example, but not limited to: a draft for a dissertation proposal, a grant proposal, a dissertation chapter, a presentation script, or a journal article. Come see me during office hours and I’ll give you feedback on your ideas.
- **Final paper** (15–20 pages, double-spaced): Integrating the feedback on your paper outline, your final essay will develop aspects of your own research in relation to one or more of the theoretical perspectives you’ve learned about in this course.

**Remote course format**

We will meet synchronously during the allotted time slots via Zoom. I’ll record our meetings and post them on onQ for those who can’t make it. If you are in a different time zone and this poses difficulties to complete any component of the course, or if you are facing any other difficulties related to the remote format of the course, please reach out to me and we’ll figure something out.
Grading, submission & deadlines

All written assignments have to be submitted through onQ. See onQ calendar for assignment due dates. Grading and weights are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade component</th>
<th>Due dates</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading group</td>
<td>weeks 2–12</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>weeks 3–12</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline</td>
<td>week 10</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>week 13</td>
<td>35%</td>
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For your final grade, your numerical course average then will be converted to a letter grade according to the Queen’s Official Grade Conversion Scale.

Readings and resources

I will distribute a course pack in the first session of this course. Note that this material is copyrighted and is for the sole use of students registered in the course. This material shall not be distributed or disseminated to anyone other than students registered in the course. Failure to abide by these conditions is a breach of copyright, and may also constitute a breach of academic integrity under the University Senate’s Academic Integrity Policy Statement.

Academic Integrity

Queen’s students, faculty, administrators and staff all have responsibilities for supporting and upholding the fundamental values of academic integrity. Academic integrity is constituted by the five core fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility (see www.academicintegrity.org) and by the quality of courage. These values and qualities are central to the building, nurturing and sustaining of an academic community in which all members of the community will thrive. Adherence to the values expressed through academic integrity forms a foundation for the “freedom of inquiry and exchange of ideas” essential to the intellectual life of the University.

Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with and adhering to the regulations concerning academic integrity. General information on academic integrity is available at Integrity@Queen’s University, along with Faculty or School specific information. Departures from academic integrity include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, use of unauthorized materials, facilitation, forgery and falsification. Actions which contravene the regulation on academic integrity carry sanctions that can range from a warning, to
loss of grades on an assignment, to failure of a course, to requirement to withdraw from the university.

**Accommodation for disabilities**

Queen’s University is committed to achieving full accessibility for people with disabilities. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. If you are a student with a disability and think you may need accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact the Queen’s Student Accessibility Services (QSAS) and register as early as possible. For more information, including important deadlines, please visit the QSAS website.
# Course schedule & readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan 12</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>⋆</td>
<td>⋆ ⋆ ⋆</td>
<td><strong>Part I: State, Sovereignty, Violence</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jan 19</td>
<td>State, authority, sovereignty</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jan 26</td>
<td>Race, gender, sovereignty</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Feb 2</td>
<td>Making people and things legible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Feb 9</td>
<td>Unsettling sovereignty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Feb 16</td>
<td>Reading week</td>
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<tr>
<td>⋆</td>
<td>⋆ ⋆ ⋆</td>
<td><strong>Part II: Capitalism, Nationalism, Violence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Feb 23</td>
<td>Racial capitalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mar 2</td>
<td>Carceral capitalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mar 9</td>
<td>Economic crises &amp; nationalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mar 16</td>
<td>White nationalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mar 23</td>
<td>Economies of worth</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mar 30</td>
<td>Surviving capitalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Apr 6</td>
<td>Wrap-up</td>
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</tbody>
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**Jan 12: Introduction**

No readings.

**Jan 19: State, authority, sovereignty**

Jan 26: Race, gender, sovereignty


Feb 2: Making people and things legible


Feb 9: Unsettling sovereignty


Feb 16: Reading week

No class.

Feb 23: Racial capitalism

Mar 2: Carceral capitalism

- Watch Ava DuVernay’s documentary “13th” (available on Netflix).

Mar 9: Economic crises & nationalism


Mar 16: White nationalism


Mar 23: Economies of worth

Mar 30: Surviving capitalism


Apr 6: Wrap-up

No readings.