Political Sociology

Thursdays 2.30-5.30, Kingston 304

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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 one book per week. In addition, there are 4 grade components:

- **Weekly research journal**: The purpose of this assignment is to 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. I will grade the assignment on a pass/fail basis. You will structure it according to the following template which has two sections:

  1. **Summary section**: In this section, you note down the architecture of the author’s argument. You have to structure it according to the following points (which social scientists usually use to evaluate arguments):
     - What’s the author’s main claim? How does the author arrive at their claim?
     - What new concepts and terms does the author develop? Name and define them, and state how they relate to the author’s main claim.
     - What kind of evidence does the author present to convince us of their claim?
     - The last point is dedicated to everything else you’ve thought of while reading the text: What kinds of questions did you have while reading the text? What didn’t you understand? How did the text make you think differently about the topic? What are your critiques? Etc.

  2. **Research section**: Here is where you briefly relate the text to your research topic. Here are some examples of questions you might want to think about: How
does your research relate 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?

• “In the news:” You will prepare materials (e.g. news clippings) on a contemporary issue to illustrate one of the readings we discuss that week, and prepare 5 questions for our in-class discussion. The idea here is that it’s always easier to think through examples, so we’ll use the news event to start talking about the readings of the week.
• Participation: This is a graduate course and how much you will get out of it depends a lot on how much you put into it. I will grade how well you are prepared and whether you make a genuine effort to contribute to the collective learning process in our in-class discussions.
• Final essay (20 pages, double-spaced): For your final essay, you will develop one aspect of your own research in relation to one or more of the theoretical perspectives you’ve learned about in this course. Come see me during office hours and I’ll give you feedback on your ideas.

Grading, submission & deadlines

All written assignments have to be submitted through onQ. Grading and due dates are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade component</th>
<th>Due dates</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research journal</td>
<td>weeks 2–12</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation &amp; discussion</td>
<td>weeks 3–12</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>weeks 2–12</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final essay</td>
<td>week 14</td>
<td>40%</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 9</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>* * *</td>
<td><strong>Part I: State, Sovereignty, Citizenship</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jan 16</td>
<td>State, authority, sovereignty</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jan 23</td>
<td>Territory &amp; sovereignty</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jan 30</td>
<td>Race, gender &amp; sovereignty</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Feb 6</td>
<td>Making people &amp; things legible</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Feb 13</td>
<td>State, culture, citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Feb 20</td>
<td>Reading week</td>
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<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>* * *</td>
<td><strong>Part II: Capitalism, Inequality, Nationalism</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Feb 27</td>
<td>Primitive accumulation &amp; violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mar 5</td>
<td>Legacies of violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mar 12</td>
<td>Economies of worth</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mar 19</td>
<td>Economic crises &amp; nationalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mar 26</td>
<td>White supremacy &amp; white nationalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Apr 2</td>
<td>Surviving capitalism</td>
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</tbody>
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### Jan 9: Introduction

No readings.

### Jan 16: State, authority, sovereignty

Jan 23: Territory & sovereignty


Jan 30: Race, gender & sovereignty


Feb 6: Making people & things legible


Feb 13: State, culture, citizenship


Feb 20: Reading week

No class.
**Feb 27: Primitive accumulation & violence**


**Mar 5: Legacies of violence**

- We’ll watch and discuss Ava DuVernay’s documentary “13th” in class.

**Mar 12: Economies of worth**


**Mar 19: Economic crises & nationalism**

Mar 26: White supremacy & white nationalism


Apr 2: Surviving capitalism


An eclectic selection of relevant books which couldn’t make it into this syllabus

• Mezzadra, Sandro and Brett Neilson (2013). Border as method, or, the multiplication of labor. Durham: Duke University Press.