Political Palm Reading – Identity and Political Development

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Session 4: July 19th - July 25th
Class location: TBD
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Course Description

Welcome to Political Palm Reading! Political identity is one of the most controversial areas of political discourse, and at the same time, it is central to how we think, act, and respond to others. There are many ways of investigating national identity – structures and institutions; personal leadership; and race, ethnicity, and creed, to name a few. One of the major problems when studying political identity is that these terms are “slippery” and it is often hard to understand what they mean. In the policy realm, without understanding the structures that cultivate and contribute to a people’s or a nation’s political identity, political solutions can fail. While personal identity is determined by our collective words and actions, national identity is likewise determined by our laws, norms, moral/religious understandings, histories, and our efforts and freedoms to change these structures. This course will engage with these ideas – strengthening your critical thinking skills and opening your minds to the complexities of political development.

This class has two key components – learning and engagement with major theoretical concepts, and, the application of these concepts in a major relevant case studies. In our week together we will focus on three major themes:

- **Law as Culture** - Do we create laws that reflect our values, or, do laws determine our values?
- **The Origins of Political Systems** - Does Confucius-ism still influence the politics of some Asian countries? How about Christianity and Western development?
- **The Effects of Democracy and Authoritarianism on Identity** - How do public freedoms impact our identity?

The application of these themes will take the form of you playing a lead role as a mock policy advisor. As a team you will be able to select a case study on an issue, understand the issue deeply, and make policy suggestions to a mock assembly of national or world leaders. Case studies will include: conflict summaries, notes, primary resources, secondary resources, datasheets, and other pertinent information so that the advisory team has a foundation for deliberation and collaboration. The team will select their case study Tuesday morning, analyze throughout the week, and present a summary of the case study and their policy advice on Friday. Case studies will include, but are not limited to: Reparations to decedents of American slavery; Creating a two-state solution in Palestine and Israel; Supporting development in Africa; Developing global and/or regional climate regulations.

**The major project for this class mirrors professional positions in a US national political administration and serving a regional expert/policy advisor in the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). This experience will prepare you to evaluate context and evidence critically to make practical political decisions and negotiate counter arguments.
Schedule

**Day 1: The Making of a Nation and Political Identity – or – Power, Law, and Myth**

Summary materials to be read before class: Link forthcoming

This class will include introductions, course overview, lecture, discussion of readings, and dialogue. This will be a mixture of the professor setting the stage with lecture but will also be very interactive.

Participants will be introduced to the case studies so we can select a case and teams for tomorrow.

**Day 2: Law as Culture – or – What determines “appropriate,” me or the law?**

Do we create laws that reflect our values, or, do laws determine our values?

Today is our long class and we will take advantage of this by analyzing short readings together in groups, selecting case studies, and starting our engagement with the case studies. Each team member will receive their own case study folder (all materials in the folder are the same). The team is expected to discuss the case study over dinner to start thinking and sharing.

**Day 3: The Origins of Political Systems – or – How does what we believe affect political identity?**

How does religion or morality affect political identity? How does multiculturalism affect political identity?

We will review a short reading or summary about legal pluralism and how rules and beliefs affect political identity and political development. Class will brainstorm and publically discuss their approaches to their case study, ask questions of professor and other groups.

**Day 4: The Effects of Democracy and Authoritarianism on Identity – or – Why this class may look different under a dictatorship?**

How do public freedoms impact our identity? In this class we will dive into the culture of everyday authoritarianism.

This is our second long class. We will explore the impact that everyday authoritarianism has on culture and human interaction. We will use examples from the former East Germany, the former Soviet Union, and current authoritarian regimes. Teams will have time to incorporate class lessons into their presentations and further discuss. The afternoon session will be a period of time when teams pull their presentations together and can work with the professor to give critical feedback. Groups are expected to work after class to perfect their presentation for tomorrow.

**Day 5: Summary of what we learned and how it applies to our lives. Presenting Case Studies**

We have covered a lot of ground in only one week. Let’s review what we have learned and why it is meaningful. How can we apply what we have learned to our everyday life and studies? Teams will give their policy briefs and recommendations.

Congratulations! You are now veterans of Political Palm Reading and Pre-College Summer!