

Political Geography

Devon Moffett

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Office: [Zoom](#)

Office Hours: Friday 1-3pm & by appointment

E-mail: dmoffett@ucmerced.edu

Geography is fundamentally the study of space. Political Science is the study of who gets what, when, where, and how. Political Geography is the inquiry into the interrelation between these concepts. Often physical space, which predates human social structures, can present a strong causal predecessor to politics. Politics on the other hand often creates space in the more abstract sense, but certainly has the capacity alter physical space. Perhaps most interesting, however, are those occasions in which space is aligned with, but causally external to, political phenomena of interest; on such occasions geography provides us valuable causal leverage we can use to further our understanding of the world.

This course will provide an exploration through many of the most salient relationships between space and politics. Through so doing, it aims to engender a broad schematic of how such interactions work and how they might be used to advance our knowledge. Additionally, it will present the basics of practically working with geographic data to answer political questions.

Learning Outcomes

General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs):

1. Life at the Research University - Asking Questions: UC Merced graduates take an inquiry-oriented approach to the world that reflects engagement with the mission and values of our research university.
2. Reasoning - Thinking Critically: UC Merced graduates are equipped with multiple tools of analysis to support accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.
3. Communication - Explaining & Persuading: UC Merced graduates communicate in a variety of ways to diverse audiences.
4. Cultural and Global awareness - Engaging with differences: UC Merced graduates see themselves in relation to local and global cultures and systems of power, past and present.
5. Citizenship - Contributing to the Public Good: UC Merced graduates are engaged with their communities for the benefit of society.

Program Learning Outcomes for Political Science:

6. Understand the processes, theories, and empirical regularities of political institutions and political behavior in the student's chosen emphasis area: American politics, comparative politics, or international relations.
7. Employ critical thinking and demonstrate social scientific literacy, including basic quantitative literacy.
8. Utilize contemporary social science research methods to conduct rigorous research on political phenomena.
9. Write effectively, particularly to convey complex concepts and information in a concise manner.

10. Apply abstract theory and research methods to understand contemporary political events and public policies.

Intended Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

1. Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of processes, theories, and empirical regularities in Political Geography (corresponds with PLO 4, 6, 7).
2. Conduct political science research that makes an original contribution to political science knowledge using the methods and insights of Political Geography (corresponds with PLO 1, 2, 8, 9).
3. Effectively communicate the interrelation between politics and geography, with the capacity to tie the broad concepts of Political Geography to specific empirical instances (corresponds with 3, 10).

Requirements and Expectations

You are expected to attend class meetings and to complete the required reading. All readings are available online. Lectures and discussions will assume that you have completed the reading for that day and are able to analyze the content. Assignments will be posted on CatCourses and will be turned in to CatCourses electronically. All due dates are noted in the syllabus. Assignments are due at 11:59pm on the due date listed. Late assignments will be penalized one whole grade for every 24 hours that they are late.

Grade Breakdown:

Reading Quizzes	15%
Class Participation	15%
Reading Presentation	10%
Midterm	20%
Final	20%
Final Paper	20%

Assignments:

Reading Quizzes – 15%

At the start of every class you will take a short quiz on the readings that will be discussed. The lowest three scores will be dropped when calculating your final grade.

Class Participation – 15%

You'll be expected to show up and contribute to the class discussion with few absences. I have one requirement of participation: the class has to be better for your being in attendance than it would have been otherwise.

Reading Presentation – 10%

You will sign up to read and briefly present one of the readings across the semester. You will be expected to be able to describe its motivating question, theory, hypotheses, method, and conclusions. Additionally,

when you are presenting you will be expected to prepare two discussion questions around which broader class discussion can be motivated.

Midterm – 20%

The midterm will include a number of short answer questions on the broad topics covered up until Week 10.

Final – 20%

The final will include a number of short answer questions on the broad topics covered over the entirety of the course.

Final Paper – 20%

You will write an original research paper 8-12 pages long. This paper will identify some fundamental gap in our knowledge of politics. It will offer a hypothesis which could explain this gap. It will use geographic data and methods to evaluate this hypothesis. The final draft will be due May 12th. More details will be provided in class.

Course Policies

Student Accommodations

If you feel that you need some form of accommodation to get the most out of the course, reach out to me about it at your earliest convenience.

Late/Missed Assignments

If you are ill or have a personal, or family, crisis that requires you to miss an assignment, please notify me by email as soon as reasonable and explain the circumstances. From there we can set up a meeting to discuss how to proceed with respect to assignments and performance evaluation.

Changes to the Syllabus

The schedule in this syllabus is tentative; I reserve the right to make changes to the schedule or to other aspects of the course discussed in the syllabus. Any such changes will be announced in class; each student is responsible for being aware of such changes.

Academic Integrity

All University Academic Integrity policies apply; it is students' responsibility to know these policies. Plagiarism and cheating are not tolerated and will result in a failing course grade. Extensive use of generative AI falls under this same umbrella.

Course Schedule

Topic 1: Introduction

Readings:

- 1/22 – Syllabus

Topic 2: Geography and Causality

Readings:

- 1/24 – Sobel, Michael E. "Causal inference in the social sciences." *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 95, no. 450 (2000): 647-651.

Topic 3: The Geographic Origins of the State

Readings:

- 1/29 – Olson, Mancur. "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development." *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 567–76.
- 1/29 – Dal Bó, Ernesto, Pablo Hernández-Lagos, and Sebastián Mazzuca. "The paradox of civilization: Preinstitutional sources of security and prosperity." *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 1 (2022): 213-230.
- 1/31 – Allen, Robert C. "Agriculture and the Origins of the State in Ancient Egypt." *Explorations in Economic History* 34, no. 2 (1997): 135-154.
- 1/31 – Acemoglu, Daron, James A. Robinson, and Rafael J. Santos. "The monopoly of violence: Evidence from Colombia." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 11 (2013): 5-44.

Topic 4: Geographic Republicanism

Readings:

- 2/5 – Rodden, Jonathan. "The geographic distribution of political preferences." *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 (2010): 321-340.
- 2/7 – Martinez-Bravo, Monica, Gerard Padró I. Miquel, Nancy Qian, and Yang Yao. *The rise and fall of local elections in China: theory and empirical evidence on the autocrat's trade-off*. No. w24032. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2017.

Topic 5: Federalism and Autonomy

Readings:

- 2/12 – Stepan, Alfred. "Federalism and democracy: Beyond the US model." In *Theories of Federalism: A reader*, pp. 255-268. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005.
- 2/12 – Weingast, Barry R. "The economic role of political institutions: Market-preserving federalism and economic development." *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 11, no. 1 (1995): 1-31.

- 2/14 – Keating, Michael, Paul Cairney, and Eve Hepburn. "Territorial policy communities and devolution in the UK." *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 2, no. 1 (2009): 51-66.
- 2/21 – GIS Lab 1

Topic 6: Electoral Geography

Readings:

- 2/26 – Reynolds, Andrew, Ben Reilly, and Andrew Ellis. *Electoral system design: The new international IDEA handbook*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, (2008).
 - Read Chapter 2. Skim over Chapter 3, with particular attention to the “what it is” subsections.
- 2/28 – Friedman, John N., and Richard T. Holden. "Optimal gerrymandering: sometimes pack, but never crack." *American Economic Review* 98, no. 1 (2008): 113-144.
- 2/28 – Adams, Greg D. "Legislative effects of single-member vs. multi-member districts." *American Journal of Political Science* (1996): 129-144.
- 3/4 – Crisp, Brian F., and Scott W. Desposato. "Constituency building in multimember districts: collusion or conflict?." *The Journal of Politics* 66, no. 1 (2004): 136-156.

Topic 7: Historical Borders

Readings:

- 3/6 – Haydukiewicz, Lech. "Historical and geographic regionalization versus electoral geography." *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 19 (2011): 98-111.
- 3/6 – Lowes, Sara, Nathan Nunn, James A. Robinson, and Jonathan L. Weigel. "THE EVOLUTION OF CULTURE AND INSTITUTIONS: EVIDENCE FROM THE KUBA KINGDOM." *Econometrica* 85, no. 4 (2017): 1065–91.

Topic 8: Policy Boundaries

Readings:

- 3/11 – Goodman, Christopher B., and Suzanne M. Leland. "Do cities and counties attempt to circumvent changes in their autonomy by creating special districts?." *The American Review of Public Administration* 49, no. 2 (2019): 203-217.
- 3/13 – Card, David, and Alan B. Krueger. "Minimum wages and employment: A case study of the fast food industry in New Jersey and Pennsylvania." (1993) *NBER*.

Topic 9: Midterm

- 3/18 – GIS Lab 2
- 3/20 – Midterm

Topic 10: Spring Break – NO CLASS

Topic 11: Colonialism

Readings:

- 4/1 – Dell, Melissa. "The persistent effects of Peru's mining mita." *Econometrica* 78, no. 6 (2010): 1863-1903.
- 4/3 – Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation." *The American Economic Review* 91, no. 5 (2001): 1369–1401.
- 4/3 – Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. "Reversal of fortune: Geography and institutions in the making of the modern world income distribution." *The Quarterly journal of economics* 117, no. 4 (2002): 1231-1294.

Topic 12: Resource Endowments

Readings:

- 4/8 – Ross, Michael L. "What have we learned about the resource curse?." *Annual review of political science* 18 (2015): 239-259.
- 4/8 – Davis, Charles. "The politics of "fracking": Regulating natural gas drilling practices in Colorado and Texas." *Review of Policy Research* 29, no. 2 (2012): 177-191.
- 4/10 – Brahmabhatt, Milan, Otaviano Canuto, and Ekaterina Vostroknutova. "Dealing with Dutch disease." (2010) *World Bank*.

Topic 13: Conflict

Readings:

- 4/15 – Buhaug, Halvard, and Scott Gates. "The geography of civil war." *Journal of peace research* 39, no. 4 (2002): 417-433.
- 4/17 – Bearce, David H., and Eric O'N. Fisher. "Economic geography, trade, and war." *Journal of conflict resolution* 46, no. 3 (2002): 365-393.
- 4/17 – Owens, Mackubin Thomis. 1999. "In Defense of Classic Geopolitics." *National War College Review* 52 (4): 56-76.

Topic 14: Rural vs Urban

Readings:

- 4/22 – Gimpel, James G., Nathan Lovin, Bryant Moy, and Andrew Reeves. "The urban–rural gulf in American political behavior." *Political behavior* 42 (2020): 1343-1368.
- 4/22 – García del Horno, Rubén, Guillem Rico, and Enrique Hernández. "Do they feel like they don't matter? The rural-urban divide in external political efficacy." *West European Politics* (2023): 1-26.
- 4/24 – Pierskalla, Jan H. "The politics of urban bias: Rural threats and the dual dilemma of political survival." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 51 (2016): 286-307.

Topic 15: Final

- 4/29 – Review
- 5/1 – Final Exam

Topic 16: GIS in R – OPTIONAL ATTENDENCE

- 5/7 – GIS Lab 3

==Final paper due May 12==