POLITICAL CULTURE

Political Science 210
Stanford University
Spring 2001
David Laitin and Barry Weingast, Instructors
Mondays, 3:15-6PM

Purpose of Course

This course will introduce an approach to political culture that is an alternative to the standard political science and anthropology accounts, both of which focus on the values and attitudes embedded in such institutions as language, the family, and religion. The approach taken in this course will be one derived from economics, and will focus on culture as an equilibrium. Drawing out the observable implications of this approach will be the fundamental purpose of this course. Students will be expected to read the assigned texts, participate in seminar discussion, and write a paper that addresses a problem from the perspective of culture developed in this course. The paper will be due on Friday of examination week.

Books to Purchase

Robert Ellickson Order Without Law Harvard University Press (paper)
Timur Kuran Private Truth, Public Lies Harvard University Press (paper)
David Laitin Identity in Formation Cornell University Press (paper)
Pierre Bourdieu Outline of a Theory of Practice Cambridge University Press (paper)
Roy D’Andrade The Development of Cognitive Anthropology Cambridge University Press (paper)

Background Reading

Students who are interested in the classic texts in political science and anthropology where notions of political culture are central might want to peruse the following texts:

Max Weber The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism
Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba The Civic Culture
Clifford Geertz The Interpretation of Cultures
Clifford Geertz *Negara*
Ruth Benedict *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*
David Laitin *Politics, Language and Thought: The Somali Experience*

An excellent “bridge” article from the classic tradition to the economistic approach we take in this course is John Ferejohn “Rationality and Interpretation” in Kristen Monroe, ed. *The Economic Approach to Politics* (1991).

**Schedule**

- **Week 1 (April 9): Introduction to the Course**

  **Read:**

  Laitin/Weingast Notes, “Prolegomenon for a New Theory of Culture” [available on course website]. These are “rough” notes, written in code between Laitin and Weingast. Students should see this as a source for ideas rather than a finished statement on culture.

  **Assignment:**

  From the Laitin/Weingast “Prolegomenon”, propose a “problem to be solved” that has the potential to be addressed in the context of a seminar paper for this course. This assignment should be written up in about 1000 words. Students should send their assignments by email to the instructors by Monday morning April 9, at 10AM.

- **Week 2 (April 16): Culture, Heuristics, Mental Models**

  **Read:**

  Roy D’Andrade *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology*
• Week 3 (April 23):  Culture as an Equilibrium

Michael Chwe  
Rational Ritual [book in press]

Avner Greif (1994)  
"Cultural Beliefs and the Organization of Society"  
Journal of Political Economy

Paul Milgrom, Douglass North and Barry Weingast  
The Role of Institutions in the Revival of Trade: The Law Merchant, Private Judges, and the Champagne Fairs”  
Economics and Politics v2, n1 (March 1990): 1-23

David Laitin  
"Tower and Babel as a Coordination Game"  
APSR (September 1994), pp. 622-34.

Pierre Bourdieu  
Outline of a Theory of Practice

Barry Weingast  
"Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law"  
APSR 1997.

Sugden, Robert  
(1997) “Spontaneous Order” in Mark Casson (ed.),  
Culture, Social Norms And Economics. Volume 2. Economic performance: 90-102

• Week 4 (April 30):  Mechanisms of Cultural Production

Readings:

Thomas Schelling  

Ann Swidler  
"Culture in Action"  

Robert Boyd and Peter Richerson  
Culture and the Evolutionary Process,  
University of Chicago Press, 1995, chapters 1, 3.

Andrew Apter  
"The Subvention of Tradition” in George Steinmetz,  

John Meyer  
“The Changing Cultural Content of the Nation-State” in George Steinmetz,  

Robert Bates, Rui de Figueiredo and Barry Weingast  
“The Politics of Interpretation: Rationality, Culture and Transition  
Politics & Society (December 1998), pp 603-642.

Robert Axelrod  
“Disseminating Culture” in  
• Week 5 (Week of May 7, time to be arranged): Mechanisms of Cultural Enforcement

Ellickson Order without Law
Fearon/Laitin “Explaining Ethnic Cooperation” APSR 1996
David Laitin Hegemony and Culture, University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 97-169

• Week 6 (May 14): Discussions of Student Projects

Assignment:

On Friday, May 11 by 3PM, students should distribute to all members of the seminar progress reports on their research projects. These reports should be about 2000 words and should reflect both work that has been accomplished and work that remains to be done.

• Week 7 (May 21): Cultural Persistence and Change

Readings:

Laitin Identity in Formation
Timur Kuran Private Truths, Public Lies
Avner Greif manuscript chapters from Historical (and Comparative) Institutional Analysis: Self-enforcing and Self-reinforcing Economic Institutions

• Week 8 (May 28): Domain of Culture

Read:

Rise of the West and Changing Domain of Culture:
Randall Collins and Michael Makowsky *The discovery of society* on Durkheim, Random House, 1978, pp. 103-09
Marshall Sahlins *Culture and Practical Reason*, University of Chicago Press 1976, chapter 4

On the Nation:


On Congress:


On Political Parties:


On Corporations:


- Week 9 (June 4): Culture and Conflict

Read:

Samuel Huntington “Clash of Civilizations” *Foreign Affairs* 1993, pp. 22-49.
Donald Horowitz *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, University of California Press, 2001, chapter 6