

POL S 544 Problems in Comparative Government: Political Geography

Professor Asli Cansunar

Autumn 2021

E-mail: cansunar@uw.edu

Office Hours: Monday 3-5 pm, or by appointment

Class Hours: Wednesday, 4:30-7:20 pm

Venue: 111 Smith Hall

Course Description

Political scientists are increasingly interested in the geographic distribution of political and economic phenomena. In fact, geography shapes many processes that are of primary importance to political scientists: economic development, ethnic conflict, the incidence of distributive policies, social protests, and the preferences of voters. The influence of geography also seems to be strongly conditioned by the spatial distribution of political preferences and institutions.

A key to the incorporation of geography into social science research is to have a working understanding of the theoretical concepts and challenges underpinning geospatial data use. The primary goals of this course are to give students a working familiarity with the most current research that views geography as an essential channel driving political and economic outcomes, as well as to introduce a basic toolbox to enable students to apply geographic concepts to their own research.

The course will proceed in four steps. The class will begin with a debate over how to conceptualise *geography* as a measurement, theoretically and operationally. We will then move to examine geography as a dependent and an independent variable. In the last section of the course, the students will learn to incorporate geography and spatial methods into research design. Classes will follow a “workshop” style, combining lecture and hands-on programming sessions.

Logistics

Programming sessions during the lectures will take place using RStudio. Students are requested to have RStudio up and running on their machines, and students should familiarize themselves with RStudio prior to the lecture. Course materials will provide sample code in R. Additionally,

a working knowledge of statistics, and linear regression covered in an introductory statistics or causal inference class is useful.

Grading and Responsibilities

Your grade will be based on the following:

- Weekly Discussion Points (starting 10/14) and Participation (25%)
- Discussion Paper (25%)
- Final Paper (50%)

Discussion Points:

Each student should submit two discussion points on the weekly readings (starting 10/14). The two discussion points should be send to me via email (to cansunar@uw.edu). At the latest, you should send the two discussion points 24 hours before class (i.e., 4:30 pm Tuesday). Your discussion points will shape class discussion and I will share all discussion points with the class. Each discussion point should be about one to two paragraphs long and raise questions or arguments specific to areas of the week's readings. These should not be clarifying questions but raise points for discussion. Questions are good starting points, but you should attempt to also suggest an answer. Make sure to back up any points you raise. For example, it would not be sufficient to say "the empirical model suffers from omitted variable bias". Instead, you should specify what exactly is missing and why it would a threat to inference. Moreover, criticism is again a great starting point, but try to be constructive in your discussion points.

Discussion Paper:

Each student will write a discussion paper on the existing research on their area of interest. Your discussion paper should explain how geography, either methodologically and/or theoretically, is absent from the literature and elaborate on the problems caused by this absence. In your work, you should develop concrete suggestions to improve existing research by incorporating geography as a dependent or independent variable. You can also use the replication materials of published articles to demonstrate how spatial visualization of data can better explain existing patterns and results. Your review should be approximately 2500 words long (excluding the bibliography). You may want to pick a topic that is related to your research paper. You are welcome to use parts of your discussion paper in the final paper. Discussion Papers are due before the class of Week 8 (11/18).

Final Paper

Each of you will submit an original research project as the final assignment in the class. This paper should be a full research paper on a topic in political geography. You should develop and empirically investigate a theoretical argument. The paper will have to make at least a theoretical or empirical contribution. You should submit a one paragraph proposal to me by Week 5 (October, 28th, 5pm) and I encourage you to come talk to me about your paper early and often. The

final paper should be no longer than 10,000 words (including main body of text, notes, references, and the headers of tables and figures).

Class Schedule

1 Introduction

Week 01, 09/30 Conceptualizing Place and Space in the Social Sciences

Readings

- Agnew, J., & Hui, I. (2013). Identifying the role of 'where' in political science: The spatial dimensions of political analysis.
- Goodchild, M. F., Anselin, L., Appelbaum, R. P., & Harthorn, B. H. (2000). Toward Spatially Integrated Social Science. *International Regional Science Review*, 23(2), 139–159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016001760002300201>
- Grasland, C. (2010). Spatial Analysis of Social Facts. *Handbook of Quantitative and Theoretical Geography* (pp. 000–046). Faculty of the Geosciences and Environment of the University of Lausanne. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00410669>

Week 02, 10/07 Basics of Geographic Analysis in R: Handling Spatial Data and Visualization

Readings

- Branch, J. (2016). Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in International Relations. *International Organization*, 70(4), 845–869.
- Cho, W. K. T., & Gimpel, J. G. (2012). Geographic Information Systems and the Spatial Dimensions of American Politics. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15, 443–460.
- Ichino, N., Williams, M., & Wibbels, E. (2018). The Political Geography of Government Projects: Evidence from +/-40,000 Projects in Ghana.

2 Geography as an Independent Variable

Week 03, 10/14 How Does Geography Shape Institutions?

Readings

- Alesina, A., Giuliano, P., & Nunn, N. (2013). On the Origins of Gender Roles: Women and the Plough. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 128(2), 469–530.
- Engerman, S. L., & Sokoloff, K. L. (2002). *Factor Endowments, Inequality, and Paths of Development Among New World Economies* (Working Paper No. 9259). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w9259>
- Iyigun, M., Nunn, N., & Qian, N. (2017). *The Long-run Effects of Agricultural Productivity on Conflict, 1400-1900* (Working Paper No. 24066). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w24066>
- Michalopoulos, S. (2012). The Origins of Ethnolinguistic Diversity. *American Economic Review*, 102(4), 1508–39.

- Nunn, N., & Puga, D. (2012). Ruggedness: The Blessing of Bad Geography in Africa. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 94(1), 20–36.
- Stasavage, D. (2010). When Distance Mattered: Geographic Scale and the Development of European Representative Assemblies. *American Political Science Review*, 104(4), 625–643.

Week 04, 10/21 How Does Geography Shape Sub-national Outcomes?

Readings

- Beramendi, P., & Rogers, M. (2021). Disparate geography and the origins of tax capacity. *The Review of International Organizations*, 16(1), 213–237.
- Cirone, A. (2018). Under pressure: Political geography of mobilization.
- Dasgupta, A. (2020). Explaining rural conservatism: Technological and political change in the great plains.
- Pierskalla, J., De Juan, A., & Montgomery, M. (2019). The territorial expansion of the colonial state: Evidence from German East Africa 1890–1909. *British Journal of Political Science*, 49(2), 711–737.

Week 05, 10/28 Geography, Economic Development, and Economic Growth

Readings

- Brunnschweiler, C. N. (2008). Cursing the blessings? natural resource abundance, institutions, and economic growth. *World development*, 36(3), 399–419.
- Easterly, W., & Levine, R. (2003). Tropics, germs, and crops: How endowments influence economic development. *Journal of monetary economics*, 50(1), 3–39.
- Rodrik, D., Subramanian, A., & Trebbi, F. (2004). Institutions rule: The primacy of institutions over geography and integration in economic development. *Journal of economic growth*, 9(2), 131–165.
- Sachs, J. D. (2003). Institutions don't rule: Direct effects of geography on per capita income. *National Bureau of Economic Research*.

Week 06, 11/04 How Does Geography Shape Political Behavior?

Readings

- Adiguzel, F. S., Cansunar, A., & Corekcioglu, G. (2021). Out of sight, out of mind? electoral responses to proximity of healthcare.
- Cho, W. K. T., & Rudolph, T. J. (2008). Emanating political participation: Untangling the spatial structure behind participation. *British Journal of Political Science*, 38(2), 273–289.
- Ichino, N., & Nathan, N. L. (2013). Crossing the line: Local ethnic geography and voting in Ghana. *American Political Science Review*, 107(2), 344–361.
- Jacobs, N. F., & Munis, B. K. (2019). Place-based imagery and voter evaluations: Experimental evidence on the politics of place. *Political research quarterly*, 72(2), 263–277.
- Schaffner, B. F. (2013). Support at any distance? the role of location and prejudice in public opposition to the “ground zero mosque”. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 46(4), 753–759.

3 Geography as a Dependent Variable

Week 07, 11/11 Why Do Certain Things Cluster in Space? Homophily, Segregation, and Clustering

Readings

- Boustan, L. P. (2013). *Racial residential segregation in american cities* (Working Paper No. 19045). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w19045>
- Ellison, G., & Glaeser, E. L. (1997). Geographic concentration in us manufacturing industries: A dartboard approach. *Journal of political economy*, 105(5), 889–927.
- Krugman, P. R. (1991). *Geography and Trade*. MIT press.
- Mummolo, J., & Nall, C. (2017). Why partisans do not sort: The constraints on political segregation. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(1), 45–59.
- Trounstein, J. (2020). The geography of inequality: How land use regulation produces segregation. *American Political Science Review*, 114(2), 443–455.

4 Geography as a Methodological Challenge/Opportunity

Week 08, 11/18 Geography as an Opportunity for Data Collection: Agricultural suitability, Cell Phone Data, Nighttime brightness

Readings

- Bancilhon, M., Constantinides, M., Bogucka, E. P., Aiello, L. M., & Quercia, D. (2021). Streetonomics: Quantifying culture using street names. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2106.04675*.
- Bozcaga, T. (2020). The social bureaucrat: How social proximity among bureaucrats affects local governance. *Program on Governance and Local Development Working Paper*, (35).
- Bozcaga, T., Christia, F., Harwood, E., Daskalakis, C., & Papademetriou, C. (2019). Syrian refugee integration in turkey: Evidence from call detail records. *Guide to mobile data analytics in refugee scenarios* (pp. 223–249). Springer.
- Dell, M., Jones, B. F., & Olken, B. A. (2014). What do we learn from the weather? the new climate-economy literature. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 52(3), 740–98.
- Livny, A. (2021). Can religiosity be sensed with satellite data? an assessment of luminosity during ramadan in turkey. *Public Opinion Quarterly*.
- Martinez, L. R. (2018). How much should we trust the dictator's gdp estimates. *Available at SSRN 3093296*.

Week 09, 11/25 Geography as an Opportunity for Inference: Geographic Regression Discontinuity, Natural Experiments, Borders

Readings

- Dell, M., Lane, N., & Querubin, P. (2018). The historical state, local collective action, and economic development in vietnam. *Econometrica*, 86(6), 2083–2121.
- Ferwerda, J., & Miller, N. L. (2014). Political devolution and resistance to foreign rule: A natural experiment. *American Political Science Review*, 108(3), 642–660.
- Keele, L., & Titiunik, R. (2016). Natural experiments based on geography. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 4(1), 65–95.
- Kocher, M. A., & Monteiro, N. P. (2016). Lines of demarcation: Causation, design-based inference, and historical research. *Perspectives on Politics*, 14(4), 952–975.
- McCauley, J. F., & Posner, D. N. (2015). African borders as sources of natural experiments: Promise and pitfalls. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 3(2), 409–418.

Week 10, 12/02 Geography as a Threat to Inference: Modifiable Areal Unit Problem and Spatial Auto-correlation

Readings

- Cook, S. J., & Weidmann, N. B. (2019). Lost in aggregation: Improving event analysis with report-level data. *American Journal of Political Science*, 63(1), 250–264.
- Kelly, M. (2019). The Standard Errors of Persistence. *CEPR Discussion paper no. DP13783*.
- Lee, D. W., & Rogers, M. (2019). Measuring geographic distribution for political research. *Political Analysis*, 27(3), 263–280.
- Rodden, J. (2010). The geographic distribution of political preferences. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 13, 321–340.

Accommodations

Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW's policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at [Religious Accommodations Policy](#). Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the [Religious Accommodations Request form](#).

Access

Your experience in this class is important to me. It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have already established accommodations with Disability Resources for Students (DRS), please activate your accommodations via myDRS so we can discuss how they will be implemented in this course.

If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), contact DRS directly to set up an Access Plan. DRS facilitates the interactive process that establishes reasonable accommodations. Contact DRS at disability.uw.edu.

Academic Integrity

The University takes academic integrity very seriously. Behaving with integrity is part of our responsibility to our shared learning community. If you're uncertain about if something is academic misconduct, ask me. I am willing to discuss questions you might have.

Acts of academic misconduct may include but are not limited to:

- Cheating (working collaboratively on quizzes/exams and discussion submissions, sharing answers and previewing quizzes/exams)

- Plagiarism (representing the work of others as your own without giving appropriate credit to the original author(s))
- Unauthorized collaboration (working with each other on assignments)
- Concerns about these or other behaviors prohibited by the Student Conduct Code will be referred for investigation and adjudication by (include information for specific campus office).

Students found to have engaged in academic misconduct may receive a zero on the assignment (or other possible outcome).

COVID-19

We are all in this together! In this class, masks covering nose and mouth are required, and eating and drinking are prohibited. The instructor and TAs have the authority to cancel class if students do not comply. Non-compliant students may be reported to the Community Standards and Student Conduct office.

If you have symptoms, do not come to class and do get tested. For FAQs about COVID-19 and UW Policy, go [here](#).