

Local Democracy in Comparative Perspective

Fall 2024

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Although the media focuses on national politics, local government, policy, and electoral politics are critically important around the world. Local governments in the U.S., for example, manage the police, determine housing policies, provide basic public services such as garbage collection and water and sanitation; and implement national policies from welfare programs to climate change. Local governments in developing countries like India also have substantial powers including the implementation of large programs for the poor, deciding where a road will be built, and helping citizens access a distant and often unresponsive state. In this class, we will examine local democracies, or elected local governments, in a diverse array of contexts in developed and developing democracies. We will focus on answering four fundamental questions with applications to the U.S., India, Brazil, Ghana, and other countries.

- (1) What do local governments do and how does this vary across different local political systems and across developed and developing countries?
- (2) “Who governs” at the local level—that is, what types of people run for and hold office, and what types of individuals, social groups, institutions, or interest groups influence local government decisions?
- (3) When is local democracy most responsive to poor and marginalized groups? Specifically, in what types of social and political contexts does local democracy work best for the poor?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your final grade will be based on the following components:

(1) Attendance and Participation (15%)

You are expected to attend all classes and to read the required readings in advance of each class session. To do well in this course, you must attend and actively participate in class both during regular class meetings and during Q & A sessions when we have guest lectures. Since this is a seminar, all students should speak in every class. You must also fully participate in all class activities such as group presentations and occasional online forum activities related to films or guest lectures. You will not be penalized for 1 absence but will lose points for any additional absences.

(2) In-class Take-Home Midterm Exam (25%)

The Midterm will include a combination of identification questions and an essay question (broken into several component parts). It will include material presented in required readings and class lectures/discussions. You will have about 10 days to complete the exam.

(3) Progress /Change in Local Governance and Democracy (5%)

I ask you to find news that documents efforts to improve governance/democracy/etc .in a particular country. You will present your news at the start of class and post your articles on sakai under the “News” assignment folder. In your short (3 minutes) presentation, be sure to explain

not only what you learned from your news article, but why it represents progress, change, or innovation in local government and/or democracy—by connecting it to ideas we discuss in class.

(4) Case Study Presentations (15%)

Students will complete a presentation that applies a class session theme to a research question that explains a real-world case. You will pick an argument or concept from the course and explore whether that argument explains your specific case through a careful application of the argument to evidence from your case. You are welcome to either explore one local government case or system in more depth or to explore a comparison between two cases that vary on some dimension. The presentation should last about 10 minutes. Presentations will take place from weeks 5 to 12. You will be required to meet the professor to discuss your presentation (after conducting preliminary research) no less than one week before the date of your presentation. You should prepare a one page memo for this formal meeting (although it will be for your reference in our discussion).

(5) Local Democracy Field Assignment—Partner Project (10%)

For this assignment, I ask you to pick an institution of local government or organization active in local government (e.g., PTA) that you will spend some time getting to know through interviews, background research, and field visits. It is acceptable to attend several local government events such as town hall meetings, volunteer with a local campaign, or to spend time shadowing local officials. Past students, for example, have attended weekly office hours with the mayor, attended city council meetings or the meetings of a local government agency, and participated in local organizations active in lobbying local governments.

We will have an in-class conference to present your field projects to the class in the second half of our 13th weekly session. I will provide a handout on this project and information on some options for organizations in week 3. Plan on spending at least 8+ hours with your chosen organization/campaign over the course of the semester. This assignment can be done individually upon approval by the professor.

(6) Final Paper (30%)

You will write a final paper (10-12 pages) that examines a research question on local government that interests you. The paper will address a research question on local government and can extend the topic of your presentation in more depth if you wish. Your paper topic must be approved by the professor by April 5.

Classroom Etiquette

To make sure that we have a hospitable learning environment, I ask students to follow three simple rules:

- 1) Turn your cell phones off and close your laptops when class begins (unless you are in paired discussion looking over readings).

- 2) Respect your classmates. Debate is encouraged but disagree respectfully by engaging in ideas and evidence rather than personal attacks.
- 3) Coffee/beverages are fine but food is not permitted in class since it can distract your classmates.
- 4) AI tools such as chatGPT are not to be used on any take home exams, although it is acceptable use these tools to identify relevant resources for papers and take-home assignments that are not exams.

A Note on Academic Integrity

As goes without saying, it will not be possible to pass this course if I find any evidence of plagiarism/cheating of any kind for any assignment. At minimum, this will result in a zero for that assignment and will be referred to the Dean without exceptions. If you do the work yourself, and think a lot about the material, you'll be fine.

Some Useful Links to Follow

UN Habitat: <https://unhabitat.org/urban-themes/>
Centre for the Future State: <http://www2.ids.ac.uk/futurestate/>
Eldis, "Decentralization and Local Governance": <http://www.eldis.org/go/topics/resource-guides/governance/decentralisation-and-local-government#.VA3w-EiLGIQ>
Deliberative Democracy: <http://www.deliberative-democracy.net/>
The Ash Center (Harvard): <http://www.ash.harvard.edu/>
Ashoka, profiles of Fellows: <https://www.ashoka.org/fellows>
LA Forwards and Backwards: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/la-forwards-backwards/id1281847259?mt=2>
Not Safe for Government: <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/govtech-social>
City Mayors: <http://www.citymayors.com/>

Required Books

Available at the bookstore and on course reserve:

Dahl, Robert. 1963. *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in the American City*. Yale University Press.

Oliver, J. Eric, Shang E. Ha, and Zachary Callen. 2012. *Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy*. Princeton University Press.

Tsai, Lily L. 2007. *Accountability Without Democracy: Solidary groups and public goods provision in rural China*. Cambridge University Press.

*** NOTE: READINGS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE.** Changes will be announced in advance in class, and a revised syllabus will be posted on Sakai in an announcement. It is your responsibility to make sure you refer to the current version of the syllabus.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS

PART 1: THE POWER AND INSTITUTIONS OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Session 1: Introduction

Session 2: What is local democracy and why does it matter?

Faguet, Jean Paul. 2012. *Decentralization and Popular Democracy: Governance from below in Bolivia*. University of Michigan Press. Introduction.

Dahl, *Who Governs*, Chapter 1 (pp 1-10).

De Tocqueville, Alex. *Democracy in America* (on administrative decentralization) Chapter 5.

Session 3: Political Decentralization

Eaton, Kent, Ed Connerly, and Paul Smoke (Eds). 2010. *Making Decentralization Work*. Chapter 1 (“Democracy, Development, and Security as Objectives of Decentralization”, pp. 1-18) and Chapter 3 (“Elections and Development of Local Democracy”).

Chauchard, Simon. 2017. *Why Representation Matters*. Cambridge Press, Chapter 3.

Session 4: How Much Power Does the Mayor Have? Variation Across U.S. Municipalities

Smith, Greenblatt, and Buntin. 2017. *Governing States & Localities, 6th Edition*. CQ Press, Chapter 11: 349-64.

Oliver, J. Eric, Shang E. Ha, and Zachary Callen. 2012. *Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.

Session 5: Decentralization on the Ground: Variation Across Countries in the Global South

Heller, Patrick, K. N. Harilal, and Shubham Chaudhuri. 2007. "Building Local Democracy: Evaluating the impact of decentralization in Kerala, India." *World Development*, 35 (4) 626-648.

Crawford, Gordon. 2009. ‘Making democracy a reality’? The politics of decentralization and the limits to local democracy in Ghana.

Session 6: State Capacity at the Local Level

Guest Lecture: Prof. Adam Auerbach, Johns Hopkins University

"[Who Knows How to Govern? Procedural Knowledge in India's Small Town Councils](#)" (with Shikhar Singh and Tariq Thachil). Forthcoming at the *American Political Science Review*.

Dutta, A. and Fischer, H.W., 2021. "The Local Governance of COVID-19: Disease prevention and social security in rural India." *World Development*, 138, p.105234.

Session 7: Turnout in Local Elections: U.S.

Hajnal, Zoltan L., and Paul G. Lewis. 2003. "Municipal Institutions and Voter Turnout in Local Elections." *Urban Affairs Review*, 38 (5) 645-668.

Oliver, J. Eric, Shang E. Ha, and Zachary Callen. 2012. *Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 2.

Session 8: Turnout: India and Ghana

Ahuja, Amit and Pradeep Chhibber., 2012. "Why the Poor Vote in India: "If I don't vote, I am dead to the state". *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 47, pp.389-410.

Nathan, Noah. 2019. "Does Participation Reinforce Patronage? Policy preferences, turnout and class in urban Ghana. *British Journal of Political Science*, 49(1), pp.229-255.

Session 9: Vote Choice in Local Elections in Comparative Perspective

Matson, Marsha, and Terri Susan Fine. 2006. "Gender, ethnicity, and ballot information: Ballot cues in low-information elections." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 6 (1) 49-72.

Oliver, J. Eric, Shang E. Ha, and Zachary Callen. 2012. *Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.

Schneider, Mark. 2018. "[How Savvy is the Rural Indian Voter?](#)" *Hindu Business Line*, 31.

Session 10: In-Class Movie: *Street Fight* on Cory Booker's mayoral campaign

Sinclair, B., McConnell, M. and Michelson, M.R., 2013. Local Canvassing: The efficacy of grassroots voter mobilization. *Political Communication*, 30(1), pp.42-57.

Session 11: Representation, Responsiveness, and Service Delivery

Hajnal, Zoltan, and Jessica Trounstine. 2005. "Where Turnout Matters: The consequences of uneven turnout in city politics." *Journal of Politics*, 67 (2): 515-535.

Arora et al. 2023. "The Added Value of Local Democracy: Evidence from a Natural Experiment in India." World Bank.

Recommended: Jha, Saumitra, Vijayendra Rao, and Michael Woolcock. 2007. "Governance in the Gullies: Democratic responsiveness and leadership in Delhi's slums." *World development* 35.2 (2007): 230-246.

Session 12: Social Capital, Social Norms, and Local Governance

Tsai, Lily L. 2007. *Accountability Without Democracy: Solidary groups and public goods provision in rural China*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1 and 4.

Recommended: Bradlow, B.H., 2024. "Urban Social Movements and Local State Capacity." *World Development*, 173, p.106415.

PART 2: WHO GOVERNS? POWER, INFLUENCE, AND ELECTIONS

Session 13: Who Governs I? Power, Influence, and Change

Question: How has the nature and distribution of power (and influence) in local elections changed? What are the important centers of power in Los Angeles and how has this evolved over time?

Dahl, Robert. 2005. *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. Yale University Press. Chapters 1-5 (11-63).

2013. "Koch Group Has Ambitions in Small Races." *New York Times*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/04/us/politics/koch-group-has-ambitions-in-small-races.html>

Session 14: Who Governs II? Descriptive Representation and Social Inequality (2/28)

Question: What explains whether minorities and women run for office and what are consequences of representation of these groups for policy?

Lawless, Jennifer L., and Richard L. Fox. 2010. *It Still Takes a Candidate: Why women don't run for office*. Cambridge University Press. Introduction.

Hajnal, Zoltan L. 2006. *Changing White Attitudes Toward Black Political Leadership*. Cambridge University Press. Introduction.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2NqEJdvjIs>

Session 15: Policy Consequences of Representation by Marginal Groups

Chauchard, Simon. 2014. "Can Descriptive Representation Change Beliefs About a Stigmatized Group? Evidence from rural India." *American Political Science Review*, 108 (2) 403-422.

Jensenius, Francesca. 2017. *Social Justice Through Inclusion: The consequences of electoral quotas in India*. Oxford University Press. Introduction.

PART 3: LOCAL DEMOCRACY, REPRESENTATION, AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Session 16: Deliberative Democracy in India and Indonesia

Olken, Benjamin A. 2010. "Direct Democracy and Local Public Goods: Evidence from a field experiment in Indonesia." *American Political Science Review*, 104 (2) 243-267.

Parthasarathy, Ramya, Vijayendra Rao, and Nethra Palaniswamy. 2017. "Deliberative Inequality." Typescript.

Session 17: Bottom-Up Civic Engagement and Local Government Influence

Auerbach, Adam Michael, and Gabrielle Kruks-Wisner. "The geography of citizenship practice: How the poor engage the state in rural and urban India." *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 4 (2020): 1118-1134.

Session 18: Explaining Variation in Public Goods Provision

Auerbach, Adam Michael. 2016. "Clients and Communities." *World Politics*, 68(1) 111-148.

Ziblatt, D. 2008. "Why Some Cities Provide More Public Goods than Others: A Subnational Comparison of the Provision of Public Goods in German Cities in 1912." *Studies in Comparative International Development (SCID)*, 43(3), 273-289.

Session 19: Innovations in Local Governance

Tendler, Judith and Sara Freedheim. 1994. "Trust in a Rent-Seeking World: Health and Government Transformed in Northeast Brazil." *World Development*, 22 (12), 1771-1791.

Van Cott, Donna Lee. 2008. *Radical Democracy in the Andes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Selected chapter.

PART 4: LOCAL DEMOCRACY: SELECTED POLICIES

Session 20: Policing and Race Relations in America

Phelps, Michelle. 2023. *The Minneapolis Reckoning: Race, Violence, and the Politics of Policing in America*. Introduction.

Nelsen, M.D., Ramanathan, K. and Ogorzalek, T., 2023. Experiences of Policing in Gentrifying Neighborhoods: Evidence From Chicago. *Urban Affairs Review*, p.10780874231215068.

Recommended: Rothstein, R. 2014. "The Making of Ferguson: Public Policies at the Root of its Troubles." *Economic Policy Institute* (pp. 1-2, "Executive Summary").

Session 21: Policing II

Fung, A. 2003. "Deliberative Democracy, Chicago Style: Grassroots Governance in Policing and Public Education" in *Deepening Democracy*. Verso.

Venkatesh, S. 2012. "How the Federal Government is Killing Community Policing." *New Republic*.

Session 22: Housing and Urban Development

Panel Discussion on Housing in LA, Washington DC, and Mumbai.

UN Habitat. 2003. *Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements*.

Boo, Katherine. 2014. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity*. Random House. Selection.

[2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report](#)

Session 23: Environmental Justice

Guest Speaker: Justin Schott, Executive Direct, EcoWorks (Detroit) (Learn more here: <http://www.ecoworksdetroit.org/justin-schott>)

Mullin, M, and Hughes, S. 2016. "[Local Water Politics.](#)" In *The Oxford Handbook of Water Politics and Policy*, edited by K Conca and E Weinthal.

Manikutty, S. 1998. "Community Participation: Lessons from experiences in five water and sanitation projects in India." *Development Policy Review* 16 (4) 373-404.

Session 24: Local Governments and Climate Change

Recommended: Larson, L.R., Lauber, T.B., Kay, D.L. and Cutts, B.B., 2017. Local government capacity to respond to environmental change: Insights from towns in New York State. Environmental Management, 60, pp.118-135.

Session 25: Field Presentations

Session 26: Course Conclusion

Goals/Objectives of the Course (intended outcomes):

1. Students will come to understand major debates in local politics in developing and developed countries.
2. Students will learn about the local political systems of different countries across the globe and their consequences for governance generally and the poor specifically.
3. Students will engage in effective written expression.
4. Students will learn to analyze complex political phenomena through careful engagement with theory and evidence.
5. Students will gain direct exposure to local politics in the LA-area through guest speakers and class projects.

Reading Skills:

As you manage the reading for this and other courses, you are likely to find, if you have not already, that there is no correlation between effort and outcome. It is entirely possible to spend several hours reading something without “getting it.” And it is equally possible to spend less than a half-hour reading something else and getting to the heart of the argument. You will have to devise for yourselves ways to read efficiently. These are some devices that may help:

1. Figure out what the heart of an argument is before you read deeply: skim, read the abstracts, the jacket blurbs, often short reviews published elsewhere. When you know where the center of gravity is, you read more efficiently.
2. Read actively: do not simply soak up the reading for what the author wants to tell you, but approach it with questions, and try to answer them for yourself as you make your way through.
3. Use other peoples’ skills: you do not have to do all the work yourself. It is not “cheating” if you talk through the argument with someone else before or after you delve in, or look at reviews for explication, or form reading groups where you can discuss the argument with each other.
4. Write in order to read. The response papers for this class and the (non-graded) worksheet attached should help.
5. Use diagrams if necessary: often, the structure of an argument can be most clearly expressed if you “draw” it, using arrows and lines, than by trying to understand it in words.
6. Organize your notes in a way that makes retention and information retrieval possible: you could use index cards, annotated bibliographies, database programs like Filemaker Pro etc. These rules may be obvious to some and not to others. Basically, do whatever works for you. But be self-conscious about the reading process as a skill that has to be learned and not necessarily as an ability that either comes naturally or does not.

Reading Worksheet

For each book, chapter, or article assigned in this course, you should fill out the following (non-graded) worksheet. Many of these points can be addressed in a sentence or two (e.g. Questions 1 and 2; in some cases, answers will not need even to be full sentences (e.g., Question); and in some cases, the answers may overlap. These worksheets should be retained: they will be useful for future reference.

1. State the central question that the reading addresses.
2. State the central argument(s) defended in the paper in response to this question.
3. What type of reasoning or evidence is used to support these arguments? If it is an analytical paper, what is the logic that undergirds the argument? If an empirical paper, what type of data is employed? Are there other data sources that you think might be more appropriate?
4. Do you find the claims of the reading convincing? What do you see as the main gaps that need to be filled?
5. Why (if at all) is the reading interesting?
6. Do you agree with the main claims? What are your hesitations? (This may simply involve restatement of previous points.)
7. Identify one or two implicit premises or background assumptions in the paper that you think are especially controversial or objectionable.
8. Considering your answers to the previous questions, write an abstract for the article of no more than 100 words. (Feel free to repeat formulations given in response to earlier questions.)
9. When you have done this for individual readings, take some time to think about the various readings you have been assigned in relation to each other. See if you can write or imagine a summary table for all the readings taken together which compares and contrasts them.