POLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Institutions, Inequality, and Policy in the Global South

Approximate level: Upper level/300s

THE QUESTIONS DRIVING OUR CLASS

- What does it mean for a country or society to be "developed," and who decides how development should be measured?
- Why have development outcomes varied so substantially across countries and regions of the Global South?
- How do historical legacies, political institutions, state capacity, and international actors shape development?
- Who benefits from economic growth, and how do inequality, gender, migration, and conflict affect development outcomes?
- When do development policies work, and how can we evaluate their political and social consequences?

Course Description

Why are some countries wealthier, healthier, more equal, or more politically inclusive than others? How have colonialism, political institutions, international markets, and global organizations shaped these differences? And what can governments and international actors do to improve development outcomes?

This course examines the politics of international development across the Global South. We begin by asking what development means and how it should be measured before considering the historical foundations of contemporary development outcomes. We then examine state capacity, poverty and inequality, gender, aid and trade, migration and remittances, democracy and authoritarianism, civil society, political violence, climate change, and international institutions. The final part of the course considers how scholars and policymakers evaluate whether development interventions work.

Throughout the course, we draw on comparative evidence from across the Global South. Students engage political science research alongside policy reports and international development data to evaluate competing explanations for development outcomes and their implications for contemporary policy.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to

- Define and critically evaluate competing understandings and measures of development;
- Explain how colonialism, state formation, political institutions, and international political economy shape development outcomes;
- Analyze relationships among economic growth, poverty, inequality, gender, migration, conflict, and political institutions;
- Compare major theoretical explanations for differences in development across countries;
- Evaluate the roles of governments, international organizations, civil society, and other actors in development policy;

- Interpret and critically assess development indicators and policy data;
- Apply political science research to contemporary development problems;
- Develop clear, evidence-based policy recommendations and communicate them effectively to academic and policy audiences.

Required Materials

Green, December, and Laura Luehrmann. 2022. *Comparative Politics of the Global South: Linking Concepts and Cases*. 5th ed. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. **[G&L]**

Additional journal articles, book chapters, policy reports, and data materials as assigned will be available through the course management system. Students will also work with publicly available materials and data from organizations including UNDP, the World Bank, ILO, IOM, and UNHCR.

Course Policies

GRADES

Component	Weight
Reading Responses and Data Exercises	**15%**
Development Indicators Exercise	**10%**
Midterm Exam	**20%**
Comparative Development Analysis	**20%**
Policy Memo	**25%**
Policy Briefing	**10%**
Total	**100%**

Reading Responses and Data Exercises (15%): You will complete ten short assignments over the course of the semester that ask you to respond critically to readings, interpret development indicators, or apply course concepts to contemporary policy problems. Your two lowest grades will be dropped, so eight count toward your final grade.

Development Indicators Exercise (10%): You will compare two countries using multiple measures of development, such as income, health, education, inequality, and governance indicators. The goal is to evaluate what different measures reveal, and what they may obscure, about development.

Midterm Exam (20%): The midterm will consist of identification terms and short essays covering Weeks 1–6. You will receive the essay questions in advance and may use a handwritten 3x5 card during the exam.

Comparative Development Analysis (20%): You will select two countries and analyze a development outcome using concepts and theories from the course. The paper should compare competing explanations and draw on relevant empirical evidence. A short proposal will be submitted in advance for feedback.

Policy Memo (25%): You will write a policy memo addressing a contemporary development problem in a country or region of the Global South. The memo should define the policy problem, assess relevant political and institutional constraints, evaluate possible interventions, and make an evidence-based recommendation. A short proposal identifying the problem, the case, and a preliminary recommendation is due in Week 11 for feedback.

Policy Briefing (10%): During Weeks 13 and 14, you will present the central problem, evidence, and recommendation from your policy memo in a short professional briefing.

Detailed guidelines for each assignment, including formatting expectations and evaluation criteria, will be provided during the semester.

Letter Grade Distribution

A 93.0 and above	**A-** 90.00–92.99	**B+** 87.00–89.99	**B** 83.00–86.99
B- 80.00–82.99	**C+** 77.00–79.99	**C** 73.00–76.99	**C-** 70.00–72.99
D+ 67.00–69.99	**D** 63.00–66.99	**D-** 60.00–62.99	**F** 59.99 and below

This is the final grade distribution. Grades will NOT be rounded or "bumped up."

Late Submission, Make-Up, and Extension Policy

Assignments submitted late will receive a three-point deduction per day unless an extension has been arranged. Make-up exams and extensions may be arranged when illness, emergencies, or other significant circumstances interfere with coursework. Please contact me as soon as reasonably possible so we can discuss an appropriate arrangement consistent with University policy.

For a make-up assignment or extension, please:

- Contact me as soon as reasonably possible in the event of illness or emergency. You are not required to disclose private medical details to me.
- For known scheduling conflicts, including religious or cultural observances and professional activities, contact me as early as possible so we can plan an appropriate arrangement.

Incomplete Policy

Requests for an incomplete grade (grade "I") for this course will not be accepted, except under exceptional circumstances according to University policies.

Class Decorum and Communication Policies

Text messaging, checking of emails, and web surfing will not be tolerated during lectures. Please concentrate on the course. Also, during the lectures, you will have opportunities to communicate with other classmates. Please be aware of the power of language and always be respectful to your instructor and classmates. Any misbehavior, inappropriate comments, or discriminatory remarks will not be accepted.

Academic Integrity

Should you commit academic misconduct in this class, you will be held accountable according to University policies. Consult the institution's published academic integrity policy for details.

Accommodations

If you have a physical, psychiatric, emotional, medical, or learning disability that may impact your ability to carry out coursework, contact the appropriate University accessibility office, which will review your concerns and determine, with you, what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation are confidential.

Emergency or Illness

Should you experience a serious illness or personal emergency during this course that would prevent you from completing required assignments, notify the professor as soon as possible. Students who communicate with the professor may receive appropriate accommodations or pursue alternative actions consistent with University policy.

Course Schedule

Readings should be completed before the first class session of the assigned week. Short policy materials or data exercises may also be assigned during the semester.

PART I: DEFINING AND EXPLAINING DEVELOPMENT

Week 1 What Is Development?

G&L, "Comparing and Defining an Interdependent World."

Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf. Chapter 1, "The Perspective of Freedom."

UNDP, *Human Development Report*, current Human Development Index materials.

In-class exercise: *Comparing GDP per capita and multidimensional measures of development.*

Week 2 History Matters

G&L, "Precolonial History: What Once Was, and Why It Matters."

Rodney, Walter. 1972. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.* London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications. Chapter 3, "Africa's Contribution to European Capitalist Development: The Pre-Colonial Period."

Week 3 Colonialism and Its Legacies

G&L, "Colonialism and Resistance: Gold, God, and Glory."

Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. 2001. "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation." *American Economic Review* 91(5): 1369–1401.

In-class discussion: *How does Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson's institutional explanation compare with Rodney's account of extraction and underdevelopment?*

Week 4 State Capacity and Public Goods

Suryanarayan, Pavithra. 2024. "Endogenous State Capacity." *Annual Review of Political Science* 27: 223–243.

World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators.

Data exercise: *Comparing government effectiveness and state capacity across countries.*

PART II: DISTRIBUTION, MARKETS, AND DEVELOPMENT

Week 5 Growth, Poverty, and Inequality // DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS EXERCISE DUE

G&L, "The Global Economy: What the Pandemic Reveals."

Milanovic, Branko. 2013. "Global Income Inequality in Numbers: In History and Now." *Global Policy* 4(2): 198–208.

World Bank, Poverty and Inequality Platform.

Week 6 Gender and Development

Duflo, Esther. 2012. "Women Empowerment and Economic Development." *Journal of Economic Literature* 50(4): 1051–1079.

Viterna, Jocelyn, and Kathleen M. Fallon. 2008. "Democratization, Women's Movements, and Gender-Equitable States: A Framework for Comparison." *American Sociological Review* 73(4): 668–689.

UNDP, Gender Inequality Index; ILOSTAT, gender and labor-market indicators.

Week 7 Aid, Trade, and Debt // MIDTERM EXAM

G&L, "Aid, Trade, and Debt: Contending Views on Development."

Wright, Joseph, and Matthew Winters. 2010. "The Politics of Effective Foreign Aid." *Annual Review of Political Science* 13: 61–80.

OECD Development Assistance Committee data; World Bank, International Debt Statistics.

Week 8 Migration, Remittances, and Development // COMPARATIVE DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS PROPOSAL DUE

Bakker, Matt. 2015. "Discursive Representations and Policy Mobility: How Migrant Remittances Became a 'Development Tool.'" *Global Networks* 15(1): 21–42.

de Haas, Hein. 2010. "Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective." *International Migration Review* 44(1): 227–264.

World Bank, *Migration and Development Brief*; IOM, migration and development materials.

PART III: REGIMES, SOCIETY, AND POLITICAL ORDER

Week 9 Democracy and Development

G&L, "Democracy: Reform, Reconfiguration, or Disintegration?"

Przeworski, Adam, and Fernando Limongi. 1997. "Modernization: Theories and Facts." *World Politics* 49(2): 155–183.

Week 10 Authoritarianism and Development

G&L, "Authoritarianism's Appeal: Why Now?"

Arsel, Murat, Fikret Adaman, and Alfredo Saad-Filho. 2021. "Authoritarian Developmentalism: The Latest Stage of Neoliberalism?" *Geoforum* 124: 261–266.

Week 11 Civil Society, Social Capital, and Development // POLICY MEMO PROPOSAL DUE

G&L, "Civil Society Takes on the State."

Skidmore, David. 2001. "Civil Society, Social Capital and Economic Development." *Global Society* 15(1): 53–72.

World Bank, social accountability and community-driven development materials.

Week 12 Conflict, Displacement, and Development // COMPARATIVE DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS DUE

G&L, "Violence: The Call to Arms."

Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97(1): 75–90.

UNHCR, *Global Trends*, current edition.

PART IV: GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE

Week 13 Climate Change and Development // POLICY BRIEFINGS (SESSION 1)

G&L, "Confronting Global Challenges."

Grossman, Guy, Audrey Sacks, and Alice Z. Xu. 2026. "The Politics of Climate Change in the Developing World." *Annual Review of Political Science* 29.

World Bank, Climate Change Knowledge Portal; UNDP, climate adaptation materials.

Week 14 International Institutions and Development // POLICY BRIEFINGS (SESSION 2)

G&L, "Sovereignty and the Role of International Organizations."

Barnett, Michael N., and Martha Finnemore. 1999. "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations." *International Organization* 53(4): 699–732.

Stone, Randall W. 2008. "The Scope of IMF Conditionality." *International Organization* 62(4): 589–620.

PART V: DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN PRACTICE

Week 15 What Works? Evaluating Development Policy

Banerjee, Abhijit V., and Esther Duflo. 2011. *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty.* New York: PublicAffairs. Chapter 1, "Think Again, Again."

In-class workshop: *Students evaluate a development impact study by identifying the intervention, outcome, counterfactual, evidence, limitations, and implications for policy.*

Course wrap-up: *Development for whom? What should count as development, who should determine development priorities, and what can states and international institutions realistically accomplish?*

FINAL POLICY MEMO DUE: See course calendar