Description

India is the world’s largest democracy and its second most populous country. This course introduces core issues in the study of modern Indian politics. The class is organized around ten topics. We trace how India gained independence; how its political regime consolidated; the relationship between the state and the economy; how political parties and electoral campaigns operate; the state’s institutional architecture; the bureaucracy and threats posed by corruption; the role of caste and religion in shaping vote choice; India’s foreign relations and the development of nuclear weapons; and the drivers of violent insurgency against the central government. The focus is on building knowledge and understanding of the Indian case. But we will also consider what India’s experience can tell us about the plausibility of more general theories of politics, and how they might be refined. Class sessions will be interactive, with plenty of opportunity for group discussion. The reading list is diverse and draws from political science, journalism, history, anthropology, and economics.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites. The class will be of most immediate interest to students majoring in political science, economics, and international studies. An excellent accompaniment to this class is ECON 164, The Indian Economy, taught by Prof. Karthik Muralidharan.

Logistics

Teaching assistant

Siddhartha Baral  
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Office hours: Tuesdays, 10:00–13:00, SSB 446
Materials

Assignments and grading will be done through TritonEd. Copies of all readings can be accessed on TritonEd by clicking the right arrows (⇒) in the detailed class schedule, below. The syllabus also contains suggestions for films and documentaries to watch, and podcasts to listen to. Most of these are freely available online.

Requirements

1. **Reading and participation (20%).** The class addresses ten topics. Each topic is covered by two lectures. There are four or five required readings assigned for each topic. The lectures are designed to give you the background you need to put the readings in context. Ensure you have read and digested all the readings before attending class. Your contribution to class discussions will be assessed. Class attendance will be tracked. You may miss up to two class sessions with no questions asked. After that, missing classes will count heavily against your participation grade.

2. **Writing I, II: Reading responses (40% total, 20% each).** Twice in the quarter, you will write a detailed response to one or more of the assigned readings for a given topic. The two responses must address two different topics. Here is what a reading response should do and not do:
   - It should not be a summary of the reading(s).
   - Rather, it should be a critical reflection on the readings. This could come in several flavors: juxtaposing two readings and adjudicating a point of disagreement between them; highlighting internal contradictions within a reading’s argument; pointing to an absence of empirical support for a particular claim, and suggesting either how it could be tested, or what the available evidence indicates about its veracity; suggesting an alternative interpretation of evidence presented in a reading (“While the author argues the evidence supports THAT interpretation, there are reasons to believe that THIS explanation is more sensible”); and so forth.
   - Each response must be strictly between 700 and 900 words.
   - Do not include a bibliography or any footnotes.

3. **Quiz (10%).** There will be a short, closed-book, in-class quiz. On it, you will be required to do the following:
   - Write in the names of India’s states on a blank map;
   - Be able to correctly write the name and political party of each state’s current chief minister;
   - For any year between 1947 and the present, be able to write the name and political party of India’s sitting prime minister at that time.

4. **Writing III: Final paper (30%).** Choose ONE of the questions listed in the detailed course description below. (These questions appear under the headings for each of the ten topics.) Write a 1,500 word essay in response to the question you pick. The essay should have these features:
   - It must pose a thesis, expressed clearly in one and no more than two sentences toward the very start of the essay, and no later than the second paragraph. It should take the
form, “This paper argues that…” or very similar. The thesis statement must be underlined. Papers lacking a thesis statement cannot receive a top grade.

- It must reference ten or more of the class readings. You may cite these readings using the Harvard citation style—e.g. “The sky is blue (Jha 2018).”
- Include a bibliography only for citations that do not appear on the class syllabus. Note, you are not expected to read beyond the syllabus but may do so if you wish.
- The paper must be strictly no shorter than 1,400 words and no longer than 1,600 words. The word count does not include the bibliography but does include footnotes.
- You may have no more than five short footnotes; fewer is better.
- Top grades will be awarded to papers that present a clearly articulated, perhaps novel argument that is well supported in the body of the paper. Use signposts to tell the reader how each part of the paper contributes to your central claim.

Resources

There are ample ways to stay up to date with Indian current affairs. For example:

- New York Times India page
- The Hindu
- Indian Express See especially the regular opinion columns by Pratap Bhanu Mehta and Ashutosh Varshney
- Caravan
- 3 Things Daily news podcast
- The Big Story Podcast from The Quint
- The Seen and the Unseen Podcast featuring in-depth weekly discussions

Academic honesty

You are expected to do your own work, and to properly attribute ideas, quotations, and sources. Please consult the university’s website on academic integrity.

Disabilities policy

Students with disabilities should please inform the instructor of any accommodations you may need. We will do everything possible to facilitate your full participation in the class.

Email policy

I will reply to emails within two business days.
Schedule

Lectures 1/2—Freedom

Thursday, 2019-09-26 & Tuesday, 2019-10-01

Questions

• How did British colonial authorities maintain power in India before 1947?
• Why did the idea of Pakistan gain a mass following in late colonial India?

Readings


Further resources

Film:

Documentaries:
• “Gandhi: The Making of the Mahatma; The Rise to Fame; The Road to Freedom.” BBC Two. 3 parts.
• “Does Britain Owe Reparations?” Shashi Tharoor, Speech to the Oxford Union, 2015.

Podcasts:
• “India: A People Partitioned.” BBC World Service. 5 parts.
Lectures 3/4—Congress

Thursday, 2019-10-03 & Tuesday, 2019-10-08

Questions

• What were the main characteristics of the “Congress System?”
• What led Congress party dominance to break down?

Readings


Further resources

Film:

Documentaries:
• “Phantom India.” Louis Malle, 1969. 6 parts.

Podcasts:
• “Examining Indira Gandhi’s Long Lasting Legacy (with Mark Tully).” The Takeaway, WNYC Radio.
Lectures 5/6—Hindutva

Thursday, 2019-10-10 & Tuesday, 2019-10-15

Questions

- What explains Hindu-Muslim violence in India?
- To what extent has the BJP been reinvented under the leadership of Narendra Modi?

Readings


Further resources

Film:

Documentaries:

Podcasts:

*****Wednesday, 2019-10-16, 11.59pm—READING RESPONSE 1 DUE*****
Lectures 7/8—Kashmir

Thursday, 2019-10-17 & Tuesday, 2019-10-22

Questions

- To what extent have the actions of the Indian state contributed to the insurgency in Kashmir?
- Can classic theories of insurgency help explain the dynamics of the Kashmir conflict?

Readings


Further resources

Film:


Documentaries:


Podcasts:

Lectures 9/10—Caste

Thursday, 2019-10-24 & Tuesday, 2019-10-29

****Thursday, 2019-10-24 QUIZ IN CLASS****

Questions

- Describe two policies the Indian state has pursued to improve the wellbeing of lower castes. How effective have these policies been and why?
- What explains the rise to political power of lower caste groups in the 1980s and 1990s?

Readings


Further resources

Film:


Documentaries:


Podcasts:

- “Is Caste Arithmetic Trumping Nationalism in UP?” The Chessboard, Business Standard, 2019. ⇒ NB, the predictions here turned out to be incorrect
- “Caste and Economic Quotas are Different, Here’s Why.” The Big Story, The Quint, 2019. ⇒

Comic:

Lectures 11/12—World

Thursday, 2019-10-31 & Tuesday, 2019-11-05

Questions

• “Nuclear weapons make South Asia safer.” Discuss.
• Has the ideology of India’s ruling party affected relations between the United States and India over time? If so, how?

Readings

• Clary, Christopher and Vipin Narang (2019). “India’s Counterforce Temptations: Strategic Dilemmas, Doctrine, and Capabilities”. In: International Security 43.3, pp. 7–52.

Further resources

Film:

Documentaries:
• “India’s Nuclear Riddle.” Al Jazeera, 2016.

Podcasts:
• “India’s Time is Now.” Asia Unbound, Council on Foreign Relations, 2018.
Lectures 13/14—Economy

Thursday, 2019-11-07 & Tuesday, 2019-11-12

Questions

- “India is living through a New Gilded Age and needs its own Progressive Era” (to paraphrase James Crabtree). Discuss.
- How was the Indian government able to embark on economic liberalization in 1991 despite political opposition?

Readings


Further resources

Film:

Documentaries:
- “Storyline: Commanding Heights.” PBS Storyline, 2002. 3 parts; see especially episode 2. ⇒

Podcasts:
- “India’s Farming Crisis.” BBC World Service: In the Balance, 2018. ⇒

*****Wednesday, 2019-11-13, 11.59pm—READING RESPONSE 2 DUE*****
Lectures 15/16—Elections

Thursday, 2019-11-14 & Tuesday, 2019-11-19

Questions

- Choose two factors thought to affect who citizens vote for in India. Describe the influence of these factors.
- Why is voter turnout so high in India?

Readings

- Ahuja, Amit and Pradeep Chhibber (2012). “Why the Poor Vote in India: If I Don’t Vote, I am Dead to the State”. In: Studies in Comparative International Development 47.4, pp. 389–410.

Further resources

Film:

Documentaries:
- “The Magnificent Journey: Times and Tales of Democracy.” Abhijit Banerjee and Gaurav Gupta, 2019. Hats off to anyone who can find an online version of the documentary itself

Podcasts:
Lectures 17/18—State

Thursday, 2019-11-21 & Tuesday, 2019-11-26

Questions

- What problems do citizens routinely encounter in accessing state services in India and how do they deal with these problems?
- Detail two policies that could reduce corruption in India.

Readings


Further resources

Film:

Documentaries:

Podcasts:
- “Understanding Bureaucracy from the Bureaucrat’s Perspective.” Centre for Policy Research, 2016. ⇒
- “Corporate-Government Relations in India..” Pragati Podcast, 2019. ⇒
Lectures 19/20—Democracy

Tuesday, 2019-12-03 & Thursday, 2019-12-05

Questions

• To what extent is India a full fledged democracy?
• Has ethno-religious diversity helped or hindered the emergence and persistence of democracy in India?

Readings


Further resources

Film:

Documentaries:
• “Is Democracy India’s Achilles Heel?” Intelligence Squared, 2011. ⇒

Podcasts:
• “India’s Role as a Democracy in the Liberal International Order.” Brookings India, 2019. ⇒

*****Friday, 2019-12-06, 11.59pm—FINAL PAPER DUE*****