

2nd Term, Academic Year 2024-2025

Political Culture

By Elias Dinas

Tuesday, 9:00-11:00

Course Description:

Nomothetic accounts of politics have postulated a deductive framework to explain political outcomes, in principle applicable across space and over time. In this framework, self-interest is the driving force of human action, dictating decisions based on two ingredients, both exogenously given: preferences and institutions. Within this set-up, culture has been treated as a residual quantity, devoid of any analytical power. The purpose of this course is to unpack and scrutinize this residual, bringing culture to the forefront of political analysis.

The seminar offers an in-depth exploration of theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of political culture. Political culture, as a field of study, intersects various disciplines, including political science, economics, public policy, psychology, evolutionary biology, and anthropology. This course aims to define and understand culture using social science tools, addressing fundamental questions about its origins, transmission, and evolution.

We will address key questions such as:

- What is culture?
- How is culture formed and transmitted?
- What forces contribute to cultural persistence and change?
- What are the economic and political implications of culture?

Throughout the course, we will consider the impact of culture on attitude formation and political action. We will also examine the role of institutions and processes in cultural transmission and rupture. Our readings will draw from diverse parts of the world, including Asia, Africa, North America, and Europe, providing a global perspective.

Embedded in our discussions will be the exploration of crucial concepts such as group identities and social norms. We will investigate how social norms form, persist, and under what conditions they change, as well as the implications of culture on both economic and non-economic outcomes. We will delve into work on historical persistence, long-term effects, and the linkage between culture and group identity, incorporating theoretical and empirical work on social identity theory.

The course will be structured around discussions of the readings, with active participation expected from all students. Neither presentations nor response papers will be required, but you will be encouraged to contribute thoughtfully to the seminar discussions.

Course Goals:

- To develop a comprehensive understanding of political culture through interdisciplinary approaches.
- To critically analyze the formation, persistence, and change of culture and its implications on political and economic outcomes.
- To engage with and contribute to scholarly discussions on social norms and group identity.