

Syllabus

POLS60838/ECON+70573: Empirical Political Economy

Fall 2025-26

Professor: Saad Gulzar
Location: Jenkins and Nanovic Hall B066
Time: Monday 3:30-6:15pm

Contact Information

Instructor: Saad Gulzar
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Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Description

This course explores recent research in political economy and comparative politics, aiming to equip students with foundational skills for conducting empirical research. The course is structured into three parts. Part 1 provides an overview of recent literature on selected topics, with class discussions focusing on research design, implementation, data collection, analysis, and writing decisions. Part 2 features four guest speakers whose ongoing work students will replicate and extend, offering hands-on experience in the intricacies of conducting an empirical study. Part 3 is dedicated to students presenting their own research, which we will collaboratively develop throughout the semester.

Course Details

- The first part of the course surveys recent research. Each week will focus on a specific topic to allow us to ground our discussions in substantive areas of research. I have included review papers for you to go through to learn about the topic and to identify open areas of research in the area. In class, we will discuss in detail specific papers, paying particular attention to research design. Readings range from field experiments to quasi-experimental studies. Before class students will submit brief response papers that enumerate reactions to each assigned reading for the week. Classes will include a lecture by the instructor, student discussions, and most weeks, we will also have one of the paper authors join via Zoom for a brief Q&A. The response papers and class discussion is worth 30% of the grade.
- In the second part of the course, we will work through a number of recent working papers. Each week we will have a guest speaker in the class whose work will be discussed by a team of students (more below). The objective of this exercise is to develop an understanding of different elements of experimental projects. To this end, we will untangle project parts related to implementation, data collection, analysis, and writing. A typical weekly meeting will include the following: discussion on framing and contribution to literature, replication of the study material, and potential extensions of the analysis. We will also go through survey instruments and any other material made available by authors.
 - *Replication Teams*: Each week a guest speaker will come to the class to discuss in-progress research. Instead of presenting their work, guests will share their paper, replication materials, and survey instruments with the class at least a week in advance. A group of two students will be assigned each week to ‘discuss’ the paper in place of the authors. These students will comment on the theory and contributions of the paper, replicate the complete findings of the experiment, and extend the paper with additional analysis and/or contributions to theory. This is 30% of your grade.

- *Reading*: The reading load for this part of the course is relatively light: during most weeks you will be assigned one reading. However, the course only works if everyone who is not on the replication team has read the papers in advance and come prepared with comments and suggestions. Students are expected to read the material very carefully. You may even find it helpful to read the material multiple times.
- *Response papers*: Each student who is not part of the replication team for the week will write a one-page response on the circulated paper. The response paper must have the following components: 1) discuss one contribution of the paper in relation to existing literature that is already noted in the paper 2) one contribution of the paper that is not noted in the text, 3) one comment on validity of the results, 4) one possible extension and a discussion of its feasibility. Students who are presenting need not submit a response paper. This is 10% of your grade.
- The final part of the class will allow students to workshop their own research. There will be three opportunities for feedback. In the first few weeks of the course you will schedule a mandatory meeting with the instructor for an initial discussion of the idea. In week 8, students will do a short presentation with an interim design where peers will provide written feedback. In the final two weeks of the semester, students will present the final paper. This is 30% of your grade.

Prerequisites

Training in causal inference in the department or elsewhere. Discuss with instructor if you have any questions.

Schedule

- Introductions, format, and logistics
- Politicians and Parties
 - Review of the literature
 1. Gulzar, Saad. “Who enters politics and why?.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 24 (2021): 253-275.
 2. Bandiera, O., Callen, M., Casey, K., La, E., Ferrara, C. L., & Teachout, M. (2019). State effectiveness. *International Growth Centre Evidence Paper*.
 - Experimental and quasi-experimental research
 1. Lecture: Gulzar, S., and Khan, M. Y. (2025) “Good Politicians: Experimental Evidence on Motivations for Political Candidacy and Government Performance.” *Review of Economic Studies*
 2. Brierley, S., Kramon, E., & Oforu, G. K. (2020). The moderating effect of debates on political attitudes. *American Journal of Political Science*, 64(1), 19-37.
 3. Casey, K., Kamara, A. B., & Meriggi, N. F. (2021). An experiment in candidate selection. *American Economic Review*, 111(5), 1575-1612.
 4. Lecture: Gulzar, Saad, et al. “Can Party Elites Shape the Rank and File? Evidence from a Recruitment Campaign in India.” *American Political Science Review* 119.2 (2025): 812-831.
- Bureaucracy and Accountability
 - Review of the literature
 1. Besley, Timothy, et al. “Bureaucracy and development.” *Annual Review of Economics* 14 (2021).
 2. Pepinsky, T.B., Pierskalla, J.H. and Sacks, A., 2017. Bureaucracy and Service Delivery. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 20, pp.249-268.
 3. Brierley et al, “Bureaucratic Politics: Blind Spots and Opportunities in Political Science” *Annual Review of Political Science*, forthcoming.
 - Experimental and quasi-experimental research

1. Xu, Guo. "The costs of patronage: Evidence from the British empire." *American Economic Review* 108.11 (2018): 3170-98.
 2. Sukhtankar, S., Kruks-Wisner, G., Mangla, A. (2022). Policing in patriarchy: An experimental evaluation of reforms to improve police responsiveness to women in India. *Science*, 377(6602), 191-198. (Also read Appendix 2: Ethics Statement)
 3. Lecture: Gulzar, S. and Pasquale, B.J., 2017. Politicians, Bureaucrats, and Development: Evidence from India. *American Political Science Review*, 111(1), pp.162-183
 4. Raffler, P. J. (2022). Does political oversight of the bureaucracy increase accountability? Field experimental evidence from a dominant party regime. *American Political Science Review*, 1-17.
- Survey and Lab-in-the-Field
 1. Lecture: Bursztyn, L., Callen, M., Ferman, B., Gulzar, S., Hasanain, A., & Yuchtman, N. (2020). Political identity: Experimental evidence on anti-Americanism in Pakistan. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 18(5), 2532-2560.
 2. Sheffer, L. et al (2023). How Do Politicians Bargain? Evidence from Ultimatum Games with Legislators in Five Countries. *American Political Science Review*, 1-19.
 3. Kim, E. (2023). Entertaining beliefs in economic mobility. *American Journal of Political Science*, 67(1), 39-54.
 4. Alrababa'h, A., Masterson, D., Casalis, M., Hangartner, D., & Weinstein, J. (2022). The Dynamics of Refugee Return: Syrian Refugees and Their Migration Intentions. *British Journal of Political Science*.
 - Replication: Gemma Dipoppa (Columbia University), material circulated on Sep 15
 - Reducing Prejudice
 - Review of the literature
 1. Paluck, Elizabeth Levy, et al. "Prejudice reduction: Progress and challenges." *Annual review of psychology* 72 (2021): 533-560.
 2. Paluck, Elizabeth Levy, Seth A. Green, and Donald P. Green. "The contact hypothesis re-evaluated." *Behavioural Public Policy* 3.2 (2019): 129-158.
 3. Nathan, N. and Sands, M. "Context and Contact: Unifying the Study of Environmental Effects on Politics." *Annual review of political science*. Forthcoming
 - Experimental and quasi-experimental research
 1. Scacco, A., & Warren, S. (2018). Can Social Contact Reduce Prejudice and Discrimination? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Nigeria. *American Political Science Review*, 112(3), 654-677.
 2. Salma Mousa. "Building social cohesion between Christians and Muslims through soccer in Post-ISIS Iraq." *Science* 369(6505): 866-870.
 3. Lowe, Matt. "Types of contact: A field experiment on collaborative and adversarial caste integration." *American Economic Review* 111.6 (2021): 1807-44.
 4. Kalla, J. L., & Broockman, D. E. (2023). Which Narrative Strategies Durably Reduce Prejudice? Evidence from Field and Survey Experiments Supporting the Efficacy of Perspective-Getting. *American Journal of Political Science*, 67(1), 185-204.
 - Replication: Sarah Thompson (Cornell University), material circulated on Sep 29
 - Environment
 - Review of the literature
 1. Gulzar, Saad and Kathryn Baragwanath. "Democracy and the Environment." *Annual Review of Political Science* (2026)

2. Larson, Anne M., and Fernanda Soto. "Decentralization of natural resource governance regimes." *Annual review of environment and resources* 33 (2008): 213-239.
 3. Balboni, C., Berman, A., Burgess, R., Olken, B. (2022), *The Economics of Tropical Deforestation*.
- Experimental and quasi-experimental research
1. Lecture: Dipoppa, Gemma, and Saad Gulzar. "Bureaucrat incentives reduce crop burning and child mortality in South Asia." *Nature* (2024): 1125-1131.
 2. Sanford, Luke. "Democratization, elections, and public goods: The evidence from deforestation." *American Journal of Political Science* (2021).
 3. Buntaine, M., Greenstone, M., He, G., Liu, M., Wang, S., & Zhang, B. (2024). "Does the Squeaky Wheel Get More Grease? The Direct and Indirect Effects of Citizen Participation on Environmental Governance in China." *American Economic Review*.
- Student draft presentations and office hours
 - Final paper consultation
 - Migration
 1. Bell, Fasani, and Machin. (2013) "Crime and immigration: Evidence from large immigrant waves." *Review of Economics and statistics* 21, no. 3 (2013): 1278-1290.
 2. Pinotti, P. (2017). *Clicking on heaven's door: The effect of immigrant legalization on crime*. *American Economic Review*, 107(1), 138-168.
 3. Masterson, D., Lehmann, M. C. (2020). *Refugees, mobilization, and humanitarian aid: Evidence from the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon*. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64(5), 817-843.
 4. Dipoppa, G. (2024). *When migrants mobilize against labor exploitation: Evidence from the Italian farmlands*. *American Political Science Review*, 1-18.
 - Traditional Governance
 1. Adam-Rahman, Natalya and Sarah Thompson. 2024. "Unintended Consequences of Gender Segregation: Election Administration and Women's Turnout." Working Paper.
 2. Cheema, Ali, Sarah Khan, Asad Liaqat, and Shandana Khan Mohmand. 2023. "Canvassing the Gatekeepers: A Field Experiment to Increase Women Voters' Turnout in Pakistan." *American Political Science Review* 117(1): 1-21. doi: 10.1017/S0003055422000375
 3. Borker, Girija. 2021. "Safety First: Perceived Risk of Street Harassment and Educational Choices of Women." World Bank Policy Research Working Paper. [also conditionally accepted at AER]
 4. Brulé, Rachel and Nikhar Gaikwad. 2021. "Culture, Capital, and the Political Economy Gender Gap: Evidence from Meghalaya's Matrilineal Tribes." *Journal of Politics* 83(3): 834-850. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1086/711176>
 - Student final presentations