

Political Sociology • On States and Smashing Them

SOC 333 • Spring 2019 • Tu/Th 2:00-3:15 • Graham 204
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Office hours Th 10-12 (<https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/xpakt>)

“The state calls its own violence law, but that of the individual, crime.”
—Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (1844)



We're always hearing about this thing called "the state," but my guess is that if you were put on the spot, you'd have trouble differentiating the state from a concept like government. Are the two identical? Is government simply a part of the state? And how do concepts that designate areas beyond the state – the family, civil society, the economy, the religious sphere, etc. – relate to the state? Is this state a thing? Is it an institution? Or is it a person or group of people, as suggested in the image on the first page of this syllabus? Or as some authors we'll cover in this course insist, is the state actually a social relation?

Of course, the modern state is just that: modern. States in their current form didn't always exist, but they certainly do now. Where did they come from, when did they emerge, and above all, what social forces prompted their formation?

In this course, I'll introduce you to a number of critical analyses of the state. In the process, we will be reviewing a number of key questions sociologists have asked about states over the last half century, and we'll explore a variety of answers to these questions. But before we can get there, we'll start the class with a discussion of the concept of "political" in political sociology. What does it mean that political sociology is *political* as such, and how does this relate to our objective of interrogating states? We'll begin by discussing the concept of the political by way of a close reading of Carl Schmitt.

We'll then leave the realm of theory and ask how sociologists have tended to study the state. How have they defined their object of inquiry? We'll explore a number of perspectives, focusing in particular on Max Weber's classic definition of the state (and Charles Tilly's brilliant application).

Once we know what we're working with, we'll turn to our second unit and try to figure out where states come from. Once again, Tilly will provide us with one of many possible answers, and I'll be reviewing additional explanations in lecture.

At this point in the class, we'll know what states are and where they come from, which will allow us to figure out how they actually work. This enterprise will take us in two directions. First, we'll investigate how states spread their power in a variety of contexts including sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and Western Europe. Second, we'll look at how states act in relation to subject populations, asking how they construct these populations in the first place. As we'll see, this also involves processes of gendering and racialization, concepts we don't typically associate with the state. I hope to convince you that race and gender *can't* be thought without reference to the state.

In our final unit on the state itself, we'll turn from what states control to what (or who) controls the state. Marxists have tended to argue that states are run by the ruling class. Are they? Meanwhile, many feminists have argued that the state helps reproduce masculine domination. But does this mean that men control the state? Similarly, do states reproduce white supremacy, as many have argued? And if so, does this mean that white people control the state directly?

Finally, we'll close out the class by looking at various projects of contesting state power. We'll begin with the classic example of the Paris Commune in which the Parisian working class built an alternative government – a self-government – in 1871. Even if their experiment was brutally crushed, with more than 20,000 murdered by the military police (and twice that number incarcerated), it is one of the most important historical examples of an attempt to “smash” the state. We'll see why. We'll then turn from France to the French colony of Haiti, looking at how a slave revolt turned into a full-scale revolution, with former slaves successfully seizing the state. We'll also discover how this revolt spread across the Atlantic, prompting a proliferation of assaults on the state elsewhere. We'll conclude with a more contemporary example of such a wave, turning to the Arab Spring of 2011. We'll let sociologist Asef Bayat be our guide, asking why an entire region rose up against authoritarian states and why they failed to smash (let alone reform) most of them.

A note on reading. Reading is a central component of this class. As such, it is imperative that you complete your biweekly assignments. Because you are likely unfamiliar with most of the material we will be covering, this reading can be daunting. It is *very* important that you make time for it. With a couple of exceptions, these are not texts that you can simply skim. I repeat: this is a reading-intensive course. If you don't plan to do the readings, this is *not* the class for you.

With that said, you do not need to buy a single book for this class. I will make every reading available on Canvas free of charge. (You may decide to purchase some of the books if you want more, however. I'm happy to help you strategize in case you're wondering what to buy.)

However, just because the texts are available online doesn't mean that you should skim them on your phone. You need to give them the same attention you would if you were actually holding a book. For me, this means printing it out, underlining important sections, and writing notes in the margins. Annotating your texts is absolutely crucial. If you want to do this on your computer or tablet instead, fine. But please do learn to mark up the text. It's central to learning how to read in an academic context, which is very different from reading for pleasure. Of course, many of these readings are immensely pleasurable. But you should also be able to extract their central arguments, and this means marking them up.

Requirements for the class are the following:

1. **Participation (20 %):** While this may be a lecture class, but you'll quickly learn that my style is fairly Socratic. I don't want to hear the same half dozen people in every meeting. *If you're shy or reluctant to speak for other reasons, please come see me in office hours. I'm happy to make accommodations as needed.*

In addition to coming to class and actually participating, you are required to submit two items via Canvas before every single class:

- (1) a discussion question, and
- (2) the most important quote from the reading.

You'll need to do this for every set of readings by noon the day our class meets, i.e. *before* class. While I'll only grade these as Pass/Not Pass, the very fact of doing it doesn't guarantee you a Pass. I want to see deep engagement with the readings. If you're unsure what that means, come see me in office hours. That's what they're there for!

2. **Reading memos (25 %):** You are required to submit four short writing assignments (2 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1" margins) via Canvas:
 - (a) What is the state? (due February 3)
 - (b) Why did states emerge and how did they consolidate their power? (February 24)
 - (c) What do states control and how do they do so? (March 24)
 - (d) Who controls the state? (April 14)
3. **Midterm (25 %):** There will be an in-class midterm on February 28. *If you require special accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible.* The content of the midterm will not be a surprise and will draw on all course material covered before that date. There will be nothing unexpected, and the entire thing will be short answers. Note that I reward clear, concise writing. If that means writing a longer version of the answer on scrap paper and then editing it down to fit the space allotted, great. Whatever gets you to your goal is a worthy strategy.
4. **Final (30 %):** As with the midterm, this will be in-class. It is scheduled for May 9, from 3:30 to 6:30 in this very room. Again, there won't be any surprises. It will be very similar to the midterm but will focus on material from the latter portion of the class. But unlike the midterm, *it will also be cumulative*. But don't worry; we'll go over this in some detail before it's time to begin studying. If you've done the course readings, attended lectures, participated in discussion, and turned in the writing assignments along the way, you'll be very well prepared.

On plagiarism: If you are currently enrolled for a 300-level course – and you are – then I expect that you know what constitutes plagiarism. If you do not, I urge you to consult the UNCG Office of Rights and Responsibilities website on plagiarism, available at <https://osrr.uncg.edu/academic-integrity/violations-and-sanctions/plagiarism/>. I don't play when it comes to plagiarism. If I catch you plagiarizing on an assignment, it should go without saying that I will fail you on that assignment. If the case is sufficiently egregious, I may decide to fail you for the entire class.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me via email or preferably, in person during office hours. I promise I don't bite. I wish these sorts of unpleasanties did not require addressing, but after more than a decade of teaching, I've realized that they absolutely do. Please do not be that person. It's 2019, and the plagiarism detection software will catch you before I have to even lift a finger.

On attendance: While your grade depends heavily upon you completing all of the assignments, including reading responses posted to Canvas, I will not take attendance, and the fact of missing class will not affect your grade. However, please note that in my experience teaching, students who miss more than three classes invariably struggle to pull off a low C. And almost without exception, those who miss substantially more class time are those who tend to fail. To reiterate: I do not require attendance, but I strongly urge you not to miss class. The fact of missing class won't affect your grade; but missing lecture will absolutely impact your grade.

On laptop use: I'm not one of those professors who complains about students using laptops in class. However, I may choose to ban them from our classroom if I notice students playing around on the Internet during class time. Please don't test me; I really don't like reverting to a parental role. Take me seriously in this class, and I'll do the same. Test me in this class, and I'm fine with doing the same. And no, do not be on your phone. You're adults, and I realize you may occasionally have emergencies. Fine. But if I notice you playing around on your phone on a regular basis, expect me to kick you out of class.

On the lecture format: This is a lecture course. In general, it means I'll be talking quite a bit, though as you'll quickly learn, I also include group work in my repertoire. In addition, I tend to adopt a Socratic approach to lecturing to encourage active learning. This won't be one of those snoozefests where a professor reads slides to you, and you dutifully copy down their every word. Instead, I plan to facilitate discussions in this class. That means I expect you to discuss. And in order to do that, I expect you to come to class prepared. Doing the reading doesn't mean that you skim the assigned text and put a check next to it on the syllabus. It means that you think deeply about the reading and come to class with a number of questions, criticisms, etc.



Without further ado, let's move on to the schedule of readings. Please note that asterisked readings are only for those students taking this class for honors, or else as graduate students. Unless you fall into these two categories, you are not responsible for completing these readings.

What is the “political” in political sociology?

January 15: Introduction and course overview

January 17: From now on, all friendship is political

Carl Schmitt. 1996 [1932]. *The Concept of the Political*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 19-53.

*Carl Schmitt. 1996 [1932]. *The Concept of the Political*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 54-79.

What are states anyway?

January 22: How have sociologists studied states?

Theda Skocpol. 1985. "Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research." Pp. 3-37 in *Bringing the State Back In*, edited by Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

January 24: How have sociologists studied states incorrectly?

Timothy Mitchell. 1991. "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics." *American Political Science Review* 85(1):77-96.

January 29: We kill so you don't have to!

Max Weber. 1946 [1919]. "Politics as a Vocation." Pp. 77-87 in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*Max Weber. 1946 [1919]. "Politics as a Vocation." Pp. 78-128 in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

January 31: Making an offer you can't refuse...

Charles Tilly. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." Pp. 169-91 in *Bringing the State Back In*, edited by Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Where do states come from?

February 5: Do states make war, or does war make states?

Charles Tilly. 1992. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990-1992*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 67-95.

*Richard Lachmann. 2002. "Comparisons Within a Single Social Formation: A Critical Appreciation of Perry Anderson's Lineages of the Absolutist State." *Qualitative Sociology* 25(1):83-92.

February 7: How do you grow a state?

Charles Tilly. 1992. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990-1992*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 96-126.

How do states spread their power?

February 14: State or 🍌!

James C. Scott. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 40-63.

February 19: Designing state power

Jeffrey Herbst. 2000. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 139-72.

February 21: Making citizens

Eugen Weber. 1976. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 67-94.

February 26: Review

February 28: MIDTERM

[POLITICS AS A VACATION (SPRING BREAK)]

What do states control in the first place?

March 12: How do states “see” their populations?

James C. Scott. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 53-84.

*James C. Scott. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1-52.

*Fernando Coronil. 2001. “Smelling Like a Market.” *American Historical Review* 106(1): 119-29.

*Michel Foucault. 2007 [1977-78]. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*. New York: Palgrave: 87-114.

*Partha Chatterjee. 2004. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 3-79.

March 14: Are racial states racist states?

David Theo Goldberg. 2002. *The Racial State*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 98-134.

*Tianna S. Paschel. 2017. "Disaggregating the Racial State: Activists, Diplomats, and the Partial Shift toward Racial Equality in Brazil." Pp. 203-27 in *The Many Hands of the State: Theorizing Political Authority and Social Control*, edited by Kimberly J. Morgan and Ann Shola Orloff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

March 19: The personal is political, but is it produced by the state?

Wendy Brown. 1992. "Finding the Man in the State." Pp. 166-96 in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

*R. W. Connell. 1990. "The State, Gender, and Sexual Politics: Theory and Appraisal." *Theory and Society* 19(5): 507-44.

And who controls the state itself?

March 21: Is it the ruling class?

Bob Jessop. 1982. "Marx and Engels on the State." Pp. 1-31 in *The Capitalist State: Marxist Theories and Methods*. Malden, MA: Basil Blackwell.

March 26: But if the ruling class actually controlled the state, wouldn't they ruin it?

Hal Draper. 1977. "The Tendency toward State Autonomy." Pp. 311-38 in *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Vol. I: State and Bureaucracy*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

*Nicos Poulantzas. 1969. "The Problem of the Capitalist State." *New Left Review* 58, 67-78.

*Ralph Miliband. 1970. "The Capitalist State: A Reply to Nicos Poulantzas." *New Left Review* 59, 53-60.

*Fred Block. 1987 [1980]. "The Ruling Class Does Not Rule: Notes on the Marxist Theory of the State." Pp. 51-68 in *Revising State Theory: Essays in Politics and Postindustrialism*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

March 28: Is it men?

Lynne Haney. 1996. "Homeboys, Babies, Men in Suits: The State and the Reproduction of Male Dominance." *American Sociological Review* 61(5): 759-78.

April 2: Is it white people?

Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts. 2013 [1978]. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, 7-31.

April 4: NO CLASS

This state thing is garbage. Now what?

April 9: Let's be our own state!

In class: Excerpts from *La Commune (Paris 1871)* (d. Peter Watkins, 2007)

April 11: No, let's smash it first!

Donny Gluckstein. 2011. *The Paris Commune: A Revolution in Democracy*. New York: Haymarket, 1-44.

Karl Marx. 1996 [1871]. "The Civil War in France." Pp. 181-82 in *Later Political Writings*, edited by Terrell Carver. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

April 16: From revolution in one country...

Julius S. Scott. 2018. *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution*. New York: Verso, Ch. 3.

April 18: ...to regional rebellion.

Julius S. Scott. 2018. *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution*. New York: Verso, Ch. 4.

April 23: An 1848 for our time?

Asef Bayat. 2017. *Revolution without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1-28.

April 25: Yes...unfortunately.

Asef Bayat. 2017. *Revolution without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 153-78.

April 30: Review

May 9: FINAL EXAM (3:30-6:30)