

## **Concepts and theories of political science and international relations**

Anna Grzywacz, PhD  
Institute of Political Studies  
Polish Academy of Sciences

Autumn and Spring Semesters 2023/2024 (60h)

Mode: Zoom

Anna Grzywacz: agrzywacz@isppan.waw.pl

Office hours: by appointment only via Zoom

### **Introduction:**

The course aims to introduce students to the main concepts and theories of political science and international relations. It starts with a discussion of the history of political thought and the development of methodological approaches in political analysis. Students will become familiar with the broader debate between positivism and post-positivism, as well as the main concepts such as rational choice, the institutional approach, feminism, and theories of international relations. Each perspective will be complemented by a discussion of research methods most often applied to these approaches.

The classes are divided into two parts. The first part consists of lectures, and the second part includes case studies and examples that illustrate the use of concepts to verify students' understanding of them. After each concept is discussed, students will be asked to complete a short class assignment to demonstrate their comprehension of the material. In the first semester, there will be a session of unpacking research (Unpacking research 1) serving as an introductory and preparation class for Workshop 1. The workshop is designed to critically evaluate a piece of research. Through the analysis of empirical case studies and research articles embedded within the course material, students will explore why political theories are necessary and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. The workshop component also includes a peer exchange process. Moreover, students will have the opportunity to exercise, test, and apply the concepts they have learned throughout two semesters by writing and presenting their essays in the spring semester.

After the course, a student will be able to:

- (1) describe the history of political thought and explain the differences between different political concepts and theories;
- (2) critically assess the use, explanatory power, and predictive powers of the concepts and theories;
- (3) place research articles and essays within a political concept or theory;
- (4) critically evaluate their own and others' research in terms of their theoretical and methodological soundness.

## **Classes**

### **Autumn semester (30h)**

#### **Class 1. Introduction to the module**

#### **Class 2. What is a political theory?**

Essential readings:

- John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillip, *Introduction*. Chapter 1 in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, 2008.
- J. G. A. Pocock, *Theory in History: Problems of Context and Narrative*. Chapter 8 in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, 2008.

#### **Class 3. On the meaning of a theory. Philosophy of political science**

Essential readings:

- Harold Kincaid and Jeroen Van Bouwel, *Putting Philosophy of Political Science on the Map*. Chapter 1 in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Political Science*, 2023.
- Janet Lawler and David Waldner, *Interpretivism versus Positivism in an Age of Causal Inference*. Chapter 11 in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Political Science*, 2022.

- David Mayhew, *Political Science and Political Philosophy: Ontological Not Normative*, PS: Political Science and Politics 33 (2), 2000.

#### **Class 4. Rational choice**

Essential readings:

- Catherine Herfeld and Johannes Marx, *Rational Choice Explanations in Political Science*. Chapter 4 in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Political Science*, 2022.
- Kenneth A. Shepsle, *Rational Choice Institutionalism*. Chapter 2 in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, 2008.

#### **Class 5. Institutions and institutional change**

Essential readings:

- N. Emrah Aydinonat and Petri Ylikoski, *Explaining Institutional Change*. Chapter 6 in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Political Science*, 2022.
- Hugh Heclo, *Thinking Institutionally*. Chapter 37 in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, 2008.

#### **Class 6. Values and ideas. Contextual politics?**

Essential readings:

- Dietrich Rueschemeyer, *Why and How Ideas Matter*. Chapter 12 in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, 2006.
- Richard Price, *Detecting Ideas and Their Effects*. Chapter 13 in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, 2006.
- Jeroen Van Bouwel, *How to Deal with Values in Political Science?* Chapter 24 in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Political Science*, 2022.
- Attilia Ruzzene, *Context, Contextualization, and Case-Study Research*. Chapter 21 in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Political Science*, 2022.

#### **Class 7 and 8. Unpacking research (1)**

Readings will be provided a few days before the class.

### **Class 9. Civil society and state actors**

Essential readings:

- Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein, *Civil Society and the State*. Chapter 20 in the The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Political Science, 2022.
- Jose Harris, *Development of Civil Society*. Chapter 8 in The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Political Science, 2022.

### **Class 10. On the meanings of regime types**

Essential readings:

- Sharon Crasnow, *Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy*. Chapter in The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Political Science, 2022.
- Barbara Geddes, *What Causes Democratization?* Chapter 14 in the Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics, 2007.
- Ronald Wintrob, *Dictatorship: Analytical Approaches*. Chapter 16 in the Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics, 2007.

### **Class 11 and 12. Workshop. One problem, many approaches.**

The readings and instructions will be provided in a timely manner.

### **Class 13 and 14. Feedback on the workshop (peer review activity)**

### **Class 15. Early exam**

**Spring semester (30h)**

## **Class 1. Introduction. It all depends**

Essential readings:

- Charles Tilly and Robert E. Goodin, *It Depends*. Chapter 1 in *The Oxford Handbooks of Contextual Political Analysis*, 2022.
- Milja Kurki and Colin Wight, *International Relations and Social Science*. Chapter 1 in *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity*, 2013.

## **Class 2. Realism**

Essential readings:

- Richard Ned Lebow, *Classical Realism*. Chapter 3 in *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity*, 2013.
- John J. Mearsheimer, *Structural Realism*. Chapter 4 in *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity*, 2013.

## **Class 3. Liberalism**

Essential readings:

- Bruce Russett, *Liberalism*. Chapter 5 in *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity*, 2013.
- Jennifer Sterling-Folker, *Neoliberalism*. Chapter 6 in *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity*, 2013.

## **Class 4. Constructivism**

Essential readings:

- K. M. Fierke, *Constructivism*. Chapter 10 in *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity*, 2013.

## **Class 5. Essay 1 (instruction)**

## **Class 6. Structuralism and post-structuralism**

Essential readings:

- David Campbell, *Poststructuralism*. Chapter 12 in *International Relations. Theories Discipline and Diversity*, 2013.

## **Class 7. Feminist foreign policy**

Essential readings:

- Linda Zerilli, *Feminist Theory and the Canon of Political Thought*. Chapter 5 in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, 2008.
- Ann Tickner and Laura Sjoberg, *Feminism*. Chapter 10 in *International Relations. Theories Discipline and Diversity*, 2013.
- Jacqui True, *Mainstreaming Gender in International Institutions*. Chapter 1 in *Gender Matters in Global Politics*, 2009.

## **Class 8. Discourse and Narratives in IR**

Essential readings:

- Susan Gal, *Language, Its Stakes, and Its Effect*. Chapter 20 in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*.
- Anna Holzscheiter, *Between Communicative Interaction and Structures of Signification: Discourse Theory and Analysis in International Relations*. *International Studies Perspectives* 15(2), 2014.

## **Class 9 and 10. Middle-range theories and conceptual approaches**

Essential readings:

- Carla Winston, *Norm structure, diffusion, and evolution: A conceptual approach*. *European Journal of International Relations* 24(3), 2018.
- Marijke Breuning, *Role Theory in Politics and International Relations*. In *The Oxford Handbook of Behavioural Political Science*, 2019.

## **Class 11. International organisations and institutions in IR**

Essential readings:

- Richard Higgot, *International Political Institutions*. Chapter 31 in The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions, 2006.
- Lisbeth Hooghe, Tobias Lenz, and Gary Marks, *Theory of International Organization*, 2019. Chapter 1.

## **Class 12. IR beyond the West**

Essential readings:

- Amitav Acharya, *Dialogue and Discovery: In Search of International Relations Theories Beyond the West*. Millennium 39(3), 2011.
- Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan eds, *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia*, 2010. Chapters 9 and 10.

## **Class 13. Postcolonialism**

Essential readings:

- Siba N. Grovogui, *Postcolonialism*. Chapter 13 in *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity*, 2013.

## **Class 14 and 15. Essay 2 (discussion)**

### **Requirements and assessment**

#### General requirements:

1. Attendance is mandatory
2. Essential readings are mandatory. All of the readings will be provided in PDFs

#### Autumn semester

1. Workshop 1 (30%)
2. Exam (70%)

The workshop is designed to unpack a research problem from different theoretical and conceptual perspectives. The workshop ends with a 2-page note summarising the discussion written and discussed by small groups (4-5 students each). It is essential to follow the classes Unpacking Research 1 and 2 to have a good understanding of how the workshop will be organised.

Final exam. An open-book exam. Instructions will be provided two weeks before the exam.

### Spring semester

1. Participation in class discussions (20%)
2. Essay (80%)

Essays must be submitted no later than on the day of Class 11 to my email: [agrywacz@isppan.waw.pl](mailto:agrywacz@isppan.waw.pl). The subject line must be Political Science Essays Spring and your full name. We will be discussing the paper's structure by unpacking a piece of research, therefore it is essential to follow class 5.

Brief assessment criteria:

Length: 4000 to 5000 words;

Your essay should be built around a strong central argument

Structure:

Introduction

1. Introduce the field and clarify the purpose of the paper
  - a. what is the field of study you are going to present?
  - b. what is the purpose of your paper?
2. Review relevant literature (concisely)
  - a. what is the current understanding of the topic?
  - b. what is the main problem in the literature, if any?
3. Introduce your paper



- A. What is the empirical issue examined in this paper?
  - b. what is the line of your argument?
  - c. how are you going to structure your paper?
2. Conceptual/theoretical discussion
    - a. What are the key features of the perspective/framework of your choice? Why have you chosen it?
    - b. what are the pros and cons of the above framework? If there were cons, state how you address them.
3. Empirical analysis
    - a. What is the empirical issue you deal with?
    - b. what is a conventional approach to examine the issue?
4. Conclusion
    - a. reiterate your argument by reflecting on what you have established in your discussion.
    - b. broader implication/future research agenda.

Assessment (the following criteria are for guidance only)

1. Argument: clear and incisive argument
2. Theoretical discussion: displaying impressive skill in elucidating concepts
3. Cohesion in analysis: conducting analysis and marshalling evidence
4. Wide knowledge: shows wide knowledge of the topic, with signs of sophisticated understanding
5. Originality: displays originality in handling the problem
6. Presentation style and literature (relevant sources, wide reading, and critical engagement with literature)

I will provide a detailed description of essay requirements and grading at the beginning of the Spring semester.