Place and Politics (GOVT380)

Professor: Yamil R. Velez

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Office Hours: 3-5 PM on Tuesday and by appointment.

Office Location: Room 213 in the Public Affairs Center.

Course Overview: This course examines the importance of place in shaping American politics at the mass and elite levels. Topics will include, but are not limited to, racial segregation in the American South, white flight, immigration, gentrification, and the impact of increasing levels of diversity on national and local politics. Throughout the course, we will cover key theories in intergroup relations and how they apply to each phenomenon.

Course Structure: This course will be almost entirely discussion based. If the topic requires a lot of background knowledge, I will prepare a short lecture covering the topic prior to our discussion but otherwise, students should expect to discuss the weekly readings. Students are expected to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each paper and how the papers relate to each other. Every week, students will post a set of three questions related to the readings and some of those questions will help guide the discussion. They will also write a short 2-3 page reaction paper on the readings.

Course Objectives: By the end of the course, students will:

- Have a better appreciation of geography and place in shaping political attitudes and behavior
- Be more knowledgeable about political geography
- Gain some experience in dealing with geographical data and analysis
- Be better equipped to dissect complex issues and arguments
- Become acquainted with the research process

Required Books:


Course Website: You can access the course website through moodle.wesleyan.edu. Please check the course website at least twice a week.

Course Outline[^1]

[^1]: All articles will be made available on the course’s NotaBene site.
1. Introduction to Class

- **September 10**: Course overview

2. Thinking about Place

- **September 17**: Individuals vs. Environments: *can we adequately explain social patterns by using spatial variation?*
  - Agnew (1996a)
  - Flint (1996)
  - King (1996)
  - Agnew (1996b)
  - Cho and Rudolph (2008)

- **September 24**: Defining and Measuring Environments: *how do we measure place? how do these different measurements impact our inferences?*
  - Oliver and Mendelberg (2000)
  - Oliver and Wong (2003)
  - Baybeck (2006)
  - Cho and Baer (2011)
  - Wong et al. (2012)

3. The Impact of Contexts

- **October 1**: Southern Politics and Power Threat: *what explains the unique political development of the American South?*
  - Key (1984)
  - Black (1998)

- **October 8**: Extensions to Immigration Politics: *do the same processes that shaped the development of the American South explain attitudes toward immigrants?*
  - Blalock (1960)
  - Markert (2010)
  - Hopkins (2010)
  - Rocha et al. (2011)

- **October 15**: Cultural and Symbolic Threat: *how do intangible or subjective factors drive reactions to out-group members in the local environment?*
  - Sears, Hensler, and Speer (1979)
  - Huddy and Sears (1995)
  - Hopkins (2011)
  - Newman (2013)

- **October 22**: The Contact Hypothesis: *when do people develop more positive attitudes toward out-group members?*
  - Pettigrew (1998)
  - Stein, Post, and Rinden (2000)
  - Weber et al. (2013)

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2Research workshop #1: measuring local environments
4. The Impact of Spatial Distance

- **October 29:** Causal Inference: *if people can select where they live, can we ever be sure of whether place actually shapes behavior?*
  - Sobel (2000)
  - Enos (2014)
  - Enos (2015)

5. Electoral Boundaries

- **December 10:** Gerrymandering and Electoral Geography: *how do the lines drawn to represent districts affect political outcomes?*
  - Lublin (1999)
  - McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2009)
  - Chen and Cottrell (2014)
  - Hayes and McKee (2012)
1. Final Paper (40 %): The final paper will be an analytical essay covering a topic discussed in the course or a research paper that employs statistical analyses. The paper should be 15-20 pages long and

2. Prospectus (15 %): The prospectus is a short 3-5 page proposal that sketches out a plan for the final paper and discusses how the paper fits into the existing literature.

3. Reaction Papers (15 %): Every week, you will be asked to submit a short 2-3 page reaction paper about the readings. These papers are due on the next school day at 5 PM.

4. Research Workshops (15 %): Throughout the course, we will have short research workshops that give you a sense of how to describe and analyze spatial data. There will be two assignments related to these workshops.

5. Participation (15 %): Participation in the course will be determined by your engagement in class and outside of class. Every week, you will submit three questions about the material. These questions are due before class.

**Important Dates**: Papers are due before the start of class.

- September 24: Research Workshop Assignment
- November 5: Research Workshop Assignment
- November 19: Prospectus
- December 10: Final Paper

**Readings**: All of the readings will be posted on the class’ NotaBene site. NotaBene is an interactive annotation tool for articles and books. This site will allow you to annotate and ask me questions while you read the material. Every Sunday, I will post answers to your questions. This is a good tool if you do not understand something in the article or if the article gives you a research idea. I strongly recommend using this service as we move through the course.

**Extra Help**: Students are expected to hand in their own work. Do not hesitate to come to my office during office hours to discuss an assignment or any aspect of the course.

**Late Work**: I will not accept reaction papers for credit after 5 p.m. the day they are due. Late research paper assignments will lose 2/3 of a letter grade (e.g., a B+ becomes B-) for each day they are late. An assignment is considered one day late if it is submitted more than 10 minutes after the stated deadline. The assignment becomes two days late 24 hours after the deadline, 3 days late after 48 hours, 4 days late after 72 hours, and 5 days late after 96 hours. Assignments over five days late will not be accepted for credit.

**Contacting the Instructor**: I encourage you to contact me with questions and concerns about the course content and assignments. Please refer to me as Professor Velez in all correspondence. In general, if you have a clarification question you can reach me over e-mail or on my office phone. Questions about course material, grades, or how to structure your research paper are best dealt with in office hours where we can have a more productive conversation than over e-mail. If my office hours do not work for you because of your class schedule, work schedule, or another important commitment, I am also available by appointment. I cannot guarantee that if you e-mail me shortly before an assignment is due that I will be
able to answer your questions, so please make sure and e-mail me early if you have a time-specific question.

**Contested Grades:** If you wish to contest a grade you must submit a written explanation of why you believe the grade is inaccurate within two weeks of getting the assignment back. You must wait 24 hours from the time the assignment is returned before you submit the written explanation. I will not discuss grades until 24 hours after the assignment is passed back. If you ask me to reevaluate your grade then I reserve the right to either raise or lower your grade based on my reevaluation. This policy is meant to address disagreements with my assessment of your work. It does not pertain to calculation errors on my part. If you believe I have made a mistake adding up points, converting your points to a percentage, etc. you can let me know immediately, and I will be happy to correct any mistakes.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

**Technology in the Classroom:** You may use laptops or tablets in class for note taking purposes only. Refrain from using these devices for Facebook, instant messenger, e-mail checking, or anything else that may distract you, your fellow students, or me. It is obvious when someone is using his or her laptop for non-class related activities, and I reserve the right to discontinue the use of laptops (unless you contact me about an exception) if they become a distraction. Texting is not permitted during class.

**Academic Integrity:** Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another persons work as your own is always wrong. I expect students to follow the Wesleyan honor code and I will report any cases of academic dishonesty to the Honor Board.

Please read this for more information: [Wesleyan Honor Code](#)

For information on plagiarism: [Plagiarism, Student Handbook](#)

**Title IX:** Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 states that no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. See [Title IX at Wesleyan](#) for more information.

**Syllabus:** Note that this syllabus is a rough guide and subject to change.