

The Politics of Natural Resources: The “Resource Curse” and Beyond

MPhil Module
POLIS, Michaelmas Term 2021

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Time: 3-5 pm Friday, starting on 8th October 2021

Description

This module introduces students to the key concepts, theories, and issues in the politics of natural resources. Resource-rich states have experienced various political problems, including authoritarianism, civil wars, and international aggression, which have been attributed to the very presence of resource wealth. These issues are collectively called the “resource curse” and have received much scholarly attention since the turn of the century.

This course reviews the development of this literature and seeks to go beyond it, discussing how we can connect it to the broader scholarship on resource politics. It does so by extending the scope of the theory on three grounds: timeframe, issues, and resources. When did the political impact of natural resources begin? What other issues do they lead to? Is it just about oil? If not, what distinguishes resources with political impacts from those without?

The aim of this module is to give students the tools to understand how the geological, geographical, historical, and social settings of a country can affect its politics. It also aims to help them develop the ability to critically analyze contemporary political issues and sometimes think outside the box in explaining their causes.

Course organization and expectations

The course will consist of seven seminars of 1.5 to 2 hours in length. The purpose of the seminars is to have a student-led discussion of assigned readings each week, which will be oriented around the set question listed in this guide. Regular attendance and participation, though not formally assessed, are mandatory. If for any reason you cannot make a seminar, be sure to contact the module convenor in advance. Each session (after the first one) will be led by student discussants, which will be selected in the first session.

Students will be expected to make one presentation. Starting on the second class, discussion leaders will be asked to start the discussion through a brief reflection essay (of 2-3 double-spaced pages) about the required readings for the week. The essay discusses the readings, answers an initial discussion question set by the course instructor (see the reading list for each week), and formulates a few additional questions related to the readings to be discussed in class. The essays should be analytical and critical; it should not be a mere summary of the readings. Presenters’ questions are meant to provoke debate among class participants. Each presentation should last no longer than 10 minutes to allow for collective discussion. Please assume that everyone will have read your essay and will be ready to engage with your reflections and questions. Reflection essays should be emailed in word or pdf format to all seminar participants (including the course instructor) at **11:59 pm** on the day before our class sessions.

In the reading lists that follow, there are two kinds of readings. One is required readings; students are expected to come to class having done those readings. The other is further readings, which are included for students who may want to read further on the topic and may also be useful when writing the assessment essays.

Assessment will be based on a 3000-word essay at the end of the term. This will be due on **Friday 3 December**.

Week 1: Prehistory – Colonialism and natural resources

Discussion question: What was the role of natural resources in colonial rule?

Required readings:

- Yergin, Daniel. *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, & Power*. New York: Free Press, 2009. Chapters 1, 9, 15.
- Gray, Steven. *Steam Power and Sea Power: Coal, the Royal Navy, and the British Empire, C. 1870-1914*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Chapters 1, 2, 4.
- Elliott, J. H. "The Spanish Conquest and Settlement of America." Chapter 6. In *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, edited by Leslie Bethell, 1:147–206. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Further readings:

- Mitchell, Timothy. "Carbon Democracy." *Economy and Society* 38, no. 3 (2009): 399-432.
- Shulman, Peter A. *Coal & Empire: The Birth of Energy Security in Industrial America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015.
- Tate, Merze. "Nauru, Phosphate, and the Nauruans." *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 14, no. 2 (1968): 177-92.
- Dell, Melissa. "The Persistent Effects of Peru's Mining Mita." *Econometrica* 78, no. 6 (2010): 1863-903.
- Vilar, Pierre. *A History of Gold and Money 1450 to 1920*. London: Verso, 1984.

Week 2: Rentier states and the Middle East

Discussion question: Is rentierism unique to the Middle East?

Required readings:

- Beblawi, Hazem, and Luciani, Giacomo. *The Rentier State*. London: Routledge, 2016. Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2.
- Anderson, Lisa. "The State in the Middle East and North Africa." *Comparative Politics* 20, no. 1 (1987): 1-18.
- Bellin, Eva. "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (2004): 139-57.

Further readings:

- Crystal, Jill. *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Hariri, Jacob Gerner. "A Contribution to the Understanding of Middle Eastern and Muslim Exceptionalism." *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 2 (2015): 477-90.
- Herb, Michael. "No Representation without Taxation? Rents, Development, and Democracy." *Comparative Politics* 37, no. 3 (2005): 297-316.

- Smith, C.G. "The Emergence of the Middle East." *Journal of Contemporary History* 3.3 (1968): 3-17.

Week 3: Democracy

Discussion question: Does oil hinder democracy?

Required readings:

- Ross, Michael L. "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (2001): 325-61.
- Haber, Stephen, and Menaldo, Victor. "Do Natural Resources Fuel Authoritarianism? A Reappraisal of the Resource Curse." *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 1 (2011): 1-26.
- Dunning, Thad. *Crude Democracy: Natural Resource Wealth and Political Regimes*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Chapters 1 and 4.
- Waldner, David, and Benjamin Smith. "Survivorship Bias in Comparative Politics: Endogenous Sovereignty and the Resource Curse." *Perspectives on Politics*, 2020, 1–16.

Further readings:

- Morrison, Kevin M. "Whither the Resource Curse?" *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 4 (2013): 1117-125.
- Andersen, Jørgen J, and Ross, Michael L. "The Big Oil Change." *Comparative Political Studies* 47, no. 7 (2014): 993-1021.
- Karl, Terry Lynn. *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-states*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Smith, Benjamin B. *Hard times in the Lands of Plenty: Oil Politics in Iran and Indonesia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.
- Mukoyama, Naosuke. "Colonial Origins of the Resource Curse: Endogenous Sovereignty and Authoritarianism in Brunei." *Democratization* 27, no. 2 (2020): 224-42.

Week 4: Civil war

Discussion question: Do natural resources cause civil wars?

Required readings:

- Fearon, James D, and Laitin, David D. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75-90.
- Collier, Paul, and Hoeffler, Anke. "On Economic Causes of Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers* 50, no. 4 (1998): 563-73.
- Ross, Michael L. "How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases." *International Organization* 58, no. 1 (2004): 35-67.
- Le Billon, Philippe. "The Political Ecology of War: Natural Resources and Armed Conflicts." *Political Geography* 20, no. 5 (2001): 561-84.

Further readings:

- Hunziker, Philipp, and Cederman, Lars-Erik. "No Extraction without Representation: The Ethno-regional Oil Curse and Secessionist Conflict." *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 3 (2017): 365-81.
- Lujala, Päivi, Gleditsch, Nils Petter, and Gilmore, Elisabeth. "A Diamond Curse? Civil War and a Lootable Resource." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 4 (2005): 538-62.
- Morelli, Massimo, and Rohner, Dominic. "Resource Concentration and Civil Wars." *Journal of Development Economics* 117 (2015): 32-47.

Week 5: Anti-mining movements

Discussion question: Why do people resist mining projects?

Required readings:

- Haslam, Paul Alexander, and Ary Tanimoune, Nasser. "The Determinants of Social Conflict in the Latin American Mining Sector: New Evidence with Quantitative Data." *World Development* 78 (2016): 401-19.
- Gedicks, Al. *Resource Rebels: Native Challenges to Mining and Oil Corporations*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2001. Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2.
- Urkidi, Leire, and Walter, Mariana. "Dimensions of Environmental Justice in Anti-gold Mining Movements in Latin America." *Geoforum* 42, no. 6 (2011): 683-95.
- Conde, Marta. "Resistance to Mining. A Review." *Ecological Economics* 132 (2017): 80-90.

Further readings:

- McNeish, John-Andrew. "A Vote to Derail Extraction: Popular Consultation and Resource Sovereignty in Tolima, Colombia." *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 5 (2017): 1128-145.
- Bloomfield, Michael John. "Shame Campaigns and Environmental Justice: Corporate Shaming as Activist Strategy." *Environmental Politics* 23, no. 2 (2014): 263-81.
- Horowitz, Leah S. "'Twenty Years Is Yesterday': Science, Multinational Mining, and the Political Ecology of Trust in New Caledonia." *Geoforum* 41, no. 4 (2010): 617-26.

Week 6: International conflicts

Discussion question: Does oil cause international conflicts?

Required readings:

- Klare, Michael T. *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict*. New York: Henry Holt, 2002. Chapters 1, 2, and any one case study chapter.
- Colgan, Jeff. *Petro-aggression When Oil Causes War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Chapters 1, 2, 4.
- Jang, Hye Ryeon, and Smith, Benjamin. "Pax Petrolica? Rethinking the Oil–Interstate War Linkage." *Security Studies*, 2021, 1-23.

Further readings:

- Yergin, Daniel. *The Quest: Energy, Security and the Remaking of the Modern World*. London: Penguin, 2012.
- Macris, Jeffrey R. *The Politics and Security of the Gulf: Anglo-American Hegemony and the Shaping of a Region*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Week 7: Not so “natural” resources

Discussion question: What political roles does aid, military bases, canals, or tax havens play, and how are they different from the role of oil?

Required readings:

- Djankov, Simeon, Montalvo, Jose G, and Reynal-Querol, Marta. "The Curse of Aid." *Journal of Economic Growth* 13, no. 3 (2008): 169-94.
- Cooley, Alexander. *Base Politics Democratic Change and the U.S. Military Overseas*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008. Chapters 1, 2, and any one case study chapter.
- Smith, Simon C. *Reassessing Suez 1956: New Perspectives on the Crisis and Its Aftermath*. Aldershot:

Ashgate, 2008. Chapter 1.

- Palan, Ronen. "Trying to Have Your Cake and Eating It: How and Why the State System Has Created Offshore." *International Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (1998): 625-43.

Further readings:

- Altincekic, Ceren, and Bearce, David H. "Why There Should Be No Political Foreign Aid Curse." *World Development* 64 (2014): 18-32.
- Ogle, Vanessa. "‘Funk Money’: The End of Empires, The Expansion of Tax Havens, and Decolonization as an Economic and Financial Event." *Past & Present*, 2020.