

Political Development & Policy



Lecture 1: What is political development?

Chris Blattman

I. Is there such a thing as “political development”?

Example 1: Life in Medellin

Colombia's second-largest city and industrial heartland



Historically weak state presence in the periphery of the city

- Hillsides filled with large number of displaced persons, the poor, immigrants
- For many years, limited access to police, city services, etc.



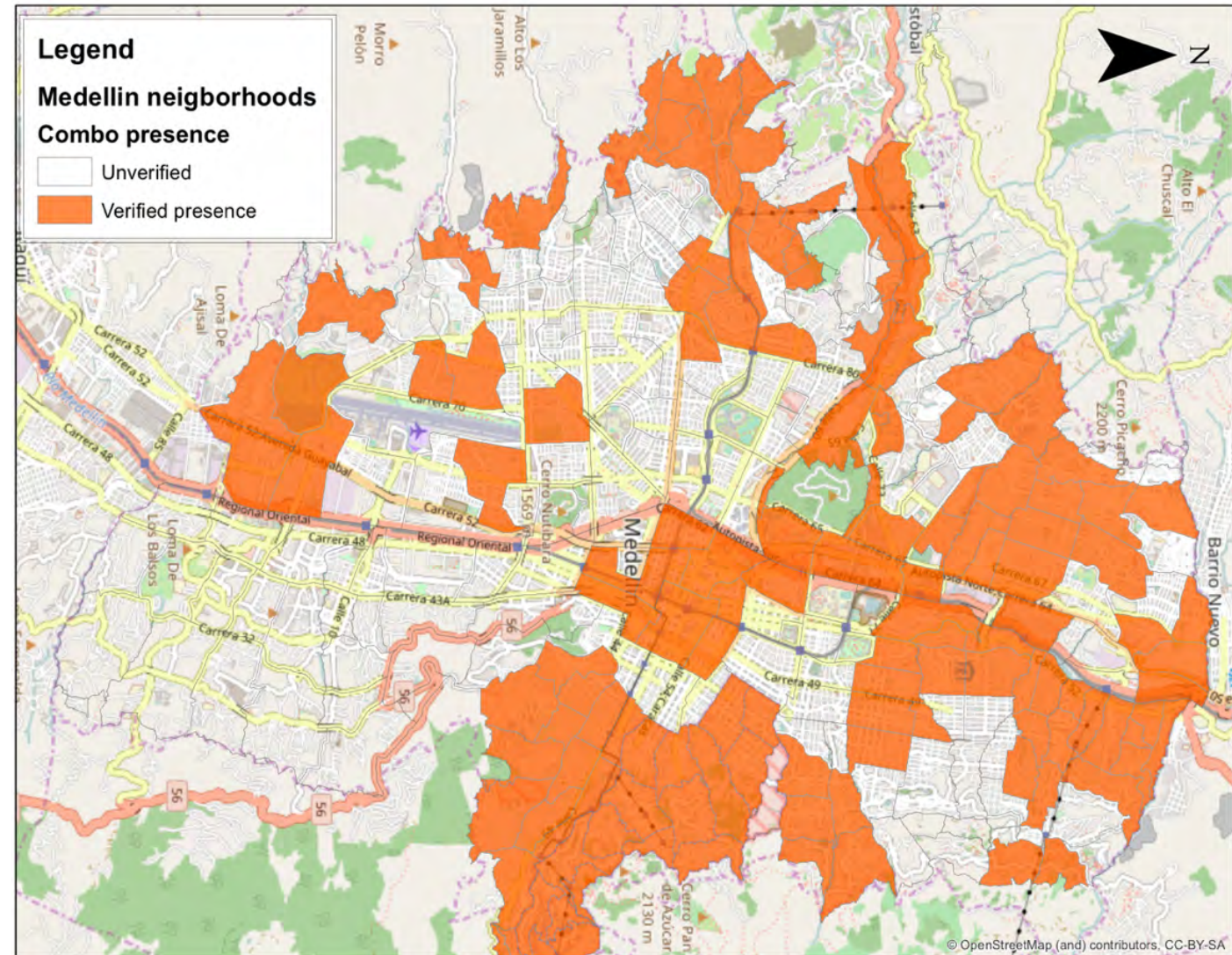
More than 300 local youth gangs city-wide

- Often groups of 20-40 men aged 13-35
- Began in lower income neighborhoods,
- Main business is illicit trade
 - Micro trafficking
 - Debt collection, loan sharking
 - Protection rackets
 - Voter “mobilization”



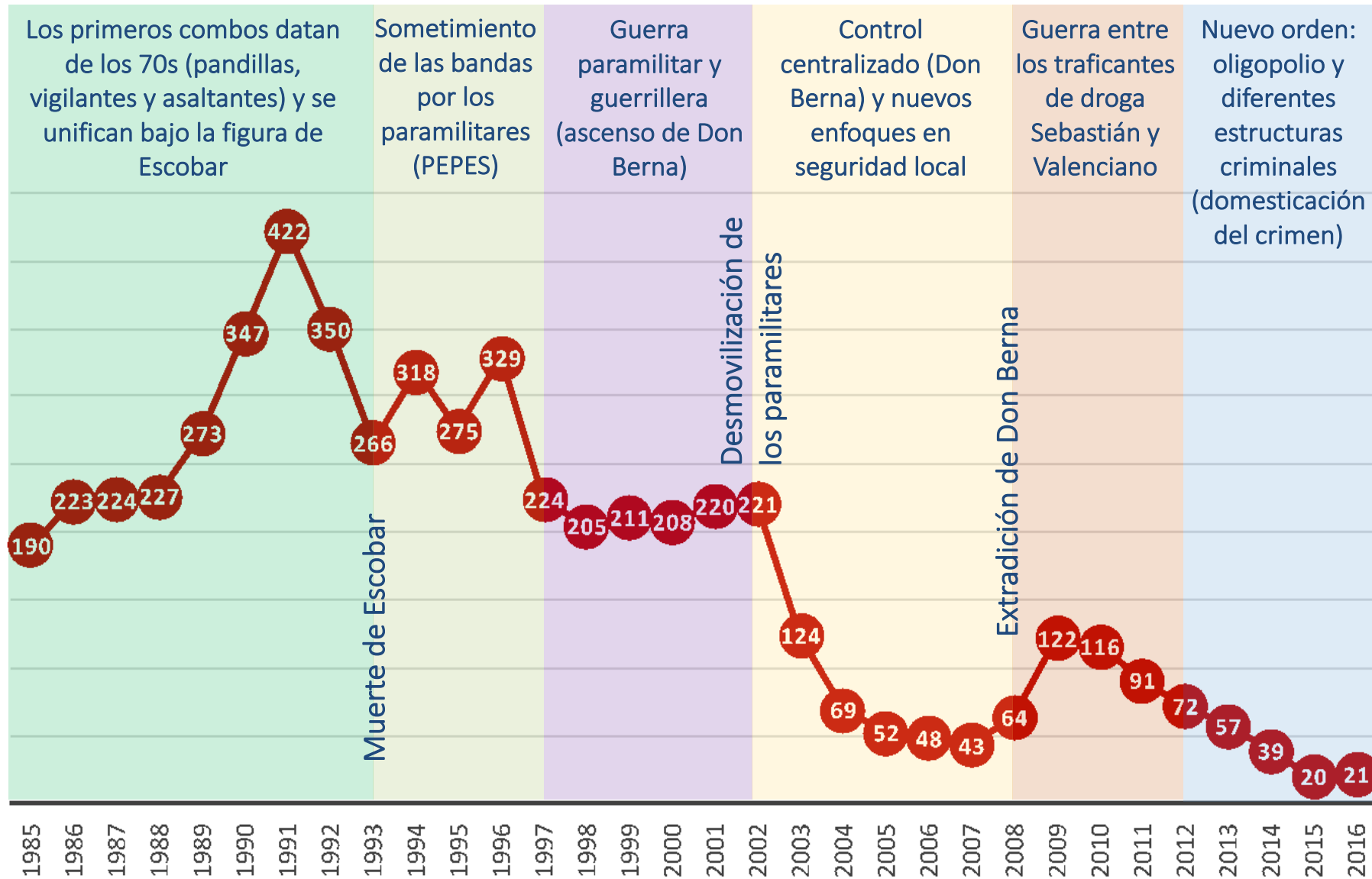
But they have begun to take on other roles as well

- Adjudicating disputes, defining and enforcing property rights
 - Noise complaints
 - Property disputes
- Provide policing and security
 - Deter and punish outside thieves
 - Reduce or regulate sexual violence
- Regulating consumer goods markets
 - Eggs, arepas
 - Microfinance
- Employment programs
 - Provide jobs through regulated markets
- Tax collection
 - Weekly, mainly from local businesses and buses



Most times there violence is low-scale, with periodic outbursts

Evolution of the homicide rate in Medellin



In what sense do you think Medellin is “underdeveloped”?



Example 2: Life in rural Liberia



Liberia

- 3.7 million people
- Colonized by African-Americans in early 19th century
- Independent republic since 1847
- Two devastating civil wars 1989-2003
- Relatively stable and growing 2003 – present
- Still one of the world's least developed nations



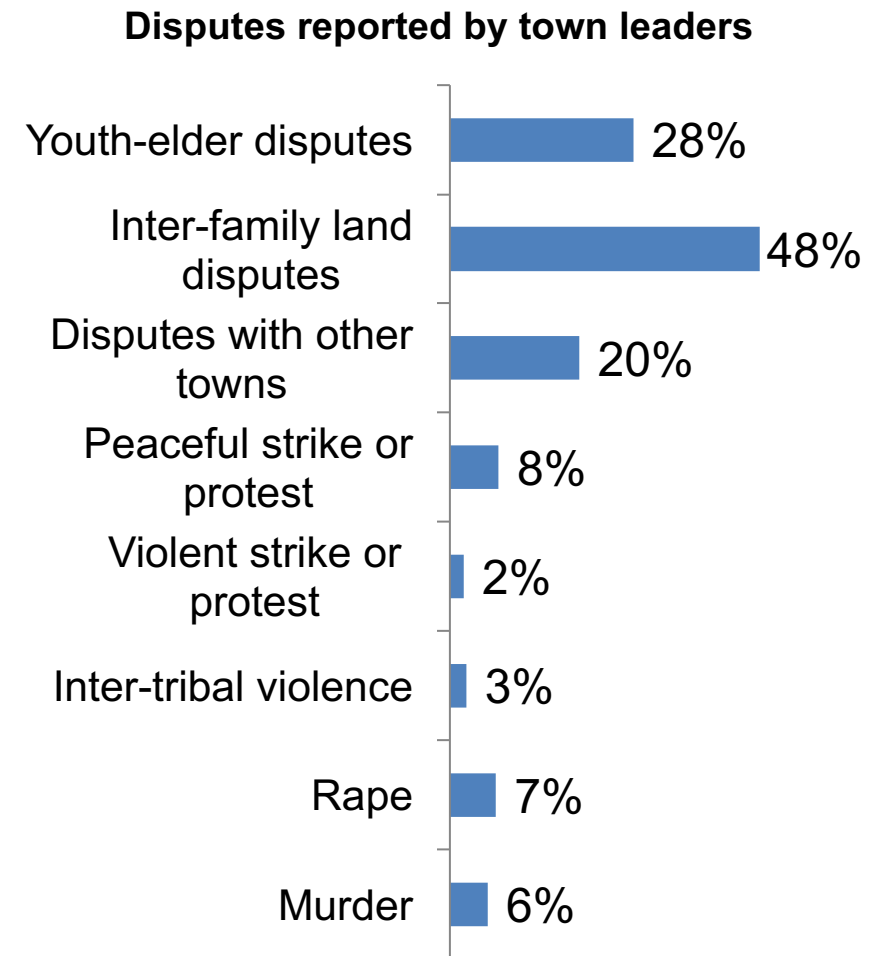
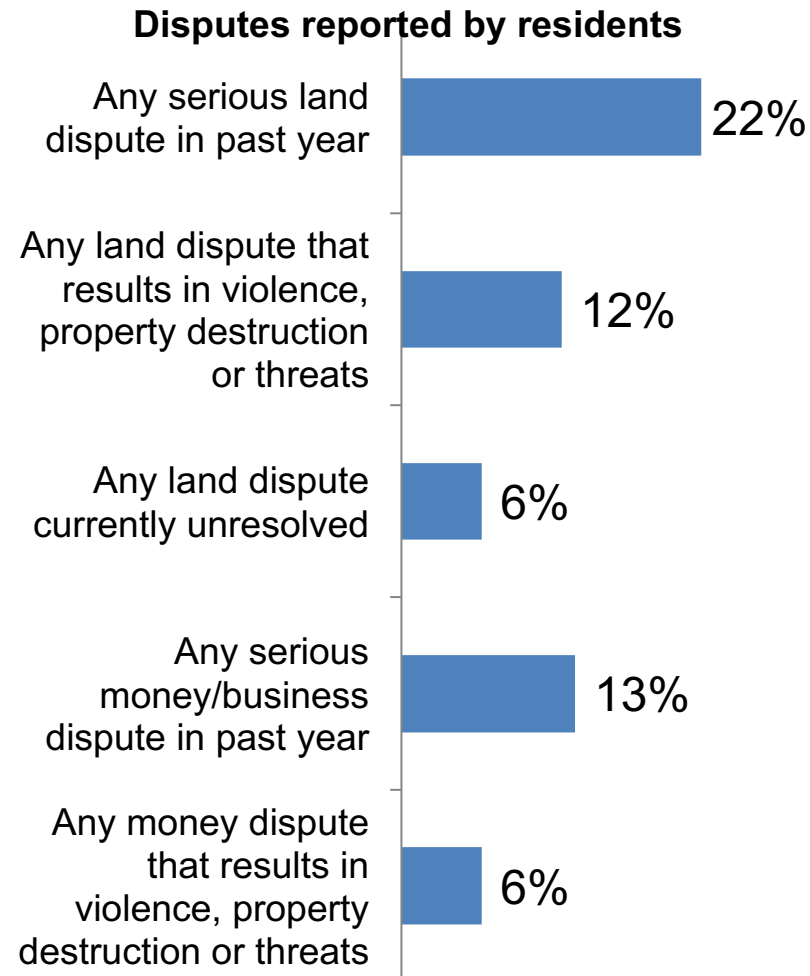
Little access to formal security, justice & public services outside capital

- Police virtually unavailable
 - No vehicles or no gas
 - Uniforms maybe
 - Little to no formal training
 - No money to feed those in jail
- Civil and criminal courts inaccessible
 - Far away
 - Huge backlogs
 - Probably no copies of laws
 - Can be corrupt and inexpensive
- No public goods access
 - No power plant, minimal road maintenance, few schools



How to manage everyday disputes over contracts, property?

Survey results from 250 Liberian villages



Disputes tend to be resolved through negotiation as well as mediation through local justice forums (informal institutions)

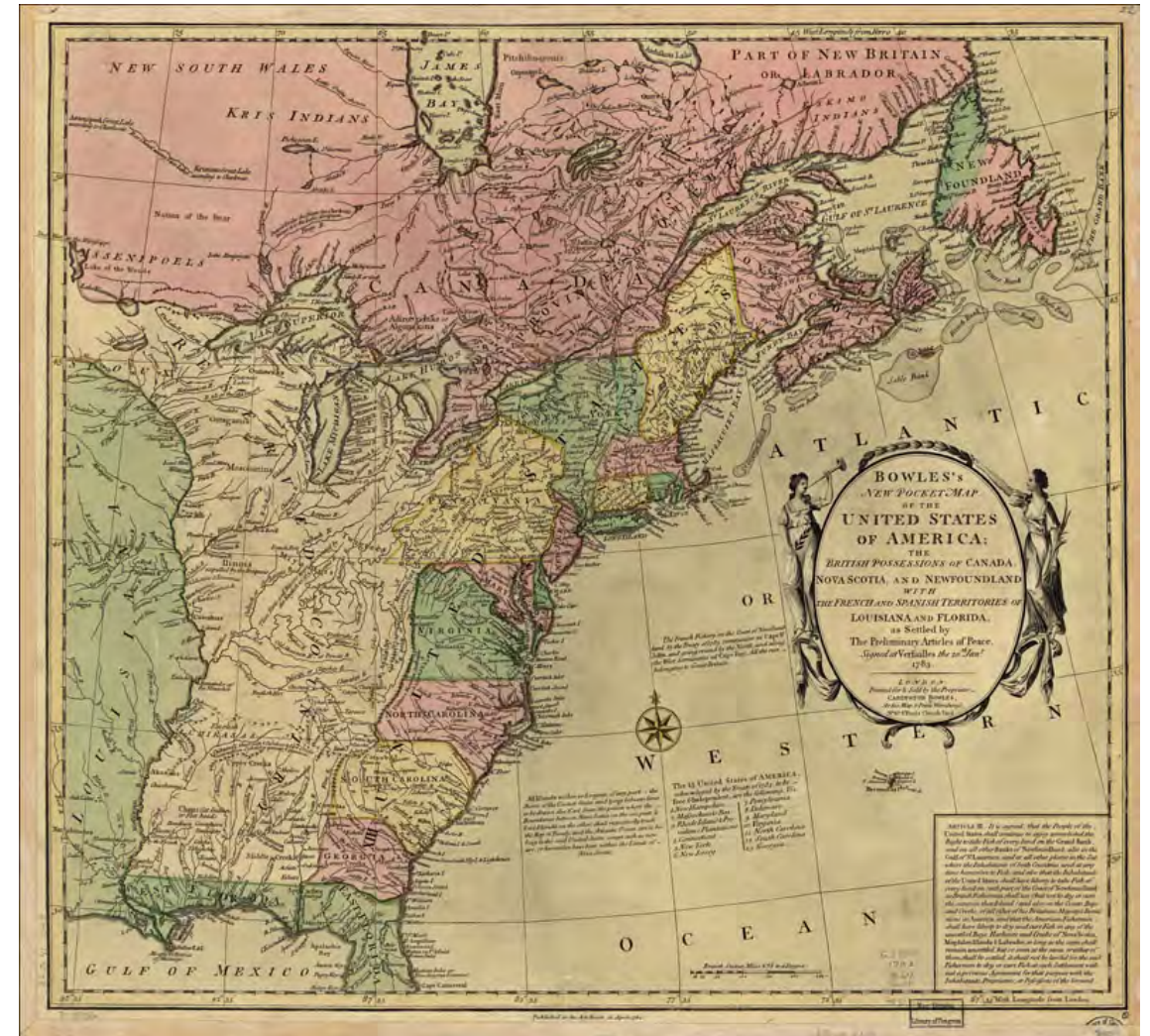


What might “political development” mean to rural Liberians?

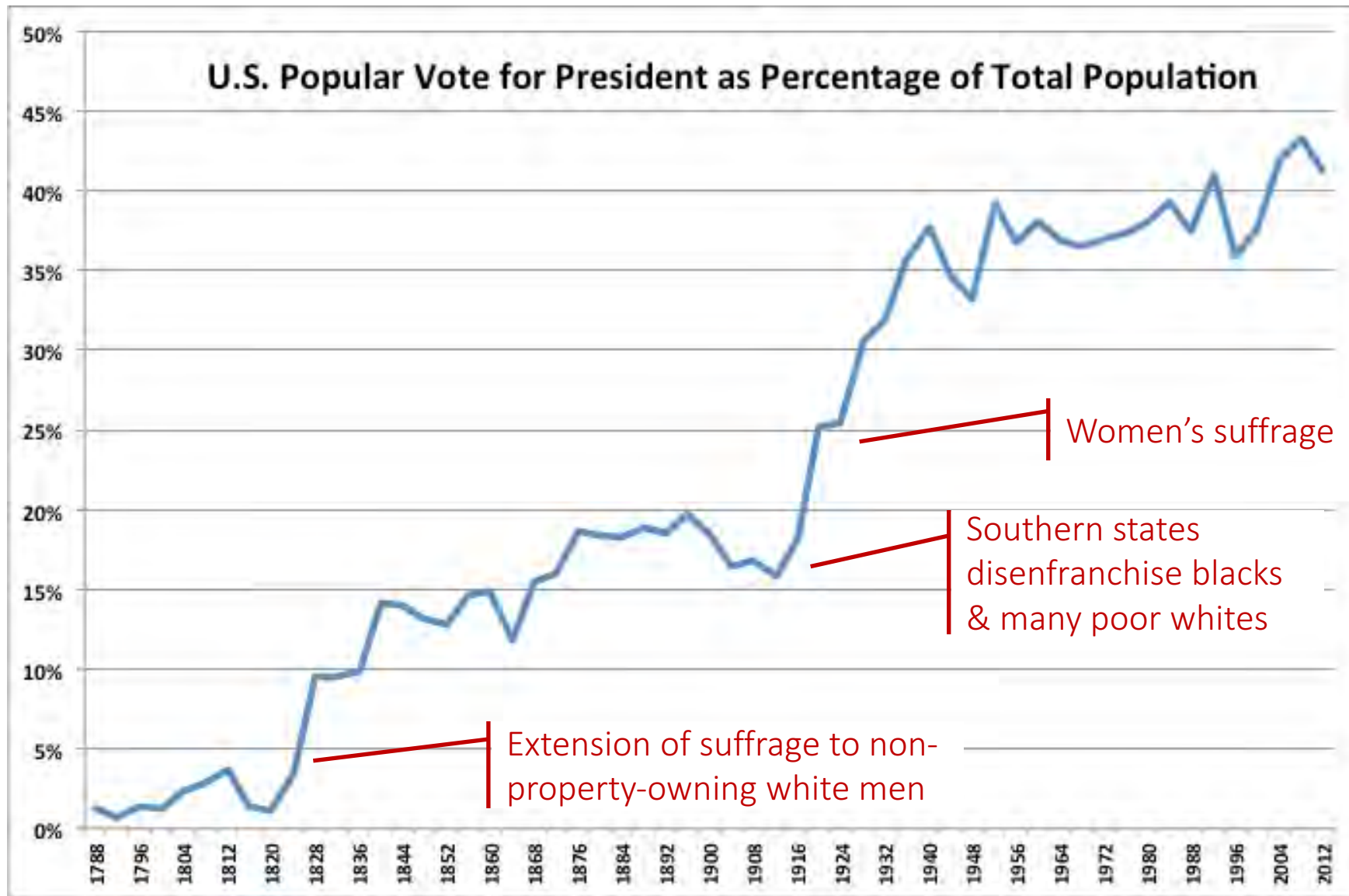


Example 3: America in the late 18th century

- On the one hand...
 - Nation founded on the principles of equality and inalienable human rights
 - Informal participation and civil society was large and vibrant
- On the other hand...
 - Revolution was led by an elite of wealthy merchants, plantation owners, and large landowners
 - Voting restricted in both countries to a small number of white male property owners



But participation was restricted for a very long time

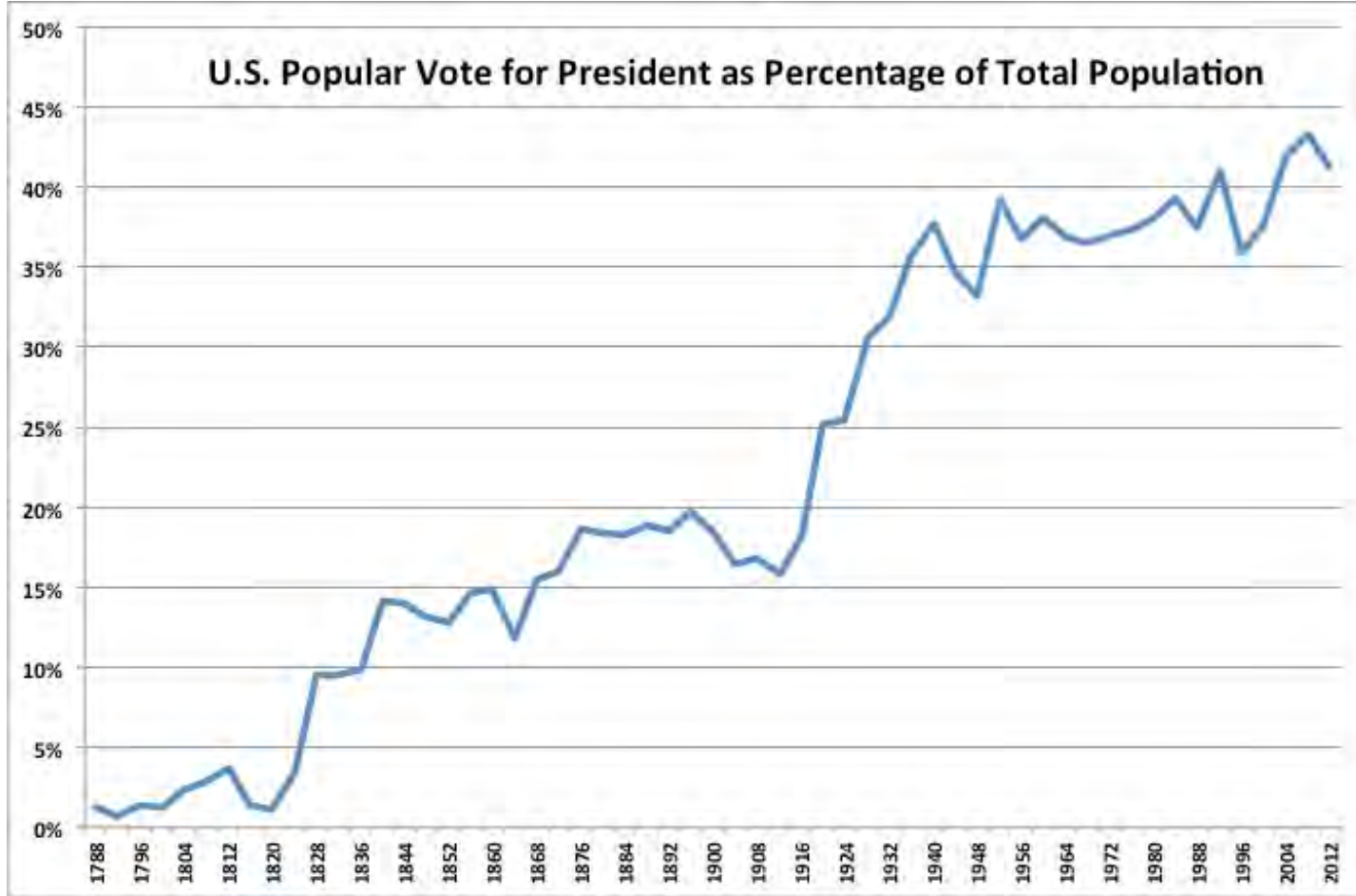


And throughout 19th century US had a clientelist system

- No professional civil service
 - Party-led patronage system where most public employees were political appointees
- Cities were dominated by powerful political machines
- Vote manipulation rampant
 - Vote buying
 - Voter fraud
 - Voter intimidation
- Was only reformed in the early 20th century, but continued long afterwards



What does political development mean in this context?



Where am I going with this?

Today

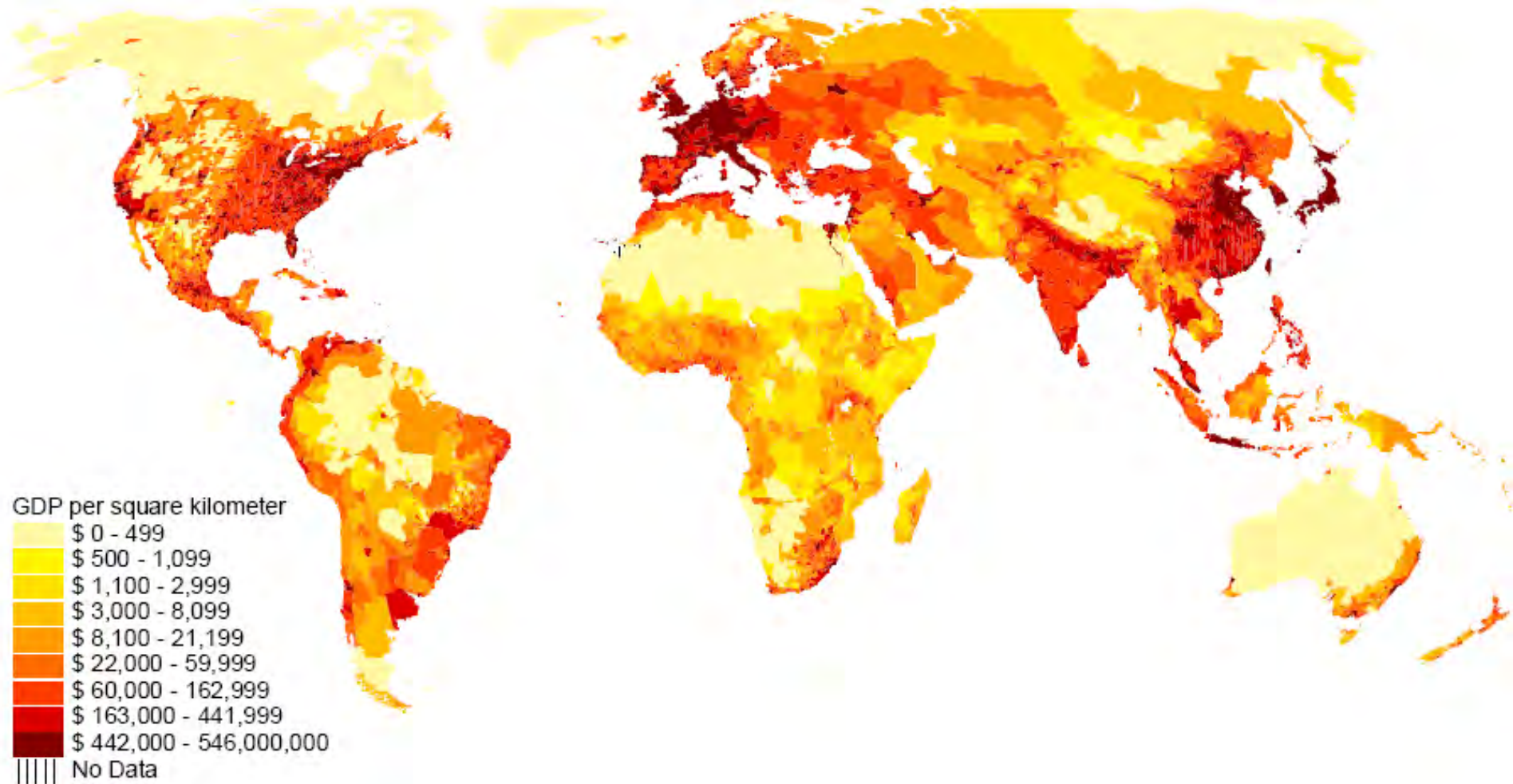
- Is there such a thing as political development?
- What can it mean?
- Why is political development important?
- (If we have time, which is doubtful)
Why do the kinds of people in this room often get political development so wrong?

This course

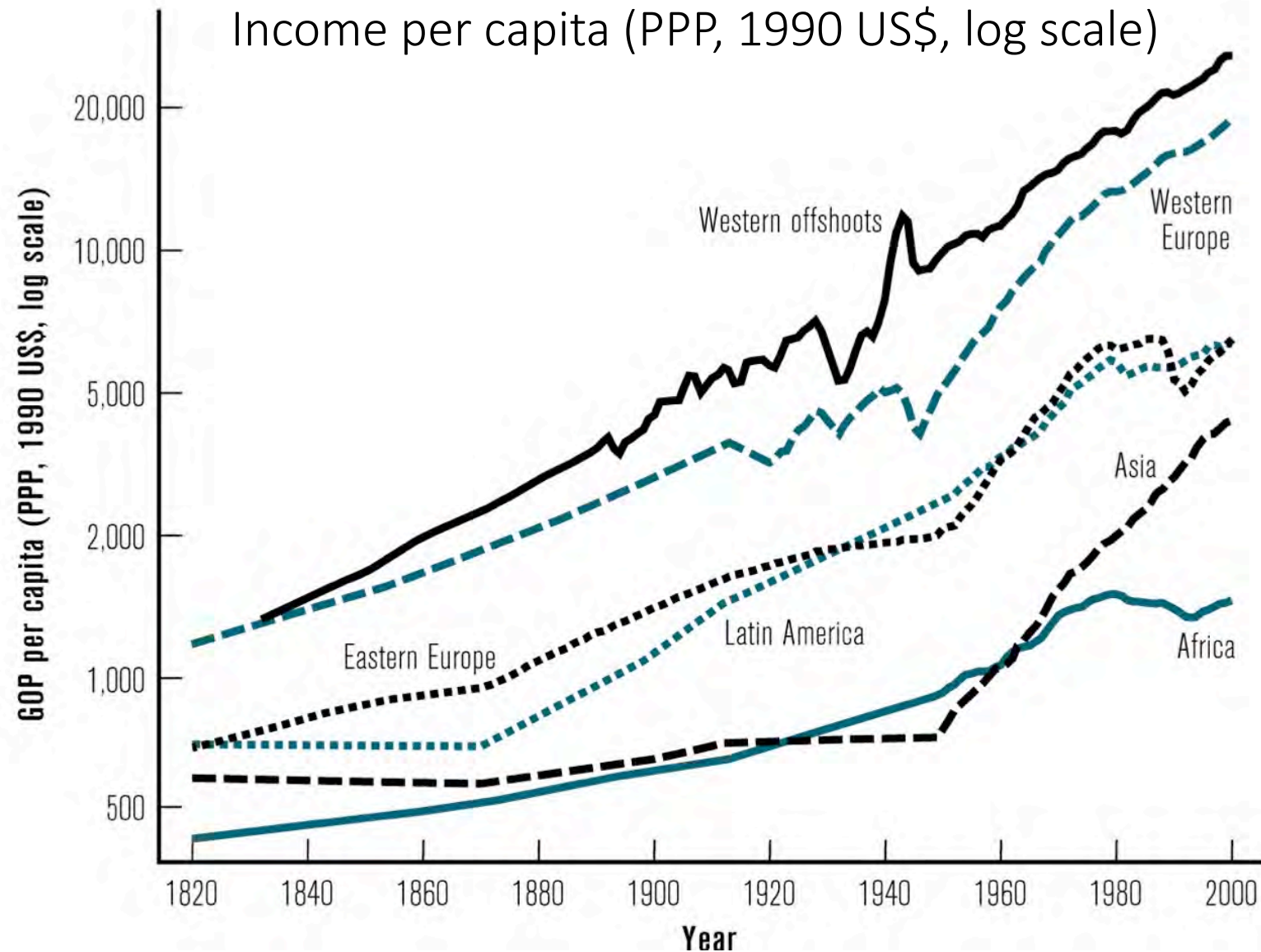
- How did political development come about in the places that have it?
- What causes political development to move backwards?
- What do we know about intervening to create political development in the short term? Can political development be engineered?
- Purposefully big picture, historical in scope, and multidisciplinary

In contrast to political development, concepts and measures of economic development are familiar and well established

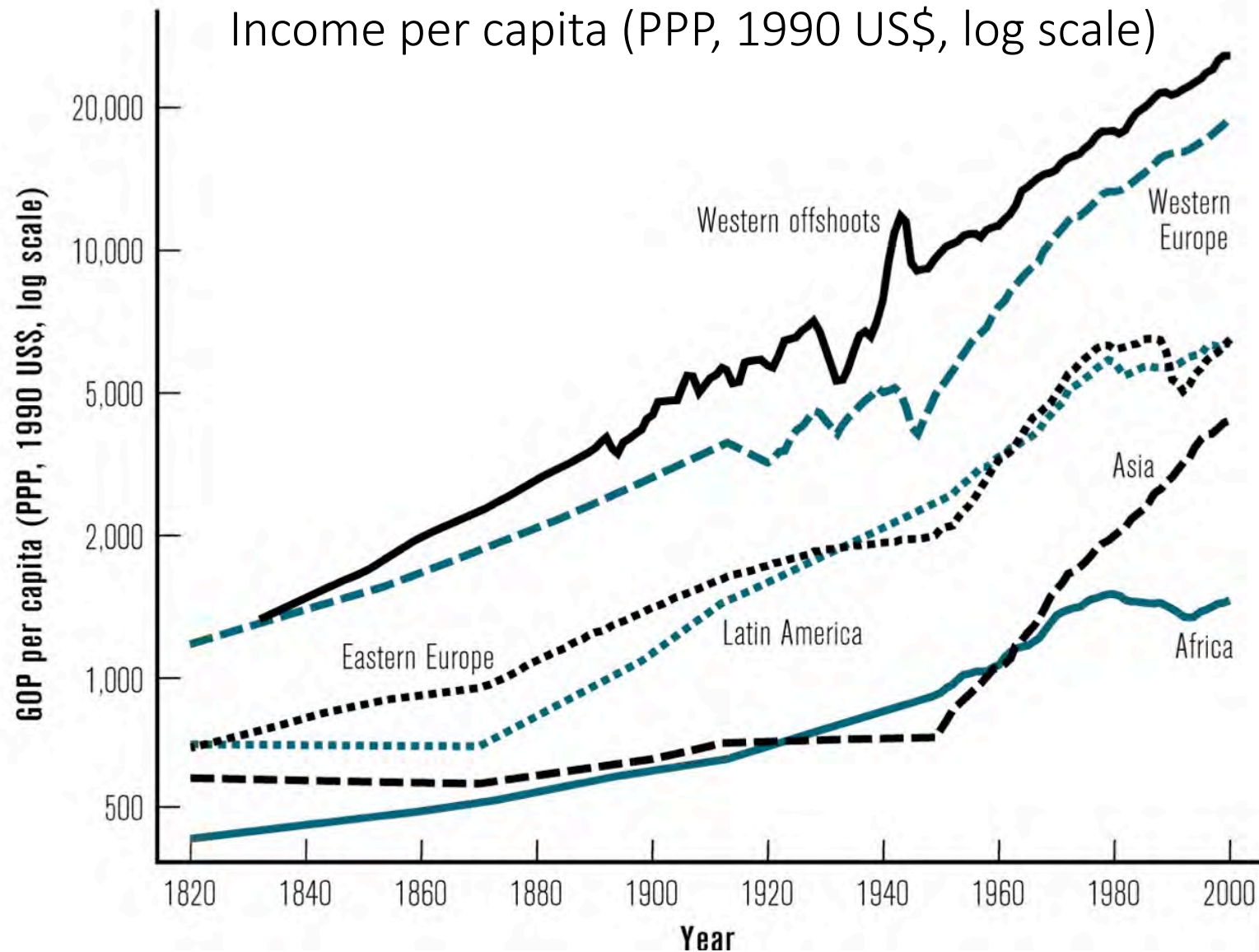
GDP per km², 1995



As a result, this is what most development discussions and classes focus on



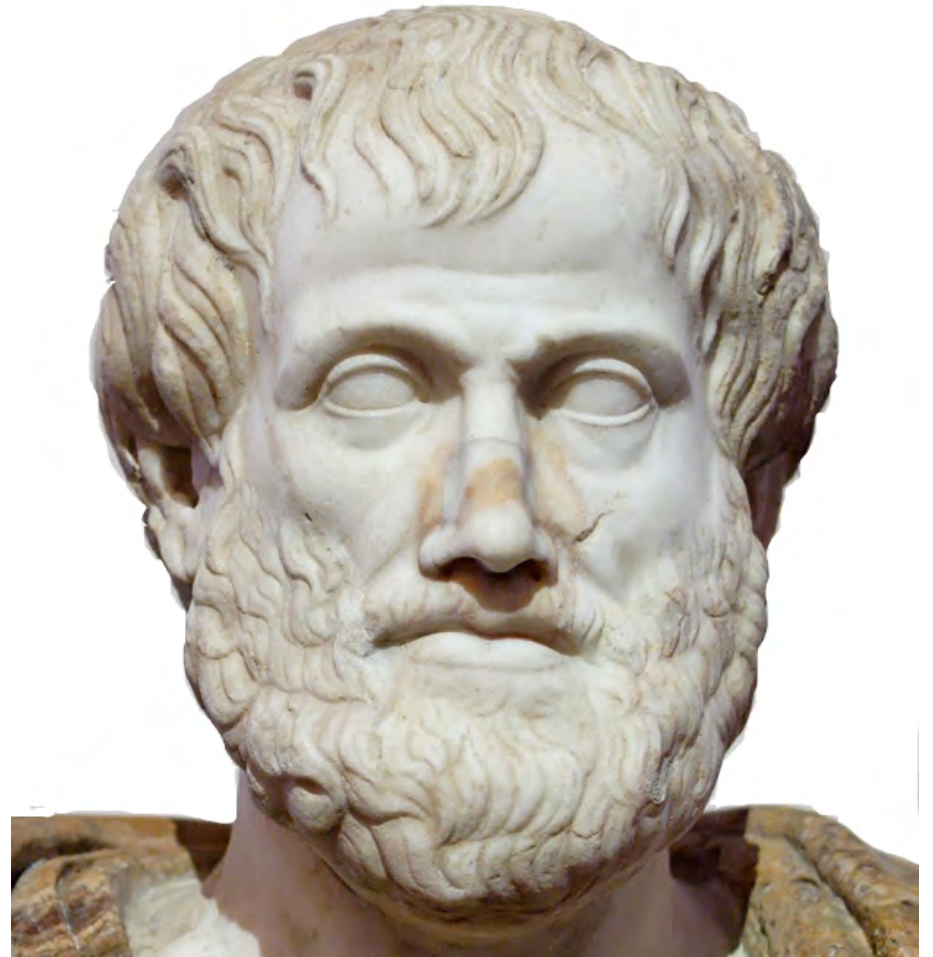
In what ways is this a limited concept of development?



One answer: Output and income, however important are not ends in themselves. They are means to ends. But which ones?

“ *The life of money-making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else.*

– Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

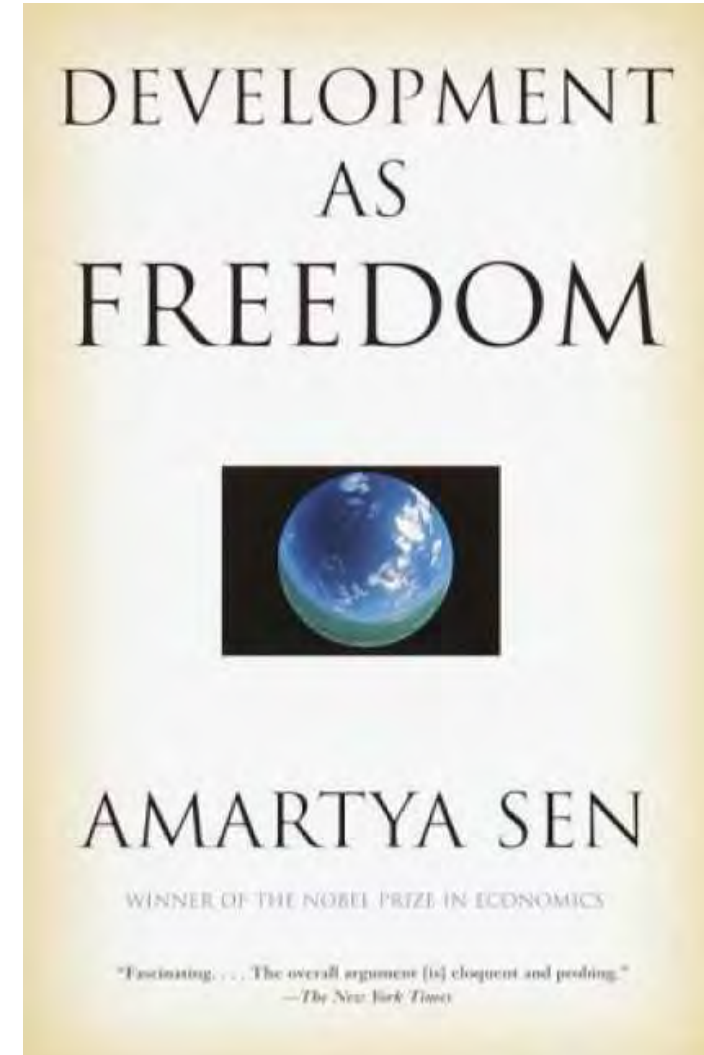


II. Political development as freedoms

Amartya Sen and “Development as Freedom”

(With his views summarized more briefly in one of the assigned readings)

- Wants us to think about development in terms of “capabilities”
- The central aspect of well-being is functioning: the freedom of choice and control over one’s life
 - Freedom from hunger
 - Freedom from disease
 - Freedom from early death
 - Freedom from violence
 - Freedom from oppression
 - Freedom to choose your own path in life
 - ...



As it happens, economic growth and poverty reduction go a long way in building certain capabilities and freedoms, but not all

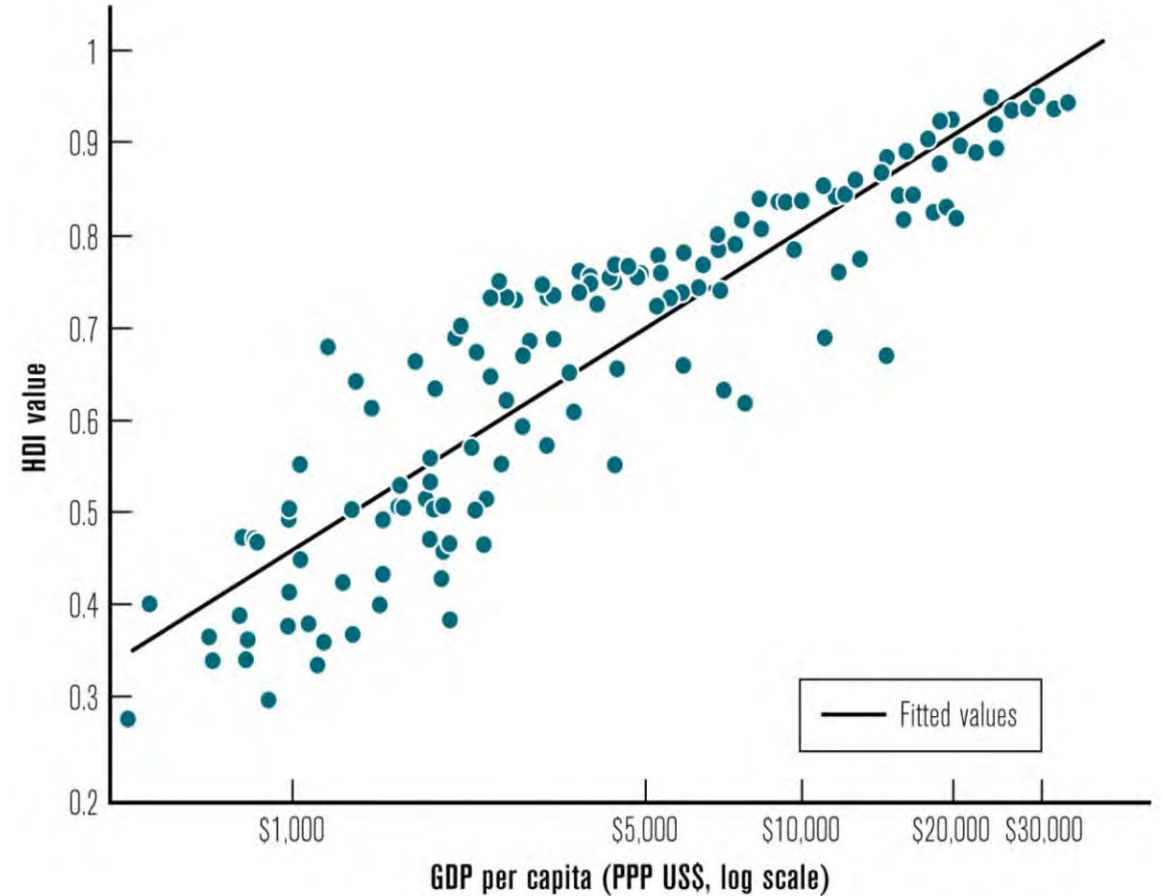
Number of people in extreme poverty

Number of people living on less than \$1.90 a day at 2011 PPP is calculated by multiplying the poverty rate and the population.



Source: World Bank

OurWorldInData.org • CC BY-SA



One conception of political development is in terms of freedoms

Freedoms from violence, arbitrary rule, oppression, injustice, uncertainty,..
Freedoms to act individually or collectively to fulfill goals and aspirations,...

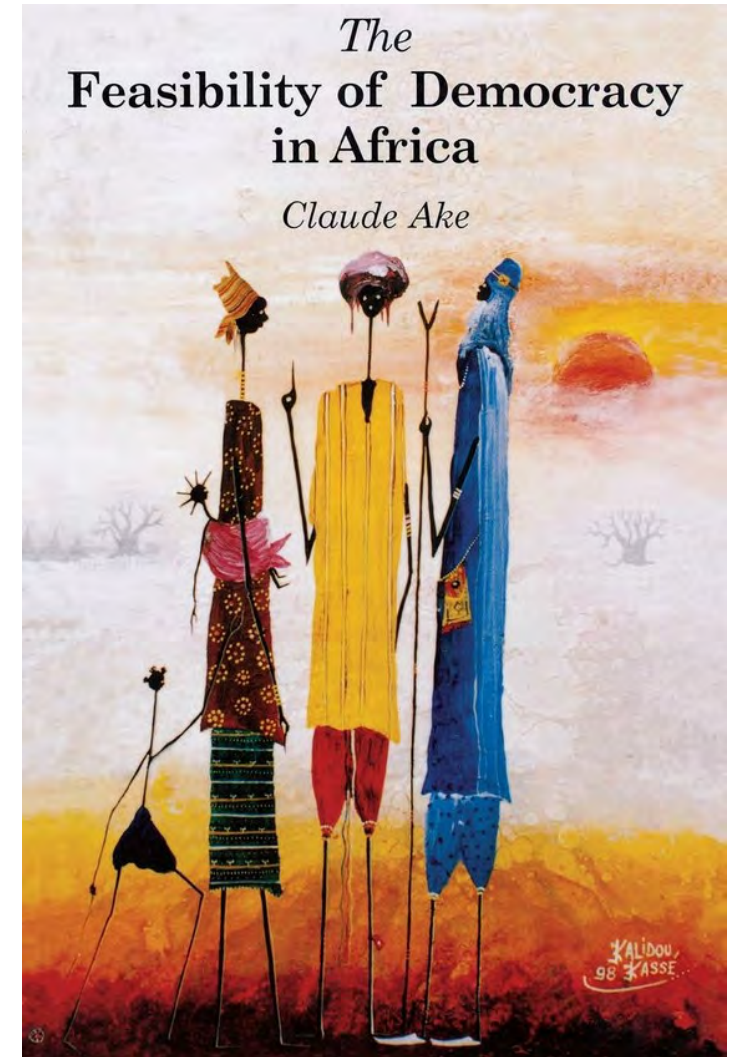
- Order and stability
 - Protect from violence
 - Provide access to justice
 - Provide stable, predictable rules, policy-making, and politics
- Equality
 - Preferences aggregated and represented
 - Equal, non-arbitrary application of the rules
- Participation and autonomy in social and political life
- Ability to act collectively to shape and coordinate society
 - Solve collective problems
 - Provide and coordinate on public goods
 - Reduce costs and uncertainty of economic transacting and political bargaining

Discussion: Do you think this is a Western definition of political development? Or is it more universal?

- Order and stability
 - Protect from violence
 - Provide access to justice
 - Provide stable, predictable rules, policy-making, and polities
- Equality
 - Preferences aggregated and represented
 - Equal, non-arbitrary application of the rules
- Participation and autonomy in social and political life
- Ability to act collectively to shape and coordinate society
 - Solve collective problems
 - Provide and coordinate on public goods
 - Reduce costs and uncertainty of economic transacting and political bargaining

Claude Ake makes a more instrumental argument for democracy

- Ake implicitly assumes certain inalienable human rights and equality
- Believed undemocratic policy-making leads to policies that diminish or alienate the average citizen rather than focusing policy on addressing the needs of many
- Believed that wider access to power and opportunities, equal treatment under the law, and accountability of power would reduce intergroup conflict (e.g. ethnic violence) and political instability
- As we will see, Ake believed some kinds of *democratization* might not bring these benefits if they misconceived what democracy is, or failed to recognize the challenges and limitations in pre-industrial societies



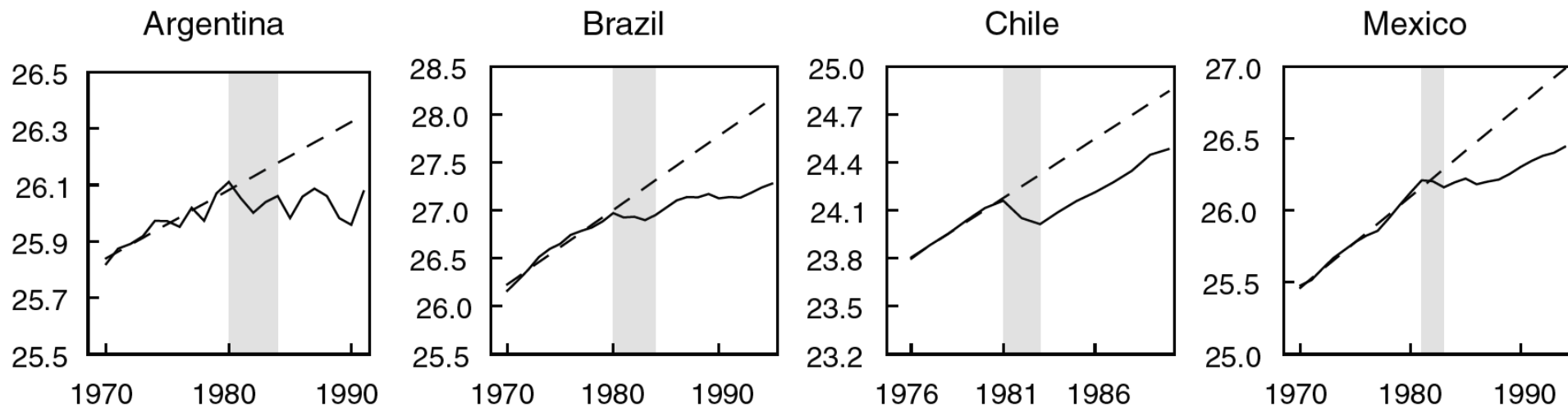
In addition to political development
being an end in itself...

...later in the class we will also see
evidence that political development →
economic development

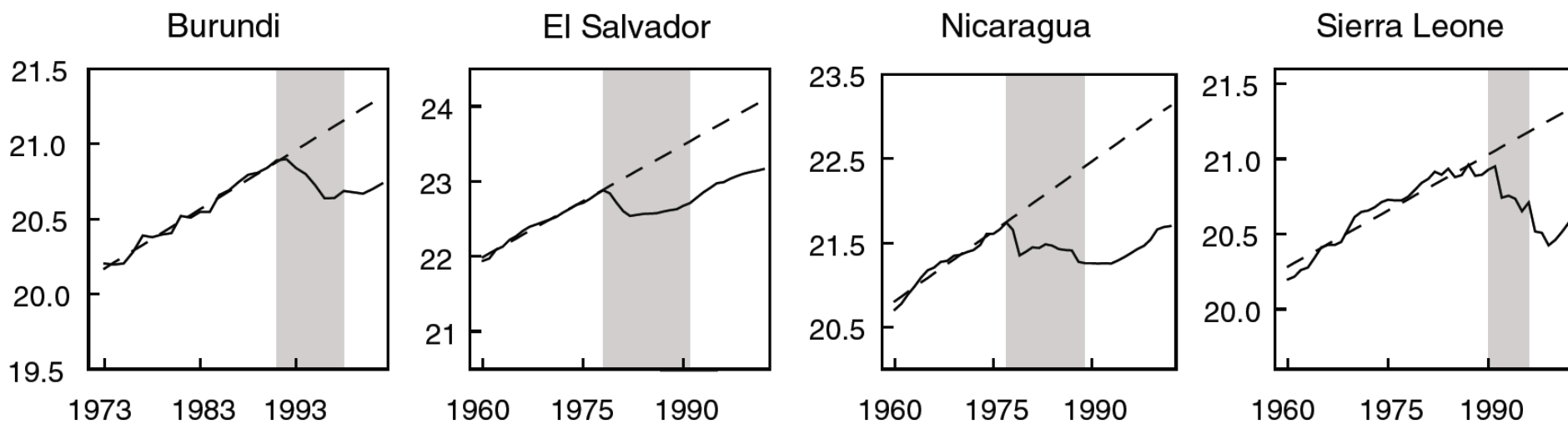
Uncontroversially, peace and order the foundation of development

Besides obvious effect on suffering, disorder is vastly destructive

Impact of debt crises on national output



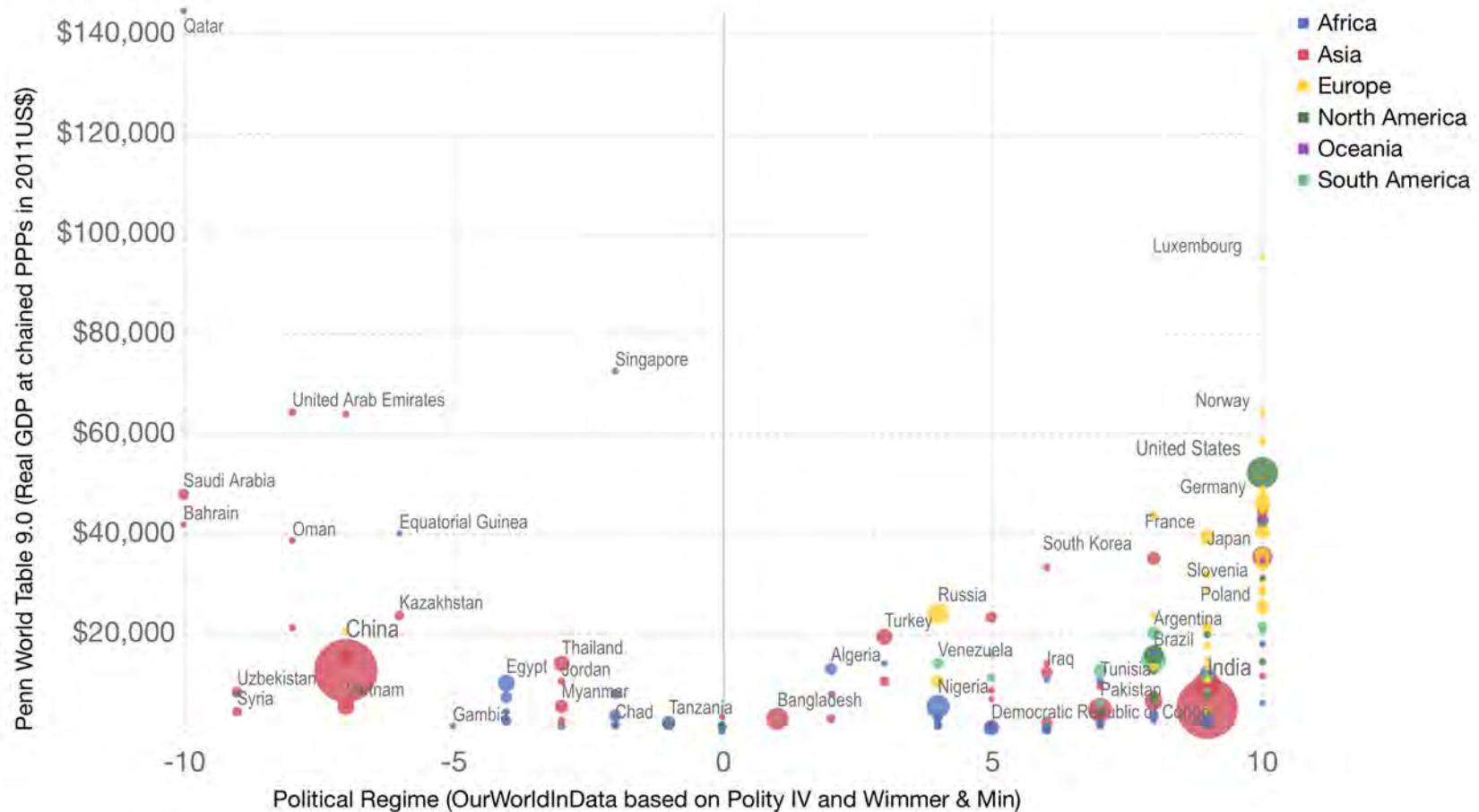
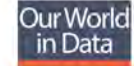
Impact of civil wars on national output



We will also weigh the evidence whether political freedoms and broad participation drive economic development

Income vs type of political regime, 2014

Political regime are classified on a range from -10 (full autocracy) to +10 (full democracy). Incomes are adjusted for price differences between countries to allow comparisons.



Source: Political Regime (OWID based on Polity IV and Wimmer & Min), Penn World Table 9.0 (2016)
OurWorldInData.org/democracy/ • CC BY-SA

III. Political development in terms of form
rather than function

Others, such as Fukuyama, define political development in terms of form (organizations, institutions) rather than their function (of delivering freedoms)

Organizations that deploy power to shape society

- States and bureaucracy
 - Centralized, rule-governed, depersonalized authorities
 - Monopoly of legitimate violence
 - With effective bureaucratic organizations and public administration
 - Efficiently manage complex tasks
 - Legal, rule-based, calculable
 - Able to shape society

Rules that constrain despotic power

- Rule of law
 - Not rule by laws but rule of law → everyone subject to the same rules
- Democratic accountability
 - Complex, adaptable, coherent, shared rules (formal & informal)

Why might so many scholars emphasize form rather than function?

Forms that deploy power to shape society

- States and bureaucracy
 - Centralized, rule-governed, depersonalized authorities
 - Monopoly of legitimate violence
 - With effective bureaucratic organizations and public administration
 - Efficiently manage complex tasks
 - Legal, rule-based, calculable
 - Able to shape society

Rules that constraining despotic power

- Rule of law
 - Not rule by laws but rule of law → everyone subject to the same rules
- Democratic accountability
 - Complex, adaptable, coherent, shared rules (formal & informal)

An illustration from a very early quasi-democracy

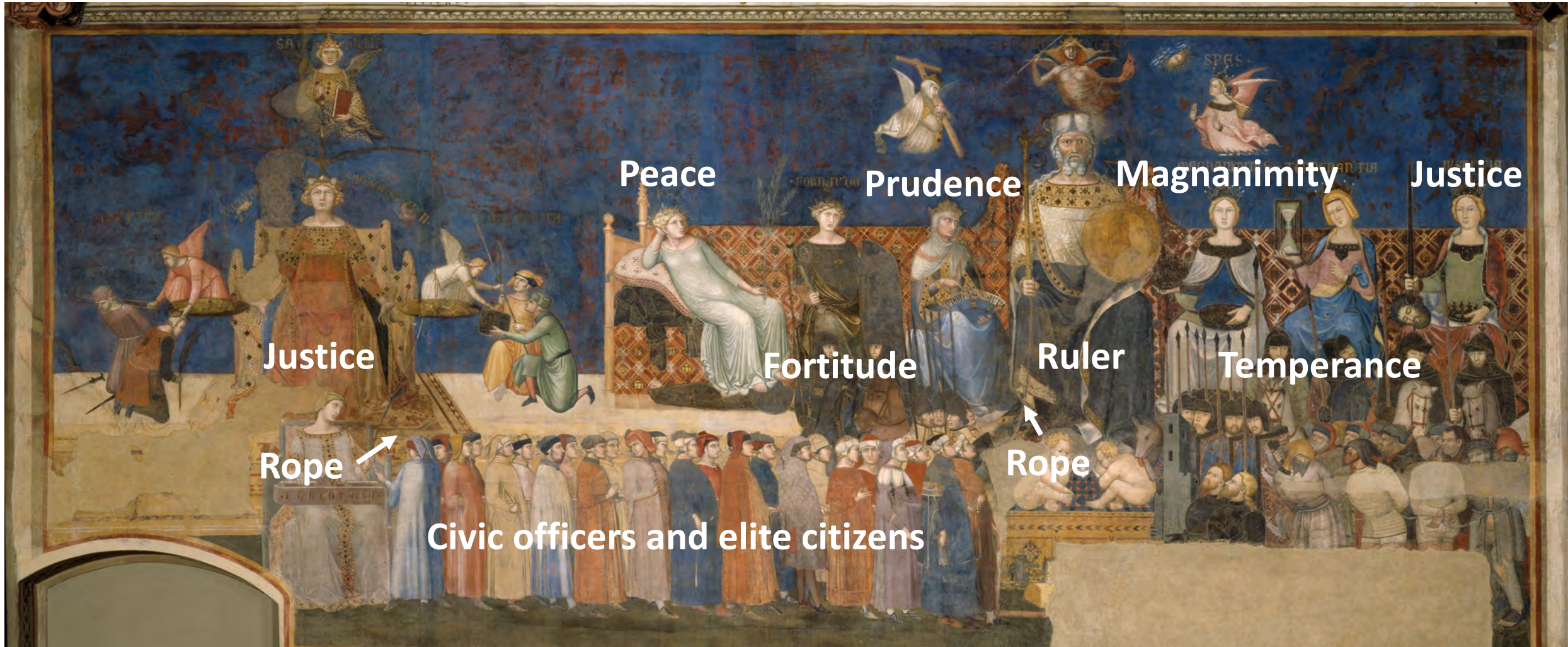
Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegory of Good and Bad Government* (Sienna, Italy, 1338-39)



The Allegory of Good Government



Contains an old idea (good rulers are virtuous) and a newer one (good rulers are constrained)



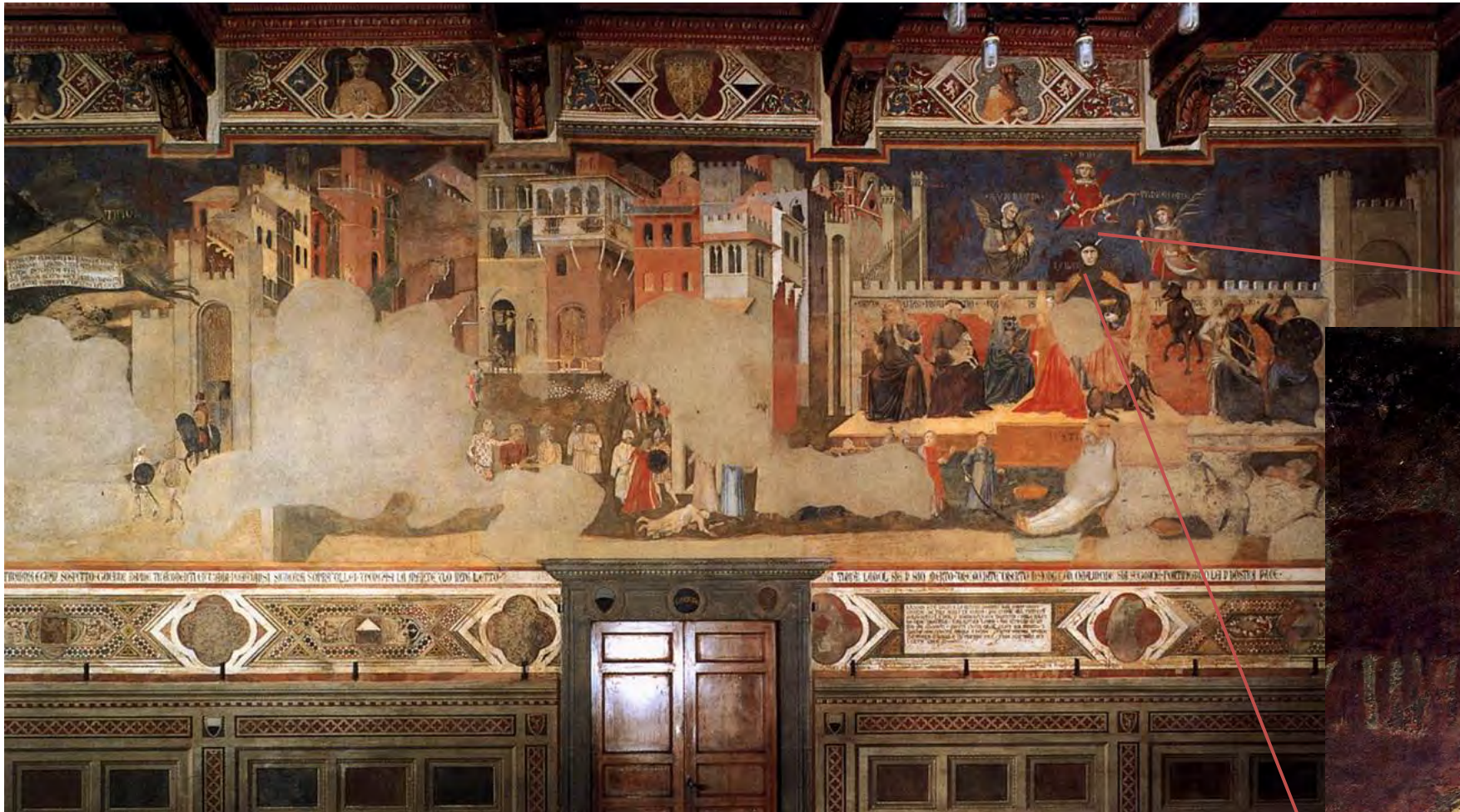
Why do so many scholars emphasize form rather than function?

- Even though many scholars are not explicit about the ends they have in mind, they emphasize these forms because they deliver the function of freedoms:
 - Freedom from oppression
 - Freedom from violence
 - Freedom to shape own life and own society
- Also, many believe that these organizations and rules also encourage the basic elements of economic development: innovation, investment, specialization and trade
 - Raise private returns to innovation and investment
 - Reduce transaction costs
 - Coordinate to provide public goods

For example: “The Effects of Good Government”
A picture of prosperity and commerce and peace



The Allegory of Bad Government



IV. What this course is about

What this course is about: The origins of political development and current efforts to make it happen

Weeks 1-6: History and theory of global political development

- The emergence of order
- Why we fight
- The origins of weak versus strong states
- The origins of free versus unfree institutions
- How society constrains the state
- 500 years of Western imperialism and local despotism

Weeks 7-10: How we intervene in the modern world

- Ending war and building peace
- Fostering stronger states
- The political economy of aid
- Democracy promotion
- How to be a piecemeal social engineer

The secret to doing well in this course:
Read a lot, and think critically about what you are reading

- Roughly 3-4 chapters or papers a week
 - Yes, really, these really are required
- I will discuss many of the recommended readings in the lecture, but you do not need to read them
- Required readings + lecture material testable
- All links on the syllabus
 - Let me know if one is broken
- Help for students unfamiliar with reading or slow readers
- Self-organize for notes and summaries

Please do read the syllabus carefully

Because the spring schedule does not easily let me give exams to graduating students, grading is focused on weekly assignments

12% for attending most lectures

22% Two game theoretic assignments (don't panic)

66% Best 6 of 7 weekly essays

Generally due before the first lecture of the week

Introducing your TAs

V. A final detour: We will not be anti-politics machines

The most common mistake outsiders make



NREGA National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

You have the
RIGHT TO WORK!



Under EGA, you have the right to
100 days employment
in a year, for each family
within 5 km of your residence
within 15 days from application
on local development project

For more information, visit www.nrega.gov.in or call 1800-120-0200

A very different example: James Ferguson in Lesotho



Cows will teach us an awful lot about politics in this class



“The anti-politics machine”

- Solving poverty and implementing programs is as technical problem, not a social and political problem
- Development projects are apolitical machines that exist to provide social services
- Cliques, factions, inefficiencies, and corruption are seen as impediments rather than strategic reactions to the environment
- Partisan and interested aid interventions are disguised as impartial and disinterested



When are we more likely to behave like
anti-politics machines?

“Peaceland”: an anthropology of aid workers.

Argues that expatriate peacebuilders are anti-politics machines

“Why do some ways of working persist when ineffective?”

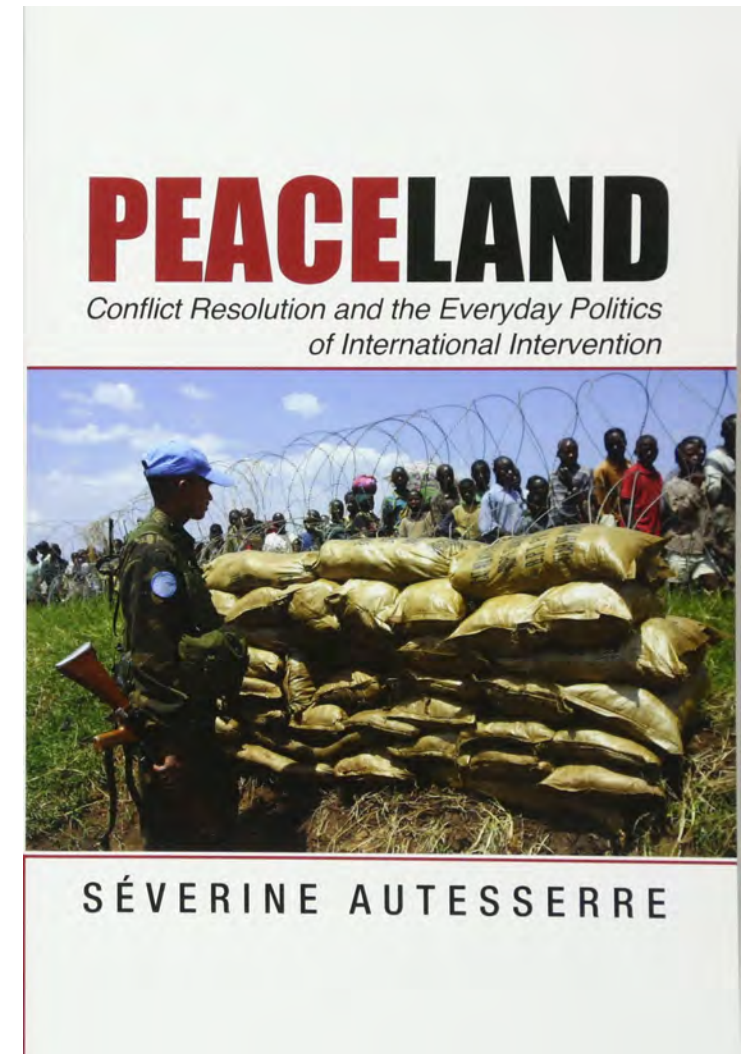
It is not callousness or stupidity or evil

Many political economy reasons that bad policy persists

But she points to underappreciated one: Development workers inhabit a different social space, have a different language, have different systems of belief and motivation, and have biased ways of collecting information.

Can this lead them to draw erroneous inferences or apply erroneous solutions?

Question: Do you think elites or bureaucrats from that country are any different? Why or why not?



Summary of lesson

- What might “development” mean in political terms?
 - Function: Order and stability; equality; autonomy; collective action and coordination
 - “Development as freedom” or capabilities
 - Form
 - Centralized, rule-governed, depersonalized authorities who monopolize violence and shape society
 - Rule of law (equal treatment under the law, including for leaders)
 - Accountability
- Why is political development important?
 - Many of these capabilities and freedoms are intrinsically important ends in themselves
 - Some forms of political development also promote economic development, which itself promotes other capabilities and freedoms
 - e.g. Reduces transaction costs and promotes coordination and public goods provision
 - These can reduce risk/uncertainty and promote innovation, investment, specialization and exchange/trade
- Why do the kinds of people in this room often get political development so wrong?
 - We often make the mistake of treating development as a technical problem not a social and political one
 - Our tendency to be “anti-politics” machines greatest when we are outside our country, class, or community