

Indian State in a Comparative Perspective

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“The Revolution evaporates, and leaves behind only the slime of a new bureaucracy. The chains of tormented mankind are made out of red tape.”

— Franz Kafka

The frustrations with bureaucracy transcend time and space. At the same time, the state is omnipresent, and most people, especially those at the margins of society, regularly find themselves facing a bureaucrat to get their entitlements or approvals for carrying out economic activities or establishing their identities. Thus, it is important to have an intellectual understanding of how the state operates. This course will go beyond the abstract idea of the state and delve into the details, i.e open the black-box of the state.

At the center of the course is the engagement with the Indian state, which has been described as a paradox – a state that is both weak and strong due to its ability to effectively carry out some functions while failing to deliver on other crucial aspects. Why does the Indian state succeed in some endeavors but fail in others? Have rapid technological advancements fundamentally altered how the Indian state works? The course will rely on a comparative perspective to examine the frameworks for answering these questions. While we will look at examples from India, we will also read about bureaucracies in other countries like the USA, China, Brazil, and Kenya.

The course is broadly divided into two parts – the first part (first three/four weeks) will introduce students to the major theoretical frameworks used to understand the functioning of the state. We will begin by looking at a range of dominant theoretical paradigms like the principal-agent framework, state as an organization, individual motivations of agents, and the state-society framework. This engagement with the dominant paradigms will help students understand how different intellectual traditions have explored the variation in the functioning and development of the state.

The second part will delve into papers that focus on specific topic areas. While examining specific topic areas (welfare services, health, education, urbanization), we will borrow from the theoretical frameworks discussed in the first part. Thus, while considering variations in the quality of welfare services, we will explore how individual motivations of block development

officers and practices within the block office shape the quality of public services. We will discuss case studies and newspaper reports to ground these discussions in a specific context.

An important objective of the course is to link theoretical discussions with empirics. The course will introduce students to empirical analysis through in-class exercises. For most weeks, after a topic is discussed, the subsequent class will involve analyzing a publicly available dataset(s) on the same topic.

For example, students will be asked to also look at national, cross-national, and sub-national datasets to test out the theories on the delivery of welfare services. Throughout the course, students will explore existing quantitative metrics on state performance and critically look at their ability to capture state performance.

Course Grading

The course grade will be divided as follows

30% for class participation:

Attendance (10%)

Students are expected to attend all the classes. There are only 2 excused absences which students can avail after informing the TA and faculty. Exceptions will only be made for extenuating circumstances.

Discussion Boards (10%)

Apart from discussions in the class students will be asked to comment on some of the week's assigned readings on the classroom discussion board. Here students can comment on aspects they found interesting and engage in discussions, sharing newspaper articles or case studies that would complement the discussions. Their posts should reflect that they have read and critically engaged with the readings. We will have 10 discussion boards and students should participate in at least 8 of the discussions.

Remaining (10 %)

Reading and Discussions:

The class will be run as a seminar course i.e., I expect students to have gone over the reading (I will make sure that readings do not exceed more than 40 pages) and be prepared to discuss them in the class. From time to time Individual students may be asked to take the lead in summarizing the readings in the class.

Empirical Explorations

Students will be encouraged to find datasets that can inform the discussions in the classroom. There is no expectation of detailed analysis. The students can point the class towards possible new ways of examining important indicators of state performance.

10% for field trip/policy maker interview(s):

As a group we will take a field trip and interact with policymakers in the classroom. The students are expected to participate in these exercises. For one of the engagements students will be asked to write a one page memo summarizing the discussion or the field trip.

20% for empirical exercise(s):

Students will be asked to do some basic exploration of dataset(s) and write a 2 pager linking the analysis to the readings.

15% Book/Report Review:

The students will be asked to review a book or read a report and then summarize the report/book and link it to the discussions in the class. The students will get 3-4 days to submit a 2500 word essay.

25% Final paper:

Students will be given a final exercise in the form of a research proposal. Students will be asked to write the research proposal to a potential funder by providing theoretical and empirical justification. The proposal sections will be outlined and the document will have a 4000 word limit. Details will be shared in the first few weeks of the class.

Learning Objective

The course will aim to achieve the following objectives.

1. Provide students with tools for understanding the main theoretical arguments behind governance and bureaucratic decision making. At the end of the course, students will be familiar with the literature on the research on state capacity and its determinants and feel confident about engaging with topics related to governance and public service delivery.

2. The course will also allow students to understand the linkages between theoretical frameworks and empirics. Students will gain familiarity with the empirical strategies used to conduct high-quality research.
3. The course will provide students with skills related to data analysis and exploration. The class sessions will involve the instructor demonstrating how to gather data and do exploratory analysis. These skills will help the student carry out their own independent analysis in the future.
4. Finally, exposure to theories around state performance will set up students to explore other areas of interest – the role of states in designing markets or how markets are organized.

Ethics

The students are expected to strictly adhere to Ashoka's Policy on Academic Integrity. Please make sure ideas are attributed and cited correctly. I have a very strict policy against plagiarism.

Readings

I plan on limiting the reading to a maximum of 40 pages (for the majority of the weeks). The idea is to enable students to do a few readings in a deeper manner. Please note the reading might change as the course progresses.

Mental Health

Ashoka University offers an inclusive education framework that welcomes, nurtures, and supports students with learning difficulties. The Office of Learning Support (OLS) has been established at the University to design various activities related to the management of such learning difficulties. Students are welcome to request learning support for their specific condition and the university will make its best efforts to extend as much support as possible for each course. The university is geared to support learning difficulties due to Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, ADD/ADHD, and visual impairment. Contact the OLS for any additional information you may seek to better understand the process and scope of their support services at ols@ashoka.edu.in

In addition to the OLS, there is also an on-campus counseling center(ACWB) which is dedicated to the care and mental health of the Ashoka fraternity. It is composed of trained therapists who offer a range of services. Please reach out to them for anything that you may need throughout the course of the semester. Email: well.being@ashoka.edu.in

Introduction: Why Study the State

The readings discuss the fundamental role of the state in shaping societal processes - justice, economic prosperity, and development.

Evans, Peter, and James E. Rauch. 1999. "Bureaucracy and Growth: A Cross-National Analysis of the Effects of "Weberian" State Structures on Economic Growth." *American sociological review*: 748–65.

Ang, Yuen Yuen. 2016. "How China Escaped the Poverty Trap." In *How China Escaped the Poverty Trap*, Cornell University Press. (Introduction)

Herd, Pamela, and Donald P. Moynihan. 2019. *Administrative Burden: Policymaking by Other Means*. Russell Sage Foundation. (Introduction)

The Indian State

How do the different readings characterize the Indian state? Are these 2 readings in agreement with each other?

Kapur, Devesh. 2020. "Why Does the Indian State Both Fail and Succeed?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 34(1): 31–54.

Pritchett, Lant. 2009. "Is India a Flailing State?: Detours on the Four Lane Highway to Modernization." <http://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/4449106> (May 4, 2015).

In Class Empirical Exercise:

- How to study different characteristics of the India state. We will look at different datasets and do some exploratory analysis

Theorizing the State

State-Society Framework and Principal Agent Models

Evans, P.B., 2012. Embedded autonomy. In *Embedded Autonomy*. Princeton University Press. [Intro]

Hassan, Mai. *Regime threats and state solutions: Bureaucratic loyalty and embeddedness in Kenya*. Cambridge University Press, 2020. First Chapter

Optional Reading

Pepinsky, Thomas B., Jan H. Pierskalla, and Audrey Sacks. 2017. "Bureaucracy and Service Delivery." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20: 249–68.

Defining State Capacity

What are the different definitions of state capacity? Why is state capacity so difficult to define?

[State capacity: a useful concept or meaningless pablum?](#) Pavitra Suryanarayanan

Berwick, Elissa, and Fotini Christia. 2018. "State Capacity Redux: Integrating Classical and Experimental Contributions to an Enduring Debate." *Annual Review of Political Science* 21: 71–91.

Optional Reading:

Mann, Michael. 1984. "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results." *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie/Europäisches Archiv für Soziologie* 25(2): 185–213.

Besley, Timothy, and Torsten Persson. 2009. "The Origins of State Capacity: Property Rights, Taxation, and Politics." *American economic review* 99(4): 1218–44.

Williams, Martin J. 2020. "Beyond State Capacity: Bureaucratic Performance, Policy Implementation and Reform." *Journal of Institutional Economics*: 1–19.

Long Term Processes and State Development

Banerjee, Abhijit V., and Lakshmi Iyer. 2002. *History, Institutions and Economic Performance: The Legacy of Colonial Land Tenure Systems in India*.

Lange, Matthew. 2009. "Developmental Crises: A Comparative-Historical Analysis of State-Building in Colonial Botswana and Malaysia." *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 47(1): 1–27.

Optional Readings

Dell, M., 2010. *The persistent effects of Peru's mining mita*. *Econometrica*, 78(6), pp.1863-1903.

Tilly, Charles. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." *Violence: A reader*.

Gorski, P.S., 1993. *The Protestant ethic revisited: disciplinary revolution and state formation in Holland and Prussia*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 99(2), pp.265-316.

State as an organization - I

Williams, M. 2015. *From Institutions to Organizations: Management and Informality in Ghana's Public Bureaucracies*. Oxford University

Honig, Dan. 2021. "Supportive Management Practice and Intrinsic Motivation Go Together in the Public Service." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118(13).

State as an organization - II

Ashraf, Nava, Oriana Bandiera, and B. Kelsey Jack. 2014. "No Margin, No Mission? A Field Experiment on Incentives for Public Service Delivery." *Journal of Public Economics* 120: 1–17.

Lipsky, Michael. 2010. *Street-Level Bureaucracy*, 30th Ann. Ed.: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service. Russell Sage Foundation. Chapter 2

Optional Reading:

Williamson, OE. 1999. "Public and Private Bureaucracies: A Transaction Cost Economics Perspectives." *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 15(1): 306–42.

Wilson, James Q. 2019. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. Basic Books. (Intro)

Welfare Services

Gupta, Akhil. 2012. *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*. Durham: Duke University Press Books. (Intro)

Dasgupta, A. and Kapur, D., 2020. The political economy of bureaucratic overload: Evidence from rural development officials in India. *American Political Science Review*, 114(4), pp.1316-1334.

Optional Readings

Aiyar, Yamini, and Michael Walton. 2015. "Rights, Accountability and Citizenship: India's Emerging Welfare State." In *Governance in Developing Asia*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 260–95.

Krishna, Anirudh, and Gregory Schober. 2014. "The Gradient of Governance: Distance and Disengagement in Indian Villages." *Journal of Development Studies* 50(6): 820–38.

Gulzar, Saad, and Benjamin J. Pasquale. 2017. "Politicians, Bureaucrats, and Development: Evidence from India." *American Political Science Review* 111(1): 162–83.

In Class Empirical Exercise:

- Using Data from MNREGA Website and Census of India examine the differences in performance across different states and Districts.

Health and Education

Banerjee, Abhijit V., Esther Duflo, and Rachel Glennerster. 2008. "Putting a Band-Aid on a Corpse: Incentives for Nurses in the Indian Public Health Care System." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 6(2–3): 487–500.

Chaudhury, Nazmul et al. 2006. "Missing in Action: Teacher and Health Worker Absence in Developing Countries." *Journal of Economic perspectives* 20(1): 91–116.

Mangla, Akshay. *Making Bureaucracy Work: Norms, Education and Public Service Delivery in Rural India*. Cambridge University Press, 2022. First Chapter

In Class Empirical Exercise:

- Using both National Family Health Survey(s) as cross-national data we will examine both sub-national and cross-national variation in health and educational outcomes and their determinants.

Corruption and the Bureaucracy

Witsoe, Jeffrey. 2012. "Everyday Corruption and the Political Mediation of the Indian State: An Ethnographic Exploration of Brokers in Bihar." *Economic and Political Weekly*: 47–54.

Bertrand, Marianne, Simeon Djankov, Rema Hanna, and Sendhil Mullainathan. 2007. "Obtaining a Driver's License in India: An Experimental Approach to Studying Corruption." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*: 1639–76.

Optional Reading:

Bardhan, Pranab. 1997. "Corruption and Development: A Review of Issues." *Journal of economic literature* 35(3): 1320–46.

Patronage and the State - I

Grindle, Merilee S. *Jobs for the boys: Patronage and the state in comparative perspective*. Harvard University Press, 2012. Chapter 1

Mathew, Santhosh, and Mick Moore. 2011. "State Incapacity by Design: Understanding the Bihar Story." *IDS Working Papers* 2011(366): 1–31.

Patronage and the State - II

Jiang, J., 2018. Making bureaucracy work: Patronage networks, performance incentives, and economic development in China. *American Journal of Political Science*, 62(4), pp.982-999.

Toral, Guillermo. "The benefits of patronage: How political appointments can enhance bureaucratic accountability and effectiveness." *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston*. 2021.

In Class Empirical Exercise:

- Using Transparency International and World Bank Surveys we will look at cross-national differences in attitudes towards corruption.

Consultants and the State

Mazzucato, Mariana, and Rosie Collington. *The big con: how the consulting industry weakens our businesses, infantilizes our governments, and warps our economies*. Penguin, 2023 (Intro).

Decentralized Governance

Bardhan, P., 2002. Decentralization of governance and development. *Journal of Economic perspectives*, 16(4), pp.185-205.

Dutta, Diya. 2009. "Elite Capture and Corruption: Concepts and Definitions." *National Council of Applied Economic Research*: 1–16.

In Class Empirical Exercise:

- Using data on decentralization from Indian states we will analyze local outcomes and their political correlates.

Technological Change and the State

Muralidharan, Karthik, Paul Niehaus, and Sandip Sukhtankar. 2016. "Building State Capacity: Evidence from Biometric Smartcards in India." *American Economic Review* 106(10): 2895–2929.

Case Studies: Development Engineering Textbook.

In Class Empirical Exercise:

- NFHS and Political Covariates

Bureaucratic Transfers

Hassan, Mai. 2020. *Regime Threats and State Solutions: Bureaucratic Loyalty and Embeddedness in Kenya*. Cambridge University Press. Second Chapter

Iyer, Lakshmi, and Anandi Mani. "Traveling agents: political change and bureaucratic turnover in India." *Review of Economics and Statistics* 94.3 (2012): 723-739.

In Class Empirical Exercise:

- Transfer Patterns of Mid-Level Bureaucrats

Representation vs Competitive Selection

Moreira, Diana, and Santiago Pérez. *Who Benefits from Meritocracy?*. No. w30113. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2022.

Bhavnani, Rikhil R., and Alexander Lee. 2019. "Does Affirmative Action Worsen Bureaucratic Performance? Evidence from the Indian Administrative Service." *American Journal of Political Science*

Optional Reading

Pierskalla, Jan H., Adam Lauretig, Andrew S. Rosenberg, and Audrey Sacks. "Democratization and Representative Bureaucracy: An Analysis of Promotion Patterns in Indonesia's Civil Service, 1980–2015." *American Journal of Political Science*

In Class Empirical Exercise:

- Using the IAS data from TCPD we will look at transfer patterns and bureaucratic identity

Urbanization and Infrastructure

Björkman, Lisa. 2015. *Pipe Politics, Contested Waters: Embedded Infrastructures of Millennial Mumbai*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. (Intro)

Kumar, Tanu, Alison E. Post, and Isha Ray. 2018. "Flows, Leaks and Blockages in Informational Interventions: A Field Experimental Study of Bangalore's Water Sector." *World Development* 106: 149–60.

Optional reading

Davis, Jennifer. 2004. "Corruption in Public Service Delivery: Experience from South Asia's Water and Sanitation Sector." *World Development* 32(1): 53–71.

In Class Empirical Exercise:

- Spatial analysis of urban areas based on satellite data and data from India Development Lab

Land Administration and Regulation

Lee, Alexander. 2019. "Land, State Capacity, and Colonialism: Evidence From India." *Comparative Political Studies* 52(3): 412–44.

Sud, Nikita. 2014. "Governing India's Land." *World Development* 60: 43–56.

In Class Empirical Exercise:

- Using data on Tehsils from [NCAER All India Survey](#)

Policing and Courts

Sukhtankar, Sandip, Gabrielle Kruks-Wisner, and Akshay Mangla. 2022. "Policing in Patriarchy: An Experimental Evaluation of Reforms to Improve Police Responsiveness to Women in India." *Science* 377(6602): 191–98.

Screening of [Court](#)

Optional Reading

Jassal, Nirvikar. 2020. "Gender, Law Enforcement, and Access to Justice: Evidence from All-Women Police Stations in India." *American Political Science Review* 114(4): 1035–54.

Banerjee, Abhijit et al. 2021. "Improving Police Performance in Rajasthan, India: Experimental Evidence on Incentives, Managerial Autonomy and Training." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 13(1): 36–66.

Rao, M., 2019. *Judges, lenders, and the bottom line: Courting firm growth in india*. Working Paper.

In Class Empirical Exercise:

- Using data on NCRB and India Development Lab we will look at over time changes in criminal outcomes as well as court level outcomes.
- [Daksh Data on Courts](#)