



AREC 370 From Poverty to Progress in The World's Largest Democracy: India's Political Economy in Transition

Term: Spring/2025

Professor: M.R. Sharan

Pronouns: He/him

Email: sharan@umd.edu

Web: [Personal Website](#)

Office Hours: By appointment

Credits: 3

Course Dates: From Jan 28, 2025 - May 20, 2025

Course Times: 11 – 12 15 PM

Classroom: SYM 0200

Course Description

India, the largest country in the world, is home to nearly 18% of the global population. As such, India's growth and progress have profound implications for humanity's trajectory in the 21st century. This course explores India's past, present, and future through the lens of political economy. We will explore the incentives of politicians and bureaucrats as well as issues related to local governance and social movements.

More Course Description

The course is structured into three key parts: the state, the citizens, and the economy. Students will be guided to think like political economists, applying economic concepts to questions of state-building, governance, and the dynamics between state and market. They will also explore citizen-centric actions such as voting and collective action and tackle significant economic issues like climate change and the rise of majoritarianism. Through this course, students will get a flavor of the following: using economic principles and theory to real-world problems and developing a broad understanding of basic econometrics and causality.

To provide a well-rounded perspective, the course will utilize a diverse range of materials, including books, research papers, magazine articles, documentaries, short films and newspaper articles. Additionally, students will benefit from insights shared by guest speakers, who are typically eminent scholars of political economy and/or experts on India based in Washington, DC, and beyond.

Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this course, you will be able to:

1. Demonstrate your ability to conceptualize and analyze the major questions and issues facing India as it progresses in developing its democratic system through class participation, presentations and problem sets.
2. Communicate the dynamics between the government and the market economy in both written and oral assignments.
3. Use economic principles to understand real-world problems such as climate change, unemployment, majoritarianism facing India and other countries.
4. Use economic principles to understand incentives of politicians and bureaucrats and how policymaking affects provision of healthcare, education and social welfare in written assignments and tests.
5. Describe the tools used to analyze voting and collective action by citizens.
6. Articulate how learning about the Indian experience changes the way you think about the role of democracy in development, how democracy shapes daily life and community living, and the key issues in your major or other areas of interest.

Prerequisites

This class is pitched at students comfortable with basic economics and statistics. Comfort with mathematics (algebra), statistics and/or economics will make the class easier. The “theory” parts of the class (see below) will use some mathematics, but nothing that will be beyond anyone with some training in math/economics. Some of the reading material will cover basic statistics.

Here are the requirements:

Econ: Econ200, Arec 250 or Arec 240

Stats: Stats 100, Math 107, BMGT 230, Econ 230 or Stat 400

Required Resources

- Course Website: elms.umd.edu

B Reading Materials

This class does not have a prescribed textbook. However, many of the lectures will draw from these three books and explicit chapters will be prescribed as reading material for lectures:

1. Drèze, J. and Sen, A., 2013. *An uncertain glory: India and its contradictions*. Princeton University Press.
2. Ghate, C. ed., 2012. *The Oxford handbook of the Indian economy*. OUP USA.
3. Muralidharan, K. 2024. *Accelerating India's Development: A State-Led Roadmap for Effective Governance*. Viking.

In addition, this class will draw on several articles, magazine pieces (including, but not restricted to, *The Economist*) and blogs.

Course Structure

Explain the structure of the course here including elements of how the work outside and inside the class should be balanced.

Tips for Success in this Course

1. **Participate.** I invite you to engage deeply, ask questions, and talk about the course content with your classmates. You can learn a great deal from discussing ideas and perspectives with your peers and professor. Participation can also help you articulate your thoughts and develop critical thinking skills.
2. **Manage your time.** Students are often very busy, and I understand that you have obligations outside of this class. However, students do best when they plan adequate time that is devoted to course work. Block your schedule and set aside plenty of time to complete assignments including extra time to handle any technology related problems.
3. **Login regularly.** I recommend that you log in to ELMS-Canvas several times a week to view announcements, discussion posts and replies to your posts. You may need to log in multiple times a day when group submissions are due.
4. **Do not fall behind.** This class moves at a quick pace and each week builds on the previous content. If you feel you are starting to fall behind, check in with the instructor as soon as possible so we can troubleshoot together. It will be hard to keep up with the course content if you fall behind in the pre-work or post-work.
5. **Use ELMS-Canvas notification settings.** Pro tip! Canvas ELMS-Canvas can ensure you receive timely notifications in your email or via text. Be sure to enable announcements to be sent instantly or daily.
6. **Ask for help if needed.** If you need help with ELMS-Canvas or other technology, IT Support. If you are struggling with a course concept, reach out to me and your classmates for support.

Policies and Resources for Undergraduate Courses

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- Academic integrity
- Student and instructor conduct
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Attendance and excused absences
- Grades and appeals

- Copyright and intellectual property

Please visit www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html for the Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with me if you have questions.

Course Guidelines

Names/Pronouns and Self-Identifications:

The University of Maryland recognizes the importance of a diverse student body, and we are committed to fostering inclusive and equitable classroom environments. I invite you, if you wish, to tell us how you want to be referred to in this class, both in terms of your name and your pronouns (he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.). Keep in mind that the pronouns someone uses are not necessarily indicative of their gender identity.

Visit trans.umd.edu to learn more.

Additionally, it is your choice whether to disclose how you identify in terms of your gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and dis/ability, among all aspects of your identity (e.g., should it come up in classroom conversation about our experiences and perspectives) and should be self-identified, not presumed or imposed. I will do my best to address and refer to all students accordingly, and I ask you to do the same for all of your fellow Terps.

Communication with Instructor:

Email: If you need to reach out and communicate with me, please email me at sharan@umd.edu. Please DO NOT email me with questions that are easily found in the syllabus or on ELMS (i.e., When is this assignment due? How much is it worth? etc.) but please DO reach out about personal, academic, and intellectual concerns/questions.

While I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 -48 hours, you may receive the odd response later.

ELMS: I will send IMPORTANT announcements via ELMS messaging. You must make sure that your email & announcement notifications (including changes in assignments and/or due dates) are enabled in ELMS so you do not miss any messages. You are responsible for checking your email and Canvas/ELMS inbox with regular frequency.

Communication with Peers:

With a diversity of perspectives and experience, we may find ourselves in disagreement and/or debate with one another. As such, it is important that we agree to conduct ourselves in a professional manner and that we work together to foster and preserve a virtual classroom environment in which we can respectfully discuss and deliberate controversial questions. I encourage you to confidently exercise your right to free speech—bearing in mind, of course, that you will be expected to craft and defend arguments that support your position. Keep in mind, that free speech has its limit and this course is NOT the space for hate speech, harassment, and derogatory language. I will make every reasonable attempt to create an atmosphere in

which each student feels comfortable voicing their argument without fear of being personally attacked, mocked, demeaned, or devalued.

Any behavior (including harassment, sexual harassment, and racially and/or culturally derogatory language) that threatens this atmosphere will not be tolerated. Please alert me immediately if you feel threatened, dismissed, or silenced at any point during our semester together and/or if your engagement in discussion has been in some way hindered by the learning environment.

Major Assignments

- **Exams (20%):** There will be a one-hour long exam on the last Thursday of class. The exam is open-book open-notes. They will be available on ELMS.
- **Class Presentations (25%):** Each student will be expected to present up to twice in a semester on a topic related to material to be covered in that week. The topic of presentation will be decided by the student in collaboration with the instructor. Presentation time and details will be provided.
- **Problem sets: (25%)** There will be 4 problem sets over the course of the semester. I will drop the lowest score, so that 3 of them are accounted for. In the weeks that they are due, problem sets are always due at 11 59 PM on Friday. I will allow for submissions up to two days after the deadline. A portion of the points (10%) will be cut for each day of lateness. Beyond the deadline, no submissions will be allowed.
- **Reading Responses (20%)** Every week before Thursday class, you will have to read a set of prescribed readings and write up a reading response note. The note will be due by 1 PM on Thursday.
- **Participation (10%)** I will grade your participation level based on participation, including communicating questions and comments during and beyond class.

Grading Structure

Assignment	Percentage %
Problem Sets	25%
Reading Responses	20%
Participation/Engagement	10%
Presentations	25%
Midterm Exam	20%
Total	100%

Academic Integrity

The University's Code of Academic Integrity is designed to ensure that the principles of academic honesty and integrity are upheld. In accordance with this code, the University of Maryland does not tolerate academic dishonesty. Please ensure that you fully understand this code and its implications because all acts of academic dishonesty will be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of this code. All students are expected to adhere to this Code. It is your responsibility to read it and know what it says, so you can start your professional life on the right path. **As future professionals, your commitment to high ethical standards and honesty begins with your time at the University of Maryland.**

It is important to note that course assistance websites, such as CourseHero, or AI-generated content are not permitted sources unless the instructor explicitly gives permission. Material taken or copied from these sites can be deemed unauthorized material and a violation of academic integrity. These sites offer information that might be inaccurate or biased and most importantly, relying on restricted sources will hamper your learning process, particularly the critical thinking steps necessary for college-level assignments.

Additionally, students may naturally choose to use online forums for course-wide discussions (e.g., Group lists or chats) to discuss concepts in the course. However, collaboration on graded assignments is strictly prohibited unless otherwise stated. Examples of prohibited collaboration include: asking classmates for answers on quizzes or exams, asking for access codes to clicker polls, etc. Please visit the [Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies](#) and reach out if you have questions.

Finally, on each exam or assignment you must write out and sign the following pledge: ***"I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this exam/assignment."*** If you ever feel pressured to comply with someone else's academic integrity violation, please reach out to me straight away. Also, ***if you are ever unclear*** about acceptable levels of collaboration, ***please ask!*** To help you avoid unintentional violations, ***the following table*** lists levels of collaboration that are acceptable for each graded exercise. Each assignment will contain more specific information regarding acceptable levels of collaboration.

Absences

Every class meeting has an associated participation grade. If you are worried you will miss more than ten classes and you have a valid excuse, you need to talk to the instructor immediately or as soon as you discover that you have a foreseeable attendance issue.

Exceptions (see below)

As a general rule, you are expected to attend class. Exceptions to these attendance policies are:

1. if you are participating in a college-listed religious holiday;
2. if you are ill;
3. if you are taking care of a family member.

If any of these situations arises for you, please contact your assigned TA prior to class to let them know.

From the university's policy

Events that justify an excused absence include:

- Religious observances
- Mandatory military obligation
- Illness of the student or illness of an immediate family member
- Participation in university activities at the request of university authorities
- Compelling circumstances beyond the student's control (e.g., death in the family, required court appearance)

Absences stemming from work duties other than military obligation (e.g., unexpected changes in shift assignments) and traffic/transit problems do not typically qualify for excused absence.

Grades

Course Points	Course Grade
≥ 97.0	A+
93.0-96.9	A
90.0-92.9	A-
87.0-89.9	B+
83.0-86.9	B
80.0-82.9	B-
77.0-79.9	C+
73.0-76.9	C
70.0-72.9	C-
67.0-69.9	D+
63.0-66.9	D
60.0-62.9	D-
< 60.0	F

All assessment scores will be posted on the course ELMS page. If you would like to review any of your grades (including the exams), or have questions about how something was scored, please email me to schedule a time for us to meet and discuss.

I am happy to discuss any of your grades with you, and if I have made a mistake I will immediately correct it. Any formal grade disputes must be submitted in writing and within one week of receiving the grade. Final letter grades are assigned based on the percentage of total assessment points earned. To be fair to everyone I have to establish clear standards and apply them consistently, so please understand that being close to a cutoff is not the same as making the cut ($89.99 \neq 90.00$). It would be unethical to make exceptions for some and not others.

Class Format

Levels of instruction

1. Each week will comprise two classes:
 - a **Tuesday Lecture:** The full class will meet every week on Tuesday from 11 to 12 15 PM. In this class, I will go over the material to be covered in that week. Participation is graded.
 - b **Thursday Lecture & Discussion:** The full class will meet on Thursday from 11 to 12 15 PM for a class that will be more discussion based. Typically, the class will involve two components: first, any carry-over topics for the week from Tuesday class will be covered; second, the class will have student-led discussions/presentations of reading material (participation is graded).
2. Things to do:
 - a) Reading Responses
 - b) Problem Sets
 - c) Presentations
 - d) Exam
 - e) Participation

Flow of activities

- *Pre:* usually the week before a topic.
 - Reading
 - Reading responses for assigned reading material to be covered in the week.
- *During:* the week of a topic
 - Lectures (in-person OR in extraneous circumstances, synchronous ZOOM)
- *Post:* the week after a topic
 - Problem sets. There are 4 assignments over 15 weeks.
 - In-class presentations: There are up to 2 presentations per student.

Class Structure:

Week	Date	Question	Detailed Topic
1	Jan 28	Course introduction	
1	Jan 30	A (very) Brief History of Indian Political Economy	A broad view of the Indian economy from 1800 – 2024 ▪ Impact of colonialism ▪ Socialism in post-independent India ▪ Market reforms of 1991 Place the Indian political and economic journey in a global perspective
		Part 1: The Indian State	
2	Feb 4	“It’s Just Politics”	Theory: ▪ How do political economists conceptualize politicians? Empirical Understandings: ▪ Is the Indian political class representative of the underlying population? ▪ How do they perform in office? How do we incentivize better performance?
2	Feb 6	The Composition, Performance and Incentives of the Indian Political Class	
3	Feb 11	“The Power of The Paper Pushers”	▪ The colonial underpinnings of the Indian bureaucracy: a developing world story ▪ Composition, incentives of the Indian bureaucrat and how it compares to bureaucrats across the world ▪ Is the Indian bureaucracy really <i>that</i> big?
3	Feb 13	The Composition, Performance and Incentives of the Indian Bureaucratic Class	
4	Feb 18	“Red Tape Blues”	Theory: ▪ How do political economists define and conceptualize corruption? Broad Questions: ▪ Is corruption a feature or a bug of a developing state? ▪ How <i>corrupt</i> is the Indian state? How much of this is emblematic of other developing countries?
4	Feb 20	Corruption	

5	Feb 25	“Cutting Through The Red Tape” Monitoring the State	Can technology break corruption? How do these systems work? • Social Audits • Complaints Mechanisms
5	Feb 27	Presentations #1	
		Part 2: The Citizens	
6	Mar 4	”The Power of the People” Social Movements As Accountability Mechanisms	Gandhi and the history of social movements in India and the world.
6	Mar 6		The effects of social movements on governance, solidarity and growth in India. The unique role of women – and the intersection of gender and social movements – in Indian collective action.
7	Mar 11	”Whose Government is it anyway?”	The role of caste in organizing society and determining economic outcomes.
7	Mar 13	The Great Indian Affirmative Action Debate	How Indian caste-based affirmative action compares with other such policies in the US and elsewhere. Does affirmative action trade-off equity for efficiency?
Mar 18–20		Spring Break	
8	Mar 25	”Small is Beautiful” Local Governance and People’s Participation	Theory: The principle of “subsidiarity” in determining devolution of powers to local government.
8	Mar 27		How has India’s experiment with local government fared?
Part 3: The Economy			

9	Apr 1	"Skipping the Assembly Line"	Theory: The Lewis Model of growth and how societies develop, moving from agriculture to manufacturing to services. How the Indian societal structure and policies upended this convention understanding of structural transforming, skipping manufacturing altogether.
9	Apr 3	Structural Transformation	
10	Apr 8	"A real sickness" India's Healthcare Crisis	Theory: The great debate on universal healthcare provision. Questions: - How has India ended up with among the largest out of pocket expenditures on healthcare in the world? - What can it learn from its neighboring countries that have done better on healthcare?
10	Apr 10	Presentations #2	
11	Apr 15	"Death By A Thousand Cuts"	Theory: The great debate on public versus private schooling. Questions: - What political economy factors explain the collapsing Indian public schooling system? - How does this inform the larger debate on when and whether to provide subsidized public schooling?
11	Apr 17	India's flailing and underfunded public schools	
12	Apr 22	"Warming without warning"	Theory: How do economists think about climate change? Questions: How does rising temperatures, drying up rivers and increases in extreme weather events affect politics in India and what lessons does that have to offer for the world over?
12	Apr 24	How climate change threatens politics and the economy	

13	Apr 29	“Strength in Numbers” The rise of majoritarianism	Theory: Do democracies naturally result in majoritarian governments? Questions: • What lessons does the rise of the Hindu right-wing in India offer to democracies worldwide? • What are the causes of this rise? • What are the consequences on political economy?
13	May 1		
14	May 6	“Piecing it Together” Big Picture Takeaways	
14	May 8		
15	May 13	Exam	

Note: This is a tentative schedule, and subject to change as necessary – monitor the course ELMS page for current deadlines. In the unlikely event of a prolonged university closing, or an extended absence from the university, adjustments to the course schedule, deadlines, and assignments will be made based on the duration of the closing and the specific dates missed.

Resources & Accommodations Accessibility and Disability Services

The University of Maryland is committed to creating and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive educational, working, and living environment for people of all abilities. The University of Maryland is also committed to the principle that no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of the University, or be subjected to discrimination. The **Accessibility & Disability Service (ADS)** provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals to provide equal access to services, programs and activities. ADS cannot assist retroactively, so it is generally best to request accommodations several weeks before the semester begins or as soon as a disability becomes known. Any student who needs accommodations should contact me as soon as possible so that I have sufficient time to make arrangements.

For assistance in obtaining an accommodation, contact Accessibility and Disability Service at 301-314-7682, or email them at adsfrontdesk@umd.edu.

Student Resources and Services

Taking personal responsibility for your own learning means acknowledging when your performance does not match your goals and doing something about it. I hope you will come talk to me so that I can help you find the right approach to success in this course, and I encourage you to visit [UMD's Student Academic Support Services website](#) to learn more about the wide range of campus resources available to you.

In particular, everyone can use some help sharpening their communication skills (and improving their grade) by visiting [UMD's Writing Center](#) and schedule an appointment with the campus Writing Center.

You should also know there are a wide range of resources to support you with whatever you might need ([UMD's Student Resources and Services website](#) may help). If you feel it would be helpful to have someone to talk to, visit [UMD's Counseling Center](#) or [one of the many other mental health resources on campus](#).

Notice of Mandatory Reporting

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking: As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Responsible University Employee," and I must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking to UMD's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy on Sexual Harassment and Other Sexual Misconduct.

If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of UMD's confidential resources, such as [CARE to Stop Violence](#) (located on the Ground Floor of the Health Center) at 301-741-3442 or the [Counseling Center](#) (located at the Shoemaker Building) at 301-314-7651.

You may also seek assistance or supportive measures from UMD's Title IX Coordinator, Angela Nastase, by calling 301-405-1142, or emailing titleIXcoordinator@umd.edu.

To view further information on the above, please visit the [Office of Civil Rights and Sexual Misconduct's](#) website at ocrsm.umd.edu.

Basic Needs Security

If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or lack a safe and stable place to live, please visit [UMD's Division of Student Affairs website](#) for information about resources the campus offers you and let me know if I can help in any way.

Veteran Resources

UMD provides some additional supports to our student veterans. You can access those resources at the office of [Veteran Student life](#) and the [Counseling Center](#). Veterans and active duty military personnel with special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployments, drill requirements, disabilities) are welcome and encouraged to communicate these, in advance if possible, to the instructor.

Participation

- Given the interactive style of this class, attendance will be crucial to note-taking and thus your performance in this class. Attendance is particularly important also because class discussion will be a critical component for your learning.
- Each student is expected to make substantive contributions to the learning experience, and attendance is expected for every session.

- Students with a legitimate reason to miss a live session should communicate in advance with the instructor, except in the case of an emergency.
- Students who miss a live session are responsible for learning what they miss from that session.
- Additionally, students must complete all readings and assignments in a timely manner in order to fully participate in class.

Course Evaluation

Please submit a course evaluation through Student Feedback on Course Experiences in order to help faculty and administrators improve teaching and learning at Maryland. All information submitted to Course Experiences is confidential. Campus will notify you when Student Feedback on Course Experiences is open for you to complete your evaluations at the end of the semester. Please go directly to the [Student Feedback on Course Experiences](#) to complete your evaluations. By completing all of your evaluations each semester, you will have the privilege of accessing through Testudo the evaluation reports for the thousands of courses for which 70% or more students submitted their evaluations.

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