

iU3A Timed Group: Power and Politics in Today's World



This relatively new way of learning for iU3A uses the video lectures from a free online course called "Power and Politics in Today's World" by Professor Ian Shapiro of Yale University as a way of getting members thinking about a range of issues from the euphoria that accompanied the collapse of communism in the late 1980s to the politics of fear and resentment that has overtaken much of the world since 2016. The aim of the discussions between members is to use the context provided by the Professor Shapiro on how did we get from there to here to share their thoughts about what comes next and how that could lead us to better politics? **Members watch two video lecture at home, and then meet monthly to discuss it.**

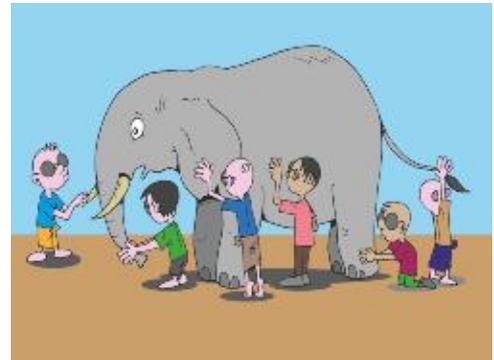
Group Coordinator: [Vivek Nanda](#) (click to contact)

When - on the third Fridays of each month from 2.30pm for about 2 hours

Where - At Islington Town Hall before the lockdown in March 2020 and on Zoom via your computer, smart phone, tablet, traditional phone subsequently.

Overview

This friendly and welcoming group discusses Power and Politics together, sharing different perspectives and priorities, to enrich the learning experience of all in a sociable and enjoyable way. In the process, many members find that they are motivated to complete they course they started, rather than move onto a new course without completing any of the courses they started. The outline structure of the Yale course can be found [here](#). A short description of the first meeting can be found [here](#).



Lectures discussed:

On **17 January 2020**

- ✓ Lecture 1: [Introduction to Power and Politics in Today's World](#), which provided an examination of political dynamics and institutions over the past 30 years, and the implications of these changes for what comes next. Among the topics covered were the decline of trade unions and enlarged role of business as political forces, changing attitudes towards parties and other political institutions amidst the growth of inequality and middle-class insecurity, the emergence of new forms of authoritarianism, and the

character and durability of the unipolar international order that replaced the Cold War.

On **21 February 2020**

- ✓ Lecture 2: [**From Soviet Communism to Russian Gangster Capitalism**](#), which focused on what led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and why did it collapse so peacefully? Prof. Shapiro discusses the events leading up to the fall of the Communist regime and its aftermath, including the rise of "gangster capitalism" in Russia, the transition from President Boris Yeltsin to Vladimir Putin, and why corruption is still so prevalent in Russia today.

On **20 March 2020**

- ✓ Lecture 3: [**Advent of a Unipolar World: NATO and EU Expansion**](#), which discusses the international architecture of the early Post-Cold War world. Prof. Shapiro uses three lenses of thinking about politics (interests, institutions and ideals) and then applies them to guide his students through the first post-Cold war crisis, the role of NATO after the fall of the Soviet Union, the origins and meaning of the Washington Consensus, and the formation and expansion of the EU,
- ✓ Lecture 4: [**Fusing Capitalist Economics with Communist Politics: China and Vietnam**](#), which discusses China and Vietnam as the two most successful examples of capitalist authoritarian regimes that have emerged in the post-communist era. Prof. Shapiro talks about causal drivers of growth in both countries, the reform era in China before the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, the sequencing debate of political and economic change, on why we should rethink modernization theory and expectations for the future of democracy in China.

On **17 April 2020**

- ✓ Lecture 5: [**The Resurgent Right in the West**](#), which discusses the sources and implications of the rise of right wing politics in the West in the late 20th century? Prof. Shapiro also discusses how the collapse of communism was (maybe counterintuitively) beneficial to the right, two logics of distributive politics, the median voter theorem, and how interests, institutions and ideals influence individual's ideas of fairness in politics. He then discusses the implications of the rise of the right in two-party versus multiparty systems.
- ✓ [**Office Hours 1: The Collapse of Communism and its Aftermath**](#)

On **15th May 2020**

- ✓ Lecture 6: [**Reorienting the Left: New Democrats, New Labour, and Europe's Social Democrats**](#), which revisits the psychology of distributive politics that was introduced in Lecture 5 to walk learners through the logic of absolute versus relative gains, Loss Aversion, Endowment Effect, and Prospect Theory. Prof. Shapiro uses these concepts to help us better understand the evolution and importance of unions in the US and Europe, Left and Centre Parties and distributive politics in two-party versus

multiparty systems, questioning the idea that multiparty systems are more redistributive in today's world.

- ✓ Lecture 7: [Shifting Goalposts: The Anti-Tax Movement](#), which discusses why the estate tax, which is paid by only the wealthiest two percent of Americans, was repealed in 2001 with broad bipartisan support? Prof. Shapiro unravels this puzzle in this lecture by going over the origins of the anti-tax movement, the logic of referendum politics, and 1994 as a pivot point. He then hones in on the estate tax repeal as a case study, discusses tax cuts and the Republican coalition and how far the goalposts have shifted for today's U.S. tax politics.

On **19 June 2020**

- ✓ Lecture 8: [Privatizing Government I: Utilities, Eminent Domain, and Local Government](#), which discusses what is privatization and what are its consequences? Prof. Shapiro helps us to answer these two questions by mapping out varieties of privatization, revisiting Neoliberalism & the Washington Consensus, and discussing the politics, law and economics of eminent domain; and the political, economic and social effects of privatizing local government.
- ✓ Lecture 9: [Privatizing Government II: Prisons and the Military](#), which discusses the privatization of two core government functions, providing military and prisons. Prof. Shapiro talks about host nation trucking in Afghanistan and provides background on the emergence of U.S. private prisons before he draws useful comparisons between the military and prison industries on how we should think about the consequences of privatization in both areas.

On **17 July 2020**

- ✓ Lecture 10: [Money in Politics](#), which discusses supply of and demand for money in politics. Prof. Shapiro provides an overview of myths and realities on courts in American politics, discusses the first amendment since Buckley v. Valeo, the importance of the changing media context, and finally the demand for money in an area of weak parties.
- ✓ [Office Hours 2: The Collapse of Communism and its Aftermath II](#)

On **21 August 2020**

- ✓ Members were asked to come prepared to share their reflections on Part I and the journey we have been on over the last 7 months. Any member who wished could speak for up to 5 minutes each on their reflections, using [Vivek's draft reflections](#) as an illustrative example. This was followed by Q&A and general discussion on the possibility of creating another living document for sharing our reflections with the help of an audio recording of this meeting only.

On **18 September 2020**

- ✓ Lecture 11: [Democracy's Fourth Wave? South Africa, Northern Ireland, and the Middle East](#), which discusses how do we get

democracies, and how do we keep them? Prof. Shapiro leads the audience through the four waves of democratization and discusses four types of democratic transitions. He then talks about the dynamics of negotiated settlements and their likelihood of success, failure and inclusiveness by using South Africa, Northern Ireland and the Middle East as examples.

- ✓ Lecture 12: [**Business and Democratic Reform: A Case Study of South Africa**](#), which discusses the role that the business sector played in the end of Apartheid in South Africa? Prof. Ian Shapiro discusses business and the backstory of South Africa's transition, revisits modernization theory and business attitudes to authoritarianism and democracy; and provides an overview of South Africa before, during and after the transition.

On **16 October 2020**

- ✓ Lecture 13: [**The International Criminal Court and the Responsibility to Protect**](#), which provides an international law background on non-intervention; discusses what the ICC and R2P are, and how radical they were for a refashioning of the legal and political order; as well as goes over the roles played by interest, institutions and ideas in the establishment of the ICC and R2P.
- ✓ Lecture 14: [**9/11 and the Global War on Terror**](#), which discusses what was (and is) the Global War on Terror, how radical an innovation it was, what it meant for the emerging post-Cold War international order as well as what were the paths not taken.
- ✓ [**Office Hours 3: A New Global World Order?**](#)

On **20 November 2020**

- ✓ Lecture 15: [**Demise of the Neoconservative Dream: From Afghanistan to Iraq**](#), which discusses when the End of History ended for the US and the Neoconservative Dream as well as provides a background to Iraq since 1991, and the costs of the Iraq war.
- ✓ Lecture 16: [**Denouement of Humanitarian Intervention**](#), which discusses the origins of how and why did NATO's intervention in Libya happen and its implications for the prospects for Humanitarian Intervention, the stability and future shape Middle East and the ability of the US to be a force for good internationally.

On **18 December 2020**

- ✓ Lecture 17: [**Filling the Void - China in Africa**](#) provides a historical overview on Chinese engagement in Africa since the beginning of the Cold War, engages with key questions arising from the relationship and suggests how to think about African bargaining power with China in light of global economic and political changes over the past two decades.
- ✓ Lecture 18: [**Political Limits of Business: The Israel-Palestine Case**](#), which discusses the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Breaking the Impasse advocacy group consisting of Israeli and Palestinian business leaders, subsequent business efforts and lessons learned.

On **15 January 2021**

- ✓ Lecture 19: [Crisis, Crash, and Response](#), which discusses the financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent choices in historical perspective, three perspectives on regulation and missed opportunities.
- ✓ Lecture 20: [The Housing Crisis and its Aftermath](#), which discusses what produced the subprime mortgage crisis, what the results were and what the lessons are for today.
- ✓ [Office Hours 4: The End of the End of History](#)

On **19 February 2021**

- ✓ Lecture 21: [Backlash - 2016 and Beyond](#), which discusses the economic, demographic, & cultural sources of the 2016 backlash and the larger puzzle of resurgent identity politics.
- Lecture 22: [Political Sources of Populism - Misdiagnosing Democracy's Ills](#), explores the question - what is it about democratic political systems that has fostered the resurgence of populism? Prof. Ian Shapiro discusses answers to this question by shifting the focus away from exclusive attention to the attitudes of voters to include the incentives and motivations of politicians.
- ✓ [Office Hours 5: The Politics of Insecurity.](#)

On **19 March 2021**

- ✓ Lecture 23: [Building Blocks of Distributive Politics](#), which discusses six building blocks of distributive politics and why policy without politics is empty, and politics without policy is blind.
- ✓ Lecture 24: [Unemployment, Re-employment & Income Security](#), which focuses on the question: How to respond to endemic and permanent wage insecurity in light of last lecture's discussion of politics?

On **16 April 2021**

- ✓ Lecture 25: [Tough Nuts - Education and Health Insurance](#), which looks at two other challenges, K-12 education and universal health insurance, in light of two especially strong obstacles in the United States, fiscal federalism and inertia that privileges path dependence.
- ✓ Lecture 26: [Agendas for Democratic Reform](#), which provides a review of central themes, discusses four paths taken and missed, and agendas for democratic reform.

Optional Extras:

- The slides for all the lectures, which are very large files as they have videos embedded in them, can be found [here](#).
- The optional readings for all the lectures can be found [here](#).