

Discussion Questions – Colin's Sections

The main purpose of discussion section is, indeed to have a discussion. It is our feeling that the best way to learn the theories taught in Gov 20 is to be able to debate them, both in the sense of debating different interpretations of the theories as well as in the sense of debating the implications of various ideas. Section should be an opportunity to ask questions and to clarify ideas from the readings, but it will not be a place where we simply walk through every single reading from the week.

To that effect, you will need to submit one question every week *by the beginning of the Thursday lecture*. This question should either be the catalyst for a debate or should outline specific issues you had with the readings---either aspects of the reading that you didn't fully grasp or disagreed with, or ideas that really caught your attention as particularly good or particularly bad ideas. The questions can be short; a single sentence will often be enough. But it should be clear from the question that you are engaging with the readings. Some ideas for good questions from the first couple of weeks are listed below, as are some inadequate questions (*some, if not all, of the "bad" questions are totally legitimate for lecture or office hours and you should feel free to ask them there---they're just not helpful for a discussion!*)

Good Questions for Discussion:

- Cultural theories make a lot of sense to me, like the Protestant work ethic in Weber or Lerner's thoughts on the Middle East. But don't cultures actually change pretty quickly?
- How can Lerner claim that his ideas aren't ethnocentric? The idea that Islam is "backwards" seems to be really ethnocentric!
- I understand that relatively backward states could use technologies developed elsewhere, but I don't get why they saw other states as so threatening. Is technology always threatening?
- So, if the only successful developers in the 1960s and 1970s, does that mean that dictatorships can be good?
- Why does Levitsky put Japan in with the authoritarian states? Wasn't Japan a democracy after World War II?
- Couldn't we call Gerschenkron a voluntarist? Doesn't someone have to lead these changes?

Bad Questions for Discussion:

- Levitsky's wrong. Authoritarianism sucks.
- I don't get Gerschenkron. Can you explain relative backwardness?
- What's the definition of democracy?
- I don't understand the terms in the Amsden reading.