

Periodic course evaluation

## **HGO4401 Democratization and civil society in developing countries**

Fall 2017

### **Course information**

This course examines the dynamics of democratization in developing countries, with special emphasis on representation of people and the role of civil society. The first part of the course focuses on contemporary institutional changes and academic debates on democratization, governance and citizenship in the Global South. The lectures and readings point to the global spread of formal democracy and neoliberal governance, but also the prevalence of depoliticization and flawed popular representation and participation. Following from this, the second part of the course focuses on efforts towards more substantive democratization, examining the interplay between political spaces and actor strategies to pursue diverse issues and interests. The course draws on interdisciplinary literature and debates, while also foregrounding political geographic approaches and contributions. The course is thus designed to give both a broad overview of the field and a theoretical basis for master degree studies in human geography within the field of democratization and civil society in developing studies.

The learning goals for the course are for students to attain:

#### Knowledge

- A good overview of key theoretical issues and debates on democratization and civil society in developing countries
- A good understanding of political geographic approaches to and selected contextual cases of democratization and civil society in developing countries

#### Skills

- Ability to understand and critically assess theoretical and contextual literature on democratization and civil society in developing countries
- Ability to write an academic review paper at an advanced level within the course topic

#### Competences

- Critical reflexivity around the form, substance and political dynamics of democratization and popular representation in developing countries
- Reflexivity around theoretical strategies and challenges of doing research on democratization and civil society in the Global South

The teaching in 2017 consisted of 12 thematic lectures (lecturers in parenthesis):

1. Introduction (Kristian Stokke)
2. Transitions to formal democracy (Kristian Stokke)
3. Politics of citizenship (Kristian Stokke)
4. Contentious politics and civil society (Kristian Stokke)
5. Discursive political spaces (Marielle Stigum Gleiss)
6. Political parties and popular representation (Kristian Stokke)
7. Governance and the politics of citizenship in southern cities (Marianne Millstein)
8. Politics of industrial citizenship (David Jordhus-Lier)
9. Religious civil society (David Jordhus-Lier and Heidi Østbø Haugen)
10. Informality, urban citizenship and the politics of knowledge (David Jordhus-Lier)
11. Environmental justice (Kristian Stokke)

## 12. Conclusion: Lessons and policy implications (Kristian Stokke)

The reading package consists of a selection of articles and book chapters, totalling 880 pages.

The examination is based on a term paper that students work on throughout the semester. The topic for the term paper is decided by each student in consultation with the course instructor(s), and must be within the thematic focus of the course.

### Course results in 2017

Number of students registered for exam: 28

Number of students completing exam: 26

Grade distribution: A: 4 (15%); B: 8 (31%); C: 9 (35%); D: 2 (8%); E: 2 (8%), F: 1 (4%)

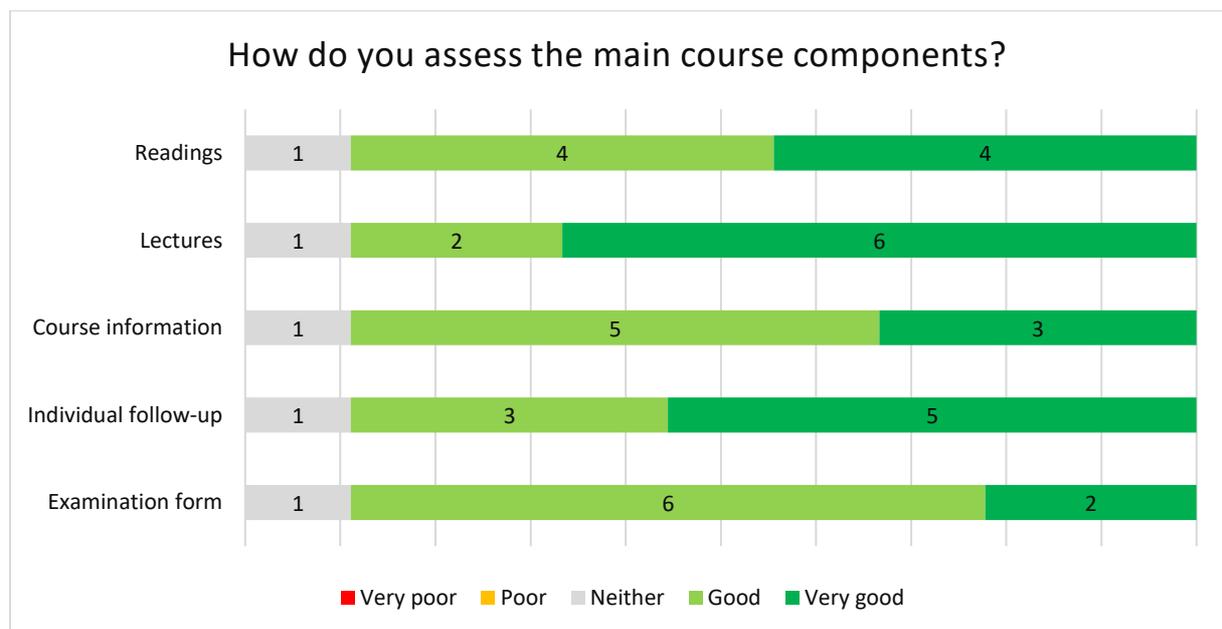
### Course evaluation

This periodic course evaluation is based on an online questionnaire that was distributed to all students that completed the course in 2017. Out of a total of 26 students, 9 completed the survey. The survey consisted of the following three questions.

*QUESTION 1: How do you rate the quality of the following components in the course (very poor – poor – neither – good – very good):*

- Readings
- Lectures
- Course information
- Individual follow-up
- Examination form

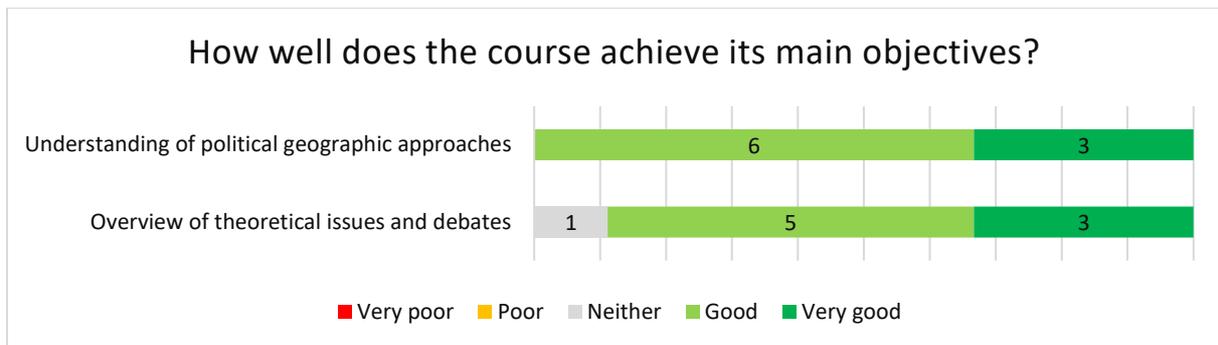
The following figure shows the distribution of answers for question no. 1:



*QUESTION 2: How well do you think the course has enabled you to reach the following learning outcomes (very poor – poor – neither – good – very good):*

- Students shall attain a good overview of key theoretical issues and debates on democratization and civil society in developing countries
- Students shall attain a good understanding of political geographic approaches to and selected contextual cases of democratization and civil society in developing countries

The following figure shows the distribution of answers for question no. 2:



*QUESTION 3: Do you have any positive or negative feedback that we should take into consideration for the future of the course?*

Only one comment was provided in response to this question:

- *The professor was really good!*

### **Observations and recommendations**

Although the response rate to the online questionnaire was relatively low (35%), the submitted answers support the observation that HGO4401 is a well-functioning course. No major concerns have been raised by the students through the survey or by other communication channels.

While the course and its core components seem to function well, I will make the following observations based on my experience as course coordinator:

1. The thematic focus and core line of argument, as expressed in readings and lectures, could be more clear and coherent
2. The number of lectures could be reduced from 12 to 10 and the reading package could be reduced from 880 to approximately 750 pages
3. The teaching could be less lecture-based and more based on a hybrid lecture/seminar format
4. The individual follow-up on the student papers could be strengthened and more well-organized

Blindern, 19 August 2018

Kristian Stokke