

17.588f13 Week 1 “Introduction”

Questions for Class Discussion

What role do you think political scientists should play in the world? Are there any roles they should not play? What role do you hope to play?

Most political scientists (including area specialists) failed to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some responded that this failure was not fundamentally problematic for political science, because the USSR was “just one data point”. As far as you are concerned, is this a satisfying response? If not, is there a better one?

Przeworski & Teune argue for “turning proper names into variables” when comparing across countries? Give an example of how you might follow their advice. Do you like the result?

How do you think political science research is supposed to be conducted? Is it actually conducted this way? If not, why not? How does research in our discipline compare to the way research is actually conducted in other fields?

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