INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE POLITICS
Political Science 450, Fall 2007
Ripton Room, Mondays, 9am to 11:50am

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Course Description

The purpose of this course is to provide a very general overview of major theoretical and methodological approaches that appear in the field of comparative politics. The reading list draws from classic and contemporary works. Most of these are “major books” that rank very highly in indices of citations and can be found on the shelves of most experts in comparative politics. Like the use of Latin in the Catholic Church or Arabic in Islam, these books constitute part of the common language that links diverse branches of this broadest of sub-fields of political science.

This course covers a wide array of topics; the interrelationships of state institutions, culture, markets, and societal organizations. These topics will occupy the first part of the course. The second part of the course will focus on the foundations of political regimes and the creation of political order, and the comparative study of these processes. Political conflict will be studied as a closely related element of these processes.

Course Requirements

Participation: Taking part in discussions plays a critical role in your engagement in the course. You are encouraged to discuss course material among yourselves prior to class. You may also find the course blog to be a useful venue to float your ideas and anticipate class discussion. [http://gradcp.blogspot.com]

As you prepare to discuss the core readings in each week’s class, consider the following:

- What do you find to be useful in a particular approach? Why did the author of that work think that a particular approach was useful?
- What are some of the dilemmas and questions that are raised in a particular work?
- Can you identify faulty evidence, problems of case selection, leaps of logic (or faith), overgeneralization / over-specification of variables, lack of historical context, or other problems?
- What are the merits and pitfalls of selecting a particular week’s approach over other approaches encountered in this course or elsewhere?
- What questions do the readings leave unanswered / unaddressed?
- In what way is the work a contribution to the field, and why do so many political scientists think that it is worthy? What is its likely shelf life?

Review essays: You are required to post on the blog four essays in response to each of four weeks’ readings. Each essay is to be of no more than 750 words, excepting the essay for the week
during which you are a discussion leader (see below). For that week alone, your review can be longer, but please try to stay in the range of about 1,500 words. These are to be posted on the blog no later than 5pm on the Sunday before Monday’s class so that other students will have an opportunity to read these postings.

**Discussion leader:** Each student will have the opportunity to lead discussion for each week’s readings. Discussion leaders will have the option of writing a somewhat longer reflection paper (of about 1,500 words), as they will likely be more juiced up on the readings in comparison to other weeks. The discussion leader might find a meeting with Will prior to the class meeting to be advisable. Once class begins, the discussion leader will have no more than 15 minutes to present his or her findings. Most presenters will find that it is advantageous to focus on a few issues or problems related to the assigned readings, rather than try to summarize them or cover all of the issues that are raised. Open-ended presentations are encouraged. The goal is to facilitate the subsequent discussion rather than to bury once and for all the works of our departed academic ancestors or to stage a drive-by against today’s luminaries. Of course, one should assume that all other class participants have read the work.

**A paper:** Students will write a paper of about 20 or so double spaced pages. A rough draft is due in class on the [date]. The final version of the paper is due on [date]. First year graduate students may use this paper as a vehicle to try out ideas for their second year papers or explore topics that might be relevant to eventual dissertations. They also may use this paper as a basis for a review essay or an article for eventual submission to a scholarly journal for publication. Second year and other advanced students may want to use the paper as a way to develop a dissertation proposal, a grant proposal, or a chapter of a dissertation. Undergraduates will have the chance to develop a substantial writing sample for job or school applications.

“What should I write about?” The list below provides suggestions and is not exhaustive.

1. An analytical paper will identify a significant problem related to the politics of a particular subject covered in one of the week’s readings. This can be used to develop in greater depth a substantive area of debate within the comparative politics sub-field. This might take the form of framing a research agenda which links central issues in a particular debate to empirical research. Given the constraints of the ten week term, the empirical research will necessarily be preliminary. The paper can propose an agenda and plan for empirical research and preliminary data.

2. A review essay would survey a body of work related to the topic for a particular week. Optional readings are listed under relevant weekly headings. These and other works may be consulted. Consult with Will to refine a review list.

3. A research proposal for a grant application or dissertation proposal would identify a significant problem related to a comparative politics topic. It would evaluate current approaches to addressing this problem and justify the need for additional research. It then develops a research design to address this absence.

**Grade criteria:**

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<tr>
<th>Particular</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation (class discussion, blog contributions)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review essays (three shorter essays)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion leadership and longer essay</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>50%</td>
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Course Readings


Class Schedule

I. Basic Elements

24 September: Introduction: Comparison in Political Science

What distinguishes comparative politics from other sub-fields of political science? If you were given $25,000 to conduct field research outside of the United States, where would you go and what would you study and why?

At the start of this course, how do you define terms such as “state,” “political development,” “political culture” and “nation”? [This session is not expected to last for the duration of the scheduled time.]
1 October: The Creation and Development of Varieties of States, [The Story from Europe]


Optional:


8 October: States and Societal Authority


Optional:


15 October: States and Markets


Optional:


**II. Politics of Contention**

**22 October:** The Politics of Nations and National Identity


**Optional:**


**29 October:** Regimes, Revolution and Democracy. Is a bourgeoisie a necessary ingredient of a democracy?


**Optional:**


**5 November:** The Creation of States and Regimes: A story from the periphery


**Optional:**


**III: Managing Contention and Regime Types**

**12 November:** Development [“Modernization”] Mobilization and the Institutionalization of Political Regimes

Samuel Huntington (1968) *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale). [Skip the American exceptionalism section unless you are interested in Huntington’s arguments concerning Iraq.]

**Optional:**


19 November: Democratic Politics: A Historical Perspective, [Depending on the interests of the class members, it may make sense to divide readings on this week. One group would read Schumpeter and the other would read a selection of more contemporary scholarship on democratization. Discussion would then focus on contrasting approaches and lessons.]

Joseph Schumpeter (1942), *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper), [You may stop reading at page 302]

Optional:


26 November: Social Movements


Optional:


**The Missing Weeks:**

What was left out? What would have been included in a semester-length course? Perhaps we would have taken a closer look at the influence of specific institutional designs on regime and other aspects of politics. Some of the readings in the sections on democracy, democratic transitions, and authoritarian politics take account of institutions. We would have taken a closer look at the politics of ethnicity. Identity (including ethnic) politics is a huge area of study that does not appear in any significant degree here. I would have included more on the politics of conflict, including the breakdown of states and the politics of civil wars. However, I teach an entire seminar devoted to those issues. Finally, some of the core issues covered in Marx and Weber appears in the works above, and can be found most visibly in the Schumpeter book. Yet we do not devote time to the core classics of this duo. One could devote at least a week to inequality and social structure and use a comparison of Marx and Weber as a basis for those readings.