Political Science 550
Comparative Political Analysis
State University of New York at Albany
Spring 2014

Professor Cheng Chen  M 2:45-5:35
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Course Description

The objective of this seminar is to provide a critical survey of the field of comparative politics, exposing the student to different methodological approaches and to substantive areas of research. The first half of the course traces the intellectual history of the field with a focus on the bifurcation between theories that emphasize the “universal” (the homogenizing effects of specific processes or variables) and the “particular” (the persistence of distinctive historical legacies and trajectories). It then examines the recent debates between rational-choice, cultural, and structuralist scholars, and discusses the major methodological issues in comparative politics, considering the trade-offs between varieties of formal, quantitative, and qualitative methods. In the second half of the course, the focus shifts to substantive areas of research in the field of comparative politics, including the complex relations among nationalism, nation-states and societies; the origins, consolidation, and patterns of democratic governance; the dynamics behind revolutions and other forms of “contentious politics”; the political economy of development and the emergence of varieties of capitalism; and the relationship between international/global economy and domestic politics and policies. Overall, the course is designed to introduce important issues and debates that comparativists have regularly engaged in, and to provide a broad intellectual map of an extremely heterogeneous field so that the relationships between different kinds of problematiques and approaches can be better understood.

Course Requirements

The seminar depends heavily on students’ participation as it will rely both on lectures, student presentations, and class discussions. The expectation is that you will spend at least five or six hours in preparing for the seminar, and that you will come to class with at least some sense of the diverse arguments and approaches represented by the assigned readings. Bear in mind that this is a survey class and, as such, our focus will be less on the empirics of specific pieces and more on the relations among, and differences between, the conceptual frameworks, substantive theories, and methodological perspectives represented by the assigned pieces. For this purpose, it would be better to distribute your preparation time over the entire set of readings each week, presumably taking notes and jotting down questions and remarks. Our class discussions will address how the readings relate to each other, but this requires that you first make your own attempt to grasp the significance of the various pieces.

Each student will be required to make several presentations, the exact number of which will depend on the number of students enrolled in the seminar. The written assignments will include a mid-term take-home exam and a double-spaced 15-20 page final field paper.
surveying and assessing the relative merits of different research traditions and theoretical
approaches in the study of a particular topic. You need to go beyond the assigned readings
for your selected topic as you generate a wide-ranging critical survey of books and articles
that represent competing theoretical arguments and research traditions as these have evolved
in the study of that topic. Students are encouraged to meet with the instructor in early April
to make sure that his or her topic and outline are suitable for this review paper, which is due
in class on Tuesday, May 7. Late paper will result in grade reduction. Grades will be
assessed as follows: class participation (20%); mid-term exam (30%); and field paper (50%).

Readings

Mark Lichbach & Alan Zuckerman, eds. Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and
Structure, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

The rest of the required readings will be included in a course pack available at Mary Jane
Books on Western Avenue at Quail Street. Those marked with “available on-line” can be
retrieved by clicking on “Journals - Print and Online” from the Libraries web page and typing
in the title of the journal in the search box.

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January 27: Overview

• Course syllabus

PART ONE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS AND RESEARCH TRADITIONS

February 3: The Modernization Paradigm, 1950s-70s

• Andrew Janos, Politics and Paradigms (Stanford University Press, 1986), 36-64
• Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, Toward a General Theory of Action (Free Press,
1951), 76-91
• Alex Inkeles and David Smith, Becoming Modern: Individual Change in Six
Countries (Harvard University Press, 1974), 154-175
• Gabriel Almond, “A Functional Approach to Comparative Politics,” in Almond and
James Coleman, eds. The Politics of Developing areas (Princeton University Press,
1960), 3-25
• Walt W. Rostow, The Stages of Economic Growth (Cambridge University Press,
1962), 1-15
• Karl Deutsch, “Social Mobilization and Political Participation,” in J. Finkle and R.
Gable, eds. Political Development and Social Change (Wiley, 1966), 384-405
February 10: Challenges to the Modernization Paradigm


February 17: Return of Universalism: “Post-Industrialism” and “Globalization”

- Etel Solingen, “The Global Context of Comparative Politics” (L&Z, ch. 9)

February 24: Nuts, Bolts and Structures in Comparative Politics

- Lichbach & Zuckerman, “Paradigms and Pragmatism” (L&Z, ch.1)
- George Tsebelis, *Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics* (University of California Press, 1990), 18-47
- Margaret Levi, “Reconsiderations of Rational Choice in Comparative and Historical Analysis” (L&Z, ch. 5)
March 3: Methodological Issues in Comparative Political Analysis


PART TWO: SUBSTANTIVE AREAS OF RESEARCH

March 10: Nations, States, and Societies I: Nationalism and National Identity

- Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 5-34
March 24: Nations, States and Societies II: State-Formation and State-Society Relations

- Joel Migdal, “Researching the State” (L&Z, ch. 7)
- Margaret Levi, Of Rule and Revenue (University of California Press, 1989), 1-9, 38-47
- Joel Migdal, Strong Societies and Weak States (Princeton University Press, 1988), 3-41
- Crawford Young, The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective (Yale University Press, 1994), 43-76
- Joel Migdal, State in Society (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 231-264

March 31: Political Regimes I: Democracy, Democratization, and Democratic Stability

- Seymour Martin Lipset, Political Man (Doubleday, 1959), 27-53, 64-70

April 7: Political Regimes II: Variation and Consequences of Democratic Institutions

- Arend Lijphart, Democracy in Plural Societies (Yale University Press, 1977), 25-52

April 21: Challenging Political Order: Perspectives on “Contentious Politics”

• Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 3-43
• James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Yale University Press, 1987), 28-48
• Sidney Tarrow, “States and Opportunities: The Political Structuring of Social Movements,” in D. McAdam, J. D. McCarthy, and M. N. Zald, eds. *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 41-61
• Meyer N. Zald, “Culture, Ideology, and Strategic Framing,” in D. McAdam et al., eds. *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 261-274
• Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow, “Ballots and Barricades: On the Reciprocal Relationship between Elections and Social Movements,” *Perspectives on Politics* 8:2 (June 2010): 529-542 [available on-line]
• Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, “Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics” (L&Z, ch. 10)

April 28: Political Economy I: The State and Economic Development

• Mark Blyth, “An Approach to Comparative Analysis or a Subfield within a Subfield? Political Economy” (L&Z, ch. 8)
• Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Beacon, 1944), 56-76
• Albert Hirschman, *The Strategy of Development* (Yale University Press, 1958), 7-28
• Atul Kohli, *State-Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-23
May 5: Political Economy II: The International Economy and National Politics