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 (with
reasonable margins and font) 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 Thursday, May 5. 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


This book is available at Mary Jane. The rest of the required readings are available on Blackboard. Those marked with “available on-line” can be retrieved by clicking on “E-Journals” from the Libraries web page and typing in the title of the journal in the search box.

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January 21: Overview

- Course syllabus

PART ONE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS AND RESEARCH TRADITIONS

January 28: The Anticipation of Comparative Analysis in the 19th Century


February 4: Universalist Grand Theory: The “Modernization Paradigm,” 1950s-70s

- 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

February 11: Recognizing Variations

- Theda Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back in: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research,” in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer & Theda Skocpol, eds. *Bringing the State Back in* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1-28
February 18: Return of Universalism? “Post-Industrialism” and “Globalization”

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


February 25: Analytic Divides 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)
- Ira Katznelson, “Strong theory, Complex History” (L&Z, ch. 4)
- Marc Howard Ross, “Culture in Comparative Political Analysis” (L&Z, ch. 6)

March 3: Methodological Issues in Comparative Political Analysis


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**PART TWO: SUBSTANTIVE AREAS OF RESEARCH**

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


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- 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

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• 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

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

• Seymour Martin Lipset, Political Man (Doubleday, 1959), 27-53, 64-70
• Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture (Princeton University Press, 1963), 3-26, 473-305

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

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

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April 14: 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

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• 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 21: 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

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- Peter Hall and David Soskice, “An Introduction to Varieties of Capitalism,” in Hall and Soskice, eds. *Varieties of Capitalism* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 1-21

April 28: Political Economy II: The International Economy and National Politics


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May 5: Paper Due