Course overview
This class offers a critical introduction to the field of comparative politics. Comparative politics is commonly described as the study of the domestic politics of different states. In this class, we will focus less on the “what” (the dimensions of various polities) than on the “how” and “why”: methodological approaches and tools, theoretical advances and assumptions, and core substantive foci. The course offers not only an intellectual history and map, but also an entrée into key debates and the trade-offs among different approaches (rational, cultural, and structural; quantitative, qualitative, and interpretive; small-N and large-N) and an overview of a range of substantive areas in comparative politics (states, regimes, institutions, collective action, nationalism, political economy, and globalization). Overall, the course is designed both to provide a broad survey, including at least a glimpse into many of the field’s canonical texts (either directly or by way of synoptic works assessing those texts), and to give you the tools you will need to embark on further studies and original research.

Objectives
By the end of the course, you will be able to:
- Summarize and compare the key conceptual frameworks used in comparative politics.
- Discuss and critique the major questions and theories on which comparative politics focuses.
- Outline the key debates within core areas of comparative political inquiry.
- Synthesize across cases and approaches in canonical works of comparative politics.
- Demonstrate ability to craft a research prospectus.

Requirements and evaluation criteria
Participation (40%) The class will be run as a discussion-driven seminar. It is vitally important that every student participate actively and thoughtfully each week. Participation will be evaluated based on whether you voluntarily pose and respond to questions in each class session, demonstrate that you have completed the assigned reading, and listen respectfully to what your peers say. The reading load is heavy (about 200 pages per week) and diverse, but you
should come to class having thought through both the arguments and approaches presented, and
the significance of and connections among the assigned texts. Do not just read selected pieces
from among the assigned works; read all, jotting down notes or questions as you read, even if
you focus more intently on some texts than others.

As part of the participation requirement, each week, at least one student will prepare a 3-4 page
critical summary of the week’s readings for distribution to the class (which will be useful for
you to have for later reference) and lead class discussion for that day. These summaries should
go beyond synopsizing individual pieces, to synthesize and critique the readings: identify major
themes, highlight points of (dis)agreement, link the readings with what has come before in the
class, and tease out methodological or intellectual trends. Particularly since each critical
summary will cover several assigned texts, these summaries should not include more than a
capsule summary of any given work. Rather, while having a collaboratively-produced set of
succinct, integrated summaries will be helpful particularly for those taking the comparative
politics field exam, my assessment will home in on your effort at integration and analysis.

Depending on enrollment, each student will complete one or two of these summaries. Keep in
mind, too, that what is assigned is but a slice of the canonical literature on these topics. Keep in
mind, too, that what is assigned is but a slice of the canonical literature on these topics. Keep in
mind, too, that what is assigned is but a slice of the canonical literature on these topics. Keep in
mind, too, that what is assigned is but a slice of the canonical literature on these topics.

Exam (30%)  You will have an in-class midterm exam on March 8.

Prospectus (30%) The final project for the class will be a research prospectus of approximately
15 pages in length, structured to match NSF requirements for grant proposals. (We will discuss
those requirements in class. Those students wishing to develop a comparable proposal targeting a
different grant competition may do so, but should speak with me first.) The prospectus will allow
you the chance to home in on a particular area in depth, while deploying your new-found
knowledge of the approaches, methods, and literatures of comparative politics. (Regardless of
your own ultimate research aims, this prospectus must fall within this subfield.) A 1-2 page
précis (abstract or sketch) is due by 5:00pm on March 23. We will not have class (or assigned
reading) that week, so you will have ample time to get started; I expect you to have far more than
1-2 pages’ worth of ideas and material by then, but will enforce the page limit. Think of the
précis as an executive summary of your prospectus, touching on research questions, guiding
hypotheses and assumptions, methods, and literatures within which the project will fit; one
cannot write such a summary without a fairly clear vision of the document as a whole. You will
both submit and give a 15 minute presentation on your prospectus on the last day of class.

Special needs  Students with special needs due to physical, learning, or other disabilities will be
accommodated. To request such accommodation, first register with the Disability Resource
Center (Campus Center 137, http://www.albany.edu/disability/DRC/); they will provide you with
a letter to me, detailing the provisions requested. To ensure equitable treatment of all students,
please submit these letters within the first two weeks of the semester (in person, so we can
discuss appropriate arrangements).

Academic honesty  I expect all students to be ethical and honest in completing all work for this
class. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with the university’s guidelines on academic
integrity (http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html); ignorance is NOT an
excuse. Violations of this code, such as plagiarism, cheating, copying, or misrepresentation of work as your own, will meet with appropriate penalties and discipline as outlined in UAlbany’s regulations, up to and including loss of course credit, suspension, or expulsion from the university. It is the responsibility of every student also to report any observed violations.

Course readings
Since we will read mostly journal articles or snippets of larger works, only one book is required for purchase; it is available from either the UAlbany bookstore or Mary Jane Books (or from your favorite second-hand/online bookstore; make sure to buy the correct edition). I will post all additional readings (chapters and articles) on Blackboard. You may wish to purchase at least some of the books from which these extracts are drawn, however, and/or to read beyond the segments indicated.


Schedule (readings are due on the date under which they are listed, but need not be read in the sequence listed):

19 Jan: Introduction

26 Jan: Meta-approaches to comparative politics

2 Feb: Comparative methods


Alexander George & Andrew Bennett, Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences (MIT, 2005), pp. 3-36

James Mahoney & Dietrich Rueschemeyer, “Comparative Historical Analysis: Achievements and Agendas,” in Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 3-38


9 Feb: States & societies

Joel Migdal, “Researching the State,” in Lichbach & Zuckerman, chap. 7


Joel Migdal, Atul Kohli, & Vivienne Shue, State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 7-34 (Migdal) and 293-326 (Kohli & Shue)


Margaret Levi, Of Rule and Revenue (California, 1989), pp. 1-9, 38-47


16 Feb: Regime types & transitions

Mancur Olson, “Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development,” APSR 87: 3 (1993), pp. 567-76


Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 3-43, 282-3


**23 Feb: Democratic institutions**


• Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies* (Yale, 1977), pp. 25-52


**1 Mar: Electoral rules and accountability**


8 Mar: Midterm exam (in class)

15 Mar: No class (Spring Break)

22 Mar: No class (Independent research)
• *Précis of prospectus due* (electronically by 5pm, Friday, March 23)

29 Mar: Political economy: Modernization theory and beyond
• Mark Blyth, “An Approach to Comparative Analysis or a Subfield within a Subfield: Political Economy,” in Lichbach & Zuckerman, chap. 8
• Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Beacon, 1944), pp. 56-76
• Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (Yale, 1968), pp. 32-78

5 Apr: Political economy: Development, welfare, & reform
• Peter Evans, *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State, and Local Capital in Brazil* (Princeton, 1979), pp. 14-54

12 Apr: **Collective action & contentious politics**
• Doug McAdam, Sydney Tarrow, & Charles Tilly, “Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics,” in Lichbach & Zuckerman, chap. 10
• James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Yale, 1987), pp. 28-48
• Mark Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma* (Michigan, 1995), pp. 3-32

19 Apr: **Nationalism & identity**
• Walker Connor, “A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a …,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1:4 (1978), pp. 377-400
• Kanchan Chandra, “Making Causal Claims about the Effect of ‘Ethnicity,’” in Lichbach & Zuckerman, chap. 15
• Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (California, 1986), pp. 55-92

26 Apr: **The global and the local**
• Etel Solingen, “The Global Context of Comparative Politics,” in Lichbach & Zuckerman, chap. 9


3 May: **Conclusion**

• *Prospectus due in class*

• *Student presentations*