RPOS 550
FIELD SEMINAR: COMPARATIVE POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Professor Meredith Weiss
Spring 2019

Class: Monday 5:45-9:25; HS304

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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. The emphasis in this course is less on cutting-edge applications of theoretical frameworks or applied analyses of novel data than on laying foundations: we will emphasize the sorts of foundational works that subsequent studies—likely including your own future endeavors—test and engage.

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 (30%) 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. Bear in mind that this is a survey class; hence, 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.

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!

Aside from participating in class, you are strongly encouraged to attend departmental seminars, regardless of subfield. Not only might you find the speakers’ research interesting and thought-provoking, but they will model for you how to give (or in some cases, how not to give …) an academic seminar.

Exam (30%) You will have a midterm exam on 4 March, taken during class time.

Field paper (40%) The final project for the class will be a paper of 15-20 pages in length that will allow you the chance to home in on a particular area in depth, while deploying your newfound knowledge of the approaches, methods, and literatures of comparative politics. Your paper will survey and assess the relative merits of different research traditions and theoretical approaches in the study of a particular topic. In most cases, that topic will be among those covered in class. (If you prefer to focus on a topic not addressed in class, make sure to clear it with the professor first, to make certain it will be appropriate for the assignment.) You will need to extend 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 strongly encouraged to meet with the instructor in early April to make sure that their topics and outlines are suitable for this review paper. The paper is due by 5:00pm on Friday, May 10. Each student will also give a 15 minute conference-style presentation of their paper in class that day.
General guidelines
All written assignments must be double-spaced, with 1” margins, in Times New Roman or a comparable font. Late papers will incur a non-negotiable penalty of five points for each day late. Papers should be thoroughly proofread, to avoid aggravating the reader.

Accommodating disabilities  Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, medical, cognitive, learning and mental health (psychiatric) disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Disability Resource Center (518-442-5490; drc@albany.edu). Upon verification and after the registration process is complete, the DRC will provide you with a letter that informs me that you are a student with a disability registered with the DRC and list the recommended reasonable accommodations. 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 the UAlbany bookstore (or your favorite second-hand/online bookstore; make sure to buy the correct edition). The rest of the required readings are available electronically. Those marked with “available on-line” can be retrieved by clicking on “EJournals” from the Libraries web page and typing in the title of the journal in the search box; book chapters will be on Blackboard.


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

28 Jan:  Introduction
• James Mahoney, “Debating the State of Comparative Politics: Views from Qualitative Research,” Comparative Political Studies 40:1 (2007), pp. 32-38 [available on-line]
• Gerardo Munck and Richard Snyder, “Debating the Direction of Comparative Politics,” Comparative Political Studies 40:1 (2007), pp. 5-31; 45-47 (Rejoinder to Mahoney) [available on-line]
• Matthew Charles Wilson, “Trends in Political Science Research and the Progress of Comparative Politics,” PS (October 2017), pp. 979-84 [available on-line]

4 Feb:  Meta-approaches to comparative politics
11 Feb: Recognizing variations

- Theda Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back in: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research,” in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer & Theda Skocpol, ed. *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge, 1985), 1-28

18 Feb: Comparative methods

• Kathleen Thelen & James Mahoney, “Comparative Historical Analysis in Contemporary Political Science,” in J. Mahoney and K. Thelen, Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis (Cambridge UP, 2015), pp. 3-36


• Ricks & Liu – Process Tracing

25 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)

• Timothy Mitchell, “The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics,” APSR 85:1 (1991), pp. 77-96 [review from 6 Feb.]

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


4 Mar: Midterm exam

11 Mar: Regime types & transitions

• Mancur Olson, “Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development,” APSR 87: 3 (1993), pp. 567-76 [available on-line]


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

• Robert Dahl, Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition (Yale, 1971), pp. 1-32


18 Mar:  No class (Spring Break)

25 Mar:  Democratic and electoral institutions

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

1 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

8 Apr:  Political economy I: Modernization theory and beyond
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- 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

15 Apr: Political economy II: Development, welfare, & reform
- Peter Gourevitch, Politics in Hard Times (Cornell UP, 1986), pp. 17-34
- Peter Evans, Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State, and Local Capital in Brazil (Princeton UP, 1979), pp. 14-54
- Stephan Haggard, Pathways from the Periphery: The Politics of Growth in the Newly Industrializing Countries, (Cornell UP, 1990), pp. 23-48

22 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 [available on-line]
• Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (California, 1986), pp. 55-92
• *Optional* (e.g., if you have already read some of the above): Kanchan Chandra, “Making Causal Claims about the Effect of ‘Ethnicity,’” in Lichbach & Zuckerman, chap. 15

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

6 May: Student presentations

*Friday 10 May:* Final papers due by **5:00pm** (via email or hard copy)