Introduction to Comparative Politics

POLS V1501 Fall 2007  
TR 10:35-11:50am  
202 Altschul Hall  

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Teaching Assistants

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Introduction

Comparative politics is premised on the idea that you can compare apples and oranges. Comparing both entire political systems and specific units within political systems helps us understand what we are looking at in each one. For example, to understand the causes of a specific revolution, it is necessary to compare it to others and even to instances where revolution did not occur, so that we can isolate the factors that precipitated revolution in one place and time but not others.

The course is structured in two parts. Part I reviews some foundational topics in comparative politics, such as state formation, nationalism, democratization, and revolution. Part II focuses on some major puzzles in the sub-field, such as: Why are some countries resource-rich but very poor while others are resource-poor but very rich? How do different democracies work? What determines voter behavior? What causes corruption? What causes civil wars?

The course has three goals: (1) to guide you to analyze and compare complex political processes through frequent reading and discussion, (2) to teach you to write clear, well-argued expository essays, and (3) to serve as an introduction to and foundation for advanced undergraduate study in political science and related social sciences. Like the other 1000-level introductory surveys, this course is a prerequisite for several 3000- and 4000-level lectures, colloquia, and seminars.

Requirements

- Lecture and discussion section participation 20%
- Three in-class quizzes 15%
- 5-page research design 35%
- Final exam 30%
Attendance is mandatory in both lectures and discussion sections (attendance will be taken in the latter). More than two unexcused section absences will hurt your section attendance grade. At every lecture, I distribute important handouts and make announcements. Please be on time every time; class starts promptly at 10:35 am and ends promptly at 11:50 pm.

Each of the writing assignments develops a specific skill set. The in-class quizzes help you keep up with the readings and train you to identify authors’ arguments. The dates of the quizzes are indicated on the course schedule below.

The Research Design trains you to think like a comparativist by designing a research proposal on any topic of interest to you. The only requirement for the research design is that you make use of comparison in some way. You may compare two events, processes, groups, or institutions in one country or across two countries, or compare across time. You may even propose to compare two neighborhoods in a single city. While the scale of the comparison is up to you, a strong research design must be anchored in a very specific and focused question, a puzzle that genuinely interests you. You should construct a cogent answer to the question (your argument), discuss alternative answers to the same question (competing arguments), and develop a clear and feasible research strategy for how you would bolster your argument.

Constructing a research design is not a one-shot exercise, but a multi-step process of rethinking and revision. Therefore, you will have the opportunity to receive feedback on a first a draft so that your final submission is lucid and precise. See the course schedule below for submission dates and requirements.

For the in-class final exam, you will be asked to define major concepts and write one essay from a list of three questions distributed at least one week in advance. The final exam is cumulative.

**Required Texts**

The following textbook has been ordered at Labyrinth Books (112th St. btw. Broadway and Amsterdam, 212-865-1588) and also placed on reserve at Butler library. All other course readings are available online via the Reserves link on the class Courseworks page.


**Policy on Late Assignments, Missed Quizzes, etc.**

- There are no make-up quizzes, if you miss a quiz, you forfeit 5% of your course grade. There are only two conditions under which a make-up will be administered: family emergency or serious illness (doctor’s note required). Any other circumstances do not count (work commitments, routine illnesses, schedule conflicts, etc.)
Late research designs will be downgraded a third of a letter grade per day, including weekends. For example, a “B” assignment due Tuesday but handed in Thursday will receive a “C+”. Assignments submitted more than four days after the due date will not be accepted.

There are no make-up final exams. The date of the final exam is determined by the College Registrar.

No grade of “Incomplete” will be assigned in this course, so please manage your schedule to hand in all coursework on time.

**Academic Honesty**

All students taking this course must adhere to the Barnard College honor code, regardless of their academic affiliation. The honor code considers it “dishonest to ask for, give, or receive help in examinations or quizzes, to use any papers or books not authorized by the instructor in examinations, or to present oral work or written work which is not entirely our own, unless otherwise approved by the instructor.” If in doubt about any of these provisions or you would like to discuss these matters further, please seek help from your section leaders and the instructor.

**Classroom Etiquette**

- Our class is a professional environment conducive to active learning, and any distractions will undermine this purpose. So as a matter of respect for your peers, your section leaders, and your instructor, please be in your seats by 10:35 am, and I in turn will always end class promptly at 11:50 am.

- If work circumstances require you to arrive 10 minutes late or leave early once or twice a semester, please do so unobtrusively and without disruption to other members of the class.

- All cell phones and beepers must be turned off for the full duration of the class period. Students whose phones ring during lecture will be asked to leave.

- Please do not bring your breakfast to class. Water and beverages in sealed containers are fine; noisy, aromatic foods are not allowed.
Course Schedule

September 4: Introduction, Overview of Syllabus and Course Requirements

September 6: Comparative Politics: What is it?
- Sodaro, ch. 1

September 11: Comparative Politics: Content and Concepts
- Sodaro, chs. 2 & 4.

September 13: Comparative Politics: Methods
- Sodaro, ch. 3.

Part I. The Big Issues in Comparative Politics

September 18-20: State Formation
- Sodaro, ch. 5.

First in-class Quiz on September 18 on Tilly reading

September 25-27: Nationalism
- Sodaro, ch. 6.
October 2-4  Democratization

- Sodaro, chs. 7&9.

October 9-11  Revolution

*Registrar’s Note: October 9 is the last day to drop a class


Second in-class Quiz on October 9 on Skocpol reading

Part II. Puzzles for Comparativists

October 16-18  What are “Hybrid Regimes”?

October 23-25  Why Do Democracies Look Different?

- Sodaro, ch. 8.
- Sodaro, chs. 16, 17, 18 (Britain, France, Germany)

October 30-November 1  Why are Some Countries Resource-rich but Poor while Others are Resource-poor but Rich?


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First Draft of Research Design due in class October 30

November 6  Election Day Holiday

November 8  Why are Some States ‘Predatory’ and Others ‘Developmental’?

November 13-15  Why do Citizens Vote?
*Registrar's Note: November 15 is last day to pass/fail

- Sodaro, pp. 270-274.

Third in-class Quiz on November 13 on Lancaster & Lewis-Beck and Schuessler

November 20  What Explains Civil Wars?


November 22  Thanksgiving Holiday

November 27-29  Civil Wars (cont’d).

*Guest Lecture: Professor Severine Autesserre, Department of Political Science, Barnard College*


Research Design due in class on November 27
December 4-6  

**What Causes Political Corruption?**


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**Final Exam on Tuesday December 18, 9 am-12 noon**

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