POL 2700
FOUNDATIONS AND APPROACHES TO COMPARATIVE POLITICS

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Office hours: Tuesday, 3:00–4:00 pm or by appointment

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Office hours: Thursday, 10:00–11:00 am or by appointment

Format: This seminar is reading and discussion intensive. All students are expected to have covered the required readings for each session. The recommended readings listed complement the required readings and the expectation is that, together, the required and recommended readings will provide a foundation for students preparing for field examinations.

Requirements: Students are expected to attend each class and to participate actively in the class discussion. Grades will be based on the completion of weekly response papers, two essays (10–15 pages, double spaced, 12-point font), and regular participation.

Weekly response papers: Listed under each week’s readings (see below) are 4–7 questions related to the readings. You should answer one of these questions and turn in the paper on Quercus before the start of class. Be prepared to discuss the other questions in class. The questions are very broad and are intended to force you to begin to think critically about the reading. Answers should total 1–2 pages and make specific references (with page numbers) to the assigned readings. The papers will not be graded. Instead, an A (85%) will be given as long as the paper is handed in on time and there is evidence that the reading has been done.

This course has a significant amount of reading. It is important that you try and complete all the reading; at the same time, learning how to skim effectively is an important skill in academia. See the following blog post: “How to Read and Get the Most Out of a Journal Article” JEPS Bulletin, https://blog.efpsa.org/2013/02/28/how-to-read-and-get-the-most-out-of-a-journal-article/.

Critical essays: You will be required to write two essays (10–15 pages each) on the required readings. Note that you are not expected to do outside readings for these essays. One of the essays is a comparative analysis of the week’s required readings. The other is a book review. The first essay (book review or literature review) is due October 29 by 5:00 pm and the second (book review or literature review) is due December 7 by 5:00 pm. It is required that you do one of the assignments from weeks led by Bertrand and the other from a week led by McElroy.
One of the essays – the comparative analysis – should compare and contrast the readings from a particular week. How do the readings “talk” to each other? How are the theoretical approaches and/or methodologies different or similar? What in your view are the strengths and weaknesses of each? We advise that you focus on one or two key issues in the work (e.g., structure versus agency, use of history, epistemology) rather than trying to cover too much. You are welcome to build on one of the study questions provided for that week.

The other essay should be a book review of one of the assigned books in the course: Yashar, Wilfahrt, Lawson, Boucoyannis, Ziblatt, or Spruyt. This essay should analyze the key claims of the author and critique their methodology, theoretical or conceptual approaches.

The purpose of these written exercises is to summarize, contextualize, and critically analyze key texts in the field of comparative politics. To do this, you will need to marry two slightly different approaches. On the one hand, you should think “big.” What are the main arguments that the works advance? What are the main problems or puzzles that the author(s) address?

On the other hand, you should also think “small.” It is not sufficient to summarize the authors’ argument. Rather, we want you to “unpack” the argument and provide a critique of it. The instructors are interested in your own ideas, thoughts, and reactions. The best critiques will focus, in detail (with quotes and page numbers), on one or two key aspects of the text, such as the use of a particular concept, application of the argument to different cases, or choice of methodology. It is much better to cover a small, important part of the book in a precise and scholarly manner than to analyze broad swaths of the text in an imprecise way. Every effort should be made to critique the author in terms of the questions he or she is trying to address rather than other questions you might find more interesting. You should make sure to back up any claim with specific citations from the text. Every major concept used in the paper should be precisely defined.

It is important to emphasize that “critique” is not a synonym for “criticize.” A critique is primarily an effort to understand rather than identify problems in the text (although you are very welcome to do this).

**Marking:**
- Participation: 10%
- Weekly reading responses: 30%
- Two critical essays (30% each): 60%

**Book review options:**
Bertrand’s weeks:

McElroy’s weeks:


**WEEKS AT A GLANCE**

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<td>Second critical essay due December 7, 5:00 pm</td>
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WEEK 1 (JB/BM): WHAT IS COMPARATIVE POLITICS?

SEPTEMBER 11

Reading response questions

1. What is the difference between idiographic and nomothetic approaches? What different kinds of questions characterize each? Where do you think political science lies in the spectrum between the two? How do these different approaches value parsimony?

2. Describe the approach of King, Keohane, and Verba (KKV) to causal inference. How does it differ from that offered by Brady and Collier? For example, what is the too few cases/too many variables problem? How do KKV on the one hand and Brady and Collier on the other approach this problem?

3. What is the fundamental difference between structural and voluntarist approaches? What would be evidence that an author is relying on a structural approach? Voluntarist approach?

4. What is ethnographic research? What are the main advantages of this approach?

Required readings

Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology


The dominant paradigm

Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research: Chaps 1, 3; the rest of KKV is highly recommended.

Critiques of the dominant paradigm


Qualitative vs Quantitative Research

Mahoney, J. and Goertz, G. 2006. “A Tale of Two Cultures” Political Analysis 14: 227-249.

Ethnography


Structuralism vs. Voluntarism

Recommended readings

Peter Hall, “Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics,” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschmeyer, *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*.


**WEEK 2: CRITICAL AND POSTCOLONIAL APPROACHES**

**SEPTEMBER 18**

**DISCUSSION LED BY PROF. MARTHA BALAGUERA**

Reading response questions

1. What are discourses (including “colonial discourses”) and why do you think they are important for the purposes of a critical approach to the study of politics? While Foucault defines critique as “the art of not being governed quite so much” (“What is critique?” p. 29), Chatterjee argues for a notion of “political society” concerned with the “politics of the governed” in postcolonial societies. How is “government” being theorized by Foucault and Chatterjee and how does it compare to everyday as well as conventional political science understandings of the term?

2. What are the strengths and flaws of “post-colonialism” as a category of analysis?

3. What does a critique of the “repressive hypothesis” illuminate about power and how could you apply this alternative framework to your own research?
Required readings


Recommended readings


WEEK 3: INDIGENOUS APPROACHES
SEPTEMBER 25
DISCUSSION LED BY PROF. CHADWICK COWIE

Reading response questions

1. What are some common threads/similarities that the authors showcase throughout the readings? Are there any?
2. Can Indigenous methodologies and approaches to research be utilized in other areas of the world and other areas of research?
3. Does decolonization and Indigenous methodologies go hand-in-hand?
4. Is “positionality” important in research, especially comparative research?
Required readings


Recommended readings


**WEEK 4 (BM): STATES AND STATE FORMATION**

**OCTOBER 2**

Reading response questions

1. Describe the main similarities and differences between the authors’ conceptualization of state strength. What dimensions does each focus on? What does it mean for the state to be “strong” according to each? What indicators do the different authors use to measure strength/weakness?

2. What are the defining features of the “Westphalian” international order, as described by Spruyt? How does it differ from the international orders that existed in East and...
Southeast Asia before European colonialism? For that matter, how accurately does the “Westphalian” ideal type describe early modern Europe?

3. What role does war play in the construction of the state for Tilly? What critiques of this argument and alternative explanations for state formation do other authors provide?

4. What is the relationship between state strength/weakness and regime in the different works? What type of state is required for successful democratization or the rise of representative institutions?

5. How does Tilly’s narrative of European state formation differ from the model advanced by von Friedeburg and Morrill? Can the two be reconciled? Does von Friedeburg and Morrill’s revisionist account of European state-building have any implications for how we ought to study state formation in other parts of the world?

**Required readings**


**Recommended readings**


Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), chap. 4.
Reading response questions

1. What does it mean to take an institutionalist perspective? What is the range of definitions of institution – what if anything unites institutionalists?
2. How do different approaches theorize obedience to institutional rules?
3. How do different approaches theorize institutional origins?
4. What is the difference between an institution and an organization?
5. How does Pepinsky view institutions in authoritarian contexts? What are the potential criticisms of the institutional approach?

Required readings


Historical institutionalism


Rational Choice Institutionalism


Sociological institutionalism


Intended and Unintended Consequences of Institutional Change

Critiquing the institutional approach


**Recommended readings**

Lijphart interview in Munck and Snyder, *Passion, Craft, and Method* (chapter 8).


WEEK 6 (BM): DEMOCRACY AND AUTOCRACY

OCTOBER 23

Reading response questions

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the “minimal” or proceduralist definitions of democracy advocated by Dahl and Schmitter and Karl? Should standard comparative politics definitions of democracy be deepened, and if so, how?

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of studying long-run trends in regime development – for instance, “settled” versus “unsettled” democratization, as Ziblatt proposes – rather than discrete transitions from autocracy to democracy and vice versa?

3. Do you find Ziblatt’s argument that “settled” democratization requires the accommodation of conservative old-regime elites convincing? Are there any alternative strategies for dealing with conservative elites he overlooks? How might Moore respond to Ziblatt? What, if any, are the implications of Ziblatt’s argument for understanding recent democratic backsliding?

4. Does stable democracy have a social-economic basis? To what extent can class preferences over democracy be generalized across contexts?

5. Is “illiberal democracy” a useful conceptual category? Should it be understood to mean an intermediate form – a hybrid of democratic and authoritarian elements – or does it differ qualitatively from both liberal democracy and authoritarianism?

Required readings


Recommended readings


Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

WEEK 7 (JB): CULTURE AND IDEAS

OCTOBER 30

Reading response questions

1. What is a cultural explanation in political science?
2. How is culture different from norms and ideas?
3. Is culture a residual category?
4. What distinguishes a semiotic approach from one that focuses on political culture?
5. How do traditions, legacies, or moral authority explain political outcomes? Are these ideas, norms, or culture?

Required readings


Culture and symbols: the semiotic approach

Political culture and the Civic culture approach


Precolonial or traditional legacies?


Religion and “Moral Authority”


Recommended readings


WEEK 8 (JB): NATIONALISM AND IDENTITY

NOVEMBER 13

Reading response questions

1. How do different authors theorize the origins of nationalism? Is it a modern phenomenon?
2. What are the main differences in Gellner, Smith and Anderson’s explanation of nationalism?
3. How and why did nationalism spread, according to these different approaches?
4. Does Greenfeld’s distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism help understand the origins, spread or expression of nationalism?
5. How do Brubaker and Roeder link institutions to the emergence and outcomes of nationalism?

Required readings


Recommended readings


WEEK 9 (BM): CLASS AND MATERIAL INTERESTS
NOVEMBER 20

Reading response questions

1. What is class analysis, according to the various authors? What are the main differences between their approaches?
2. Does the ruling class rule? Describe and compare different models of how class and business interests shape policymaking. How does the account of business power in Hertel-Fernandez differ from that of Fred Block? What might explain this difference?
3. What are the tensions between ruling class power and democracy?
4. What are the roles of agency and structure in Hertel-Fernandez’s discussion of business power? Do you agree with his argument?
5. What strategies do the various authors adopt to measure class and to empirically establish the impact of business power on policy outcomes? To what extent are these strategies able to convincingly rule out alternative explanations?

Required readings


Recommended readings


**WEEK 10 (JB): REVOLUTIONS AND RESISTANCE – TWO ENDS OF A CONTINUUM?**

**NOVEMBER 27**

**Reading response questions**

1. How does Skocpol differentiate her theory of revolution from previous ones? What are its core features?
2. Does Kurzman’s argument on revolution challenge previous approaches?
3. How do Goodwin and Lawson add new theoretical insights to explain revolution?
4. What are the different generations of explanation of revolutions? How are this week’s authors situated in these generations?
5. What explains resistance according to Scott?
6. Is it useful to think of resistance on a continuum with revolution at the other end? How can we situate these phenomena and differentiate them from other forms of contentious mobilization?

**Required readings**

**Revolutions**

Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Intro, chap. 1, conclusion.


Lawson, George. *Anatomies of revolution*. Cambridge University Press, 2019, intro, chaps 1-3

**Resistance**


**Recommended readings**


**WEEK 11 (BM): COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ECONOMY / WRAPPING UP THE SEMESTER**

**DECEMBER 4**

Reading response questions

1. Are there distinct varieties of capitalism? Both “liberal” and “coordinated” market economies in Varieties of Capitalism theory are said to have deep historical roots, but to what extent are national models of capitalism stable and persistent over time?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the national state as the principal unit of analysis for studying capitalism, as opposed to examining capitalism as a global system?
3. The classical East Asian developmental states emerged in a specific geopolitical context, and arguably had specific historical preconditions, most of which cannot be replicated elsewhere. Can any “meaningful policy lessons” (Haggard) be extracted from these cases and applied elsewhere? In particular, is a democratic developmental state possible, and if so, under what circumstances?
4. How does Streeck’s formula for a state that can deliver “high economic performance” (cf. week 5) differ from the developmental state formula? Do the two models have any similarities?

Required readings

*“Advanced” capitalism and the Varieties of Capitalism debate*


*Political economy of development*


**Recommended readings**


