Political Science 260: Introduction to Comparative Politics
Spring 2009

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How did Saddam Hussein maintain control in Iraq? Why is Britain more democratic than Russia? Why did Hutus kill an estimated half a million Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994? Puzzles such as these are the focus of comparative politics. Comparative politics is the study of processes and institutions within countries, whereas international relations is the study of interactions among countries. Prompted by real-world puzzles, comparativists investigate broader, more theoretical questions: How do forms of governance differ, and how do they affect everyday life? How does one country become more democratic than another? Why do relations between some ethnic groups turn violent? This course introduces students to some of the central puzzles and theories of comparative politics in order to help them better understand world events.

We will explore the following political phenomena: types of governance, revolutionary movements and revolutions, democratization, participation and activism, poverty and its alleviation, ethnic conflict and peace, and state failure. For each of the topics we will spend one week examining explanations of the phenomenon and a second week evaluating the explanations against real-world examples. Are the existing explanations satisfactory, and, if not, what alternative explanations can we suggest? The examples are drawn from most regions of the world, including the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, the former Soviet Union, North America, and South America.

Course Materials

To evaluate the explanations, we will read scholarly works as well as journalistic accounts, travelogues, and policy pieces. Political novels are suggested for further reading. The course also incorporates film clips, slides, and policy exercises.

Books and Articles: Five works are available for purchase at the bookstore: The Magic Lantern, Power and Movement, Activists Beyond Borders, We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families, and When Things Fell Apart. The books are also on reserve at Kelvin Smith Library. Other course materials are available online or will be distributed, as noted in each citation below.

News: Students are strongly encouraged to follow world events. These sources offer some of the best foreign coverage:

- The New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/, provides daily news for free on its website, once you register. Also see the website for details about a student subscription discount.
- The Economist is available for free online through EuclidPLUS and in print at Kelvin Smith Periodicals. For information about a student subscription rate call 1-800-456-6086.
- National Public Radio (WCPN 90.3 FM) broadcasts brief news updates at the top of the hour and news analyses throughout the day on programs like Morning Edition, Talk of the Nation, All Things Considered, and Marketplace. See http://www.wcpn.org for the schedule and podcasts.
Course Requirements

Participation: The class is discussion-based, and students are strongly encouraged to take notes on the readings in order to be prepared to integrate and critique the materials and to pose questions for discussion. Readings should be completed by the first day of the week they are assigned, and a copy of each reading should be brought to class. Because participation is critical to understanding the material, students are expected to attend all classes. Except under extraordinary circumstances, absenteeism will negatively affect students’ final grades.

Reading Responses: In addition to reading course materials and participating in class, students will write a reading response for three of the seven “Explanations” weeks. The purpose of the reading responses is to help students understand, critique, and integrate the readings and prepare to pose questions for discussion in class. Students should develop an argument related to an analytical question, such as:

▪ What roles do masses and elites play in democratization?
▪ How does regime type affect the likelihood of state failure?

For the reading responses informal citations—phrases like “as Goodwin argues”—are acceptable. Reading responses should be between one and a half to two pages double-spaced. They must be submitted at the beginning of the first class of the week the analyzed materials are assigned. Evaluation of the responses will take into account the degree of independent thinking, use of assigned materials, and quality of writing.

Short Essays: Students will write a short essay for three of the seven “Examples” weeks. The purpose of the essays is to help students evaluate the readings and prepare to pose questions for discussion in class. For these essays the students should develop an argument through the application of the explanations from the previous week to the real-world examples found in the course materials. Students may choose which three weeks to write the essays; however, they may not write on the same topics as they covered in the reading responses. For example, if a student writes a reading response on democratization, he or she cannot write a short essay on democratization. The essays should be between two and two and a half pages double-spaced. They must be submitted at the beginning of the first class of the week the evaluated materials are assigned. Grading of the responses will take into account the degree of independent thinking, use of assigned materials, and quality of writing.

Final Assignment: Students will complete a final, take-home assignment, for which they can use notes and readings but cannot confer with others. The assignment will include a series of essay questions, requiring integration of the seven political phenomena. Assignments will be distributed at the end of class Wednesday, April 15 and must be turned in at the beginning of class Monday, April 20. Students should plan their schedules accordingly and organize and review their notes in advance.

All written work should be carefully structured and grammatically correct. To avoid plagiarism, students should review “Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It,” distributed in class. Cases of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be investigated by university judicial bodies.

Class participation and attendance will constitute 15 percent of the course grade, the three reading responses will count for 25 percent, the three short essays for 30 percent, and the final assignment for 30 percent. Students will lose a half a grade on any assignment for each day it is late.
Course Schedule and Readings

Day 1 (January 12): Introduction to Course and Comparative Politics

TYPES OF GOVERNANCE

Week 1 (January 14): Explanations


NO CLASS January 19

Week 2 (January 21): Examples


REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS and REVOLUTIONS

Week 3 (January 26, 28):  Explanations


Week 4 (February 2, 4):  Examples


SUGGESTED:

Week 5 (February 9, 11): Explanations


Week 6 (February 16, 18): Examples


PARTICIPATION and ACTIVISM

Week 7 (February 23, February 25): Explanations


Week 8 (March 2, 4): Examples


NO CLASS March 9, 11
POVERTY and ITS ALLEVIATION

Week 9 (March 16, 18): Explanations AND Examples


Students may write a reading response or a short essay for this week. Both types of papers are due March 16.
Week 10 (March 23, March 25): Explanations


Week 11 (March 30, April 1): Examples

Week 12 (April 6, 8): Explanations


Week 13 (April 13): Examples


Conclusion (April 15): Integrating the Phenomena

Students are expected to review their notes and be prepared to integrate the topics we studied.

Final Day (April 20)

DUE: Final Assignment—April 20

NO CLASS April 22, 27