Political Science 260: Introduction to Comparative Politics  
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Kelly M. McMann  
Case Western Reserve University  
Department of Political Science  
Office Address: 218 Mather House  
Email Address: kelly.mcmann@case.edu  
Phone Number: 216-368-5565  
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays  
10:00-11:00 and by appointment

How did Hosni Mubarak maintain control in Egypt? 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 in Movement, The Foundation of Ethnic Politics, 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. Required materials for week one will be distributed in class; required materials for subsequent weeks will be available on the course Blackboard site, unless otherwise noted. Paper or electronic copies of readings should be brought to class the days they are assigned.

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

- The New York Times provides free access to 20 articles per month at http://www.nytimes.com/ Additional articles can be read through LexisNexis Academic, on Kelvin Smith Library’s Database web page, under Research Tools.
- The Economist is available through Kelvin Smith Library’s Electronic Journals, under Research Tools. For a subscription, see https://www.economistsubscriptions.com/ecom26/global/index.php
- 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 paper or electronic copies of readings should be brought to class the days they are assigned. 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 or how does regime type affect the likelihood of state failure. The strongest papers typically introduce the argument in the first paragraph and then use evidence from the readings throughout the remainder of the paper to defend the argument. They also usually incorporate ideas from each reading for that week and perhaps draw on ideas from previous readings as well. 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. The strongest papers typically introduce the argument in the first paragraph and then use evidence from the readings throughout the remainder of the paper to defend the argument. 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 Thursday, December 8 and must be turned in Monday, December 12 at 11 am at Mather House 218. Students should plan their schedules accordingly and organize and review their notes in advance.

All written work should be carefully structured and grammatically correct. Informal citations—phrases like “as Goodwin argues”—are acceptable. 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 and the three short essays for 55 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 (August 30): Introduction to Course and Comparative Politics

NO CLASS September 1

TYPES OF GOVERNANCE

Week 1 (September 6, 8): Explanations


Week 2 (September 13, 15): Examples


REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS and REVOLUTIONS

Week 3 (September 20, 22): Explanations


NO CLASS September 27, 29

Review Week 3 reading and read ahead for Week 4.

Week 4 (October 4, 6): Examples


Week 5 (October 11, 13): Explanations


Week 6 (October 18, 20): Examples


NO CLASS October 25
PARTICIPATION and ACTIVISM

Week 7 (October 27) Explanations


Week 8 (November 1, 3): Examples


Week 9 (November 8, 10):  Explanations AND Examples


Students may write a reading response or a short essay for this week. Both types of papers are due November 8.
Week 10 (November 15, 17): Explanations


Week 11 (November 22): Examples


NO CLASS November 24
Week 12 (November 29, December 1) Explanations


Week 13 (December 6): Examples


Conclusion (December 8): Integrating the Phenomena

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

DUE: Final Assignment—Monday, December 12, 11 am, Mather House 218