Political Science 160: Introduction to Comparative Politics

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Why were some leaders, but not others, overthrown in the Arab Spring? 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 stable are different forms of government? 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 typically 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, Behind the Beautiful Forevers, 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 under Course Documents, 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 can be accessed for free on a Case computer or through VPN at http://library.case.edu/ksl/researchtools/newspapers/. Select Factiva. For a subscription, see the bottom of the NYT home page.
- The Economist is available in the periodicals section on the first floor of Kelvin Smith Library. For a subscription, see https://www.economistsubscriptions.com/ecom26/global/index.php
- National Public Radio (WCPN 90.3 FM) broadcasts news updates at the top of the hour and news analyses throughout the day. See http://www.wcpn.org for the schedule and podcasts.
- Monkey Cage offers brief news analysis on timely topics. See https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/
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 and Short Essays: In addition to reading course materials and participating in class, students will write a reading response for three of the seven “Explanations” weeks and a short essay for three of the seven “Examples” weeks. The purpose of these papers is to help students understand, critique, and integrate the readings and prepare to pose questions for discussion in class. In these papers, students should develop an argument related to an analytical question, such as what role do masses and elites play in democratization, for a reading response, or how did international factors influence the transformation of Eastern Europe in 1989, for a short essay. 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. The strongest short essays typically draw on the theories from the week before.

Students may choose which weeks to write the reading responses and short essays; however, they may not write a reading response and a short essay on the same topic. For example, if a student writes a reading response on democratization, he or she cannot write a short essay on democratization. Reading responses should be between one and a half to two pages double-spaced; short essays should be between two and two and a half pages double-spaced. Papers must be submitted at the beginning of the first class of the week the analyzed materials are assigned. Evaluation of the papers 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 10:00 am in 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

TYPES OF GOVERNANCE

NO CLASS September 1

Week 1 (September 6, 8): Explanations


NO CLASS September 13, 15

Week 2 (September 20, 22): Examples


Eva Bellin. “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring.” Comparative Politics 44, no. 2 (January 2012), 127-149.

Review materials from Week 1.

REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS and REVOLUTIONS

Week 3 (September 27, 29): Explanations


Week 4 (October 4, 6): Examples


Week 5 (October 11, 13): Explanations


Week 6 (October 18, 20): Examples


PARTICIPATION and ACTIVISM

NO CLASS October 25

Week 7 (October 27) Explanations


Week 8 (November 1): Examples


November 3: Students will sign up to meet individually with the instructor to review the papers they have written. Meetings will take place during class and other times this week in Mather House 218. We will not meet as a class November 3.

POVERTY and ITS ALLEVIATION

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


Students may write either a reading response or a short essay for this week. Each type of paper is due November 8.
Week 10 (November 15, 17): Explanations


NO CLASS November 22, 24

Week 11 (November 29, December 1): Examples


STATE FAILURE

Week 12 (December 6) Explanations AND Examples


Students may write either a reading response or a short essay for this week. Each type of paper is due December 6

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—Due Monday, December 12 at 10:00 am at 218 Mather House