Political Science 160: Introduction to Comparative Politics  
Fall 2021

Why were some leaders, but not others, overthrown in the Arab Spring? Why is Britain more democratic than Hungary? How has the militant group Boko Haram gained influence in Nigeria? 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 civil wars erupt? 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: regime types, democratization, civil wars, participation and activism, ethnic voting and parties, and inequality. For each of the topics we will typically spend one week examining theories of the phenomenon and a second week evaluating the theories against real-world examples. Are the existing theories satisfactory, and, if not, what alternative explanations can we suggest? The examples are drawn from most regions of the world, including Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America, and South America.

Course Materials

To evaluate the theories, we will read scholarly works as well as journalistic accounts, travelogues, and policy pieces. The course also incorporates film clips, data analysis, and policy exercises.

Books and Articles: Three works are available for purchase at the bookstore: The Magic Lantern, Power in Movement (3rd edition), and Behind the Beautiful Forevers. Other required materials are available on the course Canvas 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 can be accessed for free by CWRU students by following the instructions at https://researchguides.case.edu/NYT
- The Economist can be accessed for free by CWRU students by selecting The Economist at https://researchguides.case.edu/az.php?a=e
- 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—including COVID-19 illness, quarantine or isolation—absenteeism will negatively affect students’ final grades. If you must quarantine or isolate for COVID-19, please request notes from a classmate.

Theories Week Papers and Examples Week Papers: In addition to reading course materials and participating in class, students will write a theories week paper for three of the six “Theories” weeks and an examples week paper for three of the six “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.

For both types of papers, students should develop an argument related to an analytical question, such as what role do masses and elites play in democratization, for a theories week paper, or how did international factors influence the transformation of Eastern Europe in 1989, for an examples week paper. 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. Differences between the two papers include the nature of the assigned materials from which they draw (i.e. theories vs. examples) and the lengths of the papers. Theories week papers should be between one and a half to two pages double-spaced; examples week papers should be between two and two and a half pages double-spaced. Finally, the strongest examples week papers typically draw on the theories from the week before.

Students may choose which weeks to write theories week papers and examples week papers; however, they may not write a theories week paper and an examples week paper on the same topic. For example, if a student writes a theories week paper on democratization, he or she cannot write an examples week paper on democratization. Papers must be submitted as Word files by email to the instructor (kelly.mcmann@case.edu) before the beginning of the first class of the week the analyzed materials are assigned.

Evaluation of the papers will take into account, in order of priority, the use of assigned materials, the degree of independent thinking, and the 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 six political phenomena. Assignments will be distributed electronically at the end of class Thursday, December 2, and completed assignments must be emailed as Word files to the instructor (kelly.mcmann@case.edu) by 1 pm EST Monday, December 6. 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 Bellin argues”—are acceptable. To avoid plagiarism, students should review “Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It,” posted on the Canvas course site. Class meetings may not be recorded. 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, theories and examples weeks papers 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, except when experiencing extraordinary circumstances.
Course Schedule and Readings

Day 1 (August 24): Introduction to Course and Comparative Politics

NO CLASS August 26

REGIME TYPES

Week 1 (August 31, September 2): Theories


Week 2 (September 7, 9): 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.


Week 3 (September 14, 16): Theories


Week 4 (September 21, 23): Examples


CIVIL WARS

Week 5 (September 28) Theories


NO CLASS meeting September 30: Individual meetings with instructor

Week 6 (October 5, 7) Examples


Week 7 (October 12, 14): Theories


NO CLASS: October 19

Week 8 (October 21): Examples


ETHNIC VOTING and PARTIES

Week 9 (October 26, 28): Theories


Week 10 (November 2, 4): Examples


INEQUALITY

Week 11 (November 9, 11): Theories


Week 12 (November 16, 18): Examples


NO CLASS November 23, 25
Conclusion (November 30, December 2) 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 6 at 1:00 pm EST by email