Political Science 440A:
Theories of Comparative Politics

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Autumn 2020

Class time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-1:50 pm
Office hours: By appointment

Course Overview

This seminar is designed to serve the following goals:

1. To acquaint students with many of the leading theories within the field of comparative politics. The weekly themes center on dependent variables, and the readings are oriented toward leading theories (or proposed independent variables) that account for the variation in these crucial explananda. This course seeks to balance traditional macro-sociological and contemporary microanalytic approaches. Students will be exposed both to classic texts and to the state-of-the-art books and articles. However, we will not address some major areas of comparative politics, including comparative electoral behavior, voting rules, and legislatures. These topics, which are fundamental to comparative politics, are addressed in other graduate coursework offered by the department.

2. To provide examples of how best to prepare papers for their future submissions to field journals. Papers from the leading journals in the field, including the American Political Science Review, will be included in the readings. Students will be expected to read these journals on a regular basis not only to keep up with trends in the field, but also to learn the styles and forms of contributions to comparative politics.

3. To sensitize students to the question of research strategies. The seminar will expose students to diverse methodological tools, in preparation for PS 440C in which students will be asked to use a diverse set of tools to answer a well-specified and theoretically-interesting question whose answer is worth knowing.

4. To develop seminar skills. Students will be asked to write short papers to be delivered to the seminar group, to present the weekly readings, and to engage in critical discussions of the presented papers.

Course Requirements

1. Reading

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• Required Reading: students are expected to read all items listed for common reading that immediately follow the topic of the week. Optional readings will also be suggested. For optional books, specific pages will not be assigned; students should attempt to extract as much as possible from the book in a few hours of reading. The purpose is to capture the broad contribution of these works rather than their specifics;
• Optional Reading: students are expected to read beyond the common readings for their papers, if they are writing one for that session. Here the reading should be more careful, with specifics provided on data and arguments; if they are not writing a paper, they should read selectively from the optional texts.
• Reading Fellow Students’ Papers: All students should read the papers of the other students before the seminar meets.

2. Writing

• For two of the course sessions, students will write a paper, to be completed by noon on the day before the seminar, with copies posted on the class website. These papers should be from 1,000 to 1,500 words. The criteria for an exemplary paper are ones that:
  – Propose and defend a thesis that relates to the topic of the week;
  – Address anticipated objections to the thesis; and
  – Synthesize, in the course of the thesis defense, some of the relevant literature for that week such that students who read the paper but who have not read the pieces under discussion would be able to grasp their principal arguments and data employed in supporting them.

3. Presentation

• Students will be responsible for presenting the readings during class each week and leading the seminar. Each student should sign-up to present twice over the course of the quarter. We encourage students to write for the sessions that they choose to present but this is not required.

4. Examination

• In the 10th week, a take-home exam will be handed out for submission during final exam week. If a student chooses to enroll in the course for 3 units (rather than 5 units), a final exam will not be required.

Agenda of Topics and Readings

Week 1: Origins of the State and State Capacity


Optional

**Week 2: History, Structure, and Regime Type**


Optional

**Week 3: Economic and Political Foundations of Regime Type**


Optional

**Week 4: Revolution and Protest Mobilization**


Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), chs. 2-3.


Optional

**Week 5: Identity and Nationalism**


*Optional*

**Week 6: Conflict**


*Optional*

**Week 7: Cooperation**


*Optional*


**Week 8: Authoritarian Regimes**


Barbara Geddes, “What do we know about Democratization after Twenty Years?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2.1 (June 1999), pp. 115-144.


*Optional*


**Week 9: Social Order**


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James Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (Yale University Press, 1998), Introduction and ch. 2.

Optional

Week 10: Accountability


Optional
— Susan Rose-Ackerman, Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences, and Reform (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Note for Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). SDRC staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the SDRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk, (650) 723-1066.