Understanding Comparative Politics

SOSC 3520
Spring, 2019
TuTh 12:00PM - 01:20PM
Rm 2304, Lift 17-18

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a comparative politics course targeting toward advanced undergraduate students. With its long history, comparative politics has covered many different topics. The course will focus on important substantive questions to understand political phenomena around the world.

There are two intended learning outcomes for this course. First, it is designed to build perspectives and skills to understand and analyze domestic politics around the globe by exposing students to the basic literature in political science and economics related to comparative politics subfield. Except for the first few classes, the course will be run as a combination of lecture and student presentation(s) and discussion, in which everyone is expected to participate. Therefore, everyone is responsible for reading, preparing presentations and critically assessing the readings and presentations. Second goal of the course is to encourage students to develop skills of critical writing. Students will write essays for final evaluation based not only on the readings, lectures, and presentations during the semester but also on individual research effort.

The course consists of five topics related to politics. Each topic is broad and complex. Due to time constraints, we will focus on several key subtopics in each section. First, we will discuss the basic logic and methodologies in comparative politics. We will then survey the literature on a controversial topic in state formation and regime types. In the subsequent section, the class will focus on election and government system. Then we move to policy-related issues: economic development and redistribution. Finally, we will visit several challenges in comparative political economy including poverty, foreign aid, natural resources, civil war and political connection/corruption.
GRADING

1. **Presentation**: 20% of the grade will be determined by contributions to in-class presentation. The presentation should aim to provide innovative and intelligent answers to given question, concise summary and critical assessment of the related literature. One team will consist of 4 people (Not all of you need to present). Team will be organized and the first meeting opportunity will be provided in class on **February 19, 2019**. Presenters are required to prepare a proper presentation with slides, not exceeding 20 minutes. Final presentation slides should be sent to the instructor and the TA 24 hours prior to the presentation. You are free to consult to the instructor or TA in the process of preparation. The team grade will be decided based on presentation materials and presentation. To avoid free-riding, there will be an anonymous peer review among group members. Individual’s grade will be adjusted by the peer review.

2. **Mid-term and final examination**: Mid-term exam will take 20% of the grade and is scheduled on **March 26, 2019**. Final exam (20%) will be scheduled by the school. Both exams will be a mixture of multiple choices, true or false, short answers, and short essays. You MUST sit these exams at the scheduled time. Two exceptions are family emergency and emergent surgery. In any case, you must provide a doctor’s note with his or her contact information. Upon a proper doctor’s note and contact information, a make-up exam may be scheduled.

3. **Final paper**: 30% of the grade will be decided by individual final paper. You can choose any topic related to comparative politics. You need to submit a one-page proposal on 5pm, **23/04/2019** for comments. Comment session will be held on **7-9/05/2019**. (Proposal will not be graded.) The final paper submission to the CANVAS is due on 5pm, **29/05/2019**. Detailed guideline will be announced. Paper cannot exceed 2000 words.

4. **Class attendance and participation**: 10% of the grade will depend on attendance and participation. Attendance check will be randomly conducted about 5 times during the semester. One absence will be waived. Active participants will be noticed and considered.

Failure to complete any of the tasks above (presentation, mid-term exam, final exam, final paper or attendance) may result in a failure grade for this course.

TEXTBOOKS


Other useful textbooks


**TOPICS & READINGS**

I. Introductory Materials

**Jan 31: Overview**

*What is political science? What is comparative politics? Is politics comparable?*

*Essential Readings*

CGG, Chapter 1. Introduction

**Feb. 12, Feb. 14: Research Methods**

*Is political science a science? What are quantitative/qualitative research? What are the advantages and disadvantages?*

*Essential Readings*

CGG, Chapter 2. What is Science?

*Recommended Readings*


**Feb. 19: team organization and discussion**

Submit a one page plan (what you have discussed and who will research which part) for presentation to LMES by 1:30pm.
II. State and Regime

Feb. 21: The nation state

*What is state? What is nation? What is sovereignty? How does state differ from dynasty?*

**Essential Readings**

CGG, Chapter 4. The Origins of the Modern State.

**Recommended Readings**

Samuels, Chapter 2. The State.


Feb. 26, Feb. 28: Democracy

*What is Democracy? How can one measure democracy? What values does democracy bring to a society?*

**Essential Readings**

CGG, Chapter 5. Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy.


**Recommended Readings**


Mar. 5, Mar. 7: Autocracy

*What is autocracy? Is autocracy bad? Why or why not? Why do people support or choose authoritarian regime voluntarily? Why do autocracies have elections?*
Essential Readings

CGG, Chapter 10. Varieties of Dictatorships.

Recommended Readings


Mar. 12: Democratization (and Autocratization)

What lead a country to democratization? What causes autocratization? What makes a country to swing between two regime types?

Essential Readings

CGG, Chapter 8. Democratic Transitions.

Recommended Readings


III. Institutions

Mar. 14, Mar. 19: Electoral System

Why countries have different electoral system? Are elections democratic/fair? Does election reflect the voice of the majority? What are the features of good electoral system?

Essential Readings


Recommended Readings


**Mar. 21: Political Parties**

*Why do parties matter? Why are there only a handful number of parties? Do they represent people? What types of people join the party?*

**Essential Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**Mar. 26: Midterm Examination**

- In-class exam
- 60 minutes (early leave is allowed)
- Multiple choice, short answers (1-3 words), True or false, short essays

**Mar. 28: Government System**

*Why do states have different balance between the legislature and the administration? Which government system is more democratic, or more efficient? What do we expect the government to do?*

**Essential Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**Apr. 2, Apr. 4: Social Movement**

*Why do people protest? Why does the mass participate in protest? Why do governments tolerate/repress protests?*

**Essential Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**IV. Policies**

**Apr. 9, Apr. 11: Economic Growth**

*What drives economic growth? Does regime type matter? Why the richest countries are democracies? Why some authoritarian countries are wealthy?*

**Essential Readings**

Samuels, Chapter 11. Political Economy of Development.

CGG, Chapter 9. Democracy or Dictatorship: Does It Make a Difference?

**Recommended Readings**


**Apr. 16: Redistribution and Welfare Politics**

*Does the government responsible for basic social welfare? Why does the government redistribute? Do people like redistribution?*

**Essential Readings**

Samuels, Chapter 12. The Political Economy of Redistribution.

**Recommended Readings**


**V. Challenges**

**Apr. 18, Apr. 23 : Poverty and Inequality**

*Why are there poor population in wealthy democratic countries? Why do the poor often vote for the conservative/right-wing parties? Does anti-poverty program or foreign aid reduce the poverty level?*

**Essential Readings**


**Recommended Readings**

Apr. 25: Natural resources

*Are natural resources beneficial for the citizens? Why are resource-rich countries autocratic? Why do they have smaller number of populations and universities?*

**Essential Readings**

World Bank, “Natural Resources: When Blessings Become Curses.”

**Recommended Readings**


5:00PM, Apr. 23: Final paper proposal due at 5pm

Apr. 30: Political Violence and Civil War

*Why are there a war within a country? What explains civil conflict? Does religion or ethnicity contribute to conflict?*

**Essential Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


May 2. Political Connection and Corruption

*Is corruption inevitable in politics? Is nepotism corruption?*

**Essential Readings**


Recommended Readings
Raymond Fisman and Yongxiang Wang, *The Mortality Cost of Political Connections*.

May 7, May 9: Comment Session
One-on-one session for proposal comment will be held.

5:00PM, May. 29: Final Paper Due
Significant deduction for late submission. See the paper guideline for details.

Presentation subjects
1. Why do people in some countries support authoritarian rulers? [Oct. 6 (end)]
2. Is democracy for everyone? [Oct. 8 (begin)]
3. Do political parties represent people or elites? [Oct. 13 (begin)]
4. Why do some protests spread out while others do not? [Oct. 27 (begin)]
5. Why are the majority of richest countries democracies? [Nov. 3 (end)]
6. Why are some authoritarian regimes wealthy? [Nov. 5 (begin)]
7. Do people like government’s welfare spending? [Nov. 10 (begin)]
8. Can democracy end poverty? [Nov. 12 (end)]
9. Why do oil-exporting countries lack democracy? [Nov. 17 (begin)]
10. Is Xi’s Anti-corruption campaign successful? [Nov. 24 (begin)]