Understanding Comparative Politics

SOSC 3520
Fall, 2019
Mon, Wed 10:30PM - 11:50PM
Rm 4502, Lift 25-26

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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.

This course 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.

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**: 30% 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 4-6 people (Not all of you need to present). Team will be organized and the first meeting opportunity will be provided in class on **September 16, 2019**. Presenters are required to prepare a proper presentation with slides, not exceeding 20 minutes. Final presentation slides should be sent to the instructor 24 hours prior to the presentation. You are encouraged to consult to the instructor (as a group) in the process of preparation. The team grade will be decided based on presentation materials and presentation. To avoid free-riding, attach detailed division of labor on the last page of the slide. Individual’s grade will be adjusted by the division and quality of labor. **READING SCRIPT IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED** during the presentation.

2. **Mid-term and final examination**: Mid-term exam will take 20% of the grade. Final exam, taking 40% of grades, will be scheduled by the school. Both exams will be a mixture of multiple choices, true or false, short answers, and short essays. Final exam will be cumulative. Mid-term will be one hour and the final will be two hours. Essential readings and lectures are the subjects of exams. You MUST sit these exams at the scheduled time. Two exceptions are family emergency (such as sudden fatal illness or death) and your 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. **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

Sep. 4: Overview

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

*Essential Readings*

CGG, Chapter 1. Introduction

Sep. 9 and 11: 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*

James Mahoney and Gary Goertz. 2006. *A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, Political Analysis, 14:227-249.


II. State and Regime

Sep. 16: team organization and discussion

Sep. 16: 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.


**Sep. 18, and 23: Democracy**

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

**Essential Readings**

CGG, Chapter 5. Democracy and Dictatorship: Conceptualization and Measurement.


**Recommended Readings**


**Sep. 25 and 30: 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**


**Oct. 2 and 9: 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**

**Oct 14 and 16: 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**


Oct. 21: Political Parties

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

**Essential Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


Oct. 23: Midterm Examination

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

Oct. 28 and 30: 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

Nov. 4 and 6: 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


Nov. 11: 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

Nov. 13 and 18: 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


Nov. 20: 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


Nov. 25: 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**


**Nov. 27: Political Connection and Corruption**

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

**Essential Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**TBD: Final Exam**
Presentation subjects

2. [Social Movement] How did Tunisia succeed as an only case from Arab Spring? [Oct 30]
5. [Inequality and Redistribution] South Africa - the most unequal country [Nov 11]
6. [Poverty] Is poverty individual, governmental or global responsibility? [Nov 13]
7. [Foreign Aid] Why is Ethiopia - the largest aid receiver - still poor? [Nov 18]
10. [Corruption] India vs China - Who will end corruption faster? [Nov 27]