

Topics and Methods in Comparative Politics

M.A. course, Winter 2011

Instructors

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Classes

Mondays and Wednesdays from 13:30 to 15:10, on Fridays from 15:30 to 17:10

Office hours

TBA

Credits

4 CEU credits, 8 ECTS credits

Course description

The course has the same function as the core-courses taught by Anton Pelinka and Carsten Schneider in the first semester: to introduce and elaborate the fundamental methodological and topical concerns of comparative politics. As opposed to prof. Pelinka's course we do not limit ourselves to the discussion of European politics, and, contrary to prof. Schneider's course, we will discuss historical-cultural contexts as much as methodological and institutional issues. The first part of the course will focus on issues related to methods, epistemology and research design. The second part will target specific political institutions and patterns of political culture. The course-material will demonstrate through concrete research enterprises how political scientists build theories, prove their hypotheses, design concepts or ascertain causal mechanisms.

Course requirements

This is a four-credit core course. The course does not presuppose any particular prior knowledge. Students are expected to be present at all lectures and seminars. During the seminars they are expected to reflect critically on the mandatory readings listed below. If one is unable to attend the class, (s)he should signal this via e-mail to the lecturer. Activity in the classroom can be complemented with questions, suggestions and comments sent to the lecturer 24 hours prior to the meetings.

Evaluation

- (1) Mid-term exam (15%)
- (2) Four written assignments - 400 words-long essays (40%)
- (3) Class activity (20%)
- (4) Research proposal (25%)

The mid-term exam covers the material of the first five weeks. Students will have hundred minutes to answer, based on the readings and on the lectures, five questions. The titles of the four written assignments are indicated in the course outline below. They need to be sent by Wednesday, 12 o'clock, the week after the topic has been discussed in the class. The short research proposal shall be about 2500 words long. You should indicate in this proposal how you would study a political phenomenon in either a small (2-5) or a large (over 20) group of countries - if you had the time and resources.

Learning outcomes and their assessment

By the end of the course students are expected to understand the institutional and cultural embeddedness of political processes and be aware of the methodological opportunities and dangers involved in comparative research. The assignments are expected to improve the ability to generate logical, plausible and persuasive arguments, to compare and contrast, and to derive theoretical conclusions from empirical observations. The class activity will center on the readings, helping the students to synthesize information, determine focus points and discern the main line of argumentation. The ability to deploy effective oral presentation and discussion skills is assessed with the help of the presentation. The obligation to submit a research proposal will focus the attention of students on methodological sophistication and the ability of matching abstract concepts with tangible and measurable social phenomena.

Week 1. 10, 12 and 14 January

Introduction: What is Comparative Politics?

(lecturer: Jason Wittenberg)

Mandatory readings:

Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, "Paradigms and Pragmatism: Comparative Politics During the Past Decade," in Lichbach and Zuckerman, eds., *Comparative Politics: Rational, Culture, and Structure*. Second edition. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. University of Michigan Press, 2003, Chapter 1.

King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press, Chapter 1.

Henry E. Brady and David Collier, eds., 2004. *Rethinking Social Inquiry*. Rowman and Littlefield, selections.

Week 2. 17, 19 and 21 January

Theory in Comparative Politics

(lecturer: Jason Wittenberg)

Mandatory readings:

Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. University of Michigan Press, 2003, Chapter 5.

- King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press, Chapter 3.
- Adam Przeworski, 2007. "Is the Science of Comparative Politics Possible?," in Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, eds., *The Oxford handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Margaret Levi, "Reconsiderations of Rational Choice in Comparative and Historical Analysis," in Lichbach and Zuckerman, eds.
- Ira Katznelson, "Strong Theory, Complex History: Structure and Configuration in Comparative Politics Revisited," in Lichbach and Zuckerman, eds.

Assignment: The readings by Przeworski and King, Keohane, and Verba each discuss the possibility of theory-building in comparative politics. On which issues do the two readings agree and disagree?

Week 3. 24, 26 and 28 January

Research Design

(lecturer: Jason Wittenberg)

Mandatory readings:

- Robert H. Bates, Chalmers Johnson, and Ian S. Lustick, "Controversy in the Discipline: Area Studies and Comparative Politics," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 30, no. 2, June 1997, pp. 166-179.
- Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. University of Michigan Press, 2003, Chapter 3.
- King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press, Chapters 4-6.
- Thad Dunning, "Improving Causal Inference: Strengths and Limitations of Natural Experiments," *Political Research Quarterly*, Volume 61, Number 2, June 2008, pp. 282-293.

Assignment: Is there a "best" way of answering questions in Comparative Politics? Do different kinds of research designs provide different kinds of knowledge? What kinds?

Week 4. 31 January and 4 February

Political Culture

(lecturer: Zsolt Enyedi)

- Putnam, Robert D., with Roberto Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 63-120.
- Norris, Pippa and Ronald Inglehart 2009. *Cosmopolitan communications: cultural diversity in a globalized world*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 261-286.

Week 5. 7 and 11 February

Presidents, Parliaments and Institutionalism

(lecturer: Zsolt Enyedi)

Mandatory readings:

- Lijphart, Arend (ed.) 1992. *Parliamentary Versus Presidential Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (Excerpts from articles by Juan J. Linz, Donald L. Horowitz and Seymour M. Lipset) pp. 118–27, 203–211.
- Blondel, Jean 1995. *Comparative Government: An Introduction* (2nd ed.) London: Prentice-Hall, 267-297.
- Peters, B. Guy 1999. *Institutional Theory in Political Science: The 'New Institutionalism'*. London: Pinter. pp. 1–24.

Assignment: Argue against parliamentarism!

Week 6 and 7.

No classes, except 21 February: mid-term exam

Week 8. 28 February and 4 March

Conflict Resolution, Consociationalism and Consensualism

(lecturer: Zsolt Enyedi)

Mandatory readings:

- Cohen, Frank S. 1997. Proportional versus Majoritarian Ethnic Conflict Management in Democracies. *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 30, no. 5, pp. 607–630.
- Lane, Jan-Erik and Svante Ersson 2000. *The New Institutional Politics: Performance and Outcomes*. London: Routledge, pp. 207-224.

Assignment: Argue against consensualism!

Week 9. 7 and 11 March

Corporatism

(lecturer: Zoltan Dujisin)

Molina, Oscar & Martin Rhodes, *Corporatism: The Past, Present, and Future of a Concept*, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2002. 5, 305-331.

Luksic, Igor, *Corporatism packaged in pluralist ideology: the case of Slovenia*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 36, 2003, 509-525

Week 10. 14 and 18 March

Parties, Electoral Systems and Democratic Performance

(lecturer: Zsolt Enyedi)

Mandatory reading:

- Powell, G. Bingham Jr. 1982. *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability and Violence*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. pp. 74–132.
- Blais, André and Louis Massicotte 1996. Electoral Systems. In Lawrence LeDuc, Richard Niemi and Pippa Norris (eds.) *Comparing Democracies. Elections and Voting in a Global Perspective*. London: Sage Publications, 49–81.

Week 11. 21 and 25 March

Alignment, Cleavages, Re-alignment

(lecturer: Zsolt Enyedi)

Flora, Peter (ed.) 1999. *State Formation, Nation-Building and Mass Politics in Europe: The Theory of Stein Rokkan*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 30, 42-43, p.72, 78, 141-147, 160, 227-244.

Rogowski, Ronald 1987. Political Cleavages and Changing Exposure to Trade. *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 81, no. 4, pp. 1121-1137.

Week 12 28 and 1 April

Wrap-Up

(lecturers: Zsolt Enyedi and Zoltan Dujisin)