Overview

This course offers a survey of major themes in comparative politics. It is one of two survey courses in comparative politics offered by the department. The two courses complement each other, but need not be taken in any particular order. This course generally focuses on substantive topics, such as institutions, mobilization, redistribution, representation, and violence. The course is designed for Ph.D. students who are preparing to take comprehensive exams, but is open to other students as well. Ph.D. students preparing for comprehensive exams will be given preference over other students.

The course includes a great deal of student involvement and is really designed to help you educate yourselves about the major themes in comparative politics and develop the analytic skills need to conduct research at a high level.

Requirements and Evaluation

The requirements include:

**Participation in Seminar:** Students must be prepared each week to discuss the core readings. Students who are making any sort of presentation are exempt from this requirement [20 percent of grade].

**Presentation.** Each student will make one presentation. (20 percent)

**Critical Essays:** Each student will write a critical essay (20 percent)

**Data Critique:** Each Student will write one data report and critique. (10 percent)

**Final paper:** Each student will write a short paper (10 pages or so) that identifies a research question, explains why this question is important, and then proposes a strategy for answering the question. Feel free to conduct the data analysis if time and topic permit. (30 percent)

Presentations

Each week, 15-30 minutes of the seminar will be devoted to presentations by students on questions that are posed on the syllabus or on topics proposed by the students. These presentations should be 12-15 minutes each, and should be presented using slides. We will then have discussions about the materials. In general, weak presentations will simply summarize the readings ("Smith says x, Jones says y"). Strong presentations will describe any key conceptual issues that must be addressed by work on the question (e.g., a presentation on inequality might discuss different ways of conceptualizing inequality);
Describe the central arguments/debates in the literature on the question (e.g., a presentation on corruption might focus on different types of variables – such as regime type, decentralization, level of development – that influence corruption levels);

Describe thorny methodological issues that bedevil work on the question (e.g., a presentation on social revolutions might discuss the problems created by the small-n nature of the phenomenon).

Offer criticisms and/or suggest pathways for future research.

To help students get started, the syllabus lists "Suggested Readings." These might serve as a place to begin, but students must do their own bibliographic research. Students should obviously not feel obligated to cover all of these suggested readings. Students should post their presentations on the "Lecture" section of CourseWorks. They should also create a bibliography of the works they have consulted.

Written essay

Each student will write an essay that advances an argument related to at least one of the readings for the week. The best papers will make an original argument and present a critical summary of the existing research on a question raised in that week. The papers need not cover all the readings in a given week, but they do need to present an argument based on at least one of those readings. All research papers are should be posted on the class website on CourseWorks by Sunday at 6 PM. Students will be expected to be familiar with their colleagues’ papers. Papers are limited to 5 double-spaced pages with 12 point font.

As with the presentations, students should create a bibliography of the works they have consulted. Students may post entries from this bibliography to the course bibliographic data base if they are willing.

Data reports

Students will write a short paper that analyzes the data used to study the topic for the week. The best reports will

Describe the conceptual variable(s) that are being measured by the data that is the topic of the report. For example, a presentation on measuring party locations would simply state that the data described are used to place parties in an ideological space, and might then describe different ways of conceptualizing this space

Describe what data exist on the topic. For example, the party locations presentation might include data from mass surveys, elite surveys, party manifestos, or legislative roll calls.

Give (brief) examples of how the data have been used.

Discuss (briefly) any significant controversies that exist regarding measurement.

Provide links to relevant codebooks or data sets.

I have in mind a brief document for this assignment (3-4 pages), with useful links to data, codebooks, or especially relevant bibliographic resources. All reports should be posted to the relevant "Assignment" in CourseWorks.

Students can choose which Data question to answer, and "property rights" will be "first come, first served" (i.e., the first person to tell me they want to work on a specific question will be allowed to do so, with only
one person working on each topic). Also, the questions are "suggested" – if a student would like to pose and answer a different data question, including data questions about archives or other important resources for qualitative research, they can do so with my approval.

Final Paper

The research design paper should be (10 pages or so) that identifies a research question, explains why this question is important, and then proposes a strategy for answering the question. A weak paper will simply do the above. A strong paper will propose a novel topic that sheds light on an important debate; identifies how and why this paper makes a contribution to the literature, and proposes a clear research strategy. A strong paper will also include a careful critique of the research design identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal. You can also present a finished paper complete with data-analysis, but this may be difficult given time constraints.

Materials

Most works are available from JSTOR or the Columbia Electronic Library. These are marked with “J.” I will also post works on the Courseworks website. These are marked with a “C.” Many are also available via Google and other electronic sources. The readings may change in some weeks based on student interest.

Required Reading available through Book Culture 536 W. 112th between Broadway and Amsterdam.


Jan. 28. Week 1. Introduction: Thinking about Thinking

Heath, Chip and Stan Heath *Made To Stick*, Introduction, 1, 4, 6, Epilogue. C

Recommended:

Feb. 4. Week 2. Institutional Legacies and Causation
Main Discussion: Do institutional legacies influence contemporary outcomes? How can we know whether this is the case?


Edward Glaeser, Rafael La Porta, Florencio Lopez-de-Silanes, and Andrei Shleifer “Do Institutions Cause Growth?” Journal of Economic Growth, September, 2004 J

Recommended:


**Presentation Topic One:** Is “path dependence” a useful concept?


**Presentation Topic Two:** To what extent can field experiments resolve debates about the relationship between institutions and economic development?


Various Authors in APSA-CD Newsletter October 2011 symposium on experiments.

Recommended:
Feb. 11. Week 3. Representation and Accountability


Recommended:


Presentation Topic One: What determines the choice of electoral systems in advanced democracies?


Calvo, Ernesto. 2009. The competitive road to proportional representation: partisan biases and electoral regimes under increasing party competition. World Politics. 61:2, 254-295.


Response by Cusack et al. APSR. 2010.

Response by Boix. APSR. 2010.
**Presentation Topic Two:** Under what conditions are autocrats accountable?


**Recommended:**


**Feb 18. Week 4. Redistribution and Inequality**


**Presentation Topic One:** What determines preferences over redistribution?


**Presentation Topic Two:** Under what conditions do politicians support core or swing voters?


Recommended:


**Presentation Topic One: Under What conditions can private groups provide public goods for their members?**


**Presentation Topic Two: “Does ethnicity influence the provision of public goods, if so, how?”**


**Recommended:**


**March 4. Week 6.** Small group meetings to discuss paper topics. Paper topics due. Tuesday March 2 at 5:00.

**March 11. Week 7. Civil War**
Main Discussion: What Causes Civil Wars?


**Presentation Topic One: Do economic shocks influence civil wars?**


**Recommended:**

--------------------March 18  -------------------Spring Break --------------------No Class

**March 25. Week 8. Corruption**


Presentation Topic One: How can governance be measured?


Steven Voight. “How (Not) to Measure Institutions?”

Presentation Topic Two: Can greater transparency reduce corruption?


Recommended:


**April 1. Week 9. Natural Resources and Democracy**


**Presentation Topic One: Does development aid function as a natural resource curse?**


Recommended:


**Presentation Topic Two: What are secure property rights and how do they come about?**


April 8. Week 10.
Main Discussion: Under what conditions do people take part in politics? Why does participation take the form that it does?


Alexander Scacco. “Who Riots.” Ms. NYU.


Presentation Topic One: What determines voter turnout?
TBD.

Presentation Topic Two: Is “contentious politics” a useful concept?


Recommended:
April 15. Week 11. Violence in Politics

Main Discussion: What role does violence play in politics?


http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/violencia_published_0.pdf


Presentation Topic One: How does warmaking affect statemaking, if at all?


Presentation Topic Two: The military is typically the greatest obstacle to democratization. Do you agree?


Recommended:


Recommended:

April 22. Week 12. Clientelism


Recommended:

**Presentation Topic:** Where do good states come from?


**Recommended:** [http://www.essex.ac.uk/government/electoralmalpractice/bibliography.html](http://www.essex.ac.uk/government/electoralmalpractice/bibliography.html)

**April 29. Week 13. Presentations of Research Paper**

APPENDIX: Other Possibilities:

**Bureaucracy**

Main discussion Topic: How does politics influence bureaucratic design and performance?


