Basic Theories and Concepts in Comparative Politics  
PSC 77901  
Fall 2016

Professor Julie A. George  
Julie.George@qc.cuny.edu  
Jgeorge2@gc.cuny.edu  
Office Hours:  
Thursday, 3:00-5:00pm  
Office Location:  
5204  
Office Phone: TBA

Course Meeting:  
Thursday, 6:30-8:30pm  
Location: Room 5383

Course Description:  
This seminar offers a comprehensive introduction to the heterogeneous subfield of comparative politics. Its goals is to provide students with a substantive understanding of the myriad theoretical approaches engaged by scholars, their strengths and weaknesses, and their various use in particular questions of interest to comparative politics. While the primary emphasis of the class will be in parsing the breadth of theoretical approaches, the nature of the subject matter demands substantive application as well as some inquiry into methodological implications. Thus, the students taking this course will become familiar with key research questions that preoccupy the subfield, as well as the concepts, theories, and approaches that underpin possible answers.

Course Requirements:  
Reading:  
Students are expected to keep up with the reading assignments, which should be completed before on the day they are assigned. The reading requirements for this class are extraordinary – they are designed to equip students with an encyclopedic sense of the main approaches and questions in comparative politics. This is standard fare for a basic core class in a political science graduate program. It is best to read the readings with the underlying questions listed in mind.

Writing:  
This class is designed to help students derive research questions in comparative politics, write a literature review on major theoretical issues in the subfield, and, for the PhD students, complete the preliminary exam (first exam) in the program. The writing assignments are designed to hone student skills to excel in all of these arenas. There are three types of writing assignments:

1. 2-3 page reading analyses: students will choose an article or a combination of two articles in a given week, providing a critical examination of their main precepts and how they interact with the key topic questions that week; if comparative, the analysis should have a clear analytical thesis throughout. Students should submit these by midnight the day BEFORE the reading is due. Students may choose which weeks/topics they prefer, but there are deadlines for each set.
   a. Set 1: Students should complete one for part 1, September 1 to September 15
   b. Set 2: Students should complete one for September 22 to October 27
   c. Set 3: Students should complete one for November 3 to December 8
2. 5 page papers: These papers will ask students to sift various scholarly approaches to key questions in comparative politics, making use of the reading materials discussed in the course. Prompts for these papers will be distributed in class.

3. 3 line summaries: Students will choose one week and provide a three sentence summary (namely the argument and the theoretical contribution of the piece) for three of the readings of any week in part 2. This is hard. Students can try up to three times and count the highest score.

4. There will be a 2 hour final exam or take home exam on or due December 15. We will decide as a class the format.

Discussing
Full attendance in class is expected. Student participation and discussion are required. Students will lead the discussions of the reading, with little direction by the instructor except where needed. Students should participate meaningfully every day. Individual students will sign up to present the reading material on given weeks. Students should familiarize themselves with course topics so that they can sign up during class on September 1.

Course Grade Allocation

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-3 page reading analyses (3)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Page Papers (2)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 line Summaries (3)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assigned reading: Please obtain the following books for this course – we will be reading them essentially in their entirety. The remainder of the course material is available from library sources or on the course’s Blackboard site. All readings must be completed prior to that day’s course meeting.


All Grad Center policies on plagiarism and academic integrity will be followed to the letter. Please make sure to paraphrase and cite correctly. If you have any questions, let me know.

This syllabus may change as the course progresses. I will make sure to give you ample warning so you can plan accordingly.
Course Schedule

Thursday, August 25: Course Introduction
No Reading

META-ISSUES IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS: OBJECTIVES, APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGICAL DEBATES

Thursday, September 1: Objectives, Purposes, and History of Comparative Politics

Underlying Questions:
- What is comparative politics?
- Is it primarily a matter of subject and substance, or is it a method?
- What are the key questions of comparative politics, currently and historically?
- What factors caused the evolution of comparative politics over time?

Required Reading:

Further Reading:
Thursday, September 8: Approaches in Comparative Politics

Underlying Questions:

• Do approaches determine the questions of political science?
• Do different approaches bring different answers to the same questions?
• Are there strengths and weaknesses to various institutional approaches?
• How should we navigate such issues, as analysts and scholars?
• How do rational choice, historical institutionalism, and functionalism differ?

Required Reading:


Further Reading:


Thursday, September 15: Methodological Debates in Comparative Politics

Underlying Questions:

• How do we know what we observe and theorize is correct?
• How do comparative political scientists design studies to ensure validity and reliability? What constitutes “good” political science?
• How do the KKV and DART debates reflect key issues in comparative politics?

Required Reading:


DART Symposium (2014), *PS*, vol. x, no. x.: read Lupia and Elman, p. 19-24; Moravscik, p. 48-
Further Reading:

**BIG QUESTIONS, DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS**

**Thursday, September 22: The State and State Formation**

**Underlying Questions:**
- What is the state?
- What are the constituent parts and functions of the state?
- How have scholars posited the state and its role in comparative politics? What are the implications of their approaches?

**Required Reading:**

**Further Reading:**
Mahmood Mamdani (1996), *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*.


**Thursday, September 29: Regime Types and Characteristics**

**Underlying Questions:**
- How is state power constituted?
- What factors affect regime type assessment and measurement?
- What are the best ways to understand regime types and their characteristics?
- How do the approaches of the scholars affect the sorts of questions they ask and the data they rely on to draw conclusions?

**Required Reading:**


**Further Reading:**


**Thursday, October 6: No Class: Monday Schedule**
Thursday, October 13: Regime Type Origins

Underlying Questions:
- What factors determine regime type?
- Why do some countries take on democratic regimes or characteristics, while others take on (or remain) authoritarian?
- What are the roles of structural or elite factors in regime outcomes?

Required Reading:
Karl Polanyi (2001), The Great Transformation, 2nd edition (Boston: Beacon Press). (Full book or as much as possible – get the essence and the meat of the argument)

Further Reading:
David Collier, ed. (1979), The New Authoritarianism in Latin America.

Thursday, October 20: Regime Transitions

Underlying Questions:
- Why do states undergo regime transition?
- How do scholars compare cross-regional regime breakdown? What factors crosscut geographic space and which ones are area specific, if any?
- What factors contribute to successful democratic transition?

Required Reading
Further Reading:
Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996), *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*.

**Paper 1 Due**

**Thursday, October 27: Institutions and Outcomes**

Underlying Questions:
How do institutional structures affect political outcomes?
How do political factors affect institutional design?

Required Reading:

Further Reading:
Thursday, November 3: Interest Groups, Collective Action, and Contentious Politics and Social Movements

**Underlying Questions:**
- What is the relationship between the government and the governed?
- How do mass actors affect political change?
- What is the problem of collective action? How can it be overcome?
- What is the role of civic society in political regime and outcome?

**Required Readings:**

**Further Reading:**

Thursday, November 10: Identity, Nationalism, and Ethnicity

**Underlying Questions:**
- What is ethnicity? How do ethnic identities form?
- How do ethnic and national identity affect political outcomes?
- What is the role of identity in political cleavages?

**Required Reading**

**Further Reading:**  
Ronald Inglehart (1990), *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*: intro. (pp. 3-14).  
Lynne Haney (1999), “‘But We Are Still Mothers’: Gender, the State, and the Construction of Need in Postsocialist Hungary,” in Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, eds., *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*: 151-188.

**Thursday, November 17: Civil Wars and Revolutions**

**Underlying Questions:**  
What are revolutions and civil wars?  
What makes them different from contentious politics or social movements?  
What is the role of violence in civil wars and revolutions?

**Required Reading:**  

**Further Reading:**  
John Foran (2005), *Taking Power: on the origins of Third-World revolutions*.  
Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (1979).  

Paper 2 Due

**Thursday, November 24:** No Class, Thanksgiving Holiday

**Thursday, December 1: Political Economy 1: Politics and Development**

*Underlying Questions:*

What is the relationship between politics and economic development?

How do economic structures affect politics in societies and states?

What is the role of class in political outcomes?

*Required Readings:*


*Further Reading:*

Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Falletto (1979), *Dependency and Development in Latin America*.


**Thursday, December 8:** Final class – topic to be announced/decided later in the semester, based on student interests and class evolution.

**Thursday, December 15: Final Exam**
Comparative politics and political theory are two different things. Political theory seeks to explain certain political phenomena and why they are what they are, their probable cause and at times predicts possible of a/the political development. Theory is a set of interrelated concepts, definitions and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting and controlling the phenomena (Agbaje, 2006). Thus, political theory explains, predicts, specifies relationship or controls certain political event/outcome. I think that one is based on reality and the other is based on ideals. Many theories fall out because of the reality of human nature. Marx Theory - USSR, Venezuela, Vietnam reality. Political Theory and Comparative. Politics have developed in close proximity and the earliest comparativists have been political theorists. From the Greek political discourse, Aristotle came up with the first. Pennington, Mark “Theory; Institutions and comparative Politics" in Comparative Politics (eds.) Judith Bara. and Mark Pennington, Sage Publications, India, 2009. p. 13. Mohamed, Manoranjan (1975),
