This seminar is a graduate-level introduction to the literature in comparative politics. It can serve as a survey or review for advanced students as well. Because the key theories and concepts are also key political science concepts and theories, it is not exclusively intended for those majoring or minoring in comparative politics; all are welcome. It is not a course in methods or methodologies of research. The focus will be on research questions, concept formation, theoretical approaches, theory formulation, and competing theories, not on theory testing or verification.

Learning Goals

Students in this seminar will vary in their goals depending on the extent of their prior knowledge of the subject matter, their particular substantive interests, and their field specialization within the discipline. Overall, the course should prepare them (1) to think, articulate orally, and write theoretically: to identify a theory in a reading, define its key concepts, articulate its causal mechanisms, and evaluate its empirical demonstration; (2) to know the evolution of questions, concepts, and theories within the discipline of comparative politics so as to understand those theories better, analyze their limitations and biases, and appreciate the cumulative nature of knowledge in the field; (3) to pass the first exam in comparative politics comfortably; and (4) to feel solidly grounded in the questions and literature of comparative politics so as to identify areas of further interest and specialization, especially to prepare a dissertation proposal. These goals are basic, foundational; many other benefits for critical thinking and analysis will also result, but the foundation comes first.

Keep in mind, however, that this is an introduction – a great deal of material will be read and discussed, often with time only to skim the surface. It will seem overwhelming at times and students in past seminars have always found that weekly study groups help to share the burden of time, but rest assured that having this grounding will be of great use and you will return time and again to much of what you started in this seminar.

Outcomes Assessment

There are three requirements for this course; the course grade will weight each of these 3 equally (33 percent each), but with upward adjustment for improvement over the semester:
(1) Class participation in informed discussion of the readings. Be prepared each week to identify and analyze the research question, theories/arguments, key concepts, and empirical bases of the readings for that session. You will be challenged to do so if you do not volunteer. The better every one is prepared to do this first cut, the more there will be time to do critical discussion of the readings as well. We want to get to that, but we cannot do so until we get the authors’ arguments clear.

(2) Three short papers (the length of an average answer to a first exam question), one for each third of the course readings/syllabus, as follows:

Take a topic of literature or a concept from each of three four-week segments of the syllabus that is of interest to you and write a critical review of the literature as if you were writing a book review essay. You may choose to focus on one of the week’s readings or cross among the four weeks. Length is entirely up to you, as you wish and need to make your argument. Because this assignment is intended as preparation for answering question on the first exam, you may want to consider this as practice also for writing an essay that is well-enough crafted to be succinct but comprehensive in a 2-hour period. Be sure to include these elements:

- Identify the concept and/or research question of the literature you are reviewing
- Summarize the arguments of the literature you are reviewing; take literature from the syllabus; you can stick with readings in the required list, but you may find it productive to add from the further readings (you may go beyond that list, if you wish, and I will be happy to assist with suggestions)
- Do a critical analysis
- Provide prime empirical examples (identify the empirical bases of the key texts and arguments or apply them to examples of your own)
- At the end, suggest a first exam question that you think would be a good way to capture that subject and test students’ knowledge (this requirement is often neglected; please do not forget it).

You are free to choose the topics and dates of your essays, as long as you select one for each of three sub-periods in the syllabus, and deliver it on the week after that topic or those readings appear on the syllabus (e.g., for reasons on September 10, essay is due September 17); if you are doing an entire session, then one week after it (e.g., for session 1, October 8). Choose:

1. First essay: sessions from September 10, 17, 24, and October 1
2. Second essay: sessions from October 8, 22, 29, and November 5
3. Third essay: sessions from November 12, 19, 26, December 3 and 10

(3) A final examination December 17: we will decide between an in-class, 2-hour written exam on December 17 or a take-home final due on December 17.
Readings:

The readings for this course will be largely articles or chapters from books, and therefore you will have to rely on Blackboard (the password will be given at the first meeting of the seminar) for articles and Mina Rees reserves for books. If a reading is in a journal to which you have online access through the GC system, it will not be, in most cases, on Blackboard.

There are no required texts for this course. Many will be worth purchasing for your personal library, but that should be an individual decision. For example, you will read most or all of: Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation.*


You will also read substantial portions of some books that you might want to have in your personal library. The Graduate Center library receives a financial return if you order books from Amazon through the GC library website (look for the tiny icon at the bottom of the far right column, a small a in a black box).

It will also be worthwhile to look regularly at the tables of contents of the major journals in the field; to look each year at the very useful essays in *Annual Review in Political Science*; and to read the book reviews for comparative politics in *Perspectives on Politics* and the review essays in *World Politics*—these habits will keep you in touch with theoretical trends and debates in the field of comparative politics.

Class Schedule and Readings

September 3  Introduction: to what does comparative refer?

September 10  Scope of the Field and the Roles of Theory and Concepts

*What is the primary subject matter of comparative politics? Are there major debates within the subfield? How would you explain the current organization of subfields in comparative politics? Evolution of the field? What is the role of a concept? What is theory? What is conceptual stretching and why does it occur?*

Required reading


**Further reading:**

Pinar Bilgin and Adam David Morton, “Historicising representations of ‘failed states’: beyond the cold-war annexation of the social sciences?” *Third World Quarterly* vol. 23, no. 1 (2002), pp. 55-68 (if you want to learn about Gramsci’s arguments, read the rest of the article, too, 68-75).

**September 17 Theoretical and Methodological Approaches**

*What is an “approach”? What is the difference between a theory, a research approach, and a research method? Does it matter what approach one uses? Identify four distinct approaches and their defining theoretical assumptions and concepts.*

**Required reading:**


Further reading:


Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science (1994), chs. 1-3, 8 (pp. 1-46, 179-204).


September 24 The State and State Formation

What is the primary unit of analysis in comparative politics? Is the state a concept or a type? What are the main theories on the origins of the modern state? What is the debate about the western (or European) bias of the concept of the state? What is the difference between state and nation, and why does it matter?

Required reading:

Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (1975), ch. 1 (you will find the chapters by Finer and Ardant especially good, too).


Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1996), chapters 1 and 8, pages 3-34 and 285-301; read chs. 3 and 4 if you have an interest in continuing.


Joel Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*, chapters 1 and 3 (pp. 3-38 and 58-94).

**Further reading:**


Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (1979): chs. 1, 4, conclusion (pp. 3-43, 161-173, 284-293).


**October 1  Political Regimes: Concepts and Classifications**

*What is a regime in comparative politics (NB: it is distinct from international relations theory)? What is the difference between state and regime? What are the standard typologies of regimes? What is the purpose of such a typology? What are the characteristics of democracy? Of non-democratic regimes? What is the difference between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes? What is dictatorship? Why is the concept hybrid regime gaining currency?*

**Required reading:**

Further Reading:


October 8  

Explanations of regime type: class, modernization, global order

Comparative politics is primarily a study of variation – e.g., why do regimes differ? Why do governments or their policies differ? Does it matter? Why are some countries democracies, others authoritarian regimes? What explains these differences?
Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (1944): read as much as you can; be sure to understand his concept and theory of the double movement.


**Further reading:**


NO CLASS October 15 (Monday classes that day)

October 22 Regime Transition

What causes regimes to break down? This question is raised perennially in response to actual events: most important was the collapse of interwar democracies and rise of fascism in the 1930s; the return to democracy in Latin America after military regimes in the 1980s also provoked a literature on “democratization,” or “transitions to democracy”; the collapse of the Soviet system in eastern Europe in 1989-91, on the one hand, and what Huntington erroneously called the “third wave” of democratization in southern Europe and Africa, on the other, provoked a third, with debates about whether the causes were everywhere the same or regionally specific. The events of 2010-2011 in North Africa and the Middle East are now provoking another round.

Lisa Anderson, ed., Transitions to Democracy (1999), articles by Dankwart Rustow and by Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman [OR, access the originals in Comparative Politics 29: 3 (April 1997)].
Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle, Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective (1997): preface, introduction, chs. 2, 3, 6, and conclusion (pp. xiii-xvi, 1-18, [61-81 (see above], 82-127, 194-232, 268-279).
Nancy Bermeo, Ordinary Citizens in Extraordinary Times: Citizens in the Breakdown of Democracy (2003), chapters 1 and 7 (7-20, 221-56)
Valerie Bunce, “Should Transitologists Be Grounded?” Slavic Review 54 (Spring 1995), 111-127 (this is the second in a series of four articles on their debate).

Further Reading:

Eva Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring,” Comparative Politics (January 2012): 127-149.
Rudolf Heberle, From Democracy to Nazism: a regional case study on political parties in Germany (1945; 1970), chapters 4-5 (pp. 90-127).
October 29    Comparative Political Institutions

The comparative study of institutions is both an approach (institutionalism) and a body of empirical research and theory. What is a political institution? What is path dependence? Identify some empirical theories where institutions are independent (causal) variables. Identify some explanations for variation in the choice of political institutions (that is, as a dependent variable).

Required reading:


Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in 36 Countries* (1999), chapters 1-4, 16-17 (pp. 1-61 and 275-309). (Read the other chapters if you wish detail on different institutions of democratic government.)


Further reading:


November 5  Institutionalized Modes of Political Participation

The essence of democracy is representation of the interests and demands of citizens on governments. The channels of their representation and the predictable outcomes vary, however, depending on electoral systems, organizations of representation such as political parties, interest groups, and client-patronage networks, and the historical trajectory of these channels, including moments of transition to democracy.


Philippe C. Schmitter and Gerhard Lehmbruch, eds., *Trends toward Corporatist Intermediation* (1979), chs. 3 (Schmitter), 7 (Jessop) (pp. 63-94, 185-212); recommended, ch. 9 (pp. 231-270).


Look again at Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.

**Further Reading:**


November 12  Collective Action, Contentious Politics

The “problem” of collective action; collective choice; organized interests; coordination failure; social capital; social movements; contentious politics; mass politics; protest movements; class conflict; state-society relations; civil society.

Required readings:


Further reading:


November 19  Politics of Identity

It is said that politics in the 1980s-90s became driven by identity. What does that mean? How is identity defined? Ethnicity, language, religion, gender, race – how are they systematically related to political action and outcomes?


Lynne Haney, “‘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* (1999): 151-188.

Further Reading:


November 26 Abnormal Politics: Revolution, Civil War

The study of revolution is as old as the field of comparative politics. Has there been change over time in its analysis? If so, how? What categories of political violence should be distinguished – revolution, civil war, riots, now criminal activity, for example,
and why? How does the study of revolution and civil war differ from that of social movements and collective action, if at all, and if so, why?

John Foran, *Taking Power: on the origins of Third-World revolutions* (2005): chapters 1 and 6 (pp. 5-29 and 247-278).

Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (1979), introduction (pp. 3-42).


**Further reading:**

Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (various editions).


James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (1976), chs. 1 and 2


Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (1979).


Jason Wittenberg and Jeffrey Kopstein, “Deadly Communities,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 44:5 (May 2011).

December 3 The Role of the State in Development and Distribution

The relation between regime type and development is not uniform. How can one explain the variation in economic development and growth among countries? Is the growing global inequality a result of globalization, or does it depend on political organization within countries? These questions focus on the independent role of the state, particularly in response to international economic conditions, and the class coalitions or alliances on which it is based, or is “embedded” in state-society relations. Thus, this question revives debates about the nature and autonomy of the state as well.

Required readings:

Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Falletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (1979), preface to English edition, introduction, ch. 6, conclusion, and postscriptum (preface and pp. 1-7, 149-216). (You would be well rewarded by reading the entire book; it is not long.)
Peter Evans, *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation* (1995), chs. 1-3 and 10 (pp. 3-73 and 227-250).
Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, chapters 1 and 2, pp. 9-54 (read the entire book if you can).


**Further reading:**


Vivien A. Schmidt, “Putting the Political Back into Political Economy by Bringing the State Back in Yet Again,” *World Politics* 61:3 (July 2009): 516-46.

Robert Wade, *Governing the Market*, ch. 1 (pp. 8-33).


James Mahoney, *Colonialism and Post-Colonial Development: Spanish America in Comparative Perspective* (2010).


**December 10**

**The Global Context**

*States exist in a state system and a global economy. What is the impact on domestic politics and policy? Is “globalization” leading to convergence (political, institutional, economic, cultural)? Does the changing character of the world economy influence this debate?*

**Required readings:**

[review Polanyi and Cardoso and Falletto]

**Further reading:**

Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (2005), chs. 1, 2, 8, and 9 (pp. 1-34, 143-182).


**December 17: Final Examination**