POLS 6220
Comparative Politics Seminar
Utah State University

Instructor: Laura Gamboa
Email: laura.gamboa@usu.edu
Office Hours: M 3-6 pm (or by appointment)

Time: 3:00-5:50 pm
Place: OM 318.
Office: Main 330C.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why some countries are democracies while others are dictatorships? Why some countries experience social protests while others do not? Do high courts work the same way everywhere? How do different electoral rules affect the behavior of parties, politicians and voters? Why are some countries extremely prosperous while others are extremely poor? Comparative Politics examines these and other related questions. It studies the differences and similarities of political systems, often focusing in factors found within these systems.

This course provides a comprehensive introduction to Comparative Politics. In it, we will examine methods and strategies of investigation used by comparativists. We will also analyze and assess the main theoretical approaches in the subfield, as well as some of the substantive topics they try to explain.

The goals of this course are:

1. Identify the main theoretical approaches in Comparative Politics
2. Identify some of the most important research questions in Comparative Politics
3. Assess the usefulness of different theoretical and methodological approaches to address these questions

By participating in this course you will be able to:

1. Enhance your understanding of Comparative Politics
2. Develop your ability to think critically about methodological, theoretical and substantive controversies in Comparative Politics
3. Strengthen your ability to pose research questions, and propose and assess plausible answers to those questions

REQUIREMENTS

Readings

The readings are listed below. You are expected to complete all the readings listed under the date and section before class. As you read, please keep in mind the study questions that I will hand out for each week. I will use these questions to structure class discussion and they will therefore help you prepare your participation. You do not need to read the
readings listed under Recommended Readings. I included these in the syllabus in case you want/need to do more research on that topic for class or any time during your graduate program.

You do not need to buy any book. You can find the articles via Google Scholar, USU Library Website, JSTOR or other databases available via USU Libraries. Most of the books listed in the syllabus are available in the library either as E-Books or in the Course Reserves section. Whenever the book is not available via the library, I will post the chapters assigned in Canvas.

Participation

Active participation is essential for your learning process and the success of a seminar. You are expected to attend every session having completed the readings assigned and ready to discuss and debate them. Some people think out loud and in the process they participate a lot. Other people would rather moll over what they want to say and speak once they are very, very sure of what they think. Both types of people are valuable for a seminar. Therefore, in order to get an A in this item, you need to participate at least once in every class either with a question or with a substantive comment. I will call on students if I need to.

I strongly encourage you to ask questions in class. In my experience, it is very likely that if you have a question, others in the class will have similar doubts. When you ask a question you help yourself and your classmates. Participation counts for 30% of your grade.

3 Sentences Summaries

Finding out the basic argument and theoretical contribution of a text is essential in Political Science. In order to practice this skill, you will have to write 3-sentences (no more, no less!) summaries of two of the readings assigned. These summaries should outline:

1. Dependent Variable
   The outcome of the study. The phenomenon the reading is trying to explain.

2. Independent Variable
   The cause of the outcome. The factor(s) that explain(s) the dependent variable.

3. Causal Mechanism
   The logical story that connects the independent variable to the dependent variable.

You have to submit summaries for ten classes (out of 12). Together, they will account for 20% of your grade. They will be due on class via Canvas. Make sure you use your three sentences wisely. I will not read beyond the third sentence.

Final Research Project

During the course of the semester you will work on a research proposal that addresses a question in Comparative Politics. The final write-up should have between 4,000 and 5,000 words (roughly 15-20 pgs, Times New Roman, double spaced). Finding a research question and designing a plan to answer it cannot be done from one day to the other. For this reason, I will ask that you give me six updates. These updates should build on each other. That means, update 2 should include update 1 with revisions, update 3, should include update 2 and 1 with revisions and so on.
1. **Research Question - Sept 11**
   For this update you will need to outline the research question and explain why is it an important question to answer. This update should have between 500-700 words (roughly 2-3 pgs, Times New Roman, double spaced).

2. **Literature Review - Oct 2**
   The literature review should identify, summarize, and analyze research that directly, or indirectly, addresses the question you have posed. It should clearly state both: how this literature helps answer your question and why does it fall short from doing so. The literature review should have 1000-1500 words (roughly 4-6 pgs, Times New Roman, double spaced).

3. **Theory - Oct 23**
   A theory includes an independent variable that explains your dependent variable, and a causal mechanism that links them together. This section should have 1000-1500 words (roughly 4-6 pgs, Times New Roman, double spaced). You will not need to prove this theory (i.e. do the empirical analysis), but it needs to be plausible, logical, and eventually testable.

4. **Hypotheses - Nov 6**
   Statements of the form \( \text{if } X \text{ then } Y \) that express how you expect \( Y \) to behave, given a variation in \( X \). Hypotheses are statements that help you assess your theory. They can be stated in bullet points. This section should not take more than 2 pgs (Times New Roman, doubled spaced).

5. **Methods - Nov 26**
   The last part of a proposal is the methodology. How do you plan to test your argument? Are you going to use quantitative or qualitative methods? How do you plan to operationalize the variables? What are the empirical implications of your hypotheses? This section can have a combination of paragraphs and bullet points. It should not take more than 2-3 pgs (Times New Roman, doubled spaced).

6. **Final - Dec 11**
   The final draft should have all the sections above organized in a coherent text. Think about it as if it was your thesis proposal and/or a grant proposal. It should include all the feedback you have received including the peer feedback from the research workshop. It should not be more than 15-20 pgs (Times New Roman, doubled spaced).

Each update should include the section due plus a revised version of previous updates. I will provide further instructions as we move along with this project. You might want to read *On the Art of Writing Proposals* to get some general advise on how to write research proposals. The research project will account for 30% of your grade. The updates will account for 20% of that grade. The final draft will account for 10%

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**Research Workshop**

Researchers do not work alone. Often time we share our work to get feedback. Learning how to ask for, give, and receive that feedback is an important skill regardless of your line of work. In order to practice the “art” of giving and receiving feedback, we will use the last two sessions of class to have a research project workshop. The idea is for you to share your research projects and get peer feedback before you turn in your final draft.
The workshop will work as follows. I will ask all of you to distribute your projects a week before the workshop. I will assign each project a discussant. That discussant will be in charge of giving detailed comments. I expect all of you to provide feedback. The discussant will be in charge of getting the conversation started, but all of you must participate with at least one comment for each of the papers. I will give you more detailed instructions as we get closer to the activity. Participation in the workshop will account for 20% of your grade.

HONOR CODE

You are expected to abide by USU’s Student Code. Group study is encouraged but all class assignments are individual. I expect each one of you to present your own work. Plagiarism or cheating will not be tolerated. Any violation to academic integrity will be punished according to USU’s policies.

DISSABILITIES

Students with ADA-documented physical, sensory, emotional or medical impairments may be eligible for reasonable accommodations. Veterans may also be eligible for services. All accommodations are coordinated through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) in Room 101 of the University Inn, (435)797-2444, https://www.usu.edu/drc/. Please contact the DRC as early in the semester as possible. Alternate format materials (Braille, large print, digital, or audio) are available with advance notice.

GRADING

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-Sentences Summaries</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Workshop</td>
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CLASS SCHEDULE

NOTE: We may discover that we want to spend more/less time on certain topics. I may consider making changes to the class schedule if such a change would benefit most students’ learning in this course.

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH

September 4: Intro & Research Methods


**Recommended Readings**


**Approaches to Comparative Politics**

**September 11: Structural Approaches**


- Ansell, Ben and David Samuels. “Inequality and Democratization: a Contractarian Approach” *Comparative Political Studies*, 43 (12), 1543-1574 (Online)


**Recommended Readings**


• Ansell, Ben W. and Samuels, David J. Inequality and Democratization: An Elite Competition Approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014


• Sunkel, Osvaldo (1972) “Big Business and Dependencia” Foreign Affairs 50(3): 517-531.

September 18: Cultural Approaches


• Inglehart, Ronald and Pipa Norris. Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse Perspectives on Politics, 15(2), 443-454. (Online)


Recommended Readings


September 25: State Centered Theories

- Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Ch1. 3-33, 47-51 and at least one of the cases (France 51-67, China 67-81, or Russia 81-99) and the counter cases 99-111. (E-Book)


Recommended Readings


October 2: Rational Choice Institutionalism Approaches


Recommended Readings


- Nalepa, Monika. *Skeletons in the Closet: Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. (*there is an article in World Politics that summarizes the argument*)


**October 9: Historical Institutionalism Approaches**


**Recommended Readings**


**October 16: Actor Centered Approaches**


**Recommended Readings**


**October 23: International Context Approaches**


Weyland, K. (2012). The Arab Spring: Why the Surprising Similarities with the Revolutionary Wave of 1848? Perspectives on Politics, 10(4), 917-934. *(Online)*


Levitsky, Steven and Lucan Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Read Chs 1 and 2. Read pgs 3-26 and 37-54 carefully, skim the rest. *(E-Book)*


**Recommended Readings**


Popular Topics in Comparative Politics

October 30: Regime and Regime Change


- Review: Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Way. 2010

Recommended Readings


November 6: Social Movements


**Recommended Readings**


**November 13: Political Parties**


Recommended Readings


November 20: Public Opinion and Voting Behavior...in New(er) Democracies


Other Readings


November 27-30: Thanksgiving

December 4: Paper Workshop

December 11: Final Paper