

COMPARATIVE AREA STUDIES

Central European University
MA Course, Methods Elective
Winter Semester 2017

Instructor

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Classes

TBA

Office hours

TBA

Credits

2 CEU credits, 4 ECTS credits

Course description

Comparative area studies is one of the most promising new approaches in comparative politics. It builds on the contribution that area studies has made to political science and develops a framework for comparing political phenomena across world regions. This research design allows for a better appreciation and specification of regional similarities and differences. The fundamental insight from comparative area studies is that region mediates global and universal processes and therefore is an explanatory variable in its own right.

Course requirements

No prior knowledge is assumed. Students are expected to be present at all seminars and to come prepared. If you are unable to attend class, you should notify me via e-mail prior to the session.

Assessment

- Active class participation (10%)
- Opinion paper (30%)
- Presentation of research design (30%)
- Paper with research design (30%)

Active class participation is expected and graded. Some guidelines: participate regularly, make informed contributions, refer to the reading, focus on the main points, formulate clearly, respond to others in the discussion, and demonstrate critical engagement.

Each student writes an opinion paper on the debate in week 6. The task is to summarize and critically engage with the arguments, concluding with your own evaluation. The paper is due midnight on the day before class that week and should be no more than 1,500 words long (everything included).

Each student will design a research project comparing a political phenomenon across two or more regions and/or time periods. The aim is to get first-hand experience with the practice of comparative area studies. A first version will be presented as a PowerPoint presentation of 10 minutes maximum. The guidelines for the presentation will be introduced in the first session.

The final paper will contain the final version of the research design in comparative area studies. It should be no more than 1,500 words long (everything included). Details will be introduced in the first session.

Please note that for all assessments, late submission and violation of the word or time limit will result in a lower grade.

Reading material

All the course material is available in electronic form. The syllabus only contains the required reading. Each week, suggestions for further reading will be made in class.

Learning outcomes

At the end of the course the student should be able to:

- Evaluate the contribution of area studies to political science;
- Understand the potential of comparative area studies;
- Reflect on the notion of “region” in comparative politics;
- Reflect on the notion of “time period” in comparative politics;
- Design a project comparing a political phenomenon across world regions or across time;
- Summarize arguments, assess evidence, and formulate an opinion;

Schedule

Week 1 Introduction

The first session introduces students to the topic of (comparative) area studies.

Reading:

Basedau, Matthias and Patrick Köllner (2007) Area Studies, Comparative Area Studies, and the Study of Politics: Context, Substance, and Methodological Challenges, *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 1(1): 105-124.

Bogaards, Matthijs (forthcoming) Microscope or Telescope? The Study of Democratization Across World Regions, *Political Studies Review*, DOI: 10.1177/1478929916645360.

Week 2 Area Studies

The second session sketches the contribution of area studies to political science.

Reading

Szanton, David (2004) The Origin, Nature, and Challenges of Area Studies in the United States, in David Szanton (ed.) *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.1-33.

Hanson, Stephen (2009) The Contribution of Area Studies, in Todd Landman and Neil Robinson (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE, pp.159-174.

Week 3 Area Studies and Political Science

The third session explores the tension between area studies and political science, with a focus on Africa.

Reading:

Robert Bates (1997) Area Studies and Political Science: Rupture and Possible Synthesis, *Africa Today* 44(2): 123-132.

Patrick Chabal (2005) Area Studies and Comparative Politics: Africa in Context, *Afrika Spectrum* 40(3): 471-484.

Week 4 Building Bridges

The fourth session looks at some examples of scholars who have tried to build bridges between area studies and comparative politics.

Reading:

Kopecký, Per and Cas Mudde (2000) What has Eastern Europe Taught us About the Democratisation Literature (and Vice Versa)? *European Journal of Political Research* 37(4): 517-539.

Pierson, Paul (2003) Epilogue: From Area Studies to Contextualized Comparisons, in Grzegorz Ekiert and Stephen Hanson (eds.) *Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe: Assessing the Legacy of Communist Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.353-366.

Week 5: Theory and Practice of Comparative Area Studies

In this session, we look at the theory and practice of comparative area studies.

Reading:

Chaisty, Paul, Nic Cheeseman, and Timothy Power (2014) Rethinking the 'Presidentialism Debate': Conceptualizing Coalitional Politics in Cross-Regional Perspective, *Democratization* 21(1): 72-94.

Hoffmann, Bert (2015) Latin America and Beyond: The Case for Comparative Area Studies, *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 100: 111-120.

Week 6 Cross-Regional Comparison: A Debate

Session number five is devoted to a classic exchange about the merits of comparing post-communist democratization in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union with democratic transitions in Latin America and Southern Europe.

Reading:

Schmitter, Philippe and Terry Lynn Karl (1994) The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go? *Slavic Review* 53(1): 173-185.

Karl, Terry Lynn and Philippe Schmitter (1995) From an Iron Curtain to a Paper Curtain: Grounding Transitologists or Students of Postcommunism? *Slavic Review* 54(4): 965-978.

Bunce, Valerie (1995) Should Transitologists Be Grounded? *Slavic Review* 51(1): 111-127.

Bunce, Valerie (1995) Paper Curtains and Paper Tigers, *Slavic Review* 54(4): 979-987.

Week 7 Paired Comparisons

This session looks at one particular way of connecting and selecting cases.

Reading:

Tarrow, Sidney (2010) The Strategy of Paired Comparison: Toward a Theory of Practice, *Comparative Political Studies* 43(2): 230-259.

Gisselquist, Rachel (2014) Paired Comparison and Theory Development: Considerations for Case Selection, *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47(2): 477-484.

Week 8 Comparative Era Studies?

What happens if we treat time periods as cases and compare eras as we do areas?

Bartolini, Stefano (1993) On Time and Comparative Research, *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 5(2): 131-167.

Haydu, Jeffrey (1998) Making Use of the Past: Time Periods as Cases to Compare and as Sequences of Problem Solving, *American Journal of Sociology* 104(2): 339-371.

Week 9 Comparisons over Time and the Arab Spring

This session examines the contribution of comparative era studies to our understanding of the Arab Spring.

Reading:

Way, Lucan (2009) Comparing the Arab Revolts: The Lessons of 1989, *Journal of Democracy* 22(4): 13-23.

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

Week 10

In the final regular session, I will present my project proposal on "Postcommunism in Africa: A Cross-Regional Comparison".

No classes in week 11 and 12. Instead, we will reserve one afternoon for the presentation and discussion of the student projects.