COMPARATIVE POLITICAL RESEARCH

MA course, Fall 2012, 4 CEU credits, 8 ETCS

Instructor

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Classes

Mondays and Wednesdays, 11.00 - 12.40

Office Hours

Tuesdays, 15.30 - 17.10, Wednesdays, 14.30 - 16.10

Teaching Assistant

Artak Galyan

TA Office Hours

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Course Description and Learning Outcomes

The aims of this course are the following: making students familiar with the basic rules of doing comparative research: introducing the most influential approaches and salient topics in comparative political science. The course, thus, will help students to evaluate the methodological merits of those political science publications that use a comparative approach, to recognize which intellectual tradition they belong to, and to design their own comparative research strategy. During the course work, students are asked to write small
position papers and a longer final paper, to actively participate during in-class discussions, and to prepare in-class presentations. The position papers are expected to help develop the ability to synthesize the information gathered from the mandatory readings, determine a focus point, and discern the main line of argumentation. The final paper is expected to improve the ability to generate logical, plausible, and persuasive arguments, to compare and contrast, and to derive theoretical conclusions from comparative empirical observations. The emphasis on in-class participation and in-class presentations is meant to foster the skills of expressing informative reflections 'on the spot' and to decrease potential fears of speaking in front of others.

The course is structured into five parts of different lengths. In the first part, we introduce the basic rationale of comparing in political science. Part two constitutes the backbone of the entire course. We discuss several important basics of the comparative method, such as the logic of theory testing, the processes of concept formation and data aggregation, and the question of an adequate selection of cases. In the short third part, participants will be exposed to the 'meta'-theoretical paradigms in comparative research. In the fourth part, we will deal with some of the major themes in comparative social research, paying specific attention to the most salient political institutions and to the issues of varieties of democracies. In the last part, students present drafts of their final paper. The course meets twice a week. Most of the time, the first meeting of each week will be predominantly organized as a lecture, the second predominantly as a seminar.

Course Requirements

1) Students are expected to be actively present at all lectures and seminars. In case you are unable to attend, you need to inform both instructors via email prior to the meeting you are going to miss. During the seminars you are expected to reflect critically on the mandatory readings and to engage in discussions with your fellow students and the instructor(s). Questions and stimulating interaction during the lectures will be positively evaluated as well. As some might be more shy than others and because our class might be bigger than average, everybody is encouraged to send questions, suggestions, and comments via email to the instructors prior to the meetings. These emails will count towards the participation grade. In general, for the grade, the quality of participation prevails over its quantity. Feedback on the class performance (including grade) will be provided if and when students sign up for an appointment during the office hours.

2) Each student will have to take part in one 40 minutes presentation in a group of 2-3 persons, depending on the number of participants in the course. Each presentation needs to be accompanied by a 1-page(!) handout to be distributed to all course participants. Structure, content, and function of this handout will be discussed in the beginning of the course. Presentations can only take place during the second, third, and fourth part of the course and are delivered during the second meeting of each week. The presentation needs to be on the topic of the week and should be based on more than the material covered by the mandatory readings. Grade-relevant features of the presentation are: adherence to time limit, meaningful hand-out, coherence between different presenters within group, factually adequate representation of the literature processed, critical/innovative/interesting/stimulating/thought-provoking own thoughts. Feedback on the presentation (including a grade) will be provided if and when presenters sign up for an appointment during the office hours.
(3) Throughout the course you will have to write two position papers. The position papers should briefly summarize the content of the readings for that particular week (NB: not session!) and then critically reflect on them relying on previous readings and lectures. You are free to choose for which topic to write the position paper, as long as the following conditions are fulfilled: (a) the two papers must be written on topics that stem from two different parts of our course; (b) none of the position papers can be written on the same topic as your presentation. The position paper must be between 750-800 words and be uploaded to the course's e-learning website prior to the first meeting of the week. As their name suggest, position papers are meant to explain what your position on a specific issue is. Therefore, keep mere summaries to a necessary minimum and spend most effort on developing your own thoughts. Papers that do that will receive a better grade than those that limit themselves to correct summaries of the texts read.

(4) There will be one take-home exercise. The content of the exercise is indicated in the course outline below. The exercise needs to be type-written and uploaded to the course's e-learning site 24 hours before the second seminar session of the week.

(5) In the last three weeks of the course, each participant will have to present a short research proposal in class in which you outline a prototypical study on a topic of your choice using the insights on research designs, theories, and methods commonly used in comparative research that you have gained in this course. It is not meant to be a full-blown empirical comparative study. Rather, it should indicate how such a study were performed in case you had the time and resources. Each student is asked to contact me as soon as possible in order to discuss the content of the research proposal. All papers need to be uploaded to the e-learning site one week prior to the start of the research proposals discussion section of our course. Notice that ALL draft papers have to be submitted by that deadline, regardless of the exact date at which they are discussed. The draft version of this paper shall be between 2000 and 3500 words. After the discussion of all papers in class, you will have time to improve your proposal based on the input from your fellow students and instructors. The final version of the research proposal must be uploaded to the course's e-learning website by the deadline of December 7, 2011 at midnight. The final version shall be between 3000 and 3500 words.

(6) Each student will be assigned as a discussant to one of a fellow student's final research proposal draft during the last part of the course. The task consists in writing a one-page long report with constructive criticisms and suggestions for improving the paper and to present these thoughts in class. The suggestions need to be uploaded to the e-learning site of the course 12 hours prior to the meeting and also sent to the author of the research proposal via email. The oral presentation of comments should be about 5 minutes. Paper givers are not supposed to present their paper, but are asked to engage in a discussion with the paper discussant and the class. Discussants who present fair, constructive, meaning- and helpful feedback in a friendly manner will receive a better grade than those who fail to do so.

**Evaluation**

(1) In-class participation: 10%

(2) One presentation: 15%

(3) Two position papers: 30%

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(4) One exercise: 5%
(5) Research proposal: 35%
(6) Comments on a research proposal: 5%

Useful Books and Sources of Information

The following books are particularly relevant for this course. For publications in brackets the full reference appears at the end of the syllabus


(Collier and Gerring 2008)

(Gerring 2012)


**Some journals you should regularly look at:**

PART 1. INTRODUCTION (WEEK 1)
Why do political scientists compare cases? And what are “cases” to start with?

Week 1 (Sep. 17+19): The Rationales of Comparative Political Research

Mandatory readings:


(Ragin and Becker 1992), chapter 1

Recommended readings:


(Ragin and Becker 1992)

PART 2. THE NUTS AND BOLDS OF COMPARING (WEEKS 2-5)

In this part of the course we discuss some core issues of comparative research designs, paying particular attention to trade-offs and some common pitfalls and biases. This part will help students to better evaluate published work of applied comparative social research and to perform better designed comparative research of their own.

Week 2 (Sep 24+26): Concept Formation and Measurement

Mandatory readings:


(Gerring 2012), chapter 5

Recommended readings:


**Exercise**

24 Hours prior to the second seminar of the week, upload a list of at least ten hypotheses to the e-learning site. You are free to choose the topics. The hypotheses can deal with different themes that are of relevance in comparative political science. In case you are unsure what the ingredients of a proper hypotheses are, feel free to read up on this, using the mandatory and recommended readings.

**Week 3 (Oct. 1+3): Theories and Hypotheses**

**Mandatory readings:**

(Gerring 2012), chapter 8


**Recommended readings:**

(Coppedge 2002)

(Gerring 2012), chapters 9-12

**Week 4 (Oct. 8+10): Case Selection Strategies and Multi-Method Designs**

**Mandatory readings:**


**Recommended readings:**


(Rohlfing 2008)


**Week 5 (Oct 15+17): Biases, Potential Pitfalls, and Trade-Offs**

**Mandatory readings:**

(Landman 2000), chapter 2

(Gerring 2012), chapter 2

**Recommended readings:**


Seligson, Mitchell A. (2002): The renaissance of political culture or the renaissance of the ecological fallacy. *Comparative Politics*, vol. 34, issue 3, pp. 273-292


**PART 3. META-APPROACHES IN COMPARATIVE POLITICAL RESEARCH**

*(WEEK 6)*

This part of the course introduces the major meta-theoretical paradigms in comparative social research, discusses their core assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses and possibilities for combining approaches.

**Week 6 (Oct 22+24): Functionalism, Institutionalism, Rational Choice**

**Mandatory readings:**


**Recommended readings behavioralism:**


(Kaase 2010)


**Recommended readings institutionalism:**


Recommended readings rational choice and game theory:


Dowding, Keith (1994): The compatibility of behaviouralism, rational choice and 'new institutionalism'. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, vol. 6, issue 1, pp. 105-117


(Tsebelis 1990), especially chapters 1+2

**PART 4. CORE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES (WEEKS 7-9)**

*This part of the course aims at familiarizing students with the debates on the most important institutional variations among democratic political systems and the consequences they may trigger. Usually, the first session of the week provides an overview on the institutional variation and the second session explores the consequences (or causes) of that variation.*

**Week 7 (Oct. 29+Oct. 31): Executive Formats and Types of Parliaments**

**Mandatory readings:**


(Elgie 2005)


**Recommended readings:**


(Cheibub 2007), chapter 6


Linz, Juan José (1990): The perils of presidentialism. *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 1, issue 1, pp. 51-69

Linz, Juan José (1990): The Virtues of Parliamentarism. *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 1, issue 1, pp. 84-91


Mainwaring, S. (1997), Multipartism, Robust Federalism and Presidentialism in Brazil, (p. 55-110), in S. Mainwaring and M. S. Shugart (eds.) Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America, Cambridge University Press


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**Week 8 (Nov. 5+7): Territorial Organizations of State Power**

**Mandatory readings:**


**Recommended readings:**


Rodden, Jonathan (2004): Comparative federalism and decentralization. on meaning and measurement. *Comparative Politics*, vol. 36, issue 4, pp. 481-500


**Week 9 (Nov. 12+14): Electoral Systems and Party Systems**

**Electoral Systems (Monday, Nov. 12)**

**Mandatory readings:**


**Recommended readings:**


**Party Systems (Wednesday, Nov 14)**

**Mandatory readings:**

(Horowitz and Browne 2005)


**Recommended readings:**


(Bielasiak 2002)


(Jones 2005)


(Randall and Svasand 2002)


(Schmitter 2001)
PART 5. DISCUSSION OF STUDENT DRAFT RESEARCH PROPOSALS (WEEKS 10-12: NOV 19-21; NOV 26-28; DEC 3-5)

In this part of the course we discuss each students’ draft of the final paper. These debates will help to fine-tune the paper before submitting it for the final evaluation, to get hands-on practical experience when trying to put into practice the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological tools for comparative political research that we have learned throughout the course, to gather further experience in how to communicate your own (complex) thoughts in relatively short time, and to handle multiple feedback from, and in front of, a larger audience.

Here are some useful texts on how to (start) writing a dissertation.

(Gerring 2012), chapter 2

(Hancke 2009)

(Van Evera 1997), chapters 4 and 5

Reference list for publications that above appear in brackets:


