Topics in Comparative Politics

M.A. course, Winter semester 2017

Instructor
Matthijs Bogaards (Visbogaards@ceu.edu)

Classes
Mondays and Wednesdays, 9.00-10.40, Nador 13, 309.

Office hours
Mondays and Wednesdays, 11.00-13.00.

Credits
4 CEU credits, 8 ECTS credits

Course description
Studies in Comparative Politics has the same function as the course Comparative Politics had in the fall semester: to introduce students to the fundamental concepts, findings, and methods of comparative politics. Through the papers and presentation, students will practice comparative politics and reflect on its status as a field of inquiry. The course analyzes in depth key institutional configurations in democracies and authoritarian regimes. Special attention is paid to the comparative performance of political systems.

Course requirements
This is a four-credit core course. The course does not presuppose any particular prior knowledge. Students are expected to be present at all sessions. If one is unable to attend the class, (s)he should e-mail the instructor in advance. The use of electronic devices (laptops, tablets, e-readers, phones, etc.) is not allowed in class.

Assessment
1) Two 1500-word research papers (20% each)
2) Nine in-class quizzes (5% each) (only the best 8 grades count)
3) Presentation (20%)

Students are expected to come to class prepared and to contribute actively to the discussion.

Students write two research papers. The first paper is based on the reading for week 3. The aim is to apply guidelines for conceptual analysis to a bad concept in comparative politics. The second paper is based on the reading for week 6. The aim is to systematically compare two measures of regime type (Freedom House and the V-Dem project) for a country of the student’s choice (provided no other student has chosen the same country). The research papers are due the following week.

The second session each week starts with an in-class quiz on the topic of that week. The quiz covers the reading and the discussion in the first session that week. With the
exception of weeks 2, 3, and 6, there is a quiz every week. Only the best eight grades out of the total of nine count.

In every week, except for weeks 1, 2, 3, and 6, there will be the opportunity for students to do a presentation. The aim is to present on the state of comparative politics in a country of the student’s choice (provided no other student has chosen the same country). The starting point is Van Biezen and Caramani (2006), which is discussed in the second week.

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

Learning outcomes and their assessment

By the end of the course students are expected to understand the institutional and cultural embeddedness of political processes and be aware of the methodological opportunities and dangers involved in comparative research. The research papers are expected to improve the ability to critically engage with concepts, to do empirical research, and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. The discussion of the readings encourages a multifaceted approach to social phenomena and will increase the students’ ability to see their discipline within a broader social science and humanities context. The presentations benefit both the presenter and the audience: the presenter has the opportunity to develop his/her presentation skills while all learn about the way comparative politics, as a field within political science, is organized and practiced in a range of countries, helping students to reflect on the socially and politically constructed nature of the science of politics. The weekly quizzes help students to test their knowledge and understanding on a regular basis, allowing for regular and quick feedback on learning processes. All aspects of the class contribute to develop the skill of problem analysis: the ability to understand problems in a cross-national comparative perspective and in an international context and to discuss these with students of a different cultural background.
Week 1: Is/can there be a science of politics?

*Mandatory reading:*
Philippe Schmitter (no date) *Politics as a Science* (aka Politology). Unpublished manuscript.

Week 2: How to do Comparative Politics?

*Mandatory reading:*

Week 3: What is a good/bad concept?

*Mandatory Reading:*

Week 4: What is the best electoral system (and how to get it)?

*Mandatory Readings:*

Week 5: What is the best form of government?

*Mandatory Readings:*

Week 6: How to measure regime type?

*Mandatory readings:*
Week 7: What has democracy ever done for us?

*Mandatory Readings:*

Week 8: Are consensus democracies “kinder and gentler”?*

*Mandatory Readings:*

Week 9: What’s wrong with American democracy?

*Mandatory readings:*

Week 10: Why are some countries democratic and others not?

*Mandatory readings:*

Week 11: Authoritarianism 2.0?

*Mandatory readings:*

Week 12: What role do institutions play in authoritarian regimes?

*Mandatory readings:*

Every week, further readings will be suggested in class.
**Appendix: Presentation Assessment Sheet**

CEU, Winter semester 2017  
Studies in Comparative Politics (MA course)  
Prof. Dr. Matthijs Bogaards

**Student name:**  
**Session:**  
**Date:**

### Academic content

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<td>Evidence of research</td>
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### Presentation skills

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**Comments:**