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:

Week 2 Area Studies
The second session sketches the contribution of area studies to political science.

Reading
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:

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:

Week 5: Theory and Practice of Comparative Area Studies
In this session, we look at the theory and practice of comparative area studies.

Reading:

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:
Week 7 Paired Comparisons
This session looks at one particular way of connecting and selecting cases.

Reading:

Week 8 Comparative Era Studies?
What happens if we treat time periods as cases and compare eras as we do areas?


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:

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.