Comparative European Politics
POLS 5348

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Instructor:
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MA Programme in Political Science (type)

Fall semester 2018-19 (4 credits)
Class meetings: Tuesday & Thursday, 11.00-12.40


Introduction

Is democracy in Europe under threat? Among the many challenges to (national) democracy in Europe, observers often mention the rise of populist/authoritarian political parties, separatism and ethnic conflict, the erosion of national democracy through globalisation, the change of media systems, and the only superficial consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

This course introduces the literature from different fields in comparative politics, which deal with democracy. These are, in particular, the transition to democracy, models of democracy and democratic institutions, and the quality of democracy. It introduces concepts from comparative politics, and comparative research as a method. We capitalise on these literatures to assess the challenges to democracy in Europe, and to discuss the risk of democratic backsliding.

Empirically, the course offers an insight into a variety of democracies, and into the history of democratisation in Europe. It focuses particularly on a selected number of countries in Europe. And it compares the functioning of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe and in Western Europe. Methodologically, the course offers insights into applied empirical research designs and methods in comparative political research.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, students will

✓ be familiar with key topics and concepts in comparative politics.
✓ be able to distinguish and analyse political regimes, and possess the instruments to compare and analyse democratic political systems.
✓ will be able to assess the state of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe and in Western Europe, and will be familiar with a selected number of political systems in Europe, and their history.
Understand the logic of comparative studies in political science/social science, and conduct comparative analyses.

Course requirements and assessment

Attendance and active class-room participation (15 %)

Expert for one week or session (20% of the grade)
Participants have to prepare for an expert discussion in class (25% of the grade), based on the expert readings and the discussion questions, on which we agree beforehand. (Enrol for an office hour no later than 10 days before your ‘expert week’). Reading lists can be changed, in agreement between the lecturer and the experts. Experts prepare to respond to questions in a cohesive way, but do not prepare a linear presentation (see below). Each expert prepares material for about 15 minutes of discussion.

The topic of the expert discussion can overlap with the topic of the paper, which the student writes in the second semester of the seminar.

Deadline: Expert discussions take place between week 3 and week 12. Usually, there are two discussants per class. Topics and dates will be assigned in the second week of the semester. To the extent possible, we will try to consider the interests of the students.

Short assignments (15% of the grade)

Assignment 1: problem articulation
Problem articulation (200-300 words) on one or several broader questions (will be introduced in first meeting). Deadline: 25 September 2018, 11.00h

Assignment 3: abstract.
Outline of the research design of your final paper. Max. 1 page. Containing research question, preliminary case selection, and idea about the key variable(s) and hypotheses to be analysed.
Deadline: 8 November 2018, 11.00h

Assignment 4: discussant
Discuss the abstract of one other student, and provide comments to each of the other participants of your group (to be defined) at the feedback sessions. On 13 November 2018, timetable to be agreed on.

Final paper (50 %)
Course participants will submit an empirical, comparative research paper, focused on democracy, models of democracy, and/or regime transitions. 5000 words.
Deadline to be announced.

Grading criteria:
- Originality: is there a clear idea behind the paper (and is it followed and answered in the paper)?
- Clarity: is the argument well structured?
- Case selection and choice of appropriate data: is the selection of the cases and data well explained and convincing?
- Fit of theory and empirical analysis: does the design for the empirical analysis fit the theoretical concept to be investigated?
- Is the operationalisation clear and valid?
- Conduct of the empirical analysis and appropriateness of the conclusions.
- Overall structure of the paper: is there a clear golden thread throughout the paper? Does the introduction/conclusion refer to the paper, is the research design written and structured clearly, does it fulfil formal standards, is the structure appropriate?

_Late submission:_ In case of late submissions, three grade points from the final grade of the assignment are deducted for every 12 hours of delay. For instance, submitting 15 hours late leads to a deduction of six points.

**Course programme**

**Week 1 (18/20 September) – Introduction**
Contemporary challenges to democracy. Illiberal regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. The methodological foundations of comparative politics. Conceptualisation and measurement, at the example of democracy.

_Required readings:_

_Further readings:_

_ Introductory books into Comparative Politics and Democracy Studies:_

**Week 2.1 (25 September) - Anti-democratic backlashes**
Democratic facades, competitive-authoritarian regimes, hybrid regimes. The narrow line between democracies and hybrid regimes. Case study of Turkey.

_Required readings:_

Comparative European Politics (Autumn 2018)


Further readings:

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I. Political regimes and transitions
Regime change, transition towards democracy, and the stability of (democratic) regimes.

Week 2.2. (27 September) – Transitions towards democracy, an overview
Transitions towards democracy and the consolidation of democracy: structural theories (modernisation) vs. actor-based explanations ('transitology').

Required readings:

Assignment 1: problem articulation

Further readings:

Week 3 (2/9 October) – Mobilisation, democratisation, and conflicts
Two perspectives (and challenges) on the mobilisation and democracy: a structural (modernisation) perspective, and the risk of ethnic conflict. Nuances of the history of transitions to democracy in Western and in Central and Eastern Europe.

Required readings:

Expert group: Does modernisation explain transitions or regime stability? How do regime transitions relate to conflict?

Further readings:

**Week 4 (9/11 October) – An actor approach: Transitology in Western and Central and Eastern Europe**
The actors' role in the transition process, and the legacy of authoritarian regimes.

**Required readings:**

**Expert group**: Pacted and non-pacted transitions - putting the Polish transition into perspective.
The impact of international factors. Explaining democratic backsliding: coups and regime entrenchment.

**Further readings:**
**II. Varieties of democracy**

The different types and shapes of democracies. Which democracies perform best?

**Week 5 (16/18 October) – The Quality of Democracy**

What is the best democracy? According to which criteria should this be assessed? Key dimensions explaining the variety of democratic political systems. What is the populist view of democracy? Introducing a rational choice model for the effect of democratic institutions.

**Required readings:**


**Expert group:** The political and economic effects of democratic institutions. Models of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, Latvia or Slovenia.


The political system of Latvia or of Slovenia; literature to be defined.

**Further readings:**


Week 6 (25 October) – Electoral systems and political parties
Models of political representation. The impact of electoral systems on the formation of a party system.

Required readings:

Expert group: Why electoral reforms? Personal or party representation.

Further readings:
Week 7 (30 October) – Institutional conflicts in (semi-)presidential regimes
Assessing the democratic performance of different institutional setup, looking at parliamentary and presidential regimes, and their European ‘sub-type, semi-presidential regimes.

Required readings:


Further readings:

Assignment 2: abstract. Deadline: 8 November 11.00h

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III. The Demos.
How do we define a democratic constituency?

Week 8 (6 / 8 November) – Political cleavages
The alignment and realignment of voters: identifying the changing conflicts in European politics. How globalisation alters national democracies.

Required readings:

Expert group: Frozen cleavages or tabula rasa? Political conflicts and party competition in Central and Eastern Europe.


Further readings:

Week 9.1 (13 November) – Paper workshops (feedback)
Schedule to be announced.
Assignment 3: discussant and comments

Week 9.2 (15 November) – One European demos?
Are there genuine pan-European politics, with Europe-wide conflicts? Or is Europe the sum of its nation-states, and European conflicts are conflicts between nation-states?

Required readings:

Expert group: What are the main political divisions in Europe?

Further readings:
Week 10.1 (20 November) – Federalism and partition
Territorial arrangements as a key question in the establishment of a constitutional order. Does territorial autonomy rise separatist movements? The case of Russia

Required readings:

Expert group: Asymmetric federalism. Does federalism fuel separatist movements?

Further readings:

Week 10.2 & 11.1 (22/ 27 November) – Democracy in divided societies
The transition towards democracy of divided societies can lead to conflicts. Does democracy has a recipe for ethnically heterogeneous societies?

Required readings:

Expert group: An alternative model for conflict-solution? Are identities and cleavages the product of political institutions?

Further readings:

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IV. The Citizens.
Bringing the citizens in: Which role for citizens in democracies? What do citizens expect from democracy?

Week 11.2 (29 November) – Citizens view of democracy
What is democracy in the citizens’ eyes? Are citizens’ evaluations of democracies related to the ‘objective’ democratic performance? What do citizens expect from democracy?

Required readings:

Further readings:

Week 12 (4/6 December) Direct democracy, social movements, revolutions
When citizens rule: direct democracy and the threat of the tyranny of the majority. Social movement, revolutions, and regime change.

Required readings:
Expert group: Referendums in Switzerland and challenges to democracy. Revolutions: comparison of Coloured Revolutions to the Arab Spring and to Europe in 1848.

Further readings: