Comparative Politics

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MA course, 4 credits, Fall 2016.
Tuesday and Thursday, 11 am – 12.40 pm
Teaching assistant: Bálint Mikola
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Course description
The aim of the course is to make students familiar with some important issues and
approaches in comparative politics by presenting concrete research problems and
enterprises. By the end of the course students are expected to have a better understanding
in different trends in comparative politics, to be able to evaluate the merits of political
science publications, to recognize what intellectual tradition they belong to, and to design
your own research strategy. The readings and the lectures describe and exemplify the
development of the discipline, which has resulted in a genuine methodological pluralism.

Beyond introductory methodological issues the course will cover issues in social and
political change, structural vs agency-oriented explanations, dynamics of democratization
and de-democratization in comparative perspective, and new forms of political
communication.

By the end of the semester, each student will be expected to write research proposal
on a selected topic. The selection of the topic will be up to the student, but decision
should be made by early November so that each will have adequate time to both read and
“digest” the issue and its literature.

In the proposal, students should address the following: What is the problem, issue,
puzzle, event, outcome, process, trend, controversy that you intend to explain, and why
do you choose it? What are your assumptions? How do you conceptualize your selected
issue and how do you come up with the way of looking at it? How do you address the
issues of validity and reliability? What is the unit (are the units) included in your analysis
and why they were selected? Is agency located at the level of individuals or at the level of
structures? What, if any, method of comparison do you intend to apply and how? Are the
observed empirical phenomena equivalent across countries?

Requirements
Students must participate in all classes and inform the professor in advance if they cannot
attend a class. They should read the mandatory readings before the meetings. Students are
expected to participate actively in the discussions, and will also be asked to present one
or more readings during the semester. The final paper (research proposal) should be about
3000-word long. Final papers should be both handed in print-out form and e-mailed by
the last meeting of the semester.

Grading: in-class activities, presentations (30%)
written assignmens (30%)
final paper (40%)
Written assignments due to:
- October 4.
- November 3.
- November 15.

Consulting some of the following books, listed below, would certainly be useful:

Topics and readings

WEEK 1. September 20, 22. Science, politics, and social science

Mandatory readings


Further readings


WEEK 2. September 27, 29. Research design

Mandatory readings


Further readings


WEEK 3. October 4. Concept formation, conceptual stretching, area studies and global comparisons.


FIRST WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: The Karl/Schmitter vs Bunce debate (October 4.)


Further readings

**WEEK 3. October 6. Case study research and process tracing**

**BÁLINT MIKOLA**

**Mandatory readings**


**Further readings**


WEEK 4. October 11, 13. Structural explanations: Functionalism, modernization and development

Mandatory readings


Further readings


**WEEK 5. October 18. Societal modernization, post-materialism, value change**

**Mandatory readings**


**Further readings**

**WEEK 5-6. October 20, 25, 27. Agency-based explanations: Democratization research and the Rustow – Lijphart model**

**Mandatory readings**


**Further readings**

[www.democracybarometer.org](http://www.democracybarometer.org); Freedom House Index; Human Development Index  
WEEK 7. November 1. Public holiday, no class

WEEK 7-8. November 3, 8. Actors vs structures in comparative historical analysis: The case of revolution

Mandatory readings


SECOND WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: The Goldstone vs Keddie debate (Nov. 3.)


Further readings
Theda Skocpol, 1979. States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

WEEK 8. November 10. Transformation of party politics: Online activism and intra-party democracy BÁLINT MIKOLA

Mandatory readings


Further readings


Shakes Italian Politics.” *South European Society and Politics* 18 (4): 427-449.


**WEEK 9. November 15, 17. Deconsolidation of democracy**

*Mandatory readings*


**THIRD WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: Schmitter/Karl, Carothers (November 15.)**


*Further readings*


WEEK 10. November 22. Comparing non-democratic regimes

Mandatory readings


Further readings


**WEEK 10. November 24. Student presentations**

**WEEK 11. November 29, December 1. Student presentations**

**WEEK 12. December 6, 8. Student presentations, concluding discussion**

*Further readings*
