Welcome to SS366: Comparative Politics!

Why are some countries torn by conflict while others are peaceful? Why are some rich while others are poor? Why do some democracies die and others survive? These puzzles underscore the importance of understanding the causes of three sets of political phenomena: political stability/instability, democracy/authoritarianism, and prosperity/poverty. Supporting the investigation of these outcomes, the course has four overarching goals:

1) Identify important questions that address the strength, weakness, or absence of stability, inclusion, and prosperity;

2) Apply the scientific method to these questions.

3) Develop the skills to critically evaluate the explanations.

4) Enable students to begin to design their own research.

The question-driven approach of SS366 is organized into five blocks: states, regimes, society, political action, and political economy. Themes derived from these categories form the backbone of the course, including: the effect of variations in state-formation on political stability (State); the influence of regime type – democratic or authoritarian -- on political and socio-economic performance (Regime); the determinants of democratization (Regime); the accelerants of identity politics and ethnic conflict (Society); the causes of collective action and political violence (Political Action); and the effects of political institutions on the distribution and growth of wealth (Political Economy).

Format

- 30 Lessons @ 75 min, with no labs
- Major Assignments: research paper, writ, WPR, TEE
- 3.0 Credit Hours
- Prerequisites: SS202, Corequisites: SS307 or SS357
Course Objectives

After studying the material in SS366, each cadet will be able to:

- Formulate clear research questions using appropriate social science theories and concepts.
- Conduct a theory-test using process-tracing as a method.
- Comprehend the origins of democracy and the resilience of authoritarian regimes.
- Identify and analyze the conditions under which democracies emerge and endure or decay and collapse; understand the different institutional forms that democratic government might adopt and the consequences of these choices.
- Evaluate the factors that prompt the politicization of identity (ethnicity, religion, gender) in different case studies.
- Categorize and evaluate the variables that support collective political action, both peaceful and violent.
- Understand the impact of globalization on state sovereignty, democracy, and economic development.
- Effectively critique the efforts of scholars and peers to formulate and test social science arguments.

Requirements

The graded requirements, worth a total possible 1,000 points, are:

1) Writ (50 Points)

2) WPR (100 Points)

3) Term End Exam (250 Points)

4) Course Research Paper (400 Points)
   a. Paper Proposal (50 points): This states your puzzle/research question and contains an annotated bibliography with at least 7 separate theoretical works.
   b. Literature Review and Theory Identification (150 Points): This is the first part of the paper. It includes your introduction, literature review, theory you will test, a process-tracing of that theory, and an operationalization of your variables.
   c. Final Paper (200 Points): The final paper will include a revised introduction, literature review, methodology, evidence, analysis, and a conclusion. You must incorporate changes received from the previous submission, which will require some re-writing.

5) Instructor Points (200 Points) – Distribution discussed in class
## Course Schedule

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Block I: States

Learning Objective: Understand how different historical trajectories of state formation influence the legitimacy and effectiveness (ability to perform essential functions) of the state.

Lesson 1: Introduction – what is comparative politics?

Lesson Objective:
Describe the objectives, relevance, and requirements of SS366. Apply the scientific method to explain variation.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What are the main assignments of the course and what is expected of you in SS366?
2. What kind of questions do we ask in comparative politics? How are these different from international relations?
3. What is the comparative method? The method of agreement/difference?
4. What is the current state of democracy in the world?

Assigned Reading (22)
- SS366 Course Syllabus.
- David Samuels, Comparative Politics. Chapter 1: 4-25
- V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2019 (Available Online)
  Main Findings: 5
  Section 1: State of the World 201 – Liberal and Electoral Democracy: 10-26 (Skim)

Lesson 2: How do we use qualitative methods in comparative politics?

Lesson Objective:
Describe how political scientists test theories using case studies, and how to employ process-tracing as a method.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What are the main components of a political science study/paper?
2. How can we test theories using case study analysis?
3. What is process tracing?
4. What theory does Ross test in “Oil, Islam, and women?”
5. Describe the method and logic that Ross uses.

Assigned Reading (31)
- Stephen Van Evera, Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science. 27-30 (“How can theories be tested?”) 50-67 (Chapter 2); Skim/review 7-15
- Political Science Research Framework (slide in course reader)
- Optional: David Collier, Understanding Process Tracing.” PS: Political Science and Politics, Vol 44, No. 4 (October 2011) 823-830
Lesson 3: How do we use quantitative methods in comparative politics?

Lesson Objective:
Interpret basic quantitative evidence while critically assessing the strengths and weakness of both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. Why is regression analysis sometimes called “the hydrogen bomb of statistics”?
2. What is the “coefficient,” “p-value,” and “R-squared”? What do they tell us?
3. What are some common regression mistakes? How can we avoid them?
4. How do you interpret the regression results Ross presents? How do these results complement his case studies?
5. According to Desch, what tensions exist between rigor and relevance?

Assigned Reading (48)

Lesson 4: What is the state?

Lesson Objective:
Describe the concepts of the state, government, and regime as well as state strength and scope.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What is a state? A government? A regime?
2. What is state strength? Scope?
3. How do we measure state strength?
4. What effect did CPA orders one and two have on the strength of the Iraqi state?

Assigned Reading (32)
- Coalition Provisional Authority *Order Number 1* and *Order Number 2*
Lesson 5: How does state formation affect state strength?

Lesson Objective:
Explain the historical forces that determine state formation and effectiveness.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. How does a state gain and lose legitimacy?
2. What is a state and what does it mean for one to be strong?
3. How did European states become strong?
4. Why does Tilly compare states to protection rackets?
5. How did the Crusades contribute to the development of strong European states?

Assigned Reading (28)

  86-87 (legitimacy and effectiveness)

  169-173; 183-184

  551-565, Interpret the Tables, conclusion 581-3

Lesson 6: What is democracy and authoritarianism? (Writ)

Lesson Objective:
Describe the basic characteristics of democratic and authoritarian regimes.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What elements are necessary for us to consider a country a democracy? A liberal democracy?
2. What is an illiberal democracy?
3. Why do almost all countries in the world claim to be democracies?
4. Leaders in democracies are accountable to their voters; are authoritarian leaders accountable to anyone?

Assigned Reading (38)
- Samuels, Comparative Politics.
  Chapter 3: 59-66 (Democratic Political Regimes)
  Chapter 4: 91-99 (Non-Democratic Political Regimes)
- Optional: Watch: CGP Grey: The Rules for Rulers

Lesson 7: Why does democracy develop? (Part one)

Lesson Objective:
Explain modernization and class conflict theories of democratic regime change. Critically assess different theories of democratization.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What are the “class conflict,” and “modernization” theories of democratization?
2. Mancur Olson’s article is a landmark in political science that has been cited over 3,000 times! Explain the causal logic of his democratization theory.
3. Explain the causal logic discussed in the Welzel and Inglehart article. What are the mechanisms that produce democracy?
4. What is Barrington Moore’s thesis?

Assigned Reading (32)
- Samuels, Comparative Politics.
  Chapter 5: 121-133
- Mancur Olson, "Dictatorship, democracy, and development." American Political Science Review 87, no. 3 (1993) 573-574 (Section on “The Improbable Transition”)
Lesson 8: Why does democracy develop? (Part two)

Lesson Objective:
Explain international and economic influences on democratic regime change. Critically assess different theories of democratization.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. How does the explanation of the role of economic development in fostering democracy presented by Przeworski et al differ from those explored in lesson 7?
2. In what ways can international forces effect a country’s domestic political regime?

Assigned Reading (28)
- Samuels, *Comparative Politics*. Chapter 5: 134-144.

Lesson 9: What varieties of democracy exist? (UK)

Lesson Objective:
Describe different institutional configurations of democracies. Assess the effects of these different institutional configurations.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What distinguishes a parliamentary from a presidential system?
2. Which institutional configuration appears to better promote democratic consolidation?
3. What distinguishes majoritarian from proportional electoral systems?

Assigned Reading (31)
- Samuels, Chapter 3: 78-86
Lesson 10: What causes authoritarianism to endure? Part one: The MENA region

Lesson Objective:
Explain the persistence of authoritarianism in the MENA region and how key variables here might apply to other cases.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. Why might oil have something to do with the MENA’s democratic deficit?
2. What does hereditary rule signal that has implications for a dictator’s ability to withstand a challenge?
3. Political scientists describe Saudi Arabia as a “rentier state.” What does this mean and what is the impact on regime type?

Lesson 11: What causes authoritarianism to endure? Part two: China

Lesson Objective:
Explain the persistence of authoritarianism in China and how key variables might apply in other cases.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. Why might the Chinese middle class not create the democratic pressure we might expect?
2. According to Pei, how does the CCP maintain control in China?
3. What techniques do the CCP use?
4. What similarities exist between regimes in China and the MENA region?

Assigned Reading (15 + podcast)
- Listen: NPR Planet Money Episode 681: “The Oil Kingdom.”

Assigned Reading (31)
- Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts, "Reverse-engineering censorship in China: Randomized experimentation and participant observation," Science, 345, Iss. 6199 (August 2014)
Lesson 12: What varieties of authoritarianism exist?

Lesson Objective:
Describe institutional variations in authoritarian institutions.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. Why would an authoritarian leader choose to hold elections?
2. What purpose do elections and elected officials serve for an authoritarian ruler?
3. What are the characteristics that describe a “competitive authoritarian” regime?
4. How might a state become a “competitive authoritarian” regime?

Assigned Reading (28)


Lesson 13: Why do democracies fail?

Lesson Objective:
Explain the forces that cause liberal democracies to transform into non-democracies. Analyze recent cases of democratic failure.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. How do modern transitions from democracy to non-democracy differ from those during the Cold War?
2. What steps do Levitsky and Ziblatt see as progressing to the eventual death of a democracy?
3. How do we see the forces described by Bermeo, Levitsky, and Ziblatt at work in Poland?
4. Do you see evidence of democratic backsliding in any other countries?

Assigned Reading (48)


- “How Poland is Weakening Democracy.” *The Economist*, 25 Jul 2017
Lesson 14: Why do authoritarian regimes fail?

Lesson Objective:
Explain which variables are most important in causing the collapse of a single-party regime.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. Why did the Mexican PRI voluntarily give up their domination of the electoral commission?
2. What aspects of authoritarian resilience were present in Mexico prior to the 1990s, and how did they eventually fail?
3. What distinguished elections that led to revolutions from those that did not?
4. Are authoritarian regime failures the result of structure (institutions) or agency (choices that people make)?

Assigned Reading (47)
- Beatriz Magaloni, "The demise of Mexico’s one-party dominant regime." *The third wave of democratization in Latin America: advances and setbacks* (2005):
  - 121-146

  - 43-47, 59-77

Lesson 15: Is democracy “better” than dictatorship?

Lesson Objective:
Critically assess policy differences between regime types. Normatively evaluate whether democracy has more to offer than authoritarian regimes.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. According to Mulligan et al, in what ways do the policies enacted differ? In what ways are they similar?
2. According to Przeworski, what is the cardinal virtue of democracy?
3. What relationship does Dahl see between democracy and the ability to make moral choices?
4. If a form of “guardianship” delivered greater prosperity than democracy, should we still choose democracy?

Assigned Reading (33)
- Casey Mulligan, Ricard Gil, and Xavier Sala-i-Martin, "Do democracies have different public policies than non-democracies?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (2004):
  - 51-64, 71-72

  - 6-9

  - 44-61, 69-74, 78-80
Lesson 16: WPR

Lesson Objective:
To assess understanding of states and regimes.

The WPR will occur during our regular class time.

Assigned Reading
- Review materials from blocks one and two.

Lesson 17: Film Viewing: Democrats (2015)

Lesson Objective (L.O.):
Critically assess how comparative politics theories play out on the ground by studying the case of constitutional reform in Zimbabwe.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What aspects of competitive authoritarianism do you see in Zimbabwe?
2. How does ZANU-PF remain in power despite its horrendous management of the economy in Zimbabwe?
3. How effective will Zimbabwe’s new constitution be in ushering in more accountability and democracy?

Assigned Reading
- Watch the official trailer for Democrats (2015)
- Review your notes from Lesson 9, 10, and 14. Prepare to look for similarities between ZANU-PF’s mechanisms of control and those of other dictatorships we’ve studied.
Lesson 18: How do political identities form?

Lesson Objective:
Critically assess the evidence for whether political identities are primordial or socially constructed.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What are social cleavages?
2. What is the constructivist explanation of political identity and how does it contrast with the primordial explanation?
3. Why are the Chewas and Tumbukas adversaries in Malawi, but allies in Zambia? Which theory of political identity does this case appear to support?

Assigned Reading (36)
- Samuels, Comparative Politics. Chapter 6: 150-172

Lesson 19: What is a nation?

Lesson Objective:
Describe nationalism. Explain the origins of nationalism and its political effects.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What caused states to begin emphasizing national narratives? What purpose do these narratives serve?
2. How does nationalism impact legitimacy?
3. What role does nationalism play in explaining why some communist regimes fell and others endured? What transmission mechanisms existed?
4. How is nationalism related to ethnic cleansing and genocide?

Assigned Reading (34)
Lesson 20: How do religious identities affect politics – and vice versa?

Lesson Objective:
Describe both how religious actors can influence domestic institutions and how political elites can instrumentalize religious identities.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What is the relationship between religious identification and democracy?
2. How might Protestant missionaries have contributed to the development of democracy in Africa and Asia?
3. What relationship does Islam have to anti-American sentiment in the MENA region?
4. What links exist between these pieces and theories from previous lessons?

Assigned Reading (49)
- Samuels, *Comparative Politics.* Chapter 7: 177-201

Lesson 21: How can states govern across social divisions?

Lesson Objective:
Describe different institutional approaches to managing diversity within a state. Critically assess competing evidence for the effectiveness of these approaches.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What is consociationalism?
2. Identify the institutional configurations Lijphart recommends for managing social divisions.
3. What are Cammett & Malesky’s findings?
4. What is the purpose of the Croatia case study found in Web Appendix 7?

Assigned Reading (39)
  Optional: Web Appendix 7
  693-695, Figure 1, 702-706
Block IV: Organizing for Political Action

Learning Objective: Understand the collective action problem and the origins, effectiveness, and endurance of violent and non-violent means of political action. Evaluate the conditions that support collective action, both peaceful and violent.

Lesson 22: How do groups organize for political action within institutions?

Lesson Objective:
Describe how and why states institutionalize avenues of political participation.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What is the collective action problem? How can we resolve it?
2. What are the benefits and drawbacks of corporatism and pluralism?
3. What role do political parties play and how are they formed?
4. What is the difference between closed and open party systems?

Assigned Reading (32)
- Samuels, Comparative Politics.
  Chapter 9: 233-258
  13-16, 33-36

Lesson 23: How do groups organize for political action outside of institutions?

Lesson Objective:
Describe how citizens mobilize independently of the state to effect political change.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What is civil resistance and what makes it effective?
2. Why do social revolutions tend to come about so unexpectedly?
3. Do you observe any of the relationships hypothesized by Stephan & Chenoweth in action during Kuran’s description of fall of the USSR?

Assigned Reading (52)
- Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, "Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict."
  World Politics 44, no. 1 (1991)
  12-25, 33-48 (Skim)
Lesson 24: What causes political violence?

Lesson Objective:
Critically assess competing explanations in the “grievance vs opportunity” debate. Explain the social incentives of terrorism.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What IV groupings does Samuels offer to address why civil wars occur?
2. According to Fearon and Laitin, what variables best predict the civil war risk of a given country?
3. How does Cederman et al’s explanation differ from Fearon and Laitin’s?
4. How does the way Cederman et al measure inequality differ from the way Fearon and Laitin do? Which is most appropriate for the research question?

Assigned Reading (36)
- Samuels, *Comparative Politics.*
  Chapter 10: 264-73; 274-287 (Skim)


Lesson 25: What explains the dynamics of political violence?

Lesson Objective:
Explain several causes of violence towards civilians. Describe why some armed groups turn violent toward civilians, while others do not.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. Why is violence towards civilians a puzzle?
2. Why might states attack civilians?
3. Why do some groups commit mass sexual violence while others do not?

Assigned Reading (32)


Lesson 26: What happens to society after violence ends?

**Lesson Objective:**
Explain how exposure to political violence changes the future behavior of a society.

**Reading/Discussion Guide:**
1. According to Blattman, how did the future political behavior of those forcibly recruited differ from those who joined voluntarily?
2. What is the causal logic explaining how the institution of slavery influences present day political attitudes in the US?
3. How can slave raids that occurred hundreds of years ago explain variation in today’s African societies?

Assigned Reading (41)

Lesson 27: Can we end violence and (re)build states?

**Lesson Objective:**
Describe attempts at conflict resolution and statebuilding. Apply theories of comparative politics to evaluate the prospects for success.

**Reading/Discussion Guide:**
1. Why are the post-war occupations of Germany and Japan poor comparisons for the US effort in Iraq?
2. What cases might serve as better comparisons to the US effort in Iraq?
3. What are the three different models of statebuilding and how do they relate to IR worldviews?

Assigned Reading (33)

Block V: Political Economy

Learning Objective: Understand how political institutions and identities affect the distribution and growth of wealth.

Lesson 28: Why do some states redistribute wealth more than others?

Lesson Objective:
Explain what causes different levels of wealth redistribution.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. Why do states take such different approaches to wealth distribution?
2. What role do electoral institutions play in determining how much a state redistributes?
3. What effect does ethnic composition have on the amount a state redistributes?
4. What is the trilemma that Iverson and Wren discuss?

Assigned Reading (38)

- Samuels, *Comparative Politics.*
  Chapter 12: 324-340; skim 341-350

  Chapter 6: Race and Redistribution
  146-154, 177-181

  507-516; 544-546

  165-175

Lesson 29: Why are some states wealthy and others poor?

Lesson Objective:
Explain the political causes of poverty and economic growth.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What is the role of regime type on economic development?
2. Why are institutions so important to economic development?
3. Why have so few changes occurred to problematic colonial institutions?

Assigned Reading (29)

- Samuels, *Comparative Politics.*
  Chapter 11: 294-6; 301-4; 312-9

- Daron Acemoglu, "Root causes."

Lesson 30: Does globalization help or hurt democracy?

AND

What are the key themes we have discussed in SS366?

Lesson Objective:
Describe how globalization affects domestic political institutions.

Reading/Discussion Guide:
1. What is globalization and how does it affect domestic political regimes and the incentives that they face?
2. What is populism? What is the connection between populism and globalization?
3. What strategies are most effective for draining support from populist parties?
4. How can you organize and utilize the material that we’ve discussed during the course to address some of the major questions in Comparative Politics?

Assigned Reading (17)

