Comprehensive Politics (BA) - Syllabus

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Course description

The course provides an overview of the basic elements of comparative politics, addressing political processes, structures, actors, and norms in a range of specially chosen countries in a comparative perspective. The aim is to cover the following political systems: EU, UK, Germany, USA, China, France, Russia, and Japan. Comparative Politics concentrates on problems concerning political power, democracy, and authoritarian forms of government, the political economy and development, parties and states, political participation, identity, religion, and politics and social classes.

Description of objectives

On completion of the course the student is expected to be able to:

- **Knowledge**
  - explain the concepts and theories of comparative politics
  - describe comparative politics’ field of study
  - understand the comparative methods and their application to specific material
- **Skills**
  - independently consider the problems of comparative politics
- **Competencies**
  - turn concepts and theories into concrete analyses of empirical material

Assignments

Course program and readings

Week 1 - The decline of democracy & introduction

Learning goals:

- Empirically guided and problem-oriented discussion of the concept of democracy, and attempts to measure it; distinction between democracy and quality of democracy (Rupnik, Munck & Verkuilen).
- Conceptual precision is of special importance in Comparative Politics where theories travel across regions and over time. Different approaches to concept formation (classical, family resemblance, radial concepts) are introduced (Sartori and Collier & Mahon).

Required readings

Further readings:

**Bloc I – Patterns of State and Regime Formation**

**Week 2 - State and Empire**

Learning goals:
- What is a state? What is an empire? The classical theories of state formation (Fukuyama).
  - Until recently, empire was the dominant form of social organization, and in many regions they have continued to be so until recently. What are the characteristics of imperial rule -- and the consequences?
- The classical theories of state building are eurocentric. What has held back the process of state formation in Africa, and why are African states weak (Herbst)? How is state building different today from the early modern period (Krasner)? And can we fix that (Krasner)?
- Cases covered: Political history of Western Europe, particularly France and UK

Required readings

Further readings:

**Week 3 - From Early Regimes to Modern Democracy**

Learning goals:
- What are the origins of early representative institutions (Ertman)?
- And how did modern democracy arise from that (Przeworski)?
- Early representative institutions are an institutionalization of privileges to certain groups in society; modern democracy is the removal of said privileges. How can we understand that dynamic?

Required readings


Week 4 - How does democracy spread (or not). Colonization and the case of the Middle East.

Learning goals:
- Now that we understand the origins of representative democracy in Europe -- how did it spread outside the continent (Hariri)? How did the pattern of European colonization shape subsequent regime developments and what are the causes and consequences of different forms of colonization (Lange).
- Cases covered: the Middle East.
- The Middle East also opens the discussion of varieties of authoritarianism that follows in the coming two weeks.

Required readings


Further readings:

Week 5 - Regime types, levels of democracy, varieties of authoritarian regimes, hybrid regimes

Learning goals:
- Have a fundamental overview of political regimes: what are the constitutive characteristics of subtypes of democracy (Møller and Skaaning) and of subtypes of autocracies (Seeberg).
- Understand the relationship (causally and temporally) between the different regime attributes -- historically and today (Møller and Skaaning).
- Understanding the rise and the function of competitive authoritarian regimes.
- Cases covered: –

Required readings


Further readings:

**Bloc II – Regime Transitions**

**Week 6 - Authoritarian institutions / elections and parliaments in authoritarian regimes**

Learning goals:
- The concept of institutions under authoritarian rule: different function of institutions, but self-enforcing institutions do play a role in information sharing (establish credible commitments) as well as in terms of coordination.
- Explaining legislatures, elections, and parties in terms of credible commitment mechanisms (Magaloni) or as co-optation mechanisms (Gandhi).
- Cases covered: China

Required readings:

Further readings:

**Week 7 - Revolutions**

Learning goals:
- Revolutionary thresholds and equilibria: explain how participation of others lowers costs of participation causing a spiraling effect (Granovetter) = ‘revolutionary bandwagon’ (Kuran). The consequence of this is that small groups in society act as linkages, and each link can be crucial for revolutions to occur.
- Structural explanations vs. rational choice explanations: rational choice
- Discuss Bellin (‘emotional trigger’, communication, risk of being killed) in terms of collective action terminology, thresholds, and preference falsification: detect radicals vs. conservatives (Granovetter: young, urban), find focal points (e.g. Bouazizi, Tunisia), spread of information about costs of participation (YouTube clip with military not repressing, Egypt), and how this information again increases costs of repression.
- Social Media and Collective Action
- Cases covered:

Required readings:

Further readings:

**Week 8 - Coups**

Learning goals:
- When does the military intervene in politics? What impedes / facilitates coups?
- Recap on weeks on transitions: Does revolutions and coups lead to democratization or just another authoritarian regime? Important for democratization: negotiation, pacts, credible commitments, future payoffs. With the readings to this module in mind, how could one expect transitional outcomes of revolutions vs. coups?

Required readings

Further readings:

**Week 9 - Feedback week**

**Bloc III – Varieties of Democracy**

**Week 10 - Democracy and Institutions (Introduction)**

Learning goals:
- Institutions and political effects
- Introduction into dimensions of democratic institutions: consensus-majoritarian
- Consensus-majoritarian as a type of democracy: Germany and UK
- Presidentialism and semi-presidentialism
- Cases covered: Germany, UK, France, European Union

Required readings

Further readings:

**Week 11 - Federalism and Unitary States**

Learning goals:
- Why federalism?
- Different types of territorial autonomy/decentralisation
- Bicameralism
- How does federalism combine with democracy + non-democracy
- Cases covered: Federal systems in practice: United States versus Russia

Required readings

Further readings:

**Week 12 - Electoral Systems**

Learning goals:
- Systematic overview over electoral systems
- The effect of electoral systems on party systems + models of representation
- The effect of electoral systems on types of representation
- What is "the best" electoral system? Mixed electoral systems – mixing the two elements
- Cases covered: Germany, different outcomes in each chamber of parliament

Required readings

Further readings:

**Week 13 - Social Cleavages and Institutions**

Learning goals:
- Definition of cleavages
- Institutions for divided societies: Consociational and integrationist approaches
- Endogeneity of social cleavages
- Comparative case study design (Posner)
- Cases covered: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Required readings

Further readings:

**Week 14 - Democracies and their citizens: direct democracy; civil society/social movements**

Learning goals:
- Get familiar with institutions that allow for direct participation of citizens
- Spread of institutions of direct democracy
- A veto player model of direct democracy
- The role of civil society in democracies
- Cases covered: United Kingdom, United States

Required readings

Further readings:

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