PLSC 777a Seminar in Comparative Politics I

This course, an introduction to the study of comparative politics for Ph.D students, examines the purpose and methodology of comparative inquiry. Designed to introduce students to the study of comparative politics and to assist students in developing research topics and strategies, the course explores key themes -- the process of state formation, the origins of political regimes and other institutions, the politics of redistribution, and the logic of collective action and political violence-- through the critical reading and discussion of classic, contemporary, and unpublished works, supplemented with contemporary readings on social science methods.

(Note: PLSC 777b will be taught in the spring by Stathis Kalyvas and will focus on research design.)

Class Meeting: Tuesdays 1:30-3:20
Office Hours: Wednesdays 1:30 - 3:30 (sign up on office door), 8 Prospect Place, room 108.
Email address: elisabeth.wood@yale.edu.

Requirements:

1. Reviews of the reading. For eight of the weeks of the course each participant will write a short review of the week's reading. Reviews should include a concise summary of the argument and evidence, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and raise questions for discussion. Consider questions such as: What comparative strategy or design is employed? What precisely is being compared? Is there an identified set of cases thought to be comparable? Is the comparison explicit, and if so how were the cases selected? Is there an implicit comparative design? Does the work principally generate ideas, test causal hypotheses, or develop theory, or some combination of these? Does the author appear to believe the conclusions of the study are generalizable? What is the stated scope of the argument? What evidence is presented that is said to confirm or disconfirm the author’s argument? Can you suggest a further or better way to evaluate the author’s claims?

Reviews should be two (not more) single-spaced pages. Reviews should be sent as an email attachment to all class members by midnight Monday.

2. Writing assignment. A paper (10-15 pages) that further explore a theme of the course. The student may choose to write a literature review, a research paper, or a research proposal. The topic must be approved by the instructor by mid-term (October 26), and the student must submit a abstract, outline, and bibliography by November 30.

3. Class presentation. Participants will make occasional short presentations of the week’s reading
to the class. Each presentation (no more than 10 minutes) should assess the work’s strengths and weaknesses, addressing questions similar to those listed above.

4. All participants must attend the Comparative Politics Workshop (Tuesdays at 4:00).

Course Materials:
Books available for purchase at Book Haven.
Elisabeth Wood. Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador
Carles Boix. Political Parties, Growth and Equality

Books recommended for purchase:
Steven Wilkinson. Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India.
Gary King, et. al. Designing Social Inquiry. (Will be used in PLSC 777b)
Henry E. Brady and David Collier, eds., Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards.
Wayne Booth, et.al., The Craft of Research

Course Outline

September 7. Introduction: goals of the seminar

September 14. Comparative case study methods


Theda Skocpol. 1979. Introduction and conclusion of States and Social Revolutions. Cambridge.


Background reading (if needed):

Recommended:


John Gerring 2004. The art and science of the case study. For publication in Carles Boix and Susan Stokes, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*


**September 21. Class, race and state formation**


Recommended (includes reading on political regimes):


**September 28. High risk collective action**


Recommended:


**October 5. Statistical methods**


Recommended


**October 12. Class politics and the state**


Recommended:


**October 19. The politics of redistribution in democracies**


Recommended:


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October 26. Causal mechanisms


Andrew Bennett. 1999. Causal inference in case studies: from Mill’s methods to causal mechanisms. 1999 APSA mss. [replace if possible with chapters from Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, Case Studies and Theory Development, forthcoming, MIT. ]

Due: description of paper topic and initial bibliography

Recommended:


http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/bea02/

November 2. Political violence in war


Recommended:


November 9. Ethnic identities and political regimes


Recommended:


November 16. Electoral politics and ethnic political mobilization


Due: Paper abstract, outline, and bibliography

Recommended:


**November 30. New methods in comparative politics: agent-based modeling, Boolean inference, and behavioral experiments**


**Recommended:**


Due: first drafts of papers

Final papers due December 10, 10:00 am.