Models of Excellence in Comparative Research: 
Classic Works and the Scholars Who Produce Them

The premise of this seminar is that close engagement with powerful models of excellence in scholarship helps us do our best work. The seminar thus exposes students to classic works and leading scholars in comparative politics. Rather than focusing on theoretical approaches or schools of research, as do most surveys of comparative politics, this course focuses instead on the scholars who produced the field’s major works. We read a set of works that illustrate the distinct intellectual styles, approaches, and contributions of the leading scholars in comparative politics. We also read in-depth interviews with these scholars where they reflect on their intellectual formation, their works and ideas, the nuts and bolts of the research process, their relationships with colleagues, collaborators and students, and the evolution of the field. Too often students experience the fundamental works in the field as disembodied “texts.” Yet behind every work of scholarship lies a real person with passions, interests, and life experiences. The interviews open a unique and valuable window onto this human dimension of scholarship. Finally, by focusing on canonical works that have stood the test of time, the course sets in a broader perspective the current controversies in the field, such as the contributions of rational choice theory, area studies, and different kinds of methodological tools to generating knowledge about the political world.

Requirements

I. Participation (20%): This course is a seminar. Its success depends on students reading all the assigned work for each session and contributing actively to seminar discussion. This means you should come to class having thought enough about the readings to comment intelligently both on where you think they say something useful and where you think they are unhelpful. You are also expected to attend the Colloquium on Comparative Research (CCR) presentations held every other week (Wed., 5:00-6:30); these presentations are an important supplement to the course material.

In addition, each student will write eight short memos (2-4 pages) highlighting what you learned from each week’s readings. The memos should be sent to the entire class, including me, by e-mail and are due at 6 pm on Wednesday before each class.
II. Papers (80%): Each student will write two 10-20 page papers on topics to be announced by the instructor. The first paper will be due during the middle of the semester. The second paper will be due at the end of the semester.

Readings

The following nine required books should be purchased. They are available at the Brown University Bookstore.


Most of the additional reading is available on-line. During the first class meeting, we will discuss procedures for getting the readings that are not available on-line.
Overview of Class Sessions

1. Are There Classics in the Social Sciences?
2. Passion and Craft in the Social Sciences
3. Gabriel A. Almond: Structural Functionalism and Political Development
5. Barrington Moore, Jr.: The Critical Spirit and Comparative Historical Analysis
6. Samuel P. Huntington: Order and Conflict in Global Perspective
7. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan: Political Regimes, Democratic Governance and the Quest for Knowledge
10. Adam Przeworski: Capitalism, Democracy and Science
12. David Collier and Theda Skocpol: Comparative Historical Analysis and Comparative Politics
0. Introduction and Course Logistics (September 10)

1. Are There Classics in the Social Sciences? (September 17)


Recommended Readings:


- Gerardo L. Munck and Richard Snyder, “Debating the Direction of Comparative Politics: An Analysis of Leading Journals,” Comparative Political Studies, 40:1 (January 2007): 5-31. See also the commentaries by James Mahoney and Erik Wibbels, as well as the rejoinder by Munck and Snyder.

2. Passion and Craft in the Social Sciences (September 24)


3. Gabriel A. Almond: Structural Functionalism and Political Development (October 1)


5. Barrington Moore, Jr.: The Critical Spirit and Comparative Historical Analysis (October 15)


6. Samuel P. Huntington: Order and Conflict in Global Perspective (October 22)


7. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan: Political Regimes, Democratic Governance and the Quest for Knowledge (October 29)


8. Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter: Democratization and Agenda Setting Research (November 5)


10. Adam Przeworski: Capitalism, Democracy and Science (November 19)


11. Robert H. Bates and David D. Laitin: Rational Choice Theory and Comparative Politics (December 3)


12. David Collier and Theda Skocpol: Comparative Historical Analysis and Comparative Politics (December 10)


Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979, Preface and Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

