

Introduction to Comparative Politics: Nationalism, Ideology, and State Power Spring 2019

WILLIAMS COLLEGE
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OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAY 2:00-5:00
AND BY APPOINTMENT

Why did democracy in Chile, among the oldest republics in the world, collapse violently into one of the most durable military regimes of the 20th century? Could something of the sort happen in the United States? Or in the UK? How might the unthinkable, be it coups, revolutions, or the (re)turn to democratic practice by undemocratic regimes, become thinkable? What does the Iranian Revolution and the Arab Spring teach us about the promise and limitations of social movements more broadly? Are we at the end of history or is a new global consensus emerging, one that is decidedly authoritarian and ultranationalist in outlook? This course asks students to push against conventional wisdom, the reported and seemingly permanent truths of political and social life, to seek falsifiable, testable, and above all, causal explanations for the anomalies, gaps, and mysteries in the domestic politics of states and countries.

Lectures, essays, and classroom debates will return over and over again to the problem of *power*, of *violence*, and of conciliating *difference* in a world of inevitable change. What constitutes authority in a non-democratic regime? How do states and regimes reproduce themselves? Is it possible to end state violence in a democracy? We will seek out answers by taking an ambitious and comparative approach to explaining puzzles states, regimes, and governments in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East.

The substantive focus of the course will be on the local, but the methodological approach, the “science” to the “political,” will be to chase explanations for the universal. The challenge here is to produce analysis broad enough to explain social phenomena across a range of countries and historical contexts yet sensitive enough to local flavor and detail so as to be empirically valid. This balance between the deductive and the inductive, between theory and case-study, constitutes comparative politics at its best and is what most sets it apart from IR and American Politics, sister subfields broader and narrower in scope, respectively.

This term will also see us exploring the balance between “feelings and facts,” the normative and the empirical. What is the role of virtue and morality in a world in which “everything that is solid” seems to “melt into air?”

Above all, this course asks that you come to class not only to take notes and listen to lecture but to challenge and debate your classmates *and* your professor. Attendance is more than mandatory, it is vital. Take to heart John Stuart Mill’s notion that most opinions, even false ones, contain some portion of the truth, “and since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions, that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied.” No idea or concept is certain or worthwhile---what Mill describes as “a living truth”---unless it is fearlessly challenged.

Requirements:

Participation in class, plus discussion outside of class via blogs (30%)

What in class participation means: “Demonstrates good preparation, knows case or reading contents well, has thought through their implications (the ‘so what?’), brings readings to class, annotated with questions and complaints. Is curious, above all skeptical, about the material and the assumptions that undergird its various claims and propositions. Speaks, or writes, fearlessly and in good faith.”

The work of participation includes blog entries (approximately 250 words or one single-spaced page of text) assigned regularly as a directed reading and in reaction to a particular film, reading, or lecture. My intention is to encourage engagement through the written word, fostering discussion and debate in a context that may be more comfortable for some students.

The blogs will be due **at noon on Friday**, followed by a very brief “response-to-a-response” to a classmate’s posting (you can pick whomever you want). Response postings are expected to be respectful of the dignity and efforts of other students, and to provide constructive criticism or praise on the structure, style, and content of the essay. These will be due **at noon on Sunday**.

A desultory reminder: If you miss class more than twice without an excuse, or you fail to post your blog posts in a timely manner, **your final grade will not be higher than a B+**, regardless of how well you score on your essays. By the same token, not doing the blogs, or doing them late, constitutes absence from the course and will drag your grade down accordingly.

First Short Essay, 4-5 pages (20%)

Second Short Essay, 4-5 pages (20%)

Final Essay, Research and Analysis, 7-10 pages (30%)

The best way to produce good words is to slog through the bad ones, to set down a writing routine that will generate inspiration. In this vein, we will be writing consistently, for improvement as well as for assessment.

I can’t emphasize enough the excellence of the Writing Workshop at Williams. Here’s the link explaining how to schedule an appointment as well as drop-in hours:

<https://writing-programs.williams.edu/writing-workshop/>

Get to know Hale Polebaum-Freeman, the reference librarian for political science at Sawyer. Williams has an outstanding array of resources—Hale is one of them, among its best. Seriously. *Get to know Hale.*

Readings:

The following texts are available for purchase at the bookstore and will be on reserve at Sawyer. All other readings will be on Glow or distributed in class.

- Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*
- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*

- James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*
- Afshin Marahi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State (1870-1940)*
- Nancy Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy*
- Lawrence Weschler, *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers*
- Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of Shabs*
- Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*

Optional

- Patrick O’Neil & Ronald Rogowski (eds.), *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, 5th Edition

WEEK ONE The Politics of Politics

Tuesday, February 5 Stop Being So Political

What are the limits of politics? Why do we recoil from “being political?” Why do we dislike politicians so? What is power, and why do we obey? How do we explain a “political correctness” so powerful that “it shapes behavior without being mentioned or publicly acknowledge; it is simply the way things work?”

- Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 13
- Bernard Crick, Preface and Chapter One, *In Defence of Politics*

Thursday, February 7 Why and How We OBEY

- Plato, *The Republic*, Book 8, paying special attention to the decay of the republic as it moves from aristocracy to democracy, ending in tyranny
- Please watch the short and strangely entertaining clip of Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69F7GhASOdM>
- John Gaventa, Preface and Chapter 1, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*
- Vaclav Havel, the parable of the green grocer, in “Power of the Powerless”
- George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant”

Recommended

- Why take this course? Read “This Is the Best Time Ever to Study Political Science” by Tom Pepinsky to find out!
- Aristotle, *Politics*, [Book I, Parts 1-2; Book III, Parts 1-7](#)

WEEK TWO Power and the State

Are states glorified mafias? How are states different from criminal rackets? What is the relationship between state power and virtue?

Tuesday, February 12 Modern Authority and the Virtue of Rule

- Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*
- John T. Scott and Robert Zaretsky, “Why Machiavelli Still Matters”

Thursday, February 14 **The Origin(s) and Meaning of the Modern State**

- Max Weber, the classical definition of the state in “Politics as a Vocation”
- Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime”
- Vadim Volkov, “The Politics of State Formation,” pp. 155-166
- Francis Fukuyama, “The Necessity of Politics”

Screening of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*, Sunday, February 17 at 8 pm. First paper topic assigned that night. **Paper due Friday, March 1.**

WEEK THREE **The State as a Material and Emotional Project**

How is state authority secured? What is the relationship between states and their societies? Between states and war? What prevails, material forms of rule, or the immaterial? How useful is the concept of legitimacy?

Tuesday, February 19 **Questioning Weber: Alternatives to the Monopoly of the State**

- Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation”
- Joel Migdal, “The State-In-Society Approach”
- Will Wilkinson, “Authority! How the #@%\$! Does It Work?”
- Lisa Wedeen, “Acting ‘As If’: Symbolic Politics and Social Control in Syria”
- James C. Scott, “Normal Exploitation, Normal Resistance,” in *Weapons of the Weak*

Thursday, February 21 **War Made the State, and the State Made War: Tilly Revisited**

- Ian Morris, “The Slaughter Bench of History”
- Jeffrey Herbst, “War and the State in Africa”
- Ariel Ahram, “Learning to Live with Militias: Toward a Critical Policy on State Frailty”

Highly Recommended

- Robert Rotberg, “The New Nature of Nation-State Failure”
- Tony Judt, “Captive Minds”

WEEK FOUR **The Science of Social Science: Explaining Puzzles, Getting Causal**

How might the social sciences be made scientific? What is meant by causality and validity? By middle-range approach? Who prevails in the social sciences, the fox or the hedgehog? What are institutions, and how might it be both an independent and dependent variable? What is culture, and how does it differ from rational choice and institutional approaches to comparative politics? What does “semiotic practices” mean, and how does the concept help us to understand culture as a system (independent variable or cause) and a practice (dependent variable or effect)?

Tuesday, February 26 **Questioning Causality and Replicability**

- Daniel Ziblatt, “Of Course Generalize, but How? Returning to Middle-Range Theory in Comparative Politics”
- Ed Yong, “How Reliable are Psychology Studies?”

- Christie Aschwanden, “Science Isn’t Broken: It’s Just a Hell of a Lot Harder Than we Give it Credit For”
- Cara Giaimo, “Can We Blame the Mafia on Lemons?”
- Masha Gessen, “The Dying Russians”

Thursday, February 28 Cultural Approaches to Social Phenomena

- Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”
- William H. Sewell, Jr., “The Concept(s) of Culture” (focus on culture as a “system” and a “practice”)
- Ian Shapiro, “Can the Rational Choice Framework Cope With Culture?”
- Shervin Malekzadeh, “Paranoia and Perspective, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Start Loving Research in the Islamic Republic of Iran”

Recommended

- Jacqueline Stevens, “Political Scientists are Lousy Forecasters”
- Kevin A. Clarke and David M. Primo, “Overcoming ‘Physics Envy’”
- Philip Kitcher, “The Trouble with Scientism”
- Mark Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman, “Research Traditions and Theory in Comparative Politics”

WEEK FIVE Imagining Nationalism

What does Anderson mean by “the manner in which nations are imagined?” How, if at all, does Chatterjee’s critique of Anderson improve the concept of “imagined communities?” What does the former mean by “inner” and “outer” domains?

Tuesday, March 5 Benedict Anderson and His Critics

- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*
- Partha Chatterjee, “Whose Imagined Community?” in *The Nation and Its Fragments*
- Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*, pp. 3-14

Thursday, March 7

- George Orwell, “England Your England”
- Charles King, “Loser Nationalisms”
- Michael Walzer, “What Does It Mean to Be an ‘American?’”

WEEK SIX Against “Authenticity” and Primordial Hatreds

How are projects of authenticity made “real?” Where do intellectuals and state planners draw from in terms of sources for nationalist projects? How might projects of authenticity expose states to opposition from below? Why is “ethnic warfare” a myth? Are you convinced by the claim that Is political violence is a rational choice rather than an irrational impulse?

Tuesday, March 12 Negotiating Nationalism in Iran and Israel

- Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*
- Kamran Aghaie, “Islam and Nationalist Historiography,” pp. 21-28

- Yael Zerubavel, “The Fall of Masada,” in *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*

Thursday, March 14 Deconstructing State Violence and “Ethnic” Warfare

- Charles King, “The Myth of Ethnic Warfare”
- Marc Lynch, “The Entrepreneurs of Cynical Sectarianism”
- Edward Said, “Impossible Histories: Why the Many Islams Cannot be Simplified”
- Kwame Anthony Appiah, “There is No Such Thing as Western Civilization”
- Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History”

Spring Break, March 16-31

Please read Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of Shabs*, and the introduction/conclusion of Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*. For the latter, become an expert on at least one “failed” explanation for the Iranian Revolution.

Watch the remarkable documentary *Please Vote for Me* with your family!

WEEK SEVEN What It Means to Be Modern

What does it mean to be modern (or pre-modern)? What is the relationship between visibility, legibility, and orders of rule in modern states? What is the dilemma of modernization?

Tuesday, April 2 Negotiating Modernity

- John Grey, “Isis and What it Means to be Modern”
- Daniel Lerner, “The Grocer and the Chief: A Parable”
- Monica Ringer, “Theory of Modernization” and “Crisis and Translation,” in *Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform in Qajar Iran*
- Alexis de Tocqueville, “Concerning the Philosophical Approach of the Americans,” “Concerning the Principal Source of Beliefs Among Democratic Peoples,” and “How Religion in the United States Makes Use of Democratic Instincts,” in *Democracy in America*

Thursday, April 4 The Legible City

- James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*
- Burma's Bizarre Capital: A Super-Sized Slice of Post-Apocalypse Suburbia

Strongly Recommended

- Michael Walzer, “Moral Minimalism,” in *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*

Screening of the film *Goodbye, Lenin!*, Sunday, April 7 at 8 pm.

WEEK EIGHT

Democracy Defined and Applied

How might we define democracy, minimally? Which way do the causal arrows point in terms of institutional versus cultural designs of democratic regimes? How and why did democracy become the privileged regime type? Does democracy in fact represent a brief interregnum in human affairs, and if so, what form(s) of government might replace it?

Tuesday, April 9

The Meaning and Fragility of Democracy

- Alexis de Tocqueville, “Author’s Introduction,” in *Democracy in America*
- Abraham Lincoln, “The Gettysburg Address” and “Second Inaugural Address”
- Dîrdalâ, Lucian-Dumitru, “Robert Dahl and the Road to Polyarchy”
- Fareed Zakaria, “A Brief History of Human Liberty”

Thursday, April 11

Democracy as an Institutional and Cultural Project

- Alexis de Tocqueville, “On the Use Which the Americans Make of Associations in Civil Life” and “How the Americans Combat Individualism by the Doctrine of Self-Interest Properly Understood,” from *Democracy in America*
- Sheri Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of Weimar Republic”
- Juan Linz, “The Perils of Presidentialism”
- James Madison, “The Federalist Nos. 47 and 48”
- Alexander Hamilton, “The Federalist No. 70”

Strongly Recommended

- Yascha Mounk, “America Is Not a Democracy”
- Timothy Shenk, “Is Democracy Really Dying?”

WEEK NINE

Democracy in Service to Authoritarianism...and Vice Versa

A question and a puzzle for all non-democratic regimes: Why bother with democracy? Who is to blame for democracy’s demise? Elites or the ordinary?

Tuesday, April 16

- Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, Introduction, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*
- Shervin Malekzadeh, “How Iran’s Elections Marginalized Radicals and Consolidated a New Political Center”
- Malekzadeh, “How Elections are Secularizing Iranian Politics”

Thursday, April 18

Why Democracies End

- Nancy Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy*

Second paper topic assigned April 18. Due on **Friday, April 26**.

WEEK TEN

When Democracies Fail: The Cases of Chile and Hungary

Was the demise of democracy in 1973 due to cultural or institutional flaws? What has changed since the end of the Cold War in terms of the prospects for democratization, in light of the rising tide of authoritarianism in Europe and possibly the Americas? Was Chile 1973, is Hungary today, the exception or the future foretold?

Tuesday, April 23

Chile: An Enduring Puzzle

- Arturo Valenzuela, “The Move to a Socialist Center and the Erosion of the Political Center” and “The Chilean Military, the 1973 Election, and Institutional Breakdown,” in *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile*
- Watch the documentary, *La Batalla de Chile (The Battle of Chile)*
- Christopher Hitchens, “The Case Against Henry Kissinger”
- Roberto Ampuero, "Thirty Years On, a Chilean Laments We All Killed Allende"
- Shervin Malekzadeh, “Iranians Must Take Responsibility for Their Role in the 1953 Coup”

Thursday, April 25

Illiberalism in Hungary and the New Authoritarianism

- Tom Pepinsky, “Life in Authoritarian States is Mostly Boring and Tolerable”
- Ivan Krastev, “Paradoxes of the New Authoritarianism”
- Cas Mudde, “Don’t Blame Democracy’s Decline on Ignorance. The Problems Lies Deeper”
- Patrick Kingsley, “How Viktor Orbán Bends Hungarian Society to His Will”
- Will Hutton, “Beware the Illiberal Alliance of Poland and Hungary, A Grave Threat to the EU”
- John Domokos, “What I Learned about Viktor Orbán on a Road Trip with My Dad”

Screening of the film *No*, Sunday, April 28 at 8 pm

WEEK ELEVEN

Transitions (Back) to Democracy: Coming to Terms with a Violent Past

What is the balance between justice versus governance in post-conflict settings? What are the effects of the persistence of impunity in Rwanda, Uruguay, Brazil, the United States? Is it possible to rebuild democracy by forgetting? By remembering a lie? How do we know that we’re not remembering the wrong things?

Tuesday, April 30

Impunidad y Olvido: Brazil and Uruguay

- Lawrence Weschler, *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers*

Thursday, May 2

Rwanda and the Civil Rights Movement

- Phil Clark, “How Rwanda Remembers Its Genocide: When Remembrance is the Official Policy”
- Philip Gourevitch, “After the Genocide”

- Please visit the haunting project, “Portraits of Reconciliation,”
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/04/06/magazine/06-pieter-hugo-rwanda-portraits.html>
- Holland Cotter, “A Memorial to the Lingering Horror of Lynching”
- Karen L. Cox, “The Confederacy’s ‘Living Monuments’”

WEEK TWELVE A World Beyond Ideology and the State?

What exactly makes nonviolent conflict strategic? Why does it work, if at all? Are we in an age of the non-movement, of “refolution” and a politics free from the state?

What are the politics of place? How shall we gather?

Tuesday, May 7 Nonviolence, Nonmovements, and the Unthinkable

- Maria J. Stephen and Erica Chenoweth, “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict” (or even better, watch this clip: <https://goo.gl/XEGszr>)
- Timothy Garton Ash, “Velvet Revolution: The Prospects”

Thursday, May 9 Final Lecture: How Shall We Gather?

- Flannery O’Connor, “Everything That Rises Must Converge”
- Timothy Snyder, “The Banality of Good”

Final Research Project, due Wednesday, May 15