1. Course Description

This seminar aims to introduce students to some of the central topics, concepts, and questions in the field of comparative politics, with an emphasis on topics outside the scope of “developed” or “advanced” democracies. The course is designed to familiarize students with the field as it stands today, and will focus on relatively recent contributions. This course does not pretend to cover the most important, “seminal” or “foundational” articles and books in the field. We will focus on the “frontier” of research being done on the politics of developing countries by political scientists, economists and scholars from other disciplines. The most important goal of the course is to stimulate students curiosity, to give a broad overview of the range of methodological approaches that can be used to tackle challenging questions, and to motivate students to identify areas where there is potential for making a contribution to the discipline. However, students specially interested in comparative politics should become familiar with the more classical, foundational articles and books throughout their Ph.D. program.

We will not focus on any specific region of the world, and the course will not be structured around area studies. Rather, throughout the semester, we will analyze substantive topics that are central to the current debates in comparative politics, including: the importance and origins of institutions, democratic and authoritarian regimes, the role of the state, political representation and accountability, violence, social and political change, survival of democracy.

2. Course Requirements

Class participation: This course is organized as a weekly seminar. The class is designed to be highly participatory. It is essential that students come to class fully prepared to discuss the required weekly readings.

Discussion memos: On the day before the seminar, students must submit one page memo with discussion questions on that week’s readings. The memo must be concise and straight to the point: list the set of questions that follow from your reading of a particular paper. The memo is not an essay and should be written sharply, preferably using bullet-points. The reading memos are to be submitted
through NYU classes by 4PM on Tuesday prior to the class. We will circulate the comments among the class participants by 6PM on Tuesday so that we can all prepare for the discussion.

**Paper reviews:** The seminars will be structured around the in-depth discussion of two/three papers per session. Students will be assigned to write referee reports on the papers marked with two asterisks. In addition to briefly summarizing the paper (in one paragraph), the review should evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the paper, critically assess its overall contribution, and propose how the paper could be made better and outline further questions that follow from that paper. We will then have an open discussion and discuss potential avenues for future research. The number of discussions per student during the semester will depend on the number of students enrolled. At the start of the semester, we will randomly assign students to review papers, but you will have a week to voluntarily redistribute the papers among yourselves.

**Research paper:** Students must also submit a research proposal on April 26th. This must be a concrete proposal on a research paper. It should include a motivation and contribution to the literature, data sources and empirical strategy. These research proposals will be circulated among all class participants. During the last 2 sessions of the semester, we will all discuss each proposal and provide feedback.

The distribution of grading is as follows:

- In-class participation: 25%
- Discussion memos: 25%
- Referee reports: 25%
- Research proposal 25%.

### 3. Readings

All readings marked with a “(*)” or a “(**)” are required and you should read them carefully. Your weekly one-page memo will be based on these readings. Each reading marked with a “(**)” will be reviewed by one student. Students are encouraged to bring particular readings of interest to our attention, and to make suggestions of any kind about the syllabus. We may adjust the syllabus and the required readings throughout the semester.

**Week 1: Feb 3 - Theory and Method in Comparative Politics**

  

Additional Readings:


Week 2: February 10 - Institutions, History, and Development


Additional Readings:


**Week 3: February 17 - Origins of Democracy**


- Ben W Ansell and David J Samuels. *Inequality and Democratization: An Elite-Competition Approach*. Cambridge University Press, 2014 (Chapters 1 and 2) (*)


**Additional Readings:**


Week 4: February 24 – Autocracy


Additional Readings:


Week 5: March 3 – Hybrid Regimes


Additional readings:


- Michael K Miller. Elections, information, and policy responsiveness in autocratic regimes. *Comparative Political Studies*, 48(6), 2015


**Week 6: March 10 – The State**


**Additional Readings:**


- Jeffrey Herbst. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton University Press, 2000 (Read Chapters 1, 2 and 5)


**Week 7: March 17 – Bureaucracy**


Additional readings:


Week 8: March 24 - Representation and Accountability


Additional Readings:


Week 9: March 31 - Violence


Additional Readings:


- Lauren E. Young. The psychology of state repression: Fear and dissent decisions in zimbabwe. *American Political Science Review*, 113(1):140–155, 2019

Week 10: April 7 – Information


Additional Readings:


William R Hobbs and Margaret E Roberts. How sudden censorship can increase access to information. *American Political Science Review*, 112(3):621–636, 2018

Week 11: April 14 – Social and Political Change


Additional readings:


### Week 12: April 28 - Vulnerabilities of Democracy


#### Additional readings:


- Matt Singer. Delegating away democracy: How good representation and policy successes can undermine democratic legitimacy. *Comparative Political Studies*, forthcoming


### Week 13: April 30 - Discussion of Research Proposals I

### Week 14: May 7 - Discussion of Research Proposals II