

PS114 Introduction to Comparative Politics: Nation-States and Democracy

Seminar Leader: Dave Braneck

Course Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00-10:30

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

Why and how do political systems differ from one another? Which processes have led to the formation of distinct political regimes? And how do these historical variations affect politics today? In addressing these questions in a wide set of contexts, this course provides an introduction to key theoretical approaches and concepts in the comparative study of politics. The focus will be on core topics in political development such as state and nation-building, the role of the state in the economy, its relationship to civil society and processes of democratization. We will also look at different types of political regimes, electoral and party systems—and the ways in which they affect the structure, functioning, and social role of political institutions. We explore these topics from a comparative perspective in combining theoretical texts with case studies. By the end of the course, students will be able to understand important topics in domestic politics, grasp the diversity of political systems and regimes, and analyze current political developments.

Requirements

Reading Material

- Class Reader (available at library)
- Snyder, Timothy. 2017. *On Tyranny*. Penguin (978-1847924889; you must have your own copy of the edition with this ISBN!)

Class Preparation

Please come to class fully prepared. This means thoroughly reading and engaging with the assigned texts/content. Take notes and address any questions raised in class pertaining to the texts. Do your best to prepare questions of your own about the strength and validity of the author's argument, how they chose to make their case, and how their argumentation fits with what else we've read and discussed in class.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. There will be an attendance sheet for every session. Each absence beyond two (that is more than two absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) will lead to the subtraction of 1 point from the overall final grade. Late arrival counts as an absence. If you miss more than 30 percent of the class you cannot pass.

The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2021: Please contact me directly if you need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. Additionally, if you are feeling ill please refrain from attending class. Remote participation and asynchronous learning options will be offered as needed.

Assignments and Grading Breakdown

Classroom Participation: 30%

This course is built on thoughtful and engaged discussion from all participants. This includes coming prepared to class and actively participating in group and class-wide discussions and in-class projects. Students should feel comfortable voicing their views, but please be mindful and respectful of other course members while doing so. A respectful decorum is necessary, and if it feels like this is lacking at any point please do not hesitate to discuss this with the seminar leader.

Case Study Presentation: 35%

Each individual student will present their case study (which also is the focus of the final paper) and line of argumentation in a professional presentation during weeks 11-13.

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- The Q&A period for each presenter will be 10-15 minutes. He or she should be prepared to answer questions relating to their project's theme.

Written assignments (All assignments must be submitted in print, please use Times New Roman pt 12, 1.5-spaced):

Abstract (500 words): 5%

Consider this to be your elevator pitch—or your book cover blurb. What is your case and the main puzzle? What is the main question you seek to address in your research? What are the hypotheses (and potential lines of argumentation)?

Extended Introduction (1,000 words): 15%

The introduction frames the puzzle and research question in more depth. It embeds them in existing literature and presents the (tentative) main line of argumentation in broad strokes. What have other authors argued about your theme? What are your hypotheses? Which material will you look at to make your case? Make sure to use Chicago citation style for your bibliography and in-text citation!

Final Essay (3,500 words): 30%

The final essay will examine and analyze your selected case study. It will consist of an introduction, main body (that develops and substantiates your argument), and a conclusion (as well as a bibliography). Use paragraphs and subheadings to clearly structure your text.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Schedule

Section 1: Introduction

Class 1: Preliminaries (Tues 31.08)

- Calhoun, *Dictionary of Social Scientists*

Class 2: Finding a Puzzle (Thurs 02.09)

- Kakutani, *The End of Normal*
- Ziblatt and Levitsky, *How Democracies Die*

Section 2: Actors, Institutions, Processes

- DEMOCRACIES IN COMPARISON -

Class 3: Democracy in Theory (Tues 07.09)

- Dahl, *On Democracy*

Class 4: Parties and Electoral Systems (Thurs 9.09)

- Gallagher, *Elections and referendums*
- Katz, *Political Parties*

Class 5: Separation of Powers (Tues 14.09)

- Newton & Van Deth, *Constitutions/Presidential and Parliamentary Govt.*

Class 6: Federalism and Regionalization (Thurs 16.09)

- Keating, *Re-Thinking Sovereignty*
- Graefe, *Pol. Econ. Of Min. Nationalism*

Class 7: Authoritarian Rule (Tues 21.09)

- Brooker, *Authoritarian Regimes*

Class 8: Framing a Question (Thurs 23.09) ***ABSTRACT DUE!***

- Peer review session

- NATIONS AND NATIONALISM: DEFINING THE DEMOS –

Class 9: Civic vs. Ethnic Nationalism (Tues 28.09)

- Renan, *What is a Nation?*
- Smith, *The Origin of Nations*

Class 10: Nationalism by Necessity (Thurs 30.09)

- Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*

Class 11: Identity as Political Instrument (Tues 05.10)

- Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*
- Watch [Aleida Assmann on Memory](#)

Class 12: The Role of Gender and Race (Thurs 07.10)

- McClintock, *No longer in a future haven*
- Watch [Benedict Anderson on Nationalism](#)

Class 13: Why Nations (Still) Matter (Tues 12.10)

- Calhoun, *Nations Matter*

Class 14: Comparing Cases (Thurs 14.10)

- Ryan, *The Comparative Method*

No class on 19.10 and 21.10 due to Fall Break (18-22.10)

- DEMOCRATIZATION AND BACKSLIDING -

Class 15: Populism (Tues 26.10)

- Müller, *What is Populism*

Class 16: Party Polarization (Thurs 28.10)

- Mickey et al., *Safe for Democracy?*
- Moun, *The Undemocratic Dilemma*

Class 17: The Media: Epistemic Crisis (Tues 02.11)

- Benkler et al. *Network Propaganda*

Class 18: The End of Liberalism (Thurs 04.11) *****ESSAY INTRODUCTION DUE!*****

- Weinmann and Vormann, *Politics of Fear*

- COLLOQUIUM WEEKS: CASE PRESENTATIONS

Class 19 – 24: Case presentations (9-25.11)

Section 3: Outlook

Class 25: On Tyranny (30.11)

- Snyder, *On Tyranny*, lessons 1-10

Class 26: On Tyranny cont. (02.12)

- Snyder, *On Tyranny*, lessons 11-20

Class 27: Democracy: It was nice while it lasted? (07.12)

- Levitsky and Ziblatt, *The Biggest Threat to Democracy Is the GOP Stealing the Next Election*
- Rana, *It Would Be Great if the United States Were Actually a Democracy*

Class 28: Final discussion (09.12) *****FINAL ESSAY DUE!*****