

Seminar on Comparative Politics

Instructor : Htet Thiha Zaw (htzaw@umich.edu)

Weekly Meetings : Tue, Fri 7-8:30 a.m. (Yangon Time)

Office Hours : Upon request

Zoom Links : [here](#) (Meeting ID: 943 5582 2908, Passcode: 753851)

Course Description

This seminar surveys major topics in comparative politics, addressing topics of special importance in the subfield, although far from exhaustively. Each week participants discuss a subset of the pertinent scholarly literature, often focusing on a major theoretical controversy. We address key methodological issues in the context of these substantive and theoretical works.

Learning Goals

After taking this course, you can expect to be:

- Be familiar with research in comparative politics, including seminal studies as well as the frontiers of research.
- Read critically and evaluate research in comparative politics and social science research in general.
- Understand the basics of producing quality political science research with effective arguments and supporting evidence.

On Zoom

All sections and office hours are online via Zoom. All sections will be automatically recorded and later shared on Canvas. Passwords are required for all meetings. Please do not share the meeting links and passwords with those outside the class. Please check your canvas announcements for Zoom links to sections and office hours.

Your audio is automatically muted upon entering. If you want to speak up, please use the “Raise Hand” feature to let me know (Instructions on how to use the feature [here](#)). You can also use the chatbox to share your questions and comments. Please do not record or distribute any class activity, including the synchronous online meetings and the pre-recorded lectures, without explicit written permission from me, except as necessary as part of the approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student’s own private use.

Office Hours and Email Policy

The best way to get in touch with me is via office hours. My office hours are on Fridays 12–2 pm EST via Zoom. If you cannot make it to office hours due to a class conflict or another unavoidable circumstance, please contact me for an appointment. I will do my best to accommodate.

If you cannot come to office hours, email is the best way to contact me with quick questions. I will do my best to respond to your emails within 24 hours, from 9 am - 5 pm EST Monday through Friday. If I have not responded within 24 hours, please send a follow-up. An email sent to me at 5:01 pm EST on Friday can expect a response by 5:00 pm EST Monday. All emails should begin the subject line with [POLSCI389].

Grading

Grading will be distributed as follows:

- Attendance and Participation (20 percent)
- Short Responses (20 percent)
- Final Research Proposal (55 percent)
 - Research question (5 percent)
 - Literature Review (10 percent)
 - 5-minute Presentation (10 percent)
 - Proposal Draft (10 percent)
 - Final Proposal (20 percent)

Attendance and Participation (20 percent)

Attendance in the section is mandatory because it gives our class a chance to discuss the readings and share our thoughts from diverse viewpoints. *You have three unexcused absences.* You are responsible for any material you miss due to an unexcused absence; office hours do not replace sections missed due to unexcused absences. A note from a doctor or some other person of authority (documenting a family emergency or medical attention for an illness) is suggested (but not required) for an excused absence. Students with family responsibilities, athletic commitments, or religious conflicts should discuss those with me as soon as possible. Any further absences will halve your section grade.

There will be one quiz during each section, based on the required readings for the day. Grading is on a participation basis (no/full credit), and the questions cover basic facts about the arguments, data, and findings. These quizzes will also serve as a jumping-off point for discussion.

While video presence is encouraged for an engaging discussion, it is not required. We will also adjust this policy after a few sections if needed. If you are unavailable to attend sections for reasons other than above (or if you plan to take the course asynchronously), please contact me in advance so that we can try to make other arrangements.

Short Responses

To further promote comprehension of the main course concepts, students will write two short responses based on core readings of their choice of a week throughout the semester. The short responses should address the following points:

- Describe the reading's main claim. (1-2 sentences)
- Summarize the reading's argument in support of this claim. (1-2 paragraphs)
- Provide one example that supports this claim. (1 paragraph)
- Describe one potential criticism of this claim. (1 paragraph)
- List one question or comment that you had about the reading. (1-2 sentences)

I will provide an example of what I expect for the short responses at the start of the course. The short responses will be due by 5pm ET on the day before the class. The short responses will be graded on a 0-1 point scale, where 1 indicates that the short response was done in a satisfactory manner and submitted on time, and 0 indicates that it was not submitted on time.

Final Research Proposal (55 percent)

Each student will write a research proposal related to historical political economy (10-15 pages long, double-spaced, 12-pt font, and 1-inch margins). I strongly encourage you to work on the topic that you find to be of the most interest. This Research Proposal may form the basis of a research paper, an honors thesis, or even a bigger project if you decide to pursue a career in research.

Ideally, you will identify a puzzle that derives from one or more of the course readings. If you want, then you may co-author your paper with up to two other classmates. Each co-author will receive the same grade for each assignment under this project.

The paper will be completed in five parts. The first three parts will be a draft of the paper's front end, including the motivation and/or puzzle, a review of the relevant literature, your argument, and a description of your proposed data and empirical strategy. The last two parts will strengthen the ideas and eventually produce the final draft.

The components for this project are as follows. All components are due by 11:59 p.m. Yangon Time. Unless otherwise specified, all assignments should be formatted as a double-spaced, 12-pt font document with 1-inch margins.

Research Question (5 percent, due September 17, 2021): Based on our discussion about writing a research question on July 8, write two research questions that are of interest to you (maximum 150 words each for each stating the research question and elaborating the relevant ideas). In the following week, we will chat over an office hour appointment, and I will share my thoughts about which one sounds more promising and feasible for the final Proposal. Here we will also discuss the readings that will be useful for your next assignment (four minimum).

Literature Review (10 percent, due October 1, 2021): Here, you will write a 2–3-page literature review, where you detail the existing research and findings that are relevant to your question and explain the new knowledge or insights you can gain from the project. You will use this assignment as a basis for the presentation assignment.

5-minute Presentation (10 percent, due during class on October 15, 2021): This is the presentation version of the previous assignment, with more explanation on your plan. On either of the days, you will give a 5-minute presentation, followed by 5 minutes of a Q&A session. You should have a

maximum of three slides: the first detailing the research question and the project, the second providing a brief overview of the literature, and the third describing the next steps that you plan to take (data, methodology, etc.) You do not need to take all of these steps in the final project. I will explain more about this in due course.

Proposal Draft (10 percent, due November 5, 2021): The proposal draft is the version you have of the final Proposal so far. This will give me an opportunity to have a look at it and provide final feedback. In this week, we will chat over an office hour appointment, where we will go over the draft and discuss the improvements we can make at this point.

Final Proposal (20 percent, due November 26, 2021): Final Proposal is due on November 26.

List of Topics

Identity Politics I	(August 9 – August 13)
Identity Politics II	(August 16 – August 20)
Political Institutions I	(August 23 – August 27)
Political Institutions II	(August 30 – September 3)
Origins of the State and State Building I	(September 6 – September 10)
Origins of the State and State Building II	(September 13 – September 17)
Long-run Development	(September 20 – September 24)
Colonialism and Development	(September 27 – October 1)
Democracy and Its Struggles I	(October 4 – October 8)
Democracy and Its Struggles II	(October 11 – October 15)
Parties, Elections, and Electoral Systems I	(October 18 – October 22)
Parties, Elections, and Electoral Systems II	(October 25 – October 29)
Non-Democratic Systems I	(November 1 – November 5)
Non-Democratic Systems II	(November 8 – November 12)
Violence and Mobilization	(November 15 – November 19)
Political Behavior	(November 22 – November 26)

Reading List

Recommended Book

Clark, W. R., Golder, M., & Golder, S. N. (2017). *Principles of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press. Below is the reading list (2 readings per week). All are required readings. (Note: This list is adapted from the University of Michigan's Seminar in Comparative Politics course.

Identity Politics I (August 9 – August 13)

Horowitz, D. (1985). *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 3–89.

Laitin, D. D. (1985). Hegemony and religious conflict: British imperial control and political cleavages in Yorubaland. In Evans, P. B., Rueschemeyer, D., and Skocpol, T., editors, *Bringing the State Back In*. Cambridge University Press, New York.

Identity Politics II (August 16 – August 20)

Posner, D. N. (2004). The political salience of cultural difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia and adversaries in Malawi. *American Political Science Review*, 98(4):529–46.

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso Editions, London, pp. 1–65.

Political Institutions I (August 23 – August 27)

Hall, P. A. and Taylor, R. C. R. (1996). Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms. *Political Studies*, 44:952–73.

Cox, G.W. and McCubbins, M. D. (2001). The institutional determinants of policy outcomes. In Haggard, S. and McCubbins, M. D., editors, *Presidents, Parliaments, and Policy*. Cambridge University Press.

Political Institutions II (August 30 – September 3)

Greif, A. and Laitin, D. D. (2004). A theory of endogenous institutional change. *American Political Science Review*, 98(4):633–652.

Rodden, J. (2009). Back to the future: Endogenous institutions and comparative politics. In Lichbach, M. I. and Zuckerman, A. S., editors, *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, pages 333–357. Cambridge University Press.

Origins of the State and State Building I (September 6 – September 10)

Tilly, C. (1990). *Coercion, Capital, and European States*. Blackwell, Chapter 1.

Spruyt, H. (2009). War, trade, and state formation. In Boix, C. and Stokes, S. C., editors, *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford University Press.

Origins of the State and State Building II (September 13 – September 17)

Thies, C. G. (2005). War, Rivalry, and State Building in Latin America. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(3):451–65.

North, D. C. and Weingast, B. R. (1989). Constitutions and commitment: The evolution of institutional governing public choice in seventeenth-century England. *The Journal of Economic History*, 49(4):803–832.

Long-run Development (September 20 – September 24)

Lange, M., Mahoney, J., and vom Hau, M. (2006). Colonialism and development: A comparative analysis of Spanish and British colonies. *American Journal of Sociology*, 111(5):1412–62.

Dincecco, M. (2015). The rise of effective states in Europe. *The Journal of Economic History*, 75:901–918.

Colonialism and Development (September 27 – October 1)

Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., and Robinson, J. A. (2001). The colonial origins of comparative development: An empirical investigation. *American Economic Review*, 91(5):1369–1401.

Banerjee, A. V. and Iyer, L. (2005). History, institutions and economic performance: The legacy of colonial land tenure systems in India. *American Economic Review*, 95(4):1190–213.

Democracy and Its Struggles I (October 4 – October 8)

Moore, Barrington, J. (1966). *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Beacon Press, Boston, pp. 413–83.

Boix, C. and Stokes, S. C. (2003). Endogenous democratization. *World Politics*, 55(4):517–49.

Democracy and Its Struggles II (October 11 – October 15)

Acemoglu, D. and Robinson, J. A. (2005). *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 2.

Ansell, B. and Samuels, D. (2014). *Inequality and Democratization*. Cambridge University Press, New York, read chapter 4 and skim Chapters 5 and 6.

Parties, Elections, and Electoral Systems I (October 18 – October 22)

Duverger, M. (1954). *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity*. Wiley and Sons.

Clark, W. R. and Golder, M. (2006). Rehabilitating Duverger's theory: Testing the mechanical and strategic modifying effects of electoral laws. *Comparative Political Studies*, 39:679–708.

Parties, Elections, and Electoral Systems II (October 25 – October 29)

Lipset, S. M. and Rokkan, S. (1990). Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments. In Mair, P., editor, *The West European Party System*, pages 99–138. Oxford University Press.

Cox, G. W. (1997). *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*. Cambridge University Press, chapter 2.

Non-Democratic Systems I (November 1 – November 5)

Gehlbach, S., Sonin, K., and Svobik, M. (2016). Formal models of nondemocratic politics. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 19:565–84.

Gallagher, M. E. and Hanson, J. K. (2015). Power tool or dull blade? selectorate theory for autocracies. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18:367–85.

Non-Democratic Systems II (November 8 – November 12)

Slater, D. (2010). *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*. Cambridge University Press, chapter 6. ([Library link](#)).

Svobik, M. W. (2012). *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge University Press, New York, chapters 2 and 4.

Violence and Mobilization (November 15 – November 19)

Wilkinson, S. (2004). *Votes and violence: electoral competition and ethnic riots in India*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Chapters 2 and 5. ([Library link](#).)

Varshney, A. (2001). Ethnic conflict and civil society: India and beyond. *World Politics*, 53(3):362–98.

Political Behavior (November 22 – November 26)

Seligson, M. A. (2002a). The impact of corruption on regime legitimacy: A comparative study of four Latin American countries. *Journal of Politics*, 64(2):408–433.

Kasara, K. and Suryanarayan, P. (2015). When do the rich vote less than the poor and why? explaining turnout inequality across the world. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(3):613–27.