PSC 622: Comparative Political Behavior
Fall 2008
Tuesday 9:00-11:50 AM
502 Park Hall

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Office hours: Wednesday 10:00 – Noon, and by appointment

Course Description

The course is a graduate-level introduction to the subfield of comparative mass political behavior, which studies the role played by the mass public in politics and elections. The seminar discussions will focus on research questions relating to cross-national differences and similarities in public opinion formation, political culture and values, voting behavior, and other forms of political participation. Much of the theory of mass political behavior comes directly from or builds upon theoretical arguments in the American politics literature. Consequently, research on comparative political behavior investigates whether generalized theories of mass behavior hold across political systems, which often involves the development of theoretical explanations for cross-national heterogeneity in causal relationships associated with political institutions and context.

The analytical approach adopted in the course is strictly comparative. The seminar discussions will review research whose fundamental goal is increasing our knowledge of mass political behavior by comparing countries and their political systems. In turn, idiosyncratic factors that are specific to a particular case or country are treated as “noise” that confounds the investigation of general causal relationships rather than as novel sufficient conditions warranting special attention. Many of the course readings consider multiple countries in their empirical analyses and even the single-country studies are primarily concerned with the broader implications for mass political behavior across comparable countries rather than any country-specific result. Most of the research examines democracies (since the mass public plays a far more significant role in these systems) but the countries compared range from advanced industrial democracies in Western Europe to nascent democracies with developing economies in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

In the course schedule below, the required readings for each week are listed under the subject heading of the seminar discussion. Additional “background” readings are also listed for students who have not taken the pro-seminar in comparative politics (PSC 503) and want to review some of the seminal research to which the required readings respond. Students are expected to come to class each week prepared to discuss the required readings. You should complete these readings prior to each class session, taking notes on the central theoretical arguments and empirical findings in each piece, recording your critical comments, and reflecting on the scholarly connections among the readings. The class meetings will be run as seminars where the students are expected to actively participate in the discussion.

Attendance and participation in class discussions will count for 20% of the course grade. The class discussions will be built around talking points submitted by students on the day prior to each class meeting. The talking points will count for 30% of the course grade. Students are also responsible for writing a research paper due at the end of the semester. The research paper will develop a theoretical argument relating to a topic covered in the course and then evaluate that argument with empirical evidence. My expectations regarding the sophistication of the empirical analysis will be consistent with the student’s level of methods training. First-year students can employ small-N research designs and
bivariate statistics, while more advanced students will be expected to estimate multivariate statistical models. About a month before the paper is due, students will prepare a research design and present it to the class. The research paper and research design presentations count for 40% and 10% of the course grade, respectively. Further information about the research paper will be provided later in the semester.

**Weekly talking points:** After the first week, each student will be required to submit three “talking points” on each week’s readings. These are due by email (send them to hpalmer@buffalo.edu) by Monday at 10:00 AM prior to the class session in which the readings will be discussed. These talking points should be the three most interesting questions or arguments identified by the student in the week's readings. They should be written in the form of a short paragraph summarizing the question or argument. No more or less than three distinct talking points should be submitted each week. Each talking point should refer to one or more specific sections of the weekly readings (with appropriate page references). Each talking point should refer to a different chapter or article from the weekly readings. Talking points in excess of 160 words will not be accepted. Talking points that arrive late will also not be accepted.

**Required Text:**

**Recommended Text:**

These texts should be available for purchase from on-line retailers.

You should be able to download the other required readings using the UB Library’s Electronic Journals archive. If you cannot find a reading, let me know ASAP.

**Course Schedule and Readings**

**August 28: Introduction**
No required reading.

*Background reading:*

**September 2: Nature of Mass Opinion**


*Background reading:*

**September 9: Culture, Values, and Tolerance**


*Background reading:*

**September 16: Sociological Models of Voting**


Background reading:

September 23: Parties, Candidates, and Issues

Background reading:

September 30: Rosh Hashanah
NO CLASS.
October 7: Government Performance and Economic Voting

Background reading:

October 14: Strategic Voting
Background reading:

October 21: Support for Democracy

Background reading:

October 28: Support for European Union
November 4: Voter Turnout

Background reading:

November 11: Research Design Presentations

November 18: Social Capital and Non-Electoral Participation

Background reading:

**November 25: Work on research papers**

NO CLASS (enjoy Thanksgiving).

**December 2: Political Protest**


*Background reading:*


**December 10: Research papers are due by 4:00 PM**