

Fri. Sept. 4 – Intro. to Comparative Political System: Discussion Notes

ICP, ch. 1: Introducing Comparative Politics

- Three Critical Junctures: 1989, 2001, 2008
 - 1989: the end of a bipolar world and the emergence of a unipolar world
 - 2001: the ‘global war on terror’ (GWOT)
 - 2008: the financial crisis (and food/resource crises)
- What is the effect of globalization on national sovereignty?
- Fields of political science
 - Political theory
 - International relations
 - American politics (in the US)
 - Comparative politics
- What is the nation-state?
 - How do states claim legitimacy?
- How scientific can political ‘science’ really be?
 - In natural science, variables can be isolated and experiments repeated
 - Should comparativists seek universal laws, specific patterns, configurations of factors, or the “thick descriptions” of political culture?
 - What is rational choice theory, and why is it so popular?
 - Why have comparativists settled on ‘middle-level theory’?
- What are ‘failed states’, and why are they studied?
- What are some policies or realities that help or hinder economic growth, and how should growth be defined?
 - What is Keynesianism? Neoliberalism?
- Why does purchasing power parity (PPP) matter when calculating GDP per capita?
- What are some different possible paths toward democracy?
 - What is a transitional democracy?
 - What is a consolidated democracy?
 - The authors assert that ‘a careful study finds that, once a country adopts a democratic regime, the odds are that it will endure’? Can you think of any counterexamples?
- Do you agree that various social identities other than class are growing in importance?
- Typologies of states
 - Most different case analysis
 - The First/Second/Third World typology
- What are some features that distinguish authoritarian regimes from democracies?

Farrell, ch. 1: The Study of Electoral Systems

- (3) What is the difference between electoral *laws* and electoral *systems*?
- How should we classify electoral systems?
 - (4) By outputs? (i.e., by proportional vs. non-proportional systems)
 - § What are the virtues of these two systems? Do you have a preference?
 - (6) By their component parts?
 - § District magnitude
 - § Electoral formula
 - Categorical versus ordinal ballots
 - § Ballot structure
 - Plurality (also called ‘single member plurality’, or ‘first past the post’)
 - Majority
 - Proportional
 - Mixed systems
- Defining Representation
 - Microcosm conception
 - Principal-agent conception
- Types of Distortions
 - In non-proportional systems
 - § Malapportionment
 - § Gerrymandering
 - In proportional systems
 - § Minimum electoral thresholds
 - § Party laws

Introducing Britain

- 1688 – Glorious revolution establishes power of parliament
 - Last successful coup or revolution in British History
- 1750 – Industrial Revolution begins in Britain
 - Typical worker transforms from smallholder peasant to wage laborer
 - Peasant enclosure policy forces peasants off land
- Post-1945 – Keynesian model of postwar reconstruction
 - Nationalization of key industries, full employment, expansion of social services, increased output, price stability
- 1979 – Thatcherite Policy
 - Replaces Keynesianism with passive monetary/fiscal policy, privatization, and cuts in government spending
- 1997 – New Labor’s Third Way (Tony Blair)
 - Neoliberal economics but more attuned to minority interests