INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE POLITICS

COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS
Department of Political Science

Political Science 102-03
Spring 2010
TTh 12:30–1:45
Office Hours: T 3–4
Th 9:30-11, 3:30-4:30

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It is often said that democracy is the best system of government humans have devised. As countries in the former Soviet Union, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East attempt to democratize their governments, this belief appears to be becoming more widespread. But when we say that democracy is the best form of government, what do we mean? Is it the best form of government for managing ethnic conflict in divided societies? Is it the form of government best suited to addressing problems of poverty and social injustice? Can democracy take root in any country, regardless of that country’s level of economic development or its culture or history?

To answer these questions, we will examine two established democracies – Great Britain and India - and compare them with the Soviet Union, Russia since the collapse of the USSR, and China. Many scholars have argued that a democratic political system cannot exist in a non-capitalist economy. If this is true, is the reverse also true: will a capitalist economy, given enough time, inevitably produce a democratic political system? We will examine these questions closely in the cases of the USSR (later Russia) and China. Both the USSR and China developed state-controlled economies accompanied by repressive authoritarian political systems. From the late 1980s Russia pursued a change from an authoritarian to a democratic regime AND a change from a state-controlled to a free-market economy. The Russian economy is now capitalist, but the political system is, after a short period of democracy, once again undemocratic. By contrast, China’s Communist Party has basically adopted capitalism while only very slightly opening up its political system. Which strategy of change will be more viable in the long term, and what are the costs to Russian and Chinese citizens of each path?

The second topic we will address is that of poverty and economic development, particularly through the contrast of China and India. When the Communist Party took over China in 1947, and when India achieved independence in 1949, each country was overwhelmingly poor and economically underdeveloped, but each chose a different political system. The authoritarian regime of Communist China pursued rapid, state-controlled economic development; while millions of lives were lost, particularly to famine in the late 1950s, this rapid development greatly increased the standard of living of the average citizen. India chose a democratic system, and the Indian poor participate actively in politics, voting in much higher numbers than poor people in the U.S. But economic development which would improve the lives of the poor has come much more slowly in India than in China, and the average Chinese citizen today is better educated, lives longer, and is less likely to be poor than the average Indian citizen. Did the adoption of democracy in India slow economic development in any way? By increasing the standard of living and level of education in China, has
the authoritarian Communist regime created a population that is increasingly well-equipped to demand democracy and an end to Communist rule?

Course Requirements

The requirements for this course are a five page paper (20%), a midterm (20%), a ten page paper (30%), and a final (30%).

Readings

The following book can be purchased in the Holy Cross Bookstore:


Almost all of the readings for this class are reserve readings, available on electronic reserves (noted ER in the syllabus.) They can be accessed by going to the library’s website, and then clicking on “electronic reserves.” Choose either my name from the professor list or the course name from the course list, click on it, and then enter the password. Click on the title of the relevant article to read it. Make sure to ONLY read the pages listed on the syllabus.

CLASS SCHEDULE

**Th Jan 21: Introduction**

**DEFINING THE BASIC TERMS AND TOOLS OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS**

**T Jan 26: What is Democracy?**

- “What Democracy Is……and Is Not,” Philippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, reprinted in *Comparative Politics* 98/99 (ER)

- Freedom House Checklist of Political Rights and Civil Liberties (distributed in class)

**Th Jan 28: Forms of Democracy: Presidential and Parliamentary**

Parliamentarism is the Better System


The Advantages of Presidentialism


T Feb 2: Political “Development” and Stability

- *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Samuel Huntington, pp. 1-8 and 39-59 (ER)

**COMPETING THEORIES ABOUT THE CAUSES OF DEMOCRACY**


- *The Spirit of Democracy*, 74-79 (ER)

T Feb 9: *Are Certain Attitudes or Cultural Norms Necessary for Democracy?*


-------------------------------------------------------------TH FEB 11: FIRST PAPER DUE-------------------------------------------------------------

**THE UNITED KINGDOM**

Th Feb 11: The Historical Development of Democracy in the United Kingdom

- *Introduction to Comparative Politics*, 38-48, 61-66 (ER)
• *Social Origins of Dictatorship & Democracy*, Barrington Moore, Chapter 7 and Chapter 1 (read in this order) (ER)

**T Feb 16: Contemporary British Politics & How Power Changes Hands**

• *Introduction to Comparative Politics*, 70-77 (ER)


• “Gordon Brown’s Woes,” *The Economist*, May 7, 2009 (ER)


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**INDIA**

**T Feb 23: The Foundations of Democracy**

• *Introduction to Comparative Politics*, 255-258 (ER)


**Th Feb 25: India’s Political System, and Caste and Poverty Historically and Today**

• *Introduction to Comparative Politics*, 269-290 (ER)


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T Mar 9: Caste and Poverty in India, Historically and Today


**Has Democracy Helped the Poorest in India?**


- “Poor in India Starve as Surplus Wheat Rotts,” Amy Waldman, *New York Times*, December 2, 2002 (ER)


**Th Mar 11: Corruption in India and the Effect on Poverty**


- “Food Riots Expose How Corruption Hurts India’s Poor,” Reuters, October 12, 2007 (ER)


**COMMUNIST AND POST-COMMUNIST TRAJECTORIES**

T Mar 16: The Basics of Marxism


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**CHINA**

T Mar 23: The Chinese Revolution & The Contemporary Chinese Political System,

- *Introduction to Comparative Politics*, 627-635 (ER)

**Th Mar 25: The Politics and Economics of the New China**

- *Introduction to Comparative Politics*, 635-637, 640-659, 663-668 (ER)

**T Mar 30: Worker Protests**


----------------------------------------EASTER BREAK-----------------------------------------

**T Apr 6: Farmer Protests, and the Question of Rule of Law**


**Th Apr 8: Corruption in China**


• “The Next Asian Miracle,” Yasheng Huang, *Foreign Policy*, July/August 2008 (ER)

**T Apr 13: The Problem of the “Missing Girls” in India and China**


• “No Girls Please, We’re Indian,” Kalpana Sharma, *The Hindu*, August 29, 2004 (ER)


**THE SOVIET UNION AND RUSSIA**

**Th Apr 15 – T Apr 20: The Political and Economic System of the Soviet Union**

• *Introduction to Comparative Politics*, 355-362 (ER)


-------------------------------------T APR 20: SECOND PAPER DUE-------------------------------------

**Th Apr 22: Capitalism Emerges……..**

• *Introduction to Comparative Politics*, 368-378 (ER)


**T Apr 27: But Does Democracy?**
• "Introduction to Comparative Politics," 362-365, 380-385, 388-400 (ER)

• “Russia,” Freedom in the World 2008, Freedom House (ER)

• “Another Mystery in Moscow,” Ann Cooper, Committee to Protect Journalists (ER)


**Th Apr 29: Russian Citizens and the Shift Back to Authoritarianism**

• “The Putin Popularity Score,” Pew Research Center, December 6, 2006
  http://pewresearch.org/pubs/103/the-putin-popularity-score


**T May 4: Wrap-up**

---------------------------------Wed May 12 8:30 a.m. FINAL EXAM------------------------