

Chaos politics? Theory Meets Reality in Comparative Politics

Why do people waste their vote across the world? Why do ethnic groups kill each other in some places and not others? Why does the same policy seem great in one place and fail miserably in another? Comparative politics offers a rich tradition of empirical and theoretical insights that can help us make sense of the political world. But many of the political developments taking place seem to contradict expectations in existing literature. In much of the world, politics seem chaotic and unpredictable. If most places are exceptions to existing theory, what use do we have for this theory? And how can theories be modified to be more useful?

In this course, we will look at real-world examples that seem to contradict established theories in comparative politics. We will then read recent research that tries to explain or resolve these seeming contradictions. The goal is to understand more about when and why theories are useful, discuss which assumptions (often implicit ones) that theories rely on to make sense, and reflect on how these insights can enrich our understanding of political patterns even in places where the theories generally do seem to apply.

The course is about theory development in comparative politics, focusing on voting behavior, protests and violence, and the effects of institutions and policies. It also has a strong empirical focus. Examples are taken from across the world, though most of the examples are from developing democracies.

Learning outcome

Knowledge

You will:

- be familiar with central theories in comparative politics
- know empirical examples that both support and contradict these theories
- understand concepts related to theory development such as deterministic and probabilistic theories, assumptions, and scope conditions

Skills

You will:

- Be able to think critically about theoretical explanations
- Recognize assumptions in theoretical explanations
- Understand empirical implications of theoretical explanations
- Know how to apply theories to new contexts
- Be more confident in thinking about how theories can be modified

Competence

You will:

- improve your systematic and critical thinking
- gain experience in writing academic texts

Prerequisites

Recommended previous knowledge

[STV1300 – Komparativ politikk](#) or other introductory courses in comparative politics.

Teaching

Lectures and seminars.

Compulsory activities

- Attend the first seminar
- Present a short outline for your term paper
- Present your term paper
- Comment on other students' papers
- Present revised paper to seminar leader for comments

The seminars are taught in English, and the papers handed in must be written in English.

See the [seminar guidelines](#) for more information about the seminars.

See the [rules for reassignment of seminar groups](#) and [the guidelines for compulsory activities](#).

Examination

- 3-hour written exam.
- term paper.
- you must pass the compulsory activities in order to sit the exam.

The term paper must:

- be about an empirical example that seems puzzling given some theoretical perspective you have learnt in political science, and seek to explain this puzzle
- use literature both on and off the syllabus
- be between 2000 and 2500 words
- meet the [formal requirements for submission of written assignments](#).