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CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ANALYSIS

FRANÇOIS BRIATTE

PRESENTATION

This course introduces some core notions for contemporary political analysis. A science of politics aims at the production of theoretical explanations and contextualised accounts of political phenomena, informed by the collection and analysis of empirical data. It looks at the real world using concepts that are put into operation through rich frameworks that use deductive logic and inductive interpretation to understand as precisely as possible the current state of affairs. Better understandings of our world should lead us to want to change it more effectively, in accordance with our conceptions of justice and humanity.

In practice, the course will offer an introduction to complex material taken from current political science, in order to encourage students to think in abstract terms about the political dimension of the real world. The course is taught entirely in English, and a firm grounding in political science is necessary to engage with the reading material. For both reasons, the course will be an interesting challenge, and an unusual one: as far as I know, this is the first postgraduate-level political science course that will be taught in English at this University. Welcome!

REQUIREMENTS

As for any MSc course, attendance is compulsory and students are required to read the required material before class. For further information about the course as well as additional material and instructions, please refer to the course website: <http://f.briatte.org/teaching/copola/>.

Exams will consist in two short assignments worth $2 \times 25\%$ of the final grade, and class participation for the remaining 50% (yes, participation is *that* vital to the course). I can be reached by email at all times about the course: f.briatte@ed.ac.uk—however, *please do not wait the last minute* to ask questions about class or about exams.

CONTENTS

Methods

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| I. Introduction | <i>The first section of the course introduces social inquiry and the standard research methods used by political scientists. All three sessions cover methodological challenges that apply to virtually any research design.</i> |
| II. Comparison | |
| III. Case studies | |

Notions

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| IV. History | <i>The second section of the course concentrates on some crucial notions that we routinely refer to without necessarily thinking about their precise scientific content. These notions are ambiguous yet essential to political analysis.</i> |
| V. Organizations | |
| VI. Culture | |

Themes

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| VII. Opinion | <i>The third and final section covers four core themes in political science research. The objective of this section is to think about the concrete application of the methods and notions learnt from the previous sessions.</i> |
| VIII. Collective action | |
| IX. States | |
| X. Globalization | |

READINGS

In addition to a selection of articles and book chapters, the course lectures borrows heavily from the following book—read from it *after* the lectures, during which you will get a preliminary overview of its content:

Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating (eds), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). The book is a readable, elaborate account of the theoretical and methodological tools available to social scientists.

Some additional readings are listed below if you feel confident enough to delve into more detailed research material:

Mark I. Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman (eds), *Comparative Politics. Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 162–192. This edited volume can be used as a handbook on comparative politics.

Craig Parsons, *How to Map Arguments in Political Science* (Oxford University Press, 2007). The book is a succinct, accessible, and well-structured exposition of current theories in political science. Its chapters form an excellent survey of modern explanatory frameworks.

West European Politics 41 Special Issue 1–2 (2008). This journal issue has rounded a very impressive list of scholars to review their research interests, which makes up for a good survey of contemporary research agendas, including many not covered in this course.

Finally, the following readings provide additional insights on social science explanations:

Josep Colomer, *The Science of Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2010). The author's take on political science is readily positivist, which helps to distinguish some very valuable results and theories within all parts of modern political science.

Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). This handbook covers a lot of findings and theories used by social psychologists and analytical sociologists.

John Gerring, *Social Science Methodology: Tasks, Strategies, and Criteria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1st ed. 2007, 2nd ed. forthcoming 2011). This book should be on top of any reading list about case studies in social research.

Jonathon Moses and Torbjørn Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing. Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007). Perhaps the most accessible text on the history and epistemology of the social sciences.

SESSIONS

A note on the readings: each session lists three readings, but *you will be assigned only one per week*, in order to avoid mid-term burnout and to make sure that you find the time to complete the weekly reading on time for class. The two remaining texts will be covered by the lectures and discussed at length in class, which is why attendance and participation are so vital to the course.

Part I — Methods

I. INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY This session asks fundamental questions about political science: what makes a science of politics, and what exactly does it try to understand? The session discusses the foundations of political *science* and introduces the rest of the course.

READINGS Adrienne Héritier, “Causal Explanation,” in della Porta and Keating, ch. 4.

Peter Mair, “Concepts and Concept Formation,” in della Porta and Keating, ch. 10.

David Collier and Steven Levitsky, “Democracy. Conceptual Hierarchies in Comparative Research,” in David Collier and John Gerring (eds), *Concepts and Methods in the Social Sciences: The Tradition of Giovanni Sartori* (Routledge, 2009), 269-88.

II. COMPARISON

SUMMARY This session explores comparisons beyond theoretical concerns: under what practical conditions can we compare specific phenomena, like guerrilla warfare or social revolutions, across space and time?

READINGS Carles Boix, “Civil Wars and Guerrilla Warfare in the Contemporary World: Toward A Joint Theory of Motivations and Opportunities,” in Stathis Kalyvas *et al.* (eds), *Order, Conflict and Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 197–218.

Donatella della Porta, “Comparative Analysis: Case-oriented versus Variable-oriented Research,” in della Porta and Keating, ch. 11.

Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions. A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Harvard University Press, 1989), 47–111.

III. CASE STUDIES

SUMMARY This session concentrates on qualitative (small-*n*) case studies, for which a specific methodological approach has gradually emerged in the recent years.

READINGS Frank Dobbin, “Why the Economy Reflects the Polity: Early Rail Policy in Britain, France, and the United States,” in *Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg (eds), The Sociology of Economic Life*, 2nd ed., 401–424.

Pascal Vennesson, “Case Studies and Process Tracing: Theories and Practices,” in della Porta and Keating, ch. 12.

Mark Thatcher, *The Politics of Telecommunications* (Oxford University Press, 1999), introduction and ch. 1.

Part 2 — Notions

IV. HISTORY

SUMMARY This sessions looks at how we can integrate historical trends and data to the study of social and political facts.

READINGS John H. Goldthorpe, “The Uses of History in Sociology: Reflections on Some Recent Tendencies,” *British Journal of Sociology* 42 (1991), 211–230.

William H. Sewell, Jr., “From State-Centrism to Neoliberalism. Macro-Historical Contexts of Population Health since World War II,” in Peter A. Hall and Michèle Lamont (eds), *Successful Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 254–287.

Sven Steinmo, “Historical Institutionalism,” in della Porta and Keating, ch. 7.

V. ORGANIZATION

SUMMARY This session explores the dynamics, characteristics and common patterns that apply to the organization and mobilization of individuals in very different social settings.

READINGS John L. Campbell, “Where Do We Stand? Common Mechanisms in Organizations and Social Movements Research,” in Gerald F. Davis *et al.* (eds), *Social Movements and Organization Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 41–68.

Marshall Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins. Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2009), ch. 1.

Diego Gambetta, “Can We Make Sense of Suicide Missions?” in Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 259–299.

VI. CULTURE

SUMMARY This session discusses the status of *culture* in social research: can we use culture as an explanatory variable, or should we try to remove it completely from our analysis?

READINGS Max Horkheimer and Theodor M. Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford University Press, 2002), 94–136.

Michael Keating, “Culture and Social Science,” in della Porta and Keating, ch. 6.

Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273–286.

Part 3 — Themes

VII. OPINION

SUMMARY This session entirely revolves around the quantitative analysis of public opinion and voting patterns in the United States.

READINGS Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy. The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (Princeton University Press, 2008), ch. 5.

Mark Franklin, “Quantitative Analysis,” in della Porta and Keating, ch. 13.

Andrew Gelman (and colleagues), *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State. Why Americans Vote the Way They Do* (Princeton University Press, 2008), ch. 6.

VIII. COLLECTIVE ACTION

SUMMARY This session focuses on the mobilization of interest groups, and the impact that collective action can bear on politics and policy.

READINGS Paul Burstein and April Linton, “The Impact of Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Social Movement Organizations on Public Policy: Some Recent Evidence and Theoretical Concerns,” *Social Forces* 81 (2002): 381–408.

Jonas Pontusson and David Rueda, "The Politics of Inequality: Voter Mobilization and Left Parties in Advanced Industrial States," *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (2010): 675–705.

Philippe C. Schmitter, "The Changing Politics of Organised Interests," *West European Politics* 31 (2008): 195–210.

IX. STATES

SUMMARY This session discusses the formation of the state apparatus, its methods of control over its subjects, and resistance to these methods.

READINGS Joel S. Migdal, "Researching the State," in Mark I. Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman (eds), *Comparative Politics. Rationality, Culture, and Structure* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 162–192.

Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter B. Evans *et al.* (eds), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169–191.

James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, 1998), excerpts TBA.

X. GLOBALIZATION

SUMMARY This session discusses transnational and international processes, and also discusses the ethical commitments of the political scientist: should we try to use political science to change the world? The question cannot be avoided in a world of violent conflicts, collapsing economies, widespread poverty and persistent prejudice.

READINGS Beth A. Simmons, Frank Dobbin and Geoffrey Garrett, "Introduction: The International Diffusion of Liberalism," *International Organization* 60 (2006): 781–810.

Leonhard Dobusch and Sigrid Quack, "Copyright between Creativity and Exploitation: Transnational Mobilization and Private Regulation," working paper, 2010.

Wesley W. Widmaier, Mark Blyth and Leonard Seabrooke, "Exogenous Shocks or Endogenous Constructions? The Meanings of Wars and Crises," *International Studies Quarterly* 51 (2007): 747–759.

SOUNDTRACK

Just for the fun of it, this will be the official playlist of the course, which you might hear playing if you come to class a few minutes in advance:

1 · Robert Wyatt, “N. I. O. [New Information Order]” (*Dondestan Revisited*, 1998) · 2 · Jeff Mills and Montpellier Philharmonic Orchestra, “The March” (*Blue Potential*, 2006) · 3 · Johan Soderqvist, “Eli’s Theme” (*Let the Right One In*, 2008) · 4 · Teatro del Silencio, “Louise Michel” · 5 · Biosphere, “Birds Fly by Flapping Their Wings” (*Dropsonde*, 2006) · 6 · Neil Young and Crazy Horse, “Cortez The Killer” (*Weld*, 1991) · 7 · Killing Joke, “Absolute Dissent” (*Absolute Dissent*, 2010) · 8 · Bérurier Noir, “Petit Agité” (*Concerto pour Détraqués*, 1985) · 9 · Ministry, “N. W. O. [New World Order]” (*Psalm 69*, 1992) · 10 · Kraftwerk, “Europe Endless” (*Trans-Europe Express*, 1977).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Daniel Little and Cosma Shalizi inspired parts of this syllabus, although none of them are aware of its existence and cannot be blamed for its mistakes and omissions, which remain mine and mine alone. I am thankful to Christophe Bouillaud and Simon Labouret for comments on an early version.

Last revised: 24 January 2011.