

PL223 Comparative Politics

Details

Instructor: Bogdan G. Popescu

Hours: MW 08:30-09:45AM

Total Hours of Contact: 2:30 per week

Room: F.2.1-Frohring Campus, Second Floor, Room 1

Credits: 3

Prerequisites: None

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

Comparative Politics is both a subject and a method of study. Its goal is to understand variation in important political outcomes across countries and time. The course examines the nature, development, structure, and functioning of countries' political systems with very different cultures, social and economic profiles, political histories, and geographic characteristics. The course attempts to answer the following significant questions:

- What distinguishes democratic from non-democratic regimes? Why do some countries democratize, whereas others do not? Do democracies perform better than non-democratic regimes in the provision of public goods?
- What are the causes and consequences of different political institutions? What determines their subsequent development?

Before addressing such questions, we must consider how to address them. We address questions by generating hypotheses and testing them with empirical evidence. These give rise to two further general issues:

- What hypotheses should we test? Hypotheses are associated with different theoretical schools or approaches within political science.
- What evidence should we use in generating and testing hypotheses? Should we focus on a small number of cases and study them in depth? Or should we include as many cases as possible, using statistical techniques to analyze the data? These are questions of comparative method, and multiple methods are used in Comparative Politics.

Summary of Course Content

The course will convene twice a week. The first session will be a lecture, while the second session will have presentations from students and a discussion. By the end of the course, you should be

able to engage critically with questions falling under the headings of the broad questions outlined above. You should be able to respond to particular questions about the different topics of the course, drawing on the relevant literature and empirical evidence to develop and support compelling answers to those questions. You should also be able to think about theoretical arguments, empirical testing, and evidence regarding such statements.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, the students will be able to:

- Engage critically with questions falling under the headings
- Use the comparative method for political topics
- Understand the advantages and disadvantages of different theoretical frameworks and research methodologies
- Think about theoretical arguments as well as empirical testing and evidence regarding such arguments

Assessment

There are three components to the final grade for this class:

- Contributions to Class 33%
- Mid-term 33%
- Final exam 33%

Contributions to Class

The contributions to class are the average of:

- presentation
- physical presence
- class participation
- questions submitted every week
- quality of questions

The mid-term and final exams are closed-book. They will test the improvement of students' knowledge of the theories and facts developed in the course, and independent critical thinking. Both the mid-term and final exams represent 33% of the grade.

A major exam (midterm or final) cannot be made up without the permission of the Dean's Office. The Dean's Office will grant such permission only when the absence was caused by a serious impediment, such as a documented illness, hospitalization or death in the immediate family (in which you must attend the funeral) or other situations of similar gravity. Absences due to other meaningful conflicts, such as job interviews, family celebrations, travel difficulties, student misunderstandings or personal convenience, will not be excused. Students who will be absent from a major exam must notify the Dean's Office prior to that exam. Absences from class due to the observance of a religious holiday will normally be excused. Individual students who will have to miss class to observe a religious holiday should notify the instructor by the end of the Add/Drop period to make prior arrangements for making up any work that will be missed.

Presentations

Each student will deliver a 10-15 minute presentation on a topic assigned in advance. Presentations should include a clear introduction, main points, and conclusion. Use visual aids (e.g., slides) effectively, ensuring text is legible and visuals are relevant. Practice beforehand to stay within the time

limit and maintain a confident, professional tone. Be prepared to answer 2-3 questions from peers or the instructor during and after the presentation. Remember to cite your sources and avoid reading verbatim from slides or notes.

In addition to summarizing the key arguments or findings, your presentation should include critical analysis of the material. Highlight what the author does not address, the limitations of their research, or potential problems in their analysis or methodology. Think about how the research could be improved, expanded, or connected to broader themes discussed in class, and incorporate these insights into your presentation.

You can find below an example of a good presentation together with the original material based on which the presentation was made.

- [Presentation](#)
- [Book chapter](#) (based on which the presentation is made)

Rubric for Presentations

Criteria	Weak	Points	Satisfactory	Points	Strong	Points
Content Knowledge	Limited understanding of the reading, may not accurately summarize key points.	10	Adequate understanding of the reading, provides a basic summary of key points.	20	Comprehensive understanding of the reading, presents a nuanced and detailed summary of key points.	29
Critical Analysis	Fails to offer meaningful analysis or insights. Limited connection to broader concepts.	10	Offers some analysis, but lacks depth and may not connect insights to broader themes.	10	Provides a sophisticated and insightful analysis, linking key points to broader theoretical or empirical frameworks.	15
Organization	Presentation lacks structure, making it difficult to follow. Ideas are disjointed.	10	Somewhat organized, but transitions between ideas are weak. Some difficulty in following the presentation.	10	Well-organized presentation with clear transitions between sections, making it easy to follow and understand.	15

Criteria	Weak	Points	Satisfactory	Points	Strong	Points
Clarity of Expression	Uses unclear language or terminology. Communication may be challenging for the audience.	10	Communication is generally clear, but some jargon or complex sentences may hinder understanding.	10	Communicates ideas effectively, using clear language and appropriate terminology. Easy for the audience to follow.	15
Engagement with Audience	Minimal engagement with the audience. Lack of eye contact and enthusiasm.	5	Some engagement with the audience, but may struggle to maintain interest. Limited eye contact and enthusiasm.	9	Actively engages with the audience, maintains eye contact, and demonstrates enthusiasm for the topic. Captivates the audience's interest.	10
Visual Aids (if applicable)	No or poorly designed visual aids that do not enhance understanding.	5	Basic visual aids that partially enhance understanding.	7	Well-designed and effective visual aids that significantly contribute to the clarity and impact of the presentation.	8
Time Management	Presentation significantly exceeds or falls short of the allocated time.	5	Presentation is within the acceptable time range but lacks balance between summarizing and analyzing.	7	Effectively manages time, presenting a well-balanced combination of summarization and critical analysis within the allocated time.	8

Criteria	Weak	Points	Satisfactory	Points	Strong	Points
Total Points		55		73		100

Attendance

Students are required to attend classes following the University's policies. Students with more than two unexcused absences are assumed to have withdrawn from the course. Students with a justified reason not to attend class have to send me an email explaining why they cannot attend ahead of class and need to submit a [form to the Dean's Office](#).

Academic Honesty

As stated in the university catalog, any student who commits an act of academic dishonesty will receive a failing grade on the work in which the dishonesty occurred. In addition, acts of academic dishonesty, irrespective of the weight of the assignment, may result in the student receiving a failing grade in the course. Instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Academic Affairs. A student reported twice for academic dishonesty is subject to summary dismissal from the University. In such a case, the Academic Council will then make a recommendation to the President, who will make the final decision.

Students with Learning Difficulties and other Disabilities

The University does not discriminate based on disability. Students with approved accommodations must inform their professors at the beginning of the term. Please see the website for the complete policy.

Required Books

There are no specific required book for the course. See the items for every specific week's session.

Week 1

Class 1: Introduction to the Comparative Politics

09/01/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- Only small-N studies can be detailed enough to attain real understanding of complex political systems. Discuss.
- Comparative political analysis relies excessively on whole countries as units of comparison, but generating satisfactory alternative variables to countries is extremely difficult. Discuss.
- Population versus sample

Class Reading:

- Roberts Clark, W., Golder, M. and Golder, S. 2013. Principles of Comparative Politics. Washington DC: CQ Press. Chapter 2
- King, G., Keohane, R. and Verba, S. 1994. Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research. Princeton: Princeton UP. Chapters 1 and 2.

Class 2: Introduction to the Comparative Politics

09/03/2024 - Wed - Discussion

- Only small-N studies can be detailed enough to attain real understanding of complex political systems. Discuss.
- Comparative political analysis relies excessively on whole countries as units of comparison, but generating satisfactory alternative variables to countries is extremely difficult. Discuss.

Class Reading:

- King, G., Keohane, R. and Verba, S. 1994. Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research, Princeton: Princeton UP. Chapter 3
- Brady, H.E. and Collier, D. 2004. Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield. Chapter 1.

Week 2

Class 1: State Formation and State Building

09/08/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- What explains heterogeneity in the form and timing of the creation of early state institutions?
- Do nations create states - or vice versa?

Class Reading:

- Spruyt, H. 2007. 'War, Trade and State Formation' in Boix, C. and Stokes, S. The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics Oxford: Oxford University Press, 211-35
- Tilly, C. 1985. 'War making and state making as organized crime', in Evans, P., Rueschemeyer, D. and Skocpol, T. Bringing the State Back In. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 5.

Class 2: State Formation and State Building

09/10/2024 - Wed - Discussion - NO CLASS

- What explains heterogeneity in the form and timing of the creation of early state institutions?
- Do nations create states - or vice versa?

Class Reading:

- Centeno, M.A. 1997. 'Blood and Debt: War and Taxation in Nineteenth-century Latin America.' American Journal of Sociology, 102(6): 1565-1605
- Levi, M. 1981. 'The predatory theory of rule.' Politics and Society, 10(4), 431-65.

Week 3

Class 1: Colonialism

09/15/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- What effects did colonial occupation have on the trajectory of democracy in colonized countries?

- Do the terms “metropole” and “periphery” describe accurately the relationships developed between colonial powers and the countries in which they established their settlements?

Class Reading:

- Mamdani, Mahmood. 1996. Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism. Princeton University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.
- Acemoglu, Daron, and James Robinson. 2012. Why nations fail. New York: Crown Business. Chapters 1 and 2.

Class 2: Colonialism

09/17/2024 - Wed - Discussion

- What effects did colonial occupation have on the trajectory of democracy in colonized countries?
- Do the terms “metropole” and “periphery” describe accurately the relationships developed between colonial powers and the countries in which they established their settlements?

Class Reading:

- Mamdani, Mahmood. 1996. Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism. Princeton University Press. Chapters 3 and 4. ***Presentation by Preslava***
- Acemoglu, Daron, and James Robinson. 2012. Why nations fail. New York: Crown Business. Chapters 1 and 2. ***Presentation by Giorgio***
- Acemoglu, Daron, and James Robinson. 2012. Why nations fail. New York: Crown Business. Chapters 3, 4, 9. ***Presentation by Gabriele***

Week 4

Class 1: Conceptualizing Democracy

09/22/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- How do we define democracy?
- What are the criteria we can use to decide whether a concept is valid or not?

Class Reading:

- Roberts Clark, W., Golder, M. and Golder, S. 2013. Principles of Comparative Politics. Washington DC: CQ Press, Chapters 5.
- Collier, David, LaPorte, Jody M., and Seawright, Jason. Putting Typologies to Work: Concept Formation, Measurement, and Analytic Rigor. Political Science Quarterly. 76(1), pp. 217-232

Class 2: Conceptualizing Democracy

09/24/2024 - Wed - Discussion

- How do we define democracy?
- What are the criteria we can use to decide whether a concept is valid or not?

Class Reading:

- Sartori, Giovanni, 1970. “Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics,” The American Political Science Review. 64(4), pp. 1033-1053. ***Presentation by Alon***

- Coppedge, Michael et al. 2011. “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach”. *Perspectives on Politics*. 9(1): pp. 247-267 **Presentation by Valentina**
- Chu, Jonathan et al. 2024. People consistently view elections and civil liberties as key components of democracy. *Science*. 386(6719): pp. 291-296. **Presentation by Massimo**

Week 5

Class 1: Democratization

09/29/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- Does growth cause democracy?
- Do “elite-driven” factors matter most for democratization?

Class Reading:

- Roberts Clark, W., Golder, M. and Golder, S. 2013. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Washington DC: CQ Press, Chapter 8.
- Geddes, B., 2009. ‘What Causes Democratization?’ Boix, C. and Stokes, S.C. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 14.

Class 2: Democratization

10/01/2024 - Wed - Discussion

- Does growth cause democracy?
- Do “elite-driven” factors matter most for democratization?

Class Reading:

- Lipset, S.M., 1959. *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. London: Heinemann, Chapter 2. **Presentation by Pietra**
- Przeworski, A. et al., 2000. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and well-being in the World. 1950-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2. **Presentation by Mariana**

Week 6

Class 1: Autocracies and Hybrid Regimes

10/06/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- Why would an autocrat, or an elite, choose to grant power to the wider electorate?
- What factors explain why some countries democratize whereas others remain under the label of competitive authoritarianism?

Class Reading:

- Gerschewski, J. 2013. ‘The three pillars of stability: legitimation, repression, and co-optation in autocratic regimes,’ *Democratization*, 20(1), 13-38.
- Roberts Clark, W., Golder, M. and Golder, S., 2013. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Washington DC: CQ Press. Chapter 10: “Varieties of Dictatorship”

Class 2: Autocracies and Hybrid Regimes

10/08/2024 - Wed - Discussion

- What are the institutions and their mode of operation within authoritarian regimes?
- Many authoritarian regimes have institutions which look democratic on paper but are different in practice. What explains that?

Class Reading:

- Svolik, M. 2012. The Politics of Authoritarian Rule. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 2. ***Presentation by Lucilla***
- Gandhi, J., 2008. Political Institutions under Dictatorship. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 3. ***Presentation by Sophia***
- Mattingly, D. 2022. How the Party Commands the Gun: The Foreign–Domestic Threat Dilemma in China. American Journal of Political Science. 68(1): 227-242 . ***Presentation by Nevena***

Week 7

Class 1: Political Parties and Party Systems

10/13/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- How are parties formed, how do they link with particular groups in society, and how do they reflect social divisions in a given country?
- How do parties organize themselves for the purposes of competing for power?

Class Reading:

- Roberts, Clark, W., Golder, M. and Golder, S. 2013. Principles of Comparative Politics. Washington DC: CQ Press. Chapter 13
- Boix, Carles, 2007. “The Emergence of Parties and Party Systems.” In Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics, eds. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 499–521

Class 2: Political Parties and Party Systems

10/15/2024 - Wed - Discussion

- How do parties compete?
- What are the different ways of conceptualizing this competition and the link between party appeals and voter behavior?

Class Reading:

- Downs, Anthony. 1957. An Economic Theory of Democracy. New York: Harper and Row. Chapters 7 and 8. ***Presentation by Thomas***
- Zulianello, Mattia 2019. Varieties of Populist Parties and Party Systems in Europe: From State-of-the-Art to the Application of a Novel Classification Scheme to 66 Parties in 33 Countries. Government and Opposition, 55(2): pp. 327 - 347 ***Presentation by Noor Sara***
- Boix, Carles, 2007. “The Emergence of Parties and Party Systems.” In Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics, eds. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 499–521

Week 8

Class 1: Revision for Midterm

10/20/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

Class 2: MIDTERM

10/22/2024 - Wed

Week 9

Class 1: Electoral Systems

10/27/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- How should electoral systems be classified?
- What are the origins of electoral systems?

Class Reading:

- Roberts Clark, W., Golder, M. and Golder, S. 2013. Principles of Comparative Politics. Washington DC: CQ Press. Chapter 13

Class 2: Electoral Systems

10/29/2024 - Wed - Discussion

- What are the origins of electoral systems?
- Which types of systems produce better outcomes?

Class Reading:

- Gallagher and Mitchell. 2008. Introduction to Electoral Systems. in “The Politics of Electoral Systems” Chapter 1. pp. 3-24. **Presentation by Preslava**
- Lijphart, A. 1999. Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapter 8. **Presentation by Giorgio**
- Boix, C. 1999. ‘Setting the Rules of the Game: The Choice of Electoral Systems in Advanced Democracies’, American Political Science Review, 93(3), 609-624. **Presentation by Gabriele**

Week 10

Class 1: Executives

11/03/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- What different institutional forms do executives take?
- Is the categorization of democratic regimes into ‘presidential’, ‘parliamentary’, and ‘semi-presidential’ analytically satisfactory?

Class Reading:

- Roberts Clark, W., Golder, M. and Golder, S. 2013. Principles of Comparative Politics. Washington DC: CQ Press. Chapter 12.
- Tsebelis, G. 2002. Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Introduction and Chapter 3

Class 2: Executives

11/05/2024 - Wed - Discussion

- What are the effects of executive format?

Class Reading:

- Linz, J. 1990. 'The Perils of Presidentialism', *Journal of Democracy*, 1(1), 51-69. **Presentation by Alon**
- Eaton, K. 2000. 'Parliamentarism versus Presidentialism in the Policy Arena', *Comparative Politics*, 32(3), 355-376. **Presentation by Valentina**

Week 11

Class 1: Legislatures

11/10/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- What shapes the role that legislatures play in democratic governance?
- How does the structure and composition of legislatures affect the character and quality of democratic governance?

Class Reading:

- Laver, M. 2006. 'Legislatures and Parliaments in Comparative Context', in Weingast, B. and Wittman, D. eds. *Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 7.
- Cox, G.W. 2006. 'The Organization of Democratic Legislatures' in Weingast, B.R. and Wittman, D.A. eds. *Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 8.

Class 2: Legislatures

11/12/2024 - Wed - Discussion

- What shapes the role that legislatures play in democratic governance?
- What is the relationship between party discipline and parliamentary government?

Class Reading:

- Bowler, S., Farrell, D.M. and Katz, R.S. 1999. *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 2. **Presentation by Massimo**
- Carey, J.M. 2007. 'Competing Principals, Political Institutions, and Party Unity in Legislative Voting,' *American Journal of Political Science*, 51(1), 92-107. **Presentation by Pietra**

Week 12

Class 1: Federalism

11/17/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- Why are federal arrangements adopted and what determines their subsequent evolution?
- What different forms does federalism take?

Class Reading:

- Roberts Clark, W., Golder, M. and Golder, S. 2013. Principles of Comparative Politics. Washington DC: CQ Press. Chapter 15.
- Beramendi P. 2007. 'Federalism' in The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 31.

Class 2: Federalism

11/19/2024 - Wed - Discussion

- What different forms does federalism take?
- What are the consequences of federalism?

Class Reading:

- Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. 2003. 'Unraveling the Central State, But How? Types of Multi-Level Governance,' American Political Science Review, 97(2), 233-243. ***Presentation by Mariana***
- Baake. K.M. and Wibbels, E. 2006. 'Diversity, Disparity and Civil Conflict in Federal States,' World Politics, 59(2), 1-50. ***Presentation by Lucilla***
- Gerrring, John, Ziblatt, Daniel, Van Gorp, Johan, and Arevalo, Julia. 2011. 'An Institutional Theory of Direct and Indirect Rule,' World Politics, 63(3), 377-433. ***Presentation by Sophia***

Week 13

Class 1: Judiciaries

11/24/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- What do we mean by the judicialization of politics? How widespread is the phenomenon, and what are its causes?
- How important are courts to democratic success and to 'output', and how do they sustain their political position and legitimacy?

Class Reading:

- Ferejohn, J., Rosenbluth, F. and Shipan, C. 2007. 'Comparative Judicial Politics' Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shapiro, M. and Stone Sweet, A. 2002. On Law, Politics and Judicialization. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.

Class 2: Judiciaries

11/26/2024 - Wed - Discussion

- What do we mean by the judicialization of politics? How widespread is the phenomenon, and what are its causes?
- How important are courts to democratic success and to 'output', and how do they sustain their political position and legitimacy?

Class Reading:

- Stone Sweet, A. 2000. Governing with Judges: Constitutional Politics in Europe. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapters 1, 2, and 5. ***Presentation by Nevena***
- Shapiro, M. and Stone Sweet, A. 2002. On Law, Politics and Judicialization. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapters 1 and 2. ***Presentation by Thomas***

Week 14

Class 1: Electoral Corruption and Clientelism

12/01/2024 - Mon - [Lecture](#)

- Does clientelism benefit the poor?
- Under what conditions is vote buying more likely to emerge?

Class Reading:

- Kitschelt, H. 2000. 'Linkages Between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Politics', Comparative Political Studies, 33(6-7), 845-879
- Stokes, S. 2007. 'Political Clientelism' in Boix, C. and Stokes, S. eds., The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Class 2: Electoral Corruption and Clientelism

12/03/2024 - Wed - Discussion

- Does clientelism benefit the poor?
- Under what conditions is vote buying more likely to emerge?

Class Reading:

- Hicken, A. 2011. 'Clientelism', Annual Review of Political Science, 14, 289-310. **Presentation by Noor Sara**
- Isabela Mares and Lauren Young. 2016. 'Buying, Expropriating, and Stealing Votes,' Annual Review of Political Science. 267-287.
- Simpser, Alberto, 2020. 'The Culture of Corruption Across Generations: an Empirical Study of Intergenerational Bribery Attitudes Behavior', Journal of Politics.

Supplementary Tutorials

[Revision for Final Exam](#)