

Comparative Government

Dr Chao-Yo Cheng



Week 3: Codifying



Today's plan

- ▶ Logistics: Seminar log and mini critical review (20% each)
- ▶ Recap: "Nations, States and Nation-States" (40 mins)
- ▶ Refresher lecture (1-1.5 hr)
 - Comparing constitutions
 - Judiciary in comparative perspective
- ▶ Reading exercise: "Constitutions and the Quality of Democracy" (next week)



Seminar log

- ▶ Due on **February 13**, 2026 (Friday)
- ▶ Write a **500-word** piece of connected prose (max)
- ▶ Choose one topic from Week 1-4 and answer the questions listed at the end of the lecture outline
- ▶ Review the readings (both required and optional ones), the recorded lecture and the refresher lecture in class
- ▶ Your response should
 - provide an overview of what you have learned and some of the key points you will take with you
 - provide thoughts from class discussion to demonstrate your reflection and understanding of the topics/issues, with specific examples



Mini critical review

- ▶ Due on **February 20**, 2026 (Friday)
- ▶ Write a **500-word** piece of connected prose (max)
- ▶ Choose one topic from Week 1-5
- ▶ In your review:
 - discuss the reading exercise to review relevant topics of the week, based on the questions we discuss in class
 - review the answers you heard in class discussion and provide your thoughts





ERIK VOETEN, JEFF D. COLGAN, AND FEDERICA GENOVESE JANUARY 22, 2026

Can climate policies survive the return of Trump?

Two experts discuss how the U.S. and the world move forward with climate mitigation.



SARAH BINDER AND MARK SPINDEL JANUARY 21, 2026

The Federal Reserve is still playing defense

Four takeaways from the latest bouts between Trump and the Federal Reserve.



ELIZABETH N. SAUNDERS JANUARY 20, 2026

Chalkboard Politics: What just happened in Venezuela?

Understanding the U.S. intervention with Chalkboard Politics.



KELECHI AMAKOH JANUARY 15, 2026

Four things to watch in Uganda's 2026 election

From Museveni's long rule to repression of opposition parties, these issues have shaped this year's election.

<https://goodauthority.org/>



Exercise: “Democracy and Nationalism” (Eun A. Jo, College of William and Mary)

Good to Know: Nationalism and democracy

Democracy needs more than a good story.

EUN A JO - SEPTEMBER 29, 2025



<https://goodauthority.org/news/good-to-know-nationalism-and-democracy/>



- ▶ Is nationalism good or bad for democracy? Why?
- ▶ Does the "typology" make sense to you? Can you place countries you know in the table? Any exceptions?
- ▶ What activities can contribute to the construction of shared identity, namely "nation-building?"
- ▶ The article concludes by saying nationalism needs a better "narrative." What does that mean?



Recap: Nations, states and nation-states

▶ Nations

- "Imagined Communities" (see Benedict Anderson 1983)
- Top-down and/or bottom-up construction of shared identity

▶ States

- Political authorities/entities with the legitimacy to use coercive power (see Charles Tilly 1990)
- Centralized armed forces (military and police), bureaucracy and infrastructure (e.g., transportation)
- Taking various forms in history and contemporary era

▶ Nations and states do not always align, and when they do not

- Intra-state or civil wars and secession/independent movement; Wars in the Balkans in the 1990s
- Multi-ethnic/nation states (or plural societies as put by Arend Lijphart 1977); Northern Ireland after the 1997 Good Friday Agreement



Refresher lecture

- ▶ Comparing constitutions
 - For legal scholars
 - For political scientists
- ▶ Judiciary in comparative perspective
 - Constitutional review
 - Emergency power
- ▶ Looking forward: Two visions of democracy



Comparing constitutions like a legal scholar

- ▶ Formats: Codified versus uncoded? Written versus unwritten?
- ▶ Texts: Lengthy versus succinct? Principles or details? Wording of articles?
- ▶ Rules to amend and change: How difficult it is to change some parts of or the whole constitution?



Debate on UK “constitution”



The Constitution Unit

28 November 2019

Do We Need a Written Constitution?

Prof Sionaidh Douglas-Scott and
Prof Nick Barber debate this
longstanding question



<https://youtu.be/dcdBnn2NXmM>



“Constitute Project”



<https://www.constituteproject.org/>

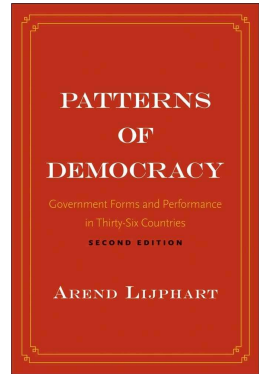
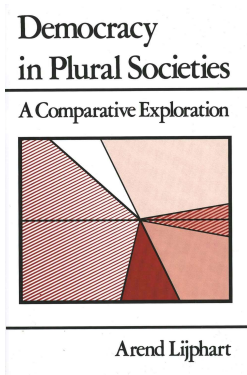


Comparing constitutions like a political scientist

- ▶ Varieties of constitutions
- ▶ Key inquiries: Underlying power dynamics driving the "creation" as well as the "practice"
 - Power concentration and dispersion (Lijphart 1999; Powell 2000)
 - Rigid or adaptative constitutions (Levitsky and Murillo 2009; Abramson and Barber 2019)



Constitutional “engineering” in plural societies (Lijphart 1977)



Supreme courts and constitutional review

Basic logic.



USA



Germany



UK.



Emergency power.

Collapse of Weimar democracy (check Sherri Berman).

