

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

POLISCI 111: Introduction to Comparative Politics

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Course Description

This course introduces students to significant themes in comparative politics, designed to explore the main building blocks of politics across various scales of analysis. While our world is dominated by Western powers, nation-states, and capitalist institutions, these structures were not inevitable. This course aims to denaturalize these familiar features and uncover how our current political world emerged.

We will begin with an unusual starting point: the mid-15th-century Chinese expeditions. From there, we will trace the evolution of politics and institutions across a wide geographical and temporal frame. Through comparative analysis, students will delve into the emergence of the modern state system, the roots of democratization and authoritarian regimes, the analysis of different institutional designs of government, the rise of the market economy and economic inequality, the birth of nations and nationalism, and the factors leading to ethnic conflicts and social revolutions.

Throughout the course, we will examine these processes from the perspectives of holders of power on different scales and those attempting to counter power relations. By employing a complementary, comparative, historical, and ethnographic approach, students will gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic and complex nature of comparative politics.

Course Objectives

As part of the General Education program, this course fulfills the global education requirement by introducing students to topics of broad political significance in the world today. Students will engage with conceptual tools in comparative analysis and learn to apply them effectively. By the end of this course, students will be able to answer critical questions such as: How did modern nation-states emerge? Why are some countries democratic while others are authoritarian? Why did nations and nationalisms develop? Why do some ethnic groups engage in conflict? Why do we live in a world marked by economic inequality? What are the legacies of colonialism in the Third World? What have been the root causes of major social revolutions throughout history? These and other pressing questions will be thoroughly examined, providing students with a deep and nuanced understanding of global political dynamics.

Instructor Information

I have been involved in the teaching of a wide variety of courses at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, including Corporate Lobbying and Global Economy, Energy Policy and Environmental Injustices, Introduction to American Politics, Introduction to Legal Studies, Race and American Democracy, and Introduction to Comparative Politics. I'm very excited to experience different modalities of teaching and learning. My research focuses mostly on comparative politics of democratization, nationalism, politics of race and ethnicity, and qualitative methodology of political science. My regions of interest and specialization are the United States and Western Europe.

Prerequisites

None

Readings (Required)

All the readings are uploaded to the Canvas page of the course and become available when you are supposed to read them.

15% weekly online discussions

60% short writing assignments (3 x 20%)

25% final exam (online take-home)

Course Requirements (Methods of Evaluation)

Response Papers or Podcasts:

The semester consists of fourteen weeks, and each student is expected to submit a response paper on the resources covered in any four weeks of their choice. Each response paper should be 600-750 words and address the question based on all the course materials assigned for that particular week, with questions available under the readings for each week. Papers will be assessed based on the clarity of the argument or position taken, coverage of all the resources for that week, and the ability to see connections, agreements, or disagreements between the resources. Submissions are due by 11:59 pm on Sundays and should be emailed as MS Word or Google Doc files to fcetin@umass.edu. Late submissions are accepted, with a penalty of two points for every six hours past the deadline. This assignment is crucial for your development in the class, as it encourages critical thinking and deeper engagement with the course readings. It also allows you to articulate the main arguments of the course texts in your own words. You will likely see an improvement in the quality of your essays as you complete more assignments. This assignment accounts for $4 \times 10 = 40\%$ of your final grade.

Weekly Online Discussions:

Each week, I will post a question on the discussion board on the course's Canvas page. You are expected to post your own response to the prompt (1 point) and then engage substantively with the entries of two of your peers (0.5 points each). Your engagement should expand on their responses and go beyond simply agreeing or disagreeing. You are required to participate in this weekly discussion for at least ten weeks of your choice. If you complete this assignment for more than ten weeks, your lowest grades will be dropped accordingly. The deadline for the weekly discussion entries and engagements is 11:59 pm on the following Tuesday. For example, the deadline for Week 4's discussion is 11:59 pm on Tuesday of Week 5. This assignment constitutes $10 \times 2 = 20\%$ of your final grade.

Midterm and Final Exams

The midterm and final exams will consist of two sections. In the first section, you will be asked to define and discuss the significance of several analytical concepts selected from the readings. The number of concepts you need to address will be specified later. In the second section, you will choose one of three essay questions, each covering at least two weeks of the semester, and write a 600-800 word essay. The exam dates will be announced as the semester progresses, but the midterm will be held in Week 8 and the final in Week 15. The exams are not cumulative; the midterm will cover content from Weeks 1 to 7, and the final will cover content from Weeks 9 to 15. Together, the midterm and final exams will constitute 40% of your final grade.

Academic Honesty Policy Statement

Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions will be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards will not be sufficient evidence of a lack of intent. For more information, visit <http://umass.edu/honesty>

Disability Accommodation

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to making reasonable, effective, and appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of students with disabilities and create a barrier-free campus. If you have a disability and require accommodations, please register with Disability Services (161 Whitmore Administration building; phone 413-545-0892) to have an accommodation letter sent to your faculty. Information on services and materials for registering is also available on their website www.umass.edu/disability. If you are not a student of UMass but need special accommodations, please directly contact me so that we can figure out the best action plan together.

Technical Support

The 24/7 Help Desk is available to students using Canvas for their online courses at UMass Amherst through Continuing & Professional Education. If you are experiencing technical issues with the system, please contact them directly. Contact information is located: On the Canvas login page under "Need Technical Support?" and within the "Help Desk Information" module within Canvas.

Grading Policy

Percentage Totals	Grade	Credit Points
93 – 100%	A	4.0
90 – 92%	A-	3.7
87 – 89%	B+	3.3
83 – 86%	B	3.0
80 – 82%	B-	2.7
77 – 79%	C+	2.3
73 – 76%	C	2.0
70 – 72%	C-	1.7
67 – 69%	D+	1.3
63 – 66%	D	1.0
60 – 62%	D-	0.7
59% or below	F	0
Incomplete	INC	0

Course Schedule

Week 1: What is Comparative Politics?

Readings

- No reading is assigned for this week. Review the course syllabus, watch my online lecture, and post your entry for the discussion board of Week 1.

Week 2: The Rise of the West

Readings

- Robert Marks. The Origins of the Modern World. pp. 1-14 and 33-64

Response Paper Question:

How do euro-centric accounts explain the emergence of the West as the dominant power? On what points do Marks challenge euro-centric explanations? What are the elements of a non-Eurocentric historical narrative explaining the emergence of the Modern World?

Week 3: The State 1

Readings

- Max Weber. Politics as a Vocation. pp. 77-84
- Charles Tilly. Coercion, Capital, and European States. pp 67 - 87
- James C. Scott. Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve Human Conditions Have Failed? pp 53 - 83

Response Paper Question:

What is state? How did it emerge and transform political and human life?

Week 4: The Rise of the State 2

Readings

- David Graeber and David Wengrow. The Dawn of Everything. Chapter 10
- James C. Scott. The Art of Being Not Governed. pp 1 - 39
- Recommended: James C. Scott, The Art of Being Not Governed, Watch between 08:48-01:00:40: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNkkEU7EoOk>

Response Paper Question:

Was the state the desirable form of political organization throughout history? How did the state look in the eyes of those attempting to evade state authority?

Week 5: The Birth, Spread, and Functioning of Democracy

Readings

- Barrington Moore. Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World. pp. 413 - 432
- Dietrich Rueschmeyer et al. Capitalist Development and Democracy. Chapter Introduction
- Samuel Huntington. Democracy's Third Wave. pp. 12 - 34
- Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2002). Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 51-65.
- Recommended: Watch between (6:20-41:35) Yogendra Yadav, "Diversity and Democracy in India" (2011 IDRC lecture), watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a13IEi9DsPM>

Response Paper Question:

- Why and how did the first democracies emerge and then include different segments of society?
- Why and how did democracy spread to different regions as a form of political rule?

Week 6: Authoritarian Regimes: Types, Resilience, and Collapse

Readings

- Axel Hadenius. Pathways from Authoritarianism. pp 143 - 157
- Steven Levitsky and Luke Way. Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War. Chapter Introduction
- Milan Svolik. The Politics of Authoritarian Rule. Chapter Introduction

Response Paper Question:

What are the differences between democracies, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian regimes? Which type of authoritarian regimes are more resilient and why?

Week 7: Institutions of Government

Readings

- All of the below are from the following book: Tyler Dickovick et al. *Comparative Politics: Integrating Theories, Methods, and Cases*
- Constitutions, Judiciary, and Administration: 171 – 193
- Legislatures, Elections, and Representation: 198 – 220
- Executive Systems: 226 – 248
- Party Systems: 256 - 275

Response Paper Question:

Describe the institutional design of the United States in light of the readings above. If you would like to change any aspect(s) of this system, what would they be and why?

Week 8: No Class: Midterm Exam Week

Week 9: The Birth of the Market Economy

Readings

- Adam Smith. *The Wealth of Nations*. Selected expert from Patrick O’Neil and Ronald Rogowski eds. *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*. pp. 129-133
- Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. *Communist Manifesto*.
- Karl Polanyi. *The Great Transformation*. pp. 35-44 and 71-80.

Response Paper Question:

Why did the market economy emerge according to Smith, Marx and Engels, and Polanyi? Is there anything natural about its emergence according to these authors?

Week 10: The Rise of the Global Gap 1

Readings

- Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson. Why Nations Fail? The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty. Chapters 3, 12-13
- Max Weber. Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism. Selected excerpts

Response Paper Question:

What are the similarities and differences between the accounts of Acemoglu and Robinson and Weber regarding the origins of economic inequality between different countries and regions? Which of them makes more sense to you and why?

Week 11: The Rise of the Global Gap 2

Readings

- Ha-Joon Chang. Kicking Away the Ladder: Infant Industry Promotion in Historical Perspective. pp 21 - 32
- Andre Gunder Frank. "The Development of Underdevelopment" in Charles Wilber, ed., *The Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment*. pp. 99-108.

Response Paper Question:

When and why did the gap between the West and the rest emerge? Did the economic inequality between the West and the rest decline or grow in the 20th century? How can we account for this change?

Week 12: The Rise of Nations and Nationalism

Readings

- Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. pp. 5 - 7 and 37 - 46
- Ernest Gellner. *Nations and Nationalism*. pp. 1 - 7 and 29 - 39
- Eric Hobsbawm. "Nationalism" in Patrick O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski. *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*. Pp 68 - 77

Response Paper Question:

How do Anderson and Gellner differ in explaining the rise of what is called nations today? How are nation and state related? Can one exist without the other?

Week 13: Ethnic Conflicts and Civil Wars

Readings

- Donald Horowitz. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. pp 3 - 12
- Barry Pozen. The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict. pp 27 - 47
- Daniel Posner. The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi? pp 529-544
- James Fearon and David Laitin. Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War. pp 75 – 90

Response Paper Question:

Why do ethnic conflicts and civil wars emerge in different parts of the world? Is it possible to prevent them?

Week 14: Social Revolutions

Readings

- Theda Skocpol. France, Russia, China: A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions, pp 175 - 210
- John Foran. A Theory of Third World Social Revolutions: Iran, Nicaragua, and El Salvador Compared, pp 3 - 27

Response Paper Question:

What are the similarities and differences between the origins of the revolutions analyzed in the two articles above? Do you see revolutionary conditions in any country today? Why or why not?