

Introduction to Comparative Politics

Fall 202X

MWF 10:20-11:20 am, Memorial Building 205

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 03:00pm-05:00pm

Thursdays 11:20am-1:20 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This introductory course is designed to examine the foundational topics necessary for understanding political systems and processes in a comparative perspective, assuming that a comparative perspective is a useful way to understand political dynamics. We will focus on core themes such as the state, political institutions, regime types, the role of civil society, the politicization of social identities, and broader questions of development. In addition, the course explores critical contemporary issues—not always highlighted in traditional comparative politics courses—such as populism, post-materialism, and informal institutions. Throughout the semester, students will engage with classic and influential works in comparative politics to build a strong foundation for more advanced study in the field.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

Specific goals:

1. **Identify and describe the main concepts in comparative politics.**
2. Analyze global events using these concepts, **being aware about when and when not using them to analyze specific situations.**
3. **Form an informed opinion** about the current political events, using the concepts provided.

Broad goals:

4. Have the **foundational knowledge to pursue more advanced and specialized courses** in comparative politics.
5. Get a sense of **how countries and other global actors interact between them in all regions** (not only the NATO area, the Middle East, or South Asia), and how theoretical bodies can also explain them

COURSE CORE VALUES

1. No memorization
2. Case-oriented learning
3. Comparative-based and non-Eurocentric contents.

COURSE FORMAT

This course will be held **in person**. Recordings will not be uploaded to Canvas unless W&L decides to switch to an online format due to public health concerns. Students should attend lectures and take notes as needed to perform well in the course. The lecture content and assigned readings will be the primary sources of questions for the Monitoring Tests.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **Attendance** is non mandatory. **As an adult**, I expect you to manage your own class duties. However, please note that class participation is graded each session, and some class content will be included in evaluations. **It is entirely your responsibility if you receive low grades due to absences.**
- **No cell phone use, email checking, or procrastination is allowed during class.** Activities such as chatting, texting, playing online games, or reading unrelated material show a lack of respect for Prof F and for the class as a whole. Be respectful, and if you find the class to be unengaging or believe it could be improved, you are welcome to share your feedback during the (anonymous) feedback sessions scheduled throughout the semester.
- **There is no required textbook for this class.** However, you are expected to complete the assigned readings before each session in order to fully participate in discussions and improve your participation grade. All readings will be posted on Canvas.

COURSE EVALUATION

Weight		Grading policy			
Paper	25%	Excellent	A: 94-100	A- : 90-93	
Final Exam	25%	Good	B+ : 87-89	B : 84-86	B- : 80-83
Monitoring Exams	40%	Fair	C+ : 77-79	C : 74-76;	C- : 70-73
Participation	10%	Poor	D+ : 67-69	D : 64-66;	D- : 61-63
Total	100%	Fail	F : 60 and >		

1. Paper (25%)

Students will turn in one paper of approximately three to four pages (or approximately 1,000 words) about a topic addressed in class. Each topic requires applying a concept or idea already covered in class to a specific country (or countries).

Guidelines for the papers and a rubric can be found at the end of the syllabus and on Canvas. There are five paper topics. The list of topics can be found on the syllabus, immediately after the class schedule. The due date is December 1st at 11:59pm. Papers should be both uploaded to Canvas.

During the first week of the semester, you should sign up for a specific paper. Only a limited number of people can turn in papers for each topic. Those who do not sign up for papers will

be assigned a week. Once the sign-up is finalized—which will be announced in class and on Canvas—due dates are binding, and changes may not be made except under extenuating circumstances.

2. Final Exam (25%)

Both evaluations will assess your achievement of the course's main objectives:

1. Mastery of the basics of the main theories in comparative politics.
2. Ability to compare these theories, identifying their similarities and differences.
3. Capacity to provide an informed opinion on current events using these theories.

Note: The Final Exam will evaluate the whole class contents

3. Monitoring Exams (40%)

To assess your understanding of class concepts, you will complete four Monitoring Exams during the semester. Each test will evaluate how you apply the theories and concepts to analyze contemporary situations. This evaluation is not memoristic. Participation in all exams is mandatory

4. Class Participation (10%)

Active participation in class is required. To perform well, you should **contribute at least once each week regarding the readings and concepts**. Although there is no exact quantifiable rubric for participation, evaluations will consider the following parameters:

5. Strong Participation (3 points): Demonstrates thorough reading and understanding of key concepts.
6. Mild Participation (2 points): Shows commitment to the materials with a basic grasp of concepts.
7. Incipient Participation (1 point): Displays enthusiasm and willingness to learn but with minimal conceptual understanding.

DISABILITY ACCOMODATIONS

The University makes reasonable academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of the Dean of the College. Students requesting accommodations for this course should present an official accommodation letter within the first two weeks of the term and schedule a meeting outside of class time to discuss accommodations. It is the student's responsibility to present this paperwork in a timely fashion and to follow up about accommodation arrangements.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

The University affirms that diverse perspectives and backgrounds enhance our community. We are committed to the recruitment, enrichment, and retention of students, faculty, and staff who embody many experiences, cultures, points of view, interests, and identities. As engaged citizens in a global and diverse society, we seek to advance a positive learning and working environment for all through open and substantive dialogue. Please read the [Politics Department Statement on Diversity and Inclusion](#).

[Policy on Prohibited Discrimination](#)

The University prohibits and this policy addresses discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, veteran's status, and genetic information in its educational programs and activities and with regard to employment. Additionally, the University prohibits retaliation against any individual who brings a good faith complaint under this policy or is involved in the complaint process. Students, faculty, and staff found to have violated this policy will be disciplined appropriately, up to and including termination from employment or dismissal from the University.

Sexual Discrimination & Misconduct Policy

The University prohibits all forms of sexual misconduct-which includes sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual intercourse, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual exploitation, domestic and dating violence, and stalking-and retaliation. This policy provides guidance to assist those who have experienced or been affected by sexual misconduct, whether as a complainant, a respondent, or a third party. It includes detailed information about what conduct is prohibited, confidential and reporting resources, and resolution procedures.

CLASS SCHEDULE

- **The highlighted activities are graded, and participation in all of them is MANDATORY.**
- **Students are expected to complete the assigned readings before each session. These readings will be evaluated through the four Monitoring Exams (but not in the Final Exam).**

BLOCK 1: INTRODUCTION

August 26: Class introduction and course overview

- No reading

August 28: What is Comparative Politics and Why do we need to study it?

- Green, Amelia H. (2013). "How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps."

BLOCK 2: THE STATE

August 30: What is (and is not) a state?

- Weber, Max. (1946). "Politics as a Vocation," in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (eds. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills), pp. 77–83.

September 4: Origins of the state: The belicist and neo-belicist paradigms

- Tilly, Charles (1990). Coercion, Capital and European States, chapter 3.

September 6: Origins of the state II: Other paradigms

- Spruyt, Hendrik (2009) War, Trade, and State Formation, pp. 211–235.

September 9: State building in Germany and Botswana (Case study day)

- No readings assigned

BLOCK 3: INSTITUTIONS

September 11: What an institution is?:

- North, Douglas (1990) Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance, chapter 1.

September 13: Electoral rules

- Arend Lijphart (1996) Constitutional Choices for New Democracies, pp. 162-174.

September 16: Presidentialism and parliamentarism

- Donald Horowitz (1996) Comparing Democratic Systems, pp. 143-149

September 18: Political parties

- Kitschelt, Herbert (2000) Linkages between citizens and politicians in democratic polities, pp. 845-879.

September 20: Electoral systems in United Kingdom and Brazil (Case study day)

- No readings assigned

September 23: Monitoring Exam #1

BLOCK 4: POLITICAL REGIMES

September 25: Authoritarianism

- Frantz, Erica. (2018). Authoritarianism: What everyone needs to know, chapter 5

September 27: Democracy

- Schmitter, Philippe C., and Terry Lynn Karl (1991) What democracy is . . . and is not, pp. 75-88.

September 30: Democratic transitions

- Geddes, Barbara (2009) What Causes Democratization? pp. 317–339.

October 2: Democratic backsliding

- Bermeo, Nancy (2016) On democratic backsliding, pp. 5-19

October 4: Hybrid regimes

- Diamond, Larry (2002) Elections without democracy: Thinking about hybrid regimes, pp. 21–35.

October 7: Political Regimes in India, Turkey, and North Korea (Case study day)

- No readings assigned

BLOCK 5: CIVIL SOCIETY

October 9: What do we mean by civil society?

- Putnam, Robert D., Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Y. Nanetti. (1992). Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy., chapter 4

October 11: Collective action and interest groups

- Olson, Mancur (1971) The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups, chapter 1.

October 14: Why men rebel? Individual-based explanations

- Gurr, Ted (1970) Why Men Rebel, chapter 2

October 16: Why men rebel? Structural explanations

- Skocpol, Theda. States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China. Introduction

October 18: Revolutions in France and China (Case study day)

- No readings assigned

October 21: Monitoring Exam #2

BLOCK 6: IDENTITIES

October 23: What is an identity?

- Fukuyama, Francis (2018) *Identity: The demand for dignity and the politics of resentment*, Preface and chapter 1.

October 25: Ethnic identities

- Posner, Daniel (2005) *Institutions and ethnic politics in Africa*, pp. 1-20.

October 28: Territorial identities

- Greenfeld, Liah, and Jonathan Eastwood. (2009). National identity, pp. 256–273

October 30: Religious identities

- Philpott, Daniel (2007) Explaining the political ambivalence of religion, pp. 505-514.

November 1: Gender identities

- Htun, Mala, and S. Laurel Weldon (2012) The civic origins of progressive policy change: Combating violence against women in global perspective, 1975–2005, pp. 548-569.

November 4: Identities in Japan and Nigeria (Case study day)

- No readings assigned

November 6: Monitoring Exam #3

BLOCK 7: POLITICAL ECONOMY

November 8: The state and the economy

- Hall, Peter A. and David Soskice (2001) An Introduction to Varieties of Capitalism, pp. 1-33

November 11: Poverty and inequality

- Banerjee, Abhijit, and Esther Duflo (2003) Inequality and growth: What can the data say?, pp. 267-299.

November 13: Economic development

- Acemoglu, Daron and James Robinson. Why Nations Fail? (2012), chapter 1

November 15: Welfare states and redistribution

- Mares, Isabella (2004). Economic insecurity and social policy expansion: Evidence from interwar Europe, pp. 745-764.

November 18: Resource curse

- Ross, Michael (1999) The political economy of the resource curse, pp. 297-322.

November 20: Economic development in Singapore, Venezuela, and Saudi Arabia (Case study day)

- No readings assigned

November 22: Monitoring Exam #4

November 25-29: No classes. Happy Thanksgiving.

December 1: Paper due date

BLOCK 8: CONTEMPORARY TOPICS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

December 2: Populism

- Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) Populism: A very short introduction, chapters 1 and 5.

December 4: Post-material politics

- Inglehart, Ronald (1989) Culture shift in advanced industrial society, pp. 66-103.

December 6: Informal institutions

- Tsebelis, George (2000) Veto Players in institutional analysis, pp. 441-474
- December 9: Populism, post materialism, and informality in the US and Hungary (Case study day)

FINAL EXAM: TBA

Paper topics

Is Hungary a competitive authoritarian regime, a closed authoritarian regime, or a democracy?

Ghana transitioned to democracy in 1992 and has remained a stable democracy since then. In light of existing theories of democratization, is Ghana's democratic stability surprising?

How do Israel's political institutions—namely, its parliamentary system and electoral rules—explain its recent inability to form a durable national government?

India is one of the world's most ethnically diverse countries. Is it inevitable that ethnicity is also central to its politics?

As recently as the mid-1990s, Nigeria and China were equally poor. Why is China today so much richer?