

## Political Science 250: Introduction to Comparative Politics

Fall Quarter 2024

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00-3:20

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Office hours: Wednesday, 2:00-4:00 and by appointment

This course has two goals. The first is to introduce students to some of the basic ideas of comparative politics. Comparative politics is the study of the domestic politics of countries around the world. In contrast to international relations, which focuses on relations *between* nations, comparative politics studies events *within* nations. By comparing events within countries, comparative politics tries to construct theories that help us to understand politics across a wide range of countries. If you care about issues like poverty and development, democracy and dictatorship, war and peace, not to mention ethnic conflict, revolution, and globalization, and you want to think intelligently about them, you must study comparative politics.

The second goal of the course is to teach students how to think like political scientists. This means that they will become familiar with the rules of causal inference, the ways that we can show that one phenomenon causes another. If you want to understand something, you have to know where it comes from and what effects it has (what causes it and what it causes). The rules of causal inference are the basis of reasoning about just about any subject. Students will learn how to identify the dependent and independent variables (alternatively known as effect and cause) in examples of political research and show how one follows from the other. By the end of the course, they will be able to both critically evaluate the causal arguments of others and construct their own causal arguments.

This course differs from many traditional courses in comparative politics. Most courses focus on the politics of individual countries around the world (for example, England, France, Russia, India). They are something like "Around the World in Ten Weeks." The focus here will instead be on the theory of politics, the ways that political scientists actually study politics. We will consider topics rather than countries. Most of our time will be spent discussing arguments about how politics works. We will refer to many individual countries, but only in order to build and evaluate theories not to learn about those countries per se.

The course is divided into two halves that look at two main topics in comparative politics. In the first half of the course, we will focus on the process of political development – how countries become (or do not become) stable and secure democracies. In the second half, we will study political institutions like electoral rules, executive-legislative relations, and federalism and their effect on politics. While these topics do not cover the entire field of comparative politics, they

will give students an idea of the sort of issues that comparativists address and how they address them.

### **Course Requirements:**

Course requirements include:

- Timely reading of weekly assignments and regular attendance at class lectures

You are expected to have completed the readings before the class lecture and the discussion section for the week. Keeping up with the readings will be vital to your overall course performance, and it will be difficult to catch up if you fall behind. The knowledge acquired in the readings will be cumulative. That is, each week you will be introduced to new issues and theories that will become part of the “tool-box” you will use to analyze readings and lectures in subsequent weeks. Also, timely reading of the assignments will be vital to your participation in the discussion sections each week.

- Regular attendance and participation in discussion sections

Attendance at discussion sections is required. Discussion sections will provide you with your first opportunity to discuss, interpret, and challenge the assigned readings and lecture materials. You must actively participate in discussion sections.

The questions preceding each set of readings on the syllabus will give you a sense of what you should know for discussion section and should help guide your reading and studying. The critical thinking questions following each set of readings will challenge you to think more deeply about the issues in the readings. There may also be quizzes on the readings in discussion section and debates about important issues.

- Two short exercises

Students will complete two short assignments during the quarter. They will be distributed in class. The due dates are listed in the syllabus.

- A mid-term and a final exam

The dates of the midterm and in-class final are set in the syllabus. Note that the final exam is scheduled for the last day of class, the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. Exceptions are permitted only with university-approved excuses.

- Research Study Participation Requirement

Students enrolled in this course are required to complete a research participation assignment. This will involve taking part in studies conducted by students and faculty from the Department

of Political Science and will include up to 4 hours of research study participation. This will primarily require completing on-line surveys, and in some cases in-person studies at Scott Hall. Students will be able to see how political science studies are conducted and can request information about the studies at the end of the quarter. Students who prefer not to participate in research may opt for an alternative that entails reading a book chapter about political science research and writing a five-page reaction paper. The typical chapter is about 20 pages and thus reading it and writing a five-page paper should take approximately four hours. In order to opt for the 5-page paper alternative, please email the lab manager, Jacob Fortier at [jacobfortier2027@u.northwestern.edu](mailto:jacobfortier2027@u.northwestern.edu).

- Late work

Five points will be deducted for each day assignments are handed in late unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor.

### **Course Evaluation:**

Evaluation in the course will be based on the following exercises:

Short exercises:	25%
In-class midterm:	30%
Final:	35%
Discussion section:	10%

Final grades will use the following rubric:

A: 94-100  
 A-: 90-93.99  
 B+: 87-89.99  
 B: 83-86.99  
 B-: 80-82.99  
 C+: 77-79.99  
 C: 73-76.99  
 C-: 70-72.99

### **Course Readings:**

All readings will be available on the course's Canvas site.

### **Accommodations:**

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU ([accessiblenu@northwestern.edu](mailto:accessiblenu@northwestern.edu); 847-467-5530) and provide

professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

### **Academic Integrity:**

Students in this course are expected to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic Guide." For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern, see: <http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html>.

## **Course Outline and Readings**

### **September 24: Thinking About Politics**

- 1) What is an argument?
- 2) How do you show that one phenomenon causes another?
- 3) What are some of the obstacles to causal inference?

- Charles King, "How to Think"

Critical thinking question: Consider some of the things you believe about politics. How would you state them as scientific propositions? Can you think of ways to rigorously prove them?

### **Part 1: Politics of Development**

### **September 26, October 1: What Is Democracy and Where Does it Come From?**

- 1) What are different ways of defining democracy?
- 2) How important is democracy?
- 3) How do we measure democracy?
- 4) How has democracy evolved over time?
- 5) Does economic development cause democracy?
- 6) What mechanisms link economic development with democracy?

- Fareed Zakaria, "A Brief History of Human Liberty"
- Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave*, chapter 1
- Przeworski et al., "What Makes Democracy Endure?"
- Anne Meng Twitter thread on measuring democracy
- Herre and Roser, "Democracy" at Our World in Data

Critical Thinking Questions: Are poor countries doomed to be non-democratic? Why is India democratic? Why are Singapore, Saudi Arabia, and Russia non-democratic?

### Discussion Section Debate: Democracy – For and Against

#### **October 3, October 8: States Before Democracy?**

- 1) What is a state?
- 2) What mechanisms led to the emergence of modern states?
- 3) Why have African countries had problems building states?

- Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime”
- Jeffrey Herbst, “War and State in Africa”
- Henry Farrell, “Dark Leviathan”
- Herre and Arriagada, “State Capacity” at Our World in Data

Critical Thinking Question: Based on the European experience, what would you recommend to countries like Afghanistan or Democratic Republic of Congo trying to build stronger states?

### Discussion Section Debate: A Strong State or a Strong Democracy – Which Is More Important?

#### **October 10: The Roots of Prosperity**

- 1) Why are some countries rich and others poor?
- 2) What kind of government do you need to promote development?
- 3) Does prosperity depend on certain values?

- Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, chapter 3
- Shulevitz, “A New Theory of Western Civilization”
- Max Roser, “Economic Growth” at Our World in Data

Critical Thinking Questions: How would you explain why some countries remain poor? Why isn't it easy to replicate the path of rich countries?

### **October 10: SHORT EXERCISE 1 DUE**

#### **October 15: Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict**

- 1) What is a nation? What is nationalism?
- 2) Where does nationalism come from?
- 3) What is the relationship between nationalism and democracy?

- Eric Hobsbawm, “Nationalism”
- Snyder and Ballentine, “Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas”
- Roser et al, “War and Peace” at Our World in Data

Critical Thinking Question: Can nationalism ever be a force for good in the world?

### **October 17: The Middle Eastern Exception?**

1) What factors have prevented democracy from emerging in the Middle East and how?

- Michael Ross, “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?”
- M. Steven Fish, “Islam and Authoritarianism”

Critical Thinking Question: Was the Arab Spring doomed from the start?

### **October 22: Collective Action and Revolutions**

- 1) Why do people have difficulty forming groups?
- 2) Why are revolutions hard to predict?
- 3) Why do wars happen?

- Collective Action handout
- Timur Kuran, “Now Out of Never”
- Chris Blattman, “The Five Reasons Wars Happen”

Critical thinking question: How could we help people to overthrow dictators?

Discussion Section Debate: What are the causes of and solutions to the war in Ukraine?

### **October 24: IN-CLASS EXAM**

#### **Part 2: Democracy and Its Institutions**

### **October 29: Types of Democracy**

- 1) What is the difference between a consensual and majoritarian democracy?
- 2) What kind of politics does each produce?

- Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, chapters 1-4
- Fukuyama on Vetocracy
- Constitute Project database

Critical Thinking Questions: What kind of democracy would you recommend for Syria? For Afghanistan? For the US?

## October 31: Electoral Systems

- 1) What is the difference between PR and first-past-the-post electoral systems?
- 2) What is Duverger's Law and how does it work?
- 3) How can we use electoral design to increase the representation of women and minorities
- 3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of different electoral systems?
  - Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, chapter 5 (only 62-69), chapter 8
  - Maurice Duverger, "The Number of Parties"
  - Pippa Norris, "Women's Representation"

Critical Thinking Questions: Why does Canada have three parties despite a first past the post system? Why does Austria have only two parties despite a PR system?

Discussion Section Debate: PR versus Plurality – Which Is Better?

## November 5, November 7: Presidentialism Versus Parliamentarism

- 1) What are the basic features of presidential and parliamentary systems?
- 2) What are their advantages and disadvantages?
  - Gallagher, Laver, and Mair, "Building and Maintaining a Government"
  - Juan Linz, "The Perils of Presidentialism"
  - Guillermo O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy"

Critical Thinking Questions: Why doesn't the US suffer from the perils of presidentialism? Or do we? Why do you think minority governments form in parliamentary systems?

Discussion Section Debate: Presidentialism versus Parliamentarism – Which Is Better?

## November 12: SHORT EXERCISE 2 DUE

### November 12: Federalism and Its Correlates

- 1) What are federal, confederal and unitary systems?
- 2) Why is federalism usually associated with bicameralism and judicial review?
- 3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of federalism?
  - Alfred Stepan, "Federalism and Democracy"
  - Gabriella Montinola, et al, "Federalism, Chinese Style"

Critical Thinking Question: Does federalism lead to prosperity or poverty?

## **November 14: Welfare State**

- 1) What are the types of welfare states?
- 2) Why do some countries have larger welfare states than others?
- 3) Why is welfare state retrenchment not the opposite of welfare state growth?

- Pierson, “The New Politics of the Welfare State”
- Alesina et al., “Why Doesn’t the US Have a European Style Welfare State?”

Critical Thinking Question: Why doesn’t the US have a European-style welfare state? Where is the welfare state most likely to be cut?

Discussion Section Debate: Federalism – A Race to the Top or the Bottom?

## **November 19: Civil Society and Democracy**

- 1) What is civil society?
- 2) How does it affect democracy?

- Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, chapters 1, 4
- Robert Putnam, “Tuning In, Tuning Out”

Critical Thinking Questions: What can we do to create a strong civil society? Is it possible that a strong civil society would be a danger to democracy?

## **November 21: End of History and Populism**

- 1) Is history over?
- 2) What explains the rise of populism and does it matter?

- Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History”
- Yascha Mounk, “European Disunion”

Critical Thinking Question: What do you think is happening in the world today and why?

Discussion Section Debate: Are current problems in the US the same as ones facing our peers or different?

## **November 26: IN-CLASS EXAM**