

# INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE POLITICS

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**Course Description:** In an increasingly interconnected world, insights into the politics of other nations and an ability to analyze cross-national political trends are invaluable for a host of potential careers, such as those in international corporations, non-profits, and national (and local) governments. This course will provide an overview of the central themes, theories, concepts, and questions in comparative politics.

The course is organized into five sections. The first will provide a foundation in the core concepts and methodologies of comparative research. The next section examines democracy and dictatorship and the global trends in democratic transitions. Building on this material, the third section will focus on the political institutions, such as legislatures, electoral rules, and party systems that structure political contestation. The fourth section will look at the actors involved in politics, from the perspective of how the institutions we learned about earlier and historical context shape their behavior. Finally, the course will address processes important for understanding contemporary global politics: economic development and globalization.

**Required Texts:** Aside from the assigned textbook, we will also read articles from academic journals and book excerpts, which will be made available online.

- Daniele Caramani. 2017. *Comparative Politics*, 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Course Objectives:** Successful students will be able to:

1. demonstrate a basic understanding of the relationships between individuals, actors, and processes across different political systems both historical and contemporary.
2. apply the core concepts and ideas of comparative politics to analyzing the politics of a country case study as well as comparing and contrasting across a set of countries.
3. critically assess the current democratic and authoritarian trends in the world.

**Assignments and Evaluation:**

- Comparative analysis paper (30%): A core skill of a comparative politics researcher is the ability to compare, contrast, and analyze political phenomena across different countries while taking into account their political system, institutions, issues, and political actors. In this spirit, students will produce a comparative analysis paper that will explore a recent election in a selected foreign country and examine it from the perspective of a recent election in their home nation. Students will be expected to compare/contrast the cases in terms of the institutions, actors, and issues that influence electoral outcomes and discuss their implications for governance and policymaking in these nations.
- Exams (20% and 30%): There will be one mid-term after the third section of the course and a cumulative final exam.
- Reading Quizzes (10%): To motivate students to keep up with readings, there will be weekly short quizzes (starting after the second week) on the scheduled readings at the start of class. I will drop the lowest four scores, so only ten quizzes will be factored into the course grade.
- Participation (10%): Students will be assessed on the quality of their comments and questions, coming prepared to engage in class discussions, and participation in any in-class activities.

**Course Schedule:** Assigned textbook chapter(s) in parentheses and selected readings in bullets.

Date	Topics
	<b>Introduction</b>
Week 1	What is comparative politics? (Ch. 1)
Week 2	Comparative research methods (Ch. 2 and 3)
	<b>States and regimes</b>
Week 3	What is democracy and how do we measure it? (Ch. 5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schmitter, Philippe C. and Terry Lynn Karl. 1991. "What Democracy Is ...and Is Not." <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 2 (3): 75-88.</li> </ul>
Week 4	Explaining processes of democratization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2000. <i>Forging Democracy from Below</i>. Ch. 1, 5-7.</li> </ul>
Week 5	Authoritarian regimes (Ch. 6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levitsky, Steven and Lucan Way. 2002. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 13 (2): 51-65.</li> </ul>
	<b>Institutions</b>
Week 6	Constitutions: The rules of the game (Ch. 9)
Week 7	Executives and legislatures (Ch. 7 and 8) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linz, Juan J. 1990. "The Perils of Presidentialism." <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 1 (1): 51-69.</li> </ul>
Week 8	Federalism (Ch. 11)
Week 9	Electoral systems (Ch. 10) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Norris, Pippa. 1997. "Choosing Electoral Systems: Proportional, Majoritarian and Mixed Systems." <i>International Political Science Review</i> 18 (3): 297-312.</li> </ul>
Week 10	Social cleavages and party systems (Ch. 13) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posner, Daniel. 2004. "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 98 (4): 529-545.</li> </ul>
	<b>Actors</b>
Week 11	Political parties and partisanship (Ch. 12) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morgan, Jana. 2007. "Partisanship during the Collapse of Venezuela's Party System." <i>Latin American Research Review</i> 42 (1): 78-98.</li> </ul>
Week 12	Political culture (Ch. 17)
Week 13	Participation: Voter turnout, protest, and activism (Ch. 18) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blais, André. 2000. <i>To Vote or Not to Vote? The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory</i>. Introduction and Ch. 1.</li> </ul>
Week 14	Ideology, retrospection, and the vote choice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tavits, Margit and Natalia Letki. 2009. "When Left is Right: Party Ideology and Policy in Post-Communist Europe." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 103 (4): 555-569.</li> </ul>
	<b>Processes</b>
Week 15	Political economy and economic development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Olson, Mancur. 1993. "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 87 (3): 567-576.</li> </ul>
Week 16	Regional integration and globalization (Ch. 24) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hobolt, Sara B. 2016. "The Brexit Vote: A Divided Nation, A Divided Continent." <i>Journal of European Public Policy</i> 23 (9): 1259-1277.</li> </ul>