
POLS-Y107

Introduction to Comparative Politics

Course Overview

This course will introduce students to comparative politics – the study of domestic political institutions, processes, behavior, and outcomes across and within countries. We will study concepts such as democracy and autocracy, political and electoral institutions, political violence, and identity. Cases will be drawn from around the world to give students a grounding in the method of comparative analysis. This course is recommended for those thinking about a major or minor in political science and for anyone interested in learning more about the politics of developed and developing countries.

Goals: The course has three primary objectives: (1) to introduce students to some of the most important political developments in the world today, (2) to acquaint students with the most up-to-date explanations for these developments, and (3) to give students the tools necessary to think critically about these explanations. Along the way, we will learn about differences and similarities among countries and a range of approaches to analyzing the political world. At the end of the course, students will be in a better position to understand and critically engage in contemporary arguments about key political developments around the world.

Objectives: The course is organized around a set of important political questions: What is the state and where did it come from? What is democracy? Why are some countries democratic but others authoritarian? Do natural resources and foreign aid help or hinder the emergence of democracy? Are some cultures more or less compatible with democracy? What explains the variation we observe in authoritarian regimes around the world? How does democracy and dictatorship affect the material well-being of their citizens? Why are ethnic groups politicized in some countries but not others? Why do some countries have many parties whereas others have only a few? How do governments form, and what are the material and normative implications associated with different types of government? Do presidential or parliamentary democracies last longer and why? How do democratic institutions influence economic policy? Are there institutional solutions to ethnic conflict? Why are policy outcomes so stable in some countries but variable in others? How do institutions influence political representation?

Using the latest research in comparative politics, we examine competing answers to substantively important questions such as these and evaluate the proposed arguments for their logical consistency and empirical accuracy. In addressing the substantive questions at the core of this course, students are introduced to a variety of methods that are central to the study of comparative politics. For example, students are exposed to tools such as decision theory, social choice theory, game theory, and statistical analysis. Students learn how to calculate expected utilities, how to solve complete information games in strategic and extensive form, how to solve repeated games, how to solve simple games with incomplete information, how to evaluate one-dimensional and two-dimensional spatial models, and how to interpret simple statistical results.

Note: While this is an introductory course, this does not mean that the material covered will be easy. Indeed, many of the concepts and methods introduced in this class may well be more complicated than those addressed in upper-level classes. The course is introductory only in the sense that the material addressed is foundational and key for understanding the subject matter examined in upper level classes.

Instructor

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Office Hours: Please sign up at <https://calendly.com/jasonywu/meeting>

Requirements and Grading

Students are expected to regularly attend class, contribute to class discussions, complete the reading assignments and problem sets, and participate during in-class activities. There will be four problem sets (January 30, February 27, March 27, April 24), two midterm exams (February 20 and April 3), and a final exam (May 6). I will drop the lowest problem set grade.

Students have a choice when it comes to how their attendance grade is evaluated. In this course, they can choose if they would like their attendance in lecture to count towards the final grade. Students who choose to make attendance count will be assessed as follows. Students are permitted to miss up to three class meetings without permission or penalty. If students miss no more than three classes, they will receive +3% on their final grade. If they miss four or more classes, their final grade will be docked by -3%. Absence for illness, university-sponsored activities, or family emergencies will, of course, be excused but only subject to proper written documentation. The default is to not have attendance count. If this option is selected, then whether students attend or not will not affect their final grade.

- Participation: 10%
- Problem Sets: 15%
- Midterm 1: 25%
- Midterm 2: 25%
- Final Exam: 25%

Course Policies

Generative Artificial Intelligence

Tools such as ChatGPT are becoming important resources in many fields and industries, and have become valuable resources. Students are encouraged to consult generative AI tools, as

well as other references, for clarifying concepts and ideas in this class. However, because the assignments for this class are designed to help students think independently, generative AI tools may not be used to complete the problem sets for this course.

Technology Policy

Please put away electronic devices such as phones, tablets, laptops, or earbuds/headphones when we are in class. Plan to take notes by hand, and bring hard copies of the readings to class. Note: If you have accommodation needs around technology that have been registered with Accessible Educational Services, please let me know.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to abide by the guidelines of the IU Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct (<http://studentcode.iu.edu/responsibilities/academic-misconduct.html>) regarding cheating and plagiarism. Any ideas or materials taken from another source must be fully acknowledged and cited.

Disability Accommodation

Please contact me if you require assistance or academic accommodations for a disability. You should establish your eligibility for disability support services through the Office of Disability Services for Students in Wells Library W302, 812-855-7578.

Late Policy

Late assignments will be penalized by one grade (e.g. A- to B+) every twenty-four hours, with a maximum penalty of 20 %.

Course Outline and Readings

The following book is required for the course:

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics* (4th ed.) Washington, DC: CQ Press/Sage.

Week 1 (1/13-1/17): What is Comparative Politics? What is Science?

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapters 1-2.

Week 2 (1/20-1/24): The Political Options: Exit, Voice, and Loyalty

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 3.

Week 3 (1/27-1/31): What is the State?

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 4.

Tilly, Charles. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." In Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer, & Theda Skocpol (ed.) *Bringing the State Back In*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Problem Set 1 due, January 30.

Week 4 (2/3-2/7): Democracy and Dictatorship: Conceptualization and Measurement

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 5.

Week 5 (2/10-2/14): The Economic Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 6.

Ross, Michael L. 2001. "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53: 325-361.

Week 6 (2/17-2/21): The Cultural Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 7.

Fish, M. Steven. 2002. "Islam and Authoritarianism" *World Politics* 55: 4-37.

Midterm Exam, February 20.

Week 7 (2/24-2/28): Democratic Transitions

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 8.

Kalyvas, Stathis. 2000. "Commitment Problems in Emerging Democracies: The Case of Religious Parties." *Comparative Politics* 32: 379-399.

Problem Set 2 due, February 27.

Week 8 (3/3-3/7): Varieties of Dictatorship. Selectorate Theory.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 9.

Week 9 (3/10-3/14): Problems of Group Decision Making

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 10.

Week 10 (3/17-3/21): Spring Break, No Class

Week 11 (3/24-3/28): Parliamentary, Presidential, and Semi-Presidential Democracies: Making and Breaking Governments

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 11.

Problem Set 3 due, March 27.

Week 12 (3/31-4/4): Elections and Electoral Systems

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 12.

Midterm Exam, April 3.

Week 13 (4/7-4/11): Social Cleavages and Party Systems

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 13.

Week 14 (4/14-4/18): Institutional Veto Players

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 14.

Week 15 (4/21-4/25): Consequences of Democratic Institutions I

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 15.

Problem Set 4 due, April 24.

Week 16 (4/28-5/2): Consequences of Democratic Institutions II

Clark, William, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder. 2024. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Chapter 15.

Final Exam - May 6, 7:40PM - 9:40PM.