

PL SC 003.002: Introduction to Comparative Politics (Honors)

Course Information

Class Time: Tuesday, Thursday 10:35 AM - 11:50 AM

Place: 106 [Wartik Lab](#)

Course Website: Canvas

Contact Information

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Office Hours: 2:00 - 3:00 Wednesday and by appointment.

Course Description

Goals: The course has three primary objectives: (i) to introduce students to the major questions in comparative politics, (ii) to acquaint them with the field's best answers, and (iii) to give them the tools necessary to think critically about those answers. The course adopts an explicitly strategic approach to politics. Ultimately, the course suggests that the behavior of rulers and the ruled is most usefully understood as the interaction between individuals seeking goals in an environment in which goal attainment is complicated by the choices of other actors. Since game theory is a useful tool for understanding such interactions, it is used throughout the course whenever it is illuminating. The course also argues that explanations should be confronted with as much potentially falsifying evidence as possible. Consequently, every effort is made to present students with information about rigorous empirical tests of the theoretical arguments that they encounter and to try to give them the tools to begin to critically engage such evidence themselves. The course views comparative politics as a subfield of political science, which, like all of science, is about comparison. In the course, students make many comparisons across disparate contexts and attempt to use such comparisons to test claims made about the political world. In doing so, they learn about the similarities and differences among countries, both democratic and authoritarian. They also learn about the conditions under which some claims about the political world apply or do not apply. This course introduces students to the study of comparative political science.

Types of Questions: The course is organized around a set of questions that comparative scholars have asked repeatedly over the past several decades: What is the state and where did it come from? What is democracy? Why are some countries democracies whereas others are dictatorships? How might we explain transitions to democracy? Does the kind of regime a country has affect the material well-being of its citizens? Why are ethnic groups politicized in some countries but not in others? Why do some countries have many parties whereas some have only a few? How do governments form, and what determines the type of governments that take office? What are the material and normative implications associated with these different types of government? How does the type of democracy in a country affect the survival of that regime? Using the latest research in the field of 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.

Methodology: In addressing the substantive questions that are central to this course, students are introduced to methods that are commonly used in the study of comparative politics. For example, students are exposed to tools such as game theory, social choice 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 course is an ‘introduction’ to comparative politics, this does not mean that the material covered will be easy. ‘Introduction’ simply means that the material addressed in this class is foundational and will allow students to better understand the subject matter examined in upper level classes.

Course Requirements

Participation: Attendance during scheduled class periods is expected. In my previous classes, attendance has been a good predictor of a student’s performance on homework and exams. You will find it difficult to pass this class if you do not attend regularly. You should bring the relevant readings to class and be prepared to participate in discussions; please note that I will call on students at random with questions. Demonstrating a lack of knowledge of the readings or other material under discussion will have a negative effect on your participation grade, in the following sense: Everyone begins with 100% for the participation grade. Maintaining this 100% requires showing up to class prepared (having completed the readings carefully) and contributing to the class discussion. If you are called upon to contribute but cannot do so in a meaningful fashion (because you are absent or unprepared) then you will lose 2% of your participation score. You are welcome – and encouraged – to contribute to class discussions at any time; simply raise your hand rather than waiting to be called upon.¹ Due to the random nature of the process by which students are called upon, it is possible to skip class or show up without doing the reading and not lose participation points on any particular day. As a general strategy, however, I advise preparing for class regularly.²

Note that the use of the internet during class is discouraged (unless a brief search for something directly related to a current class discussion seems appropriate). Surfing the web on laptops, phones, or tablets is distracting both for the owner of the device and for people seated nearby. Please be considerate of the time and effort your classmates are putting into the class. If you are unable to refrain from going online during class to visit non-course related websites, I reserve the right to deduct participation points for that day.

Readings: Students are expected to do all of the assigned readings prior to the class during which they will be discussed. Some in-class assignments will be based on the readings assigned for that day.

Assignments: There will be regular homework assignments, many of which will be submitted via the course website. In-class assignments will be used as well. In the interests of fairness, homework assignments that are handed in late will not be graded.

Exams: There will be two midterms and a final exam. Exam makeups will only be possible in extenuating circumstances (oversleeping, leaving early for spring break etc. are not suitable excuses). If you are ill or have a university-accepted excuse for missing an exam, please notify me *prior* to the test date. Material covered on the exams will come from class discussion and lecture, the assigned readings, and homework assignments.

¹This participation policy is based on one developed by a former colleague, [Will Moore](http://willopines.wordpress.com/2013/03/08/poker-chips-in-the-classroom/). For the rationale behind it, see <http://willopines.wordpress.com/2013/03/08/poker-chips-in-the-classroom/>.

²If you can’t attend class regularly due to illness or university-related travel, let me know so that I can take your circumstances into account.

- Midterm 1: Thursday, September 29
- Midterm 2: Thursday, November 10
- Final Exam: TBA

Required Text/Materials

Clark, William, Matt Golder & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Washington D.C.: CQ Press.

This book should be available at the university bookstore. Additional readings will be made available on the course website or via the PSU library [for online journals].

Grading:

Your final grade is a weighted average of the three exams, homework and in-class assignments, and participation: Midterms 1 and 2 are *each* worth 20%; the final is worth 30%; the homework/in-class assignments are worth 20%, and participation is worth 10%. I will use the following scale to calculate your course grade: A (93-100), A- (90-92.9), B+ (87-89.9), B (83-86.9), B- (80-82.9), C+ (77-79.9), C (70-76.9), D (60-69.9), F (59.9 and below).

Academic Dishonesty The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe. All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor. In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in class or take home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not. Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity. In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found [here](#).

Disabilities Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services. For further information regarding policies, rights and responsibilities please visit the Office for Disability Services (ODS) Web site. Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable accommodations.

Tentative Schedule This schedule should be treated as tentative and flexible. It may be the case that it takes us more or less time for a particular topic than I have allotted here. A regularly-updated schedule that includes due dates for homework assignments will be available on the calendar section of the course website. Any changes to the readings listed on the syllabus will also be posted. You are expected to check the syllabus and the calendar regularly so that you are aware of all readings and assignments.

◇ **Week 1: August 22 - 26** – What is comparative politics? What is Science?

Tuesday – Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. [CGG] Chapter 1, pp. 1-18.

Thursday – CGG Chapter 2, pp. 19-44.

◇ **Week 2: August 29 - September 2** – What is politics?

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 3, pp. 50-66.

Thursday – No class (Instructor at conference). Reading: CGG Chapter 3, pp. 66-75.

◇ **Week 3: September 5 - 9** – What is the state?

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 4, pp. 87-108.

Thursday – CGG Chapter 4, pp. 109-119, 138-142. 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. [Course Website]

◇ **Week 4: September 12 -16** – Democracy and dictatorship: conceptualization and measurement. The economic and cultural determinants of democracy and dictatorship.

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 5, pp. 143-168.

Thursday – CGG Chapter 6, pp. 171-203.

◇ **Week 5: September 19 - 23** – The economic and cultural determinants of democracy and dictatorship. The cultural determinants of democracy and dictatorship.

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 6, pp. 203-209 and Ross, Michael L. 2001. “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” *World Politics* 53: 325-361. [Download using Penn State library access.]

Thursday – CGG Chapter 7, 213-248 and Fish, M. Steven. 2002. “Islam and Authoritarianism.” *World Politics* 55: 4-37. [Download using Penn State library access.]

◇ **Week 6: September 26 - 30** – The cultural determinants of democracy and dictatorship.

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 7, 248-259.

Thursday – **1st Midterm Exam.**

◇ **Week 7: October 3 - 7** – Democratic transitions.

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 8, pp. 265-290.

Thursday – CGG Chapter 8, pp. pp. 290-307 and Kalyvas, Stathis. 2000. “Commitment Problems in Emerging Democracies: The Case of Religious Parties.” *Comparative Politics* 32: 379-399. [Download using Penn State library access.]

◇ **Week 8: October 10 - 14** – Democracy or dictatorship – does it make a difference? Varieties of dictatorship.

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 9, pp. 325-346.

Thursday – CGG Chapter 10, pp. 349-384.

Recommended: Gandhi, Jennifer & Ellen Lust-Okar. 2009. “Elections Under Authoritarianism.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 403-422.

◇ **Week 9: October 17 - 21** – Varieties of dictatorship. Problems of group decision making.

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 10, 384-403 and Smith, Alastair. 2005. “Why International Organizations Will Continue to Fail Their Development Goals.” *Perspectives on Politics* 3: 565-567. [Download using Penn State library access.]

Thursday – CGG Chapter 11, pp. 413-439.

◇ **Week 10: October 24 - 28** – Problems of group decision making. Parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential democracies: Making and breaking governments.

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 11, pp. 439-446.

Thursday – CGG Chapter 12, pp. 457-512.

◇ **Week 11: October 31 - November 4** – Parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential democracies: Making and breaking governments. Elections and electoral systems.

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 12, pp. 499-5524.

Thursday – CGG Chapter 13, pp. 536-564.

◇ **Week 12: November 7 - 11** – Elections and electoral systems.

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 13, pp. 564-597.

Thursday – **2nd Midterm Exam.**

◇ **Week 13: November 14 - 18** – Social cleavages and party systems.

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 14, pp. 603-641 and Posner, Daniel N. “The Political Salience of Cultural Differences: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi.” *American Political Science Review* 98: 529-545. [Download using Penn State library access.]

Thursday – CGG Chapter 14, pp. 641-667.

Recommended: Bawn, Kathleen. 1993. “The Logic of Institutional Preferences: The German Electoral Law as a Social Choice Outcome.” *American Journal of Political Science* 37: 965-989.

Thanksgiving Break, November 21 - 25

◇ **Week 14: November 28 - December 2** – Institutional veto players. Consequences of democratic institutions.

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 15, pp. 672-739.

Thursday – CGG Chapter 16, pp. 741-788.

◇ **Week 15: December 5 - 9** – Consequences of democratic institutions.

Tuesday – CGG Chapter 16, pp. 788-805.

Thursday – CGG Chapter 16, pp. 805-826 and Brancati, Dawn. 2004. “Can Federalism Stabilize Iraq?” *Washington Quarterly* 27: 7-21. [Download using Penn State library access.]

Final Exam (TBA)