

# PLSC 003.002: Introduction to Comparative Politics (Honors)

---

## Course Information

Time: Tuesday, Thursday 9:05 - 10:20.

Place: 117 Thomas Building

Professor Contact Information:

E-mail: sgolder@psu.edu

Office: 305 Pond Lab

Office Hours: 10:45 - 11:45 Tuesday and Thursday.

## 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.

**Objectives:** 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, students will 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 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 analyze 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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 have read this far in the syllabus, congratulations; please email me a picture of a kiwi (the choice of bird, fruit, or notable New Zealander is up to you) for some extra homework points. 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

---

<sup>1</sup>This participation policy is based on one developed by a former colleague, Will Moore.

<sup>2</sup>If 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.

assignments that are handed in late will not be graded.

*Exams:* There will be one midterm (held in the normal classroom during the regularly-scheduled class time) 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.

- Midterm Exam: March 14.
- Final Exam: TBA

### **Required Text/Materials**

Clark, William, Matt Golder & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*, Third edition. Washington D.C.: Sage / CQ Press.

This book should be available at the university bookstore and a copy will be on reserve at the PSU library. There are significant changes in the content to the third edition and so it is important that you get this (blue) edition of the book. 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 two exams, homework and in-class assignments, and participation: the midterm is worth 30%; the final is worth 35%; the homework/in-class assignments are worth 25%, 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).

**Tentative Schedule** The schedule below 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. Any changes to the readings listed on the syllabus will be posted on the course website (Canvas). You are expected to check the syllabus and the course website regularly so that you are aware of all readings and assignments.

◇ **Week 1: January 8 - 10** – What is comparative politics? What is Science?

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. [CGG] Chapters 1 - 2.

◇ **Week 2: January 15 - 17** – What is politics?

CGG Chapter 3.

◇ **Week 3: January 22 - 24** – What is the state?

CGG Chapter 4.

Ong, Lynette H. 2018. “Thugs-for-Hire’: Subcontracting State Coercion to Violent Agents.” in Charles Crabtree, Matt Golder and Sona Golder (eds.), “Symposium: The Comparative Politics of Policing.” *CP: Newsletter of the Comparative Politics Organized Section of the American Political Science Association* 28(1): 58-62. [Course Website]

◇ **Week 4: January 29 - 31** – Democracy and dictatorship: conceptualization and measurement. The economic and cultural determinants of democracy and dictatorship.

CGG Chapters 5 - 6.

Kellam, Marisa. 2018. “Media Freedom Decline in Democracies: Lessons from Latin America.” in Matt Golder and Sona Golder (eds.), “Symposium: Fake News and the Politics of Misinformation.” *CP: Newsletter of the Comparative Politics Organized Section of the American Political Science Association* 28(2): 44-49. [Course Website]

Ross, Michael L. 2001. “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” *World Politics* 53: 325-361. [Download using Penn State library access.]

◇ **Week 5: February 5 - 7** – The cultural determinants of democracy and dictatorship.

CGG Chapter 7.

Beath, Andrew and Fotini Christia and Ruben Enikolopov. 2013. “Empowering Women through Development Aid: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan”. *American Political Science Review* 107(3): 540-557. [Download using Penn State library access.]

Terman, Rochelle. 2017. “Researching Gender and Women in Muslim Contexts: Beyond Orientalism?” in Matt Golder and Sona Golder (eds.), “Women/Gender and Comparative Politics.” *CP: Newsletter of the Comparative Politics Organized Section of the American Political Science Association* 27(1): 68-75. [Course Website]

◇ **Week 6: February 12 - 14** – Democratic transitions.

CGG Chapter 8.

◇ **Week 7: February 19 - 21** – Democracy or dictatorship – does it make a difference? Varieties

of dictatorship.

CGG Chapters 9-10.

Wallace, Jeremy. 2018. "Dearth and Distortion in Dictators' Data." in Matt Golder and Sona Golder (eds.), "Symposium: Fake News and the Politics of Misinformation." *CP: Newsletter of the Comparative Politics Organized Section of the American Political Science Association* 28(2): 70-74. [Course Website]

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.]

◇ **Week 8: February 26 - 28** – Problems of group decision making.

CGG Chapter 11.

### Spring Break, March 3 - 9

◇ **Week 9: March 12 - 14** – Review.

No new reading.

*Thursday* – **Midterm Exam.**

◇ **Week 10: March 19 - 21** – Parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential democracies: Making and breaking governments.

CGG Chapter 12.

◇ **Week 11: March 26 - 28** – Elections and electoral systems.

CGG Chapter 13.

◇ **Week 12: April 2 - 4** – Social cleavages and party systems.

CGG Chapter 14.

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.]

◇ **Week 13: April 9 - 11** – Institutional veto players.

CGG Chapter 15, pp. 645-689.

Farrell, Henry. Why Is Inequality Higher in America? The Monkey Cage Blog (January 11, 2012).

◇ **Week 14: April 16 - 20** – Consequences of democratic institutions I.

CGG Chapter 16.

García-Ponce, Omar. 2017. “Civil War and Female Political Participation: The Case of Peru.” in Matt Golder and Sona Golder (eds.), “Symposium: Women/Gender and Comparative Politics.” *CP: Newsletter of the Comparative Politics Organized Section of the American Political Science Association* 27(1): 25-31. [Course Website]

◇ **Week 15: April 23 - 27** – Consequences of democratic institutions II.

CGG Chapter 16.

Brancati, Dawn. 2004. “Can Federalism Stabilize Iraq?” *Washington Quarterly* 27: 7-21. [Download using Penn State library access.]

## **Final Exam (TBA)**

### **Additional Information**

#### **Academic Dishonesty:**

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, the University’s Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity, respect other students’ dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. Academic integrity includes a commitment by all members of the University community not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.

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. Students with questions about academic integrity should visit <http://www.la.psu.edu/> and then click on 'Academic Integrity.'

Penn State defines academic integrity as “the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner” (Senate Policy 49-20). Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without permission from the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students facing allegations of academic misconduct should not drop the course; those who do will be added to the course again and will be expected to complete course work and meet course deadlines. If the allegations are dismissed, then the drop will be permitted. Students found responsible for academic misconduct often receive academic sanctions, which can be severe, and put themselves at risk for disciplinary sanctions assigned by the University’s Office of Student Conduct (see Senate Policy G-9).

### **Disabilities:**

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University’s educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. Student Disability Resources (SDR) website provides contact information for every Penn State campus (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/disability-coordinator>). For further information, please visit the Student Disability Resources website (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/>).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: See documentation guidelines at (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/guidelines>). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

### **Counseling and Psychological Services:**

Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy

respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park (CAPS): 814-863-0395 or <http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling/>; Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400; Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

**Extended or long-term absences:**

During your enrollment at Penn State, unforeseen challenges may arise. If you ever need to miss an extended amount of class in such a circumstance, please notify your professor so you can determine the best course of action to make up missed work. If your situation rises to a level of difficulty you cannot manage on your own with faculty support, reach out to the Student Care & Advocacy office by phone at (814-863-2020) or email them at [StudentCare@psu.edu](mailto:StudentCare@psu.edu). Office hours are Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Educational Equity:**

Penn State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Acts of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment due to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, or veteran status are not tolerated and can be reported through Educational Equity via the Report Bias webpage, (<http://equity.psu.edu/reportbias/>).