

Introduction to Comparative Politics

Course Overview

This course is an introductory course to comparative politics. It introduces basic concepts, theories, and tools in comparative politics, providing a foundation for more advanced political science courses. It will also help students to better understand and analyze current affairs and social issues from a political perspective.

The course is organized around key political questions, including what the state is, what democracy is and is not, how democracy and dictatorship affect citizens' material well-being, and how different electoral systems shape the behavior of voters and politicians. Drawing on the latest research in comparative politics, we examine competing answers to these substantively important questions and evaluate the proposed arguments for logical consistency and empirical accuracy using methods central to modern social science, such as social choice theory, game theory, and statistical analysis.

Course Objectives

1. Develop a basic understanding of fundamental issues of comparative politics
2. Apply concepts with different perspectives to analyze current affairs and social issues
3. Comprehend common tools in modern social science

Textbook

Clark, W. R., Golder, M., & Golder, S. N. (2017). *Principles of comparative politics*. CQ Press.

Assessment

- 10% - In-class participation
- 40% - Quiz x 2
 - Multiple-choice questions x 10
 - A short explanation of key terms x 2
- 10% - Group presentation on discussion reading
 - For 6 selected weeks, 3 - 4 students need to form a group and present one of the assigned readings with 1- 2 questions for in-class open discussion
- 40% - Group Project (5% research prospectus (500 words); 10% in-class presentation (20 minutes); 25% final report (2000 words))
 - Same grouping as the presentation on discussion reading
 - A group project that describes and analyzes real political events or phenomena using concepts learned in this class
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Course structure

The weekly class will be divided into three 45-minute sessions. The first two sessions cover basic concepts with examples, and the final session includes a student-led discussion of the assigned reading.

Weekly Schedule and Readings

The schedule below lists the issues covered in the lecture, the required reading, and the discussion reading (if any) for each week. Read the required and discussion readings before the lecture. Students are expected to spend 3 to 6 hours per week reading and working on the group project.

Part A Introducing the Field of Politics

Week 1 Introducing the Study of Politics

- Issues: what is (comparative) politics, the scientific study of politics, and the development of the discipline
- Required reading: Clark et al. (2017), Chapters 2-3

Week 2 Politics as the Study of the State

- Issues: state of nature, different views of the state, and State vs. Nation
- Required Reading: Clark et al. (2017), Chapter 4

**Submit the group list after the add/drop period*

Part B Comparing Political Regimes

Week 3 Comparing different political ideologies

- Issues: political ideologies and their functions, and review of basic political ideologies: liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, fascism, socialism, etc.
- Required Reading:

Heywood, A. (2021). *Political ideologies: An introduction*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Chapter 1 and Chapter 12

Week 4 Democracy and dictatorship: Conceptualization and measurement

- Issues: definition and core features of democracy and dictatorship, measurement, and data set of global polities
- Required Reading: Clark et al. (2017), Chapter 5 & Chapter 10 (pp. 487 – 495)
- Discussion Reading:

Schmitter, P. C., & Karl, T. L. (1991). What democracy is... and is not. *Journal of Democracy*, 2(3), 75-88.

Diamond, L. J. (1990). Three paradoxes of democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 1(3), 48-60.

Week 5 The economic determinants of democracy and dictatorship

- Issues: redistribution and democracy, selectorate theory, and resource curses
- Required Reading: Clark et al. (2017), Ch 6 & Chapter 10 (pp. 496 – 517)
- Discussion Reading:

Olson, M. (1993). Dictatorship, democracy, and development. *American Political Science Review*, 87(3), 567-576.

Hong, J. Y. (2018). How natural resources affect authoritarian leaders' provision of public services: evidence from China. *The Journal of Politics*, 80(1), 178-194.

Week 6 The cultural determinants of democracy and dictatorship

- Issues: (cultural) modernization theory, civic culture, and social capital
- Required Reading: Clark et al. (2017), Ch 7
- Discussion Reading:

Woodberry, R. D. (2012). The missionary roots of liberal democracy. *American Political Science Review*, 106(2), 244-274.

Fish, M. S. (2002). Islam and authoritarianism. *World Politics*, 55(1), 4-37.

Week 7 Democratic Transition and democratic backsliding

- Issues: external and internal causes of democratization, and the global trend of democratic backsliding
- Required Reading:

Geddes, B. (1999). What do we know about democratization after twenty years?. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2(1), 115-144.

Little, A. T., & Meng, A. (2024). Measuring democratic backsliding. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 57(2), 149-161.

**Submission of research prospectus*

Part C Comparing Political Institutions

Week 8 Parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential democracies:

- Issues: executive-legislative relations, presidentialism vs parliamentarianism, and semi-presidential system
- Required Reading: Clark et al. (2017), Chapter 12

**1st mid-term Quiz at the beginning of the lecture*

Week 9 Institutional Veto Players

- Issues: federalism and its features, centralization vs decentralization, and bicameralism
- Required Reading: Clark et al. (2017), Chapter 15
- Discussion Reading:

Stepan, A. C. (1999). Federalism and democracy: Beyond the US model. *Journal of Democracy*, 10(4), 19-34.

O'Reilly, R. F. (2005). Veto points, veto players, and international trade policy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 38(6), 652-675.

Week 10 Elections and Electoral Systems.

- Issues: majoritarian vs proportional electoral system, mixed system, and problems of group decision
- Required Reading: Clark et al. (2017), Chapters 11 & 13
- Discussion Reading:

Benoit, K. (2006). Duverger's Law and the study of electoral systems. *French Politics*, 4, 69-83.

Cox, G. (1999). Electoral rules and electoral coordination. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2(1), 145-161.

Week 11 Party systems and social cleavages

- Issues: function of political parties, consequences of electoral systems, development of parties, and their contemporary challenges
- Required Reading: Clark et al. (2017), Chapter 14
- Discussion Reading:

Dalton, R. J. and Wattenberg, M. (2000). Unthinkable Democracy: Political Change in Advanced Democracies. In Dalton, R. J. and Wattenberg, M (Eds), *Parties Without Partisans* (pp. 3 – 16). New York: Oxford University Press.

Guth, J. L., & Nelsen, B. F. (2021). Party choice in Europe: Social cleavages and the rise of populist parties. *Party Politics*, 27(3), 453-464.

Week 12 Interest Groups, Civil Society, and the Mass Media

- Issues: interest groups and group politics, the concepts and functions of civil society, mass media and politics
- Required Reading:

Foley, M. W., & Edwards, B. (1996). The paradox of civil society. *Journal of Democracy*, 7(3), 38-52.

Park, C. S., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2021). Learning about politics from mass media and social media: Moderating roles of press freedom and public service broadcasting in 11 countries. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 33(2), 315-335.

**2nd mid-term Quiz at the beginning of the lecture*

Week 13 Group Presentation

Week 14 Group Presentation