Course Description

Comparative politics is often defined in contrast to international relations because *anarchy* does not rein at the domestic level. In this formulation, the presence of centralized institutions of governance at the domestic level prevents the war of each against all associated with world politics. But, what are these institutions, how did they develop, and do they always produce the order they are imagined to? In answering these questions, this course provides an introductory survey to the study of politics through the questions, puzzles and analytic frameworks of comparative politics. The course is also grounded in developing a working knowledge of politics in several countries: Nigeria, France, China, Mexico, India, USA and Rwanda. The countries covered in the course are intended to help you develop and apply some of the skills and techniques of comparative politics.

We cover the following topics in this course:

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Readings

The syllabus lists required readings. **You are expected to complete all required readings before each class meeting.**

The following text has been ordered for the course and is available at Water Street Books:

Readings marked by a ** are in the course reading packet, available for pick-up on the first floor of Weston. The reading packet will come in two (2) parts. Part 1 is available immediately; Part 2 will be ready shortly.

This course is also informed by current events in countries around the world. As such, I expect you to keep abreast of contemporary political and economic events by regularly reading the international/world section of a major news provider (*New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Times of London*, *The Guardian*, *The BBC News Online*). All are online and most are free.

**Reading Guide:**

The reading loads are not especially heavy, about 120 pages a week, so you are expected to read them carefully and reflectively. Before approaching each reading think about the discussion questions for that day/topic. Then skim over the reading to get a sense of the themes it covers, the countries, the periods, the methods and, before reading further, jot down on a piece of paper what questions you hope the reading will be able to answer for you: what do you hope to be able to learn from reading the article? Next, read the introduction and conclusion. This is normally enough to get a sense of the big picture.

Ask yourself: are the claims in the text surprising? Are you convinced? Can you think of examples of places that do not seem to be consistent with the logic of the argument? Is the reading answering the questions you hoped it would answer? If not, is it answering more or less interesting questions than you had thought of?

Next ask yourself: what kind of evidence or arguments would you need to see in order to be convinced of the claims? Now read through the whole text, checking as you go through how the arguments used support the claims of the author.

Keep an eye out for unstated assumptions that the author uses: what does she assume about how humans behave or think? What does she assume about the ability of groups to act collectively, and so on. It is very rare to find a piece of writing that you agree with entirely. So as you come across issues that you disagree with or are not convinced by, write them down and bring them along to class for discussion. Also note when you are pleasantly surprised, when the author produced a convincing argument that you had not thought of.

**Requirements**

**Attendance and Class Participation (20%)**

Regular attendance and participation is expected and necessary for you to do well in this course. I will spot check attendance during the semester as I see fit. If you must miss class, I want to be notified **ahead** of time. Exceptional participation will be rewarded with a bonus grade. More than two unexcused absences will result in a 50% reduction in your class participation grade; more than three will result in a 100% reduction.
In addition to our regular class meetings, we will have four (4) Friday discussion sessions throughout the semester on current topics that relate to our class themes. Each section will have a maximum of 10 students, and each student is required to attend at least one discussion session. You are welcome to attend more than one discussion session. Readings and topics for discussion will be set in advance of each meeting. The meeting dates are **Sept. 26, Oct. 10th, Oct. 31st and Nov. 21st**.

**Response Papers (20 %)**

You are required to write 4 response papers of no more than 3 pages, based on an assigned question and drawing on the readings for that day. Each paper **must** be drawn from a different **Topic** of the course. The first 2 response papers are due before the mid-term (by Thursday Oct. 9th). Papers are due on the day we discuss that in class.

Your response essays should be double-spaced, with standard sized font (times or times roman size 12 font) and margins no smaller than an inch at the top, bottom, left and right.

**In-Class Mid-Term (25 %)**

There will be closed-book in-class mid-term exam on **Thursday October 16th**. The in-class mid-term will have two parts:

a. 5 short ID’s (3 points each)

b. 1 essay question (10 points)

The list of 10 IDs and 4 essay questions from which the mid-term will be drawn will be handed out in class on Thursday October 9th.

**Final Exam (35 %)**

There will be a closed-book final exam to be scheduled for exam week. The final will consist of:

a. 5 short ID’s (3 points each)

b. 2 essay questions (10 points each)

The list of 10 ID’s and 10 essay questions from which the exam will be drawn will be handed-out on the final day of class (Thursday Dec. 4th).

**Honor Code Guidelines Apply to All The Written Requirements For This Course. Give Credit to Ideas That Are Not Your Own, Even If Drawn From The Internet. If you are Not Sure How to Give Credit, Ask Before You Turn In Written Work.**
Unlike the other three sub-disciplines of political science, comparative politics is the only one whose name signals both a substantive focus and a methodological approach. Whatever else we do, we presumably COMPARE. The three readings for today address what is meant by comparison and why we compare.

**Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method**

Kopstein and Lichbach. 2005. “What is Comparative Politics,” in *Comparative Politics*. Chapter 1


**Discussion Questions:**

- Discuss the three research traditions in comparative politics. Do you think that these research traditions are mutually exclusive?

- Is there a difference between the experimental, statistical and the comparative method?

- As discussed by Kopstein and Lichbach, what do we compare and how do we compare?

**Interests, Institutions and Culture: Explanatory Frameworks in CP**


**Discussion Questions:**

- Based on the reading, what are the central assumptions of the interest-based (rational choice) explanatory framework? Do you foresee any potential
problems with this approach?

- What is culture? Is a cultural explanation significantly different from an interest-based or institutional explanation?

## MACRO FRAMEWORKS

Comparative politics is often defined in contrast to international relations because anarchy does not reign at the domestic level. In this formulation, the presence of centralized institutions of governance at the domestic level prevents the war of each against all imagined for world politics. The readings for today address three key questions: what are these centralized institutions, how did they develop historically, and what happens when they fail?

### Monday

**The State**


**Discussion Questions:**

- According to Tilly, ‘wars make states, and states make war’. Critically discuss the logic and dynamic of state formation implied by this statement.

- Based on the readings, can one discern a logic understood to characterize all states? Or are differences among states so vast that generalizations about what states are and how they behave are worthless?

- According to Herbst, what are the prerequisites for successful state formation? How do these factors interact with each other to produce state consolidation?

At the domestic level, what makes decisions by state institutions authoritative? That is, why do individuals comply with the rules and regulations announced by holders of political office? Weber’s chapter, which demands close reading, provides a typology of types of authority.

### Thursday

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### Sep. 18: Bases of Authority and Legitimacy


**Discussion Questions:**

- As discussed by Weber, what differentiates traditional, charismatic and rational legal authority?

- In his 1983 article, Joseph argues that politics in Nigeria is prebendal. What does Joseph mean by prebendalism? What is the relationship between prebendalism and the 3 bases of authority discussed by Weber?

- In light of Lewis’s article, is Nigeria still a prebendal state? How would you characterize the basis of political authority in Nigeria?

### Nationalism

Ernest Renan. What is a Nation? **

Anthony D. Smith The Origins of Nations **

Benedict Anderson Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. Chapters 1-3 **


**Discussion Questions:**

- So, What is a Nation? Is there a difference between a state and a nation?

- How and why does the development of print media shape the process of nation building?

- Are all nations imagined along similar lines?

### Case: France


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Discussion Questions:

- According to Eugen Weber, at what point did the French Crown become interested in the linguistic conquest of its territories? In your view, why do you think a single language was important?

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**First Discussion Session**

**Friday Sep. 26th**

**MODERN POLITICAL REGIMES**

Modern political systems not only differ with respect to their bases of authority, as we noted last week, but also fundamentally differ on the relationship they engender between state and society (i.e. regimes). In this section of the course, we examine some of the theoretical and empirical grounds by which comparativists have classified states based on the relationship between state and society.

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**Sultanistic, Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes**


Discussion Questions:

- According to Aristotle, what are the three forms of tyranny? Are these three forms of tyranny analogous with Nuemann’s simple, ceasaristic and totalitarian dictatorship?

- As discussed by Linz and Stepan, what is the fundamental difference between an authoritarian and a totalitarian regime?

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**China**

**Thursday Oct. 2:**


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**Discussion Questions:**

- The readings suggest that China has gone through a number of significant reforms over the past couple of decades. Based on your understanding of regime classification, in your view, is China totalitarian or authoritarian?

- According to Nathan, why did communism collapse in the USSR but survive in China? Are there limits to the authoritarian resilience Nathan attributes to China?

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Almost universally, all states claim to be democratic. In today’s readings we examine some of the issues that are at stake in debates about classifying regimes as democratic.

**Democracy**

*Monday Oct. 6:*


**Discussion Questions:**

- As elaborated by Dahl, what makes a political system democratic? Do you foresee any problems with the definition that Dahl provides?

- Why, according to Schmitter and Karl, can democracy not be reduced to the regular holding of elections? Would Alverez et al., agree with Schmitter and Karl?

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**Nigeria**

*Thursday Oct. 9:*


**Discussion Questions:**

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Based on the evidence from the readings, would you consider Nigeria democratic? In your answer, be explicit about how you are defining democracy.

**Friday Oct. 10th**

**Second Discussion Session**

**Topic, Meeting Time and Location TBA**

**Thursday Oct. 16th:**

**IN-CLASS MID-TERM**

In this part of the course we explore several topics in comparative politics (regime change and consolidation, social movements and contentious politics, revolutions and identity/ethnic politics) from each of the three explanatory frameworks introduced in the first half of the course.

**REGIME CHANGE**

All the readings in this section address an enduring puzzle in comparative politics: why do some countries become democratic, but others fail? As we will see, answers to these questions have involved macro-historical accounts, social-cultural postulations and more short-term strategic analyses.

**Transitions to Democracy**

**Monday Oct. 20th:**


**Discussion Questions:**

- What is the relationship between economic development and transitions to democracy?
- What is the ‘civic culture’? What is the relationship between political attitudes and regime types?
- According to Przeworski under what conditions are transitions to democracy likely?

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Case: Mexico


Chapter 9 (Mexico) of *Comparative Politics: Interests, Institutions, and Identities in a Changing Global Order*. 299-333.

Discussion Questions:

- What explains the defeat of the PRI in the 2000 elections in Mexico? In view of your answer, which theoretical framework do you think most comprehensively explains the transition in Mexico?
- In light of the conduct of the 2006 Presidential elections, would you consider Mexico to be democratic? Be sure to draw on theory and evidence in your response.

Once a transition to democracy has occurred, what makes democracy stick? How do we know when a democracy is at risk of collapse? The readings for this week grapple with these key questions.

Democratic Consolidation


Discussion Questions:

- What is democratic consolidation? Does it mean or imply more than the continuation with elections?
- *After a transition, all democracies have the same chance of being consolidated.* Discuss with respect to readings from this week
- What does Przeworski mean by self-enforcing compliance? How does this idea inform his understanding of democratic consolidation?

Case: India
Thursday Oct. 30th:

Chapter 10 (India) of *Comparative Politics: Interests, Institutions, and Identities in a Changing Global Order*. 343-94


Discussion Questions:

- India possesses many of the attributes (extreme poverty, high illiteracy, high social stratification, etc.,) generally assumed to hinder democracy. What accounts for the survival of democracy in India?

- What makes Kohli say that India ‘endures’ elections? Does this suggest that, perhaps, democracy in India is not yet consolidated?

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Friday Oct. 31st

Third Discussion Session

**Topic, Meeting Time and Location TBA**

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Monday Nov. 3rd:


Mancur Olson. 1960. *The Logic of Collective Action* Chapter 1

Discussion Questions

- What is contentious politics? According to Tarrow, under what conditions is collective action likely? Do you find this argument convincing?

- What is a public good? Why characteristics of public goods make collective action difficult? Are there any general solutions to these collective action problems?

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Thursday Nov. 6th:

Case: US Civil Rights Movement


Discussion Questions

- Based on MLK’s account, what factors contributed to the successful staging of the Montgomery Bus Boycott? What does this mean for the ‘collective action problem’ identified by Olson?
REVOLUTIONS

Karl Marx. *Manifesto of the Communist Party* **

**Monday**  
**Nov. 10th:**

Discussion Questions:
- What is the rebel’s dilemma? Are there any solutions to this dilemma?
- According to Marx, why is class conflict inevitable?
- What does Gurr mean by absolute deprivation? How compelling is this concept as an explanation of revolutions?

**Case: China**

**Thursday**  
**Nov. 13th:**

Discussion Questions:
*In the last class we looked at three explanations of revolutions. After reading the chapter by Lieberthal, which framework do you think gives a more compelling account of the Chinese Revolution?*

IDENTITY POLITICS


**Monday**  
**Nov. 17th:**

Discussion Questions:
- According to Horowitz, what is an ethnic group and why is this type of identity associated with conflict?
- According to Malesevic, what are the limitations of an interest-based understanding of ethnic relations? In his view, what is a more appropriate framework for examining ethnic relations?
- According to Chandra, what is ethnic identity? Under what conditions might
Ethnic identity become the basis for political mobilization?

**Case: Rwanda**

**Thursday Nov. 20th:**


Discussion Questions:

- Are Hutus and Tutsis primordial identities? Be sure to justify your answer.
- What are the factors behind the outbreak of 1994 genocide in Rwanda? What does this say about the salience of identity in political mobilization?

**Friday Nov. 21st**

**Forth Discussion Session**

Topic. Meeting Time and Location TBA

**POLITICAL ECONOMY**

**What is Political Economy**


Martin Staniland. *What is Political Economy?* Chapter 1 **

Discussion Questions:

What is political economy?

What are some of the features of positive political economy (PPE)? Which of the three explanatory frameworks does PPE belong to?

**Monday Nov. 24th:**

Do different regime types have a substantive effect on important economic outcomes? Specifically, does democracy in the political realm foster or hinder growth?

**Regime Type and Growth/Development**


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Discussion Questions

- Economic development has occurred and failed to occur under a variety of totalitarian, authoritarian and democratic regimes. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the form of a regime significantly affects economic performance. Based on the readings, critically discuss and develop your own position on the relationship between regime type and economic performance.

LAST CLASS MEETING

*Thursday Dec. 4th:*

REVIEW SESSION

LIST OF CONCEPTS AND ESSAY QUESTIONS FROM WHICH THE EXAM WILL BE DRAWN HANDED OUT