

POLI 2053 Intro to Comparative Politics

Time and Location

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30-11:50

100% Web Based

Instructor Information

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

Why are some states democracies, and others not? Why do democracies use different electoral rules, and what are their consequences? Why do some people vote, and others not?

Comparative Politics is a subfield of political science that addresses these questions and more in different contexts around the world. This course introduces fundamental concepts, theories and questions of the study of comparative politics. We will learn a number of topics central to understanding the political systems and political events around the world: democratization, voting and elections, political parties, representation, and political violence. This course will give students a basic understanding of how politics operates in the political systems around the world, and how historical, cultural, economic, and institutional differences across countries affect politics and policy-making.

Course Structure

1. This course will be delivered 100% online. There are two components of the course. First, all lectures will be pre-recorded by the instructor and will be posted on Moodle in the format of narrated PowerPoint slides. Second, there will be Zoom synchronous sessions. These synchronous sessions consist of class discussions and group activities (through breakout rooms). Students are expected to attend these sessions. Please consult with me in advance if you can't.
2. This course is NOT self-paced, independent study. You are expected to listen to the pre-recorded lectures and complete the assignments according to the course schedule.
3. You are required to read the assigned reading carefully each week.
4. There are two take-home exams (midterm and final) scheduled for the semester.
5. If you have any questions with the course material. Also, I encourage you to seek out assistance at the first sign of difficulty with the course material. I will be happy to discuss the material with you.

Teaching Assistant

Harriet Sellers

Ph.D. Student, Department of Political Science, Louisiana State University E-mail:

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Learning Objectives

- Understand the fundamental concepts and theories in the study of comparative politics.
- Employ critical thinking and analytical tools to understand political phenomena.
- Develop skills to think critically and communicate thoughts effectively.

Course Materials

1. There is one required book in the course, available for purchase at the university bookstore. I strongly encourage to purchase this book: William Clark, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder, 2018. Principles of Comparative Politics, 3rd Edition, CQ Press (ISBN: 978-1506318127).
2. For some weeks, there will be additional readings beyond the textbook. I will post these reading materials on Moodle.

Course Policies

LSU Learning Competency Statement for the Social Sciences

Integrated learning allows students to make simple connections among ideas and experiences and across disciplines and perspectives. The LSU Integrative Learning Core (ILC) curriculum is designed to develop student abilities to transfer their learning to new situations, and demonstrate a sense of self as a learner. A fundamental goal of the ILC is to foster students' practical and intellectual capacities associated with integrative learning in preparation for high competence and functionality in their post-baccalaureate careers. This course fulfills the BOR Area of Social/Behavioral Sciences and provides students experience with the ILC proficiency of Global Learning.

Academic Honesty

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are required to abide by the academic conduct policies outlined in the LSU Code of Student Conduct [Link]. I strongly encourage you to review these policies. All violations of the university's academic conduct policies are turned over to the Dean of Students. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, collaboration, or any other form of cheating, consult the course instructor.

Special Accommodations

For students who have special needs or who require accommodations through Disability Services, please advise me of your situation so arrangements can be made. To request

academic accommodations, students must contact Disability Service, located in 124 Johnston Hall.

Classroom Etiquette (for Synchronous Sessions)

1. Arriving late or leaving during class is disruptive. Please make every effort to be on time. If you know in advance that you have to leave early, please let me know before class begins.
2. To help keep background noise to a minimum, please mute your microphone when you are not speaking. If you wish to speak, either physically raise your hand or use the “Raise Hand” button.
3. Work to create a friendly climate for class. Avoid personal attacks and insults during class discussions. Please respect your peers whether you agree with what they say or not.
4. Please stay focused on meetings by not doing other tasks (e.g., checking e-mails, social media).

More Notes on Synchronous Sessions

The purpose of having synchronous sessions is to offer interactive instructions commensurable to those available in traditional face-to-face classes. At the same time, I understand that students might have difficulties in attending the sessions synchronously due to various reasons. To minimize concerns related to these difficulties, I am employing the following approaches:

1. For students who cannot attend Zoom sessions synchronously, I will post recordings of the sessions on Moodle.
2. Please note that some parts of our Zoom sessions will be recorded and posted on Moodle. If you are uncomfortable with recording, please turn off your camera and/or use private chats.
3. The university provides quiet zone spaces on campus for students to do virtual classes.

Grade Dispute Policy

- If you are going to dispute a grade, you will need to submit a written explanation for doing so within one week of the quiz or exam being handed back to the class. I will not consider grade disputes after this one-week period.
- You will receive a response within one week of submitting it. Please be warned, however, that a reassessment does not automatically result in a higher grade; your grade could stay the same, go up or be lowered.

Requirements and Evaluation

Grading breakdown

- Attendance (10%) After taking each lecture, you are required to take a quiz/ poll posted on Moodle. I will take your attendance based on whether you take this quiz/ poll. I will also take attendance for Zoom synchronous sessions. If you are unable to attend these sessions synchronously, you will need to watch the recorded video of the sessions and complete the assignment asynchronously (Please let me know in advance if you can't attend synchronous sessions). If you are going to miss class due to religious holidays or university events, you must notify me as soon as possible (at least one day prior to the day of your absence).
- Participation (10%) Class participation is essential to learning. Each week, there will be discussion forums on Moodle, where students can post their thoughts on a specific topic. You are strongly encouraged to participate in these discussions as often as you can. In order to receive the full participation grade, you will need to post on these forums at least once a week.
- Quizzes (15%)
- In addition to quizzes for attendance tracking, there will be 5 quizzes during the semester. You will be taking these quizzes on Moodle at a specific time that I will notify in advance. Each quiz will consist of approximately 10 multiple choice questions. At the end of the semester I will drop each student's lowest quiz score. Quizzes will contain questions both from the assigned readings and recent lectures. Makeup quizzes will not be given unless the instructor is notified in advance and agrees that the absence is a university excused absence. Students who miss quizzes will receive a score of 0.
- Media Report Assignment (20%) See the section below for details.
- Exams
 - Midterm (20%) Tuesday
 - Final (25%) Tuesday
 - Both midterm and final exams will be delivered in an open-book, take-home format. The purpose of the exams is to assess your comprehension of concepts we are discussing and your ability to employ them in the explanation of major components of political systems. They will draw on all aspects of the course: readings, lectures, class discussions and activities. The final exam is cumulative and is based on all materials covered throughout the semester.
 - Makeup exams will not be given unless the instructor is notified in advance and agrees that the absence is a university excused absence. Students who miss exams will receive a score of 0.

Media Report Assignment

The primary purposes of this assignment are to 1) motivate students to follow political events across the globe and 2) facilitate understanding of how academic theories speak to politics in the real world. Over the course of the semester, each student is required to monitor news coverage on politics in a country of your choice other than the U.S. Your job is to gather at least three recent news articles, editorials or opinion pieces for this country and produce a report containing (1) the texts of the articles (or the links to the articles), (2) a short summary of each article, and (3) an analysis addressing the questions listed below:

1. What are the main political agendas in the country?
2. How does each story reflect change or continuity in politics in that country?
3. How does each story relate to the material we have covered in class?
4. What are the implications of this story for other countries and world politics?

You are encouraged to pick stories from the following newspapers or magazines. The websites of these newspapers make it very easy for you to find recent stories on specific countries: from the home page click on “World” and then a specific region. I will provide a guideline on how to access these websites through LSU libraries. Please consult with me if you want to use a story from a source that is not listed here, and are unsure about whether it is acceptable for the project. The article(s) should be recent, preferably within the last 6 months.

- The New York Times (www.nytimes.com)
- The Washington Post (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/>)
- The Guardian (London) (www.guardian.co.uk)
- The Independent (London) (<http://www.independent.co.uk>)
- The Economist (available in the periodicals section of the library)

Course Schedule (Subject to Change)

1. Week 1: Introduction and Course Overview
2. Week 2: What is Comparative Politics?, Methods to Study Comparative Politics
3. Week 3: State
4. Week 4: Concept of Democracy, Determinants of Democracy I
5. Week 5: Determinants of Democracy II
6. Week 6: Democratic Transition, Midterm Review
7. Week 7: Midterm
8. Week 8: Democracy or Dictatorship, Varieties of Dictatorships
9. Week 9: Types of Democratic Governments, Making and Breaking Governments
10. Week 10: Electoral Systems
11. Week 11: Designing Electoral Rules
12. Week 12: Political Parties
13. Week 13: Strategic Effect of Electoral Laws
14. Week 14: Consequences of Democratic Institutions
15. Week 15: Media Report, Final Review
16. Week 16: Final Exam