



LAKE FOREST
COLLEGE

Introduction to Comparative Politics
POLS 140 / IREL 130
SPRING 2024
Monday and Wednesday 2:30-3:50 PM
Classroom: Brown Hall 215

Instructor: Diana Dávila Gordillo, PhD

Office: Brown Hall 331

Office Hours: Thursday 14:00 am – 16:00 pm (walk-in)
or by appointment outside those hours, please send me an email.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the main concepts and theories of comparative politics. Students explore central questions of comparative politics research, such as: do variations in political institutions (constitutions, elections, parties, and party systems) matter and why? What are the different ways in which citizens participate in politics and how has it changed over time? What are the key differences between democratic and authoritarian regimes and how a country may transition from one to another? In addition, students also learn about fundamental principles and methods of comparative political analysis. Lastly, case studies of different countries around the globe help students apply abstract theories, concepts, and methods and thereby develop strong analytical and critical thinking skills. (Under the Forester Fundamental Curriculum, this course meets the Social Sciences and Global Perspectives requirements. Under the old GEC, this course meets the Cultural Diversity requirement.)
cross listed: IREL 130

This course meets 2 times per week for 160 minutes per week. The course carries 1.0 course credit (equivalent to four semester credit hours). Students are expected to devote a minimum of 12 hours of total work per week (in-class time plus out-of-class work) to this course.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Knowledge and understanding of domestic politics in countries outside of the United States
- Understanding of the logic and the tools of comparative analysis that can be applied to empirical research of any country(s).



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- Understanding variations in political institutions (e.g., party systems, electoral systems, etc.) and their consequences
- Understanding the causes of the rise and decline of democracies and authoritarian regimes
- Ability to analyze key concepts in comparative politics (e.g., state, nationalism, revolution)
- Ability to critically evaluate scholarly and popular articles about politics of various countries and regions
- Ability to formulate a research question and a thesis statement, as well as defend it in written form

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required Textbook:

Comparative government and politics: an introduction (12th edition) by Rod Hague, John McCormick, and Martin Harrop, Bloomsbury, 2022.

The book is also available via course reserve at the library. You may use the eBook version, or even an older edition of the book. However, it is your responsibility to check what content is missing or different between the editions. You will be responsible for ensuring you read all the required material, including examples from the assigned book's edition. I have three copies of the book you can borrow.

Additional materials will be posted on Moodle. All readings and other materials are due on the date they are assigned. Students should come to class ready to answer questions and engage in discussion. This means: reading all assigned material *before* class.

Attendance

Attendance and punctuality are mandatory. If you will be absent due to athletics events or other college-approved events, please let me know at the beginning of the semester. If you have to miss a class for any reason, I will allow for three absences without penalty; each unexcused absence thereafter will result in a half-letter deduction from the final grade (A to A-, B+ to B, etc.). Six or more absences will result in failing the course. Be smart and save up your absences for when you REALLY need to miss a class!

Technology

You may use your laptop in class to reference the readings or other class-related materials. However, please refrain from using your laptops, phones, or other devices for browsing, texting, or social media, as it is distracting not only to you but to students around you as well. Please be mindful and respectful. We can all tell when you are using these devices for not class-related activities.



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Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the due date will be penalized a half-letter grade per day. If you realize you may not be able to submit your papers on time, please reach out BEFORE the deadline.

Debates and Discussions

The topics of this course are subject to debate, and students are expected to have different ideas and perspectives. While productive discussions are highly encouraged, statements or comments that personally attack any individuals or groups will not be tolerated. If you have any particular sensitivities that might have a bearing on your ability to read, hear, watch, or discuss certain material, please notify me. Please be aware, however, that because of the nature of this class, I cannot guarantee that you will be completely shielded from the material you find disturbing.

House rules

The recent years have been long and challenging for all. We have all made it to this point, facing enormous challenges and disruptions in our life plans. Some paths have been forever disrupted, and others appear more daunting than they should. Nonetheless, we have all continued to persevere and make the best out of this challenging situation. To be sure, nobody signed up for the pandemic and its aftermath. However, as we need to continue moving, my commitment to you is to be tirelessly enthusiastic and work hard for you.

Your success in this class is important to me. We all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If aspects of this course prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we will develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

This class is a partnership between me as your lecturer and you as students. Together, we will build a supportive, respectful, and productive environment. Building this kind of environment requires mutual respect. What do I expect from you to create an environment of mutual respect? I expect students to arrive to class prepared to contribute, meaning that you have completed the readings and completed the necessary assignments. I also expect professional behavior in class. Think of how you would behave at an important meeting. One arrives a few minutes early. One does not wander off, surfs the web, explores social media, or text a friend. Repeated unprofessional behavior will be seen as a lack of engagement.



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IMPORTANT DEADLINES

Participation reflection	May 3 (midnight)
Map quiz 1	January 31
Map quiz 2	February 7
Map quiz 3	February 28
Map quiz 4	March 27
Map quiz 5	April 10
Country report 1	February 18
Country report 2	April 7
Special paper	March 10
Mid-term	March 4
Final exam	May 3 (1:30 pm)
Final presentation + script	Assigned day between April 22 and 30
Extra credit	May 3 (midnight)

GRADING

Participation (15%)

I expect students to read the textbook chapter and other assigned materials *before class* and be prepared to discuss them. Your participation grade will be based on the quantity *and* quality of your contribution to class discussions and group activities. I realize that some may feel more comfortable speaking up in class than others. For those who find themselves hesitant to participate, please see me during office hours or schedule an appointment with me so that we can discuss strategies to improve your performance in class. (Of course, that invitation is open to all students to discuss whatever matter you would like.). By the end of the semester, I will ask you to evaluate your participation and give yourself a grade. Your final grade will be somewhere between the grade you gave yourself and *my* evaluation of your participation. Take this opportunity to advocate for yourself.

Map Quizzes (5%)

Map quizzes will take place on select Wednesday as indicated in the course schedule below; they will test your knowledge of the geographic locations of states on regional maps. Reference maps will be posted on Moodle to help you prepare for the map quizzes.

“Your selected country” two (2) short papers (15%)

During the first session, we will discuss what country you are more interested in understanding better. This country will become the focus of at least 1 short paper, you are free to change your country for paper #2. For each paper, you will need to write about two pages and up to three pages on the topic of your choice. The deadlines for submissions are February 18 and April 7. Each paper should address any of the topics suggested for each



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deadline. More detailed instructions for each paper will be provided in class and via Moodle.

The paper will take the form of a report where you state the current status of the topic regarding your country, e.g., if you are writing about elections in your selected country, the paper will address the recent elections in your selected country. You will need to make an argument **AND** analyze the information/data you will be presenting. This is an open-topic assignment with hard deadlines.

For the **February 18** deadline, you will write a paper on **one (1)** of the following topics (it is your choice!). The possible topics are: **state formation, state failure, democratization, authoritarianism, political culture, or political participation** in your selected country case.

For the **April 7** deadline, you will write a paper on **one (1)** of the following topics: **political parties, party systems, executives, legislatures, women's representation, interest groups, social movements, constitutions, courts, or bureaucracy** in your selected country case.

Midterm Exam (20%) and Final Exam (20%)

The **mid-term exam** will be held on **March 6 during class time**. It will include multiple-choice, true-false, and short essay questions. The **final exam** will be held on **May 3 from 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm**. The format of the final exam is the same as the midterm. You will not need to be in the classroom to do the exam. However, you will ***only*** be able to do the exam during the exam time. If you cannot find a quiet place to do the exam, our usual classroom will be available for you to use. These are open notes and open-book exams.

Presentation (10%)

At the end of the semester, each student will present and discuss a research project in class (a maximum of 10 minutes). Specific presentation guidelines will be posted in Moodle. The presentation time slot will be randomly allocated and announced during the semester. You will present a research topic of your choice.

This presentation will give you the opportunity to explore your understanding of a case. To prepare the presentation, we will follow the structure of a research paper, starting with formulating a research question, forming a preliminary thesis statement, searching for relevant academic literature, as well as other secondary sources, and summarizing your findings. In this presentation, you will answer a research question of your interest in this format *what explains X phenomenon?* You will present relevant academic literature on the topic and provide a *clear and plausible* answer to your research question. This is a big project for which separate submission deadlines have been set. More detailed information



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about the different components of this assignment, including deadlines, prompts, and other instructions, will be posted on Moodle.

Written presentation report (5%)

You will need to submit a written version of your presentation. This written piece should follow each element required for the presentation and be presented in a narrated form. The paper should include citations and a bibliography. This assignment should work as a script for your presentation. This assignment is due BEFORE your presentation, so each student will have a specific deadline.

Special topic paper (10%)

Following an in-class group exercise on **February 21**, you will be asked to write a paper (two to three pages) on the topics discussed during that session. This paper should combine the topics discussed in class with elements and citations from the assigned readings and material discussed in the session. More instructions and details will be posted on Moodle.

This paper is due on **March 10 by midnight**.

Film Paper (Extra-credit 2%)

This is an optional extra-credit assignment. It requires you to watch a film that depicts issues that are relevant to the ideas, concepts, and theories in comparative politics. You will need to select the film. After watching a film of your choice, you will write a short reflection paper (500-600 words) connecting concepts you learned in class with the events you observed in the film. The film paper is due by **May 3, by midnight**.

Grading Scale

A = 93-100; A- = 92-90

B+ = 87-89; B = 83-86; B- = 80-82

C+ = 77-79; C = 73-76; C- = 70-72

D+ = 67-69; D = 63-66; D- = 60-62

Please read the syllabus additional document to get information about academic honesty, support for students with disabilities, academic support and tutoring, the sexual misconduct statement, and the faculty diversity commitment statement.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1:

January 17: Introduction

Wednesday: Introduction (the syllabus). What country do you know best? Which one would you like to know more about? **How do you cook rice?**

Week 2:



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Jan. 22 and 24: What is Comparative Politics and research methods

Monday and Wednesday:

Required reading: Comparative Government and Politics Chapters 1 “Government and Politics” and 2 “Making comparisons.”

Activity: Through a quick google search find recent work done by comparativists (political scientists that focus on comparative politics). Be prepared to talk about the research you will read about AND the methods used in the work.

Submit a simple word document with a link to the work you read about via moodle.

We will also start discussing the final research presentation.

Week 3:

Jan. 29: States and Nations and Jan. 31: State Failure

Monday:

Required reading: Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 3 “States and Nations.”

Wednesday:

Required reading: Rotberg, Robert I. "The new nature of nation-state failure." *Washington quarterly* 25, no. 3 (2002): 83-96.

In-class discussion: we will watch some videos about political protests and discuss whether these can be taken as examples of state failure. Read the assigned article carefully and be ready to discuss the topic.

January 31 - MAP QUIZ: ASIA

Week 4:

Feb. 5: Democracy and Feb. 7: Authoritarianism

Monday:

Required readings Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 5 “Democratic Rule”

SKIM: Geddes, B. (2011). What Causes Democratization. In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*. Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604456.013.0029>



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This book chapter will be posted in Moodle.

Wednesday:

Mandatory reading: Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 6 “Authoritarian Rule”

Watch: “Understanding what authoritarianism is” a short video by the University of Amsterdam, Political Science Department. Link here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1tXjJobjfs>

February 7 - MAP QUIZ: AFRICA

Week 5:

Feb. 12: Political culture and Feb. 14: Political participation

Monday:

Required reading: Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 4 “Political Culture”

Wednesday:

Required reading: Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 13 “Political Participation”

February 18: DEADLINE TO SUBMIT YOUR FIRST COUNTRY REPORT

Week 6:

Feb. 19: Electoral systems and Feb. 21: Voting barriers exercise

Monday:

Required reading: Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 14 “Elections”

In class activities: we will work with multiple tools to understand electoral systems. Links are posted on Moodle but will be used in class in small groups.

Wednesday: In-class exercise: eliminating voting barriers. We will work with the electoral rules of an imaginary country to find ways to *create* voter suppression. I will provide the document with these rules in class. Your Special Topic Paper will address ways to *avoid* voter suppression.



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In preparation for this exercise, read the following short articles:

- Block the vote: <https://www.aclu.org/news/civil-liberties/block-the-vote-voter-suppression-in-2020>
- 11 Barriers to voting: <https://www.carnegie.org/our-work/article/11-barriers-voting/>
- Social and structural barriers to voting: <https://publicwise.org/publication/social-structural-barriers-to-voting/>

Democracy Matters: Addressing non-statutory barriers to college student voting: <https://tufts.app.box.com/v/idhe-nonstatutory-barriers>

Week 7:

Feb. 26: Political parties and Feb. 28: Party systems

Monday:

Required readings:

- Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 15 “Political Parties” (skip the party systems discussion) / Ch. 16 old edition.
- Cyr, Jennifer. “Between Adaptation and Breakdown: Conceptualizing Party Survival.” *Comparative Politics* 49, no. 1 (October 1, 2016): 125–45. <https://doi.org/10.5129/001041516819582919>.

Wednesday:

Required readings:

- Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 15 “Political Parties” (focus on the party systems discussion) / Ch. 16 old edition.
- Chapter 13 “Party Systems” by Daniele Caramani, in *Comparative Politics* (fifth edition) Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2020. (This reading will be posted on Moodle).

February 28 - MAP QUIZ: SOUTH AMERICA

Week 8:

March 4: Mid-term review and March 6: Mid-term

Monday: Mid-term review

Wednesday: Mid-term



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March 11: DEADLINE TO SUBMIT YOUR SPECIAL PAPER- ELECTORAL BARRIERS BY MIDNIGHT.

Week 9:

March 11 and 13: Mid-semester break.

Week 10: March 18: Final presentation workshop and March 20: Executives

Monday: Final paper workshop

This week you will start working on your presentation for the end of the semester. By the end of the week, you will submit the following:

1. A short paragraph describing the phenomenon/case you will focus on.
2. A copy of an academic article that addresses a similar phenomenon that you will use to build your argumentation.
3. A short paragraph where you explain: how this article will help you answer your research question.

Wednesday:

Required reading: Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 8 “Executives”

March 24: Deadline to submit your final presentation step 1

Week 11:

March 25: Legislatures and March 27: Women’s representation

Monday:

Required reading: Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 9 “Legislatures”

Wednesday

Required reading:

- Schwindt-Bayer, L., & Squire, P. (2014). Legislative power and women’s representation. *Politics and Gender*, 10(4), 622–658.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X14000440>
- Readings posted in Moodle.

March 27 - MAP QUIZ: NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA



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Week 12:

April 1: Interest groups and April 3: Writing Day

Monday:

Required reading: Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 16 “Interest Groups” / Ch. 18 old edition.

Wednesday: NO IN CLASS SESSION – Use this session to finish writing your Country Report 2 and to advance on Step 2 for the final presentation.

April 7: DEADLINE TO SUBMIT YOUR SECOND COUNTRY REPORT

April 7: Final presentation step 2

Week 13:

April 8: Social movements and April 10: Constitutions and courts

Monday:

Required reading:

- Chapter 16 “Social movements” by Dieter Rucht, in *Comparative Politics* (fifth edition) Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2020. (This reading will be posted on Moodle).
- SKIM and focus on IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: Bishara, Dina. "The Generative Power of Protest: Time and Space in Contentious Politics." *Comparative Political Studies* 54, no. 10 (2021): 1722-1756.

Wednesday:

Required reading: Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 7 “Constitutions and Courts” / Ch. 7 old edition.

April 10: MAP QUIZ: EUROPE

Week 14:

April 15: Bureaucracies and April 17: final exam review and review of step 3



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Monday:

Required reading: Comparative Government and Politics: Chapter 10 “Bureaucracies”

Wednesday: Exam review and review of step 3 (full draft)

[April 19: Final presentation step 3](#)

Week 15:

April 22 and 24: Presentations

Week 16:

April 29: presentations

*****FINAL EXAM is on May 3 from 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm. This is an online exam*****