

Political Science 2545G
Foundations of Comparative
Politics
Winter Term 2026

Course Director

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SSC 7225

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Office hours: Thursday 4-5:30 or by appointment

Course Description

Why do states vary so much in terms of their capacity and impact? Why do we see different political regimes in different countries and regions, and at different times? Why have different parts of the globe taken up different pathways to economic development, and with varying results? Why do democracies differ in institutional structure, and with what performance effects? Why have we seen a broad turn to populist approaches to politics in recent years? These are amongst the key questions we will address in Comparative Politics 2545G. More broadly, the course has the aim of setting out the major themes, concepts, and approaches used in comparative politics while at the same time providing students with an introductory look at the character of political life in a variety of areas of the world. It will emphasize that comparative politics is both a subject and a method. Accordingly, its practitioners aspire to learn not simply by studying other countries, but by systematically comparing and contrasting their political processes and structures in the hope of deriving more general knowledge. This comparative enterprise is, however, best conducted on a solid conceptual, theoretical, and historical foundation, the development of which will concern us greatly over the course of the term.

Learning Outcomes

This course aims to enable students to:

- (a) define the subfield of comparative politics and expand their understanding of politics through structured comparative analysis
- (b) identify the key features of the world's political systems, as well as the major differences setting regions and countries apart from each other
- (c) understand and apply the major concepts and theories that help us make sense of these similarities and differences

Course Format

This course features two-hour lectures on Thursdays, and one-hour tutorials at scheduled times on Wednesdays. The lectures will contextualize and clarify the readings, draw out key connections and implications, and extend well beyond the readings in relevant ways. This is where the various components of the course come together. Tutorials will focus on questions posted on OWL in your weekly reading guides. Learning benefits from engagement, so come prepared to earn your grades through effective participation. Respectfully sharing your thoughts on the relevant issues is good, but doing so in direct response to the assigned readings and lecture materials is much better. Show us that you understand what you're being taught, that you can

apply it to the issues at hand, and ideally that you are capable of thinking critically about the concepts and theories you're addressing. Asking well-informed questions can also be a key element of good tutorial participation. Keep working at it over the course of the term, and you will likely see the quality of your contributions steadily improve, along with your understanding of the course materials.

*****Prerequisite:** Political Science 1020E OR Political Science 1025F/G and 1026F/G, OR permission of the instructor. **Anti-requisites:** Political Science 245E or 2245E. Students are responsible for ensuring that they either have the prerequisites or special approval. The consequences of failure to do so are not subject to appeal.

***There is no required textbook for purchase this term. The readings will be accessible on OWL, at the “Course Readings” site.

Requirements and Evaluation

- (1) a one-hour mid-term exam, in class on March 5th, covering weeks 2-7 – multiple choice format (20%); if required, and accepted, the makeup exam will take place Friday, March 13th at 11 am
- (2) a two-hour final exam, during the formal exam period – hybrid format: multiple choice and written answers (40%)
- (3) a comparative research paper of 8-10 pages in length (roughly 2500 words), due March 20th at 11:59 pm, though with 72 hours flexibility – so no late penalty before 11:59 pm on March 23rd, two points per day thereafter (30%)
- (4) regular, active, and informed participation in the weekly tutorial meetings (10%)

***Further details on the various graded requirements will be provided at the introductory class on January 8th, and in more detailed assignment descriptions on the OWL site.

Extensions and Accommodations

The mid-term exam will be the course requirement with accommodation limited exclusively to those providing supportive documentation. The makeup exam is scheduled for March 13th at 11 am for those granted such accommodation. The research paper will feature built-in deadline flexibility – if you require medical or other accommodation, this must be registered before the proper deadline, which means by March 20th. All requests for accommodation must proceed through Academic Counselling, not the professor or TAs. Students with a formal accommodation permitting them to write separately or with extra time should contact Accessible Education as soon as possible.

Plagiarism and AI

Academic offenses such as plagiarism and reliance on AI technologies such as ChatGPT will be taken very seriously. Students are expected to research and write their own assignments in full. The substantial benefits derived from engaging in independent research, formulating and organizing your own thoughts, and expressing them clearly and persuasively cannot otherwise be accessed.

Electronic copies of all assignments submitted on OWL are automatically processed by the plagiarism detection service Turnitin.com. Please be advised that: All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between the University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com.

Appeals

Grade appeals must first be made through your TA, beginning with a brief statement (1-3 paragraphs) of what you feel the grader missed or failed to fully appreciate in your paper. The appeal will only be taken up if the provided reasons are sufficiently compelling. Please wait at least 48 hours after the release of grades before submitting a grade appeal. No appeal will be accepted beyond three weeks after the release of grades.

Lecture Notes

Success in this course requires lecture attendance and a good set of notes for studying. Students who miss a lecture should acquire notes from a classmate. Lecture slides will not be provided to students. I will, however, make exceptions in cases of long quoted passages or exceptionally wordy slides, which will be posted.

COURSE READINGS

Week One

Course Introduction (January 8)

No required readings. No tutorials – they will begin in week two.

Week Two

The Comparative Method: Concepts, Theory, and Cases (January 15)

Arend Lijphart, 1971. “Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method.” *American Political Science Review* 64: 682-93.

Peter A. Hall, 2006. “Systematic Process Analysis: When and How to Use it.” *European Management Review* 3: 24-31.

Daniele Caramani, 2010. “Of Differences and Similarities: Is the Explanation of Variation a Limitation to (or of) Comparative Analysis?” *European Political Science* 9: 34-48.

Week Three

State Formation and Fragility (January 22)

Max Weber, 1958. “Politics as a Vocation.” In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds., HH Gerth and C. Wright Mills. Galaxy, pp. 77-84.

Charles Tilly, 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." In *Bringing the State Back In*, eds., Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. Cambridge University Press.

Jeffrey Herbst, 1990. "War and the State in Africa." *International Security* 14 (4): 117-39.

Week Four

Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Identity (January 29)

Benedict Anderson, 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso), chapters 1 (pp. 5-7) and 3 (pp. 37-46).

Rogers Brubaker, 1990. "Immigration, Citizenship, and the Nation-State in France and Germany: A Comparative Historical Analysis." *International Sociology* 5 (4): 379-407.

Daniel Posner, 2004. "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi." *American Political Science Review* 98 (4): 529-45.

Week Five

Capitalism, Class, and Conceptions of Political Development (February 5)

Seymour Martin Lipset, 2003. "Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics," in Robert Dahl, Ian Shapiro, and Jose Antonio Cheibub, eds., *The Democracy Sourcebook* (The MIT Press), pp. 56-64.

Karl Marx, 1978. "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (WW Norton & Company), pp. 473-91, 499-500.

Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, 1997. "Modernization: Theories and Facts." *World Politics* 49 (2): 155-83 (pp. 155-78; the rest is recommended rather than required).

Week Six

Colonial and Post-colonial Politics (February 12)

Nicolas van de Walle, 2007. "Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss? The Evolution of Political Clientelism in Africa." In *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, eds., Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson. Cambridge University Press.

Maya Tudor, 2017. "The Nationalist Origins of Political Order in India and Pakistan." In *States in the Developing World*, eds., Miguel Centeno, Atul Kohli, and Deborah J. Yashar. Cambridge University Press.

*****Break Week: No tutorials February 18, no lecture February 19**

Week Seven

***Logics and Patterns of Development in the Global South* (February 26)**

Andre Gunder Frank, 1984. "The Development of Underdevelopment." In *The Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment*, ed., Charles Wilber. Random House, pp. 99-108.

Peter B. Evans, 1989. "Predatory, Developmental, and Other Apparatuses: A Comparative Political Economy Perspective on the Third World State." *Sociological Forum* 4 (4): 561-87 (pp. 561-76 and 581-7; the rest is recommended rather than required).

Ha-Joon Chang, 2003. "Kicking Away the Ladder: Infant Industry Promotion in Historical Perspective." *Oxford Development Studies* 31 (1): 21-32.

Week Eight

***Mid-term Exam* (March 5)**

***There will be *no* tutorials this week – good luck preparing for the exam!

Week Nine

***Civil Society and Social Capital* (March 12)**

Robert Putnam, 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton University Press), chapters 4 (pp. 86-106) and 6 (pp. 167-81).

Peter A. Hall and Michele Lamont, 2009. "The Wear and Tear of our Daily Lives." *The Globe and Mail* (Op. Ed., Friday November 13).

Week Ten

***Regime Change I: Sources of Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism* (March 19)**

Natasha Ezrow and Erica Frantz, 2011. *Dictators and Dictatorships: Understanding Authoritarian Regimes and their Leaders* (Continuum), pp. 1-7.

Sheri Berman, 1997. "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic." *World Politics* 49 (3): 401-429.

Thomas P. Bernstein, 2013. "Resilience and Collapse in China and the Soviet Union." In *Why Communism Did Not Collapse: Understanding Authoritarian Regime Resilience in Asia and Europe*, ed., Martin K. Dimitrov. Cambridge University Press, pp. 40-64.

***No tutorials this week – good luck on your research papers!

Week Eleven

***Regime Change II: Democratization, Waves, and Hybrids* (March 26)**

Jorgen Möller and Svend-Erik Skaaning, 2013. *Democracy and Democratization in Comparative Perspective: Conceptions, Conjunctures, Causes, and Consequences* (Routledge), pp. 65-89, 127-41.

Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, 2002. “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism.” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2): 51-65.

Week Twelve

***Institutionalizing Democracy* (April 2)**

Jan-Erik Lane, 2011. “Two Great Constitutional Paths,” in Lane, *Constitutions and Political Theory* (2nd edition; Manchester University Press), chapter 1 (pp. 19-33).

Juan J. Linz, 2003. “The Perils of Presidentialism.” In *The Democracy Sourcebook*, eds., Robert Dahl, Ian Shapiro, and Jose Antonio Cheibub. The MIT Press, pp. 258-65.

Arend Lijphart, 1991. “Constitutional Choices for New Democracies.” *Journal of Democracy* 2 (1): 72-84.

Alan Renwick, 2009. “How Likely is Proportional Representation in the House of Commons? Lessons from International Experience.” *Government and Opposition* 44 (4): 366-384.

Week Thirteen

***Populism, Parties, and Partisanship* (April 9)**

Cas Mudde, 2017. “Populism: An Ideational Approach.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds., Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy. Oxford University Press, pp. 27-46.

Kurt Weyland, 2021. “How Populism Corrodes Latin American Parties.” *Journal of Democracy* 32 (4): 42-55.

Sheri Berman and Maria Snegovaya, 2019. “Populism and the Decline of Social Democracy.” *Journal of Democracy* 30 (3): 5-19.