What is Comparative Politics?

Comparative politics (CP) is a sub-field of political science. Scholars and students of CP study domestic political phenomena using the comparative method at the individual, local, sub-national, and national levels. Comparativists are driven to understand big questions about the political world, such as “what causes civil wars?” “why are some states wealthier than others”, and “how do autocracies persist?”

Throughout the term, we will encounter scholarship that compares between or within a wide range of cases using a variety of methods. You will read about autocracies and democracies, generous and non-existent welfare states, wealthy and impoverished citizens, and the whole spectrum of political ideologies. You will also become familiar with how to read and interpret academic political science. The unifying theme that will give our course cohesion from week to week is a question based on Harold Lasswell’s (1936) definition of politics: “Who gets what, when, and how?”

As an introductory survey course, I designed the readings as a dialogue between canonical CP themes and diverse, cutting-edge scholarship. Canon and mainstream theories and concepts will be covered by our text and paired with an article or chapter that challenges or extends our knowledge of those topics. These additional readings are chosen to reflect a diversity of methods, author backgrounds, and empirical case material. Because we cannot everything in a single semester, I selected a set of recommended (i.e., not mandatory) readings to bring depth to your study of each topic.

Learning Goals: At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand and debate CP theories and concepts.
- Apply the methodology of comparative analysis in political science.
- Read and interpret arguments in political science scholarship.
- Identify academic articles and primary sources on country case-specific politics using the Internet and library search tools.

Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion:

This classroom is an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class and religion. Your identity shapes your learning, and I am here to facilitate your education. I am developing this course to be in-line with anti-racist pedagogical practice; this is a process and I (we) will inevitably commit some errors along the way. Here are some resources about how to talk about race and other difficult conversations that will arise naturally during discussions of comparative politics theories and cases:
• https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race
• Project Implicit Social Bias test https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/
• A compilation of acceptable and unacceptable terms

Names, Gender: If you have a name and/or pronouns that differ from those in your official USC records, please let me know. If I am mispronouncing your name, please correct me.

Mental Health: If you feel that experiences outside of class are impacting your course performance, please come and talk to me. If you would rather consult someone outside the classroom, USC Counseling and Mental Health (https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling/) and Academic Counseling (https://undergrad.usc.edu/services/counseling/) are great resources.

The Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance(213) 740-5086 works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class: equity.usc.edu. Incidents of bias, hate crimes and micro-aggressions can be confidentially reported to: studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support.

Accommodations: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. If you have registered accommodations with the Disability Services and Programs Office (https://dsp.usc.edu/), please communicate those to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course.

For those on or near campus, DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. They can be contacted online or by phone at (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), or ability@usc.edu.

Representation in Course Materials: I welcome and encourage your suggestions to improve the effectiveness of this course for you personally, as well as for other students. It is my intent that this course serves the needs of students from all backgrounds, and believe that the diversity students bring to our class is a strength and resource. I also acknowledge that the field of political science has historically been written by a small subset of privileged voices, and that a disproportionate number of core readings were authored by white men. I have made explicit choices regarding readings to bring greater balance and diversity in author backgrounds, but also acknowledge that part of my job is teach the prevailing theories in the field. I encourage you to take up the gauntlet of a political scientist and find new and interesting ways of critiquing the canon with new perspectives, data, and theories.

Student Hours

Student Hours (my term for office hours) will be held after class on Wednesdays from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM (2 hours) via Zoom. You can make an appointment for Student Hours here: https://calendar.google.com/calendar?cid=Y19mNmdtNGZuczNpZGJ1dDZjbGVlaDluMzMc0Bncm91cC5jYWx1bmRhc15nb29nbGUuY29t. Click on the “Student Hours” event, then “Go to appointment page for this calendar.” From there, you can sign up for a 20 minute time slot by clicking and typing your name in the “What” line of the pop-up box. Student hours are a time when students can and should come to ask questions or resolve confusion about course material, as well as to discuss career and educational goals as they relate to this course. Please attend these hours - they are for you and can help you succeed in this class. Ask questions often and early; do not wait until exams or assignment due dates.
Course Assignments and Grading:

This course involves regular and diverse assessments that are designed to deepen your engagement with the material and build your fluency in the comparative politics concepts and theories that help explain how our social and economic worlds work. Through regular assessment, you will also have objective feedback about your own performance. Your grade will be comprised of four components: participation, exercise sets, a short paper, and two exams.

Late Assignments: Late assignments will be deducted half a letter grade for each day that it is late. For example, if your work earned a B (83-86 percent), you would get a B- (80-82) after one day late, and C+ (77-79) for the second day late. If you anticipate difficulty with a deadline, please talk to me in advance.

The breakdown of each assignment as a component of your overall grade is as follows:

- Participation (Online Discussion Board posts, Group Debates) .................. 15%
- Exercises (3 assignments) ................................................................. 30%
- Short Paper (5-7 pages) ................................................................. 15%
- Exams ................................................................. 40%
  - Midterm (10%, Take-Home)
  - Final (30%)

Participation:
In keeping with best teaching practices, I can only assess students based on quantifiable assessments. To that end, your participation grade will be comprised of one synchronous components (in-class group debates, 5 percent) and one asynchronous components (Online Discussion, 10 percent). Rubrics will be provided for group debates and discussion forum posts during the first week of class.

- **Group Discussions/Debates (5%)**: Some time in each class will be devoted to group discussion and debate. This will make use of Zoom’s “breakout room” feature to create small groups of 4-5 students who will be given a topic to discuss or question to debate. When we reconvene in as a larger group, group numbers will be chosen at random to present their discussion or their argument.

- **Online Discussion (10%)**:
  - By 5:00 PM on Wednesday during Weeks 2 to 13, you must post one critical-thinking question or comment related to that week’s content on the BlackBoard class Discussion Board. For example,
    - Critical-thinking Question: “I was listening to Masha Gessen’s Getting Curious episode and they discussed the process of autocratic consolidation. How do we measure autocratic consolidation? Is it about political attitudes or institutions? Is it always a long-term process or could it be short lived?”
    - Critical-thinking Comment: “We studied why some welfare states are more expansive than others in democratic cases, but I noticed that in my country case of Tunisia, the welfare state was more generous and developed even under authoritarianism than some democracies. I looked into welfare states in autocracies and found that the logics we studied and class differ according to the class actors that matter (masses in democracy and elites in autocracy). I do not see how this reconciles with the outcomes that Tunisia saw during and after the Jasmine Revolution.”
  - 5 posts should include references to the country you select to study over the course of the semester.
– By 5:00 PM on Friday during Weeks 2 to 13 you must respond to two posts by your colleagues. You should try to answer their question, engage in a discussion based on your own knowledge of other cases/sources, or propose a counter argument to their commentary. Only the first two comments on a post will count for credit (to be sure that every post receives feedback), but you are welcome to post more in the spirit of discussion.

Exercises: Throughout the semester, I will distribute three brief take-home assignments that require you to apply the concepts we have learned in class. These will include a mix of methodological and conceptual questions covered in class, the readings, and discussion that ultimately will help you prepare for exams.

Short Paper: Students will write a 5-7 page paper in response to one of a set of prompts provided. Evidence in your paper must draw on your selected country case and compare that case with another country.

Papers should be formatted with double spacing and one-inch margins. Footnotes should be single spaced and the page count does not include bibliography. Cite your sources according to APA formatting (not MLA) and be consistent! Pro-tip 1: Google Scholar provides citations in multiple formats that you can insert into your bibliography. Pro-tip 2: Use a citation manager like Zotero or Mendeley that will automatically format your in-text citations and create a bibliography for you, saving a lot of time.

Midterm Exam: The midterm is a take-home assignment. Consulting with other students is not permitted. The exam should be submitted to Turn-It-In on the due date and will be checked against other students’ submissions as well as for similarities to online and offline published sources.

Final Exam: This will be a two-hour “in-class” online exam held during our scheduled final period. It will be similar to the midterm, but covers the whole semester.

(Zoom) Classroom Policies

Attendance and Online Learning: The pandemic has upended our collective and individual lives. Logistically speaking, we are spread across multiple time zones, and I can only mandate attendance for students for whom our course time falls within reasonable learning hours in their time zone, i.e., between 7:00 AM and 10:00 PM.

Attendance for synchronous (real-time) classes is mandatory, where mandatory means making a good faith effort to attend every class. The following exceptions are automatically accepted reasons for not attending synchronous class meetings:

1. Lecture or discussion fall outside the hours of 7:00 AM and 10:00 PM in your local time zone (I will circulate a poll to the class, but please also communicate this to me as soon as possible).

   • For these students, I will implement asynchronous attendance by requiring students to watch the class recording and completing an alternative asynchronous activity.

2. Illness

3. Family responsibilities (i.e., taking care of children or dependents)

4. Personal emergencies (illness or death of a loved-one)

5. Religious observance

If these situations or any other emergency should arise, please let me know as soon as possible so we can make alternate arrangements for your coursework.
Camera Policy:
It is my preference that, if practicable, your camera be on during class. That said, I also acknowledge that there are many dynamics at play that make learning environments unequal in remote learning. In the first instance, I encourage the use of virtual backgrounds and earphones/headsets to mitigate privacy concerns. I know that not every computer supports virtual backgrounds, so if you have a need for accommodations on this point, please contact me directly.

A Note on Academic Integrity:
Honest, open inquiry is the foundation of academia, and the original work you produce should be in dialogue with an established body of literature. Acknowledging your sources is key. If you use ideas, text, or data from any source that is not your own, you must cite it. Essays written for this course may not be submitted for another course without the explicit consent of myself and the other instructor.

Please visit the university's Writing Center website (https://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/) to learn about using sources and revisit the university's Academic Integrity Policy (https://sjacs.usc.edu/students/academic-integrity/).

I have a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism and violation of academic integrity will be referred to the Dornsife and USC administration. The University takes plagiarism infractions seriously, and penalties for students caught plagiarizing include lowered or failing grades, suspension, and possible expulsion.

Required Readings:
- You can access course materials related to the textbook through this link: https://console.pearson.com/enrollment/02ofcz
- All other required readings will be provided on Blackboard (with the exception of the main textbook). If this presents a problem, please let me know.
- Recommended readings can be found through the USC Library or Google Scholar; you will need to be signed in to your USC VPN client to access these resources remotely (https://itservices.usc.edu/vpn/).

Important Dates:
- Exercise Set #1 ......................... August 31
- Midterm Due .................. September 18, 5:00 PM PST
- Exercise Set #2 .................. September 30
- Exercise Set #3 .................. October 14
- Short Paper Deadline .............. October 28
- US Election Day .................. November 3
- Final Exam ...................... November 18, 8–10 AM

Course Outline

| PART I: FOUNDATIONS |
Week 1

August 17: Introduction, Definitions, and Categories

- **Required (After First Class):**
  - Read the syllabus and contact me with any questions.
  - Goats and Soda About Terminology

- **Recommended (After First Class):**

- **Reminder:** If you are US national, check here to find out by when you should register to vote in your state: [https://www.eac.gov/voters/register-and-vote-in-your-state](https://www.eac.gov/voters/register-and-vote-in-your-state) and time frames for early, absentee, and by-mail voting: [https://www.usa.gov/absentee-voting](https://www.usa.gov/absentee-voting)

August 19: Science of Politics

**Homework Due Today:**
Select your country case for the semester and post it on the designated thread on Blackboard. Include 2-3 sentences about why you chose that case.

- **Required Readings:**
  - Clark, Golder, and Golder (2012) “What is Science?”
  - Watch Prof. Zachariah Mampilly’s TED Talk about protests across Africa. Thought experiment: how you would approach comparing African protests and their outcomes? What hypotheses you might advance about the relationship between protests and inequality?

- **Recommended:**
  - Samuels (2012), pp. 5–26

**PART II: STATES AND REGIMES**
Week 2: The State

August 24: Early State Formation

- **Required Readings:**
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 2, Sections 2.1-2.3

- **Recommended:**
  - Tilly, C. War Making and State Making as Organized Crime in Rueschemeyer, Evans, and Skocpol, eds, Bringing the State Back In. 1985, pp. 44-77

August 26: Modern and Late State Formation

- **Required Readings:**
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 2, Sections 2.4-2.5
  - Migdal, J. Strong Societies and Weak States, chapters TBD

- **Recommended:**

Week 3: Political Regimes 1

August 31: Non-Democratic Regimes 1: Autocratic Regime Types (EXERCISE SET 1 DUE)

- **Required:**
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 4, Sections 4.1-4.2

- **Recommended:**

September 2: Non-Democratic Regimes 2: Autocratic Institutions

- Samuels (2018), Chapter 4, Sections 4.3-4.4

Week 4: Political Regimes 2

September 7: Labor Day, no class
September 9: Democratic Regimes 1: Defining Democracy

• Required:
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 3, Sections 3.1-3.3

• Recommended:

Week 5: Political Regimes 3

September 14: Democratic Regimes 2: Democratic Institutions

• Required:
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 3, Sections 3.4-3.7

• Recommended:

September 16: Regime Continuity and Change

• Required:
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 5, Sections 5.1-5.5
  - Listen/Watch from 0.00-34.15: The Portal Podcast, Prof. Timur Kuran on revolution and preference falsification: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzjqjU2FOwA

• Recommended:

MIDTERM EXAM DISTRIBUTED: DUE SEPTEMBER 18, 5:00 PM PST
PART III: POLITICAL ECONOMY

Week 6: Political Economy I

September 21: States, Markets, and Economic Development

• Samuels (2018), Chapter 11, Sections 11.1-11.3


September 23: Historical Legacies

• Required:
  – Samuels (2018), Chapter 11, Section 11.4

• Recommended:

Week 7: Political Economy II

September 28: Welfare and Redistribution I

• Required:
  – Samuels (2018), Chapter 12, Sections 12.1-12.2

• Recommended:

September 30: Welfare and Redistribution II (EXERCISE SET 2 DUE)

• Required:
  – Samuels (2018), Chapter 12, Section 12.3

• Recommended:

PAPER TOPICS DISTRIBUTED: DUE OCTOBER 28
PART IV: AGENCY AND IDENTITY IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Week 8: Collective Action

October 5: Forms of Political Identity

- **Required:**
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 6, Sections 6.1-6.3

- **Recommended:**

October 7: Collective Action (Problems)

- **Required:**
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 9, Section 9.1

- **Recommended:**

Week 9: Identity 1

October 12: Social Movements and Group Identities

- **Required:**
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 9, Section 9.2

- **Recommended:**

October 14: Interest Groups and Political Parties (Exercise Set 3 DUE)

- **Required:**
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 9, Section 9.3-9.4
• **Recommended:**

**Week 10: Identity 2**

**October 19: Race and Ethnicity**

• **Required:**

• **Recommended:**
  - Symposium on Race held at the University of Michigan on January 19, 2018 and organized by Prof. Hakeem Jefferson (Stanford): “The Other America: Still Separate, Still Unequal.” [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLAvEYYDf9x8VRKfgyuNn3t4XMEdoYBfD](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLAvEYYDf9x8VRKfgyuNn3t4XMEdoYBfD)

**October 21: Religion and Nationalism**

• **Required:**
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 7, Sections 7.1-7.4

• **Recommended:**
Week 11: Identity 3

October 26: Gender and Intersectionality

- **Required Readings:**
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 8, Sections 8.1-8.5

- **Recommended:**

October 26: Migration

- **Required Readings:**

- **Recommended:**

**Part V: Political Violence**

Week 12: Political Violence

November 2: War

- **Required Readings:**
  - Samuels (2018), Chapter 10, Sections 10.1-10.5

• Recommended:

November 4: The Coercive State

• Required Readings:

• Recommended Readings:

Week 13: Synthesis

November 9: Synthesis

• Re-read one article from the semester that you experienced difficulty with when it was first assigned. In a 5-sentence post on the discussion board, state your original challenge and what you learned (or didn’t) from your re-read.

November 11: Pre-Exam Review Session

• Submit at least one question to the the discussion board on Blackboard and provide one answer to a peer’s question on the discussion board. You will only get credit for being the first respondent to a given question (this is to make sure all questions get answered).

November 18, 8–10 AM: ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS FINAL EXAM

Congratulations! You reached the end.
Please email me a picture of a dog with a monocle so that I know you read the syllabus.*

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*This assignment is adapted from Prof. Zak’s POSC 311 syllabus. Cite your sources!