

POSC 360: Comparative Political Institutions

Prof. Miguel Maria Pereira

Spring 2021

Instructor: Miguel Maria Pereira
Email: m.pereira@usc.edu

Class Hours: Mon/Wedn 9:30-10:50 am
Office Hours: Monday, 2:30-4:00 pm, or by appt.

Course Description

This course will take students through the design, maintenance and reform of political institutions in contemporary democracies, from legislatures and bureaucracies, to simple behavioral norms. Political institutions influence the behavior of voters and politicians, and ultimately the policy outcomes we observe. By the end of the semester, students will understand the importance of institutional design in shaping political and social outcomes, but also its limitations.

Objectives

This course will help you develop the knowledge and skills to (1) read critically within the field of political science, (2) take part in informed discussions, and (3) write coherently and convincingly about past and current political issues. Students will be given many opportunities through class participation, individual research assignments, and exams to think critically about topics related to political institutions.

Requirements and Gratings

- **Participation and short presentations (15%)** - Regular attendance is a key determinant of success in this course. The readings serve as a background, not a substitute, for the lectures and class discussions. Absences will result in a deduction in your class participation grad and will affect your ability to answer the exam questions. In addition to simply attending class, you are expected to participate actively in all class discussions. Special rules will be in effect for fully remote students in timezones that make synchronous class participation difficult. We will discuss this issue during Week 1 and if this applies to you, it is your obligation to inform me about this so we can figure out a sensible solution together.

Keep in mind that participation is not merely attendance. If you attend every class but do not actively engage in what we are doing, your participation grade will be a “C” (i.e., average). At the same time, full participation does not mean simply “talking a lot.” Participation entails reading the materials, coming to class prepared to ask and answer questions about them, offering thoughtful responses when appropriate, and participating in in-class activities and discussions.

Finally, throughout the semester, every student will give **one (1) short presentation** in class (5-10 mins.). The presentation will focus on a specific political institution in your country of expertise (see **Final Project**, below). The presentation can focus on the origins of that particular institution in the country, the political consequences of the institution (e.g., how the electoral system influences the party system; how a gender quota affected (or not) the representation of women), or an institutional reform (in the past or under consideration). Alternative themes related to the topics of the course or the introduction of less common political institutions are encouraged! Alternatively, students can prepare a presentation on one of the *Additional materials* listed that week.

- **First Mid-Term Exam (25%)** - In-class mid-term exam based on the content of the readings, lectures, and class discussions.
- **Second Mid-Term Exam (25%)** - In-class exam based on the content of the readings, lectures, and class discussions in the second half of the course.
- **Final Project (25%)** - At the beginning of the semester, you will be assigned to a group (4-5 students). The group will focus on researching the political institutions of one particular country. Throughout the semester, each individual member will make one (1) short presentation about a specific institution in their country of expertise (see **Participation** above). The goal of these presentations is for you to build a body of knowledge about the history and political institutions in your country such that you can complete the course’s final project: a paper where you (in group) imagine what would happen if one of the key political institutions in your country would be reformed. Each group is expected to write one paper, which should be between 3,000 and 5,000 words long. If the paper is shorter than 3,000 words or longer than 5,000 words, there will be a penalty. All papers are due by class time on April 19. Late papers will be accepted with a 20% penalty per 24-hour period. That week, each group will prepare a joint presentation of their project.
- **Final Project Outline (10%)** - on (or before) March 18 you will submit a detailed outline of your final paper topic and a bibliography. The aim of this assignment is to ensure that you are making adequate progress on the final project.

Class policies and etiquette

There is one core tenet of classroom etiquette that we must all agree upon for this course to be a success – respect. I will respect each and everyone of you as an adult responsible for your own learning, and I look forward to the opportunity to work with you. This requires that we agree to abide by the following considerations:

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- Classroom discussion should be civilized and respectful to everyone and relevant to the topic we are discussing. Everyone is entitled to their opinion. Classroom discussion is meant to allow us to hear a variety of viewpoints. This can only happen if we respect each other and our differences, are willing to listen, and are tolerant of opposing points of view. Respect for individual differences and alternative viewpoints will be maintained at all times in this class.
 - Attend all class sessions, arrive on time, and stay until the class is over. If you must miss class or arrive late/leave early, please notify me before class.
 - Use email in a respectful manner. Email has become the preferred way for students and faculty to communicate with each other outside of class, and it is an excellent technology. But, remember, emails to professors or classmates should be just as respectful as if you were writing them a formal letter. Do not use email as a forum to discuss important course-related issues that should be addressed in person.
 - **Zoom etiquette I:** To make these online meetings a positive experience for everyone that somewhat resembles what our normal classroom would have looked like, please (i) try to join our class meeting from a quiet, distraction-free environment, (ii) turn on your camera when you join class, (iii) look at the camera when you are talking to the class and (iv) keep your audio on mute until you want to speak, and (v) have a plan for taking notes (paper and pencil, digital notepad, Word/Pages doc).
 - **Zoom etiquette II:** If we have students who are taking this class asynchronously, I will have to record each class meeting. These recordings will only be accessible for registered students and only for the length of the semester. For the protection of your information and as a FERPA requirement, it is not allowed to share the recording links or copies of recordings with anyone outside of the class. If you have further concerns regarding your privacy, please let me know as early as possible so we can discuss additional measures (changing your Zoom display name, no webcam use, ...).

Readings

Throughout the semester, we will rely heavily on the following textbook:

- (NvD) Newton, Kenneth, and Jan W. Van Deth. 2016. *Foundations of Comparative Politics: Democracies of the Modern World* (3rd edition). Cambridge University Press.

If you prefer to read inBut if you prefer reading on-screen, digital versions of all the chapters covered in this course are available through the library. The remaining readings will be posted on Blackboard.

I do not expect you to read every word in every assigned reading. Here are some suggestions on how to get the main point of a text, how to remember what you read, and how to engage with new material. Please review them as you start the semester:

- [How can I read academic literature quick\(er\)?](#)
- [Remembering What You Read](#)
- [Six Useful Reading Habits](#)

Course Outline

Week 1 - Course introduction

January 20

- No readings.

Week 2 - What are institutions? Where do they come from and why do they matter?

January 25

- March, James G., and Johan P. Olsen. 2006. "Elaborating the "new institutionalism'." *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions* Chapter 1: 3-20.
- David, Paul A. 1985. "Clio and the Economics of QWERTY." *The American Economic Review* 75.2: 332-337.

Additional materials

- Hodgson, Geoffrey M. 2006. "What are institutions?" *Journal of Economic Issues* 40.1: 1-25.

January 27

- NvD Chapter 3 - Constitutions.

Additional materials

- Persson, Torsten, and Guido Enrico Tabellini. 2005. *The economic effects of constitutions*. MIT press. Chapters 1 and 9.
- Tsebelis, George, and Amie Kreppel. 1998. "The history of conditional agenda-setting in European institutions." *European Journal of Political Research* 33.1: 41-71.

Week 3 - Presidential and parliamentary systems

February 1

- NvD Chapter 4 - Presidential and parliamentary government.
- (Skim) Shugart, Matthew S. 2006. "Comparative executive-legislative relations." *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*: 344-65.

Additional materials

- Elgie, Robert. 2004. "Semi-presidentialism: concepts, consequences and contesting explanations." *Political Studies Review* 2.3: 314-330.

February 3

- Mainwaring, Scott, and Matthew S. Shugart. 1997. "Juan Linz, presidentialism, and democracy: a critical appraisal." *Comparative Politics*: 449-471.

Additional materials

- Gerring, John, and Strom C. Thacker. 2004. "Political institutions and corruption: The role of unitarism and parliamentarism." *British Journal of Political Science*: 295-330.
- Cheibub, José Antonio et al. 2014. "Beyond presidentialism and parliamentarism." *British Journal of Political Science*: 515-544.

Week 4 - Legislatures and policymaking

February 8

- Carey, John M. 2006. "Legislative organization." *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*.
- (Skim) NvD Chapter 6 - Policy making and legislating.

Additional materials

- Lijphart, Arend. 1999. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* Chapters 1-3.
- Martin, Lanny W., and Georg Vanberg. 2014. "Parties and policymaking in multiparty governments: the legislative median, ministerial autonomy, and the coalition compromise." *American Journal of Political Science* 58.4: 979-996.

February 10

- Zelizer, Adam. 2019. "Is position-taking contagious? Evidence of cue-taking from two field experiments in a state legislature." *American Political Science Review*

Additional materials

- Anderson, Sarah E. et al. 2016. "Legislative Institutions as a Source of Party Leaders' Influence." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41.3: 605-631.
- Pereira, Miguel M. 2020. **How do Public Officials Learn About Policy? A Field Experiment on Policy Diffusion.** *British Journal of Political Science*

Week 5 - Legislatures and policymaking II

February 15

- Presidents Day (NO CLASS)

February 17

- NvD Chapter 14 - Decision making.

Additional materials

- Zubek, Radoslaw. 2011. "Negative agenda control and executive-legislative relations in east central Europe, 1997-2008." *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 17.2: 172-192.
- Baumgartner, Frank R., et al. 2009. "Punctuated equilibrium in comparative perspective." *American Journal of Political Science* 53.3: 603-620.

Week 6 - Electoral systems

February 22

- Lijphart, Arend. 1999. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* Chapter 8 - Electoral Systems.
- (pages 200-205) NvD Chapter 11 - Voters and elections.

Additional materials

- **The minority majority - America's electoral system gives the Republicans advantages over Democrats.** *The Economist*, July 2018.
- Various resources at fairvote.org

February 24

- Shugart, Matthew Søberg et al. 2005. "Looking for locals: voter information demands and personal vote-earning attributes of legislators under proportional representation." *American Journal of Political Science* 49.2: 437-449.
- Noack, Rick. 2019. **If Britain had Germany's electoral system, Boris Johnson may have lost the election.** *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2019.

Additional materials

- **Complicated Yet Fair - Germany's Voting System Explained** *Der Spiegel*, September 2013.

Week 7 - Institutions and political representation

March 1

- Paxton, Pamela Marie, Melanie M. Hughes, and Tiffany Barnes. 2020. "Explaining the Political Representation of Women: Politics." In *Women, Politics, and Power: A Global Perspective*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Additional materials

- O'Brien, Diana Z., and Johanna Rickne. 2016. "Gender quotas and women's political leadership." *American Political Science Review* 110.1: 112-126.
- Gulzar, Saad, Nicholas Haas, and Benjamin Pasquale. 2020. "Does Political Affirmative Action Work, and for Whom? Theory and Evidence on India's Scheduled Areas." *American Political Science Review*.

March 3

- Butler, Daniel M., and Adam M. Dynes. 2016. "How politicians discount the opinions of constituents with whom they disagree." *American Journal of Political Science* 60.4: 975-989.

Additional materials

- Sheffer, Lior, et al. 2018. "Nonrepresentative representatives: an experimental study of the decision making of elected politicians." *The American Political Science Review* 112.2: 302-321.
- Carnes, Nicholas, and Noam Lupu. 2015. "Rethinking the comparative perspective on class and representation: Evidence from Latin America." *American Journal of Political Science* 59.1: 1-18.

Week 8 - First mid-term

March 8

- Prepping: **bring questions.**

March 10

- In-class exam.

Week 9 - Political parties and party systems

March 15

- NvD Chapter 12 - Party Government.

Additional materials

- Katz, Richard S., and Peter Mair. "The cartel party thesis: A restatement." *Perspectives on politics* (2009): 753-766.

March 18

Final project outline due today!

- Boix, Carles. 2007. "The emergence of parties and party systems." In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*.

Additional materials

- Hooghe, Liesbet, and Gary Marks. 2018. "Cleavage theory meets Europe's crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the transnational cleavage." *Journal of European Public Policy* 25.1: 109-135.
- Podcast *Transformations in European Politics*. [Liesbet Hooghe. The Transnational Cleavage](#)

Week 10 - Multilevel governments

March 22

- NvD Chapter 5 - Multilevel government.

Additional materials

- Podcast *Transformations in European Politics*. [Sara Hobolt. Brexit and Euroscepticism](#)
- Anderson, Cameron D. 2006. "Economic voting and multilevel governance: A comparative individual-level analysis." *American Journal of Political Science* 50.2: 449-463.

March 24

- (Skim) Rodden, Jonathan. "The dilemma of fiscal federalism: Grants and fiscal performance around the world." *American Journal of Political Science* (2002): 670-687.
- [The Catalan question continues to divide](#). *The Economist*, July 2018.

Additional materials

- Hierro, Maria Jose, and Didac Queralt. 2020. "The divide over independence: Explaining preferences for secession in an advanced open economy." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Week 11 - The public bureaucracy (hard to imagine, right?)

March 29

- NvD Chapter 7 - Implementation: the public bureaucracy.
- (pp. 267-285) Moe, Terry M. 1989. "The politics of bureaucratic structure." In *Can the Government Govern?*.

Additional materials

- Raffler, Pia. 2019. "Does Political Oversight of the Bureaucracy Increase Accountability? Field Experimental Evidence from an Electoral Autocracy." Working paper.

March 31

- White, Ariel R., Noah L. Nathan, and Julie K. Faller. 2016. "What do I need to vote? Bureaucratic discretion and discrimination by local election officials." *American Political Science Review* 109.1: 129-142.
- (Skim) Fang, Albert H., Andrew M. Guess, and Macartan Humphreys. 2019. "Can the government deter discrimination? Evidence from a randomized intervention in New York City." *The Journal of Politics* 81.1: 127-141.

Additional materials

- Fried, Brian J., Paul Lagunes, and Atheendar Venkataramani. 2010. "Corruption and inequality at the crossroad: A multimethod study of bribery and discrimination in Latin America." *Latin American Research Review* 76-97.
- Linos, Elizabeth, Joanne Reinhard, and Simon Ruda. 2017. "Levelling the playing field in police recruitment: Evidence from a field experiment on test performance." *Public Administration* 95.4: 943-956.

Week 12 - Institutional change: Democratic backsliding I

April 5

- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How democracies die*. Broadway Books. Introduction, Chapter 5, and Chapter 8.

Additional materials

- Podcast *Transformations in European Politics*. [Daniel Ziblatt: How Democracies Die](#).
- Applebaum, Anne. 2018. "[A Warning From Europe: The Worst Is Yet to Come](#)." *The Atlantic*, October Issue.

April 7

- Wellness day (NO CLASS)

Week 13 - Institutional change: Democratic backsliding II

April 12

- We will watch the documentary *What is Democracy?*

April 14

- Discussion of the documentary.

Week 14 - Group presentations

April 19

Final project due today!

- Presentations I.

April 21

- Presentations II.

Week 15 - Second mid-term

April 26

- Final review and exam prepping (**bring questions!**).

April 28

- In-class exam.