Introduction to Comparative Politics
Louisiana State University

Course Overview:

Political systems are defined by their context, driven by constitutions and ideologies and sustained by their economies. This course offers an introductory survey of the major issues in one of the key fields of political science: comparative politics. Comparative politics is the study of the politics related and issues within countries so that comparisons can be made between them and theories developed to explain what we observe. The topics typically studied within this sub-field are state formation, forms of government/political regimes (i.e. democracy and authoritarianism), political economies, political cultures, political ideologies, governing institutions, electoral institutions, and other forms of political representation and participation. More broadly, comparative politics is a method of analysis that evaluates similarities and differences among political systems in order to develop general conclusions about political phenomena. This class will explore evolving patterns of interaction between politics, history-culture, society, the economy, and the formation of the most important form of political organization. Some of the primary questions we will seek to answer in this course include: Why are some countries democratic while others are not? What are the consequences of different types of political organization? Are politics a function of cultural values or economic development? Is one type of political system superior to another?

We will examine the different categories composing the concepts above and explore them in the context of particular countries (developing and developed). At times, we will briefly examine some of the more prominent theories that try to account for variation in political phenomena across countries and/or time periods. We will also spend some time discussing how particular current events illustrate important concepts and relate them to theories.

Course Objectives:

POLI 2053 is a general education course designed to improve broad knowledge and critical understanding of the political phenomena. It is designed to teach an understanding of the levels of association ranging from friends and family to civilizations of global significance and an understanding of the diversity of cultures across time and space, as well as universal social characteristics and global networks. As an introductory course, this course has three goals: first, to understand the important concepts and theories in comparative politics; second, to provide a broad perspective for students to understand the important political issues of the world we live in; third, to acquire basic methods and tools to analyse important questions in comparative politics.

This class will teach you about politics around the world, focusing on subjects like democracy, the political roots of economic development, and how America’s political system compares to that of other countries. If you are interested in political science as a concentration, this class will prepare you for more advanced subjects. If you just want to understand what is going on in the world, this class will provide you with useful theoretical frameworks, as well as factual background on some of the most important countries in the world.

Course Requirements:

1. Students are expected to complete all readings AND assignments before class, attend all classes, and become actively involved in seminar discussions.
2. Students are expected to take up to twelve pop quizzes in class. Each pop quiz includes one or two simple questions based on the assigned readings for the current session, or the notes from previous lectures. The two lowest-scored quizzes will be dropped.

3. Students are expected to take one midterm exams and one final exam. All the exams will reflect the lecture notes and readings.

Required Readings:

Each session has approximately 30 pages of reading, which includes both textbook chapters and academic articles. The sessions involve lectures on and discussions of the assigned readings.


2. Journal articles and other book chapters. These readings will be posted on Moodle or distributed in class by the instructor.

3. As it is very important to be aware of world events, students are required to read the news from well-regarded sources. The preferred sources are The Economist, New York Times, and World News.

Special Notice:

***As attendance and participation in class are highly important to student success, Laptops, mobile devices such as iPads, and Cellphones are banned during class time. The only exception is in the event of a specific dispensation from the Office of Disability Services. I am well aware of the benefits and drawbacks of using laptops in class, and have come to the decision that they are not worth the trouble they cause in a classroom.

***Make-up Exams: A make-up exam for the Final exam can be arranged only when an adequate documentation of a “valid reason” for absence, as defined by University Document PS-22, is provided. (http://appl003.lsu.edu/slas/dos.nsf/$Content/Student+Handbook?) There is no make-up exam for Midterm exams. The weight of a missed Midterm exam will be added to the Final exam automatically.

***Plagiarism: Plagiarism is not allowed and under no circumstances can be excused. Cite your sources of information properly whenever you quote or paraphrase other authors.
(http://www.lib.lsu.edu/instruction/plagiarism2.html)

Grading:

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<tr>
<th>Research Paper (5-7pgs)</th>
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<tr>
<td>* Paper (20pts)</td>
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<td>* Research Design (5pts)</td>
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<td>Examinations</td>
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<td>* Midterm (20pts)</td>
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<td>* Final (30pts)</td>
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<td>Presentations (country/research)</td>
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<td>* Group Presentation (5pts)</td>
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<td>* Country paper: 1-2pgs (5pts)</td>
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<td>Participation/Attend/Quizzes</td>
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<td>* Article Reviews (5pts)</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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A= 90-100; B= 80-89; C=70-79; D= 60-69; F= 59 or below
Lecture Outline and Reading Assignments

Week One: Introduction

Aug. 21: Course Introduction: The Study of Politics
Brainstorm: Political Environment
Movie: Lord of the Flies. Part 1

Aug. 23: Movie: Lord of the Flies. Part 2
Read Chapter 1
What is a state (brief overview)?

Week Two: Overview of Comparative Politics/Methods

Aug. 28: Read Chapter 1: Issues in Comparative Politics
Discuss Lord of the Flies

Aug. 30: Read Chapter 2: Comparing Political Systems
Discuss Rationalist, Structuralist, and Culturalist methods
Methods: Write a research design (in class)

Week Three: Political Culture and Political Socialization

Sept. 4: Read Chapter 3: Political Culture and Political Socialization

Sept. 6: Read Chapter 3: Political Culture and Political Socialization
Read Article:
***Write a research design

Week Four: The Role of Interests in Comparative Politics

Sept. 11: Read Chapter 4: Interest Articulation

Sept. 13: Read Chapter 5: Interest Aggregation and Political Parties
Read Article:
***Write a research design

Week Five: States and Institutions

Oct. 2: What is a state? What is an institution? Democratic vs. Authoritarian governance
Read Articles:
2. To be announced 3. To be announced
***Write one research design
Oct. 4: Explore the significance of institutions. 
England's Economic Transition
Read Articles:
2. To be announced
***Write one research design

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Week Six: Forms of Government (Presidential, Parliamentary, Hybrid)
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Sept. 18: Read Chapter 6: Government and Policymaking
Read Article:

Sept. 20: Read Chapter 6: Government and Policymaking
Read Article:
To be announced
***Write a research design
Explain expectations for research design

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Week Seven: Public Policy and Political Economy
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Sept. 25: Read Chapter 7: Public Policy
Sept. 27: Read Chapter 7: Public Policy
Discussion on Political Economy
Read Article:
***Write a research design
***Write a research design

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Week Eight: Review
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Oct. 9: Review for Midterm
Research Design due at the beginning of class
Read Article:
To be announced
***Write a research design

Oct. 11: MIDTERM EXAMINATION

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Week Nine: Advanced Industrial Democracies
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Oct. 16: Britain
Oct. 18: FALL HOLIDAY
Week Ten: Advanced Industrial Democracies cont'd...

Oct. 30: France
Nov. 1: United States

Week Eleven: Developing Countries

Nov. 6: Mexico
Nov. 8: Nigeria

Week Twelve: Post-Communist Transition

Nov. 13: Russia
Nov. 15: China

Week Thirteen: Politics of Islam

Nov. 20: Iran
Nov. 22: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Week Fourteen: Presentations and Review

Nov. 27: Research Paper Due
Paper Presentations

Nov. 29: LAST DAY OF CLASS
Paper Presentations
Review