

Introduction to Comparative Politics

Fall 2014

Instructor Information

Instructor: Pablo Fernandez-Vazquez

Office hours: T 9-10am, Th 1.30-3pm *or by appointment*

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Course Information

Time: T and Th 10am-Noon

Location: Commons 351

Course Description

Comparative Politics is the field within political science charged with the study of domestic politics. Its main goal is to systematically compare political units —mainly countries— in order to make statements about the factors that explain how politics works. The comparative method allows us to address questions such as why some countries establish democratic institutions while others are ruled by autocrats or how the choice of electoral system modulates the capacity of citizens to discipline incumbent politicians. This course will cover the following topics: political regimes, transitions to democracy, institutional choices within democratic regimes, social cleavages and ethnic identities, vote buying and patronage, electoral accountability, and the economic consequences of institutional designs. The discussion of each of these topics will be structured around specific questions that comparative politics can illuminate. There are no prerequisites for this course.

Learning Outcomes

The goal of this comparative politics course goes beyond the accumulation of factual information about political systems across the world. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. *Understand central concepts in comparative politics such as political regime, collective action and protest, executive-legislative relations, electoral systems, ethnic identities, social cleavages and electoral accountability.*
2. *Identify the defining features of institutional choices like democracy vs autocracy, presidentialism vs parliamentarism, electoral systems and unitary vs federal structures.*

3. *Formulate analytical arguments on how the choice of political institutions or differences in social structures influence regime transitions, economic outcomes, government stability, the capacity of voters to select and hold politicians accountable, the probability of civil conflict and the mapping of policy issues that are present in the public debate.*
4. *Elaborate (counterfactual) statements on how a **change** in political institutions or in social structure would reshape the political dynamics of a country.*

Course materials

Several required readings are assigned each week. Most readings come from these two Comparative Politics textbooks, which will be available in the Campus Bookstore and on Course Reserve at the Library:

- Samuels, David. 2013. *Comparative Politics*. Pearson Education.
- Clark, William R., Matt Golder and Sona N. Goder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Sage, 2nd edition.

The remaining weekly readings will be made available through the course's online platform (Blackboard). They can also be accessed through the online library catalogue.

Course Assessment

Grades for this course will be assigned according to the following criteria:

In-class participation	10%	<i>Ongoing</i>
Short essay I	15%	<i>Due September 25th</i>
Midterm exam	20%	<i>October 21st</i>
Short essay II	15%	<i>Due November 20th</i>
Final exam	40%	<i>December 9th</i>

- *In-class participation:* Class participation is different from attendance. Students are encouraged to actively engage in class activities, ask questions and contribute to class discussions. In order to do so effectively, students are expected to do the assigned readings in advance of the class session. Students who do not feel comfortable speaking in class must contact me by the end of the second week of class at the latest.
- *Short essay I:* Students are expected to write a short essay (between 2-4 double-spaced pages) addressing the following question:

In light of our discussion of the determinants of transitions to democracy, why do these regime changes tend to happen in waves?

The goal of this assignments is for students to leverage what we will have covered in class on the factors that explain democratic transitions to formulate an analytic argument explaining why transitions tend to happen in concentrated periods of time and often in geographic clusters.

- *Short essay II:* For the second short essay (2-4 double-spaced pages) students will be asked to write a report discussing the best institutional choices for a fictional country that has recently democratized, *Livonia*. In order to do so, students will be provided with information regarding the background ethnic, economic, social and political characteristics of the country. Students are expected to leverage this information to make a recommendation on the optimal institutional choices for the country.
- *Midterm and final exams:* Both the midterm and the final exams will have two parts. In the first part, students answer two short questions (out of 4 options) regarding the basic analytical concepts covered in class. The second part will be an essay question (to choose from 2 options).

The opportunity to take a make-up exam will only be offered in extremely rare circumstances. A doctor's note or a letter from the Dean will be required to be eligible to take the make-up exam. If an *unanticipated* emergency causes you to miss the exam, please contact me as soon as possible.

Course Calendar

Please find below the calendar for this course. Please be advised that changes may need to be made to this schedule, in which case I will announce it well in advance.

August 26th	Introduction
August 27th	The Comparative Method
September 2nd	Defining Political Regimes (I)
September 4th	Defining Political Regimes (II)
September 9th	Transitions to Democracy: Structural Factors (I)
September 11th	Transitions to Democracy: Structural Factors (II)
September 16th	Transitions to Democracy: Collective Action (I)
September 18th	Transitions to Democracy: Collective Action (II)
September 23rd	Presidentialism and Parliamentarism (I)
September 25th	Short essay I due. Presidentialism and Parliamentarism (II)
September 30th	Electoral Systems (I)
October 2nd	Electoral Systems (II)
October 7th	Legislatures and Bicameralism (I)
October 9th	Legislatures and Bicameralism (II)
October 14th	<i>FALL BREAK</i>
October 16th	<i>FALL BREAK</i>
October 21st	MIDTERM EXAM
October 23rd	<i>Midterm exam review</i>
October 28th	Ethnic Identities (I)
October 30th	Ethnic Identities (II)
November 4th	Social Cleavages and Issue Politics (I)
November 6th	Social Cleavages and Issue Politics (II)
November 11th	Electoral Accountability (I)
November 13th	Electoral Accountability (II)
November 18th	Vote Buying and Patronage (I)
November 20th	Short essay II due. Vote Buying and Patronage (II)
November 25th	<i>THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY</i>
November 27th	<i>THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY</i>
December 2nd	Political Institutions and Economic Outcomes (I)
December 4th	Political Institutions and Economic Outcomes (II)
December 9th	FINAL EXAM

Course Schedule

The following course schedule presents the topics that will be discussed each week. Each topic is structured around specific questions, which are included in the description of each week's content. Readings are assigned for each session. **All readings are required.** Please do the readings in the order specified.

Week 1. Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method

The goal of this week will be to familiarize ourselves with the object of comparative politics as well as with its main tool, the comparative method.

- a) *August 26th*: Description of the course structure, learning goals and student assessment.
- b) *August 28th*: Comparative politics and the comparative method. Required reading:
 - Samuels, David. *Comparative Politics*. Chapter 1.

Week 2. Defining Political Regimes

What distinguishes democracies from autocracies? Is it the existence of periodically held elections? How can we distinguish between different types of autocratic regimes?

- a) *September 2nd*: Defining democratic regimes. Required readings:
 - Clark, Golder and Golder. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 5.
 - Przeworski et al. 2000. *Democracy and Development*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1, pages 13-30.
- b) *September 4th*: Types of autocratic systems. Required readings:
 - Clark, Golder and Golder. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 10, pages 349-374.

Week 3. Transitions to Democracy: Structural Factors

Does economic development lead to the collapse of authoritarian regimes? What is the impact of natural resource wealth on the probability of democratization?

a) *September 9th*: Overview of the different explanations of democratization. Required readings:

- Samuels, David. *Comparative Politics*. Chapter 5.

b) *September 11th*: Modernization theory and natural resource curse. Required readings:

- Przeworski, Adam and Fernando Limongi. 1997. Modernization: Theories and Facts. *World Politics*, vol 49, n 2.
- Ross, Michael. 2001. Does Oil Hinder Democracy? *World Politics*, vol 53, n 3.

Week 4. Transitions to Democracy: Collective Action and Mass Protest

Why can autocratic regimes survive despite widespread unpopularity? What explains the sudden emergence of popular protest? How do movements solve collective action problems? How does repression influence decisions to participate in mass actions?

a) *September 16th*: The problem of collective action. Required readings:

- Samuels, David. *Comparative Politics*. Chapter 9, pages 228-245.

b) *September 18th*: When does mass protest arise? Who participates? Required readings:

- Kuran, Timur. 1991. Now Out of Never. The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989. *World Politics*, vol 44, n 1.
- Beissinger, Mark, Amamey Jamal and Kevin Mazur. 2014. Who Participated in the Arab Spring? A Comparison of the Egyptian and the Tunisian Revolutions. *Manuscript*.

Week 5. Institutional Choices: Presidentialism and Parliamentarism

What are the main differences in the chain of democratic delegation and accountability between Presidential and Parliamentary systems? How does the type of executive-legislative relations influence government and regime stability? Are there implications for the capacity to enact new legislation?

a) *September 23rd*: Defining types of executive-legislative relations. Required readings:

- Clark, Golder and Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. chapter 12.

b) *September 25th*: [**First short essay due**]. The consequences of presidentialism and parliamentarism. Required readings:

- Linz, Juan. 1996. The Perils of Presidentialism, in Larry Diamond et al (eds). *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Samuels, David. 2007. Separation of Powers, in Carles Boix and Susan Stokes (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford University Press.

Week 6. Institutional Choices: Electoral Systems

What are the two main families of electoral systems? What are the implications for district size, ballot structure and seat-assignment formula? What are the implications of electoral systems for the number of legislative parties? And for proportionality between votes and seats? What about clarity of choice and accountability?

a) *September 30th*: Types of electoral systems. Required readings:

- Clark, Golder and Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. chapter 13.

b) *October 2nd*: The consequences of electoral systems. Required readings:

- G. Bingham Powell, Jr. 2000. *Elections as Instruments of Democracy*. Yale University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.

Week 7. Institutional Choices: Legislatures and Bicameralism

What are the functions of legislatures? How does the distinction between parliamentarism and presidentialism affect the functions that legislators accomplish? What about electoral systems? What are the implications of bicameralism for political representation?

a) *October 7th*: Legislatures, party discipline and constituency service. Required readings:

- Carey, John M. 2007. Competing Principals, Political Institutions, and Party Unity in Legislative Voting. *American Journal of Political Science*, vol 51 n 1.
- Scholl, Edward L. 1986. The Electoral System and Constituency-Oriented Activity in the European Parliament. *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol 30 n 3.

b) *October 9th*: Bicameralism. Required readings:

- Clark, Golder and Golder. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 15.

Week 8. FALL BREAK

Week 9. MIDTERM EXAM and review

- a) *October 21st: Midterm exam*
- b) *October 23rd: In-class review of midterm exam.*

Week 10. Ethnic Identities

How can we define ethnic groups? Why are they politically relevant? What are the implications of ethnic diversity? Does the institutional accommodation of ethnic differences appease or ignite ethnic conflict?

- a) *October 28th: Group identities. Required readings:*
 - Samuels, David. *Comparative Politics*. Chapter 6.
- b) *October 30th: Ethnic politics. Required readings:*
 - Posner, Daniel. 2004. The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi. *American Political Science Review*, vol 98, n 4.
 - Clark, Golder and Golder. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 16 [section].

Week 11. Social Cleavages and Issue Politics

What are some of the main dimensions of political conflict in advanced democracies? How does this structure electoral competition? How do cleavages and electoral rules interact to create party systems?

- a) *November 4th: Social Cleavages. Required readings:*
 - Clark, Golder and Golder. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 14
- b) *November 6th: Party families and spatial representations of preferences over issues. Required readings:*
 - Mair, Peter and Cas Mudde. 1998. The Party Family and Its Study. *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol 1, n. 1.

- Benoit, Ken and Michael Laver. 2006. *Party Policy in Modern Democracies*. Routledge. Chapter 1 and Appendix B (skim).

Week 12. Electoral Accountability, Economic Voting and Corruption

Do elections help citizens discipline democratic incumbents? What are the institutional factors that foster electoral accountability?

a) *November 11th*: Economic voting. Required readings:

- Powell, G. Bingham and Guy D. Whitten. 1993. A Cross-National Analysis of Economic Voting: Taking Account of the Political Context. *American Journal of Political Science*, vol 37 n 2.

b) *November 13th*: Accountability for political corruption. Required readings:

- Tavits, Margit. 2007. Clarity of Responsibility and Corruption. *American Journal of Political Science*, vol 51, n 1.

Week 12. Vote Buying and Patronage

What is vote buying and patronage? How does it affect the capacity of voters to select and discipline politicians? How can we overcome it?

a) *November 18th*: Definition and political consequences. Required readings:

- Brusco, Valeria, Marcelo Nazareno and Susan C. Stokes. 2004. Vote Buying in Argentina. *Latin American Research Review*. vol 39, n 2.
- Wantchekon, Leonard. 2003. Clientelism and Voting Behavior: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin. *World Politics*, vol 55 n 3.

b) *November 20th*: [**Second short essay is due**]. How to overcome vote buying. Required readings:

- Stokes, Susan, Thad Dunning, Marcelo Nazareno and Valeria Brusco. 2013. *Brokers, Voters and Clientelism*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 7 and 8.

Week 13. THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY from November 24th to November 30th

Week 14. Political Institutions and Economic Outcomes

What are the implications of democratic regimes vs autocracies in terms of economic growth and equality? What about the impact of certain democratic institutions?

a) *December 2nd*: The economic consequences of political regimes. Required readings:

- Clark, Golder and Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 9.

b) *December 4th*: Institutional choices in democracies and economic outcomes. Required readings:

- Samuels, David. 2013. *Comparative Politics*. Chapter 12.
- Clark, Golder and Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 16 (section)

Week 15.

December 9th: FINAL EXAM