

Introduction to Comparative Politics, Pol S 241 Section B

Syllabus: Spring 2015

Lagomarcino 142, Tuesday/Thursday 9:30-10:50 AM
Course website on Blackboard Learn: <http://bb.its.iastate.edu/>

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QUESTIONS?

A syllabus is like a contract between you and me. It outlines all of the things I expect from you over the course of the semester, and what you can expect from me in return, such as grades and lectures. I am allowed to modify it as things come up over the semester, but only if I notify you. I expect that you will read the entire document, and that you will refer back to it throughout the semester any time you have questions—for instance, about when an assignment is due, or how long your essay needs to be.

If you ever have a question about anything in this course, look here first! Peruse the entire document from front to back to make sure you haven't missed a detail. Next, check the "Documents, Readings, and Assignments" section under Blackboard to see if there's another document that answers your question. If you peruse the syllabus and Blackboard and can't find the answers to your question, your next step should be to ask two classmates, if at all possible. Try to get to know a few people in this class, and jot down their names and phone numbers so that you can ask a question if needed.

As a final resort, if you can't find it in the syllabus and Blackboard and your classmates also don't know the answer to your question, please email me or our TA Reed Clayton. When you email, make sure you tell us that you couldn't find the answer anywhere else. (For more on emailing a professor, see [here](#).)

About this Class

Do democracies provide their citizens a better quality of life? Why does Brazil's legislature have nearly 30 parties, while in the US Congress there are typically only two? And what has caused countries such as Romania and Nicaragua to transition to democracy in the past 20 years, while governments such as those of Azerbaijan and Cuba have remained authoritarian?

These are a few of the many questions scholars of comparative politics (comparativists) try to answer. Comparativists study politics in countries around the world, seeking to understand how they differ and why. To do so, we need information about different political systems and outcomes (**data**), as well as some possible explanations for why these differences occur (**theory or hypotheses**). We typically examine only a sample of countries, but we hope to draw lessons that apply even to countries we have not studied. This requires that we pay careful attention to **methodology**, so that we choose the right sample and draw the appropriate lessons.

In this introductory course, we will discuss all three components of comparative politics: data, theory, and methodology. We will begin by discussing how we compare and why. We will then proceed to discuss a number of concepts we can use to describe political systems, such as states and nations, authoritarianism versus democracy, and presidentialism versus parliamentarism. Finally, we will illustrate and debate these concepts by focusing on a number of "cases," or countries. Our textbook will focus on ten countries – Brazil, China, Germany, India, Iran, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, and the United Kingdom. We will learn more about the political systems and histories of these countries, as well as the current political issues they face.

Objectives

In this class, our objective is to hone four sets of skills:

“Soft” Skills: These are the social skills and personal habits you will need to succeed both in the college classroom and any professional workplace after you graduate.

1. Follow directions and plan ahead (step #1: read the syllabus!). When you need help, seek it as soon as possible!
2. Communicate with the professor (i.e., your “boss”) and your fellow classmates (i.e., your “coworkers”) respectfully—be informative, clear, courteous, and direct.
3. Give the task at hand your full attention.

Citizen Skills:

1. Understand and appreciate important events in countries around the world, and effectively seek additional information when something happens that you do not understand.
2. Understand how the United States is similar to or different from other countries in the world, as well as how it is connected to other countries.
3. Know how to select and evaluate information sources.

General Academic Skills:

1. Clearly and effectively communicate information and ideas in writing.
2. Read critically, identify unanswered questions, and develop hypotheses that could answer those questions.

Political Science Skills:

1. Understand general political science concepts and methods of inquiry.
2. Identify and analyze the purpose and roles of the state.
3. Identify key differences between democratic, authoritarian, and semi-authoritarian systems.
4. Identify and discuss the major issues and challenges facing countries in the transition to and consolidation of democracy.
5. Compare and evaluate how different political systems operate.

Textbook

Drogus, Carol Ann and Stephen Orvis. 2015. *Introducing Comparative Politics: Concepts and Cases in Context*, 3rd Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

When reading the textbook, focus primarily on the substantive content (meaning, not the case studies), unless I explicitly tell you to read a case study.

In addition, there is one optional book, one which you may write an optional paper due at the end of the semester: Dobson, William J. 2012. *The Dictator's Learning Curve: Inside the Global Battle for Democracy*. New York: Anchor Books.

Grading and Requirements

TOTAL POINTS IN CLASS: 500

1. **Three Exams:** Exams will be a combination of multiple choice and essay question, and will be run through the testing center.
 - **Exam A, February 17:** 100 points
 - **Exam B, April 9:** 100 points
 - **Exam C, May 4:** 60 points

2. **Four Country and Concept Essays:** 25 points each. Each mini-essay is due in-class by the date assigned, and should be 350-500 words. All of your responses should be based on the same country. Please print out your essays but try to keep them to a single sheet of paper (either single-space them or print front-and-back.)
 - **Essay 1:** Due January 27
 - **Essay 2:** Due February 12
 - **Essay 3:** Due March 3
 - **Essay 4:** Due April 7

3. **Role Playing Game Responses:** 10 points each (30 points total).
 We will have three short games in class over the course of the semester. For each game, you will submit a brief response. For the first and third games, you can submit a hand-written response by the end of class, or you may email your response to me and to our TA, Reed Clayton, by the beginning of the following class period if you aren't able to complete your response in class.
 - **Create Your Own State:** Game January 29; response due by February 3
 - **Uprising!** Response due on Blackboard by March 5
 - **Slugs and Worms:** Game March 31; response due by April 2

4. **Constitutional Design:** 30 points. You will work in a group to design a constitution for a country I will choose. Your group will be responsible for submitting a **hard copy** of a draft constitution by Thursday, April 16 (you may also submit it to my box by the end of the day Friday).

5. **Country Presentations:** 50 points. Together with the other students assigned to your country, you will make a 20 minute presentation to teach your classmates what you have learned over the course of the semester. I will pass out instructions for these presentations the first day your group meets (January 27).

6. **Real World Politics Reports:** 30 points. You will work with a group of 4-5 peers to make an approximately 10 minute presentation at some point during the semester on current events. By 5 PM the day before class, your group needs to email me your topic, several bullet points for discussion, and a media source (newspaper article, very brief video clip, blog post, etc.) you will present to the class. In your presentation, you must discuss (a) what happened/is happening; (b) very brief background about the country(ies) involved that you think your peers need to understand the topic; and (c) how this connects to things we are discussing in class. I will prepare additional discussion orienting class around the topic.

Optional Assignments/Bonus Opportunities:

1. **Paper on regimes and regime transitions:** Up to 20 bonus points on your lowest exam grade. Read Dobson. Write a 6-7 page paper comparing your country to at least 3 countries Dobson discusses in terms of regime type, social movements, and any possible transitions to or from democracy (CAREFUL: make sure you understand what "regime type" means, and what your country's regime type is).

2. **Public lectures:** ISU will have many excellent coming through this semester. You may earn up to 4 bonus points per speaker for attending up to 2 different lectures. After each lecture, send me and TA Reed Clayton an email with a paragraph describing the lecture and why it's relevant for this class, and hand in the flyer or program from the event.
 - Jenny Nordberg, "[The Underground Girls of Kabul](#)": February 5
 - Roman Cybriwsky, "[Kiev, Ukraine: From the Collapse of Socialism to the Mass Uprising of 2013–14](#)": February 9
 - Norman Finkelstein, "[The State of the Promised Land](#)": March 9
 - Frans Schryer, "[Stories of Undocumented Workers from Mexico](#)": March 24
 - Philip McMichael, "[The Politics of Global Food Security](#)": April 14

Your point total will be assigned a letter grade according to the following scale:

A: 465-500 **A-:** 450-464 **B+:** 435-449 **B:** 415-434 **B-:** 400-414 **C+:** 385-399
C: 365-384 **C-:** 350-364 **D+:** 335-349 **D:** 315-334 **D-:** 300-314 **F:** ≤ 299

Attendance Policy

Many aspects of this course require you to be present, both for your own benefit and for that of your fellow students. Beginning Tuesday, January 20, we will pass around a sign-in sheet in every class. **It is your responsibility to make sure that you SIGN the sheet by your name (you shouldn't just check your name off).** If you have an extenuating circumstance that requires you to be absent (illness, family emergency, etc.), it is your responsibility to notify either me or our TA. If at all possible, you must do so before class time. We may request documentation of your excuse. **If you have four or more unexcused absences in the semester, you will automatically fail the course.**

Other Policies

Computers, digital communication, etc.

- This semester, I am asking you **not to use laptops or cell phones in class**. (If I see you using your cell phone, I reserve the right to ask you to bring it up to the front of the class and lay it on the table.) I will use my laptop to make PowerPoint presentations and show videos, and I will post these materials on Blackboard after class. Lots of research shows that using a laptop in class distracts not only you, but also your classmates surrounding you. Curious? Read [this](#), [this](#), [this](#), [this](#), [this](#), [this](#), and [this](#). Let's try to respect each other by giving each other our full attention three hours a week!
- Please allow 24 hours for me to respond to emails. When you email me, please include a descriptive subject line and make sure you remind me what class you are in. For very helpful pointers on emailing a professor, see [this](#).

Late/missing assignments.

- Any student with a *legitimate* excuse for missing the exams may retake them at a date and time we will arrange. If you miss the exam, it is your responsibility to contact me.
- If you have an excused absence for the day/week you were assigned to a Real World Politics Report, you may be reassigned to another day. I may, however, consult the members of your previous group before reassigning you to a new group.
- I will accept late Country and Concept Essays only if you have an excused absence for the day they were due.
- I will take a letter grade off your written assignments for each day they are late. I will not accept late optional papers.

Legitimate excuses for the purpose of late/missing assignments.

- If you're sick—especially if you're having flu-like symptoms—please don't come to class! Email BOTH me and our TA, Reed Clayton before class time if at all possible. Depending on the severity of the case and the length of your absence, we may ask for documentation of the illness.
- If a member of your immediate family dies, you may be excused if you provide documentation of the event – a dated funeral program or obituary, a note from a religious leader on official letterhead, etc.
- If you anticipate problems, please talk with me about them ahead of time; I am happy to make *reasonable* accommodations. In any cases of doubt, I will be the final arbiter of what constitutes a legitimate excuse or a reasonable accommodation.

Academic integrity.

- The most frequent problem of academic integrity I encounter involves plagiarism. Iowa State has an excellent resource on understanding and avoiding plagiarism [here](#). **If you use more than three words, or even just one key word, from another author without using quotation marks and citing your source, you are committing plagiarism.** If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please ASK.
- Anyone thought to have violated Iowa State's [standards of academic integrity](#) may fail the course, and may be referred to the Dean of Students to face university-sanctioned penalties.

Students with disabilities.

If you have a disability and need accommodations for this course, please contact me early in the term so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to Student Disability Resources (SDR), located on the main floor of the Student Services Building, Room 1076, 515-294-7220. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course. All conversations between you and me will remain confidential.

Class Schedule

Unit, Topic and Date	Readings (<i>in italics</i>) and Assignments (in bold) (to be read/completed by date listed)
Introductions and Expectations	
Tuesday, January 13	
The Comparative Method: How Do We Learn from Comparison?	
Thursday, January 15	In class: Sign up for Real World Politics Report group <i>Profile on Syria's civil war (online); case study of Racial Politics in the United States, pp. 175-184</i>
Tuesday, January 20	In class: Sign up for Country and Concept Group <i>Chapter 1, pp. 2-15 (top)</i>
State Strength, Resources, and the Economy: What is the State, and What Do States Do?	
Thursday, January 22	Real World Politics Report: Group 1 <i>Chapter 2, pp. 36-57</i>
Tuesday, January 27	Country and Concept Essay 1 Due <i>Case studies of Somaliland in Ch. 2</i>
Thursday, January 29	Real World Politics Report: Group 2 Create Your Own State Simulation; Response due by the end of class or emailed by Tuesday to TA <i>Chapter 5, pp. 196-225</i>
Tuesday, February 3	<i>Chapter 10, pp. 532-544</i>
States, Nations, and Identity: Who Belongs?	
Thursday, February 5	Real World Politics Report: Group 3 <i>Chapter 3, pp. 98-103</i>
Tuesday, February 10	Real World Politics Report: Group 4 <i>Chapter 4, pp. 144-168, pp. 173-175</i>
Thursday, February 12	Country and Concept Essay 2 Due <i>Chapter 12, pp. 648-665 (including case studies)</i>
Exam A: Tuesday, February 17 (online)	

Unit, Topic and Date	<i>Readings (in italics) and Assignments (in bold)</i> (to be read/completed by date listed)
Democratic and Authoritarian Regimes and Regime Transitions: How Is the Country Run? Part I	
Thursday, February 19	Real World Politics Report: Group 5 <i>Chapter 3, pp. 103-110, 113-127 (including case studies), 130, 135-137</i>
Tuesday, February 24	<i>Chapter 8, pp. 398-403</i>
Thursday, February 26	Real World Politics Report: Group 6 <i>Chapter 9, pp. 454-461, 466-473, 477-488</i>
Tuesday, March 3	Country and Concept Essay 3 Due Uprising! role-playing game
Thursday, March 5	Real World Politics Report: Group 7 Uprising! response due on Blackboard by class time <i>Case studies of Iran and China in Chapters 8 and 9</i>
Executives, Legislatures, Judiciaries, and Bureaucracies: How Is the Country Run? Part II	
Tuesday, March 10	<i>Chapter 6, pp. 258-267, 272-274, 280-289</i>
Thursday, March 12	Real World Politics Report: Group 8 <i>Chapter 8, pp. 404-411</i>
Tuesday-Thursday, March 17-19: Spring Break	
Tuesday, March 24	<i>Chapter 6, pp. 289-292, 296-301</i>
Federalism, Parties, and the European Union: How Are Really Big States and Groups of States Run?	
Thursday, March 26	Real World Politics Report: Group 9 <i>Chapter 6, pp. 305-316</i>
Parties and Elections: How Do Citizens Choose Leaders, and How Do Leaders Choose Policies?	
Tuesday, March 31	Slugs and Worms Game; Responses due by the end of class or emailed by Thursday morning to TA <i>Chapter 7, pp. 324-361</i>
Thursday, April 2	Real World Politics Report: Group 10
Tuesday, April 7	Real World Politics Report: Group 11 Country and Concept Essay 4 Due <i>Chapter 8, pp. 429-434</i>
Exam B: Thursday, April 9 (online)	
Constitutional Convention	
Tuesday, April 14	Instructions handed out in class
Thursday, April 16	Your group should have a draft constitution by the start of class, but you can submit a hard-copy to my box by Friday afternoon
Country Presentations: Order to Be Determined Randomly and Announced January 22	
Tuesday, April 21	Country A, B, C Presentations <i>Case studies for countries presented today</i>
Thursday, April 23	Real World Politics Report: Group 12 Country D, E Presentations <i>Case studies for countries presented today</i>
Tuesday, April 28	Country F, G, H Presentations <i>Case studies for countries presented today</i>
Thursday, April 30	Real World Politics Report: Group 13 Country I & J Presentations <i>Case studies for countries presented today</i>
Exam C: Monday, May 4 (online)	
Optional Bonus Paper Due Friday, May 8	