

POLS 131: Introduction to Comparative Politics

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Class Hours: MW 11:30 a.m. – 12:55 p.m.

Class Room: Chase 101

Course Description

“Politics is the art of the possible,” begins a famous and ostensibly aspirational quote by the European statesman Otto von Bismarck. In this course, we will explore the fundamental challenges and opportunities that underlie “the art of the possible.” Using case studies of domestic politics around the globe, this course will introduce you to the core substantive and methodological debates that characterize the subfield of comparative politics. Accordingly, we will work through many of the questions that comparativists ask about the political similarities and differences between (and within) countries *and* across time. For example: What is democracy and how should we “measure” it? What triggers a transition from authoritarianism to democracy? How do the politics of identity shape conflict and cooperation? Why are some social movements successful while others are not? Are certain political institutions necessary for economic development? Our examination of these questions will always be driven by theory and informed by evidence. As we shall see, the “answers” to these questions paint a complex and nuanced picture of politics as a process. A process aptly explained by Bismarck’s unabridged quote: “Politics is the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best.”

Course Objectives

1. Consume, criticize, and respond to canonical arguments and cutting-edge research in comparative politics
2. Hone critical thinking and writing skills through active engagement with course materials and application to current and historical events
3. Develop an understanding of how scholarship is produced and knowledge is accumulated in the field
4. Identify and build transferable skills that will support you during your time at Haverford and beyond

Required Readings

LaVaque-Manty, Mika and Danielle LaVaque-Manty (2015). *Writing in Political Science: A Brief Guide*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Course Policy

Learning is not a spectator sport! Given that we have the great privilege of belonging to a world-class selective liberal arts college community, our classroom experience will be as “hands-on” as possible. The most recent “Introduction to Comparative Politics” courses at Princeton University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Pennsylvania State University, had respective enrollments of 79, 153, and 197 students! Our more intimate setting means that, instead of a generic textbook approach, we will be able to work through some of the articles and book chapters that have served as cornerstones of the discipline. Likewise, we will engage with cutting-edge research that represents the vanguard of comparative politics scholarship. Regular attendance and engagement with course material is expected. Active participation creates positive externalities for all, and your contributions to a positive classroom environment will be factored into your final grade. You are encouraged to annotate readings, highlighting the questions, reflections, and points of interest that they prompt. Finally, I encourage all students to come to office hours at least once during the semester.

Class Requirements

1. Participation: **15%**
2. Data Project: **25%**
3. Response Papers: **20% (2, 10% each)**
4. Debates: **15%**
5. Final paper: **25%**

Grading

Final grades for our course will be based on the following numeric cutoffs:

>= 93.00	A	73.00 - 76.99	C
90.00 - 92.99	A-	70.00 - 72.99	C-
87.00 - 89.99	B+	67.00 - 69.99	D+
83.00 - 86.99	B	60.00 - 66.99	D
80.00 - 82.99	B-	<= 59.99	F

Participation (15%)

Regular attendance and active engagement during class are required to succeed in POLS 131. A high school cross country coach of mine used to tell all of his runners, “you can never ‘make up’ a missed practice.” In the same sense, there is no way to “make up” a missed class. I understand that things like family emergencies, illness, college authorized extracurricular events, etc., might

impact your ability to make it to **every** session. In the event that you will miss a class session, I ask that you notify via email me with as much advance notice as possible.

In addition to regularly attending class, “participation” entails making active contributions to class discussions and practicing good citizenship. To this end, remember that quantity is not as important as quality, and that amplifying the voices and ideas of your classmates goes a long way in creating an positive class experience for all. Among other things, practicing good citizenship means arriving to class on time, giving your classmates your undivided attention, and refraining from personal attacks when engaging with your peers and their ideas.

As a final component of your participation grade, I will periodically ask you to make Moodle forum reflection posts that respond to a prompt pertaining to some aspect of the course (a reading, a short video, an in-class discussion or activity, etc.). You are encouraged to read and react to your classmates posts. These posts are graded on completion, but should reflect a sincere effort to engage with the prompt as course concepts and readings.

Data Project (25%)

One of the central questions we will explore this semester concerns how regime type (democracy or dictatorship) impacts the provision of various political, economic, social “goods” (or potentially “bads”) deemed important to human well-being (for example; economic growth or equality, public health outcomes, gender or racial equity, climate change policies, educational attainment, etc.). You will work in groups of two or three to conduct an empirical analysis on the relationship between regime type (i.e., democracy or dictatorship) and an outcome of your choosing. Ultimately, your analysis should posit an answer to the question: Does the type of government in place affect the prospects of observing the outcome of interest?

Each group will collect cross-national quantitative data for their analysis, and individual group members will complement the cross-national data analysis with a brief individual country case study. The data project will adopt a “scaffolded” structure allowing for multiple rounds of feedback before the final submission. All groups will consult with Karen Viars, research and instruction librarian, for assistance with data collection after submitting a one-page topic and relevance statement. Prior to conducting your analysis your group will conduct research into your proposed outcome of interest to better understand how scholars and policymakers conceptualize and measure your outcome.

In lieu of a midterm, each group will give an overview of their data project in a 10 minute presentation during the Wednesday session of Week 7. The presentation should include a high level overview of the outcome of interest, relevant summary statistics and visualization of the data, as well as an assessment of the source and quality of the data utilized. You are individually responsible for submitting one question and one comment in response to each presentation besides your own. The final component of the project, due at the end of Week 9, is a brief write-up summarizing the project findings and incorporating feedback received from in-class presentations.

Response Papers (20% 2 at 10% each)

Over the course of the semester, once in the first half and once in the second half, you will write two short papers in response to provided prompts and drawing on relevant course readings.

Broadly speaking, both response papers will focus on understanding the craft and process of research in the (sub)field of comparative politics. Further information (prompts and due dates) can be obtained from the assignment document. These reading responses should be 3-4 (double spaced) pages in length.

Debates (15%)

We will have two in-class debates during the semester. You will actively take part in one debate and serve as a juror in the other. In addition to taking notes and casting a vote to determine the winning side of the debate, jurors will also write a 1-2 paragraph reflection on the debate on a Moodle forum post. Your grade for the two debates will be split between your active participation in one debate (10%) and your short reflection on the other (5%).

Final Paper (25%)

The final paper will be an 8-10 (double-spaced) page comparative case study that will showcase the knowledge you've accumulated over the semester. Students will choose a guiding question from a provided list and then investigate the answer via a paired comparison of two country case studies. Your paper should propose a clear, well-defined research question, review existing literature, and use a comparative case study design to answer the question. You will be responsible for getting enough done on your paper to have a working thesis, outline, and two full pages drafted in order to go through an in-class peer review exercise during Week 15.

Attendance Policy

Should you need to miss a session, please notify me via email **as soon as possible**. Since participation is an important part of your grade, regular attendance is necessary (but not sufficient!) to succeed in this class. **Repeated unexcused absences will result in a failing grade.**

Late Work Policy

As a general policy, I apply a **ten (10) percentage points penalty per day (24 hours) an assignment is submitted past the deadline** (starting at 0:00:01 past the deadline). Learning how to balance your academic and extracurricular commitments is an important part of your college experience. I will not penalize students who recognize this responsibility by excusing late submission from students who don't. If a serious issue precludes your timely submission of an assignment, please email me immediately and we will make alternate arrangements.

Academic Integrity Policy

You are expected to abide by the [Haverford College Honor Code](#) at all times. Per the Honor Code, "Academic dishonesty includes acts of plagiarism, improper collaboration, and using more time and/or resources than allotted. A student commits an act of plagiarism as defined by the Faculty Handbook and the Academic Code Glossary by representing 'another person's ideas or scholarship' as that student's own work. Students should not inappropriately give or receive aid when taking exams" (H.C. Const. art. I, §3.04 cl. 1b.). Please make sure that you are familiar with

these policies. *For the purposes of this course, the use of ChatGPT or other AI composition software is viewed as improper collaboration and falls under the banner of academic dishonesty.* Students are strongly encouraged to consult the Writing Center's [Resources for Writers and Speakers](#) as they pertain to plagiarism.

Commitment to an Equitable & Inclusive Learning Environment

According to the College's [Statement of Purpose](#), "Haverford strives to be a college in which integrity, honesty, and concern for others are dominant forces." Pursuant to these goals, the college, and this classroom, adheres to the philosophy that all community members should enjoy a learning environment free from harassment, sexual misconduct, discrimination, or violence of any kind. If you encounter any form of sexual harassment, misconduct, or assault, or discrimination based on race, color, religion, age, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability, please contact [Raquel Esteves-Joyce](#), Title IX Coordinator and Assistant Vice President for Student Diversity, Equity and Access.

Counseling & Psychological Services

College can be a very stressful time. Many students face emotional, personal, or psychological challenges that have the potential of impeding academic progress, emotional well-being, and social development. [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) is an extremely valuable resource available to all Haverford students at no cost. The staff at CAPS are committed to providing counseling services that honor the needs, strengths, and identities of Haverford's increasingly diverse student community. CAPS services include wellness and self-help options; individual and group counseling; crisis intervention; psychiatric services; facilitating access to gender affirming care; and community education and outreach services for the College community. If you need immediate support you should call Campus Safety (who will connect you with an on-call CAPS crisis counselor) at +1 610-896-1111.

Disabilities Policy

Haverford College is committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body and provides equitable access to students with disabilities. Likewise, I am committed to providing an enjoyable and accessible learning experience for all students enrolled in this course. If you have (or think you may have) a disability related to mental health, chronic health, neurological state, and/or physical condition, please contact the [Office of Access and Disability Services \(ADS\)](#) at hc-ads@haverford.edu. It is never too late to request ADA accommodations – our bodies and circumstances are continuously changing. Please know that all inquiries and health-related information is handled in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Students who have already been approved to receive academic ADA accommodations and want to use these in this course should share their accommodation letter and make arrangements to meet with me as soon as possible to discuss how their accommodations will be implemented in this course. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice in order to successfully implement.

Class Schedule

Students must come to class having read all of the readings corresponding to that session. Important: class readings are subject to change, contingent on mitigating circumstances and the progress we make as a class. Please make a habit of checking the course Moodle page and your email for updates.

Week 01, 01/20 - 01/24: Thinking like a Political Scientist

No class Monday (Martin Luther King Jr. Day).

Read *all* associated documents on course website.

- [Critical Reading in the Social Sciences](#)
- [Dos and Dont's of Writing for Students](#)
- [Haverford College Guide to Writing in Political Science](#)
- [Haverford College Political Science Library Skills Rubric](#)

Wednesday, January 22nd: How Should We Think about Comparison?

Sartori, Giovanni (1970). "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics". In: *American Political Science Review* 64.4.

Lijphart, Arend (1971). "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method". In: *American Political Science Review* 65.3.

Week 02, 01/27 - 01/31: Case Studies and the Comparative Method

Monday, January 27th: What Makes a Good Case?

Gerring, John (2009). "The Case Study: What It Is and What It Does". In: *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Ed. by Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. 1st ed. Oxford University Press.

Pepinsky, Thomas B. (2019). "The Return of the Single-Country Study". In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 22.1.

Wednesday, January 29th: Library Instruction Session with Karen Viars and Anna Lacy

LaVaque-Manty, Mika and Danielle LaVaque-Manty (2015). *Writing in Political Science: A Brief Guide*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Note: We will meet in [Lutnick 232](#) for this session. Please come having read the Preface, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of *Writing in Political Science: A Brief Guide*. Additionally please review the [Haverford College Political Science Library Skills Rubric](#).

Week 03, 02/03 - 02/07: States Formation, State Capacity, and State Failure

Monday, February 3rd: Where Do States Come From?

Tilly, Charles (1985). "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime". In: *Bringing the State Back In*. Ed. by Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press.

Blaydes, Lisa and Anna Grzymala-Busse (2024). "Historical State Formation Within and Beyond Europe". In: *World Politics*.

Wednesday, February 5th: What Does it Mean to be a Weak State?

Centeno, Miguel Angel, Atul Kohli, and Deborah J. Yashar (2017). "Unpacking States in the Developing World: Capacity, Performance, and Politics". In: Dinsha Mistree. *States in the Developing World*. Ed. by Miguel A. Centeno, Atul Kohli and Deborah J. Yashar. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press.

Jones, Rebekah and Lisa L. Miller (2025). "Lethal Violence and the Racialized Failure of the American State". In: *Perspectives on Politics*.

Daut, Marlene L. (2023). "What's the Path Forward for Haiti?" In: *The New Yorker*.

Data Project Topic and Relevance Statement Due Friday, February 7th. Schedule meeting with research librarian Karen Viars for no later than Friday, February 21st.

Week 04, 02/10 - 02/14: Nations and Nation Building

Monday, February 10th: What is Nationalism?

Gellner, Ernest (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Nachdr.. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press.

Anderson, Benedict R. (2016). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London New York: Verso.

Note: Please read Gellner (1983) Introduction and Anderson (1983) Chapter 1: Introduction and Chapter 2: Cultural Roots.

Wednesday, February 12th: How and When is Nationalism Politically "Useful?"

Mylonas, Harris and Maya Tudor (2021). "Nationalism: What We Know and What We Still Need to Know". In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 24 (Volume 24, 2021).

Note: Everyone will read Mylonas and Tudor (2021). Half of the class will read Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006) and the other half will read Miguel (2004).

Darden, Keith and Anna Grzymala-Busse (2006). "The Great Divide: Literacy, Nationalism, and the Communist Collapse". In: *World Politics* 59.1.

Miguel, Edward (2004). "Tribe or Nation? Nation Building and Public Goods in Kenya versus Tanzania". In: *World Politics* 56.3.

Week 05, 02/17 - 02/21: Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict

Monday, February 17th: What is Ethnicity?

Chandra, Kanchan (2006). "What Is Ethnic Identity and Does It Matter?" In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 9.1.

Wimmer, Andreas (1997). "Who Owns the State? Understanding Ethnic Conflict in Post-Colonial Societies". In: *Nations and Nationalism* 3.4.

Wednesday, February 19th: How Does Ethnicity Impact Politics and Vice Versa?

Posner, Daniel N. (2004). "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi". In: *American Political Science Review* 98.4.

McMurry, Nina (2022). "From Recognition to Integration: Indigenous Autonomy, State Authority, and National Identity in the Philippines". In: *American Political Science Review* 116.2.

Response Paper 1 Due Friday, February 21st.

Week 06, 02/24 - 02/28: Democracy and Democratization (Pt. 1)

Monday, February 24th: What is Democracy and (How) Can We Measure It?

Dahl, Robert Alan (2007). *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.

Schmitter, Philippe C and Terry Lynn Karl (1991). "What Democracy Is. . . and Is Not". In: *Journal of Democracy* 2.3.

Teorell, Jan, Michael Coppedge, Staffan Lindberg, and Svend-Erik Skaaning (2019). "Measuring Polyarchy Across the Globe, 1900–2017". In: *Studies in Comparative International Development* 54.1.

Note: For Dahl (1971) please read Chapter 1: Democratization and Public Opposition and Chapter 3: Historical Sequences.

Wednesday, February 26th: Is There a Relationship Between Income (GDP per capita) and Democratization?

Przeworski, Adam and Fernando Papaterra Limongi Neto (1997). "Modernization: Theories and Facts". In: *World Politics* 49.2.

Boix, Carles and Susan C. Stokes (2003). "Endogenous Democratization". In: *World Politics* 55.4.

Week 07, 03/03 - 03/07: Democracy and Dictatorship Group Data Project Week

Monday, March 3rd: In-class Data Project Workshop

No readings.

Wednesday, March 5th: In-class Data Project Presentations

No readings.

Week 08, 03/10 - 03/14: Spring Break

Week 09, 03/17 - 03/21: Democracy and Democratization (Pt. 2)

Monday, March 17th: When Do Societal Actors Demand Democratization?

Moore, Barrington (1993). *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Lertchoosakul, Kanokrat (2021). "The Paradox of the Thai Middle Class in Democratisation". In: *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 9.1.

Note: For Moore (1966) please read Chapter 7: The Democratic Road to Modern Society.

Wednesday, March 19th: When and Why Do Authoritarian Rulers Instigate Democratization?

Slater, Dan and Joseph Wong (2022). *From Development to Democracy: The Transformations of Modern Asia*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Treisman, Daniel (2020). "Democracy by Mistake: How the Errors of Autocrats Trigger Transitions to Freer Government". In: *American Political Science Review* 114.3.

Note: For Slater and Wong (2022) please read Chapter 1: Democracy through Strength.

Data Project Write Up Due Friday, March 21st.

Week 10, 03/24 - 03/28: Formal and Informal Institutions

Monday, March 24th: What are Institutions? How Do Institutional Decisions Shape Political Outcomes?

North, Douglass C. (1990). *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Linz, Juan J. (1990). "The Perils of Presidentialism". In: *Journal of Democracy* 1.1.

Horowitz, Donald L. (1990). "Presidents vs. Parliaments: Comparing Democratic Systems". In: *Journal of Democracy* 1.4.

Note: For North (1990) please read Chapter 1: An Introduction to Institutions and Institutional Change and Chapter 2: Cooperation: the Theoretical Problem.

Wednesday, March 26th: When Do Informal Institutions Emerge? What Do These Institutions Tell Us About the Distribution of Power?

Helmke, Gretchen and Steven Levitsky (2004). "Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda". In: *Perspectives on Politics* 2.4.

Note: Everyone will read Helmke and Levitsky (2004). Half of the class will read Wantchekon (2003) and the other half will read Holland (2016).

Wantchekon, Leonard (2003). "Clientelism and Voting Behavior: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin". In: *World Politics* 55.3.

Holland, Alisha C. (2016). "Forbearance". In: *American Political Science Review* 110.2.

Week 11, 03/31 - 04/04: The Debate around Democratic Backsliding

Monday, March 31st: What is Democratic Backsliding? Are We in an Age of Democratic Decline?

Bermeo, Nancy (2016). "On Democratic Backsliding". In: *Journal of Democracy* 27.1.

Brownlee, Jason and Kenny Miao (2022). "Why Democracies Survive". In: *Journal of Democracy* 33.4.

Mounk, Yascha (2022). "The Danger Is Real". In: *Journal of Democracy* 33.4.

Bermeo, Nancy (2022). "Questioning Backsliding". In: *Journal of Democracy* 33.4.

Ginsburg, Tom (2022). "The Value of "Tyrannophobia". In: *Journal of Democracy* 33.4.

Hyde, Susan D. and Elizabeth N. Saunders (2022). "Follow the Leader". In: *Journal of Democracy* 33.4.

Brownlee, Jason and Kenny Miao (2022). "A Quiet Consensus". In: *Journal of Democracy* 33.4.

In-class Debate #1.

Wednesday, April 2nd: How Should We Measure Backsliding? Do Existing Measures Overemphasize the Threat of Democratic Death?

Little, Andrew T. and Anne Meng (2024). "Measuring Democratic Backsliding". In: *PS: Political Science & Politics* 57.2.

Miller, Michael K. (2024). "How Little and Meng's Objective Approach Fails in Democracies". In: *PS: Political Science & Politics* 57.2.

Levitsky, Steven and Lucan Way (2024). "The Resilience of Democracy's Third Wave". In: *PS: Political Science & Politics* 57.2.

Little, Andrew T. and Anne Meng (2024). "What We Do and Do Not Know about Democratic Backsliding". In: *PS: Political Science & Politics* 57.2.

In-class Debate #2.

Debate Reflections due Friday, April 4th.

Week 12, 04/07 - 04/11: Authoritarianism

Monday, April 7th: What are the Core Challenges of Authoritarian Politics?

Svolik, Milan W. (2012). *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Slater, Dan (2024). "Authoritarianism's Historical Entanglements". In: *The Oxford Handbook of Authoritarian Politics*. Ed. by Anne Wolf. Oxford University Press.

Note: For Svolik (2012) please read Chapter 1: Introduction and Chapter 2: The World of Authoritarian Politics.

Wednesday, April 9th: What Do We Mean When We Discuss the “Institutional Turn” in Authoritarian Politics?

Gandhi, Jennifer (2008). *Political Institutions under Dictatorship*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press.

Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Way (2002). “Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism”. In: *Journal of Democracy* 13.2.

Levitsky, Steven and Lucan Way (2020). “The New Competitive Authoritarianism”. In: *Journal of Democracy* 31.1.

Note: For Gandhi (2008) please read Chapter 1: The World of Dictatorial Institutions.

Week 13, 04/14 - 04/18: Economic Development

Monday, April 14th: How Do Political Institutions Shape Economic Development?

North, Douglass C. and Barry R. Weingast (1989). “Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England”. In: *The Journal of Economic History* 49.4.

Ang, Yuen Yuen (2024). “Adaptive Political Economy: Toward a New Paradigm”. In: *World Politics*.

Wednesday, April 16th: What Role (if any) Should States and Governments Play in Promoting Development?

Krueger, Anne O. (1990). “Government Failures in Development”. In: *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 4.3.

Stiglitz, Joseph E. (1996). “Some Lessons from the East Asian Miracle”. In: *The World Bank Research Observer* 11.2.

Response Paper 2 Due Friday, April 18th.

Week 14, 04/21 - 04/25: Social Movements and Revolutions

Monday, April 21st: What Drives the Evolution of Contentious Politics?

Tarrow, Sidney and Charles Tilly (2009). “Contentious Politics and Social Movements”. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Ed. by Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. Oxford University Press.

Bennett, W. Lance and Alexandra Segerberg (2012). “The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics”. In: *Information, Communication & Society* 15.5.

Wednesday, April 23rd: What Constitutes a Revolution? How Have Our Understandings of Revolutions Evolved to Account for Shifting Historical, Social, and Global Contexts?

Skocpol, Theda (1994). *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beissinger, Mark R. (2024). "The Evolving Study of Revolution". In: *World Politics*.

Note: For Skocpol 1994 please read Chapter 4: Explaining Revolutions: In Quest of a Social-Structural Approach and Chapter 6: France, Russia, China: A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions.

Week 15, 04/28 - 05/02: Writing Workshop and Course Wrap Up

Final paper working thesis, outline, and two full pages due for in-class writing workshop.