

Comparative Politics

TTh | 11:30–12:55 | Spring 2026

Instructor: Professor Joseph Cerrone

Office: Union Hall 332

Office Hours: T 1:15 p.m. – 2:15 p.m., or by appointment

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Overview

This course offers an introduction to the core theories, concepts, and ideas that animate scholarly study of comparative politics. We will explore how politics varies across and within countries and compare how institutions, attitudes, behaviors, and identities shape political processes and outcomes. Our focus will be on applying scholarly ideas to investigate real-world politics around the globe.

Learning Objectives

As a result of completing this course, students will be able to:

- ❖ Understand the core concepts and theoretical approaches that guide comparative politics;
- ❖ Analyze current events in light of these aforementioned concepts and theories; and
- ❖ Apply these concepts and theories to understand politics in selected country cases.

Course Materials

All course materials are available on the course website. There is no textbook for this course.

Assignments

There are four assignments for this course:

- ❖ Participation (20%)
- ❖ Current Event (10%)
- ❖ Analytic Memos (20%)
- ❖ Comparative Case Study (50%)

Participation (20%)

It is important to come to class prepared to actively participate, including by completing the assigned readings and attending class regularly. Participation can take many forms, including asking questions, answering questions, contributing to discussions, and engaging in structured activities and exercises. Participation will be assessed based on the consistency, quality, and thoughtfulness of students' contributions over the course of the semester. If students have concerns about their ability to participate during in-class discussions, they are encouraged to contact the instructor early in the semester with their concerns.

Current Event (10%)

To encourage analytic discussion related to real-world political developments, each student will be responsible for one Current Event presentation during the semester. Each presentation should use a news article to illustrate, challenge, or question the theme of the assigned class session. Presentations should be 3–5 minutes and address four key questions: (1) What happened?; (2) What concept from the course does this event address?; (3) What does the event suggest about how this concept works in practice?; and (4) What is one follow-up question we should ask about this event as political scientists? The presentations should be informal (no slides) and must go beyond summarizing the event to explicitly address the four components previously listed. Presenters should prepare to engage with the class for a follow-up discussion. Presentation dates will be assigned at the beginning of the semester, students should select a current event that relates to the topic of their assigned class session.

Analytic Memos (20%)

To hone analytic writing skills, students will write two Analytic Memos during the semester. For each memo, students will choose one question from a list provided by the instructor (posted on the course website two weeks before the deadline). Each memo should be approximately 1,000–1,500 words and should advance a clear, well-supported argument. Memos should draw on the concepts, theories, and evidence discussed in class and the readings (including by directly citing readings from at least two class sessions). Students are not expected to fully resolve the question; memos should demonstrate the ability to: (1) articulate a clear position; (2) critically analyze competing claims; and (3) use evidence to support an argument (going beyond summarizing arguments made in the readings or class discussions). The papers will be due on February 26 and April 2.

Comparative Case Study (50%)

To gain experience conducting political science research using the comparative method, students will complete a semester-long Comparative Case Study. The goal of the project is to practice how political scientists ask questions, construct arguments, select cases, and analyze evidence. The project will be completed in several installments:

- ❖ *Research Proposal:* In the Research Proposal, students will identify a political science research question and explain why it is interesting and important. The Research Proposal is worth 10% of the final grade and is due on February 5.
- ❖ *Research Design:* In the Research Design, students will articulate a clear hypothesis to answer the research question and suggest a comparative case study research design to assess the hypothesis. The Research Design is worth 10% of the final grade and is due on March 5.
- ❖ *First Draft & Peer Review:* In the First Draft, students will compile the first two assignments into a research paper and add a preliminary case analysis. The First Draft will be ungraded and is due on April 9. In the Peer Review, students will practice offering and receiving constructive

criticism of their research. Completion of the in-class peer review on April 14 will count toward students' participation grade.

- ❖ *Research Presentation:* In the Research Presentation, students will prepare a 5 minute presentation on their research in progress. The presentation should include slides and clearly cover all completed phases of the project. Students will sign up for the date of their presentation during the first week of class. The Research Presentation is worth 10% of the final grade and will occur on April 16, 21, or 28.
- ❖ *Final Draft:* In the Final Draft, students will finalize their paper by completing the case study analysis and revising the first draft based on comments received from the instructor and during peer review. The Final Draft is worth 20% of the final grade and is due at noon on May 15.

Detailed instructions for each stage of the project are available on the course website.

Course Policies

Absences

Students should plan to attend all class sessions. Students will be given two free absences, after which their grade will be adversely affected. In the case of an absence, students should keep up with the class readings and consult another student for class notes. If you plan to be absent in order to observe a religious holiday, please inform the instructor—any such absences will be excused without penalty.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to be familiar with the Honor Code. Academic dishonesty or other violations of the code will be reported and penalized. Academic dishonesty includes cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.

Artificial Intelligence

Students are prohibited from using generative artificial intelligence tools (including ChatGPT). If students would like to use such tools to support their research, they must receive prior authorization from the instructor. Violations of this policy will be considered acts of academic dishonesty.

Classroom Conduct

All students are responsible for contributing to a professional, scholarly, and welcoming classroom environment. Rudeness, intolerance, or discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated.

Extensions and Late Assignments

Please consult the instructor about an extension before the deadline if you need extra time to complete an assignment. Requests for an extension following the deadline will not be granted. Late assignments will be penalized one-third of a letter grade each day they are late.

Moodle

Course materials—including the syllabus, assignment instructions, and additional resources—are posted on Moodle. Students should regularly check Moodle and their Haverford email address for class updates. All assignments must be submitted on Moodle.

Technology in the Classroom

In order to facilitate active engagement, students are asked to not use technology in the classroom. This includes laptops, tablets, phones, or other electronic devices. If necessary, these devices may be used sparingly to consult class readings. Students with an accommodation will be exempted from this policy.

Use of Electronic Class Material

Students are encouraged to use electronic course materials for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. Electronic course materials should not be shared or used for non-course related purposes unless express permission has been granted by the instructor. Video or audio recordings of class sessions without explicit permission are prohibited. Please contact the instructor if you have questions regarding what constitutes permissible or impermissible use of electronic course materials.

Course Schedule

Tuesday, January 20 - Foundations of Comparative Politics

Key Question: Why does comparison matter for how we understand politics?

Readings:

- ❖ Syllabus
 - ❖ Complete [Presentation Sign Up](#)
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Thursday, January 22 - Institutions and the State

Key Question: How do institutions shape political incentives, outcomes, and possibilities?

Readings:

- ❖ Skocpol, Theda. 1985. "Bringing the State Back In." In *Bringing the State Back In*, eds. Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. New York: Cambridge University Press.
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Tuesday, January 27 - Civil Society and Social Movements

Key Question: To what extent is civil society necessary for a robust democracy?

Readings:

- ❖ Putnam, Robert D. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6 (1): 65–78.
 - ❖ Berman, Sheri. 1997. "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic." *World Politics* 49(3): 401–29.
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Thursday, January 29 - Democracy and Democratization

Key Question: How do we know if a country is democratic or not?

Readings:

- ❖ Collier, David, and Steven Levitsky. 1997. "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research." *World Politics* 49 (3): 430–451.
 - ❖ Shi, Tianjian, and Jie Lu. 2010. "The Meanings of Democracy: The Shadow of Confucianism." *Journal of Democracy* 21(4): 123–130.
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Tuesday, February 3 - Democratic Institutions I

Key Question: What are the strengths and limitations of presidentialism and parliamentarianism?

Readings:

- ❖ Linz, Juan L. 1990. "The Perils of Presidentialism." *Journal of Democracy* 1(1): 51–69.
 - ❖ Mainwaring, Scott, and Matthew S. Shugart. 1997. "Juan Linz, Presidentialism, and Democracy: A Critical Appraisal." *Comparative Politics* 29(4): 449–471.
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Thursday, February 5 - Democratic Institutions II

Key Question: How do distinct electoral rules shape competition and representation in democracy?

Readings:

- ❖ Baglione, Lisa. 2025. "Electoral and Party Systems." In *Understanding Comparative Politics*, pp. 46–53. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.
- ❖ McClintock, Cynthia. 2018. "Reevaluating Runoffs in Latin America." *Journal of Democracy* 29 (1): 96–110.
- ❖ Wegman, Jesse, and Lee Drutman. 2025. "How to Fix America's Two-Party Problem." *New York Times*, January 14.

Assignment:

- ❖ Research Proposal Due
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Tuesday, February 10 - Populism

Key Question: Is populism an opportunity or a threat to democracy?

Readings:

- ❖ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. 2017. "Populism and Democracy." In *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
 - ❖ Ruth-Lovell, Saskia P., and Nina Wiesehomeier. 2025. "Populism in Power and Different Models of Democracy." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 58(1): 87–90.
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Thursday, February 12 - Democratic Backsliding

Key Question: How can democracy erode without collapsing?

Readings:

- ❖ Bermeo, Nancy. 2016. "On Democratic Backsliding." *Journal of Democracy* 27 (1): 5–19.
- ❖ Carrier, McKenzie, and Thomas Carothers. 2025. *U.S. Democratic Backsliding in Comparative Perspective*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Focus on pp. 13–27

Tuesday, February 17 - Authoritarian Regimes

Key Question: How is political power exercised in authoritarian regimes?

Readings:

- ❖ Gandhi, Jennifer, and Ellen Lust-Okar. 2009. "Elections Under Authoritarianism." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 403–422.
 - ❖ Gandhi, Jennifer, Ben Noble, and Milan Svolik. 2020. "Legislatures and Legislative Politics Without Democracy." *Comparative Political Studies* 53(9): 1359–1379.
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Thursday, February 19 - Hybrid Regimes

Key Question: What are hybrid regimes—and are they stable or transitional?

Readings:

- ❖ Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2020. "The New Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 31 (1): 51–65.
 - ❖ Levitsky, Steven, Lucan A. Way, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2026. "The Price of American Authoritarianism." *Foreign Affairs*.
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Tuesday, February 24 - Modernization

Key Question: How does economic development relate to democracy?

Readings:

- ❖ Berman, Sheri. 2009. "What to Read on Modernization Theory." *Foreign Affairs*.
 - ❖ Przeworski, Adam, and Fernando Limongi. 1997. "Modernization: Theories and Facts." *World Politics* 49(2): 155–183.
 - ❖ Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, and George W. Downs. 2005. "Development and Democracy." *Foreign Affairs*.
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Thursday, February 26 - Resource Curse

Key Question: Does natural resource wealth hinder democracy?

Readings:

- ❖ Ross, Michael L. 2001. "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53 (3): 325–361.
Read pp. 325–337 and 356–357
- ❖ Haber, Stephen. 2024. "The Rise and Fall of the Resource Curse." Stanford King Center on Global Development, Working Paper No. wp2057.

Assignment:

- ❖ Analytic Memo I Due
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Tuesday, March 3 - (Neo)Colonialism

Key Question: How does the legacy of colonialism impact political and economic outcomes?

Readings:

- ❖ Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. 2008. "The Role of Institutions in Growth and Development." Commission on Growth and Development, Working Paper No. 10.
Stop at "Pitfalls of Reform" on p. 10
 - ❖ Nkrumah, Kwame. 1966. "Introduction." In *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. New York: International Publishers Co. Inc.
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Thursday, March 5 - Development

Key Question: Does foreign aid help or hinder development and democracy?

Readings:

- ❖ Sachs, Jeffrey. 2005. "Can Extreme Poverty Be Eliminated?" *Scientific American*.
- ❖ Easterly, William. 2007. "The Ideology of Development." *Foreign Policy*.
- ❖ Letters. 2007. "In Defense of Development." *Foreign Policy*.

Assignments:

- ❖ Research Design Due
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Spring Break: March 6–15

Tuesday, March 17 - Nationalism and Ethnicity

Key Question: How do nationalism and ethnicity develop and shape politics?

Readings:

- ❖ *Selections from:* Renan, Ernest. 1995 [1882]. "What Is a Nation?" In *The Nationalism Reader*, eds. Omar Dahbour and Micheline R. Ishay. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.
- ❖ *Selections from:* Anderson, Benedict. 1983. "Introduction." In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso.

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- ❖ *Selections from:* Brubaker, Rogers. 2002. "Ethnicity Without Groups." *European Journal of Sociology* 43(2): 163–189.
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Thursday, March 19 - LGBTQ+ Rights

Key Question: How does democracy impact LGBTQ+ rights?

Readings:

- ❖ Encarnación, Omar G. 2014. "Gay Rights: Why Democracy Matters." *Journal of Democracy* 25(3): 90–104.
 - ❖ Velasco, Kristopher, Siddhartha Baral, and Yun (Nancy) Tang. 2024. "Is Democracy Bad for LGBT+ Rights." *Journal of Democracy* 35(3): 131–145.
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Tuesday, March 24 - United Kingdom

Key Question: How has the United Kingdom weathered the global populist backlash of recent years?

Readings:

- ❖ Leal, David L. 2024. "Democracy in Britain: A Primer." *Hoover Institution*, October 8.
 - ❖ Applebaum, Anne. 2017. "Britain After Brexit: A Transformed Political Landscape." *Journal of Democracy* 28 (1): 53–58.
 - ❖ Guelke, Adrian. 2017. "Britain After Brexit: The Risk to Northern Ireland." *Journal of Democracy* 28(1): 42–52.
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Thursday, March 26 - Russia

Key Question: How is political power exercised through authoritarian rule in Russia?

Readings:

- ❖ Fish, Steven. 2017. "The Kremlin Emboldened: What Is Putinism?" *Journal of Democracy* 28 (4): 61–75.
 - ❖ Stoner, Kathryn. 2023. "The Putin Myth." *Journal of Democracy* 34(2): 5–18.
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Tuesday, March 31 - China

Key Question: How does authoritarian rule relate to political stability and economic growth in China?

Readings:

- ❖ Maizland, Lindsay, and Eleanor Albert. 2022. "The Chinese Communist Party." *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 6.
- ❖ Ang, Yuen Yuen. 2022. "How Resilient Is the CCP?" *Journal of Democracy* 33 (3): 77–91.

Thursday, April 2 - India

Key Question: How does democratic politics coexist with illiberalism in India?

Readings:

- ❖ Varshney, Ashutosh. 2019. "Modi Consolidates Power: Electoral Vibrancy, Mounting Liberal Deficits." *Journal of Democracy* 30 (4): 63–77.
- ❖ Khosla, Madhav, and Milan Vaishnav. 2021. "The Three Faces of the Indian State." *Journal of Democracy* 32(1): 111–125.

Assignment:

- ❖ Analytic Memo II Due
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Tuesday, April 7 - Mexico

Key Question: To what extent has Mexico experienced democratic backsliding?

Readings:

- ❖ Aguilar, Azul A. Aguiar, Rodrigo Castro Cornejo, Alejandro Monsiváis-Carrillo. 2025. "Is Mexico at the Gates of Authoritarianism?" *Journal of Democracy* 36 (1): 50–64.
 - ❖ Ríos, Viridiana. 2024. "Why Mexico Is Not on the Brink." *Journal of Democracy* 35 (3): 57–68.
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Thursday, April 9 - Nigeria

Key Question: How does democracy relate to low state capacity and internal divisions in Nigeria?

Readings:

- ❖ Koni Hoffman, Leena, and Jon Wallace. 2025. "Democracy in Nigeria." *Chatham House*.
- ❖ Njoku, Ekeledirichukwu C. 2025. "Democracy, Ethnic Politics and Nation Building in Nigeria, 2015–2024." *Journal of Nation-building & Policy Studies* 9(1): 53–73.

Assignment:

- ❖ First Draft Due
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Tuesday, April 14 - Peer Review Session

Thursday, April 16 - Research Presentations

Tuesday, April 21 - Research Presentations

Thursday, April 23 — Research Day (No Class)

Tuesday, April 28 - Research Presentations

Thursday, April 30 - Putting It All Together

Final Paper Due: May 15 at 12 noon
