



Political Science, Lyon College

POL 201: COMPARATIVE POLITICS

SPRING 2024

Lyon Building 204 — MWF 1-1:50

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Course Description

This is an introductory course in the comparative politics (CP) subfield of political science. As political scientists, we are often interested in making comparisons:

- Why are some countries democratic while others are authoritarian?
- Why are some countries rich and some countries poor?
- Why are some countries plagued by violent conflict while others are largely peaceful?
- Why do some countries have large welfare states while others spend little on social welfare?
- Why do some people vote while others do not?

These are undoubtedly important questions with real-world policy implications. However, developing and testing answers to these questions is a difficult task. Unlike a natural scientist working in a laboratory setting, political scientists must grapple with the complexities of the social world where an infinite number of factors are potentially driving an outcome of interest.

In this course, we will attempt to formulate explanations for important political outcomes as well as test our explanations through use of the comparative method. The class is designed to cover a wide range of issues, including democratization, political participation, violent conflict, development, inequality, globalization, and more. Considering the diverse array of topics we will cover, this course stresses foundational concepts and fundamental theories over more in-depth analyses of subject areas which are provided in upper-level POL courses at Lyon College.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, successful students will be able to:

1. Describe how theories from comparative politics (CP) explain real-world differences in countries' political systems and social outcomes
2. Examine key differences between U.S. politics and the politics of select foreign countries, including China, Germany, Iran, Nigeria (and more)
3. Design their own original codebook for measuring democracy and classifying countries by regime type
4. Develop their own constitution from scratch with the goal of creating a stable and prosperous political system
5. Construct and test their own hypotheses using the comparative method
6. Write effectively and organize their research into an original research paper
7. Communicate their ideas effectively through debate and a PowerPoint presentation

Required Materials

- **Textbook:** Samuels, David J. 2017. *Comparative Politics* (Second Edition). Pearson: London, UK. **ISBN:** 9780134562674
- All other readings will be posted on the course Canvas page.

Grading

Letter grades for the course are computed as follows: **A** = 90-100; **B** = 80-89; **C** = 70-79; **D** = 60-69; **F** = < 60.

Your grade for the course is comprised of the following criteria:

1) Exam 1	20%
2) Exam 2	20%
3) Attendance and Participation	10%
4) Democracy Codebook Project (due Mar 8)	10%
5) Designing a Constitution	15% Total
Assignment (due May 3)	10%
In-Class Presentation (Week 16)	5%
6) Comparative Case Study Paper	25% Total
Paper Outline (due Feb 23)	5%
Final Paper (due Apr 19)	20%

Exams (40% Total). There are two non-cumulative exams for this course. Both exams are worth 20% of your final grade and will consist of three parts. For Part I, you will answer a series of multiple choice and true/false questions. For Part II, you will be given a set of terms and be asked to define them in 1-2 sentences. For Part III, you will be given a choice of essay questions to answer in 3-4 paragraphs. Generally speaking, the exams will test your knowledge of key concepts as well as your ability to relate the concepts and course material to real-world issues. I will distribute a study guide prior to each exam. The study guide will contain a complete list of terms and short answer questions that may show up on the exam.

Attendance/Participation (10%). Attendance and participation are essential for doing well in this course. I take attendance at the beginning of each class. More than two unexcused absences will result in a lower attendance grade. In addition, I evaluate the quality/quantity of your participation throughout the semester. Generally speaking, students that attend class but do not participate can expect to receive a “C” for this portion of their grade. Your compliance with the course technology policy (see below) also affects your participation grade.

Democracy Codebook Project (10%). Part of this course is about learning how to measure abstract political concepts in the real world. Over the first half of the semester (primarily during class time), you and another student will design your own original codebook that can be used to classify countries by regime type. Your codebook must define democracy and provide an explicit set of rules that a researcher can use to measure how democratic a country is (according to the definition you give). It is up to you to decide what those rules will be! I will hand out detailed instructions for the Codebook project following Week 2 of the course. **The written codebook must be submitted to me by midnight, March 8th.**

Designing a Constitution (15% Total). Over the second half of the semester, you will take on the monumental task of creating your own government. Students will be broken up into groups of two and provided with a description of the new country of Brendonia that recently obtained independence. Given the characteristics of Brendonia, your goal is to design political institutions and rules that will guide the country toward peace and prosperity. For example, will you choose to employ majoritarian or PR voting rules? Will you institute a unitary state or a federal style of government? I will hand out in depth instructions for completing this assignment during Week 7. Students will also formally present their constitutions to the class in a PowerPoint presentation during Week 16 of the course. The written portion of the assignment and the PowerPoint presentation count 10% and 5% toward your final grade, respectively.

Comparative Case Study Paper (25% Total). Each student is required to write a short analytical paper that explains a particular outcome by comparing two different country cases. For instance, you may be interested in why some countries democratize or why some countries are plagued by civil war. In no more than eight double-spaced pages, you will have to select two

different foreign countries (i.e., *not* the U.S.) and develop a political argument that explains each case using the comparative method. You should refer to the separate assignment sheet (posted on Canvas) for more in-depth instructions.

All students must approve a topic with me by submitting a typed bullet-point 1-2 page (double-spaced) outline by midnight on Friday, February 23. The outline counts as 5% toward your final grade. Your outline should address the following points:

1. What is the policy or outcome that your paper seeks to explain (i.e., the dependent variable)?
2. Why is this policy or outcome important, puzzling, or worth analyzing?
3. What is your argument? In other words, what factor (i.e., the independent variable) do you think explains the policy or outcome you have chosen and why? You may choose to formulate your own original argument or test existing arguments we discuss in class (e.g., modernization theory, the “resource curse”, etc.).
4. Which two countries will you choose to compare and why? For this part, you should refer to either the “Method of Agreement” or “Method of Difference” as discussed in Chapter 1 of your textbook. **You may *not* choose the U.S. as one of your cases.**
5. A preliminary works cited page on the back. Your works cited page does not count toward the page limit.

Ideally, students at the end of the semester will have a polished writing sample that they can use for applying to internships, jobs, and other opportunities beyond their time at Lyon College. The page limit for final papers is MAX eight double-spaced pages. All papers should use 1-inch margins and 12pt Times New Roman font. Papers that exceed the page limit or do not follow these directions will be penalized. **The deadline for papers is Friday, April 19.** Late papers and outlines are penalized a full letter grade per every calendar day late.

Course Technology Policy

In the interest of creating an optimal environment for learning, **the use of laptops and cell phones are banned during class time**, barring exceptional circumstances. Please plan to bring paper and something to write with in order to take notes. Noncompliance with this policy will result in a lower participation grade while perfect compliance with this policy will push your participation grade upward.

The learning management system (LMS) we will utilize throughout the semester is Canvas. All course material (e.g., syllabus, assignment instructions), readings, grades, class slides, and other useful resources will be posted on Canvas. Students will also use Canvas to submit all

writing assignments. Please let me know if you have trouble accessing Canvas at any point throughout the semester.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: “Samuels” refers to your textbook. Unless otherwise noted, readings for the week should be completed before Monday’s class.

Week 1 (Jan 17 & 19): Introduction and the Comparative Method

Key Questions: What is comparative politics (CP)? How should we build and test our theories within CP?

 Readings:

- Course Syllabus
- Samuels, Chapter 1

Week 2 (Jan 22 & 24 & 26): What is Democracy?

Key Questions: What does it mean to be a “democracy”? How do democracies balance between effective government and limited government?

 Readings:

- Samuels, Chapter 3
- Gunitsky, Seva. “How Do You Measure ‘Democracy’?” *Washington Post*. June 23, 2015.

 **Case Study #1:** Germany

Week 3 (Jan 29 & 31 & Feb 2): Non-Democratic Regimes

Key Questions: Are all non-democratic regimes alike? How do authoritarian rulers hold on to power?

 Readings:

- Samuels, Chapter 4
- Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Way. 2002. “Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism.” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2): 51-65.

 **Case Study #2:** Iran

Week 4 (Feb 5 & 7 & 9): The Origins and Elusiveness of Democracy

Key Questions: How have global levels of democracy changed over time? Under what circumstances do countries democratize?

 Readings:


- Samuels, Chapter 5
- Przeworski, Adam, and Fernando Limongi. 1997. "Modernization: Theory and Facts." *World Politics* 49 (2): 155-178. (You do NOT have to read the appendix)

Week 5 (Feb 12 & 14 & 16): Democratic Backsliding & Populism

Key Questions: Why do some democracies fail and backslide into authoritarian regimes? What explains the current rise in populism?

 Readings:

- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*: Chapter 1.
- Przeworski, Adam. 2019. *Crises of Democracy*: Chapter 6.

 **Case Study #3: Russia**


Week 6 (Feb 21 & 23): Autocratic Backsliding?

****No Classes on Monday, Feb 19 (Mental Health Day)****

Key Questions: Why are some transitions to authoritarianism reversed? How do political entrepreneurs consolidate power?

 Readings:

- Guachalla, V. Ximena Velasco, Calla Hummel, Sam Handlin, and Amy Erica Smith. 2021. "Latin America Erupts: When Does Competitive Authoritarianism Take Root?" *Journal of Democracy* 32 (3): 63-77.
- Gaddafi, Muammar. *The Green Book*: Chapters 5-6.

 **Case Study #4: Libya**

 Assignments Due:

- Paper Outlines Due Friday, February 23rd (by Midnight)**

Week 7 (Feb 26 & 28 & Mar 1): Catch-Up and Exam 1

Key Questions: How do I do well on the exam?!

 Readings:

- Exam 1 Study Guide
- Designing a Constitution* Assignment Instructions

! Important Dates:

- Study Session in Class on Feb 28**
- Exam 1 in Class on Mar 1**

Week 8 (Mar 4 & Mar 6): The Politics of Collective Action

****No Classes on Friday, Mar 8 (Away at ArkPSA Conference)****

Key Questions: What explains the emergence of social movements, interest groups, and political parties? Why are special interests sometimes over-represented in politics?

 Readings:

- Samuels, Chapter 9

! Important Dates:

- Democracy Codebooks Due Friday, March 8th (by Midnight)**

Week 9 (Mar 11 & 13 & 15): Rational Choice and the “Irrationality” of Voters

Key Questions: Why do people vote? Why is voter turnout higher in some democracies compared to others?

 Readings:

- Blais, Andre. 2000. To Vote or Not to Vote: *The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory*: Introduction & Chapter 2.

WEEK 10

NO CLASS — SPRING BREAK


Week 11 (Mar 25 & 27): Protests and Violent Conflict

No Classes on Friday, Mar 29 (Easter Break)

Key Questions: What prompts individuals to protest and/or take up arms against their government? Why do some states experience protracted violent conflicts while others experience peace?

 Readings:

- Samuels, Chapter 10


 **Case Study #5: France**

Week 12 (Apr 1 & 3 & 5): Explaining the North-South Divide

Key Questions: Why are some countries rich and some countries poor? What role should the state play in promoting economic development?

 Readings:

- Samuels, Chapter 11

 **Case Study #6: Nigeria**

Week 13 (Apr 8 & 10 & 12): The Welfare State

Key Questions: Why do some countries engage in more economic redistribution than others? What causes some individuals to oppose the welfare state?

 Readings:

- Samuels, Chapter 12

Week 14 (Apr 15 & 17 & 19): Inequality

Key Questions: Is economic inequality a threat to democracy/democratization? Does democracy really lead to lower income inequality?

 Readings:

- Scheve, Kenneth and David Stasavage. 2017. "Wealth Inequality and Democracy." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20: 451-468.

 Assignments Due:


- Final Papers Due Friday, April 19th**

Week 15 (Apr 22 & 24 & 26): The Globalization Backlash

Key Questions: What is “globalization”? Is globalization compatible with democracy and development?

 Readings:

- Samuels, Chapter 13
- Scheve, Kenneth and David Stasavage. 2017. “Wealth Inequality and Democracy.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 20: 451-468.

 **Case Study #7: China**

Week 16 (Apr 29 & May 1 & 3): Catch Up & Student Presentations

 Readings:

- Readings TBA

 Assignments Due:

- Designing a Constitution* Assignment Due Friday, May 3rd

Week 17 (May 6 & 8): Course Wrap-Up & Final Exam

Key Questions: How do I do well on the exam?

 Readings:

- Exam 2 Study Guide

 Important Dates:

- Exam 2 in Class on May 8**