INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE POLITICS  
Political Science, V1501  
Columbia University, Spring 2013

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Time: T/Th 10:10-11:25  
Location: Schermerhorn 614

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course provides a broad overview of the comparative politics subfield by focusing on important substantive questions about the world today. The course is organized around four questions. First, why can only some people depend upon the state to enforce order? Second, how can we account for the differences between autocracies and democracies? Third, what different institutional forms does democratic government take? Finally, are some institutions more likely than others to produce desirable social outcomes such as accountability, redistribution, and political stability?

Because the study of comparative politics requires the knowledge of specific cases, we will focus on eight countries: China, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, and the United Kingdom.

This course will prepare you for higher-level courses in political science in two ways. First, it will teach you make and evaluate arguments about politics. Second, it will introduce you to the methods that political scientists use in their research.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

Your grade will be based on the following:

○ Participation in weekly discussion sections (15%):

Attending sections is compulsory. Discussion sections begin the second week of class.

You are expected to have done the required readings for the week before your section meets. Your TA may set additional assignments for section. One section assignment will be a brief survey including questions about politics commonly asked in cross-national survey research. You will fill out the survey in your discussion section in the week of February 3rd.
o **Exams (3 x 25%)**: 

There will be three in-class exams covering the lectures and assigned readings. You *must* sit these exams at the scheduled time. If you are unable to do the exam because of you are sick, you must provide a note from your doctor. The exams will be held in class on:

- Tuesday, February 26\(^{th}\)
- Tuesday, April 2\(^{nd}\)
- Thursday, May 2\(^{nd}\)

o **Written Assignment (10%)**: 

You will write a 4 to 5 page paper that uses the material we will cover this semester to make the case that a one institutional change will increase accountability, equity, or democratic stability in a specific country. The final paper will be due on May 10\(^{th}\). We will circulate a description of the assignment and a list of eligible countries on April 18\(^{th}\). You must clear your proposed paper topic with your TA by April 25\(^{th}\).

If you have a concern about a grade you've received you should write your TA a memo describing why your grade ought to be revised upwards. Your TA may either increase or decrease your grade.

**Readings**

There are two required books, which are available at [Book Culture](#):


All other readings are available through URLs in this syllabus.
Session 1 (22/1): Introduction

PART I. THE STATE, ORDER, AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Sessions 2 & 3 (24/1 & 29/1): The State

Principles, Ch. 4 The Origins of the Modern State

Sessions 4 & 5 (31/1 & 5/2): Political Violence

Case Studies, India
Case Studies, Nigeria

PART II. POLITICAL REGIMES - DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP

Sessions 6-8 (7/2, 12/2 & 14/2): Describing Political Regimes

Principles, Ch. 5, Democracy and Dictatorship: Conceptualization and Measurement
Principles, Ch 10, Varieties of Dictatorship, pp. 349-384
Case Studies, Russia
Case Studies, Mexico

Session 9 & 10 (19/2 & 21/2): The Effect of Political Regimes

Principles, Ch. 9, Democracy or Dictatorship: Does It Make a Difference?
Principles, Ch. 11, Problems with Group Decision Making
Case Studies, China
Case Studies, United Kingdom

Session 11 (26/2): Exam 1
Sessions 12-14 (28/2, 5/3 & 7/3): Explaining Political Regimes

*Principles*, Ch. 6, The Economic Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship
*Principles*, Ch. 7, Cultural Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship
*Case Studies*, Germany

**PART III: POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN DEMOCRACIES**

Sessions 15-16 (12/3 & 14/3): Parties and Elections I

*Principles*, Ch. 13, Elections and Electoral Systems
*Principles*, Ch. 14, Social Cleavages and Party Systems
*Case Studies*, Japan

Spring Break (19/3 & 21/3)

Sessions 17-18 (26/3 & 28/3): Parties and Elections II


Session 19: Exam 2


*Principles*, Ch. 12, Parliamentary, Presidential, and Semi-Presidential Democracies

Session 22 (11/4): Federalism and Decentralization

*Principles*, Ch. 15, Institutional Veto Players, pp. 673-691
PART IV: POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Sessions 23-24 (16/4 & 18/4): Representation and Accountability

*Principles*, Ch. 16, Consequences of Democratic Institutions, pp. 743-765


*Principles*, Ch. 16, Consequences of Democratic Institutions, pp. 766-788

Session 27 (30/4): Democratic Institutions and Stability

*Principles*, Ch. 16, Consequences of Democratic Institutions, pp. 788-826

Session 28 (2/5): Exam 3