

**Introduction to Comparative Politics** | University of Houston  
**POLS 3311** | Fall 2017  
Monday and Wednesday, 4:00-5:30 p.m. | Francisco Cantú  
McElhinney Hall 113 | fcantu10@uh.edu

Comparative politics is a field that analyzes differences among the political institutions, political behavior, and public policies of the countries. This is an upper-level course that introduces students to the principal concepts and theories in the field and provides the basic tools for political inquiry. There are two goals in this course. First, students will learn new analytical tools and concepts applicable to any other upper division political science course. Second, students will practice and polish their writing skills.

### **Format**

We will meet twice a week for the duration of the semester. There are assigned readings for each lecture, and students are expected to come to each class having read all the required material. The material reviewed in class is designed to complement and expand information of the reading material, so lectures are not a substitute for the readings or vice versa. You are responsible for any work that you miss, and missing class is no excuse for not turning in an assignment.

### **Expectations**

Similar to speaking a foreign language, riding a bike for first time, or learning to play a musical instrument, exposure to new vocabulary and concepts used in comparative politics may prove a challenging task. Therefore, the following are the minimum expectations that both instructor and students need to have in this course.

On the one hand, I will be available for assistance throughout the semester and promptly answer your e-mails. Lectures will begin and end on time. The examinations will be a fair evaluation of the material covered in lectures and assigned readings. Grading standards will be fair and open. Essays and exams will be turned back no later than a week after submitted.

On the other hand, after making an informed choice to join this class, you are ready to learn and not just enrolled to earn a certain grade or requirement. You are responsible for your own learning, and need to come to class prepared having both read the assigned material and ask for feedback on what you need help with. You will attend classes regularly and on time. Finally, you have to be aware of the deadlines of the class and be responsible of submitting assignments on time.

### **Readings and material for the class**

There is an average of 30 pages of text to read before every lecture. Depending on your reading skills, you should complete the assigned readings in no more than three hours. Reading the assigned material before coming to class is a very important part of the work you will be doing. At the beginning of every class, I expect that you understand the basic argument of the readings, gain some familiarity with new concepts, and be aware of the parts of the topic in which you need more attention or assistance.

Book chapters and academic articles are available on Blackboard. Also, we will use a classroom response system that requires you to bring any device with wi-fi and web browser (e.g., laptop, smartphone, or tablet). You need to sign-up to the system following the instructions at [https://learningcatalytics.com/users/sign\\_up](https://learningcatalytics.com/users/sign_up). The fee for using this system during the semester is 12 dollars. This is the only class material you will need to pay for this class. Please, let me know ASAP if you are not able to pay the fee or cannot bring any of the electronic devices mentioned above.

*A quick note on electronic devices:* Besides the moments in class we will use the system mentioned

above, I strongly discourage you from using an electronic device in class. Using laptops in class has detrimental effects for students,<sup>1</sup> and they distract others students around and myself. If you feel that your learning will be hampered by not having access to your laptop for note-taking or other legitimate purposes, please sit at the back row of the room. However, I reserve the right to deduct points from your participation without notice if you do use mobile devices or otherwise engage in distracting behavior during class time.

### **Course Requirements**

**Exams:** There will be three partial evaluations for this course. Each of the exams will be based on the questions discussed every week and will cover the readings and lectures for each section. These evaluations will usually include five short identification questions and an essay. The topic for the essay will be based on a couple of news articles that I will provide you a week in advance to each partial exam. Each of your two highest-scored exams will count 20% of your final grade, and your exam with the lowest grade will count 15%.

**Short essays:** Students are required to submit three (3) 750-word essays throughout the length of the semester. Every week, students will have the opportunity to submit, via Blackboard, an essay following the instructions for each of the topics discussed in class. This assignment is designed as an auxiliary tool to recall and organize some of the material for the exams. Additional guidelines for the essay will be provided the first day of class.

Essays are due on Sunday at midnight. You should submit one paper for each of the three sections of the course. In other words, you need to submit one essay before September 17, another essay between October 1 and October 22, and the last essay between November 5 and December 3. Students cannot submit more than one essay per section and no extensions are allowed, so plan ahead. Each of your two highest-scored essays will count 10% of your final grade, and your essay with the lowest grade will count 5%. The topics for the weekly essay are listed below.

- Section I

- Week 1 (due on August 27). Describe what makes a good argument and provide relevant examples.
- Week 2 (due on September 5). Define what is democracy and how we can distinguish it from autocracy.
- Week 3 (due on September 10). Delineate the different types of dictatorships and their potential consequences for survival.
- Week 4 (due on September 17). Explain the relationship between economic development and democratization.

- Section II

- Week 6 (due on October 1). Discuss the differences between presidential, parliamentary, and mixed democracies.
- Week 7 (due on October 8). Contrast the advantages and disadvantages of presidential and parliamentary systems.
- Week 8 (due on October 15). Compare the main features of the majoritarian and proportional electoral systems.
- Week 9 (due on October 22). Discuss the different dimensions of the party systems.

- Section III

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/05/16/why-smart-kids-shouldnt-use-laptops-in-class/>

- Week 11 (due on November 5). Discuss the relationship between economic development and inequality.
- Week 12 (due on November 12). Explain the reasons for why some countries are richer than others.
- Week 13 (due on November 22). Describe the relationship between political institutions and ethnic identity.
- Week 14 (due on December 3). Discuss the problems for achieving collective action.

**In-class quizzes:** To encourage you to read in advance of the lecture, there will be several in-class quizzes, which dates will not be announced in advance. Each quiz consists of a short question about the main argument or facts of the readings assigned to that day. There will not be trick questions and the answers will be obvious for those who read the material. Quizzes missed due to absences or late arrivals cannot be made up. When estimating your final grade, I will drop out your two lowest quizzes. The average grade of your quizzes will count 15% of your final grade.

**Participation:** Class participation means that you are fully present during lectures, group presentations and other class activities. This entails offering relevant and informed insights, keeping competing conversations with classmates to a minimum, and refraining from use of electronic devices.

**Grading**

Partial Evaluations	2×20%+15%=55%
Essays	2×10%+5%=25%
In-class quizzes	15%
Participation	5%
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 100%

Final letter grades will be calculated in an absolute scale as follows: A (94-100%), A- (90-93%), B+ (87-89%), B (84-86%), B- (80-83%), C+ (77-79%), C (74-76%), C- (70-73%), D+ (67-69%), D (64-66%), D- (60-63%), F (0-59%).

**Deadlines and extensions**

Unless very pressing (and fully documented) situations, extensions are not allowed. There are no make-up essays or quizzes.

**Disabilities**

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both me and the Center for Students with DisAbilities (CSD).<sup>2</sup> You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriate accommodations.

**Counseling and Psychological Services**

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS ([www.uh.edu/caps](http://www.uh.edu/caps)) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the “Let’s Talk” program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus.<sup>3</sup>

**Academic Integrity**

Students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the honor pledge that will be provided the first day of class. There will be a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism in any of the required activities for this course, and any violation will be penalized in the terms cited by the UH’s Academic Dishonesty Policy.<sup>4</sup> Violations include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and complicity in academic

<sup>2</sup><http://www.uh.edu/csd/>

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets\\_talk.html](http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html)

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.uh.edu/provost/policies/honesty/\\_documents-honesty/academic-honesty-policy.pdf](http://www.uh.edu/provost/policies/honesty/_documents-honesty/academic-honesty-policy.pdf)

dishonesty. Feel free to consult with me before submitting your essay if you have concerns about the correct way to reference the work of others.

#### **Office Hours**

Wednesday 5:30-7:00 p.m. at 429 Philip Guthrie Hoffman Hall. If you cannot make it at that time, please send me an e-mail to schedule a meeting outside those hours.

#### **Teaching Assistant**

Paul Johnson (pjohnson7@uh.edu). Office hours: Monday 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. at 426 Philip Guthrie Hoffman Hall.

## **I. Introduction / Political Development**

### **Week 1. Logistics and Introduction of the Course**

- What is the scientific method as it relates to studying politics?

#### **August 21**

No assigned reading

#### **August 23**

: Chapter 3

### **Week 2. The State and Political Regimes**

- What is the state?
- What makes a state successful?
- What is democracy?
- How to conceptualize and measure democracy?

#### **August 28**

Samuels, D. (2013). *Comparative Politics*. Pearson Education: 28-57

#### **August 30**

Dahl, R. (1971). *Polyarchy*. Yale University Press: : 1-16.

Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2017). *Principles of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press, 3 edition: : 154-169.

### **Week 3. Dictatorships**

- What is a dictatorship?
- What are the main challenges of authoritarian rule?
- How can we distinguish the different types of dictatorship?

### September 6

Gandhi, J. (2008). *Political Institutions Under Dictatorships*. Cambridge University Press, New York: 1-41.

### Weeks 4 and 5. Democratization

- Why do some states become democracies but not others?
- Does democracy require a “democratic culture”?
- Is economic change fundamental to modern democracy?
- Why do democracies break down?

### September 11

Putnam, R. D. (1994). What makes democracy work? *IPA Review*, 47(1):31–34

Inglehart, R. (2000). Culture and democracy. In Harrison, L. E. and Huntington, S., editors, *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*. Basic Books, New York: 80-96

### September 13

Lipset, S. M. (2003). Political man: The social bases of politics. In Dahl, R., Shapiro, I., and Cheibub, J. A., editors, *The Democracy Sourcebook*, pages 56–70. MIT Press

Boix, C. (2006). The roots of democracy. *Policy Review*, (135):1–19

### September 18

Diamond, L. (2015). Facing up to the democratic recession. *Journal of Democracy*, 26(1):141–155

### September 20

First Partial Exam

## II. Political Institutions

### Weeks 6 and 7. Systems of Government

- How to distinguish presidential, parliamentary, and mixed democracies?
- How do governments form and survive in each type of democracy?
- Do differences between systems of government matter?

### September 25

Cheibub, J. A. (2007). *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press: 26-45

### September 27

Shepsle, K. A. (2010). *Analyzing Politics*. W.W. Norton & Co: 503-527

## October 2

Linz, J. J. (1992). The perils of presidentialism. In Lijphart, A., editor, *Parliamentary Versus Presidential Government*. Cambridge University Press: 118-127

Mainwaring, S. and Shugart, M. S. (1997). Juan Linz, Presidentialism, and Democracy: A Critical Appraisal. *Comparative Politics*, 29(4):449–471 (only read 449-463)

## October 4

Film: Please Vote for Me.

## Week 8. Electoral Systems

- How to combine individual preferences into a single choice?
- What are electoral systems?
- How different voting methods affect the outcome?

## October 9

Powell, G. B. (2000). *Elections as Instruments of Democracy*. Yale University Press: 3-19

## October 11

Norris, P. (2004). *Electoral Engineering*. Cambridge University Press: 39-65

## Week 9. Parties and Party Systems

- What is a political party?
- What are party systems and how can we classify them?
- How can we explain differences among party systems?

## October 16

Scarrow, S. (2010). Political parties and party systems. In LeDuc, L., Niemi, R. G., and Norris, P., editors, *Comparing Democracies 3*, pages 45–64. Sage Publications, Ltd

## October 18

Dalton, R. J. (1996). *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Chatham House Publishers, Chatham, NJ: 143-164

## Week 10. Veto Players and Institutional Design

- What are the tradeoffs when choosing political institutions?

## October 23

Lijphart, A. (1999). *Patterns of Democracy*. Yale University Press: 2-47

## October 25

Second Partial Exam

### III. Policy Outcomes

#### Week 11. Poverty and Inequality

- What is a poverty trap?
- How to measure poverty and inequality?
- What explains changes of income distribution?

#### October 30

Todaro, M. P. and Smith, S. C. (2015). *Economic Development*. Addison-Wesley, 12 edition: 216-224, 226-230

#### November 1

Milanovic, B. (2016). *Global Inequality*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 46-117

#### Week 12. Economic Development and Redistribution

- What is the relationship between the states and markets?
- What is the role of government in economic development and income redistribution?
- Why some countries are rich and others poor?
- What kinds of policies are required to reduce the magnitude and extent of absolute poverty?

#### November 6

Bueno de Mesquita, B. and Smith, A. (2011). *The Dictator's Handbook*. PublicAffairs, New York: 1-20, 101-125

#### November 8

Acemoglu, D. and Robinson, J. A. (2012). *Why Nations Fall?* Crown Business, New York: Ch. 1, p. 7-44

Hidalgo, C. A. and Hausmann, R. (2008). A network view of economic development. *Developing Alternatives*, (5):5-10

#### November 13

Sachs, J. D. (2005). *The End of Poverty*. Penguin Books: 210-225

Easterly, W. (2001). *The Elusive Quest for Growth*. MIT Press: 145-170

#### Week 13. Ethnicity

- What are the main forms of political identity?
- When does identity become politicized?

#### November 15

Dickovick, J. T. and Eastwood, J. (2013). *Comparative Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2nd edition: 326-347

**November 20**

Htun, M. (2004). Is gender like ethnicity? the political representation of identity groups. *Perspectives on Politics*, 2(3):439–458

**Week 14. Collective Action**

- How do individuals coordinate their separate interest to mobilize collectively?
- Under what conditions do social movements succeed?

**November 27**

Elster, J. (2007). *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge University Press: 388-400.

**November 29**

Brancati, D. (2016). *Democracy Protests*. Cambridge University Press: 18-38

Rosenberg, T. "The Art of Protest," *The New York Times*. November 21, 2016.

**December 4**

Third Partial Exam