

Comparative Politics (PLS 205 - 002)

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 10:10am–11am

Strong Hall 0300

Instructor Contact Information

Instructor: Assistant Professor Michael Masterson

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Office hours: Wednesday 2:30 pm –5 pm & Thursday 1:30–4:00 or by appointment.

My office is in Strong Hall 330, and you should feel free to come in during office hours without an appointment. When scheduling a meeting outside of my office hours, please strive to contact me at least 2 days in advance. I will do my best to respond to emails by the end of the business day. There is no guarantee of a response to emails sent during non-business hours until the next business day.

Course Overview

This course will introduce the main theories of comparative politics, which explain important global phenomenon including: democratization and democratic survival, how authoritarian regimes maintain control, economic development, civil war, and environmental policy. Rather than focusing on a particular country or group of countries, this course seeks to provide a broad overview of the main theories of comparative politics. Understanding politics beyond the United States is an important part of broadening your horizons. Further, the United States is far from immune to the phenomenon covered in this course, so understanding these processes will also deepen knowledge of US politics and promote better citizenship.

Lectures

The lectures are intentionally designed to cover content *not* included in the text to further expand student learning. For this reason, it is important that students *both* attend lecture and read the text.

Assignments

Quizzes

7 quizzes will each cover the preceding two weeks of lectures and readings. Quizzes will be conducted at the beginning of class on the scheduled days (see the readings schedule below). Each quiz will have 10 multiple choice questions. Students may use any *hand-written* notes they have taken on the lectures and readings during the quiz but may not consult the readings themselves or electronic sources. Each student's lowest graded quiz will be dropped, but there is no makeup policy outside of exceptional circumstances.

Literature Review Paper

The literature review paper is divided into four components that are due throughout the semester. *Each component should be turned in separately*, meaning, for example that the

theory section should not include any content from the paper proposal or the introduction to the paper and the evidence section of the paper should not contain any content from the theory section. The only exception to this is when students add an introduction and conclusion and turn in the full paper at the end. This is a big project, and students should be sure to pace themselves and not fall behind. However, on the bright side, there is no final exam!

Literature Review Paper Proposal

Students should choose a comparative politics theory to write a literature review about. In their proposal, students should make clear what the main prediction of the theory is. The main prediction should hypothesize how variation in a single independent variable (treatment) affects a single dependent variable (outcome). For example, some theories of democratic politics predict that democracies with high GDP per capita (independent variable) are less likely to collapse (dependent variable). The proposal should also mention any research the student has found on the topic so far that could be used in conducting the review. Proposals should be about 1 page double spaced and are due by **11:59pm on September 22**.

Literature Review Paper Theory Section

This section of the paper should explain the theory and its logic. This includes each of the following components of a theory:

- A main prediction
- A mechanism through which the independent variable affects the outcome. For example, a theory of democratic politics that makes the main prediction mentioned in the literature review paper proposal section might argue that democracies with a high GDP per capita have a politically powerful middle class that has a vested interest in preserving democracy because this form of government ensures that their property will not be taken without due process.
- Scope conditions that explain when the theory applies. For example, maybe the theory of democratic politics mentioned above does not apply to democracies that have extreme wealth inequality because, even if these democracies have a high GDP per capita, the concentration of wealth at the top means the middle class is not large or powerful enough for the mechanism to be effective.

The paper should also explain what the observable implications of the theory are, meaning what we would and would not expect to observe if the theory is correct. Every theory will have multiple observable implications, so try to think of as many as you can (the papers you review should also be a good way to find these). For example, if the development and democracy theory mentioned above were correct, we would not expect to observe high GDP democracies collapsing at a higher rate than low GDP democracies. Further, we would expect middle class support for democracy to be high in wealthy democracies.

This section of the paper should cite a minimum of 4 peer-reviewed sources, and your use of those sources should show that you have truly read and engaged with their content. This section should be 3–4 pages double spaced and is due by **11:59 PM on October 27th**.

Literature Review Paper Evidence Section

This section of the paper should explain the findings of previous research and to what extent these support the theory. What is the evidence for and against the theory and what are the strengths and weaknesses of this evidence? This section of the paper should conclude by offering an assessment of the overall support for the theory. This section of the paper should cite a minimum of 4 peer-reviewed sources that have not been cited in previous sections of the paper. Your use of these sources should show you have truly read and engaged with their content.

This section of the paper should be 3–4 pages double spaced and is due by **11:59 PM on December 1**.

Full Literature Review Paper

You should add an introduction and conclusion to your literature review paper. The introduction should introduce your theory, explain why it is important, and preview your main conclusions. The conclusion should sum up the paper and point to areas future scholarship should examine to clarify whether the theory is support or not. For example, maybe previous research is focused only on the theory's main outcome, and more research is needed on its mechanisms.

Once the introduction and conclusion have been added, the full paper should be 8–10 pages double spaced and is due by **11:59 PM on Friday December 8th**

Guidelines for all Written Assignments

Papers should have 1 inch margins. They should use a font size of 11 or 12 and one of the following fonts: Times, Calibri, Liberation Serif, Computer Modern, or Helvetica.

Bibliographies do not count towards page length requirements. Papers should follow the [Chicago](#) author-date citation style. Your paper should include both a parenthetical reference with page numbers in the portions of the text in which you engage with each source as well as a full bibliography at the end. The file that you upload to Blackboard should be in PDF format.

The use of AI text generation tools is a form of plagiarism and is not permitted.

Grading

- Quizzes 25%
- Topic Proposal 10%
- Attendance and Participation 20%
 - Students' attendance scores are based on attending each class and arriving on time. Students must earn participation points from participating in class

discussions that will take place during each lecture. However, *if you are sick and may be contagious, please do not come to class*. Instead, seek medical attention from your doctor or at Mager's Health and Wellness Center. They can provide you a medical excuse and advise you when it is safe to return to class. Contact me to let me know that you are sick and will not be in class. We can work together to ensure you will be able to keep up with readings and assignments through the Blackboard course site.

- Literature Review Paper Theory Section 15%
- Literature Review Paper Evidence Section 15%
- Full Literature Review Paper 15%

Late Work Policy

If you believe you may be late turning in an assignment because of an event, such as a medical or family emergency, then you should email me as far as possible in advance of the due date of the assignment to request an extension. Late assignments not granted an extension prior to the due date will lose 10 percentage points and an additional 10 percentage points for each day late after the first day. Assignments more than 3 days late will not be accepted, and late quizzes will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances.

Course Readings

All of the readings are available through Blackboard.

University Policies

Please see the [University Policy Statement Page](#) for up-to-date university policies that apply to this and all courses on the following issues: Nondiscrimination, Disability Accommodation, Title IX Policy, Lauren's Promise, Religious Accommodation, Mental Health & Stress Management, Chosen Name Policy, Suicide Prevention, Student Requirements for Technology, Academic Integrity, Cell Phone Policy, Audio/Video Recording of Course Activity, Dropping a Class, Emergency Response, and Cultural Competence Statement.

Course Schedule

The dates listed below give the final class day of each week by which you should have completed the readings. All of these fall on a Friday except for Wednesday August 30, Wednesday October 11th, November 8th, and Wednesday December 6th because there are no classes on those Fridays. The dates of quizzes and literature review project due dates are also included.

August 25th

No readings

Wednesday August 30th

Textbook Chapter 1 “Doing Comparative Politics”

No Class Friday: American Political Science Association Conference

September 8th

Textbook Chapter 2 “The State”

Quiz on last two weeks of lectures and Chapters 1–2

September 15th

Textbook Chapter 3 “Democratic Political Regimes”

September 22nd

Textbook Chapter 4 “Non-Democratic Political Regimes”

Quiz on last two weeks of lectures and Chapters 3–4

Topic Proposal Due**September 29th**

Textbook Chapter 5 “Regime Change”

October 6th

Textbook Chapter 6 “Political Identity”

Quiz on last two weeks of lectures and Chapters 5–6 due

Wednesday October 11th

Textbook Chapter 7 “Religion and Politics”

October 20th

Textbook Chapter 8 “Gender and Politics”

Quiz on last two weeks of lectures and Chapters 7–8 due

October 27th

Textbook Chapter 9 “Collective Action”

Theory Section Due**November 3rd**

Gohdes, Anita R (2020). “Repression technology: Internet accessibility and state violence”.
In: *American Journal of Political Science*.

Quiz on last two weeks of lectures and Chapters 9 and Gohdes 2020 article

Wednesday November 8th

Textbook Chapter 10 “Political Violence”

No Class Friday: Peace Science Conference

November 17th

Textbook Chapter 11 “Political Economy of Development”

Quiz on last two weeks of lectures and Chapters 10–11

November 24th

No readings (Thanksgiving break)

December 1st

Textbook Chapter 12 “The Political Economy of Redistribution”

Evidence Section Due

Wednesday December 6th

Last day of lecture

Textbook Chapter 13 “Globalization”

Quiz on last two weeks of lectures and Ch 12–13

Friday December 8th

Full Literature Review Paper Due