

PL SC 003: Introduction to Comparative Politics

Course Information

Class Time: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9.05-9.55
Place: 100 [Huck Life Sciences](#)
Course Website: [Canvas](#)

Contact Information for Professor

Name: Matt Golder
Homepage: <http://http://mattgolder.com/>
Online Material: <http://mattgolder.com/books/pocp>
Course Webpage: [Canvas](#)
E-mail: mgolder@psu.edu (preferred method of contact)
Tel: 814-867-4323
Office: 306 [Pond Lab](#)
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 10-11

Contact Information for Teaching Assistants

Name: Xu 'Lee' Xu
E-mail: xux112@psu.edu (preferred method of contact)
Office: 210 [Pond Lab](#)
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1.30-2.30

Name: [Boyoon Lee](#)
E-mail: bul70@psu.edu (preferred method of contact)
Office: 214 [Pond Lab](#)
Office Hours: Mondays, 11-12.

Course Description

Goals: The course has three primary objectives: (i) to introduce students to the major questions in comparative politics, (ii) to acquaint them with the field's best answers, and (iii) to give them the tools necessary to think critically about those answers. The course views comparative politics as a subfield of political science, which, like all of science, is about comparison. In the course, students make many comparisons across disparate contexts and attempt to use such comparisons to test claims about the political world. In doing so,

they learn about the similarities and differences among countries, both democratic and authoritarian. They also learn about the conditions under which some claims about the political world apply or do not apply.

Types of Questions: The course is organized around a set of questions that comparative scholars have asked repeatedly over the past several decades: What is the state and where did it come from? What is democracy? Why are some countries democratic but others authoritarian? Do natural resources and foreign aid help or hinder the emergence of democracy? Are some cultures more or less compatible with democracy? What explains the variation in the different types of authoritarian regimes that we see around the world? How does democracy and dictatorship affect the material well-being of their citizens? What are the tradeoffs that exist when adopting different types of democratic institutions? Why are ethnic groups politicized in some countries but not in others? Why do some countries have many parties whereas some have only a few? How do governments form, and what are the material and normative implications associated with different types of government? Do presidential or parliamentary democracies last longer and why? How do democratic institutions influence the type of economic policy that we implement? Are there institutional solutions to ethnic conflict? Why are policy outcomes so stable in some countries but variable in others? How do institutions influence political representation? Using the latest research in the field of comparative politics, we examine competing answers to substantively important questions such as these and evaluate the proposed arguments for their logical consistency and empirical accuracy.

Methodology: In addressing the substantive questions that are central to this course, students are introduced to a variety of methods that have become central to the study of comparative politics. For example, students are exposed to tools such as decision theory, social choice theory, game theory, and statistical analysis. Students learn how to calculate expected utilities, how to solve complete information games in strategic and extensive form, how to solve repeated games, how to solve simple games with incomplete information, how to evaluate one-dimensional and two-dimensional spatial models, and how to interpret simple statistical results.

Note: While this course is an ‘introduction’ to comparative politics, this does not mean that the material covered will be easy. Indeed, many of the concepts and methods introduced in this class may well be more complicated than those addressed in upper-level classes. ‘Introduction’ simply means that the material addressed in this class is *foundational* and will allow students to better understand the subject matter examined in upper level classes.

This syllabus is designed to provide an overview to the course. Clickable links are printed in [Penn State blue](#).

Teaching Assistants:

Xu ‘Lee’ Xu and Boyoon Lee will be the teaching assistants for this class. They will be your primary resource for reviewing the material that we cover in class. Throughout the semester, they will hold regular office hours and will conduct occasional review sessions.

Course Requirements

Attendance: Attendance is not graded. There are occasional in-class quizzes, though, that can provide additional points to your overall grade. If you do miss class, you are expected to get notes from a fellow student – ‘private make-up lectures’ with the professor or teaching assistants will not take place.

Readings: It is assumed that students will do all of the assigned readings before coming to class. You should come to class prepared to participate in discussions. You are encouraged to volunteer questions and observations; I will call on students at random with questions from time to time.

Assignments: There will be almost weekly homework assignments, most of which will be done on Canvas. In the interests of fairness, homework assignments that are handed in late will not be graded.

Exams: There will be three exams – two midterms and a final. Exam makeups will only be possible in the most extenuating of circumstances (oversleeping, leaving early for Thanksgiving etc. are not suitable excuses). If you are extremely ill or have a university-accepted excuse for missing an exam, please notify me *prior* to the test date. I will only consider your request if you make it prior to the exam. Material covered on the exams will come from lectures, the assigned readings, and homework assignments.

The final exam will, among other things, include a short essay question that is stated below:

Suppose that you are writing a constitution for a new democracy in a large country with many social and ethnic cleavages and a per capita income of about \$5,000 in 1985 ppp dollars. You want to do everything you can to try to ensure the consolidation of democracy.

1. What other goals should you have in mind when writing your constitution?
2. What specific institutional form would you choose? *For example*, would you choose a federal or unitary system? Proportional representation or a single-member district plurality electoral system? Would you choose a parliamentary or a presidential form of democracy? And so on.
3. When answering these questions, give a sense as to how you arrived at your answers. Indicate why you made the institutional choices that you did and why you think that your choices are compatible with each other.

Exam Dates

- Midterm 1: Friday, September 29.
- Midterm 2: Friday, November 3.
- Final Exam: TBD.

Grading:

Your final grade is a weighted average of the three exams and homework assignments: Midterms 1 and 2 are *each* worth 25%; the final is worth 30%; the homework assignments are worth 20%. Additional points may be earned from in-class quizzes.

I will use the following scale to calculate your course grade:

A	93-100	C+	77-79.9
A-	90-92.9	C	70-76.9
B+	87-89.9	D	60-69.9
B	83-86.9	F	59.9 and below
B-	80-82.9		

Required Text/Materials

- Clark, William, Matt Golder & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics* (Third Edition). Washington D.C.: CQ Press/Sage.

This book has been ordered and will be available at the university bookstore. There are significant changes in the content to the third edition and so it is important that you get this (blue) edition of the book. Additional readings will be made available on Canvas.

How do I succeed?

- Although attendance in class is not graded, it is highly recommended. Attendance at lectures is always a good predictor of a student's performance on homework and exams. You will find it difficult to pass and do well in this class if you do not attend regularly.
- You should do all of the assigned readings prior to coming to class, including any appendix at the end of the assigned chapter. If you have questions about the readings, you should bring them to class or office hours.
- The homework assignments are very important and allow you to know if you are prepared for the exams or not. If you do not understand the homework assignments, either before or after they are completed, you should come to office hours.
- One way to improve your performance on both the homework and the exams is to do the practice problems at the end of the chapter. The teaching assistants and I will be happy to look at your answers during our office hours. Please attempt the problems before coming to office hours, though.
- **You should come to office hours regularly.** This is a vastly underused resource that is available to you. *It is OK to ask for help.* Attendance at office hours does not mean that you are not smart; it simply means that you care enough about your performance to use the resources available to you.

Academic Integrity

The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor.

In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in-class or take-home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found at <http://www.la.psu.edu/current-students/student-services/academic-integrity/academic-integrity>.

Counseling and Psychological Services

Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

[Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park \(CAPS\)](#): 814-863-0395.

[Counseling and Psychological Services at Commonwealth Campuses](#).

Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400.

Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741.

Disabilities

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. The Student Disability Resources Web site provides contact information for every Penn State campus. For further information, please visit the [Student Disability Resources Web site](#).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, [participate in an intake interview](#), and [provide documentation](#). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, [your campus's disability services office](#) will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

Educational Equity/Report Bias Statements

Penn State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Acts of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment due to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, political belief, or veteran status are not tolerated and can be reported through Educational Equity via the [Report Bias webpage](#).

University Police Services, University Park: 814-863-1111.

Multicultural Resource Center, Diversity Advocate for Students: 814-865-1773.

Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity: 814-865-5906.

Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs: 814-865-0909.

Affirmative Action Office: 814-863-0471.

Tentative Schedule

This schedule should be treated as tentative and flexible. It may be the case that it takes us more or less time for a particular topic than I have allotted here. We will adapt accordingly. Note, however, that I will not alter the exam dates.

Week 1: August 21 - 25 – What is comparative politics?

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Preface, Chapter 1.

Week 2: August 28 - September 1 – What is science?

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 2.

Week 3: September 4 - 8 – What is politics?

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 3.

No class on Monday this week

Week 4: September 11-15 – What is the state?

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 4.

Optional: Tilly, Charles. 1985. “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime.” In Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer, & Theda Skocpol (ed.) *Bringing the State Back In*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Week 5: September 18-22 – Democracy and dictatorship: conceptualization and measurement. The economic determinants of democracy and dictatorship.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapters 5-6.

Ross, Michael L. 2001. “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” *World Politics* 53: 325-361.

Week 6: September 25-29 – The cultural determinants of democracy and dictatorship.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 7.

Fish, M. Steven. 2002. “Islam and Authoritarianism.” *World Politics* 55: 4-37.

1st Midterm Exam (Friday, September 29)

Week 7: October 2-6 – Democratic transitions.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 8.

Kalyvas, Stathis. 2000. “Commitment Problems in Emerging Democracies: The Case of Religious Parties.” *Comparative Politics* 32: 379-399.

Optional: Kuran, Timur. 1989. “Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989.” *World Politics* 44: 7-48.

Optional: King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, & Margaret E. Roberts. 2013. “How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression.” *American Political Science Review* 107: 326-343.

Week 8: October 9-13 – Democracy or dictatorship – does it make a difference? Varieties of dictatorship. Selectorate theory.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapters 9-10.

Optional: Smith, Alastair. 2005. “Why International Organizations Will Continue to Fail Their Development Goals.” *Perspectives on Politics* 3: 565-567.

Week 9: October 16-20 – Problems of group decision making.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 11.

Week 10: October 23-27 – Parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential democracies: Making and breaking governments.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 12.

Week 11: October 30 - November 3 – Elections and electoral systems.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 13.

2nd Midterm Exam (Friday, November 3)

Week 12: November 6-10 – Social cleavages and party systems.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 14.

Optional: Posner, Daniel N. “The Political Salience of Cultural Differences: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi.” *American Political Science Review* 98: 529-545.

Week 13: November 13-17 – Institutional veto players.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 15.

Thanksgiving (No Class): November 19-25

Week 14: November 27 - December 1 – Consequences of democratic institutions.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 16.

Week 15: December 4-8 – Consequences of democratic institutions.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 16.

Final Exam (TBD)