

# POLS 250: Introduction to Comparative Politics

Spring 2008

MWF 11:00-11:50 am

Faner Hall, Room 1005

Prof. Frederick Solt

Office: 3166 Faner Hall

Office Hours: M 1:30-5:00 pm & W 1:30-4:00 pm

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## 1 Overview

Comparative politics is the field that uses evidence to answer questions about the workings of domestic politics by comparing the experiences of different countries. Our study of the topic begins with countries relatively similar to the one most of you know best, the United States. We will investigate why the advanced industrial democracies have pursued such different social and economic policies, the policies that have the most direct impact on the wellbeing of their citizens. In doing so, we will also learn how political institutions differ across democracies and the effects that these differences have on politics. During the second half of the course, we will turn to recently democratizing countries to study how authoritarian regimes maintain power, the circumstances in which they give way to democracy, and the problems often faced by

new democratic governments in the developing world. Throughout the course, we will consider how comparison allows us to draw conclusions about political processes.

## 2 Requirements

Your grade will be based on class attendance, pop quizzes, short papers, a midterm, and a final exam.

### 2.1 Attendance

You can't learn if you don't show up. Missing class will impact your grade in many ways—I have found that each additional absence reduces a student's exam grades by an average of 3%—but it does so most directly through your attendance score. You may miss two classes without penalty, although you should

be sure to get notes on what we covered from a classmate. All other absences will reduce your final grade by one percentage point each.

## 2.2 Quizzes

Seven times during the semester, you will be asked to complete a short quiz on recent material. The typical quiz format will be five short-answer questions. *There are no make-up quizzes*; those who miss a quiz will receive a zero. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

## 2.3 Papers

For any five of the six countries we will be examining this semester, you must complete a short research and writing assignment.

1. Using the search boxes on the webpages below, find a news article about the politics of the country that illustrates a point made in our classroom discussion. When running a search, use as many search terms as necessary to find results that are relevant. For example, if your search for articles mentioning “Indonesia” yields 327 hits, including local sports scores, try adding “elections” or “democracy” (or both), until you have a manageable number to look through. Remember that not every article you find searching this way will exemplify a point from class. Choose carefully.

Chicago Tribune

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/>

New York Times

<http://nytimes.com/>

Los Angeles Times

<http://www.latimes.com/>

The Guardian (London)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/>

BBC News

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

2. Write a very short paper—one to two paragraphs, not in any circumstances to exceed one page—that explains how the article demonstrates the point from class. What is the relationship between our classroom discussion and the events reported? How does what you’ve learned help you better understand what the journalist is describing?
3. You must print out a copy of the article and staple it to your paper. Papers are due in class at the next meeting following the conclusion of our discussion of the country in question. No late papers will be accepted.

## 2.4 Exams

The midterm exam will be held in class on Friday, February 29. The final exam is currently scheduled for Thursday, May 8, from 12:50 to 2:50 pm, in our classroom; it will

focus on material from the second half of the course. Two review sessions will be held before each exam: one in the preceding class session, and one outside of class on the evening before the exam.

## 2.5 Grading

Your grade will be calculated on the following basis:

|            |                            |
|------------|----------------------------|
| Attendance | 10%                        |
| Quizzes    | 30% (six quizzes, 5% each) |
| Papers     | 20% (five papers, 4% each) |
| Midterm    | 20%                        |
| Final      | 20%                        |

## 2.6 Readings

There is one required book for this course:

Lijphart, Arend. 1999. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

It is available from the Student Center bookstore and all of the online booksellers. Additional readings will be handed out in class or are accessible online.

## 3 Class Schedule

**M Jan 14** Introduction

### 1 Britain

**W Jan 16** Institutions & parties

**F Jan 18** Social policy

**M Jan 21** MLK Day

**W Jan 23** Economic policy

**F Jan 25** From Thatcher to New Labour

**M Jan 28** Britain Review

### 2 Sweden

**W Jan 30** Institutions & parties (*Britain Paper Due*)

**F Feb 1** Social policy

**M Feb 4** Economic policy

**W Feb 6** Postmaterialism: gender equity

**F Feb 8** Sweden Review

### 3 Germany

**M Feb 11** Institutions & parties (*Sweden Paper Due*)

**W Feb 13** Institutions & parties, cont.

**F Feb 15** Social policy

**M Feb 18** Economic policy

**W Feb 20** Postmaterialism: the environment

**F Feb 22** Germany Review

### Review & Midterm

**M Feb 25** Three (other) countries (*Germany Paper Due*)

**W Feb 27** Review

**F Feb 29** *Midterm*

### 4 Indonesia

**M Mar 3** Intro to democratic transitions

**W Mar 5** Authoritarianism in Indonesia

**F Mar 7** Crisis

***Spring Break, Mar 8-16***

***No Class, Mar 17-21***

**M Mar 24** Democratic transition

**W Mar 26** Issues and problems

**F Mar 28** Indonesia Review

### **5 Mexico**

**M Mar 31** Authoritarianism in Mexico (*Indonesia Paper Due*)

**W Apr 2** Crisis

**F Apr 4** Democratic transition

**M Apr 7** Democratic transition, cont.

**W Apr 9** Issues and problems

**F Apr 11** Mexico Review

### **6 Czech Republic & Slovakia**

**M Apr 14** Authoritarianism in Czechoslovakia (*Mexico Paper Due*)

**W Apr 16** Crisis

**F Apr 18** Democratic transition

**M Apr 21** Issues and problems

**W Apr 23** Czech Republic & Slovakia Review

**F Apr 25** Reserved for Make-Up

### **Review**

**M Apr 28** Four (other) countries (*Czech Republic/Slovakia Paper Due*)

**W Apr 30** Review

**Th May 8** *Final*, 12:50-2:50 pm