

Introduction to Comparative Politics | University of Houston
POLS 3311 | Spring 2023
Monday and Wednesday, 4:00-5:20 p.m. | Francisco Cantú
Science Building 116 | fcantu10@uh.edu

This is an upper-level course that introduces students to the principal concepts and theories in comparative politics, a subfield within political science that analyzes differences among the institutions, behavior, and policies of the countries. The course is organized thematically and covers the most relevant questions of the subfield. At the end of the semester, students completing this course will (1) be able to discriminate among different political regimes and institutions and (2) have practiced 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 will complement 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 the first time, or learning to play a musical instrument, exposure to new vocabulary and concepts used in comparative politics may prove challenging. Facing those challenges, 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. I will promptly answer your e-mails (within the next 24 hours within Monday to Friday). 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 are transparent. You will know from the first day of class the purpose, task, and criteria of each assignment and evaluation. All the work you submit will be turned back no later than a week after its deadline.

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. A successful performance in this course means that you assume greater responsibility for your own learning outcomes. You need to come to class prepared, having both read the assigned material, and letting me know when you need help with the material. Also, you have to be aware of the deadlines of the class and be responsible for submitting assignments on time.

Office Hours and Contact Resources

Mondays 2:00-4:00 p.m. at PGH 429. Please send me an email (fcantu10@uh.edu) to schedule a meeting. We can also arrange a meeting outside those hours if they do not work for you.

I will post notifications and messages to your uh.edu e-mail account, please make sure you have access to it.

Teaching Assistant

Eugenia Artabe (meartabe@uh.edu). Her office hours are Mondays from 1 to 3 pm at PGH 406.

Readings and material for the class

The course requires the following textbook:

Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press.

The printed version of the textbook should be available at the UH bookstore.¹ Please let me know in the first week of class if you cannot afford to buy or rent the required textbook.

¹<https://www.bkstr.com/houstonstore/home>

All the additional readings, videos, and audio clips will be available on Blackboard. Also, we will use *Socrative*, (<https://www.socrative.com/>) a free response system available using any electronic device.

There is an average of 30 pages of text to read for each lecture. 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.

Course Requirements

Take-home essays: There will be two take-home essays. The goal of these essays is to give you the opportunity to apply the concepts and analytical tools you learned to a concrete case. The essay will be graded on your skill in developing an argument and in using the materials covered in the course to support this argument. You should write an essay of no more than five typewritten, double-spaced pages (there is a tolerance of half-page below or above this limit). The standards for grading the essay will be provided the first day of class. Your best essay will count for 25% of your final grade, and the remaining essay will count for 20%.

Essays are due on March 6 and May 1 at 4:00 pm. The essay questions are the following:

- **Take-home essay # 1** (Deadline: March 6): Can we use the existing theories of democratization to explain the current democratic backslide in the world? Pick two specific theories of democratization, describe each of them in no more than a paragraph, then discuss the advantages and limitations of these theories to understand the erosion of the democratic regimes that many countries are facing nowadays. Provide relevant examples.
- **Take-home essay # 2** (Deadline: May 1): The United States has a presidential, federal political system of government, a bipartisan party system, and a majoritarian electoral system. What kind of institutional arrangements would you propose to mitigate the current democratic backslide in the United States? Use the experience from other countries to propose two institutional changes for the political system in the country. Pay specific attention to how an institutional change might affect other institutions. Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of such changes in terms of accountability and representation.

Assignments: There will be seven assignments along the semester. The goal of the assignments is to reinforce the concepts learned during class. Assignments are due on Saturday at midnight.

The average of your best five assignments will count as 25% of your final grade. Any points you make from the other assignments will count as bonus points (up to 5% of your final grade). The assignments are listed below.

- **Assignment # 1** (Deadline: January 28): Define in a paragraph what do we mean by "comparative" in comparative politics.
- **Assignment # 2** (Deadline: February 11): Pick a country (other than the US) and describe the different evaluations of its political regime according to the Polity project (<https://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html>), The Economist Intelligence Unit (<https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/>), and the V-Dem database (https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/74/8c/748c68ad-f224-4cd7-87f9-8794add5c60f/dr_2021_updated.pdf). Compare the corresponding operationalization and discuss their differences.
- **Assignment # 3** (Deadline: February 25): Compare the similarities and differences between the economic and cultural explanations for democracy.

- **Assignment # 4** (Deadline: March 11): Review the film we watched in class by reporting anything that struck you about the film, including the most relevant thing you learned, what surprised or confused you, or how and why it reminded something else you have previously read in the course.
- **Assignment # 5** (Deadline: March 25): Provide two original examples of delegation problems. One of them should correspond to an adverse selection problem and the remaining one to a moral hazard issue.
- **Assignment # 6** (Deadline: April 8): Pick a country other than the US and that is classified as a democracy according to at least one of the classifications you reviewed for the Assignment #2. Estimate the Effective Number of Electoral Parties (ENEP) and the Effective Number of Legislative Parties (ENLP) in the country of your choice. Describe the electoral rules to select the members of the legislative and executive power. Discuss what is the relationship between the electoral system and the party system in your case study.
- **Assignment # 7** (Deadline: April 22): Compare and discuss two advantages and two disadvantages of the parliamentary system over the presidential system.

The rubric for this assignments will be provided during the first week of class.

Reading quizzes and in-class essays: There will be several in-class quizzes, which dates will not be announced in advance. The goal of the quizzes is to encourage you to come prepared for lectures. Each quiz consists of a short question about the 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. You are allowed to use a sheet of paper with your handwritten notes when answering the quiz; no other material will be allowed.

Students will also write several in-class essays requiring the analysis and presentation of evidence-based arguments. The essays should be no longer than a couple of paragraphs. We will review the basic requirements of good expository writing, which students will be required to implement in their papers. You will be allowed to only use your handwritten notes from class.

Quizzes and essays missed due to absences or late arrivals cannot be made up. When estimating your final grade, I will drop out your four lowest activities in class. Similar to the assignments, there is some space to miss a few quizzes and in-class essays without hurting your final grade. The average grade of your quizzes will count as 25% of your final grade.

Class participation: Class participation means being fully present during lectures and other class activities. I grade students' participation across the whole semester. The grade represents my overall assessment of your participation in the class. Lower scores are for students deriding others' contributions in a discourteous way or engaging in distracting behaviors online and in the classroom. Class participation will count for 5% of your final grade.

Grading

Take-home essays	20% + 25% =	45%
Assignments		25%
Reading quizzes/In-class essays		25%
Participation		5%
<hr/> Total		<hr/> 100%

Final letter grades will be calculated on an absolute scale as follows: A (94-100%), A- (90-93.9%), B+ (87-89.9%), B (84-86.9%), B- (80-83.9%), C+ (77-79.9%), C (74-76.9%), C- (70-73.9%), D+ (67-69.9%), D (64-66.9%), D- (60-63.9%), F (0-59.9%).

Electronic devices

Besides the specific occasions we will use them during lectures, the use of cell phones, laptops, or other

electronic devices is strongly discouraged. There is evidence about the detrimental effects of laptops on students' performance in class.² Moreover, the use of electronic devices for activities other than class related is a very distracting behavior to others students around and myself. If you do use electronic devices to engage in distracting behavior during class time, I reserve the right to deduct all your participation points without notice. If you feel that your learning will be hampered by not having access to your laptop for note-taking or other legitimate purposes, please speak to me.

Deadlines and extensions

Outside the fully documented cases described in the Excused Absence Policy (see below), there are no make-up quizzes or assignments. All the deadlines and instructions for the assignments are already available in this syllabus, and I encourage you to plan in advance. Also, the course leaves you some buffer to miss some assignments and quizzes, so use those opportunities wisely. Files uploaded close to the deadline risk being marked as not submitted, so please try to submit your work early. Corrupted files will not be graded, and you are responsible for checking your file thoroughly before uploading. Screenshots will not be accepted as proof.

Take-home essays submitted late will be penalized with 20% of the grade, plus an additional 10% for every 24 hours after the deadline.

Reasonable Academic Adjustments/Auxiliary Aids

The University of Houston complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, pertaining to the provision of reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids for disabled students. In accordance with Section 504 and ADA guidelines, UH strives to provide reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids to students who request and require them. If you believe that you have a disability requiring an academic adjustments/auxiliary aid, please contact the Justin Dart Jr. Student Accessibility Center (formerly the Justin Dart, Jr. Center for Students with DisABILITIES).³

Academic Integrity

High ethical standards are critical to the integrity of any institution, and bear directly on the ultimate value of conferred degrees. All UH community members are expected to contribute to an atmosphere of the highest possible ethical standards. Maintaining such an atmosphere requires that any instances of academic dishonesty be recognized and addressed. The UH Academic Honesty Policy is designed to handle those instances with fairness to all parties involved: the students, the instructors, and the University itself.⁴ All students and faculty of the University of Houston are responsible for being familiar with this policy. There will be a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism in any of the required activities for this course. Any violation to the UH Academic Honesty Policy will result in automatic failure of the course. Examples of violations to the policy include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and complicity in academic dishonesty. This course will not accept any previously submitted work as new work without instructor's approval. Feel free to consult with me before submitting your essay if you have concerns about the correct way to reference the work of others.

Title IX/Sexual Misconduct

In accordance with the UHS Sexual Misconduct Policy, your instructor is a "responsible employee" for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which they become aware to the Title IX office.⁵ Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report in confidence.

²See, for example, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/05/16/why-smart-kids-shouldnt-use-laptops-in-class/> and <http://thechronicleofeducation.com/2017/04/06/using-laptops-class-harms-academic-performance-study-warns/>

³<https://uh.edu/accessibility/>

⁴<https://uh.edu/provost/policies-resources/honesty/>

⁵<https://uh.edu/equal-opportunity/title-ix-sexual-misconduct/resources/>

COVID-19 Information

Students are encouraged to visit the University's COVID-19 website for important information including diagnosis and symptom protocols, testing, vaccine information, and post-exposure guidance. Please check the website throughout the semester for updates. Consult the Graduate Excused Absence Policy for information regarding excused absences due to medical reasons.⁶

Recording of Class

Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center.⁷ If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor's recordings for their own studying and notetaking. Instructor's recordings are not authorized to be shared with anyone without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.

Excused Absence Policy

Regular class attendance, participation, and engagement in coursework are important contributors to student success. Absences may be excused as provided in the University of Houston Graduate Excused Absence Policy for reasons including: medical illness of student or close relative, death of a close family member, legal or government proceeding that a student is obligated to attend, recognized professional and educational activities where the student is presenting, and University-sponsored activity or athletic competition.⁸ Under these policies, students with excused absences will be provided with an opportunity to make up any quiz, exam or other work that contributes to the course grade or a satisfactory alternative. Please read the full policy for details regarding reasons for excused absences, the approval process, and extended absences. Additional policies address absences related to military service, religious holy days, pregnancy and related conditions, and disability.

Syllabus Changes

Due to the changing nature of the current pandemic, please note that the instructor may need modify the course syllabus and may do so at any time. Notice of such changes will be announced as quickly as possible through e-mail (via your UH email account) and Blackboard.

Schedule

Week 1 (January 18). Introduction

Week 2 (January 23 - 29). Tools to Success in Class / What Do We Mean by Comparative Politics?

- What is the "comparative" in comparative politics?
- January 25:
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 13-31 (Chapter 2).
- January 28:

⁶<http://catalog.uh.edu/content.php?catoid=44&navoid=15976>

⁷<https://uh.edu/accessibility/>

⁸<http://publications.uh.edu/content.php?catoid=45&navoid=16576>

– Assignment # 1

Week 3 (January 30-February 5). The State/ Democracy I

- What is the state?
- What makes a state successful?
- What is democracy?
- January 30
- Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 53-69 (Chapter 4).
- “The return of the Taliban; There goes the neighborhood.” (2021, Aug 14). *The Economist*, 29-30.
- February 1:
 - Last day to drop a course without receiving a grade
 - Dahl, R. (1971). *Polyarchy*. Yale University Press: 1-16.
 - Przeworski, A. (2018). *Why Bother with Elections?* Polity: 13-27 (Chapter 2).

Week 4 (February 7-13). Democracy II/ Dictatorship

- How to conceptualize and measure democracy?
- What are the main features of autocratic regimes?
- What are the challenges of authoritarian rulers?
- February 7:
 - Kellstedt, P. M. and Whitten, G. D. (2018). *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 3 edition: 104-123.
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 71-75 (Chapter 5, "Democracy in Historical Perspective").
- February 9:
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 155-194 (Chapter 8).
 - “Monarchy; Sovereign immunity.” (2019, Apr 27). *The Economist*, 52-54.
- February 11:
 - Assignment # 2

Week 5 (February 13-19). Economic Theories of Democratization

- Why do some states become democracies but not others?
- Is economic change fundamental to modern democracy?
- What is the role of economic inequality on democratization
- February 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.

- Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 71-79 (Chapter 5, "Modernization Theory and Democracy").

- February 15:

- Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 79-95 (Chapter 5, starting at "A Variant of Modernization Theory").
- Boix, C. (2006). The roots of democracy. *Policy Review*, (135):1-19

Week 6 (February 20-26). Cultural Determinants of Democracy

- Does democracy require a “democratic culture”?

- February 20:

- Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 97-122 (Chapter 6).
- Putnam, R. D. (1994). What makes democracy work? *IPA Review*, 47(1):31-34.

- February 22:

- Henrich, J. (2020). *The Weirdest People in the World. How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous*. Allen Lane, London: pages TBD.

- February 25:

- **Assignment # 3**

Week 7 (February 27-March 5). Democratic Backsliding

- Why do democracies break down?

- February 27:

- Haggard, S. and Kaufman, R. (2021). The anatomy of democratic backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, 32(4):27-41.
- Bermeo, N. (2016). On democratic backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1):5-19.
- “Hungary’s election: Unstoppable strongman” (2022, Apr 9). *The Economist*, 41.
- “Bukele’s bulldozer” (2021, May 8). *The Economist*, 34-35.

- March 1:

- Svobik, M. W. (2019). Polarization versus democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 30(3):20-32.
- Gibson, L. (March-April 2020). The Authoritarian Reflex. *Harvard Magazine* (<https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2020/03/feature-the-authoritarian-reflex>)

Week 8 (March 6-12). Film: The Last King of Scotland (Kevin Macdonald, 2006)

- March 6:

- **Essay Evaluation # 1**

- March 11:

- **Assignment # 4**

Week 9 (March 20-26). Political Delegation and Social Choice

- What is political delegation?
- How do democracies make decisions?
- What are the main problems with group decision making?
- How to combine individual preferences into a single choice?
- March 20:
 - Taylor, S. L., Shugart, M. S., Lijphart, A., and Grofman, B. (2014). *A Different Democracy. American Government in a Thirty-One-Country Perspective*. Yale University Press, New Haven: 1-24.
- March 22:
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 195-215 (Chapter 9).
- March 25:
 - **Assignment # 5**

Week 10 (March 27-April 2). Electoral Systems

- What is an electoral system?
- How do electoral systems work in practice?
- What are the consequences of different electoral systems?
- March 27:
 - “Engines of Our Ingenuity (No. 2680): The Electoral College” (Houston Public Radio) (<https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/shows/engines-of-our-ingenuity/engines-podcast/2021/08/10/404723/engines-of-our-ingenuity-2680-the-electoral-college/>)
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 253-261 (Chapter 11, "Elections and Electoral Integrity").
- March 29:
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 261-287 (Chapter 11, beginning at "Electoral Systems").
 - “Requiem for losers? Tactical voting” (2017, Apr 29). *The Economist*.

Week 11 (April 3-9). Political 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?
- April 3:
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 289-308 (Chapter 12, until "Types of Political Parties and Social Cleavages").
 - “A new world” (2020, Jul 4). *The Economist*, 46.

- April 5:
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 308-319 (Chapter 12, starting at "Number of Parties").
 - “Anti-EU parties cluster at ideological extremes, whereas pro-EU ones are centrists” (2019, Jun 1). *The Economist*, 81.
- April 8:
 - Assignment # 6

Week 12 (April 10-16). Systems of Government (I)

- 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?
- April 10:
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 217-227 (Chapter 10, until "Government Formation Process").
 - “The nine lives of Lofven” (2021, Jun 26). *The Economist*, 44-45.
 - “Boris Johnson; The wreckage he leaves behind” (2022, Jul 9). *The Economist*, 55-56.
- April 12:
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 227-252 (Chapter 10, starting at "A Simple Theory of Government Formation").
 - “Too many kingmakers” (2021, Apr 3). *The Economist*, 37-38.
 - “French parliamentary elections; Jupiter waning” (2022, June 25). *The Economist*, 52-53.

Week 13 (April 17-23). Systems of Government (II)

- Do differences between systems of government matter?
- April 17:
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 379-392 (Chapter 14, "Presidentialism and Democratic Survival").
 - “Cleaning up Latin American democracy” (2015, Mar 18). *The Economist*.
- April 19:
 - Borgen (2010), Season 1, Episode 1 (<https://youtu.be/xqeB5r4JkQ0>)
 - Last day to drop a course or withdraw with a ‘W’
- April 22:
 - Assignment # 7

Week 14 (April 24-April 30). Veto Players/ Consequences of Political Institutions

- What is the tradeoff between checks and balances and policy stability?
- How do different families of political institutions influence representation?
- April 24:
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 321-350 (Chapter 13).
- April 26:
 - Clark, W. R., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2018). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press: 351-364 (Chapter 14, "Majoritarian or Consensus Democracy?")
 - Colomer, Josep (2019, Dec 17). "The British institutional dilemma" (<https://jcolomer.blogspot.com/2019/12/britain-either-change-party-system-or.html>).

Week 15 (May 1-7).

- May 1:
 - **Essay Evaluation # 2**