Introduction to Comparative Politics

Fall 2020

INTL 3300

Department of International Affairs
University of Georgia

Professor Megan Turnbull
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Class Meeting: T/Th, 2:20-3:35pm, Room 115, International Affairs (IA) Building, 202 Herty Drive
Office Hours: by appointment via zoom

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why do some countries hold elections while others do not? Why are some states able to provide security and welfare to their citizens while others struggle to do so? Why are some countries plagued by violence while others enjoy internal peace? These questions have long animated the field of comparative politics and are among the several of which we will explore this semester. This course will provide students with a firm foundation in the subfield of comparative politics, preparing them for more specialized courses on the topics in the course schedule below. The course has two main objectives:

1. To familiarize students with the importance of theory and research design for describing, explaining, and understanding political processes. After taking this course, students should be able to distinguish between different theoretical explanations and evaluate the merit of evidence used to support them.

2. To provide students with an overview of key topics and debates in comparative politics. Students should be able to understand the basis of these debates as well as take and support positions on them.

READINGS & COURSE MATERIAL

All readings, lectures, and course materials will be accessible through eLearning Commons (eLC). There are no books or other materials that need to be purchased for this course. Some of the readings are dense and involve advanced statistics and formal modeling. You are not expected to fully grasp the mathematics and statistical models in the readings; indeed, we will spend little time on them in class. Rather, you should focus on absorbing the logic and steps of the argument, how different variables are operationalized and measured, and the evidence used to support the conclusions. You are strongly encouraged to bring any questions about jargon, concepts, argumentation, or anything else to class or office hours.

The readings/topics for November 10, 12, 17, and 19, will be determined by the students.
REQUIREMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>% of Final Grade</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Memos</td>
<td>5 memos, each worth 5%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Election Day Report</td>
<td>Assessment of American democracy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>November 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Response to Election Day Report</td>
<td>Respond to a classmate’s Election Day Report</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>November 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Proposal</td>
<td>Strategies for depolarization</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>November 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design Group Project</td>
<td>Construct a research design in a group to answer a political science question</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>December 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Design Presentation</td>
<td>Online (recorded) presentation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>December 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>8-10 pages</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>December 9</td>
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ATTENDANCE

There will be many opportunities to participate online and in person throughout the semester, yet given the pandemic, attendance (in person or via zoom) is not required and there is no participation grade. Because of physical distancing requirements, it is not possible for all of us to meet every class. During the first week of the semester, the class will be divided into three groups – Groups A, B, and C – and students are welcome, but not required, to attend their assigned days in person in the course schedule, below. Everyone is invited to participate via zoom on the days they are not eligible to attend.

As all readings and lectures will be posted on eLC, we will use our class time for discussion, which will be recorded via zoom and uploaded to eLC. If you choose to attend class in person on days you are eligible, you must sign up online at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled class time. A link to sign up forms will be available on eLC. If you choose to attend class in person, note that UGA requires all students, faculty, and staff to wear face coverings over the nose and mouth while indoors and maintain at least six feet of distance whenever possible. If you come to class without a face covering, you will be asked to find one or to leave and participate virtually.

Special Considerations for Covid-19: I would like nothing more than to be in the classroom with all of you this semester; however, the Covid-19 pandemic has made this unsafe for us and for the larger Athens community.
1. If you experience symptoms consistent with Covid-19, or are exposed to someone who has tested positive for Covid-19, **DO NOT ATTEND CLASS.** Report your exposure and any symptoms immediately through Dawgcheck and seek a test as soon as possible.

If you are sick and unable to complete your work on time, **DO NOT PANIC.** Do reach out to me as soon as possible, so we can find a solution and ensure you get credit for your work as you are able to complete it. I will not impose late penalties.

2. All course materials, including links to lectures and slides, will be made available through hyperlinks on the syllabus or on eLC. The syllabus will be updated regularly. **You will not be punished in any way for exclusively participating in this class online.**

3. After Thanksgiving (November 26th), all classes will be held exclusively online.

**OFFICE HOURS**

Office hours are the time that professors and teaching assistants specifically designate to meet with students for help with assignments, questions about the lecture or reading, answer questions, or just to chat. In other words, office hours are your time. You are encouraged to come to office hours with questions about the class, comparative politics, political science, or just to introduce yourself. Professor Clare Brock provides a more thorough description of office hours if you would like more information: http://www.clarebrock.com/blog/office-hours

**CRITICAL READING MEMOS & OTHER ASSIGNMENTS**

The purpose of the critical reading memos is threefold. They will (1) help you digest the main points of the readings, (2) strengthen your writing skills, and (3) sharpen your capacity for analytical thinking. **You will complete five critical reading memos during the semester.** Briefly, your memo should (1) summarize the main argument and evidence for the day’s reading(s) and (2) critically engage with the readings. Memos should cover all of the readings assigned that day, and they should be 1-2 pages in length. A handout with more information will be circulated at the start of the semester. There will not be a sign-up sheet and you are free to write your memo for any five classes where a reading is assigned. **Memos are due by noon the day of class, uploaded to the specified assignment folder on eLC** (for example, “September 1 Reading Memo”). Please note that these will be circulated to the entire class and may inform our class discussion for the day.

Information about the remaining assignments in the table above (including guidelines and due dates) will be shared separately.

**ASSESSMENT AND GRADING**

Recent studies show self-assessment and self-grading enhance student learning and creativity. For each assignment, students will assess and grade themselves, and I will provide written feedback and a grade as well. For assignments worth 10% of the final grade or less, the student’s
grade will stand as the final grade (conditional on students submitting the assignment; if the
assignment is not submitted, then the grade is an automatic zero). For assignments worth more
than 10% of the final grade, the student’s grade will stand as the final grade except where there is
more than a 5 point difference (out of 100) between their grade and the professor’s. In such an
event, the student and professor will meet with the goal of agreeing on a final grade. If an
agreement cannot be reached, then the final assignment grade will be the average of the student’s
and the professor’s grade.

**USE OF LAPTOPS AND TABLETS IN CLASS**

While some students find that personal laptops and tablets enhance their classroom experience,
others find them to be a significant distraction. In an effort to accommodate all students, the
classroom will be divided into “laptop” and “non-laptop” sections. You are welcome to sit in
whichever section you feel best suits your learning needs for the day.

**CLASS RECORDINGS**

There may be instances where the lecture portion of this course is recorded under Section 504
and Title II of the ADA ACT. If you have questions or concerns, please contact the Director of
the Disability Resource Center at eew@uga.edu.

**UNIVERSTY HONOR CODE AND ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY**

As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to abide by the University’s academic
honesty policy, “A Culture of Honesty,” and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must
meet the standards described in “A Culture of Honesty” found at:
https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/. Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty
policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation. Questions related to course assignments
and the academic honesty policy should be directed to the instructor.

**MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCES**

If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and
Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit https://sco.uga.edu. They
will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the
appropriate resources or services.

UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services
(https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga) or crisis support
(https://www.uhs.uga.edu/info/emergencies).

If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA
(https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga) for a list of FREE workshops, classes,
mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University
Health Center. Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.
COURSE SCHEDULE

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Thursday, August 20: Introduction
• We will all meet over zoom for our first meeting to discuss the syllabus and the plan for the semester.

Tuesday, August 25: Why do we compare? (Group A)
• Read
• View Lecture 1
• Guiding questions
  o What makes political science a “science”? More broadly, what makes an academic discipline “scientific”?
  o Do you agree that the study of politics can be a scientific endeavor? Why or why not?

Thursday, August 27: The Comparative Method (Group B)
• Reading
• View Lecture 2
• Guiding questions
  o What is the method of agreement? Method of difference?
  o What are the strengths of the comparative case study method? Weaknesses?

Tuesday, September 1: Theory, Hypotheses, and Evidence (Group C)
• Readings
• View Lecture 3
• Guiding questions
  o What are the key terms in the chapter? Why are they useful for studying and thinking about politics?

Thursday, September 3: Research design wrap up (Group A)
  o View Lecture 4

Tuesday, September 8: The State (Group B)
• Readings

- View Lecture 5
- Guiding Questions
  - What is the state? What makes it different from other organizations?
  - According to Bates, what is different about state formation in the developing world compared to early modern Europe?
  - What international factors shape state formation today?

Thursday, September 10: The breakdown of the state: civil war (No in-person meeting; Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association)

- Readings
- View Lecture 6
- Guiding questions
  - What causes civil war? Why does it happen?
  - How do Collier and Hoeffler measure their variables? What might be some problems with their measurements and indicators? Can you think of better ways to measure the key concepts in their hypotheses?

Tuesday, September 15: Research and policy on civil war (Group C)

- Readings
- Guiding questions
  - Do you agree with Luttwak? Why or why not? Be sure to use evidence to support your position.

Thursday, September 17: Rebuilding political authority: post-conflict politics (Group A)

- Readings
  - Read Stakeholder Democracy Networks’ short briefing on The Tompolo Foundation
- View Lecture 7
- Guiding questions
  - Do warlords ever have a right to govern? If so, when?
  - Are “state rulers” any different from “warlords”? If so, how?
  - Does Tompolo qualify as a warlord who has a right to govern? If you were a policy advisor to the Nigerian government, what would you advise? Work with Tompolo? Try to weaken and undermine him? As you answer this question, keep in mind our recent discussions on states, political order, and civil war.
Tuesday, September 22: Political order and violence wrap (Group B)
  o View Lecture 8

Thursday, September 24: Defining development (Group C)
  • Readings
  • View Lecture 9
  • Guiding questions
    o What does Sen mean by “development as freedom?” Do you agree with his argument?
    o Do all good things- democracy, freedom, economic growth- go together?
    o Have you studied, interned, or worked abroad? Are you thinking about it? How, if at all, does the piece from Bright Magazine resonate with your travel experiences?

Tuesday, September 29: Development (Group A)
  • Readings
  • View Lecture 10
  • Guiding questions
    o What role do institutions play in development? What are the different types of institutions that Acemoglu and Robinson describe?
    o What else might explain differences in wealth and political freedoms between countries and across time?

Thursday, October 1: Political regimes (Group B)
  • Reading
  • View Lecture 11
  • Guiding Questions
    o What makes a country a democracy? An authoritarian regime?
    o How would you define democracy? How would you know it when you see it?

Tuesday, October 6: Measuring democracy (online activity, no in-person meeting)
  • Read Freedom House country report hand-outs in preparation for class activity
Thursday, October 8: Modernization Theory (Group C)
- Readings
- View Lecture 12
- Guiding questions
  - What do you think the key take-aways or conclusions are of the reading?
  - Do you find the reading persuasive? Why or why not?

Tuesday, October 13: Democratization: Rational Actor Explanations (Group A)
- Readings
- View Lecture 13
- Guiding questions
  - Who are the key actors in Acemoglu and Robinson’s argument? What are their economic interests? How does their economic position shape their preferences for (non)democracy?
  - In a nutshell, what is the argument? Can you explain it to a friend in your own words? Focus on the steps of the argument.

Thursday, October 15: Democratization as a Mistake (Group B)
- Reading
- View Lecture 14
- Guiding Questions
  - How might democratic transitions be a mistake? Why do authoritarian rulers make these mistakes?
  - How does Treisman code mistakes? Put differently, how does he, and the reader, know a “mistake” when they see it?
  - What flaws do you see in the research design? Coding? How would you make it better?

Tuesday, October 20: Governments and electoral systems (Group C)
- Reading
- View Lecture 15
- Guiding questions
  - What are the different electoral systems described in the article? Forms of government?
  - Which electoral system does Lijphart advocate for and why? Do you agree?

Thursday, October 22: Regime Transition wrap up (Group A)
o View Lecture 16

Tuesday, October 27: Polarization (Group B)
- Readings
- View Lecture 17
- Guiding Questions
  - What is polarization?
  - According to the authors, why does it undermine democracy?
  - Is polarization always bad for democracy?

Thursday, October 29: Democratic erosion (Group C)
- Readings
- View Lecture 18
- Guiding question
  - What is Levitsky and Ziblatt’s argument? How would you know if they were wrong? How would you know if they were right?

Tuesday, November 3: No class – go vote!

Thursday, November 5: Election Day activity reports (Group A)

Tuesday, November 10: Topic and readings to be determined by students (Group B)

Thursday, November 12: Topic and readings to be determined by students (Group C)

Tuesday, November 17: Topic and readings to be determined by students (Group A)

Thursday, November 19: Topics and readings to be determined by students (Group B)

Tuesday, November 24: Policy Proposal discussions (Group C)

Thanksgiving Break

Tuesday, December 1: Group Research Design Project Online Presentations

Thursday, December 3: Group Research Design Project Online Presentations
Mental Health and Wellness Resources:

- If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit https://sco.uga.edu. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.
- UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services (https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga) or crisis support (https://www.uhs.uga.edu/info/emergencies).
- If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA (https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga) for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center.
- Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.