

International Affairs 3300: Introduction to Comparative Politics

University of Georgia, School of International and Public Affairs, Fall 2025

Course Instructor: Dr. William Acosta

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Office Hours: 10:30-12:30, Candler Hall 216

Class Time and Location: MWF, 8:00-8:50 AM, Candler Hall 2014

Course Description

This course introduces the field of comparative politics, focusing on the study of political systems around the world. The course is divided into two main parts. In the first half, we will examine democratic regimes: how they function and how they vary. In the second half, we will study authoritarian regimes, looking at their structures, methods of control, and the conditions under which they change.

The course is divided into four sections:

1. Institutions of Democracy
2. Rights and Liberties (*Reacting to the Past simulation: Egypt 1925*)
3. Institutions of Dictatorship
4. Transitions from Dictatorship to Democracy (*Reacting to the Past simulation: Argentina 1985*)

Required Texts

All required texts are available online for free through the UGA Library or eLC:

1. Gregory S. Mahler. *Comparative Politics: Exploring Concepts and Institutions Across Nations*, 6th edition (2019) – eBook available via UGA Library.

2. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita & Alastair Smith. *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior is Almost Always Good Politics* (2012) – eBook available via UGA Library.
3. Reacting to the Past Simulations (provided through eLC):
 - *Egypt 1925: Modernization and Women's Rights*
 - *Argentina 1985: Contested Memories*

Grading Policy (100 points total)

- Exam 1 (20 points): Covers Institutions of Democracy– Due Friday, Sept 19
- Paper 1 (20 points): Reflection *Egypt 1925* simulation – Due Monday, Oct 13
- Exam 2 (20 points): Covers Institutions of Dictatorship– Due Monday, Nov 10
- Paper 2 (20 points): Reflection on *Argentina 1985* simulation – Due Monday, Dec 1
- Participation (20 points): Attendance, preparation, and engagement in class and simulations.

Course Guidelines

1. Students are expected to read the assigned course materials before all class meetings and participate actively within in-class discussions and activities.
2. Check eLC regularly for updates on the course.
3. The class will follow a primarily seminar (i.e., discussion) format. I will lecture when necessary. I will break you up into groups of 5. You will work with this group for the whole semester, so exchange contact information. One of you will be the discussion leader for your group. This can change depending on the dynamics of the group. If one member of the group is missing, then 20% of that group is missing. If you are going to miss class, you must inform both me and your group members that you will not be in attendance so that they may plan accordingly. Once your group has thoroughly discussed the day's assigned readings, I will ask each group to contribute a wider class discussion.
4. Assignments are due on the dates and times given. Late work will be penalized 10% for each day it is late. After 5 days, the work will be maxed out at 50%.

5. If you need extensions, please **inform me via email**. If you tell me in person I will forget.
6. Be respectful to one another. I will not tolerate students being disrespectful or making others uncomfortable. We will discuss controversial topics in this class. Passion is fine but respect is necessary. Furthermore, only one person speaks at a time. Do not interrupt or speak over each other.
7. This is a digital free space unless I say otherwise. No laptops, tablets, or phones are allowed. Thus, bring hard copies of your talking point for your personal use. Do not work on other coursework in this class. It is disrespectful to both me and your classmates.
8. As a University of Georgia student, you are expected to adhere to the University's academic honesty policy, "A Culture of Honesty," and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must comply with the standards outlined in "A Culture of Honesty," which can be found at: [UGA Academic Honesty Policy](#). Ignorance of the academic honesty policy is not an acceptable excuse for violations. If you have questions related to course assignments or the academic honesty policy, please direct them to the instructor. Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing will be referred to Judicial Affairs, as mandated by university policy.
9. Avoid using generative AI. While AI has its uses, particularly in creating reference pages, it creates sloppy work.
10. It is the policy and practice of the University of Georgia to create an inclusive learning environment. Students requiring accommodations should discuss such matters with the me at the outset of the course. Students requesting accommodations must register with the Disability Resource Center on campus (706-542-8719, <http://www.drc.uga.edu>).

11. UGA provides both clinical and non-clinical options to support student well-being and mental health, any time, any place. Whether on campus, or studying from home or abroad, UGA Well-being Resources are here to help.
- Well-being Resources: well-being.uga.edu
 - Student Care and Outreach: sco.uga.edu
 - University Health Center: healthcenter.uga.edu
 - Counseling and Psychiatric Services: caps.uga.edu or CAPS 24/7 crisis support at 706-542-2273
 - Health Promotion/ Fontaine Center: healthpromotion.uga.edu
 - Disability Resource Center and Testing Services: drc.uga.edu
12. Any exceptions to or modifications to these rules or the syllabus are given at my discretion.
13. The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Course Schedule

Schedule and Readings

Part I: Institutions of Democracy (Weeks 1–5)

Core Text: Gregory S. Mahler, *Comparative Politics: Exploring Concepts and Institutions Across Nations* (Ch. 1–7)

Week 1

Wed Aug 13: Introduction to Comparative Politics – No reading

Fri Aug 15: What is Comparative Politics? – Mahler, Ch. 1

Week 2

Mon Aug 18: Constitutions and Regimes – Mahler, Ch. 2

Wed Aug 20: Political Institutions Overview – Mahler, Ch. 2

Fri Aug 22: Executives – Mahler, Ch. 3

Week 3

Mon Aug 25: Legislatures – Mahler, Ch. 4

Wed Aug 27: Parties and Party Systems – Mahler, Ch. 5

Fri Aug 29: Electoral Systems – Mahler, Ch. 5

Week 4

Mon Sept 1: No Class (Labor Day)

Wed Sept 3: Conclave 1492 Simulation (Day 1)

Fri Sept 5: Conclave 1492 Simulation (Day 2)

Week 5

Mon Sept 8: Conclave 1492 Simulation (Day 3)

Wed Sept 10: Judiciaries and Civil Society – Mahler, Ch. 6–7

Fri Sept 12: Review and Exam Workshop

Fri Sept 19: Exam 1 Due

Part II: Rights and Liberties (Egypt 1925 Simulation)**Week 6**

Mon Sept 22: Prep Session 1 – Imperialism and Egyptian Nationalism

Wed Sept 24: Prep Session 2 – Women's Rights and Islamic Law

Fri Sept 26: Prep Session 3 – Party Roles and Strategy

Week 7

Mon Sept 29: Game Session 1

Wed Oct 1: Game Session 2

Fri Oct 3: Game Session 3

Week 8

Mon Oct 6: Game Session 4

Wed Oct 8: Game Session 5

Fri Oct 10: Debrief Session 1

Week 9

Mon Oct 13: Debrief Session 2

Fri Oct 17: Paper 1 Due

Part III: Institutions of Dictatorship (Weeks 10–12)

Core Text: Bruce Bueno de Mesquita & Alastair Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook*

Week 10

Mon Oct 20: The Rules of Authoritarian Politics – Ch. 1–2

Wed Oct 22: The Logic of Power – Ch. 2

Fri Oct 24: Institutions as Tools of Control – Ch. 3

Week 11

Mon Oct 27: Corruption, Loyalty, and Patronage – Ch. 4

Wed Oct 29: Authoritarian Survival and Misgovernance – Ch. 5

Fri Oct 31: No Class (Fall Break)

Week 12

Mon Nov 3: Coercion and Repression – Ch. 6

Wed Nov 5: Case Study: China and Russia

Mon Nov 10: Exam 2 Due

Part IV: Transitions from Dictatorship to Democracy

Wed Nov 12: Prep Session 1 – Argentina’s Dictatorship and Dirty War

Fri Nov 14: Game Session 1

Week 14

Mon Nov 17: Game Session 2

Wed Nov 19: Game Session 3

Fri Nov 21: Game Session 4

Week 15

Mon Nov 24: Debrief Session

Wed Nov 26: No Class (Thanksgiving)

Fri Nov 28: No Class (Thanksgiving)

Week 16

Mon Dec 1: Paper 2 Due and Course Wrap-Up

Tue Dec 2: Course Evaluations