

# Introduction to Comparative Politics (INTL3300, Fall 2025)

**Instructor:** Ning He  
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**Class meeting times:** Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 12:40-1:30PM  
**Class location:** Room 267, Miller Learning Center  
**Office hours:** Monday and Wednesday 2:00-3:00PM (by appointment)

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

## Course Description

This course provides an overview of the central concepts, questions, and theories in comparative politics—the study of domestic politics around the world. As a subfield of political science, comparative politics analyzes the variations in political institutions and political behavior both within and across countries. This introductory course covers questions including the conceptualization and measurement of institutional forms across countries, how certain institutions emerge, under what conditions institutions endure, adapt, or collapse, and the impacts of institutions on political behavior and human well-being. The course is structured around four core topics: (1) the origins and impacts of modern states; (2) the measurement of regime types and theories that explain their variations; (3) democratic institutions and politics; and (4) politics in authoritarian states.

A central aim of this course is to equip students with the conceptual and analytical tools used in the field of comparative politics. These tools are intended to help students gain a scientific understanding of domestic politics across a range of contexts.

## Requirements and Grading

### Requirements

**Attendance and quizzes (10%)** Students are strongly encouraged to attend all lecture

sessions throughout the semester, although attendance will not be recorded. There will be five short, unannounced quizzes based on recent lectures and assigned readings. Each quiz will count for up to 2% of the final course grade. Make-up quizzes will not be offered unless the student provides documentation for a university-approved medical excuse or family emergency.

**Midterm and final exams (60%)** There will be two in-class exams during the semester: a midterm and a final. The midterm exam will cover course materials from Week 1 through Week 7 and will account for 20% of the final course grade. The final exam will be cumulative, encompassing all topics covered throughout the course, with greater emphasis on materials covered after Week 7. It will account for 40% of the final course grade. Both exams will include a combination of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. Both exams will be closed-book: students should not use any digital or printed resources during the exam. Make-up exams will be offered only in cases of documented, university-approved medical excuses or family emergencies, and must be arranged with the instructor in advance whenever possible.

**Response memos (30%)** Students are required to submit two response memos, each offering analytical responses to a set of questions related to specific course topics. Each memo will count for 15% of the final course grade. Memos must be typed in 12-point font with 1.5-line spacing and one-inch margins, and should not exceed four pages (excluding references). The first memo is due on September 26, and the second memo is due on November 14, both by the end of day (23:59 eastern time). The questions for the memos will be posted two weeks prior to each deadline. Late submissions will incur a penalty of 10% of the memo grade per day, unless accompanied by a university-approved medical excuse or documentation of a family emergency. Students are expected to develop their analytical responses independently, drawing on knowledge gained from lectures and course materials. The use of generative AI tools should be limited and must not replace original thinking. Submissions that rely heavily on AI-generated content will not be accepted and may result in a significant grade penalty.

### **Important Dates**

- September 26: First memo due
- October 6: Midterm exam
- November 14: Second memo due
- December 5: Final exam

## Grade Scale

Students will receive a final score out of 100, calculated by summing the points earned from all graded components described above. Decimal points in the final score will be rounded up to the nearest whole number. Final course grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

Final Score	Letter Grade
93–100	A
90–92	A–
87–89	B+
83–86	B
80–82	B–
77–79	C+
73–76	C
70–72	C–
60–69	D
0–59	F

## Course Materials

The primary course materials are the instructor’s lecture slides and the required readings, which are listed below under Course Schedule. The lecture slides will be shared each Monday before class. All readings will be posted at the start of the semester. Both the midterm and final exams will be based on the lecture slides and the required readings. Portions of the lecture content draw on the following textbook, which students may consult as an additional reference. Purchasing or consulting the textbook is optional.

- William Roberts Clark, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Third Edition. Sage Publishing, 2017

The assigned readings are a major component of the course. Students are expected to read them before the first class of each week. While it is not necessary to read every paragraph in detail, you should aim to understand the main arguments and how the authors develop and support them. Relying solely on AI-generated summaries is discouraged, as it may prevent you from engaging meaningfully with the material.

Please do not share class materials—including lecture slides, readings, assignments, and exams—without obtaining the instructor’s permission.

## Course Schedule

	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Week 1 (Aug 13-15)	<b>No class</b>	Lecture	Lecture
Week 2 (Aug 18-22)	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture
Week 3 (Aug 25-29)	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture
Week 4 (Sep 1-5)	<b>No class</b>	Lecture	Lecture
Week 5 (Sep 8-12)	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture
Week 6 (Sep 15-19)	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture
Week 7 (Sep 22-26)	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture
Week 8 (Sep 29-Oct 3)	Lecture	Lecture	<b>Review</b>
Week 9 (Oct 6-10)	<b>Midterm</b>	<b>No class</b>	<b>No class</b>
Week 10 (Oct 13-17)	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture
Week 11 (Oct 20-24)	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture
Week 12 (Oct 27-31)	Lecture	Lecture	<b>No class</b>
Week 13 (Nov 3-7)	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture
Week 14 (Nov 10-14)	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture
Week 15 (Nov 17-21)	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture
Week 16 (Nov 24-28)	<b>Review</b>	<b>No class</b>	<b>No class</b>
Week 17 (Dec 1-5)	<b>No class</b>	<b>No class</b>	<b>Final exam</b>

### Week 1 The Foundations of Comparative Politics

- *What is comparative politics? What are the scientific approaches to understanding politics?*
  - Arend Lijphart. “Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method”. *American Political Science Review* 65, no. 3 (1971): 682–693
  - Gary King, Robert O Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press, 1994 (Chapters 1.1 & 2.1)

### Week 2 The State (I)

- *What is a state? What are the origins of states? What is state capacity?*
  - Francis Fukuyama. *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011 (Chapters 2 & 5)

- Francis Fukuyama. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014 (Chapters 1 & 2)

### Week 3 The State (II)

- *How does state capacity matter? Does decentralization bring better governance outcomes?*
  - James C Scott. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press, 1998 (Chapter 1)
  - Arend Lijphart. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries (Second Edition)*. Yale University Press, 2012 (Chapter 10)

### Week 4 Varieties of Regimes

- *What is regime type? How to distinguish, measure, and categorize democracies and autocracies?*
  - Philippe C Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl. “What Democracy Is... and Is Not”. *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 3 (1991): 75–88
  - Steven Levitsky and Lucan A Way. “Elections without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism”. *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51–65

### Week 5 Transition to Democracy

- *Why are certain countries democratic while others are not? When does a democratic transition happen?*
  - Samuel P Huntington. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991 (Chapter 1)
  - Daniel Treisman. “Democracy by Mistake: How the Errors of Autocrats Trigger Transitions to Freer Government”. *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 3 (2020): 792–810

### Week 6 Electoral Systems (I)

- *How do proportional, majoritarian, and mixed systems differ?*

- Arend Lijphart. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries (Second Edition)*. Yale University Press, 2012 (Chapter 8)
- Matthew Shugart and Martin P Wattenberg. *Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: The Best of Both Worlds?* Oxford University Press, 2001 (Chapters 1 & 2)

## Week 7 Electoral Systems (II)

- *What choices do voters make under different electoral systems? How do electoral systems affect political representation?*
  - Ramin Skibba. “Which Is the Fairest Electoral System?” *Nature* 634 (2024): 280–283
  - Pippa Norris. *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior*. Cambridge University Press, 2004 (Chapters 5-7)

## Week 8 Party Systems

- *What determines how many parties compete in elections? Does the number of parties matter for democracy?*
  - Gary W Cox. *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World’s Electoral Systems*. Cambridge University Press, 1997 (Chapter 2)
  - Arend Lijphart. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries (Second Edition)*. Yale University Press, 2012 (Chapter 5)

## Week 9 Midterm

## Week 10 Government Formation

- *How do parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential democracies differ? Are presidential democracies less stable than parliamentary democracies?*
  - Arend Lijphart. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries (Second Edition)*. Yale University Press, 2012 (Chapters 6 & 7)
  - Juan J Linz. “The Perils of Presidentialism”. *Journal of Democracy* 1, no. 1 (1990): 51–69

## Week 11 Voting Behavior

- *When do citizens turn out to vote? What strategies do political parties use to gain votes? Can voters hold elected officials accountable?*
  - Arend Lijphart. “Unequal Participation: Democracy’s Unresolved Dilemma”. *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 1 (1997): 1–14
  - Christopher H Achen and Larry M Bartels. *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*. Princeton University Press, 2016 (Chapters 1 & 5)

## Week 12 Democratic Backsliding

- *What is democratic backsliding? How do democracies backslide? What types of democracies are more prone to backslide?*
  - Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. *How Democracies Die*. Crown, 2019 (Chapter 4)
  - Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman. “Democratic Decline in the United States: What Can We Learn from Middle-Income Backsliding?” *Perspectives on Politics* 19, no. 1 (2021): 28–44

## Week 13 Politics in Authoritarian Regimes

- *What is authoritarian power-sharing? How do dictators maintain their hold on power? Why are some authoritarian regimes more durable than others?*
  - Ronald Wintrobe. *The Political Economy of Dictatorship*. Cambridge University Press, 1998 (Chapters 1 & 2)
  - Daniel Treisman and Sergei Guriev. *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*. Princeton University Press, 2022 (Chapters 1, 2, 5)

## Week 14 Democracy, Autocracy, and Development

- *Does democracy foster economic growth? Why do some autocracies oversee fast economic growth?*

- Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson. *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. Crown Publishers, 2012 (Chapters 3 & 5)
- Mancur Olson. “Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development”. *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 567–576

## Week 15 Political Violence

- *Why are some authoritarian regimes more repressive than others? What are the consequences of state violence?*
  - Timur Kuran. *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification*. Harvard University Press, 1995 (Chapters 1, 5, 15)
  - Arturas Rozenas, Sebastian Schutte, and Yuri Zhukov. “The Political Legacy of Violence: The Long-Term Impact of Stalin’s Repression in Ukraine”. *The Journal of Politics* 79, no. 4 (2017): 1147–1161

## Week 16 Review Session

## Week 17 Final Exam

# Course Policies

## Classroom Policies

I am committed to fostering an inclusive, respectful, and accessible learning environment for all students. If you require special accommodations due to disability, I will work with you and the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to ensure the necessary support is provided. For more information, please visit the DRC website: <https://drc.uga.edu>.

Students are expected to observe the following classroom policies:

- To support a focused learning environment, any activities that may disrupt the lecture are not permitted during class.
- Laptops and other digital devices are permitted in the classroom, but should only be used for class-related activities. Please ensure that all devices are silenced to avoid disruptions.



- Video or audio recording of lectures is not permitted without consent of the instructor.

### **Communication and Office Hours**

I respond to emails sent between Monday and Thursday within 24 hours. Emails sent after Thursday will be answered by the following Monday.

Office hours are by appointment only. To schedule a 20-minute meeting, please visit my website (<https://www.hening.org>) and reserve a time slot.

### **Academic Integrity**

As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to abide by the University's academic honesty policy and the Student Honor Code. A Culture of Honesty, the University's policy and procedures for handling cases of suspected dishonesty, can be found at [honesty.uga.edu](https://honesty.uga.edu). The Student Honor Code provides that "I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others." Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation.

## **Mental Health and Wellness Resources**

UGA Well-being Resources promote student success by cultivating a culture that supports a more active, healthy, and engaged student community.

Anyone needing assistance is encouraged to contact Student Care & Outreach (SCO) in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-8479 or visit [sco.uga.edu](https://sco.uga.edu). Student Care & Outreach helps students navigate difficult circumstances by connecting them with the most appropriate resources or services. They also administer the Embark@UGA program which supports students experiencing, or who have experienced, homelessness, foster care, or housing insecurity.

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](https://well-being.uga.edu)

- Student Care and Outreach: [sco.uga.edu](https://sco.uga.edu)
- University Health Center: [healthcenter.uga.edu](https://healthcenter.uga.edu)
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services: [caps.uga.edu](https://caps.uga.edu) or CAPS 24/7 crisis support at 706-542-2273
- Health Promotion/ Fontaine Center: [healthpromotion.uga.edu](https://healthpromotion.uga.edu)
- Accessibility and Testing: [accessibility.uga.edu](https://accessibility.uga.edu)

Additional information, including free digital well-being resources, can be accessed through the UGA app or by visiting <https://well-being.uga.edu>.