

# PL SC 003: Introduction to Comparative Politics

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## Course Information

Class Time: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 8.00-8.50  
Place: 119 [Osmond Lab](#)  
Course Website: [Angel](#)

## Contact Information for Professor

Name: Matt Golder  
Homepage: <https://files.nyu.edu/mrg217/public/>  
Course Webpage: <https://files.nyu.edu/mrg217/public/comparative.html>  
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Office Hours: Wednesday 9-10.

## Contact Information for Teaching Assistants

Name: Charles Crabtree  
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Office: 231 [Pond Lab](#)  
Office Hours: Fridays, 10-11

Name: Sarah Liu  
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Office: 214 [Pond Lab](#)  
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2-4

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## Course Description

**Goals:** The course has three primary objectives: (i) to introduce students to the major questions in comparative politics, (ii) to acquaint them with the field's best answers, and (iii) to give them the tools necessary to think critically about those answers. The course adopts an explicitly strategic approach to politics. Ultimately, the course suggests that the behavior of rulers and the ruled is most usefully understood as the interaction between individuals seeking goals in an environment in which goal attainment is complicated by the choices of other actors. Since game theory is a useful tool for understanding such interactions, it is used throughout the course whenever it is illuminating. The course also argues that explanations should be confronted with as much potentially falsifying evidence as possible. Consequently, every effort is made to present students with information about rigorous empirical tests of the theoretical arguments that they encounter and to try to give them the tools to begin to critically engage such evidence themselves. The

course views comparative politics as a subfield of political science, which, like all of science, is about comparison. In the course, students make many comparisons across disparate contexts and attempt to use such comparisons to test claims made about the political world. In doing so, they learn about the similarities and differences among countries, both democratic and authoritarian. They also learn about the conditions under which some claims about the political world apply or do not apply. This course introduces students to the study of comparative political science.

**Types of Questions:** The course is organized around a set of questions that comparative scholars have asked repeatedly over the past several decades: What is the state and where did it come from? What is democracy? Why are some countries democracies whereas others are dictatorships? How might we explain transitions to democracy? Does the kind of regime a country has affect the material well-being of its citizens? Why are ethnic groups politicized in some countries but not in others? Why do some countries have many parties whereas some have only a few? How do governments form, and what determines the type of governments that take office? What are the material and normative implications associated with these different types of government? How does the type of democracy in a country affect the survival of that regime? Using the latest research in the field of comparative politics, we examine competing answers to substantively important questions such as these and evaluate the proposed arguments for their logical consistency and empirical accuracy.

**Methodology:** In addressing the substantive questions that are central to this course, students are introduced to a variety of methods that have become central to the study of comparative politics. For example, students are exposed to tools such as decision theory, social choice theory, game theory, and statistical analysis. Students learn how to calculate expected utilities, how to solve complete information games in strategic and extensive form, how to solve repeated games, how to solve simple games with incomplete information, how to evaluate one-dimensional and two-dimensional spatial models, and how to interpret simple statistical results.

**Note:** While this course is an ‘introduction’ to comparative politics, this does not mean that the material covered will be easy. Indeed, many of the concepts and methods introduced in this class may well be more complicated than those addressed in upper-level classes. ‘Introduction’ simply means that the material addressed in this class is foundational and will allow students to better understand the subject matter examined in upper level classes.

This syllabus is designed to provide an overview to the course. Clickable links are printed in [Penn State blue](#).

### **Teaching Assistants:**

[Charles Crabtree](#) and [Sarah Liu](#) will be the teaching assistants for this class. They will be your primary resource for reviewing the material that we cover in class. Throughout the semester, they will hold regular office hours and will conduct occasional review sessions.

## Course Requirements

*Attendance:* Attendance at lectures is highly recommended. In my previous classes, attendance at lectures has been a good predictor of a student's performance on homework and exams. You will find it difficult to pass this class if you do not attend regularly. If you do miss class, you are expected to get notes from a fellow student – 'private make-up lectures' with the professor will not take place.

*Readings:* It is assumed that students will do all of the assigned readings and you should come to class prepared to participate in discussions. You are encouraged to volunteer questions and observations; I will call on students at random with questions from time to time.

*Assignments:* There will be almost weekly homework assignments, most of which will be done on Angel. In the interests of fairness, homework assignments that are handed in late will not be graded.

*Exams:* There will be three exams – two midterms and a final. Exam makeups will only be possible in the most extenuating of circumstances (oversleeping, leaving early for Thanksgiving etc. are not suitable excuses). If you are extremely ill or have a university-accepted excuse for missing an exam, please notify me *prior* to the test date. I will only consider your request if you make it prior to the exam. Material covered on the exams will come from lectures, the assigned readings, and homework assignments.

The final exam will, among other things, include a short essay question which is stated below:

Suppose that you are writing a constitution for a new democracy in a large country with many social and ethnic cleavages and a per capita income of about \$6,500 in 1985 ppp dollars. You would like to do everything you can to try to ensure the consolidation of your democratic regime.

1. What other goals should you have in mind when writing your constitution?
2. What specific institutional form would you choose? Would you choose a federal or unitary system? Proportional representation or a single-member district plurality electoral system? Would you choose a parliamentary or a presidential form of democracy?
3. When answering these questions, give a sense as to how you arrived at your answers. Also indicate why you think the choices that you've made are compatible with each other.

## Exam Dates

- Midterm 1: Friday, October 4
- Midterm 2: Friday, November 1
- Final Exam: TBA

## Grading:

Your final grade is a weighted average of the three exams and homework assignments: Midterms 1 and 2 are *each* worth 25%; the final is worth 30%; the homework assignments are worth 20%.

I will use the following scale to calculate your course grade:

A	93-100	C+	77-79.9
A-	90-92.9	C	70-76.9
B+	87-89.9	D	60-69.9
B	83-86.9	F	59.9 and below
B-	80-82.9		

## Required Text/Materials

Clark, William, Matt Golder & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Washington D.C.: CQ Press.

This book has been ordered and will be available at the university bookstore. Additional readings will be made available on Angel and on the [course webpage](#).

## Academic Dishonesty

The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor.

In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in class or take home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found [here](#).

## Disabilities

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services. For further information regarding policies, rights and responsibilities please visit the [Office for Disability Services \(ODS\) Web site](#). Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable accommodations.

## Tentative Schedule

This schedule should be treated as tentative and flexible. It may be the case that it takes us more or less time for a particular topic than I have allotted here. We will adapt accordingly. Note, however, that I will not alter the exam dates.

**Week 1: August 26-30** – What is comparative politics? What is Science?

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Preface, Chapters 1-2.

**\*\* No Class on Friday, August 30 \*\***

**Week 2: September 2-6** – What is science? What is politics?

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapters 2-3.

**\*\* Labor Day (No Class): September 2 \*\***

**Week 3: September 9-13** – What is politics? What is the state?

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapters 3-4.

*Optional:* Tilly, Charles. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." In Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer, & Theda Skocpol (ed.) *Bringing the State Back In*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

**Week 4: September 16-20** – What is the state? Democracy and dictatorship: conceptualization and measurement.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapters 4-5.

**Week 5: September 23-27** – The economic determinants of democracy and dictatorship.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 6.

Ross, Michael L. 2001. “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” *World Politics* 53: 325-361.

**Week 6: September 30 - October 4** – The cultural determinants of democracy and dictatorship.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 7.

Fish, M. Steven. 2002. “Islam and Authoritarianism.” *World Politics* 55: 4-37.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Midterm Exam (Friday, October 4)**

**Week 7: October 7-11** – Democratic transitions.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 8.

Kalyvas, Stathis. 2000. “Commitment Problems in Emerging Democracies: The Case of Religious Parties.” *Comparative Politics* 32: 379-399.

*Optional:* Kuran, Timur. 1989. “Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989.” *World Politics* 44: 7-48.

*Optional:* King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, & Margaret E. Roberts. 2013. “How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression.” *American Political Science Review* 107: 326-343.

**Week 8: October 14-18** – Democracy or dictatorship – does it make a difference? Varieties of dictatorship. Selectorate theory.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapters 9-10.

*Optional:* Smith, Alastair. 2005. “Why International Organizations Will Continue to Fail Their Development Goals.” *Perspectives on Politics* 3: 565-567.

*Optional:* Gandhi, Jennifer & Ellen Lust-Okar. 2009. “Elections Under Authoritarianism.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 403-422.

**Week 9: October 21-25** – Problems of group decision making.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 11.

**Week 10: October 28 - November 1** – Parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential democracies: Making and breaking governments.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 12.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Midterm Exam (Friday, November 1)**

**Week 11: November 4-8** – Elections and electoral systems.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 13.

**Week 12: November 11-15** – Social cleavages and party systems.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 14.

*Optional:* Posner, Daniel N. “The Political Salience of Cultural Differences: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi.” *American Political Science Review* 98: 529-545.

**Week 13: November 18-22** – Institutional veto players.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 15.

**\*\* Thanksgiving Break (No Class): November 25-29 \*\***

**Week 14: December 2-6** – Consequences of democratic institutions.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 16.

**Week 15: December 9-13** – Consequences of democratic institutions.

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2012. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Chapter 16.

**Final Exam (TBA)**