



Course information 2026-27

PS2082 Comparative Politics

General information

MODULE LEVEL: 5

CREDIT: 30

NOTIONAL STUDY TIME: 300 hours

Summary

This course is centred on the study of political institutions, analysing these institutions from a comparative perspective. We will consider how institutions vary across democratic and non-democratic regimes and investigate how politics operates in both developed and developing countries. The course tackles thematic topics such as state capacity, economic growth, the welfare state, political violence, and ethnic and national identities, among others.

Conditions

CONDITION TYPE:

Prerequisites: If taken as part of a BSc degree, the following course(s) must be attempted before you can register on this course:

- PS1130 Introduction to modern political thought **OR**
- PS1172 Introduction to political science.

Aims and objectives

The main aims of this course are to:

- introduce the discipline of comparative politics, including its key concepts, theories and methodologies
- demonstrate the application of different comparative methods to the study of politics, including the formulation and testing of hypotheses through both qualitative and quantitative methods
- provide analytical tools for comparing political systems, institutions and behaviours across different countries and contexts
- encourage critical understanding of how political institutions shape political outcomes such as stability, legitimacy and policy effectiveness
- bridge theory and empirical evidence, using real-world case studies and applications to demonstrate how concepts operate in practice.

Learning outcomes

At the end of this course, and having completed the Essential reading and activities, you should be able to:

- understand the foundations and methods of comparative politics as a discipline
- analyse the state, including its development and effectiveness across different regions
- examine nations and society, including different aspects of identity
- explore different political–economic systems and the impact of wealth and inequality
- investigate democratic regimes, including how they are measured and compared
- analyse nondemocratic regimes, including the origins and sources of authoritarianism
- understand developed democracies and how they balance freedom and equality
- understand communism and post-communism in a historical and contemporary context
- examine the issues that developing countries face, and the legacy of colonialism.

Employability outcomes

The course will teach skills that will enhance employability, including the ability to:

- Complex problem solving
- Decision making
- Communication

Essential reading

For full details please refer to the reading list.

The main textbook for this course is: *Essentials of Comparative Politics* (8th Edition), by Patrick N. O’Neil.

In addition, examples of other readings include:

- How Dictatorships Work (2018) – Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, Erica Frantz.
- Treisman, Daniel. "Democracy by mistake: How the errors of autocrats trigger transitions to freer government." *American Political Science Review* 114.3 (2020): 792-810.
- Putnam, R. D., R. Leonardi, and R. Y. Nanetti. "Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy." (1993).
- Frymer, Paul, and Jacob M. Grumbach. "Labor unions and white racial politics." *American Journal of Political Science* 65.1 (2021): 225-240.
- Robinson, Amanda Lea. "Ethnic Visibility." *American Journal of Political Science* (2023).
- Martin, Lanny W., and Georg Vanberg. 2014. "Parties and policymaking in multiparty governments: the legislative median, ministerial autonomy, and the coalition compromise."
- Tavits, Margit. "The development of stable party support: Electoral dynamics in postcommunist Europe." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(2): 283-298.

- O'Brien, Diana Z., and Johanna Rickne. 2016. "Gender quotas and women's political leadership." *American Political Science Review* 110.1: 112-126.
- Carey John M. 2007. "Competing principals political institutions and party unity in legislative voting." *American Journal of Political Science* 51(1): 92-107.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1999. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (chapters 1-3).

Assessment

This course is assessed by a three-hour and fifteen-minute closed-book written examination.

Syllabus

The following topics will be examined:

- The state and state capacity
- Presidential and parliament systems
- Electoral and party systems
- Wealth and development
- Welfare systems
- Identity politics
- Elites and nondemocratic rule
- Political violence