

Course information 2025-26

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

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

After taking this course students should have a good understanding of major approaches and themes in the study of comparative politics. They should be able to answer questions such as:

- What are political institutions and how should we study them?
- How do elites retain power in democratic and nondemocratic settings?
- What role does state capacity play in promoting economic and human development?
- What is the welfare state, and is it under threat?
- Why does political violence occur?
- How do different electoral systems influence political representation?

Learning outcomes

At the end of this course, after completing the Essential reading and activities, students should have a good understanding of the way in which political institutions operate across democratic and non-democratic settings, and across developed and developing countries.

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