



Course information 2023-24

PS2082 Comparative politics

General information

COURSE LEVEL: 5

CREDIT: 30

NOTIONAL STUDY TIME: 300 hours

Summary

This course encompasses how we form or develop concepts of democratic political institutions and some of the different ways in which democracies can be organised.

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

The main aim of this course is to enable students to address questions such as the following:

- What are political institutions and how should we study them?
- Why does democracy require institutions?
- How do institutions relate to legitimate political authority?
- How does political culture relate to institutions?
- What is the relationship between democratic government and legitimate authority?
- How are democracies with presidential systems different from democracies with parliamentary ones?
- How do different electoral systems influence differences in party systems?
- How do different types of legal system influence the working of political institutions?
- How does political culture influence bureaucratic behaviour?
- How do democracies decentralise power to regional or local government?

Learning outcomes

At the end of this course and having completed the essential reading and activities students should have a good understanding of the way in which different democratic institutional systems work.

Specifically, students should be able to explain:

- Why institutional analysis is a key aspect of comparative politics
- How institutional stability and political legitimisation interact
- What is meant by political culture and how it influences institutional behaviour

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- How presidential systems differ in key respects from parliamentary ones
- The relationship between elective and non-elective dimensions of the democratic state
- The concept of federalism and how it differs from local government.

Essential reading

For full details please refer to the reading list.

Ackerman, B. 'The Rise of World Constitutionalism' *Virginia Law Review*, 83/4 (May 1997), pp.771-797

Booth J and Seligson M *The Legitimacy Puzzle in Latin America; Political Support and Democracy in Eight Nations* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Bowen, J. *Why the French Don't like Headscarves; Islam, the State and the Public Sphere* (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2006) [ISBN 97801521734202].

Connolly, W. (ed.) *Legitimacy and the State*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) [ISBN 9780814713952].

Dahl, R.A. *Democracy and its Critics*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) second edition [ISBN 9780300049381].

Dahl R.A. *On Democracy* (New Haven; Yale U.P 1998) [ISBN 9780300084559].

R. Elgie, 'The perils of semi-presidentialism: Are they exaggerated?' *Democratization* 15/1 (2008), pp.49-66)

P Lassman and R Speers *Weber's Political Writings* (Cambridge texts in the History of Political thought, 1994) (to be used as an alternative to Connolly 1984)

Linz, J. 'The Perils of Presidentialism', *Journal of Democracy* 1: 51–69 (1990).

March, J.G. and J.P. Olson 'The New Institutionalism', *American Political Science Review* (September 1984) 73(3): 734–50

Roberts A *The Quality of Democracy in Eastern Europe; Public Preference and Policy Reforms* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009) [ISBN 9780521110334]

Assessment

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

Syllabus

This course is concerned mainly with the question of how different kinds of political systems work. It focuses both on the political process and on the role of government. The syllabus considers mainly democratic government and considers the main variations between different kinds of democracy.

The following topics will be examined:

- presidential and parliamentary systems
- legitimacy and political culture
- the nature and role of the state; bureaucracy; the judicial power, the role of the military
- forms of political organisation; parties and interest groups
- electoral systems and party competition
- federal and unitary states.

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