

# POLI 212: Introduction to Comparative Politics

Dogus Aktan

Fall 2024

HRZ 210

MWF // 11:00-11:50

## Contact Information

**Instructor:** Dr. Dogus Aktan

**Office:** Herzstein Hall 107

**Email:** da105@rice.edu

**Office Hours:** TR, 2:30 - 4:00 pm

## Course Overview and Learning Outcomes

This course introduces students to key concepts, themes, and approaches in the comparative study of politics. The field of comparative politics is extremely large and varied. We will tackle general questions such as, what are the determinants of democracy? We will also look at specific cases, such as China's economic growth as an authoritarian regime.

This course is designed as a survey of some of the major questions and findings in Comparative Politics, which will help students to think rigorously about political phenomena. It will also provide solid foundation for students to prepare them for more advanced classes.

The course will also explore how political scientists try to understand complex real world phenomena by using theory and empirical evidence.

Students who apply themselves will be have:

- **Substantive knowledge:** Students will be able to recognize a large number of key terms in political science. They will also be familiar with many of the criteria and theories used to classify and compare types of governments across world.
- **Critical thinking:** Students will be able to use the concepts and theories in Comparative Politics to explain real life political events. They will also gain proficiency in summarizing and evaluating academic writing in political science.

- **Informed Citizenship:** Students will be able to place their countries' politics in a broader context and thus, become more informed participants in the political process.

## Course Readings

There are no required books to buy for this course. We will discuss a variety of readings from academic journals, excerpts from various textbooks, and the popular press. All readings will be made available on Canvas. If you want to have a text book in hand to follow through, I am happy to recommend a few.

I don't assign a lot of readings but I expect you to do *all* of them *before* the class and be prepared to discuss them. As a rule of thumb, you should expect to read somewhere between 20 to 30 pages for each Monday and Wednesday session. I don't expect you to read every single word of every reading, but you should be able to extract key elements such as the author's goals, arguments, and the evidence they present.

I am aware some of the readings can be challenging at a first glance, particularly if they include methodologies you are not familiar with it. Don't be discouraged. The readings (both individual readings and the overall load) are chosen so the main arguments will be accessible to you. I will give you specific instructions (such as what sections to focus on) about each reading when necessary.

## Class Format and Policy

The class format throughout will combine lecture, discussion, and in-class activities such as simulations.

Monday and Wednesday sessions will be focused on lectures, although students are still encouraged to ask questions and engage with the material.

Friday sessions will be dedicated to class discussions, simulations, and student questions. These simulations will aim to demonstrate key dynamics of politics that are covered in the course such as collective action and principal-agent problems.

## Policy on Student Questions and Emails

I am always happy to answer student questions during office hours or over e-mail. I will generally reply to e-mails within 24 hours but make sure you send your questions in a timely manner. If I don't respond to your email within 2 days, please feel free to remind me in person or send a reminder email.

Keep in mind that most questions you may have (about assignments, policies, etc...) can be answered by simply taking a close look at the syllabus. Every student should read the entire syllabus carefully at the beginning of the class and before sending me a question. When you have finished reading the syllabus for the first time, send me an e-mail, telling me what your favorite animal is.

## Assignments and Grades

|                                 |        |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| Participation                   | : 20%  |
| Short Reaction-Papers (2 Total) | : 20%  |
| Response Papers (2 Total)       | : 30%  |
| Final Exam                      | : 30%  |
| Optional Bonus Assignments      | : 0-5% |

### Participation 20%

Students are expected to attend most, preferably all, class sessions, and to contribute to the class by an active combination of asking questions in lecture, participating in discussions and playing an active role in simulations and other activities.

### Short Reaction Papers 20%, 10% each

Each student is required to write **two** short (around 2 pages) reaction papers. The paper will focus on the readings in one session and summarize the main arguments of the assigned reading(s) and evaluate the evidence provided. This can be done in bullet point format. Due before class on Friday at the end of the Module.

### Response Papers 30%, 15% each

Each student is required to write **two** response (around 4 pages) response paper at the end of modules 3 and 4. The paper will respond to a question using the assigned readings in the chosen (and previous) modules. Due before class on Friday after next Module starts.

### Final Exam 30%

There will be a final exam. It will cover the whole course, consist of short answer questions and a longer essay question.

## Optional Bonus Assignments (Max One) 0-5%

Throughout the semester, there might be optional assignments. These assignments might come up in various ways. For example, there might be relevant current events that the syllabus could not have accounted for. Or, class discussions might come across interesting topics that we don't get a chance to explore adequately. In these cases, I will come up with short assignments that are entirely voluntary. You will not get penalized for not doing them, but you will get bonus points if you choose to do them. Other options include:

- Writing a short simulation recap memo.
- Volunteering to lead the class discussion on a Friday session.
- Doing well in a short oral examination or presentation.

## Assignment Calendar

|                       | Assigned   | Due          |
|-----------------------|------------|--------------|
| First Reaction Paper  | -          | September 20 |
| First Response Paper  | October 18 | October 25   |
| Second Response Paper | November 8 | November 15  |
| Second Reaction Paper | -          | November 29  |
| Final Exam            | TBD        | TBD          |

## Grade Policies

All assignments and exams must be completed on time in order to pass this course. Make ups will only be granted under extraordinary circumstances such as documented and verified medical or family emergencies. All documentation corresponding to such emergencies should be forwarded to the professor. Personal reasons are insufficient excuses for making up missed assignments, exams, or quizzes.

All assignments must be submitted via Canvas. I do NOT accept assignments via e-mail.

Students must complete ALL mandatory assignments to be able to receive a passing grade.

I do not grade on a curve. Each student's work will be evaluated independently based on its quality. It is possible for every student in the class to get an A. However, getting such high marks will require hard work on your part.

If a student wishes to dispute their grade on an assignment, they must contact me within 48 hours of receiving their grade and set an appointment to discuss it. At this appointment they must bring a typed summary of the reasons why they believe the grade is unfair. I

will then reevaluate the assignment on the basis of these reasons. All revised grades are final, and they may be lower than the original grade.

## **Absence Policies**

I expect you to attend all scheduled classes. An absence will be considered unexcused unless you give me documentation of the absence. You should also check out the Rice University absence policies [here](#).

## **Rice Honor Code**

In this course, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you matriculated at this institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the Honor System Handbook at <http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/>. This handbook outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of your academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process.

## **Disability Resource Center**

If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Disability Resource Center (Allen Center, Room 111 / [adarice@rice.edu](mailto:adarice@rice.edu) / x5841) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

## **Mental Health Statement**

If you are having trouble completing your coursework, please reach out to the Wellbeing and Counseling Center. Rice University provides cost-free mental health services through the Wellbeing and Counseling Center to help you manage personal challenges that threaten your personal or academic well-being. If you believe you are experiencing unusual amounts of stress, sadness, or anxiety, the Student Wellbeing Office or the Rice Counseling Center may be able to assist you. The Wellbeing and Counseling Center is located in the Gibbs Wellness Center and can be reached at 713-348-3311 (available 24/7).

## **Title IX Responsible Employee Notification**

Rice University cares about your wellbeing and safety. Rice encourages any student who has experienced an incident of harassment, pregnancy discrimination or gender discrimination or relationship, sexual, or other forms interpersonal violence to seek support through The SAFE Office. Students should be aware when seeking support on campus that most employees, including myself, as the instructor/TA, are required by Title IX to disclose all incidents of non-consensual interpersonal behaviors to Title IX professionals on campus who can act to support that student and meet their needs. For more information, please visit [safe.rice.edu](https://safe.rice.edu) or email [titleixsupport@rice.edu](mailto:titleixsupport@rice.edu).

## **Syllabus Change Policy**

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

# Course Schedule

## Module 1: Introduction, Overview, and Building Blocks

### Week 1: Introduction, Overview

- Monday, August 26: Introduction and Logistics
  - Syllabus
- Wednesday, August 28: Overview of Comparative Politics
  - Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune. *Logic of Comparative Inquiry*. Pages 3-30
- Friday, August 30: Class Activity

### Week 2: Politics, Institutions, and Strategic Action

- Monday, September 2 - NO CLASS
- Wednesday, September 4 : Overview of Politics and Strategic Decision-Making
  - William Roberts Clark, Matt Golder, Sona Nadenichek Golder. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Pages 88-120
- Friday, September 6: : Class Activity / Discussion

## Module 2: The Modern State and Political Regimes

In this module we first examine the modern administrative nation state and nature of political regimes. What are the origins of strong states? Why do state institutions differ across countries? We then look at how political scientists conceptualize and classify political regimes. What does democracy mean? How do we measure it?

### Week 3: Understanding the Modern State

- Monday, September 9: Origins of Modern State in Europe
  - Anna Grzymala-Busse. “Tilly Goes to Church: The Medieval and Religious Origins of the European State” BroadStreet
  - For a more thorough explanation, you can check out the academic article that the above blog is based here.
  - For a different, more philosophical take on the process of state formation focused on China, you might also read here
- Wednesday, September 11: Comparing European Experience

- Mark Dincecco and Yuhua Wang. “Violent Conflict and Political Development Over the Long Run: China Versus Europe” *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Jeffrey Herbst. “War and the State in Africa” *International Security*
- Friday, September 13: Class Activity / Discussion

#### Week 4: Political Regimes: Concepts, Definitions, and Measurement

- Monday, September 16: Definitions of Democracy and Dictatorship
  - Robert Dahl. *Polyarchy*. Pages 1-10
  - Terry L. Karl and Philippe Schmitter. “What Democracy Is... and Is Not” *Journal of Democracy*
- Wednesday, September 18: Measuring and Classifying Regimes
  - Michael Coppedge et al. “Two Persistent Dimensions of Democracy: Contestation and Inclusiveness” *The Journal of Politics*
  - Milan Svolik. *Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Pages 19-27
- Friday, September 20: **First Reaction Paper Due**, Class Activity / Discussion

### Module 3: Understanding Democracies

In this module we focus on democracies. We first look at how democratization occurs in the first place. Then we look the variation in key democratic institutions, such as elections and across. We examine how these institutions shape the incentives for the elites and the masses.

#### Week 5: Determinants of Democracy

- Monday, September 23: What causes democratization? An Overview
  - Jan Teorell. *Determinants of Democratization*. Pages 16-38
  - Read if you have time:
    - Stephen Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman. “Democratization During the Third Wave” *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Wednesday, September 25: Culture, Economy, and External Threats (or Opportunities)
  - **Culture:** Christian Welzel and Ronald Inglehart. “Liberalism, Postmaterialism, and the Growth of Freedom” *International Review of Sociology*
  - **Economy:** Eva Bellin. “The Dog that Didn’t Bark: The Political Complacency of the Emerging Middle Class (with Illustrations from the Middle East)” *Political Power and Social Theory*



- Read if you have time after reading the first two:  
**External Threats:** Douglas M. Gibling and Jaroslav Tir. “Settled Borders and Regime Type: Democratic Transitions as Consequences of Peaceful Territorial Transfers” *American Journal of Political Science*
- Friday, September 27: Class Discussion and Review

## Week 6: Varieties of Democracy

- Monday, September 30: Parliamentary, Presidential, and Semi-Presidential Democracies
  - Scott Mainwaring, “Presidentialism, Multipartyism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination”, *Comparative Political Studies*
- Wednesday, October 2: Presidentialism or Parliamentarism, Does it Matter?
  - Jose Antonio Cheibub, *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy*, Pages 68-94
- Friday, October 4: Class Discussion

## Week 7: Elections and Electoral Systems

- Monday, October 7: Overview of Electoral Systems
  - Richard W. Soudriette and Andrew Ellis. “Electoral Systems Today: A Global Snapshot.” *Journal of Democracy*
  - Arend Lijphart. “Constitutional Choices for New Democracies.” *Journal of Democracy*
- Wednesday, October 9
  - Donald L. Horowitz. “Electoral Systems: A Primer for Decision Makers” *Journal of Democracy*
  - William Roberts Clark, Matt Golder, Sona Nadenichek Golder. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Pages 738-745. (Pages 535-565 are a handy reference in case you need it)
- Friday, October 11: Class Activity

## Week 8: Political Parties in Democracies

- Monday, October 14 - NO CLASS
- Wednesday, October 16: Party Systems and Their Effects
  - Carol Ann Drogus and Stephen Walter Orvis. “Formal Institutions: Political Parties and Party Systems” in *Introducing Comparative Politics in Concepts and Cases in Context*
  - Michael J. Sodaro. *Comparative Politics: A Global Introduction* Pages 274-283
- Friday, October 18: **First Response Paper Assigned**, Class Discussion

## Module 4: Understanding Authoritarian Regimes

We start by examining how democracies turn into authoritarian regimes. Similar to previous module, we examine institutional variation across authoritarian regimes and how this variation the prospects for authoritarian rulers and their citizens. Finally we examine why seemingly democratic institutions such as elections are routinely employed by dictators.

### Week 9: Stability and Demise of Democracies

- Monday, October 21: Is Democracy in Retreat?
  - Michael K. Miller. “How Little and Meng’s Objective Approach Fails in Democracies” *PS: Political Science & Politics*
  - Andrew Little and Anne Meng. “Measuring Democratic Backsliding” *PS: Political Science & Politics*
- Wednesday, October 23: Causes of Democratic Erosion
  - Milan Svolik “Polarization versus Democracy” *Journal of Democracy*
  - Anna Grzymala-Busse and Monika Nalepa. “Why are there protests in Poland? Here are the five things you need to know.” *Washington Post*
- Friday, October 25: Class Discussion

### Week 10: Varieties of Dictatorship

- Monday, October 28: Types of Dictators
  - Milan Svolik. *Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Pages 1-19
  - Read if you have time:  
Jennifer Ghandi, *Political Institutions under Dictatorship* Pages 12-34
- Wednesday, October 30: Authoritarian Regimes and Their Survival
  - Abel Escriba-Folch and Joseph Wright. *Foreign Pressure and the Politics of Authoritarian Survival*
- Friday, November 1: Class Activity

### Week 11: Elections, Political Parties, and other Institutions in Dictatorships

- Monday, November 4: Political Parties
  - Beatriz Magaloni and Ruth Kricheli. “Political Order and One-Party Rule” *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Wednesday, November 6: Elections
  - Jennifer Ghandi and Ellen Lust-Okar “Elections Under Authoritarianism” *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Friday, November 8: **Second Response Paper Assigned**, Class Discussion

## Module 5: How do Regimes Matter?

Having examined both democratic and authoritarian regimes, we can ask big, important questions: How do different regimes types matter for the well-being of their citizens? Does democracy increase or hinder economic growth? Are authoritarian regimes always more violent?

### Week 12: Development and Welfare

- Monday, November 11: Do Democracies Promote More Economic Growth?
  - William Roberts Clark, Matt Golder, Sona Nadenichek Golder. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Pages 425-454
- Wednesday, November 13: Is China an Outlier?
  - Yuen Yuen Ang *China's Gilded Age: Paradox of Economic Boom and Vast Corruption* Pages 1-22
- Friday, November 15: Class Discussion

### Week 13: Human Rights and Contentious Politics

- Monday, November 18: Does Democracy Constrain State Violence?
  - Christian Davenport. “Democratic Pacification: An Empirical Assessment” *International Studies Quarterly*
- Wednesday, November 20: How Do Protests Differ Across Regime Types?
  - Peter Lorentzen. “Designing Contentious Politics in Post-1989 China” *Modern China*
- Friday, November 22: Review Session

### Week 14: Regime Type and Gender Equality

- Monday, November 25: Regime Type and Gender Equality
  - Elin Bjarnegård and Pär Zetterberg. “How Autocrats Weaponize Women’s Rights” *Journal of Democracy*
- Wednesday, November 27 - NO CLASS
- Friday, November 29 - **Second Reaction Paper Due**, NO CLASS

## Module 6: Review and Recap

### Week 15: Review and Recap

- Monday, December 2: Things that could (perhaps should) have been in the syllabus
  - Readings TBD by student vote
- Wednesday, December 4 - Class Overview and Q & A
- Friday, December 6 - Final Exam Workshop