

POLI 212: Introduction to Comparative Politics: Europe and North America

POLI 212
Fall 2024
MWF 12:35-1:25
McConnell Engineering Building 204

Prof. Maria Popova
Ferrier 462
Office Hrs: Tue 3-4pm; W 2-3pm

Course description

This course is an introduction to fundamental comparative politics concepts and research that focuses on Europe and North America. Comparative politics is a subfield of political science that focuses on the domestic politics of individual countries, not on the interaction among countries in the international arena. The topics covered include: state and state institutions, regimes, form of government, parties and party systems, elections, rule of law, nationalism, civil society, identity, populism, and regime transitions—democratization and autocratization. The first part of the course introduces the concepts through foundational readings. The second part of the course offers a brief introduction to democracies in Europe and North America—some of the main achievements, as well as the current challenges these polities face. You can expect to come away from this course with a solid background in the main concepts and themes in the literature on the politics of Europe and North America. The course will prepare you for advanced courses in European and North American politics, as well as for advanced courses on the substantive themes covered in this course but focusing on different regions.

Required Readings

This course requires a significant amount of reading. If you fall behind it will be difficult to catch up.

I have ordered one collection and it is available for purchase at Paragraphe Bookstore on McGill College. You can also buy it at Amazon.

Patrick H. O’Neil and Ronald Rogowski, *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics* (WW Norton, 5th edition), 2018.

Purchasing the book is strongly recommended. However, if you’d prefer not to buy it, you can look through the table of contents for the articles/excerpts that I have assigned and track down the original articles through McGill library and read those. In some cases, the book contains an excerpt, rather than the full article, but reading the full article instead will not be a liability, but an asset for your learning objectives.

The rest of the articles are accessible online through McGill Library and posted in the Readings folder under the Content tab on myCourses.

Assessments

Students will be evaluated on the basis of four measures:

- 1) Conference participation (10%)
- 2) In-class midterm (30%)
- 3) Podcast assessment (20%)
- 4) Final assessment (40%)

Conference Participation

You should register for a conference time on Minerva as soon as possible. Conferences will begin during the week of **September 16th** and attendance is mandatory. You can have one unexcused absence during the term. Conferences are an opportunity to discuss the material covered in lecture, as well as parts of the assigned readings, which were not explicitly covered in lecture. Come to conference having done the readings and ready to participate in discussion. To facilitate discussion and enhance your own learning, you can prepare questions based on the readings and pose them to the group. Also, use the session to clarify your understanding of the main concepts. Don't be shy to pose questions such as "I don't quite understand concept X because of these issues" or "What does the author mean when they say "XYZ" on p.1234". Sometimes this type of question is particularly insightful as it gets to the crux of the author's arguments. Note that the conferences held before the midterm will also feature an exercise that prepares you for the midterm.

Your conference grade will be based on the quality of your participation in group discussions and activities. A-level work (8-10/10) means that your questions and comments are well-distributed throughout the term, insightful, and indicative of a close reading of the assigned articles. B-level work means that your participation is sometimes insightful, but sometimes perfunctory and suggesting that you haven't done the reading (7/10). C-level work means that you only occasionally make constructive, informed contributions to the discussion (6/10). Attendance without any participation throughout the term will result in the minimal passing grade (5/10). Sporadic attendance only will result in a failure for this assessment. Participation is worth 10% of your grade.

In-class Midterm

The midterm will be held in class on **October 25th**. The goal of the midterm is to give you an incentive to stay on top of the work throughout the semester—coming to class, doing all the readings before conference, and discussing them in conference. This way, you will be better prepared for the cumulative final assessment, which will be held on a university-selected date in December.

At the midterm, you will be given 3 AI-generated images that illustrate/capture a certain comparative politics concept that we have read about and discussed in class and in conference. You will choose two of the images and write two ~150 word responses—one for each image.

The response should discuss what AI got right, what it got wrong, and what it missed about the concept, with references to the relevant readings. In conference, you will practice this type of analysis by discussing one image in every conference as an exercise. 150 words per image is just a general guideline as writing styles and speed vary. We will not be counting each word and penalizing small deviations. We will evaluate the responses using 4 criteria: 1) revealed knowledge of the concept/term discussed; 2) correct/incorrect statements; 3) appropriate references to readings; 4) good, grammatical prose. The criteria are roughly equally weighted with only slightly descending order.

Images that you discussed in conference will not appear on the exam. The exam will be closed book and hand-written (unless you have accommodations and take the midterm at the OSD office).

Podcast assignment

There will be a momentous political development in November—the US presidential election! Chances are that something politically interesting will happen in Europe or Canada as well during the fall. Soon after the midterm, I will post 2 or 3 assignment prompts that focus on an important political event in Europe or North America. For this assessment, you will work in groups (2-3 people) to produce a 7-10 min podcast that analyzes the issues raised in the prompt of your choosing through the lens of some of the readings in the second part of the course. Once you choose a topic, you should consider read the recommended readings for this topic as well to help you go deeper into the topic and producing a better, more informed podcast. The topics will relate to democratic and rule of law backsliding or resilience.

To produce the podcast, you will likely need to write about 1000-1300 words of text. This is just a general guideline. You do not need to submit your text. If you have a strong preference for working alone, contact your TA to discuss the possibility of accommodation. All participants in a podcast will receive the same grade. The podcast will be assessed using 3 criteria: 1) insightful and well-articulated analysis; 2) analysis that closely follows the prompt, i.e. doesn't discuss a tangential/related issue of your own choosing; 3) weaves in readings (required or recommended) and assesses their claims against some empirical evidence drawn from current affairs discussion. Production value and competence will make a small difference to your grade only on the margins, i.e. if it's particularly impressive or particularly sloppy.

The podcast should be submitted on myCourses by **December 2nd**.

Final Assessment

The cumulative final examination, worth 40% of your grade, will be given on the university-selected date during the fall exam period. It will consist of multiple choice questions and term IDs that aim to test your understanding of the main concepts covered over the course of the semester. The term ID portion will require you to define a term and discuss its significance. You should write about 100 words per term. The criteria for evaluating a good response include: 1) accuracy and completeness of the definition; 2) references to readings; 3) an appropriate example that illustrates the importance of the term (if applicable). The multiple choice questions aim to

test whether you have studied and retained information on all topics we have covered. Preparing for this portion requires memorization, but there will be no trick questions or questions that get at marginal minutia mentioned in lecture or in some of the readings. A good rule of thumb for preparation is that if a fact/concept/issue appears both in lecture and in some of the readings, it's likelihood of appearing on the exam is higher.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the control of McGill University, assessment tasks in a course are subject to change, provided students are sent adequate and timely communications regarding the change.

On note taking in class

I will use slides during class, which will be uploaded to myCourses after class. Do not waste your time writing down what you see on the slides. Instead, take notes during lecture on the explanations and clarifications I provide. Note taking is a very useful skill, which will serve you well during your entire undergraduate education, so work on it during this class. This is a useful starter resource on note taking: <https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/effective-note-taking-in-class/> . I recommend taking notes by hand because you will be less distracted.

On missed exams

If you are absent for the midterm for documented emergency medical or family reasons, an alternative exam date will be arranged. The alternative arrangement is only open to those who can provide a valid medical/family reason for missing the midterm or final exams. If you cannot provide a valid reason for your absence, you will receive an F for the missed exam.

On academic integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#).” (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003) (See McGill's [guide to academic honesty](#) for more information.)

On special needs and accommodation

The TAs and I will do our best to provide an inclusive learning environment. If you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me, either in office hours or by email, and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.

On mental health

There may be times when personal stressors or emotional difficulties interfere with your academic performance or well-being. If you are experiencing mental health difficulties

which prevent you from attending class or meeting deadlines in this course, please notify the TA and me by email or come by office hours. Use McGill's mental health services resources too: <https://www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/>.

On language of submission

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté. (Énoncé approuvé par le Sénat le 21 janvier 2009)

In accord with McGill University's [Charter of Student Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded. (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009)

Land Acknowledgement

McGill University is located on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. McGill honours, recognizes, and respects these nations as the traditional stewards of the lands and waters on which we meet today.

On classroom etiquette

Please, respect these basic ground rules to help me maintain a good learning environment in class for everyone:

- 1- Do your best to arrive in class on time.
- 2- If you're using your laptop/tablet to take notes, please refrain from checking email, texting, social media, etc. These activities are likely to distract and disrupt those sitting next to you and they often distract me as well. As I lecture, I look around the room to see if everyone is following my explanations and if you're chuckling/gasping/frowning at a meme or an email you just read, your expression might throw me off as I might perceive it as a reaction to something I've said. I will stop lecture and call you out as the source of the disruption.
- 3- Please remember to silence your cell phones.
- 4- Please do not talk.

Note: In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change. **The privilege of additional work will not be granted.**

Lecture and reading schedule

Note: This is the full, comprehensive list of lectures; if a date doesn't appear on the list, then we don't have lecture on that date. I recommend putting all these dates into your calendar at the beginning of the term.

PART I: Fundamental concepts in comparative politics

Aug 28 Introduction to the course

Aug 30 The state and state sovereignty

- *Essential Readings*, pp. 27-35, 57-64 (Weber and Krasner)
- (Recommended) Caporaso, James A. "The European Union and forms of state: Westphalian, regulatory or post-modern?" *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 34, no. 1 (1996): 29-52.

Sep 4 State capacity, state failure, state building

- *Essential Readings*, pp. 49-57 (Rotberg)

Sep 9 Regimes: democracy

- *Essential Readings*, pp. 180-189 (Schmitter and Karl)
- Linz, Juan J., and Alfred C. Stepan. "Toward consolidated democracies." *Journal of democracy* 7, no. 2 (1996): 14-33.

Sep 11 Regimes: dictatorships

- *Essential Readings*, pp. 241-253 (Linz and Stepan)

Sep 13 Regimes: communism/socialism in USSR and Eastern Europe

- Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next*, Princeton UP, 1996, 19-30.

CONFERENCES START WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 16th

Sep 18 Hybrid regimes

- *Essential Readings*, pp. 254-264 (Levitsky and Way)

Sep 20 Forms of government

- Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Shugart, "Juan Linz, Presidentialism, and Democracy: a Critical Appraisal," *Comparative Politics* v. 29, no. 4 (July 1997), pp. 449-471.

Sep 25 Electoral systems

- *Essential Readings*, pp. 189-198 (Lijphart), pp. 432-436 (Duverger), and pp. 437-446 (Iversen and Soskice)

Sep 27 Party systems and voting behavior

- Dalton, Russell J. "Political Cleavages, Issues, and Electoral Change," in Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective, edited by Lawrence LeDuc, Richard G. Niemi, and Pippa Norris (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 319-342.

Oct 2 Constitutionalism and the rule of law

- Louis Favoreu, "American and European Models of Constitutional Justice," in David S. Clark (ed.), Comparative and Private International Law: Essays in Honor of John Henry Merryman on his Seventieth Birthday (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1990), pp. 105-120.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo. "The quality of democracy: Why the rule of law matters" *Journal of democracy* 15, no. 4 (2004): 32-46.

Oct 4 Institutions and the role of ideas

- Thelen, Kathleen. "Historical institutionalism in comparative politics." *Annual review of political science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 369-404.
- Helmke, Gretchen and Steven Levitsky, "Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda," *Perspectives on Politics* 2(4) (2004): 725-40
- (Recommended) Béland, Daniel, and Robert Henry Cox, eds. *Ideas and politics in social science research*. Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 3-20.

Oct 9 Identity and political culture

- Abdelal, Rawi, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott. "Identity as a Variable." *Perspectives on politics* 4, no. 4 (2006): 695-711.
- Katherine Cramer, The Politics of Resentment, pp. 1-25.

Oct 11 Civil society and social capital

- Rothstein, Bo, and Dietlind Stolle. "The state and social capital: An institutional theory of generalized trust." *Comparative politics* 40, no. 4 (2008): 441-459.

- (Recommended) Robert Putnam, Making Democracy Work (Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 1-16, pp.163-185.

Oct 23 Ethnicity, nations, and nationalism

- Smith, Anthony D. "Memory and modernity: reflections on Ernest Gellner's theory of nationalism." *Nations and nationalism* 2, no. 3 (1996): 371-388.
- (Recommended) Mylonas, Harris, and Maya Tudor. "Nationalism: What we know and what we still need to know." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24, no. 1 (2021): 109-132.

Oct 25 In-class midterm

PART II: Democracy in Europe and North America: Achievements and challenges

Oct 30 The drivers of early democratization

- *Essential Readings*, pp.379-386 (Toqueville), pp. 413-419 (Acemoglu, et al), pp. 419-432 (Ansell and Samuels)
- (Recommended) Sheri Berman, "How Democracies Emerge: Lessons from Europe." *Journal of Democracy* v. 18, no. 1 (January 2007), pp. 28-41

Nov 1 Post-WWII democratization and rights expansion

- Vallinder, Torbjörn. "The judicialization of politics—A world-wide phenomenon: Introduction." *International Political Science Review* 15, no. 2 (1994): 91-99.
- Epp, Charles R. *The rights revolution: Lawyers, activists, and supreme courts in comparative perspective*. University of Chicago Press, 1998, Introduction.
- (Recommended) Hirschl, Ran. "The political origins of the new constitutionalism." *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 11, no. 1 (2004): 71-108.

Nov 6 Nationalism and the collapse of Communism

- Beissinger, Mark R. "Nationalism and the collapse of Soviet communism." *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 3 (2009): 331-347
- (Recommended) Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next*, Princeton UP, 1996, 30-39.

Nov 8 Democratic transition and consolidation in Eastern Europe

- Carothers, Thomas. "The end of the transition paradigm." *Journal of democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002): 5-21.

- Milada Vachudova, “The Leverage of International Institutions on Democratizing States: Eastern Europe and the European Union”, *EUI Working Paper*, 2001, available at: <http://cadmus.iue.it/dspace/handle/1814/1742>
- (Recommended) Kopstein, Jeffrey S., and David A. Reilly. "Geographic diffusion and the transformation of the postcommunist world." *World politics* 53, no. 1 (2000): 1-37.

Nov 13 Democratic and rule of law backsliding

- Waldner, David, and Ellen Lust. "Unwelcome change: Coming to terms with democratic backsliding." *Annual Review of Political Science* 21 (2018): 93-113
- (Recommended) Kovács, Kriszta, and Kim Lane Scheppele. "The fragility of an independent judiciary: Lessons from Hungary and Poland—and the European Union." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 51, no. 3 (2018): 189-200
- (Recommended) Bermeo, Nancy. "On democratic backsliding." *Journal of democracy* 27, no. 1 (2016): 5-19.

Nov 15 Polarization and democratic norm erosion

- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt "The Crisis of American Democracy." *American Educator* 44, no. 3 (2020): 6.
- (Recommended) Milan Svobik, “Polarization versus Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 30, No. 3 (July 2019), pp. 20-32

Nov 20 A crisis in support for democracy?

- Foa, Roberto Stefan, and Yascha Mounk "The danger of deconsolidation: The democratic disconnect." *Journal of democracy* 27, no. 3 (2016): 5-17.
- Bartels, Larry M. Democracy erodes from the top: Leaders, citizens, and the challenge of populism in Europe. Princeton University Press, 2023, pp. 1-17 (Chapter 1), pp. 216-239 (Chapter 8).
- (Recommended) Hooghe, Liesbet, and Gary Marks. "Cleavage theory meets Europe’s crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the transnational cleavage." *Journal of European public policy* 25, no. 1 (2018): 109-135.

Nov 22 Ukraine, democracy, and the EU (no in class lecture; watch the recorded lecture posted on myCourses)

- Maria Popova and Oxana Shevel, “Ukraine is Europe: Lessons for Europe and for Political Science” *European Political Science*, 23, no. 3 (2024)

Nov 27 Populism and the far right

- Mudde, Cas. *The far right today*. John Wiley & Sons, 2019, pp. 99-112.

- Vachudova, Milada Anna. "Populism, democracy, and party system change in Europe." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24 (2021): 471-498.
- (Recommended) Grzymala-Busse, Anna. "How populists rule: The consequences for democratic governance." *Polity* 51, no. 4 (2019): 707-717.
- (Recommended) Wagner, Andrea, Anna Brigeovich, and Dorian Kroqi. "(MIS) Perceptions of populism: do populists and anti-populists know what populism is?." *Acta Politica* (2024): 1-24.)

Nov 29 Democratic resilience or death?

- Bustikova, Lenka, and Petra Guasti. "The illiberal turn or swerve in Central Europe?" *Politics and Governance* 5, no. 4 (2017): 166-176.
- Powell, Jonathan M., Salah Ben Hammou, Amy Erica Smith, Lucas Borba, Drew Holland Kinney, Mwita Chacha, and Erica De Bruin. "A Coup At the Capitol? Conceptualizing Coups and Other Antidemocratic Actions." *International Studies Review* 24, no. 1 (2022):
- (Recommended) Keck, Thomas M. "The US Supreme Court and democratic backsliding." *Law & Policy* 46, no. 2 (2024): 197-218.

Dec 2 Podcast assignment due on myCourses

Dec 4 Theorizing in comparative politics