Comparative Politics: POL-UA 500
Spring 2013 Syllabus

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Tues. and Thurs., 9:30 – 10:45 am
GSACL (238 Thompson Street), Room C95
Office hours: Thurs., 2 – 4 pm
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Course Description:

This course offers an introduction to comparative politics, with an emphasis on key issues of importance to countries of the developing world. Our goal is to introduce students to the most pressing problems developing countries face today and have faced since independence. Four central questions motivate the lectures: (1) Why are state institutions in the least developed countries generally so weak? (2) Why do some countries have democratic governments while others have authoritarian governments? (3) Why have some countries developed more quickly than others? (4) Why have some developing countries been plagued by high levels of political violence while others have not?

By the end of the semester, students should have a richer understanding of the current state of knowledge within political science on these four topics. The course lectures will present cutting edge theoretical and empirical research on the politics of developing countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. As we address core themes, we will study events in particular countries but our main goal will be to use social science concepts and methods to examine more general patterns within and across countries.

Requirements and Prerequisites:

This is an introductory lecture course geared toward all students with an interest in comparative politics. There are no prerequisites to enroll in the course.

Students will be evaluated on the following:

(1) Attendance and Participation (20%)

You are expected to attend all lectures and to read the required readings in advance of each lecture. In order to do well in this course, you must attend and actively participate in weekly discussion sections, led by graduate student TAs. In section, emphasis will be placed on the
quality of your participation, including responses to the TA's questions about the readings and reactions to other students’ comments.

In addition to contributing to the general discussion in section, students will serve as the lead discussant for one of the required course readings. Discussant presentation assignments will be made by the TA during the first week of section. Student presentations will take place at the beginning of each class. As a discussant, your task is to raise questions and offer critical comments about the reading’s argument and the evidence offered in its support. Your TA will discuss expectations for the discussant presentations during the first section meeting.

(2) Map Quiz (5%)

Included below is a set of four maps listing the names and locations of 118 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. Students will be expected to know the name and location of approximately 40 of these 118 countries. This background information will help you understand the material presented in the lectures, and will help you with the readings. The map quiz will be held in class on Thursday, February 14. Students can study for the quiz by reviewing the maps at the following links:

- Middle East Map Quiz: [http://www.ilike2learn.com/ilike2learn/MidEast.html](http://www.ilike2learn.com/ilike2learn/MidEast.html)
- South America Map Quiz: [http://www.ilike2learn.com/ilike2learn/Samerica.html](http://www.ilike2learn.com/ilike2learn/Samerica.html)

(3) In-class Midterm Exam (20%)

The midterm exam will take place on Thursday, March 14, and will include a combination of identification questions and short essay answers. It will include material presented both in the required readings and in the lectures.

(4) Essay (25%)

The main written requirement for the course is a short paper of approximately 6 to 7 pages, due on Tuesday, April 16. Students will choose from a set of topics handed out in lecture on Thursday, March 28. Essays will include: (i) a clear argument linked with one of the main themes of the course, and (ii) evidence in support of the argument, drawn from materials from the course and your own research.

(5) In-class Final Exam (30%)

The final exam will be a closed-book exam covering only material from the second half of the semester. It will include several short essay questions related to core themes of the course. The final exam, as set by the registrar, will take place on Thursday, May 16.
Readings:

The amount of weekly reading assigned for the course is not particularly heavy, but students are expected to read each of the required readings carefully before coming to class. Students should come to class with a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of each reading on its own terms, and in relation to the other readings for the week.

When you read an article, you should consider the following questions: What is the paper’s main claim or argument? Is it convincing? What are the strengths and limitations of the evidence offered? Is there additional evidence you would like to see before you accept the paper’s claims?

We will be reading large portions of the following four books, including a textbook – *Comparative Politics* by David Samuels. These four texts are available for purchase at the NYU Bookstore. I would recommend buying these books, but copies of each have also been made available on reserve at Bobst Library.


Other required readings, such as academic articles and single book chapters, will be available online through the course’s NYU Classes webpage or through the library’s website.
Syllabus:

Part I: Introduction

Session 1 [January 29]: Introduction

Session 2 [January 31]: What is Comparative Politics?

Samuels, *Comparative Politics*, chapter 1.

Recommended:


Part II: States

Sessions 3-4 [February 5, 7]: The State in Comparative Perspective

Samuels, chapter 2.


Recommended:


Sessions 5-6 [Feb. 12, 14]: Colonial Rule and its Legacies

*Note: Map quiz in class on February 14.*


Recommended:


Part III. Political Regimes and Political Change

Session 7 [Feb. 19]: Democracy and its Alternatives

Samuels, chapter 3.


Recommended:


Sessions 8-10 [Feb. 21, 26, 28]: Why are Some Countries Democratic (or Not)?

Samuels, chapter 5.


Sessions 11-12 [March 5, March 7]: When Do Countries Transition to Democracy (or Not)?


Recommended:


Session 13: [March 12]: Midterm Review Session

Session 14: [March 14]: In-class Midterm

*Note: No Class March 19-21: SPRING BREAK*

Session 15: [March 26]: Clientelism and Democracy in Developing Countries


Recommended:


Part IV. Economic Development

Sessions 16-17: [March 28, April 2]: Economic Policy Choices and the Sources of Development Failure

Samuels, chapter 11.


*Recommended:*


**Session 18 [April 4]: The Politics and Economics of Foreign Aid**


*Recommended:*


**Part V: Political Violence and Post-Conflict Recovery**

**Sessions 19-21: [April 9, 16, 18]: Explaining Political Violence**

*Note: There is NO LECTURE on April 11. Short Essays are due in class on April 16.*

Samuels, chapter 10.


*Recommended:*


**Sessions 22-23: [April 23, 25]: Why do Ordinary People Participate in Violent Conflict?**


*Recommended:*


**Session 24 [April 30]: Case Study: Sudan’s Civil Wars**


*Recommended:*


**Sessions 25-26 [May 2, May 7]: Recovering from Conflict**


**Recommended:**


**Session 27 [May 9]: Overview and Final Exam Review**