Course description and objectives

It’s a heady time to study comparative politics. The field has recently undergone a vast transformation, and the boundaries between comparative politics and other sub-fields (such as international relations and political theory) are much fuzzier than in the past, opening new avenues for inquiry. Many assumptions have also been overturned, and a flurry of debates about the core principles of the field has yielded a broad new spectrum of sophisticated research, along with a sober assessment of the sub-discipline’s limits and possibilities.

Comparative politics is a large and amorphous subfield, and this course makes no attempt to cover all of it. Instead, we will focus on some key works, concepts, and debates, including classic along with exemplary recent controversies. The aim is neither a survey nor an “intellectual history,” but rather an advanced introduction to some of the core conceptual, theoretical, and analytical tools of the field. In this sense, although the course is open to all graduate students, it is designed to be especially useful for doctoral students preparing candidacy exams.

This is not a research seminar, and you are not expected to carry out any original empirical research for this class. Instead, this is a reading, writing, and discussion-intensive seminar, which will focus on the list of required readings, on any of the optional readings you may decide to dive more deeply into, and on any further related readings where appropriate. (Doctoral students writing comprehensive exams would be well advised to master both the required and deeper dive lists as a point of departure for their preparation.)

Technical requirements

The course will take place online via Desire2Learn (D2L) and Zoom. Students will be expected to play an active role in class discussions, held via Zoom each week.
This means that students are expected to have a computer device with a camera and a functioning internet connection for synchronous meetings during regular class time.

**Structure**

Students are expected to come to class well prepared, having completed and thought about each week’s assigned readings. To help you do that, each student will submit a 300-400-word review of the required reading. The reviews may focus on all the week’s readings (and aim for a broad synthesis), or on some of it (and aim for a more in-depth analysis). The successful review will not simply summarize the key ideas, but **critically engage them**. All reviews **will be made available to the class through the D2L discussion forum by noon the day before class** (i.e. each Monday). You are encouraged to engage with each other’s posts online.

I will lead each week’s discussion with a general statement framing some of the central problems and questions to be addressed, but then one student each week will make a brief presentation on the readings. Each presentation (about 10 minutes long) should build on the review and explain in some greater depth what you take to be the key ideas and questions for the seminar to consider. The presentation is also an opportunity to engage with other students’ reviews, and to explore possible tensions, disputes, etc. The online and in-class discussions are intended to complement each other, in the sense of starting and continuing various conversation threads from one forum to another.

In addition to the reviews, there are two other writing requirements for the course: a 2,500-word take-home exam, as well as a review essay of 3,000-4,000 words (each double-spaced, with standard margins in 12pt font). I will distribute a set of questions in advance for the take-home exam, and you will be able to choose one from among 2-3. The review essay should evaluate at least three major books or five major articles on a related subject published in the last decade. You should discuss these works against a general background of the field in which they are situated, using the themes of the course as a point of departure. (The list of books for review is not limited to the items in the syllabus.) For models, you may wish to consult representative review essays in journals such as *Comparative Politics*, the *American Political Science Review*, the *Canadian Political Science Review*, *Latin American Research Review*, or *World Politics*, among others. The review essay will be due one week after the last day of class.

Late papers without a valid excuse (supported with appropriate documentation) will not be accepted.

Grades will be distributed as follows:

- 12 weekly reviews (@2% each)  
  - 24%
- Take-home exam (due October 27th)  
  - 25%
- Participation (incl. in-class and online discussion, weekly presentations)  
  - 21%
- Review essay (due December 8th)  
  - 30%
Readings
Some PDF copies of the readings are available on D2L, and the balance of the required readings is available online (e.g. through the links below).

Grading criteria
A- (80-84%) → A (85-89%) → A+ (90%) 
*Exceptional performance: strong evidence of original thinking; good organization; capacity to analyze and synthesize; superior grasp of subject matter with sound critical evaluations; evidence of extensive knowledge base. Work at this level will also be clearly written, with no spelling or grammar faults.*

B- (70-73%) → B (74-76%) → B+ (77-79%) 
*Competent performance: evidence of grasp of subject matter; some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with the literature. Work at this level will generally be clearly written, containing at most a few, if any, spelling or grammar faults.*

D (50-54%) → D+ (55-59%) → C- (60-62%) → C (63-66%) → C+ (67-69%) 
*Adequate performance: understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material; acceptable but uninspired work, not seriously faulty but lacking style and vigour. Work at this level is sometimes or often unclear, and contains from some to many spelling and/or grammar problems.*

F (0-49%) 
*Inadequate performance: little or no evidence of understanding of the subject matter; weakness in critical and analytic skills; limited or irrelevant use of the literature. Work at this level is usually poorly written, with numerous spelling and grammar problems.*
Schedule

September 8 (no review required this first day)

1. **Introduction**
   - Peter Hall, “Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Research,” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, 2003), Chapter 11; https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/10.1017/CBO9780511803963.012

Diving deeper...


**PART I – APPROACHES**

September 15

2. **Paradigms and concepts**

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1 May be modified as necessary.


*Optional*


September 22

3. **A single logic of inquiry?**


Diving deeper...


September 29

4. **Causality, explanation, and mechanisms**


Diving deeper...


- Jon Elster, “A plea for mechanisms,” in Peter Hedström and Richard Swedberg, eds. Social Mechanisms: Analytical Approaches to Social Theory (Cambridge, 1998), Ch. 3; https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511663901.003


October 6

5. Decision-making and collective action


Diving deeper...


• Alan Ryan, “Problems and Methods in Political Science: Rational Explanation and Its Limits,” in Ian Shapiro et al. eds., *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 186-200; https://doi.org/ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/10.1017/CBO9780511492174.009

Take-home exam topics handed out

October 13

**PART II – AREAS OF STUDY**

6. **Institutions**


• Helmke, Gretchen and Steven Levitsky, “Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda,” in *Perspectives on Politics* 2:4 (December 2004), 725-740; http://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca:2048/login?url=http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1537592704040472


*Diving deeper...*
• Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (Peter Smith, 1978)


October 20

7. The emergence of the state


• Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1997), Chapter 1 “Introduction”, pp. 1-34; https://doi.org/ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/10.1017/CBO9780511529016


*Diving deeper…*


• Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard, 2000), Part 2.1 “Two Europes, Two Modernities,” and 2.2 “Sovereignty of the Nation-State” (pp. 67-113); https://libcom.org/library/empire-antonio-negri


October 27

Take-home exam due

8. The spread of the state?


Diving deeper...


November 3

9. Democracy

- Robert Dahl, Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition (1971), chapters 1 & 3, pp. 1-16, 33-47; (PDF available on D2L.)

• David Collier and Steven Levitsky, “Democracy: Conceptual hierarchies in comparative research,” in David Collier and John Gerring, eds. Concepts and Method in Social Science: The Tradition of Giovanni Sartori (Routlegde, 2009), Chapter 10, pp. 269-288; https://escholarship.org/uc/item/29t3x8dr


Diving deeper...


• Barrington Moore Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (1966), Chapters 7-8, pp. 413-452.


November 10

Reading week – no class

November 17

10. Authoritarianism


Diving deeper...

- Juan Linz, “Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes,” in Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby, eds. *Handbook of Political Science* 3 (1975), pp. 191-357 (skim to get main ideas)


• Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, How Democracies Die (Crown, 2018), Chapters Chapters 4 & 5, pp. 72-117.


• Beatriz Magaloni, Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico (Cambridge, 2006); https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/10.1017/CBO9780511510274

• Jennifer Gandhi, Political Institutions under Dictatorship (Cambridge, 2008); https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/10.1017/CBO9780511510090

• Milan W. Svolik, The Politics of Authoritarian Rule (Cambridge, 2012); https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/10.1017/CBO9781139176040

• Dan Slater, Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia (Cambridge, 2010); https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/10.1017/CBO9780511760891

November 24

11. Conflict, Violence and (Dis)Order


Diving deeper...


Jeremy Weinstein, Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence (Cambridge University Press, 2006); https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/10.1017/CBO9780511808654

December 1

12. Political economy and globalization


*Diving deeper…*


• Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957 [1944]).

• Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (Unwin, 1943).

• Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago, 1962)


December 8

**Review essays due** (midnight via D2L dropbox)

13. Complex governance


*Diving deeper…*


Reading Skills (Adapted from David Woodruff and Kanchan Chandra, MIT Department of Political Science):

As you manage the reading for this and other graduate courses, you are likely to find, if you have not already, that there is no correlation between effort and outcome. It is entirely possible to spend several hours reading something without “getting it.” And it is equally possible to spend less than a half-hour reading something else and getting to the heart of the argument. You will have to devise for yourselves ways to read efficiently. These suggestions may help:

1. Figure out what the heart of an argument is before you read deeply: skim, read the abstracts, the jacket blurbs, often short reviews published elsewhere. When you know what the centre of gravity is, you read more efficiently.

2. Read actively: do not simply soak up the reading for what the author wants to tell you, but approach it with questions, and try to answer them for yourself as you make your way through.

3. Use other peoples’ skills: you do not have to do all the work yourself. It is not “cheating” if you talk through the argument with someone else before or after you delve in, or look at reviews for explication, or form reading groups where you can discuss the argument with each other.

4. Write in order to read. The response papers for this class and the (non-graded) attached worksheet should help.

5. Use diagrams if necessary: often, the structure of an argument can be most clearly expressed if you “draw” it, using arrows and lines, than by trying to understand it in words.

6. Organize your notes in a way that makes retention and information retrieval possible: you could use index cards, annotated bibliographies, database programmes like EndNote etc.

These rules may be obvious to some and not to others. Basically, do whatever works for you. But be self-conscious about the reading process as a skill that has to be learned and not necessarily as an ability that either comes naturally or does not.
Reading Worksheet

For each book, chapter, or article assigned in this course, you may wish to fill out a worksheet like this one. Many of these points can be addressed in a sentence or two; in some cases, answers will not need to be full sentences; and in some cases, the answers may overlap. Keep these worksheets: they will be useful for future reference, especially as you prepare for exams.

1. State the central question that the reading addresses.
2. State the central argument(s) defended in the paper in response to this question.
3. What type of reasoning or evidence is used to support these arguments? If it is an analytical paper, what is the logic that undergirds the argument? If an empirical paper, what type of data is employed? Are there other data sources that you think might be more appropriate?
4. Do you find the claims of the reading convincing? What do you see as the main gaps that need to be filled?
5. Why (if at all) is the reading interesting?
6. Do you agree with the main claims? What are your hesitations? (This may simply involve restatement of previous points.)
7. Identify one or two implicit premises or background assumptions in the paper that you think are especially controversial or objectionable.
8. Considering your answers to the previous questions, write an abstract for the article of no more than 100 words. Feel free to repeat formulations given in response to earlier questions.

Expectations for writing

In this course, it’s not only what you write that matters in how you will be evaluated, but also how you write it. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.) but also general clarity and organization, along with proper documentation of research sources.

George Orwell wrote that “the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.” The advice in these articles should help you avoid slovenly writing, at least:

- William Zinsser, “Writing English as a Second Language”
  https://theamericanscholar.org/writing-english-as-a-second-language/
- Steven Pinker, “Why Academics Stink at Writing”:
  http://chronicle.com/article/Why-Academics-Writing-Stinks/148989/
- And beyond Pinker’s article, I would very strongly recommend his book The Sense of Style:

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If after all this advice you still need help with writing, it is available through Writing Support Services in the Student Success Centre (3rd floor of the Taylor Family Digital Library): http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support.

For further information, please refer to the University of Calgary Calendar section on writing across the curriculum: http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-2.html

http://www.cartoonstock.com/

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IMPORTANT POLICIES AND INFORMATION

Supporting Documentation and the Use of a Statutory Declaration

As stated in the University Calendar:

Students may be asked to provide supporting documentation for an exemption/special request. This may include, but is not limited to, a prolonged absence from a course where participation is required, a missed course assessment, a deferred examination, or an appeal. Students are encouraged to submit documentation that will support their situation. Supporting documentation may be dependent on the reason noted in their personal statement/explanation provided to explain their situation. This could be medical certificate/documentation, references, police reports, invitation letter, third party letter of support or a statutory declaration etc. The decision to provide supporting documentation that best suits the situation is at the discretion of the student. Students cannot be required to provide specific supporting documentation, such as a medical note.

Students can make a Statutory Declaration as their supporting documentation (available at ucalgary.ca/registrar). This requires students to make a declaration in the presence of a Commissioner for Oaths. It demonstrates the importance of honest and accurate information provided and is a legally binding declaration. Several registered Commissioners for Oaths are available to students at no charge, on campus. For a list of locations to access a Commissioners for Oaths, visit ucalgary.ca/registrar).

Falsification of any supporting documentation will be taken very seriously and may result in disciplinary action through the Academic Discipline regulations or the Student Non-Academic Misconduct policy.

This statement is accessible at: https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/m-1.html

Absence from a Mid-term Examination

Students who are absent from a scheduled term test or quiz for legitimate reasons are responsible for contacting the instructor via email within 48 hours of the missed test to discuss alternative arrangements. A copy of this email may be requested as proof of the attempt to contact the instructor. Any student who fails to do so forfeits the right to a makeup test.

Deferral of a Final Examination

Deferral of a final examination can be granted for reasons of illness, domestic affliction, and unforeseen circumstances, as well as to those with three (3) final exams scheduled within a 24-hour period.Deferred final exams will not be granted to those who sit the exam, who have made travel arrangements that conflict with their exam, or who have misread the examination timetable. The decision to allow a deferred final exam rests not with the instructor but with Enrolment Services. Instructors should, however, be notified if you will be absent during the examination. The Application for Deferred Final Exam, deadlines, requirements and submission instructions can be found on the Enrolment Services website at https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/exams/deferred-exams.

Appeals

If a student has a concern about the course or a grade they have been assigned, they must first discuss their concerns with the instructor. If this does not resolve the matter, the student then proceed with an academic appeal. The first step in an academic appeal is to set up a meeting with the Department Head. Appeals must be requested within 15 days of receipt of the graded assignment.
**University Regulations**

Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the University policies found in the Academic Regulations sections of the Calendar at [www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/academic-regs.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/academic-regs.html).

**Student Accommodations**

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit [www.ucalgary.ca/access/](http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/).

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor.


**Plagiarism and Other Forms of Academic Misconduct**

Academic misconduct in any form (e.g. cheating, plagiarism) is a serious academic offence that can lead to disciplinary probation, suspension or expulsion from the University. Students are expected to be familiar with the standards surrounding academic honesty; these can be found in the University of Calgary calendar at [http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html). Such offences will be taken seriously and reported immediately, as required by Faculty of Arts policy.

**Required Access to Technology**

Please see the University's resource page at [https://ucalgary.service-now.com/it?id=kb_article&sys_id=86e7438013753ac06f3afbb2e144b031](https://ucalgary.service-now.com/it?id=kb_article&sys_id=86e7438013753ac06f3afbb2e144b031)

**Copyright Legislation**

As stated in the University of Calgary Calendar, Academic Regulations, “students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright and requirements of the copyright act to ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorised sharing of course materials (including instructor notes, electronic versions of textbooks etc.). Students who use material protected by copyright in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy.”


**Instructor Intellectual Property**

Course materials created by instructors (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may NOT be reproduced, redistributed or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the course at the same time may be allowed under fair dealing.

**Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP)**

FOIP legislation requires that instructors maintain the confidentiality of student information. In practice, this means that student assignment and tests cannot be left for collection in any public place without the consent of the student. It also means that grades cannot be distributed via email. Final exams are kept by instructors but can be viewed by contacting them or the main office in the
Department of Political Science. Any uncollected assignments and tests meant to be returned will be destroyed after six months from the end of term; final examinations are destroyed after one year.

Faculty of Arts Program Advising and Student Information Resources

For program planning and advice, please consult with the Arts Students' Centre by calling 403-220-3580 or by email at artsads@ucalgary.ca. You can also visit arts.ucalgary.ca/advising for program assistance.

For registration (add/drop/swap), paying fees and assistance with your Student Centre, contact Enrolment Services at (403) 210-ROCK [7625].

Important Contact Information

Faculty of Arts Undergraduate Students’ Union Representatives
Phone: 403-220-6551
Email: arts1@su.ucalgary.ca, arts2@su.ucalgary.ca, arts3@su.ucalgary.ca,
arts4@su.ucalgary.ca
Students’ Union URL: www.su.ucalgary.ca

Graduate Students’ Association
Phone: 403-220-5997
Email: askgsa@ucalgary.ca
URL: www.ucalgary.ca/gsa

Student Ombudsman
Phone: 403-220-6420
Email: ombuds@ucalgary.ca

Campus Mental Health Resources
The University of Calgary recognizes the pivotal role that student mental health plays in physical health, social connectedness and academic success, and aspires to create a caring and supportive campus community where individuals can freely talk about mental health and receive supports when needed. We encourage you to explore the excellent mental health resources available throughout the university community, such as counselling, self-help resources, peer support or skills-building available through the following resources:

SU Wellness Centre: http://www.ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/
Student Wellness Services: https://www.ucalgary.ca/wellness-services/services/mental-health-services
Campus Mental Health Strategy website: https://www.ucalgary.ca/mentalhealth/