

POLS 454: COMPARATIVE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, FALL 2020, 3 CREDITS

Basic Information

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Course Description

Bulletin Description

Overview

This course examines the emergence, evolution, and functioning of political institutions across democracies. Topics include party systems, presidential and parliamentary regimes, legislative organization, electoral systems, and bureaucratic structures.

Course Objectives

The goal of this course is to provide students with a strong grounding in the scholarly literature on democratic political institutions, and to introduce them to how democratic institutions structure political behavior in a comparative, cross-national, context. After completing this course students should:

- be familiar with the range of institutional frameworks that democracies employ,
- be grounded in the academic literature on party organization and systems, electoral systems, forms of governance, and bureaucratic politics,
- be able to relate institutional structures to broad problems in social systems, such as collective action, social choice, principal-agent, coordination, and commitment problems,
- effectively read, understand, and critique current scholarly work in political science, and
- be able to develop clear research designs to study question about democratic institutions.

Required Student Resources

You should purchase the texts below. All other required readings will be available on Blackboard.

- Torben Iversen & Frances Rosenbluth. 2010. *Women, Work, and Politics: The Political Economy of Gender Inequality*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Isabela Mares. 2015. *From Open Secrets to Secret Voting: Democratic Electoral Reforms and Voter Autonomy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The following textbook is optional but highly recommended, especially for students who have not taken POLS 225. It is on reserve at the library (for POLS 225). I refer to this book as CGG in the schedule.

- William Clark, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics, 3rd Ed.* Washington, DC: CQ Press.

I will send students an invitation to join the course Slack workspace at [NDSUPOLS454.slack.com](#). I expect students to regularly check this workspace for announcements and to use it to communicate with the instructor and classmates outside of class.

Evaluation

Summary

Paper	25%
Discussion Leadership	10%
Discussion Participation	15%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	10%

Paper

You will write a short (10-12 pages, 10 pages means the text makes it onto the 10th page, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, no title page, 1 line for your name, 1-2 line 12 pt title, no subheadings, no blank lines between paragraphs, bibliography does not count towards page length) paper during the semester. The paper will take the form of a theoretical review & extension of one italicized reading (see the schedule). You must sign up for a slot on Blackboard corresponding to a particular italicized reading. Slots are first-come-first-served.

You will ground your paper in some aspect of the reading assigned for the week for which you sign up. I do not expect you to write a thorough review of the reading. Rather, you should use the reading as a foundation or jumping-off point for your argument. Nonetheless, your paper must establish a clear link between your argument and work that inspired it. You will propose an extension to the reading that is grounded in social scientific reasoning.

Crucially, you should use the bulk of your paper to propose your own objective (i.e. not normative) argument that builds on the reading. This argument should propose a cause-and-effect theory that could be tested with real data, and should build on your background in political science. The paper should have a clearly stated thesis, elucidate the mechanism that causes the proposed independent variable(s) to affect a specified dependent variable, and draw on relevant literature to support the logical foundations of the argument. You must also discuss what kind(s) of empirical evidence (patterns in data that you could, in principle, collect) would support or falsify your argument. You must actively cite work beyond the class reading to support your argument; at least 5 of these citations must be works of political science published in peer reviewed journals or university press books and you should make active use of no fewer than 8 sources beyond the class reading. We will read, evaluate, and discuss examples of strong—and not so strong—short papers during the second week of class.

Paper drafts are due in digital form (PDF, Word or Open/Libre Office document), no less than 50 hours before the bold-dated class meeting (see schedule) for the week that your selected paper is assigned. You will distribute your draft to the instructor and the rest of the class through email. Final versions of your papers are due in digital form, two weeks (not counting midterm week) after the bold-dated class meeting for the week that your selected paper is assigned. **Students will forfeit both their paper and associated discussion leadership grades (see below) if they miss the draft submission deadline.** Table 1 provides a grading rubric for the short papers.

Section	Criteria	Percentage Points
Grounding	Clear, situates reader, correctly represents reading	10
	Acts as a concise foundation for argument	10
Extension	Clearly stated thesis	10
	Argument is logical, fully developed, and persuasive	30
	Discusses testing/falsification thoroughly and logically	20
	Clearly describes/justifies potential evidence	20
Deductions	Late draft or revision	100
	Missed discussion	100
	Revision lacks bibliography that meets requirements	10-100
	Revision shows poor citation style	10-100
	Revision has too few pages	10/page
	Revision has too many pages	10/page
	Revision has poor grammar, spelling, etc	1-20
Revision ignores formatting instructions	10	

Table 1: Short Paper Rubric

Criterion	Percentage Points
Establishes plan for thesis clarity	10
Establishes plan for effective explanation of argument	25
Establishes plan for effective testing/falsification	25
Effective use of time	20
Discussion well managed	10
Plan annotated thoroughly	10
Deductions	
Draft or summary late	100
Miss discussion	100
Draft too short	10/page
Draft too long	10/page
Draft has poor grammar, spelling, etc	1-10
Draft ignores formatting instructions	1-10

Table 2: Discussion Leadership Rubric

Discussion Leadership

Students will lead 10-20 minute discussions about their papers, on the bold-dated class meetings that correspond to their chosen readings. Students will provide an informal presentation of their papers, lasting roughly five minutes. Students should carefully explain both the logic of their arguments and their reasoning for why the potential evidence that they mention in their paper would support or falsify their argument. After their initial comments, presenters will engage in a constructive discussion with the class, and the instructor. With the help of the class, discussion leaders will identify the key strengths and weaknesses in their papers and develop a plan of action for improving their drafts. Discussion leaders should strive to make sure that the discussion is productive. To this end, presenters should prepare a series of questions to ask the class about their papers, with the goal of eliciting feedback that can help them to revise their papers most effectively.

Discussion leaders should take careful notes throughout the session, paying special attention to comments and suggestions on thesis clarity, the development of hypotheses, the quality and clarity of argument, and the appropriateness of proposed tests for falsifying hypotheses. They will use these notes to draft a one to two page summary of the discussion, identifying strengths and weaknesses in the draft, and outlining the plan of action developed during the class discussion. **These action plans are due before the next class period** and, along with the instructor's in-class observations, form the basis of discussion leadership grades. Discussion leaders should annotate—for example, using Word's comments feature—their action plans, indicating how particular class members contributed to a given action item. Table 2 provides a rubric for discussion leadership grades.

Discussion Participation

All students must read presenters' papers, and the readings that they extend, in advance. Non-presenting students will type up an evaluation form (available on Blackboard) in response to each presenter's paper and must bring two copies of each evaluation to class. These documents should evaluate each presenter's paper according to the rubric in table 1. Students should pay special attention to the presenter's core argument and discussion of falsification/potential evidence. They should prepare two carefully thought-out pieces of constructive criticism for the presenter that focus on these two points (one for each) and explain these critiques, in short paragraphs, containing full sentences, on their evaluation forms. I will grade students' discussion participation on a pass/fail basis. Students will obtain full points for discussion participation on a particular day if they hand in fully completed evaluation forms for each presenter at the beginning of class and actively engage in group discussion. Students should share key points on their evaluation forms verbally during the discussion period, although they are free to go off script. Indeed, while prepared criticisms will help to ensure that we have fruitful sessions, this will work best if students engage in the discussion in real time and voice thoughts that come to mind, rather than relying fully on their prepared comments. The class will collaboratively develop a plan of action for improving the draft under consideration during the in-class sessions. Students who miss class, fail to hand in complete and constructive evaluation forms, fail to speak constructively during each discussion, or who fail to contribute substantively during group discussions, will obtain no points for the day. Remember that presenters provide annotations on their plans of action that identify students' contributions! Total discussion participation points are distributed evenly across all discussion days. I will not accept handwritten evaluation forms and students should give one copy of their evaluation forms to the presenters.

Exams

The midterm and final exams will each count for 15% of your total grade. Each exam will contain a series of short essay questions. Generally, students choose four of six questions to answer. The final exam is non-cumulative and each exam covers about half of the course material.

Participation

You are expected to attend every class and to participate in class activities and discussions. Participation (beyond discussion participation, which is graded separately) is worth 10 percent of your final grade and will reflect your engagement in and contribution to class discussion, not simple attendance (which should be a given, although lack of attendance will negatively impact your grade). Participation can take many forms, including—but not limited to—asking questions, answering my queries, engaging in class debate, organizing or participating in study groups, and taking an active role in group activities. Towards the end of the semester, each student will write a short (1-2 page) paper making an evidence-based case for the participation grade that she feels she deserves. These papers, and the persuasiveness of their arguments, will form the basis for students' participation grades. Although

you have substantial leeway in how you make your case for your participation grade, your self-evaluation should follow this rough rubric:

- A Strong attendance, frequent and thoughtful verbal participation, active participation in group work
- B Strong attendance, regular and thoughtful verbal participation, active participation in group work
- C Strong attendance, some verbal participation, satisfactory participation in group work
- D Missed more than 3-4 classes, little to no verbal participation in class lack of engagement in group work
- F Frequently miss class, no verbal participation, leave your group members hanging

Class Policies

Grades

I use a flat grade scale: A=90–100, B=80–89, C=70–79, D=60–69, F=59 or lower. If you have a complaint about a grade you must type a formal appeal describing the problem. Your appeal should make a cogent argument for improving your grade. Attach a copy of the original assignment/exam to your appeal.

Reading and Discussion

You **must** do the reading ahead of time to succeed in this course. You also need to participate in class discussion to get the most out of this class. While I will do some lecturing, this is largely a discussion-based course and the quality of the discussion will suffer if you, and your classmates, fail to read in a timely fashion, or do not speak up when you have a question or comment to contribute. If the discussion suffers, your understanding will suffer. If your understanding suffers, your grade will suffer. This course requires a substantial amount of reading (typically around 70, but sometimes as much as 150 pages per week). Much of the reading consists of recent research and is, therefore, often complex. This means that reading will take time and concentration. If you do not want to do this much reading, to read with care, or to engage in class discussion, you should drop this course.

Late Assignments, Missed Exams and Discussion Sessions

I will not accept late assignments except in extreme, and unexpected circumstances. Students should notify the professor of exam scheduling issues at least two weeks before the exam in question. You will need a very good reason to reschedule an exam. The same policy holds for discussion leadership. I will penalize students for missed discussion sessions unless they have a documented and valid (medical, etc) excuse. Students must provide such excuses ahead of time if possible.

Academic Honesty

The academic community is operated on the basis of honesty, integrity, and fair play. NDSU Policy 335: Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct applies to cases in which cheating,

plagiarism, or other academic misconduct have occurred in an instructional context. Students found guilty of academic misconduct are subject to penalties, up to and possibly including suspension and/or expulsion. Student academic misconduct records are maintained by the Office of Registration and Records. Informational resources about academic honesty for students and instructional staff members can be found at www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty.

Please make sure that you understand common standards of academic integrity and plagiarism and consult the instructor if you are ever in doubt. I have a no tolerance policy for academic misconduct and students who commit such misconduct should expect, at minimum, to receive a failing grade for this class.

Discrimination and Harassment

NDSU is committed to providing a safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and working environment for all members of its university community. NDSU's policy on discrimination and harassment is available at www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/policy/156.pdf and the equity office provides information about filing complaints here: www.ndsu.edu/equity/filing_a_complaint_at_ndsu/. Any form of violence or harassment, including sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking is unwelcome at the University. NDSU provides a Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Sexual Assault Resource Guide at www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/equity/Resources/Sexual_Harassment_Guide_PROV_1437.pdf.

Low-grade discrimination and harassment can be especially pernicious in a classroom setting. Please read the following blog post and work to avoid the behaviors that the post describes: bit.ly/36vwaus.

Please note that the instructor has a mandatory responsibility to report instances of discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, and retaliation, as described here: www.ndsu.edu/equity/reporting_responsibilities/. What this means is that as your professor, I am required to report any incidents of such misconduct that I observe, or that students or others report to me.

Electronic Devices

Students should put away their cell phones during class, although students with good reasons (e.g., parents of young children) may keep their phones on vibrate in case of emergency. I discourage using a laptop for note-taking because research shows that students retain information better when they take notes by hand and because they can be distracting to other students.

Students with Special Needs

Any students with disabilities or other special needs, who need special accommodations in this course, are invited to share these concerns or requests with the instructor and contact the Disability Services Office (www.ndsu.edu/disabilityservices) as soon as possible.

Attendance

According to NDSU Policy 333 (www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/policy/333.pdf), attendance in classes is expected. In this course, attendance is mandatory unless you have a valid reason to miss a session. If possible, you must notify the instructor in advance if you need to miss class.

Veterans and student service members with special circumstances or who are activated are encouraged to notify the instructor as soon as possible and are encouraged to provide Activation Orders.

Written Communication

I expect students to take care with their written communication, to proof-read their work, and to ensure that their writing is grammatical and clear. Scientific writing often uses passive voice, includes overly complicated vocabulary and prose, and makes comprehension unnecessarily difficult for readers. As a student it is natural to copy this style as you build your own. In this course I will push you to develop a simple, clear, efficient, and engaging writing style. To get started on this process, and to see who is reading the syllabus, I will grant one percentage point of extra credit to any student who corrects all of the passive voice in the University-mandated language in this syllabus, and posts these corrections to my private channel in the Slack workspace.

Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading
Week 1	Visions of Democracy	Lijphart (1999) Ch. 1–3, GLM (2006) pp. 441–457; CGG Ch. 12 (pp. 457–462), 13 (pp. 542–546, 564–578), 15 (pp. 673–712)
Week 2	Social Science	CGG Ch. 2 (req), Short paper examples
Week 3	Party Systems	Boix (2007), <i>Boix (1999)</i> ; CGG Ch. 14
Week 4	Why Parties?	Aldrich (1995) Ch. 2, Stokes (1999)
Week 5	Party Development	<i>Cox (1987) Ch. 2–3, 6–11</i>
Week 6	Parties & Parliaments	<i>Kam (2009) Ch. 1–3, Ringe (2010) Ch. 1–3</i>
Week 7	Parties & Presidents	<i>Samuels & Shugart (2010) Ch. 2–4</i> ; CGG 12
Week 8	Review & Midterm	
Weeks 9, 10	Institutions & Gender	<i>Iversen & Rosenbluth (2010)</i>
Week 11	Electoral Incentives	<i>Golden (2003), Pekkanen, Nyblade, & Krauss (2006), Shomer (2009)</i> ; CGG Ch. 13
Week 12	Coalition Government	Laver (1998), <i>Golder & Thomas (2012)</i> ; CGG Ch. 12
Week 13	Delegation & Oversight	McCubbins & Schwartz (1984), Bawn (1997), <i>Alter (2002)</i>
Week 14 & 15	Political Economy	<i>Mares (2015)</i>
Week 16	Catch up & Review	

CGG readings are optional, unless otherwise noted, but recommended for students who have not taken POLS 225, or who are rusty on the material covered in that class. All other readings are required. Italicized readings may be used as the basis for a theoretical review and extension paper.