

PS9566B: Comparative Politics

Department of Political Science – Western University, Winter 2026

Instructor: Dr. Mathieu Turgeon (mturgeo4@uwo.ca)

Office hours: Wednesday 12-2pm or by appointment

Course description

This course offers a broad introduction to the field of comparative politics. Comparative politics, when taught in Canada, would encompass any study that is country specific but that is not Canada, or any study that compares two or more countries, including Canada or not. Comparativists explore a wide range of topics and adopt a variety of methodological (qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods) and theoretical approaches (e.g., rational choice theory, historical and sociological institutionalisms, cultural and psychological approaches, etc.). They are generally (although not exclusively) concerned with "big questions" shaping the world like democratization, democratic backsliding, group and racial inequalities, interest groups and social movements, electoral and party systems, executive-legislative relations, public policies, and, more broadly, how institutions (rules and norms) affect economic and political actors and outcomes.

Class organization

This course adopts a seminar format where all students come prepared to discuss the assigned weekly reading. We will be reading one book in its entirety every week. The books have been selected to cover a wide range of topics and methodological and theoretical approaches. The selected books have been praised by the political science community and most of them have received prizes from professional associations in the past ten years. The selection of books should give students a general idea about how comparativists go about producing high-quality research on a variety of topics.

Course assessment

Students will be assessed as follows:

- **Class participation, 10%:** Students will be responsible to lead class discussions. Class responsibilities will be assigned at the beginning of the semester depending on the number of registered students.
- **5 reading quizzes each worth 3%, total 15%:** To ensure that students keep up with the readings, I will apply six reading quizzes during the semester. Quizzes will take place at the very beginning of class. For your final grade, I will count your five highest scores. There will be no make-up for quizzes under any circumstances. Don't be late!
- **Short discussion papers, 25%:** Students are responsible to turn in five 2-page, single-spaced discussion papers on the weekly reading of their choosing (5% each, total 25%). Discussion papers should address theoretical and/or methodological aspects of the assigned reading. Discussion papers should be uploaded on Brightspace *before* class. No short discussion paper will be acceptable after class has started.

- **Individual term paper, 50%:** Students are required to produce one final term paper of 2500-3000 words. The term paper is due at the end of the semester (no later than April 17 at noon). Details about the term paper will be provided in class. Students should also discuss with the instructor what they intend to do for their research paper before working on it.

Weekly readings

Week #1 (January 8)

Review of syllabus and class organization.

Week #2 (January 15): Nation and state building

Wimmer, A., 2020. *Nation building: Why some countries come together while others fall apart*. Princeton University Press.

Suggested readings

- a. Basta, K. 2021. *The symbolic state: Minority recognition, majority backlash, and secession in multinational countries*. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP.
- b. Paglayan, A.S. 2022. "Education or indoctrination? The violent origins of public school systems in an era of state-building." *American Political Science Review*, 116(4), pp.1242-1257.
- c. Mylonas, H. and Tudor, M. 2021. "Nationalism: What we know and what we still need to know." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24(1), pp.109-132.

Week #3 (January 22): Parties and party systems

De Vries, C and S. B. Hobolt. 2020. *Political Entrepreneurs: The Rise of Challenger Parties in Europe*. Princeton University Press.

Suggested readings

- a. Bértoa, F.C. and Enyedi, Z. 2021. *Party system closure: Party alliances, government alternatives, and democracy in Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- b. Ziblatt, D. 2017. *Conservative political parties and the birth of modern democracy in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- c. Mainwaring, S. 2018. *Party Systems in Latin America: Institutionalization, Decay, and Collapse*. Cambridge University Press
- d. Kernell, G. 2024. *Inside Parties: How Party Rules Shape Membership and Responsiveness*. Cambridge University Press.

Week #4 (January 29): Political geography

Rickard, S.J., 2018. *Spending to win: Political institutions, economic geography, and government subsidies*. Cambridge University Press.

Suggested readings

- a. Menendez, I. 2016. "Globalization and welfare spending: How geography and electoral institutions condition compensation." *International Studies Quarterly*, 60(4), pp.665-676.

- b. Bisbee, J. and You, H.Y. 2024. "Political geography and firm strategies: How electoral competition influences local job creation." *The Journal of Politics*, 86(2), pp.687-703.
- c. Sovacool, B.K. 2021. "Who are the victims of low-carbon transitions? Towards a political ecology of climate change mitigation." *Energy Research & Social Science*, 73, p.101916.

Week #5 (February 5): State bureaucracy

Hassan, M., 2020. *Regime threats and state solutions: Bureaucratic loyalty and embeddedness in Kenya*. Cambridge University Press.

Suggested readings

- a. Qian, J. and Bai, S. 2024. "Loyalty Signaling, Bureaucratic Compliance, and Variation in State Repression in Authoritarian Regimes." *Comparative Politics*, 56(4), pp.423–447.
- b. Corduneanu-Huci, C. 2019. "Autocratic checks and balances? Trust in courts and bureaucratic discretion." *Democratization*, 26(4), pp.561–584.
- c. Bauer, M.W. 2024. "Administrative responses to democratic backsliding: When is bureaucratic resistance justified?" *Regulation & Governance*, 18(4), pp.1104–1117.

Week #6 (February 12): The politics of national security

Le, T.P. 2021. *Japan's Aging Peace: Pacifism and Militarism in the Twenty-First Century*. Columbia University Press.

Suggested readings

- a. Catalinac, A. 2016. *Electoral reform and national security in Japan: From pork to foreign policy*. Cambridge University Press.
- b. Wagner, W. 2020. *The democratic politics of military interventions: Political parties, contestation, and decisions to use force abroad*. Oxford University Press.
- c. Raunio, T. and Wagner, W. 2020. "The party politics of foreign and security policy." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 16(4), pp.515-531.
- d. Haesebrouck, T. and Mello, P.A. 2020. "Patterns of political ideology and security policy." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 16(4), pp.565-586.

Week #7 (February 19): *Spring reading week. Enjoy the break!*****

Week #8 (February 26): Political participation

Aytaç S. E. and S. C. Stokes. 2019. "Why Bother? Rethinking Participation in Elections and Protests." Cambridge University Press: New York.

Suggested readings

- a. Turgeon, M. and Blais, A. 2023. "Am I obliged to vote? A regression discontinuity analysis of compulsory voting with ill-informed voters." *Political Science Research and Methods*, 11(1), pp.207-213.
- b. Blais, A. and Daoust, J.F. 2020. *The motivation to vote: Explaining electoral participation*. UBC Press.
- c. Kostelka, F. and Blais, A. 2021. "The generational and institutional sources of the global decline in voter turnout." *World politics*, 73(4), pp.629-667.

Week #9 (March 5): Public policy and politics

Natter, K. 2023. *The Politics of Immigration Beyond Liberal States: Morocco and Tunisia in Comparative Perspective*

Suggested readings

- a. Busemeyer, M.R., 2014. *Skills and inequality: Partisan politics and the political economy of education reforms in western welfare states*. Cambridge University Press.
- b. Durazzi, N. and Geyer, L. 2022. "Social inclusion and collective skill formation systems: policy and politics." *Journal of European Social Policy*, 32(1), pp.105-116.
- c. Busemeyer, M.R. and Guillaud, E. 2023. "Knowledge, skills or social mobility? Citizens' perceptions of the purpose of education." *Social policy & administration*, 57(2), pp.122-143.
- d. Bullock, J.G. 2021. "Education and attitudes toward redistribution in the United States." *British Journal of Political Science*, 51(3), pp.1230-1250.

Week #10 (March 12): Inclusion and representation

Htun, M., 2016. *Inclusion without representation in Latin America: Gender quotas and ethnic reservations*. Cambridge University Press.

Suggested readings

- a. Turgeon, M. and Habel, P. 2022. "Prejudice, political ideology, and interest: Understanding attitudes toward affirmative action in Brazil." *Political Psychology*, 43(3), pp.489-510.
- b. Senk, K., Coulombe, N.M. and Edry, J., 2024. "Women's Legislative Representation and Human Rights Treaty Ratification." *Politics & Gender*, pp.1-33.
- c. Chauchard, S. 2014. "Can Descriptive Representation Change Beliefs about a Stigmatized Group? Evidence from Rural India." *American Political Science Review*, 108(2), pp. 403–422.

Week #11 (March 19): Democratic and authoritarian regimes

Shen-Bayh, F.F. 2022. *Undue Process: Persecution and Punishment in Autocratic Courts*. Cambridge University Press.

Suggested readings

- a. Haggard, S. and Kaufman, R. 2021. *Backsliding: Democratic regress in the contemporary world*. Cambridge University Press.
- b. Grumbach, J.M., 2023. "Laboratories of democratic backsliding." *American Political Science Review*, 117(3), pp.967-984.
- c. Lee, A. and Paine, J., 2024. *Colonial Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship*. Cambridge University Press.
- d. Albertus M. and V. Menaldo. 2017. *Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week #12 (March 26): Language and politics

Pérez, E. and Tavits, M., 2023. *Voicing Politics: How Language Shapes Public Opinion*. Princeton University Press.

Suggested readings

- a. Liu, A. H. 2015. *Standardizing Diversity: The Political Economy of Language Regimes*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- b. Shair-Rosenfield, S., Schakel, A.H., Niedzwiecki, S., Marks, G., Hooghe, L. and Chapman-Osterkatz, S. 2021. "Language difference and regional authority." *Regional & Federal Studies*, 31(1), pp.73-97.
- c. Öztürk, S. and Öztürk, A. 2024. "A paradox of ethnic politics? Minority language recognition and political trust in an authoritarian setting." *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, p.07388942241292201.

Week #13 (April 2): Clientelism

Mares, I. and Young, L.E., 2019. *Conditionality and coercion: Electoral clientelism in Eastern Europe*. Oxford University Press.

Suggested readings

- a. Barbosa, T. and Turgeon, M., 2024. "When everyone is corrupt, no one is? Examining the effects of widespread corruption on electoral behavior." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, pp.1-20.
- b. Vera, Sofia B. 2022. "How Does Clarity of Alternatives Affect the Electoral Fortune of Corrupt Politicians?" *Electoral Studies* 77: 102476.
- c. Solaz, H., C. E. De Vries, and R. De Geus. 2019. "In-group Favouritism and the Electoral Punishment of Corruption." *Comparative Political Studies* 52 (6): 896–926.