

Political Science CPO 2002: Introduction to Comparative Politics

Instructor: Kwabena Fynn Fletcher

Semester: Spring 2026

Department: Political Science

Class Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:20 –2:35 PM

Location: HCB 0217

Email: kf21k@fsu.edu

Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom

Scheduling Link:

Course Description

This course introduces students to the scientific study of comparative politics, focusing on cross-national comparisons to explain systematic relationships among social, economic, and political variables worldwide. Rather than concentrating on a few countries in depth, the course examines all countries as cases within a global framework.

We approach comparative politics as a science, emphasizing that hypotheses must be falsifiable and tested with data. In this course we will contemplate the following questions and statements:

Section I: Foundations of Comparative Politics

- What is comparative political science?
 - What is science?
 - What is politics?
- This section establishes the conceptual and methodological foundations of the field.

Section II: Democracies and Dictatorships

- What is the state?
- Why are some states democratic while others are authoritarian?
- How do we define and measure democracy?
- How do transitions to democracy occur?
- Why do some dictatorships maintain elections, parties, and parliaments?
- Do democracies produce systematically different outcomes (economic growth, health, education) compared to dictatorships?

Section III: Institutions in Democracies

- Differences between parliamentary and presidential democracies
- Types of governments and their formation

- Minority governments: why they exist
- Electoral systems and their consequences
- Party systems: why some countries have many parties while others have few
- Policy change: why it is incremental in some contexts but not in others
- How institutions shape accountability, representation, and stability
- Are certain forms of democracy more stable than others?

Methodological Tools

Students will gain practical skills to analyze these questions, including:

- Solving logic problems
- Applying simple game-theoretic models
- Interpreting statistical results

No prior knowledge is required: only an open mind and willingness to learn. While the course emphasizes a scientific and mathematical approach, mastering these skills provides excellent preparation for advanced political science coursework at Florida State University.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Apply the methodological tools of political science to solve logic problems, utilize basic game-theoretic models, and interpret statistical results.
- Compare democracies and dictatorships, with particular attention to how authoritarian regimes transition into democratic systems.
- Evaluate the structure and function of institutions within democratic states.

As a Liberal Studies Social Sciences course, students will also achieve the following competencies:

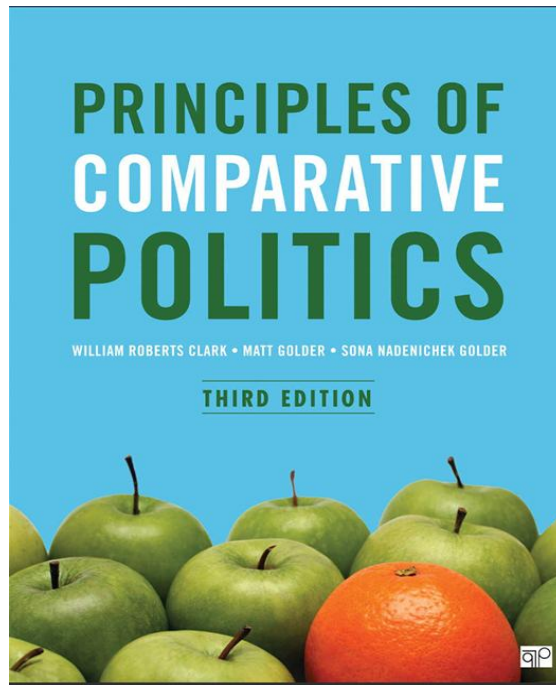
- *Competency 1:* Critically examine, interpret, and explain how personal, political, cultural, economic, and social experiences or structures shape both the past and the present.
- *Competency 2:* Gather and analyze data using social science and/or historical methodologies to evaluate causal arguments and assess assertions, assumptions, and explanatory evidence.

- *Competency 3:* Employ appropriate methods and technology in the collection and analysis of data.

Course Materials

The required textbook for this course is:

Clark, William, Matt Golder, & Sona Golder. 2008. Principles of Comparative Politics. Third Edition. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.



We will refer to this text as “CGG” throughout the course. The book is available at the FSU bookstore or through online retailers.

Please consult the course schedule at the end of this syllabus for the assigned readings. All readings must be completed before the class session under which they are listed. Any changes to the reading list or schedule will be announced in class and communicated via email or Canvas.

Canvas Use

Canvas will be used extensively in this course. Through Canvas, you will:

- Access and submit homework assignments
- View grades

- Receive announcements and emails from your instructor

It is your responsibility to ensure you have access to Canvas and that your account is properly linked to your email address. Canvas can be accessed at canvas.fsu.edu.

Additional Resources

Supplementary online materials to complement the CGG textbook—including quizzes, flashcards, and study guides—are available at:

<http://college.cqpress.com/sites/principlescp/Home.aspx>

Evaluation

Class participation = 30 points

To fulfil the requirement for class participation, I strongly encourage you to do the following (at a minimum):

1. Complete all readings in advance of the class period and come to class prepared to discuss the readings. These reading assignments are required, not optional, and are a necessary first step toward in-class participation. Please bring a copy of the readings with you to class for reference.
2. Come to class, take good notes, and ask informed and pertinent questions of your instructor.
3. Critically engage with the material and participate in class activities and discussions.
4. Refrain from negative participation, defined as classroom behavior which is disrespectful to other students or the instructor.

Synthesis Essays (2) = 40 points

Throughout the term, you'll write two short essays reflecting on course concepts. Prompts will be given in class and are due one week later. Each essay will answer one question in under two pages (single-spaced). I stop reading after two pages. Essays must include both in-text citations and a reference list. In-text citations should include page numbers. Prompts will be predictable and are not designed to surprise you. Because you'll have ample notice, late submissions are not accepted unless exceptional health-related circumstances arise, at my discretion. Plan your time accordingly.

Quiz (in-class) = 30 points

There will be a total of 3 quizzes throughout the semester, each worth 10 points. Quizzes will be administered in class in a multiple-choice format.

Optional Discussion Leadership (10 Points)

In the last week of March, students will lead a discussion on any reading from Weeks 12 – 15. This will be done over Zoom with me and the students only. This session will be a discussion of the reading, focusing on the arguments in the reading and the student's reaction or views to reading. Discussion will not last more than 10 minutes per student.

Finally, note that I adhere to the following number-to-letter grade conversion chart for all exams, quizzes, and final grades. Grades ending in .5 or higher are rounded up to the nearest whole percentage point:

Percentage Range	Grade
93 or above	A*
90–92	A-
87–89	B+
83–86	B
80–82	B-
77–79	C+
73–76	C
70–72	C-
67–69	D+
63–66	D
60–62	D-

Note: *An A is the highest grade you can earn in this class.*

Make-Up Exams

Make-up exams will be granted only for excused absences in accordance with Florida State University's Attendance Policy. Excused absences include:

- Documented illness
- Deaths in the family or other documented crises
- Call to active military duty or jury duty
- Religious holy days
- Official University activities

Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students with valid documentation.

Students must contact the instructor prior to or within two days following an exam and provide appropriate documentation from the Dean of Students. The Dean of Students Office, where documentation may be submitted, is located at Suite 4100, University Center (Stadium A).

On the recording of lectures allowable by HB223

In this class, consistent with state law and university policy, students are permitted to make recordings of class lectures for personal use only. As noted, sharing, posting, or publishing classroom recordings may subject you to honor code violations and legal penalties associated with the theft of intellectual property and violations of other state laws. Moreover, students and educators have expressed concern that recording classroom activities may negatively impact the learning experiences, especially in classes that involve questions, discussion, or participation. To protect a learning environment in which everyone feels free to experiment with ideas, we ask you to refrain from recording in ways that could make others feel reluctant to ask questions, explore new ideas, or otherwise participate in class. Students must monitor their recordings so that they do not include participation by other students without permission. Students with disabilities will continue to have appropriate accommodation for recordings as established by the Office of Accessibility Services.

Technology Policy

The use of technology in the classroom can be beneficial for engaging with real-life politics and bringing course materials to life. I may use videos, YouTube clips, Twitter, or Facebook occasionally to keep us motivated and engaged. However, cell phones and laptops can be distracting and detrimental to the classroom experience. They often take students away from lectures and discussions. Therefore, I strongly recommend putting cell phones on silence during class time, except in the case of exceptional circumstances. Texting or attempting to read class material on phones is not allowed. Taking pictures of slides without permission is a breach of intellectual property rights. I encourage students to take notes by hand, as research shows it improves test scores. Please leave laptops at home and engage in classroom discussions. Information pertinent to class discussion is not found on social media platforms or sports news sites.

University Attendance Policy:

Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family, and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid written excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

Academic Honor Policy:

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to "... be honest and truthful and ... [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found

at <http://fda.fsu.edu/academic-resources/academic-integrity-and-grievances/academic-honor-policy>)

Americans With Disabilities Act:

FSU is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for all persons with disabilities in a manner that is consistent with the academic standards of the course while empowering the student to meet the integral requirements of the course. Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Office of Accessibility Services; and (2) request a letter from the Office of Accessibility Services to be sent to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type; and (3) meet (in person, via phone, email, zoom, etc...) with each instructor to whom a letter of accommodation was sent to review approved accommodations. Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations to a student until appropriate verification from the Office of Accessibility Services has been provided. This syllabus and other class materials are available in an alternative format upon request. For the latest version of this statement and more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Office of Accessibility Services
874 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)
oas@fsu.edu
<https://dsst.fsu.edu/oas>

Academic Success:

Your academic success is a top priority for Florida State University. University resources to help you succeed include tutoring centers, computer labs, counseling and health services, and services for designated groups, such as veterans and students with disabilities. The following information is not exhaustive, so please check with your advisor or the Department of Student Support and Transitions to learn more.

Confidential campus resources:

Various centers and programs are available to assist students with navigating stressors that might impact academic success. These include the following:

Victim Advocate Program
University Center A, Rm. 4100
(850) 644-7161
Available 24/7/365
Office Hours: M-F 8-5
<https://dsst.fsu.edu/vap>

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

Florida State University's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) primary mission is to address psychological needs and personal concerns, which may interfere with students' academic progress, social development, and emotional well-being. The following in-person and virtual (tele-mental health) services are available to all enrolled students residing in the state of Florida:

1. Individual therapy
 2. Group therapy
 3. Crisis Intervention
 4. Psychoeducational and outreach programming
 5. After-hours crisis hotline
 6. Access to community providers for specialized treatment
- Call 850-644-TALK (8255) for more information on how to initiate services.

Counseling and Psychological Services

250 Askew Student Life Center

942 Learning Way

(850) 644-TALK (8255)

Walk-in and Appointment Hours:

M-F 8 am – 4 pm

<https://counseling.fsu.edu/>

Services at UHS are available to all enrolled students residing in Florida:

The mission of University Health Services (UHS) is to promote and improve the overall health and well-being of FSU students. UHS provides a coordinated continuum of care through prevention, intervention, and treatment. Services include general medical care, priority care, gynecological services, physicals, allergy injection clinic, immunizations, diagnostic imaging, physical therapy, and a medical response unit. The Center for Health Advocacy and Wellness (CHAW) assists students in their academic success through individual, group, and population-based health and wellness initiatives. Topics include wellness, alcohol and other drugs, hazing prevention, nutrition and body image, sexual health, and power-based personal violence prevention. For more information, go to uhs.fsu.edu.

University Health Services

Health and Wellness Center

960 Learning Way

Tallahassee, FL 32306

Hours: M-F, 8 am – 4 pm

(850) 644-6230

<https://uhs.fsu.edu/>

Free Tutoring from FSU

On-campus tutoring and writing assistance is available for many courses at Florida State University. A comprehensive list of on-campus tutoring options is available at tutoring.fsu.edu. High-quality tutoring is available by appointment and on a walk-in basis.

These services are offered by tutors trained to encourage the highest level of individual academic success while upholding personal academic integrity.

Syllabus Change Policy

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

Statement on Public Health Protocols

During any adverse event or condition that threatens our University community, please look for specific information on the FSU Alerts page (<https://alerts.fsu.edu/>) to ascertain particulars of the current situation. Please be patient with one another while we navigate any ongoing challenge. Whatever happens, we are committed to helping you learn the material thoroughly and stay on schedule with your degree program.

Class Schedule

Week 1

Thursday (Jan 8): *Introduction to course. What is comparative politics?*

Week 2 – CGG Ch. 2: What is Science?

Tuesday (Jan 13): Inference and logical fallacies

Thursday (Jan 15): Chapter discussion and applications

Week 3 – CGG Ch. 3: What is Politics?

Tuesday (Jan 20): Exit, voice, and loyalty game

Thursday (Jan 22): Chapter wrap-up

Week 4 – CGG Ch. 4: The State

Tuesday (Jan 27): Contractarian view of the state

Thursday (Jan 29): Predatory view of the state

Week 5 – CGG Ch. 5: Measuring Democracy

Tuesday (Feb 3): Indicators and definitions

Thursday (Feb 5): Applications and critiques

Week 6 – CGG Ch. 6: Economic Explanations for Democracy

Tuesday (Feb 10): Classic modernization theory

Thursday (Feb 12): Variants of modernization theory

Week 7 – Exam Week

Tuesday (Feb 17): Wrap up and Review

Thursday (Feb 19): Exam #1

(Last week to drop a course without receiving a grade)

Week 8 – CGG Ch. 7: Cultural Explanations for Democracy

Tuesday (Feb 24): Cultural determinants I
Thursday (Feb 26): Cultural determinants II

Week 9 – CGG Ch. 8: Democratic Transitions

Tuesday (Mar 3): Bottom-up Transitions to Democracy
Thursday (Mar 5): Top-down Transitions to Democracy

Week 10 – CGG Ch. 9: Does Democracy Make a Difference?

Tuesday (Mar 10): Policy outcomes
Thursday (Mar 12): Social and economic impacts

Spring Break (No Class)

Tuesday (Mar 17) & Thursday (Mar 19): No Class

Week 11 – Exam Week

Tuesday (Mar 24): Wrap up and Review
Thursday (Mar 26): Exam #2

Week 12 – CGG Ch. 10: Varieties of Dictatorships

Tuesday (Mar 31): Fundamental Problems of Authoritarian Rule
Thursday (Apr 2): Selectorate theory

(Last week to drop a course with permission from the Dean)

Week 13 – CGG Ch. 11: Problems with Group Decision-Making

Tuesday (Apr 7): Collective action problems
Thursday (Apr 9): Resistance and repression

Week 14 – CGG Ch. 12: Systems of Government

Tuesday (Apr 14): Parliamentary and presidential systems
Thursday (Apr 16): Semi-presidential systems

Week 15 – CGG Ch. 13: Elections and Electoral Systems

Tuesday (Apr 21): Electoral rules

Thursday (Apr 23): Party systems and social cleavages

Week 16 – Exam Week

Tuesday (Apr 28): Wrap up and Review

Thursday (Apr 30): Exam #3