

SOSC 3520: UNDERSTANDING COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Wednesdays & Fridays, 15:00 – 16:20, Room 4504 (lift 25-26)

Instructor	Teaching Assistant
Prof. James K. WONG (jameskalei@ust.hk) Room 3370 (lift 13-15) Office hours: By e-mail appointment	Mr. Roy HO (psrho@ust.hk) Room 2359 (lift 13-15) Office hours: By e-mail appointment

Course Description

This course analyzes politics from a comparative perspective. The central theme is to demonstrate how political science understands and explains the variations of political phenomena across different countries or jurisdictions. It explores topics ranging from comparative approaches and methods to comparative political regimes, actors, and institutions. Students will benefit with the knowledge, skills, and attitude for analyzing the world of politics.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

- (a) Describe the key methods, concepts, and theories in comparative politics; and
(b) Explain the similarities and differences in political regimes, actors, and institutions.
- Apply concepts and theories in discussing issues in comparative politics.
- Exercise independent and critical judgments in the study of politics.

Common Core Competencies (CCCs)

Students will have the opportunity to develop their problem-solving skills in the following domains: Application of critical thinking (PS02) and evaluation of information and sources (PS03).

Class Schedule

WEEK	CLASS	TOPIC
Theme I: Foundations of Comparative Political Science		
1	Class 0 [Sep 2]	Class Orientation
	Class 1 [Sep 4]	Topic 1: Introduction to Comparative Politics
2	Class 2 [Sep 9]	Topic 2: Approaches to Political Analysis
	Class 3 [Sep 11]	
3	Class 4 [Sep 16]	Topic 3: Comparative Methods
	Class 5 [Sep 18]	
4	Class 6 [Sep 23]	Workshop 1: Developing Cases
	Class 7 [Sep 25]	
5	Class 8 [Sep 30]	Revision and Consolidation for Theme 1
	Class 9 [Oct 2]	
6	Class 10 [Oct 7]	FOUNDATION TEST
	* Group Project Consultations [Oct 9] *	
Theme II: Issues in Comparative Political Science		
7	Class 11 [Oct 14]	Topic 4: Democracy and Dictatorship
	Class 12 [Oct 16]	
8	Class 13 [Oct 21]	
	Class 14 [Oct 23]	

9	Class 15 [Oct 28]	Workshop 2: Presenting Cases
	Class 16 [Oct 30]	
10	Class 17 [Nov 4] Class 18 [Nov 6]	Topic 5: Political Parties and Interest Groups
11	Class 19 [Nov 11] Class 20 [Nov 13]	Topic 6: Government Systems
12	Class 21 [Nov 18]	
	Class 22 [Nov 20]	Revision and Consolidation for Theme 2
13	Class 23 [Nov 25]	Workshop 3: Analyzing Cases
	Class 24 [Nov 27]	Workshop 4: Evaluating Case Analyses

Note: Class schedule and topics may be adjusted to facilitate students' learning.

Assessment and Grading

Deliverable / Weighting		Requirements
Group Project <i>Alignment with ILOs: 1(a), 1(b), 2 & 3</i> <i>Alignment with CCCs: PS02 & PS03</i>	25%	<i>Deliverable 1: Case Video (10%)</i> • Task: Select a real-world political phenomenon and <u>describe</u> its presence, absence, or variation across two countries or jurisdictions. • Format: Create a narrated case video (max. 10 minutes). Generative AI tools are permitted to assist in production. • In-class Demonstration: Groups will present a draft video (max. 5 minutes) on Oct 28 (Workshop 2). • Deadline for Final Version: 23:59, Nov 6 (Fri)
		<i>Deliverable 2: Case Analysis (15%)</i> • Task: Analyze a peer group's video. <u>Explain</u> the presence, or absence, or variation of the chosen phenomenon using relevant concepts and theories in comparative politics. • Format: Design a poster (Generative AI permitted) and present a 5-minute pitch on Nov 25 (Workshop 3). • Deadline for Final Version: 23:59, Dec 2 (Wed)
Peer Assessment (group-based) <i>Alignment with ILOs: 2 & 3</i> <i>Alignment with CCCs: PS02</i>	5%	• Task: Evaluate the group assigned to analyze your case video. Critically review their analysis and submit an assessment form. • In-class Defense: Deliver a 3-minute verbal review and defend your assessment during a Q&A session on Nov 27 (Workshop 4). • Deadline for Assessment Form: 23:59, Dec 2 (Wed) (NB: Please submit the assessment form with score justifications).
Foundation Test <i>Alignment with ILOs: 1(a), 1(b) & 3</i> <i>Alignment with CCCs: PS02</i>	30%	• Date: Oct 7 (Wed) (In-person) • Syllabus: Topics 1, 2, and 3 only. • Format: Multiple-choice and structured questions. • Permitted Aids: You can bring one double-sided A4 information sheet (to be collected at the end of the test).

		• Policies: Attendance is mandatory. ‘Make-up’ tests require documented evidence of medical/family emergencies or official duties.
Final Test <i>Alignment with ILOs: 1(a), 1(b), 2 & 3</i> <i>Alignment with CCCs: PS02</i>	40%	• Date: Examination period in Dec 2026 (In-person) • Syllabus: Topics 4, 5, and 6 only. • Format: Multiple-choice and structured questions. • Permitted Aids and Policies: Same as the Foundation Test.

Remarks:

- (1) A maximum of 5 points of **attendance and participation bonus** will be awarded to students who contribute actively to class discussions. Attendance will be taken on an ad hoc basis.
- (2) For late submission, no submission or no show, **mark penalty** will apply. For confirmed cases of plagiarism, cheating and abuse of generative AI tools, sanctions will be imposed.
- (3) For the group project, each group should submit detailed **division of labor**. The score of each individual student may be adjusted based on the division and quality of labor.
- (4) This course will be assessed using **criterion-referencing**. The rubrics for the major assessment tasks are provided at the end of this syllabus, outlining the criteria used for evaluation. Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be released within **two weeks of the due date**.

Important Dates

Date / Time	Task	Date / Time	Task
Sep 16 / 23:59	Grouping Confirmation	Nov 25 / in class	Case Analysis Presentation
Oct 7 / in class	Foundation Test	Nov 27 / in class	Verbal Review of Case Analysis
Oct 28 / in class	Case Video Demonstration	Dec 2 / 23:59	Submissions: Poster and Peer Assessment Form
Nov 6 / 23:59	Submission: Case Video	Exam period	Final Test

Final Grade Descriptors

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on Subject Grading Description
A+, A, A-	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates excellent attainment of knowledge, skills and attitude in the comparative analysis of politics.
B+, B	Good Performance	Demonstrates good attainment of knowledge, skills and attitude in the comparative analysis of politics.
B-, C+, C	Marginal Performance	Demonstrates adequate attainment of knowledge, skills and attitude in the comparative analysis of politics.
F	Failure	Demonstrates insufficient attainment of knowledge, skills and attitude in the comparative analysis of politics.

Course AI Policy

The use of generative AI tools is permitted for open-book assignments. However, students should understand that generative AI tools should only be used as *tools* and should NOT be a substitute for students' own work. Students must certify that the work submitted in their assignments is their own original work, except where they have acknowledged the use of external sources or assistance, including generative AI tools.

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Feedback on assignments will include comments and suggestions for further improvement. Students who have further questions about the feedback, including scores, should consult the Instructor OR Teaching Assistant within five working days after the feedback is received.

Resubmission Policy

Students who are unable to submit any of the assessed tasks should contact the Instructor or Teaching Assistant within five working days after the respective deadlines to discuss arrangements for resubmission.

Required Text

William Roberts Clark, Matt Golder & Sona Nadenichek Golder (2025) *Foundations of Comparative Politics* (2nd edition), Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press.

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST – Academic Registry](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

Additional Resources

- Andrea Kendall-Taylor, Natasha Lindstaedt & Erica Frantz (2019) *Democracies and Authoritarian Regimes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Andrew Heywood (2025) *Politics* (6th edition), London: Bloomsbury Academic. [e-book]
- John McCormick (2020) *Cases in Comparative Government and Politics*, London: Red Globe Press. [e-book]
- John T. Ishiyama (2012) *Comparative Politics: Principles of Democracy and Democratization*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. [e-book]
- Patrick H. O'Neil, Karl Fields & Don Share (2013) *Cases in Comparative Politics* (4th edition), New York: W. W. Norton & Co. [e-book]
- John McCormick, Rod Hague & Martin Harrop (2022) *Comparative Government and Politics: An Introduction* (12th edition), London: Bloomsbury Academic. [e-book]
- Todd Landman (2008) *Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics: An Introduction*, Abingdon, Oxon/New York: Routledge. [e-book]

Last revised: 28 August 2026

Appendix 1: Grading Rubrics

Grading Rubric for Group Project (Case Video)

Excellent Performance	Good Performance	Marginal Performance	Failure
The case video has a specific topic. It describes the presence, absence, or variation of a real-world political phenomenon across two countries or jurisdictions. It does NOT include any analytical explanations. The country/jurisdiction cases are easy to read and understand. The visual and audio materials used are appropriate.	The case video demonstrates the attainment of only some of the desired attributes (as for excellent performance) while some attributes are not yet attained. For the attributes attained, there is room for enhancement.	The case video demonstrates only minimal attainment of the desired attributes (as for excellent performance). For the attributes attained, there is significant room for enhancement.	The case video is inadequate, demonstrating very limited attainment of the desired attributes.

Grading Rubric for Group Project (Case Analysis)

Excellent Performance	Good Performance	Marginal Performance	Failure
The poster has a sensible interpretation of the topic. There is a logical argument substantiated by appropriate evidence and/or examples. There is application of relevant concepts and theories in comparative politics. The analysis is well-structured and coherent. There is good use of language. The presentation is clear.	The poster demonstrates the attainment of only some of the desired attributes (as for excellent performance) while some attributes are not yet attained. For the attributes attained, there is room for enhancement.	The poster demonstrates only minimal attainment of the desired attributes (as for excellent performance). For the attributes attained, there is significant room for enhancement.	The poster is inadequate, demonstrating very limited attainment of the desired attributes.

Grading Rubric for Foundation and Final Tests

Excellent Performance	Good Performance	Marginal Performance	Failure
The questions are answered accurately and/or justified with reasonable explanations. There is a logical and coherent elaboration with good use of language.	Only some of the questions are answered accurately and/or justified. The explanations are generally reasonable, but they are not substantiated well and/or there lacks sufficient clarity. There is room for enhancement in terms of logic, coherence, and/or use of language.	Only a very few questions are answered accurately. The explanations are unclear or do not make sense. There is significant room for enhancement in terms of logic, coherence, and/or use of language.	Most of the questions are answered inaccurately or the answers are not relevant to the questions. The answers are unsatisfactory in terms of logic, coherence, and/or use of language.

Appendix 2: Reading List

Theme 1: Foundations of Comparative Political Science	
Topics 1, 2 & 3	
Required Text	Clark, Golder & Golder (2025), chapters 1-3.
Recommended Texts	- John T. Ishiyama (2012), chapter 1. [e-book] - John McCormick, Rod Hague & Martin Harrop (2022), chapters 1-2. [e-book] - Todd Landman (2008), chapters 1, 2 & 4. [e-book]
Journal Articles	John Gerring (2004) What is a Case Study and What is it Good for? <i>The American Political Science Review</i> 98(2): 341-354.

Theme II: Issues in Comparative Political Science	
Topic 4	
Required Text	Clark, Golder & Golder (2025), chapters 5, 6 & 8.
Recommended Texts	- John T. Ishiyama (2012), chapters 2-4. [e-book] - John McCormick, Rod Hague & Martin Harrop (2022), chapters 5 & 6. [e-book] - Todd Landman (2008), chapters 6 & 9. [e-book]
Journal Articles	- Beatriz Magaloni (2008) Credible Power-Sharing and the Longevity of Authoritarian Rule, <i>Comparative Political Studies</i> 41(4/5): 715-741. - Daron Acemoglu & James Robinson (2005) <i>Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy</i>, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. - Jennifer Gandhi & Adam Przeworski (2007) Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats, <i>Comparative Political Studies</i> 40(11): 1279-1301. - Jennifer Gandhi & Ellen Lust-Okar (2009) Elections Under Authoritarianism, <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> 12: 403-422. - Pippa Norris & Ronald Inglehart (2008) Islamic Culture and Democracy: Testing the 'Clash of Civilizations' Thesis, <i>New Frontiers in Comparative Sociology</i> 109: 221-250. - Stephen Haber & Victor Menaldo (2011) Do Natural Resources Fuel Authoritarianism? A Reappraisal of the Resource Curse, <i>American Political Science Review</i> 105(1): 1-26.
Topics 5 & 6	
Required Text	Clark, Golder & Golder (2025), chapters 10, 12 & 14.
Recommended Texts	- John T. Ishiyama (2012), chapter 8. [e-book] - John McCormick, Rod Hague & Martin Harrop (2022), chapters 8, 9, 15-16. [e-book] - Todd Landman (2008), chapter 8. [e-book]
Journal Articles	- Anthony Downs (1957) An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy, 65(2): 135-150. - Arend Lijphart (2012) <i>Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries</i>, New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Cameron G. Thies & Schuyler Porche (2007) [The Political Economy of Agricultural Protection](#), *The Journal of Politics* 69(1): 116-127.
- Cas Mudde (2004) [The Populist Zeitgeist](#), *Government and Opposition* 39(4): 541-563.
- George Tsebelis (2000) [Veto Players and Institutional Analysis](#), *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration* 13(4): 441-474.
- José Antonio Cheibub & Fernando Limongi (2002) [Democratic Institutions and Regime Survival: Parliamentary and Presidential Democracies Reconsidered](#), *Annual Review of Political Science* 5: 151-179.
- José Antonio Cheibub & Svitlana Chernykh (2008) [Constitutions and Democratic Performance in Semi-Presidential Democracies](#), *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 9(3): 269-303.
- Juan J. Linz (1990) [The Perils of Presidentialism](#), *Journal of Democracy* 1(1): 51-69.
- Lawrence Ezrow et al. (2010) [Mean Voter Representation and Partisan Constituency Representation: Do Parties Respond to the Mean Voter Position or to Their Supporters?](#) *Party Politics* 17(3): 275-301.
- Matt Golder (2003) [Explaining Variation in the Success of Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe](#), *Comparative Political Studies* 36(4): 432-466.
- Steffen Ganghof (2003) [Promises and Pitfalls of Veto Player Analysis](#), *Swiss Political Science Review* 9(2): 1-25.