SOSC 3520: UNDERSTANDING COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Wednesdays & Fridays, 15:00 – 16:20, Room 6573 (lifts 29-30)

Instructor	Teaching Assistant
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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/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:

1. (a) Describe the key methods, concepts, and theories in comparative politics; and
   (b) Explain the similarities and differences in political regimes, actors, and institutions.
2. Apply concepts and theories in discussing issues in comparative politics.
3. 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 [Feb 4]	Class Orientation
1	Class 1 [Feb 6]	Topic 1: Introduction to Comparative Politics
2	Class 2 [Feb 11] Class 3 [Feb 13]	Topic 2: Approaches to Political Analysis
3	* Public Holiday [Feb 18] and Learning Consultations [Feb 20] *	
4	Class 4 [Feb 25] Class 5 [Feb 27]	Topic 3: Comparative Methods
5	Class 6 [Mar 4]	Revision and Consolidation for Theme 1
5	Class 7 [Mar 6]	**FOUNDATION TEST**
**Theme II: Issues in Comparative Political Science**	
6	Class 8 [Mar 11] Class 9 [Mar 13]	Topic 4: Democracy
7	Class 10 [Mar 18] Class 11 [Mar 20]	Topic 5: Dictatorship
8	* Foundation Test Feedback [Mar 25] and Learning Consultations [Mar 27] *	

9	Class 12 [Apr 1]	Topic 6: Political Parties
	* Public Holiday [Apr 3] and Mid-term Break [Apr 8] *	
	Class 13 [Apr 10]	Topic 6: Political Parties
10	Class 14 [Apr 15] Class 15 [Apr 17]	Topic 7: Interest Groups
11	Class 16 [Apr 22] Class 17 [Apr 24]	Topic 8: Government Systems
12	Class 18 [Apr 29]	Revision and Consolidation for Theme 2
	* Public Holiday [May 1] *	
13	Class 19 [May 6] Class 20 [May 8]	Group Project Presentations and Peer Reviews

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

Assessment and Grading

Deliverable / Weighting		Requirements
Group Project *Alignment with ILOs: 1(a), 1(b), 2 & 3* *Alignment with CCCs: PS02 & PS03*	25%	***Deliverables: Poster (20%) and Presentation (5%)*** • Each student group will identify a phenomenon in real-world politics, formulate a study question, and answer the question from a comparative perspective. The analysis should incorporate **at least TWO country/jurisdiction cases** and apply relevant concepts and/or theories. • Each group will create a **poster** AND deliver a **3-minute presentation** on **May 6 (Wed)**. The poster and presentation will be peer-reviewed. All groups will verbally respond to the peer reviews on **May 8 (Fri)**.
Peer Review *Alignment with ILOs: 2 & 3* *Alignment with CCCs: PS02*	5%	• Each group will critically review a poster and presentation of a peer group as assigned. • They will deliver a **3-minute verbal review** on **May 8 (Fri)** to offer comments and suggestions.
Foundation Test *Alignment with ILOs: 1(a), 1(b) & 3* *Alignment with CCCs: PS02*	30%	• This is a **closed-book** test scheduled for **Mar 6 (Fri)**. • The test will cover materials for Theme I only. Students will respond to multiple-choice and structured questions. • Each student is allowed to bring an information sheet of ONE double-sided A4 paper. The information sheet will be collected by the end of each test. • Students must complete the test in person. In case of medical/family emergencies or unavoidable duties, students must present appropriate evidence to request 'make-up' arrangements.
Individual Essay *Alignment with ILOs: 1(a), 1(b), 2 & 3*	40%	• Students will ***individually*** write a **2,000-word** essay on one of the issues in comparative politics discussed in Theme II. • The word limit does not include endnotes and appendices.

Alignment with CCCs: PS02 & PS03		Students are expected to use Harvard citation and referencing style. • The submission deadline of the final paper is **23:59, May 2 (Sat)**.

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
Feb 20 / 23:59	Grouping confirmation	May 6 / in class	Group Project – Presentation
Mar 6 / in class	Foundation Test	May 8 / in class	Group Project – Peer Review
May 2 / 23:59	Submission of Individual Essay		

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]**

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Appendix 1: Grading Rubrics

Grading Rubric for Group Project

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 Test

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.

Grading Rubric for Individual Essay

Excellent Performance	Good Performance	Marginal Performance	Failure
The essay has a sensible interpretation of the topic. There is a logical argument substantiated by appropriate examples and/or evidence. There is application of relevant concepts and theories. The essay is well-structured and coherent. There is good use of language. The presentation is clear.	The essay 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 essay demonstrates only minimal attainment of the desired attributes (as for excellent performance). For the attributes attained, there is significant room for enhancement.	The essay is inadequate, demonstrating very limited attainment of the desired attributes.

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? *The American Political Science Review* 98(2): 341-354.

Theme II: Issues in Comparative Political Science

Topics 4 & 5

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, *Comparative Political Studies* 41(4/5): 715-741. • Daron Acemoglu & James Robinson (2005) *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. • Jennifer Gandhi & Adam Przeworski (2007) Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats, *Comparative Political Studies* 40(11): 1279-1301. • Jennifer Gandhi & Ellen Lust-Okar (2009) Elections Under Authoritarianism, *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 403-422. • Pippa Norris & Ronald Inglehart (2008) Islamic Culture and Democracy: Testing the 'Clash of Civilizations' Thesis, *New Frontiers in Comparative Sociology* 109: 221-250. • Stephen Haber & Victor Menaldo (2011) Do Natural Resources Fuel Authoritarianism? A Reappraisal of the Resource Curse, *American Political Science Review* 105(1): 1-26.

Topics 6, 7 & 8

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) *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries*, 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.