POSC 25000: Comparing Countries

Hunter College, City University of New York

****Always consult the version of the syllabus on Brightspace for the most up to date version****

Spring 2026 | M/W 2:30pm – 3:45pm
Location: West Bldg W208
Professor: Juan Corredor-Garcia (jcorredorgarcia@gradcenter.cuny.edu)
Office Hours: MW 1:30 –2:20pm Office West Bldg 1730A. We can also speak via Zoom during these times. If you want to secure a spot in advance, you can make an appointment via email 24h before.

Course Description

This course provides students with an introduction to the Comparative Politics subfield (CP) within the discipline of Political Science. Comparative Politics refers to the study of politics within different countries around the world. The focus is on the process of state-building, the emergence and development of major types of political regimes and institutions in relation to key cultural, economic, and historical forces.

Much of the research in CP begins with empirically grounded questions or puzzles. For example: What are the origins of contemporary states? Why some states have more capacity than others? Why are non-state actors capable of challenging state power? When do countries become democratic and when do they become authoritarian nations? What does explain the widespread democratic backsliding in several countries around the world? Under what conditions democratic regime transitions occur? What are the political origins of violence and conflict? When do people organize and mobilize collectively to make demands to the state? This course addresses these and related questions. It prepares students to think *comparatively* by introducing the wide range of topics, methodologies and research strategies that scholars of CP commonly use.

This writing-intensive course takes a broad as well as detailed approach: the course addresses major themes and concepts in comparative politics as well as specific country case studies. The course has no formal prerequisites and should be valuable to anyone with an interest in comparative politics. Much of the material covered in the course – both readings and lectures – draws from and grounds classic and emerging research in political science, but we also use broader social science research to understand political issues across the globe.

The course is divided into five modules that focus on essential themes in Comparative Politics:

1. The State. Origins, Nature, and Capacity
2. Political Regimes
3. Political Violence and Conflict
4. Social Mobilization and Collective Action
5. Emerging Issues in Comparative Politics

Learning Objectives
Students who successfully complete this course will:

1. **Become** conversant in the terminology and arguments explaining the impact of various processes and structures on politics within states, both generally and in application to cases.
2. **Acquire** a broad knowledge of the theories, concepts and empirical strategies used to analyze political processes and structures in different countries of the world.
3. **Develop** a theoretically informed and empirically grounded understanding of the state, its institutions, and the regime types.
4. **Know** how to compare different state structures and conditions and explain how these impact a state's politics.
5. **Explain** why some countries are democratic while others turn into non-democratic regimes.
6. **Develop** and **strengthen** critical thinking and writing skills by using empirical evidence in written assignments, essays, and oral class participation.

Course Readings
There are no books to purchase for this class. Unless otherwise noted in the syllabus, all readings are electronically available on the **Brightspace** website. The course readings consist primarily of journal articles and book chapters, although other formats might be included, such as blogs, op-eds, podcasts, and documentaries. Some of the course materials are Open Educational Resources (OER). All students are required to obtain access to Brightspace and check it regularly for announcements. You can login to Brightspace through https://ssologin.cuny.edu/cuny.html

Note that I also include a list of "Additional Readings" – these are not required for the course. Readings vary in length, methodology, and empirical focus. For some class sessions you will read a single article, while for others you might read two articles or several book chapters. In all cases, it is important to read carefully but strategically – meaning that you read to identify the key conceptual, theoretical and empirical points without getting bogged down in details that may not be relevant to your learning objectives. For some quick advice and useful strategies on how to accomplish this, see here and here.

Grades

- **In-Class Individual Writing Assignment (10 points)**
- **Midterm Exam (20 points)**
- **In-Class Group Presentation (10 points)**
- **Oral Examination (20 points)**
- **Country Brief (5 x 7 = 35 points)**
- **Attendance and Punctuality (5 points)**

Grades (explained)

- **In-Class Individual Writing Assignment (10 points)**

You have one short in-class individual writing assignment due on **February 11**. This is a closed book exam using bluebooks. You will have up to 75 minutes to complete the assignment. The questions will cover material from lectures and readings from **Class 1 to Class 5.** More detailed instructions will be provided separately before the assignment.

❖ **Midterm Exam (20 points)**

You have a midterm exam due on **March 25**. This is a closed-book assignment to be completed on Bluebooks. You will have up to 75 minutes to complete the assignment. The questions will cover material from lectures and readings from **Class 7 to Class 17**. More detailed instructions will be provided separately before the exam.

❖ **In-Class Group Presentation (10 points)**

In groups of four/five students, you will be asked to deliver a presentation about one topic from Module 1 to Module 4. You will first have to submit a 250-word draft of the presentation and do a Peer evaluation of the other groups presentation (5 points). Presentation during class of 20 minutes (5 points). You will devote an entire session preparing the oral presentation on April 22. Presentations are due on **April 27, 29, and May 4**. Two points will be deducted for students missing each session during the presentation period. More detailed instructions including formatting, evaluation, and citation instructions will be posted on Brightspace.

❖ **Oral Examination (20 points)**

The final exam is an oral examination face-to-face with the instructor on **May 20th from 1:45pm to 4:45pm**. Three prompts will be selected advance. Students can select one of the prompts. Students should be prepared for responding the prompt and follow up questions during five-seven minutes. Spots are allocated based on the roster order and will be published two weeks before the final exam. More detailed instructions will be provided closer the date of the final exam.

❖ **Country Brief (5 x 7 = 35 points)**

Students will choose one (1) country, which must be any United Nations member state + Taiwan (except the United States), no later than **February 4**. Over the course of the semester, students will research this country through five (5) Country Briefs. The prompts for each brief will be posted on Brightspace in the first week of February. Country Briefs should be completed biweekly in the form of in-class activities and/or homework.

❖ **Attendance and Punctuality (5 points)**

Attendance is required and can be taken in the first or last 15 minutes of the class. If you are not present when I take the roster, you will not get attendance credit for that session. I understand, however, that unexpected events can occasionally prevent you from attending class. **You can miss up to three (3) classes without penalty and without need to provide an excuse.** Do note, however, that it is your responsibility to obtain notes for the classes that you miss. **Students missing 30% of classes (i.e., nine (9) classes) will automatically get a F**. Students missing more than three (3) classes cannot earn A+ or A grades.

❖ **Extra-credit, optional assignments (10 points)**

In case you want to improve your grade, you can submit two extra-credit, optional handwritten assignments to be submitted in class (each is worth 5%). The first optional assignment is due on **March 11**. The second optional assignment is due on **May 11**. More details will be announced via Brightspace.

Bonus (2.5 points)

I will reward up to 2.5 points for those who book office hours to meet me during the semester. One meeting suffices to earn the bonus.

Make-up Assignments

There is an automatic 3.0-point deduction applied to any in-class or online make-up assignments that you need to schedule because you missed the original assignment for any reason (e.g., travel, illness, etc.).

Grading Structure

You can earn a maximum of 100 points in the class. Course grades are based on consistent class participation, country briefs, attendance, an individual writing assignment, a midterm exam a small-group presentation, and a final exam.

- A+: 99-100
- A: 93 – 98.99
- A-: 90 – 92.99
- B+: 87 – 89.99
- B: 83 – 86.99
- B-: 80 – 82.99
- C+: 77 – 79.99
- C: 73 – 76.99
- C-: 70 – 72.99
- D: 60 – 69.99
- F: below 60

Incompletes and Credit/No Credit

To be eligible for a grade of incomplete, students must have reached an agreement to that effect with the professor prior to the final exam. No grade of incomplete will be awarded without documentation of a health issue, mental health issue, or some other legitimate obstacle to completing the course in a timely manner. Said health issues can affect either the student or a family member under the student's care. All work must be completed within a semester. In accordance with Hunter College policy, to be eligible for Credit/No Credit students must have completed all assignments and take the final exam.

Late Policy

Assignments submitted after they are due will be counted as late. Three points will be deducted from the final grade of an assignment that is submitted after the indicated deadline. An additional three points will be deducted every hour that the assignment is late. Late assignments will not be eligible for points if submitted more than one day (24 hours) after they are due.[1]

Hunter College Policy on Academic Integrity

A university, by its nature, strives to foster and recognize originality of thought, which can be recognized only when people produce work that is theirs alone, properly acknowledging information and ideas that are obtained from the work of others. It is therefore important that students must maintain the highest standards with regard to honesty, effort, and performance. As a public school, Hunter is committed to ensuring that all members of the academic community strive not only for excellence in scholarship but also for integrity of character. In the pursuit of knowledge and personal development, it is imperative that students present their

[1] Any requests for short extensions due to extraordinary circumstances will be assessed on an individual basis and must be communicated to me via email no later than 24 hours before the assignment is due. You may have a **maximum of two extensions** available throughout the term.

own ideas and insights for evaluation, critique, and eventual reformulation. As part of this process, each student must acknowledge the intellectual contributions of others.

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, please see CUNY's Policy on Academic Integrity: http://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-resources/Academic-Integrity-Policy.pdf

Office Hours and Email Correspondence

You are encouraged to see me during office hours. You can make an appointment to meet with me by sending an email to jcorredorgarcia@gradcenter.cuny.edu. If you are unable to meet during office hours, email me to discuss alternative dates/times. All emails should include the course number in the subject line of the email. Email correspondence: I will make efforts to reply to emails sent M-F from 8 AM – 6 PM within 48 hours of receipt. If I can, I will respond more quickly, but please plan ahead with this 48-hour lead time in mind, and do not expect an immediate reply late at night or over the weekend.

Communication

The most effective way to reach me outside of office hours is via email**.** When communicating via email, please remember to be professional in your tone, and to **write POLSC 25000 on the subject of the email.** It is your responsibility to ensure that you have a Hunter or CUNY email in place and that you check it on a daily basis. Because I receive too many emails, I only respond to those coming from Hunter or CUNY email accounts. In other words, I do not respond to personal email addresses, so please make sure to enable your institutional email address to communicate with me. I regularly send any updates to the syllabus or other notifications via email using Brightspace.

AI Policy

During our class, we may use AI Writing tools such as ChatGPT or Gemini. You will be informed by the professor as to when, where, and how these tools are permitted to be used, along with guidance for attribution. Any use outside of this permission constitutes a violation of Hunter College's Academic Integrity Policy. Please also note that this policy applies only to my class, and it is your responsibility to check with each instructor if ever you are unsure about what constitutes academic integrity in their class.

Class Structure

The structure of the course adopts an inclusive pedagogy format. In addition to class lectures, we will also engage consistently in several individual and small-group discussions throughout the semester. An inclusive classroom invites and allows students to fully participate in the learning experience. As a result, cooperative learning is not only expected but highly encouraged.

Lecture Slides

I use slides to focus the lectures, communicate some of the material, and prompt discussion. I normally upload slides to Brightspace the week of class. But note that the slides themselves contain only a small part of the lecture material – hence the importance of attending in-person and remote classes and doing readings for each class.

Virtual Classes and Recordings

On occasion we may need to hold class online synchronous or asynchronous due to pre-existing research trips that I committed to months ago, if we have a guest lecturer outside New York City who cannot attend in-person to our classroom, or if public health or weather conditions require it as indicated by the University.

ADA Policy

In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical, and/or Learning) consult the Office of AccessABILITY, located in Room E1214B, to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance, please call: (212) 772- 4857 or (212) 650-3230.

Hunter College Policy on Sexual Misconduct

In compliance with the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of sexual violence on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College. A) Sexual Violence: Students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-610-7272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444). B) All Other Forms of Sexual Misconduct: Students are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John Rose (jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123. CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct Link: http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/la/Policy-on-Sexual-Misconduct-12-1-14-with-links.pdf"

Important Resources:

- **Center for Student Achievement:** If you're experiencing academic difficulties or just worried about how to manage your time, the Center for Student Achievement is here to support you. Collaborate with them to troubleshoot, address concerns and enhance your study skills. The Center for Student Achievement is located at Room 417, West Building. Phone number is 212-772-4890.
- **Rockowitz Writing Center:** The Dr. Murray and Anna C. Rockowitz Writing Center (RWC) is a comprehensive service for the entire Hunter community, offering academic support to all registered undergraduate and graduate students. Register for live video tutoring or an e-tutoring session. RWC is located at the Silverstein Student Success Center Cooperman Library, 7th floor, East Building. You can reach out to them at 212-772-4212 and rwc@hunter.cuny.edu
- **Sylvia E. Fishman Student Center**: The Sylvia E. Fishman Student Center is a supportive space where students can connect with peers, meet with advisors for academic guidance, plan programs and events, and access fully equipped facilities for presentations. The center is located at Room 417, West Building. You can reach out to them at 212-650-3282 and studentcenter@hunter.cuny.edu.

COURSE CALENDAR
Module 1
The State: Origins, Nature, and Capacity

Class 1: Overview of the Course, Key Themes, and Logistics
Jan 26, Monday *Online Synchronous Class*

- No readings assigned for today

Class 2: What is Comparative Politics? / How to Compare?
Jan 28, Wednesday

- Hoover Green, Amelia. How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps. 2013.
- Kopstein, Jefrey, Marck Lichbach, and Stephen Hanson. What Is Comparative Politics? In *Comparative Politics. Interests, Identities, and Institutions in a Changing Global Order*. 2014: 1-9.

Class 3: The State Apparatus and its Functions
Feb 2, Monday

- Levi, Margaret. The State of the Study of the State. In: Katznelson, Ira and Helen Milner (Eds.). *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2002: 33-55.

Class 4: Questioning Traditional Approaches of the State
Feb 4, Wednesday

- Scott, James. The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia. Yale University Press. 2009. Ch1
- O'Donnell, Guillermo. On the state, democratization and some conceptual problems: A Latin American view with glances at some post-communist countries. *World Development* 21(8), 1993: 1355-1369.

Class 5: Political Identity: Nation, Citizenship, and Ethnicity
Feb 9, Monday

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso. 2006. Introduction and Chapter 3.

Class 6: **In-Class Writing Assignment (10 points)**
Feb 11, Wednesday
NOTE: This is a closed-book exam using Bluebooks. The assignment consists of several short-answer questions that you are expected to answer with 5-7 sentence responses. **The questions will cover course materials from Class 1 to Class 5.** You will have 75 minutes to complete the assignment.

Feb 16, Monday **NO CLASS ON FEBRUARY 16: COLLEGE CLOSED**
Country Brief #1

Module 2
Political Regimes

Class 7: Democracies
Feb 18, Wednesday

- Walter, Barbara. Democracy Needs a Loser. *The New Yorker.* August 24, 2024.
- Przeworski, Adam. Who Decides What Is Democratic? *Journal of Democracy* 35(3), 2024: 5-16.

Class 8: Autocracies
Feb 23, Monday

- Geddes, Barbara. What do We Know About Democratization After 20 Years? *Annual Review of Political Science* 2(1), 1999: 115-144.
- Select one of the following readings:
  - Reading: Applebaum, Anne. There Was No Russian Election. *The Atlantic.* March 20, 2024.
  - Reading: Ryback, Timothy. How Hitler Dismantled a Democracy in 53 Days. *The Atlantic*. January 8, 2025.

Class 9: Hybrid Regimes
Feb 25, Wednesday

- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. The New Competitive Authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy* 32(3), 2020: 51-65.
- Podcast: Lessons From Hungary's Democratic Backsliding. WYNC Studios. June 6, 2025.

Class 10: Librarian Class Instruction for Completing Country Briefs
March 2, Monday
Country Brief #2

- Students should bring laptops for completing an in-class activity. For equipment borrowing, click the following link: https://www.hunter.cuny.edu/information-technology/services/equipment-support/equipment-loans/

Module 3
Political Violence and Conflict

Class 11: Political Violence. Logics and Types

March 4, Wednesday

- Kalyvas, Stathis. The Landscape of Political Violence. In Chenoweth Erica, Richard English, Andreas Gofas, and Stathis Kalyvas. *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*. 2019: 11-33

Class 12: Civil Wars
March 9, Monday

- Kalyvas, Stathis. Civil Wars. In Boix, Charles, and Stokes, Susan (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford University Press. 2009: 416-434.

Class 13: Criminal Wars. Guest Speaker: Prof. Lorena Villavicencio (Universidad Internacional del Ecuador)
March 11, Wednesday

(Optional) Extra-Credit Assignment I: due on May 11 at 2:30pm (EST).

- Mayorga, Galo, and Kai Thaler. Crime, Crackdowns, and Democracy in Ecuador. *Journal of Democracy* 37(1), 2026. 120-133.

Class 14: State Repression
March 16, Monday

- Davenport, Christian. State Repression and Political Order. *Annual Review of Political Science* 10(1), 2007: 1-23.

Class 15: Revolutions
March 18, Wednesday ***Online Synchronous Class***

- Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions. A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. *Cambridge University Press*. 1979. Ch1

Class 16: Midterm Review
March 23, Monday ***Online Asynchronous Class***
Country Brief #3

The recorded lecture will focus on reviewing course materials from Class 7 to Class 16.

Class 17: Midterm Exam (20 points)
March 25, Wednesday

Note: This is a closed-book exam using Brightspace's Lockdown Browser. The assignment consists of several short-answer questions that you are expected to answer with 5-7 sentence responses. **The questions will cover material from lectures and readings from Class 7 to Class 16.** You will have up to 75 minutes to complete the assignment.

Module 4

Social Mobilization and Collective Action

Class 18: Politics from Below
March 30, Monday

- Tarrow, Sidney. Contentious Politics. In Della Porta, Donatella, and Mario Diani (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*. 2015. Ch1.

NO CLASS ON APRIL 1-9: SPRING RECESS

Class 19: Social Movements
April 13, Monday

- Della Porta, Donatella, Hanspeter Kriesi, Dieter Rucht. *Social Movements in a Socialising World*. Palgrave Macmillan London. 1999. Ch1.

Class 20: Civilian Resistance
April 15, Wednesday

- Chenoweth, Erica. Civil Resistance. A Brief Introduction. *Oxford University Press*. 2021: 1-14
- Podcast: How to Topple Dictators and Transform Society. Vox. January 3, 2020.

Class 21: Film
April 20, Monday
Country Brief #4

- TBA

Group Presentation

Class 22: Guidelines & Preparation
April 22, Wednesday

Class 23: Group Presentation 1,2,3
April 27, Monday

Class 24: Group Presentation 4,5,6
April 29, Wednesday

Class 25: Group Presentation 7, 8
May 4, Monday

Module 5
Emerging Issues in Comparative Politics

Class 26: Against Methodological Nationalism
May 6, Wednesday
Country Brief #5: Final Version

- Schwedler, Jillian. Against Methodological Nationalism: Seeing Comparison as Encompassing through the Arab Uprising. In Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith (Eds.). *Rethinking Comparison. Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*. Cambridge University Press. 2021: 172-189.

Class 27: Transnational Comparison. Insights from the Amazon Rainforest
May 11, Monday

(Optional) Extra-Credit Assignment II: due on May 11 at 2:30pm (EST).

- Sellers, Jefferey. 2019. From Within to Between Nations: Subnational Comparison across Borders. *Perspectives on Politics* 17(1): 85-105.

Class 28: Comparing World Cuisines
May 13, Wednesday

Class 29: Oral Exam
May 20, Wednesday **from 1:45pm to 4:45pm**

The final exam is an oral examination face-to-face with the instructor. Three prompts will be selected advance. Students can pick one of the prompts. Students should be prepared for responding the prompt and follow up questions during five-seven minutes. Spots are allocated based on the roster order and will be published two weeks before the final exam. More detailed instructions will be provided closer the date of the final essay.