GOVT 157: Democracy and Dictatorship: Politics in the Contemporary World

Fall 2018

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Lecture Time: T/R 8:50 – 10:10a.m.
Lecture Place: TBD
Office Hours: 4:15-5:15p.m. W, 1:30-2:30 R or by appointment

Course Description

This course is designed to provide students with an overview of substantive topics comprising the subfield of comparative politics and a survey of the wide-reaching methodological approaches that scholars employ in their research. Through attending lectures, actively participating in discussions, engaging with course readings, and completing course assignments, students will learn to parse, evaluate, and critique political science texts and to communicate these assessments both orally in class discussions and in writing exercises. Additionally, students will be provided with a guided hands-on opportunity to implement independent political science research. Following an introductory session, the course is organized into five primary units.

The first unit examines the organizational structures of political units (with an emphasis on the state) and considers state-building in the European context and, subsequently, in the developing world. This first unit establishes the foundation for the study of political regimes in the second unit of the course. The second unit introduces democratic and authoritarian political regimes, both substantively and empirically. In addition to studying the measurement of democratic and authoritarian political regimes, this unit reviews predominant explanations of regime type and investigates the influence of political regime type for economic development, for example. In this unit, students will have the opportunity to investigate political regime trajectories in countries of interest to them and to explore relationships between political regime type and economic development, for example, in select countries. It concludes with an overview of the vast literature accumulated on political regime transitions.

The third unit provides an introduction to democratic political institutions and explores the variation in electoral systems, for example, across democratic countries. After broadly investigating variation in majoritarian, proportional, and mixed electoral formulas, students will work in groups to evaluate electoral system reform in a country of their choosing. The fourth unit extends the study of elections beyond the mechanics surrounding vote tabulations to consider what scholars know about voters and political behavior. Specifically, it reviews conventional micro- and macro-level explanations of turnout in elections and considers less conventional mediums through which voters participate in politics. Following a brief interlude on identity politics, the course concludes with a fifth unit that considers some of the most pressing contemporary challenges to democratic governance. This unit examines corruption, political populism, and democratic recession.

Course Objectives

This course has two primary objectives. The first objective is to introduce students to the wide array of topics and relationships examined in comparative politics. The second objective is twofold. It is to familiarize students with social science approaches to research and to equip students with basic analytical tools to begin inquiry of the substantive relationships studied.
Learning Outcomes

- Upon completion of this course, students should have an understanding of the comparative politics subfield and a sense of the types of concepts and research questions that scholars of political science study.
- After this course, students should be able to document and compare political regimes (and the institutions comprising them) across select countries. Students will be able to discuss measurement issues pertaining to political regimes and to produce explanations for various observed disparities across democracies and autocracies.
- Upon completion of this course, students should be able to describe participatory patterns and contemporary challenges to democratic governance. They should be able to identify countries confronted with these challenges and to propose innovative solutions to addressing declining turnout, corruption, political populism, and/or democratic recession.
- After this course, students should be able to parse, evaluate, and critique classic political science texts and communicate these assessments both orally in class discussions and in writing exercises.
- Following the completion of this course, students should be able to identify basic approaches to political science research and be able to implement basic quantitative assessments.

Classroom Behavior

Students are expected to attend class regularly, complete all readings and other assignments on time, and to actively participate in discussions. Students are asked to contribute to an environment conducive to learning by treating their professor and peers with respect and by voicing disagreement productively.

Course Assignments and Policies

Class participation: Students are expected to attend all course lectures and discussions. Students are permitted three unexcused absences without penalty. Excused absences include medical and family emergencies and absences for university-approved activities. If extenuating circumstances require you to miss more than three class sessions, you should contact the instructor as early as possible to make accommodating arrangements. Every unexcused absence after the three permitted will result in a one-percentage point deduction from your participation grade.

Participation grades depend not solely on attendance but also on engagement and contribution in lectures and course discussions. Prior to each session, students are expected to have engaged with assigned material and should come to class prepared to respond to the following:

- What are the main concepts?
- What is the primary argument?
- What type of empirical evidence does the author introduce to substantiate his/her claims?
- Do you find this evidence compelling? Why or why not?
- How does this contribution relate to other course content and/or current events?
• Do you see any ways to extend or refine this research? If yes, please explain.

Reading Questions/Short Writing Exercises: Students will be invited to complete several formative assignments throughout the course. These include posing and responding to questions on reading material (see above) and completing short in-class writing exercises. These items are designed to assess student comprehension of assigned readings and will be graded as either “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory.”

Exploratory Exercise: Students will be asked to complete one exploratory exercise. This exercise will serve as a guided approach to implementing basic quantitative research. Specifically, the instructor will provide students with a series of questions to be answered using data(sets) popular among political scientists. This exploration will be introduced and disseminated in-class on Tuesday, September 25, and students will have an opportunity to collaborate on the assignment in an in-class laboratory session. The due date will be one week later on Tuesday, October 2. Students will be provided with a rubric and an example of excellence to use as a model.

Democratic Country Report: Each week, beginning in Week 7, students will be prompted to respond to several simple questions relating to the topic of the week for a particular democratic country to which they are randomly assigned. The specific questions to which students are asked to respond are listed under the week-by-week sections on the course Moodle website. Students will record their responses to posed questions before the Tuesday class session. Students will review their peers’ posts and reply to one post before the Thursday class session. In replies, students should report commonalities between and, ideally, disparities across their assigned countries and the countries discussed in their peers’ posts. Students should discuss anticipated effects of observed differences on the basis of course material.

Exams: This course will have a mid-term exam and a final exam. The mid-term exam will take place in class on Tuesday, October 16. The final exam will take place on Friday, December 14 from 9:00am-12:00pm for Section 1 and on Thursday, December 13 from 9:00am-12:00pm for Section 2. Both the mid-term and final exams will be cumulative and will consist of fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, and short answer questions. Exams will include content from lecture, readings, and other assignments. In order to perform well on these exams, students should complete all course assignments (including readings), be attentive and active participants in class, and seek help from the instructor as needed. In-class review sessions will be held prior to both the mid-term and final exams.

Assignment Policies: Students are expected to complete and submit assignments in accordance with deadlines outlined in the syllabus. If extenuating circumstances prevent students from completing assignments by the assigned due date, students should be in communication with the instructor in advance of the deadline to make alternative arrangements and accommodations.

Grading

Course grades will be calculated as follows:

Class participation = 10%
Reading Questions and Short Writing Exercises = 10%
Exploratory Exercise = 15%
Democratic Country Report = 20%
In-class Midterm Exam = 20%
Final Exam = 25%
Total = 100%
Additional Items

**Electronic Devices:** Note taking on computers and other electronic devices is permitted. However, taking notes by hand is highly encouraged. Multiple studies find that taking notes by hand improves the comprehension and retention of material (see Mueller and Oppenheimer 2014).

Students are asked to refrain from using electronic devices including cell phones, laptops, tablets, etc. for personal use during course lectures and discussions. These devices can be disruptive to the instructor and hamper other students’ abilities to learn.

**Academic Integrity:** Academic integrity and honesty is expected of all students. In short, students are expected to complete all course assignments independently. While students are encouraged to discuss course content and topics with others, all graded assignments should reflect the work of individual students. With questions, please consult:

http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/standardsregulations/plagiarism.html

Students who do not adhere to these standards may fail the entire course.

Students are not expected to conduct outside research for any course assignments, but if they choose to do so, students are required to cite considered sources appropriately. Students are asked to reference Wesleyan’s library guidelines (http://libguides.wesleyan.edu/citing).

**Disability-Related Accommodations:** Wesleyan University is committed to the learning of all students. To that end, the university provides accommodations for qualified students with documented disabilities. Students requiring special accommodations should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible as accommodations cannot be provided retroactively. For information and direction, students should reference https://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/Student/requesting.html and set up a meeting with Accessibility Services. The instructor will collaborate with Accessibility Services to provide appropriate accommodations for students who require them.

**Readings:** There are no textbooks required for this class. All required readings are available on the course website, online, or through Wesleyan’s Library.

Course Schedule

**Week 1:** Introduction to the Course, Discipline, and Methods

Tuesday, September 4: Introduction/Presentation of Syllabus/Pre-Course Survey

Thursday, September 6: Comparative Politics and Approaches to Research

**Assignments:**

Thursday:


**Week 2:** The Organization of Political Units/State Building Around the World
Tuesday, September 11: States, Nations, and Nation-States/Origins of the European State
Thursday, September 13: Colonialism and State-Building Beyond Europe

Assignments:

Tuesday:

Thursday:

Week 3: Political Regimes: Democracies as the “Gold Standard”
Tuesday, September 18: Introduction to Political Regimes, Democracy and Its Measurement
Thursday, September 20: Modernization Theory and Cultural Determinants of Democracy

Assignments:

Tuesday:

Thursday:

Week 4: Unpacking the Residual Category: Authoritarian Regimes
Tuesday, September 25: Authoritarian Regimes Overview Political Regime Exploration Assigned
Thursday, September 27: Single-Party Regimes and Military Dictatorships

Assignments:

Tuesday:

Thursday:


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**Week 5: Does Regime Type Matter?**

**Tuesday, October 2:** In-Class Work on Exploration Exercise  
**Thursday, October 4:** Consequences of Regime Type and Democratic Survival

**Assignments:**

**Tuesday:**  

**Thursday:**  


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**Week 6: Democratic Transitions/Midterm Review**

**Tuesday, October 9:** Democratic Transitions, *Political Regime Exploration Due*  
**Thursday, October 11:** Midterm Review

**Assignments:**

**Tuesday:**  


**Thursday:** None.

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**Week 7: Midterm Exam/Presidential Versus Parliamentary Systems**

**Tuesday, October 16:** In-Class Midterm Exam  
**Thursday, October 18:** Presidential Versus Parliamentary Systems

**Assignments:**

**Tuesday:** None.

**Thursday:**

Week 8: Elections and Electoral Systems

Tuesday, October 23: Fall Break. No Class.
Thursday, October 25: Elections and Electoral Systems

Assignments:

Tuesday: None.

Thursday:


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Week 9: Political Parties, Party Systems, and Voters

Tuesday, October 30: Political Parties and Party Systems, *Response Paper Assigned*
Thursday, November 1: Voters and Declining Turnout in Democratic Elections

Assignments:

Tuesday:


Thursday:


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Week 10: Unconventional Forms of Democratic Political Participation and Political Involvement in Authoritarian Regimes

Tuesday, November 6: Unconventional Forms of Political Participation: Social Movements and Protests, *Response Paper Due*
Thursday, November 8: Elections and Participation in Authoritarian Regimes

Assignments:

Tuesday:


Thursday:
Week 11: Identity Politics: Gender and Ethnicity

Tuesday, November 13: Gender and Politics
Thursday, November 15: Ethnic Politics

Assignments:

Tuesday:


Thursday:


Week 12: Contemporary Challenges to Democratic Governance: Political Corruption

Tuesday, November 20: Corruption, *Response Paper Assigned*
Thursday, November 22: Thanksgiving Break. No Class.

Assignments:

Tuesday:


Week 13: Contemporary Challenges to Democratic Governance: Political Populism and Democratic Recessions

**Submit country report in class.

Tuesday, November 27: Political Populism, *Response Paper Due*
Thursday, November 29: Democratic Recession, Debate Topic and Side Assigned

Assignments:
Tuesday:


Thursday:


Week 14: In-Class Discussion of Country Reports, Final Exam Review

Tuesday, December 4: Ted Talks Discussion: What if we replaced politicians with randomly selected people?
Thursday, December 6: Final Exam Review

Assignments:
Tuesday:

Thursday: None.

Final Exam:
Section 1: Friday, December 14 9:00am-12:00pm
Section 2: Thursday, December 13 9:00am-12:00pm