



Diablo Valley College
POLSC 220 – 9018 / Comparative Politics / 3 Units / Spring 2025
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Instructor: John Kropf – Office Hours: 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Room W-216
Schedule: Mondays, HYBRID / ONLINE 6:00 to 7:25 pm, January 27 – May 19, 2025

Course Description: Understanding political developments and disputes around the world has never seemed more important than it is today. Many people now see the world as more complicated and less comprehensible than it was during either the Cold War (1944-1989), or the post-Cold War era (1989-2001). Diversity of political, economic, and social life among nations exists in every period of history. Comparative politics attempts to understand this diversity, assessing current events in the light of fundamental and long-standing questions: Why do governments form? Why does a group of people come to see itself as a nation? Why do nations sometimes fall apart? How can a government convince people that it has the right to rule? Do some forms of government last longer than others? Do some forms of government serve their people's interests better than others? How do democracies form, and how do they fall apart? Can government policy reduce poverty and improve economic well-being? This course introduces you to the many and often conflicting answers to these questions by examining them comparatively. It will also help you to start to assess which answers are the most convincing and why.

Recommended: Eligibility for ENGL-122 or equivalent

Student Learning Objectives (SLOs): A comparative analysis of the political systems of selected foreign states. An investigation of the origins and nature of politics, philosophies and cultures and their expression in political institutions and processes. At the completion of this course, students will be able to....

1. Describe the content and origins of several significant political philosophies of the world.
2. Evaluate the institutional consequences of the adoption of any particular philosophy.
3. Differentiate the institutional structures which organize political behavior in several different political environments.
4. Analyze and *critically* evaluate some of the most important contemporary issues we face in the 21st century based on 1-3 above.

Course Text: Orvis and Drogus, *Introducing Comparative Politics* (required). Weatherby et.al., *The Other World: Issues and Politics in the Developing World* (recommended). The instructor will also provide other assigned readings.

Course Methodology: Classes will consist primarily of class lectures and discussions, which will amplify and clarify text materials. Students will be expected to read assigned material prior to lectures/discussions.

Class Evaluation: Student progress will be evaluated through a research paper and discussion questions and video responses related to your readings. Late work will be accepted on a case-by-case basis but will *definitely* lower your grade. Getting written work uploaded to Canvas in a timely fashion will be very important. Attendance is mandatory and will be taken formally at each session. Discussion forms an important component of this course, so class participation is strongly encouraged. Student participation in class is an indicator of student interest and shows that the student is keeping up with the assigned readings. Also, since a significant portion of your grade is based on participation, *this means that missing more than two classes will almost certainly lower your overall letter grade.* Your final grade will break out as follows:

Journal Article Responses – 20%

Video Discussion Boards – 20%

First Draft Research Paper – 25%

Final Draft Research Paper – 25%

Class Participation – 10%

This course is under restricted AI use!

Students are not allowed to use advanced automated tools (artificial intelligence or machine learning tools such as ChatGPT, DALL-E, Grammarly, GitHub CoPilot, etc.) on assignments in this course. Each student is expected to complete each assignment without substantive assistance from others, including automated tools.

Important Dates:

February 6 – Last day to drop class *without* a “W” on your transcript.

March 23 – Last day to request PASS / NO PASS

April 18 – Last day to drop class *with* a “W” on your transcript.

One final note: Dropping this class is YOUR responsibility. DVC policy mandates that I cannot electronically drop you from this class after April 18th through the final grading period.

Political Science 220 / Comparative Politics Outline

This schedule is tentative and can be adjusted to accommodate student/instructor interest.

OD = Orvis and Drogus text / W = Weatherby text

Part I: A Framework for Understanding Comparative Politics

January 27: LECTURE ONE / DISCUSSION: *Introduction to and Description of the Course.* We'll begin tonight with a brief description of the topics we'll be covering this semester and look at some of the “big” issues in comparative politics: What is it? Why study it? How to study it? And the three key questions in comparative politics. We should also take any questions, comments, or concerns found in the syllabus.

Video: *Where to Invade Next.*

Readings for 1/27: OD – Chapter 1.

Readings for 2/3: OD – Chapter 2.

February 3: LECTURE TWO / DISCUSSION: *The Modern State.* Our next lecture will cover the common characteristics of all modern states, and how these characteristics give their rulers power. We'll cover the historical origins of modern states and examine whether the characteristics of modern states limit power in any way. We should also ask why some states are stronger than others, and why other states fail completely. Finally, we'll ask a contemporary question: Is (or was) ISIS ever a state?

Video: *Where to Invade Next.*

Readings for 2/10: OD – Chapter 3.

February 10: LECTURE THREE / DISCUSSION: *States, Citizens, and Regimes.* Moving deeper into the framework of comparative politics, we'll look at how different ideologies balance the rights of citizens with the state's ability to compel obedience. On what grounds do different regimes give citizens an opportunity to participate in politics? Who rules where citizens do not seem to have such an opportunity? To what extent does ideology explain how different regimes are organized and justify themselves? What else helps explain how different kinds of regimes actually function? And finally, where do different regime types emerge and why?

Video: *What is Democracy?*

Readings for 2/24: OD – Chapter 4.

February 24: LECTURE FOUR / DISCUSSION: *States and Identity.* Tonight, we'll be asking how and why identity groups form, and become politically successful. How does the social construction of identity groups influence who has power? What are the implications of identity groups' demands on the ideal of equal citizenship in the modern state? And we'll finish by examining the different politic issues faced by different types of identity groups.

Video: *Zero Tolerance.*

Readings for 3/3: Weatherby – Chapter 5.

March 3: LECTURE FIVE / DISCUSSION: *Other World Regions: Latin America.* One of our objectives this semester will be to examine other parts of the world. We'll begin with Latin America, our geographic neighbors to the South. Let's start with a general look at the geography of the region, and then look at the people and culture, the history of the area, with special focus on the colonial experience, wars for national independence, the beginnings of US involvement in the region and finally economics and government.

Video: *Harvest of Empire.*

Readings for 3/10: OD – Chapter 5.

Part II: Political Systems and How They Work

March 10: LECTURE SIX / DISCUSSION: *Governing Institutions in Democracies.* The text notes that democracies must limit the power of their executives to provide accountability. It follows that we should ask which institutional choices best ensure this accountability and how. How much power should various minority groups have in a democracy? Does greater participation and representation of many voices in government result in less effective policymaking? And most importantly: what explains why particular democratic institutions arise in particular countries but not in others?

Video: *Requiem for the American Dream.*

Readings for 3/17: OD – Chapter 6.

March 17: LECTURE SEVEN / DISCUSSION: *Institutions of Participation and Representation in Democracies.* Institutions are a very important aspect of democracies. Do some types of institutions provide better overall representation for average citizens? How do institutions affect the representation of ethnic, gender, religious, and other groups? Why do people join political parties and participate in other kinds of political activity? Is there any clear pattern of when and where particular party and electoral systems develop? Special attention will be paid to comparing the U.S. to other major democracies.

Video: *Pay to Play: Democracies High Stakes.*

Readings for 3/31: OD – Chapter 7.

March 31: LECTURE EIGHT / DISCUSSION: *Contentious Politics: Social Movements, Political Violence, and Revolution.* Politics often move beyond the confines of institutional policymaking. This week we'll look at what the text calls "contentious politics" or political activity that goes beyond institutional bounds. We'll start by asking why people are mobilized to participate in contentious politics. What effects does this type of politics have on governments and government policy? And most importantly: why do contentious politics sometimes turn violent and take the form of terrorism, civil war, or revolution?

Video: *American Insurrection.*

Readings for 4/7: OD – Chapter 8.

April 7: LECTURE NINE / DISCUSSION: *Authoritarian Institutions.* Some authoritarian regimes disperse power more widely than others. To the extent that this is true, how can students of comparative government determine "who rules" and what, if anything, limits executive power in an authoritarian regime? There are also various subtypes: military, one-party, theocratic, personalist, and electoral authoritarian. In what ways do differences across these subtypes explain differences in leaders' actions, levels of repression, and types of popular participation? How close is the U.S. to being described as "authoritarian" or is this just hyperbole?

Video: *Putin's Way.*

Readings for 4/14: OD – Chapter 9.

April 14: LECTURE TEN / DISCUSSION: *Regime Change.* This week we'll examine the process through which one regime is transformed into another, defined by comparativists as "regime change." Why does the military intervene in politics in certain countries and not in others? What best explains why some new democracies survive whereas others revert to authoritarianism? And is it true that a democracy can survive in any country, or does it require a certain type of society, culture, or economy? What does the phrase regime change mean with regard to the U.S. or is this term not applicable to us?

Video: *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised.*

Readings for 4/21: Weatherby – Chapter 7.

April 21: LECTURE ELEVEN / DISCUSSION: *Other World Regions: Asia and Eurasia.* As Weatherby et.al. note, much of the story of modern Asia has been one of the Western searches for wealth followed by imperialism that made it possible because of superior military technology. Now that technology is being challenged by emerging powers of Asia. As Asian economic powers grow stronger, they are also taking on more responsibilities for the world's problems and contributing more significantly to their solutions. This week we'll examine this extremely important geographic location of the world, including its history and culture.

Video: *China: Power and Prosperity.*

Readings for 4/28: OD – Chapter 10.

Part III: Political Economy and Policy

April 28: LECTURE TWELVE / DISCUSSION: *Political Economy of Wealth.* We have our third part of the course starting tonight which will take us to the end of the semester. Tonight, we'll start by looking at how and why states intervene in the market economy. We'll inquire into the relationship between economic policies of the state and how it reflects the relative power of different groups in society. How important is globalization in determining the economic policies of individual countries? And finally, why have some wealthy states (such as ours) intervened in the market economy more than other countries? All this, and lots more....

Video: *Free to Choose.*

Readings for 5/5: OD – Chapter 11.

*******RESEARCH PAPER DUE TONIGHT APRIL 28 AT 11:59 PM*******

May 5: LECTURE THIRTEEN / DISCUSSION: *Political Economy of Development.* It should be obvious that poorer countries in the world would prefer to be wealthier. Most comparativists believe the path to greater material wealth is through *development*. But what is development and why does it matter? What should be the role of the state in the development process? What explains the ability of states to pursue development in the context of globalization? And what types of regimes are able to pursue development more effectively and why? These are the central questions we'll be tackling this week.

Video: *System Error.*

Readings for 5/12: OD – Chapter 12.

May 12: LECTURE FOURTEEN / DISCUSSION: *Public Policies When Markets Fail: Welfare, Health, and the Environment.* As the text notes, as globalization spreads the market economy, the issues raised in our last two lectures about the relationship between the state and the market loom even larger. Market failure, as economists describe it, will likely mean more state intervention in the market through social, health, and welfare policies. Why have many governments pursued significant reforms to welfare states in the era of globalization? Why have Western states in particular had so much difficulty reforming health policies and controlling costs? Where do we locate more effective welfare and health systems, and can they be replicated? This will signal the end of our discussion from the Orvis / Drogus text.

Video: *Four Horsemen.*

Readings for 5/19: Weatherby – Chapter 8.

May 19: LECTURE FIFTEEN / DISCUSSION: *Other World Regions: The Middle East and North Africa.* We've reached the end of the road! One more look at another geographic part of the world and it'll be time to wrap things up. For our last night we'll head to a part of the world which has seen significant violence, poverty, and despair over the last few decades – the Middle East region. As per earlier discussions, we should start with a look at basic geographic parameters, taking care to note the “geopolitical” aspects that are difficult to gloss over. We'll move from there to examine the people of the region, which many citizens of the west tend to see as “homogeneous” – a popular misconception. Religion, history and culture, and of course economies and governments, with special attention to the concepts of Islam and democracy and Arab nationalism will all be covered in this week's lecture and discussion.

Video: *Arabs & Terrorism.*

May 19 / Final discussion and wrap up of the course. FINAL DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE TONIGHT. Best of luck to all and have a great summer break!