

POLS 454: COMPARATIVE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, FALL 2021, 3 CREDITS

Basic Information

Professor: Dan Pemstein
Class Location: Minard 118
Office Location: Putnam 12
Class Slack

Email: daniel.pemstein@ndsu.edu
Class Time: TuTh 12:30–1:45
Office Hours: Schedule
Virtual Office (Zoom)

Course Description

Bulletin Description

This course examines the emergence, evolution, and functioning of political institutions across democracies. Topics include party systems, presidential and parliamentary regimes, legislative organization, electoral systems, and bureaucratic structures.

Course Objectives

The goal of this course is to provide students with a strong grounding in the scholarly literature on democratic political institutions, and to introduce them to how democratic institutions structure political behavior in a comparative, cross-national, context. After completing this course students should:

- be familiar with the range of institutional frameworks that democracies employ,
- be grounded in the academic literature on party organization and systems, electoral systems, forms of governance, and bureaucratic politics,
- be able to relate institutional structures to broad problems in social systems, such as collective action, social choice, principal-agent, coordination, and commitment problems,
- effectively read, understand, and critique current scholarly work in political science, and
- be able to develop clear research designs to study question about democratic institutions.

Required Student Resources

You should purchase the text below. All other required readings will be available on Blackboard.

- Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Broadway Books.

The following textbook is optional but highly recommended, especially for students who have not taken POLS 225. It is on reserve at the library (for POLS 225). I refer to this book as CGG in the schedule.

- William Clark, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder. 2017. *Principles of Comparative Politics, 3rd Ed.* Washington, DC: CQ Press.

I will send students an invitation to join the course Slack workspace. I expect students to regularly check this workspace for announcements and to use it to communicate with the instructor and classmates outside of class.

Schedule

Students will read roughly two journal articles each week and should complete all readings before the first class of the week.

1 Getting Situated (August 24 & 26)

CGG Ch. 2 (Required)

2 Democratic Emergence (August 31 & September 2)

Ansell, Ben and David Samuels. 2010. "Inequality and Democratization: A Contractarian Approach." *Comparative Political Studies* 43(12): 1543–1574.

Mickey, Robert. 2015. *Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972*. Princeton University Press. Ch. 1.

3 Democratic Emergence (September 7 & 9)

Riedl, Rachel B., Dan Slater, Joseph Wong, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2020. "Authoritarian-Led Democratization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 23: 315–32.

Edgell, Amanda B., Vanessa A. Boesa, Seraphine F. Maertz, Patrik Lindenfors, and Staffan I. Lindberg. Forthcoming. "The Institutional Order of Liberalization." *British Journal of Political Science*.

4 Party Organization (September 14 & 16)

Boix, Carles. 2007. "Mass Political Mobilization." In Boix, Carles and Susan Stokes. *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford University Press.

Cox, Gary 1987. *The Efficient Secret: The Cabinet and the Development of Political Parties in Victorian England*. Cambridge University Press. Ch. 2–3, 6.

5 Party Party Organization (September 21 & 23)

Cox, Gary 1987. *The Efficient Secret: The Cabinet and the Development of Political Parties in Victorian England*. Cambridge University Press. Ch. 7–10

Katz, Richard S. and Peter Mair. 1995. "Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy." *Party Politics* 1(1): 5–28.

6 Electoral Institutions (September 28 & 30)

Boix, Carles. 1999. "Setting the Rules of the Game: The Choice of Electoral Systems in Advanced Democracies." *American Political Science Review* 93:3: 609–624.

Ahmed, Amel. 2010. "Reading History Forward: The Origins of Electoral Systems in European Democracies." *Comparative Political Studies* 43(8–9): 1059–1088.

7 Electoral Institutions (October 5 & 7)

Mares, Isabela. 2015. *From Open Secrets to Secret Voting: Democratic Electoral Reforms and Voter Autonomy*. Cambridge University Press. Ch. 2–5.

8 Parties & Representation (October 12 & 14)

Lijphardt, Arend. 1999. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. Yale University Press. Ch. 1–3.

Stokes, Susan. 1999. "Political Parties and Democracy." *Annual Review of Political Science* 2(1): 243–267.

9 Parties & Representation (October 19 & 21)

Rosenbluth, Frances McCall and Ian Shapiro. 2018. *Responsible Parties: Saving Democracy From Itself*. Yale University Press. Ch. 1–3.

Vachudova, Milada Anna. 2021. "Populism, Democracy, and Party System Change in Europe." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24:471–98.

10 Executive Institutions (October 26 & 28)

Linz, Juan J. 1990. "The Perils of Presidentialism." *Journal of Democracy* 1(1): 51–69.

Cheibub, José A. and Fernando Limongi. 2002. "Democratic Institutions and Regime Survival: Parliamentary and Presidential Democracies Reconsidered". *Annual Review of Political Science* 5: 151–179.

11 Executive Institutions (November 2 & 4)

Schwindt-Bayer, Leslie A. and Margit Tavits. 2016. *Clarity of Responsibility, Accountability, and Corruption*. Cambridge University Press. Ch. 2, 6.

Samuels, David and Matthew Shugart. 2010. *Presidents, Parties, and Prime Ministers: How the Separation of Powers Affects Party Organization and Behavior*. Cambridge University Press. Ch. 2–3.

12 Legislative Accountability (November 9)

Carey, John. 2009. *Legislative Voting and Accountability*. Cambridge University Press. Ch. TBD.

13 Delegation & Oversight (November 16 & 18)

Ramseyer, Mark J. and Frances Rosenbluth. 1997. *Japan's Political Marketplace*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters TBD.

Malik, Rabia. Forthcoming. "(A)political Constituency Development Funds: Evidence from Pakistan." *British Journal of Political Science*.

14 Thanksgiving (November 23 & 25)**15 Democratic Backsliding (August 30 & December 2)**

Waldner, David and Ellen Lust. 2018. "Unwelcome Change: Coming to Terms with Democratic Backsliding." *Annual Review of Political Science* 21: 93–113.

Mechkova, Valeriya, Anna Lührmann, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2017. "How Much Democratic Backsliding?" *Journal of Democracy* 28(4): 162–169.

16 Democratic Backsliding (December 7 & 9)

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Broadway Books.

Evaluation

Summary

Article Discussion Leadership	15%
Article Discussion Participation	15%
Paper Discussion Leadership	10%
Paper Discussion Participation	15%
Paper	25%
Final Exam	20%

Article Discussion

After the first week of class, we will devote each Tuesday to discussing two course readings. We will spend the first 30 minutes of these classes discussing the readings in a seminar format. We will devote the remainder of each Tuesday to developing exam study guides for each article, split into two groups, one for each reading.

Article Discussion Leadership

Each of you will be a discussion leader for two articles during the course. I will circulate a discussion leader sign-up sheet on Blackboard the first week of class. Each Tuesday course session will have 1–2 discussion leaders (one per article), and the instructor will act as the discussion leader for articles with no student leader. Discussion leaders have two tasks. Leaders should generate 5 questions that delve into their specific readings and/or connect their article to previous readings. Leaders should circulate discussion questions to the Slack workspace no later than 7 PM on the Monday night before the relevant class. These sets of discussion questions will each be worth 2.5% of the leaders' grade and will be graded on a pass/fail basis (100% vs 50% for submitted questions).

The discussion leaders will also lead half of the class in developing a study guide for their article. This study guide will be no more than one single-spaced page in length. It will provide a brief synopsis of the article, identify the primary independent and dependent variables, and discuss the internal and external validity of the research described in the article. Finalized study guides will be due at 11:59PM on the day of the class in question. I will grade these guides on a pass-fail basis (100% vs 50% for submitted guides). Each guide will be worth 5% of leaders' overall grade.

Article Discussion Participation

Each Tuesday I will randomly assign students who are not signed up to lead discussion to one article. Students should, therefore, read both articles before class on days that they do not act as discussion leaders. Students will work with the discussion leaders to develop the study guide for that article. Each study guide will be worth 1.25 grade points for discussion participants (graded pass/fail as described above). We have 14 weeks of class readings, so students may earn a bit of extra credit if they participate in every class and can miss two classes and still obtain the full 15%.

Paper

You will write a short (10-12 pages, 10 pages means the text makes it onto the 10th page, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, no title page, 1 line for your name, 1-2 line 12 pt title, no subheadings, no blank lines between paragraphs, bibliography does not count towards page length) paper during the semester. The paper will take the form of an extension of one reading (see the schedule). You must sign up for a slot on Blackboard corresponding to a specific week. Slots are first-come-first-served and students should not sign up to act as discussion leaders and paper writers on the same week.

You will ground your paper in some aspect of the reading assigned for the week for which you sign up. I do not expect you to write a thorough review of the reading. Rather, you should use the reading as a foundation or jumping-off point for your argument. Nonetheless, your paper must establish a clear link between your argument and work that inspired it. You will propose an extension to the reading that is grounded in social scientific reasoning. Crucially, you should use the bulk of your paper to propose your own objective (i.e. not normative) argument that builds on the reading. This argument should propose a cause-and-effect theory that could be tested with real data, and should build on your background in political science. The paper should have a clearly stated thesis, elucidate the mechanism that causes the proposed independent variable(s) to affect a specified dependent variable, and draw on relevant literature to support the logical foundations of the argument. You must also discuss what kind(s) of empirical evidence (patterns in data that you could, in principle, collect) would support or falsify your argument. You must actively cite work beyond the class reading to support your argument; at least 5 of these citations must be works of political science published in peer reviewed journals or university press books and

Section	Criteria	Percentage Points
Grounding	Clear, situates reader, correctly represents reading	10
	Acts as a concise foundation for argument	10
Extension	Clearly stated thesis	10
	Argument is logical, fully developed, and persuasive	30
	Discusses testing/falsification thoroughly and logically	20
	Clearly describes/justifies potential evidence	20
Deductions	Late draft or revision	100
	Missed discussion	100
	Revision lacks bibliography that meets requirements	10-100
	Revision shows poor citation style	10-100
	Revision has too few pages	10/page
	Revision has too many pages	10/page
	Revision has poor grammar, spelling, etc	1-20
Revision ignores formatting instructions	10	

Table 1: Short Paper Rubric

you should make active use of no fewer than 8 sources beyond the class reading. We will read, evaluate, and discuss examples of strong—and not so strong—short papers during the second week of class.

Paper drafts are due in digital form (PDF, Word or Open/Libre Office document) at 11:59PM on Tuesday of the author's selected week. You will distribute your draft to the instructor and the rest of the class through Slack. **Final versions of your papers are due in digital form at 11:59PM on Friday, two weeks from your assigned week.** In other words, you have two weeks and a day to revise your paper after we discuss the draft. **Students will forfeit both their paper and associated discussion leadership grades (see below) if they miss the draft submission deadline.** Table 1 provides a grading rubric for the short papers.

Paper Discussion Leadership

Students will lead discussions about their papers, on the bold-dated class meetings that correspond to their chosen readings. In general, these discussions will tend to last about half an hour, but we can use the whole class period if necessary. Students will provide an informal presentation of their papers, lasting 5–10 minutes. Discussion leaders should develop five slides for their presentations—thesis, causal mechanism, hypotheses, proposed data collection, and proposed tests/falsification—to force themselves to distill their papers down to their building blocks. Students should carefully explain both the logic of their arguments and their reasoning for why the potential evidence that they mention in their paper would support or falsify their argument. After their initial comments, presenters will engage in a constructive discussion with the class, and the instructor. With the help of the class, discussion leaders will identify the key strengths and weaknesses in their papers and develop a plan of action for improving their drafts. Discussion leaders should strive to make sure that the discussion is productive. To this end, presenters should prepare a series of questions to ask the class about their papers, with the goal of eliciting feedback that can help them to revise their papers most effectively.

Discussion leaders should take careful notes throughout the session, paying special attention to comments and suggestions on thesis clarity, the development of hypotheses, the quality and clarity of argument, and the appropriateness of proposed tests for falsifying hypotheses. They will use these notes to draft a two to three page summary of the discussion, identifying strengths and weaknesses in the draft, and outlining the plan of action developed during the class discussion. **These action plans are due at 11:59PM on the Monday following the presentation** and, along with the instructor's in-class observations, form the basis of discussion leadership grades. Discussion leaders should annotate—for example, using Word's comments feature—their action plans, indicating how particular class members contributed to a given action item. Table 2 provides a rubric for discussion leadership grades.

Paper Discussion Participation

All students must read presenters' papers, and the readings that they extend, in advance. Non-presenting students will type up an evaluation form (available on Blackboard) in response to each presenter's paper and circulate their evaluation forms on Slack before class.

Criterion	Percentage Points
Establishes plan for thesis clarity	10
Establishes plan for effective explanation of argument	25
Establishes plan for effective testing/falsification	25
Effective use of time	20
Discussion well managed	10
Plan annotated thoroughly	10
Deductions	
Draft or summary late	100
Miss discussion	100
Draft too short	10/page
Draft too long	10/page
Draft has poor grammar, spelling, etc	1-10
Draft ignores formatting instructions	1-10

Table 2: Discussion Leadership Rubric

These documents should evaluate each presenter's paper according to the rubric in table 1. Students should pay special attention to the presenter's core argument and discussion of falsification/potential evidence. They should prepare two carefully thought-out pieces of constructive criticism for the presenter that focus on specific aspects of these two broad points (one for each) and explain these critiques, in short paragraphs, containing full sentences, on their evaluation forms. Good critiques often propose ways to improve thesis clarity, point out logical issues with the proposed causal mechanism, highlight problems with how authors derive hypotheses from their theses and mechanisms, flag issues with proposed measurement of key variables, or address logical flaws in how proposed tests could potentially falsify hypotheses. **Please put time and thought into these critiques. A big part of your job in this class is to help make your colleagues' papers better!**

I will grade students' discussion participation on a pass/fail basis. **I will not hesitate to fail lazy critiques.** Students will only obtain full points for discussion participation on a particular day if they circulate fully completed evaluation forms for each presenter before class starts on the relevant Thursday. Students should share key points on their evaluation forms verbally during the discussion period, although they are free to go off script. Indeed, while prepared criticisms will help to ensure that we have fruitful sessions, this will work best if students engage in the discussion in real time and voice thoughts that come to mind, rather than relying fully on their prepared comments. The class will collaboratively develop a plan of action for improving the draft under consideration during the in-class sessions. Students who miss class, fail to circulate complete and constructive evaluation forms on time, fail to speak constructively during each discussion, or who fail to contribute substantively during group discussions, will obtain no points for the day. Remember that presenters provide annotations on their plans of action that identify students' contributions! I will evenly distribute discussion participation points across discussion days. Students can miss (or fail) two discussion sessions with no penalty to their final grades. For example, if

we have 10 students in class, students will obtain full points (15%) if they participate and provide carefully thought out feedback to 7 of their peers.

Exam

The final exam will count for 20% of your total grade. The exam will contain a series of short essay questions. The exam will be open note and students will be able to make use of the article study guides that they develop during the semester during the exam.

Class Policies

Reading and Discussion

You **must** do the reading ahead of time to succeed in this course. You also need to participate in class discussion to get the most out of this class. This is a discussion-based course and the quality of the discussion will suffer if you, and your classmates, fail to read in a timely fashion, or do not speak up when you have a question or comment to contribute. If the discussion suffers, your understanding will suffer. If your understanding suffers, your grade will suffer. This course requires substantial reading. Much of the reading consists of recent research and is, therefore, often complex. This means that reading will take time and concentration. If you do not want to do this much reading, to read with care, or to engage in class discussion, you should drop this course. At the same time, a big part of this course is about helping you to learn how to digest complex social science research, so please do not be discouraged if the first few articles you read seem overwhelming. That is completely normal and will improve with practice.

Late Assignments, Missed Exams, and Discussion Sessions

Please get in touch ahead of time if you expect to miss an exam, paper, or article/paper discussion deadline. I will work with students to reschedule their commitments and I will not require an excuse to do so. That said, the structure of this course relies on students getting their work in on time. Article discussion will suffer if the discussion leader misses class and we cannot discuss student papers that we haven't read. I want to be as flexible as possible in light of our current circumstances, but I also want to run a productive course. Please do not abuse this policy.

Office Hours

Office hours are a time for students to discuss any aspect of the course, or related issues, with me. PLEASE TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OFFICE HOURS! This is where you can get one-on-one help with aspects of the class that are difficult for you, but surprisingly few students take advantage of this resource. While I have set times devoted to office hours, students must schedule appointments using navigate. I will hold all office hours virtually, using Zoom, this semester, to better manage COVID-19 risk.

Attendance

According to NDSU Policy 333 (<http://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/policy/333.pdf>), attendance in classes is expected. In this course attendance is mandatory unless you have a valid reason to miss a session (but see COVID policy below).

Veterans and student service members with special circumstances or who are activated are encouraged to notify the instructor as soon as possible and are encouraged to provide Activation Orders.

Academic Honesty

The academic community is operated on the basis of honesty, integrity, and fair play. NDSU Policy 335: Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct applies to cases in which cheating, plagiarism, or other academic misconduct have occurred in an instructional context. Students found guilty of academic misconduct are subject to penalties, up to and possibly including suspension and/or expulsion. Student academic misconduct records are maintained by the Office of Registration and Records. Informational resources about academic honesty for students and instructional staff members can be found at <http://www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty>.

Please make sure that you understand common standards of academic integrity and plagiarism and consult the instructor if you are ever in doubt. I have a no tolerance policy for academic misconduct and students who commit such misconduct should expect, at minimum, to receive a failing grade for this class.

Students with Special Needs

Any students with disabilities or other special needs, who need special accommodations in this course, are invited to share these concerns or requests with the instructor and contact the Disability Services Office (<http://www.ndsu.edu/disabilityservices>) as soon as possible.

Discrimination and Harassment

NDSU is committed to providing a safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and working environment for all members of its university community. NDSU's policy on discrimination and harassment is available at [here](#) and the equity office provides information about filing complaints. Any form of violence or harassment, including sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking is unwelcome at the University. NDSU provides a Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Sexual Assault Resource Guide.

Low-grade discrimination and harassment can be especially pernicious in a classroom setting. Please read the following Psychology Today blog post and work to avoid the behaviors that the post describes.

Please note that the instructor has a mandatory responsibility to report instances of discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, and retaliation, as described here. What this means is that, as your professor, I am required to report any incidents of such misconduct that I observe, or that students or others report to me.

Written Communication

I expect students to take care with their written communication, to proof-read their work, and to ensure that their writing is grammatical and clear. Scientific writing often uses passive voice, includes overly complicated vocabulary and prose, and makes comprehension unnecessarily difficult for readers. As a student it is natural to copy this style as you build your own. In this course I will push you to develop a simple, clear, efficient, and engaging writing style. To get started on this process, and to see who is reading the syllabus, I will grant one percentage point of extra credit to any student who corrects all of the passive voice in the University-mandated language in this syllabus, and posts these corrections to my private channel in the Slack workspace.

COVID-19

NDSU policy requires students to wear masks during class. I will strictly enforce this policy. I will bring a few paper masks to each class in case you forget yours. While I do not anticipate any issues, please be aware that I will ask students who refuse to wear appropriate face coverings to leave class and will refer such students for code of conduct violations.

Please do not attend class if you feel ill or if you have a known COVID exposure. I will record every class session and students can request recordings of any class session that they miss. In general, I will be very lenient about attendance (and everything else) this semester. Please talk to me as early as possible about your participation (paper) if you have to miss more than 3–4 class sessions this semester and we can work out a strategy to ensure that you participate in other ways to compensate for missed classes.

Please note that the University is giving students \$100 if they are fully vaccinated by October 15 (this means you need to get your first shot before September 15!). Please consider your responsibility to the NDSU and Fargo communities and get your shots, and enjoy the beer money. On a personal note, while I am vaccinated, I have two unvaccinated children under 12 at home and I am doing my best not to accidentally transmit COVID to my kids (e.g., through a non-symptomatic breakthrough infection) and, in turn, their classmates. Beyond the obvious wish for my kids not to get sick, keep in mind that our collective ability to keep Fargo Public Schools operating with as few students as possible quarantined is going to be a huge factor in how much time the typical NDSU faculty member will be able to devote to teaching this semester. If we're all stuck at home with quarantined kids your classes are simply not going to get the attention they deserve. I REALLY APPRECIATE your efforts to reduce COVID's spread in our community!

Finally, while I intend to provide a standard in-classroom course for the duration of the semester, I reserve the right to move to synchronous online delivery if COVID case rates in Fargo, at NDSU, or in our class become too high.