

# Introduction to Comparative Politics

Political Science 225  
North Dakota State University

# What is Political Science?

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## Definition

Political science is the study of politics in a scientific manner.

Ok, but what does this mean?

# What Political Science is Not

- Modern history
- Journalism
- Getting involved/political action
- Policy?

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Where might we observe politics?

- At work
- In the family
- In a city council
- At the United Nations

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- Political Behavior
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  - Elections
  - Interest groups
  - Political parties
- Political Institutions
  - Heads of state
  - Legislatures
  - Bureaucracies
  - Courts

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- Cross-country similarity/difference
- Generalization
- Example: Democracy

# Big Questions in Comparative Politics

Comparative politics is a large field but has focused on a number of 'big' questions:

- Why is there such variation in how political interests are organized?
- Why do some democracies work better than others?
- Why have some countries democratized while others remain authoritarian?
- Why do some countries have healthier economies than others?
- Why do some countries experience internal violence?



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  - Example: Northern vs southern Europe
- Institutional accounts focus on strategic decision-making under constraints
  - Pro: Generalizable and precise
  - Con: Oversimplifies human behavior
  - Example: Presidential vs parliamentary government

## Example: Syria

Potential questions?

# Example: Syria

Potential questions?

- What motivated individual Syrians to revolt?
- What sorts of people joined each side?
- Did technology make collective action more likely?
- What is driving government response?
- What determines international reaction?