

# Comparative Politics in Developing Countries

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Sample syllabus

## Instructor

Gustavo Diaz  
diazdia2@illinois.edu  
420 David Kinley Hall MC-713  
1407 W Gregory Drive  
Urbana, IL 61801

## Course Description

This course covers the following global challenges:

1. Poverty
2. Bad government
3. Violence

We will focus on these challenges from the perspective of comparative politics, meaning that we will use social science research concepts and tools to understand variation across countries in these dimensions. In short, some countries seem to be more developed than others, we will try to understand the factors that explain why countries are “underdeveloped.”

We will start the course by discussing different definitions of development, then we will move to discuss the long-term and proximate causes of and challenges to development.

As we will learn, development is a complex idea with multiple dimensions, and the explanations to what promotes or harms development are equally complex. Throughout this course, we will build concepts and tools from social science research to assess the merits and pitfalls of different explanations for development (or lack thereof).

**Note:** The current version of this syllabus assumes a 15-week semester.

## Course Goals

By the end of this course, students will be familiar with the subfield of comparative politics, especially in the context of developing countries. Through the introduction of social science concepts and tools, students will also be able to engage on productive conversations, scholarship, and policy debates surrounding the causes of and challenges to development.

A secondary goal of this course is to promote critical thinking around global politics. Politics and policy debates often involve discussions with normative and factual considerations. Through this course, students will improve their ability to disentangle factual from normative matters, thus improving the quality of their contributions in their personal and professional life.

Finally, through exposure to the politics of the developing world, students will gain perspective on domestic politics. Discussing development issues will allow us to understand the extent to which our home country (or any country we are interested in) is unique or faces similar challenges. This perspective will improve the breadth and depth of our future work.

## **Requirements and Expectations**

There is no formal requirement to take this course (revise based on school policy).

I expect willingness to participate and engage with the material. Some of the readings may use concepts and data analysis techniques that assume preexisting knowledge of social science research. While I expect critical and curious reading, I do not expect complete mastery of the material. I will do my best to cover complex ideas and analyses in a way that does not require previous training.

At the end of the day, this is a course about politics, and people will hold different ideological views and policy preferences. I expect respectful interaction in the classroom and in writing assignments. I believe it is acceptable to substantiate an argument with personal preferences or experiences, but we must recognize them as anecdotal evidence, and be aware that other people may hold different views and beliefs that are equally valid. I will try my best to foster a respectful environment in all aspects of this course, and I expect you to contribute.

## **Materials**

There is no required textbook. Instead, every week will have 2-3 required readings. The readings for each week are listed below and can be accessed through the course website.

## **Assignments**

Your final course grade will depend on the following assignments. All assignments will be graded with a score from 0 to 100, with 100 being the highest possible grade.

### **Midterm Exams (20% each)**

We will have two exams during the term, both occurring in the scheduled class meeting time and location. One roughly in the middle and another by the end. Exams will cover content from lecture, required readings, and discussion sections. Exams are not cumulative, meaning that the first exam will only cover the first half of the course, and the second exam will cover the second half (although the second half of the course presumes understanding of the first half). We will hold a review session on the lecture preceding an exam. I expect you to submit questions in preparation for that meeting.

Exams will include a mixture of multiple choice questions and short essay questions (exact format will vary based on roster size).

## **Weekly Reading Questions (40%)**

Every week, except for the first and in exam weeks, I will distribute weekly questions about the reading material. The specific format of the questions will vary depending on the learning goals of that week. You may expect short essay questions, open-ended essay questions, data interpretation and policy evaluation questions.

You are only required to complete 9 weekly reading questions out of a total of 11. If you complete more than 10, only your best 10 weekly reading questions will count towards your final grade.

Reading questions will be posted on X and are due on X every week (contingent on whether we hold discussions sections).

## **Participation (20%)**

I will not take attendance, but I expect you to engage actively in this class. At a minimum, I expect you to attend lecture (and discussion sections). To obtain a good participation grade, you must also make interventions conducive to a productive and respectful learning environment for yourself and others during class, discussion sections, during office hours, or through other means that best suit your learning style. We all have different learning styles, so I will keep an open mind about what constitutes good participation, and I encourage to be proactive about pursuing the participation avenues that best suit your learning style. You will receive a temporary participation grade mid-semester along with feedback on how to improve.

## **Final Exam**

We will hold a final exam in the scheduled final examination period. The final exam is optional for students with a passing grade, and is required otherwise. The final exam has two parts, the first part corresponds to the content of the first midterm, the second part corresponds to the content of the second midterm. You may take as many parts of the final as you please.

Your grade for each part of the final will count towards the grade of the corresponding midterm. If you take the final, your midterm grade will be replaced with the grade of the corresponding part of the final, but only if doing so improves your final grade. Otherwise, your midterm grade will remain the same.

## **Grading**

TBD. This section will detail the conversion from points to letter grades.

## **Policies**

TBD. This section will outline course policies on late assignments, academic honesty, classroom behavior, study habits, special needs, extra credit etc.

## Schedule

### Week 1: Introduction

Day 1: Course Overview

Day 2: Comparative Politics and Social Science Research

#### Reading:

- Birdsall, Nancy, Dani Rodrik, and Arvind Subramanian. 2005. "How to Help Poor Countries." *Foreign Affairs* 84(4): 136-152
- Lijphart, Arend. 1971. "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method." *American Political Science Review* 65(3): 682-693

### Week 2: Understanding Development

Day 1: Measuring Development

Day 2: Critiques to Development

Due: Weekly reading questions I

#### Reading:

- Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Anchor Books. Introduction ("Development as Freedom") and Chapter 2 ("The Ends and Means of Development"), pp. 3-13, 35-54
- Valenzuela, J. Samuel and Arturo Valenzuela. 1978. "Modernization and Dependency: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Latin American Underdevelopment." *Comparative Politics* 10(4): 535-557

### Week 3: States and Nations

Day 1: States, Nations, and Nation States

Day 2: Historical Origins of the State

#### Reading:

- Walker, Connor. 1978. "A nation is a nation, is a state, is an ethnic group is a . . ." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1(4): 377-400
- Tilly, Charles. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. *Bringing the State Back In*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 117-139
- Herbst, Jeffrey. 1990. "War and the State in Africa." *International Security* 14(4): 117-139

### Week 4: State Building and State Failure

Day 1: State Building

Day 2: State Failure

#### Reading:

- Fukuyama, Francis. 2004. "The Imperative of State Building." *Journal of Democracy* 15(2): 17-31
- Menkhaus, Ken. 2003. "State collapse in Somalia: second thoughts." *Review of African Political Economy* 30(97): 405-422
- Luna, Juan Pablo, and Hilel David Soifer. 2017. "Capturing Sub-National Variation in State Capacity: A Survey-Based Approach." *American Behavioral Scientist* 61(8): 887-907

## **Week 5: Colonial Legacies and Development**

**Day 1:** Colonial Legacies and the Reversal of Fortunes

**Day 2:** Colonial Legacies and Institutions

### **Reading:**

- Lange, Matthew, James Mahoney, and Matthias vom Hau. 2006. "Colonialism and Development: A Comparative Analysis of Spanish and British Colonies." *American Journal of Sociology* 111(5): 1412-1462
- Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. 2001. "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation." *American Economic Review* 91(5): 1369-1401

## **Week 6: Regime Types**

**Day 1:** Democratic Regimes

**Day 2:** Authoritarian Regimes

### **Reading:**

- Schmitter, Phillippe C. and Terry Lynn Karl. 1991. "What Democracy Is... and Is Not." *Journal of Democracy* 2(3): 75-88
- Geddes, Barbara. 1999. "What do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2: 115-144
- Cheibub, José Antonio, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Raymond Vreeland. 2010. "Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited." *Public Choice* 143(1-2): 67-101

## **Week 7: Regimes and Development**

**Day 1:** Democracy and Development

**Day 2:** Autocracy and Development

### **Reading:**

- Olson, Mancur. 1993. "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development." *American Political Science Review* 87(3): 567-576
- Inglehart, Ronald, and Christian Welzel. 2009. "How Development Leads to Democracy: What We Know About Modernization." *Foreign Affairs* 88(2): 33-48
- Bellin, Eva. 2004. "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Politics* 36(2): 139-157

## **Week 8: Review and Midterm Exam I**

**Day 1:** Review

**Day 2:** Midterm Exam I

## **Week 9: Ethnic and Cultural Diversity**

**Day 1:** Measuring Diversity

**Day 2:** Diversity and Development

### **Reading:**

- Fearon, James D. 2003. "Ethnic and Cultural Diversity by Country." *Journal of Economic Growth* 8: 195-222
- Habyarimana, James, Macartan Humphreys, Daniel N. Posner, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. 2007. "Why Does Ethnic Diversity Undermine Public Goods Provision." *American Political Science Review* 101(4): 709-725
- Posner, Daniel N. 2004. "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi." *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 529-545

## **Week 10: Placeholder for mid-semester break**

## **Week 11: Violence**

**Day 1:** Ethnic Violence

**Day 2:** Religious Violence

### **Reading:**

- Fearon, James, and David Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97(1): 75-90
- Caselli, Francesco and Wilbur John Coleman II. 2013. "On the Theory of Ethnic Conflict." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 11(S1): 161-192
- Canetti, Daphna, Ibrahim Khatib, Aviad Rubin, and Carly Wayne. 2019. "Framing and fighting: The impact of conflict frames on political attitudes." *Journal of Peace Research* 56(6): 737-752

## **Week 12: Corruption**

**Day 1:** Defining Corruption

**Day 2:** Fighting Corruption

### **Reading:**

- Svensson, Jakob. 2005. "Eight Questions About Corruption." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19(3): 19-42
- De Vries, Catherine E. and Hector Solaz. 2017. "The Electoral Consequences of Corruption." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20: 391-408

- Fisman, Raymond, and Miriam Golden. 2017. "How to Fight Corruption." *Science* 356(6340): 803-804

### **Week 13: The Resource Curse**

**Day 1:** The National Resource Curse

**Day 2:** The Subnational Resource Curse

#### **Reading:**

- Ross, Michael L. 1999. "The Political Economy of the Resource Curse." *World Politics* 51(2): 297-322
- Gervasoni, Carlos. 2010. "A Rentier Theory of Subnational Regimes: Fiscal Federalism, Democracy, and Authoritarianism in the Argentine Provinces." *World Politics* 62(2): 302-340
- Knutsen, Carl Henrik, Andreas Kotsadam, Eivind Hammersmark Olsed, and Tore Wig. 2017. "Mining and Local Corruption in Africa." *American Journal of Political Science* 61(2): 320-334

### **Week 14: Foreign aid**

**Day 1:** Foreign Aid and Development

**Day 2:** Challenges to Foreign Aid

#### **Reading:**

- Cohen, Jessica, and William Easterly. 2009. "Thinking Big versus Thinking Small." In *What Works in Development? Thinking Big and Thinking Small*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, pp. 1-23
- Blattman, Christopher, and Paul Niehaus. 2014. "Show Them The Money: Why Giving Cash Helps Alleviate Poverty." *Foreign Affairs* 93 (May/June): 117-126
- Cruz, Cesi and Christina J. Schneider. 2017. "Foreign Aid and Undeserved Credit Claiming." *American Journal of Political Science* 61(2): 396-408

### **Week 15: Review and Midterm Exam II**

**Day 1:** Review

**Day 2:** Midterm Exam II

### **Placeholder for Final Exam Date**