

PLS 140
Introduction to
Comparative Politics

Week 1, Lecture 1:
Introduction to the course

Welcome to PLS 140!

Plan for this week

- Introduction to the course
- Introduction to the subfield of Comparative Politics and to the use of comparison in Political Science
- Introduction to comparative research

Plan for today

- Introduction to the course
- Introduction to the subfield of Comparative Politics and to the use of comparison in Political Science

Course objectives

- Understanding of key political phenomena
- Command of the comparative method
- Ability to think comparatively—and analytically, critically, and creatively—and explain relationships between political phenomena



Course content

- Comparative political analysis
- The state and political development
- Political regimes
- Organization of the state
- Collective action and collective identities



Comparative Politics

Course organization

- Readings:
 - Textbook
 - Important contributions to Comparative Politics
- Lectures and section discussions
- Contact:
 - Office hours and Q&A sessions
 - Moodle forums and messages



Assessment

- Reading annotations
- Group presentation
- Presentation discussion participation
- Group paper
- Individual paper
- Term test
- Final exam



Course policies and requirements



IT'S IN THE SYLLABUS

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Commitments



Politics



Five W's



Political Science

- Normative vs. empirical questions
- Four subfields:
 - Political Theory
 - American Politics
 - International Relations
 - Comparative Politics

Comparative politics

- Use of comparison to answer empirical questions about politics
→
- The comparative method

Foundations of research design

- Empirical puzzles: anomalies unexplained by existing knowledge
- Concepts: abstract ideas generalized from particular instances
- Conceptualization: concept development
- Inferences: conclusions based on evidence and reasoning
- Operationalization: translation of abstract concepts so that they can be measured in the empirical world
- Variables: concepts with values that vary / change

Cases

- Units or instances of a phenomenon of interest
- Cases and the universe of cases (=population)
- Small-N and large-N

Comparative method

- Most similar systems design: cases identical except for the values of the independent and dependent variables of interest
- Most different systems design: cases distinct except for the values of the independent and dependent variables of interest
- Comparative checking: examination of the conditions in which claims hold
- Within-case comparison

Takeaways

- Comparative Politics as a subfield of Political Science
- The use of the comparative method to make inferences about political phenomena
- Introduction to the course content and the pedagogical approach