Course Description

What makes a dictatorship transform to a democracy? Which types of political systems perform better? Is democracy incompatible with certain cultures? These questions are among the important themes that this course will cover. This course will introduce you to the basic concepts, theories, and methods of comparative politics.

Learning Objectives

• Understanding key concepts and issues in comparative politics
• Developing research skills
• Improving writing skills
• UTEP EDGE skills
  – problem-solving
  – communication
  – global awareness
  – teamwork
  – critical thinking

Required Texts


  – Available online or at UTEP Bookstore.

Other readings are available through Blackboard.
iClicker

iClicker is an application for in-class interaction between students and the instructor. Throughout the semester, I will use iClicker to give quizzes or take polls. Your participation through iClicker will count 15% towards your final score. I will walk you through the setup before I record your grades. Setup instruction is also available [here](#). You can use iClicker on your computer or mobile devices, so you do not need to buy a hand-held clicker. You are responsible for getting iClicker ready on your device by the second class meeting.

Course Requirements

Finishing readings before class is key to success in this class because it underlines your success in all the following class components.

1. iClicker participation (15%)

This includes quizzes, polls, etc., and it may take place at any time. **Note that you will lose all your iClicker points for a class if you are absent.**

   If you fail to answer iClicker questions during class due to technology problems, you can turn in your answers on paper at the end of that class. **I will not accept paper-based answers for previous classes.** You are responsible for fixing tech problems in a timely manner. Contact UTEP Technology Support when necessary. If you show no efforts to fix the problems, your answers on paper may not be accepted.

2. Reaction Essay (15%)

You are required to write an essay in response to one reading of your own choosing. The readings available for this task are marked with [Reaction Essay] in the timetable. You will be asked to declare your choice in the first weeks of the semester. Once a reading is selected, you should honor your choice. I only allow change of reading in exceptional circumstances.

   The essay should be 2-3 pages, double-spaced, one-inch margin on all sides, with 12 point Times New Roman font. I believe that best educational results are achieved through interactive feedback between students and the instructor, so your essay is completed in two phases. First, you should submit a first draft on Blackboard by 12:59 pm on the day the reading is scheduled to be covered in class. I will provide feedback and the second and final draft is due one week after I provide the feedback. Your 2nd draft will be graded partly by how you respond to my comments and suggestions.

   In your essay, do more than summarizing. I place more emphasis on how analytical and critical you are. Do you agree with the author or not? Why? What do you find especially convincing or weak? Does the author provide sufficient support for the arguments? Is the reasoning valid? What do you think the author has missed? What inspires you the most?

   I do not require specific styles such as APA or Chicago, but you must have citations that can be traced back to the original sources. **Copying somebody’s words without quoting the speaker is plagiarism. Using others’ ideas without citing the writers is plagiarism. Plagiarism is strictly prohibited and will be detected and handled as academic misconduct.**

   The first and final drafts are worth 5% and 10% of your final grade, respectively.
3. In-class Debate (5%)

A debate will be held during class on April 25, 2024. The specifics of the debate will be announced later in the semester.

4. Exams (50%)

There are a midterm exam (25%) and a final exam (cumulative, 25%). Both are close-book and conducted on Blackboard through the Respondus LockDown Browser.

5. Group Research Project (15%)

You will conduct a group project with 3 or 4 classmates. In the project, you shall compare two countries’ performance on one policy area, and propose a broader theory about the relationship between country characteristics and policy performance. You may choose from the following countries: The US, Canada, Mexico, Japan, Great Britain, China, India, and Russia. The available policy areas include voter turnout rates, education, immigration, health care, public safety, economic development, economic inequality, and environmental protection. Note that some countries are not comparable in certain areas, so your research question should guide your case selection.

Each group should make a presentations (5%) and submit a written report (10%). Presentations and written reports should draw on data and information from credible sources. Your presentation should focus on why you choose your country cases and establish causal relationships for their policy outcomes. The written report should present the content of the presentations in a more organized and detailed way, plus an appendix detailing the contributions of each group member. The written report should be 10-15 pages, double-spaced, one-inch margin on all sides, with 12 point Times New Roman font. It is due on Blackboard on Thursday, May 2. Your grade will be based on the overall quality of the group project as well as your own contributions.

Your letter grade will be assigned as follows:

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<th>Letter Grade</th>
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<td>[90, 100]</td>
<td>A</td>
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Course Policies

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on laboratory reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another person’s as one’s own. And, collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Violations will be taken seriously and will be referred to the Office of Student Life for possible disciplinary action. Students may be suspended or expelled from UTEP for such actions. Refer to https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/osccr/student-conduct/academic-integrity.html for further information.

Accommodations for Disabilities

Accommodations will be made for students with disabilities. Please discuss with me in person as soon as possible about any needs you might have. Or you may contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services (phone: 5148, Email: cass@utep.edu) at 302 Union East within the first two weeks of classes.
Course Schedule

Tuesday, 1/16: Course Introduction
• McCormick et al. Ch. 1

Thursday, 1/18: Basics of Research Methods
• McCormick et al. Ch. 2

Tuesday, 1/23: States I

Thursday, 1/25: States II
• McCormick et al. Ch. 3

Tuesday, 1/30: Democratic Rule I

Thursday, 2/1: Democratic Rule II
• McCormick et al. Ch. 5. 104-110; 119-129.

Tuesday, 2/6: Authoritarian Rule I
• Hauge et al. Ch. 6.

Thursday, 2/8: Authoritarian Rule II
Tuesday, 2/13: Democracy vs. Authoritarianism


Thursday, 2/15: Film on Communism

Tuesday, 2/20: Democratization I


Thursday, 2/22: Democratization II

- McCormick et al. Ch. 5. 111-119.

Tuesday, 2/27: Presidential vs. Parliamentary Systems I

- McCormick et al. Ch. 8.

Thursday, 2/29: Presidential vs. Parliamentary Systems II


Tuesday, 3/5: Electoral Systems

- Midterm Q&A

Thursday, 3/7: Midterm Exam on Blackboard

- Available from noon to 11:59 pm with a 2-hour limit

3/12, 3/14: Spring Break

Tuesday, 3/19: Political Participation I

- McCormick et al. Ch. 13.
Thursday, 3/21: Political Participation II


Tuesday, 3/26: Political Culture I

- McCormick et al. Ch. 4.

Thursday, 3/28: No Class

Tuesday, 4/2: Political Culture II


Thursday, 4/4: Political Parties

- McCormick et al. Ch. 15.


Tuesday, 4/9: Social Movements


Thursday, 4/11: Public Policy

- McCormick et al. Ch. 17.

Tuesday, 4/16: Political Economy


Thursday, 4/18: Politics of Inequality


- Interview with Thomas Sowell, link
Tuesday, 4/23: Globalization and Immigration


- Live Q&A on Blackboard from 11 am to noon

Thursday, 4/25: Debate

- On Blackboard, topic to be announced

- All students participate online

Tuesday, 4/30: Final Exam Q&A

Thursday, 5/2: Group Project Presentation

- Group project written report due at midnight

Thursday, 5/9: Final Exam on Blackboard

- Available from noon to 11:59 pm with a 2-hour limit