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Pols 150 : Introduction to Comparative Politics
Spring 2005, MW 11:30-12:20 pm, WES 3139

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is Comparative Politics? What do we compare? Why do we call this course “Comparative Politics” if what we do is compare countries? Why not call it “Comparative Countries”? The simple answer is that it is called comparative politics because we compare

POLITICAL SYSTEMS

This begs the question: What are political systems? Why are we interested in political systems? Why do we care what political systems exist? In essence, political systems comprise a set of structures that perform specific functions necessary to achieve the balance between **Stability, Security, Growth, and Representation**. We care because these goals do conflict with each other. And when they conflict, lives are often lost.

Inherently, then, a country may experience several political systems as it strives to balance these goals. Consider, for instance, how many political systems has the United States experienced?

Well, comparative politics gives us an opportunity to examine what we have, what others have, what we need and others need, and what we can do to help. It gives us an opportunity to learn from mistakes and successes so that we can help.

Helping means participating, civic involvement. To participate and become involved we need to know what works in a political system, how they work and, then, what we can do to help it work better. Specifically, we set the following course goals:

1. Identify the roles of government - what do governments do? How do they perform these functions? When?
2. Identify how structures or institutions enable the government’s functions.
3. Identify how structures or institutions impede the government’s functions.
4. What additional considerations/events may affect the government’s functions? Are there trade-offs? What are they?
5. What are the roles of interest groups in a political system? Do we need to mobilize? How do interest groups mobilize?
6. What are the roles of the opposition (eg., opposition political parties, rebel groups) in a political system?
7. What roles do international organizations and foreign governments perform?

These goals help us understand how political systems identify problem policy areas and address them. In our class, we will learn these questions in each of the following countries – the US, China, Great Britain, India, France, Mexico, and Egypt. We will also draw on examples from current events to flesh out these concepts. And, we will through service-learning understand first hand

about political involvement and participation.

NOTE: Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent a full demonstration of abilities should contact me as soon as possible so that we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and to facilitate the educational opportunity.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION. Performance is evaluated based on ALL of the following:

Civic Involvement & Community Service Project	40%	Due every other week until April 25 Event scheduled for April 6
First examination –	20%	March 2
Final exam –	20%	May 18
Recitation –	20%	Additional requirements set by GTAs
Total –	100%	

WHY civic-participation:

- , Students in large traditional-learning classes tend not to perform as well as their counterparts in small classes. However, students in large service-learning/ civic-involvement classes tend to do well. This helps your grade.
- , One of the most frequent complaint among university students is that they do not see the relevance of their learning. This is especially true of classes that do not comprise their major proper. Another complaint among students is that they want hands-on approach. With this civic-participation project, there are personal- and corporate-skills to be learned - how to organize, publicize, mobilize; team-building; compromise and negotiation; what does a hands-on approach require.
- , YOU explain - Why should you be involved? Why should you participate? What are the benefits of participation? If you can address these questions, YOU have now acquired additional leadership/ motivational qualities that you can ADD to your resume.
- , It increases the profile for the students. This event will be PUBLICIZED widely. You can add it to your resume. You can talk about it. YOU will be popular!

I. Civic Involvement Project – GROUPS OF FIVE STUDENTS

Motivation: To help students improve political, social, and humanitarian awareness

To help students improve their grades

To help students develop a) resume b) event-oriented skills c) team-building

Target: Raise awareness and donations for Asia Tsunami disaster relief.

NOTE: there are several aspects to the event, including a collections drive and then a sales drive of the items collected on April 6, 2005.

Work involved: (Community-oriented, Event-oriented, Learning-oriented, Team-Building).
A & B) Country and Event Awareness (eg., car-cleaning, clothes drive, book drive).

- **Create** awareness posters/car stickers/etc for event
- Paper should discuss the aspects of the poster that are important
- Paper should explain where to place awareness posters/car stickers/etc and why
- Paper should explain what did you learn about community awareness in the process.
What will you do during the event to address what you learned?

C) Contact, Collect, Publicize, and Remind

- Set minimum collections target and **collect** for donated ITEMS for the event (community- and event oriented)
- Paper should explain how this target is to be achieved and what measures are taken (including names of contacts, organizations contacted, etc).
- Paper should explain what caused it to succeed or fail.
- Paper should explain what did you learn about community awareness in the process?
What will you do during the event to address what you learned?

D) Provide information

- Determine and **print out** information about the countries affected during event
- Determine and **print out** information to provide about the agencies involved and its organizational philosophy.
- Paper should include the information used. Paper should also explain why this information is relevant (about the countries AND the agencies) and how to make it accessible
- Paper should explain what did you learn about community awareness in the process.
What will you do during the event to address what you learned?

E) Awareness & Donation Event & Community & Agency Feedback

- Paper should **record** the general feedback received from the community? Describe some of them and explain why they were interesting, important, or revealing.
- Paper should discuss what does feedback from the community tell you about the information given out.
- Paper should record feedback from the agency. What does the feedback tell you about the value of the event to the agency? What does the feedback tell you about your involvement?
- Paper should discuss what did you learn about community awareness in the process.
What would you do to address what you have learned for future projects?

F) Analysis of event (Every Participant must Write this up for the Parts That They Chaired and Hand in for the Final Folder)

- Identify and explain how the elements you chaired helped the processes work.
- Specify areas for improvement: where did they not work and why.
- Discuss lessons learned – about the countries, about the event, about the community, and about civic-participation.

Papers:

Each student in the five-person group is responsible for **chairing** one of the five major tasks and turning in at least a 4-page paper, double-spaced, typed to describe the tasks fulfilled.

Final Folder: Contains --

- all papers from (A) to (F)
- all discussion recorded and all the materials created and disseminated (posters and printouts).

By Jan 31st, every one should be in a group.

On February 7th, every group needs to have decided

- who is chairing which part of the event in their group
- approximate dates for completing each element of the event for their group (NOTE: PAPERS ARE DUE ABOUT EVERY OTHER MONDAY. Please plan the element in time to complete the writing)
- Every group member should have a copy of this
- a copy will be given to the TAs and the professor.

NO LATE PAPERS/FOLDERS WILL BE ACCEPTED. FINAL FOLDER DUE APRIL 25, 2005.

II. Examinations:

Two examinations in this course make up 40% of the grade. Make-up examinations will be given ONLY IF

- there is documented evidence explaining the absence, such as medical certificates;
AND
- you contact me (leave a phone message, send email) before the examination. In the case of an emergency, contact me as soon as immediately possible. The make-up examinations WILL BE different from the actual examination.

III. READINGS:

Required Text:

Almond, Gabriel, G. Bingham Powell, Jr., Kaare Strom, and Russell Dalton. 2004. Comparative Politics Today. Addison, Wesley, and Longman.

1. Schedule of Lectures and Readings:

Jan 24: Introduction and Organization

Jan 26- Feb 2: Governments, Political Systems, and Comparative Politics

Almond et al, Chaps. 1, 2, 3, and 19: Topics for discussion:

- The US and Comparative Politics
- Definitions
- The role of government
- What is a political system?
- Why, what, and how do we compare?

- f. Current topics in the literature
- g. What is the system? What are system functions?
- h. What is process? What are process functions?
- i. What is policy? What are policy functions?
- j. What is political culture?
- k. How is political culture classified?
- l. Why is the study of political culture helpful?
- m. What ways are there to study political culture?

Feb 7: AWARENESS PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT DUE

Feb 7-16: Interest Groups and Political Parties

Almond et al, Chaps 4, 5, and 13

- a. Interest groups in communist countries: China and the former Eastern bloc
- b. What is interest articulation?
- c. What are the forms of interest articulation?
- d. Why is interest articulation important?
- e. What are the different types of interest groups?
- f. What characteristics distinguish them?
- g. What is the focus in political parties?
- h. Describe and explain the differences in party systems.
- i. Compare them to interest group systems. What are the important differences between these systems?

Feb 21: AWARENESS PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT DUE

Feb 21-28: Government, People & Institutions

Almond et al, Chaps 6, 7

- a. What are decision rules?
- b. What are the different limitations on the government?
- c. What is an “effective” executive?
- d. What is the distinction between a policy-maker and one who writes policies? Why is this distinction important?
- e. How do we assess policy performance?
- f. Discuss the conflicts in policy demands
- g. Discuss how policy goods affect evaluation of the political system.
- h. What are the different strategies of producing political goods?
- i. In what ways are institutions relevant to the current topics in the literature?
- j. In what ways is government integral to the current topics in the literature?

March 2: EXAM 1

March 7: AWARENESS PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT DUE

Review of Exam

March 9 - 16: Politics in England & India

Almond et al, Chaps 8 and 17

- a. What is the political system in England & India?
- b. Which part of the government represents the “effective executive” in both countries
- c. What are the duties of the PM? How do they support political stability and continuity? How are they similar in both countries? Different?
- d. What are the duties of the parliament? How are they similar in both countries? Different?
- e. Which theory of government fits England best? Justify.
- f. Which theory of government fits India best? Justify.
- g. How is recruitment carried out in England? India?
- h. How do interest groups work in England? India?
- i. Describe the electoral system. How does the electoral system affect political candidacy? Representation? Democracy? Policy-making?

March 21 - 23: SPRING BREAK

March 28: AWARENESS PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT DUE

March 30: Politics in England & India (cont'd)
Almond et al, Chaps 8 and 17

APRIL 6: AWARENESS RAISING EVENT

April 11: AWARENESS PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT DUE

April 4 - April 20: Politics of France & Egypt
Almond et al, Chaps 9 & 16

- a. Describe the political system in France. In Egypt.
- b. What checks exist against the executive in France? In Egypt?
- c. What powers do the French executive have? The Egyptian?
- d. What legacies did France inherit? Egypt?
- e. How do these legacies affect politics in these countries? Policy-making?
- f. What is the effect on the Law on Political Parties?
- g. What is the effect of different term-lengths on the politics of France?
- h. What venues should one choose for participation in France? In Egypt?

April 25: AWARENESS PROJECT FINAL REPORTS & FOLDER DUE

April 25 – May 11: Politics of Mexico
Almond et al, Chaps 14 & 19

1. What is the political system in Mexico in theory and in practice?
2. What is *municipio libre*? In theory, what is the effect of *municipio libre*? In what other countries have we witnessed this concept?
3. What is political centralism? How does political centralism affect Mexican politics?
4. What are the patterns of relationship between the political parties and political system?
5. Who would a candidate impress in order to seek office in Mexico?
6. What type of relationship do the political elites have with their supporters? In other countries, where would you find this relationship?

7. Identify the main political parties in Mexico on a political left-right spectrum.
8. What are the patterns of relationship between the political parties and political system?

May 11: REVIEW & RECAP

May 18: FINAL EXAM