

PO 180: Introduction to Comparative Politics
Illinois College
Fall 2026, Kirby Learning Center 108
Time: Monday, Wednesday, & Friday 2:40 PM to 3:50 PM

Instructor: Robert Tanner Bivens

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Pronouns: He/Him

Office: Kirby Learning Center 206

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, & Friday 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM/Tuesday & Thursday: 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM

I. Overview

This course introduces students to the complex, fascinating, and ever-changing field of comparative politics. The field of comparative politics can be sectioned off into three different levels of exploration: theoretical, methodological, and empirical. For this class, students will be introduced to all three separate approaches. Theoretically, we will focus on the evolution of the main disciplinary debates in comparative politics such as those surrounding democratization, electoral systems, nationalism, institutions, and the interaction of the state and the market. Methodologically, we will discuss the various tools and approaches that scholars use to compare states including qualitative case comparisons and quantitative statistical models. Empirically, we will look at how these theories and methods have been applied to the real world and with what results.

The course thus gives students the basic means with which to progress from critical consumers of politics to active, engaged producers of comparative political research. In this class we will learn how to compare democratic institutions to explain why the USA and Germany are democracies with entirely different selection processes. We will learn about the importance of political institutions and how they can be a signal of the power that institutions can have when it comes to economic success. We will explore how differing identities change and shape global politics.

II. Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will:

- Apply the fundamentals of Comparative Politics to political realities
- Utilize knowledge in academic and practical applications
- Obtain the ability to debate and discuss comparative politics from a graduate level of understanding
- Utilize the comparative method as a research tool

III. Student Assistance

I want my students to be able to engage in this class to the fullest of their abilities with as few distractions or conflicts as possible. It is currently a stressful time in this world with the aftermath of the pandemic on top of the rigor and challenges of academic life. In addition, those who are

neurodivergent may have a difficult time in the academic setting and I want to be able to mitigate those problems as much as possible so that you can feel confident leaving the class with the best grade possible.

As such, if you or somebody you know is struggling with anxiety or completing coursework due to neurodivergent issues, do not hesitate to reach out. IC has a number of resources available that can help:

- Disability Services Office: <https://www.ic.edu/disabilityresources>. Tel. 217-245-3639
- Student Counseling Services: <https://www.ic.edu/counseling> Tel. 217-245-3038
- As always, in the event of a crisis and for immediate help call 911

IV: Course Structure & Course Components

Course Outline

This is an in-person course. We meet on **Monday, Wednesday, & Friday from 2:40 PM to 3:50 PM**. As a 100-level intro class, this course will be separated into two elements, Monday and Wednesday will be dedicated to the traditional course lecture format in which I will be giving a lecture on the important elements of class. Fridays will be dedicated to a seminar-style discussion of the week's newspaper and weekly readings and how they connect to what was discussed in class and in our required readings.

In addition to the course style there will be seven assignments to assess the quality of student work. First, a participation grade connected to weekly discussion presentation, attendance of course lectures, and steady maintenance of course grades; Second, there will be two research papers due throughout the semester; third there will be an assessment of engagement with the weekly newspaper reviews; fourth a week of the course will be dedicated to studying China's Belt & Road Initiative utilizing what we learned in class. A grade will be assessed based on a student's participation in those three days of the week. And finally, there are two major exams, the midterm and final exam.

Course Components

Participation: Students are expected to maintain consistent participation in the course. This includes attending class, engaging in class discussion, submitting assignments on time, and demonstrating participation through other means. 5 points of the class will be dedicated to this participation and will be calculated and added to your final grade at the end of the semester.

Participation will be graded by the following criteria:

- Frequently attend lectures
- Frequently engages in course discussions
- Frequently attend class on Fridays for weekly discussion sessions
- Actively engages in course activities outside of lectures
- Submits assignments on time

- Maintains communication with the professor when there is an issue with attendance or submitting an assignment late that has been granted an extension
- Demonstrate consistent engagement with the coursework and materials

Note on Attendance: Attendance will be factored into your participation grade. However, attendance alone is not mandatory. It is understood that life is difficult and that we all have multiple obligations. If a student is showing a strong level of engagement with the class through work or communication, attendance inconsistencies will be mitigated. However, if a student is frequently missing class and does not demonstrate a strong level of engagement, their grade will suffer as a result.

Note on Documentation of Absences: A **formal excuse with documentation** will **only** be needed for **midterm and final exams**.

Research Papers x2: Over the course of the semester, students will need to complete two research papers due the **Friday of Week 5 and Week 12**. Prompts will be provided by the professor and will have a maximum word limit of 1000 words (excluding citations which are required with a work cited page). Each paper will be worth 10% of the total grade for a total of 20% points when combined.

Newspaper Article Review & Participation: For ten weeks out of the semester, I will assign to you, in addition to your required reading for the week, a newspaper article about that week's themes and discussions. You will read the article and then, in groups of 3-5, provide a presentation that details how the article relates to what we have learned from class. Your group will be graded on understanding of information, usage of the weekly readings to help bolster your point, and quality of argument. Each week you will be assessed on the paper with a maximum score of 1% (10% in total).

NOTE: Students who are not in attendance and do not have an excused absence prior to the Friday class will not be able to make up the point. There may be other opportunities to earn points back later. But if someone does not take part in the Friday discussions, it will be a point lost.

China's Belt & Road Initiative Presentation & Quiz: On Week 13, the week after we return from Thanksgiving Break, we will be going through a collection of activities and group discussions about China's Belt & Road Initiative. The purpose of these group discussions and in person exams is to apply what we have learned in the class to one of the most controversial talking points in contemporary comparative politics, China and the rise of their global development initiatives known as BRI. There will be a collection of three events, one each day of the week, that you all will be tested on including presentations on the book that you will be required to read, a group presentation on aspects of BRI, and finally an in-person quiz on the topic on the final Friday. The three aspects will be collectively worth 15% of your final grade.

Midterm & Final Exam: There are two exams that will occur over the course of the semester with the midterm exam occurring halfway through the semester that is worth 20% of your total grade and the final exam being worth 30% of your total grade. Both exams will be OPEN NOTE!

NOTE: Unlike the papers, the midterm and final exam will require a formal showing of evidence if absences occur to retake the exams.

V: Grading Distribution

<u>Assessment</u>	<u>Course Points</u>
Participation	5
Newspaper Article Review & Participation	10
Research Papers x2	20
China's BRI Presentation & Quiz	15
Midterm Exam	20
Final Exam	30
TOTAL	100

Final Course Grading Scale

A = 93 to 100

A- = 90 to 92

B+ = 87 to 89

B = 83 to 86

B- = 80 to 82

C+ = 77 to 79

D = 60 to 69

F = 0 to 50

The average anticipated course grade is expected to be around 75-80 for the course. A student who consistently attends lectures, pays minor attention to the material, takes the midterm and final exam, and answers the reading assignments per the instructions on the materials should be able to finish at minimum with around a C to B- grade.

Similarly, it should be expected that students will need to work hard to obtain B's and A's. However, the same can be said for D's and F's.

VI: Course Policies

Email Policy: I am available via email when you have questions or concerns about the course.

These are professional communications: Please be respectful, formal, and proof-read your

correspondence. A 24-hour turnaround time during the week should be anticipated. Please consult this syllabus before emailing, as your questions may be answered here.

All email communication must be done from your **IC email address** and must include the course code **PO 180 in the subject line**. Those two requirements help me combat phishers and scammers as well as ensure they are received and read in a timely manner. If you ignore this, it is likely your email may be missed.

Academic Dishonesty & Plagiarism: This course takes academic misconduct and plagiarism seriously. Do not risk a failing grade. Do not consult with others while writing exams or preparing your written responses. It is strictly forbidden to consult with anyone (e.g. another student, friend, or family member) while completing course assessments. Evidence of such behavior will lead to a zero on the component and/or a zero in the course (and further sanctions as appropriate). I will be looking for evidence of such behavior and will treat any as serious academic dishonesty. All assignments and exams will be inspected using plagiarism detection tools. Students are expected to have read and abide by IC's Intellectual and Academic Integrity (<https://catalog.ic.edu/intellectual-and-academic-integrity>). If you have any questions relating to academic practices, academic integrity, and issues of plagiarism and/or citation please join the Q&A sessions to chat about them.

“Academic integrity is a fundamental component of the mission of Illinois College. Academic integrity is the completion of course tasks with one’s own ideas and/or accurately acknowledging sources. Violations of academic integrity include plagiarism and all other forms of cheating. If a professor encounters a violation of the Code of Integrity, he or she will contact the Academic Affairs Office. The instructor will then enact an appropriate punishment. If the student(s) does not agree with a punishment the student(s) may make an appeal to the Academic Integrity Judicial Board.”

Generative AI Writing Tools: The use of generative AI writing tools for any assignment is forbidden. Any evidence of their usage will result in a failing grade for the assignment and may be subjected to further academic dishonesty investigations.

Note: Tools that help with spelling and grammar mistakes like Grammarly do not count as an AI writing tool. But Grammarly’s generative AI services would count as an AI writing tool and be subject to disciplinary action

Food and Drink in Class: Students are free to eat or bring drinks to class if they are not disruptive to the learning experience.

Electronics in Class Policy: Laptops and tablets may be used to take notes and keep track of slides as they will be posted to MOODLE. Cell phones should be set to vibrate or silent while in class to ensure that the class is not disturbed. Any disruptive behavior including but not limited to: cell phones ringing during class, students watching videos on their electronic devices, sounds coming from their electronic devices, or any electronic device impeding the learning experience of other students may be grounds for **dismissal** from the class for that day.

Submissions: All written versions of the course assignments must be submitted using MOODLE. Assignments are **not accepted via email** (unless requested with cause).

Lates & Make-Ups: This course has a rather rigid course schedule assignment schedule. However, some leeway can be provided for students that need it. Midterm and final exams must have some

form of official documentation to have them rescheduled. However, research and group project elements are more flexible. To ensure you do not receive a late penalty, a student must request an extension from me **before** the deadline. Extensions requested after the deadline will frequently be denied without good cause. Any assignment that is late will receive a 5% grade deduction for each day after the submission deadline. Once the fifth day is reached, the grade will be marked as zero.

Speak to Me: In addition, you should feel welcome speaking to your instructor and requesting an extension or accommodation for any medical, emotional, professional, or familial reason – or any other issue that impacts your ability to succeed in our course. I'll be understanding! But I ask that you be in contact with me **before you miss a deadline** rather than after it has passed

Preferred Name & Pronouns: If your name is different than that which is found on the university roster, please let me know either by marking it on the sheet or letting me know in person. This is helpful for a variety of students that include but not limited to: transgender students, gender nonconforming individuals, students who abbreviate their first name, students who use their middle name, international students, and so forth. If your name is also difficult to pronounce or often mispronounced, I encourage you to write it phonetically on the sheet as well, so I do not say it incorrectly. Please include your pronouns on the roster sheet as well to ensure I do not misgender anyone and to ensure others do not as well.

Class Participation & Respecting Classmates: This is a graduate-level course which means that the course will rely heavily on debates and discussions among classmates on the topic for that week. In these situations, it is expected that you behave in a professional, academic, and respectful manner. Topics including hate speech or verbiage used to belittle or harass will not be tolerated and will result in a student being dismissed from the course if it occurs.

Technical Requirements: This course uses Moodle. Students should familiarize themselves with Moodle and all technical requirements as soon as possible. If you have technical concerns, IC's IT services may be able to assist.

Make sure you have access to a reliable computer for this class to submit your writing assignments, join in discussions, and access the reading material/lecture material for the course. If you do not have a reliable computer, please let me know as soon as possible and we can find a means on campus for you to access Moodle

Incomplete: Requests for an "Incomplete" designation in this course are only accepted under extenuating circumstances and at the discretion of the instructor. Requests **must** be made to your instructor before the final appeal date. When the course is closed the grade is finalized and there is nothing I can do.

VII: Course Materials

Required Books (2)

Boix, Carles & Susan C. Stokes. 2009. *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford University Press. Oxford, UK.

Schatz, Edward & Rachel Silvey. 2025. *Seeing China's Belt and Road*. Oxford University Press. Oxford UK.

VIII. Class Schedule

<u>Week</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1	9/2 & 9/4	Syllabus & Introduction to Comparative Politics	
2	9/7, 9/9, & 9/11	Comparative Method & Perspectives	
3	9/14, 9/16, & 9/18	The State & State Formation	Newspaper Article Review
4	9/21, 9/23, & 9/25	Democratization	Newspaper Article Review
5	9/28, 9/30, & 10/2	Authoritarianism	Research Paper 1 Due/ Newspaper Article Review
6	10/5, 10/7, & 10/9	Hybrid Regimes	Newspaper Article Review
7	10/12, 10/14, & 10/16	MIDTERM EXAM WEEK	MIDTERM EXAM 10/12 NO CLASSES 10/14 & 10/16
8	10/19, 10/21, & 10/23	Governance	Newspaper Article Review
9	10/26, 10/28, & 10/30	Parties, Elections, & Representation	Newspaper Article Review

10	11/2, 11/4, & 11/6	Identity & Nationalism	Newspaper Article Review
11	11/9, 11/11, & 11/13	Collective Violence	Newspaper Article Review
12	11/16, 11/18/ & 11/20	Civil Society, Contentious Politics, & Collective Action	Research Paper 2 Due/ Newspaper Article Review
X	11/23, 11/25/ & 11/27	NO CLASS	
13	11/30, 12/2, & 12/4	China's Belt & Road: Putting Theory into Practice	BRI Quiz & Presentation Due
14	12/7, 12/9, & 12/11	Comparative Political Economy	Newspaper Article Review
15	12/14	FINAL EXAM	FINAL EXAM

IX: Detailed Course Schedule & Readings

Week 1: Syllabus and the Introduction to Comparative Politics

- The Syllabus
- Amelia Hoover Green. 2013 "How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps." <https://www.ameliahoovergreen.com/uploads/9/3/0/9/93091546/howtoread.pdf>
- Carles Boix & Susan C. Stokes. 2009. "Introduction" TEXTBOOK Chapter 1

Newspaper Article

- NONE

Week 2: The Comparative Method & Perspectives

- North, Douglass. 1991. "Institutions." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 5(1): 97=112.

- James Mahoney & Celso M. Villegas. 2009. "Historical Enquiry and Comparative Politics." TEXTBOOK Chapter 3
- John Gerring. 2009. "The Case Study: What It Is and What it Does." TEXTBOOK Chapter 4
- Robert H. Bates. 2009. "From Case Studies to Social Science: A Strategy for Political Research." TEXTBOOK Chapter 7.

Newspaper Article

- NONE

Week 3: The State & State Formation

- Hendrik Spruyt. 2009. "War, Trade, & State Formation." TEXTBOOK Chapter 9.
- Russell Hardin. 2009. "Compliance, Consent, & Legitimacy." TEXTBOOK Chapter 10
- Tilley, Charles. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." In E. Rueschemeyer & T. Skocpol's (eds.) *Bringing the State Back In*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, MA. 169-191.

Newspaper Article

- Simon Speakman Cordall. 2025. "Does International Recognition Mean Palestine is Going to be a State?" *Al-Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/26/does-international-recognition-mean-palestine-is-going-to-be-a-state>

Week 4: Democratization

- Christian Welzel & Ronald Inglehart. 2009. "Mass Beliefs & Democratic Institutions." TEXTBOOK Chapter 13.
- Barbara Geddes. 2009. "What Causes Democratization?" TEXTBOOK Chapter 14.
- Frances Hagopian. 2009. "Parties and Voters in Emerging Democracies." TEXTBOOK Chapter 24.

Newspaper Article

- Andrew Wojtanik. 2026. "Democracy in Africa is Fragmenting into Three Paths." *Democracy in Africa*. <https://democracyin africa.org/democracy-in-africa-is-fragmenting-into-three-paths/>

Week 5: Authoritarianism

- Ronald Wintrobe. 2009. "Dictatorship: Analytical Approaches." TEXTBOOK Chapter 16.
- Gandhi, Jennifer & Adam Przeworski. 2007. "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats." *Comparative Political Studies*. 40(11): 1279-1301.

- PODCAST: Democracy Works. “The Context: Seven Ways Anyone can Fight Authoritarianism.” NPR. "https://www.npr.org/player/embed/fis-785061367-58ba5a2edf78a86de952068570846895/fis-785061367-58ba5a2edf78a86de952068570846895"

Newspaper Article

- Joshua Kurlantzick. 2026. “As Democracy Falters Worldwide, Authoritarians are Winning.” *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/articles/freedom-houses-annual-report-shows-the-dire-state-of-democracy-worldwide>

Week 6: Hybrid Regimes

- Diamond, Larry. 2002. “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes.” *Journal of Democracy*. 13(2): 21-35.
- Collier, David & Steven Levitsky. 1997. “Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research.” *World Politics*. 49(3): 430-451.
- Miklos Bankuti, Gabor Halmai, & Kim Lane Scheppele. 2012. “Hungary’s Illiberal Turn: Disabling the Constitutions.” *Journal of Democracy*. 23(3): 138-146.

Newspaper Article

- What Should Europe Do About Viktor Orban and Illiberal Democracy? *New York Times*.

Week 7: Midterm Exam Week

- NONE! Prepare yourself for the exam!

Newspaper Article

- NONE

Week 8: Governance

- Raymond M. Duch. 2009. “Comparative Studies of the Economy and the Vote.” TEXTBOOK Chapter 33.
- Matthew E. Carnes & Isabela Mares. 2009. “The Welfare State in Global Perspectives.” TEXTBOOK Chapter 35.
- Jose Maria Maravall. 2009. “Accountability and the Survival of Governments.” TEXTBOOK Chapter 37.

Newspaper Article

- Pierre Purseigle. 2025. “France’s Political Upheaval isn’t Temporary – It’s a Profound Constitutional Crisis.” *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/oct/14/france-constitutional-crisis-prime-minister-president>.

Week 9: Parties, Elections, and Representation

- Carles Boix. 2009. "The Emergence of Parties and Party Systems." TEXTBOOK Chapter 21.
- Anne Wren & Kenneth M. McElwain. 2009. "Voters & Parties." TEXTBOOK Chapter 23.
- Rein Taagepera. 2009. "Electoral Systems." TEXTBOOK Chapter 28.

Newspaper Article* (Journal Article worth debating)

- Wouter Veeneendaal. 2013. "How Democracy Functions without Parties: The Republic of Palau." *Party Politics*. 22(1): 1-10.

Week 10: Identity & Nationalism

- Lieah Greenfeld & Jonathan Eastwood. 2009. "National Identity." TEXTBOOK Chapter 11.
- Harris Mylonas & Maya Tudor. 2021. "Nationalism: What We Know and What We Still Need to Know." *Annual Review of Political Science*. 24: 109-132.
- John Campbell. 2017. "Identity Politics in South Africa." *Council on Foreign Relations*.
<https://www.cfr.org/articles/identity-politics-south-africa>

Newspaper Article

- Lily Hindy. 2026. "Kurdish Gains in Syria Could Disappear Without International Support – Just as They Did in Iraq Decades Ago." *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/kurdish-gains-in-syria-could-disappear-without-international-support-just-as-they-did-in-iraq-decades-ago-276840>.

Week 11: Collective Violence

- Steven Pincus. 2009. "Civil Wars." TEXTBOOK Chapter 17.
- Ashutosh Varshney. 2009. "Ethnicity & Ethnic Conflict." TEXTBOOK Chapter 12.
- Paul B. Stares. 2025. "Conflicts to Watch in 2026." *Council on Foreign Relations*.
<https://www.cfr.org/reports/conflicts-watch-2026>.

Newspaper Article

- Eric A. Friedman, Suad Abdel Aziz and John Prendergast. 2025. "Sudan is in Free Fall." *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/06/opinion/sudan-darfur-el-fasher-uae.html?unlocked_article_code=1.XFA.8IqU.JHskqYhUIucq&smid=nytcore-android-share.

Week 12: Civil Society, Contentious Politics, and Collective Action

- Sidney Tarrow & Charles Tilley. 2009. "Contentious Politics & Social Movements." TEXTBOOK Chapter 19.
- Mark I. Lichbach & Helma GE de Vries. 2009. "Mechanisms of Globalized Protest Movements." TEXTBOOK Chapter 20.
- Filippo Sabetti. 2009. "Democracy & Civic Culture." TEXTBOOK Chapter 15.

Newspaper Article

- Tim Balk. 2026. "No Kings Rally 5 Takeaways." *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/29/us/politics/no-kings-rallies-takeaways.html>.

Week 13: China's Belt & Road: Putting Theory into Practice

- Schatz, Edward & Rachel Silvey. 2025. *Seeing China's Belt and Road*. Oxford University Press. Oxford, UK.
- YES! The Whole Book.

Newspaper Article

- NONE (All of this is related to the book)

Week 14: Comparative Political Economy

- Hay, Colin. 2020. "Does Capitalism (Still) Come in Varieties?" *Review of International Political Economy*. 27(2): 302-319.
- National Resource Governance Institute. 2015. "The Resource Curse: The Political and Economic Challenges of Natural Resource Wealth." *Natural Resource Governance Institute*.
https://resourcegovernance.org/sites/default/files/nrgi_Resource-Curse.pdf
- Kristin Saucier. Review of the Bottom Billion. <https://www.worldhunger.org/the-bottom-billion-why-the-poorest-countries-are-failing-and-what-can-be-done-about-it/>

Newspaper Article

- Emmanuel Ameyaw. 2024. "Ghana's Economic Crisis Was Caused by Government Borrowing – The Central Bank Did the Best it Could: Economist." *The Conversation*.
<https://theconversation.com/ghanas-economic-crisis-was-caused-by-government-borrowing-the-central-bank-did-the-best-it-could-economist-232020>

Week 15: FINAL EXAM

- NONE