Course Description

This course introduces a subfield of political science known as Comparative Politics. Simply put, this is the empirical study of states, governments, and political life, using the knowledge gained from analyzing politics in many countries. In this introductory course, we will learn fundamental concepts about how political systems function and how they change, with particular attention to the cases of Germany, Brazil, and Russia, and to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom. These countries allow us to study political regimes with vastly different cultural, socioeconomic, and historical conditions, and with a variety of political institutions.

We will begin with a classic reference point for any analysis of democracy, Robert Dahl’s *Polyarchy*. We’ll examine the criteria for defining a democracy (compared to other regime types) and then consider which factors help democracies to survive. Next we’ll look at the variety of political institutions that modern democracies use to choose leaders, make collective decisions, represent interests, and implement policy. This section of the course relies on Arend Lijphart’s seminal work on democratic institutions, *Patterns of Democracy*. We conclude this section of the course by considering several articles on public opinion and citizen participation.

With a grounding in how modern democracies work, we then turn to cases of regime change; that is, the collapse of democracy (in the case of Germany under the Nazis) and its opposite, the collapse of an authoritarian regime and a successful transition to democracy (in the case of Brazil). Finally, we study Russia, a case where state socialism collapsed but democracy has yet to consolidate. At the conclusion of the course, we will have a few days to use our comparative knowledge to consider the prospects for democratic change in the Middle East and the quality of and challenges for democracy in the United States.

Course Objectives

After taking this course, students should have the conceptual vocabulary needed for upper-level classes in comparative politics and understand news about political institutions and events around the world. In particular, students should be able to:

1) Define democracy, contrasting it with other regime types
2) Discuss factors that facilitate democratic stability, with examples from particular cases
3) Discuss factors that facilitate democratic transitions, with examples from particular cases
4) Explain the main variations in democratic institutions and forms of interest representation and discuss their advantages and disadvantages (parliamentarism v. presidentialism; majoritarian v. consensus; federalism v. unitary systems; pluralism vs. neocorporatism; etc.)
5) Discuss the democratic history and institutions of Germany, the United Kingdom, and Brazil
6) Discuss regime transition, current institutions, and challenges for democracy in Russia.

A note on introductory courses:

Some students find their first course in comparative politics surprisingly challenging. It can be disconcerting to find old terms used in new ways or to reconsider long-held understandings of politics and government derived from a single case, such as the USA.

It will be helpful to remember that this course is an “introduction” not because it is easy, but because it is your first exposure to a new field of study. You will be introduced to a great many topics in order to provide you with a foundation in comparative politics. The most difficult readings in the course may be slow going, but be assured many Kenyon students before you have handled these readings and this course’s reading load. Most topics are covered in this course in just one or two class periods, so it is important to come to every class and to come with the readings prepared. All of that said, I trust that the readings, lectures, discussion, and assignments will provide a fascinating, eye-opening overview of politics around the world.

Required Books:


Robert Dahl, Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition. (Yale:1971)


Arend Lijphart, Patterns of Democracy (Yale: 1999)


Thomas Remington, Politics in Russia, 7th edition (Pearson: 2012)

Wherever possible, other readings, primarily articles from scholarly journals, will be available on Moodle, but occasionally you will need to use the Course Reserves to read a book chapter.

Requirements and Grading

- **15% Preparation and contributions to the good of the order** – Assessed by regular and useful contributions during class and/or on the class Moodle forum page, and success on pop quizzes. There are no make-ups for pop quizzes and no extra time given if you are tardy to class. One missed or horrible quiz will not ruin your grade, so
you do not need to explain your absence. If you have missed several quizzes, I presume I will have received official word from the Dean of Students about the serious illness or family emergency that has required you to miss a number of days of the semester. I do not plan to take attendance, but I also expect that office hours are for consulting with students who want to learn the material better, not for re-teaching the material to someone who did not show up for class.

- **25% Mid-term exam** (essay and short essay based on readings and class material) – Oct. 12. You must take the exam at the scheduled time unless the Dean has notified me of your grave extenuating circumstances.
- **30% Paper** (5-7 pages) – Due Nov. 9. Submit via Turnitin.com and bring a paper copy to class.
- **30% Final exam** – Focused on material after the mid-term. December 16, 1:30-3:30 PM. This time is set by the Kenyon registrar. I wish it were earlier too, but we all have to live with it. Please do not plan to leave Gambier for the holidays before 3:30 on 12/16/11.

**Standards:**

- **A**'s indicate *excellence* – work that is not only well done, but shows thorough understanding as well as depth and/or originality in dealing with the course materials; carefulness and sophistication in argument and composition, accuracy on details, etc.
- **B**'s mean *good* (indeed a B+ means “very good”). “B” work is well done, showing a good grasp of the material and solid style and argumentation. Sometimes B work contains some of the qualities of A-work in parts of the essay, but not throughout (or, conversely, has many of the traits of a C essay, but some stronger elements).
- **C**'s indicate *satisfactory* or “OK” work, showing some effort to address questions and understand material, but little depth or mastery. Work that relies solely on class material without attention to the readings (or the reverse) may be judged only “ok.”
- **D**’s indicate *poor* work, showing a lack of effort, incompleteness, poor grasp of the concepts, much sloppiness in thought or composition, etc.

**Use MOODLE!**

This syllabus, many readings, and other announcements, details about assignments, supplementary links, etc. will be posted on the course MOODLE site.

**Changes: Rare, but possible**

Sometimes deadlines, readings or even policies (say, taking attendance) need to be adjusted. I do not anticipate major changes, but any that are made would be announced in class and posted on the class Moodle site.

**Disability Accommodation**

Students with disabilities who may need academic accommodations should speak with me privately *early* in the semester to discuss their needs. Also, you are required to register for
support services with the Office of Disability Services in the Olin Library, Center for Innovative Pedagogy. Please contact Erin Salva, ODS Coordinator, at PBX 5453 or salvae@kenyon.edu.

Academic Honesty

The work submitted for grades in this course must be done completely and only by the individual student who submits it. The Kenyon College Course of Study discusses academic honesty at some length, explaining that while “learning from another artist or scholar is commendable,” it is plagiarism to “use the ideas (written, oral, graphic or artistic) or the phraseology of another person covertly, so as to represent the material as one’s own.” Ignorance of the law, as the saying goes, is no excuse. Unintentional plagiarism is still an infraction against scholarly ethics.

Kenyon faculty members are required to report all suspected academic dishonesty to department chairs. You are responsible to read and understand the standards of academic honesty elaborated in the Course of Study and to ask the instructor, or a member of the Academic Infractions Board, in advance of submitting your work, if you have any doubts about how to use and cite sources, information, or ideas.

DATE          TOPIC, ASSIGNMENT, AND QUESTIONS FOR READING/DISCUSSION

AUG 26        Introduction to the course. What is Comparative Politics?
               PART I: WHAT IS DEMOCRACY? WHAT MAKES A DEMOCRACY STABLE?

AUG 29        Defining Democracy


               Questions: What is democracy? What are the criteria of democracies? Can we measure the concept of democracy?

AUG 31        Historical Explanations for Democratic Stability

               Dahl, Polyarchy, Ch. 3, pp. 33-47.

               Questions: Does the sequence of political liberalization and expanding participation matter for the long-term stability of democracy? Can it have impact on democratization processes today?

SEPT 2         Structural Explanations for Democratic Stability

               Dahl, Polyarchy, Chs. 4-7, pp. 48-123.

**Questions:** What is meant by a “social requisite” of democracy? Do nations have to wait to become wealthy to become democratic? What is the relationship between capitalism and democracy?

**SEPT 5** How Do We Explain which Countries are Stable Democracies? Elite Beliefs and Political Culture

Dahl, *Polyarchy*, Chs. 8, 124-88

**Questions:** What is “political culture”? Why do you think Dahl focuses on the beliefs of elites rather than the broader public?

**PART II: GOVERNING INSTITUTIONS: PRESIDENTIAL & PARLIAMENTARY**

**SEPT 7** Models of Democracy: Westminster v. Consensus

Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, Chapter 1-4

**SEPT 9** Executive-Legislative Relations: Presidential v. Parliamentary Systems

Lijphart, Chs. 6-7 and 11 (pp. 90-142 and 200-15)

**Questions:** What is the difference between a parliamentary and presidential system of government? How are governments formed in a parliamentary system? Why are political parties so important in parliamentary systems? How is government formed in Great Britain? In a consensus democracy? What is the relative power of the executive within parliamentary and presidential systems? How do these differences affect individual politicians and legislators?

**SEPT 12** Parliamentary Rule in Practice: Germany

Dalton, *Politics in Germany: Online Textbook*, chapter 2 (skip the section on “A Federal system,” which we’ll read later) and in chapter 9, “The Process in Review.”

**Questions:** How is a government formed in Germany? How does this differ from Britain? Why have the Germans created the particular parliamentary arrangements that they now have?

**SEPT 14** Pros and Cons of Parliamentary and Presidential Systems


Sept 14 Questions: What are the advantages and disadvantages of presidential rule? What are the advantages and disadvantages of parliamentary rule? How different would American democracy be with a parliamentary system?

PART III: ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS

SEPT 16 Political Parties and Party Systems
Lijphart, Patterns of Democracy, Chs. 4-5, pp. 48-89.

Questions: What role do parties play in a democracy? Why are they important? Is party “discipline” beneficial? Why or why not?

SEPT 19 Electoral Systems
Lijphart, Patterns of Democracy, Ch. 8, pp. 143-70.

Questions: What is the difference between a system of plurality or majority and a system of proportional representation? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these different electoral systems?

7:30 PM Recommended – excellent opportunity to post your review afterward on Moodle: Award-winning journalist, ROBIN WRIGHT, speaking on "Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World" in Rosse Hall.

SEPT 21 The German Party & Electoral System
Dalton, Politics in Germany, Online Edition, chapter 8.

Questions: How have the Germans merged features of PR and plurality electoral systems in their mixed system? How does each part of the system work? To what extent do these features shape the German party system and the incentives of parties and candidates?

PART IV: OTHER INSTITUTIONS OF DEMOCRACY

SEPT 23 Interest Representation: Pluralism vs. Corporatism
Lijphart, Patterns of Democracy, chapter 9, pp. 171-84.

Dalton, Politics in Germany, Online Edition, chapter 7.

Questions: How do pluralist and corporatist interest representation systems differ? What difference does the mode of interest representation make for democracy? Give examples of German neo-corporatist organizations. Think about how those function compared to interests groups representing similar sectors (labor, business, etc.) in the USA.
SEPT 26  Federal vs. Unitary / Centralized vs. Decentralized


*Recommended: Federalist No. 10:*

*Questions:* How does German federalism differ from American federalism?

SEPT 28  Constitutions and Judicial Review


*Questions:* Are written constitutions necessary to democracy? In the USA, we are accustomed to strong judicial review (the Supreme Court can decide that an act of congress is unconstitutional). Is this the norm among modern democracies? In what ways might judicial review be considered undemocratic? In what ways can an unelected judiciary with powers of judicial review be consistent with democratic values?

SEPT 30  The State and the Economy


Dalton, Chapter 3 through “Collapse of East German Economy,” and chapter 10.

*Questions:* How do democracies manage their economies? Are the forms of economic management examples of non-democratic arenas of policy making? In the case of Germany, what role has the state played in the economy in the post-War era and how has that changed over time?

OCT 3  Majoritarian and Consensus Models


*Questions:* What differences are there between consensus and majoritarian democracies in terms of representativeness, accountability and efficiency? What type of institutional arrangements would you recommend for an ethnically divided society? Would a consensus democracy always be better for a divided society?

OCT 5  The Role of Public Opinion and Mass Beliefs

Questions: What are the contending views about the character of citizens’ knowledge about political issues and the political system? How can and do citizens influence their societies’ decision makers? Can citizens play a constructive role in modern democracy?

OCT 7  
**Fall Reading Period**

**PART V: WHAT DOES THE DEMOS DO IN A MODERN DEMOCRACY?**

OCT 10  
Modes of Participation in Modern Democracies


Questions: What are the different modes of political participation that citizens in democracy might choose? How does voting fit into the larger pattern of democratic political participation? Which modes of participation are becoming more common? Why is electoral turnout declining?

OCT 12  
**Midterm exam**

OCT 14  
Values Change


Questions: Which fundamental values about inter-personal relations seem to have impact on one’s views about democracy? Which seem to shape political behavior? How have these values been changing in advanced industrial societies over the past two generations?

OCT 17  
Civil Society and Social Capital


Questions: What is civil society? Why and how is it important to democratization and democratic stability? Has there been a decline in civic attitudes and behavior? What implications does this have for democracy?
PART VI: DEMOCRATIC BREAKDOWN & AUTHORITARIAN RULE: NAZI GERMANY

OCT 19  
Weimar Germany


OCT 21  
A Micro View of the Values that Failed to Support Democracy in Germany


*Questions*: What factors in Nordheim might have disposed the citizenry toward the Nazis in the late 1920s and 1930s? Who were the major political actors there and how did each view democracy?

**Saturday, OCT 22**  
2 – 4 PM  

*If you cannot view the film at this time, please view it on your own at the Olin Library Multimedia Center, for discussion on Friday.*

OCT 24  
The Nazi Seizure of Power: Using Democratic Institutions Against Democrats


*Questions*: How exactly did Hitler come to power? How did the institutions of Weimar Germany allow an avowed anti-democrat to use democratic institutions to become chancellor? Who Voted for Hitler?

OCT 26  
Who Voted for Hitler and why?


*Questions*: Which social groups and types of individuals seemed to gravitate most to the NSDAP in the elections of the early 1930s? How did the Nazis campaign? How did their campaign tactics benefit them?

OCT 28  
Totalitarianism

Allen, Nazi Seizure of Power, chapters 12-14.

*Questions*: What was Nazi ideology? In *Triumph of the Will*, what do the various speakers offer as the Nazi philosophy? The Nazi program? What might have been the purpose of *Triumph of the Will*?
PART VII: AUTHORITARIAN BREAKDOWN & DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION: BRAZIL

OCT 31 Montero, Brazilian Politics, chs. 1-3 (pp. 1-50)

Questions: What are the major “historical patterns” of Brazilian history? How did Brazil’s state capacity change during the 20th century? Why, according to Montero, does Brazil need a strong state in order to have a strong democracy?

NOV 2 Montero, Brazilian Politics, chapter 4 (pp. 50-72)

Questions: Is Brazil a majoritarian or a consensus system? What is “extreme multipartism” and why is that a problem for a democracy? What is “oligarchical politics”? What is populism? What is clientelism? Why are these problematic for democracy?

NOV 4 Montero, Brazilian Politics, chs. 5-6 (pp. 73-116)

Questions: Is severe socioeconomic inequality compatible with democracy? Why or why not? What explains the emergence of a more democratic civil society in Brazil? What is the landless peasant movement?

NOV 7 Montero, Brazilian Politics, chs. 7-8 (117-148)

Questions: How is the state involved in Brazil’s economy? What is “regional integration” and why would countries of the Southern Cone seek it? What challenges does Brazil face in a globalized world?

NOV 9 Papers Due at the start of class.

No new reading.
Class topic: Overview of the Soviet state.

PART VIII: REGIME BREAKDOWN & TRANSITION, WITHOUT DEMOCRACY: RUSSIA

NOV 11 The Collapse of the Soviet Union

Remington, Politics in Russia, chapters 1 and 2

Questions: How was the state organized under the Soviet system? Why did the regime collapse? What are the four “domains of change” challenging post-Soviet Russia?
Governance Institutions in Russia

Remington, *Politics in Russia*, chapter 3

**Questions:** In what ways do Russia’s governing institutions mix features of presidentialism and parliamentarism? What goals were the writers of Russia’s constitution trying to accomplish with a mixed or “semi-presidential” system?

Electoral Institutions in Russia

Remington, *Politics in Russia*, chapter 6

**Questions:** What is Russia’s electoral system? Describe its party system. To what extent are these systems functioning well to sustain democratic “rules of the game” in Russia?

Between State & Market

Remington, *Politics in Russia*, chapter 7

**Questions:** What is meant by “dual transition”? How did Russia make the transition to a more market oriented economy? Who in society “won” and “lost” in this process? What have been the political ramifications of the way Russia made its shift toward a market economy?

**Thanksgiving Week**

Political Participation and Public Opinion in Russia

Remington, *Politics in Russia*, chs. 4 and 5

PART X: CURRENT DEMOCRACY EVENTS AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

Democracy in an Era of Globalization


The Arab Spring and Prospects for Democracy in the Middle East


Additional readings may be added reflecting events that occur this fall.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings/Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEC 5</td>
<td>The Status of Democracy around the World</td>
<td>Readings from <em>Freedom House</em>. Details to be announced.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Questions: What is an “illiberal” democracy?</td>
<td>What is a delegative democracy? To what extent do these “democracies” comport with the definition of democracy discussed in the beginning of the semester?</td>
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<td>DEC 9</td>
<td>Review and some conclusions.</td>
<td><em>Short readings may be assigned to help us wrap up.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>DEC 16</td>
<td><strong>Final Exam</strong>, in-class, closed-book, essay and short-essay.</td>
<td>Focused on the material since the mid-term. <strong>1:30-3:30.</strong></td>
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