

## COMPARING STATES & SOCIETIES INTL 260

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Wofford College  
Government & International Affairs  
Spring 2026  
TR 1-2:20pm, Daniel Building 204

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Office hours: M 3-5pm; Th 3-5pm

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### Overview

What we see in different countries is not “natural” or the way things must be; instead, it is the result of politics: decisions about who gets what, how, and why. Why are some states more powerful than others? How has colonialism shaped countries’ long-term development? Why are some countries democratic while others are authoritarian? Through which mechanisms do authoritarian leaders survive in office? Are parliamentary democracies more stable than presidential ones—and if so, why? What are the pros and cons of proportional versus majoritarian electoral systems, and how do they shape party formation? How do populism and polarization shape democratic politics? These are the types of questions we will explore in this course. Readings and lectures draw on a mix of historical and contemporary cases from Western and Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Form and articulate informed views about key questions, debates, and topics in the study of comparative politics.
- Engage critically with multiple theories, research designs, and methodological tools to analyze past and contemporary political events across world regions.
- Build a strong foundation for future coursework in comparative politics, international relations, and other subfields within political science and the social sciences.
- Strengthen reading, writing, research, communication, and teamwork skills through in-class and take-home assignments of varying stakes.

### Assignments & Grading

**Class Participation (20%):** Participation in class is a vital component of this course and is essential for a productive learning environment. Students are expected to attend class regularly, arrive on time, and actively contribute to discussions and in-class activities. Reading the assigned materials in advance is critical for informed participation. Participation will be graded in two

equal parts: **10% for attendance** and **10% for engagement**. The attendance component requires students to attend *all* or *almost all* sessions, with *up to three* unexcused absences permitted throughout the semester without penalty (please refer to the section titled “Absences, Scheduling Conflicts & Late Submissions” on p. 4 for more details). Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. The engagement component assesses students’ regular involvement in class through thoughtful comments and questions that show preparation and curiosity about the material. To receive full marks on engagement, students should contribute to class conversations consistently throughout the semester, rather than only sporadically or occasionally.

**Office Hours Attendance (5%):** Students are expected to attend office hours *at least once* during the semester to discuss any aspect of the course—assignments, readings, ideas, or broader questions. This is not just a grade boost; it is also an opportunity to check in and build a relationship. I view office hours as a space to support your learning, professional development, and life beyond the classroom. Students are always welcome to come more than once. Office hours are by appointment, held on **Mondays from 3-5pm** and **Thursdays from 3-5pm at Daniel Building 221**. You can sign up [here](#). If that time does not work for you, I am happy to schedule an *ad hoc* appointment—either in person or virtually. Please email me at [tacconen@wofford.edu](mailto:tacconen@wofford.edu) or talk to me before/after class to meet at a different day or time.

**Midterm Exam (25%):** Students will take an in-class midterm exam, scheduled for **Thursday, March 19**. The exam will include a mix of multiple-choice questions, short-answer responses, and long-answer essays designed to assess students’ understanding of the material, engagement with the readings, and ability to reflect on key debates. Specific instructions and a study guide will be provided in advance.

**Country Expertise Memos (25%):** Students will become experts on one country over the course of the semester. To do so, they will write *two* short analytical memos on their assigned country’s political history and institutions. These assignments are designed to help students conduct independent research and apply key theories and concepts from the course in a structured, memo-style format. Each memo is worth 12.5% of the final grade. Submissions are scheduled for **Thursday, March 5** and **Thursday, April 16**, via Moodle by 11:59pm on the assigned dates. Detailed prompts and instructions will be provided in advance, and countries will be randomly assigned early in the semester.

**Comparative Country Presentation (Group Project) (25%):** By the end of the semester, students will deliver an in-class group presentation. Students will be randomly assigned to groups of approximately 4-5 members. Each group will draw on its members’ country expertise to prepare a comparative analysis focused on one “stellar” country—selected from among the countries represented within the group—that has performed particularly well in terms of *democracy* or *economic development*. The presentation should explain *why* this country has outperformed the others, using course concepts and theories to analyze potential explanations

such as institutional design, political or economic reforms, leadership strategies, etc. Groups will be responsible for preparing presentation slides and presenting during the final week of the semester, on **Tuesday, May 5** or **Thursday, May 7**. More detailed instructions and evaluation criteria will be provided later in the course.

### **Academic Integrity**

This course adheres to the Wofford Honor Code, which defines plagiarism as “the act of using another person’s words or ideas and presenting them as one’s own with or without the consent of the other.” The guidelines outlined in the Honor Code will be used to identify and address academic dishonesty. Examples include, but are not limited to: verbatim repetition, without acknowledgement, of the writings of another author; borrowing or using information developed by another without acknowledging the source; paraphrasing or translating the work or thought of another person without acknowledgment; allowing any other person or organization to prepare work that one then submits as their own; and borrowing language or ideas from another person without proper acknowledgement and citation. Violations of academic integrity are taken seriously and may result in severe consequences, including suspension or expulsion. If you have any doubts or questions, consult the [Honor Code](#), the [Writing Center](#) and/or the [Wofford Library](#) for more information.

### **Classroom Environment**

This classroom is a space for adult learners. I encourage open, respectful dialogue—not only between students and myself, but also among peers. Communication should flow horizontally, fostering learning through peer-to-peer interaction, not just instructor-led discussion. Creating an inclusive and engaging environment is essential for this course to function well. Disrespect of any kind will not be tolerated. Be kind to each other. I will be especially attentive to maintaining a classroom that is welcoming to all students, regardless of gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, or cultural background. I will not micromanage your behavior by enforcing rules about phones or laptops. You may use your devices for note-taking or class-related research during activities. However, any non-course-related use of technology is not allowed. If at any point you have concerns, comments, or suggestions about the class environment, please reach out to me via email, or speak to me before/after class or during office hours. This is a shared space we will build together—and my door is always open.

### **AI**

Developing strong research, writing and critical thinking skills is especially important in the first years of college. For this reason, the course includes a mix of in-class and take-home assignments designed to help you strengthen these skills over time. Some assignments (such as

the midterm exam) are intentionally designed to be completed in class, without the use of AI tools. Others (such as the country expertise memos) require independent research, analysis, and writing outside of class. For take-home assignments, AI tools should *never* substitute for your own thinking, research, or writing. That said, I cannot forbid the use of AI outside of class. You may use tools like ChatGPT for brainstorming, expanding on a topic, and helping you better understand a reading, among other things. But remember that these tools can make mistakes or produce inaccurate information, so it is your responsibility to evaluate and corroborate anything they generate. I encourage you to reflect on the skills you may allow to atrophy—or never fully develop—if you rely too heavily on AI. In my view, learning to use these tools thoughtfully is part of your education, just like learning to use Google or Word. But I urge you to approach AI with intention, especially given its novelty. All written assignments are subject to review using AI-detection tools. Work may be flagged if these tools indicate that more than 10% of a submission is AI-generated or AI-paraphrased. Submissions that exceed this threshold may be reported as potential violations of academic integrity, in accordance with university policy.

### **Absences, Scheduling Conflicts & Late Submissions**

Most assignments in this course—midterm, comparative country presentation, class participation, and office hours attendance (which is not in class but still in person)—require your presence. Students should review the assignments and grading section carefully and ensure they can attend on those days. If you anticipate a conflict, notify me as early as possible—*at least one week in advance*—so that we can arrange an alternate day and time to complete the assignment, typically during office hours (you may notify me in person, but please follow up by email so there is a written record and it is easier to track). If you email me a photo of the best soccer player of all time (there is only one right answer—well, maybe two—but in any case, they are both Argentine), you'll automatically receive two extra credit points in the course. Students may miss *up to three* class sessions during the semester without penalty or documentation—no questions asked. Additional unexcused absences will reduce the attendance portion of your participation grade. Additional absences may be excused in cases such as illness, family emergencies, religious observances, or college-sanctioned events, but *they require advance notice and appropriate documentation*. If you are sick, documentation may come from the [Wellness Center](#). If you are a student-athlete, please let me know in advance if you'll miss class due to athletic commitments. If you miss an in-class assignment for an excused absence, we will arrange a make-up session; otherwise, you will lose full credit for that assignment. Please note that missing the comparative country presentation may be particularly difficult to make up; in such cases, an alternate task will be assigned, and it will be more demanding than the original format. If you anticipate needing additional time for submitting the country expertise memos, please notify me *at least one week in advance* and I can offer a 48-hour extension—no questions asked. Otherwise, late memos will incur a penalty of one-third of a letter grade for each day late.

If you are facing ongoing challenges that may affect your ability to attend class or complete your work, please reach out as soon as possible so we can work together on a plan.

## Accessibility

Wofford College is committed to full inclusion of all students. If you have already established disability accommodations with Accessibility Services, please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you have not yet established services through Accessibility Services but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations, please contact Accessibility Services at [accessibilityservices@wofford.edu](mailto:accessibilityservices@wofford.edu) or visit <https://www.wofford.edu/student-experiences/wellness-center/accessibility>.

## Mental Health

College can bring challenges that interfere with learning and well-being, including strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating, or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns may affect your ability to attend class, focus, complete assignments, or participate in daily activities. If you are experiencing distress, please reach out to me and/or seek support through campus resources. Wofford's Wellness Center offers a variety of [Counseling Services](#) and other resources that you may find useful. You can contact them at 864-597-4370, email [counselingservices@wofford.edu](mailto:counselingservices@wofford.edu), or schedule a virtual appointment [here](#). For immediate assistance, call the [Office of Campus Safety](#) at 864-597-4911. For immediate mental health assistance, contact the Terrier Care Line at 864-597-4393 (available 24/7).

*Asking for help is a sign of courage and strength.*

## Required Texts

All required readings are available on Moodle.

## Schedule

| Date   | Topic/Assignment              | Readings                    |
|--------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| T 2/3  | Introduction                  | No readings assigned        |
| Th 2/5 | What is Comparative Politics? | O'Neil 2015; Lijphart 1971  |
| T 2/10 | State Formation & Capacities  | Spruyt 2007; O'Donnell 1993 |

|         |                                                      |                                               |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Th 2/12 | State Formation & Capacities (cont.)                 | Same as above                                 |
| T 2/17  | Democracy                                            | Schmitter & Karl 1991                         |
| Th 2/19 | Democratic Transitions & Consolidation               | Przeworski & Limongi 1997; Linz & Stepan 1996 |
| T 2/24  | Dictatorship I: Totalitarianism                      | Arendt 1951                                   |
| Th 2/26 | Dictatorship II: Authoritarianism                    | Magaloni 2008                                 |
| T 3/3   | Hybrid Regimes                                       | Levitsky & Way 2002; Varol 2015               |
| Th 3/5  | Discussion & Review of Political Regimes             | No new readings assigned                      |
|         | <b>Country Expertise Memo I Due</b>                  |                                               |
| T 3/10  | Presidential vs. Parliamentary Systems of Governance | Mainwaring & Shugart 1997                     |
| Th 3/12 | Federalism                                           | Beramendi 2007; Brancati 2004                 |
| T 3/17  | Midterm Review Session                               |                                               |
| Th 3/19 | <b>Midterm Exam</b>                                  |                                               |
| T 3/24  | <i>Spring Holiday, No Class</i>                      |                                               |
| Th 3/26 | <i>Spring Holiday, No Class</i>                      |                                               |
| T 3/31  | <i>No Class</i>                                      |                                               |
| Th 4/2  | Parties, Cleavages & Electoral Systems               | Amorim-Neto & Cox 1997; Posner 2004           |
| T 4/7   | Parties, Cleavages & Electoral Systems (cont.)       | Same as above                                 |
| Th 4/9  | Representation & Welfare                             | Kitschelt 2000; Esping-Andersen 1990          |
| T 4/14  | Corruption & Money in Politics                       | Winters & Page 2009                           |

|                                      |                                             |                         |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Th 4/16                              | Political Violence I:<br>Civil Wars         | Kalyvas 2007            |
| <b>Country Expertise Memo II Due</b> |                                             |                         |
| T 4/21                               | Political Violence II:<br>Criminal Politics | Barnes 2017             |
| Th 4/23                              | Political Violence III:<br>State Repression | Davenport 2007          |
| T 4/28                               | Populism                                    | Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017 |
| Th 4/30                              | Polarization & Parting Thoughts             | McCoy et al. 2018       |
| T 5/5                                | <b>Comparative Country Presentations</b>    |                         |
| Th 5/7                               | <b>Comparative Country Presentations</b>    |                         |

## List of Readings

Assigned readings for the course are listed below with full citations:

- Amorim Neto, Octavio and Gary W. Cox. 1997. "Electoral Institutions, Cleavage Structures, and the Number of Parties." *American Journal of Political Science* 41:(1), pp. 149-174.
- Arendt, Hannah. "The Origins of Totalitarianism [1951]." *New York* (1973), pp. 305-318 & 341-351.
- Baramendi, Pablo. 2007. "Federalism" in Carles Boix and Susan Stokes (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 752-782.
- Barnes, Nicholas. 2017. "Criminal politics: An integrated approach to the study of organized crime, politics, and violence." *Perspectives on Politics*, 15(4), 967-987.
- Brancati, Dawn. 2004. "Can Federalism Stabilize Iraq?" *Washington Quarterly*, 27:(3) Spring, pp. 7-21.
- Davenport, Christian. 2007. "State Repression and Political Order." *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.*, 10(1), 1-23.

- Esping-Andersen, Gøsta. 1990. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Princeton University Press, Ch. 1, pp. 9-34.
- Kalyvas, Stathis N. 2007. "Civil Wars." In *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, eds. Carles Boix and Susan Stokes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 416–34.
- Kitschelt, Herbert. 2000. "Linkages Between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Society." *Comparative Political Studies* 33:(6/7), pp. 845-879.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2002. "Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy*, 13:(2), pp. 51-65.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1971. "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method." *American Political Science Review*, 65:(3), pp. 682-692.
- Linz, Juan J., and Stepan, Alfred. 1996. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-communist Europe*. John Hopkins University Press. Ch. 1, pp. 3-15.
- Magaloni, Beatriz. 2008. "Credible power-sharing and the longevity of authoritarian rule." *Comparative Political Studies*, 41(4-5): 715-741.
- Mainwaring, Scott, and Matthew S. Shugart. 1997. "Juan Linz, Presidentialism, and Democracy: A Critical Appraisal." *Comparative Politics*, pp. 449-471.
- McCoy, Jennifer, Tahmina Rahman, and Murat Somer. 2018. "Polarization and the Global Crisis of Democracy: Common Patterns, Dynamics, and Pernicious Consequences for Democratic Polities." *American Behavioral Scientist* 62(1): 16-42.
- Mudde, Cas, and Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira. 2017. *Populism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press. Ch. 1, pp. 1-20.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo. 1993. "On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems (A Latin American View with Glances at Some Post-Communist Countries)." *World Development*, 21:(8), pp. 1355-70.
- O'Neil, Patrick. 2015. "Introduction: What is Comparative Politics?" in *Cases in Comparative Politics*, 5th edition, pp. 2-29.

- Posner, Daniel N. 2004. "The political salience of cultural difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia and adversaries in Malawi." *American Political Science Review*, 98(4), 529-545.
- Przeworski, Adam, and Limongi, Fernando. 1997. "Modernization: Theories and Facts." *World Politics*, 49(2), 155-183.
- Schmitter, Philippe C., and Terry Lynn Karl. 1991. "What democracy is... and is not." *Journal of Democracy* 2:(3), pp. 75-88.
- Spruyt, Hendrik. 2007. "War, Trade, and State Formation." *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, pp. 211-235.
- Varol, Ozan. 2015. "Stealth Authoritarianism." *Iowa Law Review* 100(4). Parts I, II and III.
- Winters, Jeffrey A., and Benjamin I. Page. 2009. "Oligarchy in the United States?" *Perspectives on Politics*, 7(4), 731-751.