

PSCI 3600***Governments and Politics Around the World*****Fall 2026 | Section 002**

Instructor	Ayna Shamyradova	Class meetings	Mondays and Wednesdays 11:10 AM - 12:30 PM BLB 075
Email	aynashamyradova@my.unt.edu	Course modality	Face-to-face with Canvas support
Office	WH 152	Office hours	Mondays and Wednesdays 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM and 1:00 - 2:00 PM and by appointment

Course at a Glance

- No prerequisites
- One required textbook plus readings on Canvas
- Two exams, one individual country assignment, reading questions, and in-class activities
- Regular discussion, simulations, data exercises, and case comparisons

Central Course Questions

- Why are some states stronger, richer, or more democratic than others?
- How do institutions shape political competition and public policy?
- When do identities produce cooperation, exclusion, or conflict?
- How can comparison help us evaluate competing explanations?

1. Course Overview

Course overview. This course introduces comparative politics - the systematic study of political life within and across countries. We will use comparison to understand both particular political systems and broader patterns in world politics. The course is organized around five connected areas: the comparative method; the state; regimes and political institutions; identity and political conflict; and political economy and development. Rather than treating countries as isolated cases, we will ask how differences in institutions, historical legacies, social identities, resources, and political choices help explain variation in outcomes such as state capacity, regime type, representation, conflict, corruption, and development.

Course structure. Class meetings combine short lectures with discussion, country comparisons, simulations, source evaluation, and basic data interpretation. Students will build factual knowledge of governments around the world while learning how comparative political scientists define concepts, develop arguments, select cases, and evaluate evidence.

2. Learning Objectives

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

- Define and distinguish core concepts, including state, nation, government, regime, democracy, autocracy, political institution, identity, and development.
- Explain the logic of comparative analysis and apply most-similar and most-different case designs to political questions.
- Compare executives, legislatures, electoral systems, party systems, courts, and federal arrangements across countries.
- Evaluate major explanations for state formation, democratization, authoritarian persistence, identity-based conflict, and economic development.
- Use country evidence and basic cross-national indicators to assess competing causal claims.
- Develop a clear comparative research question, construct an evidence-based argument, and communicate findings in writing and class discussion.
- Locate, evaluate, cite, and ethically use scholarly and public sources.

3. Required Materials and Technology

Required textbook. O'Neil, Patrick. 2024. *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, 8th ed., with card. W. W. Norton & Company. ISBN-10: 1324062002; ISBN-13: 9781324062004.

Earlier editions may differ in pagination and content.

Additional required readings. Selected articles, book chapters, news analyses, and data resources will be posted through Canvas or linked in the course schedule. Students are not expected to purchase additional books.

Recommended reference. Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, 2nd edition (2012). Selected excerpts will be provided through Canvas.

Technology. Students need regular access to Canvas and UNT email.

4. Communication

Communication. Use your UNT email account and please include “PSCI 3600.002” in the subject line. I will normally respond within two business days. If you do not receive a response after two business days, a polite follow-up is welcome. Course announcements and schedule changes will be posted on Canvas and sent to your UNT email.

Office hours. Office hours are an opportunity to ask questions, test ideas, review feedback, or discuss political science more generally. You are more than welcome to stop by.

5. Assessment and Grading

Course component	Weight	Primary learning assessed
Participation and in-class activities	20%	Preparation, engagement, application
Reading questions	20%	Reading comprehension, analysis
Midterm examination	20%	Concepts, comparison, application
Comparative country assignment	20%	Research design, evidence, writing
Final examination	20%	Synthesis and cumulative understanding

Participation and in-class activities (20%)

Participation means being prepared and contributing to the work of the class. Activities may include short quizzes, country-comparison worksheets, debates, simulations, and data exercises.

Reading questions (20%)

Ten short reading-question sets will be assigned during the semester. Questions will ask you to identify an author’s argument, define a concept, interpret evidence, or connect a reading to a country case. Responses should not exceed one double-spaced page and are due before class on Wednesday of each assigned week. Reading questions will be posted on Canvas one week before the due date.

Midterm examination (20%)

The midterm covers material from the first half of the course and will combine multiple-choice, identification, and short analytical questions. A review session will precede the exam. Unless otherwise announced, students may bring one letter-sized, one-sided handwritten note sheet.

Comparative country assignment (20%)

This individual paper (approximately 2-3 double-spaced pages, excluding references) compares two countries in order to explain one political outcome. The assignment must pose a focused comparative question, use at least two course concepts, draw on at least four credible sources and one comparative indicator or dataset, consider an alternative explanation, and reach a defensible conclusion.

Students will complete a topic proposal and an annotated source list during the semester before submitting the final assignment.

- Assignment format**

All assignments should be submitted in a Microsoft Word or pdf format. For Word documents, the font should be 12 points in size and either Aptos/Calibri (basic Word font) or Times New Roman. APA-style citations are recommended.

Final examination (20%)

The final examination is cumulative, with greater emphasis on material taught after the midterm. It will assess students’ ability to define concepts, compare countries and institutions, interpret evidence, and synthesize arguments across the major parts of the course. The date, time, and location will match the official UNT final-exam schedule.

Grading Scale

A	B	C	D	F
89.5–100	79.5–89.49	69.5–79.49	59.5–69.49	Below 59.5

Comparative Country Assignment Criteria

Criterion	Country assignment
Question and argument	20%
Use of course concepts/theory	25%
Comparative evidence and case logic	30%
Organization and clarity	25%

6. Course Policies

Attendance and participation

Because much of our learning takes place through discussion, comparison, and in-class activities, regular attendance is expected. If you must miss class, communicate as soon as reasonably possible and consult Canvas and a classmate for notes.

Late work and technical problems

Reading questions are intended to prepare you for discussion and should be submitted before class. A response submitted within 24 hours of the deadline may earn up to 50% unless an extension has been arranged. If Canvas is unavailable, upload early and confirm that the file opens, and email a time-stamped copy before the deadline.

Missed examinations

Makeup examinations are available for university-authorized absences or serious, documented circumstances. Contact the instructor as soon as possible, preferably before the exam. A makeup may use a different format while assessing the same learning objectives.

Lecture materials and note-taking

Selected outlines, links, or slides may be posted after class, but they are not a substitute for attendance, readings, discussion, or personal notes. Students with approved accommodations will receive materials in accordance with their accommodation letter.

Electronics

Laptops and tablets may be used for course-related work. Phones should be silenced and put away unless an activity requires them.

Respectful discussion and classroom community

Comparative politics involves contested questions about democracy, identity, inequality, religion, migration, and conflict. Disagreement is expected; personal attacks, harassment, and demeaning language are not. Critique arguments and evidence rather than people. We will work together to create a classroom in which students can question, revise, and learn.

Extra credit

Individual extra-credit assignments will not be created. Any extra-credit opportunity will be offered to the entire class and announced through Canvas.

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences and Generative AI

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to, cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions, from an admonition to expulsion from the University.

This course is designed to develop your own comparative reasoning, research judgment, and writing. Generative AI tools may support learning, but they may not replace the intellectual work that an assignment is designed to assess. It is permissible to use generative AI tools for grammar correction, brainstorming, or locating sources; however, AI-generated answers to reading questions or the country assignment are prohibited. Students remain responsible for verifying all information and sources produced or suggested by AI tools.

7. University Requirements and Student Support

Office of Disability Access

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. To request accommodations, you must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) by completing an application for services and providing documentation to verify your eligibility each semester. Once your eligibility is confirmed, you may request your letter of accommodation. ODA will then email your faculty a letter of reasonable accommodation, initiating a private discussion about your specific needs in the course.

You can request accommodations at any time, but it is important to provide ODA notice to your faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. Keep in mind that you must obtain a new letter of accommodation for each semester and meet with each faculty member before accommodations can be implemented in each class. You are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding your accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty have the authority to ask you to discuss your letter during their designated office hours to protect your privacy. For more information and to access resources that can support your needs, refer to the Office of Disability Access website.

[Office of Disability Access](#)

Emergency notification and procedures

UNT uses Eagle Alert to notify students quickly of severe weather, campus closures, and health or public-safety emergencies. If a university closure affects class, consult Canvas for the contingency plan, revised deadlines, and instructions for course materials.

Student support and wellness

UNT provides academic, financial, health, and wellness resources. Useful starting points include [UNT student success](#), [UNT wellness](#), [Student Support Services & Policies](#), the UNT Writing Center, UNT Libraries, the Learning Center, and Scrappy Says. Asking for help early is a responsible academic practice.

Syllabus changes

The instructor may revise readings, activities, or deadlines when necessary to support learning or respond to university closures and other circumstances. Students will receive reasonable notice through Canvas and UNT email. Changes to major grading weights will not be made without clear notice and an academically justified reason.

8. Tentative 15-Week Course Schedule**Weeks 1-8: Foundations, the State, Regimes, and Institutions**

Week	Unit / focus	Topics and key questions	Required reading	Activities and milestones	Due
1 Aug 17-19	Why Compare?	Introduction to comparative politics; countries, cases, concepts, variables; most-similar and most-different designs.	O'Neil, ch. 1; Sartori, "Comparing and Miscomparing" (excerpt).	Country-facts/map exercise; comparative-design lab.	Practice RQ
2 Aug 24-26	The State and Its Origins	State, nation, government, and regime; social contract; state formation in Europe and beyond.	O'Neil, ch. 2 (selected sections); Hobbes, Leviathan, chs. 13 and 17 (excerpts); Tilly, "War Making and State Making"; Herbst, States and Power in Africa (excerpt).	State-definition sorting activity; Western/non-Western state-formation comparison.	RQ 1
3 Aug 31-Sep 2	State Capacity, Legitimacy, and Fragility	What should states deliver? Why do some states govern territory and provide public goods more effectively?	O'Neil, state capacity sections; Lange, "British Colonial State Legacies..." (excerpt); Fragile States Index or comparable data resource.	State-capacity dashboard lab; compare two African or Middle Eastern cases.	RQ2
4 Sep 7 (no class) - 9	Democracy, Autocracy, and Measurement	Defining democracy and autocracy; regime classification; majoritarian and consensus visions of democracy.	O'Neil, democracy sections; Przeworski, "Who Decides What Is Democratic?"; Lijphart, Patterns of Democracy (selected chs. 1-3).	Regime-classification clinic; design-a-democracy simulation.	RQ 3
5 Sep 14-16	Executives and Legislatures	Presidential, parliamentary, and semi-presidential systems; executive-legislative relations; accountability and governability.	O'Neil, institutions sections; Lijphart, selected chs. 6-7 and 11; Stepan & Skach, "Constitutional Frameworks..." (excerpt).	Case lab: United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Mexico; institutional trade-off debate.	RQ 4
6 Sep 21-23	Elections, Parties, and Interest Groups	Electoral rules; Duverger's Law; party systems, social cleavages, interest representation.	O'Neil, parties/elections sections; Lijphart, selected chs. 5, 8-9; Lipset & Rokkan, "Cleavage Structures..." (excerpt).	Seat-allocation simulation; build and compare party systems.	Country Asgmt Topic Proposal
7 Sep 28-30	Federalism, Courts, and Constitutional Design	Federal/unitary systems; decentralization; judicial review; rule of law; majoritarian versus consensus institutions.	Lijphart, selected ch. 10 and pp. 212-218; short country readings on Canada, India, and Nigeria.	Federalism negotiation; constitutional-court mini case.	RQ 5
8 Oct 5-7	Review and Midterm	Synthesis of comparative method, state, regimes, and institutions.	Review guide; no new major reading.	Student-generated review questions; midterm examination (October 7, 2026).	MIDTERM

Weeks 9-15 and Finals: Change, Identity, Development, and Synthesis

Week	Unit / focus	Topics and key questions	Required reading	Activities and milestones	Due
9 Oct 12-14	Democratization and Democratic Culture	Modernization, elite bargaining, revolution, political culture, and international influence; Arab Spring cases.	O'Neil, democratization sections; Przeworski & Limongi, "Modernization"; Inglehart, "Renaissance of Political Culture" (excerpts); current case reading on Canvas.	Democratization timeline; competing-explanations workshop.	RQ6
10 Oct 19-21	Authoritarianism and Hybrid Regimes	Types of autocracy; repression, co-optation, institutions, and competitive authoritarianism.	O'Neil, nondemocratic rule sections; Geddes, "What Do We Know..."; Wintrobe, "Tinpot and Totalitarian"; Levitsky & Way, "Competitive Authoritarianism" (excerpts).	Authoritarian-survival strategy game; case comparison: Russia and China.	RQ 7
11 Oct 26-28	Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Conflict	Nation-building; imagined communities; ethnic identity and political salience; when identities become conflictual.	O'Neil, identity sections; Anderson, Imagined Communities, chs. 1 and 3 (excerpts); Posner, "Political Salience of Cultural Difference."	Identity-category exercise; Zambia/Malawi comparison.	Annotated Sources
12 Nov 2-4	Citizenship, Immigration, and Political Identity	Citizenship, migration, religion, polarization, inclusion, and exclusion across democracies and autocracies.	O'Neil, selected identity/violence sections; short comparative readings on Europe, India, and Taiwan posted on Canvas.	Structured debate; Comparative Country Assignment workshop.	RQ 8
13 Nov 9-11	Political Economy and Development	Capitalism, socialism, communism; measuring development; institutions, colonial legacies, corruption, resources, and aid.	O'Neil, ch. 4 and development sections; Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, "Colonial Origins..."; Fisman & Miguel, "Diplomatic Parking Tickets" (excerpts).	Development-indicator lab; public-goods/corruption game.	RQ 9
14 Nov 16-18	Contemporary Challenges	Democratic backsliding, populism, misinformation, and AI.	Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding" (excerpt); Kreps & Kriner, "How AI Threatens Democracy"; current short reading on Canvas.	Source-evaluation activity.	RQ10
Nov. 23-29 - Thanksgiving Break - No Class.					
15 Nov 30-Dec 2	Course Synthesis, Review Session	Comparison across the state, regime, identity, institutions, and development.	No new major reading; review guide.	Q&A; comparative-concept map; final review.	Country Asgmt DUE
Finals	Final Examination	Cumulative final with emphasis on the second half of the course.	Review guide and course materials.	Saturday, December 5, 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.	FINAL EXAM

