

SS475: Comparative Political Institutions

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

Course Overview

“Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. In consequence they structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social, or economic. Institutional change shapes the way societies evolve through time and hence is the key to understanding historical change.”¹

The study of political institutions – “the rules of the game” that structure political competition within all states – sits at the center of comparative politics as a discipline and is the subject of SS475. In particular, we will focus on explaining the institutions that relate broadly to a country’s “regime type.” Though regime type is often boiled down to a distinction between democracy vs. dictatorship, political regimes are better understood as collections of institutions that regulate political power within a polity: how is power gained and lost? How is political power transferred? How is power divided, dispersed, or consolidated? By whom is political power granted and by whom is it taken away? Who has the right to exercise political power, and who does not? When viewed in comparative perspective, democracies, dictatorships, and “hybrid” regimes alike can all be analyzed along these dimensions and debates. Such a comparative analysis is the overarching objective of SS475.

Part I of the course (“Foundations of Political Regimes”) begins with a critical assessment of the concept of democracy, exploring key debates in political science over how democracy should be defined and measured. From there we shift our attention to a rich literature that seeks to understand which – if any – economic and cultural factors influence whether countries become democracies or dictatorship.

Part II (“Transitions to and From Democracy”) engages theories that seek to explain when, why, and how democratic transitions take place. This includes bottom-up or “demand side” explanations of democratization that focus on the role of citizens and society, as well as top-down or “supply side” explanations that focus on the role of political elites in bringing about democratic transitions. Subsequent lessons explore the conditions under which new democracies are likely to become stable consolidated democracies, as well as those under which weak democracies are likely to revert to authoritarianism.

Parts III (“Authoritarian Regimes and Institutions”) and IV (“Democratic Institutions”) explore the particular institutions through which dictatorships and democracies function, paying particular attention to the different roles played by elections, political parties, and other political actors under various regimes.

Finally, Part V (Institutions and their Outcomes) asks whether and how a country’s political institutions influence outcomes of interest, including regime survival, economic development, inequality and redistribution, and ethnic conflict.

1. Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.

Student Learning Objectives

Through SS475, each cadet will develop a sophisticated understanding of the role that political institutions play in governing political competition within a wide variety of regimes around the world. Furthermore, they will develop the knowledge, analytical skills, and communication skills to support their further intellectual development as they progress through the International Affairs major at West Point:

1. **Think Critically:** Students will think critically about the role that political institutions – particularly those that define a country’s regime type – play in structuring competition for power within a polity, appreciating and applying the value of intellectual pluralism to critically analyze political institutions from multiple perspectives.
2. **Read Critically:** Students will read critically a wide spectrum of academic literature in comparative politics and comparative institutions in order to understand, analyze, and critique the arguments, methods, and evidence that are used to advance theoretical arguments in the literature.
3. **Gain Disciplinary Knowledge:** Students will understand and critically engage the key definitions, theories, debates, and disagreements in the field of comparative institutions, particularly those related to regime type definitions, regime transitions, and the role of political institutions in democratic and authoritarian regimes.
4. **Apply Disciplinary Knowledge:** Students will apply theories of political science theories to analyze and explain current and historical events in international affairs; understand the major issues and actors in global politics; and assess policy implications of contemporary challenges in international politics as they relate to domestic political institutions.
5. **Communicate Effectively:** Students will communicate clear and effective analysis and arguments about complex political issues verbally and in writing.

Requirements

Grading Scale

The following grade scale will be used to assess cadet work:

Table 1: Department of Social Sciences Grade Scale

	Grade	Percent	QP	Subjective Interpretation
Mastery	A+	97.0-100.0	4.33	Above standards of writing
	A	93.0-96.9	4.00	Mastery of concepts
	A-	90.0-92.9	3.67	Can apply concepts to new situations
Proficiency	B+	87.0-89.9	3.33	Meets standards of writing
	B	83.0-86.9	3.00	Solid understanding of concepts
	B-	80.0-82.9	2.67	Strong foundation for future work
Passing	C+	77.0-79.9	2.33	Approaching standards of writing
	C	73.0-76.9	2.00	Acceptable foundation for future work Acceptable understanding of concepts
Below Standard	C-	70.0-72.9	1.67	Below standards of writing
	D	67.0-69.9	1.00	Doubtful understanding of concepts Weak foundation for future work
Failing	F	Below 67.0	0.00	Unacceptable standards of writing Definitely failed to demonstrate understanding of concepts

Graded Assignments

The course requirements, worth 1,000 points in total, are as follows:

1. **Assigned Readings, Lessons 1-30:** The key to success in SS475 is completing the assigned readings before each lesson. Though there are no points assigned directly to readings, they are the daily “homework” for the class, just like a problem set in math. Failure to do the readings might not have an immediate grade impact comparable to failure to submit a problem set, but the long-term consequences are significant: success or failure on ALL of the course graded events below hinges on your comprehension and utilization of the ideas presented in readings.
2. **Daily Writing Exercises, Lessons 1-30:** SS475 is a “writing in the major” course for the International Affairs Major (see below for further discussion). One method by which we will develop cadets’ critical thinking and academic writing skills is through a daily writing exercise at the beginning of each class. Cadets will receive a prompt at the beginning of class that asks them to reflect on some aspect of the assigned readings through 5 minutes of writing in their composition book. Though writing responses will not be graded, they will set the foundation for productive class discussions during the remainder of the lesson.
3. **Critical Analysis Papers (150 points each, due 21 SEP/31 OCT/3 DEC):** During the semester, cadets will write three critical analysis papers worth 150 points each and approximately 1,500 words in length. These papers will develop cadets’ critical reading, conceptual thinking, critical analysis, and analytical writing skills. For each paper, cadets will select an academic article written on some element of political institutions from a list of approved journals. In each paper, cadets will conduct a rigorous and in-depth analysis of the article’s research question and puzzle, its theoretical argument, its contribution and relation to a larger theoretical literature, and the methodology and evidence used to support its theoretical claims. This sort of in-depth analysis of key scholarly works often constitutes an important element of the literature review or theory development section of a larger research project. By honing their analysis and academic writing skills iteratively through the three critical analysis papers, Cadets will be developing skills that they will need when completing thesis, capstone, or other advanced research papers later in their academic careers as IA majors. The final critical analysis paper constitutes the course’s “Signature Writing Event” (SWE) as the culmination of the analytical writing development process, and will be accompanied by a brief writing reflection memo.²
4. **Written Partial Review (150 points, 12 OCT):** The midterm exam will test cadets’ critical reading and analysis skills, focusing on key concepts from the course material presented in the first half of the course. In order to encourage good note-taking habits, cadets will be allowed to use all of their handwritten reading notes and class notes during the exam.

A make-up exam will be offered only to those cadets with a validated excuse and instructor permission, IAW USCC SOP (Chapter 8, card 806, section 3.a.1)³ and DPOM 02-3.

2. SS475 serves as the “Writing-in-the-Major” (WiM) course for International Affairs majors who have selected the “Institutions, Governance, and Development” track. It is thus part of the West Point Writing Program (WPWP), which supports your development as a writer and communicator across the curriculum. As a WiM course, this class engages you in the study and practice of writing in the discipline of political science. Along the way, you’ll receive selective writing instruction that prepares you to complete the Signature Writing Event (SWE), which your instructor will assess for evidence of your proficiency as a writer. This assessment is separate from the grade you’ll receive on the assignment. Your instructor will also foster your growth as a writer by providing you with timely, detailed, and personalized feedback. More information about the Writing Program, its underlying principles, and specific requirements (including the SWE) is available at <http://usma.edu/wpwp>.

The Mounger Writing Center (MWC) is a subcomponent of the Writing Program and a valuable resource for you to consider. Located on the second floor of Jefferson Hall, the MWC offers one-on-one consultations and group workshops to all Cadets, during the day as well as ESP, for any course (not just WPWP courses). All sessions are led by Graduate or Cadet Writing Fellows ready to meet you wherever you are in the writing process and work with you on virtually any kind of writing—papers, research essays, lab and technical reports, design projects, PowerPoints, even oral presentations. Conversations at the MWC are designed to help all writers express themselves more clearly, forcefully, and effectively. Appointments strongly preferred; schedule at <http://usma.mywconline.com>. All sessions with the MWC must be cited in your final work according to official guidance in the DAW.

3. “Cadets are officially excused from attendance at regularly scheduled WPRs only for the following reasons: (a) Medically

5. **Term End Exam (300 Points):** The final exam is a comprehensive test that covers material from the entire course. In particular, the exam will test cadets' ability to synthesize and critically engage concepts, ideas, theories, and debates from across entire course. Like the WPR, cadets will be permitted to use all of their handwritten reading notes and class notes during the TEE.
6. **Class Participation (100 Points):** As a seminar-style class, active cadet engagement is vital to creating the proper learning environment in SS475. Students will be awarded up to 100 points for their participation in class discussions. Worthwhile participation is based on completing assigned readings, good note taking during reading and in class, careful pre-class preparation, and thoughtful contributions to in-class discussion. Far more important than quantity of participation is the quality of an individual's participation in class.
7. **Bonus Points (Priceless, but 20 points max):** SS475 cadets are required to join the course Facebook group "Politology" (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/irtopia/>), which will serve as an online forum for our class.⁴ I will frequently post articles and items of interest that relate to course topics, and encourage you to do the same. Cadets can earn 5 bonus points (up to a max of 20) for each article they post with a paragraph of commentary linking that article to a concept from class.⁵ If you do not have a Facebook account, you may send your article and commentary to me, and I will post on your behalf.

Guest Lectures

We will have one required guest lectures during the semester:

- 5 December, time TBD: Ambassador Michael McFaul.⁶

Course Readings

All cadets enrolled in SS475 are required to purchase a printed copy of the following textbook, which serves as the foundational text for the course. Used copies are acceptable as long as they are the third edition of the book.

William Roberts Clark, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder. *Principles of Comparative Politics*. Third Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2018

All other assigned readings in the syllabus are available for download as a zip file on the **SS475 BlackBoard page**.

You are required to bring hard copies of all assigned readings/texts to class on the day that we discuss them. Much of our work in class will require close readings of scholarly writing, so it is essential that everyone has the readings at their fingertips during class.

excused by surgeon, USMA...(b) On emergency leave or special pass. (c) Participating in corps squad competition or trips. (d) Participating in cadet public relations council trips. (e) Participating in honor investigative hearings. (f) Appearing before an investigating officer UP Regulations, USMA, or UCMJ proceedings."

4. All cadets are required to join the Facebook group during the first week of classes and remain members for the duration of the semester. When the semester is over, you're free to leave the group, but you're also welcome to stay in it if you'd like to stay connected with the current events posted in the future. It is my policy to only accept friend requests from 2LTs and higher. If you're interested in staying in touch after graduation, please wait until that time to send a request.

5. In order to receive bonus points, articles must be posted NLT 3 December - the purpose of the bonus opportunity is to encourage active engagement throughout the semester, not a desperate last-minute flurry.

6. Ambassador McFaul served from 2009 - 2011 as special assistant to the president and Senior Director of Russian and Eurasian Affairs on the NSC. From December 2011 - February 2014, he served as the United States Ambassador to Russia. Since returning to his position as a political science professor at Stanford University, AMB McFaul has been an outspoken critic of the Putin regime and its foreign and domestic policies.

Part I Foundations of Political Regimes

1. Introduction: Institutions, Politics, and Power (21 August)

- Read SS475 Syllabus
- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 47-74
- Robert A Dahl. “The Concept of Power.” *Behavioral science* 2, no. 3 (1957)

2. Defining Democracy 1: Procedural and Minimalist Approaches (23 August)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 143-157
- Joseph Schumpeter. “Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy.” In *The Democracy Sourcebook*, edited by Robert A. Dahl, Ian Shapiro, and Jose Antonio Cheibub. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003
- Adam Przeworski. “Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense.” In *The Democracy Sourcebook*, edited by Robert A. Dahl, Ian Shapiro, and Jose Antonio Cheibub. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003

3. Defining Democracy 2: Substantive and Liberal Approaches (27 August)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 157-169
- Larry Diamond. “Defining and Developing Democracy.” In *The Democracy Sourcebook*, edited by Robert A. Dahl, Ian Shapiro, and Jose Antonio Cheibub. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003
- Fareed Zakaria. *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*. Vol. 76. Foreign Affairs. 1997

4. Economic Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship 1: Modernization Theory and its Critics (31 August)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 175-187
- Seymour Martin Lipset. “Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics.” In *The Democracy Sourcebook*, edited by Robert A. Dahl, Ian Shapiro, and Jose Antonio Cheibub. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003
- Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi. “Modernization: Theories and facts.” *World Politics* 49, no. 2 (1997)

5. Critical Reading: How to Read Academic Articles (6 September)

- Read Critical Analysis Paper guidance
- C. Boix and S. C. Stokes. “Endogenous democratization.” *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (2003)

6. Economic Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship 2: Social Class-Based Approaches(11 September)

- B. Moore. *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy: Lord and peasant in the making of the modern world*. Beacon Pr, 1993, p. 413-427
- Theda Skocpol. “Social Revolutions in the Modern World.” In *The Democracy Sourcebook*, edited by Robert A. Dahl, Ian Shapiro, and Jose Antonio Cheibub. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003
- Evelyne Huber, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and John D Stephens. “The impact of economic development on democracy.” *Journal of economic perspectives* 7, no. 3 (1993)

7. Economic Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship 3: Sovereigns vs. Society (13 September)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 187-204
- Douglass C North and Barry R Weingast. “Constitutions and commitment: the evolution of institutions governing public choice in seventeenth-century England.” *The journal of economic history* 49, no. 4 (1989)

8. Cultural Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship (17 September)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 223-237
- Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel. “Changing mass priorities: The link between modernization and democracy.” *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (2010)
- Robert D Putnam. “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital.” *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (1995)

9. Class Drop - Critical Analysis Paper 1 (21 September)

Critical Analysis Paper #1 due 21 September NLT 1600.

Part II Transitions to and from Democracy

10. Democratic Transitions 1: Bottom-up approaches (25 September)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 269-291
- Robert Alan Dahl. *Polyarchy; Participation and Opposition*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1971
- Recommended: Timur Kuran. “Now out of never: The element of surprise in the East European revolution of 1989.” *World politics* 44, no. 1 (1991)

11. Democratic Transitions 2: Top-Down Approaches (27 September)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 292-312
- Michael McFaul. “The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship.” *World Politics* 54, no. 1 (2002)

12. Democratic Consolidation (1 October)

- Juan J Linz and Alfred C Stepan. “Toward consolidated democracies.” *Journal of democracy* 7, no. 2 (1996)
- L. Diamond. “Toward democratic consolidation.” *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 3 (1994)

13. Democratic Breakdown (5 October)

- Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan. *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequilibration*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978
- Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán. “Democratic breakdown and survival.” *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 2 (2013)

14. Democracy in Global Retreat? (10 October)

- Larry Diamond. “Facing up to the democratic recession.” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015)
- Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. “The myth of democratic recession.” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015)
- Francis Fukuyama. “At the ‘End of History’ Still Stands Democracy.” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 6, 2014

15. Written Partial Review (12 October)

In-class WPR

Part III Authoritarian Regimes and Institutions

16. Authoritarian Regimes (16 October)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 353-400
- Ronald Wintrobe. “How to understand, and deal with dictatorship: an economist’s view.” *Economics of Governance* 2, no. 1 (2001)

17. Authoritarian Institutions (18 October)

- Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski. “Authoritarian institutions and the survival of autocrats.” *Comparative political studies* 40, no. 11 (2007)
- Jennifer Gandhi and Ellen Lust-Okar. “Elections under authoritarianism.” *Annual review of political science* 12 (2009)

18. Hybrid Regimes (22 October)

- Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism.” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002)
- Larry Diamond. “Thinking About Hybrid Regimes.” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002)
- Fareed Zakaria. *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*. Vol. 76. Foreign Affairs. 1997

19. Authoritarian Breakdown (26 October)

- Barbara Geddes. “Authoritarian breakdown.” *Manuscript. Department of Political Science, UCLA*, 2004
- Jay Ulfelder. “Contentious collective action and the breakdown of authoritarian regimes.” *International Political Science Review* 26, no. 3 (2005)

20. Class Drop - Critical Analysis Paper 2 (30 October)

Critical Analysis Paper #2 due 31 October NLT 1600.

Part IV Democratic Institutions

21. Challenges of Democratic Decision Making (2 November, modified schedule)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 409-444

22. Types of Democracy: Parliamentarism vs. Presidentialism (6 November)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 453-511

23. Elections and Electoral Systems (8 November)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 521-577

24. Political Parties and Party Systems (13 November)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 585-640

25. Institutional Veto Players (16 November)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 645-689
- G. Tsebelis. "Decision-Making in Political-Systems - Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Multipartyism." *British Journal of Political Science* 25 (1995)

Part V Institutions and Their Outcomes

26. Institutions and Democratic Survival (27 November)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 762-780
- José Antonio Cheibub and Fernando Limongi. "Democratic institutions and regime survival: parliamentary and presidential democracies reconsidered." *Annual Review of Political Science* 5, no. 1 (2002)

27. Institutions and Economic Development (29 November)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 329-350
- M. Olson. "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development." *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993)
- Daron Acemoglu. "Root causes." *Finance & Development* 40, no. 2 (2003)

28. Class Drop - Critical Analysis Paper 3 (3 December)

Critical Analysis Paper #2 due 3 December NLT 1600.

29. Institutions and Inequality (7 December, modified schedule)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 727-745
- Kenneth L Sokoloff and Stanley L Engerman. "Institutions, factor endowments, and paths of development in the new world." *Journal of Economic perspectives* 14, no. 3 (2000)
- Terry Lynn Karl. "Economic inequality and democratic instability." *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 1 (2000)

30. Institutions and Ethnic Conflict (11 December)

- *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 746-762
- Arend Lijphart. "Constitutional design for divided societies." *Journal of democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004)

- Dawn Brancati. “Decentralization: Fueling the fire or dampening the flames of ethnic conflict and secessionism?” *International Organization* 60, no. 3 (2006)