

University of California, Merced / Summer 2026

POLI 003: Introduction to Comparative Politics

Course Modality: Online (on CatCourse, fully asynchronous six-week course)

Instructor: Youngbin (Ben) Kim

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Office Hours: Mondays, 9:00–11:00 AM (Zoom or in person in COB2-366), or by appointment

Schedule	Each week includes two topic-based modules, activities and course materials. Weekly Modules will be released every Monday at 9:00 AM.
Deadlines	Any assignments, quizzes, and activities are due every Friday at 11:59 PM
Workload	Because this is a compressed summer course, students should expect to dedicate substantial time each week to completing readings, lectures, assignments, quizzes, and discussion activities.

Course Description: This course introduces students to the social scientific study of comparative politics. We will tackle several big questions about political life around the world, including why some countries are democratic while others are authoritarian, why some countries become wealthy while others remain poor, and how political institutions shape behavior and outcomes.

Rather than focusing only on current events or a few individual countries, this course emphasizes how political scientists use theory and evidence to explain broader political patterns across different societies. Students will engage with diverse readings and develop analytical tools that can be applied to future coursework, research, and professional settings.

By the end of the course, students should not expect to become experts on any single country or institution. Instead, they should gain a stronger foundation for asking important comparative questions, evaluating evidence, and analyzing political systems across the world.

General Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for Political Science

1. An understanding of the processes, theories, and empirical regularities of political institutions and political behavior in the student's chosen emphasis area: American politics, comparative politics, or international relations.
2. An ability to employ critical thinking and demonstrate social scientific literacy, including basic quantitative literacy.
3. A capacity to utilize contemporary social science research methods to conduct rigorous research on political phenomena.
4. Effective written communication skills, especially the ability to convey complex concepts and information in a clear and concise manner.
5. An ability to apply abstract theory and research methods to understand contemporary political events and public policies.

Course Learning Outcomes for POLI 003

This course has been designed with the following three main objectives:

→ To introduce students to the fundamentals of comparative politics.

■ PLO 1 and PLO 2

→ To provide students with tools, both theoretical and empirical, to analyze current events.

■ PLO 4 and PLO 5

→ To help students enhance the effectiveness of both their written and verbal communication.

■ PLO 4 and PLO 5

Assignments and Grades:

The assignments in this course are designed for a fully asynchronous format while supporting different learning styles and forms of engagement. Across the six-week term, students will complete activities intended to deepen their understanding of the course materials and build practical analytical and professional skills. **Your final grade will be based on the following components: weekly writing assignments (30%), two quizzes (30%), a final project (20%), and participation (20%).** Detailed guidelines for the weekly writing assignments and final project is provided as separate documents on CatCourses under *Files > Course General*.

Academic Integrity: Students are expected to follow UC Merced's Academic Integrity and Honesty Policy. Plagiarism is not tolerated and includes a wide range of actions, such as copying from web or print sources without proper citation, submitting work completed by someone else, or reusing material from your own previous work without proper acknowledgment. **Plagiarized assignments will receive a zero. Suspected academic misconduct may also be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities in accordance with UC Merced procedures.** I encourage you to cite often and widely; using sources is expected, but ideas and language from others must be properly credited. You may use any standard citation style, such as MLA, APA, or Harvard, as long as you apply it consistently.

For more information, please review the following: [Definition of Plagiarism](#), [How to Avoid Plagiarism](#)

Submission Policy: Weekly assignments and final essay must be submitted in **PDF** format. **Incorrect, missing, google doc link or unreadable files will not be accepted as valid submissions and will receive a zero.** Please double-check that your file opens correctly and that you submitted the correct document. Late penalties will apply until a readable and correct file is submitted.

AI/LLM Policy: Your work must be written in your own words. AI tools such as ChatGPT may be used for brainstorming, outlining, or refining ideas, but AI-generated text may not be submitted as your own work. If you use AI in any allowed way, **please disclose it in your works cited section**, for example: "ChatGPT was used for brainstorming and outlining." Undisclosed AI use, hidden prompts, or clear evidence of prohibited AI-generated writing will result in a zero. When in doubt, please ask!

Communication: Please review the syllabus and assignment instructions on CatCourses before emailing. I usually respond within 24 hours on weekdays, but responses may be slower on weekends. I may not be able to answer questions sent within 24 hours of an assignment deadline.

Everything Is on CatCourses: CatCourses will be used for weekly modules, lecture materials, announcements, course updates, quizzes, and assignment submissions. **In general, all course activities will take place through CatCourses, except for student hours.**

Accommodations:

UC Merced is committed to equal access and inclusion. Students seeking accommodations should contact Student Accessibility Services as early as possible. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made through the Office of Accessibility Services, located ACS-140. You can also contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) at (209) 228-6996. You are encouraged to contact [the Dean of Students for support and resources](#) at (209) 228-3633.

Technology Resources: If you need laptop access, UC Merced offers technology resources as well: <https://ue.ucmerced.edu/technology-resources>

Evaluation:

Each assignment in this course will include a grading rubric so that students understand how their work will be evaluated. The final grade will be determined using the grading scale below. Grades will not be rounded up in this course. For example, a final grade of 92.9 will be recorded as an A-.

A: Excellent work		B: Solid, above average work		C: Average work		D: Below average work		F: Substantially below expectations	
100-98	A+	89-87	B+	79-77	C+	69-67	D+	< 60	F
97-93	A	86-83	B	76-73	C	66-63	D		
92-90	A-	82-80	B-	72-70	C-	62-60	D-		

Your final grade will be based on four main components:

1. Weekly Writing Assignments: 30%

Students will complete six short analytical essays, **one each week**. **Each writing assignment is worth 5%** of the final grade. Each essay should be **300–500 words**, excluding the works cited page, and should follow the weekly assignment instructions. Detailed guidelines for the weekly writing assignments are available on CatCourses under Course General as separate PDF instructions.

2. Quizzes: 30%

Two quizzes, each worth 15%. Each includes 10 multiple choice questions and 2 short essay questions. Quiz 1 (Week 3) covers Weeks 1–3; Quiz 2 (Week 5) covers Weeks 4–5. Timed, one-hour limit once started. No late or make-up quizzes.

3. Final Analytic Essay Project: 20%

Students will complete a final project essay of at least 1,000 words. Detailed guidelines for the final project are available on CatCourses under Course General as separate PDF instructions. Students must choose one essay topic from the provided list and include the selected topic in the header of the final submission.

4. Participation and Module Engagement: 20%

Includes discussion activities, short module check-ins, and other module-based engagement tasks. In this fully asynchronous course, timely completion of module activities determines your participation grade. Complete two modules per week, including all activities within them. All module activities are due by 11:59 PM every Friday. No late activities accepted; late work receives no credit.

Schedule of Modules and Readings

This course is organized into **six weekly modules**, with **each week divided into two modules**. Each part focuses on a different topic or question related to the broader weekly theme. This format is intended to make the course material more manageable in a compressed six-week summer session.

In addition to weekly work, there are discussion activities and check-ins designed to track attendance and participation in each module. Please note that completing these module-based activities on time is part of your participation grade.

All coursework such as module-based activities, weekly assignments, and quizzes, is due by 11:59 PM on the Friday of that weekly module.

Week	Part 1	Part 2	Weekly Work
Week 1 (7/6–10)	Orientation, Module 1 ■ Introduction to Course ■ What is Comparative Politics?	Module 2 ■ State ■ Institutions	Writing 1
Week 2 (7/13–17)	Module 3 ■ Democracy	Module 4 ■ Authoritarianism	Writing 2
Week 3 (7/20–24)	Module 5 ■ Political Parties	Module 6 ■ Democratization ■ Democratic Backsliding	Writing 3 Quiz 1
Week 4 (7/27–31)	Module 7 ■ Development	Module 8 ■ Political Violence	Writing 4
Week 5 (8/3–7)	Module 9 ■ Nationalism ■ Political Identity	Module 10 ■ Inequality ■ Populism	Writing 5 Quiz 2
Week 6 (8/10–14)	Module 11 ■ Political Participation ■ Civil Society	Module 12 ■ Course Synthesis & Review	Writing 6 Final Project

Required Readings

This course uses open-access (OER) textbooks and peer-reviewed research articles. There is no textbook to purchase. All required readings, both textbook chapters and journal articles, are posted on CatCourses. Each weekly module includes approximately two to four readings, which should be completed alongside the lecture materials and other module activities.

Course Textbooks

[CP] Bozonelos, Dino, et al. [Introduction to Comparative Government and Politics](#) (Revised First Edition). ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative, 2022.

[IPS] OpenStax. [Introduction to Political Science](#). Rice University / OpenStax, 2022.

Chapters from these two texts are cited below by their short tags, [CP] and [IPS].

Week 1 (July 6–10): Course Overview and States
Module 1 — Introduction to the Course and Comparative Politics ■ [CP] Ch. 1.1–1.2 (<i>What is Comparative Politics; Ways Comparativists Look at the World</i>)
Module 2 — States and Institutions ■ [CP] Ch. 3.1–3.2 (<i>Introduction to States; The Modern State and Regime Types</i>) ■ North, Douglass C. 1991. "Institutions." <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i> 5(1): 97–112.
Week 2 (July 13–17): Democracy and Authoritarianism
Module 3 — Introduction to Democracy ■ [CP] Ch. 4.1–4.3 (<i>What is Democracy?; Institutions within Democracy; Systems of Democracy</i>) ■ Lijphart, Arend. 2012. <i>Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries</i>. Yale University Press. Ch. 1–3.
Module 4 — Introduction to Authoritarianism ■ Frantz, Erica. 2018. <i>Authoritarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know</i>. Oxford University Press. Ch. 2 and 5. ■ Frantz, Erica. 2018. "Authoritarian Politics: Trends and Debates." <i>Politics and Governance</i> 6(2): 87–89.
Week 3 (July 20–24): Political Parties and Regime Change
Module 5 — Political Parties ■ [IPS] Ch. 8.3–8.4 (<i>Political Parties; What Are the Limits of Parties?</i>) ■ Lipset, Seymour Martin, and Stein Rokkan, eds. 1967. <i>Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives</i>. New York: Free Press, pp. 1–33.
Module 6 — Democratization, Consolidation, and Democratic Backsliding ■ [CP] Ch. 4.4 (Democratic Consolidation) ■ Kuran, Timur. 1991. "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989." <i>World Politics</i> 44(1): 7–48. ■ Haggard, Stephan, and Robert Kaufman. 2021. "The Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding." <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 32(4): 27–41.
Week 4 (July 27–31): Development and Political Violence
Module 7 — Democracy and Development ■ [IPS] Ch. 16.4 (The Post–Cold War Period and Modernization Theory) ■ Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1959. "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 53(1): 69–105. ■ Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, James A. Robinson, and Pierre Yared. 2008. "Income and Democracy." <i>American Economic Review</i> 98(3): 808–842.
Module 8 — Political Violence ■ [CP] Ch. 11.1–11.3 (<i>What is Political Violence; State-Sponsored Political Violence; Non-State Political Violence</i>) ■ Menon, Anil. 2023. "The Political Legacy of Forced Migration: Evidence from Post-WWII Germany." <i>Comparative Political Studies</i> 56(9): 1398–1432.

Week 5 (August 3–7): Political Identity and Populism

Module 9 — Political Identity

- [CP] Ch. 6.1 (Introduction to Political Identity)
- 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.
- Bos, Angela L., Jill S. Greenlee, Mirya R. Holman, Zoe M. Oxley, and J. Celeste Lay. 2022. "This One's for the Boys: How Gendered Political Socialization Limits Girls' Political Ambition and Interest." *American Political Science Review* 116(2): 484–501.

Module 10 — Populism

- Jones, Pauline, and Anil Menon. 2024. "Varieties of Populists." In *Still the Age of Populism? Reexamining Theories and Concepts*.
- Adler, David, and Ben Ansell. 2020. "Housing and Populism." *West European Politics* 43(2): 344–365.

Week 6 (August 10–14): Political Participation and Civil Society

Module 11 — Political Participation and Civil Society

- [CP] Ch. 9.1, 9.3 (*What Is Collective Action? What Are Social Movements?; A Framework for Explaining Social Movements*)
- Brady, Henry E., Sidney Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman. 1995. "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation." *American Political Science Review* 89(2): 271–294.
- Putnam, Robert D. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6(1): 65–78.

Module 12 — Synthesis and Review

- Course synthesis, final comments.
- No additional required reading.