

POLI 003: Introduction to Comparative Politics / Summer 2026

Final Analytic Essay Project

Students are required to complete one final analytic essay project, which counts for 20% of the final course grade. Students must choose one essay topic from the provided topic list and include the selected topic in the header of the final submission.

Because this is a comparative politics course, the final project should compare at least two countries, regimes, political movements, or cases. Students should not simply describe each case separately. Instead, they should compare the cases using a clear analytical framework we learn throughout this semester.

Students should use at least two assigned course readings and may also use credible outside sources, such as academic articles, democracy datasets, or country reports. These essays are designed to combine analysis of the readings with the student's own interpretation, argument, and reflection.

- Due Friday, August 14, by 11:59 PM.
- Choose one topic from the provided topic list.
- Write at least 1,000 words, not counting the title page or works cited page.
- Cite at least two assigned course readings. At least one of those readings must be an academic article or book chapter from a module. Engage its main argument directly rather than citing it in passing.
- Build the essay around a clear argument. Description alone will not earn full credit.
- Explain why your cases are comparable and what the comparison allows you to see.

Expected Writing Structure

The final project should be written as a comparative analytical essay. Students should develop a clear argument and compare their selected countries or cases using consistent criteria.

The first paragraph should define the key concept, explain why it matters, and summarize how the assigned readings discuss the topic. It should also briefly introduce the selected countries or cases and clearly state the criteria that will be used for comparison.

The second and third paragraphs should analyze your selected cases using evidence from the assigned readings, academic sources, reliable data, or credible news reporting. Begin with a brief introduction to each case, including its political system and any background a reader needs to follow your argument. Then explain why the cases are comparable, and compare them using the criteria you set out in the first paragraph and the central question of your chosen topic. Ground the analysis in evidence rather than personal opinion or assumption.

The final paragraph should present the conclusion and the student's own argument. Students should summarize the main findings of the comparison, explain their own interpretation, and connect the conclusion back to the assigned readings and the broader topic.

Use any citation style you prefer, but apply it consistently throughout, and include in-text citations at the point of each claim.

Topic list

Topic 1: Democracy and Authoritarianism in Comparative Perspective

Choose two or more countries, with at least one case commonly classified as democratic and one case commonly classified as authoritarian. Compare their electoral systems, political institutions, party competition, civil liberties, and limits on executive power. Explain why each case fits the regime category you use, based on the assigned readings and evidence from the cases. Students should explain the logic behind the comparison rather than simply relying on labels.

Topic 2: Populism Across the World

Choose two or three cases of populist parties, leaders, movements, or governments from different countries or regions. Explain why each case can be considered populist, using a clear definition from the readings or scholarly sources. Discuss whether populism is mainly an economic reaction, a cultural reaction, or a combination of both.

Topic 3: Democratic Backsliding and Institutional Erosion

What causes democratic backsliding? Choose two cases of democratic backsliding that are either scholarly debated or documented in democracy reports. Compare the mechanisms of backsliding in each case, such as attacks on courts, electoral rules, media freedom, civil society, opposition parties, constitutional checks, or executive constraints. Your essay should explain the logic behind each case and clearly connect the comparison back to the assigned reading.

Topic 4: Economic Development and Democracy

Does economic development lead to democracy? Compare two or more countries where the relationship between economic development and democracy is either strong, weak, or complicated. Use Lipset's argument about modernization theory and compare it with Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson. The essay should explain whether democracy depends mainly on economic development, political institutions, historical context, or legitimacy.

Grading Rubric

Readings & Sources (25%)

- Did the student use and correctly cite at least two assigned course readings?
- If the chosen topic names a required reading, did the student actually use it?
- Did the student apply the readings' concepts or framework accurately, rather than only naming them?
- Do any outside sources (academic articles, democracy datasets such as V-Dem or Freedom House, or country reports) meet the assignment's credibility requirements?

Comparative Analysis & Argument (50%)

- Is the essay organized around a clear argument (thesis), not just description?
- Does it genuinely compare at least two countries, regimes, movements, or cases using consistent criteria, instead of describing each case separately?
- Does the student explain why the cases are comparable?
- Is the comparison analytical and anchored in a course framework (institutions, electoral systems, party competition, civil liberties, economic development, political identity, populism, participation, or democratic backsliding)?
- Are claims supported by evidence (from the readings, reliable data, or credible reports), not just personal opinion or assumption?
- Does the conclusion present the student's own interpretation and connect it back to the readings and the broader topic?

Writing & Format (25%)

- Does the essay follow the expected structure: an introduction that defines the key concept, states the comparison criteria, and introduces the cases; two analysis paragraphs; and a concluding paragraph?
- Does it meet the $\geq 1,000$ -word requirement, excluding the title and works cited page?
- Is it free of typos, grammatical errors, and incomplete sentences?
- Does it use proper citations, effective transitions, and include a works cited page?
- Was one topic chosen from the list and noted in the header of the submission?

AI/LLM Policy

AI tools may be used only for limited support: brainstorming, outlining, organizing thoughts, or refining your own writing. AI-generated writing must not be submitted as your own original work. Undisclosed AI use, hidden prompts, or clear evidence of prohibited AI-generated text will result in a zero for the project.

Allowed AI use must be disclosed in the works cited section (e.g., "ChatGPT was used for brainstorming and outlining").

Plagiarism Policy

Any uncited idea, copied wording, or improperly paraphrased text without citation will be considered plagiarism.

Plagiarism will result in a zero for the assignment.

Before submitting, please carefully check the Turnitin report. (Below 10% is recommended)

Students should make sure that: all borrowed ideas are properly cited, copied text has not been left unchanged and no citation is missing from the essay or works cited page.

Late Policy

1% of the essay grade will be deducted for each hour late, for up to **24 hours** after the deadline.

Essays submitted more than 24 hours late will not be graded and will receive a zero.