

SIS 52019 & 52519 Introduction to Comparative Politics

School of International Studies

Kanazawa University

Spring 2021

Instructor information

Instructor: Yu Sasaki

Office hours: Thursday, 13:15–14:45

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Course information

Class meets: Thursday, 10:30–12:00

Class location: #3-102

Course Description

This is a survey course on comparative politics. It introduces you to not only traditional themes, such as state-building, regime type, and nationalism, but also hotly-debated subjects in recent years, such as the political salience of ethnic identity, authoritarian persistence, and democratic breakdown. The course stresses two aspects. First, it is theme-oriented. Going beyond the traditional “one country per week” model, which mixes endogenous institutional development with key contingent events and political bargaining, this course starts with “big questions” to motivate each theme, followed by the discussion of prevailing mechanisms, quantitative and qualitative evidence, and country case-studies. In this course, we will address these major puzzles:

- Why do some countries have well-enforced, orderly systems while others do not?
- Why are some countries democratic, while others remain nondemocratic?
- Why are some ethnic identities politically salient, leading to political mobilization and violence, while others are not?
- Why do some democratizing countries consolidate toward fully democratic states while others break down and revert back to authoritarianism?
- Why do some democratizing countries successfully institutionalize the rule of law while others do not?

In addition, this course regularly brings in current events not just to highlight how they are connected to the major puzzles and theories but also to demonstrate the significance and challenges of explaining big questions.

The second point is that the course emphasizes political economy approaches. Political economy rests on the simple assumption that actors are goal-oriented and want to maximize benefits while reducing costs to a minimum and that actors choose or create an option to achieve their goal. We adopt this analytical approach, because it allows us to engage material from other fields in social sciences.

Course Objectives

This course will enable you to achieve, *inter alia*, the following intellectual goals:

1. to learn major theories and issues in the field of comparative politics;
2. to be acquainted with scientific inquiry in social sciences;
3. to understand the variation of political outcomes in our interest, even though everyone may want to live in a wealthy, orderly, and well-functioning society;
4. to understand how and why poverty persists in Africa and why poverty alleviation is hard; and

Grades

Grades are based on three in-class examinations and class participation.

- Take-home assignment 1 (15%): Thursday, November 12, 2020
- Take-home assignment 2 (15%): Thursday, January 14, 2021
- Final exam (40%): Thursday, February 4, 2021
- Participation (30%): ongoing

This course follows the standard grade distribution of the university.

grade	%
S	100.0–90
A	89.9–80
B	79.9–70
C	69.9–60
F	< 60

Technology Policy

Students are required to do all of the readings assigned for the course. They may choose whether to print off readings, or read them from a computer or tablet. Professor Sasaki will allow students to use laptops and tablets in class, so long as they are only using them for the purposes of class and wireless/data connections are turned off. This is to prevent unnecessary distractions for other students and facilitate discussion. Professor Sasaki reserves the right to change this policy, including banning laptops and tablets, should students violate the policy. Phones are not allowed under any circumstance and should not be seen or heard by Professor Sasaki from the minute students walk into class until they leave.

Course Text

This course draws primarily from two books for reading assignments, as follows:

- O’Neill, Patrick H. 2017. *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, 6th ed. New York: W.W. Norton.
- O’Neill, Patrick H., Karl Fields, and Don Share. 2017. *Cases in Comparative Politics*, 6th ed. New York: W.W. Norton.

Course Schedule

Week 1. Introduction, Start of Quarter 1

Week 2. State-building I

O’Neill, *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, ch. 2.

Week 3. Democracy I: Definitions and Key Concepts

O’Neill, *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, ch. 5, pp. 134–146, 168–171.

In-class video-watching to do:

1. Tikhanovskaya, Svetlana. “I’m Trying to Topple Europe’s Last Dictator.” *New York Times* (video op-ed), September 24, 2020.

Week 4. Democracy I: Democratization

Przeworski, Adam, Michael E. Alvarez, José Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. 2000. *Democracy and Development: Political Regimes and Material Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 78–117.

Optional further readings:

1. Huntington, Samuel. 1991. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, Chapter 1.

Week 5. Non-democratic Regimes

O’Neill, *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, ch. 6.

Optional further readings on Myanmar:

1. Beech, Hannah. “Myanmar’s Military Deploys Digital Arsenal of Repression in Crackdown.” *New York Times*, March 1, 2021.

2. Beech, Hannah. "Myanmar's Army Is Back in Charge. It Never Truly Left." *New York Times*, February 2, 2021.
3. Beech, Hannah. "Democracy Hero? Military Foil? Myanmar's Leader Ends Up as Neither." *New York Times*, February 1, 2021.
4. Beech, Hannah. "How a Human Rights Angel Lost Her Halo." *New York Times*, November 14, 2020.

Week 6. Case Study 1: Russia

O'Neill, et al. *Cases in Comparative Politics*, ch. 6.

Required video-watching or podcast-listening to do:

1. PBS Frontline, "Putin's Way," January 13, 2015; *or*
2. This American Life. #614: "The Other Mr. President." *New York Times*, April, 2017.

Optional documentaries and podcasts on Russia:

1. Vox, "How Alexei Navalny Became Putin's Greatest Threat," February 21, 2021.
2. Navalny, Alexei. "Putin's Palace," January 19, 2021.
3. PBS Frontline, "Putin's Revenge (Part II)," November 1, 2017.
4. PBS Frontline, "Putin's Revenge (Part I)," October 25, 2017.
5. BBC The Inquiry. "Is the Greatest Threat to Putin Really Alexei Navalny?" June 14, 2017.

The Inquiry was one of the winners of the 2017 [Best Current Affairs Podcast](#) of the British Podcast Awards.

Week 7. Homework 1 Review

Homework 1 available on LMS

Week 8. Exam week, End of Quarter 1

Homework 1 due on LMS

Week 9. Ethnicity, Nations, and Nationalism, Start of Quarter 2

O'Neill, *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, ch. 3.

In-class video-watching to do:

1. Vox, “[The Armenia and Azerbaijan War, Explained](#),” December 3, 2020.

Week 10. Case Study 1: The United States

Cox, Karen L. 2003. *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, chs. 1 and 4.

In-class video-watching to do:

1. Vox, “[How Southern Socialites Rewrote Civil War History](#),” October 25, 2017.
2. PBS Frontline, “[Documenting Hate: Charlottesville](#),” August 7, 2018.

Optional documentaries on the United States:

1. PBS Frontline, “[Documenting Hate: New American Nazis](#),” November 20, 2018.

Week 11. Communism & Post-Communism: The Fall of the Soviet Union

O'Neill, *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, ch. 9.

In-class video-watching to do:

1. CNN, “[See the Berlin Wall Fall 30 Years Ago](#),” November 7, 2019.
2. Radio Free Europe, “[End of Communism: How 1989 Changed Europe](#),” November 7, 2019.

Week 12. Case Study 1: Poland

Homework 2 available on LMS

Bernhard, Michael. 2005. *Institutions and the Fate of Democracy: Germany and Poland in the Twentieth Century*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, ch. 5.

Optional further readings on Poland (in reverse-chronological order):

1. Santora, Marc. “[Poland Election: Law and Justice Party Holds on to Power, Early Returns Show](#).” *New York Times*, October 13, 2019.
2. Santora, Marc, and Joanna Berendt. “[Poland's State Media Is Government's Biggest Booster Before Election](#).” *New York Times*, October 11, 2019.
3. Santora, Marc. “[In Poland, Nationalism With a Progressive Touch Wins Voters](#).” *New York Times*, October 10, 2019.

4. Santora, Marc, and Joanna Berendt. "Mixing Politics and Piety, a Conservative Priest Seeks to Shape Poland's Future." *New York Times*, September 21, 2019.
5. Santora, Marc. "In Poland, Where History Is a Weapon, Leaders Commemorate World War II." *New York Times*, September 1, 2019.
6. Santora, Marc, and Joanna Berendt. "Polish Teachers End Strike to Allow Exams but Tell Government It's Not over." *New York Times*, April 26, 2019.
7. Berendt, Joanna, and Marc Santora. "Poland Reverses Supreme Court Purge, Retreating from Conflict with E.U." *New York Times*, December 17, 2018.
8. Santora, Marc. "Amid Growing Uproar, Poland to Remove 27 Supreme Court Justices." *New York Times*, July 3, 2018.
9. Erlanger, Steven, and Marc Santora. "Poland's Nationalism Threatens Europe's Values, and Cohesion." *New York Times*, February 20, 2018.
10. Santora, Marc, and Joanna Berendt. "Poland Overhauls Courts, and Critics See Retreat from Democracy." *New York Times*, December 20, 2017.
11. Lyman, Rick. "The Polish Parliament Reshapes Courts, Drawing Criticism." *New York Times*, December 20, 2017.
12. Erlanger, Steven. "In Eastern Europe, Populism Lives, Widening a Split in the E.U." *New York Times*, November 28, 2017.
13. Traub, James. "The Party That Wants to Make Poland Great Again." *New York Times Magazine*, November 2, 2016.
14. Smale, Alison. "'We Don't Need to Be Alone': A Political Shift Has Poland Assessing Its Values." *New York Times*, August 11, 2016.

Week 13. Developing States: Extractive Institutions

Homework 2 due in class

O'Neill, *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, ch. 10.

Week 14. Case Study 4: South Africa

O'Neill, et al. *Cases in Comparative Politics*, ch. 13.

Optional documentaries on South Africa:

1. Vox, "Why South Africa Is Still so Segregated," April 21, 2021.
2. PBS Frontline, "The Long Walk of Nelson Mandela," May 25, 1999.

Week 15. Final Exam Review

Week 16. Final Exam (Submitted Online on LMS), End of Quarter 2