Course Description

This course provides analytical tools to understand how political factors and dynamics shape institutions and policies. Why are some states able to produce stable institutions while others fail? Why do some countries provide universal health care while others do not? What institutional arrangements help negotiation and cooperation in deeply divided societies? We examine these questions through the lens of comparative politics in order to understand the conditions under which different political regimes, institutions (e.g., systems of government, electoral systems, power-sharing arrangements), and public policies (especially social policies) are adopted and change, and to learn about their political and distributive effects.

Another goal of this course is to help you hone your analytical skills and presentational abilities. In your professional lives, you will often be required to explain complex policy choices with verbal economy and analytical precision. The in-class exercises and assignments for this course are designed to help you learn these skills.

Course Expectations, Assignments, and Grading

Readings: Prior to most of our meetings, you will need to read 2-3 academic works. All of the academic readings are available online on the course’s Canvas page (unless otherwise noted).

Class Preparation, Participation, and Engagement: The quality and value of our meetings are crucially dependent on your coming to class prepared and willing to discuss the assigned readings and actively engage with the larger themes and questions they address. Your participation grade will depend on your contribution to the collective learning during class discussions and in-class exercises. The quality of your contributions relates to the content as well as the delivery of your comments. The following types of class participation are particularly welcome: bringing in specific evidence from assigned readings; using concrete examples from
case(s) to elaborate more general ideas; building on and responding to the comments of other students; and linking your professional experience to the material being discussed. Comments that are off-topic, excessive in length, or disrespectful of the opinions of others will negatively affect class discussion.

Assignments: Aside from in class participation, you’ll be expected to take a midterm and a final in class, make a group presentation, and write a short memo based on one of the in-class activities (in-class exercises or team presentations).

Instructions on these assignments will be given at the beginning of the semester.

The in-class midterm exam will take place on March 12. The final will take place on April 16.

Grading: Your final grade will be determined as follows:

- Participation and engagement: 20%
- In-class midterm (March 12): 30%
- Presentation: 10%
- In class final (April 16): 30%
- Memo: 10%

Missed classes: Class attendance is mandatory.

Academic Honesty: in written assignments, it is important that you adhere to the Kennedy School’s policies regarding proper academic practice. The academic code can be found [here](#). We urge you to read it. Please pay particular attention to the section on plagiarism, which is the appropriation of others’ words and ideas without proper attribution. The disciplinary consequences of plagiarism are dire, so please take care to quote and cite your sources. We will discuss plagiarism in the course, but it is your responsibility to make sure that the words and ideas that appear in your work are your own, and that you give credit where credit is due.

Policy on laptops and smart-phones: The use of laptops and smart-phones in class degrades the teaching and learning environment for everyone in the classroom. At the same time, we recognize that students may not be used to taking notes by hand and may wish to conserve paper by doing the readings on-screen as opposed to printing them out. Therefore, while the use of smart-phones is strictly prohibited, students may use their laptops to take notes in class or to refer to the readings. You may not, however, surf the web or check your email.

Office Hours: I encourage you to see me during office hours to discuss any questions you might have related to the course. I will ordinarily hold office hours on Thursdays from 1:00 through 4:15 pm. If you wish to see me during my office hours, please contact me directly to arrange a time.
## OVERVIEW OF COURSE SCHEDULE

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Schedule of Meetings and Readings

Tuesday, January 29: Introductory Lecture

Thursday, January 31: Political Regime and Democratization


Tuesday, February 5: Getting Democracy (Discussion)


Thursday, February 7: Authoritarian Continuity (in-class exercise)

- Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds. 2015. *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform*, pp. 50-75; 104-146; 166-167; 211-218.

Tuesday, February 12: How Democracies Die (Steve Levitsky)


Thursday, February 14: Political Regime and Policy Outcomes (Discussion)

Tuesday, February 19: Legislatures and Executives

Thursday, February 21: Electoral Rules and Power-Sharing Arrangements

Tuesday, February 26: Designing an Electoral System (in-class exercise)

Thursday, February 28: Parties and Party Systems (Scott Mainwaring)

Tuesday, March 5: Federalism and Decentralization

Thursday, March 7: Exam Preparation

Tuesday, March 12: Midterm

Thursday, March 14: Social Movements and Associational Life (Discussion)
- TBD

*Spring Break*

Tuesday, March 26: Building State Capacity and Good Government

Thursday, March 28: Building State Capacity and Good Government (Team Presentations)

Tuesday, April 2: Participatory Institutions and Direct Democracy
• TBD

Thursday, April 4: Participatory Institutions and Direct Democracy (Team Presentations)

Tuesday, April 9: Welfare Programs
• Jacob S. Hacker. 2010. "The Road to Somewhere: Why Health Reform Happened or Why Political Scientists Who Write About Public Policy Shouldn't Assume They Know How to Shape It," Perspectives on Politics, 8:3, pp. 861-876.

Thursday, April 11: Welfare Programs (Team Presentations)

Tuesday, April 16: In-class Final

Thursday, April 18: Course Wrap-up