

Sam Nunn School of International Affairs  
Georgia Institute of Technology

Summer Semester  
2020

**International Affairs 3203**  
**INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE POLITICS**

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

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**COURSE OBJECTIVES AND ORGANIZATION**

Comparative politics explores the sources of change *and* stability within and across national and subnational boundaries and seeks to explain variation in policies, processes, and politics. For example, why do broadly similar polities pursue different approaches in attempting to remedy similar policy challenges? Consider the issue of climate change – how can it be “impossible” to achieve lower carbon emissions in one advanced industrialized country when this objective is being realized through policymaking or social change in broadly similar country? The study of comparative politics often requires in-country fieldwork to collect data, conduct interviews, and carry out site visits. For this reason, most comparativists are proficient in at least one foreign language and possess deep contextual and cultural familiarity with regard to at least one country (e.g., Australia, Fiji, etc.), region (e.g., Latin America, Western Europe, etc.), or socio-economic grouping (e.g., the Global South, OECD countries, etc.).

This course surveys the main theories of comparative politics and introduces the comparative method, a tool for explaining why and how broadly similar polities employ different approaches in seeking to solve common problems. Although we will examine a variety of issues in this course, we will focus intensively on the complex interplay of factors that produces cross-national variation in policy responses to the challenges of sustainable development, which is the theme of Georgia Tech’s current Quality Enhancement Plan. As part of this exercise, students will be tasked with employing tools of comparative analysis in assessing the response of a particular country to a sustainability-related issue. It is expected that this exercise will highlight the importance of politics, context, and international interdependence in efforts to achieve sustainability. As de Tocqueville wisely put it, “[w]ithout comparisons to make, the mind does not know how to proceed.” The aim of this course is to provide students with the mental tools needed to explain change, stability, and variation through comparative analysis.



This course is part of Georgia Tech’s Serve-Learn-Sustain (SLS) initiative. SLS works with all six colleges to offer students courses and other academic and extra-curricular opportunities that prepare them to work with diverse collaborators - from the community, nonprofit, government, academic, and business sectors - to “create sustainable communities,” where humans and nature flourish, now and in the future. More information about SLS can be found at [www.serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu](http://www.serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu). Visit the website to sign up for the SLS Email List, learn about SLS’ signature programs, and find links to Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

## CORE AREA/ATTRIBUTES

Successful completion of this course counts toward fulfillment of Georgia Tech's Social Science General Education requirement, the expected learning outcomes of which are explained on the Registrar's Office website (<http://www.registrar.gatech.edu/students/gened.php>).

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Course grades will be determined by student performance on a combination of assignments, including two *examinations*, *research design exercise*, and a *comparative country case study* (in which the student utilizes tools of comparative analysis to shed light on a current sustainability-related issue affecting a particular country). Grading will be weighted as follows:

- research design exercise: 10 percent
- movie critique: 15 percent
- two examinations: 50 percent (25 percent each)
- comparative case study - PowerPoint slides: 25 percent

## INSTITUTE POLICIES

**Honor Code:** Academic honesty is required of all Georgia Tech students by the Institute's honor code, the text of which is found at [www.honor.gatech.edu](http://www.honor.gatech.edu).

**Special Accommodations:** Students requesting academic accommodations based on a documented disability are required to register with the Access Disabled Assistance Program for Tech Students (ADAPTS) at <http://www.adapts.gatech.edu>.

**Diversity & Inclusion:** The Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts – of which the Nunn School is a constituent part – supports the Institute's commitment to creating a campus free of discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status. We further affirm the importance of cultivating an intellectual climate that allows us to better understand the similarities and differences of those who constitute the Georgia Tech community, as well as the necessity of working against inequalities that may also manifest here as they do in broader society.

## LEARNING GOALS

- Cultural, contextual, and ethical awareness. Students will become more aware of the diversity of cultural and ethical systems in the world. Includes the ability to identify,



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- critically analyze, and apply distinguishing traits/perspectives/ formulations/ institutions in comparative or international empirical cases or issue areas.
- Students will acquire a basic understanding of the *core theories, paradigms, and models* that comprise the theoretical core of comparative politics.
  - Students will apply the *comparative method* to critically assess the core theories' ability to explain political, economic, and social change.
  - Students will apply the comparative method and best practices in *teamwork* to solve a current problem of comparative politics.
  - Students will defend their critical assessments and problem-solving proposals through compelling, evidence-based, arguments in *written, oral, and audio-visual formats*.

## READINGS

All required readings are posted to Canvas or available for download via the Georgia Tech Library's *ejournals* portal. Students wishing to pursue a particular topic in more depth are encouraged to consult with the Instructor.

## DISCUSSION TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 – Topics: Comparative Politics – Overview and Context

*Common readings:* Barry Eichengreen, “One Economy, Ready or Not: Thomas Friedman's Jaunt Through Globalization,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78 (No. 3, May/June 1999), pp. 118-122; Richard Florida, “The World Is Spiky,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 296 (October 2005): 48-51; “Globalization: the rise and fall of an idea that swept the world,” *The Guardian* (February 14, 2017).

Week 2 – Topics: Comparative Method and the Classical Paradigm

*Common readings:* David Collier, “The Comparative Method,” in Ada Finifter, ed., *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II* (Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 1993), pp. 105-119.

*Research Design Exercise due:*

Week 3 – Topics: Core Theories – Neo-liberalism *and* Neo-Marxism

*Common readings:* “Political Scientists Debate Theory of ‘Rational Choice,’” *The New York Times*, 26 February 2000 (uploaded to Canvas as “NYT – Rational Choice”); John Williamson, “Democracy and the Washington Consensus,” *World Development*, Vol. 21 (1993), pp. 1329-1336; and Andre Gunder Frank, “The Development of Underdevelopment,” *Monthly Review* (September 1966), pp. 17-31.

Week 4 – Topics: Core Theories: Modernization & Development *and* Culture

*Common readings:* W.W. Rostow, “The Stages of Growth,” *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1959), pp. 1-16; and Robert Putnam, “Bowling Alone,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 6 (January 1995), pp. 1-17.

Week 5 – Topics: Core Theory and Examination – Institutionalism *and* Examination Review

*Common readings:* Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 3-26; and ....  
*Examination review*

Week 6 – Topics: Examination #1 *and* Sustainable Development

*Examination #1*

*Common readings:* *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future* (Brundtland Report) (<http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>), Chapter Two; Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*, pp. 1-28 (uploaded to Canvas); and Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), pp. 3-34.

View *An Inconvenient Truth*

Week 7 – Topics: *Liberal Market Approach* – United Kingdom, New Zealand & Australia

*Common readings:* Douglass C. North, “Institutions and economic growth: An historical introduction,” *World Development*, Vol. 17 (Issue 9, September 1989), pp. 1319-133.

*Movie critique* (1-2 page critique of *An Inconvenient Truth*) due:

Week 8 – Topics: *Developmental State* and *Social Corporatism*: Japan and Denmark

*Common readings:* Samuel P. Huntington, “The Third Wave,” *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 2 (No.2 Spring 1991), pp. 12-34; Brian Woodall, “The Development of Japan’s Developmental State,” in Shiping Hua, ed., *The East Asian Development Model* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 101-120.

Week 9 – Topics: *Global South* Case Studies – China and Fiji

*Common readings:* Nick Anda, “Explaining Underdevelopment in the Pacific: Modernization vs Dependency Theories” (2015), available on-line at:

<https://nicholasanda.wordpress.com/2015/09/01/explaining-underdevelopment-in-the-pacific-modernisation-vs-dependency-theories/>; Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, chapters 13-15.

Week 10 – Topics: Energy Security and Sustainable Transportation

*Common readings:* Marilyn A. Brown, Yu Wang, Benjamin K. Sovacool, Anthony Louis D’Agostino, “Forty years of energy security trends: A comparative assessment of 22 industrialized countries,” *Energy Research & Social Science*, Vol. 4 (2014), pp. 64–77\*; and Adjo Amekudzi-Kennedy, Brian Woodall, Alex Karner et al, “Institutional Arrangements,

Transportation System Investments, and Socio-Economic Outcomes: Affecting the Development of Shared Regional Prosperity” (2020)\*.

Week 11 – Review and Examination

*Examination review*

*Examination #2*

Comparative Case Study PPT slides due