This course examines political institutions in comparative perspective. At times, it turns the spotlight to the United States, both to compare its institutions to those of other countries and to assess the critical stresses and changes it faces.

The course has one overriding aim: to enhance the ability of public policy practitioners to comprehend the fundamental transformations unfolding in key political institutions. The most prominent institution is the nation-state, which has exercised sovereignty over policies and processes for more than a century, but now is besieged by rivals for power and legitimacy.

The course is organized around four sets of issues, with 3-4 sessions allocated to each. (1) The role and place of the nation-state, including salient differences among countries such as the potency and legitimacy of the state, the robustness of democratic norms and institutions, and corruption. (2) The machinery of the state, encompassing the structure of government, voting and elections, and the means by which the state manages public responsibilities. (3) Comparison of environmental, economic and social policies. Writing assignments correspond to each of these sets of themes. (4) Contemporary challenges to the state, especially markets, global and supra-national institutions, non-governmental entities, and modern information technology.

**Participation and Classroom Discussion.** Active, informed participation is expected of all students. This means coming to class prepared, engaging in discussion, and intelligently contributing ideas and insights to the issue at hand.

To assure that students are engaged, I strongly request that laptops, tablets, smart phones, and similar devices not be used in class. This request is based on substantial evidence that students are distracted when they Google, text, email, etc. during class.

**Canvas.** The instructor will regularly communicate with students via Canvas. Most required readings (other than assigned books) will be posted on Canvas, as will relevant information on course sessions. On occasions, students will be notified of adjustments to the syllabus. Canvas may also be used to notify students of discussion topics at forthcoming class sessions.

**Office Hours.** Every student should strive to meet with the instructor at least once during the semester. To make efficient use of student and teacher time, meetings will be scheduled by appointment. A sign-up sheet will be circulated in class to arrange meetings. Students may, in consultation with the instructor schedule meetings for other times. A student who fails to appear at an appointment risks being assessed a grade penalty.

**Current Issues Discussions.** 15-20 minutes will be set aside at the start of some weekly sessions to discuss a current issue or event that is relevant to the course. These discussions will be led by students who volunteer to assemble brief readings on the subject. It is likely that some of the discussions will pertain to the United States, but any country’s developments can be grist for class discussion.
**Teaching Assistant.** The TA will have an active role in the conduct of the course. In addition to handling course logistics, the TA will recommend participation grades for students. Within time constraints, the TA may coach students who need to improve their writing skills.

**Country Presentations.** Each country team will make one 15-20 minute presentation during the semester assessing the country in light of the assigned issue for that week. The presentation should be focused on the issue with limited background description, and should be accompanied by relevant talking points.

**Reflections.** Students are encouraged to electronically submit one-page reflections on assigned readings no later than 5:00 pm the day before the material to which they pertain is scheduled to be discussed in class. These reflections have two purposes: they encourage students to prepare for class; and they enable the instructor to organize class discussion.

Reflections are not required and will not be graded. However, a student who submits accepted reflections will earn bonus points. An accepted reflection demonstrates that the student has read and thought about the assigned reading.

**Grades.** Course grades will be based on three requirements and two options. The requirements are country papers (described below), country presentations, and class presentation. The options are bonus points for leading a current issues discussion and for reflections. No exams will be administered, but students will have ample opportunity to demonstrate their competence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country Papers</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Presentations</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Country Papers.** The following general instructions will be supplemented with specific guidance for each assignment.

Students will be organized into two person teams, with each team responsible for a set of four (4) 6-8 page papers comparing two countries on assigned issues. The papers should emphasize comparison, with description limited to the amount appropriate to provide necessary background for the two countries. The comparisons should be integrated, not sequential presentations of one country and then the other. This will require both team members to be involved in writing the papers.

Each paper should be written as you would (or should) for a professional colleague who needs the information or analysis. Each should succinctly address the assigned topic, and should be written with high fidelity to the rules of grammar.

Each paper should be a sharply focused comparative statement, not a term paper or an advocacy document. The key difference between a brief comparative statement and a term paper is that the latter is fixated on the assigned topic and sticks to it throughout. There is no room in a 6-8 page comparative analysis for wanderings or side trips; no filler is needed to meet minimum page requirements.

Start the country paper process by teaming with a classmate. Students are encouraged to establish their own teams, but the instructor and TA will be available to assist. Each team should select two countries that will be the subject of the full set of four papers. Although each set of papers will cover the same countries, each paper should be self-contained, suitable to be read on its own. The papers must be submitted in the assigned sequence on the scheduled dates. Each paper should be dated, with an SPP mailbox (to which graded papers will be returned) at the top of the first page. The first paper may be resubmitted (and regarded) at the option of its
authors. To exercise this option, students must submit a revised paper no later than one week after the original paper was returned. The original grade will be expunged if the revision earns a higher grade. Students who receive low grades on subsequent papers may be permitted to resubmit, at the discretion of the instructor.

Each team should maintain a file containing the latest paper (on top) and all previous papers. The papers should be filed in a binder or folder that secures them together; paper clips and staples are not acceptable.

Use of the Internet and Other Sources. Nowadays, students (and others) routinely rely on electronic media as their primary source of information; many have considerable agility in searching on the Internet, as well as with policy-oriented blogs and websites. It is neither feasible nor desirable to ban the Internet, but it is prudent to establish rules of fair use.

1. Do not insert chunks of material from the Internet (or any other source) into your reflections and papers. The writings must be yours, not someone else’s and quotes from other sources should be brief, and properly attributed.

2. Limit use of Wikipedia, the CIA Factbook, and other easy-to-get and easy-to-copy sources. Use them, if at all, only as starting points and leads for more substantial research.

3. Attach an explanation of sources to each paper. Identify sources (including web addresses) and explain why you have relied on them. (Just select the first site to appear on the screen, or the one that bribed Google to get top billing.)

4. Plagiarism is a national epidemic that undermines learning and reflection. It is understandable that young men and women, who came of age routinely downloading music and movies, also would download written words. Although this course has no tolerance for plagiarism, submissions will not be run through powerful search engines that can detect patterns in words, sentences and paragraphs. I regard deploying search engines for this purpose repugnant.

My main weapon against plagiarism is strict application of relevance. The papers will be graded in the light of whether you address the assignment, not in terms of whether you wrote something on the topic. This may be an inadequate safeguard, but it is, in my view, appropriate for teacher and students who meet according to a fixed schedule on shared turf called a classroom.

COUNTRY PAPERS SCHEDULE

Week of

Sept. 11, 16  Selection of Country

List 4 countries as your first and second paired choices. Do not list the United States or the focus countries. I will review your preferences and will assign countries no later than the next class meeting.

Oct. 7, 9  First Paper: Democracy Audit

Compare and assess the efficacy of democratic institutions and political practices in the two countries. You may cite international ratings, such as those issued by Freedom House, Transparency International, and the World Bank, but you must probe beneath the country scores to assess how democracy works or falls short, and why. An audit of democracy should be sensitive to each country’s history, political culture and traditions, ethnic or geographic.
divisions, and other relevant conditions. Do not try to cover all facets of democracy – doing so would transform the paper into a description of the country’s political system; instead build a disciplined argument that takes account of the vulnerabilities discussed in the course, such as authoritarianism, illiberal versions of democracy, using elections or the judicial system to suppress dissent, etc.

Oct. 28 **Second Paper. Governmental Institutions**

Compare key political institutions – how they work or don’t, how they have evolved, and why, and (if appropriate) how they compare to models and arrangements in one or more focus countries or other assigned readings. You may consider voting and elections, interest groups and parties, the executive and legislature, the courts or bureaucracy. But be selective – do not aim to cover all institutions. Your memo should enable readers to understand how the two countries are governed.

Nov. 18 **Third Paper. Policy Analysis**

Analyze your countries’ approach to one of the policy areas discussed in the course. (If your country is low income, you may focus on poverty reduction or development policies.) Strive to connect public policies to findings/issues discussed in the previous papers. Can policies be explained in terms of how democracy or political institutions operate? However, do not force the argument. Be mindful of space limits, and avoid getting bogged down in detail. Focus on core or defining elements of policy, especially those that distinguish the two countries. Some specifics will be essential, but you need not cover every facet.

Dec. 9 **Fourth Paper. Challenges to the State**

Examine two of the major challenges (one of which should be globalization) facing your countries. Preferably, the challenges should be those considered in the last section of the course, but exceptions can be made with consent of the instructor. The challenges should be those facing the state as the sovereign policy authority in each country.

**ASSIGNED READINGS**

The listed items are available for purchase at the bookstore. All other readings will be posted on Canvas or distributed in class. It is likely that adjustments will be made in assigned readings during the semester. Students will be notified in class and/or via Canvas.

Charles H. Blake and Jessica Adolino, *Comparing Public Policies*

Carol Drogus and Stephen Orvis, *Introducing Comparative Politics*
CLASS SESSIONS

Sept. 4 MAPPING OUT A WORLD OF STATES
Sept. 9

We will launch the course by placing the nation-state at the center of the political universe. (The final section of the course examines contemporary developments that may dislodge the state from its authoritative position.) The first part of the session reviews data on states; the second takes an historical perspective to discuss the rise of the nation-state.

Readings:

1. Data on the size and role of governments (distributed)
2. Governance indicators (distributed)

Sept. 11 PERFORMING AND FRAGILE STATES
Sept. 16

Nation states differ significantly as governing institutions. Some are high performers that liberate citizens and provide effective public services; others are fragile or failed states that have difficulty protecting their citizens. In many – not all – countries, there appears to be a connection between socioeconomic development and state capacity.

Readings:

1. Fragile State Index
2. Leslie Holmes, Rotten States, Chapter 5
4. Drogus & Orvis, Chapter 3

(The Wednesday section will not meet on September 18)
Every country has a history, a culture and traditions that influence its form of government and political (and other) roles and relationships. These often are expressed in terms of social values and outlooks, but they also may emerge as conflicts that are branded into a country’s memory.

**Readings:**

1. Harrison and Huntington, *Culture Matters*, Chapter 7
2. Drogus & Orvis, Chapter 4

Most of the world’s countries label themselves democratic, but as democracy has gained currency it has lost some of its rigor. In some countries, democracy is more a cover for authoritarianism. Rather than freeing up citizens and opening political processes, it has become a means of legitimizing oppression and monopolization of power. We will explore why democracy is “in”, and why and how it has been hijacked.

**Readings:**

2. Drogus & Orvis, Chapter 8
3. Teresa Wright, *Accepting Authoritarianism*, Chapter 1
4. Steven Levitsky & Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*, pp. 3-36

Whether democratic or authoritarian, every state has political machinery for selecting leaders and establishing government policies. The electoral system, including rules for voting and the conduct of elections is an important marker of the type of regime and the capacity of citizens to shape the public agenda.
Readings:

1. Drogus & Orvis, Chapter 7
3. Peter Kingstone and Timothy Power, *Democratic Brazil Revisited*, pp. 107-31

Oct. 14  
GOVERNING THE STATE
Oct. 16

All democratic regimes assign roles and authority to executive and legislative institutions, but there is great variety in arrangements, with fundamental differences between presidential and parliamentary systems.

Readings:

2. Adolino & Blake, *Comparing Public Policies*, Chapter 4
3. Drogus & Orvis, Chapter 6
4. Barbara Sinclair, Unorthodox Lawmaking, Chapter 12

Oct. 21  
MANAGING THE STATE
Oct. 23

Citizens are impacted by government mostly through their interactions with the administrative entities that deliver (or fail to deliver) public services, regulate economic and other activities and implement public policies. Many countries have introduced reforms that aim to make public bureaucracies more responsive and accessible, while improving their efficiency and performance.

Readings:

1. Peter Drucker, “The Sickness of Government”
2. Jonathan Boston, The State Under Contract, Chapter 4
3. Robert Behn, *Rethinking Democratic Accountability*, Chapter 4
Oct. 28

PUBLIC POLICIES: THE ENVIRONMENT

Oct. 30

Countries differ not only in the form of government, but also in the policies they pursue. These differences sprawl across a vast number of policy arenas, including the environment.

Readings:

1. Adolino & Blake, Chapter 11
2. Drogus & Orvis, pp. 581-97
3. Hu Angang, China in 2020, Chapter 7
4. Frank Biermann & Phillip Pattberg, Global Environmental Governance Reconsidered, Chapter 11

Nov. 4

PUBLIC POLICIES: ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICIES

Nov. 6

The first half of the session will focus on economic issues, the second on health and other social policies.

Readings:

1. Drogus & Orvis, pp. 539-80
2. Adolino & Blake, Chapters 6-9

Nov. 11

LEGITIMACY AND TRUST

Nov. 13

The concluding sections of the course will examine contemporary challenges to the dominant role of nation-states. These challenges would not be effective if governments had the trust and confidence of citizens.
Readings:

1. Eurobarometer data on trust and confidence trends in EU Countries


**Nov. 18**

**CHALLENGES TO THE STATE: MARKETS**

Nov. 20

Markets and public institutions compete and cooperate in the provision of services: both supply goods, though not in the same manner or to the same recipients.

Readings:

1. Drogus & Orvis, Chapter 5

2. Jie Chen & Bruce Dickson, *Allies of the State*, Chapter 7


**Nov. 26, 28**

(If a supermajority of students agree, we will reschedule this week’s class and enable students to get an early start on Thanksgiving)

**CHALLENGES TO THE STATE: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

Technological progress has contributed to the mobilization of state power, but information technology may be different

Readings:


Nov. 26

CHALLENGES TO THE STATE: NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The second part of the session will focus on the rise and prominence of non-governmental organizations as providers of public services, organizers of political action, and substitutes for government.

Readings:

1. Peter Gourevitch and others, The Credibility of Transnational NGOs, Chapter 8
3. Shamina Ahmed & David Potter, NGOs in International Politics, Chapter 2

Nov. 28

Dec. 2

CHALLENGES TO THE STATE: GLOBALIZATION

Dec. 4

The geographical and political limits of the state render it an inadequate institution for supplying public goods that have a global reach, or for dealing with issues that spill over national borders. In trade, environment, technology and many other corners of contemporary life, global forces seem to be more potent or better capititated than the state.

Readings:

2. Ian Goldin, Divided Nations, Chapter 1

Dec. 9

THE DECAY OF POWER

Dec. 11

Readings:

1. Moises Naim, The End of Power, Chapter 11