

POLS 5400

Comparative Institutions

Dr. Selene Campion

Spring 2025

Course and Instructor Information

Meetings + Location: Tu/Th, 12:25PM-01:45PM BU C 107

Email: selene.campion@utah.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays 2-4, GC 3227

Course Description

This course provides an in-depth exploration of political institutions across different countries and contexts. Students will analyze the structures, functions, and interactions of key institutions such as legislatures, executives, judiciaries, and bureaucracies, as well as informal institutions like patronage networks. We will also address broader institutional phenomena, including the rule of law, corruption, and democratic accountability. The course explores questions such as: How do different institutional designs impact governance outcomes? Why do some institutions thrive in promoting stability and growth while others falter? What lessons can be drawn from institutional successes and failures around the world? To answer these questions we will draw on case studies from regions including South America, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and South Asia.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the theoretical foundations of institutional design and function.
2. Compare and contrast political institutions across diverse political systems.
3. Critically evaluate case studies of institutional successes and failures.
4. Apply comparative institutional analysis to understand challenges in governance and reform.

Required Materials

- There are no required textbooks for this class. All readings will be posted on Canvas.

Course Assignments

- **Participation + Attendance:** 10%
- **Weekly Reading Quizzes:** 15%
- **Midterm:** 30% (March 6)
- **Institutional Reform Assignment:** 15% (due April 15)
- **Take-home final:** 30% (due April 30)

Course Information

Attendance and Participation Policy

Attendance is mandatory in this class and your grade will be negatively affected by more than one unexcused absence. Attendance is particularly important because we will be conducting small group work throughout the semester. If you need to miss class due to illness, family emergency, or a religious holiday, you must let me know before class and provide documentation where possible.

Students are expected to actively participate in the class. I expect you to arrive at each class having done all of the assigned readings, prepared to share and defend your opinions on them. You may be asked to contribute insights, ask questions, or provide comments that reflect your preparation. Levels of participation:

- **In class but not engaged:** If you are present but not actively participating—such as being distracted by your laptop, or otherwise disengaged—it will result in a poor participation evaluation (C-range)
- **Contributing adequately:** Being prepared and making reasonable contributions to class discussions or activities meets the expected level of participation (B-range)
- **Making high-quality contributions:** Actively and frequently engaging with thoughtful, insightful, and respectful contributions during class discussions reflects exemplary participation (A-range)

Weekly Reading Quizzes

We will have weekly reading quizzes every Tuesday at the beginning of class. Quizzes will be short, usually 2-3 questions, and are used to assess your knowledge of the week's readings. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped. If you miss a quiz due to an unexcused absence you cannot make it up.

Midterm

In-class, closed-notes midterm exam that will include topics covered from Week 1 through Week 8 of the course.

Institutional Reform Assignment

Students will work in groups to develop an institutional reform case and propose recommendations for addressing key challenges. Each group will select an institution (e.g., judiciary, legislature, or a specific government agency) in a country of their choice and critically evaluate its successes, its limitations, and proposed reform. The assignment will culminate in a presentation and a written report that outlines the historical context, the rationale for the reform, and the implementation process. Emphasis will be placed on crafting evidence-based recommendations that address the specific challenges faced by the institution under study. Topics will be assigned the week following spring break and the assignment will be due on 4/15 (presentations that week).

Final Take-Home Exam

A final take-home exam will be made available on Canvas on the last day of class 4/22 and due 4/30.

Grade Policies

All students will be graded on a 100-point scale. I will assign final letter grades based on the following scale: A: 94-100 A-: 90-93 B+: 87-89 B: 83-86 B-: 80-82 C+: 77-79 C: 73-76 C-: 70-72 D: 60-69 F: 60 or below. Late work is deducted one grade for every 12 hours that it is late (e.g., from a B+ to a B). Extensions will only be granted for justifiable reasons, and I must be notified well in advance of the due date. Last-minute extension requests will not be granted.

Academic Integrity

It is expected that students comply with University of Utah policies regarding academic honesty, including but not limited to refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, misrepresenting one's work, and/or inappropriately collaborating. This includes the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools without citation, documentation, or authorization. Students are expected to adhere to the prescribed professional and ethical standards of the profession/discipline for which they are preparing. Any student who engages in academic dishonesty or who violates the professional and ethical standards for their profession/discipline may be subject to academic sanctions as per the University of Utah's Student Code: Policy 6-410: Student Academic Performance, Academic Conduct, and Professional and Ethical Conduct.

Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punished by failure on an individual assignment, and/or failure in the course. Academic misconduct, according to the University of Utah Student Code:

“...Includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one’s work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information. . . It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct.”

For details on plagiarism and other important course conduct issues, see the U’s Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities.

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)

All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability and Access (CDA). CDA will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. Prior notice is appreciated. To read the full accommodations policy for the University of Utah, please see Section Q of the Instruction and Evaluation regulations. In compliance with ADA requirements, some students may need to record course content. Any recordings of course content are for personal use only, should not be shared, and should never be made publicly available. In addition, recordings must be destroyed at the conclusion of the course.

Center for Disability & Access

- Phone: 801-581-5020
- Website: <https://disability.utah.edu>
- Address: 65 Student Services Building, 201 S. 1460 E., Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Safety at the U

The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more safety information and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit SafeU. To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, contact: Campus Police & Department of Public Safety 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677) dps.utah.edu 1735 E. S. Campus Dr. Salt Lake City, UT 84112.

Addressing Sexual Misconduct

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with

a disability, veteran's status, or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to university officials:

Title IX Coordinator & Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action

- Phone: 801-581-8365
- Website: <https://oeo.utah.edu>
- Address: 135 Park Building, 201 Presidents' Cir., Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Office of the Dean of Students

- Phone: 801-581-7066
- Website: <https://deanofstudents.utah.edu>
- Address: 270 Union Building, 200 S. Central Campus Dr., Salt Lake City, UT 84112

To File a Police Report

Contact:

Campus Police & Department of Public Safety

- Phone: 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677)
- Website: <https://dps.utah.edu>
- Address: 1735 E. S. Campus Dr., Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Victim-Survivor Advocates

If you do not feel comfortable reporting to authorities, the U's Victim-Survivor Advocates provide free, confidential, and trauma-informed support services to students, faculty, and staff who have experienced interpersonal violence.

To privately explore options and resources available to you with an advocate, contact:

Center for Campus Wellness

- Phone: 801-581-7776
- Website: <https://wellness.utah.edu>
- Address: 350 Student Services Building, 201 S. 1460 E., Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Course Schedule

Week	Dates	Topic
Week 1	January 7, 9	Introduction to comparative institutions
Week 2	January 14, 16	Institutional design
Week 3	January 21, 23	Electoral systems and representation
Week 4	January 28, 30	Institutional change and path dependence
Week 5	February 4, 6	Institutions and corruption
Week 6	February 11, 13	Institutional failure and reform
Week 7	February 18, 20	Judicial systems and reform
Week 8	February 25, 27	Informal institutions and political outcomes
Week 9	March 4, 6	Midterm review and exam
Week 10	March 11, 14	No classes - spring break
Week 11	March 18, 20	Institutional innovations: citizens' assemblies
Week 12	March 25, 27	Institutional innovations: participatory democracy
Week 13	April 1, 3	Institutions and environmental governance
Week 14	April 8, 10	Institutions and technology
Week 15	April 15, 17	Presentations
Week 16	April 22	Course wrap-up

Weekly Readings

Week 1: Introduction to Comparative Institutions

- Levin, Yuval. *A Time to Build*. Basic Books, 2020.
- Schwikowski, Martina. "South Africa's Apartheid-Era Victims Demand Reparations." *DW*, May 1, 2024.

Week 2: Institutional Design – Presidential vs. Parliamentary Systems

Cases: Brazil (presidentialism) vs. Germany (parliamentarism)

- Cheibub, José Antonio. *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2007. pp. 33-48.
- the costs of multiparty presidentialism: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/690080>
- <https://www.cnn.com/2024/11/07/europe/germany-government-collapse-explainer-intl/index.html>
OR
- coalition government falls apart <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-coalition-government-falls-apart-how-it-happened/a-70717066>

Week 3: Electoral Systems and Representation

Case: India (FPTP) vs. Netherlands (PR)

- Norris, Pippa. (1997). "Choosing Electoral Systems: Proportional, Majoritarian and Mixed Systems." *International Political Science Review*, 18(3): 297–312.
- The Guardian. "Disproportionate UK Election Results Boost Calls to Ditch First-Past-the-Post." *The Guardian*, 8 July 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/jul/08/disproportionate-uk-election-results-boost-calls-to-ditch-first>
- belgium

Week 4: Institutional Change and Path Dependence

Case:

- Duck of Minerva. "Security Theater, Path Dependence, and Snow Globes." *Duck of Minerva*, 6 June 2023, <https://www.duckofminerva.com/2023/06/security-theater-path-dependence/>
- Acemoglu, Daron. "Why Nations Fail?" *The Pakistan Development Review*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2015, pp. 301–12.
- Listen or read transcript (7 mins): NPR. "Why are some nations richer?" *NPR*, <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1211165443>.
- ADD CASE

Week 5: Institutions and Corruption

Case: Corruption and reform

- Lessig, Lawrence. "Institutional Corruption Defined." *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2013, pp. 553–555.
- Obuah, Emmanuel E. "Combatting Corruption in Nigeria: The Nigerian Economic and Financial Crimes (EFCC)." *African Studies Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 1, Fall 2010.
- "Fighting Corruption in Public Services: Chronicling Georgia's Reforms," The World Bank, 2012.

Week 6: Institutional Failure and Reform

Case: State failure and recovery

- Mick Moore, Sheelagh Stewart, and Ann Hudock, "Institution Building as a Development Assistance Method: A Review of Literature and Ideas," No. 1, 1995, pp. 9-15.
- Katherine Casey, Rachel Glennerster, and Edward Miguel, "Healing the Wounds: Learning from Sierra Leone's Postwar Institutional Reforms," in *African Successes, Volume I: Government and Institutions*, edited by Sebastian Edwards, Simon Johnson, and David N. Weil, University of Chicago Press, 2016, pp. 15–32. Available online: <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c13387>.

- Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili, "The Collapse of Afghanistan," *Journal of Democracy*, 33(2), April 2022. Available online: <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-collapse-of-afghanistan/>.

Week 7: Judicial Systems and Reform

Case:

<https://www.npr.org/2024/09/10/g-s1-20967/mexico-judicial-reform-elect-judges-constitution-change> https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Carlos-Medel-Ramirez/publication/383822489_Analyzing_Contradictions_in_the_2024_Mexican_Judicial_Reform_Legal_Philosophical_and_Structural_Implications.pdf Jaime Olaiiz – González, "Interesting Times in Mexico: Constitutional Demise was Not on the Ballot," *ICL Journal*, vol.18, no.3, 2024, pp.385 – 392.

Week 8: Informal Institutions and Political Outcomes

Case: Clientelism in India and UK

- Stokes, Susan C.. "Political Clientelism." In Robert Goodin (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*. 2013. Oxford: Oxford Academic.
- <https://www.theigc.org/blogs/rethinking-clientelism-politics-service-delivery-rural-india>
- Peace, Timothy, and Parveen Akhtar. "Biraderi, Bloc Votes and Bradford: Investigating the Respect Party's Campaign Strategy." *British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2015, pp. 224–243. Print.

Week 9: Midterm Exam and Review

Week 10: No class – spring break

Week 11: Institutional Innovations: Citizens' Assemblies

Case: Democratic innovations WHERE

- "Citizens' Assembly." *Participedia*, <https://participedia.net/method/citizens-assembly>.
- "Putting the Public Back in Public Policy." *Noema*, <https://www.noemamag.com/putting-the-public-back-in-public-policy/>.
- ADD case

Week 12: Institutional Innovations: Participatory Budgeting

Case: Participatory budgeting in Brazil and WHERE

- "Case Study: Participatory Budgeting in Brazil." *Medium*, <https://medium.com/updating-democracy-rebooting-the-state/case-study-participatory-budgeting-in-brazil>
- Calisto Friant, Martin. "Deliberating for Sustainability: Lessons from the Porto Alegre Experiment with Participatory Budgeting." *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2019, pp. 81–99.

- ADD CASE

Week 13: Institutions and Environmental Governance

Case: The Paris Agreement and local-level climate governance in Denmark and Costa Rica

- Annalisa Savaresi (2016), "The Paris Agreement: A New Beginning?," *Journal of Energy & Natural Resources Law*, 34(1), pp. 16-26.
- UN Dispatch, "Trump Pulling Out of the Paris Agreement: Here's What Will Happen,": Available online: <https://undispatch.com/trump-pulling-paris-agreement-heres-will-happ>
- C40 Cities (2024), Local Action, Global Impact: Denmark's Climate Action Planning – DK2020. Available online: <https://www.c40.org/news/local-action-global-impact-denmark->
- "Establishing Climate Governance at a Sector Level: Costa Rica's Sectoral Agreements," Partnership on Transparency in the Paris Agreement.

Week 14: Institutions and Technology

Case: Estonia's e-governance model and China's digital authoritarianism

- Katrin Nyman Metcalf, "How to Build E-Governance in a Digital Society: The Case of Estonia," *Revista Catalana de Dret Públic (Catalan Journal of Public Law)*, 58, 2019, pp. 1-12.
- <https://e-estonia.com/>
- Alina Polyakova and Chris Meserole, "Exporting Digital Authoritarianism: The Russian and Chinese Models," Brookings Institution, 2019. Available online: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/FP_20190827_digital_authoritarianism_polyakova_meserole.pdf.

Week 15: Presentations

Student-led case analyses on institutional reform debates

Week 16: Course Wrap-up

Reflecting on lessons for institutional design and reform