

AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics

Syllabus 1

Comparative government and politics is a critical field of study for young people. The twenty-first century has taught us that we cannot ignore the world around us. Happenings around the globe now directly impact our lives, and social studies teachers and students around the country face the challenge of interpreting many puzzling international events. The AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics course focuses on government and politics in other countries and provides a theoretical framework to compare political systems around the world. It is my hope that my students grasp something of the political complexities of our global environment, and gain some understanding of both commonalities and differences among modern political systems. [C13] In today's world, we cannot afford not to know.

C13—The course teaches students to compare and contrast political institutions and processes across countries and to derive generalizations.

Course Planner

The course is taught for one full academic year, with Comparative Government taught in the fall and United States Government in the spring semester. Only about 18 weeks of instruction are available for the Comparative portion of the course.

Textbooks

Mark Kesselman, et al. *Introduction to Comparative Politics*, 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

This text takes a country studies approach and provides a comprehensive study of the political systems of the six main countries studied in the course, as well as several others.

Patrick O'Neil. *Essentials of Comparative Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004.

This text takes a theoretical approach, and is used at the beginning of the course and at the beginning of each unit.

Reader

Christian Soe, ed. *Annual Editions: Comparative Politics, 2004–2005* ed. McGraw-Hill Dushkin, 2005.

This reader provides recent articles from magazines and newspapers about both theory and specific countries.

Current articles are used throughout the course, most frequently from *The Economist* and the *New York Times*. [C16]

C16—The course includes supplemental readings, including primary source materials and contemporary news analyses, that strengthen student understanding of the curriculum.

This comparative government and politics design takes a country-by-country approach, but with a heavy emphasis on cross-country conceptual comparisons. The curriculum in the first three weeks focuses on concepts and theory, and the same theoretical framework is used to analyze each of the six countries. As the course progresses, students are required to constantly think back to countries studied previously, so that they come to understand each process, institution, and issue within the context of each country’s political system, as well as comparatively in terms of other countries’ political systems. [C13]

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Weeks 1–3: Unit I: Introduction: Conceptual Introduction to Comparative Government and Politics

- Sovereignty, Authority, and Power [C1]
- Political and Economic Change [C2]
- Citizens, Society, and the State [C3]
- Political Institutions [C4]
- Public Policy [C6]
- Nations, States, and Nation-States

C1—The course provides instruction in introducing students to comparative politics.

C2—The course provides instruction in the topics of sovereignty, authority, and power.

C3—The course provides instruction in political institutions.

The Comparative Method; Sources and Analysis of Data [C14]

Readings:

- CIA World Factbook (www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html). Look at the maps and data for each of our countries.
- Kesselman, Chapter 1, “Introducing Comparative Politics”
- O’Neill, Chapter 10, “Globalization”
- Soe: Readings from Unit 5: Comparative Politics: Some Trends, Issues, and Prospects
 - “The Global State of Democracy,” Larry Diamond
 - “Cultural Explanations: The Man in the Baghdad Café”
 - “Jihad vs. McWorld,” Benjamin Barber
 - “Women in National Parliaments,” Inter-Parliamentary Union [C5]

C4—The course provides instruction in the topics of citizens, society, and the state.

C6—The course provides instruction in public policy.

C14—The course introduces students to the analysis and interpretation of data relevant to comparative government and politics.

C5—The course provides instruction in political and economic change.

Weeks 4 –7: Unit II: Advanced Democracies: Britain [C8] and the European Union

Reading:

- O’Neil, Chapter 7, “Advanced Democracies”

C8—The course uses concrete examples and discusses contemporary political changes in studying Great Britain.

Government and Politics in Britain

Readings:

- Kesselman: Chapter 2, “Britain”
- Soe: From Unit 1: “Pluralist Democracies: Country Studies”
 - “A Constitutional Revolution in Britain,” Donley Studlar

The European Union

Readings:

- *AP Comparative Government and Politics: A Study Guide*, 2nd edition, by Ethel Wood, pp. 69–74.
- Soe: From Unit 3, Part A: “The European Union”
 - “When East Meets West,” Robert Cotrell
- Updated reading from *The Economist* and the *New York Times* regarding the EU Constitution

Weeks 8-12: Unit III: “Communist and Post-Communist Countries”

Reading:

- O’Neil, Chapter 8, “Communism and Post-Communism”

Government and Politics in Russia [C12]

Readings:

- Kesselman: Chapter 8, “Russia”
- Soe: From Unit 3, Section D: “Democracy in Russia”
 - “Ten Myths About Russia: Understanding and Dealing with Russia’s Complexity and Ambiguity,” David Foglesong and Gordon M. Hahn

C12—The course uses concrete examples and discusses contemporary political changes in studying Russia.

Government and Politics in China [C7]

Readings:

- Kesselman: Chapter 13: “China”
- Soe: Unit 4, Section D: “China”
 - “China: the Quiet Revolution,” Doug Guthrie

C7—The course uses concrete examples and discusses contemporary political changes in studying China.

Weeks 13–18: Unit IV: Developing and Less-Developed Countries

Reading:

- O’Neil, Chapter 9, “Less Developed and Newly Industrializing Countries”

Government and Politics in Mexico [C10]

Readings:

- Kesselman: Chapter 10
- Soe: “Mexico at an Impasse,” M. Delal Baer

C10—The course uses concrete examples and discusses contemporary political changes in studying Mexico.

Government and Politics in Nigeria [C11]

Readings:

- Kesselman: Chapter 11
- Current articles on Nigerian issues

C11—The course uses concrete examples and discusses contemporary political changes in studying Nigeria.

Government and Politics in Iran [C9]

Readings:

- Kesselman: Chapter 12
- Current articles on conservative shifts within the Iranian government
 - Nuclear issues

C9—The course uses concrete examples and discusses contemporary political changes in studying Iran.

Teaching Strategies

The most commonly used strategy is lecture/discussion, with ample opportunity for the latter. Because students generally don’t have as much knowledge about comparative politics as they do about politics in the United States, I assign several short research projects throughout the semester to encourage student participation. In the two days that follow the due date of papers, students discuss the issues that they researched, and classes are more interactive as a result. [C15]

C15—The course requires students to write analytical and interpretive essays frequently.

Student Evaluation

Students are evaluated in several ways:

- 1) Two Multiple-choice tests20%
- 2) Two Tests that focus on free-response questions: Concept definitions, conceptual free-response, and country-context free-response20%
- 3) Four short research papers assigned: one each on the European Union, Mexico, Iran, and Nigeria [C15]40%
- 4) Written homework assignments: questions assigned on readings.....20%

Teacher Resources

- 1) *The New York Times*
- 2) *The Economist*
- 3) “Mrs. Wood’s Classes”: Website for student use and study
<http://athena.prs.k12.nj.us/users/ewood/>
- 4) *Question Hour*: Taped sessions of the British House of Commons, as aired on C-SPAN most Sunday evenings
- 5) Ethel Wood. *AP Comparative Government and Politics*. 2nd ed. Reading, Pa: WoodYard Publications, 2005.

Research Papers

Specific Requirements for the European Union

For the paper on the European Union you may choose to write on how the EU has changed economic conditions regionally and internationally or you may choose to specialize on how a specific country has responded to the issues presented by the evolving currency and trade policies. In either case you should attempt to draw upon several sources with different perspectives. The paper should be between two and three typed pages (double spaced) with an annotated bibliography of at least four references. The paper and/or the annotated bibliography should include a critique of each source in terms of credibility and bias.

Specific Requirements for the Last Three Countries

For each of the last three countries that we study—Mexico, Iran, and Nigeria—I assign the students a brief research paper that they bring to class for the last two or three days that we discuss the country. [C15] The main purpose is to get the students involved in discussion so that they can contribute as “mini-experts” on some aspect of the country’s major issues. There is some duplication of topics, but that generally works well because students can interact with one another as they share their research. The Iran assignment is included below; the Nigeria and Mexico assignments are similar, with overlapping but different topics.

C15—The course requires students to write analytical and interpretive essays frequently.

For each of the three remaining countries, you will research and write a brief paper (a total of three papers) about one important issue that the respective governments currently face. [C15] Each paper should address these three aspects of the issue:

- 1) Explanation of why the situation may be defined as an “issue.” Include here what is problematic, and the different points of view.
- 2) Reactions that the government has had to the issue. This may be inaction, or may include specific policy remedies.
- 3) Future prospects: What is the likelihood that the issue will be resolved? Explain your answer. Discuss how the situation both impacts and is impacted by world opinion. How have media and interest groups outside the country influenced the issue’s resolution?

The paper should be between two and three typed pages (double spaced), and you should include an annotated bibliography of a minimum of four references. At least one reference should include data of a quantitative nature. The annotated bibliography should include a critique of each source in terms of credibility and bias.

Sample Research Topics for Iranian Paper

The third paper will focus on issues in Iran, and the paper will be due on Wednesday, January 18. Possible issues include:

- Political/economic corruption
- Recent elections/prospects for future elections
- Political participation of women in Iran
- Current day reformist movements
- The nuclear issue
- Connections (or lack thereof) to international terrorism
- Relationship to supranational organizations (United Nations, OPEC, WTO, others)
- Ethnic/religious conflicts
- National debt/economic instability
- Education issues (religious versus secular, role of universities)
- Religious leadership: Does a theocracy work for Iran?

You may choose other issues, but if you choose off the list, just be sure to double check your topic with me before the paper is due.