

POLS 1400 Comparative Politics

Spring 2026 at Loyola Marymount University

Basic Information: The Must Knows

Section	02
Time	08:00 AM - 09:40 AM on Tuesdays and Thursdays
Location	University Hall Room 1859
Attribute	EXP: Understanding Human Behavior
Textbook	Essentials of Comparative Politics (8th Edition, hereafter ECP)

Instructor: It's Me, Hi, I'm The Problem, It's Me.

Name	Shuyuan Shen, PhD (he/him/his, pronounced as “Shoo-youAnn Shen”)
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Office	University Hall Room 4130
Office hours	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM on Tuesdays 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM on Wednesdays or by appointment (just email me!) in person or Zoom (https://calendly.com/shuyuan_shen/office)
About me	Welcome! I am Professor Shuyuan Shen, and I am excited to be your instructor. As a political scientist specializing in Comparative Politics, Chinese Politics, and Political Communication, I am extremely passionate about this field. Let’s embark on this intellectual journey together!

Hi! It's me



Course Description: Long Story Short...

This course offers a comprehensive introduction to the study of political systems around the world through comparison. At the core of the field lies a central question: why do some countries sustain stable democracies while others descend into authoritarianism? By comparing political institutions, processes, and outcomes across diverse regions, we will explore the underlying forces that shape governance, development, and conflict in the modern era.

Through a systematic examination of both convergences and divergences in political systems, we will investigate how states build and maintain authority, how societies mobilize for change, and how power is distributed and contested within different institutional frameworks. Our analysis will span established democracies, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian states, drawing connections between domestic political dynamics and broader global trends.

By the end of the semester, you will have developed the conceptual vocabulary and analytical tools necessary to engage in rigorous, evidence-based debates about the political challenges and transformations shaping the 21st-century world.

Course Goal: To Be Comparative Politics Experts!

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- **Analyze** the primary political institutions, processes, and actors across different political systems, demonstrating a substantive knowledge of their structure and operation.
- **Evaluate** the factors that contribute to the emergence, stability, and breakdown of democracies and authoritarian regimes in diverse regional contexts.
- **Formulate** evidence-based arguments comparing the strengths and weaknesses of different political systems, drawing on historical and contemporary examples.
- **Apply** foundational research skills to independently investigate and explain a political phenomenon through a comparative lens.

Class Format: How We Learn Together

We meet twice each week, with each session designed to build on the other.

- **Tuesdays:** We'll focus on big-picture concepts, key measurements, and foundational theories. Think of this as laying down the groundwork that will help you engage more deeply with the week's topic.
- **Thursdays:** We'll zoom in on a debate or case study that puts those ideas to the test, exploring both the strengths and the limits of cutting-edge research and perspectives.

Our time together is meant to be active and collaborative. Each class will combine lecture, discussion, and small-group work. You're encouraged to bring your own questions and perspectives: the best conversations often come from the insights you and your classmates raise. Small-group discussions will give you space to wrestle with the most pressing questions of the week. Sometimes these will come from me; other times, they'll grow out of your peers' ideas. To make sure everyone has a chance to contribute, I'll also provide non-verbal ways to participate for those who feel less comfortable speaking up in front of the whole class.

Course Communication: No Such Thing As A Stupid Question

All course updates will be posted in the "Announcements" section of our Brightspace page. To make sure you don't miss anything, you must turn on email notifications for "Announcements." You can

do this by clicking the drop-down menu in the Announcements widget, selecting “Notifications,” and checking the boxes for “Announcements – new announcement available” and “Announcements – announcement updated.” That way, any updates will go straight to your inbox, and you’ll always be in the loop.

If you have questions about the course and beyond, I am here to assist you! Please never hesitate to ask for clarification on any aspect of the course. I will do my best to respond to all questions within two business days (Monday-Friday).

- **For General Questions:** If you have a question about our assignments, lectures, or readings, please post it in the “Course Related Questions” forum in our Brightspace Discussions section. This way, all of your classmates can see the answer, and we can all help each other learn.
- **For Individual Questions:** If you have a personal question about your grade or specific circumstances, please email me directly using your LMU email address. The email subject should be “[POLS1400] Your Question.”

Assessment: A Path to Deeper Understanding

Instead of just exams, our class uses a series of assignments designed to help you build your skills and engage deeply with the material. Think of these as opportunities to become a more effective critical thinker, researcher, and communicator. The rubrics for all assignments can be found at the end of the syllabus. **Unless specified differently, all writing assignments use a “Normal” margin, 1.5 spacing, and font size 12.** All assignments must be submitted through Brightspace by the stated deadline. **Late submissions will incur a penalty of 20% of the total assignment grade for each 24-hour period after the deadline.**

- **Class Attendance (10).** Showing up for class on time is one of the most important things you can do to succeed. Not only does regular attendance improve your own performance, but your presence and participation also make the learning experience better for everyone. Attendance will be recorded using a sign-in sheet during each class session. The sign-in sheet will be available for the first five minutes of class only. Students who arrive after that time will be marked absent. Excused absences are limited to illness, emergencies, or University-approved commitments. Students must email the instructor before class and submit appropriate documentation within 2 days of the absence for the absence to be considered excused, unless an extraordinary circumstance prevents timely communication or documentation. However, I understand that life happens. To account for this, each student is automatically allowed **2 unexcused absences** with no email required and no impact on your attendance grade. For each unexcused absence starting with the 3rd, the final course grade will be reduced by 2 points. A student who accumulates 8

total absences, including excused and unexcused absences, will be unable to meet the minimum course requirements and will receive a failing grade (F).

- **Weekly Quizzes (10).** Each week, you will complete a short quiz on Brightspace on the assigned readings before class. These quizzes are designed to ensure you engage with the materials in advance, giving you the background knowledge needed for deeper in-class discussion and analysis. Questions will focus on the readings' core concepts, key arguments, and illustrative examples. Two attempts are allowed for each quiz, and the ten highest quizzes will count.

Quiz Deadline: 9:00 pm on Monday before class.

- **In-Class Exams (60).** You will take two exams in class over the course of the semester (tentative schedule: Week 7 and Week 17). The exams are noncumulative, and the second in-class exam covers content after the first exam. Each exam will assess your understanding of the assigned readings, lecture material, and key concepts and theories discussed in class. Question formats may include concept matching, multiple choice, true-or-false, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer. These exams are designed to evaluate both your grasp of core material and your ability to synthesize information across topics.
- **“Comparing Political Systems” Paper & Presentation (20).** This two-part assignment invites you to apply the concepts and methods of comparative politics to real-world cases. You will choose two countries and compare them on one theme we explore in this course, such as state formation, national and ethnic identity, political economy, regime type, political institutions, political violence, globalization, etc. Write a 5-page paper (70%) that (1) accurately and clearly describes the key institutions, strategies, or political outcomes relevant to your chosen theme in each case, (2) offers a rigorous, evidence-based comparison that highlights and explains important similarities and differences between the regimes, and (3) explicitly engages with course readings, lectures, and theoretical debates to support your analysis. Your argument should move beyond description to explain how and why these patterns shape authoritarian rule and what they reveal about the nature of power, control, and political change in non-democratic systems. You'll then give the class a short, 6-minute presentation (30%) in Week 13 to showcase your findings.

“Comparing Political Systems” Paper Deadline: 9:00 pm on Friday of Week 12.

“Comparing Political Systems” Slides Deadline: 9:00 pm on Sunday of Week 12.

- **Bonus Points (2).** Yes! There are 2 bonus points! You will get 1 bonus point when you complete the syllabus quiz by Wednesday of Week 2, and 1 bonus point if you submit a meme and your meme is chosen to be shared with the class. If you find a concept or argument from the readings particularly funny, insightful, or relatable, you may create a meme about it. Submit your meme by 9:00 pm on the Monday of the week in which the concept or argument will be discussed.

Course Grade: Important, But the Learning Is the Point

The course will not be graded on a curve, and your grade is based solely on your own performance. A final grade of 60 or higher is required to pass the course. A grade below 60 will not earn you unit credit. I will round all grades upward for the final calculation (e.g., 89.01 becomes 90). If you have any questions about your standing in the course at any time or want to discuss strategies for success, please don't hesitate to reach out. I'm here to help you achieve your academic goals.

		93-100	A	90-92	A-
86-89	B+	82-85	B	80-81	B-
76-79	C+	72-75	C	70-71	C-
		60-69	D	<60	F

Reading Guideline: Read Like a Champion!

Readings should be completed prior to the class meeting time for that week. All readings come from the required textbooks or through the library. Please contact the instructor if you cannot access any of the readings. Note that the topics and readings below are subject to change by the instructor as needed. In addition to well-structured, clearly-explained textbook chapters, some readings for this class come from the most cutting-edge research in this field. It is totally legitimate to feel overwhelmed or confused about the readings assigned. Reading presentations are designed to facilitate the comprehension of the readings. In addition, instead of trying to understand every single word or the technical details of the analyses, students should try to grasp the main components of the readings. More specifically, you can focus on the following questions in your reading process:

1. What is the main question(s) the author tries to answer in this article?
2. Why is this question important to answer?
3. What are some existing answers to the question?
4. What is the author's answer to this question, and how is it different from existing ones?
5. Does the author provide any empirical evidence to support their claim? What data and methods does the author use in the empirical analysis?
6. What are the findings from the empirical analysis?
7. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the theoretical and empirical arguments?
8. What are some future research directions based on this article?

Course Schedule: The Journey Ahead

Week 1 (Jan 13/15): What is Comparative Politics?

1. Course Syllabus
2. ECP Chapter 1 Introduction

Week 2 (Jan 20/22): States Formation – Why do States Emerge?

1. ECP Chapter 2 States

Week 3 (Jan 27/29): Market and Economy – Do We Really Need States?

1. ECP Chapter 4 Political Economy

Week 4 (Feb 3/5): Nations and National Identities – “Make XXX Great Again!”

1. ECP Chapter 3 Nations and Society

Week 5 (Feb 10/12): Regime and Regime Change – Secret Missions...

1. ECP Chapter 5 Democratic Regimes

Week 6 (Feb 17/19): Democratic Institutions – “Get out the Vote!”

1. ECP Chapter 5 Democratic Regimes

Week 7 (Feb 24/26): Review and First In-Class Exam

1. Feb 24: Review Session
2. Feb 26: First In-Class Exam

Week 8: NO CLASS – Spring Break

Week 9 (Mar 10/12): Developed Democracies and Democratic Backsliding – Are We Doomed?

1. ECP Chapter 8 Developed Democracies

Week 10 (Mar 17/19): Nondemocratic Regimes – Terror and Blood?

1. ECP Chapter 6 Nondemocratic Regimes

Week 11 (Mar 24/26): Political Violence – Why Violence?

1. ECP Chapter 7 Political Violence

Week 12 NO CLASS – Cesar Chavez Day + Easter Holiday

Week 13 (Apr 7/9): Comparing Political Systems Presentations (No Readings)

1. Apr 7: Student Presentation Session I
2. Apr 9: Student Presentation Session II

Week 14 (Apr 14/16): Communism and Populism – “We the People!”

1. ECP Chapter 9 Communism and Postcommunism

Week 15 (Apr 21): Immigration and Gender – The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion

1. Dancygier, Rafaela. 2024. “The Future of Multiracial Democracy: Liberal Democracy in an Age of Immigration.” *Journal of Democracy* 35(4): 63-77.
https://lmu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01LMU_INST/11j5oou/cdi_crossref_primary_10_13_53_jod_2024_a937734
2. Bjarnegård, Elin, and Pär Zetterberg. 2022. “How Autocrats Weaponize Women’s Rights.” *Journal of Democracy* 33(2): 60-75.
https://lmu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01LMU_INST/11j5oou/cdi_webofscience_primary_000819939400005
3. Apr 23: **NO CLASS** – Please work on the Study Guide and prepare for the review session.

Week 16 (Apr 28/30): Review and Exam

1. Apr 28: Review session
2. Apr 30: Second in-class exam.

Week 17 (May 5):

1. May 5: **NO CLASS** – Please fill out the course evaluation form.

Additional Policies: The Fine Print You Actually Have to Read :)

Workload Expectation: This is a 4-credit course, which means you should anticipate dedicating approximately 12 hours per week to class-related work, including time spent in class. On average, this breaks down to about 3.5 hours in class and 8.5 hours of independent work outside of class, such as completing readings and assignments. Please plan your schedule accordingly to give yourself the time and space needed to do your best work.

Use of Electronic Devices in Class: Electronic devices are allowed but not encouraged in our classroom as tools for taking notes, accessing readings, and engaging with course materials. Their use should be limited to class-related activities to avoid distracting both yourself and your classmates. Please be mindful that using devices for non-course tasks can significantly impact your and your classmates' learning experience and the quality of our class discussions. Students who are found using electronic devices for non-course-related purposes during class will lose the privilege of using such devices.

AI Policy: In this course, students are encouraged to use AI tools as supplemental resources for understanding course concepts, reviewing material, and supporting their learning. However, **the use of AI is prohibited for assignments** unless explicitly authorized by the instructor. Your assignments are designed to help you develop your own critical thinking and writing skills. All submitted assignments must be an authentic representation of your own effort and understanding. Using AI to complete work you have not done yourself is a form of academic dishonesty and will be treated accordingly. When in doubt, it is always best to ask for clarification on the expectations for a specific assignment.

Academic Honesty: As LMU Lions, we are part of a community that values honest, high-quality work. Academic honesty is a commitment we all share to respect our own ideas and the intellectual work of others. Academic honesty requires that all members of the LMU community act with integrity, respect their own intellectual and creative work as well as that of others, acknowledge sources consistently and completely, act honestly during exams and on assignments, and report results accurately. This is about more than just following rules; it's about joining a scholarly conversation with honesty and integrity. Academic dishonesty will be treated as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences that can range from receiving no credit for assignments/tests to expulsion. Details of the "Academic Honesty Policy" found at: <https://lmu.app.box.com/s/vo7dhds2588xvvh9yynyi3d1r8cvhfpf>

Use of Turnitin: All written assignments will be submitted through Turnitin, a plagiarism-prevention tool. Turnitin checks your work against a large database of sources (books, articles, websites, and student papers) to identify overlap. The purpose of using Turnitin in this class is not just to detect

plagiarism; it's to help you strengthen your writing and citation skills. You may see a "similarity report" after submission, which shows what parts of your paper match existing sources. A certain amount of matching text is normal (for example, quotations and properly cited material). What matters most is that you put ideas into your own words and cite sources correctly. If you're ever unsure about how to paraphrase or cite, please ask. I'm here to help!

LMU Support Resources: College life can bring a variety of challenges, academic, personal, emotional, or otherwise, that may sometimes feel overwhelming. Please know that you are not alone, and LMU offers a wide range of resources to support your academic goals, career development, mental and physical well-being, sense of purpose, and campus connections. A comprehensive list of services is available at <https://studentaffairs.lmu.edu/lionwellness/>. If you're navigating a difficult time or unsure where to turn, you are always welcome to talk with me. I'm happy to help connect you with resources and support you however I can within my role.

Confidentiality: I'm here to support you, and you're always welcome to talk with me. In most cases, what you share will remain private. If you'd like me to share something on your behalf, we'll discuss it together and make a plan. That said, there are some situations where I'm required to break confidentiality. If you tell me about an experience involving sexual or interpersonal violence, or if I have reason to believe you or someone else may be in danger, I'm obligated to report that information to ensure everyone's safety. I'll do my best to be transparent with you about that process if it becomes necessary.

Special Accommodations: The DSS Office offers resources to enable students with physical, learning, ADD/ADHD, psychiatric disabilities and those on the autism spectrum to achieve maximum independence while pursuing their educational goals. Staff specialists interact with all areas of the University to eliminate physical and attitudinal barriers. Students must provide documentation for their disability from an appropriate licensed professional. Services are offered to students who have established disabilities under state and federal laws. We also advise students, faculty and staff regarding disability issues. Students who need reasonable modifications, special assistance, academic accommodations or housing accommodations should direct their request to the DSS Office as soon as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. The DSS Office is located on the 2nd floor of Daum Hall and may be reached by email at dsslmu@lmu.edu or phone at (310) 338-4216. Please visit <http://www.lmu.edu/dss> for additional information.

Tentative Nature of the Syllabus: This syllabus and its contents are subject to revision; students are responsible for any changes or modifications announced or distributed in class or posted on LMU's course management system. Students should be notified of any syllabus revisions in the same manner(s) that the original syllabus was distributed (for example, distributed in class and/or posted on the course management system) and via all typical class communication channels.

Assignment Rubrics: The Grading Constitution

“Comparing Political Systems” Paper

Component	Points	Evaluation Criteria
I. Comparison of Authoritarian Systems	40	You accurately and clearly describe the relevant political institutions, processes, or outcomes in your two chosen autocracies. The paper provides a thoughtful and effective comparison, highlighting key similarities and differences on the selected theme.
II. Depth of Argument	30	You present a compelling, well-reasoned analysis of the significance of your findings. Your argument demonstrates critical thinking about why the similarities and differences matter, supported by concrete evidence.
III. Integration of Materials	20	You make clear and specific references to readings, lectures, and discussions from the course as well as materials outside of the course to support your comparison. This shows your ability to connect your research to broader concepts in comparative politics.
IV. Writing Clarity and Quality	10	Your paper is well-organized, clearly written, and free of grammatical errors, adhering to the length and formatting requirements.

“Comparing Political Systems” Presentation

Component	Points	Evaluation Criteria
I. Content & Argument	50	Your presentation effectively summarizes the main findings and core argument of your paper. You clearly articulate the comparison of political systems and the justification for your preference.
II. Clarity & Delivery	30	Your presentation is delivered clearly and professionally. You speak at a good pace, make eye contact, and engage the audience. Any visual aids (e.g., slides) are well-designed and enhance your presentation. No notes or cards are used during the presentation.
III. Timing	20	Your presentation adheres to the six-minute time limit.