Introduction to Comparative Politics: Writing Intensive
Democracy and Its Challenges
Political Science 21:790:203, Fall 2019

Instructor: Dr. Janice Gallagher
Tel: (973) 353-5126
Email: janice.gallagher@rutgers.edu

Time: Tues. 2:30-5:20
Location: Hill Hall 210
21:790:203:Q1

TA: Anthony Ghaly
Email: amg481@rutgers.edu

Office Hours: Monday, 11:30 – 1:00 pm or by appointment (Hill Hall, Room 722)
Class website: Blackboard

Course Description
- How do we know when democracy is under attack?
- What are some of the most vital issues facing democracy today, and what are the approaches different countries have taken to solving them?
- What can experiences in the rest of the world teach us about the United States today?

This course will answer these questions, and along the way introduce students to the study of Comparative Politics. What is comparative politics?

- Comparative Politics is one of the four subfields of Political Science, along with International Relations, Political Theory and American Politics. It has often been thought of as the study of the internal politics of countries outside of the United States. More recently, the United States has also been included as well.

- Comparative Politics is also “an approach to studying political behavior that focuses on comparing the impact of different features of government, society, and economy to allow us to make generalizations about how the political world operates.” We want to know how things like the system of government, political parties, and the presence of social movements matter for the lives of a country’s citizens.

- Comparative Politics seeks to come up with generalizable causal explanations for political outcomes. In other words, by studying political events in different countries, we hope to be able to answer questions like: What causes civil war? Can we predict genocide? How does inequality influence who wins the presidency?

Learning Goals:
In this course we will ask questions about key issues that the United States faces today, and seek to learn from and about other countries’ experiences. My goal is that students leave this course accustomed to asking good questions about politics, and answering these questions critically using evidence, constructing arguments, and unafraid to learn from other countries’ experiences.
During the first part of the semester we will focus on the experience of other countries with democratic backslide. We will ask what defines a democracy, explore whether the US is in a “democratic backslide,” and ask what we can learn from 4 other cases of democratic backsliding.

In the second half of the class, we will seek to answer some of the most pressing questions for the US and other democracies, and to answer them through analyzing what other countries’ experience have been and assessing how relevant their experiences are for the US.

For each of the countries & cases we study, we will cover the following aspects of their politics:

| Current Political Moment: Who is in power? What are their key positions, and are they left or right on the political spectrum? Who supports this leader? Who opposes them? | System of Government: Democracy vs. Authoritarian; Presidential vs. Parliamentary | Party System: How many parties? Represent programmatic differences? | Social Movements: What are the major social movements? What have been the most important causes they have advocated for? |

We will also discuss their income level, inequality (Gini coefficient), Population, Other relevant information, and address whether they are more similar or different than the United States.

**Expectations**
Absences for legitimate reasons (ie illness, family emergency, religious holiday, etc.) will be excused; if the absence is foreseeable, please notify me by email in advance.

Tardiness is disruptive to the entire class; please arrive on time.

*Participation:* This is a relatively small class, and I expect each student to be actively engaged. Class participation accounts for 25% of your overall course grade. It is important to remember, however, that quality is to be preferred over quantity; insightful comments and thoughtful questions that further class discussion are the goal here. If you are shy or have problems speaking up in class, please feel free to come see me in my office hours to discuss how to be successful in this aspect of the course.

*** We live in a time in which differences of opinion often lead to personal attacks: we will not do this in this class. I am committed to respecting each student’s opinion and encouraging you to reflect on your previously held opinions and beliefs. I ask from each of you:

1) To be open to new perspectives to the extent you are able;
2) To think through how your comments might affect other students in class.

As a baseline, of course, do not employ discriminatory or offensive language in this class.

*Technology:* Using your phones or computers to engage with class material is of course ok! Texting/non-class related activities aren’t (please speak to me if there is an emergency which
Being Prepared and Present: Bring the assigned readings to class at all times and, whenever necessary, drafts of your writing. To do well in the course you need to do the readings, listen to the podcasts, and view the documentaries.

### Course Requirements and Grading Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>% of grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation / Attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 1: Is Democracy Under Attack?</td>
<td>2 pages</td>
<td>Saturday, Sept 7th on Blackboard&lt;br&gt;Sept 17th Revision</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Part 1: 3 Ideas Assignment</td>
<td>3-5 pages</td>
<td>Sept 24th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part 2: 1 Country/Issue: Background</td>
<td>8-10 pages</td>
<td>Nov. 5th, Nov. 12th Revision</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper Presentations</td>
<td>PowerPoint</td>
<td>12/3 &amp; 12/10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applied Learning Reflections</td>
<td>2 pages each</td>
<td>Self-Scheduled; due 3 days after event</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Exams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm: DEMOCRATIC ROLLBACK</td>
<td>5-7 pages</td>
<td>Oct 22nd</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final: PRESSING ISSUES</td>
<td>5-7 pages</td>
<td>Dec 20th</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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As a course focused on developing writing skills, reading assignments will be kept under 75 pages per week. Students are expected to come to class prepared, having done the required reading and completed all assigned writing tasks.

All readings will be posted to blackboard – there is no assigned textbook for this class.
There are three types of writing assignments in this course:

**Final Project: This has 3 parts**

1) **Part 1: Three Ideas for Final Project: 3-5 pages**
   This assignment asks you to identify three countries with an associated issue that is of interest to you, and which you think is especially instructive for the United States.

   The issue can be:
   - Democratic rollback
   - Any of the issues covered in the second half of the course: Immigration, Policing and Incarceration; Drug Prohibition; Internet & Freedom of Speech; Climate Change; Taxation; Human Rights Violations
   - With permission of the instructor, another key world issue which has important lessons for the US (I prefer a democracy here; but am open to non-democracies as well).

   For each of the three countries you select, you will briefly summarize 2-3 scholarly articles about the country in approximately 2-3 paragraphs. This summary should also include the relevant information pertaining to the issue that interests you in each country. Such information might include (among other things): What are the signs of democratic rollback? How is the country confronting the relevant issues? What are the challenges and what are the successes? What are the positions of political parties and social movements regarding the issue at hand? You will later be selecting one of these three countries to analyze more closely.

2) **Part 2: 1 Country/Issue: Background: 8-10 Pages**
   In this paper, you will choose one of the countries and issues you wrote about in Part 1, and focus on assembling factual information about that country (see top of Page 2 of syllabus)

   The Central Question you should be answering is: What are the important contextual political factors that need to be understood in order to analyze: what caused democratic rollback? How and why the country is addressing a pressing issue?

3) **Final Paper & Works in Progress (WIP) Presentation:**
   **Comparative Analysis: Your case + US: 12-15 Pages**
   Building on Part 2, present your case/country, and draw out is lessons for the United States.
   - Use the comparative case methodology: is your case most similar or different from the United States? Why?
   - Given this, what should the United States learn from your selected case?

   This paper will need to include ONLY the KEY information about the United States which is relevant to this comparison. Your WIP presentation will be your opportunity to present your work to your classmates. You will prepare a Powerpoint presentation.

**Applied Learning Reflections: 2 during the semester**
Attend an event which addresses any of the course’s 3 central questions; any of the countries we are studying; or any of the Issues we are studying in the second half of the course.

- **How do we know when democracy is under attack?**
- **What are some of the most vital issues facing democracy today, and what are the approaches different countries have taken to solving them?**
- **What can experiences in the rest of the world teach us about the United States today?**

- **Choose something that interests you!!** And stay for at least 1.5 hours.
- **You must talk with at least 4 people who are participating in the event OR you must arrange to speak with an event organizer for at least 15 minutes.**
  - For participants: Ask them questions about why they are there; what they understand the event is for.
  - For organizers: Ask them why they thought organizing the event was important, and engage them in a discussion of what can be learned from understanding this issue.
  - Complete a 2 page written response

**Take-Home Exams: Midterm/Final: 5-7 Pages**

The midterm and final papers will be your opportunity to summarize what you have learned from our in-class discussions and from the reading. Here is a draft of the exam questions:

**Midterm Exam: DEMOCRATIC ROLLBACK**

What is democratic rollback? Is the US experiencing this? What characterizes the democratic rollback in other countries we studied? How does the US compare to these cases, and what do they suggest in terms of how political institutions, political parties, social movements, and economic factors can lead to democratic breakdown?

**Final Exam: PRESSING ISSUES**

What are 3-4 of the most pressing issues facing democracies, and what can the US learn from looking at how other countries are facing these issues?

**Writing and formatting.** All assignments should be double-spaced, one-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman. You must provide citations (footnotes or parenthetical) in the text, accompanied by a full bibliography. Please refer to the APA Style in the Rutgers Libraries citation guide ([http://libguides.rutgers.edu/writing/citations#s-lg-box-wraper-8116779](http://libguides.rutgers.edu/writing/citations#s-lg-box-wraper-8116779)). The clarity of your writing matters greatly. Please copy-edit all work. For writing assistance, contact Rutgers Newark’s Writing Center: [http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/writingcenter](http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/writingcenter)
• **Academic Integrity:** As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University’s educational and research missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community. The entire Academic Integrity Policy can be found here: [http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/)

Accommodation and Support
Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

- **Students with Disabilities:** Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter barriers due to disability. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact ODS, register, have an initial appointment, and provide documentation. Once a student has completed the ODS process (registration, initial appointment, and documentation submitted) and reasonable accommodations are determined to be necessary and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be provided to the student. The student must give the LOA to each course instructor, followed by a discussion with the instructor. This should be completed as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [ods.rutgers.edu](http://ods.rutgers.edu). Contact ODS: (973) 353-5375 or ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

- **Religious Holiday Policy and Accommodations:** Students are advised to provide timely notification to instructors about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule. The Division of Student Affairs is available to verify absences for religious observance, as needed: (973) 353-5063 or DeanofStudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

- **Counseling Services:** Counseling Center Room 101, Blumenthal Hall, (973) 353-5805 or [http://counseling.newark.rutgers.edu/](http://counseling.newark.rutgers.edu/).

- **Students with Temporary Conditions/Injuries:** Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury that is adversely affecting their ability to fully participate in their courses should submit a request for assistance at: [https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu](https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu).

- **Students Who are Pregnant:** The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist students with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy: (973) 353-1906 or [TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu](mailto:TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu).
• **Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment:** Students experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking, should know that help and support are available. To report an incident, contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance: (973) 353-1906 or TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. To submit an incident report: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm. To speak with a staff member who is confidential and does NOT have a reporting responsibility, contact the Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance: (973) 353-1918 or run.vpva@rutgers.edu.

☐ **Learning Resources:**

• Rutgers Learning Center (tutoring services)
  Room 140, Bradley Hall
  (973) 353-5608
  https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/learning-center

• Writing Center (tutoring and writing workshops)
  Room 126, Conklin Hall
  (973) 353-5847
  nwc@rutgers.edu
  https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/writing-center

*Public Domain: All work produced in this class may be read by your peers and instructor.*
Course Schedule

Introduction
Tuesday, 9/3/19
Introduction to the goals of the course and your colleagues. Preview of final project.

Essay # 1: Is American democracy is being rolled back? If so, what can citizens do about it? If not – what do you think all the hype is about?

Refer to and cite the required 2 articles listed below.


Due: Saturday, Sept 7th at 10:00 AM

Paper 1: Democracy Getting Weaker? If so, why? And why does it matter?

Week 1: What is Democracy Anyway? And how do we study it?
Tuesday, 9/10/19


Optional Reading:
Week 2: Comparative Politics and Weimar Germany  
_Tues, 9/17/19_

**PAPER 1 REVISION DUE**

  - Ch1: Asking Why Research Questions in Comparative Politics
  - Optional: Postscript: How and What to Compare


**Optional Reading:**


Week 3: Democratic Backslide 1: Venezuela  
_Tues, 9/24/19_

**PART 1: 3 IDEAS FOR FINAL PAPER DUE**

**What has the democratic backslide in Venezuela consisted of? And why did it happen?**

- _If we look at Venezuela compared to the US, do we see similar sings of democratic backslide?_

**Writing Instruction: Using and Citing Evidence**


Optional Reading:


Week 4: Democratic Backslide: Turkey
Tues, 10/1/19

Turkey’s President has turned on academia and other sectors. Why has he done this? And what does it mean for democracy in Turkey?


Optional Reading:


**Week 5: Democratic Backslide 2: Brazil**  
*Tues, 10/8/19*


*Optional Reading:*


**Week 6: Democratic Backslide 3: Hungary**

**Tues, 10/15/19**


**Optional Reading:**

**Week 7: Democratic Backslide 4: Egypt**  
**Tues, 10/22/19**

MIDTERM DUE: DEMOCRATIC ROLLBACK


**Optional Reading:**


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**Part II: Pressing World Issues: What critical issues are states confronting in 2018?**

**Week 8: Drug Prohibition**  
**Tues, 10/29/19**

What happens when countries decriminalize drugs? What do we think about drug decriminalization in the US?

Cases: Uruguay; United States


Optional Reading:


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**Week 9: Incarceration**

*Tues, 11/5/19*

**PART 2: COUNTRY/ISSUE BACKGROUND DUE, BRING TWO COPIES**

*What have other countries done about problems with the police? Have they been able to address systemic racism and human rights abuses both within the police and within their prison systems?*

**Comparative Cases: Norway/Scandinavia**


**Week 10: Incarceration Continued**  
**Tues, 11/12/19**  
**PART 2: REVISION DUE**

• AJ+. (2016, June 8). How our criminal justice system targets communities. *AJ+.* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZZmMrFQzVs

• Breaking the Cycle. (2017). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAaR0TfNxPE


**Week 11: Internet & Free Speech**  
**Tues, 11/19/19**

*How is the internet affecting democracy and in particular free speech? How is it being regulated and controlled?*
**Week 12:** How are other countries dealing with Climate Change? What can the US learn about how other countries are confronting climate change?

*Tues, 11/26/19*

*Possible cases: Germany, South Pacific*


**Week 13:** *Class Presentations*

*Tues, 12/3/19*

**PART 3: FINAL PAPER DUE**


**Week 14:** In Conclusion….What’s next for the US? Drawing lessons from international context?

*Tues, 12/10/19*

*First Half of Class: Class presentations continued.*
Second Half: Discussion, Reflection, Evaluation.

FRIDAY DECEMBER 13TH: FINAL PAPER REVISION DUE (Blackboard)

FRIDAY DECEMBER 20TH: FINAL EXAM DUE (Blackboard)