**17.50: Introduction to Comparative Politics**  
**Thursday and Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.**  
**Building 2, Room 142**

**Instructors**
Professor Chappell Lawson  
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**Why you should take this class**
This class will teach you about politics around the world, focusing on subjects like democracy, the political roots of economic development, and how America’s political system compares to that of other countries. If you are interested in political science as a concentration, this class will prepare you for more advanced subjects. If you just want to understand what is going on in the world, this class will provide you with useful theoretical frameworks, as well as factual background on some of the most important countries in the world.

**What this class is about**
This class first offers some basic analytical frameworks -- culture, social structure, and institutions -- that you can use examine a wide range of political outcomes. We then use these frameworks to understand (1) the relationship between democracy and economic development and (2) the relative centralization of political authority across countries. We will use theoretical arguments and a wide range of case studies to address several questions: Why are some countries democratic and others not? How does democracy affect economic development and political conflict? Why do some countries centralize power while others threaten to fall apart through secession and civil war? We will use examples from a wide range of countries including Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Mexico, and the United States. The lessons drawn from these countries will prepare you to analyze other countries of your own choosing in the paper assignments. At the end of the course, you should be able to analyze political events around the world, drawing on the theoretical explanations provided in the class.

**Readings**
Readings total approximately 85 pages per week and should take you about three hours, depending on how fast you read. The only book required for the class is Robert Putnam’s *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. All other readings can be found in your course reader. Both the reader and Putnam’s book will be available on reserve in Dewey Library (Building E53, first floor).
Requirements

Class participation
You are expected to participate actively and intelligently in class discussions. As a rule of thumb, you should plan to spend about an hour going over your notes from the readings and preparing for class each week after you have completed the readings. If you must miss a class, please notify the instructors in advance. More than two unexcused absences or unprepared sessions will jeopardize your class participation grade.

Class debates and presentation
There will be two in-class debates over the course of the semester. All students are expected to participate in all debates. You also will also be expected to present the results of your research paper.

Final exam
There will be an ex-camera final exam on some aspect of Iraq, which will draw on issues we have covered during the semester. For instance, you may be asked to assess the desirability of certain institutional arrangements in Iraq (e.g., federalism). Alternatively, you may be asked to address

Papers
You will write one longer (12-page) paper, involving independent research on a topic approved by the instructors, and present that paper in class. This paper may cover one of the cases we explore in substantially greater detail (e.g., Iraq), or it may address another topic. Papers cannot be rewritten for a higher grade, though we would be happy to read drafts ahead of time.

The short (4-page) essay due September 25 is intended to be a summary of course concepts to date.

Assignments and Grading
- Class participation (including debates): 25%
- Short paper (four pages): 10%
- Longer research paper (12 pages): 20%
- Presentation of research paper: 10%
- After revisions, a second draft of research paper: 10%
- A written ex camera final exam will be given during exam period: 25%
Sept. 4: *Introduction and review of syllabus* (Lawson and Rodden)

**I. Approaches to Comparative Politics**

Sept. 5: *What is the state and why have one?* (Rodden and Lawson)

- Class assignment: Find pictures of the Doge’s Palace in Venice and read about it on-line

*What is democracy and why have one?* (Lawson and Rodden)


Sept. 11: *Cleavages, preferences, and identities* (Rodden and Lawson)


Sept 12: *Culture and beliefs* (Rodden and Lawson)

- Harry Eckstein, “A Cultural Approach to Political Change.” [*Adam: could you find this article?*]
Sept. 18: Institutions I: Presidentialism, parliamentarism, and the U.S. in comparative perspective (Rodden)


Sept. 19: Institutions 2: Proportional versus majoritarian electoral rules (Rodden)


Sept. 25: Institutions 3: Federalism and decentralization (Rodden)


[SHORT ESSAY DUE SEPT. 25]

II. Processes

Sept. 26: Transitions to democracy (Lawson)


Oct 2: Does economic growth cause democracy? Modernization Theory (Lawson)


Oct. 3: *Or does democracy cause economic growth? (Rodden)*


Oct. 9 & 10: *Democracy, macroeconomic crisis and reform in Latin America* (Rodden and Lawson)

*Background:*


*Brazil*


*Argentina*

- Collection of newspaper articles (to be handed out in class).
Oct. 16 & 17: *Why does democracy break down? Weimar Germany* (Lawson and Rodden)


[CLASS DEBATE ON OCTOBER 17]

III. Student Presentations

[PAPERS DUE OCTOBER 23]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Paper Presentations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 23</td>
<td>Paper Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 24</td>
<td>Paper Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 30</td>
<td>Paper Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 31</td>
<td>Paper Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 6</td>
<td>Paper Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 7</td>
<td>Paper Presentations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. Comparative Case Studies

Nov. 13 & 14 *Corruption in Mexico* (Lawson)


Nov. 20 & 21: *Economic development and democracy in Italy: History, social capital and institutions* (Lawson and Rodden)


Nov. 27 & 28: Thanksgiving break

Dec. 4 & 5: *Will Iraq become a democracy?* (Lawson)

- Chappell Lawson and Strom Thacker, “Will Iraq Become a Democracy,” (To be handed out in class.)
- Class assignment: Independent research on Iraq