

# STV 1300 Introduction to Comparative Politics

## Course content

This course provides an introduction to the field of comparative politics, one of the major sub-disciplines of political science. As comparative political scientists, we will spend the course trying to conceptualize and explain variation in the fundamental building blocks of political life. The course has three main goals: 1) to introduce you to the major theories and questions in comparative politics, 2) to present you with the empirical answers to those questions, and 3) to give you tools to reflect critically on these answers.

*Et mer detaljert og formelt tekst-alternativ til det som er gullet ut:* Comparative politics is the study of political phenomena that occur primarily within states and other political systems. It focuses on internal political structures, actors and processes, and analyze them empirically by describing, explaining and predicting their variety across systems – be they national, regional, local, or even supra-national. The course has three major goals: 1) to introduce you to the major theories and questions in comparative politics, 2) to present you with the empirical answers to these questions and 3) to give you tools to reflect critically on these answers. This introductory course focuses on the national level of politics and will present you with competing theories and evidence from recent original research.

The course is organized thematically and covers the following topics:

- The sub-discipline as such and its historical context
- The concept and types of political regimes
- Transitions between dictatorship and democracy
- Political institutions in democratic political systems
- Voters, parties and interest groups
- Social movement and collective protest
- Revolutions and civil war
- Policy outputs and feedbacks

Examples of questions the course addresses are:

- What is “democracy” and how do we measure it?
- Why are some countries democratic whereas others are authoritarian?
- How do governments form and how does their composition differ?
- How do interest groups organize and try to exert political influence?
- When do ordinary citizens turn to protest and political violence?
- How do elections and resulting governments shape public policy?

## Learning Outcome

### Knowledge

Students will:

- Become acquainted with key questions, concepts and theories from comparative politics.
- Learn what the major differences between different regime types and forms of government are, and how such differences matter.
- Acquire basic knowledge about how and why institutions and actors in democratic political systems around the world differ and change, and with what consequences.

## **Skills**

Students will:

- Get a coherent understanding of national political systems
- Be able to compare different elements of political systems across countries
- Be able to describe and explain the rise and variation in different regime types, forms of government and political institutions.
- Be able to describe and explain variation in different forms of participation and organized collective political action.
- Be able to assess the various effects of such differences within and across countries.

## **Competences**

Students will be trained in:

- Using their general analytical skills
- Synthesizing and comparing theoretical arguments
- Critical evaluation of empirical evidence
- Application of conceptual and theoretical knowledge on empirical cases
- Discussing analytical questions based on multiple sources
- Discussing key questions of comparative politics with fellow students

## **Teaching**

There are no mandatory activities, but students are encouraged to take part in everything offered. Participation will all facilitate learning and prepare students for the exams:

- Thirteen (digital) lectures
- Help to organize (digital) colloquiums, with a list of study questions
- Guidance on how to write reading memos
- Online test questions for assessment of progress (multiple choice)
- Student resources associated with textbooks

## **Examination**

- Four hours written exam in Inspira

## **Language**

English. The exam will be given in English, but students may write in Norwegian, Swedish, Danish or English.

## **Attachment: Tentative list of main parts and lecture topics**

### **In sum: 13 lectures**

### **Part I: What is comparative politics? (ONE LECTURE, ALL?)**

- What is politics?
- What is science?
- What is a state?
- The structure of the course

**Part 2: Democracy and dictatorship (TWO LECTURES, SK)**

- Democracy and dictatorship
- Waves of democratization
- Causes of democratization

**Part 3: Political institutions (in democracies) (THREE LECTURES, EHA)**

- Parliamentary vs. presidential systems
- Legislatures
- Governments
- Institutional veto players
- Electoral systems and referendums

**Part 4: Institutional political actors and processes (TWO LECTURES, EHA)**

- Voting behaviour (incl. cleavages)
- Political parties and party systems
- Interest groups and lobbyism
- Political communication (incl. mass media)

**Part 5 Non-institutional political actors and processes (THREE LECTURES, NK)**

- Social movements and collective protest
- Revolutions
- Civil Wars

**Part 6 Policy outputs and feedbacks (TWO LECTURES, SK)**

- Policy outputs and the welfare state
- Effects of regimes, parties and governments on policy outputs
- Policy “feedback” effects on voters