This course is designed to help students develop an appreciation of what it takes to generate high-quality research and writing in a particular area of comparative politics: the politics of representative government in advanced industrialized democracies. To facilitate this, we will read and discuss published work in four categories, beginning with voters and their preferences, then moving to electoral systems and their effects, legislatures and how they function, and factors influencing governance. These categories represent just a sample of topics that have received sustained attention by comparative politics scholars and are by no means exhaustive. Nor are they mutually exclusive: one of the goals of the course is to encourage students to consider how conclusions drawn in one area of research might influence the questions asked and answers offered in another.

Within each of these four categories, we will read a mix of work that has had a large impact on the field or can be considered at the frontier. Again, time constraints prevent us from reading all or even most of the work that can be said to fall into these categories. However, the main objective of the course is not to memorize the substantive conclusions emanating from this work but to better understand the processes through which the authors drew their conclusions. By reading and critiquing a sample of high-quality work in these four broad categories, the course aims to equip students with the foundational knowledge and analytical skills required to come up with their own research questions, craft their own contributions, implement their own cutting-edge empirical analysis, and ultimately produce papers publishable in top comparative politics journals.

To this end, three required readings have been assigned each week. Students are expected to read these articles carefully ahead of time and come to class prepared to discuss them. More information about what is required of students during class is described below. In addition, an integral part of the course is the Field Lunch in Comparative Politics, which will meet at 12.30 pm on most of the same days that the class meets. The Lunch will feature a research presentation by a scholar of comparative politics. Please consult the syllabus for the schedule of Speakers, who vary in terms of career stage and hail from both NYU and other universities. You are also expected to attend these Field Lunches, read the Speaker’s paper ahead of time, serve as Discussant for one of these presentations, and contribute to the discussion each week. Every effort has been made to integrate the research presentations into the subjects covered in class that week. Class will meet right after the Lunch, from 2-4pm.

Instructors:

Michael Laver

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Course Requirements:

1. Participation (20%)
   
   Your participation is an integral part of this course. You are expected to come to the Field Lunch having already read the paper, which will be posted on the course website approximately a week ahead of time. You are also expected to come to class each week having read the required readings ahead of time, which will also be posted on the course website. During both the Lunch and the class, you are expected to contribute to the discussion in a way that demonstrates you have read the material and given serious thought to it. In addition, you will serve as Discussant for one of the research presentations. In the weeks in which you have written a referee report on one of the readings, you are also expected to prepare a brief presentation (of no more than 15 minutes) with slides on that reading in class. If you must miss a session for illness or another legitimate reason, please inform us ahead of time. We may ask you to submit a page of written notes on the assigned material for that week.

2. Three Referee Reports (30%)
   
   The second requirement of this course are the three referee reports you are expected to write, each pertaining to a reading in a different week. You will thus write referee reports in three different weeks, one of which has to be completed by the week of November 6. Your referee reports will be due on the Monday of the week in which we are discussing that particular article in class (for example, if you are reviewing an article that we are scheduled to discuss on Wednesday September 20, your referee report will be due to me on Monday September 18). You may submit these to us by email (please send it to both of us).

   In your referee report, you will be asked to treat the article as if it had been submitted to a journal and you have been asked to review it. You will need to read it very thoroughly and you may also need to acquaint yourself with other literature in that area. Your report should evaluate the contribution of the paper and the methodological rigor with which the goals it set were achieved. You will need to assess the paper’s weaknesses (whether in contribution, substance, or methodological rigor) and decide whether you believe the author should be offered the opportunity to address those weaknesses or they constitute a hurdle too large to overcome. In composing your report, it may be useful to consult referee instructions issued by general comparative politics journals.

   We will divide up the readings in the first session (September 6). Thus, please come to this session with at least six articles in different weeks that you would be happy to write a referee
report for. If you cannot attend this session, please email me ahead of time with at least six articles that you would be happy reviewing.

3. **Final Paper (50%)**

You will also write a final research paper on one of the topics covered, broadly construed. The key requirement is that the paper adopt the “comparative method”: that is, it should not be a purely theoretical paper, nor should it describe a single political system or be based on a single case. You should view your paper as the first draft of something that could, after much more time and effort has been expended on it, become a published paper of comparable quality to any one of the articles we have read. You should set yourselves the highest standards and find a topic upon which you are prepared to make a substantial investment of time, effort and creative energy. This paper is not intended as a tiresome hoop through which you have to jump, but as an integral part of the portfolio of work you will develop during your time as a graduate student.

Finding a precise, relevant, challenging, yet feasible substantive question is one of the most difficult tasks facing any political scientist. You ought to start thinking about your final paper immediately, guided by your substantive interests, intuitions and background knowledge as well as the talents you can bring to bear on the work, all of which you should exploit to the fullest extent. Questions will emerge on your agenda as you read other people’s work with a critical eye, always looking for theoretical and empirical weaknesses, always alert to ways in which arguments could be better constructed, or empirical evidence better collected, marshaled and analyzed.

Your paper’s structure should conform to current standards in the field. To this end, it must contain the following six sections:

(a) Motivation: why is answering your question important?

(b) Background/context: have other people already tried to answer this question? If so, what theories have they drawn on, what answers have they given, and why are those answers invalid or incomplete?

(c) Theoretical expectations/hypotheses: describe your own theoretical approach. Use this to deduce precise empirical observations or hypotheses that can be tested with data.

(d) Data: consider the kind of data that would provide the very best test of your hypotheses, if you had access to it. If such data are unavailable (as is usually the case), consider whether other data sets could provide a credible test of your hypotheses. If no suitable data exists, specify a feasible research project that would gather the required evidence.

(e) Method/analysis: draw clear inferences about what your data tell you about your hypotheses and thus about the research question that motivates your project.

(f) Conclusion: What conclusions have you been able to draw from your research? Under what conditions might your conclusions not be warranted? What relevance do your conclusions hold for existing work in the field? Has your research raised new questions for others to answer?
Your paper should not exceed 25 pages double-spaced. It is due to us via email on December 13 and will count for 50% of your grade. In preparation for this, you will also submit a 500-word paper prospectus to us via email on November 13. In this, you will describe the question you will try to answer in your paper, explain why this question is important, and sketch out your answers to (b) through (d) above. There will be a substantial penalty for late work, so please place these dates on your calendar and treat them as fixed. Please consult the NYU Citation Guide for information about the referencing style you will need to use, which is the Chicago author-date system, and for general information on how to properly cite sources.

Grade Breakdown:

Participation ................................................................. 20%
Three Referee Reports .................................................... 30%
Final paper ................................................................. 50%

Important Dates:

Class Begins ................................................................. September 6
Field Lunch Begins ..................................................... September 13
(At Least) One Referee Report Due .... Week Beginning November 6
Break due to Thanksgiving .................. Wednesday, November 22
Paper Prospectus Due ................................. November 13
Final Lunch and Class ................................. December 6
Final Paper Due ................................. December 13

COURSE OUTLINE

September 6: Introduction

This is an organizational meeting. We will cover the goals of the course; assign discussants for the Lunches; and assign readings for the referee reports. Please come with at least six readings pertaining to four different weeks that you would be happy to provide a referee report for. There is no assigned reading.
September 13: Policy Preferences

Special Session: instead of a Field Lunch, we are going to go through the process that resulted in the acceptance of a comparative politics paper in a top journal, paying particular attention to the referee reports and authors’ responses to these. In preparation, please read all the files in the folder entitled “Laver Crowdsourcing” on the course website.


[Maria presenting]

Background and supplementary reading:


September 20: Valence


[Francis presenting]


[Athena presenting]


[Anna presenting]

*Background and supplementary reading:*


September 27: Components in the Calculus of Voting

Field Lunch: “How Autocrats Manipulate Economic News: Evidence from Russia’s State-Controlled Television”, Arturas Rozenas and Denis Stukal, NYU. [Discussant: Trellace]


[Felipe presenting]

[Sophie presenting]


[Athena presenting]

*Background and supplementary reading:*


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**PART II: ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND THEIR EFFECTS**

October 4: On Election Campaigns

**Field Lunch:** “Sons and Lovers: Political Stability in China and Europe before the Great Divergence”, Yuhua Wang, Harvard University. [Discussant: Sophie]


[Anna presenting]


Background and supplementary reading:


October 11: On Public Policy


[Felipe presenting]


[Athena presenting]

Background and supplementary reading:


October 18: Endogeneity of Electoral Systems


[Tine presenting]


[Trellace presenting]

October 25: Mobilization and Turnout

Field Lunch: “Can Good Politicians Compensate for Bad Institutions? Evidence from an Original Survey of Italian Mayors”, Maria Cerrari, NYU. [Discussant: Aaron]


[Trellace presenting]


[Francis presenting]


[Felipe presenting]

*Background and supplementary reading:*


PART III: LEGISLATIVE POLITICS

November 1: Parties

Field Lunch: “The Effects of Supranational Integration on Political Extremism and Party-System Polarization”, Hande Mutlu-Eren, NYU and Columbia. [Discussant: Anna]

[Sophie presenting]


[Anna presenting]


[Kyuwon presenting]

*Background and supplementary reading:*


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**November 8: Legislatures**

**Field Lunch:** “Origins of Early Democracy”, Ali Ahmed and David Stasavage, NYU.  
[Discussant: Felipe]

Of the three papers assigned for today, we are going to go through the process that resulted in the acceptance of the first one, paying particular attention to the referee reports and authors’ responses to these. In preparation, please read all the files in the folder entitled “Laver Benoit Arithmetic” on the course website.


[Tine presenting]


[Kyuwon presenting]

*Background and supplementary reading:*

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**PART IV: GOVERNANCE**

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**November 15: Cabinet Formation and Duration**

**Field Lunch: “Democracy in Crisis”, Adam Przeworski (NYU). [Discussant: Maria]**


**[Tine presenting]**


**[Aaron presenting]**


**[Trellace presenting]**

*Background and supplementary reading:*


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**November 29: Delegation and Policymaking**

**Field Lunch:** “Institutional Foundations of Coalition Governance”, Mik Laver and Tiberiu Dragu (NYU). [Discussant: Athena]


  [Aaron presenting]


  [Maria presenting]


  [Francis presenting]

  *Background and supplementary reading:*


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**December 6: Portfolio Allocation**

**Field Lunch:** not scheduled


[Aaron presenting]


[Kyuwon presenting]

*Background and supplementary reading:*