

Comparative Politics Paper Assignment

GL 261 (Winter 2006-07)

First paper due no later than Friday, December 22nd

Second paper due no later than Friday, January 26th

Paper revisions due no later than Friday, February 9th

ASSIGNMENT: Everyone in the class is required to write papers answering TWO of the questions listed below: Your papers should **include a cover page** and be typed, double spaced, and stapled (no paper clips, please!). This paper is an argumentative essay, meaning that it combines opinion with the marshalling of facts (i.e., **research!**) to support a particular argument. Any argument that rests on a point of fact **MUST** be backed up by an appropriate citation. If you are uncertain as to where you might find something, please ask me. Your essay will be judged on the quality of its argument, not the length. However, it would be difficult to thoroughly answer this question in less than 3-5 pages. Your essay will be graded on the quality and depth of your research; your ability to present a reasoned, analytically sound, and empirically valid argument; and the clarity and coherence of your writing. A poorly written essay with multiple mistakes cannot make an intelligent and persuasive argument. Spelling and grammar thus are relevant to your grade.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: In terms of the study of comparative politics, this project will help you to develop a much better understanding of the politics and government of the countries you examine. In terms of broader skills, this assignment will help you learn how to gather source material and decipher its utility; summarize complex arguments; hone your skills at presenting a reasoned, analytically sound, empirically valid, and well written essay; and, if you take advantage of the resubmission option, give you experience in incorporating criticism and revising written work.

RESUBMISSION OPTION: Additionally, your papers can be revised and resubmitted for regrading. However, you **must include the original paper with my comments** and you will only receive a higher grade if the revised version shows a **significant improvement** over the original. (I would define “significant improvement” as enough to make me comfortable to increase the score by two letter grades.) This includes not only correcting all minor errors in terms of spelling, grammar, citation formats, etc., but also improving the *substance* of your essay. This may require you to rewrite sections of your essay and/or seek additional sources for your arguments, among other things. In short, you are expected to address all the comments I made on your first draft. Papers may be resubmitted at any time, but are due no later than **Friday, February 9th (at the start of class)**.

RESEARCH: In order to make your argument persuasive, you need to provide appropriate factual evidence to support your claims. Information on any given topic can be found by using the links on my homepage (<http://www.rose-hulman.edu/~casey1/>) or through the Logan Library’s Academic Search Premier database. If you are uncertain of where to find sources, please see me. You are expected to do your own research and provide references for any factual information necessary to support your argument. For example, if you say that Americans earn more per year than Germans on average, you need to provide data on per capita GDP to back that up.

GENERAL TIPS: Some general tips to help you get a better grade:

Tip #1: Start early. It is very much to your advantage to do these papers early on rather than leaving them to when you have assignments due in all of your classes.

Tip #2: Talk to me about your paper before you turn it in. I can highlight problems in your argument or sources early on, giving you time to correct them. This almost always results in a higher grade. (Of course, to do this you need to follow Tip # 1 above!)

PLEASE NOTE: I will not read rough drafts. Rough drafts get a 'rough' reading and, as a result, I may give a false impression that the paper is fine only to find problems during my more careful 'official' reading. However, I will be happy to talk through your argument in as much detail as you wish.

Tip #3: Understand both sides of the issue. In order to make a really persuasive argument for a particular position, you need to not only explain your position but to effectively refute the opposite. In order to do so, you need to fully understand the arguments of the other side. It may be useful in all cases to make a list of 'Pros and Cons' for the issue/policy in question. In terms of writing the essay, think of yourself as a lawyer in court. You not only have to persuade the jury (the reader) as to why your 'client' (your argument) is innocent (correct), but also why the 'prosecution's case' (the counterargument) is not sound. Although you know that I will be the reader, you should always write such essays as if they are to be read by a general audience.

Tip # 4: Revise and resubmit. You have the option to redo your paper for a higher grade. *Use it!* However, this requires addressing the comments that I made, especially regarding the substance of your argument or the appropriateness of your sources. I certainly expect that ALL spelling and grammar errors are corrected in any resubmitted paper, but simply doing this alone will not alter your grade.

Overall, this assignment is an interactive one that requires effort, focus, and creativity. If you stay on top of things and talk to me frequently, you will likely do well. If you throw your paper together at the last moment, you will likely do poorly. As with everything in this course, if you are not sure about something, ask questions.

PAPER QUESTIONS

You must write **TWO** papers over the course of the term from the list below. You may choose to write on any two, and some countries have more than one question, but *you must write questions on two different countries* (you cannot write on both UK questions, for example).

UNITED STATES: The America Example? From the founding of this nation, America has viewed itself as a nation apart, a unique experiment in freedom and democracy, a shining ‘city on the hill’. We thus perceive ourselves as an example for others to emulate, particularly given our current position of prosperity and power. International opinion, especially in the Middle East, has turned distinctly anti-American, however. While a good part of this is attributable to disagreement with the policies of the Bush Administration, much of this sentiment represents a generalized dislike of the American values, ideals and way of life. So is America -- not only in terms of our politics, but also our society and culture – an exemplar for other countries to learn from, even to try to emulate? Be specific about what aspects of the American system would be beneficial (or harmful, if you argue that way) for other societies to follow. If you argue that the US is not a good example for others, what country (or countries) would be a better model and why?

UNITED KINGDOM: (A) A British Constitutional Convention? Read any American government textbook and it will tell you that the foundations of American democracy are separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, specific limitations on government activity, and formally protected political, civil, and minority rights. Yet the British system has none of these things (although the European Convention of Human Rights was incorporated into UK law in 1998). How is that possible? How does the UK maintain itself as a democracy without these basic protections? What aspects of the British constitution and political practice prevent the Prime Minister from ruling dictatorially? Are these protections sufficient? Should British citizens demand a written constitution in order to protect their rights well into the 21st century?

UNITED KINGDOM: (B) Federalism or Disunion? The United Kingdom is made up of four nations – England, Scotland, Wales, and (Northern) Ireland. Constitutional reforms initiated under the Blair government created independent (“devolved”) chambers for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (the latter since suspended). The British have thus adopted a sort of “asymmetrical federalism”, with some parts of the system having independent sub-national governments (Scotland and Wales), but others not (the regions of England). Can such an odd structure hold together over the long-term? Must the UK adopt some coherent form of federalism or face ultimate break-up? Does it make sense to have the sort of half-federal system? Does this go against British political traditions?

GERMANY: (A) A Better Type of Capitalism? The German “social market economy”, with its emphasis on equitable growth and social stability, is very different from America’s more free market capitalism. Which of these systems do you think is better in providing growth and prosperity for the overall national economy? From your own perspective as a future employee, would you rather work in the German or American economic system? (Make sure to thoroughly explain your answer to both questions.) Was your answer the same for both of the previous two questions? If not, why? That is, why would there be a difference between individual and collective (national) interests in the economy?

GERMANY: (B) To PR or Not to PR? Americans often complain about the limited choice that two parties offer and long for a third (or fourth, or fifth) party. Germany, on the other hand, has what many feel is an ideal electoral structure. Elections for the Bundestag combine single member districts with proportional representation. This creates a multiparty structure and distributes seats in pretty close correspondence with the popular vote. At the same time, the last German election produced something of a stalemate, with no obvious coalition of parties able to muster a majority of support in the legislature, ultimately producing a “Grand Coalition” of the Christian Democrats (right) and Social Democrats (left). Compare and contrast the American and German electoral system, assessing the pros and cons of each. Would the United States be better off with a Germany-style system, sticking with the structure that we have, or some combination in between?

FRANCE: (A) Why Can't We All Just Get Along? France is the oldest ally of the United States, an alliance going back to the American Revolution. We fought side-by-side in two world wars and the first Gulf War. We have strong economic ties and share common democratic ideals. So why is anti-Americanism so rampant in France and anti-French views so common in America? What are the sources of these negative perceptions? Are they likely to abate in the future? All told, will France remain a close ally of the US well into the 21st century?

FRANCE: (B) Why the *Non*? On May 29th, 2005, French voters overwhelmingly rejected a proposed constitutional treaty for the European Union. (Dutch voters defeated the constitution by an even larger margin within a few days.) France was one of the founding members of the EU and a driving force for greater European integration. Without French support, the EU constitution is largely a dead letter. So why did the French vote against this referendum? More importantly, what might this result tell us about the direction of French domestic politics? For example, what sorts of policies are most likely to appeal to French voters in the 2007 presidential election? Are these likely to help France adapt to globalization and further European integration?

JAPAN: (A) The Japanese Economic Model? Twenty years ago, Japan was the economy that everyone sought to emulate. Japan rose out of the ashes of World War II, growing much more rapidly than other major industrial economies, to become the world's largest exporter and second largest economy. This spectacular achievement was often attributed to a culture which encouraged hard work, savings, and collective values, as well as a “developmental state” that, unlike the more free market American system, actively used the tools of government to advance the economy. Beginning in the early 1990s, however, that same Japanese model economy entered into an extended period of stagnant economic growth from which it is only just (slowly) emerging. So how are we to explain this varied performance of the Japanese economy? How can the “Japanese Model” produce spectacular growth in one period, but stagnation in another? Given your answer to this, what should Japan do to improve its economic performance?

JAPAN: (B) Enforced Democracy? One of the regular refrains of critics of the Iraq War is that you cannot spread democracy at the point of a gun. On the other hand, this is exactly what we did in Japan. The United States occupied the country for a decade and American military authorities wrote the Japanese constitution. Since then Japan has been stable and prosperous, a fully consolidated democracy. So why did this sort of “enforced democracy” work in Japan? How was Japan different from, say, Iraq? What does this suggest about the ability to spread democracy elsewhere?

INDIA: Development or Democracy? India has long since established itself as a stable democracy, but is still trying to move up the ranks of developed nations. Is India's democratic political system a help or a hindrance in trying to develop their economy – especially given the various ethnic, social and religious divisions that can divide the populace? That is, would India be more likely to develop faster if it was an authoritarian system like China?

RUSSIA: Is Russia a Democracy? It has been fifteen years since the collapse of communism in Russia. During that period, Russians have participated in numerous elections for national and local offices and new political parties have developed. At the same time, President Vladimir Putin has clamped down on independent media, increased central control over the provinces, and – if you believe his critics – jailed prominent critics of his regime on trumped up charges. All of this begs a basic question: Is Russia a democracy?

MEXICO: The Benefits of NAFTA? One of the stark realities of North America – and much of the reason that illegal immigration is such a big problem – is that the Mexican economy is so much poorer than that of the United States. One of the ways that Mexico sought to improve its economy was by signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which came into effect in 1994. American critics of the agreement said that it would lead to a flood of jobs moving south of the border, which is would certainly be beneficial for Mexico. Has NAFTA been a net gain for the Mexican economy? Is Mexico better off having closer economic ties with the US, or are the economic connections with the (much stronger) US economy the problem? Or are there other factors that explain the economic gap between the US and Mexico?

CHINA: The New Superpower? The spectacular rise of the Chinese economy is one of the overriding features of 21st century international politics. China has become the second largest economy in the world and one of the world's leading exporters (although both Germany and Japan still export substantially more than China). Indeed, China runs an over \$200 billion a year trade surplus with the United States. Should US policymakers be concerned about China's economic growth, particularly given its authoritarian government? Is China likely to overtake the US as the dominant world economy by, say, 2025? Even if so, is an economically stronger China detrimental to US interests? Should the US change its policies toward China, limiting trade and investment, or continue to pursue a policy of engagement with the hope of incremental change?

IRAN: The Mad Mullahs? One of the major concerns for US foreign policymakers is the fear that Iran is developing nuclear weapons (although the Iranians claim they only want to develop a civilian energy program). Must we do everything in our power (even military strikes) to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons, or can we counterbalance a nuclear Iran them with traditional strategies of deterrence? This question hinges on an assessment of the nature and goals of Iran's theocratic regime. Is the regime in Tehran so revolutionary and dangerous that pursuing traditional deterrence strategies simply will not work; that is, they are so extreme that they cannot meaningfully be deterred? Or is this a regime that, although at odds with the US, is sufficiently rational and interested in regional stability that traditional foreign policy approaches will be effective? In short, what does the nature of the domestic political regime in Tehran tell us about how we should deal with the Iranian nuclear question?