

## Laboratory / Center profile

### Comparative Political Systems Laboratory

**Representative:** Associate Professor Ken Victor Leonard Hijino  
**Areas of expertise:** Comparative political institutions, party organization theory, comparative systems of local politics and local democracy



Laboratory members and Associate Professor Hijino (center)

The faculty and students at SDM research systemic solutions for a range of pressing global issues such as: energy, food, and climate security; domestic social welfare provision; education reform; and the reviving of local communities and economies. In many of these domains, technical and/or substantial solutions to the problems seemingly exist, but are not implemented because of a clash of vested interests and an inability to reach effective collective agreement on the matter among stakeholders. The Comparative Political Systems Laboratory (CPSL) focuses on such diverging requirements between stakeholders in social systems. Its frame of reference is “politics”, the process of arriving at agreement among actors with varying interests and influence. Without understanding these political dynamics, we believe realistic solutions or re-designs of social systems cannot be achieved.

To analyse these political dynamics, the laboratory adopts the empirical approach and conceptual tools of comparative institutionalism in political science. This approach focuses on how various political institutions (such as electoral, executive, local government, and bureaucratic systems) shape and constrain the behaviour of political actors and influence the outcome of political contestation. By understanding how these “rules of the game” affect collective decision-making, the comparative institutionalist hopes to generate predictive theories to be able to better engineer political systems. CPSL covers political institutions and processes in general, but focuses particularly on the domain of local government and autonomy as well as decentralisation and federalization. My current research interest concerns the role of party organizations and systems in local governance.

This laboratory was established only in April of 2011, but currently consists of five seminar students and two external researchers. The students’ themes cover a wide range of topics which include: the designing

of local electoral campaign pamphlets; policy-formation process in local governments; local community strategies to attract foreign tourists; funding strategies for NPOs; and immigration policy in France and Japan. The laboratory centres around instructing students on the basics of social science and methods of comparative analysis while guiding them on their particular research themes. Early in the term, books of interest from related fields are recommended, read and discussed among students. As an extra-curricular activity for this laboratory, we conducted a “walk and think tour” last semester in honour of peripatetic philosophers of history starting from Aristotle. Beginning in Yokohama harbour, we stretched our legs and cooled our heads for a day’s trek to the new Skytree tower in Sumida ward. We hope to continue such outings to spark ideas and insights outside of the normal research environment.



Laboratory poster



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