INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE POLITICS

GOVT 133-001 (Fall 2019)

Wednesdays 7:20-10:00 pm, PLANET 129

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Office hours: TBD

Course Description & Objectives

This course serves as an introduction to the central concepts of comparative politics, including state formation, political economy, democratization, authoritarianism, and decision making in autocracies and democracies. The course focuses on institutions as both a cause and effect of broader political developments. Throughout the course, students will be exposed to the tools political scientists study politics, including comparative method, data analysis, and game theory. Students will also learn about the political systems of countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas.

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Compare and contrast politics in different countries;
2. Analyze the socioeconomic and cultural factors that shape political processes;
3. Analyze the effect of political institutions on economics and culture;
4. Apply theoretical concepts to concrete political problems; and
5. Understand and discuss how political scientists accumulate knowledge.

There are no prerequisites for this course. It assumes no prior knowledge of comparative politics.

Course Readings

There is only one required textbook for this course:


The textbook can be purchased at the university bookstore. Note that this book is different from Principles of Comparative Politics by the same authors. All additional readings are available
online through the hyperlinks on the syllabus.

Much of the class will be dedicated to explaining and discussing political science concepts from the textbook. Be sure to read each chapter thoroughly and carefully. The additional readings are recent news articles that illustrate how certain concepts from the textbook apply to current events. It is recommended that you read the textbook chapter first and then the news articles.

Students are encouraged to use online sources, such as the State Department Country Background Notes, the CIA World Factbook, the Economist Intelligence Unit, and BBC Country Profiles, in order to familiarize themselves with countries, events, and persons mentioned in the readings. Those sources should be used as supplements to the assigned reading, not as replacements. If you feel you need more background knowledge in order to master the readings, please feel free to contact the professor or teaching assistant for additional recommendations.

Finally, all students are encouraged to regularly read the news, particularly the sections on international or world affairs.

Course Requirements

The following requirements are designed to promote an optimal learning environment for motivated students. This syllabus is a contract; your continued enrollment in this class constitutes your acceptance of these requirements.

1. Students are expected to have completed assigned readings prior to class and be prepared to participate during class discussions. The instructor reserves the right to call on students to answer questions.

2. Students will complete three exams and one comprehensive final exam.

3. Students will submit written answers to assignments on a weekly basis. Problem sets will be submitted during class. Knowledge of elementary algebra is required for successful completion of some of the problem sets.

4. Make-up exams and problem set extensions will be given only if students have proper documentation. In place of an email, please see me during office hours to discuss missed/late work. If you anticipate any conflicts due to medical/health care, religious holidays, or travel, please inform me or the TA within the first two weeks of class. I adhere to GMU’s Attendance and Absence policies.

5. Students are expected to stay for the duration of the class period. Late arrivals and early departures are distracting to classmates. If you are unable to stay for the full duration of a class period, work with a classmate to secure the lecture notes. Please do not interrupt the class with a late arrival or early departure.

6. Students are encouraged to take notes using pen and paper. If you need to use a computer or tablet to take notes, turn the wi-fi off. If you use of electronic devices disrupts the class, you will be asked to place them in the front of the classroom until the class is over. If electronic devices cause too many distractions during the course, I reserve the right to ban them entirely at any time.
**Grading**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Class Exams (3 x 15 points each)</th>
<th>45 points</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Assignments (10 x 2 points each)</td>
<td>20 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam (30 points)</td>
<td>30 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation (5 points)</td>
<td>5 points</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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| A+ 97-100 | A 93-96 | A- 90-92 |
| B+ 87-89 | B 83-86 | B- 80-82 |
| C+ 77-79 | C 73-76 | C- 70-72 |
| D+ 67-69 | D 63-66 | D- 60-62 |
| F 59 and below | | |

*One-third of a grade will be deducted for every day an assignment is late.* Incompletes and makeup exams will be extended only in cases of documented emergencies.

**Course Assignments**

**Week 1 (August 28): Course Overview**
- CCG Chapter 1: “Introduction”

**Week 2 (September 4): What is Science?**
- CCG Chapter 2: “What is Science?”
- Assignment 1 due

**Week 3 (September 11): What is Politics?**
- CCG Chapter 3: “What is Politics?”
DRAFT

- Assignment 2 due

Week 4 (September 18): The State

- CCG Chapter 4: “The Origins of the Modern State”
- Assignment 3 due

Week 5 (September 25): Culture & Regime Type

- Exam 1 (CCG Chap. 2-4 only)
- CCG Chapter 5, pp. 72-74 & Chapter 6: “The Cultural Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship”

Week 6 (October 2): Economy & Regime Type

- CCG Chapter 5: “The Economic Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship”
- Assignment 4 due

Week 7 (October 9): Democratic Transitions

- CCG Chapter 7: “Democratic Transitions”
- Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, “The Lives of Other” (2006), available on various streaming services
- Assignment 5 due

Week 8 (October 16): Dictatorships
CCG Chapter 8: “Varieties of Dictatorship”


*Assignment 6 due*

**Week 9 (October 23): Democracy**

* Exam 2 (CCG Chap. 5-8 only)
* CCG Chapter 9: “Problems with Group Decision Making”

**Week 10 (October 30): Types of Democracy**

* CCG Chapter 10: “Parliamentary, Presidential, and Semi-Presidential Democracies”
* Assignment 7 due

**Week 11 (November 6): Elections**

* CCG Chapter 11: “Elections and Electoral Systems”
* Israel elections article (TBD)
* @TheEconomist, “What would America’s presidential election look like under a parliamentary system?” *The Economist* (June 14, 2016), available at https://twitter.com/theeconomist/status/742858089771196417?lang=en
* Assignment 8 due

**Week 12 (November 13): Social Cleavages**

* Exam 3 (CCG Chap. 9-12 only)
* CCG Chapter 12: “Social Cleavages and Party Systems”

**Week 13 (November 27): Veto Players**
• CCG Chapter 13: “Institutional Veto Players”


• Assignment 9 due

Week 14 (December 4): Democratic Performance

• CCG Chapter 14: “Consequences of Democratic Institutions”


• Assignment 10 due

Final Exam: Tuesday, December 16 at 7:30–10:15 pm

George Mason EMAIL

• George Mason requires that university email be used for all courses. I will be sending messages to your GMU email and you are responsible for making sure you have access to these messages.

• You may forward your Mason email to other accounts, but always use your Mason email when communicating with me to allow verification of your identity.

• You are required to check your Mason email account regularly and to keep your mailbox maintained so that messages are not rejected for being over quota.

• Please allow me at least 24 hours to respond to any emails. If you need a response earlier than 24 hours, type URGENT in the subject line of the email.

Blackboard

1. Go to http://mymason.gmu.edu;

2. Login using your NETID and password;
3. Click on the ‘Courses” tab; and
4. Double-click on GOVT-133 (Fall 2019) under the course listings.

**Technical Help**

- If you have difficulty with accessing Blackboard, please contact the ITU Support Center at (703) 993-8870 or support@gmu.edu.
- If you have trouble with using the features in Blackboard, email courses@gmu.edu.

**Student Responsibilities**

**Enrollment:** Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Registrar calendar: [https://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/](https://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/).

**Academic Integrity:** Students are responsible for their own work.

**Honor Code:** Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code. The George Mason University Honor Code states: “Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations. To maintain an academic community according to these standards, students and faculty members must report all alleged violations to the Honor Committee.” Students are encouraged to read the full Honor Code ([https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code](https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code)) and to remain vigilant against any violation of the Code in their own work. Any cases of academic dishonesty in this course will be pursued according to the guidelines detailed in the University Catalog.

**Time Conflicts:** George Mason University is committed to creating a welcoming, respectful and inclusive educational environment that values diversity. Students should review the syllabus at the beginning of the term to determine if there are any conflicts between class time and religious observance. It is the student’s responsibility to inform the instructor of these conflicts within the first week of the semester. [http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/](http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/).

**Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See: [https://ds.gmu.edu/](https://ds.gmu.edu/)].

**Student Services**

**Counseling and Psychological Services:** The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical
psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (individual and
group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience
and academic performance [See http://caps.gmu.edu].