COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will provide an introduction to key theoretical frameworks, concepts, and analytical methods commonly used in the study of comparative politics. As a major subfield of political science, comparative politics focuses on the internal dynamics of states—state formation and stability, political regimes, political actors and institutions, political economy, development, etc.—and builds and test theories that explain and predict a variety of cross-national patterns. Beginning with the most basic terms (the state, regimes, nations, political and economic systems), students will be provided with the tools they need to make meaningful comparisons and understand political processes and political systems.

OBJECTIVES

a) This course will provide students with the appropriate tools for studying and comparing domestic politics across countries.

b) We will explore different frameworks for comparing political, social, economic and cultural change—from accounts of individual agency to those of structural constraint.

c) We will analyze scholarly works of theoretical importance of politics in countries in the Western and non-Western, “developed” and “developing” world.
d) We will analyze and compare specific cases in order to understand political actions, political processes, and political systems.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

All course assignments and activities for this course are designed to support students to learn the knowledge and skills to successfully achieve the Student Learning Outcomes that belong to the Mason Core’s category of “global understanding.”

The goal of the global understanding category is to help students see the world from multiple perspectives, reflect upon their positions in a global society, and be prepared for future engagement as global citizens. While it may include a historical perspective, global understanding courses focus primarily on a contemporary understanding of one’s place in a global society.

The present course must meet a minimum of three of the following learning outcomes:

1. Identify and articulate one’s own values and how those values influence their interactions and relationships with others, both locally and globally.

2. Demonstrate understanding of how the patterns and processes of globalization make visible the interconnections and differences among and within contemporary global societies.

3. Demonstrate the development of intercultural competencies.

4. Explore individual and collective responsibilities within a global society through analytical, practical, or creative responses to problems or issues, using resources appropriate to the field.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

“Pop” Quizzes and participation (20%)

To assure that everyone keeps up with the class work, there will be an undisclosed number of pop quizzes during the term (probably 3-5). There are no make-ups for missed quizzes. Students are also expected to read or consult major media sources (e.g., New York Times, Washington Post, Financial Times, The Economist, etc.) and discuss current events and developments in class. The instructor will ask questions randomly during the class about the assigned readings and current affairs.

Note: Absences and failure to complete the assigned readings for a particular lecture session, or inability to discuss current event and political developments in class, will represent a zero “0” that will affect this percentage.
Mid-term examination (30%)
One mid-term examination is scheduled for October 17, 2017. This exam will cover the materials of weeks 1 to 7 of this syllabus.

Written assignment (20%)
Students will choose three cases analyzed in the book *Cases in Comparative Politics* and write about one major aspect of political science—taking into consideration particular geographical and demographic features, as well as the global context. Students should write about: i) states, ii) regimes, iii) political conflict and competition, iv) societies, or v) political economy. Papers should be 500-800 words (approx. 2-3 pages double spaced); longer papers will not be accepted. Documents should be printed and submitted electronically through Blackboard on December 7 (no later than 10:00 p.m.)

Final exam (30%)
The final examination is scheduled for December 19 (1:30 PM to 4:15 PM). It is comprehensive and will cover all the course materials.

Please note that you can miss examinations and quizzes only for medically certified incapacity or for the gravest adequately documented, crisis in your immediate family. Make-ups will be given only in the case of an illness or emergency that is properly documented.

GRADING

Your final grade in the course will be assigned based on the following scale:

- 97-100 A+
- 93-96 A
- 90-92 A-
- 87-89 B+
- 83-86 B
- 80-82 B-
- 77-79 C+
- 70-76 C
- 67-69 D+
- 63-66 D
- 60-62 D-
- < 60 F

GMU’s grading policy can be found at:
[http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/grading/#text](http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/grading/#text)
STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITIES

Students are expected to be diligent in their studies and attend class regularly and on time. Students are responsible for all class work and assignments. On recommendation of the instructor concerned and with the approval of the Dean, students may, at any time, be dropped from the course. This may result in an “F” on the student’s permanent record.

*** Important:

Please provide a respectful learning environment for your fellow students. Repeated tardiness, cell phone disruptions, reading materials unrelated to the course, and web browsing and texting during class will adversely affect your grade. Repeated disruptive behavior may result in your involuntary withdrawal from the course.

Please arrive at class on time and mute (or switch off) cell phones, pagers, and alarms during class. The use of laptop computers, tablets (such as iPads), and cell phones is prohibited in class, except when instructed to do so. Please keep them stowed and out of sight. The use of technology in the classroom will lead to the student’s dismissal from the lecture hall and the student’s forfeiture of one quiz grade.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting.

UNIVERSITY HONOR CODE

Mason shares in the tradition of an honor system that has existed in Virginia since 1842. The code is an integral part of university life. On the application for admission, students sign a statement agreeing to conform to and uphold the Honor Code. Students are
responsible, therefore, for understanding the code’s provisions. In the spirit of the code, a student’s word is a declaration of good faith acceptable as truth in all academic matters. 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. Any student who has knowledge of, but does not report, a violation may be accused of lying under the Honor Code. (See http://oai.gmu.edu for more information)

The complete Honor Code is as follows:

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: **Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.**

**SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS**

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.
READING MATERIALS

REQUIRED TEXTS:


RECOMMENDED TEXTS:


**ADDITIONAL READING MATERIAL:**

Further readings will be posted on Blackboard, so be sure to check the website often [Note: These materials will be posted one week in advance of the relevant session].

**PERIODICALS/JOURNALS**

African Affairs  
African Studies Review  
Journal of African and Asian Studies  
The Journal of Comparative Politics  
British Journal of Political Science  
British Politics  
Comparative European Politics  
Comparative Political Studies  
Comparative Strategy  
Electoral Studies  
European Journal of Political Research  
French Politics  
International Journal of Middle East Studies  
Israel Affairs  
Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Studies  
Journal of Modern African Studies
Middle Eastern Studies
Política y Gobierno
Politeia
The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies
Review of African Political Economy
Studies in Comparative International Development
West European Politics

EXPERIENTIAL COMPONENT

Additionally, our course on Comparative Politics will include a minimum of five (5) hours of unmonitored appropriate experience outside of the classroom. Students will be expected to follow current international news stories on a daily basis. These readings will lead to more fruitful discussions in class. Television news and current affairs programs may complement these readings. Students are also encouraged to participate in other events (campus lectures, programs, films, etc.) relevant to the course.
DISCUSSION TOPICS AND READINGS PER CLASS
(DRAFT-subject to change)

1.1  Road Map of the Course

August 29: Introduction and explanation of course requirements

1.2  Introduction: What is Comparative Politics?

August 31
•  O’Neil, Chapter 1.

September 5
•  O’Neil, Chapter 1.

September 7
•  O’Neil, Chapter 1.
•  Mark I. Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, “Research Traditions and Theory in Comparative Politics: An Introduction from Comparative Politics.”

1.3  States

September 12
•  O’Neil, Chapter 2.

September 14
•  O’Neil, Chapter 2.
•  Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation.”

1.4  Nations and Society

September 19
•  O’Neil, Chapter 3.

September 21
•  O’Neil, Chapter 3.
•  James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War.”
1.5 Political Economy

September 26
• O'Neil, Chapter 4.

September 28
• O'Neil, Chapter 4.

October 3
• O'Neil, Chapter 4.
• Daron Acemoglu, “Root Causes: A Historical Approach to Assessing the Role of Institutions in Economic Development.”

1.6 Democratic Regimes

October 5
• O'Neil, Chapter 5.

October 10 (reading session; no class)
• O'Neil, Chapter 5.
• Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, “What Democracy Is... and Is Not.”

October 12
• O'Neil, Chapter 5.
• Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, “What Democracy Is... and Is Not.”

October 17: MID-TERM EXAMINATION

1.7 Nondemocratic Regimes

October 19
• O'Neil, Chapter 6.

October 24
• O'Neil, Chapter 6.
• Larry Diamond, “The Rule of Law Versus the Big Man.”

October 26: Guest speaker (TBA)
1.8 **Violence**

**October 31**
- O’Neil, *Chapter 7*.

**November 2**
- O’Neil, *Chapter 7*.

**November 7: Guest speaker (TBA)**

1.9 **Advanced Democracies**

**November 9**
- O’Neil, *Chapter 8*.

**November 14**
- O’Neil, *Chapter 8*.

1.10 **Communism and Postcommunism**

**November 16**
- O’Neil, *Chapter 9*.

**November 21**
- O’Neil, *Chapter 9*.

**November 23: Thanksgiving recess**

1.11 **Less-Developed and Newly Industrializing Countries**

**November 28**
- O’Neil, *Chapter 10*.

**November 30**
• O'Neil, Chapter 10.
• Paul Krugman, “The Myth of Asia’s Miracle”

1.12 Globalization and the Future of Comparative Politics

December 5
• O'Neil, Chapter 11.

December 7
• O'Neil, Chapter 11.
• The Economist, “Leviathan Stirs Again”

December 19: FINAL EXAM

*** The professor reserves the right to make reasonable changes to this syllabus as needed ***