GOVT 133 – 002: Introduction to Comparative Politics
Spring 2020
Thursdays, 4:30-7:10pm
Location: Planetary Hall 122

Professor: Philip A. Martin (pmani5@gmu.edu)
Office hours: TBD
Office: Research Hall, 339

Course Description
This course introduces students to the subfield of comparative politics in political science. We will examine core concepts such as states, nationalism, ethnicity, political economy, democracy, authoritarianism, political violence, and populism. The course will also familiarize students with the basic tools of analysis employed by comparative politics scholars, including case studies, survey research, and the use of cross-national datasets. Students will have the opportunity to study and apply these concepts and tools in diverse political contexts in the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

The conceptual knowledge and critical thinking skills that students acquire in this course will be relevant to those interested in careers in international affairs and public policy, as well as students who wish to pursue more advanced studies in political science, economics, or related disciplines.

Learning Objectives
Students who actively engage with course readings, lectures, and assignments will:

1. Become familiar with major concepts and debates in the field of comparative politics.
2. Improve their understanding of how and why political systems vary across countries, as well as the consequences of those differences.
3. Improve their understanding of processes of political and economic change.
4. Be prepared to analyze policy problems related to democracy, economic development, and violent conflict in a rigorous and informed manner.
5. Be able to ask original and meaningful research questions that might advance the frontiers of knowledge in comparative politics and political science.

Required Readings
Textbook (available through university bookstore):


Additional required readings will be made available on Blackboard.
Course Requirements and Grading

The course will consist of one midterm exam (30%), one writing assignment (30%), and one final exam (30%). Students will also receive a grade for classroom participation (10%). Success in these assignments will require students to actively engage with material from lectures and assigned readings.

The final grade will be assigned 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+
- 73-76 C
- 70-72 C–
- 67-69 D+
- 63-66 D
- 60-62 D–
- < 60 F

Assignments

1. The midterm exam (30%) will be on [DATE TBD]. The exam will cover material from weeks 1 to 6 of the syllabus.
2. The writing assignment (30%) will be due in class on [DATE TBD]. Students will have the opportunity to select the topic of their papers, which should be in the form of an argumentative essay that applies one or more theories discussed in the course to a case study country. Papers should be 750-1000 words, typed with double-spacing in 12-point font. Detailed instructions will be given in class and posted to Blackboard.
3. The final exam (30%) will be scheduled during the exam period [TBD]. The exam will be comprehensive and cover material from the entire course.

Academic Integrity

Faculty in the Schar School have zero tolerance for academic dishonesty (e.g. plagiarism) and will strictly enforce Mason’s honor code. Please familiarize yourself with the Honor Code here: https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/.

If you have any doubts about the rules concerning plagiarism, please ask for clarification. No grade or assignment is worth academic misconduct.

Students with Disabilities
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.

**Laptop / Cellphone Policy**

To facilitate an engaged and respectful learning environment, students are encouraged to take notes in lecture using a paper and pen/pencil. Research has demonstrated that taking notes by hand is associated with better learning and performance outcomes. If you *must* use a laptop to take notes during class, please disable the internet connection. Please silence your phones during class.

**Communications Policy**

All course-related communications should be conducted via Mason email or through Blackboard. While I will try to respond to email as soon as possible, do not expect immediate replies in evenings or on weekends.

**Course Schedule (subject to change)**

**PART I: FOUNDATIONS**

**Week 1 – Introduction to Comparative Politics**

- *Cases and Concepts*, chapter 1 (“Introduction”)

Further readings (optional):


**Week 2 – Political Order and State Formation**

- *Cases and Concepts*, chapter 2 (“States”)

Further readings (optional):

**Week 3 – Nationalism and Ethnicity**


Further readings (optional):


**Week 4 – Political Economy**

• *Cases and Concepts*, chapter 4 (“Political Economy”)
• Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, section I (“Bourgeois and Proletarians”)

Further readings (optional):


**PART II: INSTITUTIONS**

**Week 5 – Democracy I: Conceptualization and Measurement**

• *Cases and Concepts*, chapter 6 (“Democratic Regimes”), pp. 143-155.

Further readings (optional):


**Week 6 – Democracy II: Parties and Elections**

• *Cases and Concepts*, chapter 6 (“Democratic Regimes”), pp. 152-173.

Further readings (optional):


**Week 7 – MIDTERM EXAM**

**Week 8 – Democratization and Political Transitions**

• *Cases and Concepts*, chapter 6 (“Democratic Regimes”), pp. 148-152.

Further readings (optional):


**Week 9 – Autocracy I: Totalitarianism and Dictatorship**

• *Cases and Concepts*, chapter 8 (“Nondemocratic Regimes”), pp. 355-370.

Further readings (optional):

Week 10 – Autocracy II: Military Rule and Illiberal Regimes


Further readings (optional):

Week 11 – Communism and Postcommunism

- *Cases and Concepts*, chapter 9 (“Communism and Postcommunism”)

Further readings (optional):

PART III: ADDITIONAL TOPICS: VIOLENCE, DEVELOPMENT, AND POPULISM

Week 12 – Political Violence

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE**

- *Cases and Concepts*, chapter 5 (“Political Violence”)

Further readings (optional):

Week 13 – Developing Countries

- *Cases and Concepts*, chapter 10 (“Developing Countries”)

Further readings (optional):


**Week 14 – Globalization, Populism, and the Future of Democracy**

• *Cases and Concepts*, chapter 11 (“Globalization”)
• Steve Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, “This is how democracies die,” *The Guardian* (2018), available at: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/commentisfree/2018/jan/21/this-is-how-democracies-die

Further readings (optional):


**Final Exam: Date TBD**