



GOVT 133: Introduction to Comparative Politics

Semester Date XXXX

Meeting Days and Times XXXX

Office Hours Days and Times XXXX

Office Hours Signup Link

Syllabus Draft Date XXXX (See Draft Modification Notes at End of Syllabus)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the central concepts of comparative politics. Emphasis is placed on how global interconnectivity influences processes of state formation, state interdependence, economic growth, inequality, democratization, authoritarianism, social mobilization, and political culture in autocracies and democracies. Students will apply the comparative politics disciplinary lens—the comparative method, game theory, path dependency, and institutional and cultural logics of change—toward the exploration of regime variation. Newly acquired concepts, theories, and research methods are applied to concrete places, to states in the Americas, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. Our goal is to answer the questions: (1) how does regime type shape everyday outcomes that affect us all -- healthcare, education, gender equality, and respect for human rights? and (2) how does our own engagement of interconnected global and local processes – for example, our consumption of fast fashion or participation in environmental, human rights, or even populist activist movements – affect our neighbors across the street and across the world.

GOVT 133 fulfills all three learning outcomes of the Mason Core Global Contexts requirement. Upon completing a Global Contexts course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and explain how patterns of global connections across nations and/or cultures have shaped societies to create interdependence and inequality.
2. Use a disciplinary lens to demonstrate knowledge of how at least one nation and/or culture participates in or is affected by global contexts.
3. Apply an understanding of one's own positionality within a globally interdependent and unequal world to analyze solutions to global problems.

In our investigation of comparative politics we uncover how the evolution of norms and values transcend nations and cultures to create both liberal and illiberal understandings of interdependence and inequality (learning outcome 1). Students, both through their readings of comparative politics theory and the application—in a capstone project—of this theory to countries and cultures of their own choosing, will become expert in how individual nations and people living in these nations are affected by global contexts (learning outcome 2). Students will apply new proficiency in comparative politics theory in weekly digests of global current events. Drawing from our reading of the World News section of the *New York Times*, we will reflect on how our own positionality in this globally interdependent world can provide both causes of and potential solutions to pressing global problems (learning outcome 3).

By the close of this course:

1. Students will be able to apply comparative politics theory to historical or current developments so as to identify patterns and processes related to local and global political change.

2. Students will, using the comparative politics disciplinary lens, be able to assess research design strengths and weaknesses of existing social science scholarship.
3. Students will be able to apply the comparative politics scientific method to develop an understanding of how patterns of global connections across nations and/or cultures have shaped diverse political outcomes in diverse polities.
4. Students will, through weekly quizzes, problem sets, and class discussion of current events, explore how our own engagement of global economies and cultures contributes to and provides potential solutions for pressing global challenges
5. Students will, through their individually assessed contributions to a capstone collective study of human rights precarity in a particular region of the world, develop advanced knowledge of how at least one nation and/or culture participates in or is affected by global contexts.

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/>

Course Readings

- Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder, Principles of Comparative Politics, 3rd Edition (CQ Press, 2018). The textbook can be rented or purchased in digital or paper format through the [university bookstore](#). The text is also available through Fenwick Library Reserves.
- The “World News” section of the New York Times. Mason students receive free access to The New York Times. Instructions for setting up your account are available at: <https://infoguides.gmu.edu/politics/news>.
- Contemporary academic journal readings in comparative politics. These readings change from course to course and are based on interests students indicate through a start of the semester survey.

Instructor-Student Communication

I will respond to emails within 48 hours. If I will be away from email for more than one day, I will post an announcement on the Blackboard course homepage.

Before sending an email with a class logistics question, do see if your question is addressed in one of the following (available on your Blackboard course menu):

1. Syllabus
2. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
3. Blackboard tutorials
4. Blackboard Q&A, and
5. Technology Requirements

Mason EMAIL

- Mason requires that university email be used for all course communication. I will be sending messages to your Mason email and you are responsible for making sure you have access to these messages.
- Please include GOVT 133 in your email subject heading to alert course instructors that your message relates to our class. Please sign your email with your full name.

Course Logistics

This course will meet in person twice weekly and use Blackboard to facilitate learning outside of class sessions. In a typical week:

- you will read about 100-150 pages
- work on problem sets to be submitted through Blackboard
- complete current events-and text based quizzes

- work on your capstone project (see discussion of the capstone in the Appendix at the end of this syllabus) both in your group and individually

You can anticipate devoting 10 hours or more to coursework each week. It is critical to keep up with weekly readings and problem sets. Each successive week's content builds on your mastery of previous weeks' concepts.

To Access Blackboard

1. Go to <https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu>
2. Login using your NETID and password.
3. Select on the 'Courses' tab.
4. Select GOVT 133 - Introduction to Comparative Politics (Course Date XXXX) under course listings

Technical Help

- If you have difficulty with accessing Blackboard, please contact the ITS Support Center at support@gmu.edu or 703.993.8870.
- If you have trouble with using the features in Blackboard, email courses@gmu.edu.

Course Requirements

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

1. Students are required to read the syllabus and complete the syllabus quiz. The syllabus quiz is due [Date], by 11:59pm. The quiz is available through Blackboard.
2. Students are expected to complete assigned readings. Students should anticipate approximately 100-150 pages of reading every week.
3. Students will complete weekly quizzes based on course readings, lectures, and current events.
4. Students will upload to Blackboard answers to problem sets. Answers should be uploaded as a *single* file – either a PDF or MS Word Document. Problem sets completed by hand can be converted into a PDF using a phone app (Adobe Scan works well). **Knowledge of elementary algebra is required for successful completion of problem sets and exam questions.** Problem set due dates are indicated on the syllabus. We will review problem sets during our online labs.
5. Students will submit a 3-page paper that analyzes the micro-causal drivers behind human rights violations in a country of their own selection (see discussion of the capstone in Weeks 14-15).
6. Students will contribute to a group poster that aggregates individual findings and presents a regional overview of human rights violations in the area of their groups geographical focus (see discussion of the capstone in Weeks 14-15).
7. Accommodation for missed or late assignments may be granted only following office hours discussion with the instructor. Students can schedule office hours appointments through the instructor's MS Bookings link. An accommodation may be extended only if students have proper documentation that can be verified. If you anticipate you will have a conflict due to medical / health care, religious holidays or travel, please inform me the first week of class. In the absence of proper documentation, late work will be assessed a 1/3 of total grade penalty for each day the assignment is late.

Student Responsibilities

Honor Code: Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code. The GMU 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/> 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 Conflict: 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. <https://ulife.gmu.edu/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/>

Student Services

Counselling 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 <https://caps.gmu.edu>.

Grading, Assignment Description, and Deadlines

Assignment	Points	Description	Deadline
Syllabus Quiz	10	Open book quiz based on course syllabus.	XXXX
Weekly Quizzes	100	Cover lectures, CGG text, current events	Weekly
1-page Brief	20	Global challenges viewed through the lens of different polities	XXXX
Problem Sets	70	Complete assigned problems based on chapter readings.	Weekly
Group Poster	10	Capstone project	Weeks 14-15
3-page paper	100	Capstone project	Weeks 14-15
Total	300		

Grading Scale

A+: 294-300	A: 276-293	A-: 270-275
B+: 264-269	B: 246-269	B-: 240-246
C+: 234-240	C: 216-234	C-: 210-216
D: 180-209	F: 0 - 179	

Class total scores are rounded to the nearest whole number. A score of 269.49 rounds to 269, a B+. A score of 269.50 rounds to 270, an A-.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Note: The schedule can be adjusted to accommodate summer/fall/spring semesters.

Weeks 1-3: What Is Comparative Politics, What Is Science, and What *Is* Politics?

- Readings
 - Course Syllabus
 - CGG Ch. 1, “What Is Comparative Politics?”
 - CGG Ch. 2, “What Is Science?”
 - CGG Ch. 3, “What Is Politics?”
 - New York Times ‘World’ section
- Assignments
 - Syllabus Quiz.
 - **Lectures, course readings, and current events quizzes**
 - Ch. 2 problem set, questions 1-14.
 - Ch. 3 problem set, questions 1-6.
 -
- Learning Objectives
 - Develop an introductory understanding of Comparative Politics to go along with learning outcome 1.
 - Develop an introductory understanding of research design and the scientific method to go along with learning outcomes 2 and 3.
 - Develop an understanding of power in the role of state formation to go along with learning outcomes 3 and 4.

Weeks 4-6: Origins of the Modern State, Democracy and Dictatorship, and **Midterm**

- Readings
 - CGG Ch. 4, “Origins of the Modern State”
 - CGG Ch. 5, “Democracy and Dictatorship”
 - New York Times ‘World’ section
- Assignments
 - Ch. 4 problem set, questions 4-11.
 - CGG Ch. 5 problem set, questions 6-9, 13, 15-16.
 - **Lectures, course readings, and current events quizzes**
- Learning Objectives

- Deepen understandings of game theory and explore how strategic form games can be applied to state formation to go along with learning outcomes 3 and 4.
- Advance your understanding global political processes to go along with learning outcomes 1 and 2.

Weeks 7-10 The Economic and Cultural Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship

- Readings
 - CGG Ch. 6, “The Economic Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship”
 - CGG Ch. 7, “Cultural Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship”
 - New York Times ‘World’ section
- Assignments
 - Ch. 6 problem set, questions 1-5.
 - Ch. 7 problem set, questions 1, 2, 3, 6a, 7 (take screen shots), 11a, 11b.
 - **Lectures, course readings, and current events quizzes**
- Learning Objectives
 - Develop an understanding of the relationship between economics and regime change to go along with learning outcomes 1 and 2.
 - Develop an understanding of the relationship between culture and regime change to go along with learning outcomes 1 and 2.

Weeks 11-12: Democratic Transitions and Does Regime Type Make a Difference?

- Readings
 - CGG Ch. 8, “Democratic Transitions”
 - CGG Ch. 9, “Democracy or Dictatorship: Does It Make a Difference”
 - New York Times ‘World’ section
- Assignments
 - Ch. 8 problem set, questions 1, 4, 5, 6, 7.
 - Note: There is no problem set for Ch. 9. In lab we will address any remaining questions you may have from the Ch. 8 problem set.
 - **Lectures, course readings, and current events quizzes**
- Learning Objectives
 - Develop an understanding of pathways to political reform to go along with learning outcomes 1, 3, and 4.
 - Develop an understanding of the real consequences regime type has on every day life to go along with learning outcomes 3 and 4.

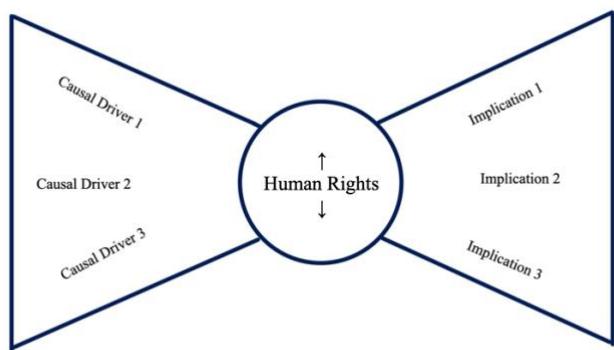
Week 13: Varieties of Dictatorship

- Reading
 - CGG Ch. 10, “Varieties of Dictatorship”
 - New York Times ‘World’ section
- Assignments
 - Ch. 10 problem set, questions 1-2, 5-6.
 - **Lectures, course readings, and current events quizzes**
- Learning Objectives
 - Develop an understanding of how variations in state-society relations influence authoritarianism to go along with learning outcomes 1, 3, and 4.

Week 14-15: Capstone—Group and Individual Analysis of Human Rights Precarity

GOVT 133 students, through collaborative and individual written analysis and oral presentation, will develop expertise in global and local variations in human rights and inequality (Mason Core Global Contexts Learning Outcome 2). Students will work in groups to conduct a “bow tie” analysis of the drivers and implications of (a) human rights erosion and (b) human rights improvements in diverse global polities. Students will form working groups based on regions of interest: Europe, Asia, Eurasia, Africa, the Middle East, Oceania, the Americas. Students will then work collectively to identify groups within these regions whose human rights—due to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, religion, caste, migration status, economic status, or any other lived identity—have faced or continue to face violations from state and non-state actors. Students will be asked to imagine two scenarios, one in which human rights for identified populations living in precarity erode further and one in which human rights for these identified populations improves. Students will then individually identify one local and one global causal driver behind human rights erosion and one local and one global causal driver behind human rights improvement (Mason Core Global Contexts Learning Outcome 1). Students will also independently identify local and global implications, both for the groups living in precarity and for polities more broadly, of human rights erosions and improvements. Lastly, students will reflect on how their own positionality within a globally interdependent and unequal world can both contribute to and provide solutions for challenges of human rights precarity (Mason Core Global Contexts Learning Outcome 3).

Bow Tie Analysis of Human Rights



Groups, with the support of GMU SP@RC, will aggregate their individual findings and present their regional analysis in a Gallery Walk using visually impactful posters. This group active learning and oral presentation exercise will be complemented by a 3-page written assignment in which students conduct a single case study of an individual or group of individuals who endured or continue to endure human rights precarity. This 3-page paper, in contrast to the group presentation on overall drivers of human rights variations, will explore micro-level causal mechanisms that produce human rights violation(s) the individual(s) in the case study face. Student case studies will be divided into three sections of roughly one page each: (1) discussion of the individual(s) lived human rights violation and how this lived experience either differs from or parallels lived experiences in other communities around the world (Mason Core Global Contexts Learning Outcome 1), (2) analysis, using the disciplinary lens of comparative politics, of the micro-causal drivers behind this specific violation (Mason Core Global Contexts Learning Outcome 2),

and (3) exploration of potential policies that students might advocate for (Mason Core Global Contexts Learning Outcome 3) to mitigate the likelihood of similar human rights violations in the future.

Capstone Assessment

1. Assessment of Individual Components of the Capstone Project
 - a. Identification of drivers behind human rights erosion
 - i. One local, polity-based driver of human rights erosion
 - ii. One global driver of human rights erosion
 - b. Identification of drivers behind human rights improvement
 - i. One local, polity-based driver of human rights erosion
 - ii. One global driver of human rights erosion
 - c. 3-Page Case study that explores
 - i. An individual's lived human rights violation
 - ii. The micro-causal drivers behind this specific human rights violation
 - iii. Potential policies that might mitigate the likelihood of similar human rights violations in the future.
2. Assessment of the Group Component of the Capstone Project
 - a. Creation of group poster
 - b. Presentation of findings in Gallery Walkthrough of Poster Presentations

Syllabus Draft Modification Notes

- XXXX Modifications
 - Modification 1
 - Modification 2