SAMPLE SYLLABUS by Dr. Fulya Felicity Turkmen
Approximate level: Lower level/100s

INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE POLITICS

The questions driving our class:

- Why do countries have different political systems, and what difference does it make?
- What explains the emergence, survival, and breakdown of democracies and dictatorships?
- How do institutions, culture, and economic conditions shape political outcomes?
- How do we compare across countries in a way that is both rigorous and meaningful?

Course Description:

This course provides a systematic introduction to the comparative study of politics. We examine the central questions, concepts, and debates that define comparative politics: the state and state formation, regime types and regime change, democratic institutions and their consequences, political culture and identity, the political economy of development, and the comparative method itself. Drawing on cases from across regions, the course equips students with the analytic tools to understand why political systems vary and what those differences mean for the people living under them.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to

- Define and distinguish among core concepts in comparative politics, including the state, regime, nation, and political institutions;
- Explain the major theoretical approaches to understanding regime types, democratization, and authoritarian resilience;
- Apply the comparative method, including most-similar and most-different systems designs, to political questions;
- Analyze the relationship between political institutions and political outcomes across country cases;
- Evaluate competing explanations for political phenomena, drawing on evidence from multiple countries;
- Present clear, evidence-based arguments about political variation using the comparative method.

Required Materials:

Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder. *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press, 2024. [CGG]

Additional short readings as assigned (available on course management system). Most supplementary readings are 5-15 pages and longer pieces will be flagged in advance.

Course Policies

GRADES

Quizzes (40%): Weekly quizzes on assigned readings. Each quiz has equal weight; your two lowest grades are dropped. There will be NO MAKEUP QUIZZES. All quizzes are open-book and open-note, but working with others is considered academic dishonesty and will be handled accordingly.

Country Case Analysis (20%): You will select a country and apply the concepts and theories from the course to analyze its political system (2,000 words). A draft proposal is due in Week 8 for peer feedback.

Midterm Exam (15%): ID terms and short essays covering Weeks 1-7. You will receive the exam in advance and may use a handwritten 3x5 card during the exam.

Final Exam (20%): Cumulative. ID terms followed by short essays. You will receive the exam in advance and may use a handwritten 3x5 card during the exam.

Self-Reflection and Assessment (5%): Two 1–2 page self-reflection essays. You will reflect on your work, the things you learned, and your plan for moving forward. I will provide a template for these reflections.

Academic Integrity

Should you commit academic misconduct in this class, you will be held accountable according to University policies. For more information regarding University policy and enforcement, visit [WEBSITE ADDRESS].

Accommodations

If you have a physical, psychiatric, emotional, medical, or learning disability that may impact your ability to carry out coursework, contact the Student Disability Resource Center, who will review your concerns and determine, with you, what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation are confidential.

Emergency or Illness

Should you experience a serious illness or personal emergency during this course that would prevent you from completing the required assignments, notify the professor immediately. Students who notify the professor may receive an incomplete grade in the course or pursue alternative actions, at the professor's discretion.

Course Schedule:

Readings should be completed before the Tuesday session of the assigned week. Readings marked (in-class discussion) will be discussed seminar-style, so it is especially important to read them ahead of time.

PART I: FOUNDATIONS

Week 1: What Is Comparative Politics?

CGG Chapter 1: Introduction
Recommended: Lijphart (1971) "Comparative Politics and Comparative Method," APSR 65(3): 682-693.

Week 2: The State

CGG Chapter 3: What Is a State?
(podcast) Planet Money, Ep. 868: "Moneyland"

Week 3: Nations, Nationalism, and Identity // Quiz

CGG Chapter 2: States and Nations
Good Authority, "Good to Know: Nationalism and Democracy" (goodauthority.org).

PART II: REGIME TYPES

Week 4: What Is Democracy? // Quiz

CGG Chapter 4: Democracy and Dictatorship: Conceptualization and Measurement
Dahl, Polyarchy (1971), pp. 1-16.

Week 5: Economic Determinants of Democracy

CGG Chapter 5: Economic Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship
Banerjee and Duflo, Poor Economics (2011), Chapter 1.

Week 6: Cultural Determinants of Democracy // Quiz

CGG Chapter 6: Cultural Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship
Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," Foreign Affairs, 1997.

Week 7: Democratic Transitions and Authoritarian Resilience

CGG Chapter 7: Democratic Transitions
Good Authority, "Why Do Election Losers Accept Their Losses?" (goodauthority.org). (in-class discussion)

MIDTERM EXAM

PART III: INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Week 8: Parliamentary, Presidential, and Semi-Presidential Democracies // Quiz

CGG Chapter 10: Parliamentary, Presidential, and Semi-Presidential Democracies
Country Case Analysis proposals due for peer feedback.

Week 9: Elections and Electoral Systems

CGG Chapter 11: Elections and Electoral Systems
(video) CGP Grey, "The Problems with First Past the Post Voting Explained" and "Multiple videos on alternative voting systems."

Week 10: Social Cleavages and Party Systems // Quiz

CGG Chapter 12: Social Cleavages and Party Systems
Good Authority, "Good to Know: What Is Polarization?" (goodauthority.org).

PART IV: COMPARATIVE POLITICS IN PRACTICE

Week 11: Varieties of Democracy and Democratic Backsliding

CGG Chapter 14: Varieties of Democracy and Political Outcomes
Good Authority, McCoy et al. (2025) "U.S. Democracy Is Under Attack. Here Are Some Lessons for Democracy's Defenders" (goodauthority.org). (in-class discussion)

Week 12: Political Violence and Revolution // Quiz

CGG Chapter 8: Varieties of Dictatorship (revisit authoritarian institutions)
Crenshaw (1981) "The Causes of Terrorism," Comparative Politics 13(4): 379-399.

Week 13: Gender, Development, and Comparative Politics

Viterna and Fallon (2008) "Democratization, Women's Movements, and Gender-Equitable States," American Sociological Review 73(4): 668-689. (in-class discussion)
Recommended: CGG Chapter 5 (revisit development section).

Week 14: Case Study Week: Applying the Tools // Quiz

No new readings. In-class: Students workshop their Country Case Analyses in small groups, applying course frameworks to their selected countries.

Week 15: Where Is Comparative Politics Going?

Good Authority, "Worried About the State of Democracy? Here Are Some Reasons to Be Optimistic Instead" (goodauthority.org).

Course wrap-up and review.

COUNTRY CASE ANALYSIS DUE: [DAY, TIME]

FINAL EXAM: [DAY, TIME]