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PSC 120S.01: Introduction to Comparative Politics

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Course Description

Introduction to the cross-national and comparative study of contemporary political systems. Focus on structural/behavioral similarities and differences, common and diverse political aspirations/struggles, and on domestic-foreign linkages. Reference to major illustrative countries in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students should understand patterns of governance and politics around the world, be able to explain similarities and differences among key political systems, be familiar with different theoretical and analytical approaches to the comparative study of political systems, and be capable of interpreting current events from a sound conceptual understanding and empirical grounding. This course also is intended to provide the basic grounding for advanced study of comparative politics at the upper-division level.

Required Texts


Course Requirements

Students are expected to complete readings on schedule, to attend class regularly, and to participate in class discussions and debates. Assessment will be based on the following:

Class participation – including group discussions/debates = 30%
Mid-term examination = 20%
Final examination = 50%
Course Outline and Reading Assignments

Part I: Overview

29 Jan A. Comparing political systems
*NG, Chpt 1

1 Feb B. Forms of government
*NG, Chpt 2

3 Feb C. Development and underdevelopment
*NG, Chpt 3

5 Feb D. Global and tribal tendencies
*CP, #54

8 Feb E. Shadows of Hate video

Part II: Western Europe

10, 12 Feb A. Britain/France/Germany
*NG, pp. 81-96; Chpt 5
*CP, #2,3,4,6,11,13,14.15

17 Feb B. The French “alternative”
*CP, #16,17,22,23

17 Feb C. EU and Euro
*NG, Chpt 6

17,19,22 Feb D. Debates
*CP, #28,30,31, 22, 23, 32, 33, 34,35,36

Part III: Russia and East/Central Europe

24 Feb A. Russia and Ukraine
*NG, pp. 165-168; Chpt 8; Chpt 9

24 Feb B. Debate
*CP, #37,38

26 Feb C. Post-breakup Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia
**NG, pp. 192-196, 239-253
Part IV: The Middle East

1 March  A. Israel and the Palestinian Question
*NG, pp. 270-277, 290-292; Chpt 12

1 March  B. Debate
*CP, #37,38

3 March  C. Iraq and Iran
*NG, pp. 296, 322-326

5 March  Mid-term examination

8-12 March  Group debate preparation

Part V: Asia

22 March  A. Overview
*NG, pp. 333-339, 361-362, 384-390

22, 24 March  B. China
*NG, pp. 344-348, 364-372, 391-398

26 March  C. Hong Kong

29, 31 March  D. Debates
*CP, #45,46,48,49

2 April  E. Japan
*NG, pp. 348-352, 372-376, 398-407
*CP, #20

5 April  F. India
*NG, pp. 352-355, 377-382, 407-413
*CP, #47

7 April  Of Snakes & Software: India at Crossroads of Change video

Part VI: Sub-Saharan Africa

9, 12 April  A. Colonialism and nationalism; contemporary political patterns
Poverty Complex video
*NG, Chpts 16, 17,18
14 April B. Namibia and South Africa
*NG, pp. 417, 460-461, 489-492
*CP, #43

16 April C. Horn of Africa

16 April D. Nigeria
*NG, pp. 417, 458-460, 486-488

19, 21 April E. Debates
*CP, #44

**Part VII: Latin America**

23 April A. Overview
*NG, pp. 499-504, 506-516, 528-530, 536, 545-551, 567-568

23 April B. Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina
*NG, pp. 517-525, 530-535, 537-543, 556-567

25 April C. Debates
*CP, #41,42

28 April D. Debt, SAP, and domestic distress
*NG, pp. 504-505, 551-556

**Part VIII: Comparative Conclusions**

30 April A. Devolution
*CP, #27

30 April B. Women in power
*CP, #24

3,5,7 May C. Debates
*CP, #25,50,52,53,54

12 May **Final Examination**
(1:10-3:10)