SYLLABUS

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Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays, 3-4:30 p.m.; and on Zoom by appt.

Course Description

This course serves as an introduction to the basic concepts, methods, primary empirical materials, theoretical approaches, and current challenges of comparative politics. Students will be trained to think and write critically on substantive issues in the politics of different countries. The substantive focus of the course will be democracy and its alternatives. The course will cover comparative democratic origins, comparative authoritarianism, processes of democratization (transitions to democracy and consolidation of democracy), breakdowns of democracy and autocratization (e.g., democratic backsliding) as well as democratic resilience.

What Is Expected of Students

Students will be expected to read, think, criticize, and form arguments. Outside of the classroom, this means that students must engage with the reading assignments and the required audiovisual materials. Inside the classroom, the work in this class is highly interactive, involving much debate and discussion, sometimes in formal, timed settings, and sometimes in less formal formats. The best students will be critical but balanced in their assessments, and they will develop coherent arguments that they can defend in their writing and in their classroom discussions and debates. Although students’ own life experiences and opinions are welcome and valued in this class, more frequently students will be asked to defend or analyze perspectives quite different from their own. The effectiveness of their arguments will be judged as rigorously as if they were personally held. Any student who believes that they will have difficulty taking on a particular position or listening to a certain point of view, ought to communicate their concerns to the professor before class or during office hours.

Materials

This course uses a variety of written and audiovisual materials that will all be available on Moodle.

Grading

Assessment of students in this course will be based on their performance on two light research papers, a group data analysis project with an oral presentation component, and classroom participation. The grade breakdown is as follows:

First writing assignment (25%)  
Second writing assignment (35%)  
Research Presentation (25%)  
Class participation (15%)
The Writing Assignments

Paper assignments in this course are of varying lengths. Yet all must be typed, paginated, and double-spaced with Times New Roman or Garamond font type, 12cpi font size, and one-inch margins. Failure to follow these style requirements will result in points deductions.

The writing assignments must be turned in as PDF files on Dropbox by 5 p.m. Late work will receive no credit. Students anticipating missing the deadline must contact the professor no fewer than 48 hours before the deadline. Since the ability to edit texts and produce concise argument is a touchstone for assessing and developing critical skills, students will not be allowed to surpass the required number of pages. A handout for each of these assignments will specify the parameters of each of these papers well before the due date. Revisions to graded first drafts will be possible.

Paper #1 Assessment of the Use of Comparative Methods

Students will be asked to select a single article from a list of citations, find and download a copy in PDF format. Once acquired, students will evaluate the article by identifying the main argument, the key variables, indicators for variance, and main concepts. The primary goal after this point will be to develop and articulate 2-3 cogent points of methodological critique on any aspect of the chosen article. This paper must be four to five pages in length. Additional requirements of this Methods Exercise will be made available in a handout.

Paper #2 Argumentative Paper Employing a Paired Comparison of Countries

Based on their study of approaches to the origins of democracy and authoritarianism, democratization and autocratization during most of the course, students will address a major research question and develop one or more hypotheses to test in a range of empirical cases. This paper will be 6-7 pages and will require some limited outside research. A handout will provide further details.

Research Presentation

As the class begins to consider more empirical cases, the students will be divided into groups of 3-4 members. Each group will be charged with the task of collecting secondary source materials and quantitative data on a number of countries as part of a collaborative project involving a choice of hypotheses. Each group will work with the professor to focus their project. Each research team will carry on some of their discussions in Moodle so that the professor may monitor the group’s progress. Each group will present their research formally in a timed presentation to the class during the final week of the term. A detailed handout will describe the format and other aspects of this project during the early part of the term.

Class Participation

It is not possible to be a consistently quiet observer in this course. The classroom work in this course requires constant communication of students’ insights into the subjects and materials of the class. Participation is an integral part of the way in which students prepare for graded assignments and are evaluated. Student participation will be assessed in both formal, structured exercises and
more informal and open-ended assignments in class. In most cases, the parameters of participation assignments will be explained in handouts and during prior classes.

Assessment of student participation provides some data to measure student learning. This course will use other tools, including occasional “diagnostics” that will ask students to respond to a small number of questions on the readings and presentations. The professor will follow up with students whose scores suggest some challenges with the materials or the schedule.

Attendance is required under normal circumstances. If health prevents in-person attendance, students so affected will be provided with a variety of alternative opportunities for participation and assessment. These may include asynchronous assignments and synchronous activities such as oral exams. This course will attempt to avoid simultaneous, hybrid formats in the classroom as these are disruptive and unsustainable.

Students who know that they will be absent due to a scheduling conflict involving athletic events, Model U.N., forensics, job interviews, or any other activity, must communicate their scheduling conflicts to the professor via email/text/WhatsApp as soon as possible.

Finally, there will be a number of enrichment opportunities linked to this course. Guest speakers who are providing on-campus talks, panel presentations, film screenings and webinars will add to the experience of this course. These are optional experiences, but I recommend that students avail themselves of at least one of these during the term. Speakers’ events included on the syllabus are required.

**The Grading Scale**

I will be using the following grading scale in this course:

- 98-100 A+
- 94-97   A
- 91-93   A-
- 88-90   B+
- 83-87   B
- 79-82   B-
- 76-78   C+
- 72-75   C
- 68-71   C-
- 67/below D/F

**Academic Misconduct**

Given the fact that academe relies upon the ethical conduct of scholars, students are held to the same standards in their own work. Any act of academic dishonesty or misconduct will be referred to the Office of the Dean of Students.

**Special Needs**

Carleton College is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Office of Accessibility Services (OAR) is the campus office that collaborates with
students who have disabilities to arrange for reasonable accommodations. If you have, or think you
may have, a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, autism spectrum, chronic health,
traumatic brain injury and concussions, sensory, or physical), please contact Sam Thayer, Director of
OAR, to arrange a confidential evaluation. This course will implement only accommodations first
approved by the OAR.

Global Trigger Warning

The substantive content of this course involves issues, subjects, and materials that some students
will find disconcerting and, perhaps, triggering. Whenever possible, I will do my best to provide
forewarning, but I also ask that students communicate directly with me about any issues or subjects
that are particularly concerning to them. These communications will be protected with the utmost
discretion.

NOTE: Readings must be completed for the dates assigned below.

SECTION ONE

THE COMPARATIVE METHOD

Session 1: Science! Assumptions, Causal Analysis, Concepts and Methods

Towards a Science of Politics (Monday, September 11)

Richard Harter, “Piltdown Man” (A Cautionary Tale About the Importance of Verification in
Scientific Inquiry). (Study the webpage to get the main idea of what happened and watch the Plainly
Difficult video on the hoax).

(June 6).

Malfeasance and Cherry-Picking Are Rife.” Chronicle of Higher Education (March 6).

The Epistemology of Political Science (Wednesday, September 13)

1994.

How Do We Know a Good Causal Argument When We See One? (Friday, September 15 and Monday, September 18)


Hall, Chapter 6.
Variables, Definitions, and Conceptualization (Wednesday, September 20)


Concepts and Causes in Debate: An In-Class Demonstration of How to Critique a Scholarly Work (Friday, September 22)


SECTION TWO

THE ORIGINS OF DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP

Session 2: Structural, Cultural, Economic and Socio-Historic Causes

Modernization Theory: Structural and Cultural Causes of Democracy (Monday, September 25)


For Moodle Homework Forum:


Modernization Theory: Economic Causes and Sustainability of Democracy (Wednesday, September 27)


Comparative Historical Sociology: Rule of Law and The Barrington Moore Theorem (Friday, September 29)


Recommended:


Session 3: Political Development: Order, the State, Revolution and Durable Authoritarianism

Political Order and Decay (Monday, October 2)


For Moodle Homework Forum:


Social Revolutions and Durable Authoritarianism (Wednesday, October 4)


Order Before Democracy? Vice Versa? (Friday, October 6)

Review discussion forum on Boix and Fukuyama.


Debate #1
Session 4: Democratic Breakdown and Comparative Authoritarian Regimes

Democratic Breakdown and Waves of Democracy (Monday, October 9)


Comparative Authoritarian Regimes (Wednesday, October 11)


Assessing the Greater Threat to Democracy: Ungovernability v. Incumbent Takeover (Friday, October 13)


Debate #2

MIDTERM BREAK (Monday, October 16)

SECTION THREE

PROCESSES OF DEMOCRATIZATION AND AUTOCRATIZATION

Session 5: Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation

Democratic Transitions: Elite Choice Approaches (Wednesday, October 18)


Simulating a Democratic Transition (Friday, October 20)

**Classroom Simulation**: A game-theoretic approach to liberalization and democratic transition.

**Political Institutions: Presidentialism and Parliamentarism (Monday, October 23)**


**Political Institutions: Parties and Electoral Systems (Wednesday, October 25)**


**Recommended:**


**Session 6: Hybrid Regimes, Autocratization and Democratic Backsliding**

**Hybrid Regimes and Autocratization (Friday, October 27)**


**Convo Speaker**: Staffan Lindberg, V-Dem Project, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

**Competitive Authoritarianism (Monday, October 30)**


**Populism and Polarization as Threats to Democracy (Wednesday, November 1)**


**Session 7: Democratic Resilience**

Opposition Strategies Against Democratic Backsliding (Friday, November 3)


**Guest Speaker:** Laura Gamboa (University of Utah), Gary Wynia Memorial Lecturer

Dealing With Populist Threats to Democracy (Monday, November 6)


Making Democracy More Resilient (Wednesday, November 8)


Debate #3

**SECTION FOUR**

STUDENT GROUP RESEARCH PROJECTS

(Friday, November 10; Monday, November 13 and Wednesday, November 15)