

POSC 125: Introduction to Comparative Politics

Instructor: Faramarz Farbod Office: Zinzendorf 102
(O) 610-861-1570 email: farbodf@moravian.edu

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Office Hrs.: W 1–3 PM

Or by appointment

In this course we will examine the contemporary but contending ways in which peoples and societies have organized themselves in order to satisfy human needs and desires. We will study the fundamental ways in which these systems are alike or different and what these mean to the lives of ordinary people living in these societies. But, that's not all. We will also take time to look at other critical factors. For example, the global capitalist system today is a neoliberal order facing multiple crises. We will spend a considerable amount of time examining what that means to societies we encounter. For example, we will look at the case of Brazil from the vantage point of hosting mega-sporting events to see how the global context of neoliberalism affects the lives of ordinary people there and how the latter have engaged in various forms of resistance and protest. We will examine India in similar fashion though not through the lens of mega-sporting events. A big part of the course also deals with comparing the US system with the German and the Chinese as well as with some contemporary Latin American states. While engaging in the latter comparisons and investigations, the course aims to remain alert to the various forms of conventional and non-conventional ways in which peoples and states have begun to challenge the dominant ways in which societies have been organized. In doing so we shall raise fundamental questions about the nature of "development" and will interrogate conventional understandings of the latter. We will consider, among other issues, whether those challenging neoliberalism today aim at a clean break or whether they represent attempts at creating post-neoliberal societies that nevertheless remain capitalist. Finally, we will consider an imagined and an alternative USA in hopes to sharpen our thinking about the core issues encountered in this course and to clarify what is at stake for ordinary people in all this.

Required Readings: (1) *Geoghegan: Were You Born on the Wrong Continent?* (2) *Werbel: Lessons from China* (3) Roy: *Capitalism: Ghost Story* (4) *Zirin: Brazil's Dance with the Devil* (5) Goldin: *Imagine: Living in a Socialist*

Grades* : Participation/TCs (30%); Book Review (20%); Quizzes (5) (10% each, 50% total)

Notes & Explanations:

- **Class Participation:** Regular attendance makes up a third (i.e., 10% of the course grade) of your class participation grade. The rest (i.e., 20% of the course grade) is determined by the quality of your participation in the Takeaway Circles and in the more general class discussions.
 - **Takeaway Circles (TCs):** Students will be organized into groups of 5. Each group forms a Circle. TCs begin most class sessions with discussions of the day's reading assignments. These discussions take place within each Circle. To facilitate informed discussions, I require (a) that each of you bring to your Circle a written form of the takeaway discussion items and/or probing questions and that you e-mail the same to me by noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays, (b) that each of you bring to class the reading materials under discussion, and (c) that a *facilitator* be designated on a rotational basis (ci) to moderate the Circle's discussions by ensuring that every person's items are considered and that discussions remain focused on significant issues as identified by the Circle's participants, and (ciii) to share with class at large what the Circle thinks is the most significant item for discussion and why.
- **Book Review:** By a Book Review I have in mind a commentary that answers the following four questions. a) What is (are) the book's main argument(s)? b) What evidence does the book offer in support of its main argument(s) or thesis? c) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the book? d) Do you find the book persuasive? Write no less than 1600-typed words. Reviews are due no later than a week after the class has finished reading and discussing a book you wish to review. I will not accept a late review. You may choose any of the required course books as listed above for this assignment.
- **Quizzes:** There will be 5 quizzes, one per each book. No make-up quizzes are allowed unless the absence is due to a substantiated emergency situation.
- **Class Readings** will be assigned on a class-by-class basis. If you miss a class, consult a classmate to find out about assigned readings.
 - **Attendance Policy:** Please arrive on time to every class. Students are encouraged to attend classes regularly. Absence due to illness requires written confirmation from a healthcare provider. Any other absence requires a satisfactory explanation otherwise it will be marked and incorporated into the course grade determination.
 - **Academic Honesty Policy:** In cases of cheating or plagiarizing in any way, I will follow the appropriate procedures as they appear in the College Student Handbook.
 - **E-Devices:** All electronic devices should be turned *off* before class.
 - Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Ms. Elaine Mara, Assistant Director of Academic & Disability Support, located on the first floor of Monocacy Hall (extension 1401). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic & Disability Support office.

* It is within my purview to apply qualitative judgment in the determination of any and all grades.