Course Overview

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been no universal political ideology challenging democracy. While authoritarianism still exists in the form of military dictatorships and Islamic-based fundamentalisms, a general understanding that eventually all political roads eventually lead to democracy has led to what Francis Fukuyama once classified as the “end of history”. However, the outbreak of ethnic-based conflicts from the Balkans to the Caucasus, to Africa and the Middle East, have raised questions on the universality of democracy, and led to the conclusion that we are now experiencing what Sam Huntington (in)famously termed a “clash of civilizations”. Whatever the beliefs, and whatever the political orientation, we are faced with a set of unavoidable facts: culture matters, identity matters, and most importantly, history matters; and they can matter more than democracy, civic co-fraternity, and economic cooperation.

Even more sobering is the harsh reality that since the end of the Cold War, and particularly after the September 11, 2001 attacks, both knowledge and understanding of culture throughout the world is severely limited in U.S. foreign policy. An inability of viewing societies beyond macrosocial categorizations has seriously impeded efforts in understanding how democracy works, and in many cases has actually worked at entrenching non-democratic regimes. It is thus critical for the study of politics to analyze the ways in which culture shapes political behavior and activity.

This course will discuss how various aspects of culture affect social relations and political activity. The course will center around three central questions:

- How is political activity and behavior shaped by culturally specific symbolic meanings and social codes?
- How and under what conditions do cultural identities (such as ethnicity and religion) become politicized in different political systems?
- How does the relationship between culture and politics shape our understanding of different areas of analysis in political science, such as, political economy, state formation, political participation and social movements?

We will address both theoretical and empirical studies of these themes and will draw on cases in both advanced industrialized as well as industrializing nation-states.

NOTE: There are no formal prerequisites for this course, but this is not a course for the apathetic or the lazy. The material is thorough, the workload is heavy, and I hold a lot of expectations. Please make sure you can meet the requirements and assignments.
Course Requirements

The structure of this class will not simply entail lectures and note taking. Readings will be followed by writing assignments meant to demonstrate the student’s ability to apply the concepts and knowledge learned. You are encouraged to challenge all conceptual formulations and develop your own approaches to problems discussed in the course. Do not simply take the arguments in the readings as be-all, end-all proclamations. Because the class will rely heavily on discussions of the readings and critically analyzing points and counter-points to many arguments, it is critical you attend class prepared, and arrive having completed the required reading. Class lectures are not solely based on assigned readings but will build on what we have read with new information provided by me. I have absolutely no problem giving unannounced quizzes if I feel the class is not keeping up.

Class attendance is also required. Two or more unexcused absences may affect your overall course grade. Four or more unexcused absences may result in you failing the class. Any absence due to illness or previous engagement must be accompanied by a doctor's note or other official letter explaining the reason for not being in class.

Students’ final evaluation will be determined by the following criteria:

- First paper assignment 20%  Paper due March 6
- Second paper assignment 30%  Paper due April 29
- Final exam (take home) 30%  Paper due no later than 7:00 PM May 10
- Class participation 20%  See description below

All papers must be submitted in hard copy and uploaded to Sakai. Late papers will result in a deduction of 1/3 of a grade each day they are late – including weekends. You may post your late paper to halt any additional penalties, but it must be followed up with a hard copy. There are no extensions. Assignments are given well in advance for you to manage your time.

Course Readings

There are no books for you to purchase. All readings are available for .pdf download via Sakai.

Final Exam

Your Final Exam will be cumulative and take-home. Assignment sheets will be given May 6. You are to upload a completed paper to Sakai by 7:00 PM May 10.

Statement on Class Participation

Class participation is accumulated throughout the semester through active engagement. This includes speaking in class discussion, posting online comments, successfully answering unannounced quizzes and short writing assignments, and coming to office hours (if necessary). Each time a student “participates”, a point will be awarded, with a maximum of 20 to be earned by the end of the semester. Please note that attendance is not related to participation. You can have a perfect attendance record but if you remain silent, you are not “participating”.

Policy on Academic Integrity

This course follows the requirements and penalties of the Academic Integrity Policy found in the Undergraduate Bulletin - http://policies.rutgers.edu/PDF/Section10/10.2.13-current.pdf. Any suspected violations will be referred to the appropriate Academic Integrity Officer. If you have questions about academic honesty, please ask.
Class Schedule

Introduction: What is Culture?

1/23: Taking Cultural Preferences Seriously in Political Science

- Read the syllabus, familiarize yourself with the website

1/28 – 1/30: Conceptualizing Political Culture


PART I: Theoretical Approaches to Political Culture

2/4 – 2/6: Theories of Social Capital

- Putnam, ch. 6: “Social Capital and Institutional Success”, pp. 163 – 185

2/11 – 2/13: Critiques of Social Capital


2/18 – 2/20: Theories of Social Character

- Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 22 – 49

2/25 – 2/27: Political Symbolism as a Dynamic Variable of Culture

PART II: The Role of Culture in Collective and Historical Memory

3/4 – 3/6: Theories of Collective Memory


*** First Writing Assignment Due March 6 ***

3/11 – 4/4: How Nations Remember their History


PART III: Culture as a Tool of Democracy and Authoritarianism

4/8: How Culture (Ab)Uses the Past to Legitimize the Present


4/10 – 4/15: How Culture Legitimize and Brings Down Dictatorships


EPILOGUE: American Pop Culture as a Universal Model?

4/24 – 4/29: A Culture of Consumerism in Postwar America


*** Second Writing Assignment Due April 29 ***

5/1: That Ain’t No High Culture You Got!


5/6: Last Day of Class

*** Take Home Final Exam Due uploaded to Sakai no later than 7 PM May 10 ***

- You may of course upload your paper to Sakai any time between May 6 and May 10. I will begin grading papers as soon as they are uploaded.