GVPT 459C: Seminar in Comparative Politics; Race and Ethnic Politics in Comparative Perspective

**Time:** 9:30 PM – 10:45 PM Tuesday and Thursday

**Professor:** Marcus Johnson

**Office:** Chincoteague 3117F

**Classroom:** TYD 0101

**Office hours:** Thursdays 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm or by appointment through Calendly: <https://calendly.com/mjohnsonjr11>

**Email:** [mjohnso6@umd.edu](mailto:mjohnso6@umd.edu)

**Graduate Course Assistant:** Mychala Walker

**Office:**

**Office hours:** Mondays 10:00 am to 12 pm, send email to schedule

**Email:** [walkm028@umd.edu](mailto:walkm028@umd.edu)

# Course Description

This course examines the multiple ways in which race and ethnicity become meaningful categories shaping political behavior. We will examine how race and ethnicity are socially constructed, why people accept (and sometimes reject) the categories imposed on them, and how categories and identities become drivers of political behavior. The course takes a comparative perspective on identity politics, looking at cases from multiple regions around the world. Because I am a scholar of race and ethnicity in Latin America, our course will engage several cases from across the region.

We will begin this course by examining how we typically encounter ethnic salience in current events and representative examples of identity politics scholarship. In the next unit we will position race and ethnicity as social constructs, interrogating what this means in theory and in the practice of identity politics scholarship. The third unit of the course will introduce three paradigms within constructivism--cleavage formation, instrumentalism, and group affect--with examples of how these interrelated theories have been applied to identity politics in Bolivia, India, and the United States. The fourth unit will apply the theories in the first two units to current events and will give you the opportunity to practice applying the theories from our course to an analysis of the real world. Students that are working on research and creative projects will have the opportunity to share their work with the class.

# Syllabus

This syllabus is a breathing document, meaning that it provides a solid structure of the course but specific dates, class topics, and assignment details are subject to change. I will always communicate about updates to the syllabus to provide you with adequate time to make adjustments as necessary. Please keep track of your email and this document on Canvas, which you can find on the course homepage.

# Course Goals

This class will introduce and build on key ideas and concepts in identity politics scholarship. Consequently, upon successful completion of the course you will be able to…

* Identify and Appraise several constructivist theories of racial and ethnic salience.
* Define key concepts in constructivist identity politics scholarship.
* Apply theories and concepts from the course to real world cases of racial and ethnic political competition.
* Compare the political salience of ethnicity and race across global regions.
* Critique and refine identity politics scholarship.
* Communicate ideas effectively through written and oral presentation.

# COVID-19 Course Policies

**Masking:** As the semester progresses, I may ask you to consider wearing a well-fitting mask during our class. The fall semester is tough with Covid, RSV, influenza and other infectious diseases and we should try our best to keep each other safe.

**Attendance:** Your active engagement in in-class activities is integral to the course experience. However, for health and safety, your attendance for in-person class meetings is not required. That said, I hope that everyone will be able to attend and participate in each class meeting. I will live-stream lectures on Zoom and will record lectures, although I cannot vouch for the audio and video quality of live-streams and recordings.

If you are feeling sick, have possibly been exposed to COVID-19, or are awaiting diagnostic test results, you should NOT come to class. If for whatever reason you are feeling ill or uncomfortable with in-person attendance, please attend through Zoom. If you will be unable to attend class, please email me as soon as you can. Attendance will not be directly factored into your final grade, but class “exit tickets” will be. Please see the grading policy and chart below for more details.

**Participation:** You should consistently contribute to class and small group discussions, whether you are attending through Zoom or in-person. You can contribute to class discussion by speaking to your peers in breakout sessions or making contributions to the full class discussion by voice or in the Zoom chat function (for virtual attendance). We will also utilize Google Docs for live annotations of class activities. Finally, there will be several short, ungraded quizzes and reflections (“Exit Tickets”) that I will ask you to complete throughout the semester. I promise to be generous and understanding with my assessment of participation. I ask that in return, you also make a consistent effort to actively engage with the class.

**Assignment Submission**: You will submit all assignments for this course via Canvas. Please do not email or submit hardcopies of assignments to me. Name your documents by combining the assignment abbreviation (e.g. RE1 for reflection essay #1, RE2 for reflection essay #2) and your first name and last name (e.g. RE1\_MarcusJohnson).

**Office Hours**: I will hold office hours in-person and/or via Zoom on Thursdays from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm or by appointment weekly. If you will attend my scheduled office hours, please use my [Calendly link](https://calendly.com/mjohnsonjr11) to schedule a 15-minute slot. If you cannot meet with me during that time, please first consult my availability on Calendly. After you schedule your appointment, please contact me by email to confirm our meeting time. Given the ongoing COVID situation, I will assume that we will meet on Zoom, unless you specify otherwise. Mychala will hold office hours via Zoom on Mondays from 10 am to 12 pm. Please send an email to [walkm028@umd.edu](mailto:walkm028@umd.edu) to schedule a meeting within this time.

**Course Communication**: In an effort to hold in-class announcements to a minimum, I will be using e-mail and Canvas to communicate most of the nuts and bolts of the course. I ask that you check your email and Canvas regularly. You are responsible for any information that I pass along via this medium. If you email me, you can expect a response between 24 and 48 hours on weekdays. I will respond to weekend emails on the following Monday.

# Additional Course Policies

**Accessibility Statement:** The University of Maryland is committed to creating and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive educational, working, and living environment for people of all abilities. The University of Maryland is also committed to the principle that no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of the University, or be subjected to discrimination. The University of Maryland provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals. Reasonable accommodations shall be made in a timely manner and on an individualized and flexible basis.

Discrimination against individuals on the grounds of disability is prohibited. The University also strictly prohibits retaliation against persons arising in connection with the assertion of rights under this Policy.

Accessibility & Disability Service (ADS) facilitates reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals. For assistance in obtaining an accommodation, contact Accessibility and Disability Service at (301) 314-7682, or adsfrontdesk@umd.edu. More information is available at the ADS website.

After receiving an Accommodations Letter from ADS, as a student you are expected to provide your course instructors with a copy of the Accommodations Letter, and meet with them, either virtually or in person to obtain their signature on the Acknowledgement of Student Request form. You and your instructors will discuss a plan for how the accommodations will be implemented in the course throughout the semester. Specific details regarding the implementation of certain ADS approved accommodations agreed upon among ADS, you as the student and the individual course instructor must be documented on a Detailed Implementation Plan, signed by you and the instructor, and submitted to ADS.

**Equity policy:** Our class will take a principled stance against racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, xenophobia, ableism, ageism and any other forms of language or (in)action that promotes inequities in the class community. Everyone makes mistakes and we will not cancel you for a lapse in judgment. However, we reserve the right to call each other in in the event that someone’s words or actions (including my own) violate this policy of equitable treatment.

All bias incidents should be reported to the [University’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion](https://diversity.umd.edu/) using [this online form](https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnivofMaryland&layout_id=50).

**Land Acknowledgement:** We are on the ancestral lands of the Piscataway People, who were among the first in the Western Hemisphere. We are on indigenous land that was stolen from the Piscataway People by European colonists. We pay respects to Piscataway elders and ancestors. Please take a moment to consider the many legacies of violence, displacement, migration, and settlement that bring us together here today.

[But what is the University of Maryland doing to address the continued practice of land theft?](https://dbknews.com/2022/01/28/end-performative-honoring-of-indigenous-people/)

**ChatGPT Policy:** "Unauthorized use of ChatGPT or similar language-generating software is prohibited in this course. Submitting work generated by ChatGPT or similar software will be considered a form of academic dishonesty and will be dealt with accordingly. If in doubt about the use of such software, please consult the instructor before submitting any assignments." (Policy generated by ChatGPT 😬)

# Labor Based Grading[[1]](#footnote-0)

This course uses a form of grading called **labor-based contract grading**. There are no points or letter grades in this course, aside from the final letter grade you earn at the end. The premise of contract grading is that if you do the work/labor required to earn a B, you will see enormous gains in your learning. Traditional grading systems encourage you to work for “points,” as if learning were a game whose goal was to get a certain grade. Contract grading redirects your focus on the *process of learning*. **Contract grading provides you with the reassurance that if you complete all of the assigned**

**work (the labor), you will earn a B**. This can free you up to take risks, and to focus on your learning, not your grade.

**Therefore the default grade for the course is a “B”.** In a nutshell, if you do all that is asked of you in the manner and spirit it is asked, if you work through the processes we establish and the work we assign ourselves in the labor instructions during the semester, if you do all the labor asked of you, then you’ll get a “B” course grade. It will not matter what I or your colleagues think of your writing and participation, only that you are listening to our feedback compassionately. **If you do not participate fully, turn in assignments late, forget to do assignments, do not follow the labor instructions precisely, or abuse this policy by submitting unsatisfactory work, you will get a lower course grade** (see the final breakdown grade table on the last page of this contract).

This system is better than regular grading for giving you a clear idea of what your final grade looks like at any moment. If you are doing everything as directed and turning things in on time, you’re getting a B. The Canvas gradebook will reflect a labor-based assessment model, and I will do my best to update it as often as I can when your labor is incomplete, late, missed, or ignored, so you should be able to check your standing at any time during the semester. Please reach out to me with any questions.

**Requirements for a “B” grade**

* *Participation.* You agree to fully participate in our scheduled class sessions and their activities and assignments, which means you will need to be present in class as often as you can, as most activities cannot be done before or after class and require your colleagues to complete. You are expected to read and take effective notes on every required reading to prepare for class meetings and the course assignments. I will expect that you have read, listened to and watched all required readings, podcasts and videos in preparation for the last class session assigned to that material (typically that is the second class dedicated to that material, but follow the course schedule as this may vary). You should also complete all “Exit Ticket” assignments prior to the start of our next scheduled class. If you are absent, you have notified Prof. J beforehand (when possible) and communicated with him within 48 hours of the missed class to make up missed in-class assignments.
* *Sharing and Collaboration.* You agree to give thoughtful peer feedback and work faithfully with your group/partner on other collaborative tasks. You also agree to work cooperatively and collegially in groups when asked. When we are in small groups, I will take note if it is evident to me that you are not actually engaging with the material or discussion. I’ll give you a warning if I notice a pattern. If you continue disengaged I will assess a -0.25 letter grade penalty.
* *Late/Incomplete Work.* You agree to turn in properly and on time all work and assignments expected of you in the spirit they are assigned, which means you’ll complete all of the instructions for each assignment. **If your work does not meet the expectations of the assignment, you will receive an incomplete grade for that assignment. I will give you the chance to revise your first incomplete assignment for full credit** (This means that the assignment will no longer count toward the limit of incomplete/late work, upon successful revision). During the semester, you may turn in a few assignments late. The exact number of allowed late/incomplete assignments is stipulated in the table on the last section of this contract. Late work is defined as any work or document due that is turned in AFTER the original due date/time.
* *Missed Work.* Missed work is any work unaccounted for in the semester—that is, I have no record of you doing it or turning it in. Accumulating any “missed work” will keep you from meeting our contract expectations (see table in Final Assessment Breakdown Section).

**Community-based labor for earning higher than a “B” grade**

The grade of B depends primarily on behavior and labor. Have you shown responsible effort and consistency in our class? Have you done what was asked of you in the spirit it was asked? Higher grades of B+, A-, and A, however, require more labor that helps or supports the class in its mutual discussions and examinations of the link between comparative politics and current events. **You will earn higher than a B in the class if you do all of what is required for a B and put in extra labor that benefits you and the whole class.** You may complete as many of the following items of extra labor as you like, but you can only complete each item once (unless otherwise stated). Each item completed fully and in the appropriate manner will raise your final course grade by one or two steps (unless otherwise stated).[[2]](#footnote-1) So, in most cases, completing one will raise your B to a B+ (1 step) or an A- (2 steps).

The same logic applies to those who are contracting for a C or below. Say, for example, you have submitted 2 late assignments and that you have 1 missed assignments, which means you meet the contractual agreement for a C grade. Finishing one of the extra assignments listed below will bring you up a step or two depending on the assignment you complete. You may even do more than two items and continue to raise your grade per item.

For the community based assignments (the assignments that come with grade bonuses) there are two types, Big Assignments and Small Assignments. Both come with letter-grade bonuses, but the bonus is larger for the Big Assignments:

* **Big Assignments:** 1) Completing 2 additional reflection essays and 2) the research project.
* **Small Assignments:** 1) In-class/Asynchronous Presentation, 2) Reflection Essay Peer Revision, 3) Course Playlist, and 4) Exceptional Assignment grading bonus.

#### **How to calculate your expected grade with Community Based Assignment Bonuses**

To earn higher than a "B" grade in this course, you can earn letter-grade bonuses by completing Big and Small Community Based Assignments. Below I outline the expected grade bonuses for a student with a baseline "B" grade.

* Complete 1 Small Assignment: Expected final grade is a B+
* Complete 2 Small Assignments: Expected final grade is an A-
* Complete 3 Small Assignments: Expected final grade is an A
* Complete 4 Small Assignments: Expected final grade is an A+
* Complete 1 Big Assignment: Expected final grade is an A-
* Complete 2 Big Assignments: Expected final grade is an A+
* Complete 1 Big Assignment and 1 Small Assignment: Expected final grade is an A
* Complete 1 Big Assignment and 2 Small Assignments: Expected final grade is an A+

So to wrap this up, I'll give two examples below of how you could earn an "A" from a baseline "B" grade.

* **Scenario 1:** 1) Complete Reflection Essay #1, 2) Complete 2 of the following reflection essays (Essay 2, Essay 3, Essay 4), 3) Complete Office Hours Check-in, 4) Miss no more than 4 Exit Tickets, 5) Complete 1 Small Assignment (e.g. Reflection Essay Peer Revision), 6) Complete Reflection Essay #5.
* **Scenario 2:** 1) Complete Reflection Essay #1, 2) Complete 1 of the following reflection essays (Essay 2, Essay 3, Essay 4), 3) Complete Office Hours Check-in, 4) Miss no more than 4 Exit Tickets, 5) Complete 1 Small Assignment (e.g. In-class/Asynchronous Presentation), 6) Complete Research Project.

# Overview of the Assignments (R: required assignments; CB: community-based assignments)

* **Office Hours Check-in (R):** You are expected to arrange at least one office hours meeting with me, Prof.. J, (virtual or in-person) by Thursday October 19. During the meeting we will discuss whether you plan to complete the research project, an in-class/asynchronous presentation, a creative project for reflection essay #5, your personal goals in the course and beyond the course, and hopefully we’ll just have the chance to get to know each other a little better.
* **Exit Tickets (R):** Most class meetings will include an “exit ticket” assignment. These may include short, ungraded quizzes and reflections that will challenge you to apply your knowledge from a given lecture and the associated set of readings. You are allowed to skip up to 4 exit tickets without a grade penalty. Exit tickets should be submitted prior to the start of the next class session. For example, the exit ticket for class 4, should be submitted before the start of class 5. Note that a late exit ticket is better than a missed exit ticket.
* **Two Reflection Essays (R):** Over the course of the semester you are required to write two reflection essays. Reflection Essay #1 is required for everyone. Reflection Essay #5 is required for everyone, unless you will complete the Research Project CB assignment below (for students that will complete the research assignment, you still must complete 2 total reflection essays). The reflection essays will vary in length (approx. 4-7 double-spaced pages in length) and content, but for each you will be required to respond to a specific prompt, making explicit reference to passages from course texts, as well as concepts and theories from the course and readings. I encourage you to be creative and adventurous with your responses. The goal is to engage critically with the course content, to move beyond summarizing course readings, to think about how certain ideas may be applied.
* **Research Project (CB–Big Assignment, 2 step bonus):** For the final research project, you will make a researched argument about whether and how ethnicity is salient to political behavior in a case study of your choosing. You might choose to conduct research on ethnic salience in a recent election (excluding U.S. federal elections, i.e. presidential and congressional), a protest movement, or some other instance of political behavior. You might conduct interviews, a survey, or participant observation. Or you might examine a specific ethnic party or “political entrepreneur” to analyze. The final project should be 10-14 double-spaced pages in length. You should make explicit reference to passages from course texts, as well as concepts and theories from the course and readings. Your project should critically evaluate the theoretical alternative explanations for ethnic salience that we have engaged in the class. You can choose to write this in the format of a traditional research paper, or you can adapt the format of some other form of argumentative or investigative writing (e.g. you can write a podcast episode, create a zine, a blog, a journalistic piece, etc.) **If you choose this option, you must submit a 2-page, double-spaced project proposal to me that outlines a clear research question, 2 explanatory or descriptive hypotheses, and 1 primary data source 1-day in advance of our office hours check-in meeting.** *Note that you are still required to complete 2 total reflection essays, but you are exempt from Reflection Essay #5.*
* **In-class/Asynchronous Presentation (CB–Small Assignment, 1 step bonus):** There are 2 possible versions of this assignment. **You may only earn this presentation credit once per semester.** All presentations must contain a visual aid (video media, presentation slides, info-graphic, etc.). If you opt to complete an asynchronous presentation, I will screen your video in class.
  + *Research Project Presentation (version 1)*: If you are completing the research CB assignment, you may elect to give a 7-10 minute presentation on your research. Your presentation should present your research question and motivate your research question by engaging our course readings and related readings. The presentation should propose at least 2 alternative explanations/answers to your question and their relationship to theories from the course. Finally, you should present the findings from your research (at whatever stage that they are). The research presentations will be held during the final week of class (Dec. 5 & 7).
  + *Current Events Presentation (version 2):* You may elect to give a 7 minute presentation on a recent current event. Your presentation should explain the who/what/when/where of the current event in about 3 minutes. The remainder of your presentation should explain the how/why of the current event using a theoretical framework from our course. Your presentation should engage with our course readings and other related readings. The current events presentations will take place during the penultimate week of class (Nov. 28 & 30).
  + Reflection Essay #5 Creative Presentation (*version 3*): You may elect to give a 7 minute presentation on your creative project. Your presentation should present the topic or theory from our class and explain how your project could be used to teach others about this course theory or concept.
* **Reflection Essay Peer Revision (CB–Small Assignment, 1 step bonus):** By the reflection essay deadline, you can choose to submit a draft of your assignment for feedback. You will be assigned another student’s draft to read and provide suggestions for revision. You will also receive comments from your partner to revise your own draft. You must submit a first draft of your reflection essay by the original due date. You will then have 7 days to exchange drafts with your partner, write a 1.5 page revision memo, and submit a final, revised draft. This option is available for reflection essays #2-4. I will provide guidelines for the revision memo on canvas prior to the deadline for reflection essay #2. **You will submit the revision memo that you received from your partner and your revised draft.** **You may only earn this presentation credit once per semester.**
* **Course Playlist (CB–Small Assignment, 1 step bonus)**: Curate a playlist for the semester. Your playlist should include 6-8 songs and each song should correspond to one class session. Each song should clearly identify which lecture (lecture title and date) it relates to and include a 3-5 sentence annotation that explains why you think the song is relevant to that day’s lecture. Be sure to engage key-terms and concepts from the course in your annotation. Podcast episodes count as songs!
* **Complete 2 additional reflection essays (CB–Big Assignment, 2 step bonus):** There will be a total of 5 reflection essay prompts this semester. The reflection essays will vary in length (approx. 4-7 double-spaced pages in length) and content, but for each you will be required to respond to a specific prompt, making explicit reference to passages from course texts, as well as concepts and theories from the course and readings. You must complete 2 more reflection essays in addition to the required reflection essays to earn this credit. **You cannot earn partial credit by completing just 1 extra essay.**
* **Exceptional Assignment Bonus (CB–Small Assignment, 1 step bonus):** For each of the assignments above (excluding the office hours check-in assignment and exit ticket assignments) you may earn an additional 0.25 letter grade bonus to your final course grade, if your work exceeds my expectations for the assignment (**you can earn this credit up to 2 times in a single-semester for a total 0.5 letter grade bonus**). The criteria for an exceptional essay/presentation grade are necessarily subjective, although I will provide feedback on all writing assignments throughout the semester to help you to figure out how to earn an exceptional grade.

|  | **# of late/incomplete required assignments** | **# of missed assignments** | **# of missed exit tickets** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **A** | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| **B** | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| **C** | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| **D** | >2 | 2 | 6 |
| **E** | >2 | >2 | 7 |
| **F** | >2 | >2 | 8 |

# Important Dates

To keep up with all dates for class meetings, readings, and assignments please follow the [course schedule](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mIVwVpiV-fSUOE9gWsuVMNlPcSvO1EOzjJOKFH2lJCo/edit?usp=sharing), also available on Canvas.

The following dates are important course meetings and deadlines

* Sep. 12: Guest Speaker—Harinee Suthakar
* Sep. 14: Reflection Essay #1 (R) due
* Oct. 2: Related Event – Dr. Olukunle Owalabi presents to UMD Comparative Politics Workshop
* Oct. 3: Reflection Essay #2 (CB) due
* Oct. 10: Discussion questions for guest speaker due
* Oct. 12: Guest speaker—Nnamdi Lumumba
* Oct. 19: Last day for office hours check-in
* Oct. 26: Reflection Essay #3 (CB) due
* Nov. 16 & 18: Film watch, *Plaza Catedral* and discussion
* Nov. 21 & 23: No class – Thanksgiving Break
* Nov. 28: Reflection Essay #4 (CB) due
* Nov. 28-30: Current Events Presentations
* Dec. 5-7: Final Project Presentations
* Dec. 14 (finals): Reflection Essay #5 or Research Project is due

1. Wording and policy adapted from Rehanna Kheshgi’s MUS237 Syllabus and Grading Contract [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. 1 grade step is equivalent to going from a “B” to a “B+” or from an “A-” to an “A”. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)