



Course Syllabus: Foundations of Government and Politics

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

POLS 2523 Section 101

Fall 2026, Tuesday/Thursday 12:30-1:50pm

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Juheon Lee

Office: O'Donohoe Hall 203

Office hours: Monday 3:30-5pm; Tuesday 2pm-5pm; and Wednesday 9am-12pm

Office phone: (940) 397-4563

E-mail: juheon.lee@msutexas.edu

Course Description

This course will introduce students to key concepts and major theoretical and methodological components of comparative politics, a subfield of political science that compares politics across countries. The assumption of this course is that we may better understand domestic political issues by comparing different political systems; therefore, its objective is to help students build up the ability to understand and analyze different political systems and key political issues around the world. By the conclusion of this course, students should be able to analyze various political issues using methods and theories of comparative politics. To achieve this goal, the course provides students with opportunities to practice various analytical skills in a range of real-world cases.

Textbook & Instructional Materials

- Patrick H. O'Neal, *Essentials of Comparative Politics* (7th edition) [Required].
- Patrick H. O'Neal, *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics* (5th edition) [Recommended]

Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook](#)

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work not the individuals to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the Office of Student Conduct.

[Office of Student Conduct](#)

Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support student's studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started on this [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources and learn how to best utilize the library.

Grading

Completing ALL the readings and regular attendance will be required of all students. Active participation in discussions is critical for students to succeed in this course.

Table 1: Points allocated to each assignment

Assignments	Points
Engagement (Attendance & Participation)	10
Movie Reflection Papers (5 points x 2)	10
Current Event Presentation (Proposal meeting 5 points)	20
Current Event Policy Paper	20
Midterm Exam	20
Final Exam	20
Total Points	100

Table 2: Total points for final grade.

Grade	Total Points
A	90 and above
B	80 to 89
C	70 to 79
D	60 to 69
F	Less than 60

Course Engagement (10%)

Your attendance and participation are vital to learning the material presented in this course. You will be expected to come to class prepared to engage thoughtfully, listen attentively, and interact with your peers respectfully. If you cannot come to class, contact me via email and provide details about your situation at your earliest convenience for your absence to be excused. ***Over the course of the semester, 4 absences will be excused for all students. More than 4 absences and unexcused absences will lower your grade.**

Movie Reflection Papers (10%)

During the semester, we will watch 2 movies on comparative politics. You will be expected to respond to each of the movies in a short reflection paper (500 words). Your response must be critical and go beyond a summary or a description of those movies. Originality will be critical for your grade (***AI assistance or similarity rate above 5% will be penalized**). All papers should be submitted electronically via D2L.

Current Event Presentation (20%)

All students are required to sign up for a slide presentation in the first week. The 30-minute presentation should include an in-depth case study on a topical political issue and some questions for class discussion. Each student will have a mandatory meeting with the instructor to decide a presentation topic. An effective and interactive presentation will earn extra credits.

Policy Paper (20%)

All students are required to complete an analytical paper on a specific political/policy issue by comparing two countries. A good paper successfully explains how different countries have taken different approaches to the same problem, compares pros and cons, and evaluates policy results. The goal is to provide policy implications by comparing and contrasting. You must use a critical thinking approach. A detailed guide will be provided.

Mid-Term Exam (20%) / Final Exam (20%)

Each exam will consist of 2-3 essays. They will test your understanding of the key concepts and the main arguments of the assigned articles. The exams will also ask you to apply a theoretical framework to the real-world examples. A study guide will be provided before the exams, and make-up exams will be granted only in case of dire and documented personal emergencies.

Late Work

Late assignments will be accepted with a grade reduction.

Important Dates

- Last day for term schedule changes: Check date on [Academic Calendar](#).
- Deadline to file for graduation: Check date on [Academic Calendar](#).
- Last Day to drop with a grade of "W:" Check date on [Academic Calendar](#).
- Refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage. If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program or contact your instructor.

Online Computer Requirements

This course requires you to have access to a computer (with Internet access) to complete and upload your assignments. It is your responsibility to have (or have access to) a working computer in this class. ****Assignments and tests are due by the due date, and personal computer technical difficulties will not be considered reason for the instructor to allow students extra time to submit assignments, tests, or discussion postings.*** Computers are available on campus in various areas of the buildings as well as the Academic Success Center. ****Your computer being down is not an excuse for missing a deadline!!*** There are many places to access your class! Our online classes can be accessed from any computer in the world which is connected to the internet. Contact your instructor immediately upon having computer trouble. If you have technical difficulties in the course, there is also a student helpdesk available to you. The college cannot work directly on student computers due to both liability and resource limitations however they are able to help you get connected to our online services. For help, log into [D2L](#).

MSU Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend all meetings of the classes in which they are enrolled. Although in general students are graded on intellectual effort and performance rather than attendance, absences may lower the student's grade where class attendance and class participation are deemed essential by the faculty member. In those classes where attendance is considered as part of the grade, the instructor should so inform students of the specifics in writing at the beginning of the semester in a syllabus or separate attendance policy statement.

An instructor who has an attendance policy must keep records on a daily basis. The instructor must give the student a verbal or written warning prior to being dropped from the class. Instructor's records will stand as evidence of absences. A student with excessive absences may be dropped from a course by the instructor. Any individual faculty member or college has the authority to establish an attendance policy, providing the policy is in accordance with the General University Policies.

Change of Schedule

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester or the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

Refund and Repayment Policy

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Midwestern State University (MSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. HOWEVER, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. As described below, two formulas (federal and state) exists in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

Services for Students with Disabilities

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Student Wellness Center, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

College Policies

Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Refer to: [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

College policy strictly prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by WATC. Adult students may smoke only in the outside designated-smoking areas at each location.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibits the unlawful possession, use or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

Campus Carry

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes has prohibited. The new Constitutional Carry law does not change this process. Concealed carry still requires a License to Carry permit, and openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit [Campus Carry](#).

Active Shooter

The safety and security of our campus is the responsibility of everyone in our community. Each of us has an obligation to be prepared to appropriately respond to threats to our campus, such as an active aggressor. Please review the information provided by MSU Police Department regarding the options and strategies we can all use to stay safe during difficult situations. For more information, visit [MSUReady – Active Shooter](#). Students are encouraged to watch the video entitled “Run. Hide. Fight.” which may be electronically accessed via the University police department’s webpage: ["Run. Hide. Fight."](#)

Grade Appeal Process

Update as needed. Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [MSU Catalog](#)

***Notice:** Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Comparative Politics

Discussion Topics: Why do we study comparative politics? What are the major components of studying comparative politics? How can the study of comparative politics be made more scientific? What can political science tell us that we don't already know?

August 25

- Introduction to the course
- **Presentation sign-up**

August 27

- Chapter 1
- Lichbach and Zuckerman, *Research Traditions and Theory*
- King, Keohane, and Verba, *The Science in Social Science*
- **Presentation sign-up**

Week 2: States

Discussion Topics: How do countries create and maintain political power? What are the sources of legitimacy that give states power? How would we measure their strength or weakness?

September 1

- Chapter 2
- Herbst, *War and the State in Africa*
- ***Presentation sign-up**

September 3

- Rotberg, *The New Nature of Nation-State Failure*
- Krasner, *Sovereignty*
- ***Presentation sign-up deadline**

Week 3: Nations and Society

Discussion Topics: What is a society? What is a nation? What do you mean by political identity? How do people organize themselves into political communities?

September 8

- Chapter 3
- Hobsbawm, *Nationalism*
- ***Student presentation 1**

September 10

- Alesina and La Ferrara, *Ethnic Diversity and Economic Performance*
- ***Student presentation 2**

Week 4: Nations and Society 2

Discussion Topics: What are the components of ethnic identity? How does national identity bind people together? What is the difference between citizenship and patriotism? What are the causes of ethnic and national conflict?

September 15

- Chapter 3
- Baldwin and Huber, *Economic Versus Cultural Differences*
- *Student presentation 3

September 17

- *Movie Watching: "Beasts of No Nation" or "American Factory"*
- *A reflection paper should be submitted by September 20 (11:59 pm)

Week 5: Political Economy

Discussion Topics: How do people use politics to create and distribute wealth? How are states involved in the management of markets and property? How do states provide public goods? What are the future trends of political-economic systems?

September 22

- Chapter 4
- Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*
- *Student presentation 4

September 24

- North, *Institutions*
- Acemoglu, *Root Causes*
- *Student presentation 5

Week 6: Democratic Regimes

Discussion Topics: What are the key components of democracy? Why has democracy emerged in some cases and not in others? What are the differences between plurality, majority, and proportional electoral systems?

September 29

- Chapter 5
- Schmitter and Karl, *What Democracy is...and is not*
- Lijphart, *Constitutional Choices for New Democracies*
- *Student presentation 6

October 1

- Stepan, Linz, and Yadav, *The Rise of "State-Nations"*
- *Student presentation 7

Week 7: Midterm Exam

October 6

- *Student presentation 8
- Review for exam

October 8

- *Online exam should be completed within the 24-hour window (12:01am–11:59pm)

Week 8: Non-Democratic Regimes

Discussion Topics: Why have some countries failed to establish democracy? What are the differences between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes? How do nondemocratic regimes maintain power? How can you distinguish between personal, monarchical, military, one-party, theocratic and illiberal regimes? How can you explain the persistence of illiberal regimes despite the trend away from authoritarianism?

October 13

- Chapter 6
- Linz and Stepan, *Modern Nondemocratic Regimes*
- *Student presentation 9

October 15

- King, Pan, and Roberts, *How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression*
- *Student presentation 10

Week 9: Political Violence

Discussion Questions: How have the administrations in the US responded to the environmental problems? Since when, have we seen the rise of environmentalism in the US?

October 20

- Chapter 7
- Crenshaw, *The Causes of Terrorism*
- *Student presentation 11

October 22

- Atran and Axelrod, *Reframing Sacred Values*
- *Student presentation 12

Week 10: Developed Democracies

Discussion Topics: Is democracy the key to peace and prosperity? What are the characteristics of developed democracies? How do political, economic, and social institutions differ in the developed democracies? How do political, economic, and social institutions differ in the developed democracies? How have developed democracies faced challenges to sovereignty? How have developed democracies seen a rise in postmodern values?

October 27

- Chapter 8
- Tocqueville, *Author's Introduction*
- *Student presentation 13

October 29

- Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson, and Yared, *Income and Democracy*
- Duverger, *The Number of Parties*
- *Student presentation 14

Week 11: Communism and Post-Communism

Discussion Topics: Why did communism fail, and what are its legacies? What are the foundations of communist ideology? How did communist systems seek to eliminate inequality? Can you analyze the effects of state control over markets and property?

November 3

- Chapter 9
- Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*
- *Student presentation 15

November 5

- *Movie Watching: "Hotel Rwanda," "The boy who Harnessed the Wind," or "Climate Change and Displacement"*
- *A reflection paper should be submitted by November 8 (11:59 pm)

Week 12: Developing Countries

Discussion Topics: What are the causes of poverty and wealth? What are the key characteristics of developing countries? How have imperialism and colonialism affected developing countries' state, societal, and economic institutions?

November 10

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 9
- Easterly, *To Help the Poor*
- Clark, *The Sixteen-Page Economic History of the World*
- *Student presentation 16

November 12

- Collier and Gunning, *Why Has Africa Grown Slowly?*
- *Student presentation 17

Week 13: Developing Countries

Discussion Topics: How have post-imperial countries suffered from ethnic and national division, limited economic growth, and weak states?

November 17

- *We the People*, Chapter 10
- Rodrik, *Is Global Governance Feasible? Is It Desirable?*
- *Student presentation 18

November 19

- *We the People*, Chapter 10
- *Student presentation 19
- *Student presentation 20
- *Policy Paper due by 11:59pm

Week 14: Globalization

Discussion Topics: How do global forces shape local communities? How do you define globalization? How can economic globalization transform markets and property within and between countries?

November 24

- *We the People*, Chapter 7
- Bourguignon, *Inequality and Globalization*
- Ferguson, *Populism as a Backlash against Globalization*

November 26

- *Thanksgiving break (No class)

Week 15: Final Exam (December 3)

December 1

- *Recap & Review for exam*

December 3

- *Online exam should be completed within the 24-hour window (12:01am–11:59pm)