

PS 119 Nation-States and Democracy

Seminar Leaders: Aysuda Kölemen, Riaz Partha Khan, and Boris Vormann

Course Times: Wednesdays and Fridays 14:00-15:30

Office Hours: By appointment

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Course Description

Why and how do political systems differ from one another? Which processes have led to the formation of distinct political regimes? And how do these historical variations affect politics today? In addressing these questions in a wide set of contexts, this course provides an introduction to key theoretical approaches and concepts in the comparative study of politics. The focus will be on core topics in political development such as state and nation-building, the role of the state in the economy, its relationship to civil society and processes of democratization. We will also look at different types of political regimes, electoral and party systems—and the ways in which they affect the structure, functioning, and social role of political institutions. We explore these topics from a comparative perspective in combining theoretical texts with case studies. By the end of the course, students will be able to understand important topics in domestic politics, grasp the diversity of political systems and regimes, and analyze current political developments.

Requirements

Reading material

→ Class Reader (available at the library)

Class preparation

In preparation for class, carefully read the assigned texts and actively engage with their core arguments. Take comprehensive notes during your reading and strive to anticipate questions such as: Why do the authors present their arguments in a particular manner? How do they introduce and support their claims? Consider how their line of reasoning connects with earlier readings and discussions in the class. This proactive approach will enhance your understanding and contribute to more meaningful participation in class discussions.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) will not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Every unexcused additional absence from a 90-min session lowers the overall participation grade by five percentage points. Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assignments, Grade Breakdown and Essay Deadlines

Oral

- Classroom Participation (2*15%) 30%

This seminar requires thoughtful and active participation in class discussions and working groups. This involves consistently reflecting on current events relevant to the course's core themes. The classroom is a safe space, and you should feel free to express your arguments and comments openly. Please do not hesitate to communicate with the seminar leader if you ever feel that this environment is not being maintained.

- Case Study Presentations 15%

Each student will present their case studies, which are also the focus of the final paper, through concise and professional presentations. Each presentation is limited to no more than 15 minutes, with time strictly enforced. The emphasis will be on presenting the puzzle, research question, the main line of argumentation and potential conclusions.

Written

All assignments must be submitted per email attachment before the respective session, please use Times New Roman pt 12, 1.5-spaced. Make sure to use Chicago Style for your bibliography and in-text citation!

- Extended Introduction (1,500 words, due April 17) 20%

The introduction frames the puzzle and research question. It embeds them in existing literature, describes the empirical material and how it will be analyzed, and presents the (tentative) main line of argumentation in broad strokes. What have other authors argued about your theme? What are your hypotheses? Which data will you look at to make your case?

- Final Essay (3,500 words, excl. bibliography, due May 15) 35%

The final essay is due on May 15. It will consist of an introduction (including positioning with reference to existing literature), main body (that develops and substantiates your argument), and a conclusion (as well as a bibliography). Use paragraphs and subheadings to clearly structure your text.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers and Academic Integrity

Written assignments that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded by 5 percentage points. For every additional 24 hours, five additional points will be subtracted from the grade. The instructor will not accept essays that are more than 96 hours late. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Schedule

Week
Beginning

Wednesday

Friday

I. Comparing Modern States

What is Comparative Politics?

1
Jan 26
Calhoun, *Diction. of the Social Sciences*
Hague, *Theoretical Approaches*
Please watch Pappas, [The Rise of Modern Populism](#)

Modern State Formation

Hall, *Varieties of State Experience*
Manow & Ziblatt, *The Layered State*

Democratization

2
Feb
Huntington, *Democracy's Third Wave*
Geddes, *What Causes Democratization?*

Articulating Puzzle & Question

Workshop

Gustafsson & Hagström, *What is the Point?*

II. Democratizing the State

Democracy in Theory

3
Feb 9
Dahl, *On Democracy*

Separation of Powers

Newton & Van Deth, *Constitutions/Presidential and Parliamentary Govt.*

Parties and Electoral Systems

4
Feb 16
Gallagher, *Elections and Referendums*
Katz, *Political Parties*

Federalism and Regionalization

Sonnicksen, *Federalism and Democracy*
Gagnon, *Multinational Federalism*

Democratization and Autocratization

5
Feb 23
Brooker, *Authoritarian Regimes*
Lührmann & Lindberg, *A Third Wave of Autocratization is Here*

Selecting and Comparing Cases

Ryan, *The Comparative Method*

→ start thinking about cases in class!

III. Nations and Nationalism: Defining the Demos

Civic vs Ethnic Nationalism

6
March 2
Smith, *The Origins of Nations*
Brown, *Are There Good and Bad Nationalisms?*

Identity as a Political Instrument

Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*
Watch [Aleida Assmann on Memory](#)

The Role of Gender and "Race"

7
March 9
Thomson, *Gender and Nationalism*
Watch [Benedict Anderson on Nationalism](#)

Do Nations (Still) Matter?

Nussbaum, *Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism*
Calhoun, *Nations Matter*

8
March 16

Postcolonial Critique
Doran, *Post-Colonialism, Anti-Colonialism, Nationalism, & History*

How to write a Literature Review?
Workshop
Knopf (2006), *Doing a Literature Review*

IV. Illiberalism and Renationalization

9
March 23

What is Populism?
Müller, *What is Populism?*
Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*

Is Populism Nationalism?
Brubaker, *Populism and Nationalism*

Spring Break March 30-April 6, 2026

10
April 6

A Consequence of Neoliberalism?
Fraser, *Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump*
Please watch Brown, [Neoliberalism's Anti-democratic Stealth Revolution](#)

A Conservative Revolution?
Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*
Drolet and Williams, *Radical Conservatism and Global Order*

11
April 13

Global south authoritarianism
Varghas-Maia and Pinheiro-Machada, *A new radical right in the Global South?*

*****Submit extended introduction*****
Puzzle, Question, Case Selection, Lit Review

V. Democracies in Crisis: Case Study Workshops

12
Apr 20

The Americas and Europe

Asia and Russia

13
Apr 27

Africa

Federal Holiday

VI. How to Save Democracy? The Problem of Scale

14
May 4

Fixing Democracy
Please watch
Ziblatt, [Tyranny of the Minority](#)
Barber, [Why Mayors Should Rule the World](#)

Cosmopolitan Hopes and Limits
Archibugi, *Global Commonwealth of Citizens*
Mouffe, *Democracy, Human rights, and Cosmopolitanism*

****FINAL ESSAY DUE** MAY 15, 2026**

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).