

ADVANCED OVERVIEW OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Political Science 411/511
Portland State University

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Fall 2025
Tuesdays 5:30-8:50 pm
[Karl Miller Center](#) 285

Office Hours

Kinsella: Tuesday 2:00-3:00, URBN 650L or via [Zoom](#)
Chris Shortell (co-instructor): Tuesday and Thursday 9:30-10:30, URBN 650J or via [Zoom](#)
Safia Farole (co-instructor): By appointment via [Zoom](#)
Jack Miller (co-instructor): Wednesday, 1:00-2:30, URBN 650M or via [Zoom](#)

Course Description

This course provides an advanced overview of the four established fields of research in political science: International Relations, American Politics, Comparative Politics, and Political Theory. This course is thus divided into four segments, with each field taught by a professor who specializes in it. During each field segment, students learn about some of the central research areas, questions, and themes of the field, as well as read advanced political science research that represents the typical analyses performed in that field. In addition, each field segment will include a special focus on the professor's field of expertise. At the end of the course, students will have a strong understanding of the main fields of political science, and be better prepared to design and perform advanced research in political science.

Learning Objectives

The course aims to develop an understanding of the differences between the four established fields of research in political science: International Relations, American Politics, Comparative Politics, and Political Theory. However, this course goes well beyond a simple field introduction, and will instead serve to acclimatize students to each fields' norms, perspectives, and methodologies. Students will read advanced political science research in each field and, at the conclusion of each of the four field segments, have an opportunity to submit a paper that advances an original theoretical contribution relevant in that field. All students will therefore learn how we conceptualize politics at the most advanced levels, and how their own research could contribute to the discipline.

For *graduate students*, there are additional learning objectives. Because graduate students are asked to write substantially longer papers, this will facilitate gaining high-level knowledge in each field. Graduate students will gain a more in-depth understanding of, for example, what sorts of questions are asked in each field as well as how the scholars in those fields form theories to answer those questions. In addition, because each field segment provides both a field overview as well as emphasis on the particular research area of the professor teaching that segment, graduate students will learn how to craft research that aligns with the expertise of the faculty.

At the end of this course, students should understand:

- The differences between the four major fields in political science.
 - From the International Relations segment: A grasp of the major theories that political scientists use to interpret and analyze events in world politics.
 - From the American Politics segment: An understanding of the difference between institutional and behavioral approaches to American politics as well as the role of historical institutionalism in the study of courts.
 - From the Comparative Politics segment: an understanding of the differences between regime types, the impact of domestic institutions, and the use of representation as a tool of the elites.
 - From the Political Theory segment: How and why methods of inquiry are themselves political.
- How to access, evaluate, and build upon political science scholarship.

In addition to the above outcomes, *graduate students* will have gained:

- An understanding of the areas of expertise represented by the faculty and how the student's own research interests can be developed while pursuing a master's degree.
- An opportunity to advance an original theoretical contribution to a field encountered in a review of the political science literature.

Readings

All assigned readings can be retrieved from the [Millar Library website](#), in Canvas, or are available online. If no link is provided for the course reading, log into the library and search the online holdings. Searching by the title of the article (in quotes) is usually the most efficient.

Paper Assignments

Written work for this course takes the form of analytic papers on the subjects from the different subfields of political science. The goal of the subject papers is to teach you how to develop an original theory. [Each assignment](#) focuses on a different element of the original theory process, and each instructor will discuss their assignment and expectations during their sessions. At the end of the quarter, our hope is that you will have gained the skills and confidence to make your own new theoretical contributions to political science.

If you are an undergraduate, you must write three subject papers – i.e., pick any three fields, and write papers for those fields. Each paper should be 6-8 pages long, double-spaced (1,500-2,000 words). *If you are a graduate student*, you must write four subject papers – i.e., you will write a paper every two weeks. Each paper should be 10-12 double-spaced pages long (2,500-3,000 words). Subject papers that are simply a summary of the assigned reading will be considered weak and will receive substantially lower grades.

Submission Instructions: The subject paper is due on the final Friday of the field segment. For example, if you are writing a paper in International Relations, then your paper is due on Friday, October 10. If you are writing a paper in Political Theory, then your paper is due on Monday, December 1. Please submit all papers to our course Canvas site.

Final Presentations

On the last day of class (December 2), students will give a 10 minute presentation in which they “teach” the class about a concept or question that relates to a subject discussed in the course. For example, if a student is interested in comparative politics, that student might teach the class about an interesting political trend or event in another country. Or if a student is interested in American politics, that student may teach the class about how a local school district, such as Portland, is handling some issue like book banning. The goal is for students to pick a topic that they are sincerely interested in, and then explain it to the class. The student should also make sure to address why this issue is important – i.e., why is it important that we know about this? This presentation should be about 10 minutes, and should include slides (PowerPoint or Google Slides). It should be well-organized and similar to a presentation that one might give at a professional conference.

Grading

Undergraduate Students:

- 15% Discussion in Class/In-class Activities
- 25% Subject Paper 1
- 25% Subject Paper 2
- 25% Subject Paper 3
- 10% Final Presentation

Graduate Students:

- 10% Discussion in Class/In-class Activities
- 20% Subject Paper 1
- 20% Subject Paper 2
- 20% Subject Paper 3
- 20% Subject Paper 4
- 10% Final Presentation

Attendance

We want you to come to class because you will get the most out of this class if you attend regularly. However, you should not come to class if you are sick, even if you’re sure that you don’t have covid.

You can miss one class with no consequences at all. This means that you don’t have to email anyone or worry that there will be a negative impact on your participation grade; you can just miss the class with no worries. If you miss more than one class, please email the instructor for that week to let them know. We then we have two options for you:

- Take the small penalty in your participation grade.
- Make up the participation penalty by submitting a discussion of the reading of the lecture that you missed. This discussion should be a summary of the readings of that day (in your own words), as well as 3 questions that you have about the readings. This summary should be 750-1,000 words, and should be submitted to the instructor for the class session you missed within one week of the day that you were absent.

Course Policies

Late Papers: Late papers may be accepted but may receive a lower grade. Consult the module instructor for whom you are writing the paper to determine whether a late paper will be accepted and with what penalty.

Academic dishonesty. Students are responsible for being familiar with the PSU [Code of Student Conduct and Responsibility](#), especially the section concerning academic misconduct -- that is, plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty. If you are unsure of the definition or consequences of academic misconduct, please consult with your instructor.

Use of Generative AI tools. Using tools to check and correct your own writing (built-in spelling and grammar checkers or third-party tools like Grammarly) is different from using generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to create content or structure in response to your prompts (like ChatGPT). In your work for this course, use of the first sort of tool is encouraged, while use of the second sort of tool is subject to the following limitations. Using generative AI to complete written assignments, including examinations, is not permitted. However, you may use these tools to study, help conduct research, or brainstorm ideas and arguments. The use of generative AI tools outside these parameters qualifies as [academic misconduct](#). If you are uncertain about the allowable use of generative AI in the course, please consult with your instructor in advance.

Discrimination. PSU's policies require faculty members to report any instance of sexual harassment, sexual violence, or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about these experiences with an employee who does not have these reporting responsibilities and can keep the information confidential, please contact a confidential advocate (503.725.5672 or [online](#)) or another confidential employee listed on the sexual misconduct resource [webpage](#).

Disabilities. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the [Disability Resource Center](#) to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The [PSU CARES](#) Team, hosted by the Dean of Student Life, is available to consult with you regarding any issues of students in distress, including sexual misconduct.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Sep 30: International Relations (Kinsella)

- Schweller, Randall L. 2016. "The Balance of Power in World Politics." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Hathaway, Oona A., and Scott J. Shapiro. 2019. "International Law and Its Transformation Through the Outlawry of War." *International Affairs* 1: 45-62.
- Schuman, Michael. 2025. "Putin and Xi Are Holding the West Together." *The Atlantic*, September 2, 2025. (Canvas)

Oct 7: International Relations (Kinsella)

- Doyle, Michael W. 1983. "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12 (3): 205-235.
- Dodge, Robert V. 2012. *Schelling's Game Theory: How to Make Decisions*. Oxford University Press. Chapters 1 (Introduction to Strategic Thought), 5 (The Two-by-Two Matrix), and 12 (The

Prisoner's Dilemma).

- Coady, C. A. J. 2004. "Terrorism, Morality, and Supreme Emergency." *Ethics* 114 (4): 772–789.

Friday, Oct 10: Subject Paper on International Relations due

Oct 14: American Politics (Shortell)

- Converse, Philip E. 2000. "Assessing the Capacity of Mass Electorates." *Annual Review of Political Science* 3: 331-353.
- Zaller, John. 1991. "Information, Values, and Opinions." *American Political Science Review* 85: 1215-1237.
- Neustadt, Richard E. *Presidential Power and Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. Chapters 1-3. (Canvas)
- Dahl, Robert A. 1957. "Decision-Making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as a National Policy-Maker." *Journal of Public Law* 6: 279-295.
- Lieberman et al. 2018. "The Trump Presidency and American Democracy: A Historical and Comparative Analysis." *Perspectives on Politics* 17:470-479.

Oct 21: American Politics (Shortell)

- Lee, Amber Hye-Yon. 2022. "Social Trust in Polarized Times: How Perceptions of Political Polarization Affect Americans' Trust in Each Other." *Political Behavior* 44: 1533-1554.
- Garand, James C., Dan Qi, and Max Magaña. 2022. "Perceptions of Immigrant Threat, American Identity, and Vote Choice in the 2016 Presidential Election." *Political Behavior* 44: 877-893.
- Deckman, Melissa. 2022. "Civility, Gender, and Gendered Nationalism in the Age of Trump." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 10: 430-454.
- Atad, Corey. 2025. "Selling Zohran." *Defector*. ([online](#))
- Levitsky, Steven, Lucan Way, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2025. "How Will We Know When We Have Lost Our Democracy?" *New York Times*, May 8, 2025. ([online](#))

Friday, Oct 24: Subject Paper on American Politics due

Oct 28: Comparative Politics (Farole)

- Geddes, Barbara. 2003. "Big Questions, Little Answers: How the Questions You Choose Affect the Answers You Get." In *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. University of Michigan Press.
- Bates, Robert H. 2009. "From Case Studies to Social Science: A Strategy for Political Research." In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Oxford University Press. Available online.
- Pepinsky, Thomas B. 2019. "The Return of the Single-Country Study." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22(1): 187-203.
- Koter, Dominika. 2013. "Urban and Rural Voting Patterns in Senegal: The Spatial Aspects of Incumbency, c. 1978-2012." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 51(4): 653-679. **[Single-country qualitative case study]**
- Stenberg, Matthew, Philip Rocco, and Safia Abukar Farole. 2022. "Calling in "Sick": Covid-19, Opportunism, Pretext, and Subnational Autocratization." *Global Studies Quarterly* 2(3): 1-11. **[Multi-country qualitative case study]**

Nov 4: Comparative Politics (Farole)

- Reuter, Ora John and Graeme B. Robertson. 2012. "Subnational Appointments in Authoritarian Regimes: Evidence from Russian Gubernatorial Appointments." *The Journal of Politics* 74(4):

917-1191. **[Observational design: single-country using quantitative data]**

- Clayton, Amanda and Par Zetterberg. 2021. "Gender and Party Discipline: Evidence from Africa's Emerging Party Systems." *American Political Science Review* 115(3): 869-884. **[Observational design: cross-country using quantitative data]**
- Huber, John. 2013. "Is Theory Getting Lost in the 'Identification Revolution'?" *Good Authority Blog*. ([online](#))

Choose and read *only two* of the following:

- Posner, Daniel. 2004. "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi." *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 529-545. **[Experimental design: natural experiment]**
- Clayton, Amanda, Amanda Lea Robinson, Martha C. Johnson, and Ragnhild Muriaas. 2020. "(How) Do Voters Discriminate Against Women Candidates? Experimental and Qualitative Evidence from Malawi." *Comparative Political Studies* 53(3-4): 601-630. **[Experimental design: survey experiment]**
- Lauren E. Young. 2019. "The Psychology of State Repression: Fear and Dissent Decisions in Zimbabwe." *American Political Science Review* 113(1): 140-155. **[Experimental design: lab-in-the-field]**
- Blair, Robert A., Sabrina M. Karim, and Benjamin S. Morse. 2019. "Establishing the Rule of Law in Weak and War-torn States: Evidence from a Field Experiment with the Liberian National Police." *American Political Science Review* 113(3): 641-657. **[Experimental design: field experiment]**

Friday, Nov 7: Subject Paper on Comparative Politics due

Nov 18: Political Theory (Miller)

- Unger, Roberto Mangabeira. 1997. *Politics. The Central Texts: Theory Against Fate*. Verso. Chapters 1-4 (pp. 3-89). (Canvas)

Nov 25: Political Theory (Miller)

- Unger, *Politics. The Central Texts*. Chapters 11-14 (pp. 306-412). (Canvas)

Monday, Dec 1: Subject Paper on Political Theory due

Dec 2: Final Presentations (Kinsella)

- Salmond, Rob, and David T. Smith. 2011. "Cheating Death-by-PowerPoint: Effective Use of Visual Aids at Professional Conferences." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44 (3): 589-596.

This syllabus is available on Canvas and online at web.pdx.edu/~kinsella/ps411f25.pdf and all course materials can be linked from this address. Last updated: 28 September 2025.