

International Affairs 3300: Introduction to Comparative Politics

School of Public and International Affairs, University of Georgia

Class Meeting: Sanford Hall 312

Instructor: Dr. William Acosta

Office Hours: Candler 214, 11:00-11:50 & 2:00-2:50, MWF

### Course Description

What makes a nation, and how does it relate to the government that claims to represent it? Who belongs to that nation, and who decides what rights and liberties its people should have? In this course, we examine how governments and states define, represent, and serve the idea of a nation. We explore how political power is organized, how authority is justified, and how institutions can either protect or limit the freedoms of their citizens. Through historical case studies, we will investigate the relationship between the state and the nation, the sources of political legitimacy, and the ways different systems of government seek to express the will of the people.

To accomplish this, we will perform three major simulations. The first is a simulation of the German parliament in 2018. You will represent the major elected parties of the Bundestag as they work to form a coalition government during the refugee crisis caused by the Syrian Civil War. Then we will move back in time to 1925 to discuss what makes a nation “modern” as we navigate Egypt’s attempt at independence. We will conclude by simulating how dictatorships make decisions. You will step into the shoes of Japan’s complex and complicated authoritarian government in 1941 as you decide the future of the Empire.

## Course Reading Material

- Japan, 1941
- All other materials will be provided via eLC for free.
- Be prepared: for this class to function smoothly, you must complete all assigned readings before the scheduled class meeting. See schedule below.

## Course Requirements

1. Participation (25%)
  - a. In-class contribution: Students will be evaluated on in person attendance, contribution to class discussion, and participation during in-class activities. Each of these is required. I will take attendance every day. **Attendance is critical in this course because missing will adversely affect not only you but also your classmates. Some assignments cannot be made up.**
  - b. Simulation participation: The simulations have role specific assignments that students must complete. Students should submit these assignments via eLC.
  - c. Reading quizzes: To ensure that you are keeping up with the readings, I will give **6 unannounced reading quizzes**. These will be in class and handwritten and will be turned in during class. **These cannot be made up.** If you anticipate being absent on any day, please inform me ahead of time.
2. Written Assignments (75%): Over the course of the semester, you must complete three written assignments.
  - a. Assignment 1: If you were to design your own government from scratch, what kind of government would you create? What types of elections would you hold, and what institutions would you establish to support and sustain it?

- b. Assignment 2: What does it mean to be modern? The Egypt 1925 reflection essay asks you to analyze your experience in the simulation as Egypt struggled to define its identity and modernize after years of foreign rule. You will reflect on your role and goals, examine broader questions about modernity, rights, and democracy, and connect these themes to challenges in modern American politics. The goal is to show how Egypt's debates over identity, power, and liberty reveal enduring lessons about democracy and political change.
- c. Assignment 3: Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith argue that dictators stay in power by rewarding a small coalition of supporters and controlling access to resources and institutions. In *Japan, 1941: Between Pan-Asianism and the West*, you witnessed how Japan's civilian, military and imperial leaders competed to control policy during a time of self-created crisis. Drawing on *The Dictator's Handbook*, readings on civil–military relations, and your experience in the simulation, analyze how Japan's political system in 1941 reflected the logic of dictatorship. How did leaders maintain power, manage elites, and balance military influence with political legitimacy?

### **Course Guidelines**

1. Students are expected to read the assigned course materials before all class meetings and participate actively in in-class discussions and activities.
2. Check eLC regularly for updates on the course.
3. The class will follow a primarily seminar (i.e., discussion) format. I will lecture when necessary.

4. Assignments are due on the dates and times given. Late work will be penalized 10% for each day it is late. After 5 days, the work will be maxed out at 50%.
5. Attendance is required. You are permitted one unexcused absence and one excused absence before it begins to affect your grade. However, much of the work we do in class cannot be made up.
6. If you need extensions, please **inform me via email**. If you tell me in person I will forget.
7. Be respectful to one another. I will not tolerate students being disrespectful or making others uncomfortable. We will discuss controversial topics in this class. Passion is fine but respect is necessary. Furthermore, only one person speaks at a time. Do not interrupt or speak over each other.
8. This is a digital free space unless I say otherwise. No laptops, tablets, or phones are allowed. Thus, bring hard copies of your talking point for your personal use. Do not work on other coursework in this class. It is disrespectful to both me and your classmates.
9. The University of Georgia prohibits students from recording class sessions or classmates. If you have formal recording accommodation from Accessibility and Testing you can record the class.
10. As a University of Georgia student, you are expected to adhere to the University's academic honesty policy, "A Culture of Honesty," and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must comply with the standards outlined in "A Culture of Honesty," which can be found at: [UGA Academic Honesty Policy](#). Ignorance of the academic honesty policy is not an acceptable excuse for violations. If you have questions related to course assignments or the academic honesty policy, please direct them to the instructor.

Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing will be referred to Judicial Affairs, as mandated by university policy.

## **Schedule**

### Week 1

- Monday, January 12: Welcome
- Wednesday, January 14: Mahler Chapter 1—Why Do We Study Politics?
- Friday, January 16: Scientific Method/Comparative Method

### Week 2

- Monday, January 19: MLK Day
- Wednesday, January 21: Mahler Chapter 2—Constitutions
- Friday, January 23: Mahler Chapter 3—Legislatures

### Week 3

- Monday, January 26: Mahler Chapter 4 —Executives
- Wednesday, January 28: Mahler Chapter 10— Germany & Game of Parliament Session 1
- Friday, January 30: Game of Parliament, Coalition Building

### Week 4

- Monday, February 2: Game of Parliament, Government Formation
- Wednesday, February 4: Game of Parliament, PMQ
- Friday, February 6: Game of Parliament, Conclusion

### Week 5

- Monday, February 9: Mahler Chapter 6— Political Behavior
- Wednesday, February 11: Mahler Chapter 7—Institutions of Civil Society

- Friday, February 13: Egypt 1925 Prep

#### Week 6

- Monday, February 15: Egypt 1925— Women’s Rights and Islamic Law
- Wednesday, February 17: Egypt 1925— Party Roles and Strategy
- Friday, February 19: Egypt 1925— Session 1: Education

#### Week 7

- Monday, February 23: Egypt 1925— Session 2: Suffrage
- Wednesday, February 25: Egypt 1925— Session 3: Marriage Reform
- Friday, February 27: Egypt 1925— Session 4: Economic Development

#### Week 8

- Monday, March 2: Egypt 1925— Session 5: Independence
- Wednesday, March 4: Egypt 1925— Debrief
- Friday, March 6: Egypt 1925— Debrief

#### Week 9: Spring Break March 9-13

#### Week 10: This book is hard.

- Monday, March 16: *The Dictator’s Handbook*— “The Rules of Politics”
- Wednesday, March 18: *The Dictator’s Handbook*— “Coming to Power” & “Staying in Power”
- Friday, March 20: *The Dictator’s Handbook*— “Stealing from the Poor, Give to the Rich” & “Getting and Spending”

#### Week 11:

- Monday, March 23: *The Dictator’s Handbook*— “If Corruption Empowers, then Absolute Corruption Empowers Absolutely”

- Wednesday, March 25: *Dictator's at War and Peace*— “Authoritarian Regimes and the Domestic Politics of War and Peace”
- Friday, March 27: *Dictator's at War and Peace*— “Audiences, Preferences, and Decisions about War.”

Week 12: *Japan, 1941*

- Monday, March 30: Set up 1—Historic Setting
- Wednesday, April 1— Role Distribution
- Friday, April 3— Faction Meeting/ Tea Ceremony, July 1940

Week 13

- Monday, April 6— Imperial Conference, Summer/Autumn 1940
- Wednesday, April 8— Imperial Conference, Spring 1941
- Friday, April 9— Imperial Conference, Summer 1941

Week 14

- Monday, April 13: Imperial Conference, Autumn 1941
- Wednesday, April 15: Imperial Conference, November 1941
- Friday, April 17: Debrief

Week 15: Transition from Dictatorship to Democracy

- Monday, April 20: *The Dictator's Handbook*— The People in Revolt
- Wednesday, April 22: *The Dictator's Handbook*— What Is to Be Done
- Friday, April 24: Wrap Up

Week 16

- Monday, April 27: Extended Office Hours
- Tuesday, April 28: Reading Day