

POLS 2301: Introduction to Comparative Politics, Fall 2025

Section 01, CRN 83511: Fully Online

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Walk-In Hours (Macon, SOAL 115): Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 12:20–2:00 p.m.; Thursdays, 12:20–5:00 p.m.

Or, schedule appointments on Calendly: <https://calendly.com/dr-lawrence-mga/meeting>.

Catalog Description: This is a comparative study of the political systems of selected countries and/or world regions.

Prerequisite: POLS 1101/1101H Introduction to American Government, or an equivalent course meeting the U.S. constitution requirement of the USG, or AP/CLEP credit.

Course Overview: Welcome to the class! This course is a survey of the political systems of several countries around the world, with an emphasis on understanding the differences between how different nation-states are governed. While some historical background and philosophical underpinnings will be explored along the way, along with the cultural context of each nation considered, we will focus on the key features of the contemporary political system in each country studied. In addition to considering the formal political institutions of each government, we will also consider the interaction of government and civil society.

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence is developed through course content on how other societies and cultures are governed, including material on the nature of the modern nation-state, different forms of democratic and non-democratic government, electoral systems, national constitutions and laws, deliberative assemblies and legislatures, executives, bureaucracies, and judiciaries.
- Perspective-Taking is developed through assignments on subjects including institution-building, fundamental rights and liberties, political representation, and/or world events.
- Persuasion is developed through course content on public opinion, political behavior, political parties, and/or interest groups, as well as accounts of deliberative bodies such as national parliaments, assemblies, and legislatures.

Student Learning Outcomes: Students will be expected to achieve the following learning outcomes, common to all sections of this course, to pass the course:

1. Compare and contrast how different countries organize their political systems.
2. Compare and contrast the societies and cultures of different countries.
3. Identify differences between how the United States is governed and the economic and political systems employed in other countries.

These outcomes will be assessed during the course.

Overall Model of the Course: The approach of this course is largely country-centric; we will discuss

general features following a comparative approach, but in the context of specific example countries. The countries being considered, in order, are:

- Great Britain: parliamentary, unitary(ish) constitutional monarchy.
- Germany: parliamentary, federal republic.
- France: premier-presidential, unitary republic.
- Russia: premier-presidential, federal authoritarian state.
- Canada: parliamentary, federal republic.
- Mexico: presidential, federal republic.
- Nigeria: presidential, federal republic.
- China (People's Republic): single-party authoritarian state.

Course Structure: Please note that this course is delivered *completely online*, via Brightspace (Desire2Learn). You are responsible for reviewing the textbook and online lectures, and participating in online discussions associated with each chapter.

Intellectual Property Notice: Course content provided either in-class or online that is the original, creative work of the professor is copyrighted by the professor and licensed only for your own, personal use, unless otherwise specified. Violations of this class policy will be considered to be student misconduct.

Required Materials: There is one book required for this course:

Patrick H. O'Neil, Karl Fields, and Don Share. 2024. *Cases in Comparative Politics*, 8th ed. New York: W.W. Norton. ISBN 978-1-324-06193-6.

It should be available, new and used, at the Middle Georgia State University bookstores; you may also be able to rent or purchase it on-line at a discount. You can also obtain the textbook as an e-book rental or purchase from the publisher at <https://digital.wwnorton.com/casescompol8>. You are required to own, or have access to, a copy of the textbook for the duration of the course (through the final examination). Additional readings may be assigned at my discretion; I will provide them for you on the course's Brightspace site.

Technology Requirements: You are required to have access to Brightspace for the duration of the course. You will also need access to a computer, tablet, or smartphone that can read Portable Document Format (Adobe PDF) files and supports modern HTML5 technologies for browsing the Internet.

Grades: Your final grade in this course will be based on the following elements, weighted as follows:

Exams (2)	40%	Quizzes (8)	20%
Discussions	20%	Term Paper	20%

The overall average posted in Brightspace throughout the semester will also be weighted as above. *Your grade is not simply based on "adding up points" as it may be in some of your other courses.* You can review your current grades at any time in Brightspace.

The final grade in the course reported to the registrar will be converted based on this scale:

Final Weighted Average	Grade	Grade Points	Catalog Description
90.0 or above	A	4.0	Excellent work
80.0–89.9	B	3.0	Good work
70.0–79.9	C	2.0	Satisfactory work
60.0–69.9	D	1.0	Passing work
59.9 or below	F	0.0	Failing work

Numeric grades will only be reported for students in dual enrollment programs. At the college level, only the final letter grade in the course is part of your permanent record.

Although a “D” is the minimum passing grade in undergraduate courses, any grades below a “C” may jeopardize your continued eligibility for federal and state financial aid. Please refer to the “Satisfactory Academic Progress” policy on the Financial Aid website for details.

Midterm Grades: Per university policy, a midterm grade will be posted to SWORDS for all students in this course one week before the withdrawal deadline. The midterm grade is strictly advisory and will not be part of your permanent student record. Students whose course average at the midterm point is passing may be assigned the midterm grade of “Satisfactory” rather than a specific letter grade; students who are failing the course will be assigned an “F” or “U” grade.

You should be aware that midterm grades do not guarantee a particular final grade in the course, as future assignments will also affect the final course grade you earn.

Midterm and Final Exams: There will be two examinations in this course, a midterm exam and a final exam. Questions on the exams may include items relating to the textbook, lectures, and other class activities. The exams may include multiple-choice, short answer, and essay questions.

During the exams, you may not make use of any notes, no discussion among students is permitted of any kind, and all electronic devices (cell phones, calculators, pagers, computers, etc.) must be **switched off and stored away**. Both exams will be administered online via Brightspace.

Quizzes: There will be a quiz in Brightspace on each of the chapters and associated lectures that we will cover this semester. The quizzes will include a mix of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer questions. At the end of the semester, your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

Exam and Quiz Content: Questions on examinations and quizzes may be drawn from the textbook, materials presented in lecture, and/or additional materials provided by the professor as announced in Brightspace.

Term Paper: Students will write a paper of between five and eight pages in length comparing *three* or more of the assigned countries on a particular dimension of government. You will be assigned a dimension to investigate; however, you may choose which three (or more) countries to compare on that dimension. The paper should make use of relevant primary and secondary source materials, including (but not limited to) the assigned textbook and readings. This paper should be your own, individual work for this course.

More details on this assignment will be provided in Brightspace later in the semester.

Discussions: An integral part of the course is participation in discussions. These discussions will consist of prompts that will be available for your response for a period of several days. You must respond to each of the discussions for a chapter to receive full credit.

For full credit in response to each discussion question, you will need to post your own response and *at least* one response. Your initial response should be at least 150 words long and should be no more than 400 words or so, and should be posted *at least 36 hours before the deadline*. Follow-up responses to classmates should be 75–200 words in length and not simply duplicate or repeat your initial response to the prompt.

Also, you should follow the following guidelines for participation in discussions, which are also posted in Brightspace; these are based on those suggested by the Center for Research on Teaching and Learning at the University of Michigan:

- Respect others’ rights to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own. When you disagree, challenge or criticize the idea, not the person.
- Listen carefully to what others are saying even when you disagree with what is being said. Comments that you make (asking for clarification, sharing critiques, expanding on a point, etc.) should reflect that you have paid attention to the speaker’s comments.
- Be courteous.
- Support your statements. Use evidence and provide a rationale for your points.
- Share responsibility for including all voices in the discussion. If you have much to say, try to hold back

a bit; if you are hesitant to speak, look for opportunities to contribute to the discussion.

- Recognize that we are all still learning. Be willing to change your perspective, and make space for others to do the same.

You should also bear in mind the university's student conduct policies.

Grading Philosophy: Your grades will be earned based on my judgment of your performance in meeting the learning objectives of the course, and not on the basis of good intentions, whether or not you agree with my political or ideological views (you probably don't), or how much effort you put in to the course. To judge your performance comprehensively, my grading may include both objective and subjective assessments; sometimes there is a clear "right" answer, sometimes there is no one "right" answer, and sometimes there are a number of potential responses that vary in completeness and correctness, and so my approach to grading differs based on that reality.

My commitment to you is that I will assign fair and appropriate grades, in a reasonably timely manner,¹ according to this philosophy, based on the work that is presented for grading. If at any time you believe I have not met that standard, see the section on "Grade Appeals" below.

Contacting the Professor: My regularly-scheduled office hours are listed at the beginning of the syllabus. During those times, I generally do not schedule appointments; rather, meetings are "first come, first serve." When I am not busy with a student in-person, I will also be available "virtually" at these times by phone or web chat. If you wish to make a confirmed appointment to see me *outside* my scheduled hours, please do so at least two business days in advance.

If you do contact me outside my office hours, please bear in mind that my other work and personal obligations may be on a different schedule than what is convenient for you; for example, I may be in class, in the midst of research, or at a meeting. Except under extraordinary circumstances, if your email includes a question or otherwise requires a response, when school is in session I will always get back to you within one business day, and frequently sooner; messages that merely inform me of a class absence may not necessarily be acknowledged.

If you call my office outside my office hours, please avoid leaving voice mail or messages with university staff; it is an incredibly unproductive and inefficient means of communication. You will usually receive a much quicker response by email.

When contacting me outside of class, please be sure to specify both the course and section you are in, as it will allow me to respond more quickly and accurately to you.

Student Privacy Rights: To ensure compliance with federal and state laws that protect the privacy of your educational records, all discussion regarding grades or other confidential information must be conducted in person, via Brightspace, or via your official *mga.edu* email address; I will not discuss confidential information over the phone, on social media, or via any non-school email address. If you have not yet activated your official university email address, please see <https://www.mga.edu/technology/services/email.php>.

As a matter of general policy I do not discuss students' class performance, attendance, or other issues with their parents or guardians. Even if a FERPA waiver is on file with the university, such a waiver does not oblige me to discuss students' class performance with parents or guardians. This policy includes students who are minors and/or dual-enrolled students.

Class Policies: The primary expectations of all Middle Georgia State University students are integrity and civility. Each student should approach his/her academic endeavors, relationships and personal responsibilities with a strong commitment to personal integrity and interpersonal civility.

Extra credit: To be fair to all students, I do not offer individualized extra-credit opportunities. If you believe you might benefit from extra credit, I strongly advise you take advantage of any opportunities offered to the whole class as they are announced over the term.

¹Some assignments, such as the reading quizzes online, are automatically graded, so you can expect fairly quick feedback on those. You should expect the grading of written work to generally take between 5 and 10 business days.

Revisions to the syllabus: While I will make every effort to follow the syllabus as-written, if unforeseen circumstances arise during the semester I reserve the right to amend any policy in this syllabus.

Attendance and absence policy: As this is a fully-online course, you are responsible for meeting the deadlines to complete assignments (such as quizzes, exams, and discussion board posts) stated in the syllabus and in Brightspace. Beyond that, you are not required to log in to the course on any particular schedule and there is no “attendance grade” *per se*; however, you are unlikely to be successful in the class if you do not regularly check on the course for new announcements. You are also required to complete the entry quiz in Brightspace before you will be able to complete any other course content.

Note: if you do not complete the entry quiz in Brightspace or otherwise substantially interact with the professor before the “no show” deadline, you will be dropped from the course as a no-show.

Make-ups: Make-up examinations must be scheduled in advance in the case of an unavoidable planned or reasonably-foreseeable absence; otherwise, make-ups will be given only in the case of an illness or other emergency that is properly documented, after the fact. To be fair to all students, make-up exams must be completed within two weeks of the originally scheduled exam date; also, make-up exams may be administered in a different format than the original exam offered to the rest of the class, at my sole discretion.

To be fair to all students in the class, students are responsible for *all assignments*, regardless of their date of initial enrollment in the course. If you fail to complete the entry quiz before the deadline for any subsequent assignment, you will not be able to make up the missed assignment(s).

Late Assignments: A late penalty of 10 percentage points per 24-hour period will apply to work turned in after the deadline for the assignment to be completed. Notwithstanding this policy, any work received within 48 hours of the deadline for final grade submissions may not be graded, resulting in a zero (0) on any assignments outstanding at that point in the semester. (Please refer to the college policy on incomplete grades for exceptions.)

Grade Appeals: Like everyone else, I am fallible and sometimes make mistakes. If I simply misrecorded a grade (for example, if I enter “70” in the gradebook when you earned an “80”) or made an arithmetic error, please bring me the returned assignment, and I will immediately correct the error.

If you believe you received an *unjust* grade, I am happy to discuss the grading of the assignment with you, in-person during regular office hours or at a scheduled appointment; please bring the graded assignment with you so we can have a productive conversation. If you remain unsatisfied with my explanation of the grade, to give us both ample time to consider the dispute, you will need to type a brief (one-page) explanation of your position and turn it in, along with the original graded assignment, *at least one week after* the assignment was originally returned to you. I will then consider your appeal and make a determination. Appeals must be submitted in hard copy format; no appeals submitted via email will be considered. Please refer to the Student Handbook and Catalog for policies regarding appeals of *final letter grades*.

Academic Misconduct: I take academic misconduct (including, but not limited to, cheating on exams and plagiarism of written work) very seriously. So does Middle Georgia State University. In this course the *minimum* penalty for academic misconduct is a grade of zero (0) on the assignment in question, with no opportunity to repeat the assignment, along with referral to the testing center to complete an examination on plagiarism, cheating, and the Student Code of Conduct. Second or subsequent violations, or egregious misconduct (for example, an organized effort to cheat involving multiple students, or academic misconduct that causes harm to other students), will automatically be referred to the Office of Student Affairs for a university-level resolution which may include a failing grade in the course, disciplinary probation, and/or academic suspension.

I offer some free advice, drawn from past experience as both a student and a professor: do not turn in plagiarized work because you have run out of time and feel as if you need to turn in *something*—taking the late penalty is better than the sanctions for academic misconduct. Similarly, if you forgot to study, it's better to get a low grade on the exam than the zero you'll get if you cheat.

One of the early computer programmers, Admiral Grace Hopper, is reported to have said that “[i]t’s easier to ask forgiveness than it is to get permission.” That advice *does not* apply in this situation. If you have the slightest doubt about whether something is academic misconduct, *ask me before handing in the assignment for grading*.

Generative Artificial Intelligence: While you are welcome to make use of generative artificial intelligence software (including, but not limited to, “large language models” like ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, etc.) to assist in written work in this course, you are strongly encouraged to ensure that content produced by this software is grammatically, factually, and logically correct. In particular, you should take care that factual assertions made in text are supported by *real* evidence; current LLMs are known to frequently “hallucinate” or fabricate supporting evidence such as citations to nonexistent sources, or interpret website content that is fictional or fantasy in nature as factual content. In many cases it will be easier to write your own responses rather than verifying the accuracy and correctness of LLM output and ensuring it does not fail to quote or cite necessary supporting evidence.

University Policies: Students are responsible for reading, understanding, and adhering to all Middle Georgia State University student policies, including those linked on the Syllabus Policy pages at <https://www.mga.edu/faculty-affairs/syllabus-policy.php> and <https://www.mga.edu/center-excellence-teaching-learning/syllabi-policies.php>. Any policy listed therein is incorporated in this syllabus by reference, even if not explicitly called out below. Note that some listed policies may not apply fully or at all to online courses like this one.

Student Code of Conduct: MGA students are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by the MGA Student Code of Conduct: <https://www.mga.edu/student-handbook/>

Nondiscrimination and Anti-harassment Policy: MGA is committed to ensuring a safe learning environment that supports the dignity of all members of the University community. We encourage students to read more about this institutional policy:

<https://policies.mga.edu/policy-manual/section-6-campus-affairs/6-5-nondiscrimination/>

Attendance Policy: MGA students should attend all class sessions, be they face-to-face or online. Class attendance and participation is an individual student responsibility. Learn more about attendance expectations by asking each of your instructors and through this web resource:

<https://mga.smartcatalogiq.com/en/2024-2025/undergraduate-catalog/academic-policy-and-information/course-policies/attendance-policy/>

Withdrawing from a Course: Before withdrawing from or dropping a course, students should check the last date for withdrawing before considering their options and the consequences of their choices:

<https://mga.smartcatalogiq.com/en/2024-2025/undergraduate-catalog/academic-policy-and-information/withdrawal/>

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity/Honesty: MGA uses a plagiarism prevention service to evaluate written work that students submit for this course. The papers will be retained by the service for the sole purpose of checking for plagiarized content in future student submissions. MGA’s Code of Conduct prohibits the use of any unauthorized assistance in completing any work for any course. The Code of Conduct is available at this webpage: <https://www.mga.edu/student-conduct/>

Academic Mindset: The purpose of a university education is not just to teach you knowledge and skills but also to expand the ways you use your mind and handle challenges. A positive academic mindset provides an effective framework that will guide you through this course and also throughout your life as you adapt to a changing world. In this spirit, MGA seeks to encourage students to strengthen their positive academic mindset. This course promotes a positive academic mindset by highlighting the following:

- Knowing that you can strengthen your abilities through effort and a positive attitude;
- Believing in your own ability to learn and continue to improve;
- Recognizing that the work in this course has value and purpose for you;
- Fostering your willingness to embrace new experiences and challenges;

- Acknowledging that your effort and attitude affect your performance.

Mental and Emotional Health Support: Counseling Services is proud to be a part of BeWell@MGA, which provides students 24/7 access to counselors and mental health resources to help cope with minor issues to major concerns. More information is available on this webpage:

<https://www.mga.edu/student-affairs/bewell/>

Accessibility Services: Students with a documented disability must work with MGA's Accessibility Services to arrange essential services relating to their disability. All entitlements to accommodations are based on documentation and USG Board of Regents standards.

If a student is considering requesting accommodations, they should first contact Accessibility Services to discuss the process: <https://www.mga.edu/accessibility-services/>

If a student needs course adaptations or accommodations because of a documented disability or chronic illness, the student should notify their instructor in writing and provide a copy of a current Student Accommodations Report (SAR), which is available only from Accessibility Services. Faculty cannot offer accommodations to any student without timely receipt of the official SAR document.

Student Success Centers (SSC): Tutoring is available free of charge on all MGA campuses for currently enrolled students. SSC tutoring sessions may be scheduled online and face-to-face through the "Book an Appointment" link on the SSC website. Other services at the SSC include online academic workshops and a robust website with resources for academic assistance. The SSC locations also have computer workstations, printing, and Internet access. To view contact information, subjects tutored, and tutor availability, go to the SSC website at <http://www.mga.edu/student-success-center/>.

Writing Center: The MGA Writing Center is a free service that provides one-on-one consultations to assist students with all types of writing. Either in-person or via Teams, our consultants provide feedback and use different strategies to help students improve their writing. Writing Center locations are open on the Macon and Cochran campuses.

Mathematics Academic Resource Center (MARC): The MARC offers free tutoring for most math courses. Tutoring can be in person or online, by appointment or walk-in. We are equipped with computers, textbooks, whiteboards, calculators, and study notes to provide students with a space to study. For hours, locations, and booking a session, please visit <https://www.mga.edu/MARC>.

Center for Career and Leadership Development: Students have free access to career and professional development services through the CCLD. Virtual and in-person appointments can be scheduled in Macon, Cochran, or Eastman at mga.joinhandshake.com. College-to-career resources include career exploration/assessments, job/internship/graduate school search assistance, career fairs, resume/interview prep, and professional/leadership development. Contact them at careerservices@mga.edu or visit <https://www.mga.edu/center-career-leadership-development/>.

Course Experience Feedback Survey: Student perception surveys of a class and its instructor are administered online at the end of each term/session for all courses with five or more students. Students will receive an email containing a link to a survey for each course in which they are enrolled. All responses are anonymous.

Campus Emergencies: In the event of a closure or delayed opening of the university due to inclement weather or other emergency, you should monitor the Knight Alert system for updates; sign up for these alerts at <https://www.mga.edu/police/alert/>. You should expect communication via email and/or Brightspace regarding any assignments to be completed or revisions to the schedule while we are unable to meet.

In the event of an emergency situation on campus, call 9-1-1 and/or campus police at (478) 471-2414.

HB 280 (Campus Carry Legislation): In accordance with O.C.G.A. § 16-11-127.1, Middle Georgia State University recognizes that a lawful weapons carrier may carry concealed handguns on Middle Georgia State campuses, excluding restricted campus facilities. More information is available at this webpage: <https://policies.mga.edu/policy-manual/section-6-campus-affairs/6-10-weapons-on-campus/>

Withdrawal Deadlines: The last day to drop the course without it appearing on your transcript is Tuesday, August 19th. Students may withdraw from the course and earn a grade of “W” through Wednesday, October 29th. After this point, students who withdraw will normally receive a grade of “WF,” which is calculated in the GPA as an “F.”

The MGA Withdrawal Form is available online or from the Office of the Registrar. Students are encouraged to read the withdrawal policy found at <https://www.mga.edu/registrar/registration/drop-add.php> before dropping/withdrawing from class. I encourage you to plan ahead and not try to drop or withdraw from class on the day of the deadline.

Course Outline: Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and will be posted to the course calendar and in Brightspace. While I may periodically remind students of upcoming scheduled events, it is ultimately **your responsibility** to be familiar with this schedule and any changes to it.

In the schedule below, *Cases in Comparative Politics* refers to chapters from the main text.

Date(s)	Topic	Reading(s)
Aug 13–18	Introduction to the course	<i>Cases in Comparative Politics</i> 1
Aug 20–28	Great Britain	<i>Cases in Comparative Politics</i> 2
Aug 29–Sep 11	Germany	<i>Cases in Comparative Politics</i> 5
Sep 12–22	France	<i>Cases in Comparative Politics</i> 4
Sep 23–26	Midterm Exam	
Sep 27–Oct 6	Russia	<i>Cases in Comparative Politics</i> 7
Oct 7–17	Canada	<i>How Canadians Govern Themselves</i> (online)
Oct 18–Nov 3	Mexico	<i>Cases in Comparative Politics</i> 11
Nov 4–17	Nigeria	<i>Cases in Comparative Politics</i> 14
Nov 18–Dec 3	China	<i>Cases in Comparative Politics</i> 8

The final exam will be available December 4–8.