

Introduction to Politics I

Course code:	POS 101/2
Term and year:	Spring 2026
Day and time:	Wednesdays and Fridays 9:30-10:45
Instructor:	A. Ebru Akcasu, Ph.D.
Instructor contact:	ebru.akcasu@aauni.edu
Consultation hours:	Fridays, 11:00-11:30, Faculty Lounge (4.10)

Credits US/ECTS	3/6	Level	Introductory
Length	15 weeks	Pre-requisite	None
Contact hours	42 hours	Course type	Bachelor Required

1. Course Description

This course introduces students to key concepts in the study of politics, beginning with foundational understandings of modern states and ideologies. Students will examine different models of state structures and their political aspirations through a comparative approach, with an emphasis on historical context and key theorists. Special attention is given to distinguishing different approaches to governance, such as democracy and authoritarianism, alongside diverse methods of representation and division of power. Beyond this, the course explores how state structures can perpetuate or challenge social inequalities, and how various political systems respond to demands for social justice, economic equity, and human rights. The role of the media in shaping public opinion and its potential to uphold or undermine democratic principles is a recurring theme.

2. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand the basic concepts, structures, and theories used in comparative politics
- Be familiar with the ways governments operate, are elected, and formed in democratic and autocratic systems
- Be familiar with the role of media and political movements and interest groups in the realm of politics, campaigns, and policy formation
- Critically apply the theoretical concepts to various data sets within case studies and present their views in an oral presentation or a written essay.

3. Reading Material

Required Materials

- Betts, Alexander. "Survival Migration: A New Protection Framework." *Global Governance* (July-Sept. 2010), pp. 361-382.
- "Data grab: the new colonialism of big tech and how to fight back. LSE Event." YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guaMbf9dqxs>

- De Gouges, Olympe. "The Declaration of the Rights of Woman, September 1791." *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*. <https://revolution.chnm.org/d/293/>
- Dwyre, Diana, and Robin Kolodny. "Democracy and Capitalism." In *The Fundamentals of Campaign Finance in the U.S.: Why We Have the System We Have*, 1–28. University of Michigan Press, 2024. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9813302.7>.
- Huntington, Samuel P. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, 1993, pp. 22–49. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20045621>.
- Jenne, Erin K. and Harris Mylonas. "Nationalism and ethnicity in the study of international relations." *Handbook of International Relations*. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishers, 2022.
- Kubicek, Paul. *European Politics*. 4th Edition. London: Routledge, 2026.
- Lu, Mathew. "Aristotle on Abortion and Infanticide." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 53/1 (March 2013): 47–62.
- Orwell, George. *Animal Farm*. New York: Signet Classic, 1996.
- UNESCO. "Threats to Freedom of Press: Violence, Disinformation, Censorship." Accessed August 5, 2025. <https://www.unesco.org/en/threats-freedom-press-violence-disinformation-censorship>.

4. Teaching methodology

The course is divided into four components: lectures, seminars, debates, and presentations. Lectures and news presentations will be on Fridays. Debates and seminar discussions will take place on Wednesdays. Students are expected to have read and analyzed the weekly readings beforehand and be ready to discuss and debate.

5. Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda
Week 1 30 Jan.	Topic: Unpacking politics Description: Introduction(s), syllabus overview, expectations, key concepts. The problem of politics. Our takes on concepts of political analysis – 'legitimacy', 'power', 'authority', 'government', 'state' and 'democracy'. What is democracy, and is it the best form of government? Reading: 1984, 89-112 Assignment/deadlines: Sign up to guide weekly news and culminating experience presentations.
Week 2 4 & 6 Feb.	Topic: Studying politics, from ancient times to current debates Description: Political science; historical overview of the political individual and the concept of representation. Reading: Mathew Lu, "Aristotle on Abortion and Infanticide;" 1984, 113-135. Assignments/deadlines: News/topics
Week 3 11 & 13 Feb.	Topic: Political Ideologies Description: Guest lecture on Fascism by Jakub Drabik. Reading: 1984, 136-158 13 February: No class – Makeup by attending at least one session of the "Freedom Colloquium" on campus (19 February).

<p>Week 4 18 & 20 Feb.</p>	<p>Topic: The Modern State Description: The modern state (and nation) and its dynamics with citizens; sovereignty, political communities and organizations. Reading: Kubicek, 1-22; <i>1984</i>, 159-182. Assignments/deadlines: News/topics</p>
<p>Week 5 25 & 27 Feb.</p>	<p>Topic: The Power of the Media Description: The media, control and access. Readings: UNESCO. "Threats to freedom of the press: Violence, disinformation, censorship;" 1984, 183-205.</p>
<p>Week 6 4 & 6 March</p>	<p>Topic: Political ideologies, systems, and regimes Description: Spectrum of representation in political systems from democratic to authoritarian; authoritarianism vs. totalitarianism Reading: Dwyre, Diana, and Robin Kolodny. "Democracy and Capitalism." In <i>The Fundamentals of Campaign Finance in the U.S.: Why We Have the System We Have</i>, 1-28. University of Michigan Press, 2024. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9813302.7, 1984, 206-229. Assignments/deadlines: News/topics</p>
<p>Week 7 11 & 13 March</p>	<p>Topic: Dividing Power Description: Distribution of power in political systems; differences between parliamentary, semi-parliamentary and presidential systems. Reading: <i>The Federalist Papers</i>, no. 47, 48, 51; 1984, 230-252. Assignments/deadlines: News/topics</p>
<p>Week 8 18 & 20 March</p>	<p>Topic: Voting Matters Description: Roots of democracy, consensus vs. majoritarian democracies; political parties and electoral systems. Readings: Kubicek, 125-153; <i>1984</i>, 253-276. Assignments/deadlines: News/topics</p>
<p>Week 9 25 & 27 March</p>	<p>Topic: When States Fail and Midterm exam Description: Multiple choice, short answer, essay covering first half of the course. Reading: Alexander Betts, "Survival Migration: A New Protection Framework." <i>Global Governance</i> (July-Sept. 2010), pp. 361-382; <i>1984</i>, 277-299.</p>
<p>Break 1 & 3 April</p>	<p>No class – Enjoy your Spring Break! Relax and Reset.</p>
<p>Week 10 8 & 10 April</p>	<p>Topic: Politics and the Media Reading: <i>1984</i>, 300-323. No Class – Experiential Learning Makeup: TBA</p>
<p>Week 11 15 & 17 April</p>	<p>Topic: The Economy of Politics Description: The role and place of the economy in modern state systems. Capitalism in a global world. Reading: Data grab: the new colonialism of big tech and how to fight back; <i>1984</i>, 324-346. Assignments/deadlines: News/topics</p>

Week 12 22 & 24 April	Topic: Movements and Other Influences Description: Entities that sway politics from outside of the government, e.g., lobbies and NGOs; documentary. Reading: Kubicek, 261-298; 1984, 347-370. Assignments/deadlines: News/topics
Week 13 29 April 1 May: No Class	Topic: Experiential Learning Description: Gender and Politics Reading: Olympe de Gouges, <i>The Declaration of the Rights of Woman</i>
Week 14 6 May 8 May: No Class	Topic: Culture Clash? Description: Culture, values, religion, migration; "clash of civilizations." Reading: Huntington, Samuel P. "The Clash of Civilizations?" <i>Foreign Affairs</i> , vol. 72, no. 3, 1993, pp. 22-49. <i>JSTOR</i> , https://doi.org/10.2307/20045621 ; Assignments/deadlines: Culminating Experience Presentations
Week 15 13 & 15 May	Topic: Politics and International Relations Description: How do different states and political cultures interact with one another? Culminating Experience Presentations. Reading: Harris Mylonas, "Nationalism and ethnicity in the study of international relations" <i>Handbook of International Relations</i> . Notes: Enjoy your summer! ☺

6. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

Assignment	Workload (hours)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Specific Outcomes	Course Learning	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Class Participation	42	20%	Demonstrating punctuality and preparedness for participation and critical engagement.		1, 2, 3
News presentations	10	10%	Demonstrating intellectual engagement, critical thinking and contextualization of the assignment topic within broader course themes.		1, 2, 3
Mid-Term Exam	35	30%	Ability to demonstrate knowledge of historical factors, actors, concepts, thinkers and events that have shaped how we understand and relate to politics. The essay section should be legible and well structured, demonstrate critical thinking and provide examples from		1, 2

			both the lectures and the readings.	
Culminating experience project – oral component	20	25%	Ability to critically approach sources and contextualize them; demonstration of research and analytical skills; effective oral communication.	1, 2
Culminating experience project – written component	10	15%	Ability to critically approach sources and contextualize them; demonstration of research and analytical skills; effective written communication.	3
TOTAL	150	100%		

*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

7. Detailed description of the assignments

Assignment 1: Participation

All students are required to come to class having read the required readings in advance. Students are expected to actively take part in class discussions and contribute to the exchange of scholarly ideas with their peers.

Assignment 2: News Presentations

Students will present on a current political news story each Wednesday and explain how it connects with at least one course topic and theme. The presentations will be partially peer-evaluated.

Due: Weekly.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Content selection	15%
Connection to course topic and themes	25%
Analysis and insight	20%
Clarity and organization	15%
Delivery and engagement	10%
Peer evaluation	15%

Assignment 3: Mid-term Exam

The midterm will consist of multiple-choice, identification, short-answer, and essay questions, covering material from the first half of the course. The essay section should demonstrate critical thinking and the ability to contextualize the topic within a broader framework.

Exam date: 27 March 2026, in-class.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Multiple choice and identification	25%
Short answer	30%
Essay	45%

Assignment 4: Culminating Experience – Oral Component

Each presentation will explore context or a theme from *1984* and explain how they relate to the course and connect to real-world scenarios. The groups are expected to discuss context topics such as historical and political circumstances of the book's publication and themes such as legitimacy, propaganda, state-building, authoritarianism, surveillance, media, free speech, power, and other relevant topics.

The presentations should be fifteen minutes long, followed by questions that the group will pose to the class to stimulate discussion. Students are flexible in terms of how to approach the project in terms of creativity, whether they choose to take it up in a traditional presentation format, or as a skit, fake/news, social media, political propaganda, comic strip format, etc. These will be partially peer-evaluated

Due: 6 and 13 May 2026.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Content accuracy	15%
Connection to course topic and themes	25%
Analysis, dept, and insight	20%
Clarity and organization	15%
Delivery and engagement	10%
Peer evaluation	15%

Assignment 5: Culminating Experience – Written Component

The written component of the culminating experience projects will consist of an application and reflection forum assignment.

Each student will reflect on a political theme in 1984, in a unique, creative, and original way (and how it develops) with +500 words:

Each student is also responsible for responding to at least two posts from their classmates. There is no word limit on this, but it ought to be meaningful.

Assessed area	Percentage
Depth of reflection	30%

Application to real-world	25%
Critical thinking	20%
Clarity, structure, mechanics	10%
Engagement with classmates	15%

Due: Weekly.

8. General Requirements and School Policies

General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU's academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work. Please see the AAU intranet for a [summary of key policies](#) regarding coursework.

Course-specific requirements

There are no special requirements for this course.

9. Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage*	Description
A	95–100	Excellent performance. The student has shown originality and displayed an exceptional grasp of the material and a deep analytical understanding of the subject.
A–	90–94	
B+	87–89	Good performance. The student has mastered the material, understands the subject well and has shown some originality of thought and/or considerable effort.
B	83–86	
B–	80–82	Fair performance. The student has acquired an acceptable understanding of the material and essential subject matter of the course, but has not succeeded in translating this understanding into consistently creative or original work.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C–	70–72	Poor. The student has shown some understanding of the material and subject matter covered during the course. The student's work, however, has not shown enough effort or understanding to
D+	65–69	
D	60–64	allow for a passing grade in School Required Courses. It does qualify as a passing mark for the General College Courses and Electives.
F	0–59	Fail. The student has not succeeded in mastering the subject matter covered in the course.

* Decimals should be rounded to the nearest whole number.

Prepared by: Dr A. Ebru Akcasu

Date: 18 January 2026

Approved by: Dr Silviya Lechner

Date: 24 January 2026