Political Geography and Comparative Politics

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| **Credit level:**4 |
| **Length:** semester 2 |
| **ECTS credit value: 8**  |
| **College and School:** Lazarski University in Warsaw, Faculty of Economics and Management  |
| **Module Leader:** prof. Jakub Wódka |
| **Host Course:** BA International Relations |
| **Pre-requisites:**N/A |
| **Co-requisites:**N/A |
| **Special features:**N/A |
| **Access restrictions:**N/A |
| **Summary of module content:** The purpose of this module is to introduce students to the study of political geography and of comparative governments all over the globe. The module will give an overview of the concepts and theories in geopolitics and will teach students how to apply these ideas in describing the evolution of the modern political map. Particular attention will be paid to the role of the European Union as a new global player, alongside comparative discussions of other regional organizations such as ASEAN, the African Union, and Mercosur to highlight similarities and differences in political geography and governance. The module also aims to introduce students to the study of comparative politics and familiarize them with the variety of political systems, their constitutive parts and unique features. |

**Assessment Methods**

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| Rank | Assessment type | Assessment name | Weighting | Qualifying set (where the minimum mark required applies across multiple assessments) |
| 1 | Group Presentation | Presentation  | 30 |  |
| 2 | Coursework | Policy brief | 30 |
| 3 | Closed Book Exam | Final exam  | 40 |

**Synoptic assessment**

N/A

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of the module the successful student will be able to:

1. Critically evaluate key theories of political geography, including theories such as Heartland Theory (Mackinder), Rimland Theory (Spykman), World-Systems Theory (Wallerstein), and Critical Geopolitics.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of interplay between political, economic, social, and cultural factors shaping the geopolitical landscape, engaging with diverse perspectives and critical debates.
3. Apply political geography theories to contemporary geopolitical challenges, demonstrating the ability to develop and sustain well-justified arguments through various forms of communication, including writing, presentations, and discussion
4. Demonstrate an understanding of different political systems.
5. Critically analyse the historical development of political systems in the geopolitical context, recognizing patterns of continuity and change in the global order.
6. Assess the geopolitical potential of major geopolitical actors.

**Course outcomes the module contributes to:**

* L4.2 Competence in understanding rival accounts of the international system and the historical dimensions of global order.
* L4.4 Appreciation of the value of critical thinking in assessing the diverse range of scholarly traditions within International Relations.
* L4.7 An ability to take responsibility for their studies and professional development, especially as it relates to personal development planning (PDP) within a digitally networked world.
* L4.8 A successful transition to the demands and expectations of university-level study.
* L4.9 The ability to develop and sustain well-justified arguments through a range of media including writing, public speaking, and visual presentations.

**Indicative syllabus content**

* Definition of Political Geography
* Geopolitics as a part of Political Geography
* Dominant theories in political geography and political ideologies, political culture and legitimacy
* History of geopolitics and history of the state
* Structures, institutions, actors and processes in comparative perspective
* Parties, social movements and their impact
* European Union as the geopolitical actor
* Geopolitics of China, Russia and other, selected non-Western countries
* Geopolitics of the Central and Eastern Europe
* Comparison of classical and critical theories in political geography.
* Integration of rival theoretical perspectives, such as realism vs. constructivism in geopolitics.

**Teaching and learning methods**

The module is conducted in the form of lectures and workshops. Workshops provide an interactive environment where students engage in case studies, debates, and applied exercises to deepen their understanding of political geography and comparative politics. Active learning is achieved through structured debates, group problem-solving tasks, and collaborative analysis of real-world case studies. Media such as maps, datasets, and video clips are used to enrich discussions and allow students to visualize complex political and geographical issues. Debates are structured around specific topics, where students take on roles representing different perspectives, helping them develop critical thinking and argumentation skills. Lectures focus on discussions of assigned readings and theoretical frameworks, providing foundational knowledge that supports the workshop activities. Furthermore, students will receive supplementary reading materials for self-study.

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| Activity type | Category | Student learning and teaching hours\* |
| Lecture | Scheduled | 60 |
| Seminar | Scheduled |  |
| Tutorial | Scheduled |  |
| Project supervisor | Scheduled |  |
| Demonstration | Scheduled |  |
| Practical classes and workshops | Scheduled | 30 |
| Supervised time in studio/workshop | Scheduled |  |
| Fieldwork | Scheduled |  |
| External visits | Scheduled |  |
| Work based learning | Scheduled |  |
| Scheduled online learning | Scheduled |  |
| Other learning | Scheduled |  |
| Total scheduled |  | 90 |
| Placement | Placement |  |
| Independent study | Independent | 110 |
| Total student learning and teaching hours |  | 200 |

\*hours per activity type are indicative and subject to change.

**Assessment rationale: why has this assessment been used for this module?**

**Group PP presentation**: students working in pairs or in groups of three will be allocated a research topic that has a testable hypothesis and methods for its verification and that is to be presented in the class. It will be used to spark class discussions, encourage peer feedback, and allow for deeper engagement with key political geography concepts.The presentation will last 20 minutes for pairs and 30 minutes for groups of three, with each student given equal speaking time and assessed individually. The presentations will be followed by a brief Q&A session, helping students develop skills for real-life public engagement. This process will assess their communication skills, analytical thinking, and ability to apply theoretical concepts to case studies, enhancing public speaking, critical analysis, and problem-solving. These skills boost employability in fields such as diplomacy, international organizations, business, consulting, policy analysis, public affairs, lobbying, and related careers, where clear communication and critical thinking are essential. This assessment directly addresses LOs 2 and 3.

**Policy brief** (1000 words) assesses students' understanding of real-world global issues by prompting them to explore current challenges and debates. Students are assigned a specific topic, allowing them to focus on a relevant issue within the scope of the module. They will have one week to prepare the brief and will receive feedback from the teacher. This assignment develops their ability to synthesize research into concise, practical documents aimed at decision-makers, refining their skills in translating theoretical analysis into professional writing. It also trains them to express ideas clearly and succinctly—an essential skill in fields such as policy analysis, journalism, intelligence, corporate communications, legal advisory, international organizations, and consulting, where drafting concise reports under time constraints is a key skill, enhancing their employability across these sectors. This assessment covers LOs 5 and 6.

Students will also be informed about the ethical considerations of AI usage in preparing their presentation and policy briefs. They may use it for tasks such as preliminary research, literature inquiry, brainstorming ideas, fact-checking, cross-referencing sources, and preparing for potential Q&A sessions.

**The final exam** (90 minutes), consisting of two policy-relevant essay-type questions, is designed to assess students' knowledge and understanding of key concepts covered in the module. It evaluates their ability to apply theoretical frameworks to complex geopolitical challenges, testing critical thinking, synthesis of information, and the application of knowledge. The final exam covers LOs 1, 4 and 5.

**Assessment criteria: what criteria will be used to assess my work on this module?**

**Group PP Presentations:** Each student will be assessed individually, based on the following criteria, each worth 20%: (1) clarity of explanation, (2) use of sources, (3) quality of argument and analysis, (4) contextual understanding and factual accuracy, and (5) ability to answer questions.

**Policy brief:** Policy briefs will be assessed based on the following criteria: (1) clarity and structure, (2) analytical depth and evidence, (3) relevance and practicality of recommendations, (4) consideration of stakeholders and context, (5) writing quality.

**Final exam:** The final exam will be assessed based on: (1) relevance and precision – ability to directly address the exam questions with concise and well-structured responses, (2) analytical depth –quality of analysis, critical thinking, and application of relevant concepts, (3) policy application and practical insight – for the policy-oriented question, the ability to formulate clear, evidence-based, and actionable recommendations, (4) use of theoretical and empirical perspectives – for the research-oriented question, the ability to synthesize information and apply relevant frameworks, (5) clarity and coherence – logical structure, readability, and effectiveness in communicating.

The assessment(s) will examine to what extent the student has demonstrated ability to:

* Conduct a comprehensive analysis of interconnections between Political Geography and Geopolitics
* Comparatively analyze different political systems, by scrutinizing the structural frameworks, governance mechanisms, and ideological foundations that underpin them
* Critically analyze the impact of ideological frameworks on political decision-making and governance structures in different regions
* Examine and analyze the roles played by major political actors, including states, international organizations, and non-state entities, in shaping the complex dynamics of contemporary geopolitics
* Communicate ideas clearly, coherently, and effectively during the presentation.

**Sources**

Dickovic, T. et al. 2022. *Comparative Politics. Integrating Theories, Methods, and Cases***.** Oxford University Press.

Flint, C., Taylor, P., 2018. *Political Geography. World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality*. Routledge.

**Recommended Reading List:**

da Vinha, L., 2022. Political Geography. In *Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods* (pp. 82-97). Routledge.

Cohen, S. B., 2014. *Geopolitics of the World System*. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Flint, C., 2021. *Introduction to Geopolitics.* Routledge.

Fukuyama, F., 2012. The Future of History. *Foreign Affairs*, 91(1), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2012-01-01/future-history.

Huntington, S., 1993. The Clash of Civilizations*. Foreign affairs,* 72(3), pp.22-49.

Jones, M. et al. 2015. *An Introduction to Political Geography*. Routledge.

Konrad, G., 1984. Antipolitics: A Moral Force. In S. Dalby, P. Routledge, and G.O. Tuathail, (eds.), 2003. *The Geopolitics Reader.* Routledge, pp. 283-285.

Kaplan, R.D., 2014. The Coming Anarchy. In *Geopolitics*. Routledge, pp. 195-202.

Mackinder, H.J., 2004. The Geographical Pivot of History (1904). The geographical journal, 170(4), pp. 298-321.

Mamadouh, V. and Müller, M., 2017. Political Geography and Geopolitics. *European Regions and Boundaries*, pp.258-279.

An annually updated reading list including a list of other resources such as contemporary journal articles, reports, magazines and blogs will be provided.

In addition, students will be expected to carry out independent research to explore topics within contemporary publications in order to broaden their knowledge and understanding beyond the core content delivered in lectures.