

DRAFT

## POPULATION POLICIES & POLITICS

Course/Seminar Overview and Syllabus

Schar School of Policy and Government  
George Mason University

Fall 2025

Course/Seminar Schedule: POGO 750 DL8  
Course offered online.  
Class on Monday (19:20 pm – 22:00 pm)  
Credit Hours: 3

Faculty: Dr. John F. May, Van Metre Hall, Room # 648  
3351 Fairfax Drive, MS 3B1, Arlington, VA 22201  
Office Hours (via Skype): By appointment  
Email address: jmay21@gmu.edu

Placement: Graduate; Pre-requisites: None

**Students with special needs.** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me, and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at (703) 993 2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

**Academic integrity.** Faculty in the Schar School of Policy and Government have zero tolerance for academic dishonesty and will strictly enforce Mason's honor code.

### INTRODUCTION

Population is a crucial dimension of the societies and the world in which we live. To a very large extent, demographic patterns and trends determine the future socio-economic prospects of all countries. These demographic patterns and trends exert their influence at different levels, namely sub-national (including the urban-rural divide), national, regional, and global. To be able to plan for future socio-economic outcomes, we need to understand the changing size, rate of growth, and distribution of a country's population as well as its changing age structure and labor force composition. We need also to understand how these sub-national and national population dynamics interact with those of other nations, especially at the regional and global levels (e.g., through international migration). Finally, we need: (a) to identify the demographic variables that are amenable to public policy interventions; and (b) to understand how national and international politics may influence the design of population policies.

## COURSE/SEMINAR DESCRIPTION AND RATIONALE

Population patterns and trends are not a given. They can be influenced by right policy interventions (i.e., population policies), with adequate policy levers (i.e., entry points or instruments to implement a policy). Population policies may also be influenced by the national and international politics.

Population policies can be defined as “*actions taken explicitly or implicitly by public authorities, in order to prevent, delay, or address imbalances between demographic changes, on the one hand, and social, economic, [environmental], and political goals, on the other*” (see J. F. May, *World Population Policies: Their Origin, Evolution, and Impact*, Cham, CH: Springer, 2012, pp. 1-2). Such policy interventions enable public authorities to modify demographic trajectories, or to adapt to them. Public authorities can implement these interventions with some degree of efficiency, within the framework of Human Rights, and, more importantly, with adequate political commitment from the leaders.

This graduate Course/Seminar is designed to provide students with the key concepts needed to assess critical changes in national and global demographic patterns and trends as well as their impact on human capital formation, health outcomes, and future socio-economic prospects, with a particular focus on population policies and politics.

After a presentation of key demographic concepts and data in the more, the less, and the least developed countries, the Course/Seminar will focus on the three main transitions, i.e., demographic, epidemiological, and migratory. It will highlight the diverse and dynamic demographic regional patterns, including urbanization trends and migration flows, and present the calculation of population projections. The Course/Seminar will focus on high, low, and very low (below replacement) fertility countries, on rapidly aging societies, and on national and international migration trends and prospects. The Course/Seminar will cover the new theory of the demographic dividend(s) as well as the crucial role of population policies or the lack thereof. The Course/Seminar will also discuss the prospects for, and implications of, future population policies and how they are influenced by politics. Specific lectures will be devoted to the situation of sub-Saharan Africa and the United States and Canada, before dealing with *ad hoc* policies to address situations of high fertility and low fertility, population aging, international migration, and the environment.

The Course/Seminar will blend theoretical approaches with empirical and current data. Students will review key chapters and/or papers on core topics such as the demographic transition, population projections, population policies, the demographic dividend(s), and other topics relevant to understanding the current and future dynamics of demographic changes. The Course/Seminar will provide tools to enable students to appreciate change and development generated by demographic trends and be equipped to understand the range of population interventions and policies. Throughout the Course/Seminar, students will also be encouraged to consider the relationship between demographic patterns and trends and *current* world events and politics (e.g., decisions of the second Trump Administration on U.S. fertility and migration).

**Course/Seminar Objectives:** Upon successful completion of the Course/Seminar, students will be able to:

- Appraise demographic and development issues;
- Interpret current and projected population data;
- Evaluate the comparative demographic, social, and economic structures of the world's different regions;
- Appraise a variety of demographic and socio-economic scenarios;
- Apply this knowledge to assess evidence-based policy responses and programmatic interventions;
- Address the rising challenges and future opportunities of unfolding demographic trends; and
- Appreciate how national and international politics may affect population policies.

**Teaching Strategies:** The Course/Seminar will rely on formal lectures, analytical reviews of core literature through in-class presentations by students, and general or small group discussions. Teaching will rely on formal presentations, videos (when available), hands-on exercises, exchanges and discussions among the participants, and presentations by guest-lecturers.

**Evaluation Methods:** Students will present in-depth discussions of core papers/articles/chapters assigned. They will also write two short essays on assigned topics, of a length of 3,000 words each.

The grading for the Course/Seminar will be based on the following:

- In-class participation: 20%
- Essays: 50% (first essay 20%; second essay 30%)
- Class presentations: 30%, **for a total of 100%**

In most classes, two students will make a presentation of a key paper or article. It is expected that these presentations will be supported by a deck of PowerPoint slides. Thereafter, these students will help lead a general in-class discussion about the main findings and lessons and/or shortcomings of these papers and articles. Students will be judged on the quality of the presentation content but also on the delivery style of their presentations.

Three key questions will be asked about each paper or articles reviewed in class:

- Why was the article or paper assigned?
- Did you find gaps in the paper or article?
- Was the article or paper convincing?

## COURSE/SEMINAR OUTLINE

Class No.	Date	Topic	Written Work Due	Student Presenter
1.	Aug 25, 2025	<b>Global Overview of Demographic Patterns and Trends.</b> Overview of the Course/Seminar; world demographic patterns and trends; demographic components (mortality, fertility, migration); key demographic indicators; balancing equation; population doubling time; sources of demographic data; review of the Population Reference Bureau <i>2024 World Population Data Sheet</i> (the <i>2025 World Population Data Sheet</i> will be issued in September 2025).		First class
	Sep 1, 2025	<i>Labor Day</i>		
2.	Sep 8, 2025	<b>Demographic Transition.</b> Analysis of the seminal review article by D. Kirk. 1996. "Demographic Transition Theory". <i>Population Studies</i> 50(3): 361-387 (Assigned Paper or AP). Analysis of chapter by J. A. Goldstone and J. F. May, "Contemporary Population Issues," in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Springer, 2022 (AP).		Two student presenters
3.	Sep 15, 2025	<b>Population Projections.</b> Projection methods; cohort component method; projections assumptions (normative, policy-oriented, or expert-based); assumptions variants; calculation of projections (including lifetables); projections results; use of population projections; policy implications of population projections; hands-on use of latest UN Population Division projections ( <i>2024 World Population Prospects</i> ). In-class discussion of T. Buettner. 2022. "Population Projections and Population Policies," in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Cham, CH: Springer (AP).		
4.	Sep 22, 2025	<b>Population Policies.</b> Analysis of the chapter by J. F. May. 2020. "Population Policies". In Y. Charbit (Edit.). <i>Population and Development Issues</i> (AP). In addition, analysis of the 2007 Niger Declaration of the Government on Population Policy (DGPP) and the 2019 Niger		Two student presenters

		National Population Policy 2019-2035 (NPP). Analysis of Y. Charbit. 2022. "Classical Foundations of Past and Present Population Policies," in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Cham, CH: Springer (AP).		
5.	Sep 29, 2025	<b>Sub-Saharan Africa's Demography.</b> Analysis of chapters 1 and 2 of J. F. May and J. P. Guengant, <i>Demography and Economic Emergence of Sub-Saharan Africa</i> , Brussels, BE: Académie royale de Belgique, 2020, pp. 17-52 (AP). In addition, analysis of the 2007 Niger Declaration of the Government on Population Policy (DGPP) and the 2019 Niger National Population Policy 2019-2035 (NPP) (cont'd). Analysis of A. R. Bado et al. 2022. "Sub-Saharan Africa: Slow Fertility Transitions Despite Policy Efforts," in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Cham, CH: Springer (AP).	Essay 1 assigned	Two student presenters
6.	Oct 6, 2025	<b>Demographic Dividend(s).</b> Analysis of the chapter by V. Turbat. 2017. "The Demographic Dividend: A Potential Surplus Generated by a Demographic Transition". In H. Groth and J. F. May (Eds). <i>Africa's Population: In Search of a Demographic Dividend</i> . Cham. CH: Springer, pp. 181-195 (GMU has an electronic copy at the Arlington Campus Library) (AP). In addition, discussion of the short briefing article by R. Lee and A. Mason. 2006. "What is the Demographic Dividend?" <i>Finance and Development</i> 43(3): 16-17. Analysis of V. Turbat. 2022. "Policies Needed to Capture Demographic Dividends," in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Cham, CH: Springer (AP).		Two student presenters
	Oct 13, 2025	<i>Columbus Day</i>	Fall break	
7.	Oct 20, 2025	<b>Demography of North America</b> (policy and political implications of US and Canada demographics). Analysis of the article by Carl Haub. 2006. "Population Policy in the United States". In G. Caselli, J. Vallin, and G. Wunsch (Eds). <i>Demography, Analysis and Synthesis: A Treatise in Population Studies</i> , vol 4, pp. 395-	Essay 1 due	Two student presenters

		406 (AP). Analysis of K. Jurczynska and J. Gribble. 2022. "The United States and Canada: Demographic Realities and Policy Responses" in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Cham, CH: Springer (AP). <a href="#">In addition, discussion of one or two recent papers by Richard Jackson issued.</a>		
8.	Oct 27, 2025	<b>Population Aging and Related Policies.</b> Analysis of the chapter by M. A. Garcia, C. Garcia, and K. Markides. 2019. "Demography of Aging". In D. L. Poston, Jr. (Ed.). <i>Handbook of Population</i> . 2 <sup>nd</sup> edit. Cham, CH: Springer, pp. 143-161 (AP). Analysis of S. Mudrazija and J. L. Angel. 2022. "Population Aging and Public Policy," in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Cham, CH: Springer (AP).		Two student presenters
9.	Nov 3, 2025	<b>High Fertility Policies.</b> Analysis of the article by John F. May. 2017. "The Politics of Family Planning Policies and Programs in sub-Saharan Africa". In J. B. Casterline and J. Bongaarts (Eds). <i>Fertility Transition in sub-Saharan Africa, Population and Development Review</i> 43(Suppl.): 308-329 (AP). Analysis of J. Cleland. 2022. "The Contraceptive Revolution," in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Cham, CH: Springer (AP).		Two student presenters
10.	Nov 10, 2025	<b>Low Fertility Policies.</b> Analysis of the article by P. Demeny. 2003. "Population Policy Dilemmas in Europe at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Century". <i>Population and Development Review</i> 29(1): 1-28. (AP). In addition, discussion of the article by J. C. Chesnais. 1996. "Fertility, Family, and Social Policy in Contemporary Western Europe". <i>Population and Development Review</i> 22(4): 729-739. (AP). Analysis of E. Ambrosetti. 2022. "Europe: Low Fertility, Aging, and Migration Policies," in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Cham, CH: Springer (AP).	Essay 2 assigned	Two student presenters
11.	Nov 17, 2025	<b>Population and Social Policies in China.</b> Analysis of Chapter 2 by S. Greenhalgh. 2010. "Creating Global Persons and a Global Society". In S. Greenhalgh. <i>Cultivating Global Citizens:</i>		Two student presenters

		<i>Population in the Rise of China</i> . Cambridge, MA - London, GB: Harvard University Press, pp. 37-78 (AP). Analysis of S. Gietel-Basten et al. 2022. "Population Policies in East Asia and Oceania," in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Cham, CH: Springer (AP).		
12.	Nov 24, 2025	<b>International Migration and Related Policies.</b> Analysis of the chapter by S. K. Brown, F. D. Bean, and S. Nasir. 2019. "International Migration". In D. L. Poston, Jr. (Ed.). <i>Handbook of Population</i> . 2 <sup>nd</sup> edit. Cham, CH: Springer, pp. 421-455 (AP). Analysis of S. K. Brown. 2022. "International Migration Policies," in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Cham, CH: Springer (AP).		Two student presenters
	Nov 27, 2025	<i>Thanksgiving</i>		
13.	Dec 1, 2025	<b>Population and the Environment.</b> Analysis of the thought-provoking article by David Lam. 2011. "How the World Survived the Population Bomb: Lessons from 50 Years of Extraordinary Demographic History". <i>Demography</i> 48(4): 1231-1262 (AP). Analysis of A. F. Barbieri and W. K. Pan. 2022. "Population Dynamics and the Environment: The Demo-Climatic Transition," in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Cham, CH: Springer (AP).	Essay 2 due	Two student presenters
14.	Dec 8, 2025	<b>Future of Population Policies.</b> Article by W. Lutz. 2014. "A Population Policy Rationale for the Twenty-First Century". <i>Population and Development Review</i> 40(3): 527-544. Commentary by J. F. May and S. Rotenberg. 2020. "A Call for Better Integrated Policies to Accelerate the Fertility Decline in Sub-Saharan Africa". <i>Studies in Family Planning</i> 51(2): 193-204. Chapter by J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone. 2022. "Prospects for Population Policies and Interventions," in J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). <i>International Handbook of Population Policies</i> . Cham, CH: Springer. <b>General reflections on the Course/Seminar. Course/Seminar evaluation (in- class).</b>	These three papers will be discussed in-class	Last class

## REQUIRED READINGS

Students will be required to purchase or rent the book of Tim Dyson, *Population and Development: The Demographic Transition*, London, GB: Zed Books, 2010, which will be the main textbook used throughout the Course/Seminar. Another major book will be the recent volume by J. F. May and J. A. Goldstone (Eds). 2022. *International Handbook of Population Policies*. Cham, CH: Springer, which will be used extensively. Another key book is J. F. May. 2012. *World Population Policies: Their Origin, Evolution, and Impact*. New York, NY: Springer (GMU Library has electronic copies at the Arlington Campus). Finally, the 2025 *World Population Data Sheet* of the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) [to be issued in September 2025] will also be a key tool, which will be used and referred to throughout the Course/Seminar (an electronic copy of this document will be distributed).

The required readings (to be done before the class) will provide critical data and basic information that will be referred to in class (about 40 pages of reading will be assigned per week). There will also be handouts of the formal presentations, which will be distributed electronically. Teaching will rely on formal presentations, hands-on exercises as well as exchanges and discussions among the students. Several podcasts and/or videos of specialists will be shown for their expertise and their insights on specific topics. Guest-lecturers will also be invited.

Readings for each class will be listed on **Canvas**. Papers, chapters, or documents that are not readily available in libraries and/or bookshops will be provided.

In addition, two publications, which are available from the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) Website, either for purchase (paper copy) or downloading (electronic copy) (see [www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org)), will be suggested as additional readings:

- *Population Handbook* (6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2011)
- MCFALLS Jr J. A. Population: A Lively Introduction (5<sup>th</sup> edition, *Population Bulletin*, Vol. 62, No. 1, March 2007)

Finally, students will be expected to review and/or use identified sections of:

Bongaarts, J. and B. C. O. Neill. 2018. "Global warming policy: Is population left out in the cold?" *Science* 361(6403): 650-652.

Goldstone, J. A., E. P. Kaufmann, and M. Duffy Toft. 2012. *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Reshaping International Security and National Policies*. Oxford, GB - New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

May, J. F. 2017. "The Role of Public Population Institutions on Fertility Outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa". *Population Horizons* 14(1): 1-8.

May, J. F. 2019. "Population Policy", chapter from D. L. Poston, Jr. (Edit.). *Handbook of Population*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edit. Cham, CH: Springer, 875-899.

May, J. F. and J. P. Guengant. 2020. *Demography and Economic Emergence of Sub-Saharan Africa*. Brussels, BE: Belgian Royal Academy.



Ross, J. 2017. *The Dynamics of Family Planning: Key Demographic Insights*. Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau.

**Other readings that can contribute to the preparation of the two essays will be available from Professor May, if needed.**

## **PREPARATION OF ESSAYS**

Each student will prepare two short essays, which will count for 50% of the final grade. For each essay, one question or proposition will be assigned to students, who will need to develop and write arguments in order to justify their answer.

The essays will be of 3,000 words (approximately 6 pages). The use of tables and figures is encouraged when feasible and if necessary. Annexes (which do not count against the word-count) can be used to support the analysis, and documentary references must be provided to show the sources used (again, references do not count against the word-count).

Please note that Wikipedia is not considered a reliable source of information. Instead, essays should rely on academic (peer-reviewed) books and journal articles as well as official documents from Governments, international institutions, and/or NGOs.

**The final Essays are due before midnight, on the days indicated in the Course/Seminar Outline. Essays are to be sent electronically to Professor May <[jmay21@gmu.edu](mailto:jmay21@gmu.edu)> in a Word file format (not in a PDF file format). Note: NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED. Remember that each paper should be 3,000 words. Again, annexes and references do not count against the word-count.**

## **KEY POPULATION JOURNALS**

- *Population and Development Review*
- *Population Studies*
- *Demography*
- *Studies in Family Planning*
- *Canadian Studies in Population*
- *Population* (in French; English version available)
- *Genus* (articles in English, French, and Italian)

Other online, open-access journals (e.g., *The Lancet*) are available as well.

## **MAIN POLITICAL SCIENCE JOURNALS**

- *Foreign Affairs*
- *Foreign Policy*

## **USEFUL WEBSITES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

### **Primary Sources on Population**

- [UN Population Division \(to access the 2024 Population Projections under the title of 2024 World Population Prospects\) \[issued on July 11, 2024\]](#)
- [The DHS Program](#)
- [UNICEF MICS Surveys](#)

- [US Census Bureau, International Program Center](#)
- [Population Reference Bureau](#)
- [The World Bank Group – Health and Population Statistics](#)
- [The Population Council](#)
- [Migration Policy Institute](#)
- [Global Aging Institute \(GAI\)](#)
- [Institut national d'études démographiques \(INED\)](#)
- [Australian National University](#)
- [The Oxford Institute of Population Ageing](#)
- [Vienna Institute of Demography](#)

### **Secondary Sources on Population**

- [Population Action International \(PAI\)](#)
- [The Population Institute](#)
- [RAND—Population Matters](#)
- [Center for Global Development](#)
- [Central Intelligence Agency](#)
- [The Center for Reproductive Rights](#)
- [The Center for Strategic and International Studies \(CSIS\)](#)
- [UNAIDS](#)
- [UNESCO](#)

### **Academic Standards**

Academic Standards exist to promote authentic scholarship, support the institution's goal of maintaining high standards of academic excellence, and encourage continued ethical behavior of faculty and students to cultivate an educational community which values integrity and produces graduates who carry this commitment forward into professional practice.

As members of the George Mason University community, we are committed to fostering an environment of trust, respect, and scholarly excellence. Our academic standards are the foundation of this commitment, guiding our behavior and interactions within this academic community. The practices for implementing these standards adapt to modern practices, disciplinary contexts, and technological advancements. Our standards are embodied in our courses, policies, and scholarship, and are upheld in the following principles:

- **Honesty:** Providing accurate information in all academic endeavors, including communications, assignments, and examinations.
- **Acknowledgement:** Giving proper credit for all contributions to one's work. This involves the use of accurate citations and references for any ideas, words, or materials created by others in the style appropriate to the discipline. It also includes acknowledging shared authorship in group projects, coauthored pieces, and project reports.

- **Uniqueness of Work:** Ensuring that all submitted work is the result of one's own effort and is original, including free from self-plagiarism. This principle extends to written assignments, code, presentations, exams, and all other forms of academic work.

Violations of these standards—including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating—are taken seriously and will be addressed in accordance with university policies. [The process for reporting, investigating, and adjudicating violations is outlined in the university's procedures here.](#) Consequences of violations may include academic sanctions, disciplinary actions, and other measures necessary to uphold the integrity of our academic community.

The principles outlined in these academic standards reflect our collective commitment to upholding the highest standards of honesty, acknowledgement, and uniqueness of work. By adhering to these principles, we ensure the continued excellence and integrity of George Mason University's academic community.

**Student responsibility:** Students are responsible for understanding how these general expectations regarding academic standards apply to each course, assignment, or exam they participate in; students should ask their instructor for clarification on any aspect that is not clear to them.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to upholding the letter and spirit of the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. Under the administration of University Life, Disability Services implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. Students can begin the registration process with Disability Services at any time during their enrollment at George Mason University. If you are seeking accommodations, please visit the [Disability Services website](#) for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: [ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu). Phone: (703) 993-2474.

**Student responsibility:** Students are responsible for registering with Disability Services and communicating about their approved accommodations with their instructor in advance of any relevant class meeting, assignment, or exam.

### **FERPA and Use of GMU Email Addresses for Course Communication**

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) governs the disclosure of education records for eligible students and is an essential aspect of any course. **Students must use their GMU email account** to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. Instructors will not respond to messages sent from or send messages regarding course content to a non-GMU email address.

**Student responsibility:** Students are responsible for checking their GMU email regularly for course-related information, and/or ensuring that GMU email messages are forwarded to an account they do check.

## **Title IX Resources and Required Reporting**

As a part of George Mason University's commitment to providing a safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and working environment for all members of the University community, the University does not discriminate on the basis of sex or gender in any of its education or employment programs and activities. Accordingly, **all non-confidential employees, including your faculty member, have a legal requirement to report to the Title IX Coordinator, all relevant details obtained directly or indirectly about any incident of Prohibited Conduct** (such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, gender-based stalking, dating/domestic violence). Upon notifying the Title IX Coordinator of possible Prohibited Conduct, the Title IX Coordinator will assess the report and determine if outreach is required. If outreach is required, the individual the report is about (the "Complainant") will receive a communication, likely in the form of an email, offering that person the option to meet with a representative of the Title IX office.

For more information about non-confidential employees, resources, and Prohibited Conduct, please see University Policy 1202: [Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence](#). Questions regarding Title IX can be directed to the Title IX Coordinator via email to [TitleIX@gmu.edu](mailto:TitleIX@gmu.edu), by phone at 703-993-8730, or in person on the Fairfax campus in Aquia 373.

**Student opportunity:** If you prefer to speak to someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential employees in [Student Support & Advocacy \(SSAC\)](#), Counseling and [Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#), [Student Health Services \(SHS\)](#), and/or the [Office of the University Ombudsperson](#).