

GOVT 132-002

Fall 2025

Introduction to International Politics

Tuesday/Thursday 10:30 am - 11:45 pm
Horizon Hall 1014

Professor: J. Luis Rodriguez, Ph.D.
Office: Van Metre Hall, Office 662
Email: jrodr80@gmu.edu
Student hours: Wednesdays 3:00 to 4:00 PM over Zoom
Link to schedule office hours:

Team

PhD Graduate Teaching Assistant:
Master's Course Assistant:
Learning Assistant:
Learning Assistant:

Course Description

This course introduces the study of international politics. We will survey the main theoretical tools international relations analysts use to study international politics (part 1), analyze how different actors try to influence international politics (part 2), and outline current international and global challenges (parts 3 and 4). Some of the main questions we will explore include whether individuals can affect international politics, the inevitability of war, the strength or weakness of international law, and how to tackle global problems such as climate change or financial crises. As an introductory course, we will overview these topics to give students the necessary tools to pursue additional international politics courses that dive into these questions in further depth.

Course Goals

The course aims to ground the theories we engage with empirical and practice-oriented examples. Through this course, students will be able to:

- Identify the interests and strategies of different international actors;
- Recognize how different international actors interact with states, international and regional organizations, multinational companies, and civil society organizations;
- Learn to engage with different writing genres: opinion pieces (op-eds and editorial pages), articles for policy audiences, articles from academic journals, and academic books, and

- Develop increased skills, confidence, and enthusiasm for engaging in informed debates on international and global politics.

Course Materials

There is no required textbook for this course. All the readings will be posted on Canvas and available at the library. Students should read the materials assigned before class, as they will serve as the basis of our discussions.

Attention:
Screens are not allowed during class.
You can only take notes by hand.

As individuals learning about international politics, students must follow international news as it unfolds in real time. A supplemental list of world news sources is posted on Canvas, and many of the news sources are free or available through the George Mason University library.

Grading and Course Requirements

Grades will be based on the following assessments:

<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Assignment</i>
20%	Reading summaries
20%	First exam
20%	Second exam
20%	Third exam
20%	Fourth exam

Attendance: Because this is a synchronous lecture, attendance is mandatory. A penalty of 20 points (on a 100-point scale) will be applied each exam if you miss more than 2 classes before each exam.

**If you know you will miss a class because of a religious holiday or other circumstances, please let me know in advance of class to ensure you are up to date on the course material.

Participation in class: Students are expected to demonstrate their engagement with the readings and international news by actively listening and contributing to in-class discussions. The professor will assign extra points per exam to students who participate in class based on quality, not quantity of participations.

Reading summaries (20%): You are required to fill a “Reading analysis worksheet” on the reading assigned per class and bring it to class. If there are more than one reading assigned by day, the syllabus indicates which reading to summarize.

We will mark worksheets using a pass/fail scale. We will use the worksheet to track attendance in class.

We will return them the class prior to each exam. You can bring them and use them during the exams.

Four exams in class (20% each for a total of 80%): These exams will test your knowledge of the readings, our classroom discussions, and broader course themes. You must do the reading and come to class to do well. The exams may include multiple-choice, short-answer, or essay questions. The exams are not cumulative.

The exams will take place on

- September 11
- October 7
- November 6
- December 4

Make-up exams are not permitted without extreme extenuating circumstances.

Extra credit opportunities: There will be two opportunities to gain extra credit.

- First opportunity: On October 30, students can earn 10 extra points toward their final grade (on a 100-point scale). You need to come to class with your computer and a bluebook, finish an online bargaining simulation, and write a review of your performance.
- Second opportunity: During the Thanksgiving break, students need to watch the movie *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (known simply and more commonly as *Dr. Strangelove*). On December 2, students can earn 10 extra points toward their final grade (on a 100-point scale). You need to come to class with a bluebook.

Grading Standards: Assignment evaluations in this course will be based on the grading scale outlined below.

Letter grade		Percentage	Interpretation
Excellent	A	95-100	Mastery of concepts. Can clearly apply concepts to new situations.
	A-	90-94	
Above average	B+	87-89	Strong understanding of concepts. Acceptable foundation for future work.
	B	83-86	
	B-	80-82	
Proficient	C+	77-79	Basic understanding of concepts. Questionable foundation for future work.
	C	73-76	
	C-	70-72	
Marginal	D	60-69	Weak understanding of concepts and foundation for future work.
Failure	F	0-59	Failed to demonstrate understanding of concepts and effort.

Part 1: What is international politics?

August 26: Introduction

- No reading assigned for today

August 28: Why international politics?

- Christian Reus-Smit, "What is International Relations?" in *International Relations: A Very Short Introduction*, New York, Oxford, 2020. [\[Reading to summarize\]](#)
- Paul Poast, "Academic IR Can't Save the World, but It's a Good Place to Start," *World Politics Review*, August 9, 2024.
- Anthony Daley, "On Reading: Strategies for Students," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1995, pp. 89-100.

September 2: Theoretical foundations to study international politics

- Christian Reus-Smit, "Theory is Your Friend," in *International Relations: A Very Short Introduction*, New York, Oxford, 2020.
- Jack Snyder, "One World, Rival Theories," *Foreign Policy*, no. 145, 2004, pp. 53-62. [\[Reading to summarize\]](#)

September 4: Theoretical foundations to study international politics (continued)

- Daniel W. Drezner, "The Social Construction of Zombies," in *Theories of International Politics and Zombies*, Princeton University Press, 2022.

September 9: The levels of analysis

- J. David Singer, "International Conflict: Three Levels of Analysis," *World Politics*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1960, pp. 453-461.

September 11 – First exam in class

Part 2: Actors in International Politics

September 16: The state

- David Lake, "The State and International Relations," in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.

September 18: International organizations

- Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations," *International Organization*, vol. 53, no. 4, 1999, pp. 699–732.

September 23: Non-state actors

- Alina Utrata, "Engineering Territory: Space and Colonies in Silicon Valley," *American Political Science Review*. 2024, vol. 118, no. 3, pp. 1097-1109.

Part 3: International Themes

September 25: The liberal international order

- Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 25, 1999, pp. 179-196.

September 30: International security

- Rita Abrahamsen and Adam Sandor, "The Global South and International Security," in Alexandra Gheciu and William C. Wohlforth (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Security*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 382-396.

October 2: International law and norms

- Tanisha M. Fazal, "The Power of Principles: What Norms Are Still Good For," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 103, no. 4, 2024, pp. 148-154.

October 7: Second exam in class

October 9: Power transitions and the rise of China

- Manjari Chatterjee Miller, "The Most Dangerous Game: Do Power Transitions Always Lead to War?" *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 103, no. 4, 2024, pp. 128-135.

October 14: Cooperation against traditional security threats

- Rebecca Davis Gibbons, "The Humanitarian Turn in Nuclear Disarmament and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons," *The Nonproliferation Review*, vol. 25, no. 1-2, pp. 11-36.

October 16: Nuclear politics

- Jon B. Wolfsthal, Hans Kristensen, and Matt Korda, "The next nuclear age" (July 3, 2025) and "Why more countries want nuclear weapons" (June 25, 2025), *The Washington Post*.

October 21: Broadening the concept of security

- Roland Paris, "Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?" *International Security*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2001, pp. 87-102.

October 23: Trade and finance

- Eswar Prasad, "Top Dollar: Why the Dominance of America's Currency Is Harder Than Ever to Overturn," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 103, no. 4, 2024.

October 28: Globalization

- Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman, "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion," *International Security*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2019, pp. 42-79.

October 30: Opportunity to gain extra credit

November 4 – Election Day, class will not meet

November 6 – Third exam in class

Part 4: Global Themes

November 11: Cooperation against emerging security threats

- Sherri Goodman and Pauline Baudu, “Climate Change as a ‘Threat Multiplier’: History, Uses and Future of the Concept,” Center for Climate and Security, Council on Strategic Risks, Briefer No. 38, January 3, 2023.

November 13: Development and the Environment

- Necla Tschirgi, “International Security and Development,” in Alexandra Gheciu and William C. Wohlforth (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Security*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 562–577.

November 18: Rights and responsibility

- Audie Klotz, “Migration,” in Alexandra Gheciu and William C. Wohlforth (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Security*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 442–456.

November 20: Identities and international politics

- Kelebogile Zvobgo and Meredith Loken, “Why Race Matters in International Relations,” *Foreign Policy*, June 19, 2020.

November 21: Technologies and international politics

- Christopher F. Chyba, “New Technologies & Strategic Stability,” *Dædalus*, vol. 149, no. 2, 2020, pp. 150-170.

November 25 – Thanksgiving Break, No class

November 27 – Thanksgiving Break, No class

December 2 – Opportunity to gain extra credit

December 4 – Fourth exam in class

Logistical notes

Readings: Assigned books will be on a reserve at the George Mason library, and assigned articles will be on Canvas.

Communication policy: All course-related communications should be conducted via George Mason email. I will try to respond within 48 hours. Unless it is an emergency, I will only email

you on a 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM schedule and only during weekdays. I do not expect you to reply outside of that same schedule.

Punctuality and absences: I expect students to be in the classroom on time. If you cannot make a seminar session, inform me beforehand via email. Submit a 200-word reaction to the assigned readings for that day. The grade for that essay will count for your participation grade.

Technology policy: Just as you would not read a newspaper in class, please respect your fellow students by refraining from the use of electronic devices or applications other than those needed to participate. Please avoid the temptation to check your email, social media, or news outlets during class because it is likely to be disruptive to your learning experience.

Late policy: Late assignment submissions will result in a standardized penalty. If you submit your assignment after the deadline but within 24 hours, 10 points will be subtracted from the grade. For example, a 95-point quality reaction submitted five minutes late would receive an 85 grade, 24 hours and 5 five minutes late a 75 grade. See the statement below for questions on accommodations.

Note: My policy with assignments favors flexibility. For this to work, though, I ask that my students favor transparency. If an issue comes up that might make things difficult for you, let me know in advance and we can work things through together.

Health and safety policy: All students taking courses with a face-to-face component are required to follow the university's public health and safety precautions. This section will be updated with the latest policies prior to the beginning of the course.

Additional notes

Library resources and librarian virtual office hours: Research assistance is available to students through [University Libraries](#). From there you can access guides, databases, and more while on campus or off-site. Students can also contact the library's Virtual Reference service here, to speak with a librarian. Drop-in and chat with Lorena Jordan, the Schar School's Policy and Government Librarian about your research, assignments, or anything relating to your area of study. No appointments are needed. Thursdays weekly from 4:00 to 6:00 PM, Eastern Standard Time. [Use this link to connect via zoom](#).

Names and pronouns: If you wish, please share your name and gender pronouns with me and indicate how best to address you in class and via email. I use He/Him/His for myself and you may address me as Luis in email and verbally. Furthermore, Mason supports and recognizes that an inclusive and welcoming community is linked to our strategic goals and is key to building a sense of belonging and well-being. For this reason, students may use the tools we provide to [change their names and pronouns on Mason records here](#).

Campus closure or emergency class cancellation: If the campus closes, or if a class meeting needs to be canceled or adjusted due to weather or other concern, students should check

Canvas and their email for updates on how to continue learning and for information about any changes to events or assignments.

Basic course technology requirements: Activities and assignments in this course will regularly use web-conferencing software (Canvas / Zoom). Students are required to have a device with a functional camera and microphone. In an emergency, students can connect through a telephone call, but video connection is the expected norm.

Privacy: Students must use their Mason email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.

Artificial Intelligence: All work submitted in this course must be your own original work; use of AI writing tools, such as ChatGPT, are prohibited in this course and will be considered a violation of academic integrity. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Academic Integrity.

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. 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, 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](#).

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