

POLS 3410: European Politics

Jordan Ernstsen

Department of Political Science
University of Utah

Spring 2025



Email: jordan.ernstsen@utah.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

Meeting Time: Mondays 6:00pm-9:00pm
Location: Sandy Center, Rm. 108

Course Description

Contemporary Europe faces cascading challenges: a resurgent security threat from Russia's re-vanchism and grinding war in Ukraine, the rise of populist and illiberal movements that threaten democratic norms, ongoing immigration and refugee crises, energy concerns heightened by geopolitical tensions, the need to address climate change while maintaining economic competitiveness, and strained transatlantic relations with a more unpredictable United States. These challenges affect individual European states differently, and their capacity to respond varies widely, reflecting Europe's inherent complexity and diversity. While the European Union provides a framework for collective action, its complex institutional structure and relationship to member states often complicates cooperation on shared problems.

To make sense of Europe's complex and diverse institutional, political, economic, and social landscape, this class take a comparative approach and critically analyzes the structure and functioning of institutions at both the continental and state level while exploring their impact on political and policy outcomes throughout Europe. The course is organized into three main sections: (1) the historical foundations of modern European politics, (2) democratic institutions and political participation, and (3) contemporary challenges and policy issues. By the end of the course, students will be equipped to think critically about the past and present of European politics and engage meaningfully with debates about Europe's future.

Learning Objectives

My goal is to guide you through the complex landscape of European politics. Together, we'll develop the analytical and theoretical knowledge that underscore the scientific study of politics—with special attention to Comparative Politics and International Relations—and allow us to uncover a sense of order in apparent chaos. More specifically, by the end of the course, you will:

1. Demonstrate a critical understanding of the historical, political, economic, and social factors shaping contemporary European politics.
2. Analyze how political institutions, constitutional structures, and electoral systems vary across European countries and impact political processes.
3. Evaluate the role and functioning of key institutions of the European Union and their influence on member states.
4. Apply theoretical frameworks and analytical tools from comparative politics and international relations to critically assess current challenges facing Europe.
5. Improve written and oral communication skills through informed discussion, analysis, and presentations on European political dynamics.

Course Materials

There is one required text for the course, which is available digitally via the Instant Access program and made accessible on our Canvas page:

- Bale, Tim. *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*, 4th edition. Palgrave, 2017.

If you have questions about accessing the text, please let me know. You are also welcome to opt out of the Instant Access program and instead purchase a hard copy of the text [here](#) if you prefer. In addition to the required text, we will also use peer-reviewed academic articles, book chapters, and other materials (e.g., videos, podcasts) to help us meet our learning objectives. These resources will be made available in class or on our course Canvas page.

Determination of Grades

The final course grade will be determined by weighing your performance in the following areas:

1. Attendance and participation	20%
2. Map quiz	5%
3. Quizzes	20%
4. Midterm exam	25%
5. Final exam	30%
<hr/> <hr/>	
FINAL GRADE	100%

I convert numerical percentage scores into letter grades using the following scheme:

A	=	93% and above	C+	=	77%-80%
A-	=	90%-93%	C	=	73%-77%
B+	=	87%-90%	C-	=	70%-73%
B	=	83%-87%	D+	=	67%-70%
B-	=	80%-83%	D	=	60%-67%
			F	=	Less than 60%

Student Responsibilities and Expectations

Attendance and Participation

Your attendance and engaged participation are essential to our shared learning experience. I expect you to come to class having completed the assigned readings, ready to actively discuss and debate ideas respectfully with your classmates. Please speak up in class and share your thoughts, questions, and ideas! The more participation we have, the more enjoyable and engaging our class sessions will be. If you ever feel uncomfortable speaking in class, please come talk to me—we can work together to find alternative ways for you to participate meaningfully in our discussions.

In addition to the assigned reading, I strongly encourage you to stay informed with current events in Europe, whether through newspapers, websites, or podcasts (I've listed a number of sources for you below). We will spend the first five to ten minutes of each class session talking about political, economic, and social developments in Europe to help us connect our course material to the real world. My hope is that these discussions enrich our collective learning experience.

Useful sources for European news

Newspapers, websites, and magazines¹:

EU Observer	Euractiv
Politico: Europe	The Economist
The Guardian	Independent
Euro News	BBC
Wall Street Journal	New York Times
Deutsche Welle	

Think Tanks:

CEPS	EPC
EUISS	CER
ECFR	European Union

Podcasts:

Mark Leonard's World in 30 Minutes	EU Confidential
Inside Europe	

¹Please note that several of these sources are behind a paywall and may therefore be inaccessible beyond the limited number of free articles they offer you each month.

Map Quiz

In-class, closed-notes quiz on Monday, January 27. You will be given a blank map of Western Europe as well as country names and asked to match the country names to the correct country.

Quizzes

Throughout the semester, I will assess your comprehension of the material, as well as your ability to *apply* the material, through a set of three in-class quizzes. Quizzes are closed notes and will consist of 20-ish short answer and multiple choice questions that cover material from the readings and lectures. I will announce upcoming quizzes in class and on Canvas one week prior to the quiz (for example, a quiz on March 24 will be announced on March 17); quiz dates are also listed here in the syllabus under the Course Structure section.

Midterm Exam

In-class, closed-notes midterm exam on Monday, March 3. The midterm will cover topics from Week 1 through Week 8 of the course. For the midterm, you will be given a small set of questions and asked to respond to several of your choosing. You will be required to write short essay responses in which you make and defend an argument drawing on material from our lectures and the readings to support your points.

Final Exam

Take-home final exam following the same format as the midterm but covering topics from Week 9 through Week 16. I will distribute the exam in class on Monday, April 21 and it is due on Friday, April 25 by 5:00PM via Canvas upload.

Communication with your Instructor

I am more than happy to discuss course-related material with you, and I encourage every student to feel free to contact me with any problems, concerns, or questions about the class. Please do not suffer in silence if you are struggling. Instead, let me know—as soon as possible—what things are not making sense or if you are having trouble and we can work it out.

While I do not hold regular office hours, I am available by appointment to meet with students via Zoom. I will also make myself available before and after class to answer any questions or address any matters that can be resolved without a formal meeting.

My preferred method of contact is email. I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours during the week. That being said, please note that I am also a husband, father, researcher, teacher, and all around human being. Life gets crazy. If I do not respond to your email with 24 hours, feel free to send a follow-up message. I will not take offense; rather, I will be grateful for the reminder. I do not check my email on the weekends—if you email me Friday after 5:00pm, please wait until Monday morning at the earliest for a reply.

My Commitment to You

As your professor, I hold high expectations of you for this course—and I expect you to hold high expectations of me in return. I am deeply committed to your learning and success, and I promise to help you navigate every aspect of this class with clarity and confidence. You can expect me to come prepared to every class, create an engaging and respectful learning environment, challenge you intellectually, and provide constructive feedback on your work. I understand that you have many demands on your time—other courses, extracurricular activities, and life beyond campus. If you find yourself struggling with any aspect of the course, please reach out. I'm here to help you succeed and learn!

Course Policies and Other Useful Information

Late and Missing Work

Late work is deducted one grade for every 12 hours that it is late (e.g., from a B+ to a B). Extensions will only be granted for justifiable reasons, and I must be notified well in advance of the due date. Last-minute extension requests are unlikely to be granted. If you are unable to be present in class on the day of a quiz or an exam, or if you are unable to meet a deadline, please contact me as soon as possible and we can make the appropriate arrangements.

Academic Integrity

It is expected that students comply with University of Utah policies regarding academic honesty, including but not limited to refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, misrepresenting ones work, and/or inappropriately collaborating. This includes the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools without citation, documentation, or authorization. Students are expected to adhere to the prescribed professional and ethical standards of the profession/discipline for which they are preparing. Any student who engages in academic dishonesty or who violates the professional and ethical standards for their profession/discipline may be subject to academic sanctions as per the University of Utahs Student Code: [Policy 6-410: Student Academic Performance, Academic Conduct, and Professional and Ethical Conduct](#).

Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punished by failure on an individual assignment, and/or failure in the course. Academic misconduct, according to the University of Utah Student Code:

...Includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting ones work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information. It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct.

For details on plagiarism and other important course conduct issues, see the U's [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#).

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities.

All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the [Center for Disability & Access](#) (CDA). CDA will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. Prior notice is appreciated. To read the full accommodations policy for the University of Utah, please Section Q of the [Instruction & Evaluation regulations](#).

In compliance with ADA requirements, some students may need to record course content. Any recordings of course content are for personal use only, should not be shared, and should never be made publicly available. In addition, recordings must be destroyed at the conclusion of the course.

If you will need accommodations in this class, or for more information about what support they provide, contact the Center for Disability & Access at 801-581-5020 or visit their [website](#).

University Safety Statement

The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more safety information and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit <https://safeu.utah.edu/>.

To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677).

Addressing Sexual Misconduct

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veterans status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS).

Course Structure

Classes

Assignment/Important Dates

Part I: Historical Foundations

Week 1 (01/06)

Week 2 (01/13)

Week 3 (01/20)

No class—Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Week 4 (01/27)

Map Quiz

Part II: Institutions and Participation

Week 5 (02/03)

Week 6 (02/10)

Quiz 1

Week 7 (02/17)

No class—President's Day

Week 8 (02/24)

Week 9 (03/03)

Midterm Exam

Week 10 (03/10)

No class—Spring Break

Week 11 (03/17)

Part III: Contemporary Challenges

Week 12 (03/24)

Quiz 2

Week 13 (03/31)

Week 14 (04/07)

Week 15 (04/14)

Week 16 (04/21)

Quiz 3
Final Exam

Course Schedule

Please note that the schedule and readings below are tentative and subject to change. Occasion may arise for us to change the order of our lectures, add or remove readings, or otherwise modify our course. When this happens, I will notify you in class and on Canvas.

Our main text is Tim Bale's *European Politics*. All other readings are available on the course Canvas page in their respective modules.

Part I: Historical Foundations

Week 1 (January 6): What Is Europe?

- Bale, Tim. "Introduction." In *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*.
- National Geographic. "[Europe: Human Geography](#)."
- "The History of an Idea." *The Economist*. December 2003.
- Jacobs, Frank. "Where is Europe?" *The New York Times*. January 9, 2012.

Week 2 (January 13): Post-WWII Europe and State Formation

- Bale, Tim. "Chapter 1: Europe—a continent in the making." In *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*.

Week 3 (January 20): No classes—Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Week 4 (January 27): The Evolution of European Integration and the EU

- Bale, Tim. "Chapter 2: The end of the nation state?" In *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*.
- Pinder, John and Simon Usherwood. "Chapter 1: What the EU is for." In *The European Union: A Very Short Introduction*, 2007.
- Pinder, John and Simon Usherwood. "Chapter 2: How the EU was made." In *The European Union: A Very Short Introduction*, 2007.
- McBride, James. 2019. "[How Does the European Union Work?](#)" *Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder*, March 2022.
- Spend some time reading the [EU's description](#) of its primary institutions. Focus particularly on the European Parliament, European Council, Council of the European Union, European Commission, and the Court of Justice of the European Union.

Part II: Domestic Institutions and Political Participation

Week 5 (February 3): Constitutional Systems, Legal Frameworks, and Parliaments

- Bale, Tim. “Chapter 3: From government to governance—running the state, making policy and policing the constitution.” In *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*.
- Bale, Tim. “Chapter 4: Governments and parliaments—a long way from equality.” In *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*.

Week 6 (February 10): Electoral Systems and Voting

- Bale, Tim. “Chapter 6: Elections, voting and referendums—systems, turnout, preferences and unpredictability.” In *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*.

Week 7 (February 17): No classes—Presidents Day

Week 8 (February 24): Political Parties and Party Systems

- Bale, Tim. “Chapter 5: Parties—how the past affects the present, and an uncertain future.” In *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*.
- Van Biezen, Ingrid, Peter Mair, and Thomas Poguntke. “Going, going,...gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe.” *European Journal of Political Research*, 51, no. 1 (2012): 24-56.

Week 9 (March 3): Midterm exam

Week 10 (March 10): No classes—Spring break

Week 11 (March 17): Civil Society, Social Movements, and Political Participation

- Bale, Tim. “Chapter 8: Participation and pressure politics—civil society, organized interests and social movements.” In *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*.
- Dodman, Benjamin. “**A year of insurgency: How Yellow Vests left indelible mark on French politics.**” *France 24*. November 2019.
- Dutkiewicz, Jan. “**How rioting farmers unraveled Europe’s ambitious climate plan.**” *Vox*. May 2, 2024.

Part III: Contemporary Challenges

Week 12 (March 24): Democratic Backsliding and Populism

- “What is Populism?” *The Economist*. December 19, 2016.
- Zakaria, Fareed. “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy.” *Foreign Affairs*, November 1997.
- Mulder, Nicholas. “**The revolt against liberalism: What’s driving Poland and Hungary’s nativist turn?**” *The Guardian*. June 24, 2021.

Week 13 (March 31): Immigration, Integration, and Multiculturalism

- Bale, Tim. “Chapter 7: Not wanted, but needed—migrants and minorities.” In *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*.

Week 14 (April 7): Economic and Social Challenges

- Bale, Tim. “Chapter 9: Politics over markets: does politics—left and right—still matter?” In *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*.
- Karma, Roge. “What is Going On With Europe’s Economy?” *The Atlantic*. March 4, 2024.
- Watch: **The Inside Story—Ukraine’s Refugee Crisis**. VOA.

Week 15 (April 14): Environmental Politics and European Security Policy

- European Commission. **The European Green Deal**.
- Mathiesen, Karl, Zia Wiese, and Louise Guillot. “**A triumphant right’s first post-election target: Overturning Green Deal car ban**.” *Politico*. June 2024.
- Bergman, Max. “A More European NATO.” *Foreign Affairs*. March 21, 2024.
- Fix, Liana and Michael Kimmage. “Trump’s Threat to Europe.” *Foreign Affairs*. March 22, 2024.
- Binnendijk, Hans, R.D. Hooker Jr., and Alexander Vershbow, A. “NATO Cannot Survive Without America.” *Foreign Affairs*. May 13, 2024.
- Röttgen, Norbert. “Europe Has Run Out of Time.” *Foreign Affairs*. November 22, 2024.

Week 16 (April 21): Europe’s Future

- Bale, Tim. “Chapter 11: Protecting and promoting—Europe’s international politics.” In *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*.
- Desmonts, William. “**Europe facing three threats to its future**.” *Social Europe*. July 2023.
- European Commission Joint Research Centre. “**The future of Europe: What do you imagine it will look like?**” May 2023.

Final exam due Friday, April 25 by 5:00PM