CSS 230
Sophomore Government Tutorial:
State and Society in the Modern Age
Fall 2025

Instructor: Dr. Rudabeh Shahid

Contact: rshahid01@wesleyan.edu

Location: FRANK 307

Schedule: 2:00 - 4:00 pm on Friday

Office: Frank Center PAC 205

Office Hours: 4:30 - 6:30 pm on Friday

Course Description: This course explores the evolution of the modern state and its complex relationship with society from both historical and comparative perspectives. We begin by examining foundational theories of state formation, with particular attention to how violence, legitimacy, and institutional development shaped the emergence of modern polities. While much of the classical literature focuses on Europe and North America, this course broadens the lens to include postcolonial and non-Western contexts – such as the Middle East, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa – to challenge Eurocentric assumptions and illustrate diverse state-building trajectories. Throughout the course, we will engage with major debates in political science: What conditions support or hinder democracy? Can modernization be decoupled from Western liberalism? Is the state still the most effective unit for organizing political life in an age of global crises? Students will analyze competing visions of democracy (procedural, participatory, liberal, radical), assess the impact of race, gender, and immigration on welfare regimes, and explore how civil society and social capital shape political participation across time and space. Additionally, in the latter half of the course, we turn to critical contemporary challenges to the modern state, including rising right-wing populism, gender inequality, and the implications of climate change for democratic governance. By the end of the course, students will not only have a deep theoretical foundation but also a nuanced understanding of how states function in practice and why that matters for global justice, inclusion, and stability. Weekly assignments will include weekly analytical essays, student-led discussions based on key questions, and case-based reflections.

Requirements: Every week you are required to write a five-page double-spaced essay (12 font, 1-inch margins). The Key Questions listed each week are meant to guide your reading, frame class discussions, and inspire the analytical essays you will submit. The essay should offer a critical reflection on the readings for the week. You will not receive any specific prompts, but rather are expected to identify theoretically relevant questions and topics of discussion on your own. You may critically engage with the overall argument, unpack the underlying assumptions, comment on the empirical evidence, or discuss broader theoretical or policy implications. You are strongly encouraged to integrate readings from different weeks and juxtapose the main

arguments of the different authors. Are there any tensions or contradictions that emerge? Are there any theoretical or empirical puzzles? The questions included in the syllabus for each week will be used to structure our class discussions and can also serve as a starting point for your papers. Please upload your essay on Moodle by 10 AM on Friday so that I can read them before class. In addition to the essays, please prepare two questions related to the readings so that you can share with us during our class discussion.

Student-led Discussion Roles: Each week (except for the first one), students will rotate through one of three roles: Summarizer, Provocateur, and Connector. These roles are meant to help enrich our class discussions. The Summarizer role starts of the discussion, offers a concise overview of the core readings, highlighting key arguments, areas of agreement or disagreement between authors, and linking them to the week's key questions. The Provocateur raises critical questions or objections about the readings, challenging assumptions, exposing limitations, or introducing provocative scenarios to stimulate debate. Rather than summarizing, this role is meant to complicate and interrogate the material. The Connector draws explicit links between the current week's readings and earlier texts, contemporary political developments, or larger theoretical debates, helping the class synthesize ideas across time. All roles should be prepared in advance but are informal in nature, with no presentations or slides being required. These roles will rotate throughout the semester to give everyone the opportunity to lead thoughtful, dynamic discussions and engage deeply with the material.

Academic Integrity
(https://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/honor-code.html)

The Honor Code: Wesleyan University students are on their honor to uphold a high degree of academic integrity. All work that students submit is expected to be of their own creation and give proper credit to the ideas and work of others. When students write and sign the Honor Pledge, they are affirming that they have not cheated, plagiarized, fabricated, or falsified information; nor assisted others in these actions.

The Honor Pledge: At the end of each academic project, students should write in full and sign the Honor Pledge: *"I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment."* Faculty members and administrators may withhold grades or decline to verify completion of the assignment to encourage student compliance with the Honor Code.

Fair Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy: I recognize the utility of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for research, simulation, and understanding complex political concepts, while emphasizing the paramount importance of academic integrity and independent thought. Students are permitted to use AI for initial research and idea generation, provided they clearly cite any AI contributions in their work to uphold Wesleyan University's academic honesty policies. However, AI-generated assistance is not allowed for tasks demanding personal reflection and/or original analysis. This approach ensures that while AI serves as a supplementary tool for enhancing learning, it does not supplant the essential development of students' analytical skills.

Note about Citation: Whenever you use anyone's words or interpretation, you must cite the source. Provide a bibliography of all sources used. You are free to use electronic resources.

They must, however, be cited. Simply downloading text from the internet and presenting it as your work is plagiarism and will be treated as a violation of academic honesty. For advice on how to cite internet sources, consult a new edition of The Chicago Manual of Style (or Turabian), the style sheet of a major organization in your discipline, or on-line references. For more information please visit: https://pitt.libguides.com/citationhelp

Accessibility Services: Any student who, because of a documented disability, may require special arrangements or accommodations, should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make necessary arrangements. For more information, please visit: https://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I): I will strive to make this course a place where you will be warmly welcomed and treated with respect. I would like to create a learning environment that supports diversity of thought, perspective, and experience. It is also my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity in age, ability, background, belief, national origin, ethnicity, social class, caste, gender identities and expressions, sexual orientation, and other visible and invisible differences. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for future course participants.

All students are expected to contribute to a respectful and inclusive environment for every other student. This does not mean we cannot disagree nor have different ideas. Rather it means that we try to consider perspectives which are different from our own, though they may differ from our own beliefs, opinions, and experiences. Discussion and debate are at the heart of this kind of learning, and you are free – even encouraged – to disagree with the instructor and/or your fellow students. However, when you do so, be sure to criticize the idea a person has expressed and not the person.

Trigger or Content Warnings: At times we will be discussing historical or current events and social or cultural dynamics that may be disturbing, even traumatizing, to some. I will do my best to provide a warning in advance when I am aware of these topics, however, sometimes the class discussion will move in an unexpected direction. If you suspect that specific material is likely to be emotionally challenging for you, I would be happy to discuss any concerns you may have before the subject comes up in class. Likewise, if you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to course material with the class or with me individually afterwards, I welcome such discussions as an appropriate part of our course interaction.

Disclaimer: This syllabus may change slightly as we go along. Any changes to the syllabus will be announced in class, and an up-to-date syllabus will always be available in your course folder. Any changes to the syllabus will not result in additional work for you or a change in our overall timeline and schedule.

We will adhere to the course schedule as closely as possible and do our best to minimize learning distractions. However, on occasion, some changes in the course flow and order of the topics or sessions may be necessary. I will advise you of these changes as early as possible. I appreciate your understanding and patience.

Course Schedule

Week 1: What Is the Modern State?

Key Questions:
- What are the origins of the modern state?
- How do Western and postcolonial perspectives diverge?
- How do different theoretical approaches explain the relationship between coercion, consent, and state legitimacy?

Readings:
Tilly, Charles. 1993. *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1990*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4.

Olson, Mancur. 1993. "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development." *American Political Science Review* 87: 567- 576.

Bhambra, Gurminder. 2018. "The State: Postcolonial histories of the concept." In *Routledge Handbook of Postcolonial Politics*, edited by Olivia U. Rutazibwa and Robbie Shilliam. London: Routledge.

Week 2: State Formation Beyond the West

Key Questions:
- What does state-building look like in MENA and postcolonial contexts?
- What are the limits of sovereignty in fragile states?
- How do historical legacies of colonialism and international intervention shape contemporary state fragility?

Readings:
Ayubi, Nazih. 1995. *Overstating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*. New York: I.B. Tauris. Chapters 1, 3, 4.

Ghani, Ashraf, Clare Lockhart and Michael Carnahan. 2005. "Closing the Sovereignty Gap: An Approach to State-building." *Overseas Development Institute*, Working Paper 253.

Herbst, Jeffrey. 1996/1997. "Responding to State Failure in Africa." *International Security*, 21(3).

Week 3: What Is Democracy? Competing Visions

Key Questions:
- How do we define democracy – thin vs. thick, procedural vs. participatory?

- Can democracy be universalized?
- What new challenges does climate change pose to democratic legitimacy and responsiveness?

Readings:
Dahl, Robert. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapters 1-7.

Sen, Amartya. 1999. "Democracy as a universal value," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 10, No. 3: 3-17.

Brechin, Steven R. and Seungyun Lee. 2023. "Will Democracy Survive Climate Change?" *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 38, No. 4, pp. 1382-1392.

Week 4: Civic Culture and American Exceptionalism

Key Questions:
- Is America's democracy exceptional?
- What is the role of civil society and "social capital"?
- How have patterns of civic engagement and social trust in the U.S. changed over time, and what are the implications for democratic resilience?

Readings:
Tocqueville, Alexis de. 2010. *Democracy in America*. Edited and abridged by Richard Heffner. Signet Books. Part One: all, Part Two: Book II chapters 26- 31.

Skocpol, Theda. 1997. "The Tocqueville Problem: Civic Engagement in American Democracy." *Social Science History*, 21(4): 455-479.

Skocpol, Theda. 2004. "Voice and Inequality: The Transformation of American Civil Democracy." *Perspectives on Politics*, 2(1): 3-20.

Putnam, Robert. 1995. "Bowling alone: America's declining social capital." *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1): 65-78.

Week 5: Modernization, Stability, and Political Decay

Key Questions:
- Is modernization always good for democracy?
- What do Lipset and Huntington get right – and wrong?
- How does postcolonial critique challenge the assumptions of classical modernization theory?

Readings:
Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1959. "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic

Development and Political Legitimacy." *American Political Science Review*, 53 (1): 69 – 105.

Huntington, Samuel. 2006. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 7.

Quijano, Anibal. 2000. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Nepantla: Views from the South*, 1(3): 533-580.

Week 6: The Welfare State and Right-Wing Populism

Key Questions:

- How has social democracy evolved – and who now defends it?
- What role does immigration play in reshaping welfare attitudes?
- How do shifting narratives around race, nationhood, and economic insecurity influence public support for welfare policies?

Readings:

Berman S. 2009. "The Primacy of Economics versus the Primacy of Politics: Understanding the Ideological Dynamics of the Twentieth Century" *Perspectives on Politics*, 7(3), pp. 561-578.

Keating, Michael and David McCrone. 2013. *The Crisis of Social Democracy in Europe*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Chapters 1, Chapter 8. Available as an EBook from Olin.

Fox, C. 2012. "Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State": in *Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press. pp. 1-18.

Slaven, Colombeau, and Badenhoop. 2021. "What Drives the Immigration-Welfare Policy Link? Comparing Germany, France, and the United Kingdom," *Comparative Political Studies*, 54 (5), pp. 855-888.

Week 7: Gender and Representation in Democratic States

Key Questions:

- Why does women's enfranchisement lag?
- Do women's political gains reshape policy?
- What forms of representation – descriptive, substantive, or symbolic – are most effective in advancing gender equity in democratic systems?

Readings:

Teele, Dawn Langan. 2018. *Forging the Franchise: The Political Origins of the Women's Vote*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. “Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent ‘Yes.’” *Journal of Politics* 61(3): 628-57.

Salamon, Hannah. 2023. “The effect of women’s parliamentary participation on renewable energy policy outcomes.” *European Journal of Political Research*, 62: 174-196.

Week 8: The State and Climate Change

Key Questions:

- How are states responding to global environmental threats?
- Can liberal democracies adapt to planetary crises without sacrificing core freedoms?
- What kinds of state forms might climate change generate?

Readings:

Wainwright, Joel and Geoff Mann. 2018. *Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future*. London: Verso.