



# SOCI 309:20 | PSCI 318:20

## Power and the State



### **Instructor:**

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### **Location:**

MULH 2034  
U7/U8

### **Office Hours:**

Online, by appointment

The state is a central concept within the social sciences and one of the most significant sources of power in the modern world—the state, it seems, is everywhere. Despite this, states today appear increasingly in crisis, with their very legitimacy as political institutions questioned.

In this course, we will go back in time to explore the history and development of the modern state in order to better understand our present. Topics covered will include: the power of disinformation; state surveillance; Brexit, Trump, and global populism; the rise of new social movements, like Black Lives Matter; the ongoing policing and surveillance of Black and Indigenous lives by the Canadian state; and state responses to COVID. The course will conclude with a reflection on democracy, and whether such a thing is possible.

# Course Objectives & Readings

By the end of this course, you should have:

- A general knowledge of the history of the state and state power
- A broad grasp of the politics, history, and meaning of key concepts such as democracy, nationalism, and neoliberalism
- A critical view of the transition away from welfare policies
- An understanding of the contemporary transformation of the nation-state



One sci-fi novel of your choice (list on moodle)

All other readings are on moodle

I truly believe that this course is relevant to your lives. If, at any time during this course, you feel that what we're learning isn't useful, I urge you to ask me: "Why should I give a damn?"

I'll gladly take time to explain why I believe what we're learning is important for you to know. And if I can't explain why, I'll amend that section of the course.



# Requirements

**Attendance** is absolutely vital to this course, and will likely be a necessary part of getting a good grade. In return for attending, I promise to make the course interesting, and worthwhile. If you are unable to attend regularly, please contact me to discuss alternative options.

The **Midterm** will assess your understanding of the course readings up to the midpoint of the term. You will be asked to answer a number of short-answer questions. **Held in-class on February 17**

The **Theory Chart** or **Podcast** is intended to get you familiar with popular theories of the state. You will be asked to produce either: (1) a chart that outlines how each theory sees the state; or (2) a fictional interview with one of the major state theorists. **Due March 14**

The **Final Paper** will assess your understanding of the course material from the entire term. In a short paper, you will be asked to describe and explain how the distribution of power works in your chosen sci-fi novel. **Due April 14**

## Grading

✓ Attendance:	10%
✓ Midterm:	20%
✓ Podcast/Theory Chart:	30%
✓ Final Paper:	40%

All citations in  
APA or ASA  
Style

Double-spaced,  
12 point, Times  
New Roman font

Late items lose 5  
marks per day



# Class Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings
Jan 17	Introduction	Syllabus
Jan 20	What is the Modern State?	Pierson, "Introduction," and "Modern states"
Jan 24	The Earliest States	Scott, "A narrative in tatters," and "Agro-ecology of the early state"
Jan 27	The History of the State	Pierson, "Placing the state in modernity"
Jan 30	Marxist State Theory I	Barrow, "Plain Marxism: The instrumentalist approach"  Extra:  Poulantzas, "The problem of the capitalist state"
Feb 3	Marxist State Theory II	Barrow, "Neo-Marxism: The structuralist approach"  Extra:  Miliband, "The capitalist state: Reply to N. Poulantzas"
Feb 7	Film	<i>#ThisIsACoup</i>
Feb 10	Weberian State Theory I	Dusza, "Max Weber's conception of the state"  Extra:  Weber, "The politician's work [Politics as vocation]"

Date	Topic	Readings
Feb 14	Weberian State Theory II	Mann, "The autonomous power of the state"  Extra:  Skocpol, "Bringing the state back in: Retrospect and prospect"
Feb 17	<b>Midterm</b>	No readings
Feb 21	Winter Break	No readings
Feb 24	Winter Break	No readings
Feb 28	The Neoliberal State	Harvey, "The neoliberal state"
Mar 3	Foucauldian State Theory I	Foucault, "8 February 1978"  Extra:  Lemke, "An indigestible meal?"
Mar 7	Foucauldian State Theory II	Foucault, "31 January 1979"  Extra:  Fraser, "Foucault on modern power"
Mar 10	Film	<i>The Trap</i> (Episode 2)
Mar 14	Policing Indigenous Movements  <b>Theory Chart/Podcast Due</b>	Crosby & Monaghan, "Idle No More and the 'Fusion Centre for Native Problems,'" and "Conclusion: Policing the imaginary 'anti-petroleum movement'"
Mar 17	Policing Black Lives	Maynard, "Devaluing black life, demonizing black bodies"  Film: <i>Black Power Mixtape</i>

Date	Topic	Readings
Mar 21	Film	<i>Black Power Mixtape</i>
<b>Drop Date March 22</b>		
Mar 24	Feminist State Theory	Brown, "Finding the man in the state"
Mar 28	State Surveillance	Fabris, "Dreams of escape" McLaughlin, "Ingesting surveillance"
Mar 31	Fascism I	Agamben, "A brief history of the state of exception" Arendt, "The so-called totalitarian state" Extra: Wolff, "Org chart"
Apr 4	Fascism II	Antonio, "Democracy and capitalism in the interregnum: Trump's failed self-coup and after" Stewart, "The rise of far-right civilizationism"
Apr 7	COVID and the State	Agamben, "The invention of an epidemic" Sotiris, "Against Agamben: Is a democratic biopolitics possible?" Extra: Supiot, "Foucault's mistake"
Apr 11	The Transnational State	Robinson, "The transnational state" Extra: Hardt & Negri, "Empire, twenty years on"



Date	Topic	Readings
Apr 14	Review and Wrap Up	No readings

**Final Paper Due**



# Additional Information

## COVID-19

The 2021–2022 academic year is taking place during an exceptional—and stressful—period of human history. As the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, we may have to quickly adjust the course assessment plan and/or delivery method with little or no notice. You may also have to stay home from class for various reasons related to COVID-19 (such as simply feeling ill). If this happens to you, please contact me so that we can discuss an alternative to your attendance grade for that class. Lastly, it is important that you take care of yourself by getting adequate amounts of sleep, and by taking appropriate mental health breaks. The university website on COVID-19 provides more information and links (<https://www.stfx.ca/coronavirus>).

## Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

As this course involves the production of written work, you should familiarize yourself with the standards for proper referencing of all cited materials, such as books, journal articles, newspaper articles, websites, and so on. Students that attempt to pass off someone else's work as their own (i.e., plagiarism) will be dealt with through the university policy on academic honesty. Please ensure that you fully understand this policy (see section 3.8 of the academic calendar, found at: <https://www2.mystfx.ca/registrars-office/academic-calendars>). Resources for avoiding plagiarism can be found on the library website (<https://www2.mystfx.ca/library/plagiarism>).

## Writing Assistance

This is a writing-intensive course, although we will not spend much time on the craft of writing as we will be busy focusing on sociology. If you need assistance with your writing, I recommend booking an appointment with me or visiting the Student Success Centre (<http://www2.mystfx.ca/student-success/>).

## Accommodations

If you have an injury, develop an illness, or encounter a personal crisis that will impact your progress in this course, please email me as soon as you are able. This will ensure that we find a way for you to complete the course. The Health and Counselling Centre is another resource available to you (<http://www2.mystfx.ca/health-and-counselling/>).

If you have any disabilities that require an accommodation in teaching style or evaluation, please speak to me as soon as possible so we can implement those accommodations. You may also want



to contact the Tramble Centre for Accessible Learning (<https://www2.mystfx.ca/accessible-learning/tramble-centre-accessible-learning>).

## **Equity and Discrimination**

Everyone learns more effectively in a respectful, safe, and equitable learning environment free from discrimination or harassment. I invite you to work with me to create a classroom space that fosters and promotes values of human dignity, equity, non-discrimination and respect for diversity. These values and practices are in accord with the StFX Discrimination and Harassment Policy which can be found at (<https://www2.mystfx.ca/equity/policies>). Please feel free to discuss with me any questions or concerns you have about equity in our classroom or in the StFX community. If I cannot answer your questions or help you address your concerns, I encourage you to talk to the Chair/Coordinator of the Department/Program or the Human Rights and Equity Advisor.

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## **Grade Scale**

A+ = 90-100	B+ = 77-79	C+ = 67-69	D+ = 57-59
A = 85-89	B = 73-76	C = 63-66	D = 53-56
A - = 80-84	B - = 70-72	C - = 60-62	D - = 50-52
F = Below 50			