Politics of Sports

Winter Semester 2025/26
101 Seminarraum S244 (101/01/1.302)

Professor Nils Ringe
ringe@wisc.edu

Course Description[1]

This course explores the relationship between politics and sports, with a focus on a range of topics that are central to politics and political science. While some maintain that sport (and athletes) should be apolitical, in most places and cultures it is anything but that. Sports are closely connected to political, economic, social, and cultural power relations. Sports are a crucial part of many national cultures and identities. Sports are routinely used as a tool of political socialization and a way to advance national interests in international affairs. Sports are subject to government regulation. Sports can both transcend or exacerbate historical, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and social divisions. Sports often play an important role in the construction and maintenance of social identities.

We will not only learn about the politics of sport, we will use sports as a lens through which to investigate and understand key concepts, issues, and challenges in the world of politics and in the field of political science.

In addition to an introductory session on October 27, the class meets four times for extended periods of time on October 30, November 27, December 11, and January 22. Each class session focuses on one overarching theme:

- Social Identities
- Race, Racism & Resistance
- Colonialism and Decolonization
- Revolution

We will use our class sessions for group discussion, presentations, guest lectures, to watch selections from documentaries, and to develop and advance your final papers.

Course Objectives

- Develop capacity to understand and critically reflect on the main debates related to the intersection of politics and sports.
- Develop oral presentation skills.
- Learn how to write an empirical research paper.

[1] *Note that this is a preliminary syllabus. I will likely make some small changes as the winter semester approaches (e.g., swap out particular readings), but the general structure and content of the class will remain what it is here.*

Requirements and Grading

This module follows the presentations + term paper model of examination, meaning you will complete several assignments, *all* of which you need to submit to receive a passing grade:

- Discussion leader for a class reading, 15% of grade

- Oral presentation of your final paper (January 22), 20% of grade

- An empirical research paper: throughout the semester, you will be working on a research paper (4,500-5,500 words in length) that builds on both existing research and one or more interviews you will conduct and rely on in your analysis. This will require your continuous attention over the course of the semester and is not something you would be able to complete as the end of the term approaches. For this reason, we will have a number of deadlines that will (hopefully) keep you on track (see the Appendix for additional information on this assignment). Your grade on this assignment will be broken down as follow:

    - Proposals, 5% of grade (due November 13 at 9:00)
    - Research design and annotated bibliography, 20% of grade (due December 11 at 9:00)
    - Final draft, 40% of grade (due February 5 at 11:59pm)

- Given that we only meet four times, it is vital that you avoid missing any of our class sessions. If you do miss class for a legitimate reason (such as illness, a family emergency, observance of a religious holiday, etc.), you will be assigned a substantial substitute assignment commensurate to 5.5 hours of class plus prep time.

Office hours

By appointment. Additional office hours may be announced at the start of the class.

Readings

All readings listed in the syllabus are <u>required</u> and made available electronically. Since we only meet four times, the number of readings for each class session is substantial. It is imperative that you not try to read everything at the last minute; instead, please be sure to spread out your reading across the entire period of time between class meetings and come to class prepared to discuss the materials.

October 30: Social Identities

Readings

- Hornby 1992 – "On Fandom" (selections)
- Kuper 2010 – "Preface to the US Edition" & "FC Barcelona and the Scottish Question"
- Kuper and Szymanski 2022 – "Are Soccer Fans Polygamists?"
- Bowman 2015 – "Futebol/Fútbol, Identity, and Politics in Latin America"
- Jaksa 2011 – "Sports and Collective Identity: The Effects of Athletics on National Unity"
- Demerdash 2023: "The Role of Football in Preserving National Identity in the Arab World"
- Stehle and Weber 2013 – "German Soccer, the 2010 World Cup, and Multicultural Belonging"
- Battini 2012 – "Reshaping the national bounds through fandom: the UltrAslan of Galatasaray"
- Jackson 2020 – "#ThemToo"
- Kuper and Szymanski 2022 – "Unbanned"

November 27: Race, Racism & Resistance

Readings

- Dubois 2011 – "Racist Delirium"
- Kuper and Szymanski 2022 – "Need Not Apply"
- Zirin 2005 – "Gone With the Wind"
- Bennett 2018 – "Preface", "N---ger", "Time Out", "BLM", "Brotherhood (pp. 90-95)"
- Zirin 2005 – "Rumble, Young Man, Rumble", "The 1968 Olympics Raise the Bar"
- Zirin 2005 – "In the Shadow of Ali"
- Zirin 2013 – "Occupy the Sports World (pp. 11-19)
- Jackson 2020 – "White and Woke", "Colin Kaepernick", "Formation", "I (Still) Can't Breathe"

December 11: Colonialism and Decolonization

Readings

- Dubois 2010 – "La France Métissée", "Reconciliation" & "An Unfinished War"
- Sugden and Tomlinson 1998 – "FIFA and Africa"
- Hawkey 2009 – "Desert Foxes"
- Darby 2002 – "Football Diffusion and Colonial Doctrine in Africa" & "Football, Indigenous Resistance and African Independence"

January 22: Revolution

Readings

- Doidge, Kossakowski, and Mintert 2020 – "Ultras and Politics"
- Spaaij and Viñas 2013 – "Political ideology and activism in football fan culture in Spain: a view from the far left"
- Bertazzo Tobar, Ramshaw & Fritz 2024: "Never Again! Fandom and the Culture of Remembrance in German Football, Leisure Sciences"
- Raab 2014 – "The Universe is Shaped Like a Football: Football and Revolution"
- Turan and Özçetin 2019 – "Football fans and contentious politics: The role of Çarşı in the Gezi Park protests"
- Dorsey 2012 – "Pitched Battles: The Role of Ultra Soccer Fans in the Arab Spring"
- Woltering 2022 – "Ultras in Egypt: Massacred, Disbanded, Steadfast?"
- Jerzak 2013 – "Ultras in Egypt: state, revolution, and the power of public space"

APPENDIX: Final Paper Guidelines

The final assignment in this class is a 4,500-5,500 word research paper on a topic of your choice that engages the nexus between politics and sports. One key part of this assignment is that it combines what we learn from existing scholarly research on your topic with primary qualitative data you will collect and analyze in one or more interviews with individuals who have practical experience in and insights into your topic. For example, if you decided to write your paper on something related to the political activism of soccer ultras, you would read and review the relevant scholarly literature on the topic and then interview, for example, a representative of the 1. FC Köln organized fan scene. It will be your responsibility to identify and approach your interviewees.

This is a substantial project and requires your attention throughout the semester. To facilitate the research and writing process for you, I am asking you to complete a series of steps during the course of the term. It also ensures that you stay on track, and it helps me stay involved in your research.

Paper proposals (due November 13 at 9:00): you will submit proposals for two potential paper topics. Each proposal should be one double-spaced page, for a total of two pages. Each proposal should include a research question (that is, the question you want your research project to address), a preliminary thesis statement, and indicate how you would go about researching your topic and who you might interview. You should also discuss why your research question is important, and what we might end up learning from your findings. The proposals are worth 5% of your final grade.

Research design and annotated bibliography (due December 11 at 9:00): an annotated bibliography is a list of citations of books, articles, and documents where each citation is followed by an annotation, the purpose of which is to inform the reader of the relevance of the source. This exercise will require you to find sources relevant to your project, to think about their content, and to figure out how they relate and contribute to your research. In other words, you should not just provide a description of the source but explicitly explain its utility *for your research* (e.g., it allows you to test your hypothesis; it helps you develop your theory; it offers an alternative explanation to the one you are proposing; it provides important background information; it includes particular data that you will rely on; etc.). The document you turn in should start with an introductory paragraph that reminds the reader of your research question and thesis statement, outlines your proposed research design (including who you plan to interview), and offers a progress report on where your research stands. The bibliography itself should include at least 15 scholarly (!) sources. Note that it will be very obvious to me if you quickly and sloppily put together a list of sources, rather than having carefully assembled a select list of sources that are most relevant to your paper. This part of the assignment is worth 20% of your final grade.

Final Draft (due February 5 at 11:59pm): the final draft of your paper is due two weeks after our final class meeting.

Some general notes:

All assignments must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins (which you may need to set manually), and in 12 point "Times New Roman" font. I expect all assignments to be well-written, grammatically correct, free of spelling errors, and to include a proper bibliography. My preference is that you use APSA style (see http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocAPSA.html) for your

citations, but I mostly care about you using a standard citation style appropriately and consistently, as long as the citations are in-text parenthetical, for example (Ringe 2025). Papers that do not meet these standards will be penalized when graded. Please submit your papers as MS Word files or as a Google doc.

All assignments related to the final paper must be submitted by the relevant deadlines online and emailed to prof.ringe.paper.submissions@gmail.com. When you email the paper, please 1) attach it as a MS Word document and 2) copy and paste the entire text of your paper directly into the email itself (so that it is one very long email). That way, if there is something wrong with the either the online submission or the email attachment, I can still be sure that your assignment was finished and submitted by the deadline.

Please name your documents as follows: yourlastname_635_nameofassignment.doc (e.g. "ringe_635_proposals.doc" or "ringe_635_bibliography.doc").

I consider an assignment to be late if it is not turned in at *exactly* the time it is due. I deduct half a letter grade for each 24-hour period an assignment is late (that is, whether you turn in your assignment one minute late or 23 hours and 59 minutes late, I deduct half a letter grade; if it is 24 hours and one minute late, I deduct a full letter grade, etc.)

A few words on plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the act of improperly using and presenting someone else's words or ideas as if they were your own. As such, plagiarism is the theft of intellectual property, and this is no less serious than the theft of material property. There are no "degrees" of plagiarism; one little offense, no matter how small it may appear, constitutes academic dishonesty. Whatever form it takes (downloading and reformatting an article, "buying" an essay, taking a "free" paper off the internet, turning in another student's work, "sharing" assignments with others, failing to cite a source, neglecting necessary quotation marks, etc.) there is no excuse for plagiarism, and it will get you in a lot of trouble.

The "I did not know" excuse does not count, in any way. Ignorance of what constitutes academic dishonesty does not entitle you to any leniency. It is much like the real world: not knowing a rule or law does not mean you are not subject to it or protect you from sanction. It is your responsibility to know what academic dishonesty is or to educate yourself. We are providing some explanation in what follows, but we urge you to ask any follow-up questions you might have.

Note that the most common form of plagiarism is failure to cite properly. You must provide a citation, for example (Brown 1999, 57), after writing a sentence or a series of sentences that contain words or ideas taken from another person or publication. If you are quoting directly, you must use quotation marks. If you are unsure about how to cite properly, check out the following resource from the UW-Madison Writing Center (and let me know if anything remains unclear: https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/quotingsources/

Also note that changing a couple of words here or there does not mean you are not plagiarizing. Here is an example: a few years ago, the journalist Fareed Zakaria was suspended from his jobs at Time Magazine and CNN for plagiarism. Below is what he wrote and then the source from which he plagiarized. Notice that he did not take from the other source word for word; he did change some words, but it still counts as plagiarism. This is not just because he did not cite the other author; it is because he passed off phrases and ideas as his own that were not.

What Zakaria wrote: *"Adam Winkler, a professor of constitutional law at UCLA, documents the actual history in Gunfight: The Battle over the Right to Bear Arms in America. Guns were regulated in the U.S. from the earliest years of the Republic. Laws that banned the carrying of concealed weapons were passed in Kentucky and Louisiana in 1813. Other states soon followed: Indiana in 1820, Tennessee and Virginia in 1838, Alabama in 1839 and Ohio in 1859. Similar laws were passed in Texas, Florida and Oklahoma. As the governor of Texas (Texas!) explained in 1893, the "mission of the concealed deadly weapon is murder. To check it is the duty of every self-respecting, law-abiding man."*

What the author of the original piece wrote (Jill Lepore in the New Yorker): *"As Adam Winkler, a constitutional-law scholar at U.C.L.A., demonstrates in a remarkably nuanced new book, "Gunfight: The Battle Over the Right to Bear Arms in America," firearms have been regulated in the United States from the start. Laws banning the carrying of concealed weapons were passed in Kentucky and Louisiana in 1813, and other states soon followed: Indiana (1820), Tennessee and Virginia (1838), Alabama (1839), and Ohio (1859). Similar laws were passed in Texas, Florida, and Oklahoma. As the governor of Texas explained in 1893, the "mission of the concealed deadly weapon is murder. To check it is the duty of every self-respecting, law-abiding man."*

So if you paraphrase, make sure you are truly writing in your own words. And make sure to properly cite all your sources, including all class materials. The burden is on you.

You absolutely must resist the temptation to take shortcuts, use AI, or otherwise cheat on your assignments, or the consequences will be dire. If you are caught cheating, you will receive a failing grade for the class and I will report you to the university. Do not put yourself (and me) into what will be a very uncomfortable situation with very serious consequences.

Finally…

I encourage you to involve me in your project by letting me know how things are progressing, by discussing ideas or problems with me, or by seeking my input in other ways. You are going to put a lot of work into writing these papers, and I am committed to helping you in the process in whatever way I can. So please do not hesitate to ask for my help or input and let me know if there is anything in particular I can do for you, or for the group as a whole, to facilitate the research and writing process.