



Course Start

Course Start is independent learning you need to complete as a fundamental part of your introduction to the course. It should take you approximately 5 hours to complete.

Course Name	IB Global Politics
How this Course Start fits into the first term of the course	● Activity 1: Read Ben Dupre's chapter on <i>The State</i> from his book <i>50 Political Ideas</i>. States are the key actors in our study of global politics and understanding them is an important piece of foundational knowledge. ● Activity 2: Research task. Choose any state and conduct some research into it. This will introduce you to some of the big questions that we will ask throughout this course, notably around the concept of power. ● Activity 3 (optional): Reading <i>Prisoners of Geography</i>, or any of the more recent books by Tim Marshall will help you get a sense of the important link between geography, power and international relations and give you an opportunity to explore one or two countries in more depth.
How will my Course Start learning be used in lessons?	● Your course will begin with an exploration of the concepts of power, sovereignty, interdependence and legitimacy and require you to use them in exam questions.
Course Start learning objectives	● To understand core concepts of international relations ● To recognise some of the many factors that influence the power exerted by states ● To begin to find areas of interest by exploring a range of syllabus related podcasts, books and documentaries
Study Skills	● Research skills - you will be asked to investigate topics including human rights violations, conflicts between states and terrorist organisations ● Synthesising information from many sources ● Evaluating the relevance and significance of information ● Presenting clear and substantiated conclusions to the rest of the class

Expectations for: IB Global Politics

Our specification is: [International Baccalaureate](#)

What this course involves
Learning to understand key political concepts and contemporary political issues in a range of contexts
Developing an understanding of the local, national, international and global dimensions of political activity
Learning to understand, appreciate and critically engage with a variety of perspectives and approaches in global politics
Appreciating the complex and interconnected nature of many political issues, and develop the capacity to interpret competing and contestable claims regarding those issues
The detailed study of four key topics: Power, Sovereignty and International Relations; Human Rights; Development and Peace and Conflict
Sitting two exam papers at the end of the course: One source-based paper exploring one of the key topics above One essay paper with questions based on the four topics above
An engagement activity, giving you an opportunity to become involved in a political issue of your choice and writing up your involvement in a report
The detailed study of two global political challenges from the following list: identity, borders, health, poverty, security, environment (higher only). You can use any aspect of these challenges to research. You will then share your research and reflections in a 10-minute oral presentation.
Completing Planned Study (independent learning) of 3 hours per week.



IB Global Politics

Course Start 2026

Hello.

Firstly, congratulations on choosing to study **Global Politics** as part of your International Baccalaureate. This course will ground you in some of the key theories and ideas governing international relations and help you see conflicts such as Russia/Ukraine or issues such as migration in an entirely new light. You will get a sense of the theories that underpin how states behave in relation to each other and their own citizens as well as looking at the role that non-state actors such as pressure groups and the UN play in international events.

Global Politics explores fundamental political concepts such as power, equality, sustainability and peace. You will develop an understanding of the **local, national, regional, international and global dimensions** of political activity and processes, as well as exploring how political issues affect your own lives.

Throughout the course we will use contemporary, real-world examples and case studies to help you gain a deep and rounded understanding of these political concepts and how they impact us all day-to-day. You will have ample opportunity to follow your own interests during this course, especially if you have chosen to take Global Politics as one of your higher options.

We look forward to seeing you in September. If you have any questions prior to starting in September please email me at cbr@varndean.ac.uk.

Cathy Bryan, Programme Leader for Politics



Course overview

Global Politics Course Content

Year 1:

- Core topics: Understanding power and global politics
- Thematic Studies
 - Rights and justice
 - Development and sustainability
 - Peace and Conflict
- Engagement Project
- **Higher Only: Global Political Challenges**

Year 2:

- Engagement Project
- Depth studies: We will investigate several political issues in depth, linking them to the core units from year one
- **Higher Only: Global Political Challenges**
- Revision

Core concepts

These four concepts provide the foundation of the entire course and are interwoven throughout all the other topics and all of the assessments.

- Power
- Sovereignty
- Legitimacy
- Interdependence

Contested meanings

The following 12 concepts weave a conceptual thread throughout the course:

- | | | |
|------------|------------------|----------------|
| • Rights | • Development | • Peace |
| • Justice | • Poverty | • Conflict |
| • Liberty | • Inequality | • Violence |
| • Equality | • Sustainability | • Non-violence |

Global Political Challenges: (Higher level only)

At Higher Level students will explore a number of global political challenges through a case studies approach from the following eight topics:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| • Environment | • Identity |
| • Poverty | • Borders |
| • Health | • Security |
| • Technology | • Inequality |

For each of the topics chosen you will complete a detailed case study, undertaking research and preparing a 10- minute videoed oral presentation. Two of these will be submitted as part of your final assessment. These will be spread over the two years of the course.

Assessment overview

	Weighting	
	Standard	Higher
Paper 1 <i>Four short-answer/structured questions based on sources from one of the four core units – 1 hour 15 mins exam</i>	30%	20%
Paper 2 <i>Two essays. One from Section A on one of the thematic studies and one from section B integrating two or more thematic studies. 1 hour 45 mins exam</i>	40%	30%
Paper 3: Higher level only 3 questions in response to a short stimulus and requiring detailed knowledge of case studies of two or more Global Political Challenges	N/A	30%
SL/HL internal project assessment Engagement Project <i>2000 word (2,400 word for HL) report based on engagement project undertaken and complementary research</i>	30%	20%

IB Global Politics – FAQs.

1) Do I need to buy a textbook?

We use a lot of different resources in Global Politics, in order to make sure the case studies we use are as contemporary as possible. We will provide you with online / paper resources that will help you to grasp the concepts and content of Global Politics. There is an official textbook and if you want to get a copy it does contain some useful resources. However, we do not recommend you get this unless you want to. There is also a revision guide. We will share details of these books once you have started the course.

However, we would like you to get hold of a copy of '**Prisoners of Geography**' by **Tim Marshall** (part of these Flying start activities). We will use the case studies / regions in this to work through our course. You can currently get it from Amazon new for around £8 (also available as an eBook)

2) What equipment will I need for Global Politics lessons?

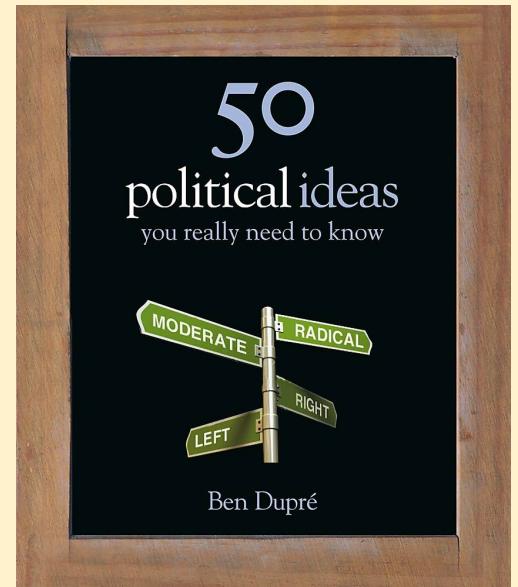
We use Google Classroom and most of the resources you will need will be on there. If you have a laptop and are able to bring it to College that would be helpful. However, we will also give you paper handouts and you will write essays etc on paper so you will need a ring binder with dividers to store this in. Some A4 lined paper, a pen, pencil and a highlighter and coloured pens also come in handy.

Course Start activities

The purpose of these Course Start activities is to prepare for lessons in the first few weeks of the course in September.

Activity 1 (must do – 1.5 hours max)

In his book **50 Politics Ideas**, Ben Dupre examines some of the most important concepts that undermine the study of global politics. His chapter on **The State** (scanned copy below) introduces you to concepts such as sovereignty. During our first term in Global Politics, we are going to be exploring the meaning of power, sovereignty, legitimacy and interdependence in international relations. These questions will help you reflect upon the text.



Questions

1. Read Weber's main characteristics of a state and rewrite into your own words using plain, modern English.
2. In your own words, explain what sovereignty means.
3. The state clearly has a huge amount of power over individuals. In what ways can individuals try to challenge or resist the power of the state? Can you think of an example?
4. What do you understand by the term legitimacy?
5. What do you think happens when a state loses its legitimacy? Can you think of an example (either contemporary or historical)?
6. Democratic states like the UK base their legitimacy on the consent of the people. The turnout (% of people who can vote, who do vote) in the 2024 UK General Election was 60%. Do you think the fact that 40% of people chose not to vote undermines the legitimacy of the state? Explain your answer.
7. What is a nation and how does it differ from a state?

Activity 2: Research task 2.5 hours

Choose any state and conduct some research into it. This will introduce you to some of the big questions that we will ask throughout this course, notably around the concept of power. You can use these questions to guide your research but you do not need to answer all of them and you can include additional information if you think it is useful.

Research questions	Possible criteria
How big is your state?	Geographical area, population size
How rich is your state?	GDP per capita, GDP
How powerful is your state?	Military power, cultural power, alliances
How important is your state on the world stage?	Is it a member of a regional organisation like the European Union, African Union, ASEAN, Arab League, NATO, G7, G20?
One more thing	Find out one more thing about your state - it can be a conflict it is involved in, an aspect of its history, a prominent figure from that state, a particular minority group from that state, one of the religions of the state.

Activity 3: Prisoners of Geography by Tim Marshall (could do)

This book is a fantastic introduction to our course. To understand global politics, we first have to understand the world we live in. We'll be studying relations between and within a range of countries from across the world, including Russia, China and the USA, so having some background is going to be really useful. If power is at some level about access to resources, then the availability of deep-water ports, fertile land, natural resources such as gas and oil etc. must have an impact on the relative power of a country or region. This book helps to explain this as well as how these have contributed to the distribution of power we see in our world today.

Choose one or two chapters and read them (feel free to read more!). You might find it helpful to make notes but we will not ask to see these.

Further reading/listening/viewing

These are just some of the books, podcasts and documentaries that Avril and I have enjoyed and found useful. We obviously don't expect you to listen to/read/watch them all; this list is simply some suggestions in case you are feeling inspired and want to find out more about global politics before you start the course.

Books

1. Francis Fukuyama, *State Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*
2. Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*
3. Tim Marshall, *The Power of Geography: Ten Maps that Reveal the Future of Our World – the sequel to Prisoners of Geography*
4. Dharshini David, *The Almighty Dollar*

Podcasts

Daily

- The Guardian: Today in Focus
- The Fourcast (from Channel 4 news)
- Global News Podcast (from BBC World Service)
- The NewsAgents

Weekly

- Politics Weekly America - from The Guardian
- The Rest is Politics - Rory Stewart and Alistair Campbell
- Pod Save America
- Pod Save the World

TV

1. Panorama - the BBC's flagship documentary series
2. Dispatches - Channel 4's flagship documentary series
3. Corridors of Power: Should the USA police the world?
[Corridors of Power: Should America Police the World? - BBC iPlayer](#)
4. India: the Modi question [India: The Modi Question - Series 1: Episode 1 - BBC iPlayer](#)
5. China: A New World Order [BBC Two - China: A New World Order, Series 1, Episode 3](#)

27 The state

The state is all-pervasive. We are born and die in its embrace, and its arms extend into every aspect of our lives. Like goldfish in a bowl, we are immersed in it, to the extent that for much of the time we are scarcely conscious of its presence. Yet we would know soon enough if the state were not there: there would be no laws to tell us what not to do, no tax to pay – and no roads to drive on, no pensions to sustain us in old age, and nobody to collect the garbage.

‘Nothing appears more surprising to those who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye’, remarked the Scottish philosopher David Hume, ‘than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few.’ The simple solution to this riddle is the state, yet the state is much more than just the government of the day. It includes the institutions of government, to be sure, but it also encompasses the courts of law, the civil service, the military services, state schools and universities, social services, public-service broadcasting corporations, and much else besides.

The state is so ubiquitous that we might suppose that it has always been there, but this is not so. As a distinctive type of political organization, the modern state is a relatively recent phenomenon, only emerging in its present form within the last 500 years. So what, exactly, is the state? What is it for, and by what right does it regulate and control our lives?

The monopoly of violence Much modern discussion of the state has been structured around the influential account given in the early decades of the 20th century by the German sociologist Max Weber. In his posthumously published *Economy and Society* (1922), Weber sets out the state’s main characteristics:

timeline

1513

Machiavelli credited with first use of ‘state’ to refer to a territorial sovereign government

1576

Jean Bodin defines sovereignty as state’s supreme authority over citizens

1651

Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* argues the case for absolute sovereignty

1690

John Locke argues that the state’s legitimacy is rooted in popular consent

It possesses an administrative and legal order subject to change by legislation . . . This system of order claims binding authority, not only over the members of the state, the citizens, most of whom have obtained membership by birth, but also to a very large extent over all action taking place in the area of its jurisdiction. It is thus a compulsory organization with a territorial basis . . .

The most salient feature of the state, for Weber, is its claimed 'monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force', which he regards as being 'as essential to it as its character of compulsory jurisdiction and continuous operation'. This monopoly amounts to the state's exclusive right to make rules or laws within its territory and to use violence, actual or threatened, to force compliance with those rules. In Weber's view, it is this means or mode of operation that defines the political character of the state, rather than any particular function or purpose that it may have.

'The State is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence.'

Max Weber, 1919

Territoriality and sovereignty An obvious feature of the state, prominent in Weber's account, is its territorial basis. Today, virtually every square inch of the earth's land area belongs to, or is energetically claimed by, some or other state. Every bit of land – not to mention the coastal waters that adjoin it, the airspace above it and the minerals beneath it – has been parcelled out into relatively neat and mutually exclusive (though not infrequently disputed) state-based territories. States are ubiquitous for the simple reason that one state abuts another, and there are no spaces between. To be stateless is generally the consequence of political exclusion or expulsion, not of geographical location and certainly not of choice. This is one sense in which the modern state is, in Weber's phrase, compulsory: you cannot 'opt out' of the state system. You are generally a citizen of the state of your birth, and that state demands your allegiance and obedience, requires that you meet certain obligations, and usually prohibits you from assuming the citizenship of another state.

States, then, are exclusive territories – all are discrete and none overlap. The limits of a state's jurisdiction are determined by its borders, and within this area

1762

Rousseau proposes that the state owes its authority to the general will of the governed

1922

Max Weber's *Economy and Society* published (two years after his death)

1990

Single German state formed from East and West Germanies

1991

Former communist state of Yugoslavia begins to split into separate states

it asserts its sovereignty – its supreme power and authority. All states, great and small, recognize the sovereign rights of their fellows, with the result that all are independent, autonomous and formally equal. This principle is crucial in the usual understanding of international relations, where universally recognized national sovereignty implies that there is no political authority higher than the state and hence that states must depend on their own resources ('self-help') to look after their interests and to preserve order (see page 179).

A state's internal sovereignty means that its authority over its citizens is supreme and is not answerable to any higher authority; in all matters relating to the public interest, the state is the final arbiter. Its jurisdiction extends uniformly and directly over all its citizens and, to a significant degree, over non-members present within its territory.

Legitimacy Coercion is not enough; a state could not survive long by force alone. It must justify its claim to sovereignty. Somehow it must convince a majority of its citizens that they should accept, or at least acquiesce in, its authority and management of public affairs. Most of the state's members must recognize, most of the time, that the state's claim to sovereign power is in some sense legitimate and hence that it is not only necessary but right to bow to its authority.

New world order

The idea of states is so powerful, both in fact and in theory, that it is tempting to suppose that the global system which they constitute has always been as it is today. But this is not so. For a state to be a state, its population must be more or less permanent and its institutions must persist through time – they must survive changes of government and leadership – but there is no guarantee that populations will stand still or that institutions will persist, as the recent examples of Yugoslavia and the two Germanies demonstrate. Likewise, the nature

of the state's power – centralized, concentrated, penetrating – suggests longevity, but this too is an illusion. A defining feature of the modern state as a system of political organization – the idea that the allegiance of the citizen is due to the state, which is itself transcendent (distinct from both rulers and ruled) – only clearly emerged in the 17th century. Before that time, patterns of government and control were complex, with loosely defined and overlapping domains and hierarchies, and loyalties were often personal, local and transient.

Citizens' acceptance of the state's legitimacy is partly a consequence of how its character and mode of operation are popularly perceived. The state is respected for the same reason that it is not much loved, because it is felt to be detached, impersonal and cold ('the coldest of all cold monsters', according to Nietzsche). Distinct from both rulers and ruled – from both present office-holders and citizens – it is seen as the embodiment of the objective rule of law, not the arbitrary rule of men; as a purveyor of abstract legal principles that are enforced by a neutral (if colourless) bureaucracy and an impartial judicial system. In sum, there is a popular belief, as Weber puts it, 'in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands'.

Not so united nations

The relationship between states and nations is close and sometimes troubled. There is a widely held (or at least widely asserted) aspiration that the two should coincide, to create what would actually be (rather than merely be called) nation-states. Nations – in the sense of large groups of people united by common history, culture, language or ethnicity – often aspire to organize themselves into politically autonomous and self-contained territorial entities (i.e. states). At the same time, many existing states attempt to enhance their unity and cohesion by creating a single unified 'nation' (and with it a sense of nationalism) from the different peoples, sometimes highly diverse in terms of ethnicity and culture, who live within their borders. The consequence is that nation-states are almost never as pure as they claim to be or their name suggests.

Democratic states typically base their legitimacy on the concept of popular sovereignty. According to this view, sovereignty belongs ultimately to the people – the citizens – who voluntarily make over some of their power to the state. The condition of this transfer is that the state should act responsibly and effectively to preserve social order and to further the common good. The existence of the state is justified so long as it enjoys the consent of its members, who may withdraw that consent if it fails to fulfil its obligations. The notion that the state is established on the basis of a tacit 'social contract' between it and its members was elaborated in various ways by the Enlightenment political theorists Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (see page 20).

the condensed idea
The monopoly of
legitimate violence