

INTA 3242A & 8803

Soccer and Global Politics: INTA 3242a
M-W 15:30-16:45 • Fall 2026

Instructor Information

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General Course Information

Description

In October 2008 a terrible kidnapping took place outside of the city of São Paulo, Brazil. A 21-year-old took his former girlfriend hostage, eventually murdering her. The event was played out for over 100 hours live on national television, yet some of the most dominant discourses were not about violence but about soccer. Indeed, the president of the Palmeiras Soccer Club rushed to the kidnapping site to try to negotiate the release of the hostage, only to have his good intentions crushed by fans that started chanting team songs, forcing his negotiations with the kidnapper to halt. After the episode ended in tragedy, the director of the SWAT team that botched the hostage rescue attempt lamented that the week was horrible, but it would end much better if only Palmeiras would win the following Sunday.

Many traditional scholars would analyze this story as an example of mass hysteria resulting from Latin American identity formation. The explosion of research on identity in the region has largely ignored sport since it has been viewed as an end, not as a cause. Instead, many scholars have focused on Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, which points to print culture as a critical factor in national identity construction, or Tilly, Centeno, and Weber who argue that national wars against foreign enemies make states and national identity. For Latin Americanists, both sets of arguments are unconvincing, yet rarely have other causal factors been established as part of a systematic explanation of identity formation for South America or beyond.

Soccer is both the global game with 4 billion fans, uniting continents and nations, and a source of intense local identity and fracturing of national identity, resulting in street battles and violence in many cities, but also social movements and progressive politics. The pulling of identity towards a larger identity in Italy, Africa, and Brazil and the use of soccer to weaken national identity and favor local ideas of nationalism and citizenship is what makes soccer a fascinating and enduring element in international and comparative politics. This course will use readings, lectures, film, and a groups research project/presentation to explore soccer and politics. The students are expected to do the readings before class, to participate in class discussions, and to gain an understanding of the political/social/economic dimensions of the beautiful game.

Identity is not the only political or social manifestation that can be highlighted through soccer. In fact, soccer is an excellent lens to examine and understand a great many of the key features of global politics, such as: Inequality, elections, gender representation, war, ethnic and religious divisions, global human trafficking, human rights, processes of globalization, dictatorship, corruption, diplomacy, propaganda, secession, institutions, imperialism/colonialism, fascism, racism, democracy, state recognition, and more.

There are multiple arenas of political life that can be shaped or explained through soccer. These include, for example:

1. the tensions between cosmopolitanism and tribalism (London vs. Buenos Aires)
2. language vs. blood/land as a source of primal identity in homeland societies (Athletic Bilbao vs. Barcelona.
3. Anarchism and fascism (Carsi vs. Lazio/Real Madrid)
4. Gender equity and social genderizing sport (Japan vs. USA vs. Norway)
5. Government using sport in bread and circus to distract the population (see Italy under Mussolini, Iran and North Korea in World Cups, Brazil and Argentina in 2013.)
6. Democracy vs. electoralism: Fifa, AFA, and more
7. Colonialism and imperialism: FIFA in Africa, baseball in Nicaragua and Cuba vs. soccer in Costa Rica.
8. Religion and Politics: The Maradoniano church, San Lorenzo and the Pope, Atlanta FC, Turkey and Iran rejecting and later embracing soccer.
9. Identity formation in immigrant societies (Garra Charrua in Uruguay and embrace of Brazilian ethnicity)
10. Core, Periphery and Semi-Periphery. Can the US ever enter the core or global soccer powers? The Elk Horn effect. The David Beckham effect? The Dirk Nowitzky effect?
11. Folklore and rationalization. Spain in World Cups and Euro Cups.
12. The allure and failure of Pharaonic projects, megaevents, the allure of modernization theory for development. Why did South Africa build so many stadia that they did not need? Why is there a huge stadium in Leiria Portugal and Cuiabá Brazil? Soccer explains Lukes 3rd face of power and Galtung's harmony of interests between global elites at FIFA and elites in their own countries through glamour and construction money.
13. The limitations of Facebook, twitter, technology to start a revolution. Al Ahly in Egypt and the truce in Istanbul. What is the relationship between technology, soccer, and politics?
14. Diego Maradona, Argentina, and the Paradox of Plenty.
15. What is a state? What is a citizen? Frank Zappa, Gibraltar, Palestine, UN vs. FIFA and the power of enforcement, CONIFA, Western Sahara vs. Cascadia.
16. Federalism, regionalism, and western expansion—Portland Timbers and Cuiabá American football.
17. Soft Power, small states using soccer to expand power and improve reputation
18. Human trafficking, Cambodia
19. Gendered sports, Women with Balls
20. Booms and busts of commodities, Anzi
21. Malapportionment for entry and hosting, CONMEBOL v Africa. How many votes does England really have? Or China? Or USA?
22. Path Dependency and soccer training in the USA v soccer powers and the future of women
23. Keeping politics out of sports☺ Poppies and flyovers. Just shut up and dribble. China and national anthem protests in Hong Kong vs. Taking a Knee Megan Rapinoe in USA.
24. Embracing diversity vs. rejecting, France vs. Italy. Game of our lives podcast.

25. Neoliberalism variances: Entertain and win at all costs, play ugly and win at all costs, plus with style cheap and try to win, gut it out and survive in top league
26. Power of international institutions. FIFA vs. UN (Guatemala etc)
27. Are firms like fraternities? Euphoric hives gone awry? Chelsea human rights NGO president and Syracuse fraternity
28. Technology and soccer—such as Erdogan in Turkey to control the crowd, the tension of VAR
29. Inequality differences of club teams, USA (on team) vs. Europe (between teams), two level games,
30. Post Materialist Values: Union Berlin, Big Lebowski, St. Pauli
31. Antisemitism and cultural appropriation, Atlanta, Palestino, Beitar, Spurs, Chelsea
32. Faces of Power
33. Resistance of the weak (Liverpool fans over prices, Afghan women, Hong Kong v. China and booing the anthem.
34. Strangling out the passion and type one and type two errors. From Hillsborough to the German Rebellion. To flare or not to flare. To stand or not to stand.
35. Civil Society and social capital—Hinchada Unida. Should hooligans be encouraged?
36. Why do some countries become soccer countries and some become baseball or cricket or rugby countries?
37. Human rights and the Çarşı
38. Soft Power and diplomacy (mega events vs. sponsoring, Neymar as act of defiance, Man City vs. PSG)
39. Politics and Corruption: Soccergate and FIFA
40. Prospect theory and Pep's strategy
41. Control: Banning football for all and anti-modernization (or just banning women)
42. Funding and constructing stadia for power and influence: The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and soccer stadia
43. Americanization of soccer: franchises, more scoring, VAR and fairness.
44. Plato, regime types, soccer governing for teams, Sugar Daddies, benevolent dictators, electoralism not democracy (Barcelona and Madrid), Germany and rerum Novarum
45. Traveling teams for independence movements (Algeria, Republican forces Spain) and regionalism. The Catalan and Basque national teams, why there is a united Ireland national team for all sports (rugby etc.) except Soccer. Why Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, Gibraltar etc. have FIFA teams but Catalonia and Basque Country do not.
46. How football and firms explain ANTIFA, and why some left-wing firms have turned more right-wing in recent years (Roma)
47. Gentrification: Cleaning up the stadiums, ousting the firms, that pathologizing of hooligans. Gangs and alternative treatment in Ecuador. Hinchada Unida Argentina.
48. Globalization: Outward from UK with missionaries, merchant marines, railway and port workers, English high schools. Globalization reversed 1st hinchada in Uruguay spreads, Torcida Split brings firms from Brazil 1950, songs on the terraces from San Lorenzo to around the world (use example of Turf song and Despacito)
49. Conspiracy theories.

This class will provide an orientation to soccer and politics. Books, newspaper readings, lectures, discussion, library assignments, and film will be the vehicles to gain an understanding. This course is reading intensive. You must be willing to engage the literature, focusing and turning off distractions. If you do not enjoy reading and are not willing to read before class, please drop the class.

Core Impacts:

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcomes:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social or geographic relationships develop, persist or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion

Course Learning Outcomes

Student will demonstrate the ability to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence social behavior.

Cultural and ethical awareness. Students will become more aware of the diversity of cultural and ethical systems in the world. Able to understand and articulate key issues with respect for a range of different variables.

Students will demonstrate understanding of soccer as both a lens for understanding political and social concepts and dynamics and as a causal variable for change.

Students will demonstrate the ability to write a persuasive compelling argument.

Students will demonstrate the ability to understand the relationship between technological change and social/political change through soccer and the effect of technology on the game.

Required Course Materials

This is a reading intensive senior level/graduate course. You must enjoy reading to succeed in this course. We will heavily rely on the class Youtube page for videos at <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLGiYM9UI0QPS5sDEcXErjyXp1IOcOeSMI>. Each class will include one theoretical/conceptual element. I will not extensively use slides, except for images, films, figures, etc., so I will not have slides to share if you miss class. If you miss class, do NOT send an email asking what you missed. You should come to office hours or get the material from someone in class.

Kirk Bowman & John Boyd (eds), *Globalization, Innovation, and Soccer: The Beautiful Game in the 20th Century*. Routledge, 2025. Free access online through the GT library.

Felipe Arocena, Kirk Bowman, and Alberto Fuentes, *The Global Pitch: Why Soccer Matters in Our Changing World*. Bloomsbury, 2026.

Timely articles and journalism.

Grading Policy

Component	Weight
TedX Talk / Team Research Project	20%
Discussion Questions	10%
Midterm	30%
Final	40%

Grade Scale: A > 90; B > 80; C > 70; D > 60

Assignments

TedX Talk	20
Discussion questions	10
Midterm	30
Final	40

Description of Graded Components

The exams are in class and closed book and notes. There will be discussion questions for every class. 7 will be randomly collected at the beginning of class and 5 will count 2 points each for final grade. TedX talk will be a critical part of the class. Students in pairs (or 3s or 4s) will develop a comparative politics analysis using MSSD or MDSO and will select two or more cases for analysis. Students will meet with professor before October 15 to finalize topics and cases. Each team will write a 10-12 page analysis (adjusted up for more team members) and present a TedX Talk on their topic and cases. More information to come.

Course Policies

Screens

There will be no screens of any type allowed in class. If you need to check your phone or use your laptop, you MUST exit class. Evidence has demonstrated that screen usage in class is like second-hand smoke to those near and behind an active screen and leads to lower performance for all.

Attendance and/or Participation

This will be an active classroom, where you will be expected to participate. I have noticed a drastic difference in the exam performance between students who regularly attend class and those who

don't. You are expected to come having carefully read the materials for that day. Exam content will include reading not covered in class and class material not covered in the readings. Lecture slides will **not** be shared.

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. Review Georgia Tech's Honor Code and the student Code of Conduct.

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarism on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Plagiarizing is defined by Webster's as "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own: use (another's production) without crediting the source."

If caught plagiarizing, you will be dealt with according to the GT Academic Honor Code. USING AI WITHOUT PROPER CITATION IS PLAGIARIZING. IF YOU USE AI WITHOUT PROPER CITATION, YOU WILL BE HANDLED BY THE DEAN OF STUDENTS. If you use AI and it is "invented or false AI garbage," your grade will be adjusted. AI is wrong a lot.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. The Student-Faculty Expectations articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Pre- &/or Co-Requisites

None

Collaboration, Group Work, and Use of Generative AI

Discussion questions are to be your own work, written by you and not AI! Exams are to be your own work. All in-class exams will be closed book and notes.

Extensions, Late Assignments, & Re-Scheduled/Missed Exams

Late discussion questions will be penalized accordingly. Make-up exams are given for illness, approved Institute activities or religious observances.