

## JSIS A 455, Scand 455 / Scand 590: Baltic Politics and Society Today

Fall Quarter 2021, Meeting Times: Tuesday and Thursday, 12:30-2:20 pm, Mechanical Engineering Building 237

Class website: See link to Canvas in your MyUW Account

Instructor: Guntis Šmidchens. Office Hours after class meetings and by arrangement, [guntiss@uw.edu](mailto:guntiss@uw.edu)

### Course Description

Three decades ago, the three North European countries - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - declared independence from the Soviet Union. In 2004, they joined the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO military alliance). Where are they today?

In Fall Quarter 2021 the course will include current issues, for example,

- [Estonian municipal elections](#) on October 17, 2021
- [Lithuania's 2021 census](#) and [Latvia's 2021 census](#).
- And other issues emerging during Autumn Quarter.
- You are preparing to be Baltic topics advisor for the American delegates to the World Summit for Democracy, December 9-10, 2021. <https://www.state.gov/summit-for-democracy/>

### Course Objectives

- Know the political, economic and social institutions of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania today
- Find and use a variety of primary sources to study and report on contemporary issues in the Baltic
- Follow breaking news to identify critical current issues in the Baltic.
- Prepare analytical briefs about current political and social developments in the Baltic

### Grades

(students must pass all three components to pass the course)

- Three briefs on current issues in the Baltic, presented in class, revised and posted online (3-5 p. each) 30%
- One brief expanded into a research paper (8-15 pages) 20%
- Participation in class and online discussion: 50% (15% contribute to discussions on assigned readings; 15% contribute to discussions of online news; 20% critique oral and online presentations by classmates)

### Reading:

- Daunis Auers, *Comparative Politics and Government of the Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the 21st Century* (Palgrave, March 2015). Also available as an [e-book through the UW Library website](#).
- Online articles and resources listed in the lecture schedule as posted in the Modules section of Canvas.

## Graded Assignments

**1. (pass/fail).** As you prepare for class discussions (see below), compile a 1-2 page survey of useful news sources for one of the three Baltic countries. This will not be handed in, but will be discussed in class, beginning in Week 2.

- Write an introduction: What information you need from news sources; & how you identify useful sources.

## **2. Three analytical briefs (30%)**

Each brief will include the following:

- Title, Executive summary (one paragraph)
- Relevance to US policy makers (this paragraph may include historical, political, economic and/or social context).
- Summarize current developments, provide historical background as needed.
- Evidence-based analysis (footnotes refer to your sources of data, and to relevant secondary sources).
- Critique of the data on which your analysis is based
- One-paragraph conclusion, indicating possible future developments.
- References cited

During the week the assignment is due, give a five-minute presentation in class. By Friday, upload your brief (Length depends on topic. It might be around 3-5 pages, 1000-1500 words) to the class website. Read and critique at least one classmate's post. Revise and expand as needed, submit before the end of the quarter for a grade.

- Brief #1 due Friday of Week 4 (October 22). Report on a current political issue.
- Brief #2 due Friday of Week 7 (November 12). Report on a current social issue.
- Brief #3 due Friday of Week 10 (December 3). Report on a current issue of your choice.

**3) Research Report (20%), discussion of drafts begins December 7, oral presentation on Dec 16, final revisions due December 17.** Analytical report on a current issue in Estonian, Latvian and/or Lithuanian politics, economy or society:

**Revise and expand one of your briefs. Your final report (8-15 pages) should include the following:**

- A research question
    - sources you used to answer this question (news reports, government publications, etc)
    - when appropriate, discuss reliability of the sources.
  - Summary of recent developments,
    - particular attention to events from September to December 2021
    - references to sources.
  - Analysis: Why are these events significant?
    - interpretations/opinions/editorials published in the Baltic and abroad
  - Conclusions: survey a variety of possible outcomes; present your own evidence-based argument:
  - A succinct title that summarizes the issue and indicates your conclusions
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- Present your report to the class on December 16, a date to be arranged.
  - Submit the final revision of your report by Friday of finals week, December 17.

## **4) Discussion participation, in class and online (40%)**

- 15% Bring notes from your assigned readings to class, participate in discussions;
- 20% respond and critique work by classmates in class and online, as assigned by instructor.
- 15% Follow the suggested online newspapers to stay informed about current news in the Baltic; post links to useful articles on the class website (informal "twitter" posts on the Canvas discussion website)

## Lecture Schedule

Note: Reading assignments may change to include breaking news and recent publications. The amount of assigned reading will stay about the same as in this syllabus. Follow the "Lecture Schedule" on the course website for the latest updates.

### Week 1 (September 30): Intro to Baltic Politics & Society Today

Thurs: Introduction. Baltic Politics and Society Today: Writing Useful Reports. Where's the news?

Guest lecture, Indra Ekmanis, editor, FPRI Baltic Bulletin

- Background reading: Daunis Auers, *Comparative Politics*, "Introduction" (pages 1-6)
- Foreign Policy Research Institute, Baltic reports: <https://www.fpri.org/topic/baltic-sea/>
- Indra Ekmanis, "(De)friending in the Baltics: Lessons from Facebook's Sputnik Crackdown." Baltic Bulletin, January 31, 2019. Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute.  
<https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/01/defriending-in-the-baltics-lessons-from-facebooks-sputnik-crackdown/>
- Sorting out the news from the Baltic: Selected Baltic news portals
  - Top native language news portals (better than English?! Use machine translation) See also "Rus" language: <http://www.delfi.ee/>, <https://www.delfi.lv/>, <https://www.delfi.lt/>, <https://www.lrt.lt/>
  - Public broadcasters: Estonia: <http://news.err.ee/>, Latvia: <https://eng.lsm.lv/> and Lithuania: <http://en.delfi.lt/> (look for & compare English pages, for example <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english>)
  - Other Baltic news portals: <http://bnn-news.com/> -- <http://www.baltictimes.com/> -- <http://www.baltic-course.com/>, and <http://www.postimees.ee/> (look for "English" button)
  - BNS, BBC and other news in Nexis Uni database, at [UW Libraries Databases](#) (login, top right corner).
  - Background, Re:Baltica Baltic Media Health Check 2019-2020 (see esp. pages 42-44): <https://en.rebaltica.lv/2020/11/baltic-media-health-check-2020/>

### Week 2 (October 5-7): Parliamentary Democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Tues, Oct 5: Parliamentary democracy in the Baltic, 1918-2021; Continued discussion of media news sources; Guest lecture Klinta Ločmele (University of Latvia).

- Read before class meeting:
- Auers, Chapter 1. "A Brief Political History," pages 7-41 [[e-book through the UW Library website](#)]
- Watch: Baltic States in the 21st Century, panel organized at the UW in 2003. Presenters: Walter Clemens, Saulius Sužiedelis, Juris Dreifelds, Toivo Raun
- Re:Baltica Baltic Media Health Check 2019-2020 (see esp. pages 42-44): <https://en.rebaltica.lv/2020/11/baltic-media-health-check-2020/>

Thurs, Oct 7: Parliaments and parliamentary democracy. Studying Online Disinformation. Guest lecture, Asta Zelenkauskaitė (Drexel University).

- Una Bergmane, "Latvia's Balancing Act: The Birth of a Pushmi-pullyu Government." Baltic Bulletin, 15 February 2019. Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/02/latvias-balancing-act-the-birth-of-a-pushmi-pullyu-government/>
- Auers, 2.1-2.2, Constitutions, Legislatures (42-50); [[e-book through the UW Library website](#)]
  - Baltic parliament websites: [Riigikogu](#), [Saeima](#), [Seimas](#). What parties are represented in parliament? Which parties form the government coalition? What are current legislation issues?

- Asta Zelenkauskaitė and Brandon Niezgoda, “Stop Kremlin trolls”: Ideological trolling as calling out, rebuttal, and reactions on online news portal commenting. *First Monday*, Volume 22, Number 5 - 1 May 2017. <https://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/7795/6225>

## Week 3 (October 12-14): Democratic Governance

Tues, Oct 12: Executive branch of government

- Auers, 2.3-2.4, Executives and Presidents (50-62) [[e-book through the UW Library website](#)]
  - Baltic government websites: [Estonia](#), [Latvia](#), [Lithuania](#). What is the responsibility of each minister in the Cabinet of Ministers?
- Eoin Michéal McNamara, “Estonia’s Outgoing Government...” FPRI Baltic Bulletin, 21 Feb 2021 <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/02/estonias-outgoing-government-leaves-damaged-security-legacy/>
- Mindaugas Jurkynas “Change in a time of pandemic: the 2020 parliamentary elections in Lithuania,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 52:2 (2021), 269-278. <https://www.tandfonline-com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/doi/pdf/10.1080/01629778.2021.1901754>

Thurs, Oct 14: Decentralized Governance. Guest lecture, Andres Kasekamp (University of Toronto)

- Auers 2.5 Decentralization and local government (62-65). Read also unelected institutions, 2.6-2.8 (65-77) [[e-book through the UW Library website](#)]
  - City councils of [Tallinn](#), [Riga](#) and [Vilnius](#): Note parties (factions) and coalitions; browse what municipal governments do.
- Europarliament (find Baltic representatives!) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/> Browse the [EU website](#). The Council of the European Union is the main link between each country and EU policy (to be discussed later)

**Sunday, October 17: District and municipal elections in Estonia**

## Week 4 (October 19-21): Parties, Politics, and Policies

Tues, Oct 19: Voters and voting

- Auers, 3.1-3.2, Elections and referendums (78-94) [[e-book through the UW Library website](#)]
- Central Electoral Commissions [Lithuania](#), [Latvia](#), [Estonia](#)
- See also national elections summaries in Wikipedia, useful, but some details are out of date or missing: [Estonia \(2019\)](#); [Latvia \(2018\)](#); [Lithuania \(2016\)](#)
- This week Tuesday and Thursday, oral Presentations of the briefs, Assignment 1 (Politics)

Thurs, Oct 21: Party politics

- Auers, 3.3, political parties 94-119 [[e-book through the UW Library website](#)]
- Survey websites of currently active parties (quick links to party websites appear in Wikipedia)

**Due Friday, Oct 22: Assignment 1, Politics.**