



ANTH3002

Anthropology, Power and Politics

Session 2, Online-flexible 2026

School of Communication, Society and Culture

Contents

<u>General Information</u>	2
<u>Learning Outcomes</u>	2
<u>General Assessment Information</u>	3
<u>Assessment Tasks</u>	4
<u>Delivery and Resources</u>	6
<u>Unit Schedule</u>	7
<u>Policies and Procedures</u>	7

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General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

Chris Houston

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Credit points

10

Prerequisites

130cp at 1000 level or above

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description

Experiences of political empowerment or helplessness are central aspects of our social lives and relationships. But how are they connected to political systems and processes?

Anthropology has a rich history of studying comparative processes of political order, social change, and individual agency in different places around the globe. This unit introduces students to the fascinating themes that have characterised cross-cultural analysis of political arrangements in anthropology, including questions of exploitation and [in]equality in tribal societies. It explores the effects of colonial power on such research, and how this context has influenced the development of anthropological knowledge. The unit also investigates contemporary manifestations of politics and power, including forms of political practice such as nationalism; state projects of cultural revolution; gender and agency; resistance and collaboration; and questions of peace-making and reconciliation amidst histories of violence and terror.

Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates>

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

ULO1: Apply anthropological theory and concepts to contemporary processes of power and politics.

ULO2: Discern and discuss the tensions and correspondences between the political institutions of different societies, their representation in ethnographic writing or film, and

political processes in the ethnographers' own society.

ULO3: Demonstrate knowledge of influential ethnographies and debates relevant to the anthropology of politics and power.

ULO4: Communicate effectively about the sociocultural dimensions of political systems and practices.

General Assessment Information

GENERAL ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

Note: ANTH3002 has both face-to-face tutorials and an external, online only enrolment, in which participation will be assessed via iLearn discussion boards only. Please see below for instructions on participation.

1) Face-to-Face Tutorial Participation (On Campus): Please complete the weekly readings before class and come to class prepared to discuss the material. Active participation entails contributing thoughtful comments regarding readings, films, and group discussions during each tutorial meeting. In your verbal contributions to class discussions, what we will be looking for is remarks that engage thoughtfully with the readings. It is also important that you engage respectfully with your peers. If you don't understand or agree with something someone says, ask them to clarify, or explain respectfully why you disagree. Everyone should feel free to speak up in class. Please do not drown out quieter voices, interrupt, or otherwise dominate class discussion. If you are having trouble speaking up in class discussion, please come to speak with the tutor privately and together we can strategise ways to facilitate your contribution to the tutorials. Each week, try to make a few notes about the lecture and reading to bring to class - questions are very much encouraged! Not understanding an aspect of the week will often provoke a rich discussion.

2) External Student Participation (iLearn Discussion Board): Each week, external students will be required to contribute weekly to the discussion thread found within each week's iLearn section.

Preparation for posting requires reading of the tutorial material for that week. Each student should post one (1) unique question related to the unit material for the rest of the class to consider. Posted material should be inspired by the tutorial reading and the lecture directly but may also be tangentially related. It doesn't have to be a spectacular insight by any means. In short, bring something intellectually stimulating to the table that came to your mind during the week as a result of your covering of unit material. Feel free to share external links, readings, audio/visual material - whatever you like, as long as it is related to the week in question. Each student's response should be around 200 words. This is obviously not going to be rigidly enforced, but we all know what 200 words looks like, as opposed to a few lines of text.

3) Late Submission Information and Policy:

Unless a Special Consideration request has been submitted and approved, a 5% penalty (of the total possible mark) will be applied each day a written assessment is not submitted, up until the 7th day (including weekends). After the 7th day, a mark of '0' (zero) will be awarded even if the

assessment is submitted. A 1-hour grace period is provided to students who experience a technical issue. This late penalty will apply to non-time sensitive assessment (incl. essays, reports, posters, portfolios, journals, recordings etc). Late submission of time sensitive tasks (such as tests/exams, performance assessments/presentations, scheduled practical assessments/labs etc) will only be addressed by the unit convenor in a Special Consideration application. Special Consideration outcome may result in a new question or topic.

Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Hurdle	Due	Groupwork/Individual	Short Extension	AI Approach
Essay plan	20%	No	04/09/2026	Individual	Yes	Open
Essay	40%	No	16/10/2026	Individual	Yes	Open
Take-Home Test	40%	No	06/11/2026	Individual	Yes	Open

Essay plan

Assessment Type [1](#): Practice-based task

Indicative Time on Task [2](#): 35 hours

Due: **04/09/2026**

Weighting: **20%**

Groupwork/Individual: Individual

Short extension [3](#): Yes

AI Approach: Open

This is a two-page plan in which you sketch out the research essay

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Apply anthropological theory and concepts to contemporary processes of power and politics.
- Discern and discuss the tensions and correspondences between the political institutions of different societies, their representation in ethnographic writing or film, and political processes in the ethnographers' own society.
- Demonstrate knowledge of influential ethnographies and debates relevant to the anthropology of politics and power.
- Communicate effectively about the sociocultural dimensions of political systems and practices.

Essay

Assessment Type [1](#): Written Submission

Indicative Time on Task ²: 55 hours

Due: **16/10/2026**

Weighting: **40%**

Groupwork/Individual: Individual

Short extension ³: Yes

AI Approach: Open

Essays will deal with major themes related to the unit, including case studies to investigate issues of political order, questions of political change, or the arguments around political agency

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Take-Home Test

Assessment Type ¹: Problem-based task

Indicative Time on Task ²: 22 hours

Due: **06/11/2026**

Weighting: **40%**

Groupwork/Individual: Individual

Short extension ³: Yes

AI Approach: Open

The exam will consist of a combination of short answers to questions that link together topics and themes covered throughout the course.

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- Demonstrate knowledge of influential ethnographies and debates relevant to the

anthropology of politics and power.

¹ If you need help with your assignment, please contact:

- the academic teaching staff in your unit for guidance in understanding or completing this type of assessment
- [Academic Success](#) for academic skills support.

² Indicative time-on-task is an estimate of the time required for completion of the assessment task and is subject to individual variation.

³ An automatic short extension is available for some assessments. Apply through the [Service Connect Portal](#).

Delivery and Resources

Welcome to Political Anthropology! There are political dimensions to everything; and yet nothing should be reduced only to politics. In this unit we think about power; domination and subordination; resistance and mobilisation; and political processes cross-culturally.

This unit introduces students to many of the vital political practices generating social life in the present. It also introduces students to some of the key literature associated with the anthropology of politics and power. Our exploration of both the practice of power and its analysis will be organized around three enduring questions: the ‘secret of order’, the ‘secret of change’, and the ‘secret of action.’

In the first half of the course students will identify and compare the themes – explicit or otherwise – that dominate the composition of a number of classical political ethnographies, while also exploring the wider question of their colonial contexts and how this context influenced the development of anthropological knowledge. The second half of the unit examines how some of these themes may still be of relevance in illuminating more contemporary manifestations of power, including forms of political practice such as nationalism and its project of social transformation; violence and terror; gender and agency; resistance and collaboration; and peace-making and reconciliation. A continuing concern of the course will be to explore how the writing of ethnography and the making of ethnographic film – that is, textual and visual representations – are implicated in these issues.

Unit Rationale:

Politics and power can be thought of as intimate aspects of our social life and relationships, and hence as aspects of all subjects of anthropological investigation. Processes of domination, resistance and social transformation are inevitably involved in the creation and representation of cultural practices and meanings. Accordingly, the specific investigation of these issues is of great help in contributing to students’ understandings of the present, as well as to their comprehension of other units in the anthropology programme at Macquarie. Appropriately, the various and competing ways that the anthropology of politics has been conceptualized and delimited has meant that political anthropology itself has been described as a “running intellectual

battleground.” One key reason for this resides in the historical political context of anthropology. Anthropology is a discipline more immediately familiar and hence more immediately implicated than other disciplines with the transformations produced by European power upon the non-European world. For a long intellectual moment, colonialism’s primary object of control constituted anthropology’s primary object of investigation. For this very reason, in this course we will seek to explore both the anthropology of politics, **and** the politics of anthropology.

This unit is worth 10 credit points which equates to 150 hours of work; therefore, you should expect to commit an average of 12 hours of your time per week to this unit including all scheduled and unscheduled activities as well as preparing and executing the assessment tasks.

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Tutorials start in Week 1

Unit Schedule

Week One: Introduction to Political Anthropology and its Key Concept

Week Two: Anthropology, Colonialism & Science

Week Three: World Systems Theory, Global Cultural History & Anthropology

Week Four: The Secret of Order

Week Five: The Secret of Change

Week Six: The Secret of Action

Week Seven: Project Modernity (1): Nazi Germany and the Turkish Republic as Revolutionary State Projects

Week Eight: Project Modernity (2): Soviet Collectivism

Week Nine: Domination and Resistance (1). Theoretical Issues

Week 10: Domination and Resistance (2): Gender and Religion

Week 11: Violence and Terror

Week 12: The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation

Week 13: Unit Review

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central \(https://policies.mq.edu.au\)](https://policies.mq.edu.au). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

- [Academic Appeals Policy](#)
- [Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [Academic Progression Policy](#)
- [Assessment Policy](#)

- [Fitness to Practice Procedure](#)
- [Assessment Procedure](#)
- [Complaints Resolution Procedure for Students and Members of the Public](#)
- [Special Consideration Policy](#)

Students seeking more policy resources can visit [Student Policies \(https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/policies\)](https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/policies). It is your one-stop-shop for the key policies you need to know about throughout your undergraduate student journey.

To find other policies relating to Teaching and Learning, visit [Policy Central \(https://policies.mq.edu.au\)](https://policies.mq.edu.au) and use the [search tool](#).

Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: <https://students.mq.edu.au/admin/other-resources/student-conduct>

Results

Results published on platform other than [eStudent](#), (eg. iLearn, Coursera etc.) or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your student email address and will be made available in [eStudent](#). For more information visit connect.mq.edu.au or if you are a Global MBA student contact globalmba.support@mq.edu.au

Academic Integrity

At Macquarie, we believe [academic integrity](#) – honesty, respect, trust, responsibility, fairness and courage – is at the core of learning, teaching and research. We recognise that meeting the expectations required to complete your assessments can be challenging. So, we offer you a range of resources and services to help you reach your potential, including free [online writing and maths support](#), [academic skills development](#) and [wellbeing consultations](#).

Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit <http://students.mq.edu.au/support/>

Academic Success

[Academic Success](#) provides resources to develop your English language proficiency, academic writing, and communication skills.

- [Ask a Study Coach](#)
- [Access StudyWISE](#)
- [Upload an assignment to Studiosity](#)
- [Complete the Academic Integrity Module](#)

The Library provides online and face to face support to help you find and use relevant information resources.

- [Subject and Research Guides](#)
- [Ask a Librarian](#)

Student Services and Support

Macquarie University offers a range of [Student Support Services](#) including:

- [IT Support](#)
- [Accessibility and disability support](#) with study
- Mental health [support](#)
- [Safety support](#) to respond to bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and sexual assault
- [Social support including information about finances, tenancy and legal issues](#)
- [Student Advocacy](#) provides independent advice on MQ policies, procedures, and processes

Student Enquiries

Got a question? Ask us via the [Service Connect Portal](#), or contact [Service Connect](#).

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit <https://students.mq.edu.au/support/technology/service-desk>.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use of IT Resources Policy](#). The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

Unit information based on version 2026.04 of the [Handbook](#)