
Political Science 278

Foundations of Modern International Politics

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Course Info:
Spring 2026
Tue/Thurs: 3:25-4:40
Meliora Room 218

The bargaining model of war is the main theoretical tool in the study of international conflict these days. But the model brackets, i.e., ignores, the question of what gets put on the bargaining table in the first place. What are leaders and states claiming from each other and what do they choose *not* to contest? It turns out there is remarkably little systematic empirical work on this fundamental question. In this course, we examine the issues states fight over from both a historical as well as contemporary perspective. The course will involve some basic new analytical tools such as GIS (Geographical Information Systems) and some very basic data analysis.

Any use of AI in this class (whether to write, brainstorm, outline, or summarize) will be considered a violation of academic integrity. Here's why: this class aims to develop both your thinking and your writing. Generative AI (ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude and other platforms) is neither writing nor thinking. Instead, it undermines intellectual development: AI content is often inaccurate or hallucinatory and at heart aims to be average. This is by design: AI predicts the most obvious or basic sequencing of words. Good thinking and good writing requires human work. To persuade your classmates, to persuade me, to surprise us, to get us to change our mind, requires sustained effort. Think of it like this: the ideas, insights and beliefs we hold as valuable deserve to be treated as such, **valuable**. AI cannot do this.

In this class, **each student is required to lead class discussion for one week, in preparation of which they need to write up a 5 page paper which summarizes the reading's Central Question, its Central Answer, the Competing Explanations they present, and their analysis of why these Competing Explanations are wrong.** The paper must be circulated to the class via e-mail no later than the evening before class, at 8:00 p.m. These papers will form the background against which we will discuss the readings in class. 40% of your grade will be based on this paper and the student's guidance of the class. Students should begin the discussion of each reading with their own short description of the central question, central argument and competing explanations.

Course Outline

Tuesday January 20

1. **Class Introduction and Outline**

CLASS CANCELLED

Read the syllabus.

Thursday January 22

2. **Class Introduction and Outline**

Read the syllabus.

There will be a pop-quiz about the syllabus on Thursday, January 22. If you fail this pop-quiz, you should not be in this class.

Tuesday January 27

3. **The State of the Discipline**

- James D. Fearon. 1995. "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization*, 49(3) (Summer): 379-414.
- Andrew Moravcsik. 1997. "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization*. 51(4) (Autumn): 513-553.

Tuesday January 29

4. **The State of the Discipline**

- Kenneth A. Schultz and Hein Goemans. 2019. "Aims, Claims and the Bargaining Model," *International Theory*, 11(3) (November): 344-374.
- Hein Goemans and Paul Hensel. 2021. "Contentious Issues," Chapter 1 in *What do we know about war?*, Routledge. 4th edition.

Tuesday February 3

5. **A Historical Overview of International Conflict**

- Kalevi J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and international Order, 1648-1989*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1996.

Thursday February 5

6. **A Historical Overview of International Conflict**

Thursday February 26

12. **Nationalism, Ethnicity, Civilizations. Empirical research.**

- Lars-Erik Cederman, Luc Girardin, Call Müller-Crepon and Yannick I. Pengl. 2025. *Nationalism and the Transformation of the State; Border Change and Political Violence in the Modern World*, Cambridge University Press.

Tuesday March 3

13. **Nationalism, Ethnicity, Civilizations.**

- Alexander B. Murphy. 2002. "National Claims to Territory in the Modern State System: Geographical Considerations," in *Geopolitics*, 7(2) (Autumn), pp. 193–214
- Scott F. Abramson and David B. Carter, 2016. "The Historical Origins of Territorial Disputes," *American Political Science Review* 110(4), November: 675–698

Thursday March 5

14. **Nationalism, Ethnicity, Civilizations.**

- Hein Goemans and Kenneth A. Schultz, 2017. "The Politics of Territorial Claims: A Geospatial Approach Applied to Africa," *International Organization, International Organization* 71(1), Winter: 31–64.

Tuesday March 10

15. **SPRING BREAK**

Thursday March 15

16. **SPRING BREAK**

Tuesday March 17

17. **Identity?**

- Hein Goemans, Andi Zhou, Joel Selway and Michael Weintraub, 2021. "Maps to Die For?". Unpublished Manuscript, University of Rochester.
- Ron E. Hassner, 2009. *War on Sacred Grounds*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Thursday March 19

Tuesday April 7

23. **Career incentives?**

- Matthew S. Gottfried and Robert F. Trager, “A Preference for War: How Fairness and Rhetoric Influence Leadership Incentives in Crises.” *International Studies Quarterly*, (2016) Vol. 60, No. 2, pp. 243–257.
- Dan Altman and Melissa Lee, 2022. “Why Territorial Disputes Escalate: The Causes of Conquest Attempts Since 1945.” *International Studies Quarterly* 66(4).

Thursday, April 9

24. **Career incentives?**

- Giacomo Chiozza and Hein Goemans, 2011. *Leaders and International Politics*, New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-3, 6.

Tuesday, April 14

25. **Factors that restrain conflict?**

- Dave Grossman, 2009. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Back Bay Books; Revised edition.

Thursday, April 16

26. **Factors that restrain conflict?**

- Michael Mann, 2023. *On Wars*, Chapters 11-14: “Fear and Loathing on the Battlefield.” pp. 311-413. Yale University Press.

Tuesday, April 21

27. **Factors that restrain conflict? – Law and Norms**

- Paul K. Huth, Sarah E. Croco and Benjamin J. Appel. 2011. “Does International Law Promote the Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes? Evidence from the Study of Territorial Conflicts since 1945.” *American Political Science Review* 105(2):415–436.
- Paul K. Huth, Sarah E Croco and Benjamin J Appel. 2012. “Law and the use of force in world politics: The varied effects of law on the exercise of military power in territorial disputes.” *International Studies Quarterly* 56(1):17–31.

Questions to consider in formulating and evaluating social science research

1. *What is the central question?*
 - Why is it important (theoretically, substantively)?
 - What is being explained (what is the dependent variable and how does it vary)?
 - How does this phenomenon present a puzzle?
2. *What is the central answer?*
 - What is doing the explaining (what are the independent variables and how do they vary)?
 - What are the hypotheses, i.e., what is the relationship between independent and dependent variables, what kind of change in the independent variable causes what kind of change in the dependent variable?
 - What are the causal mechanisms, i.e., why are the independent and dependent variables so related?
 - How do the independent variables relate to each other?
 - What assumptions does your theory make?
 - Is the theory falsifiable in concept?
 - What does this explanation add to our understanding of the question?
3. *What are the possible alternative explanations?*
 - What assumptions are you making about the direction of causality?
 - What other explanations might there be for the phenomenon of study, and to what degree do they conflict with the central answer?
 - Could the hypothesized relationships have occurred by chance?
4. *Why are the possible alternative explanations wrong?*
 - What is the logical structure of the alternative explanations (compare 2)?
 - What is the empirical evidence?
5. *What is the relationship between the theory and the evidence?*
 - What does the research design allow to vary, i.e., in this design are the explanations variables or constants?
 - What does your research design hold constant, i.e., does it help to rule out the alternative competing explanations?
 - How are the theoretical constructs represented empirically, i.e., how do you know it when you see it (measurement)?
6. *How do the empirical conclusions relate to the theory?*
 - How confident are you about the theory in light of the evidence?
 - How widely do the conclusions generalize, i.e., what might be the limitations of the study?
 - What does the provisionally accepted or revised theory say about questions of broader importance?