Politics 386
Violent Politics

Princeton University
Fall Semester, 2018

Instructor:
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Office Hours: Monday, 3:30-5:00 pm and Wednesday 10:30-12:00 pm. Use WASE to schedule.

Preceptor:
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Office Hours: Tuesday, 10-12

Lectures:
- Monday and Wednesday, 2:30 – 3:20 pm, McCosh 64

Precepts:
- Tuesday 10-10:50
- Tuesday 2:30-3:20
- Wednesday 12:30-1:20

Violent Politics is a seminar devoted to understanding (1) why politics so often turn violent and (2) the ways in which violence is used to achieve political objectives. Our starting point is that governments have tremendous power over our lives. In many places, having friends in the right positions in government is enough to make one rich and ensure your family’s welfare for generations. Thus, the competition over who controls the government is always intense and often turns violent.

This course will study various ways in which violence is used to political ends. The larger goal of the course is to understand the sources of violence in political competition and the conditions under which political disputes can be peacefully resolved. Specific forms of violence to be covered include assassination, civil war, ethnic conflict, insurgency, revolution, riots, terrorism, and war.

Course Requirements:

1. Class participation, 30%. Lectures will be run as a large seminar with the instructor providing some opening remarks to motivate discussion. Some implications:
   a. You should complete all the required readings before class as the lectures will build on the ideas in the readings.
b. Clarifying questions are always welcomed and definitely encouraged. The lectures are written to encourage them. If something doesn’t make sense to you it probably doesn’t make sense to other people too.

c. When you want to push the discussion in a new direction or add something that stood out for you in the readings, you should have a clear argument with specific citations at hand. Bringing up well-documented points from other courses or from readings you’ve done for other classes is a great idea.

d. I’ll be asking questions about the readings and encouraging you to discuss links between them during lecture. The more prepared you are, the more entertaining and informative lectures will be.

Here are some thoughts on how to attack the readings:

- Descriptive readings are intended to provide context for thinking about a specific kind of violent politics. You should approach these readings with an open mind and try to identify key facts or examples that you find puzzling and/or surprising.

- Some of the readings are theoretical, providing you with ways of thinking about the phenomena we are studying. Before approaching each theoretical reading think about the key questions for the week and how they relate to what you know from previous weeks. Then skim over the reading to get a sense of the themes it covers, and, before reading further, jot down what questions you hope the reading will be able to answer for you. Next, read the introduction and conclusion. This is normally enough to get a sense of the big picture. Ask yourself: Are the claims in the text surprising? Do you believe them? Can you think of examples of places that do not seem consistent with the logic of the argument? Is the reading answering the questions you hoped it would answer? If not, is it answering more or less interesting questions than you had thought of? Next ask yourself: What types of evidence or arguments would you need to see in order to be convinced of the results? Now read through the whole text, checking as you go through how the arguments used support (or fail to support) the claims of the author.

- Keep notes as you read. When you come across arguments that you are not convinced by, write them down and bring them to class for discussion. Also note when the author produced a convincing argument that you had not thought of.

- Work in teams. The reading list is long on purpose. You don’t actually need to read everything each week, you just need to be prepared to discuss it. If you form reading groups and share notes you’ll be well-prepared even in weeks when there’s a ton of material to cover.

2. Develop expertise, 20%. You and your classmates will be placed into teams of 2 or 3 (depending on class size) to become our class expert for one major conflict or one case that could have become a significant fight but did not. You will receive your team assignments during the week 3 precept. Each week from week 4 through 10 we will start precept by discussing the conflict or potential conflict covered by one team (week 6 we’ll skip to make time for mid-term questions). Each team will generate

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1 Courtesy of Professor Macartan Humphrey’s excellent graduate syllabus on political violence.
2 A brief summary of all of these conflicts and near misses is up on the “Course Materials” section of Blackboard.
and present a one-page fact sheet on their event, which will be assigned from the following list:

Conflicts:
1. The Katyn massacre
2. The 1916 Rising
3. Dresden fire-bombing
4. Angolan Civil War
5. The killing of Samuel Doe
6. The Kargil War
7. Kaduna riots
8. Cubana Flight 455
9. Siege of the ‘Red Mosque’
10. 1st Intifada
11. East Africa Embassy Bombings
12. Raid on Harpers Ferry
14. The Colfax Riot
15. South Sudan Civil War
16. Naxalite Movement
17. Rwandan Ethnic War (1990-4)
18. La guerra del futbol
19. South Thai Insurgency
20. Second Congo War

Near Misses:
1. Catalan Nationalist Movement
2. Cuban Missile Crisis
3. 1990 Uprising in Bangladesh
4. Monday Demonstrations
5. 2000 Bulldozer Revolution
8. Tunisian Revolution

Your fact sheet should address the following items as appropriate, not all items will be relevant for all cases:
- Short description.
- Why was violence used or why should we have expected it to be?
- If violence was used, were other means available to achieve the political end?
- Why did people take part or refrain?
- Did the violence achieve its purpose or was the purpose achieved nonviolently?
- If violence was used was the violence organized and if so how?
- What arguments for/against violence were offered before/during/after?
- Could anyone have prevented the violence? If someone did, how did they do so?
- Describe a question this event raises for our understanding of why, where, or how violence is used for political ends.

Fact sheets should be posted to your precept’s Blackboard section no later than 24 hours before class and provided in precept as handouts. Your presentation should take no more than 15 minutes and must be distinct from the fact sheet. Feel free to include images and videos in your presentation.

3. There will be two open-book take-home multiple-essay exams (25% each). The exams should take you about 4 hours. You can take mid-term any time between 9 a.m. on October 25 and 5 p.m. on October 26. Students may substitute a research paper on some aspect of violent politics for one of the exams. The paper should be exactly as long as needed to address the issue it studies, but no less than 10 pages.

Papers will be due at 4:30 p.m. on the same date as the midterm or final are due. Late papers or exams will be penalized one full letter grade per hour.
Readings and Precept:

Books can be purchased online and selections will also be on e-reserves. Articles can be downloaded and will be available on Blackboard or library e-reserves.

Most weeks we will focus on specific types of violent politics e.g. ‘wars between states.’ We will spend a few weeks at the start of the course discussing various explanations for why violence has always been an integral part of politics.

Readings are assigned by week. The course is set up for you to do the readings Thursday-Sunday the week before the lecture as I will be asking questions from the readings during lecture. If you do them Monday-Wednesday that will still work, you just won’t get as much out of lecture.

Precepts are on Tuesday and Wednesday in between the two lectures. In precept we aim to answer questions on that week’s readings, clear up any confusion or questions from the previous week, and learn from the presentations on conflicts and near-misses.

Recommended Movies:

Every week (except during week 1 and midterm week) a movie on political violence is recommended. The topic of the movie is related to the topic of the lecture during that week. If enough people are interested we can arrange screenings on campus somewhere.

Recommended Television:

To learn everything you would ever want to know about insurgency and civil war (well almost), you can skip lectures and binge watch all five seasons of The Wire. If you take this option, which is a serious one, you will have to write a 4-5 page essay on each season that discusses how the themes of the season link back to the study of political violence. Please come see me during office hours by the end of the 2nd week if you want to take this path.

For outstanding background on the conflict in Syria check out the BBC’s “History of Syria”, which you can find here: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01rb2st](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01rb2st).

Recommended Reading:

There are many great war novels that will help you gain some insight into various aspects of violent politics. If you have to choose just four, I would recommend:

- The best book on today’s unending conflicts fought without national mobilization: Phil Klay, *Redeployment*
- Two great war novels from different sides of the Vietnam War:
  - Bao Ninh, *The Sorrow of War*
  - Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*
- A brilliant interrogation of the Vietnam war told as hard science fiction: Joe Haldeman, *The Forever War*
Week 1-2 (Wed. Sep. 12 – Thu. Sep. 20): What Are Violent Politics, Why Do They Surprise Us, and How Will We Study Them?

>> For fun view a few of the following, not really the kind of violent politics we’ll study…
- http://www.cracked.com/article_17058_when-politicians-attack-17-most-violent-political-brawls.html#ixzz24rBiWtwV
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2b-2YnfZso

2. Ehrenreich, Barbara. Blood Rites: Origins and history of the Passions of War (Holt, 1997): Chapter 1 (Optionally also read Chapters 7 and 8).

Why do they surprise us?
7. One quick video (a) and two optional ones (b) and (c):
   a. Short video on Arab Spring by History Channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fgcd5ZcxDys
   b. Video on the Arab Spring and where things have ended up entitled “The Arab Spring Two Years Later” from Time, 16 July 2013: http://youtu.be/Qu16wM4cSw
   c. Guardian op-ed on the Arab Spring with a number of good videos: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/15/arab-spring-badly-wrong-five-years-on-people-power

And how will we study them?
A couple of pieces to help you think clearly about some kinds of questions…

Things we’ll discuss in lecture that you should probably read but are optional:

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3 Due to Yom Kippur falling on Sep. 18 we will have a makeup lecture on Sep. 20. That lecture will be recorded for those who cannot attend (e.g. due to Ashura).

Recommended for those interested in a non-mathematical introduction to natural experiments:

Recommended for an outstanding example of careful counter-factual thinking on hot-button political issues:

Movie for week 1: “Dr. Strangelove” or of you’ve already seen it “Fail-Safe”

Movie for week 2: “The Godfather” or if you’ve already seen it “Gangs of New York”


1. Strategic Explanations (Read for week 3)
   d. Abbreviated clip of Dwight Eisenhower’s Presidential Farewell Address: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y06NSBBRtY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y06NSBBRtY).


Movie for week 3: “Thirteen days”

2. Psychological Explanations (Read for week 4)

Optional but recommended:


The source of some ideas we will discuss in class but a hard read and so not required:


Movie for week 4: “Four Lions”

3. Normative Explanations (Read for week 5)


c. Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address.


Optional but recommended:


f. Short note on international law regarding political violence by Christoph Mikulaschek.

Movie for week 5: “Rules of Engagement”

**Week 6 (Oct. 15 – 17): War Between States**

1. Bargaining explanations


2. Domestic political explanations


3. Potential benefits of interstate war

4. New modes of contestation

Optional but recommended because they’re quite interesting on the role of religion and socially constructed ideas in contributing to conflict, and we’ll talk about ideas from them in lecture:

Movie: “Paths of Glory”

**Week 7 (Oct. 22-24): War Between Peoples: Ethnic Conflict**


Two optional readings on how people grappled with patterns of conflict around modernization through the 1980s, how those arguments were modified to explain the Wars of Yugoslav Succession after end of Cold War:

Movie: none

Weeks 8 (Nov. 5-7): Causes and Consequences of Civil War and Rebellion

Required readings:

Optional additional reading on the social contract and conflict:

Optional readings on causes of conflict:

Optional reading if you want to get a feel for how academic literature grew up to Collier vs. F&L debate we’ll discuss in lecture:

Movie: “Lord of War”

Week 9 (Nov. 12-14): Behavior in Civil War including Terrorism


Optional readings on participation in violent politics:
7. Humphreys, Macartan and Jeremy Weinstein. “Who Fights? The Determinants of

Optional reading on how ordinary people navigate and are affected by civil war
11. Ted Rall. *After We Kill You, We Will Welcome You Back as Honored Guests: Unembedded in
    Afghanistan* (Hill and Wang, 2014), Prologue (pp. 1-40). Remainder recommended.

Movie: “Restrepo”

**Week 10 (Nov. 19, 26, 28): Ending Civil War**

1. Walter, Barbara F. *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton

Optional readings on what happens after war, will discuss ideas from them in lecture:
5. Blattman, Chris. “From Violence to Voting: War and Political Participation in

Movie: “Black Hawk Down”

**Week 11 (Dec. 3-5): Violence Within Communities, Pogroms and Riots**


Movie: “Hotel Rwanda” and read this book if you want to get depressed that the story is probably too good to be true.

**Week 12 (Dec. 10-12): Violence by the State: Repression, Torture, and Genocide**


Movie: “The Battle of Algiers”

Activity: Genocide Debate

**FINAL TAKE HOME EXAM: January 16-17, 2019**