

Political Violence, State Repression, and Organized Crime

POLSCI 364 Syllabus

Spring Term 2026

Times: Mondays and Wednesdays 11.45 AM - 1.00 PM

Location: Gross Hall# 111

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Overview of Course Contents

This course introduces students to the research agenda on political violence, broadly defined to encompass sub-state armed conflict, state repression, violent and non-violent extremism, and on organized crime and criminal violence. The primary focus of the course is on understanding: (i) the sources, drivers, and dynamics of sub-state political

and criminal violence; (ii) how violent groups recruit and maintain control over their members; how and why their internal institutions and their strategies of violence vary; and what the consequences of these patterns are; and (iii) how political and criminal armed groups interact with the state and the civilian populations. The course will engage with a variety of analytical tools, empirical cases, theoretical approaches, and research methods that will familiarize students not only with cutting-edge research on these issues, but also their relation to ‘big debates’ in the political economy of conflict research, international relations, and comparative politics.

Format

The course is divided into blocks of course weeks. Each course week, we meet twice: The first part of the session will be held in lecture format, the second in seminar format coupled with group discussions and policy simulations. The lectures will cover core concepts, key questions, debates and controversies and discuss in-depth important studies related to the subject/topic of the week. The second part of each meeting will follow-up on the content of the lecture with discussions, group exercises, and simulations.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend all course sessions or notify the professors in advance in case of absences due to illness, religious observance, etc. Attendance directly affects the participation part of the final grade (details below).

Coursework & Grading

- **3 essays** (60%; 20% each): 3 pages min, 4 pages max per essay (double-spaced; times new roman, 12pt; bibliography, title page, and table of contents do not count towards the page limit; to be submitted on Sakai). Each essay critically reviews one or more readings assigned to the required or recommended readings. Students should write one *analytical* (rather than descriptive) essay of each form:
 - A critique: A evaluation of the persuasiveness and coherence of the presented argument and empirical evidence.
 - An application: A application of an argument or theory to an empirical case not explicitly discussed by the relevant author.

- A comparison: A comparison of two or more readings that explore similar questions.

The essay grading criteria will be presented in class.

- **Participation in class (40%):** Students are expected to actively and regularly contribute to the discussions and course activities, and to do *all* the required readings *in advance*. The evaluation of participation will be based on the regularity of attendance (10%; see next section), as well as the frequency (15%) and quality (15%) of the contributions in class. In terms of contribution frequency, students are expected to actively contribute to *each* group exercise and/or discussion. In terms of quality, the contributions should reflect that the students are familiar with, and have an in-depth understanding of, the materials of the course (e.g., lectures, seminars, and required readings).

Late Work & Gaps in Class Attendance

If essay deadlines have to be missed, special arrangements can *only* be made under three conditions:

- illness or other extraordinary personal circumstances (<http://trinity.duke.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies/illness>),
- religious observance (you are expected to notify the professors at least one week in advance),
- notification of varsity athletic participation (<http://trinity.duke.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies/athletic-varsity-participation>).

If deadlines are missed outside these conditions (note: technical issues do not qualify as special circumstances), strict grade penalties apply immediately, with the severity of the penalty increasing every 12 hours (i.e. an A turns into an A- *immediately* after the deadline is missed; into a B+ 12 hours after the deadline; a B 24 hours after the deadline, and so on).

The following rules apply for class attendance (which counts 10% towards the final grade): Classes can be missed with advance notification *and* one of the above conditions applying (illness/extraordinary circumstances; religious observance, varsity athletic performance). If a class is missed without advance notification and one of the qualifying conditions, the attendance grade is reduced by one full grade per missed session (i.e., an A turns into a B if one class is missed, a B into a C if two classes are missed, and so on).

Grades are strictly non-negotiable.

Office hours/consultations

I am available for personal consultations during office hours (by appointment only), typically every Thursdays from 1 to 2PM in my Office, Gross Hall 281. You can sign up on Calendry and send me an email if you would like to have a brief 15 minutes chat about course-related matters. I encourage you to also sign up for office hours with the TA. Please refrain from sending questions via email unless it's absolutely necessary (with the exception below.) Use office hours to discuss your ideas and questions with us instead. If you would like to sign up for a meeting during office hours, please email a short summary of the questions and issues that you would like to discuss at least 24 hours in advance.

Schedule and Reading List

Note: Most, if not all, mandatory course readings should be accessible through Duke Libraries website/database. To the extent possible, We will try to upload these on Canvas, but it is the student's responsibility to make sure they have access to all the required reading before class. In case of problems or questions, please contact me for assistance.

———— Introduction ————

Overview Session (Jan 7): *Introductions and Course Overview*

- Readings: [Davies et al. \(2025\)](#), [Kalyvas \(2015\)](#), [Chenoweth, Perkoski and Kang \(2017a\)](#), [Brett \(2024\)](#).
- Recommended: [Barnes \(2017a\)](#), [Chenoweth and Cunningham \(2013\)](#), [Davenport \(2007a\)](#), [Davenport, Johnston and Mueller \(2005\)](#), [Davenport, Armstrong and Lichbach \(2008\)](#), [García-Ponce \(2025\)](#).

———— Part I: Civil war violence: Causes, dynamics (i.e, recruitment & mobilization), and consequences ————

Session 1 (Jan 12 and 14): *The big picture: On the causes of civil war*

- Readings: [Collier and Hoeffler \(2004\)](#), [Fearon and Laitin \(2003\)](#), [Keen \(2012\)](#), [Walter \(2009\)](#), [Denny and Walter \(2014\)](#), [Cederman and Gleditsch \(2011\)](#).

- Recommended: Walter (2017), Djankov and Reynal-Querol (2007), Dixon (2009), Cunningham and Lemke (2014), Fearon (2012), Cederman and Vogt (2017), Fearon (2006), Sambanis (2001), Walter (2015), Blattman (2022, Introduction; Ch. 1-6), Wood (2008), Galtung (1969), Kalyvas (2001), Staniland (2017*a*), Staniland (2010), Blattman and Miguel (2010), Kalyvas and Balcells (2010), Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug (2013, ch. 3), Wood (2015), Balcells and Kalyvas (2015), Lessing (2015), Rich (2016), Schubiger and Zelina (2017), Schubiger and Sulmont (2019), Luhnnow (2018). Staniland (2021, ch. 1).

Session 2 (January 19 and 21): *Who Fights and why? The Paradox of Insurgent Collective Action*

- Readings: Humphreys and Weinstein (2008), Weinstein (2005), Samii and West (2021), Arjona and Kalyvas (2012), Beber and Blattman (2013*a*).
- Recommended: Gates (2002), Tullock (1971), Viterna (2013, ch. 1 & 3), Wood (2003, ch.1), Thomas and Bond (2015), Obayashi (2018, ch. 1-2) Taylor (1988), Lichbach (1995, ch.2), Beber and Blattman (2013*b*), Kuran (1991), Petersen (2001, ch.1-2).

Session 3 (January 26 and 28): *Armed group cohesion, fragmentation, and side-switching in civil war*

- Readings: Schubiger (2023), Gates (2017), Seymour (2014), Otto (2018), Oppenheim et al. (2015).
- Recommended: Viterna (2006), Weinstein (2007, ch.1), Thiranagama (2011), Mironova, Mrie and Whitt (2014), Schubiger (2020), Carey and Mitchell (2016), Moncada (2017), Starn (1998), Ahram (2011), Asfura-Heim and Espach (2013), Zech (2014), Carey and Mitchell (2017), Phillips (2017), Blocq (2014), Jentzsch, Kalyvas and Schubiger (2015).

Session 4 (February 2 and 4): *Order, Governance and Control in Armed Groups—**Essay # 1 deadline: February 9, noon***

- Readings: Weinstein (2007, Ch. 4-5; skim through Intro and Ch. 6), Mampilly and Stewart (2020), Arjona (2014), Shapiro (2013, Chs. 1-2) Green (2016).
- Recommended: García-Godos (2006), Bateson (2012), Schubiger (2013, ch.6), Forney (2015), Sly (2014), Stewart (2014), Arjona, Kasfir and Mampilly (2015), Arjona (2016), Staniland (2017*b*), Desmond and Barnes (2017), Gutiérrez Sanín and Gius-tozzi (2010), Shapiro (2013, Ch. 1, Ch. 2), Gates (2017), Gates (2002), Beber and Blattman (2010), Balcells and Stanton (2021), Kalyvas (2006, Ch. 6-7).

——— *Part II: Order, state repression, non-violent resistance and democratization* ———

Session 6 (February 16 and 18): *Order through State Capacity and Legitimacy*

- Readings: [Herbst \(1990\)](#), [Acemoglu and Robinson \(2016\)](#), [Levi, Sacks and Tyler \(2009\)](#), [Karim \(2020\)](#), [Baldwin, Kao and Lust \(2025\)](#).
- Recommended: [Huntington \(2006, Ch. 1\)](#), [Fukuyama \(2014, Skim Ch. 1,2, and 12\)](#), [Karaman and Pamuk \(2013\)](#), [Berwick and Christia \(2018\)](#), [Henn \(2023\)](#), [Sánchez de la Sierra \(2020\)](#), [Rotberg \(2010, Ch. 1, Skim Ch. 2-3\)](#), [Hanson and Sigman \(2021\)](#), [Lee and Zhang \(2017\)](#), [Schoon \(2022\)](#), [Gilley \(2006\)](#), [Weigel \(2020\)](#), [Blair and Roessler \(2021\)](#), [Olson \(1993\)](#), [Seligson \(2002\)](#), [Gates and Justesen \(2020\)](#).

Session 7 (February 23 and 25): *State Repression and Non-Violence Resistance*

- Readings: [Chenoweth, Perkoski and Kang \(2017b\)](#), [Christensen \(2018\)](#), [RITTER and CONRAD \(2016\)](#), [YOUNG \(2019\)](#).
- Recommended: [HILL and JONES \(2014\)](#), [HAGER and KRAKOWSKI \(2022\)](#), [Davenport \(1995\)](#), [Ritter \(2014\)](#), [LEBAS and YOUNG \(2024\)](#) [Davenport \(2007b\)](#), [Nordås and Davenport \(2013\)](#).

Session 8 (March 2 and 4): *Democratization and Political Violence*

- Readings: [Mansfield and Snyder \(2002a\)](#), [Wolf et al. \(1996\)](#), [Savun and Tirone \(2011\)](#), [Savun and Phillips \(2009\)](#).
- Recommended: [Enterline \(2006\)](#), [Braithwaite and Licht \(2020\)](#), [Mansfield and Snyder \(1995b\)](#), [Mansfield and Snyder \(1995a\)](#), [Mansfield and Snyder \(2002b\)](#), [Regan and Henderson \(2002\)](#), [Bove, Platteau and Sekeris \(2017\)](#), [Jones and Tarp \(2016\)](#).

March 9 and 11: *SPRING RECESS—NO CLASS*

——— *Part III: Political (violent) extremism in the US and around the World* ———

Session 9 (March 16 and 18): *Terrorism, Islamism and Armed Conflict*

- Readings: [MITTS \(2019\)](#), [Kydd and Walter \(2006\)](#), [Kalyvas and Naghizadeh \(2025\)](#), [Fortna \(2015\)](#)

- Recommended: Gaibulloev and Sandler (2019), Shapiro and Siegel (2012), Abdel Jelil et al. (2018), Lake (2002/ed), Stern (2016), Stanton (2013), Abrahms (2006), McMillan, Felmlee and Braines (2020), Krueger and Maleckova (2002), Adamson (2005), OECD (2021, Ch. 2, Skim Ch. 3), Cilliers and Cilliers (2015)

Session 10 (March 23 and 25): *Far-Right and Far-Left Extremism in the United States and Western Europe*— **Essay #2 deadline: March 23, noon**

- Readings: Ravndal (2017), Duran (2021), Jasko et al. (2022), Steven Chermak and Suttmoeller (2013)
- Recommended: Corbin (2017), Chermak, Freilich and Suttmoeller (2013), Matanock and Staniland (2020), Simi and Bubolz (2017), Lafree et al. (2018), Clifford and Lewis (2022).

———— *Part IV: Organized crime, gangs, and criminal violence* —————

Session 11 (March 30 and April 1): *Prison and Street Gangs*

- Readings: García-Ponce (2025), Skarbek (2016), Hamill (2011, Intro and Ch. 1), Venkatesh (2008, Ch. 1-2)
- Recommended: Dias and Salla (2013), Skarbek (2016), Rios, Carney and Kelekay (2017), Butler, Slade and Dias (2018), Skarbek (2014, Ch. 1-3), Rios (2011, Ch. 1-3), Wolf (2012), Cruz and Durá-Martínez (2016), Amnesty International (2018), Correa-Cabrera, Lopez-Santana and Pardo (2018), Cruz (2010), Bruneau, Dammert and Skinner (2011, part I), Wolf (2014) National Gang Intelligence Center (2015), Rosen and Cruz (2019)

Session 12 (April 6 and 8): *Drug Trafficking Organizations*

- Readings: Arias (2006), Duran-Martinez (2015), Farfán-Méndez (2019), Trejo and Ley (2019).
- Recommended: Snyder and Duran-Martinez (2009), Abello-Colak and Guarneros-Meza (2014), Bagley and Rosen (2015), Dell (2015), Lessing (2017, excerpts), Shirk and Wallman (2015), Durán-Martínez (2017), Trejo and Ley (2018).

Session 13 (April 13 and 15): *Gender Dimensions of Violence and Extremism*

- Readings: [TBD]

- Recommended: [TBD]

Session 14 (April 20): *Strategies to Prevent Political, Criminal and Extremist Violence*

- Readings: [Mitts \(2021\)](#), [Mummolo \(2018\)](#), [Blattman, Jamison and Sheridan \(2017\)](#), [Blair et al. \(2021\)](#)
- Recommended: [Crost et al. \(2021\)](#), [Abdel-Fattah \(2020\)](#), [Kimmel \(2018, Ch. 1\)](#), [ACLU \(2016\)](#), [Thomas et al. \(2020\)](#), [Vining, Gilligan and Samii \(2021\)](#), [Gilligan, Mvukiyehe and Samii \(2013\)](#), [Paluck \(2009\)](#), [Bhanot et al. \(2021\)](#)

Session 15 (April 22): *What have we learnt?* – **Essay # 3 deadline: April 28, noon**

- Readings: [Blattman \(2022, Ch. 1, Conclusion\)](#), [Kalyvas \(2015\)](#), [Barnes \(2017b\)](#), [Trejo, Albarracín and Tiscornia \(2018\)](#).
- Recommended: [Mulholland \(2013\)](#), [Berg and Carranza \(2018\)](#), [Duran-Martinez \(2018\)](#), [Steele and Schubiger \(2018\)](#), [Johnson \(2019\)](#).

Other general expectations and resources

[Adapted from Prof. Beardsley's Syllabus for POLISCI 659].

Academic Integrity

I follow Duke's policies on academic honesty and plagiarism <https://trinity.duke.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies/community-standard-student-conduct>.

All students must adhere to the Duke Community Standard (DCS): Duke University has high expectations for students' scholarship and conduct. In accepting admission, students indicate their willingness to subscribe to and be governed by the rules and regulations of the university, which flow from the Duke Community Standard. Regardless of course delivery format, it is the responsibility of all students to understand and follow all Duke policies, including academic integrity (e.g., completing one's own work, following proper citation of sources, adhering to guidance around group work projects, and more). Ignoring these requirements is a violation of the Duke Community Standard. Any questions and/or concerns regarding academic integrity can be directed to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards at conduct@duke.edu.

Use of AI/LLMs

Copying verbatim any text generated via artificial intelligence (e.g., Large Language Models) is prohibited for all assignments in this course unless discussed first with the instructor. Since the assignments for this course are useful for practice in academic writing, the prohibition includes uses of AI/LLM assistance in cleaning up grammar and clarity of writing. You may use AI/LLMs as part of your background research in understanding the state of the literature or to become familiar with a concept that is new to you, but you should do so with caution: LLMs tend to do poorly in summarizing work that is gated behind publisher pay walls, they tend to miss contributions to the literature that are either very recent or very old, and they tend to invent (hallucinate) scholarship that does not exist. It is strongly advised that you verify the content of any work suggested to you via AI/LLM assistance before referencing it and that you use additional means of surveying the literature.

Resources

Wellness

Student mental health and wellness are of primary importance at Duke, and the university offers resources to support students in managing daily stress and self-care. Duke offers several resources for students to seek assistance on coursework and to nurture daily habits that support overall well-being, some of which are listed below:

- *The Academic Resource Center*: (919) 684-5917, theARC@duke.edu, or arc.duke.edu.
- *DuWell*: (919) 681-8421, provides Moments of Mindfulness (stress management and resilience building) and meditation programming (Koru workshop) to assist students in developing a daily emotional well-being practice. To see schedules for programs please see <https://studentaffairs.duke.edu/duwell>. All are welcome and no experience necessary.

If your mental health concerns and/or stressful events negatively affect your daily emotional state, academic performance, or ability to participate in your daily activities, many resources are available to help you through difficult times. Duke encourages all students to access these resources.

- *DukeReach*. Provides comprehensive outreach services to identify and support students in managing all aspects of well-being. If you have concerns about a student, visit the website for resources and assistance: <https://students.duke.edu/wellness/dukereach/>.
- *Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)*. CAPS services include individual and group counseling services, psychiatric services, and workshops. CAPS also provides referral to off-campus resources for specialized care. (919) 660-1000 or <https://students.duke.edu/wellness/caps/>.
- *TimelyCare (formerly known as Blue Devils Care)*. An online platform that is a convenient, confidential, and free way for Duke students to receive 24/7 mental health support through TalkNow and scheduled counseling. bluedevilscares.duke.edu.
- *Other Resources*. If you are a student with a disability and need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to register with the Student Disability Access Office (SDAO) and provide them with documentation of your disability. SDAO will work with you to determine what accommodations are appropriate for your situation. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and disability accommodations cannot be provided until a Faculty Accommodation Letter has been

given to me. Please contact SDAO for more information: sdao@duke.edu or access.duke.edu.

- *Writing assistance.* Students might also find the resources at the Thompson Writing Program helpful. Students can schedule an appointment to discuss ways to improve as a writer at <https://twp.duke.edu/>.

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