

INTL 4455	Violent Political Conflict	Spring 2026
W/F 11:35 a.m. – 12:55 p.m.	Sanford Hall 314	Pre/Corequisites: none
Danny Hill	Dept. of International Affairs	dwhill@uga.edu
Office hours: Wednesday, 2:00–4:00	Office: 319 IA Building	

Course Description

This course examines a broad range of topics related to political violence. Its primary focus is “internal” political violence, meaning we will not read much about international conflict and war. For the most part, we will read about and discuss violent political events that take place in the context of a dispute between a country’s national government and individuals or groups that live in that country. Topics covered include state formation, civil war, mass protest, ethnic conflict, terrorism, state violence, and genocide. From time to time you will encounter material that contains graphic discussions or depictions of violence. I will always let you know about this material beforehand.

Course Objectives

One purpose of this course is to acquire knowledge of conflicts that have taken place in the past or that are still ongoing. To this end, we will read several detailed historical and journalistic accounts of particular events. However, this is not a history course. Its main purpose is to examine violent political conflict using the tools of social science. For this purpose, we will read studies that use theoretical models intended to apply to many different events, as well as studies that use statistical analysis to look for meaningful patterns (for example, to see whether certain kinds of countries are more prone to violent conflict than others). By the end of the course you will have a better understanding of what a social science approach to studying violent conflict entails, and how it can provide useful insights into real world events.

Required Reading

There will be no textbook in this class. All readings will be available on the ELC course site or through the UGA library’s website. You are expected to read the assigned material, and it is very unlikely that you will do well in the course if you do not. There will usually be one assigned reading per meeting. Some readings are more difficult than others. For more difficult or technical readings, and especially those that use theoretical models or statistical analysis, I will provide a non-technical overview and summary. To make sure everything is clear, I assume that you do not know anything about the topics we cover or the concepts and research methods used in the readings, though I am sure that is not true!

Grades

Writing Assignment 1: 25%

Writing Assignment 2: 25%

Midterm Exam: 25%

Final Exam: 25%

Grade Distribution (note that I do not assign minus grades):

90 - 100: A
86 - 89: B+ 80 - 85: B
76 - 79: C+ 70 - 75: C
66 - 69: D+ 60 - 65: D
below 60: F

Writing assignments

Students must write two essays in response to general questions related to course topics/readings. We will begin these assignments in class. I will provide the question on the day of the assignment. Responses should be 1-3 pages, hand-written. Within 1-2 weeks, I will provide comments and suggestions for improving your essays. You will have at least one week to revise and resubmit your response. You will make revisions to your essays outside of class time.

Writing Assignment 1: January 23rd, revisions due February 13th (states as violent organizations)

Writing Assignment 2: March 27th, revisions due April 17th (ethnic conflict)

Exams

The midterm and final exams will have the same format and roughly the same length. Each will include around 20 multiple choice questions, 3-5 short answer questions that require a response of about one paragraph, and two essay questions that require a response of one page (about 3-5 paragraphs). The midterm exam will take place on Friday, March 6th. The final exam is on Monday, May 4th at 12:00 p.m.

Course Website

The course website can be accessed through elc.uga.edu. You will need to use this site to access the syllabus, course readings that are not available through the library's website, and online course materials.

Syllabus Change Policy

The syllabus is a plan for the course, and we may deviate from it. I will clearly communicate to students any changes that become necessary, and will do so in a timely manner.

Use of Generative AI Tools

Text-generating “chatbots” like Chat GPT can be useful for research tasks. I encourage students to consult internet resources, including but not limited to generative AI tools, to accomplish specific, well-defined tasks for your coursework. However, I strongly discourage the use of generative AI for formulating basic research questions, arguments, thesis statements, and making general decisions about what to analyze and how to analyze it, for two reasons. One, it is not very good at these things. Two, if you are not willing to engage in these tasks yourself, you will not develop any real skills in this course. Though I don’t have any direct proof, I strongly suspect that a heavy reliance on these tools will eventually cause your brain to atrophy and also significantly decrease your prospects for gainful employment after graduation.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations in order to participate in course activities or meet course requirements should contact the instructor or designate during regular office hours or by appointment.

Well-being, Mental Health, and Student Support

If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit [their webpage](#). They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services. UGA has several resources to support your well-being and mental health. Find out more [here](#).

[Counseling and Psychiatric Services](#) (CAPS) is your go-to, on-campus resource for emotional, social and behavioral-health support. For crisis support see [this page](#). The University Health Center offers FREE workshops, classes, mentoring and health coaching led by licensed clinicians or health educators. See [here](#) for more.

University Honor Code/Academic Honesty Policy

As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to abide by the University’s academic honesty policy, “A Culture of Honesty,” and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must meet the standards described in “A Culture of Honesty” found at www.uga.edu/honesty. Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation. Questions related to course assignments and the academic honesty policy should be directed to the instructor.

Withdrawal Policy

Students who withdraw from the class before the withdrawal deadline (Thursday, March 21st) will be assigned a grade based on their performance (pass/fail) in the class up to the point of withdrawal. This means that students who are failing will be assigned a “WF” grade even if they withdraw before

the deadline. The university automatically assigns a “WF” grade upon withdrawal to students who withdraw from a class after the withdrawal deadline.

Reading and Assignment Schedule

1 States as violent organizations

Wednesday January 14: Syllabus review, class overview. No reading.

Friday January 16: Tilly, Charles. 1985. “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime.” in Theda Skocpol (ed.) *Bringing the State Back In.*, Cambridge Press.

Wednesday January 21: Callimachi, Rukmini. “The ISIS Files: When Terrorists Run City Hall.” *New York Times*, April 4, 2018. ([link](#))

Group discussion.

Friday January 23: Gurr, T.R. 1988. “War, Revolution, and the Growth of the Coercive State.” *Comparative Political Studies* 21: 45-65.

Writing Assignment 1, in class.

2 Coordination and Collective Action Problems

Wednesday January 28: Little, Daniel. 1991. *Varieties of Social Explanation.* Westview Press, chap 3.

Friday January 30: Weingast, Barry. 1997. “The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law.” *American Political Science Review* 91: 245-263.

Wednesday February 4: Kuran, Timur. 1991. “Now out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989.” *World Politics* 44: 7-48.

Friday February 6: No reading.

Collective action simulation (bonus points).

3 The Causes of Civil War

Wednesday February 11: Horne, Alistair. 2006 [1977]. *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962.* Excerpts from pages 23-74.

Friday February 13: Fearon, James and David Laitin. 2003. “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War.” *American Political Science Review* 97: 75-90.

Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. 2004. “Greed and Grievance in Civil War.” *Oxford Economic Papers* 56: 563-595.

Revisions to Writing Assignment 1 due by 11:59 p.m.

Wednesday February 18: Kalyvas, Stathis N. 2001. “New and Old Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?” *World Politics* 54(1): 99-118.

Friday February 20: Cederman, Lars-Erik, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Halvard Buhaug. 2013. *Inequality, Grievances, and Civil War.* Cambridge University Press. Chapters 3 and 4.

Wednesday February 25: Wagner, Harrison. 2007. *War and the State*. University of Michigan Press, pp. 112-122.

Friday February 27: Walter, Barbara. 1997. "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement." *International Organization* 51: 335-364.

Wednesday March 4: Review session

Friday March 6: Midterm exam

Spring Break, March 9–13

4 Ethnic Conflict

Wednesday March 18: Mueller, John. 2000. "The Banality of Ethnic War." *International Security* 25: 42-70.

Friday March 20: Fearon, James, and David Laitin. 2000. "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity." *International Organization* 54: 845-877.

Wednesday March 25: Watch excerpts from [PBS documentary](#) "Bitter Rivals: Iran and Saudi Arabia", assuming the PBS website is still functioning

Friday March 27: No reading.

Group discussion.

Writing Assignment 2, in class.

5 Terrorism

Wednesday April 1: Stohl, Michael. 1983. "Demystifying Terrorism." In Michael Stohl (ed.) *The Politics of Terrorism*. Marcel Dekker. Pages. 1-19.

Kydd, Andrew H. and Barbara F. Walter. 2006. "The Strategies of Terrorism." *Security Studies* 31(1): 49-80.

Friday April 3: Horne, Alistair. 2006 [1977]. *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*. Excerpts from pages 78-188.

Group discussion.

6 State Violence in Democracies

Wednesday April 8: Rejali, Darius. 2007. *Torture and Democracy*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 2.

Friday April 10: Horne, Alistair. 2006 [1977]. *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*. Excerpts from pages 190-207.

Wednesday April 15: Watch excerpts from documentary "[Standard Operating Procedure](#)"

Friday April 17: No reading.

Group discussion.

Revisions to Writing Assignment 2 due by 11:59 p.m.

7 Genocide (and predicting large-scale violence)

Wednesday April 22: Brief introduction to the Genocide Convention by William Schabbas ([link](#)).

Harff, Barbara. 2003. "No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust: Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955." *American Political Science Review* 97: 57-74.

Friday April 24: Review session.

Final Exam Monday, May 4, 12:00–3:00 p.m.