Politics 314: Political Violence: Causes and Solutions

Spring 2016, Wednesday 1:15-4:05, Clapp 126
Professor: Andy Reiter
Office Hours: Skinner 107, T 2:45-3:45, TH 10:45-11:45, or by appointment

Course Description and Materials

This course is an introduction to political violence. Throughout the semester, we will examine the various manifestations of political violence, focusing on diverse topics such as genocide, terrorism, and civil war. We will explore the debates in the field of political science regarding the nature and causal factors behind these types of violence, with an eye toward understanding how to stop or prevent their occurrence. We will conclude the semester by looking more directly at how violence ends, how peace is maintained, and how societies attempt to heal from past violence. There are no texts to purchase for the course, all readings are provided electronically. In addition to the course readings, you are encouraged to follow the blog http://politicalviolenceataglance.org/ throughout the semester.

Course Requirements

Your grade is based on class participation, a book review, a movie review, and a final project, for which you will have to write a policy brief and make a class presentation. The books for review are of your choosing, but must be first-hand accounts or histories of specific episodes of political violence. In other words, the goal is not to pick another academic book on the politics of violence and explain how the scholar builds off the theories we have discussed in class, but rather to apply the theories we have learned to gain a better understanding of events. For example, perhaps a memoir of a rebel soldier reveals definitive ideological reasons for fighting, which contradicts the literature that emphasizes the role of greed in civil wars. Similarly, the movie review should examine how violence is portrayed to popular audiences and how that supports or contradicts the academic literature. Each review should be 1,200-1,500 words and books and movies must be pre-approved. The main project for the course will task you with selecting an episode of ongoing violence somewhere in the world. You will research and follow this case throughout the semester, will be expected to add insights from this case into discussion where relevant, and write a 5,000-word policy brief that outlines the key issues, causes, and effects of this violence. Most importantly, it must also generate policy prescriptions for stopping and recovering from this violence. You will present and defend your analysis and recommendations during the final two weeks of the course to our class and a panel of outside faculty. Failure to complete any of the assignments will result in an F for the course.

Grade Breakdown

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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<td>Book Review</td>
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<td>Movie Review</td>
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<td>Policy Brief</td>
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Course Guidelines

Any cheating or plagiarism of any kind will result in a zero for the course. If you have any questions on what constitutes plagiarism, please ask. The onus is on you not to ensure your work abides by academic standards. Late assignments are not accepted for credit unless there are extenuating circumstances and you obtain prior approval from me. If a class is canceled for any reason, we will trim and combine readings; I will email instructions accordingly.

A Note on Course Content

While most of the readings are academic in nature, this is a course on violence, and as such, you will, at times, be exposed to descriptions of violent acts (including mass killings and sexual crimes), confessions of perpetrators, testimony of victims, and difficult moral and ethical questions. Some of you may also have experienced violence or are from a country in which mass violence occurred. So if at any point you anticipate that particular readings or discussions will be difficult for you, please contact me ahead of time. Similarly, if after readings or a discussion, you feel unsettled or troubled in anyway, please contact me. It is also important to respect the views of each other during discussions. For many of the questions we will engage, there is no right answer. For example, the debate on which individuals are guilty in a crime as large as the Holocaust will never be settled. So we will strive to take a step back and analyze these questions analytically. Rather than weigh the merits of different views on a question like this, we will instead seek to understand the reasons why those different views exist and what implications each has for the study of the events.

Course Schedule

Wednesday January 20  Introduction to the Course and Defining Violence

Wednesday January 27  Is Violence Human?

Tuesday February 2  **Case Selections Due**
Wednesday February 3  Collective Action and Recruitment


Wednesday February 10  Who Engages in Violence?


Wednesday February 17  Genocide

- The Wave (1981) – 47 minutes

Tuesday February 23  **First Review Due by 1:15 PM on Moodle**

Wednesday February 24  Gender Dynamics of Conflict and Sexual Violence  **Midterm Course Evaluations and Participation Grades**

Wednesday March 2  Terrorism


Tuesday March 8  **Policy Brief Drafts Due by 1:15 PM on Moodle**

Wednesday March 9  Civil War and Interstate War


Wednesday March 16  No Class – Spring Break

Wednesday March 23  Peacemaking and Peacekeeping


Wednesday March 30  Transitional Justice and Recovering from Violence

- Phil Clark, “Gacaca: Rwanda’s Experiment in Community-Based Justice for Genocide Crimes Comes to a Close,” Foreign Policy Digest, April 2010.

Tuesday April 5  **Second Review Due by 1:15 PM on Moodle**
Wednesday  April 6  State Repression and Police Violence


**Course Wrap-Up: Is Peace Near?**


Wednesday  April 13  Final Presentations

Wednesday  April 20  Final Presentations

Friday  April 29  **Final Policy Briefs Due by 1:15 PM on Moodle**