

Hydropolitics: Water Policy and Conflict

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Syllabus

Class Location: 140B, Tuesday 3:30-6:20 pm

Office Hours: TBD

Introduction. Water resources are increasingly contested in nearly all parts of the world. In some cases, this is because water is scarce. In other cases it is because there is inadequate infrastructure, inefficient and conflicting use patterns, or because *too much* water overwhelms a population's capacity to manage it safely. In nearly all cases, however, the consequences for humans, economies, and the environment is mediated by policy. Some of the driest regions of the planet carefully manage their water resources, in some instances well enough to export reserves to their neighbors. In other places, some of them very wet, poor infrastructure policies and farming practices prevent the conversion of those resources into sustainable productive benefits for the population. This course introduces students to some of the central challenges of water resource politics, particularly in contexts where water insecurity is a national security threat.

The course does not presume any non-general knowledge about water resources or even environmental resource policy. The goal will be to establish a firm basis from which to pursue more narrowly focused and empirically supportable research projects on the causes and consequences of water conflict. The course begins with an introduction to water resource policy at the international, national, and civic scales, identifying some of the basic concepts for thinking about water as a shared, limited, non-substitutable, immediately vital resource. Despite its fundamental importance for human life, water is frequently left unregulated or managed in conflicting and contested ways. The second half of the course will thus look at current thinking about a subset of more specific topics in water resource conflict and security, including managing competition between agricultural and municipal uses, the relationship between water insecurity and food insecurity, international water treaties, development disputes over infrastructure, and connections between violence, scarcity, and climate change. We will look at the difficulties in establishing causal connections between human migration, extremism, and water scarcity, and discuss the degree to which these difficulties should matter for making policy recommendations in this space.

The course takes a broad view of what "water conflict" means, and includes discussion of attempts to deal with inter-sectoral competition, international allocation treaties, the diplomatic and economic consequences of unilateral infrastructure construction, local communities competing for resources in a changing climate, and water scarcity as component of violent conflict and human migration. The "local-ness" of water and its contribution to nearly every productive human activity, we will see, makes water scarcity a problem that cannot be solved, merely managed.

Requirements. Attendance and active participation in the seminar are expected, of course. Students should complete all readings before class and be prepared to discuss them. *This is a graduate level course and, as such, I expect that I don't need to discipline you into doing the readings. They are there to give you what you need to join the conversation. Your participation and work must originate in your own initiative.*

I require students to participate regularly and vocally in the class, but I do not assume that being quiet is a sign of incapacity. Hence, one should feel free to fulfill the requirement of class participation by approaching me outside of class or over email to discuss their thoughts on course topics. Written assignments are as follows:

1. **Brief on policy problem and interventions** (3 pages). Students will select from a set of policy problems in context and produce a short policy brief with some practical responses drawn from research literature.
2. **Presentation of case studies.** Starting on week 4, students will begin giving a short (**strictly enforce 3 minute speaking + two audience questions**) presentation on their brief. Depending on the number of enrolled students, we will either begin the class with 1-2 of these presentations or set aside some time to complete them all on a single day.
3. **Seminar Paper** (10-15 pages). The research paper will be due over email on Monday of finals week. Details will be disseminated in the middle of the quarter, but students will be provided with a set of prompts from which to select.

Texts. There is no authoritative text on water conflict as yet. So we will mainly draw entirely from journal articles, policy reports, well-researched journalism, and book chapters. At the end of each class I will give some guidance about which sections of the readings for the next week on which to be particularly attentive. *Copies of readings will be made available for download.*

Assessment.

Participation: 10%

Brief: 30%

Presentation: 10%

Seminar Paper: 50%

Course Schedule

Subject to revision.

All readings and assignments are due at the beginning of the class on the day they are due.

W	Topic and Goals	Readings	Other/Due
1	Introduction to Water Resources, Politics, and Policy: Background on the world's water resources and what we mean by "water policy"; how it operates at the local, state, national, and international levels.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gleick, "United States International Water Policy" in <i>A Twenty-First Century U.S. Water Policy</i> 2. Jepson, <i>et al.</i> "Advancing Human Capabilities for Water Security: A Relational Approach" 	
2	Water as an Economic Resource: Water's contested status as a commodity, entitlement, and natural good casts a long shadow over claims made on the resource by different groups. Focus case: Bolivia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hoekstra, "Introduction" from <i>The Water Footprint of Modern Consumer Society</i> 2. Conca, "Invisible Hand, Visible Fist: The Transnational Politics of Water Marketization" from <i>Governing Water</i> 3. Lustgarten, "A Free-Market Plan to Save the American West from Drought" <i>The Atlantic/Propublica</i> 4. Baer, "The Global Water Crisis, Privatization, and the Bolivian Water War" in <i>Water, Place, and Equity</i> 	
3	Water as a Right: While universally supported, the humanitarian effort to make water access complete has proved to be a practical, legal, and political challenge. Is a human right to water coherent? And if so, can it be effectively instituted and protected? Focus cases: South Africa; Detroit, MI	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bluemel, "The Implications of Formulating a Human Right to Water" <i>Ecology Law Quarterly</i> 2. Bakker, "The 'Commons' Versus the 'Commodity': Alter-globalization, Anti-privatization, and the Human Right to Water in the Global South" <i>Antipode</i> 3. Taylor, "Tapped Out: Threats to the Human Right to Water in the United States" <i>Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute</i> 	

4	<p>WaSH and Drinking Water Policy: The key tasks of international development and how they are handled both globally and domestically, in the US. Focus Cases: Tanzania and Chicago, IL</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UNICEF/WHO, “Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, 2017 Update and SDG Baselines” 2. Allaire, <i>et al.</i> “National Trends in Drinking Water Quality Violations” <i>PNAS</i> 115(9) 2018. 	Brief Instructions Handout
5	<p>Agricultural Intensification: How can the world meet nutrition security demands without overextending the water resource base? How are agricultural water policy and social stability connected? Focus Cases: Sub-Saharan Africa; US agriculture</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rockstrom, <i>et al.</i> “Future Water Availability for Global Food Production” <i>Water Resources Research</i> 2. Shah, “Institutional Patterns in Farmer-led Irrigation” <i>IWMI</i> 3. Cooley, <i>et al.</i> “Water Risk Hotspots for Agriculture: The Case of the Southwest United States” 4. Hoag and Zilberman, “The Future of Water Management in the West” <i>Western Economic Forum Journal</i> 	Brief Due
6	<p>Geopolitical Approaches to Water Resources: National-level legal and treaty interactions. What are the strengths and weaknesses of assessing water security through this lens? Focus case: The Indus Rivers Treaty</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. De Stefano, <i>et al.</i> “Tracking Cooperation and Conflict in International Basins: Historic and Recent Trends” <i>Water Policy</i> 2. Dinar, “Water, Security, Conflict, and Cooperation” <i>SAIS Review</i> 3. Troell & Swanson, “Adaptive Water Governance and the Principles of International Water Law” in <i>Transboundary Water Governance: Adaptation to Climate Change</i> 4. Petersen-Perlman, <i>et al.</i>, “International Water Conflict and Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities” <i>Water International Journal</i> 	Presenting
7	<p>Cross-scale and Sub-State Conflict, Establishing Causation: Much of the actual conflict over water happens at the local and sub-state level. How does this factor into policy approaches to mitigating water conflict? Should we move away from traditional geopolitical analysis? What causal models are useful for studying this? Focus cases: China</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Giordano, “The Geography of Water Conflict and Cooperation: Internal Pressures and International Manifestations” <i>The Royal Geographic Society</i> 2. Moore, “The Politics of Thirst: Managing Water Resources Under Scarcity in the Yellow River Basin, People’s Republic of China” <i>Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs</i> 3. Gizelis, “Water Resources, Institutions, & Interstate Conflict” <i>Political Geography</i> 	Presenting Final Paper Instructions Handout
8	<p>Development and Conflict: Unilateral or uncoordinated infrastructure development of shared resources is a major source of interstate (and sub-state) conflict. International development is a political and strategic act. Focus cases: The Tibetan Plateau and China in Africa</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chellaney, “Exploiting the Riparian Advantage,” from <i>Water: Asia’s New Battleground</i> 2. Hwang, “How Chinese Money is Transforming Africa: It’s Not What You Think” <i>CARI</i> 3. Brautigam, “Chinese-Funded Hydropower Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa” <i>CARI</i> 	Presenting
9	<p>Human Migration and Extremism: Human migration may be both cause and effect in water crises. What do we know about the water-migration-extremism connection? Also, to what extent is water a target or tool of war for extremist groups? Focus cases: Yemen, East Africa, Syria and Iraq</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reuveny, “Climate-Change Induced Migration and Violent Conflict” <i>Political Geography</i> 2. King, “The Weaponization of Water in Syria and Iraq” <i>The Washington Quarterly</i> 3. Raleigh and Kniveton, “Come Rain or Shine: An Analysis of Conflict and Climate Variability in East Africa” <i>Journal of Peace Research</i> 4. Devlin and Hendrix, “Trends and Triggers Redux: Climate Change, Rainfall, and Interstate Conflict” <i>Political Geography</i> 	Presenting

10	<p>Adaptation, Cooperation, and National Security: This will be a forward-looking discussion about the future of global water policy in a world with escalating tensions and climate changes. We will attempt to define goals and strategies for preventing water conflict from a variety of perspectives.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cooley, <i>et al.</i> "Global Water Governance in the Twenty-First Century" in <i>The World's Water</i> 2. Huntjens, <i>et al.</i>, "The Multi-Track Water Diplomacy Framework: A Legal and Political Economy Analysis for Advancing Cooperation Over Shared Waters" <i>Hague Inst. For Global Justice</i> 3. Kehl, "Oil, Water, Blood and Diamonds: International Intervention in Resource Disputes" <i>International Negotiation</i> 4. Fischhendler, <i>et al.</i> "The Politics of Unilateral Environmentalism: Cooperation and Conflict over Water Management along the Israeli-Palestinian Border" <i>Global Environmental Politics Journal</i> 	Presenting
F			Final Paper Due

Additional Fine Print, Please Read Carefully

Computers and Phones. We're all adults, so I expect that you won't inappropriately use these in class. I will add, however, that I strongly discourage taking notes on a computer. Paper notes feel old fashioned, but there is ample evidence that written note-taking is more effective for learning as people trying to record what is happening digitally tend to focus on verbatim recording rather than identifying and sorting key ideas.

Office Hours. TBD. I'll settle the location after the first day and will announce in class.

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism. You will be beholden to the University's code of conduct, definitions, and consequences as outlined here: <https://college.uchicago.edu/advising/academic-integrity-student-conduct>. But much more importantly, from my perspective, is that you do your own work honestly and with earnest effort because anything else is a waste of your time and mine. There is little daylight between dishonest work and dishonest character. Think about the kind of person you want to be and act accordingly.

Disabilities and Other Special Accommodation. If you have any concerns or needs here please approach me about them as soon as is convenient. I want to make the class equally accessible to all students. See also the University guidelines on disability accommodation here: <https://disabilities.uchicago.edu/accommodations>.

Late Assignments. My policy on late assignments is that **I don't accept them at all if you have not made prior arrangements with me to turn them in at another time.** This means contacting me at least 48 hours in advance. (i.e. You can't just fire off an email to me the night before and say "sorry, I'm not turning it in," the matter must be *settled between us 48 hours in advance.*) That said, you will find I am very willing to be flexible if the reasons are sensible and you approach me with enough time. Emergencies will be handled on a case-by-case basis.