



PPHA 32740 / PLSC 32740: Order & Violence

The Roots of Wars and the Paths to Peace

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Spring 2023 Syllabus

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Course description

This is a class about violent conflict—why do some groups fight? Most enemies loathe in peace, and so what makes warring groups different? We'll study conflict at every level—nations, political factions, ethnic groups, religions, villages, and gangs—investigating the common logics and roots.

This is also a class about what to do about violence. From the streets of Chicago or El Salvador to the UN Security Council, what can be done to get warring rivals to stop the violence? And what can be done to get societies that are fragile and on the edge of fighting to be more resilient? We'll look at what some prominent people and organizations have to say about violence reduction, and assess whether it makes sense in light of social science.

We'll cover a range of literatures. We will start with game theory—the science of strategy—and introduce economics, history, comparative politics, international relations,

psychology, and sociology. We will also study the practical experiences of policymakers, and the organizations and plans they have produced.

Prerequisites This class is designed for Master's students at Harris, but is open to Master's students across the social sciences at UChicago. The Harris core classes are highly recommended, especially the analytical politics sequence. Non-Harris students are expected to be familiar with introductory economics and game theory. If you have no exposure to game theory, you will struggle with some of the assignments, but you can get by if you put in the time and effort.

Teaching style

My ideal is for this class is to be roughly one-third lecture and two-thirds presentations and discussion. This is challenging to do with large classes. Based on my experience in previous years, we may do the following:

- 4–5 weeks of lectures, all in a group, with a hybrid format, and
- 4–5 weeks of in-class discussions/presentations, where we split into halves, one half meeting Mondays and one half on Wednesdays.

See below for details. I will poll students in the first week to take their preferences into account in deciding whether or not to break into halves for part of the class.

Course Objectives

By the end of the quarter, my goal is that students have learned to:

- Be able to diagnose fragile situations, and the causes of political instability
- Be able to identify and evaluate peacebuilding measures
- Understand the ties between political development and security
- Understand of the special challenges of policy in fragile settings
- Learn to interpret popular arguments for the origins of conflict through the lens of social science

Course Structure

Generally, each week we will:

- Read a collection of articles and book chapters

- Have a mixture of lecture and discussion in class
- Complete one of the following:
 - a game theoretic problem set,
 - a roughly 2 page written assignment, or
 - a presentation and discussion.

Most of the readings are articles or books where a PDF version are hyperlinked on the syllabus. Instructions for VPN access are [here](#). There will also be reading portions of my unpublished book, and I will likely provide students with a printed copy.

Grading

Your grade will have 4 components:

1. **25%** for attendance and the quality of participation in class (asking and answering questions, high quality of commentary, ability to engage civilly with other students, ability to listen to other views, not dominating the conversation, ...)
2. **25%** for your presentation and contribution to discussions
3. **50%** for weekly assignments
 - 1 problem set
 - 2 discussion memos (2–4 pages double-spaced)
 - 1 final discussion memo (3–5 pages double-spaced)

Pass/fail and auditor policies Auditors are welcome. Please email the TA to ensure you are added to Canvas. I am also happy for students to take the class pass/fail. Note that per Harris policy, the class may not qualify for certificates if you take the class pass/fail.

Attendance No one will be penalized for missing up to two lectures, since everyone falls sick, has family circumstances, or religious observances. Please let me know if you have more frequent absences and we can discuss.

Weekly assignments The Week 3 assignment is a game theoretic problem set. We designed it to be straightforward for Harris students who have done the analytical politics core classes. Non-Harris students who do not have this background: do not freak out or drop the class. The goal is not to give non-mathematical class-takers a zero. It's to walk you through the ideas step by step, so you get a sense of what it is all about. Your classmates and your TA will be a resource for you.

Discussion memos should be 2–4 pages long, double-spaced, and represent your critical reflections on the readings. You are required to type your answers (e.g. using Word, Latex) instead of sending handwritten notes.

How to get a good grade First of all, for most of you, no one will ever look at your grades again for as long as you live, so don't worry about the grade. I am happy to have you switch to Pass/Fail if you need to.

There is a simple way to get a high grade in this course:

- **Read the readings.** All of the grading is designed to incentivize you to read and understand the material. The reason I do this is that I think reading and writing are the main way we all change how we understand the world and influence others. Virtually every reading in this course is one that deeply influenced my own perspective.
- **Think critically about what you read.** Every paper is wrong in some way. Usually it has major flaws or oversights. Your job is to figure out what the problems are and the limits of the argument. For the rest of your career, approach every paper or book with the idea that your job is partly to figure out why it is wrong.
- **Make notes and think about your essay answers along the way.** You will have some of the essay questions quite early. When reading the readings and taking class notes, write down your ideas and thoughts in real time.
- **Hand in all assignments.**

Late policy The late penalty is one grade level per day (e.g. from an A- to a B+). I can waive the penalty if you have a timely, legitimate, and documented excuse. (See disruptions, above.)

- If you are missing classes or have a late assignment because of sickness or religious observance (e.g. Ramadan), we can accommodate you. If predictable, please alert the TA by email *in advance*. Please make specific arrangements for extensions of any assignments.
- Do not wait until weeks after a missed assignment to talk to us. I especially advise against waiting to contact us until the last week of classes or after final grades have been submitted. It is easier to accommodate timely requests.

Re-grading policies Feel free to discuss your grades with your TAs to get clarification. If, following such a conversation, you feel that an error was made, *please submit a re-grade request in writing to your TA, by email, within two weeks of the assignment being handed back*. Please include an explanation or justification for the re-grade request.

A poor way to ask for a re-grade is to simply lobby non-specifically for a better grade, or to explain there is some reason you need to maintain a certain grade level. A good

way to ask for a regrading is to substantively discuss why you thought you answered the question well, ask for clarification, and if a mistake was made we can correct it. Or, if you have a legitimate medical or related excuse, please follow the instructions above.

What to do if you're having problems

I'm committed to helping everyone pass the class, in a way that you still learn the materials and gets the work done. If you find yourself unable to join a class or complete an assignment for physical health, mental health, or other personal reasons, just let me know. Here is what I suggest if a problem comes up:

- As soon as possible, email me and *copy your student services advisor*, with a note about the missed work and an explanation. *I hold everything in the strictest confidence.* But if you would like to explain the situation to your advisor only and have them contact me directly without the personal details, that is fine too.
- I don't really care when you put in the effort, so long as you find the time to read and reflect on the material in the course. In general, I will identify a way for you to make up an assignment. This will often be an extension of the deadline. If we discuss answers in depth the following class, it may be that I ask you to submit an essay on a different question.
- In extreme cases, students have sometimes taken time over the break or subsequent quarter to finalize the assignments and the class.
- Try not to tell me last minute. Advance notice is always a good policy.

Developing reading & writing skills

This is a highly reading and writing intensive course. I know this can be especially challenging for students who speak English as a second language. At the same time, it's an essential skill. One goal of mine is for you to learn to read more efficiently and write more effectively. We will talk about strategies in class, and you should feel free to ask me for feedback.

For those who want some additional help, Harris has some resources for students who feel they need help developing their academic reading and writing skills.

- For a reading assessment (and academic skills assessment in general), the best option at the University would be the [Academic Skills Assessment Program \(ASAP\)](#).
- We also have the [Harris Writing Program](#), which does not particularly focus on reading, but might indirectly help students get a better grasp of the written word and academic text comprehension.
- [The English Language Institute](#) also offers workshops and courses to help ESL students. Some are free, some are not.

Learning to write well

You may also want to invest in books and materials on writing effectively. Here are some starting suggestions for tools and books on writing:

- Use the [Hemingway Editor](#) to learn how to write more clearly. Aim for a grade 8–10 reading level in what you write. Avoid jargon. Write shorter, simpler sentences on average. Use the active voice most of the time. Some long sentences and complex phrases or words are going to be necessary, but learn to use them sparingly.
- The classic book is [The Elements of Style](#) by Strunk and White
- Another classic, Zinsser’s [On Writing Well](#) is superb
- I have also found Clark’s [Writing Tools](#) a very helpful guide.

The trick with these books and guides is not to try to do it all at once. Get a couple of tips, and try to pay attention to them as you write. Then after a little while, get another couple tips, and work on those. It’s a gradual process.

Harris Policies

Academic Integrity

All University of Chicago students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic Integrity and honesty. Among other things, this means that students shall not represent another’s work as their own, use un-allowed materials during exams, or otherwise gain unfair academic advantage.

The University’s policies regarding academic integrity and dishonesty are described [here](#). It is worth explicitly stating the University’s approach here: “It is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another’s statements or ideas as one’s own work. To do so is plagiarism or cheating, offenses punishable under the University’s disciplinary system. Because these offenses undercut the distinctive moral and intellectual character of the University, we take them very seriously.”

The Harris School’s policies are available in the Harris Student Handbook Canvas site.

- The Academic Honesty and Plagiarism section expresses the main principles.
- Detailed guidelines for more specialized student work (e.g., problem sets including computer code) are offered in the section titled Harris Integrity Policy for Problem Sets Involving Code.

- Harris’s specific procedures for handling suspected violations of these policies are available in the section Harris Procedures for Allegations of Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Dishonesty and are also re-produced as an Appendix to this document.
- All students suspected of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Harris Dean of Students for investigation and adjudication. The disciplinary process can result in sanctions up to and including suspension or expulsion from the University.
- In addition to disciplinary sanctions, I will impose a grade penalty for students who have committed academic dishonesty.
- Other penalties for violations could be imposed instead, alone or in combination, including a zero grade on the assignment or a failing grade in the course.

Disability Accommodations

The University’s policies regarding students with disabilities are available [here](#). Students who have disability accommodations awarded by the University Student Disability Services Office should inform the Harris Dean of Students office by the end of the first week of class. The Harris Dean of Students Office will work with the student and instructor to coordinate the students’ accommodations implementation.

Harris students are not required to submit their accommodations letter to the instructor. Students from other divisions in the University must submit their accommodations letter to either the instructor or the Harris Dean of Students Office.

Students who do not yet have formal accommodations in place but who feel they need accommodations on a temporary or ongoing basis should contact the Harris Dean of Students Office or Student Disability Services.

It is also worth noting that teaching in a remote environment may generate other questions and issues related to providing accommodations to students with disabilities. Some suggestions are available [here](#).

Diversity and Inclusion

The Harris School welcomes, values, and respects students, faculty, and staff from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, and we believe that rigorous inquiry and effective public policy problem-solving requires the expression and understanding of diverse viewpoints, experiences, and traditions. The University and the Harris School have developed distinct but overlapping principles and guidelines to insure that we remain a place where difficult issues are discussed with kindness and respect for all.

The University’s policies are available [here](#). Specifically, the University identifies the freedom of expression as being “vital to our shared goal of the pursuit of knowledge, as is the right of all members of the community to explore new ideas and learn from one another. To preserve an environment of spirited and open debate, we should all have

the opportunity to contribute to intellectual exchanges and participate fully in the life of the University.”

The Harris School’s commitments to lively, principled, and respectful engagement are available [here](#): “Consistent with the University of Chicago’s commitment to open discourse and free expression, Harris encourages members of the leadership, faculty, student body, and administrative staff to respect and engage with others of differing backgrounds or perspectives, even when the ideas or insights shared may be viewed as unpopular or controversial.” We foster thought-provoking discourse by encouraging community members not only to speak freely about all issues but also to listen carefully and respectfully to the views of others.

Weekly schedule and readings

This is a reading-intensive course.

- Each class I assign 1–2 required book chapters or papers. Required readings are marked with a * below. You should *read all required readings before coming to class*.
- Most readings are papers or reports, and we will upload them to Canvas. Alternatively, most readings are downloadable online by logging in through UChicago's [VPN](#).
- I also often list highly recommended readings. I may discuss them in class, or they may assist you in your essay. Mostly, however, I recommend them because they are deep and important contributions on the subject.
- In addition, you will need to buy two books. They are available at the Co-op bookstore on campus as well as online. My understanding is that Amazon currently offers the lowest price for new versions.
 - Blattman, Christopher, “Why We Fight: The Roots of War and the Paths to Peace”
 - Abt, Thomas, “Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence—and a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets”
- One of the books is by me and based on my course notes. I’m sorry, but I’m not allowed to distribute PDFs of the book. Authors earn about \$3 per book sold, so I was thinking I could make that up to the class by bringing food and drink to our presentation days, but we can discuss that.

1 Introduction (Week of March 20)

1.1 Preconceptions

This will be a discussion-based class. Before coming to class, please pick *one* of the case studies below, sit down for 15 minutes, and write down some of the explanations you have heard for (1) what the two sides are competing over, (2) why they fought (if there was violence), and (3) why they avoided violence or settled (especially if the rivals did not go to war).

1. USA/Taliban
2. Israelis/Palestinians
3. India/Pakistan

4. Gun/gang violence in major US cities
5. State/cartel conflicts in Mexico
6. China/Taiwan

1.2 The incentives for peace (and the role of agency problems)

This class will be mainly lecture-based.

- **Why We Fight*. Introduction and Chapters 1–2.
- Jackson, Matthew O., and Massimo Morelli. "Political bias and war."

Week 1 Assignment: Sign up for group presentations in Weeks 6/7. Your TA will assign you to a group.

2 Rationalist explanations (Week of March 27)

This week will be mainly lecture-based.

2.1 Uncertainty

- *Blattman, Christopher. 2022. "Why We Fight" Chapter 4.
- Fearon, James. 1995. "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49(3): 379-414.

2.2 Commitment problems

- *Blattman, Christopher. 2022. "Why We Fight" Chapter 5.
- Powell, Robert. 2006. "War as a commitment problem." *International organization* 60.1 (2006): 169-203.

Week 2 assignment: Meet with your group to decide on readings and plan for your analysis and presentation.

3 Psychological explanations (Week of April 3)

This week will be mainly lecture-based.

3.1 Intangible incentives

- *Blattman, Christopher. 2022. "Why We Fight" Chapter 3.

3.2 Misperceptions

- *Blattman, Christopher. 2022. "Why We Fight" Chapter 6.
- Pearlman, Wendy. "Emotions and the Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings." *Perspectives on Politics* 11.2 (2013): 387-409.

Week 3 assignment: Problem set due Thursday April 6

4 Global peacemaking (Week of April 10)

This will be a discussion-based class, not a lecture.

- *United Nations and World Bank Group. 2018. *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*.
- Feel free to read the Main Messages document rather than the full report.
- To facilitate smaller group discussion, even numbered groups will meet on Monday, and odd-numbered groups will meet on Wednesday.

Week 4 Assignment: Discussion memo Critically discuss the week's reading. This should be 2–4 pages, double-spaced. Wide margins and double-spacing is important so that we have room to provide you comments. Due the evening before your assigned class.

5 Meetings with TA & professor (Week of April 17)

Instead of class, you will:

- Read independently
- Meet with your group
- Prepare a preliminary analysis of the conflict
- As a group, hold a 20-minute meeting with the TA and/or professor (we will circulate a sign-up sheet)

6 Groups 1–4 presentations/discussion (Week of April 24)

Groups 1 and 2 will present on Monday, with groups 5 and 6 in attendance, reading and participating. Groups 3 and 4 will present Tuesday, with groups 7 and 8 reading and discussing. Presentations should be about 15 minutes each, leaving the remainder of the class for group discussion. Groups 1–4 will be graded on their presentation and discussion. Groups 5–8 will be graded on their contributions to the discussion.

7 Groups 5–8 presentations/discussion (Week of May 1)

Groups 1 and 2 will present Monday, with groups 5 and 6 in attendance, reading and participating. Groups 3 and 4 will present Tuesday, with groups 7 and 8 reading and discussing. Presentations should be about 15 minutes each, leaving the remainder of the class for group discussion. Groups 1–4 will be graded on their presentation and discussion. Groups 5–8 will be graded on their contributions to the discussion.

8 The Paths To Peace (Week of May 8)

This week will be mainly lecture-based.

8.1 Nov 8: Interdependence / Checks and Balances

- *Blattman, Christopher. 2022. “Why We Fight” Chapters 6 and 7.

8.2 Rules and enforcement / Interventions

- *Blattman, Christopher. 2022. “Why We Fight” Chapters 8 and 9.

9 Peacemaking in violent cities (Week of May 15)

These will be discussion-based classes, not lectures.

- *Abt, Thomas. 2019. [Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence—And a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets](#). Basic Books.
- Council on Criminal Justice. 2021. [Meeting Bulletin 3: Understanding Violent Crime](#)
- To facilitate smaller group discussion, even numbered groups will meet on Monday, and odd-numbered groups will meet on Wednesday.

Week 9 Assignment: Discussion memo Critically discuss the week's reading. This should be 2–4 pages, double-spaced. Wide margins and double-spacing is important so that we have room to provide you comments. Due the evening before your assigned class.

10 Final project due Thursday May 25

This will be a 3–5 page discussion memo on a topic of your choosing (within limits). Details to be discussed.

Note that Harris grades are due May 30. This is a hard deadline that comes from the registrar, and is beyond my control. This is why I have made the final assignment fairly light (a short discussion memo)—so that everyone should be able to complete it within a week of the final class. Your TA will need a few days to grade, I need time to review all materials and assign final grades.