



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
HARRIS SCHOOL
OF PUBLIC POLICY

Hydropolitics: Water Policy and Conflict (PPHA 32750)

Dr. Michael Tiboris

Syllabus v1, Spring 2025

Class Location/Time: Keller 0001 Fridays 1:30pm-4:20pm

Office Hours: Friday 12:00-1:30; I'll be in the lobby area somewhere; or by appointment on Zoom anytime.

Contact: mtiboris@uchicago.edu. If I do not respond within 48 hours, please send me a message through Canvas. I have several email accounts forwarded to a single inbox, so sometimes things get lost.

There are three teaching assistants for this course who will help me with the grading as well as be contact points for students with (especially logistical) questions. Please feel free to reach out to them:

Astari Raihanah (astari@uchicago.edu)

Ishina Das (ishina@uchicago.edu)

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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 of this for humans, economies, and the environment is mediated by policy decisions. Some of the driest regions of the planet carefully manage their water resources, in some instances well enough to export reserves to their neighbors. Some of the wettest have severe access issues.

This course introduces students to the central challenges of water resource management policy, at the international and domestic levels, through the concept of "hydropolitics." This is the idea that water resource management is an essentially social and political activity that must negotiate between science and society. 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 about water politics from which students interested in development or environmental resource policy can work.

Despite its fundamental importance for human life, water is frequently left unregulated or managed in conflicting and contested ways. The course begins with an introduction to key concepts in water resource policy at the international, national, and (to a lesser extent) civic

scales. The course then looks at specific management challenges and responses in sanitation (WaSH), drinking water, agricultural development, inter-sectoral use conflict, international treaties, hydropower development, and climate resilience. Topics and contexts will adjust to the interests of students in the course.

How this Course Will Work

The course will include readings, policy memos, and participation in (and construction of) simulation war games. **All assignments are due, submitted via Canvas, by the beginning of class on their assigned due date.**

1. **Readings:** All of the readings will be available to you online via the Canvas site. I don't use a single text and I tend to shuffle readings in and out term to term, **so make sure you're using this term's syllabus.** I took more than one reading from David Reed's "Water, Security, and U.S. Foreign Policy," so it might pay to buy that book if you like. But these will be found in the Canvas module to which they correspond so it isn't necessary.
2. **Lectures:** Lectures will be held in-person and you're expected to attend them in-person. **There's one exception to this this term.** I have an unavoidable personal conflict and will be conducting the first meeting remotely. This is less than ideal, but necessary. Other than that all of them will be in person. 3 hours is a long time and we will take breaks, at least one and often two during the session. I try to leave some time for discussion, but usually this happens organically as students ask questions when they arise. I like doing it that way, so feel free to interject (politely) at any time.
3. **Canvas:** This will be the hub for everything in the course. The readings are here, the assignments are here, they are all turned in here, and recordings of the lectures will be available here as well. It is divided up into "modules" which are effectively the weeks of the course. Any announcements for the course will be posted here so keep an eye on it.
4. **Office Hours/Teaching Assistants:** I show up an hour before class starts and I'll be in the Keller Center lobby area somewhere if you'd like to come talk to me. Teaching assistants will keep their own office hours which we'll announce on Canvas after the first week.
5. **Attendance and Participation:** While I'll put recordings of the lectures up on Canvas, I expect you to attend in person when we're meeting in person. I am going to **strongly** discourage the use of electronic devices in class for note taking or anything else. Better to just listen and think. Your participation grade is a reflection of your engagement with the class. Your TA's and I will be keeping a record of contacts with you throughout the term and how you interact during lectures, e.g. whether you ask questions, participate in discussions, etc. If I or your TAs don't know who you are by the end of the term that will count negatively in your participation grade.

Assignments

1. **Two Policy Briefs:** Two two-page briefs (images not included in length). Students will select a policy problem in context and produce a short policy brief with some practical responses drawn from research literature. Guiding examples and prompts will be provided.
2. **Term Paper:** (5-7 pages). This longer paper will be modeled on policy research papers designed for government and NGO consumption. The topic will be more open to allow students freedom to explore issues that interest them. However, I'll encourage you to write about transboundary governance issues that come up later in the course. Guiding examples will be provided. This paper will be due during finals week, but earlier in the week than our normal class meeting to give us enough time to grade it.

Evaluation of your written work will be based on your ability to craft a clear thesis and execute well-written and compelling analysis. I expect students to be writing and doing argumentative work at a graduate level. The value of the briefs increases as the term progresses to allow you to benefit from improved performance. I will provide as much guidance as I can in the instructions for the assignments and I am available to discuss drafts.

Participation: 10%

Briefs 50% (20% for the first and 30% for the second)

Longer Paper: 40%

Assignment	Points (200)	Evaluation	Due
Participation	20	Participating in class discussion, posting resources or discussions on Canvas, interactions with the instructor and/or Tas outside of class.	End of term
Brief 1: Rights & Economics	40	Based on quality of the thesis, efficiency, and clarity of policy recommendations.	4/18 1:30 PM
Brief 2: WASH/Agriculture	60	Based on quality of the thesis, efficiency, and clarity of policy recommendations, as well as improvement from last brief.	5/2 1:30 PM
Final Paper	80	Quality of thesis and argument, quality of research, narrow focus, analysis of recommendations, quality of writing	5/28 11:59 PM

Class Schedule

All of the readings listed here are required. In the modules, there are often items under the heading “Extra Resources.” These are not required but may be of interest to students.

	Topic and Goals	Readings (all found on Canvas)	Other/Due
3/28	The Water Crisis and Hydropolitics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water as a political object The world’s water resources The “Global Water Crisis?” 	No readings, but there are interesting tools to explore in the Canvas module. This first session will be held on Zoom to accommodate my attending a personal family event.	
4/4	Water as Property and Economic Resource <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water’s price vs. water’s value Doctrines of ownership Allocation and water markets Utility privatization 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Ingram, et al., “The Importance of Equity and the Limits of Efficiency in Water Resources” Perry, et al., “Water as an Economic Good: A Solution or a Problem?” Rockstrom, et al., “Why We Need a New Economics of Water as a Common Good” Kapoor, “Is Successful Water Privatization a Pipe Dream?: An Analysis of Three Global Case Studies” 	
4/11	Preservation and Water as a Human Right <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-economic value Limitations of the human right to water Economic inequality and water rights 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Winkler, “The Human Right to Water” Sultana and Loftus, “The Human Right to Water: Critiques and Condition of Possibility” Vanderwarker, “Water and Environmental Justice” 	
4/18	International WaSH and Drinking Water Development Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress on WASH and DW Water development as foreign policy Financing infrastructure in LIMCs 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Weinthal, et al., “Development and Diplomacy: Water, the SDGs, and US Foreign Policy” Reed, “In search of a Mission” Jeuland, “A New Chapter in Developing Water Infrastructure” Brautigam, China and Zambia: Creating a Sovereign Debt Crisis 	Brief 1 Due 1:30 PM uploaded to Canvas
4/25	Water Security vs. Food Security <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water impacts of agriculture Food security and the water SDGs High-yield export agriculture and water Food-water security and conflict 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Willett, et al., “Food in the Anthropocene” Mohtar and Assi, “The Role of New and Green Water Resources in Localizing Water and Food Security” Antle and Ray, “Challenges of Sustainable Agricultural Development in High-Income Countries” WRI, “Creating a Sustainable Food Future” 	
5/2	Development Conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infrastructure as hegemonic power Pakistan vs. India vs. China The Mekong Mexico/US Aid policy as proxy conflict 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Chellaney, “Exploiting the Riparian Advantage,” from <i>Water: Asia’s New Battleground</i> Thapan, “A Perfect Storm in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Climate Change Impacts on Food, Water, and Energy” Garcia-Acevedo, “The Confluence of Water, Patterns of Settlement, and Constructions of the Border in the Imperial and Mexicali Valleys (1900-1999)” 	Brief 2 Due 1:30 PM uploaded to Canvas

5/9	Transboundary Water Conflict and Governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict, cooperation, power • Water treaties and infrastructure • Horizontal and substate conflict 	<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. Zeitoun and Warner, “Hydro-hegemony, a Framework for analysis of trans-boundary water conflicts” 3. Drieschova and Eckstein, “Cooperative Transboundary Mechanisms” 	
5/16	Climate, Water Insecurity, Violence, and Migration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence and water insecurity • Water and human migration 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. WRI, “Water Security Solutions for an Increasingly Water-Insecure World” 2. Wrathall, et al., “Water Stress and Human Migration: A Global, Georeferenced Review of Empirical Research” 3. Rockstrom, “Pathways to the Future” 	
5/23	Adaptation and Future Water Challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crises now and in the future • What is adaptation? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gleick et al., “Water Security Solutions for an Increasingly Water-Insecure World” 2. Collins and Reddy, “China’s Growing Water Crisis” 3. Mitchel “Iran’s Impending Water Crisis” 	
5/28	Final Paper Due: NOTE This paper is due 5/28 to give us enough time to grade it before the grade deadline for graduating students.		

General Resources Available to Students

Include any texts and links as desired:

- [Harris Academic Support Programs and Handbook](#)
- [Student Wellness](#)
- [UChicagoGRAD](#)

Harris School and University of Chicago Policies

Include any text and links as desired to highlight or emphasize issues related to academic integrity, disability accommodations, diversity and inclusion, and video and audio recordings.

- [Harris School Policies](#)
- [University General Policies](#)
- [University Academic Policies](#)
- Policy on audio and video [recordings](#)