PLS 597: The Politics of Human Rights

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Office: Pond Lab, room 227
Office Hours: Wednesday 1:30pm-3:30pm and by appointment.

Introduction

This seminar introduces graduate students to the study of human rights, repression, and contentious politics, focusing on the causes and consequences of state sponsored violence and human rights violations. We will begin the course with an overview of the reasons for state sponsored violence. That is, why do states develop the capacity to behave violently in the first place? What strategic purpose does violence serve? We will also consider how individuals within a state behave and how the emergence of human rights sometimes occurs in the context of the violent and non-violent interaction between the state and individual. We will then consider various conceptualizations of rights and how such conceptualizations are related to the capacity for violence in the state and individual. How do human rights emerge given the propensity for states and individuals to sometimes act violently? This is the core conceptual consideration of the course.

As we work on addressing these fundamental questions, students will also begin to learn how to empirically assess differences in the level of respect for human rights across time and place, how human rights practices have changed globally and locally, and how grass roots activism and different types of legal institutions can be successfully leveraged to modify state behaviors. Throughout the course, students will learn how to identify and critically evaluate human rights issues as they arise in different time periods and settings around the world. Course material will draw from the diverse research methodologies that have been applied to the study of human rights and repression.

Acknowledgment

Steve, thanks for lighting the way. We miss you.
Books

Required Books

We will read select portions of the titles listed in this section in addition to articles listed below. Additional supplementary books are also listed below. Each student will be responsible for providing a written summary of 2 of the books listed in this section. Students will also lead discussion for the 2 selected books (approximately 45-60 minutes in class per book).


**Required Edited Volumes**

We will read select portions of the titles listed in this section.


Suggested Books and Edited Volumes

We will not read select portions of the titles listed in this section. Please consider these titles as important background reading because they will help to situate the required titles in the human rights, repression, and contentious politics literatures. This list is by no means exhaustive.


Assignments

1. **Critical review and summary of selected human rights book (Two, 8-10 pages each, double spaced):** In conjunction with the other students in the course, you will select two of the books listed in the **Required Books** section (selection will occur in the style of the board game, Settler’s of Catan). You will write a critical review of the two books you have selected. The document should also relate the core inferences from the book in the context of the required readings for the week in which the book is assigned. You should also address the following questions: How does the selected book fit into the broader human rights literature? What are some potential directions for future research?

   You will circulate these document to the other students enrolled in the class, three days prior to the assigned week for the book (Monday at 1pm). The final version of the the document is due to the instructor by the end of the following week (Friday at 5pm).

2. **Discussion Leader (Two, 45-60 minute sessions during two different class periods):** Lead class discussion over the book you have selected from the **Required Books** section during the assigned week for that book. Again, you should circulate a draft of the critical review you have written for the selected book, 72 hours prior to the start of the class period. In consultation with the instructor, you will also select a set of critical passages from the book to the share with the class as well, again no later than 72 hours prior to the start of the class period.

3. **Group Reproduction/Replication Project:** In groups of 2-4 students, obtain the materials necessary to reproduce or replicate a human rights research paper. Describe the initial study and the ease with which the results are reproduced. Then identify any research design flaws in the research and propose a new or improved design.

   • For more information about reproduction and replication see:
     - Fariss, Christopher J. and Zachary M. Jones. “Enhancing External Validity in Observational Settings When Replication is Not Possible” *Working Paper.*

   • For a human rights replication example see:
Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Finding the Human Rights Research Frontier (part 1)

Required Books (see list above):

- None this week.

Required Articles:


Suggested Articles:


Week 2: Theories of Human Rights, Repression, and Contentious Politics (part 1)

Required Books (see list above):

- None this week.

Required Articles:


Suggested Articles:


Week 3: Theories of Human Rights, Repression, and Contentious Politics (part 2)

**Required Books (see list above):**

1. Tarrow 2013.

**Required Articles:**


**Suggested Articles:**

Week 4: From Theoretical Concept to Operationalized Construct: Monitoring and Measuring Human Rights (part 1)

**Required Books (see list above):**

2. Wong 2012.

**Required Articles:**


**Suggested Articles:**


Week 5: From Theoretical Concept to Operationalized Construct: Monitoring and Measuring Human Rights (part 2)

Required Books (see list above):

1. Davenport 2012.


Required Articles:


Suggested Articles:


Week 6: Human Rights Debates: Trends and Historical Contexts (part 1)

Required Books (see list above):

Required Articles:

Suggested Articles:
Week 7: Human Rights Debates: Trends and Historical Contexts (part 2)

Required Books (see list above):

1. Lauren 2011.

Required Articles:


Suggested Articles:

Week 8: Mobilizing Popular Dissent

**Required Books (see list above):**


**Required Articles:**


**Suggested Articles:**


Week 9: Human Rights Activism

Required Books (see list above):

Required Articles:

Suggested Articles:
Week 10: Norms and Socialization

Required Books (see list above):


Required Articles:


Suggested Articles:


Week 11: Domestic Politics and International Treaties (part 1)

Required Books (see list above):

Required Articles:

Suggested Articles:
Week 12: Domestic Politics and International Treaties (part 2)

Required Books (see list above):

1. Miller, Keith, and Holmes 2015.

Required Articles:


Suggested Articles:

Week 13: Domestic Courts, Regional Courts, and International Courts

**Required Books (see list above):**


**Required Articles:**


**Suggested Articles:**

Week 14: Other International Institutions

Required Books (see list above):

Required Articles:

Suggested Articles:
Week 15: The Human Rights Research Frontier Revisited

Note: readings for this week will be assigned to individuals to informally (i.e., no slides) present during the last class section.

Required Books (see list above):

- None this week.

Required Articles:


Course Policies

Late Assignments

I will deduct one letter grade from a written assignment for each week it is past due. I will give no credit for the in class discussion leader assignment. You must be provide your class mates with the material 72 hours ahead of class and be in class to lead the discussion.

Resources for Harassment

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender, including violence and harassment based on sexual orientation, are a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here: www.bw.edu/resources/hr/harass/policy.pdf

Language and Gender

“Language is gender-inclusive and non-sexist when we use words that affirm and respect how people describe, express, and experience their gender. Just as sexist language excludes women's experiences, non-gender-inclusive language excludes the experiences of individuals whose identities may not fit the gender binary, and/or who may not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. Identities including trans, intersex, and genderqueer reflect personal descriptions, expressions, and experiences. Gender-inclusive/non-sexist language acknowledges people of any gender (for example, first year student versus freshman, chair versus chairman, humankind versus mankind, etc.). It also affirms non-binary gender identifications, and recognizes the difference between biological sex and gender expression. Teachers and students should use gender-inclusive words and language whenever possible in the classroom and in writing. Students, faculty, and staff may share their preferred pronouns and names, either to the class or privately to the professor, and these gender identities and gender expressions should be honored.” For more information: www.wstudies.pitt.edu/faculty/gender-inclusivenon-sexist-language-syllabi-statement.
Academic Dishonesty

The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one’s work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor.

In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in class or take home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found at: 
http://laus.la.psu.edu/current-students/academics/academic-integrity/college-policies

Note to students with disabilities: Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University’s educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services. For further information regarding policies, rights and responsibilities please visit the Office for Disability Services (ODS) Web site at: www.equity.psu.edu/ods/

Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable accommodations.