
Political Science 577

Theories of Conflict

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Thursday 14:00–16:40. Harkness 329

This course examines the literature on conflict that has developed in the last decade. We will examine recent formal literature as well as the latest substantive (non-formal) literature on conflict. The course will help graduate students identify the broad direction of international conflict studies and will also permit graduate students to pursue topics or ideas of their own interest. To that end, we set aside time for “model building sessions” where students can explore approaches to formalize some of the ideas in the substantive literature, or explore extensions of the current formal literature. We will devote one whole class at the end of the semester to such a model building session and around the mid-way point of the course take about half of one class to such a model building session. Much of the course revolves around the student led discussions, so we expect students to be prepared and fully participate. Students should have taken or be concurrently taking **PSC 584** or have an equivalent knowledge of complete and incomplete information game theory.

Course Requirements

During the semester students are required to write two 5-page papers which comment on one (set) of readings. One 5-page paper must comment on non-formal readings, the other on a formal paper or book. The paper on non-formal work requires that the student can concisely identify the main themes of the work under scrutiny. To that end, the student should be able to summarize in five pages 1) the central question, 2) the central answer, 3) the competing explanations and 4) why the competing explanations are wrong. For further guidance, please refer to the last page on this syllabus. The paper on the non-formal work requires not only that students discuss the technical aspects of the work, but also make an effort to put this in the broader IR context and evolving research agenda. At the end of the semester a research paper is due. It is our hope that students will use the “model building sessions” to lay the basics for their research papers.

To guide the class, each student is required to lead the discussion on 3 assigned readings.

Academic Integrity

Be familiar with the University's policies on academic integrity and disciplinary action (<http://www.rochester.edu/living/urhere/handbook/discipline2.html#XII>). Violators of University regulations on academic integrity will be dealt with severely, which means that your grade will suffer, and We will forward your case to the Chair of the College Board on Academic Honesty.

Texts

The following books should be ordered from Amazon:

1. Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960
2. Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966
3. R. Harrison Wagner, *War and the State; Rethinking the Theory of International Politics*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, July 2007.
4. Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, New York: The Free Press, 1988, third edition.

Students will also get an electronic version of the following book manuscripts:

1. Branislav Slantchev, *Military Threats: The Costs of Coercion and the Price of Peace*.
2. Giacomo Chiozza & Hein Goemans *Leaders and International Conflict*.

Readings not included in one of the texts can be found through one of the online databases or on the library's course web page or from Prof. Goemans.

Course Outline

Thursday, January 15

1. Introduction

It would be a good idea to start the readings for next week early!

Thursday January 22

2. What is War?

- J. David Singer and Melvin Small, *The Wages of War, 1816-1965*; New York: Wiley, 1972, pp.4-24.
- Quincy Wright, *A Study of War*, Volume 1; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942, pp.3-41
- Quincy Wright, *The Causes of War and the Conditions of Peace*, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1935, pp.1-11
- Karl Deutsch, *Peace Research*, Vermont, Middlebury College, April 26, 1972, pp.7-13. Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, New York: The Free Press, 1988, third edition.
- Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, New York: The Free Press, 1988, third edition. Entire book.

Thursday January 29

3. Schelling

- Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966
- Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960

Thursday February 5

4. Informal Models of Conflict

- R. Harrison Wagner, *War and the State; Rethinking the Theory of International Politics*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, July 2007.

Thursday February 12

5. Formal Models of Conflict

- Dagobert L. Brito and Michael D. Intriligator, Conflict, War, and Redistribution, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (December) 1985: 943-957.
- James D. Fearon, Rationalist Explanations for War, *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer), 1995: 379-414.
- Robert Powell, War as a Commitment Problem, *International Organization* 60 (Winter) 2006: 169-203.
- Mark Fey and Kris Ramsay, Uncertainty and Incentives in Crisis Bargaining: Game-Free Analysis of International Conflict, unpublished manuscript

Thursday February 19

6. Historical Context

- David Kaiser, *Politics & War*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, Chapter 4, pp. 271-414.
- Dale Copeland, *The Origins of Major War*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, Chapters 3 & 4, pp. 56-117.

Thursday February 26

7. Critiques and Limitations of Formalist Explanations of War

- Donald Wittman, *Is a lack of a credible commitment a credible explanation for war?* Unpublished manuscript, available at <http://people.ucsc.edu/~wittman/working.papers/credible.commitment.12C.pdf>.
- Scott Wolford, Clifford Carrubba, and Dan Reiter. "Information, Commitment, and War." Typescript, University of Colorado at Boulder and Emory University. 2008. Available at <http://spot.colorado.edu/~wolfordm/wrc.12.pdf>
- Mark Fey and Kris Ramsay, Mutual Optimism and War, *American Journal of Political Science*, 51 (4), October 2007, pp. 738-754
- Bahar Leventoglu & Ahmer Tarar, Does private information lead to delay or war in crisis bargaining?, *International Studies Quarterly*, 52 (3), September 2008, pp. 533-553.

Thursday March 5

8. Audience Costs

- James D. Fearon, Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes, *American Political Science Review*, 88 (3) September 1994: 577-592.
- Kenneth A. Schultz, Looking for Audience Costs, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45 (1), February 2001: 32-60.
- Mike Tomz, Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach. Unpublished Manuscript, Stanford 2005. Available at <http://www.stanford.edu/~simstomz/working/tomz-audcosts-2005-10-26a.pdf>
- Jessica Weeks Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolved, *International Organization*, Winter 2008 (62.1)
- Slantchev, Branislav L. "Politicians, the Media, and Domestic Audience Costs." *International Studies Quarterly*. 2006; Vol. 50 (2): 445-477.

Thursday March 12

9. **SPRING BREAK**

Thursday March 19

10. **Leaders**

- Giacomo Chiozza & Hein Goemans, *Leaders and International Conflict*, unpublished ms., Vanderbilt University & University of Rochester.

Thursday March 26

11. **Leaders—continued**

- George Downs and David M. Rocke. 1994. Conflict, Agency and Gambling for Resurrection: The Principal-Agent Problem Goes to War. *American Journal of Political Science* 38(2):362-380.
- Hein Goemans & Mark Fey, Risky but Rational: War as an Institutionally-Induced Gamble, *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 71, No. 1, January 2009.
- Alexandre Debs & Hein Goemans, War! Who is it good for?, unpublished manuscript, University of Rochester, 2009.
- James D. Fearon, Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes, *American Political Science Review*, 88 (3) September 1994: 577-592.
- Alastair Smith & Fiona McGillivray, Credibility in Compliance and Punishment: Leader Specific Punishments and Credibility. *Journal of Politics*, May 2006 68(2): 248-258.

- Scott Wolford, Wolford, Scott. 2008. "Leadership Turnover as a Commitment Problem." Typescript, University of Colorado at Boulder. Available at <http://spot.colorado.edu/~wolfordm/workingpapers.html>.

Thursday April 2

12. Mediation and Cheap Talk

- Andrew Kydd, Which Side Are You On? Bias, Credibility, and Mediation, *American Journal of Political Science*, 47 (4), October, 2003, pp. 597–611.
- Andrew Kydd, When Can Mediators Build Trust? *American Political Science Review*, 100 (3), August 2006: 449–462.
- Mark Fey and Kris Ramsay, Uncertainty and Incentives in Mediation, unpublished manuscript.

Thursday April 9

13. Coercion

- Branislav Slantchev, *Military Threats: The Costs of Coercion and the Price of Peace*.

Thursday April 16

War As a Bargaining Process

- Darren Filson and Suzanne Werner, 2002, A Bargaining Model of War and Peace, *American Journal of Political Science*, 46:819–838.
- Branislav Slantchev, The Principle of Convergence in Wartime Negotiation, *American Journal of Political Science*, 97(4):621–632.
- Robert Powell, Bargaining and learning while fighting. *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48, Issue 2, April 2004, pp. 344–361.

Thursday April 23

14. Students

- Brainstorming session

Questions to consider in formulating and evaluating social science research

1. *What is the central question?*

- Why is it important (theoretically, substantively)?
- What is being explained (what is the dependent variable and how does it vary)?
- How does this phenomenon present a puzzle?

2. *What is the central answer?*

- What is doing the explaining (what are the independent variables and how do they vary)?
- What are the hypotheses, i.e., what is the relationship between independent and dependent variables, what kind of change in the independent variable causes what kind of change in the dependent variable?
- What are the causal mechanisms, i.e., why are the independent and dependent variables so related?
- How do the independent variables relate to each other?
- What assumptions does your theory make?
- Is the theory falsifiable in concept?
- What does this explanation add to our understanding of the question?

3. *What are the possible alternative explanations?*

- What assumptions are you making about the direction of causality?
- What other explanations might there be for the phenomenon of study, and to what degree do they conflict with the central answer?
- Could the hypothesized relationships have occurred by chance?

4. *Why are the possible alternative explanations wrong?*

- What is the logical structure of the alternative explanations (compare 2)?
- What is the empirical evidence?

5. *What is the relationship between the theory and the evidence?*

- What does the research design allow to vary, i.e., in this design are the explanations variables or constants?
- What does your research design hold constant, i.e., does it help to rule out the alternative competing explanations?
- How are the theoretical constructs represented empirically, i.e., how do you know it when you see it (measurement)?

6. *How do the empirical conclusions relate to the theory?*

- How confident are you about the theory in light of the evidence?
- How widely do the conclusions generalize, i.e., what might be the limitations of the study?
- What does the provisionally accepted or revised theory say about questions of broader importance?