PLS 497: 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 course examines the politics of human rights and repression, focusing on the causes and consequences of state sponsored violence and human rights violations. The core questions considered include: Why do governments choose to repress individuals within their jurisdiction? Are human rights universal? Have levels of repression changed over time? How do we evaluate human rights systematically? What strategies have international institutions, non-state actors, and individuals used to uncover and reduce the use of repressive actions?

Finding and evaluating answers for these questions is a challenging endeavor. To answer these questions, 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, which we will use to help answer the motivating questions listed above. 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.

The subject matter of this course serves as a tool to help students develop skills to become a better thinker and communicator. Most class periods will consist of a short lecture and then a seminar style discussion based on the readings of the week. Participation is key to the success of the seminar portion of each class. With this in mind, much of the course grade will be based on the quality of student participation during these seminars. The goals for this course are for students to:

Ask good questions. Learning necessitates curiosity.

Assess and synthesize information. Use the course material to arrive at informed opinions.

Engage in analytical reasoning. Respectfully discuss and deliberate ideas.

Communicate effectively. Continue to improve the skills necessary to write or present a clearly argued and well-developed discourse.

Required Reading Material

Books (Full)

1. Buford, Bill. 1992. "Among the Thugs: The Experience, and the Seduction, of Crowd Violence." W. W. Norton

2. Carey, Sabine C., Mark Gibney, and Steven C. Poe. 2010. "The Politics of Human Rights: The Quest for Dignity." Cambridge University Press.

3. Sikkink, Kathryn. 2011. "The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions Are Changing World Politics." Norton Series in World Politics.

Articles and Selected Book Chapters

1. Brysk, Allison. 1994. "The Politics of Measurement: The Contested Count of the Disappearance in Argentina" *Human Rights Quarterly*, 16(4):676-692.

2. Clark, Ann Marie. 2001. "Diplomacy of Conscience: Amnesty International and Changing Human Rights Norms." Princeton University Press. **Ch.1** and **Ch.3**

3. Davenport, Christian "Media Bias, Perspective, and State Repression: The Black Panther Party." Cambridge University Press. **Ch.1**

4. Driscoll, Jesse. 2012. "Commitment Problems or Bidding Wars? Rebel Fragmentation as Peace Building". *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 56(1):118-149.

5. Fariss, Christopher J. 2014. "Respect for Human Rights has Improved Over Time: Modeling the Changing Standard of Accountability." *American Political Science Review* 108(TBD).

6. Fearon, James. 2003. "Catastrophic Terrorism and Civil Liberties in the Short and Long Run." Presented at a symposium on "Constitutions, Democracy, and the Rule of Law" held during Columbia University 's 250th anniversary celebrations, October 17, 2003.

7. Hayner, Priscilla B., 2002. "Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions." Routledge Press. **Ch.7**

8. Keith, Linda Camp, and Jennifer S. Holmes. 2009. "A Rare Examination of Typically Unobservable Factors in US Asylum Decisions." *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 22(2):224-241.

9. King Jr., Martin Luther. 1964. "Letter from the Birmingham Jail." In *Why We Can't Wait*. New York: The New American Library

10. King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret Roberts. 2013. "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression." *American Political Science Review* 107(2)326-343:

11. Mackie, Gerry. 1996. "Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account." *American Sociological Review*, 61(6):999-1017.

12. Mason, T. David and Krane. 1989. "The Political Economy of Death Squads: Toward a Theory of the Impact of State-Sanctioned Terror." *International Studies Quarterly*, 33(2):175-198.

13. Scott, James C. 1999. *Seeing Like a State*. Yale University Press. **Ch.1**

14. Smeulers, Alette. 2004. "What Transforms Ordinary People into Gross Human Rights Violators." In Sabine C. Carey and Steven C. Poe. *Understanding Human Rights Violations*. London: Ashgate.

Documentaries

Throughout the course we will watch a few documentaries about contemporary human rights issues. These documentaries are designed to help you make sense of the conceptual issues introduced in the readings and discussed during class.

1. Bardem, Javier and Álvaro Longoria. 2012. *Sons of the Clouds: The Last Colony*.

2. Openheimer, Joshua. 2012. *The Act of Killing*.

Web Documentaries and Lectures

We will also watch some short web based documentaries and lectures by other scholars concerning contemporary human rights issues.

1. Communities United for Police Reform. 2013. "Where I Am Going: Video Campaign to Raise Awareness and Change the Conversation about Stop-And-Frisk." http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/news/where-i-am-going-video-campaign-raise-awareness-and-change-conversation-about-stop-and-frisk

2. Fearon, James. 2013. Lecture on Deterrence and the International Criminal Court. http://iccforum.com/forum/deterrence

3. Roosevelt, Franklin D. 1944. "Second Bill of Rights" http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwUL9tJmypI

4. Porway, Jake. 2013. "Data in the service of humanity" (September 2, 2013) http://flowingdata.com/2013/09/02/data-in-the-service-of-humanity/

5. Lublin, Nancy. 2012. "Analyzing text messages to save lives" (September 5, 2012) http://flowingdata.com/2012/09/05/analyzing-text-messages-to-save-lives/

6. "International Commission on Missing Persons" (December 5, 2006) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-Ykrhu8K78#t=386 http://www.ic-mp.org/resources/video-material/

7. "DNA Identifies War Victims" (September 29, 2013) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kbk6QAfErXA

8. "The Story of Human Rights" (September 26, 2009) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oh3BbLk5UIQ

Class Expectations and Grades

Read all of the assigned materials and be prepared to discuss each piece during the assigned class week. **Laptops will not be allowed during class meetings**, so make sure to print out the readings before class or come prepared with written notes. More details about the assignments and their due dates are listed in the next section of the syllabus.

- 35% of your grade will be based on participation in classroom discussion about the assigned readings. There will be approximately 10-15 "pop quizzes" designed to assess your comprehension of the weekly readings. These quizzes should take up no more than 5 to 10 minutes of class. Your performance on these quizzes will be incorporated into your participation grade.
- 5% of your grade will be based on a 2-page essay in which you select a region of the world (e.g., West Africa, or Southeast Asia) to focus on for the individual class assignments.
- 30% of your grade will be based on a two-part research project (4-pages each) in which you (1) compare two human rights reports for different countries in the same year and (2) compare two rights reports for the same country in different years. **For these research projects, you should select countries within the region you selected above.**
- 15% of your grade will be based on a 2-page assessment of human rights data. **For this research project, you should find data about some aspect of human rights within the region you selected above.**
- 15% of your grade will be based on a 8-10 page memo on a local human rights Non-Governmental Organization. You will work on the final project together in groups of no more than 3 people. **For this group research project, it is optional to select an NGO that works within the region you selected above. To do so, you will need to form a group with other members of the class that share your region.**

Note 1: Assignment due dates appear below in the *Schedule of Readings* section. Assignments are due at the beginning of the first class in week of the due date.

Note 2: For each assignment, preliminary information is due by e-mail prior to the actual due date. Details about this information is contained in the each assignment description below. Reminders are also located in the *Schedule of Readings* section.

Assignment Details

- **Quizzes**: 10-15 "pop quizzes" designed to assess your comprehension of the weekly readings. Quiz grades will be incorporated into your overall participation grade.

- **Region Essay (2 pages, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, double space)**: In consultation with the instructor, select a region of the world. In the essay, you should provide a brief summary that describes why you choose the specific region. That is, explain why you are curious about the region. What about the region is interesting to you? Do you have family ties there? Did you read a story in the news about a particular country there? This is a short essay designed to help you focus on an area of the world in which human rights abuses are occurring. You will use this region to guide your selection of cases and data in the Case Comparison assignments and the Human Rights Data Assessment and Visualization Assignment.

- **Case Comparison part 1 (4 pages, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, double space)**: With the assistance of the instructor, select two countries in the same year within your chosen region. Find the Amnesty International Human Rights report for the year you have selected and compare the description of the human rights abuses contained in the two reports. **Students must e-mail their case selection to the instructor at least two weeks prior to the due date for this assignment.**

- **Case Comparison part 2 (4 pages, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, double space))**: With the assistance of the instructor, select one country within your chosen region. Find the Amnesty International Human Rights reports for two different years at least 10 years apart. Compare the description of the human rights abuses contained in the two reports. **Students must e-mail their case selection to the instructor at least two weeks prior to the due date for this assignment.**

- **Human Rights Data Assessment and Visualization (2 pages)**: With the assistance of the instructor, identify a dataset that captures some aspect of human rights within your chosen region. Create a visualization of this data using a program such as Microsoft Excel, or R. (There will be an optional R tutorial for those students interested in learning to visualize data using this free program). On the first page of this assignment describe the data, where you obtained it, and what it measures. On the second page provide the visualization and an informative caption about the image. **Anytime before the end of week 10, students are required to visit the instructor during office hours to discuss potential data sources for this assignment.**

- **Human Rights Non-Governmental Organization Memo (8-10 pages, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, doublespace)**: In a group of no more than 3 people find a local non-profit or non-governmental organization working on a contemporary human rights issue. The group can be based here in State College or nearby in New York City, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia or Washington D.C. The goal of this project is identity active human rights organizations working in and around our community. What are the human rights issues that the organization seeks to address? What are the tactics used to achieve the organization's goals? Does the organization partner with similar groups? **One member of the group must e-mail the instructor a list of group members and the name of the organization selected for this project by 5pm on the Thursday of week 10.**

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: The State and Violence part 1

Tuesday — 01/13/2015

1. Course Introduction

Thursday — 01/15/2015

1. Scott (1999) Ch. 1

Week 2: The State and Violence part 2

Tuesday — 01/20/2015

1. Driscoll (2012)
2. Mason and Krane (1989)

Thursday — 01/22/2015

1. In Class Video: Bardem, Javier and Álvaro Longoria. 2012. *Sons of the Clouds: The Last Colony*. Spain: Canal+España.

Week 3: Conceptualizing Human Rights

Due Date: The **Region Essay** assignment is due at the beginning of the first class this week.

Tuesday — 01/27/2015

1. In Class Video: "The Story of Human Rights".
2. In Class Video: Roosevelt, Franklin D. 1944. "Second Bill of Rights".
3. Carey, Gibney, Poe (2010) Ch.1 and Ch.2

Thursday — 01/29/2015

1. Carey, Gibney, Poe (2010) Ch.1 and Ch.2
2. Smeulers (2004)

Week 4: Assessment of Human Rights part 1

Tuesday — 02/03/2015

1. Brysk (1994)
2. Davenport (2010)

Thursday — 02/05/2015

1. Fariss (2014)

Week 5: Assessment of Human Rights part 2

Reminder: Case selection for the **Case Comparison part 1** assignment is due to the instructor by e-mail this week.

Tuesday — 02/10/2015

1. Guest lecture

Thursday — 02/12/2015

1. Carey, Gibney, Poe (2010) Ch.3 and Ch.4

Week 6: The State and Violence part 3

Tuesday — 02/17/2015

1. Carey, Gibney, Poe (2010) Ch.5, and Ch.6

Thursday — 02/19/2015

1. Buford (1992) Part 1

Week 7: Human Rights Activism part 1

Due Date: The **Case Comparison part 1** assignment is due at the beginning of the first class this week.

Tuesday — 02/24/2015

1. Buford (1992) Part 2 and Part 3

Thursday — 02/26/2015

1. In class activity: group human rights model development.

Week 8: Human Rights Activism part 2

Reminder: Case selection for the **Case Comparison part 2** assignment is due to the instructor by e-mail this week.

Tuesday — 03/03/2015

1. Makie (1996)
2. Markin Luther King Jr. (1964)

Thursday — 03/05/2015

1. Clark (2001) Ch.1 and Ch.3

NO CLASS: Spring Break

Week 9: Changing Human Rights part 1

Tuesday — 03/17/2015

1. Sikkink (2011) Ch.1

Thursday — 03/19/2015

1. Sikkink (2011) Ch.2, Ch.3 and Ch.4

Week 10: Human Rights in World Politics part 1

Due Date: The **Case Comparison part 2** assignment is due at the beginning of the first class this week.

Reminder: Students must visit the instructor during office hours to discuss the **Human Rights Data Assessment and Visualization** assignment by Thursday of this week. Please try to attend office hours before this week.

Reminder: One member of the group for the **Human Rights Non-Governmental Organization Memo** must e-mail the instructor a list of group members and the name of the organization selected for this project by 5pm on the Thursday of this week.

Tuesday — 03/24/2015

1. In Class Video: Fearon, James. 2013. Lecture on Deterrence and the International Criminal Court. http://iccforum.com/forum/deterrence

Thursday — 03/26/2015

1. In Class Video: Porway, Jake. 2013. "Data in the service of humanity" (September 2, 2013) http://flowingdata.com/2013/09/02/data-in-the-service-of-humanity/
2. In Class Video: Lublin, Nancy. 2012. "Analyzing text messages to save lives" (September 5, 2012) http://flowingdata.com/2012/09/05/analyzing-text-messages-to-save-lives/
3. In Class Video: "International Commission on Missing Persons" (December 5, 2006) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-Ykrhu8K78#t=386 http://www.ic-mp.org/resources/video-material/
4. In Class Video: "DNA Identifies War Victims" (September 29, 2013) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kbk6QAfErXA

Week 11: Human Rights Data

Tuesday — 03/31/2015

1. R Data Visualization Workshop

Thursday — 04/02/2015

Week 12: Human Rights in World Politics part 2

Tuesday — 04/07/2015

1. Sikkink (2011) Ch.5 and Ch.6

Thursday — 04/09/2015

1. Sikkink (2011) Ch.7 and Ch.8

Week 13: Towards the Future

Tuesday — 04/14/2015

1. Fearon (2003)
2. King, Pan, Roberts (2013)

Thursday — 04/16/2015

1. Guest lecture

Week 14: Making a Difference Locally and Globally

Due Date: The **Human Rights Data Assessment and Visualization** assignment is due at the beginning of the first class this week. Please bring a draft to class on Tuesday, which I will check. Any last minute issues should be addressed before class on Thursday. We will review each of the visualizations together during class on Thursday. Please bring a color printout to class.

Tuesday — 04/21/2015

1. Keith and Holmes (2009)

Thursday — 04/23/2015

1. Data Visualization Critique

Week 15: Making a Difference Locally

Due Date: A draft of the **Human Rights Non-Governmental Organization Memo** assignment is due at the beginning of the first class this week. Each group will also give a 10 minute presentation about their organization.

Tuesday — 04/28/2015

1. Group presentations.

Thursday — 04/30/2015

1. Group presentations continued.

Week 16: Finals Week

Due Date: The final draft of the **Human Rights Non-Governmental Organization Memo** assignment is due during the final exam period this week. You may also resubmit revised versions of the other writing assignment at this time with a 1-page memo that describes the revisions you implemented.

Introduction to R

I will introduce students to the R computing environment either in class or during an optional outside meeting. The purpose of this introduction is to teach students how to load data into the R computing environment and then produce a graph with that data as part of the data visualization project described above. Students will need to learn how to use three functions in R for this project: `getwd()`, `read.csv`, and `plot()` (or `barplot()`). You will be able to complete the data visualization project with just these simple functions. More information is available on my website. The use of R for the Data Visualization Assignment is optional. You may also use excel.

Policy on late assignments

I will deduct one letter grade from an assignment for each week it is past due.

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.