**PSCI 3500**

**Conflict and Human Security**

**Fall 2025**

Prof. James Meernik

139 Wooten Hall

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00 – 12:00; Wednesdays 9:00 – 11:00 and by appointment

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**Course Objectives and Structure**

We begin with the assumption that most people would prefer to live in a peaceful and secure environment than in one torn by conflict, violence, and war. This assumption must be tempered with the observation that war and other forms of violence are all too common features of politics within and between nations: since the end of World War II, there has not been a single day in which there was not a war of some sort going on somewhere in the world. This paradox defines the core purposes of this course: how do we understand the causes and forms of conflict and violence, and how do we understand the conditions and processes that contribute to the resolution of on-going conflicts and violence? Since this is a political science course, we will focus more on political questions such as the forms and causes of armed conflict, means of conflict resolution, and the conditions that contribute to a durable peace within and between nations. However, the field of conflict and human security encompasses theories from sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and psychology as well as political science. Insights from these other disciplines will broaden our understanding of the conditions of peace.

I expect that by the conclusion of this course you will be able to:

1. *Explain the various factors affecting human security throughout the world and explain why some human security problems are more prevalent in some countries and under some circumstances than others.*
2. *Assess and evaluate the relative impact of human security problems and their potential for leading to long-term harm in the affected countries.*
3. *Assess and evaluate the factors that explain why these problems occur and describe in written and oral form the most important findings from social science research on these problems.*
4. *Analyze and synthesize the various approaches that have been taken in post conflict nations to sustain the peace, such as the use of transitional justice, reintegration of former combatants, economic rebuilding and reconciliation, and determine which solutions work best under various conditions.*
5. *Devise your own solutions to address these problems.*

**Course Requirements**

First and foremost, students are expected to attend all classes. I will be asking questions using the iClicker instant poll app, and we will be doing in-class exercises. Your final grade will be based on two exams (a mid-term and a final), each worth 25% of your final grade; a peace agreement project worth 30% of your grade, and your clicker participation grade, which is worth 20% of your grade.

**Exams**: **(50% total)**

There will be two exams during the course of the semester, which are each worth 25% of your grade. The exams will be a combination of multiple choice and essays. I will distribute a study guide a week before the exam date. You can take make up exams only if you can demonstrate you have a university-approved absence in advance and can provide documentation regarding the reason for your unavoidable absence (work, colds, flu’s, not waking up on time, forgetting there was a test and other similar problems are not acceptable reasons for absence from a test). Hospitalization and required attendance at university-approved events are the only acceptable excuses. You may not make up more than one exam even if you have an excused absence. The exams will be delivered on line through the Canvas Learning System.

**Peace Agreement Project (30% total)**

Students will gain historical and contemporary knowledge of peacebuilding activities to help them better understand theory and practice of post conflict peacebuilding, especially as it pertains to truth, justice, accountability, reintegration of former combatants; and reconciliation among victims and victimizers. The principal means by which students will demonstrate their competence in this area is by drafting a proposed peace agreement to resolve a real-world civil war that is ongoing of this moment. Students will research the conflict, the nature of the grievances and issues being contested by the two or more actors who are party to the conflict, the types of divisions that characterize society, the length and severity of the violence, most especially including allegations and/or proof of war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide. There are two parts to this assignment. Students will submit a rough draft of part 1 of the paper, which is worth 10% of your class grade. The complete and final version of the paper is worth 20% of your class grade. ***The rough draft of the first portion of the paper is due October 30 by 11:00 pm. The final draft of the paper is due December 4 by 11:00 pm.***

**iClicker Polling (20%)**

iClicker polling is a free service which all students are able to use without charge. This course relies on your use of the iClicker polling system on your smart phone, tablet or computer (***you must have a device that allows you to connect to iClicker polling***) to encourage dynamic interaction during class. The first clicker question is typically given within the first 10 minutes of class and the last one during the closing segment. Your grade is a percentage of times you “click” in, and if you get the questions right. If you snooze, you lose. See me if you have reason to believe the clicker is malfunctioning (especially if it happens during the middle of class, if it stops then come up immediately and see me-no excuses!). There are instructional videos online to register your clicker (it must be registered to accurately record your participation). **BRING YOUR DEVICES TO CLASS BEGINNING THE FIRST DAY AND EVERY DAY!** You will not be able to make up iClicker points you missed due to absence from class unless: 1) you are attending a UNT extra-curricular event that day and you provide us with a note from your coach or faculty advisor prior to missing class; or 2) you are in the hospital for an extended period and can provide documentation from the hospital *proving you were in the hospital for the days missed*. If you forget your device you can write down your answers, but you will only have this opportunity once. If you forget your clicker more than once you will not be able to write your answers down instead. You cannot have other students use your clicker. All students involved in any such cheating will not receive any points for that class and for the next two if you are caught. Multiple warnings may result in dismissal from class.

**Classroom Etiquette**

All students must treat the instructor, the other students, and the classroom setting with respect. This includes arriving on time and staying for the entire class (or notifying the instructor in advance if this will not be possible), turning off cell phones and similar devices during class, and refraining from playing on the computer, reading, talking with friends, and any other potentially disruptive activities. This also means showing respect for alternative opinions and points of view, listening when either the instructor or a fellow student is speaking to the class, and refraining from insulting language and gestures. Repeated or egregious instances of classroom disruption will result in referral to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at [www.unt.edu/csrr](http://www.unt.edu/csrr).

**ADA Accommodation Statement**

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Studentsseeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one’s specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu.

**University of North Texas -- Department of Political Science Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences**

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

The UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline defines cheating and plagiarism as the use of unauthorized books, notes, or otherwise securing help in a test; copying others' tests, assignments, reports, or term papers; representing the work of another as one's own; collaborating without authority with another student during an examination or in preparing academic work; or otherwise practicing scholastic dishonesty. Normally, the minimum penalty for cheating or plagiarism is a grade of "F" in the course. In the case of graduate departmental exams, the minimum penalty shall be failure of all fields of the exam. Determination of cheating or plagiarism shall be made by the instructor in the course, or by the field faculty in the case of departmental exams. Cases of cheating or plagiarism in ordinary coursework may, at the discretion of the instructor, be referred to the Undergraduate Studies Committee in the case of undergraduate students. These committees, acting as agents of the department Chair, shall impose further penalties, or recommend further penalties to the Dean of Students, if they determine that the case warrants it. In all cases, the Dean of Students shall be informed in writing of the case. Students may appeal any decision under this policy by following the procedures laid down in the UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline.

**Emergency Notification & Procedures**

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to the UNT Learning Management System (LMS) for contingency plans for covering course materials.

**Attendance Statement:**

Students are expected to attend class meetings regularly and to abide by the attendance policy established for the course. It is important that you communicate with the professor prior to being absent, so you and the professor can discuss and mitigate the impact of the absence on your attainment of course learning goals. Please inform the professor and instructional team if you are unable to attend class meetings because you are ill, in mindfulness of the health and safety of everyone in our community.

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

# August 19-21: Peace and Conflict in the Post-Cold War Era

After going over the course requirements and the outline of the course, we begin with a brief overview of the patterns of conflict in the last half century. The big changes that have occurred are 1) wars *within* nations have replaced wars *between* nations as the predominant conflict modality, 2) the locus of most conflict has shifted from the major power system (Europe, North America, China, Japan) to the global South (Asia, Africa, and Latin America), and 3) the number of on-going conflicts in the world rose steadily from 1945 through 1994, then declined to about thirty a year.

**Read:** Obermeier, Anna Marie & Siri Aas Rustad (2023) Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2022, PRIO Paper. Oslo: PRIO and The Heart of the Matter: The Security of Women and the Security of States”, by Valerie M. Hudson, Mary Caprioli, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Rose McDermott, and Chad F. Emmett. *International Security*. ***Available on Canvas.***

**August 26 – September 4: Conflict within Nations: Civil War**

Since the end of World War II, revolution and other forms of war *within* nations have been more common than interstate war *between* nations. In this section we will examine the forms of civil war (e.g., revolution vs. secession) and the factors that make a nation more susceptible to civil war as well as the conditions that make individuals willing to participate in organized armed violence against their own government.

**Read:** Poverty and Civil War: What Policymakers Need to Know, by **S**usan E. Rice, Corinne Graff and Janet Lewis. Brookings Institution; “Not All Elections Are Created Equal: Election Quality and Civil Conflict”, by Daniela Donno, Kelly Morrison, and Burcu Savun. *Journal of Politics*. ***Available on Canvas.***

**September 9-16: Criminal Violence and Criminal Governance**

This is a two-part discussion of the impact of criminal violence on people’s lives where we will emphasize the human security frame of reference. We will also discuss why criminal governance—that is parts of societies in which criminal organizations take on governmental functions like dispute mediation and security—has taken root in many societies. First, however, we begin by describing and analyzing he scourge of everyday, criminal violence and the enormous toll it takes on people. The book, *The Locust Effect* demonstrates with powerful statistics and horrific stories the problems people, most especially poor people face as they go about their lives, riding to work, walking to school, and celebrating with their friends. Then we will discuss literature on criminal governance and the impact of working with these structures to reduce threats to human security, with a special focus on gangs and large, criminal organizations in Colombia.

**Read:** *The Locust Effect*, Chapters 1 and 2. Gary Haugen and Victor Boutros. Oxford University Press; Lessing, Benjamin. 2020. Conceptualizing Criminal Governance. *Perspectives on Politics*, 1–20; and Barnes, Nicholas, 2017. Criminal politics: An integrated approach to the study of organized crime, politics, and violence. *Perspectives on Politics*, *15*(4), pp.967-987. ***Available on Canvas***.

**September 18-October 2: Negotiating Peace**

A critical barrier to bringing conflicts to an end is getting the protagonists to the bargaining table in the first place. We will examine issues regarding (1) conflict mediation and the conditions under which it is most likely to be successful; (2) credible commitments: getting the protagonists to disarm and demobilize; (3) spoilers: preventing factions on both sides who opposed a negotiated settlement from sabotaging the negotiations by resuming conflict; and strategies and challenges for mediating conflict resolution.

**Read: “**Negotiating Peace” by Wallensteen and Ericsson**. *Available on Canvas.***

**October 7: Exam Online 9:30 – 10:50 Only. On Canvas.**

**October 9 – October 16: Reintegration of Former Combatants**

We will discuss the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process that is one of the first and most critical phases of peacebuilding where combatants surrender their weapons; armies are dissolved and former combatants are sent home or to new communities to begin a new life. It is the last stage of reintegrating former combatants into the community that we will focus most on and you will hear from former combatants and their victims about their experiences.

**Read**: Gaviria, Baron and Meernik, “Victims and Ex-Combatants in Colombia:The Aulas de Paz Model of Truth, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation”, and Meernik, Gaviria and Baron, “Insecurity and the Reintegration of Former Armed Non-State Actors in Colombia”. ***Available on Canvas.***

**October 21 – October 30. Transitional Justice**

Ending violence is only the first step in building peace. Building a sustainable structure of peace requires measures that resolve the issues that led to conflict in the first place and reconciling the former combatants to a future of peaceful coexistence. In this section we will explore the steps that the international community can take to build a sustainable peace in the aftermath of war. We focus especially on the various forms justice that have been established for the victims, such as international and national criminal tribunals, truth commissions, as well as other transitional justice options like memorialization and lustration.

**Read:** Truth-Seeking, Truth-Telling and Postconflict Peacebuilding: Curb the Enthusiasm? 2004. David Mendeloff. *International Studies Review* 6:355-380; “Does Transitional Justice Work”, chapter 8 in *Transitional Justice in the Balance* by Tricia Olsen, Leigh Payne and Andrew Reiter. United States Institute of Peace Press. ***All available on Canvas.***

**November 4 – November 11: Reconciliation**

After fighting and violence ends, members of societies that have ben at war with one another must find a way to productively and peacefully coexist. People in society must live together as fellow citizens and neighborhoods, but this process of coexisting and ultimately reconciliation is difficult and depends on many diverse factors ranging from individual level issues and desires for reconciliation, all the way to the government which plays a role in facilitating and encouraging reconciliation.

**Read:** “What is Reconciliation and are We There Yet”, Strupinskiene, Lina (2017). Journal of Human Rights; “Reconciliation: A Comprehensive Framework for Empirical Analysis”, Angelika Rettberg and Juan E. Ugarriza. Security Dialogue (2016). ***All available on Canvas.***

**November 13 – November 20: Simulation*.***

For these class periods students we will conduct a simulation in which each student will be assigned a unique role to help achieve peace and provide for transitional justice for a fictitious nation that has been at war for many years. There will be an extensive case study description provided in class.

**December 2 – December 4: What Do We Know & What Don’t We Know**

We will conclude the class by having an open discussion of what we know, what you know, and how you might use this knowledge in your career. There will be no lectures, but rather a structured discussion about these issues in which all students will be expected to participate.

**FINAL EXAM: On Canvas. More details coming soon!**