

POLS 689: Contentious Politics

Dr. Ches Thurber

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E-mail: cthurber@niu.edu

Office Hours: M/W 9:00-10:30 a.m.

Office: 414 Zulauf Hall

Web: www.chesthurber.com

Class Hours: Mon 2:00-4:40 p.m.

Class Room: 464 DuSable

Course Description

This course is intended as a graduate-level survey of the literature on the dynamics of political mobilization, revolt, and repression. We will ask questions such as what motivates individuals to resist government rule? How and when do groups mobilize to express dissent? What tactics do they use and why? How do states respond to dissent? How do transnational forces affect these patterns of repression and dissent? To answer these questions, we will draw on major works from comparative politics, international relations, and sociology. A unifying theme is the view of contention as not an aberration, but a (the?) central dynamic of political order, through which institutions are formed and changed, and social contracts are (re-)negotiated. We will examine multiple methodological approaches to this field of study, ranging from comparative historical analysis to cross-national quantitative statistics, and from ethnography to formal modeling. Students will develop a broad understanding of major works and theoretical traditions in the study of contentious politics, the current frontiers of the field, and the art of constructing book-length research projects in political science.

Texts

This course focuses on major books as the primary texts of study. The point here is twofold. First, I want to give you the chance to carefully read classic works that are often short-changed in modern syllabi because of their length. Second, I want you to be able to see how scholars construct and carry-out a book-length argument. After all, most of you will be writing “book-style” dissertations, so you need to read complete academic books to understand the genre. That said, there are drawbacks. Because books require more time to read, we will be unable to cover the literature as broadly. More practically, books are expensive. Fortunately, many of the titles for this class are available electronically from the library. You can look them up in the catalogue, and download an electronic version of the text, much as you would a journal article. I have marked these books (EL) below. Others, however, you will need to obtain on your own. Many are available used for very reasonable prices. I will also make sure physical copies are available on reserve at the library. Of course, there will only be one such copy of each text, and you will not have access to it for later reference. Using a combination of library resources and personal purchases, I estimate that you should be able to access all the books you need for this course for less than \$100, possibly considerably less.

The following are the books that we will be reading in this course, that I expect you to obtain either through the library or individual purchase:

- James C. Scott *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). (EL)
- Charles Tilly *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978). (EL)
- Theda Skocpol *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge University Press, 1979).
- Jeff Goodwin *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- Donatella della Porta *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). (EL)
- Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Non-violent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
- Sidney Tarrow *War, States, and Contention: A Comparative Historical Study* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015). (EL)
- Courtenay R. Conrad and Emily Hencken Ritter *Contentious Compliance: Dissent and Repression Under International Human Rights Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
- Zeynep Tufekci *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

Evaluation

Class attendance, preparation and participation (30%): The time we spend in class is for me the most important of this course. As such, punctual attendance is mandatory. But more important than just being present is that you are actively engaged. I expect that you have done the readings and that you try to participate in discussion each and every class section. On top of this, you will be assigned every third week to serve as the primary “discussant” for 1-2 chapters of the book for that day.

Reading Analyses (20%): For each week, you will be required to draft written summaries on each of the readings. These summaries will be invaluable as you prepare for comps as well as help ensure a high level of discussion in seminar. You may pick five weeks over the course of the semester in which you opt not to complete summaries.

Final Project (50%): You will produce a research paper similar in scope to what you might present at a professional academic conference (6k-8k words). It should identify a puzzle in the realm of contentious politics, broadly defined, propose a theoretical explanation, and evaluate that explanation with quantitative and/or qualitative evidence. I welcome you to write this paper in conjunction with another graduate course, *conditional on the approval of the instructor of the other course*. The idea is that this will allow you to double the effort you put into this paper, moving it closer to conference presentation and eventual publication. I am open to modifications of this assignment on an individual basis if doing so would better meet your professional goals. Please contact me as soon as possible to discuss.

Grading Standards

Grades in graduate school are a little bit silly, in my opinion, as you are at the point in your careers where it is your written work itself that matters (and how it is received by a broader scholarly com-

munity) more than the grade arbitrarily assigned by a single cantankerous professor. Nevertheless, they can serve as a helpful signaling device for your own self-assessment, for departmental funding decisions, and to admissions committees at PhD programs (for MA students planning to continue on. . .). While I have outlined a mathematical weighting above, the inherently qualitative nature of class participation and final project evaluation has made me realize that a more general qualitative statement of grading standards might be more useful. The scheme below is taken from Prof. Kyle Beardsley in the political science department at Duke University with some modifications to adapt to our departmental norms and my own personal views. I think Dr. Beardsley does a really nice job of articulating the attributes of strong graduate-level work in political science.

It may also be helpful to think about the grading distributionally. In the past, I have generally awarded between 1 and 3 straight As per graduate seminar. The modal grade has been an A-, with a few Bs and B+s.

- **A** : *Exceptional Performance*. Consistently outstanding work on all course-related tasks at a level that distinguishes the student from other members of the class. A comprehensive and incisive command of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A frequently demonstrated exceptional capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. The ability to master and integrate large amounts of factual material and abstract theories. An outstanding ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.
- **A-** : *Very Good Performance*. Consistently strong work on all course-related tasks. A command of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A clearly demonstrated capacity for original, creative, critical, and logical thinking. Understands well and can integrate the relevant factual and theoretical material central to the course. A strong ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.
- **B+** : *Good Performance*. Solid work on all course-related tasks. A good grasp of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. A generally demonstrated capacity for original, creative, critical, and logical thinking. A very good command of factual and theoretical material, and some capacity to integrate the two. A solid ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.
- **B** : *Decent Performance*. Generally consistent work on most course-related tasks. A general understanding of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. Modest evidence of the capacity for original, creative, critical and logical thinking. An acceptable understanding of factual and theoretical material, but limited evidence of the capacity to integrate the two. A basic ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.
- **B-** : *Barely Satisfactory Performance*. Mostly satisfactory work on course-related tasks, but with notable deficiencies. A general understanding of the issues, literature, and substantive information relevant to the course. Understands at a basic level the facts and theories related to the course, but with clear gaps, errors, or incomplete work. A limited or inconsistent ability to discuss effectively course subject matter using both written and oral communication skills.
- **C+/C/D/F** : *Inadequate Performance*. Work that falls short of the standards outlined above will receive a grade in the C range or lower. I won't go into the details of distinctions at these

levels as it is largely irrelevant. As per the graduate student handbook, work at this level is not considered adequate for continuation in the program.

Course Policies

- Successful completion of this course requires consistent, punctual attendance, and active participation in both class discussion and class exercises. If you must miss class due to a conflicting responsibility or an emergency, it is your responsibility to contact me to discuss the situation. I will generally require a short written assignment to be submitted in lieu of class attendance. Any more than 1 absence without prior notification and make-up work will affect your final grade.
 - It is my personal policy to allow graduate students to call me by my first name, “Ches.” This reflects the idea that I view you all as colleagues-in-training. Please let me know how you prefer to be addressed, both in name and pronoun, if it differs from what is in the college directory. I will make every effort to address you in the way you wish to be addressed. Please try and do the same for your fellow classmates, as well as for other faculty in the department.
- All students are expected to adhere to the highest levels of academic integrity. Violations of university, departmental, and disciplinary standards will not be tolerated and will lead to an F for the course.
- I am willing, on a case by case basis, to allow students to receive credit for assignments that are carried out in conjunction with another NIU political science graduate course, or that build upon work completed in a previous such course. Such arrangements need to be discussed and approved in advance by me (as well as any other faculty involved). A guiding principal is that the student should be engaged in an equivalent amount of original research and writing as if they were producing separate assignments.
- If you need an accommodation for this class, please contact the Disability Resource Center as soon as possible. The DRC coordinates accommodations for students with disabilities. It is located on the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 or drc@niu.edu. Also, please contact me privately as soon as possible so we can discuss your accommodations. Please note that you will not be required to disclose your disability, only your accommodations.
- I am committed to your success in this class – if you feel that you are not performing to your expectations, please come and see me. I am available to answer any questions you may have about course assignments, requirements or content. I generally answer e-mails within 24 hrs on weekdays, and would be happy to schedule an appointment to meet with you if you are unavailable during my posted office hours.

Class Schedule

Students are expected to read the following before Monday's class session. Readings marked (EL) are available electronically from the library. Those marked (BB) are posted on Blackboard. Students are responsible for obtaining all others.

Challengers, States, and Contention

Week 1 (Jan. 13)

- Harry Eckstein "On the Etiology of Internal Wars," *History and Theory* 4, no. 2 (1965): 133.
- William A. Gamson *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1975) Chs. 1-2. (BB)
- Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly "To Map Contentious Politics," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 1996): 17–34.
- James Ron "Varying Methods of State Violence," *International Organization* 51, no. 2 (1997): 275–300.

Week 2 (Jan. 20) : MLK Day – No Class

Mobilization, Dissent, and Revolt

Week 3 (Jan. 27)

- Scott *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*. (EL)

Week 4 (Feb. 03)

- Tilly *From Mobilization to Revolution*. (EL)

Week 5 (Feb. 10)

- John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (May 1977): 1212.
- Ted Robert Gurr "People Against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System," *International Studies Quarterly* 38 (1994): 347–77.
- Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (June 2004): 563–95.
- Macar Humphreys and J. M. Weinstein "Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (2008): 436–55.

The State Strikes Back

Week 6 (Feb. 17)

- Skocpol *States and Social Revolutions*.

Week 7 (Feb. 24)

- Goodwin *No Other Way Out*.

Week 8 (Mar. 02):

- Jennifer Earl “Tanks, Tear Gas, and Taxes: Toward a Theory of Movement Repression,” *Sociological Theory* 21, no. 1 (January 2003): 44–68.
- James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (February 2003): 75–90.
- Eva Bellin “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective,” *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (2004): 139–57.
- Christian Davenport “State Repression and Political Order,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (January 2007): 1–23.

Week 9 (Mar. 09): Spring Break

Strategy, Tactics, and Repertoires

Week 10 (Mar. 16)

- della Porta *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*. (EL)

Week 11 (Mar. 23) (Potential Reschedule due to ISA Conference)

- Chenoweth and Stephan *Why Civil Resistance Works*.

International Dimensions

Week 12 (Mar. 30)

- Tarrow *War, States, and Contention*. (EL)

Week 13 (Apr. 06)

- Conrad and Ritter *Contentious Compliance*.

Week 14 (Apr. 13)

- Clifford Bob “Marketing Rebellion: Insurgent Groups, International Media, and NGO Support,” *International Politics* 38, no. 3 (September 1, 2001): 311–34.
- Mark R. Beissinger “Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions,” *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 2 (May 2007): 259–76.

- Kristian S. Gleditsch and Mauricio Rivera “The Diffusion of Nonviolent Campaigns,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 5 (May 2017): 1120–45.
- Daniel P. Ritter *The Iron Cage of Liberalism: International Politics and Unarmed Revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) Ch. 1.

Technology and the Future of Repression and Dissent

Week 15 (Apr. 20):

- Tufekci *Twitter and Tear Gas*.

Week 16 (Apr. 27):

- Jan H. Pierskalla and Florian M. Hollenbach “Technology and Collective Action: The Effect of Cell Phone Coverage on Political Violence in Africa,” *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 2 (May 2013): 207–24.
- G. King, J. Pan, and M. E. Roberts “Reverse-Engineering Censorship in China: Randomized Experimentation and Participant Observation,” *Science* 345, no. 6199 (August 22, 2014): 1251722–2.

Final Papers Due: Monday 5/4 at 5pm.