

Theory of International Relations

PS 2501

Fall 2024

Seminar: Tuesday 4pm-6:30pm

Room: 4430 Wesley W Posvar Hall

Professor Contact Information

Rebecca Cordell

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Student Hours: Thursday 3pm-4pm

Course Description

What drives state behavior in the international system? What are the major causes of international and civil conflict? Why do states cooperate with one another on issues such as trade, migration, human rights, and peace? How does power, hierarchy, gender, and race shape global politics? What does the future look like for international relations?

Theory is essential to answering these questions and explaining the complex dynamics of global politics. This PhD-level course is designed to prepare students to conduct research and coursework in international relations. The course introduces students to core theories and empirical analysis of international relations in a scientific and rigorous way.

We begin the course with the fundamental concepts and theories of international relations. We then transition to an overview of what causes countries to engage in international conflict and cooperation. From there, we explore key themes and approaches within the subfields of international organizations, international political economy, and conflict and political violence. We conclude with a discussion of where international relations theory should head next.

The course centers on active participation, discussion, and student collaboration. Each week, students will complete the assigned readings, provide insights on the topics, and work together on interactive activities. Students will learn how to evaluate theoretical arguments with empirical evidence, identify new research questions, and use theoretical frameworks to analyze current and historical events.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students should:

- Be familiar with current theories and empirical analysis within the subfield of international relations.

- Be able to evaluate the main assumptions, logic, critiques, and supporting evidence of different theoretical arguments.
- Be able to identify linkages across studies and identify current shortcomings and areas for future research.
- Be able to apply existing explanations from international relations literature to the understanding of real-world scenarios.

Required Textbooks and Materials

Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith. 2021. *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (5th edn). Oxford University Press.

Copies of the textbook and journal articles are available to students for free via the University of Pittsburgh Library System.

Course Requirements

Assignments

1. **Active Participation** (25% of your grade): Regular attendance and participation in student-led discussions is essential to your success in this course. Research shows that students learn more and develop greater critical thinking skills when they actively participate in their learning through discussions. Students are expected to 1) complete the assigned readings before class, 2) provide insights on the topics during discussions in class and online via the discussion board, and 3) work together on interactive activities. Students will always be asked to back up their ideas with empirical evidence but are not always expected to be right—sometimes there are no right answers. Classroom discussions should be civilized and respectful to everyone and relevant to the topic that we are discussing. Students are also expected to arrive in class before the start of the class period.

In addition to completing the course readings and actively participating in class discussions and interactive activities, students will take turns to present the main premises from a reading and apply them to a relevant news article.

To assist you in critically evaluating the readings, try to identify the following aspects of each text in your notes:

- What are the main terms or concepts covered by the text?
- What are the main questions that the author tries to answer?
- What are the main arguments of the text?
- What evidence does the author use?
- What aspects of the text do you agree and/or disagree with?
- What questions would you like to ask the author?

- What future research questions stem from the text?
- 2. Critical Literature Review (50% of your grade):** Write two 4,000-word critical literature reviews on the assigned readings for a particular week. A good literature review should be driven by a clear research question and should explicitly state and discuss one or more hypotheses. The research question and hypotheses should not be new or novel, but rather should come from your reading of the existing literature. A literature review describes the main themes, research, findings, and critiques related to your topic. Your literature review is a short bibliographical essay where you identify linkages across studies, explain what existing research says about your research question, and identify current shortcomings.
- First deadline (25% of your grade): October 13.
 - Second deadline (25% of your grade): November 24.
- 3. Take Home Exam (25% of your grade):** Complete a take-home final exam on key issues in international relations theory. The exam questions will be released seven days in advance of the deadline.
- Deadline (25% of your grade): December 15.

Late assignments: Written assignments are due on the date assigned, in the form specified. Students who submit their assignments late will have points deducted from their assignment (10% within 1 hour, 25% within 12 hours, 50% within 24 hours, 75% within 48 hours, 100% more than 48 hours). I reserve the right to make exceptions to this policy as circumstances warrant, usually only with prior approval or under instances of extreme emergency or serious illness.

Student Hours: Students are required to meet with me during our student hours twice in the semester. Student hours benefit students academically and professionally by providing you with the opportunity to ask questions about the course content, gain feedback on your research and coursework ideas, and build a professional relationship with the Professor. If you would like me to provide specific feedback on your work during our student hours, you should send via email the relevant materials 48 hours in advance. I am committed to answering your questions and concerns and look forward to getting to know you.

Discussion Calendar

Week 1 (August 27): What is International Relations Theory and Why Should We Study it?

1. Kurki, Milja and Colin Wight. 2021. "International Relations and Social Science." In Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith. *International*

- Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (5th edn). Oxford University Press. Chapter 1.
2. Maliniak, Daniel, Amy Oakes, Susan Peterson, and Michael Tierney. 2011. "International Relations in the US Academy." *International Studies Quarterly* 55(2): 437–464.
 3. Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus and Daniel Nexon. 2009. "Paradigmatic Faults in International Relations Theory." *International Studies Quarterly* 53: 907–930.
 4. Zinnes, Dina. 1980. "Three Puzzles in Search of a Researcher." *International Studies Quarterly*, 24(3): 315–42.
 5. Zvobgo, Kelebogile and Meredith Loken. 2020. "Why Race Matters in International Relations." *Foreign Policy*. June 19 2020.

Week 2 (September 3): Power, Hierarchy, and Anarchy

1. Barnett, Michael and Raymond Duvall. 2005. "Power in International Politics." *International Organization* 59: 39-75.
2. Mattern, Janice Bially and Ayse Zarakol. 2016. "Hierarchies in World Politics," *International Organization* 70: 623–654.
3. Milner, Helen. 1991. "The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique." *Review of International Studies* 17: 67-85.
4. Wendt, Alexander. 1992. "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization*, 46(Spring): 391-425.
5. Simmons, Beth A. and Hein E. Goemans. 2021. "Built on Borders: Tensions with the Institution Liberalism (Thought It) Left Behind." *International Organization* 75(2): 387–410.

Week 3 (September 10): Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism

1. Mearsheimer, John J. 2021. "Structural Realism." In Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith. *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (5th edn). Oxford University Press. Chapter 3.
2. Russett, Bruce. 2021. "Liberalism." In Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith. *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (5th edn). Oxford University Press. Chapter 4.
3. Fierke, K. M.. 2021. "Constructivism." In Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith. *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (5th edn). Oxford University Press. Chapter 9.
4. Lake, David A. 2011. "Why "isms" are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress." *International Studies Quarterly* 55(2): 465-480.
5. Kristensen, Peter Marcus. 2018. "International Relations at the End: A Sociological Autopsy." *International Studies Quarterly* 62(2): 245–59.

Week 4 (September 17): Feminism and Gender Theory

1. Tickner, J. Ann and Laura Sjoberg. 2021. "Feminism." In Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith. *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (5th edn). Oxford University Press. Chapter 8.
2. Caprioli, Mary. 2004. "Feminist IR Theory and Quantitative Methodology: A Critical Analysis," *International Studies Review* 6: 253-269.
3. Cohen, Dara Kay and Sabrina M. Karim. 2022. "Does More Equality for Women Mean Less War? Rethinking Sex and Gender Inequality and Political Violence." *International Organization* 76(2): 414-444.
4. Tickner, J. Ann and Jacqui True. 2018. "A Century of International Relations Feminism: From World War I Women's Peace Pragmatism to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda." *International Studies Quarterly* 62: 221–233.
5. Weber, Cynthia. 2016. "Queer Intellectual Curiosity as International Relations Method: Developing Queer International Relations Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks." *International Studies Quarterly* 60: 11–23.

Week 5 (September 24): Race and International Relations

1. Shampa Biswas. 2021. "Postcolonialism." In Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith. *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (5th edn). Oxford University Press. Chapter 10.
2. Acharya, Amitav. 2022. "Race and Racism in the Founding of the Modern World Order." *International Affairs* 98(1): 23-43.
3. Freeman, Bianca, D.G. Kim, and David A. Lake. 2022. "Race in International Relations: Beyond the 'Norm Against Noticing'." *Annual Review of Political Science* 25: 175-196.
4. Nunn, Nathan and Leonard Wantchekon. 2011. "The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa." *American Economic Review* 101: 3221–3252.
5. Oksamytna, Kseniya and Sarah von Billerbeck. 2024. "Race and International Organizations." *International Studies Quarterly* 68:2.

Week 6 (October 8): Rational Choice Theory

1. Fearon, James D. 1995. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49(3): 379-414.
2. Elizabeth N. Saunders. 2009. "Transformative Choices: Leaders and the Origins of Intervention Strategy," *International Security*, 34(2): 119-61.
3. McDermott, Rose. 2004. "Prospect Theory in Political Science: Gains and Losses from the First Decade." *Political Psychology* 25: 289-312.
4. Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Stephan Haggard, David A. Lake, and David G. Victor. 2017. "The Behavioral Revolution and International Relations." *International Organization* 71(S1): S1-S31.
5. DeMeritt, Jacqueline H. R. 2015. "Delegating Death: Military Intervention and Government Killing." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(3): 428–54.

Deadline: First Critical Literature Review due on October 13.

Week 7 (October 15): No Class (Fall Break)

Week 8 (October 22): Why Do Countries Go to War?

1. Leeds, Brett Ashley. 2003. "Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes." *American Journal of Political Science* 47(3): 427-439.
2. Tomz, Michael and Jessica L P Weeks. 2021. "Military Alliances and Public Support for War." *International Studies Quarterly* 65(3): 811–824.
3. Hyde, Susan D. and Elizabeth N. Saunders. 2020. "Recapturing Regime Type in International Relations: Leaders, Institutions, and Agency Space" *International Organization* 74(2): 363-395.
4. Bills, Peter and Spaniel, William. 2017. "Policy Bargaining and Militarized Conflict." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 29(4): 647-678.
5. Jervis, Robert. "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma." *World Politics* 30(2): 167-214.

Week 9 (October 29): Why Do Countries Cooperate With One Another?

1. Erskine, Toni. 2021. "Normative International Relations Theory." In Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith. *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (5th edn). Oxford University Press. Chapter 13.
2. Hay, Colin. 2021. "International Relations Theory and Globalization." In Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith. *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (5th edn). Oxford University Press. Chapter 15.
3. Cordell, Rebecca and Kashmiri Medhi. Forthcoming. "Transnational Repression: International Cooperation in Silencing Dissent." *International Studies Quarterly*.
4. Kelley, Judith. 2007. "Who Keeps International Commitments and Why? The International Criminal Court and Bilateral Nonsurrender Agreements." *American Political Science Review* 101(3): 573-589.
5. Hafner-Burton, Emilie M. 2012. "International Regimes for Human Rights." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15(1): 265-286.

Week 10 (November 5): No Class (Election Day)

Week 11 (November 12): International Organizations

1. Jennifer Sterling-Folker. 2021. "Neoliberalism." In Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith. *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (5th edn). Oxford University Press. Chapter 5.
2. Koremenos, Barbara, Charles Lipson, and Duncan Snidal. 2001. "The Rational Design of International Institutions." *International Organization* 55(4): 761-799.

3. Vreeland, James Raymond. 2019. "Corrupting International Organizations." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22: 205-222.
4. Boyes, Christina, Cody D. Eldredge, Megan Shannon, and Kelebogile Zvobgo. 2024. "Social Pressure in the International Human Rights Regime: Why States Withdraw Treaty Reservations." *British Journal of Political Science* 54(1): 241-259.
5. Cordell, Rebecca, Thorin M. Wright and Paul F. Diehl. 2021. "Extant Commitment, Risk and UN Peacekeeping Authorization." *International Interactions* 47(1): 135-160.

Week 12 (November 19): International Political Economy

1. Simmons, Beth A. and Zachary Elkins. 2004. "The Globalization of Liberalization: Policy Diffusion in the International Political Economy." *American Political Science Review* 98(1): 171–189.
2. Gartzke, Erik, Quan Li, and Charles Boehmer. 2001. "Investing in the Peace: Economic Interdependence and International Conflict." *International Organization* 55(2): 391-438.
3. Cao, Xun and Aseem Prakash. 2012. "Trade Competition and Environmental Regulations: Domestic Political Constraints and Issue Visibility." *The Journal of Politics* 74(1): 66-82.
4. Fitzgerald, Jennifer, David Leblang, and Jessica C Teets. 2014. "Defying the Law of Gravity: The Political Economy of International Migration." *World Politics* 66(3): 406–45.
5. Morse, Julia C. 2019. "Blacklists, Market Enforcement, and the Global Regime to Combat Terrorist Financing." *International Organization* 73(3): 511–45.

Deadline: Second Critical Literature Review due on November 24.

Week 13 (November 26): No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Week 14 (December 3): Conflict and Political Violence

1. Davenport, Christian. 2007. "State Repression and Political Order." *Annual Review of Political Science* 10: 1-23.
2. Thomas, Jakana. 2014. "Rewarding Bad Behavior: How Governments Respond to Terrorism in Civil War." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(4): 804-818.
3. Valentino, Benjamin A. 2014. "Why We Kill: The Political Science of Political Violence Against Civilians." *Annual Review of Political Science* 17: 89-103.
4. Denny, Elaine K. and Barbara F. Walter. 2014. "Ethnicity and Civil War." *Journal of Peace Research* 51(2) 199-212.
5. Savun, Burcu. 2022. "Welcoming the Unwelcome: Refugee Flows, Refugee Rights, and Political Violence." *International Studies Quarterly* 66(1): 1-14.

Week 15 (December 10): The Future of International Relations

Students nominate the readings for the final week of class.

Deadline: Take home exam due on December 15.

Course & Instructor Policies

Academic Integrity: Students in this course will be expected to comply with the [University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity](#). Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

Disability Services: If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and [Disability Resources and Services](#) (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Content Warning and Class Climate Statement: Our course readings and classroom discussions will often focus on mature, difficult, and potentially challenging topics. As with any course in political science, course topics are often political and personal. Readings and discussions might trigger strong feelings—anger, discomfort, anxiety, confusion, excitement, humor, and even boredom. Some of us will have emotional responses to the readings; some of us will have emotional responses to our peers' understanding of the readings; all of us should feel responsible for creating a space that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful. Above all, be respectful (even when you strongly disagree) and be mindful of the ways that our identities position us in the classroom.

I expect everyone to come to class prepared to discuss the readings in a mature and respectful way. If you are struggling with the course materials, here are some tips: read the syllabus so that you are prepared in advance. You can approach your instructor ahead of time if you'd like more information about a topic or reading. If you think a particular reading or topic might be especially challenging or unsettling, you can arrive to class early and take a seat by the door so that you can easily exit the classroom as needed. If you need to leave or miss class, you are still responsible for the work you miss. If you are struggling to keep up with the work because of the course content, you should speak with me and/or seek help from the counseling center.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: The University of Pittsburgh does not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation based on disability, race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, genetic information, marital status, familial status, sex, age, sexual orientation, veteran status or gender identity or other factors as stated in the University's Title IX policy. The University is committed to taking prompt action to end a hostile environment that interferes with the University's mission. For more information about policies, procedures, and practices, visit the [Civil Rights & Title IX Compliance web page](#).

I ask that everyone in the class strive to help ensure that other members of this class can learn in a supportive and respectful environment. If there are instances of the aforementioned issues, please contact the Title IX Coordinator, by calling 412-648-7860, or e-mailing titleixcoordinator@pitt.edu. Reports can also be [filed online](#). You may also choose to report this to a faculty/staff member; they are required to communicate this to the University's Office of Diversity and Inclusion. If you wish to maintain complete confidentiality, you may also contact the University Counseling Center (412-648-7930).

Email Communication: Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address.

Gender Inclusive Language Statement: 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. Students, faculty, and staff may share their preferred pronouns and names, and these gender identities and gender expressions should be honored.

Religious Observances: The observance of religious holidays (activities observed by a religious group of which a student is a member) and cultural

practices are an important reflection of diversity. As your instructor, I am committed to providing equivalent educational opportunities to students of all belief systems. At the beginning of the semester, you should review the course requirements to identify foreseeable conflicts with assignments, exams, or other required attendance. If at all possible, please contact me (your course coordinator/s) within the first two weeks of the first class meeting to allow time for us to discuss and make fair and reasonable adjustments to the schedule and/or tasks.

Sexual Misconduct, Required Reporting, and Title IX: If you are experiencing sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and stalking, please report it to me and I will connect you to University resources to support you.

University faculty and staff members are required to report all instances of sexual misconduct, including harassment and sexual violence to the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX. When a report is made, individuals can expect to be contacted by the Title IX Office with information about support resources and options related to safety, accommodations, process, and policy. I encourage you to use the services and resources that may be most helpful to you.

As your professor, I am required to report any incidents of sexual misconduct that are directly reported to me. You can also report directly to Office of Civil Rights and Title IX: 412-648-7860 (M-F; 8:30am-5:00pm) or via the Pitt Concern Connection at: [Make A Report](#)

An important exception to the reporting requirement exists for academic work. Disclosures about sexual misconduct that are shared as a relevant part of an academic project, classroom discussion, or course assignment, are not required to be disclosed to the University's Title IX office.

If you wish to make a confidential report, Pitt encourages you to reach out to these resources:

- The University Counseling Center: 412-648-7930 (8:30 A.M. TO 5 P.M. M-F) and 412-648-7856 (AFTER BUSINESS HOURS)
- Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (community resource): 1-866-363-7273 (24/7)

If you have an immediate safety concern, please contact the University of Pittsburgh Police, 412-624-2121.

Any form of sexual harassment or violence will not be excused or tolerated at the University of Pittsburgh.

Statement on Classroom Recording: To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities

without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

Statement on Scholarly Discourse: In this course we will be discussing very complex issues of which all of us have strong feelings and, in most cases, unfounded attitudes. It is essential that we approach this endeavor with our minds open to evidence that may conflict with our presuppositions. Moreover, it is vital that we treat each other's opinions and comments with courtesy even when they diverge and conflict with our own. We must avoid personal attacks and the use of ad hominem arguments to invalidate each other's positions. Instead, we must develop a culture of civil argumentation, wherein all positions have the right to be defended and argued against in intellectually reasoned ways. It is this standard that everyone must accept in order to stay in this class; a standard that applies to all inquiry in the university, but whose observance is especially important in a course whose subject matter is so emotionally charged.

Your Well-being Matters: College/Graduate school can be an exciting and challenging time for students. Taking time to maintain your well-being and seek appropriate support can help you achieve your goals and lead a fulfilling life. It can be helpful to remember that we all benefit from assistance and guidance at times, and there are many resources available to support your well-being while you are at Pitt. You are encouraged to visit [Thrive@Pitt](#) to learn more about well-being and the many campus resources available to help you thrive.

If you or anyone you know experiences overwhelming academic stress, persistent difficult feelings and/or challenging life events, you are strongly encouraged to seek support. In addition to reaching out to friends and loved ones, consider connecting with a faculty member you trust for assistance connecting to helpful resources.

The [University Counseling Center](#) is also here for you. You can call 412-648-7930 at any time to connect with a clinician. If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, please call the University Counseling Center at any time at 412-648-7930. You can also contact Resolve Crisis Network at 888-796-8226. If the situation is life threatening, call Pitt Police at 412-624-2121 or dial 911.

The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.