

International Institutions and Cooperation

PS 2502

Spring 2025

Seminar: Wednesday 2:30pm-5pm

Room: 4430 Wesley W Posvar Hall



Source: [UN Photo/Yutaka Nagata](#)

Professor Contact Information

Rebecca Cordell

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Student Hours: Wednesday 1:30pm-2:30pm

Course Description

How do international institutions foster cooperation, manage conflict, and address some of today's most pressing challenges like human rights, climate change, global trade and development, peace and security, and emerging technologies? What factors shape the design, legitimacy, enforcement, and effectiveness of international organizations? How do states use, politicize, or even co-opt these institutions to serve their national interests?

The PhD-level course engages with key theoretical debates and empirical evidence on the origins of international cooperation and conflict at the domestic, regional, and global level.

In this course, we study a range of intergovernmental institutions, from international organizations like the UN, the WTO, Interpol, and the ICC; to regional institutions such as the EU, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the African Union. We analyze their historical development, governance structures, and their strengths and weaknesses in addressing complex transnational issues.

We begin by exploring foundational concepts and theories of international institutions and cooperation. Next, we delve into how states design institutions to mitigate collective action problems. Following that, we explore how domestic political dynamics influence cooperation on human rights through organizations,

criminal courts, and international law. We conclude with a discussion of the opportunities and challenges of international and regional institutionalized cooperation on peace, security, trade, and development.

Active participation, discussion, and student collaboration is central to this course. Each week, students will complete the assigned readings, contribute insights on the topics, and collaborate on interactive activities. In addition to developing a general understanding of the literature, students are required to focus in depth on one topic by developing an independent research paper. We conclude the course with research presentations.

By the end of the course, students will have developed the skills to critically evaluate theoretical arguments on international institutions and cooperation using empirical evidence, formulate new research questions, and apply theoretical frameworks to analyze both contemporary and historical events.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students should:

- Be familiar with current theories and empirical evidence on the causes and consequences of international cooperation and major issues related to international institutions.
- Evaluate the main assumptions, logic, critiques, and supporting evidence of literature on international organizations, law, and cooperation, and identify current shortcomings and areas for future research.
- Develop an independent research paper that develops and tests an original theoretical argument on one particular topic from the course.
- Apply existing explanations on international institutions and cooperation literature to the understanding of real-world scenarios.

Required Textbooks and Materials

Voeten, Erik. 2021. *Ideology and International Institutions*. Princeton University Press.

Conrad, Courtenay R. and Emily Hencken Ritter. 2019. *Contentious Compliance: Dissent and Repression under International Human Rights Law*. 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 Discussion Participation (20% 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 be discussion leaders. When it is your turn, you are expected to:

1. Prepare 3-5 discussion starter questions based on the readings
2. Lead discussions between students during class
3. Present a news article to the class that is relevant to the weekly topic

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. Group Project (20% of your grade):** In groups, critically evaluate the performance of an international, regional, or domestic organization and present your findings in a conference-style poster presentation. Your poster will serve as a pitch to hypothetical executive board members who are willing to make improvements to the organization if convinced by your evaluation and proposed solutions. Your analysis must incorporate theories covered in the course and empirical evidence to support your arguments. Your poster and pitch should outline:

- Rationale for Selection: Why did your group chose this organization? Discuss the theoretical, empirical, and policy motivations behind your choice.
- Key Institutional Design Features: Outline the organization's goals, membership, scope, centralization, control mechanisms, and measurable outcomes etc.
- Primary Challenges: Identify and analyze the major challenges faced by the organization (e.g., issues of legitimacy, enforcement, and effectiveness etc.).
- Proposed Solutions: Present actional recommendations for improving the organization's effectiveness.

The poster presentations will take place during class in Week 12.

Deadline: March 26.

- 3. Research Paper** (50% of your grade): Write an original research paper that builds on existing research on a topic covered during the course (up to 8,000 words). A good research paper identifies a specific question and puzzle, critically engages with the literature, develops a theoretical argument with clear causal mechanism, outlines the data and methods used to test the hypotheses, presents and interprets the findings as they relate to the theoretical argument, and poses future research questions and investigation. Your final research paper should be conference ready and include the following aspects below.

- Introduction, Research Question and Puzzle
- Literature Review
- Theory and Hypotheses
- Research Design
- Results
- Conclusion
- References

First draft deadline (25% of your grade): February 23.

Second draft deadline (25% of your grade): April 27.

- 4. Research Presentation** (10% of your grade): Give a 15-minute conference style presentation that summarizes your Research Paper. You will be graded on the content and quality of your presentation as well as your ability to offer constructive and respectful feedback to other students on how to improve their research projects. The research presentations will take place during class in Week 16.

Deadline: April 16.

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 (January 08): What are International Institutions and Why Should We Study Them?

Schmidtke, Henning, Swantje Schirmer, Niklas Krösche, Tobias Lenz. 2024. "The Legitimation of International Organizations: Introducing a New Dataset." *International Studies Perspectives* 25(1): 86-110.

Koremenos, Barbara. 2013. "The Continent of International Law." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57(4): 653-681.

Fang, Songying. 2008. "The Informational Role of International Institutions and Domestic Politics." *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (2): 304-321.

McLaughlin Mitchell, Sara and Paul Hensel. 2007. "International Institutions and Compliance with Agreements." *American Journal of Political Science* 51(4): 721-737.

Duffield, John. 2007. "What Are International Institutions?". *International Studies Review*, 9(1): 1-22.

Week 2 (January 15): Theories of International Institutions

Börzel Tanja A and Michael Zürn. 2021. "Contestations of the Liberal International Order: From Liberal Multilateralism to Postnational Liberalism." *International Organization* 75(2): 282-305.

Walter, Stefanie. 2021. "The Backlash Against Globalization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24: 421-442.

Dai, Xinyuan, Duncan Snidal, and Michael Sampson. 2017. "International Cooperation Theory and International Institutions." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*.

Martin, Lisa L., and Beth A. Simmons. 1998. "Theories and Empirical Studies of International Institutions." *International Organization* 52(4): 729-57.

Keohane, Robert O. and Lisa L. Martin. 1995. "The Promise of Institutional Theory." *International Security* 20(1): 39-51.

Week 3 (January 22): Institutional Design and Decision Making

Parente, Francesca. 2022. "Settle or litigate? Consequences of Institutional Design in the Inter-American System of Human Rights Protection." *Review of International Organizations* 17: 39–61.

Graham, Erin R. and Alexandria Serdaru. 2020. "Power, Control, and the Logic of Substitution in Institutional Design: The Case of International Climate Finance." *International Organization* 74(4): 671-706.

Voeten, Erik. 2019. "Making Sense of the Design of International Institutions." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22: 147-163.

Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Brad L. LeVeck, David G. Victor, and James H. Fowler. 2014. "Decision-Maker Preferences for International Legal Cooperation." *International Organization*. 68(4): 845-876.

Martinez-Diaz, Leonardo. 2009. "Boards of Directors in International Organizations: A Framework for Understanding The Dilemmas Of Institutional Design." *Review of International Organizations* 4(4): 383-406.

Week 4 (January 29): Cooperation and Ideology in Institutions

Voeten, Erik. 2021. *Ideology and International Institutions*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 1-5.

Week 5 (February 05): Conflict and Ideology in Institutions

Voeten, Erik. 2021. *Ideology and International Institutions*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 6-10.

Week 6 (February 12): Human Rights and International Law

Conrad, Courtenay R. and Emily Hencken Ritter. 2019. *Contentious Compliance: Dissent and Repression under International Human Rights Law*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 1-3.

Hafner-Burton, Emilie, Laurence Helfer, and Christopher Fariss. 2011. "Emergency and Escape: Explaining Derogation from Human Rights Treaties." *International Organization* 65(4): 673-707.

Simmons, Beth A. 1998. "Compliance with International Agreements." *Annual Review of Political Science* 1: 75-93.

Week 7 (February 19): Human Rights and International Courts

Conrad, Courtenay R. and Emily Hencken Ritter. 2019. *Contentious Compliance: Dissent and Repression under International Human Rights Law*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 4-7.

Zvobgo, Kelebogile and Stephen Chaudoin. 2024. "Complementarity and Public Views on Overlapping International and Domestic Courts." *Journal of Politics*. Forthcoming.

Deadline: First Draft of Research Paper due on February 23.

Week 8 (February 26): Peace and Security Organizations

Kostyuk, Nadiya and Jen Sidorova. 2024. "Role of International Organizations and Formal Alliances in the Global Diffusion of National Cybersecurity Strategies." *Working Paper*. Available at: <https://bpb-us-e2.wpmucdn.com/sites.utdallas.edu/dist/e/1380/files/2024/04/Kostyuk-Sidorova-WEIS-2024-9356574e1f44fb9b.pdf>

Jo, Hyeran, Joowon Yi and Josiah Barrett. 2023. "Humanitarian Rebels? Rebel Governance and International Humanitarian Engagement." *International Politics*.

Hultman Lisa, Jacob Kathman, Megan Shannon. 2014. "Beyond Keeping Peace: United Nations Effectiveness in the Midst of Fighting." *American Political Science Review* 108(4): 737-753.

Emilie M. Hafner-Burton. 2012. "International Regimes for Human Rights." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15: 265-286.

Lake, David A. 2001. "Beyond Anarchy: The Importance of Security Institutions." *International Security* 26(1): 129–60.

Week 9 (March 05): No Class (Spring Break)

Week 10 (March 12): Trade and Development Organizations

Farias, Deborah Barros Leal. 2022. "Which Countries are 'Developing'? Comparing How International Organizations and Treaties Divide the World." *Political Geography* 1: 1-8.

Bormann, Nils-Christian, Yannick I. Pengl, Lars-Erik Cederman and Nils B. Weidmann. 2021. "Globalization, Institutions, and Ethnic Inequality." *International Organization*. 75(3): 665-697.

Carnegie, Allison. 2014. "States Held Hostage: Political Hold-Up Problems and the Effects of International Institutions." *American Political Science Review* 108(1): 54-70.

Bättig, Michèle B. and Thomas Bernauer. 2009. "National Institutions and Global Public Goods: Are Democracies More Cooperative in Climate Change Policy?" *International Organization* 63(2): 281-308.

Woods, Ngaire and Amrita Narlikar. 2001. "Governance and the Limits of Accountability." *International Social Science Journal* 53(170): 569-583.

Week 11 (March 19): Regional Organizations

Abrahamsen, Rita, Barbra Chimhandamba and Farai Chipato. 2023. "Introduction: The African Union, Pan-Africanism, and the Liberal World (Dis)Order." *Global Studies Quarterly* 3(3): 1-10.

Schneider, Christina. 2011. "Weak States and Institutionalized Bargaining Power in International Organizations." *International Studies Quarterly* 55(2): 331-355.

Etel Solingen. 2008. "The Genesis, Design and Effects of Regional Institutions: Lessons from East Asia and the Middle East." *International Studies Quarterly* 52(2): 261-294.

Kelley Judith. 2004. "International Actors on the Domestic Scene: Membership Conditionality and Socialization by International Institutions." *International Organization* 58(3): 425-457.

Lutz, Ellen L. and Kathryn Sikkink. 2000. "International Human Rights Law and Practice in Latin America." *International Organization* 54(3): 633-659.

Week 12 (March 26): Major Challenges in International Organizations and Cooperation

Coyne, John. 2022. "Bending the Rules to Break the System: The Future of Interpol at a Crossroads." *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 42(1): 103-117.

Kinne, Brandon J. and Jonas B. Bunte. 2020. "Guns or Money? Defense Cooperation and Bilateral Lending as Coevolving Networks." *British Journal of Political Science* 50(3): 1067-1088.

Vreeland, James Raymond. 2019. "Corrupting International Organizations." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22: 205-222.

Cordell, Rebecca. 2018. "Security-Civil Liberties Trade-offs: International Cooperation in Extraordinary Rendition." *International Interactions* 45(2): 369–400.

Loyle, Cyanne E. And Christian Davenport. ND. "Transitional Injustice: Rwanda, Overcoming Violence and the Dark Side of Post-Conflict Societies." Working Paper. Available at: https://genodynamics.weebly.com/uploads/1/8/3/5/18359923/loyledavenport-transitional_injustice.pdf

Deadline: Group Project due on March 26.

Week 13 (April 02): No Class (Conference)

Week 14 (April 09): What Is the Future of International Cooperation?

Students nominate the readings for this week's class.

Week 15 (April 16): Research Presentations

Deadline: Research Presentation due on April 16.

Week 16 (April 23): No Class (Research Week)

Deadline: Final Draft of Research Paper due on April 27.

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.

Statement on Use of Generative AI: You may use generative AI tools to assist you in this course, but it must not be used as a primary source for your ideas,

analysis, or references. Any text generated by AI must be cited, paraphrased, and reviewed thoroughly to ensure AI-generated responses are aligned with your understanding. AI can be a useful tool for assisting with tasks such as brainstorming and checking typos and grammar, but it can make mistakes and the content of your work must be your own. If you use AI in your coursework, you must include a statement explaining how you used it. Any use outside of this permission constitutes a violation of the [University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity](#).

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.