

# THEORIES OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE: TOP-DOWN VERSUS BOTTOM-UP

HU Berlin — Winter 2017

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<b>Instructor:</b>	Dr. Sebastian Schutte	<b>Time:</b>	Tue. 10:00 – 12:00
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## Course Page:

- Basic information can be found on [AGNES](#).

## Class overview:

Ever since Waltz' classic work on possible sources of armed conflict in the human psyche, the structure of government, and the international system, scholars have struggled to provide a comprehensive paradigm for armed conflict. Today, two general lines of thinking dominate the academic literature and military doctrine: "top-down" explanations usually focus on political agency and the rational decision-making of armed actors. This approach is used to model conflict processes as bargaining between rational actors. In most cases, the motivation for armed conflict is also borrowed from Realist theories and revolves around power and/or material gain. This perspective still reigns supreme in the IR literature and has been applied empirically to a wide variety of conflict cases from low-level insurgencies to the Cold War.

A number of both classic and contemporary publications reject this reasoning in favor of a "bottom-up" perspective. From this angle, conflict is best understood as resulting from the shared ambition of individuals to use violence against a common enemy. Disaggregated empirical studies of civil war and simulation models typically rely on this perspective. This class will introduce both perspectives within the most prominent strands of literature. Abilities and limitations of the paradigms will be discussed in the seminars.

## Weekly readings and presentations:

- **Week 1: Overview and introduction**

- No assigned readings

- **Week 2: Original sin**

This session is centered around Clausewitz' famous book "On War" that is often summarized with a single sentence: "War is the continuation of politics by other means." This quote is actually taken out of context. The internal dynamics of conflict impose themselves on politics as much as politics imposes itself on them.

- Eliot A. Cohen: "Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime", Free Press 2002. Pages 118-132, 241-264
- Clausewitz, Carl: "On War". Translated into English by Graham 1873. Book 1, Chapter 1.
- **Presentation:** The rise and fall of Napoleon

- **Week 3: Resistance and legitimacy**

In this session, we ask whether and under what conditions uprisings and resistance against central governments can ever be legitimate. Early modern political thoughts are deeply divided on this issue; we will focus especially on the fault lines between Hobbes and Locke.

- Niccolo Machiavelli: "The Prince", 1532. Chapter XVII
- Thomas Hobbes: "Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil", 1651. Chapters I, II, XXI

- The Bible (Old Testament), 2 Samuel 11
- John Locke: “The Second Treatise of Civil Government”, 1690. Chapters XI, XII, XVIII
- **Presentation:** The English Civil War

- **Week 4: Nothing to lose but their chains**

This session focuses on class struggle as a historical paradigm in Marxism and revolutionary warfare as a corresponding military doctrine.

- Karl Marx: “Communist Manifesto”, 1848. Chapter I
- Lenin “What Is to Be Done?”, 1902. Chapters II, IV
- Mao “On Protracted War”, 1938. Chapter 1, Paragraphs 30-56
- Guevara “Guerrilla Warfare: a method”, 1963
- **Presentation:** Babeuf, Lenin, and the Soviet Revolution

- **Week 5: Hearts and minds**

In this session, counterinsurgency doctrine as an approach to containing communist uprisings during the Cold War is introduced.

- Carl Schmitt: Theory of the Partisan, 1975. Chapters I,II
- David Galula: “Counterinsurgency Warfare : Theory and Practice”, 1964, Chapters I, II, as well as pages 30-39.
- Oliver Crawford: “The Door Marked Malaya” Chapters I, VII, Page 56, Pages 81-88, Chapter VII
- **Presentation:** The Vietnam War

- **Week 6: Man, the State, and War**

Waltz’ classic attempt to integrate both bottom-up and top-down sources of conflict is the focus of this session.

- Kenneth Waltz: “Man, the State, and War”, 1959. Chapters I, II, IV, VI
- Steven Pinker: “The better Angels of our Nature”, 2011. Pages 31-40, Chapters III, V, VIII
- **Presentation:** Karl W. Deutsch, Lewis F. Richardson and the psychology of war.

- **Week 7: Mutually assured destruction**

Staying on the systemic level, this session covers the history and evolution of nuclear strategy between 1945 and 1975.

- Thomas Schelling: “Arms and Influence”, 1966. Chapters I, V to VII
- Andreas Wenger: “Living With Peril: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Nuclear Weapons”, 1997, Chapters I to III, VI, VII, X to XII
- **Presentation:** The Cuban Missile Crisis

- **Week 8: Authoritarian war and democratic peace**

Tracing the debate on the “closest thing we have to a law” in IR, this session will contrast top-down realist explanations for war with bottom-up Liberalist views.

- Immanuel Kant: “Perpetual Peace”, 1795
- Michael Doyle: “Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs”, 1983, Philosophy and Public Affairs. Volume 12, Number 3, pages 205–235
- Christopher Layne: “Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace”, 1994, International Security, Volume 19, Number 2, Pages 5-49

- **Presentation:** A descriptive view of war by political system

- **Week 9: Civil conflict I: weak states and rough terrain**

In this session, civil wars will be discussed as a thematic block. State-centric top-down views will serve as a starting point.

- James Fearon and David Laitin: “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War”, 2003, *American Political Science Review*, Volume 97, Number 1, Pages 75-90
- Jeffrey Herbst: “States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control”, 1990. Chapters I to I, I, VI to VIII
- Halvard Buhaug: “Dude, Where’s My Conflict? LSG, Relative Strength, and the Location of Civil War”, 2010, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Volume 27, Number 2, Pages 107-128.
- **Presentation:** The African World War

- **Week 10: Civil conflict II: greed over grievance**

In sessions 10 and 11, the central “greed and grievance” debate in civil war studies will be discussed. These approaches rely on a bottom-up perspective, but largely differ with regard to proposed mechanisms.

- Mancur Olson: “The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups”, 1965, Chapter I, II
- Mark Irving Lichbach: “The Rebel’s Dilemma”, 1995, Chapter I, II
- Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler: “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”, 2004, *Oxford Economic Papers* Volume 56, Pages 563 – 595
- **Presentation:** Lootable resources and civil war

- **Week 11: Civil conflict III: grievance strikes back**

In this session, recent and classic contributions are discussed that highlight the importance of non-material and non-rational motives for rebellion. Most importantly, relative deprivation and horizontal inequalities have been identified as determinants for internal conflict in recent quantitative studies.

- Ted Robert Gurr: “Why Men Rebel”, 1970. Chapters I,II, Pages 210-222
- Lars-Erik Cederman, Kristian Gleditsch, and Halvard Buhaug: “Grievances, Inequality, and Civil War”, 2013. Chapters I to V
- **Presentation:** A short history of Kurdish uprisings

- **Week 12: International terrorism: Lone wolves in geopolitics**

- Robert Pape: “Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It”, 2010, Chapter I to III, IV, VI, IX,XI
- Münkler, Herfried. *The new wars*. Polity, 2005. Chapter 5.
- **Presentation:** Terrorism as a justification for war

- **Week 13: Future domains: Hacktivism, “Cyber War”, and global surveillance**

- Espen Geelmuyden Rød and Nils Weidmann: “Empowering Activists or Autocrats? The Internet in Authoritarian Regimes” *Journal of Peace Research*, 2015
- Lyon, David. ”Surveillance, Snowden, and big data: Capacities, consequences, critique.” *Big Data & Society* 1.2, 2014.
- **Presentation:** Stuxnet, XKeyscore, and other demonstrations of advanced cyber capabilities

- **Week 14: Review of the covered material**

- In this session, we will review the covered material. After that, an open discussion will be dedicated to the question of whether or not students of armed conflict need to focus their attention on bottom-up explanations. Finally, we will pool opinions on what an integrated view of the social dynamics of conflict might look like.

- **Week 15:**

- Term paper proposals 1

- **Week 16:**

- Term paper proposals 2

**Objectives:** This course is designed for Masters students who wish to deepen their knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of political violence. This is a theory-centric class and in-depth knowledge of the assigned readings is expected. In return, students will get a broad overview of both historical and contemporary thoughts on war and peace.

**Prerequisites:**

- The class will be taught in English and corresponding language skills in speech and writing are essential.
- Previous knowledge of IR theory is helpful but not mandatory.
- Students are encouraged to include empirical analyses to their term papers. For those who wish to do so, prior methodological knowledge is essential.
- Discussion of the readings will be done close to the texts. A minimum of four to five hours of reading time per week needs to be allocated.

**Deliverables:**

- Each student needs to participate in a presentation of background information. Good presentations last only ten to fifteen minutes, provide biographical or historical background information, and thereby kick-start the discussion of the readings.
- Each student needs to present a term paper proposal in one of the last two sessions. Students are requested to briefly sketch out their ideas for term papers. A round of critical and constructive feedback is intended to streamline ideas and point presenters to helpful theoretical and empirical resources. Students that miss out on their chance to present their term paper ideas are required to circulate them in writing (two pages max.). The deadline for written research proposals is February 17, 2018
- Each student needs to submit a term paper of no less than 8,000 and no more than 12,000 characters including everything. The deadline for paper submissions is March 17, 2018.

**Grading Policy:** Students who present in one of the sessions, deliver a term paper proposal, and hand in a term paper on time are eligible for receiving five LP. Final grades are determined based on three criteria: the grade for the term paper (50%); participation in the discussions in class (20%); quality of the presentation of background material (20%), and quality of the presentation of the research proposal (10%).

**Class Policy:**

- If you want to sign up for the class, sign up via AGNES or send an email with subject line containing “Political theory class” to [sebastian.schutte@sowi.hu-berlin.de](mailto:sebastian.schutte@sowi.hu-berlin.de). Should the number of applicants exceed the capacity of the seminar, 25 of them will be randomly selected into the class.
- Deadlines are to be taken seriously. There are three things that can happen to a deadline. You can meet them and all will be good. You can realize that you are not going to meet them, in which case you will have to reach out to me *before* the deadline and explain what’s going on. I will extend the deadline if the delay occurs for reasons outside of your control. You can also miss the deadline without getting in touch. In this last case, you will fail the assignment with no room for debate.
- Any questions? Send me an email!

**Office Hours:** Mondays 6 to 6.30pm. Please contact [cordula.wesemann@sowi.hu-berlin.de](mailto:cordula.wesemann@sowi.hu-berlin.de) to get an appointment.