

The Politics of Human Rights

PLSC 451

Summer I 2019

Meeting Place: 268 Willard

Meeting Time: M-F, 11:10am–12:25pm

Course Website: <http://canvas.psu.edu/>

Instructor: Nick Dietrich

Office: 209 Pond Lab

Office Hours: T & W, 1pm–2pm

email: nmd184@psu.edu

Course Description

We care about politics because political circumstances affect the lives of human beings. This course covers the politics of human rights: why states use violence or other means to repress people, how human rights have developed over time, the role of human rights in international law, and how to evaluate the state of human rights in the world today. Human rights is a broad and changing field. Students will be expected to engage with material from many perspectives and using a variety of methodological approaches.

Students taking this course will learn to:

- Critically evaluate human rights issues around the world, including historical and emerging issues.
- Describe the various philosophical approaches to human rights.
- Evaluate state incentives and disincentives to violate human rights.
- Discuss different methodologies and approaches to studying human rights.
- Explain how international politics affect the development and enforcement of human rights law.

Class will generally involve an in-class writing exercise, a seminar-style discussion, and a short lecture. This class is heavily based on participation in the classroom, so **it is important that you do the readings before class**. The homework load in this course is intentionally light to allow you time to do the readings. You will have chances to participate through discussion, in-class writing, and other activities. The course is designed this way to allow everyone a chance to participate in a way that is comfortable for them.

Assignments and Grades

In-Class Writing: 30%. In-class writing will be my primary way of assessing your understanding of the readings. It is also how I take attendance. These short assignments give you a chance to think about the readings and develop questions or opinions before discussion. In general, we will write at the beginning of class, so please show up on time to get credit for attending. These assignments cannot be made up if you miss class. Your three lowest scores will be dropped.

Participation: 20%. Discussion will be the bulk of our class time on most days. I expect you to be engaged and pay attention during discussion, and I expect that you have read the assigned readings in advance. You do not have to talk a lot to receive full credit for participating. You can participate by asking questions, discussing what you didn't understand about the readings, or responding to questions in class.

Contemporary Human Rights Issue Essay: 10%. In 2 double-spaced pages, you will describe a contemporary human rights event or issue and then discuss that issue in relation to international law. We will discuss case selection and paper requirements in class.

Human Rights Methods and Motives Essay: 10%. Building on your Contemporary Human Rights Issue Essay, you will write an additional 2 double-spaced pages analyzing the methods and motives of the perpetrator. Your essay should identify the perpetrators and targets of the human rights violation, the methods used, and the motivation for choosing those targets and tactics.

Final Paper: 30%. The final paper consists of the two essays plus an additional 2 double-spaced pages answering one of the following questions:

1. *How would you, as a political scientist, study this kind of rights violation? Your answer should identify what existing theories can and can't tell us about this kind of rights violation and propose a theory to explain when and why states behave this way.*
2. *How would you, as a human rights advocate, recommend that we prevent this kind of rights violation from happening? Your recommendation should explain why existing restraints failed to prevent this violation and identify what approaches are likely to be more successful in the future.*

Grades

A	93–100	C+	77–80
A-	90–93	C	73–77
B+	87–90	C-	70–73
B	83–87	D	60–70
B-	80–83	F	<60

If you believe that a grade was recorded incorrectly, please come to my office hours with the graded assignment. Please do this as soon as possible so that I can correct the mistake before submitting grades.

If you believe that you should have received a higher grade on a particular assignment, please submit a sheet with your name, the assignment in question, and one paragraph explaining why the assignment should be re-graded within two weeks of receiving the initial grade. I perform re-grades blind (without checking the initial grade), so this can result in a higher, lower, or the same grade. Please note that I am unable to discuss grades over email.

Class Rules

Be respectful of others. Class will almost always involve some kind of discussion, and I expect you to treat your fellow classmates with respect. Personal insults and inflammatory remarks will not be tolerated. If an interaction in class leaves you feeling hurt, offended, or uncomfortable, please let me know so that we can devise a plan to make the classroom more inclusive in the future.

Don't use laptops or cell phones to disrupt class. Using phones or laptops for reasons not related to class will result in a penalty to your participation grade. That said, I understand that some people use laptops to take notes or look at readings. I will ask students to put laptops away if they inhibit participation.

Do the readings before class. Coming to class prepared will be a large part of your grade in our discussions and in-class writings. We will have very few out-of-class homework assignments, so I expect you to take the time to do the readings.

You can miss class three times before it affects your grade. You do not need to tell me why you are missing class or notify me in advance. I recommend saving your three absences for times when you really need it: sickness, unexpected emergencies, or other unforeseen circumstances.

Late assignments will be penalized 10% per day after the due date. If you turn in an assignment the day after it is due, the highest grade it can receive is a 90%. If an assignment is two days late, the highest grade it can receive is an 80%, and so on.

Contacting the Instructor

I prefer to be called by my first name (Nick). I also respond to Professor Dietrich (pronounced Dee-trick), if you prefer. I use he/him pronouns. I default to first names when addressing students, but please let me know if you prefer to be addressed a different way.

The best way to reach me quickly outside of class is by email (nmd184@psu.edu). I try to respond to emails by no later than 5pm the day after I receive them. I may or may not check my email after 5pm and on weekends. For more involved questions, come talk to me during office hours. I can make appointments on most weekdays if you are not available during my office hours.

Counseling and Psychological Services

This class will cover subjects that some will find difficult or traumatic. Additionally, the stress of performing in school can negatively impact mental health. A majority of college students report feeling overwhelmed, depressed, or anxious at some point (American College Health Association 2018, pg. 31-32). I take mental health very seriously; please contact me if concerns about performance in this class are affecting your mental health.

There are mental health resources available on campus through Penn State Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). CAPS provides individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

For non-emergencies:

Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park (CAPS)

<http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling/>: 814-863-0395

For emergencies:

Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400

Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

Student Disability Resources

Students with disabilities can get accommodations through Student Disability Resources (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/>). Please let me know as soon as possible if you need any accommodations for assignments, note-taking, or other aspects of the course.

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: See documentation guidelines at <http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

Diversity and Educational Equity Statement

I strive to promote an inclusive environment in the classroom and be respectful of the diverse identities and backgrounds of students in my class. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to make the classroom a more welcoming environment. Students who experience or observe an act of bias, intolerance, discrimination, or harassment that occurs at Penn State are urged to report these incidents at the University's Report Bias webpage (<http://equity.psu.edu/reportbias>).

Academic Integrity Statement

I expect that everyone in this course will behave with integrity and I will never have to enforce the academic dishonesty policy. Academic dishonesty includes turning in work partially or completely written by another person, using sources without citing them, quoting without attribution, fabricating information, or other misrepresentations of your work. It is never in

your best interest to cheat in this class; I will have to report you to the university and you will get a worse grade than if you had turned in late or incomplete work.

Academic dishonesty usually occurs when students feel pressured to produce work quickly or without proper guidance. If you are feeling this way, please come talk to me. We can work out a plan together to make sure you are able to succeed in this class.

Safer People Safer Places Network

I am a member of the Penn State Safer People Safer Places Network. I am dedicated to promoting an inclusive classroom environment and I can connect you with resources on campus for issues of sexual and gender diversity. For more information, see the LGBTQA Student Resource Center on campus (<https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/lgbtqa>).

Mandated Reporting

As a Penn State employee, I am required to report any incident of sexual misconduct to Penn State's Title IX office. This includes any incident of sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, or other forms of misconduct, whether disclosed in class, in person outside of class, or in writing. I *must* report any incidents of sexual misconduct or child sexual abuse that is disclosed to me, no matter when it occurred. Please keep this in mind during our discussions inside and outside of the classroom.

Confidential counseling support is available through the Gender Equity Center (204 Boucke, 814-863-2027) or the Centre Safe 24/7 hotline (877-234-5050). If you wish to report an incident (not confidential), you can make a report to Penn State's Title IX Coordinator (814-867-0099, titleix@psu.edu).

Lion's Pantry

The Lion's Pantry is a resource for students in need of food and other essential items. It is open to all undergraduate and graduate students with a valid Penn State ID. For more information, see the Lion's Pantry website (<https://thelionspantry.psu.edu/>).

Required Materials

This course requires articles available through the Penn State library, listed in the course schedule below. You have access to these articles through the University Library web search. In the event that a reading is not available through the university library, I will make it available to you on the course Canvas page.

Course Schedule

Please note that this syllabus is tentative and subject to change. I will notify you of any changes to the course schedule and provide you with an updated syllabus.

Week 1: Origins and Definitions of Human Rights

Monday, May 13 – Introduction

Introduction (no reading)

Tuesday, May 14 – What Are Human Rights?

DeLaet, Debra L. 2006b. “The Contested Meaning of Human Rights.” In *The Global Struggle for Human Rights: Universal Principles in World Politics*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth

Guided reading questions: What are the philosophical approaches to human rights that DeLaet describes? How are they different from one another?

Wednesday, May 15 – Universal vs. Relative Rights

DeLaet, Debra L. 2006a. “Are Human Rights Universal?” In *The Global Struggle for Human Rights: Universal Principles in World Politics*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth

Guided reading questions: What does it mean for human rights to be relative or universal? What are the pros and cons of each approach?

Thursday, May 16 – Origins of Human Rights Law

DeLaet, Debra L. 2006c. “The Development of International Human Rights Law.” In *The Global Struggle for Human Rights: Universal Principles in World Politics*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth

Guided reading questions: How did international human rights law come to be? Why would states agree to international laws?

Friday, May 17

In-Class Exercise (No reading)

Week 2: Human Rights in International Law

Monday, May 20 – Kinds of International Law

Abbott, Kenneth W., and Duncan Snidal. 2000. “Hard and Soft Law in International Governance.” *International Organization* 54 (3): 421–456

Guided reading questions: How are hard and soft law different? Is one kind better than the other?

Tuesday, May 21 – Norms

Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.” *International Organization* 52 (4): 887–917

Guided reading questions: What is a norm? How do the authors of this article say that norms change?

Wednesday, May 22 – The International Criminal Court

Simmons, Beth A., and Allison Danner. 2010. “Credible Commitments and the International Criminal Court.” *International Organization* 64 (2): 225–256

Guided reading questions: What kinds of cases does the International Criminal Court prosecute? What are the limitations of the court?

Thursday, May 23 – Treaties

Englehart, Neil A., and Melissa K. Miller. 2014. “The CEDAW Effect: International Law’s Impact on Women’s Rights.” *Journal of Human Rights* 13 (1): 22–47

Guided reading questions: Who signs onto human rights treaties? How are these treaties enforced?

Friday, May 24 – Paper Work Day

Paper work day (no reading)

Week 3: Violence & The State

Monday, May 27

Memorial Day - No Class

Tuesday, May 28 – Theories of Political Violence

Contemporary Human Rights Issue Essay Due

Valentino, Benjamin A. 2014. “Why We Kill: The Political Science of Political Violence against Civilians.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (1): 89–103

Guided reading questions: Why does the author of this article think that states use violence against civilians? Are there alternative explanations?

Wednesday, May 29 – Genocide and Politicide

Harff, Barbara, and Ted Robert Gurr. 1988. “Toward Empirical Theory of Genocides and Politicides: Identification and Measurement of Cases Since 1945.” *International Studies Quarterly* 32 (3): 359–371

Guided reading questions: What “counts” as genocide or politicide? Why do they happen? Is the way that the authors categorize them useful?

Thursday, May 30 – Mass Killing and Counterinsurgency

Valentino, Benjamin, Paul Huth, and Dylan Balch-Lindsay. 2004. ““Draining the Sea”: Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare.” *International Organization* 58 (02): 375–407

Guided reading questions: Why do the authors think that mass killings happen? Does their theory explain every mass killing?

Friday, May 31 – Sexual Violence

Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2006. “Variation in Sexual Violence during War.” *Politics & Society* 34 (3): 307–342

Guided reading questions: What factors does the author use to explain variation in sexual violence during war?

Week 4: Conceptualizing and Measuring Human Rights

Monday, June 3 – Physical Integrity Rights

Poe, Steven C., C. Neal Tate, and Linda Camp Keith. 1999. “Repression of the Human Right to Personal Integrity Revisited: A Global Cross-National Study Covering the Years 1976–1993.” *International Studies Quarterly* 43 (2): 291–313

Guided reading questions: What is a physical integrity right? How do the authors measure them?

Tuesday, June 4 – Torture

Conrad, Courtenay R., Jillienne Haglund, and Will H. Moore. 2013. “Disaggregating Torture Allegations: Introducing the Ill-Treatment and Torture (ITT) Country-Year Data.” *International Studies Perspectives* 14 (2): 199–220

Guided reading questions: Why might states use torture? How do the authors measure torture?

Wednesday, June 5 – Sources and Information

Davenport, Christian, and Patrick Ball. 2002. “Views to a Kill: Exploring the Implications of Source Selection in the Case of Guatemalan State Terror, 1977-1995.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46 (3): 427–450

Guided reading questions: What problems does the author identify with measuring human rights? Are they measurement problems or real-world problems?

Thursday, June 6 – Standards of Accountability

Fariss, Christopher J. 2014. “Respect for Human Rights has Improved Over Time: Modeling the Changing Standard of Accountability.” *American Political Science Review* 108 (02): 297–318

Guided reading questions: What problems does the author identify with measuring human rights? How are human rights changing?

Friday, June 7 – Paper Work Day

Paper work day (no reading)

Week 5: What Stops the Violence?

Monday, June 10 – Democracy

Human Rights Methods and Motives Essay Due

Davenport, Christian. 2006. “Human Rights and the Democratic Proposition.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43 (1): 92–116

Guided reading questions: Why does the author think that democracy affects human rights? What are the limitations of democratic government for improving human rights?

Tuesday, June 11 – Peacekeeping

Hultman, Lisa, Jacob Kathman, and Megan Shannon. 2013. “United Nations Peacekeeping and Civilian Protection in Civil War.” *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (4): 875–891

Guided reading questions: Does peacekeeping improve respect for human rights? What are the pros and cons of peacekeeping?

Wednesday, June 12 – Naming and Shaming

Hafner-Burton, Emilie M. 2008. “Sticks and Stones: Naming and Shaming the Human Rights Enforcement Problem.” *International Organization* 62 (4): 689–716

Guided reading questions: Does “naming and shaming” work, according to the author? What are the pros and cons of naming and shaming?

Thursday, June 13 – Judicial Institutions

Helfer, Laurence R., and Erik Voeten. 2014. “International Courts as Agents of Legal Change: Evidence from LGBT Rights in Europe.” *International Organization* 68 (01): 77–110

Guided reading questions: How do domestic judicial institutions affect human rights? How do international judicial institutions affect human rights?

Friday, June 14 – Changing Social Conventions

Mackie, Gerry. 1996. “Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account.” *American Sociological Review* 61 (6): 999–1017

Guided reading questions: Why does the author think that changing social conventions was successful in this example? What are the pros and cons of this approach?

Week 6: The Future of Human Rights

Monday, June 17 – Drones and Counting Casualties

Becker, Jo, and Scott Shane. 2012. “Secret ‘Kill List’ Proves a Test of Obama’s Principles and Will.” *The New York Times*

Guided reading questions: How does the United States count casualties in drone strikes? Why? How does drone warfare relate to human rights?

Tuesday, June 18 – Refugee Treatment and Avoiding Accountability

Amnesty International. 2016. “Australia: Appalling Abuse, Neglect of Refugees on Nauru.”

Guided reading questions: Why are Australia and Nauru doing what they are doing in this story? How does this story relate to international law?

Wednesday, June 19 – Racial Injustice and the Law

Carbado, Devon W. 2017. “From Stopping Black People to Killing Black People: The Fourth Amendment Pathways to Police Violence.” *California Law Review* 105 (1): 125–164

Guided reading questions: What problems does the author identify with US law? What options are available to stop the police violence described in the article?

Thursday, June 20 – Censorship and Surveillance

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret Roberts. 2013. “How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression.” *American Political Science Review* 107 (2): 326–343

Guided reading questions: Why does the author think the Chinese government censors posts online? How is censorship likely to change as technology changes?

Friday, June 21 – Paper Work Day

Paper work day (no reading)

Finals Week

Monday, June 24

Final Paper Due

No Class

Acknowledgments

This syllabus is subject to change over the course of the semester. Students will be notified of any updates to the syllabus. Elements of this syllabus are based on courses taught by Christopher Fariss, Jacqueline DeMeritt, and Brianne Pragg.