

POLI 211: Introduction to International Relations

Dogus Aktan

Spring 2025

Herzstein 210

MWF // 11:00-11:50

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Dogus Aktan

Office: Herzstein Hall 107

Email: da105@rice.edu

Office Hours: TR, 2:30 - 4:00 pm

Course Overview and Learning Outcomes

This course introduces students to key concepts, themes, and approaches in the scientific study of global politics. We start with a foundational concepts on how scholars think about international politics through the lens of strategic interaction. We then examine international conflict by looking at historical trends, its different causes and conduct. Following that we examine how countries negotiate, cooperate, and bargain during peacetime by looking at trade, finance, and international agreements. We finish by looking at salient issues of today and possibly tomorrow, such as climate change, terrorism, and great power conflict.

This course is designed as a survey of some of the major questions and findings in International Politics, which will help students to think rigorously about global politics . It will also provide solid foundation for students to prepare them for more advanced classes.

The course will also explore how political scientists try to understand complex real world phenomena by using theory and empirical evidence.

Students who apply themselves will be have:

- **Substantive knowledge:** Students will be able to recognize a large number of key terms in political science. They will also be familiar with many of the criteria and theories used understand how global politics unfold.

- **Critical thinking:** Students will be able to use the concepts and theories in International Politics to explain real life political events. They will also gain proficiency in summarizing and evaluating academic writing in political science.
- **Informed Citizenship:** Students will be able to place foreign policies of all countries in a broader context and thus, become more informed participants in the political process.

Course Readings

There are no required books to buy for this course. We will discuss a variety of readings from academic journals, excerpts from various textbooks, and the popular press. All readings will be made available on Canvas. If you want to have a text book in hand to follow through, I am happy to recommend a few.

I don't assign a lot of readings but I expect you to do *all* of them *before* the class and be prepared to discuss them. As a rule of thumb, you should expect to read somewhere between 20 to 30 pages for each Monday and Wednesday session. I don't expect you to read every single word of every reading, but you should be able to extract key elements such as the author's goals, arguments, and the evidence they present.

I am aware some of the readings can be challenging at a first glance, particularly if they include methodologies you are not familiar with it. Don't be discouraged. The readings (both individual readings and the overall load) are chosen so the main arguments will be accessible to you. I will give you specific instructions (such as what sections to focus on) about each reading when necessary.

Class Format and Policy

The class format throughout will combine lecture, discussion, and in-class activities such as simulations.

Monday and Wednesday sessions will be focused on lectures, although students are still encouraged to ask questions and engage with the material.

Friday sessions will be dedicated to class discussions, simulations, and student questions. These simulations will aim to demonstrate key dynamics of politics that are covered in the course such as collective action and principal-agent problems.

Policy on Student Questions and Emails

I am always happy to answer student questions during office hours or over e-mail. I will generally reply to e-mails within 24 hours but make sure you send your questions in a timely manner. If I don't respond to your email within 2 days, please feel free to remind me in person or send a reminder email.

Keep in mind that most questions you may have (about assignments, policies, etc. . .) can be answered by simply taking a close look at the syllabus. Every student should read the entire syllabus carefully at the beginning of the class and before sending me a question. When you have finished reading the syllabus for the first time, send me an e-mail, telling me what your favorite animal is.

Assignments and Grades

Participation	: 20%
Short Reaction-Papers (2 Total)	: 20%
Response Papers (2 Total)	: 30%
Final Exam	: 30%
Optional Bonus Assignments	: 0-2%

Participation 20%

Students are expected to attend most, preferably all, class sessions, and to contribute to the class by an active combination of asking questions in lecture, participating in discussions and playing an active role in simulations and other activities.

Short Reaction Papers 20%, 10% each

Each student is required to write **two** short (around 2 pages) reaction papers. The paper will focus on the readings in one session and summarize the main arguments of the assigned reading(s) and evaluate the evidence provided. This can be done in bullet point format. Due before class on next Friday.

Response Papers 30%, 15% each

Each student is required to write **two** response (around 5 pages) response papers. The paper will respond to a question using the assigned readings in the chosen (and previous) modules. Due before class on next Friday.

Final Exam 30%

There will be a final exam. It will cover the whole course, consist of short answer questions and a longer essay question.

Optional Bonus Assignments (Max One) 0-2%

Throughout the semester, there might be optional assignments. These assignments might come up in various ways. For example, there might be relevant current events that the syllabus could not have accounted for. Or, class discussions might come across interesting topics that we don't get a chance to explore adequately. In these cases, I will come up with short assignments that are entirely voluntary. You will not get penalized for not doing them, but you will get bonus points if you choose to do them. Other options include:

- Writing a short simulation recap memo.
- Volunteering to lead the class discussion on a Friday session.
- Doing well in a short oral examination or presentation.

Assignment Calendar

	Assigned	Due
First Reaction Paper	Friday, February 7 -	Friday, February 14
First Response Paper	Friday, February 21	Friday, February 28
Second Response Paper	Friday, March 28	Friday, April 4
Second Reaction Paper	Friday, April 18	Wednesday, April 23
Final Exam	Wednesday, April 23	TBD

Grade Policies

All assignments and exams must be completed on time in order to pass this course. Make ups will only be granted under extraordinary circumstances such as documented and verified medical or family emergencies. All documentation corresponding to such emergencies should be forwarded to the professor. Personal reasons are insufficient excuses for making up missed assignments, exams, or quizzes.

All assignments must be submitted via Canvas. I do NOT accept assignments via e-mail.

Students must complete ALL mandatory assignments to be able to receive a passing grade.

I do not grade on a curve. Each student's work will be evaluated independently based on its quality. It is possible for every student in the class to get an A. However, getting such high marks will require hard work on your part.

If a student wishes to dispute their grade on an assignment, they must contact me within 48 hours of receiving their grade and set an appointment to discuss it. At this appointment they must bring a typed summary of the reasons why they believe the grade is unfair. I will then reevaluate the assignment on the basis of these reasons. All revised grades are final, and they may be lower than the original grade.

Absence Policies

I expect you to attend all scheduled classes. An absence will be considered unexcused unless you give me documentation of the absence. You should also check out the Rice University absence policies [here](#).

AI Policies

Students are not allowed to use advanced automated tools (artificial intelligence or machine learning tools, such as ChatGPT) on assignments in this course. Each student is expected to complete each assignment without substantive assistance from others, including automated tools. If you are found to have used AI for an assignment, this will be treated as a violation of the Rice Honor Code. In my experience, automated tools are not great at writing political science papers. They can make up sources that don't exist and produce relatively low quality analysis. Using AI will not only result in a poor assignment, but it also undermines the whole reason why you are taking this course – to build writing and analytical skills that will help you understand and critically evaluate current events!

Rice Honor Code

In this course, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you matriculated at this institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the Honor System Handbook at <http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/>. This handbook outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of your academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process.

Disability Resource Center

If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Disability Resource Center (Allen Center, Room 111 / adarice@rice.edu / x5841) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

Mental Health Statement

If you are having trouble completing your coursework, please reach out to the Wellbeing and Counseling Center. Rice University provides cost-free mental health services through the Wellbeing and Counseling Center to help you manage personal challenges that threaten your personal or academic well-being. If you believe you are experiencing unusual amounts of stress, sadness, or anxiety, the Student Wellbeing Office or the Rice Counseling Center may be able to assist you. The Wellbeing and Counseling Center is located in the Gibbs Wellness Center and can be reached at 713-348-3311 (available 24/7).

Title IX Responsible Employee Notification

Rice University cares about your wellbeing and safety. Rice encourages any student who has experienced an incident of harassment, pregnancy discrimination or gender discrimination or relationship, sexual, or other forms interpersonal violence to seek support through The SAFE Office. Students should be aware when seeking support on campus that most employees, including myself, as the instructor/TA, are required by Title IX to disclose all incidents of non-consensual interpersonal behaviors to Title IX professionals on campus who can act to support that student and meet their needs. For more information, please visit safe.rice.edu or email titleixsupport@rice.edu.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

Course Schedule

Module 1: Introduction, Overview, and Building Blocks

Week 1: Introduction, Overview

- Monday, January 13, Introduction and Logistics
 - Syllabus
- Wednesday, January 15, IR as a Discipline and Subfield
 - Dan Reiter, “Should We Leave Behind the Subfield of International Relations?”, *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Friday, January 17, Class Activity

Week 2: Actors, Institutions, and Strategic Interaction

- Monday, January 20 - NO CLASS
- Wednesday, January 22, Crash Course on Basics of Game Theory
 - Jeffrey A. Frieden, David A. Lake, and Kenneth A. Schultz, *World Politics*, pages 86-91 (read the entire section called “A Primer on Game Theory”)
- Friday, January 24

Module 2: War and Conflict

Study of war has been central to the discipline of IR. In this module we look at the trends in international conflict and war to get a baseline understanding on its prevalence. Then we look at the bargaining framework as a key tool to understand causes of war. We finish by looking at how international organizations can mitigate the occurrence or conduct of war.

Week 3: How Common is International War? How to Think About It?

- Monday, January 27, Is the world getting more peaceful?
 - Bear Braumoeller, *Only the Dead*, pages 3-29
- Wednesday, January 29, How to think about war?
 - Christopher Blattman, *Why We Fight*, Introduction
 - Harrison Wagner, *War and the State*, Chapter 3
- Friday, January 31: Class Activity

Week 4: Bargaining Framework for War

- Monday, February 3, Bargaining Framework

- Jeffrey A. Frieden, David A. Lake, and Kenneth A. Schultz, *World Politics*, pages 93-107
- Wednesday, February 5, Why Bargaining Fails
 - Jeffrey A. Frieden, David A. Lake, and Kenneth A. Schultz, *World Politics*, pages 107-135
- Friday, February 7: Review Session

Week 5: Domestic Politics and War

- Monday, February 10, Domestic Politics and War
 - Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *Principles of International Politics*, Chapter 6 (read until section Selectorate Theory and the Conduct of War section)
- Wednesday, February 12, Selectorate Theory and War
 - Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *Principles of International Politics*, Chapter 6, (read until the end)
- Friday, February 14 - NO CLASS

Week 6: International Organizations and Rules of War

- Monday, February 17, Military Alliances
 - James Morrow, Alliances Why Write them Down?, *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Wednesday, February 19, Rules of War
 - James Morrow, When Do States Follow the Laws of War?, *American Political Science Review*
- Friday, February 21, Review Session

Module 3: Trade and Governance

In this module we focus on peacetime relations. We look at when countries can cooperate on trade for mutual benefits and when they cannot. We then examine why governments create and comply with international laws and regulations.

Week 7: International Trade

- Monday, February 24, Mutual Gains from Globalization
 - The Nation and the World Economy, Unit 18 in CORE-Econ (Read until 18.5)

- Wednesday, February 26, Conflict over Distribution of Gains
 - The Nation and the World Economy, Unit 18 in CORE-Econ (Finish Unit 18)
- Friday, February 28, Class Activity

Week 8: International Finance, and Monetary Relations

- Monday, March 3, Monetary Relations
 - Thomas Oatley, *International Political Economy*, Chapter 10
- Wednesday, March 5, Conflict and Cooperation in Monetary Relations
 - Thomas Oatley, *International Political Economy*, Chapter 11
- Friday, March 7, Class Discussion

Week 9: International Agreements and Compliance

- Monday, March 10, Why Comply with International Agreements?
 - Beth Simmons, “Treaty Compliance and Violation.” *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Wednesday, March 12, Do international courts cause compliance?
 - Clifford J. Carrubba, “Courts and Compliance in International Regulatory Regimes.” *Journal of Politics*
- Friday, March 14, Class Discussion

Week 10: Break

- Monday, March 17 - NO CLASS
- Wednesday, March 19 - NO CLASS
- Friday, March 21 - NO CLASS

Week 11: Governance and Human Rights

- Monday, March 24, Global Human Rights Regime
 - Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, “International Regimes for Human Rights.”, *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Wednesday, March 26, Breaking the Laws?
 - James R. Hollyer and B. Peter Rosendorff, “Why Do Authoritarian Regimes Sign the Convention Against Torture? Signaling, Domestic Politics and Non-Compliance.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*
- Friday, March 28, Review Session

Module 4: Current and Future Issues in Global Politics

In this module we look at enduring issues in the global politics of today and tomorrow.

Week 12: Civil Wars and Terrorism

- Monday, March 31, Civil Wars
 - Barbara F. Walter, The New New Civil Wars, *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Wednesday, April 2, Terrorism
 - Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, The Strategies of Terrorism, *Security Studies*
- Friday, April 4

Week 13: Great Power Conflict: China and the US

- Monday, April 7, The Thucydudes Trap?
 - Graham Allison, “The Thucydides Trap: Are the US and China Headed for War,” *The Atlantic*
 - Jonathan Kirshner, “Handle Him with Care: The Importance of Getting Thucydides Right.” *Security Studies*
- Wednesday, April 9, China’s strengths and aspirations
 - Suisheng Zhao, “China’s Pragmatic Nationalism,” *Washington Quarterly*
 - Daniel Drezner, “Bad Debts: Assessing China’s Financial Influence in Great Power Politics,” *International Security*
- Friday, April 11, Class Discussion

Week 14: Climate Change and Foreign Aid

- Monday, April 14, Global Climate Politics
 - Thomas Bernauer, “Climate Change Politics”, *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Wednesday, April 16, Foreign Aid
 - Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, “A Political Economy of Aid”, *International Organization*
- Friday, April 18, Review Session

Module 5: Review and Recap

Week 15: Review and Recap

- Monday, April 21, Things that could (should) have been in the syllabus:
 - TBD
- Wednesday, April 23, Review for the Final
- Friday, April 25