

POLI 369: Protest, Resistance, and Government Response

Dogus Aktan

Spring 2026

SEW 307

TR // 1:00PM - 2:15PM

Contact Information

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Office Hours: Monday: 10:00-11:30, Thursday: 2:30-4:00

Course Overview and Learning Outcomes

This course introduces students to the scientific study of contentious politics. The study of contentious politics focuses on politics outside of the normal boundaries of institutionalized politics such as protests, social movements, and revolutions. Despite having differing labels and spanning multiple disciplines, these phenomena are often studied by a cohesive group of scholars.

This course examines key questions and insights in the study of contentious politics, with a particular focus on protests and political violence. We start by exploring how and why people mobilize and the effects of various forms of collective action. We then explore government and citizen responses to mobilization. Finally, we examine the outcomes and legacies of protests by looking at the interaction of movement characteristics and responses.

Rather than emphasizing traditional exams or papers, this course uses structured discussion, group-based analysis, and agent-based simulations to develop analytical and strategic thinking. Students will apply insights from course readings to simulated political environments in order to examine how model-based strategic reasoning helps explain contentious political behavior.

Students who apply themselves in this course will develop:

- **Substantive knowledge:** Students will be familiar with a range of theories, models and empirical strategies used to study contentious politics. They will also be familiar with current and past social movements.
- **Critical thinking:** Students will be able to use the concepts and theories in the study of contentious politics to understand and explain episodes of contention. They will also gain proficiency in summarizing and evaluating academic writing in political science.
- **Informed Citizenship:** Students will be able to make informed and analytically grounded arguments about social movements around the world with various goals. They will better understand how governments, institutions, and bystanders respond to contentious action, as well as the opportunities and constraints facing extra-institutional political activity.
- **Empirical analysis:** Students will learn how political scientists use empirical evidence to study contentious politics, including how data, case evidence, and models are used to test arguments and evaluate outcomes. They will also recognize and understand key challenges to conducting empirical research in social sciences.

Course Readings

There are no required books to purchase for this course. Readings will consist of academic journal articles, book chapters, and selected essays drawn primarily from political science and related disciplines. All readings will be made available through Canvas.

Some readings may be challenging at first, particularly those that introduce unfamiliar concepts or methods. You are not expected to master every technical detail. Instead, you should focus on understanding the main argument, the core mechanism or logic, and the implications of the reading for understanding contentious politics. When necessary, I will provide guidance on which sections of a reading deserve the most attention.

The reading load is designed to be manageable and purposeful. In most weeks, one or two readings will be required for the entire class, while additional readings will be assigned to specific groups for discussion and peer teaching. Students are expected to complete assigned readings *before* class and come prepared to engage actively in discussion.

Although responsibility for leading discussion rotates across groups, all students are responsible for understanding the key arguments, mechanisms, and strategic implications of all assigned readings, particularly those scheduled for Thursdays. These readings will be directly relevant for in class discussions and group strategy memos.

Class Format and Policy

This course follows a regular weekly structure that combines lecture, discussion, and active learning. Tuesdays will typically focus on shared foundations, including lectures, guided discussion, and individual preparation. Thursdays will emphasize group-based work, peer teaching, and strategic discussion of assigned readings.

Class time will be used to clarify key concepts, examine competing theoretical perspectives, evaluate empirical evidence, and apply course material to simulations and real-world cases. Because much of the learning in this course occurs through interaction, active participation is essential.

Students will regularly work in assigned groups and will be expected to contribute meaningfully to discussions, group activities, and presentations. The course is designed to be cumulative, with later activities building on earlier concepts and strategies.

Assignments

Individual Work

Attendance and Participation	: 20%
Written Discussion Springboards (6 total; best 5 count)	: 20%

Group Work

Agent-Based Model (ABM) Strategy Memos	: 30%
Final ABM Strategy and Tournament	: 15%
Final Group Presentation	: 15%

Participation 20%

This course is discussion- and activity-based, and regular attendance is essential. Participation is evaluated individually and includes attending class, contributing to discussions, engaging constructively in group work, and participating in in-class activities and simulations.

Because much of the learning in this course occurs through interaction, students who miss more than **four unexcused class meetings** will receive a **zero** for the participation component of the course grade. Excused absences must be documented in accordance with university policy.

Peer evaluations may be used to inform participation grades for group-based work, particularly in cases of persistent under-contribution or exceptional engagement.

Written Discussion Springboards 20%

Throughout the semester, students will complete short written discussion springboards on selected Tuesdays. Springboards are designed to help you engage analytically with the readings and prepare for in-class discussion.

Springboards are **individual assignments** of approximately **300 words**. Rather than summarizing the reading, you should focus on identifying a key mechanism, assumption, or strategic implication raised by the text.

Each student is required to complete **six (6) springboards** over the course of the semester. Springboards are graded on a **0 to 4 scale**, and **the best five** will count toward your final grade.

Group Reading Leads

On designated Thursdays, student groups will be responsible for leading discussions on assigned readings. Group reading leads are designed to distribute responsibility for course material and facilitate peer learning.

Each group will complete **three (3) reading leads** over the course of the semester. For each reading lead, groups are expected to briefly present the core argument and mechanism of the assigned text and highlight its implications for understanding protest, repression, or political outcomes. Reading leads are informal and discussion-oriented rather than polished presentations.

Every group member is expected to participate actively in reading leads. Performance on reading leads contributes to group-based evaluation and will also inform individual participation grades.

Agent-Based Model (ABM) Strategy Memos (30%)

Working in assigned groups, students will complete a series of agent-based model (ABM) strategy memos over the course of the semester. These memos form the analytical core of the course and are designed to connect theoretical readings to strategic behavior in simulated environments.

In each memo, groups will translate course concepts into explicit assumptions about how different actors behave (e.g., protesters, bystanders, governments), justify these assumptions using assigned readings, and explain the strategic logic behind their choices. Memos increase in complexity over time as additional elements of contentious politics are introduced.

ABM strategy memos are evaluated based on clarity of reasoning, use of course material, and internal consistency of the proposed strategy. Emphasis is placed on analytical logic

rather than writing polish or technical sophistication. Peer evaluations will be used to adjust individual credit for group-based work in cases of persistent under- or over-contribution.

Final ABM Strategy and Tournament (15%)

Near the end of the semester, each group will submit a final, integrated ABM strategy that incorporates both protester and government behavior. This final submission requires groups to synthesize insights from across the course and articulate a coherent strategy under conditions of uncertainty and strategic interaction.

Final strategies will be implemented in a series of simulations in which group strategies are randomly matched against one another. Outcomes will depend on the interaction between competing strategies and shared structural parameters informed by earlier class discussions and simulations.

Evaluation is based on the clarity and coherence of the proposed strategy, the quality of its justification using course material, and its performance across simulations. Performance is considered in combination with strategic reasoning; no single outcome determines the grade.

Final Group Presentation (15%)

In the final week of the semester, each group will deliver a short presentation synthesizing course concepts, strategies, and outcomes. Presentations are designed to assess students' ability to explain and evaluate contentious politics using the analytical frameworks developed throughout the course.

Each group will have approximately **12 minutes** total (including questions) to present. Presentations should use a real-world protest case to assess how well course theories and models explain observed strategies, responses, and outcomes, as well as where these frameworks fall short.

Evaluation is based on clarity of argument, effective integration of course material, analytical insight, and the ability to communicate ideas concisely. All group members are expected to participate actively in the presentation.

Grades

Grade Policies

All required assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in this course. Assignments are due on the dates specified in the syllabus or on Canvas unless

otherwise noted.

Late or make-up work will be granted only under extraordinary circumstances, such as documented and verified medical or family emergencies, in accordance with university policy. Personal scheduling conflicts or workload considerations are not sufficient grounds for extensions or make-ups. All documentation related to excused circumstances should be provided to the instructor as soon as reasonably possible.

All assignments must be submitted through Canvas. Assignments submitted via email will **NOT** be accepted.

Grading Group Work

For most core project milestones, each group will submit a single product and receive a single shared grade for that submission. A shared grade on a group submission does **not** imply that every member of the group will necessarily receive the same **individual course grade**. Individual grades may differ based on patterns of contribution and engagement. In evaluating individual contribution within group work, I will consider evidence including:

- written group submissions and revision patterns,
- peer evaluations,
- participation during in-class activities and presentations,
- and observed patterns of engagement over the semester.

If a student's level of contribution is consistently and substantially below that of their group peers, I reserve the right to adjust individual credit for group-based assignments or to require additional individual work to ensure fairness and accountability.

These are intended to maintain equitable evaluation and to ensure that all students engage meaningfully with the core material and skills of the course.

Calculating Final Grades

Course grades are assigned according to the following scale. Final course grades are calculated based on a percentage rounded to the nearest percent. For example, a final score of 92.6 is rounded to 93.0, but an 82.4 is not rounded and is a B-. This grading policy is not subject to appeal.

Letter Grade	Percent Score
A+	97–100
A	93–96.9
A–	90–92.9
B+	87–89.9
B	83–86.9
B–	80–82.9
C+	77–79.9
C	73–76.9
C–	70–72.9
D+	67–69.9
D	63–66.9
D–	60–62.9
F	0–59.9

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](#).

When an absence is excused under university policy, students should notify the instructor and provide appropriate documentation as soon as reasonably possible. Unexcused absences may affect participation credit and the ability to complete in-class activities.

Policy on Student Questions and Emails

I am happy to answer student questions during office hours or by email. I typically respond to emails within **24 hours on weekdays**. If you have not received a response within **two business days**, feel free to send a brief follow-up or remind me in person.

Before emailing, please take a close look at the syllabus and Canvas. Many common questions about assignments, deadlines, and course policies are answered there. When you do email, please include the course number in the subject line and make your question as specific as possible.

Syllabus check: After you have read the syllabus for the first time, send me a short email with the subject line **“Poli 369 Syllabus Check”** and tell me your favorite animal.

AI Use Policy

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in this course is subject to clear restrictions.

Students may **not** use AI or machine learning tools (e.g., ChatGPT or similar systems) to generate substantive content for any assignment in this course. This includes but not limited to generating arguments, explanations, analyses, summaries of readings, strategy memos, or presentation content.

Limited uses of automated tools for **non-substantive assistance** (such as spelling, grammar, or minor wording suggestions) are permitted, provided that all ideas, reasoning, and analytical content are the student's own.

All submitted work must reflect your independent thinking and understanding of the course material. Submitting work generated in whole or in part by AI tools constitutes misrepresentation of authorship and will be treated as a violation of the Rice University Honor Code.

This course emphasizes analytical reasoning, strategic thinking, and collaborative problem-solving. Using AI to replace that work undermines the purpose of the course and your own learning.

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

- Tuesday, January 13, Introduction, Logistics, and Overview of Contentious Politics
 - Syllabus
- Thursday, January 15, Overview of Contentious Politics
 - Pick one of:
 - Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, Chapters 1 & 2
 - David A. Snow et. al, *Social Movements*, Introduction
 - Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, Chapter 1

Week 2: Science and Practice of Contentious Politics

- Tuesday, January 20, Crash Course in Strategic and Agent-Based Thinking
 - Paul Smaldino, *Modeling Social Behavior*, Doing Violence to Reality
- Thursday, January 22
 - Olufemi O. Taiwo, Why Protests Should Be Promises, *Time*
 - Listen: Awareness-Raising Protests Won't Threaten the Richest, Most Well-Armed People on Earth from Movement Memos [here](#): [here](#)

Module 2: Understanding Contentious Mobilization and Social Movements

In this module we focus on the movement and protests characteristics. We begin by an overview of different models of collective action to understand the mobilization phase. We then examine how participants frame or express their movement and demands. Afterwards we turn to strategic use of non-violence, and violence by protesters. We finish the module by looking at how organizational structure and leadership helps or hinders protests.

Week 3: Logics of Collective Contention

- Tuesday, January 27, Achieving Collective Action
 - Elinor Ostrom, Collective Action and the Evolution of Social Norms, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*

- Thursday January 29, Cascades and Other Solutions to Collective Action
 - Susanne Lohmann, The Dynamics of Informational Cascades: The Monday Demonstrations in Leipzig, East Germany, 1989–91, *World Politics*
 - Pamela Oliver et al, A Theory of the Critical Mass , *Annual Review of Sociology*
 - Michael Suk-Young Chwe, *Rational Ritual*, Chapter 1

Week 4: Forms and Frames of Contention

- Tuesday, February 3,
 - Robert D. Benford and David Snow, Framing Processes and Social Movements, *Annual Review of Sociology*
- Thursday, February 5, Varieties of Contentious Framing
 - Clarissa Rile Hayward, Disruption: What Is It Good For?, *The Journal of Politics*
 - Kevin O'Brien, Rightful Resistance, *World Politics*
 - LaGina Gause, Revealing Issue Salience via Costly Protest, *British Journal of Political Science*

Week 5: Violence, Nonviolence, and Civil Resistance

- Tuesday, February 10,
 - Erica Chenoweth, *Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Introduction and Chapter 1
- For discussion:
 - Robin Celikates, Learning From the Streets: Civil Disobedience in Theory and Practice
 - Mohammed Ali Kadivar and Neil Ketchley, Sticks, Stones, and Molotov Cocktails: Unarmed Collective Violence and Democratization, *Socius*
 - Peter White et al, Nonviolence as a Weapon of the Resourceful, *Mobilization*
- Thursday, February 12, NO CLASS

Week 6: Leadership, Organization, and Resources

- Tuesday, February 17
 - Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, Introduction and Leading the Leaderless
- Thursday, February 19
 - Sean Campbell, The BLM Mystery, *Intelligencer*

- Xi Chen and Kai Yang, "The Puzzle of Cross-provincial Activism in China: From Relational Dynamics to State Strategies." *Comparative Politics*
- Wendy Pearlman, "Mobilizing From Scratch: Large-Scale Collective Action Without Preexisting Organization in the Syrian Uprising" *Comparative Politics*
- Kurt Weyland, The Arab Spring: Why the Surprising Similarities with the Revolutionary Wave of 1848?, *Perspectives on Politics*

Module 3: Understanding Responses to Protests

In this module we look at the reaction to the protests by the state, the media, and the broader public. We pay special attention to the use of violence against protesters by the state.

Week 7: Responses to Protests

- Tuesday, February 24,
 - Graig R. Klein and Patrick M. Regan, Dynamics of Political Protests, *International Organization*
- Thursday, February 26,
 - Devorah Manekin and Tamar Mitts, Effective for Whom? Ethnic Identity and Nonviolent Resistance, *American Political Science Review*
 - Kenneth T. Andrews and Neal Caren, Making the News: Movement Organizations, Media Attention, and the Public Agenda, *American Journal of Sociology*
 - Peter Lorenzen, Designing Contentious Politics in Post-1989 China, *Modern China*

Week 8: Iron Fists: Policing and Repression

- Tuesday, March 3,
 - Christian Davenport, State Repression and Political Order , *Annual Review of Political Science*
 - Jacqueline DeMeritt, The Strategic Use of Repression and Political Violence, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*
- Thursday, March 5,
 - Rory Truex Focal Points, Dissident Calendars, and Preemptive Repression, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*
 - Davenport and Loyle, States Must Be Crazy, *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*

- Erin Baggott Carter and Brett L. Carter, Broadcasting Out-Group Repression to the In-Group: Evidence From China, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*

Week 9: Velvet Gloves: Censorship, Propaganda, and Co-optation

- Tuesday, March 10,
 - Jennifer Earl, Political Repression: Iron Fist, Velvet Gloves, and Diffuse Control, *Annual Review of Sociology*
- Thursday, March 12
 - Myra Marx Ferree, Soft Repression: Ridicule, Stigma, and Silencing in Gender-Based Movements, *Repression and Mobilization*
 - Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Robert, How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression, *American Political Science Review*
 - Alexa J. Trumpy, Subject to Negotiation: The Mechanisms Behind Co-Optation and Corporate Reform, *Social Problems*

Week 10: Break

- Tuesday, March 17 - NO CLASS
- Thursday, March 19 - NO CLASS

Module 4: From Responses to Outcomes and Legacies

In this module we look at both the outcomes and legacies of contentious politics. How does the interaction of movements and responses play out? What happens to protests after they get repressed? What are the lasting affect on the participants, the state, and the bystanders?

Week 11: Responses to Repression

- Tuesday, March 24, Responses to Repression
 - Jonathan Sutton, Charles Butcher, and Isak Svensson, Explaining Political Jiu-Jitsu: Institution-Building and the Outcomes of Regime Violence Against Unarmed Protest, *Jornal of Peace Research*
- Thursday, March 26
 - Erdem Aytac, Luis Schiumerini, and Susan Stokes, Why do People Join Backlash Protests? Lessons from Turkey?, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*

- Zachary C. Steinert-Threlkeld, Alexander M. Chan, and Jungseock Joo, How State and Protester Violence Affects Protests Dynamics, *The Journal of Politics*
- Jane Esberg, Censorship as Reward, *American Political Science Review*
- Mehdi Shadmehr and Raphael Boleslavsky, International Pressure, State Repression, and the Spread of Protest, *The Journal of Politics*

Week 12: Agents of Repression

- Tuesday, March 31, Repression as a Principal-Agent Problem
 - Cullen S. Hendrix and Idean Salehyan, A House Divided: Threat Perception, Military Factionalism, and Repression in Africa, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*
 - Joe Soss, and Vesla Weaver, Police Are Our Government: Politics, Political Science, and the Policing of Race–Class Subjugated Communities, *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Thursday, April 2,
 - Yanhua Deng, Kevin O’Brien, Relational repression in China: Using social ties to demobilize protesters, *The China Quarterly*
 - Jacob M. Grumbach, Robert Mickey, and Daniel Ziblatt, Enough Police, but Not Enough Police Work: An Institutional Explanation of Under-Policing in the U.S.
 - Adam Scharpf and Christian Gläsel, Why Underachievers Dominate Secret Police Organizations: Evidence from Autocratic Argentina, *American Journal of Political Science*

Week 13: Outcomes and Consequences of Contention

- Tuesday, April 7,
 - Lorenzo Bosi, Marco Giugni, and Katrin Uba, The Consequences of Social Movements: Taking stock and looking forward in *The Consequences of Social Movements*
- Thursday, April 9
 - Oliver Engist and Felix Schafmeister, Do political protests mobilize voters? Evidence from the Black Lives Matter protests, *Public Choice*
 - Adam Meirowitz and Joshua A. Tucker, People Power or a One-Shot Deal? A Dynamic Model of Protest, *American Journal of Political Science*
 - Andreas Madestam et al., Do Political Protests Matter? Evidence from the Tea Party Movement?, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Week 14: Legacies and Long Term Impacts of Contention

- Tuesday, April 14,
 - Christian Davenport et al. The Consequences of Contention: Understanding the Aftereffects of Political Conflict and Violence, *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Thursday, April 16,
 - Rory McVeigh, David Cunningham, and Justin Farrell, Political Polarization as a Social Movement Outcome: 1960s Klan Activism and Its Enduring Impact on Political Realignment in Southern Counties, 1960 to 2000, *American Sociological Review*
 - Omar Wasow, Agenda Seeding: How 1960s Black Protests Moved Elites, Public Opinion and Voting, *American Political Science Review*
 - Yuri Zhukov and Roya Talibova, Stalin's terror and the long-term political effects of mass repression, *Journal of Peace Research*

Module 5: Group Presentations

Week 15: Presentations

- Tuesday, April 21
- Thursday, April 23