

The Domestic Politics of International Conflict

Sample Course Syllabus – Graduate Level

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Course Description and Rationale

This seminar examines how domestic political actors, institutions, and information environments shape international conflict, rivalry, and cooperation, and how international security dynamics, in turn, influence domestic political processes and democratic governance. Moving beyond approaches that treat states as unitary actors, we investigate the roles of leaders, opposition parties, public opinion, legislatures, and information intermediaries in shaping foreign policy. Particular attention is given to how external threats affect democratic resilience and political polarization, and to how emerging technologies transform the relationship between domestic and international politics.

The course is organized into three parts: **(I) political actors and the domestic foundations of foreign policy**; **(II) domestic institutions, international conflict, and democratic governance**; and **(III) digital communication and the domestic–international nexus**. Students evaluate competing theories and research designs, distinguish association from causal evidence, and develop independent research projects.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students should be able to (1) explain major theories linking domestic politics to international conflict; (2) compare democratic and authoritarian mechanisms of foreign-policy decision-making; (3) critically evaluate qualitative, quantitative, and experimental research; (4) assess the effects of information technologies on political mobilization, international rivalry, and democratic institutions; and (5) formulate and present an original research design or empirical paper.

Readings and Access

The schedule combines foundational theoretical scholarship with more recent empirical research. Readings are divided into required and extra readings; selected chapters or excerpts may be assigned to keep the weekly workload manageable. Materials can be accessed through academic libraries and publicly available sources, where available.

Requirements and Assessment

- **Discussion leadership and comparative memo (30%):** Lead one seminar discussion. Submit a four-page memo comparing the week's theoretical claims, evidence, and research designs, along with six discussion questions, at least 24 hours before class (15% memo; 15% facilitation).
- **Research paper or substantive research proposal (50%):** A substantial project focused on the domestic politics of international conflict. A proposed graduate-level target is 25–35 pages for a full paper, or an instructor-approved shorter proposal for advanced undergraduates. Submit a proposal/rough draft around the middle of term (15%), final paper (30%), and research transparency appendix (5%). Quantitative papers should supply reproducible code and documentation where feasible; qualitative studies should document source selection and evidence.

- **Seminar participation (20%):** Prepared, thoughtful engagement, active listening, and evidence-based discussion. Students may participate through oral contributions and other instructor-approved formats.

Accessibility and academic integrity: Students are encouraged to discuss access needs and learning accommodations with the instructor, in accordance with applicable institutional procedures. All submitted work must appropriately acknowledge sources and represent the student's own intellectual contribution. Generative-AI tools may be used only as permitted for individual assignments; substantive use must be disclosed and their outputs critically evaluated. Specific attendance, assessment, and accommodation arrangements will follow the policies of the institution offering the course.

Schedule: Weeks indicate teaching units rather than specific calendar dates; the sequence may be adjusted to fit the academic term.

Part I: Actors, Publics, and Foreign Policy

Week 1: Beyond Unitary States: Reconsidering International Conflict

Required Reading:

- Waltz, Kenneth. 2010 (reprint of 1979 edition). *Theory of International Politics*. Waveland Press, pgs. 18-78
- Wagner, R. Harrison. *War and the State: The Theory of International Politics*. University of Michigan Press. pgs. preface, 1-103, 197-238 (just get the main ideas and criticism of Waltz)
- Reiter, Dan. 2003. *Exploring the Bargaining Model of War*. *Perspectives on Politics*. (skim) Access through institutional library
- Putnam, Robert. 1988. *Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games*. *International Organization*. Access through institutional library
- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce. 2002. *Domestic Politics and International Relations*. *International Studies Quarterly*. Access through institutional library

Extra Reading:

- Kaarbo, Juliet. *A Foreign Policy Analysis Perspective on the Domestic Politics Turn in IR*. *International Studies Review*. Access through institutional library.

Week 2: Conceptualizing Leaders and the Public in Democratic Foreign Policy

Required Reading:

- Lippmann, Walter. 1997. *Public Opinion*. Free Press. pgs. 3-68, 150-184, 201-230, 250-262
- Dewey, John. 1994. *The Public and Its Problems*. Ohio University Press pgs. 3-109, 185-219
- Reiter, Dan and Allan Stam. *Democracies at War*. pgs. 1-57.
- Desch, Michael. *Democracy and Military Effectiveness*. pgs. 1-69
- Colaresi, Michael. 2014. *Democracy Declassified*. pgs. 1-75.

Extra Reading:

- Chapman, Terrence and Dan Reiter. 2004. *The United Nations Security Council and the Rally 'Round the Flag Effect*. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Access through institutional library

- Kertzer, Joshua D., et al. (2026). “Elite Misperceptions in Foreign Policy.” *British Journal of Political Science*.
- Peez, Anton, and Felix S. Bethke (2025). “Does Public Opinion on Foreign Policy Affect Elite Preferences?” *International Studies Quarterly*.

Week 3: Leaders (and Opposition) in International Conflict and (In)Security (Comparing Democracies and Autocracies)

Required Reading: Political Science Review. Access through institutional library

- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, and Randolph Siverson. 1995. “War and the Survival of Leaders: A Comparative Study of Regime Types and Political Accountability. *American Political Science Review*.
- Chiozza, Giacomo and Hein Goemans. 2011. Leaders and International Conflict. Cambridge University Press. pgs. 1-116, 195-205. Debs, Alexander and Hein Goemans. 2010. Regime Type, the Fate of Leaders, and War. *American Political Science Review*. Access through institutional library
- Horowitz, Michael, Allan Stam, and Cali Ellis. 2015. Why Leaders Fight. pgs. 1-92, 178-187.
- Saunders, Elizabeth. 2017. No Substitute for Experience. *International Organization*. Access through institutional library

Extra Reading:

- Saunders, Elizabeth. 2017. Leaders at War. Cornell University Press.
- Croco, Sarah. 2011. The Decider’s Dilemma. *American Political Science Review*.
- Croco, Sarah and Jessica Weeks. 2016. War Outcomes and Leader Tenure. *World Politics*. Access through institutional library
- Horowitz, Michael, Allan Stam, and Cali Ellis. 2015. *Why Leaders Fight*. Additional chapters.
- Chiozza, Giacomo, and Hein Goemans. 2011. *Leaders and International Conflict*. Additional chapters.
- de Vogel, Sasha, and Jessica S. Sun (2024). “Crisis Bargaining, Domestic Politics and Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*.

Week 4: Parties and the Public in International Conflict and (De)Mobilization

Required Reading:

- Trubowitz, Peter. 2011. Politics and Strategy: Partisan Ambition and American Statecraft. Princeton University Press. Read pages 1-43 and 129-150 more carefully, and just get the main ideas of the other chapters.
- Snyder, Jack. 1991. Myths of Empire. Cornell University Press. pg. 1-111, 305-322; and skim pgs. 255-304.
- Matthew Baum and Philip Potter. 2015. War and Democratic Constraint. pgs. 1-52
- Reiter, Dan and Allan Stam. Democracies at War. pgs. 144-163, 193-205.
- Colaresi, Michael. 2014. Democracy Declassified. pgs. 75-122.

Extra Reading:

- Kaarbo, Juliet. 2012. Coalition Politics and Cabinet Decision Making: A Comparative Analysis of Foreign Policy Choices. University of Michigan Press.

- Hagan, Joseph. 1993. *Political Opposition and Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective*. Lynne Rienner Press.
- Colaresi, Michael. 2005. *Scare Tactics*. Syracuse University Press.
- Chavez, Kerry (2024). "US Military Intervention and Presidential Communication Frames." *Journal of Politics*.
- Barbera, Pablo, et al. (2024). "Distract and Divert: How World Leaders Use Social Media During Contentious Politics." *International Journal of Press/Politics*.

Part II: Domestic Institutions and International Conflict

Week 5: The Democratic Peace Correlation

Required Reading:

- Dafoe, Allan. 2014. Statistical Critiques of the Democratic Peace: Caveat Emptor. *American Journal of Political Science*. Access through institutional library
- Park, Johann and Michael Colaresi. 2014. Safe Across the Border: The Continued Significance of the Democratic Peace When Controlling for Stable Borders. *International Studies Quarterly*. Access through institutional library
- Slantchev, Branislav, Anna Alexandrova, and Erik Gartzke. Probabilistic Causality, Selection Bias, and the Logic of the Democratic Peace. *American Political Science Review*. Access through institutional library
- Matthew Baum and Philip Potter. 2015. War and Democratic Constraint. pgs. 53-83

Extra Reading:

- Choi, Seung-Whan. 2016. A Menace to the Democratic Peace? Dyadic and Systematic Difference. *International Studies Quarterly*. Access through institutional library
- Bell, Mark, and Kai Quek. 2018. Authoritarian Public Opinion and the Democratic Peace. *International Organization*. Access through institutional library
- Kenealy, Andrew (2025). "The Democratic Patience." *Journal of Peace Research*.
- Bakke, Kristin M., Marianne Dahl, and Kit Rickard (2025). "Conflict Exposure and Democratic Values: Evidence from Wartime Ukraine." *Journal of Peace Research*.

Week 6: The Selectorate Theory of War, Legislatures, and Secrecy

Required Reading:

- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, Alastair Smith, Randolph Siverson, and James Morrow. 2003. *The Logic of Political Survival*. MIT Press. selected chapters (especially chapters on winning coalitions and political survival)
- Schultz, Kenneth. *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy*. pgs. 1-56.
- Colaresi, Michael. *Secrecy Dilemma*. pgs. 123-232.
- Bell, Sam and Carla Martinez Machain. 2018. *Democracy, Transparency, and Secrecy in Crisis*. *Foreign Policy Analysis*. Access through institutional library

Extra Reading:

- Lagasse, Philippe and Stephen Saideman. 2017. *Public Critic or Secretive Monitor: Party Objectives*

and Legislative Oversight of the Military in Canada. West European Politics. Access through academic library.

- Myrick, Rachel. Forthcoming. Why So Secretive? Unpacking Public Attitudes Towards Secrecy and Success in US Foreign Policy. The Journal of Politics. Access through academic library.
- Ripsman, Norrin. 2002. Peacemaking by Democracies. pgs. 1-90.
- Gaubatz, Kurt. 2001. Elections and War. Yale University Press.

Week 7: Audience Costs (and benefits?)

Required Reading:

- Fearon, James. 1994. Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes. American Political Science Review. Access through institutional library
- Schultz, Kenneth. Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy. pgs. 57-115.
- Snyder, Jack and Erica Borghard. 2011. The Cost of Empty Threats: A Penny, Not a Pound. American Political Science Review. Access through institutional library
- Weeks, Jessica. 2008. Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve. International Organization. Access through institutional library
- Gartzke, Erik and Yonatan Lupu. 2012. Still Looking for Audience Costs. Security Studies. Access through institutional library
- Matthew Baum and Philip Potter. 2015. War and Democratic Constraint. pgs. 86-150

Extra Reading:

- Tomz, Michael. 2007. Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach. International Organization. Access through institutional library
- Slantchev, Branislav. 2006. Politicians, the Media, and Domestic Audience Costs. International Studies Quarterly. Access through institutional library
- Debs, Alexandre and Jessica Chen Weiss. 2016. Circumstances, Domestic Audiences, and Reputational Incentives in International Crisis Bargaining. Journal of Conflict Resolution. Access through academic library.
- Weiss, Jessica Chen. 2014. Powerful Patriots. Oxford University Press.
- Takei, Makito (2024). "Audience Costs and the Credibility of Public versus Private Threats in International Crises." *International Studies Quarterly*.

Week 8: Independent Research and Paper Workshop

Compare one foundational and one recent study of public support for the use of force; submit a research question and preliminary bibliography.

Extra Reading:

- French, Erik, and Colin French (2024). "Foreign Policy and Public Support for War: New Experimental Evidence." *Democracy and Security*.

Week 9: The Structure of Foreign Policy Interests and Domestic Politics

Required Reading:

- Milner, Helen and Dustin Tingley. 2017. *Sailing the Water's Edge*. Princeton University Press. Chapters 1-3, 6, and 8.
- Fordham, Benjamin. 2019. *The Domestic Politics of World Power: Explaining Debates over the United States Battleship Fleet, 1890-1*. International Organization. Access through institutional library
- Matthew Baum and Philip Potter. 2015. *War and Democratic Constraint*. pgs. 151-162, 222-236
- Hyde, Susan and Elizabeth Saunders. Forthcoming. *Recapturing Regime Type in International Relations* (review essay). International Organization. Available [here](#)

Midterm research paper draft due.

Extra Reading:

- Fordham, Benjamin. 2008. "Economic Interests and Congressional Voting on Security Issues". *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Access through institutional library
- Introduction to *The Culture of National Security*. by Peter Katzenstein (ed) Columbia University Press.
- Peez, Anton, and Felix S. Bethke (2025). "Does Public Opinion on Foreign Policy Affect Elite Preferences?" *International Studies Quarterly*.

Week 10: International Security Threats and Democratic Resilience

How do external military threats, geopolitical competition, and war influence democratic values, polarization, and public support for democratic norms?

Required Reading:

- Bakke, Kristin M., Marianne Dahl, and Kit Rickard (2025). "Conflict Exposure and Democratic Values: Evidence from Wartime Ukraine." *Journal of Peace Research*.
- Nugent, Elizabeth. 2020. "The Psychology of Repression and Polarization." *World Politics* 72(2): 291–334.

Part III: Digital Communication and Conflict

Week 11: Propaganda, Communication, and (De)Mobilization Within and Across Borders

- Messinger, Gary. 2011. *The Battle for the Mind*. Massachusetts Press. pg. 1-37, 143-250.
- Krebs, Ronald. 2015. *Narrative and the Making of US National Security*. pgs. 1-65, and 265-300
- Miskimmon, Alister, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle. *Strategic Narratives*. Chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6.

Extra Reading:

- Krebs, Ronald. 2015. *Narrative and the Making of US National Security*. Additional chapters.
- Messinger, Gary. 2011. *The Battle for the Mind*. Additional chapters.
- Chavez, Kerry (2024). "US Military Intervention and Presidential Communication Frames." *Journal of Politics*.
- DiResta, Renee, and Josh A. Goldstein (2025). "Full-Spectrum Propaganda in the Social Media Era." *Security Studies*.

Week 12: Research Workshop: Information, Communication, and Measurement

Bring a text, survey, or event-data measurement plan, addressing sampling limitations, validation, and reproducibility.

Extra Reading:

- Martin, Diego A., et al. (2024). “Trends in Online Influence Efforts.” Empirical Studies of Conflict Project..

Week 13: Social Media, Disinformation, and Cybersecurity

Required Reading:

- Singer, P.W. and Emerson Brooking. 2018. LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media. Eamon Dolan. pgs. 1-52, 148-180, and 258-273.
- Woolley, Samuel and Philip Howard. 2019. “Introduction: Computational Propaganda Worldwide” Chapter in Woolley, Samuel and Philip Howard (ed) Computational Propaganda.
- Sanovich, Sergey. 2019. “Russia: The Origins of Digital Misinformation” Chapter in Woolley, Samuel and Philip Howard (ed) Computational Propaganda.
- Zhdadova, Mariia and Dariya Orlova. 2019. “Ukraine: External Threats and Internal Challenges” Chapter in Woolley, Samuel and Philip Howard (ed) Computational Propaganda.
- Woolley, Samuel and Douglas Guilbeault. 2019. “United States: Manufacturing Consensus Online” Chapter in Woolley, Samuel and Philip Howard (ed) Computational Propaganda.
- Woolley, Samuel and Philip Howard. 2019. “Conclusion: Political Parties, Politicians, and Computational Propaganda” Chapter in Woolley, Samuel and Philip Howard (ed) Computational Propaganda.

Extra Reading:

- Beskow, David and Kathleen Carley. 2019. “Social Cybersecurity: An Emerging National Security Requirement” Military Review. Available online here.
- Vaidhyanathan, Siva. 2018. Anti-Social Media. Oxford University Press. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7
- Marigliano, Rebecca, Lynnette Hui Xian Ng, and Kathleen M. Carley (2024). “Analyzing Digital Propaganda and Conflict Rhetoric.” *Social Network Analysis and Mining*.
- Hameleers, Michael (2025). “The Visual Nature of Information Warfare.” *Journal of Communication*.

Week 14: Continuity and Change in Digital-Age Conflict

- Zeitzoff, Thomas. 2017. How Social Media is Changing Conflict. Journal of Conflict Resolution.
- Bjola, Corneliu and Ilan Manor. 2018. Revisiting Putnam’s Two-Level Game Theory In the Digital Age. Cambridge Review of International Affairs. Access through institutional library
- Colaresi, Michael. 2014. Secrecy Dilemma. Oxford University Press. pgs. 233-252.
- O’Connor, Cailin and James Owen Weatherall. 2019. *The Misinformation Age*. Yale University Press. Selected chapters.
- Lake, David. 2018. “International Legitimacy Lost? Rule and Resistance when America Is First.” *Perspectives on Politics*.

Extra Reading:

- Sanger, David. 2018. The Perfect Weapon. Crown Press.

- Kello, Lucas. 2017. *The Virtual Weapon and International Order*. Yale University Press.
- Greenberg, Andy. 2019. *Sandworm*. Doubleday.
- Gartzke, Erik and Jon Lindsay. 2015. *Weaving Tangled Webs: Offense, Defense, and Deception in Cyberspace*. *Security Studies*. Access through institutional library
- Barbera, Pablo and Thomas Zeitzoff. 2018. *The New Public Address System*. *International Studies Quarterly*.
- Gohdes, Anita. 2018. *Studying the Internet and Violent Conflict*. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*. Access through institutional library
- DiResta, Renee, and Josh A. Goldstein (2025). “Full-Spectrum Propaganda in the Social Media Era.” *Security Studies*.

This syllabus is a sample and may be revised to reflect institutional requirements and the academic calendar.