

Political Science 142K: Politics and Warfare

Tu & Th 11:10-12:30 pm

Professor: Victor V. Magagna

Syllabus

Warfare is a key but imperfectly understood problem in both history and the social sciences. A good theory of politics should be able to explain the general causes of war as well as the consequences of warfare for political and economic change. In addition, a solid theory should be able to account for the factors that allow societies to mobilize for and fight war, particularly in conditions of acute resource scarcity and internal social conflict. A failure to understand warfare as a complex form of human behavior undermines our ability to genuinely explain political and collective actions, and undermines our ability to master the preconditions of war in our own historical situation.

This course is accordingly designed to help students better understand war and its implications by addressing three crucial puzzles. First, we will examine the problem of the causal origins of war and the kinds of theories used to account for war as a general phenomenon. Second, we will focus on the paradox of perilous commitment, or the ability of societies to mobilize for “efficient” war despite the great internal and external costs and risks of actual warfare. Finally, we will analyze the problem of combat compliance, a crucial but poorly understood problem that links together the various strands of the puzzle of war. Combat compliance refers to the willingness of ordinary people to actually engage in the maelstrom of combat even when they choose to resist or defect. By focusing on these three broad problems. Students should be able to arrive at a useful working understanding of both the mechanics of war as a universal problem and the kinds of contributions social science can make to our ability to explain warfare across time and cultures.

There are no pre-requisites for this course, and all grades are based on one take-home mid-term (40%) and one take-home final (60%).

Weeks: 1-3

M. Doyle, Ways of War and Peace, pp. 9-201

N. Fergusn, The Pity of War, pp. 14-104

Weeks: 3-6

M. Doyle, Ways of War and Peace, pp. 205-311

N. Fergusn, The Pity of War, pp. 105-281, 318-338

M. Van Ceuelde, Supplying War, all

W. Murray and A. Millet, A War to be Won, pp 1-109

Weeks: 7-10

M. Van Ceuelde, Supplying War, all

M. Harrison, ed., The Economics of World War II, pp. 1-41 and two country chapters.

W. Murray and A. Millet, A War to be Won, choose selections of interests.

N. Fergusn, For Cause and Comrades, all

Thomas Desjardin, Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine, all