Human Rights Politics

Syllabus
MA Seminar “Advanced Topics in International Politics”
University of Mannheim, Fall 2022

Course Details: Thursdays 10:15-11:45
              A5, 6, Bauteil C, Room C112

Instructor:  Dr. Christoph Steinert
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Office Hours: Thursdays 14:00-15:00 in A5, B124 (please send an email in advance)

1 Course Description
This seminar focuses on human rights violations as a theoretical concept and as an empirical phe-
omenon. It tackles questions such as: What are human rights violations? How can we study
human rights violations empirically? When are human rights violations most likely to occur?
Which groups of individuals face an elevated risk of human rights violations? And which types
of interventions are effective to promote human rights? The seminar will be structured according
to different political contexts analysing distinct dynamics of repression during ‘peace’ and armed
conflicts. The seminar sheds light on different perpetrators of human rights abuse and on patterns
of civilian victimization and sexual violence during armed conflicts. The seminar also covers selec-
tive types of external interventions to conflict-torn societies such as UN Peacekeeping missions or
international criminal prosecutions. To bridge the gap between theory and practice, current real-
world examples of human rights violations will be discussed in relation to the theoretical concepts
introduced in class. By the end of the seminar, students are expected to write their own empirical
research paper on a topic of their own choice related to the field of human rights.

2 Course Objectives
The course will provide students with an understanding of the theoretical and methodological
background that enables them to conduct their own empirical analyses in the field of human rights
research. Besides introducing students to the current state of research in the field as well as the
research designs and methods political scientists have used to address these topics, this course will
encourage students to critically discuss and evaluate the literature and develop and answer their
own empirical research questions. To facilitate this process, students will have the opportunity to
present their research proposals in class and receive feedback from their peers and their instructor.
3 Organizational information

3.1 Formal Procedures

**E-mail**: All e-mails concerning this course will be sent to your university e-mail address (username@
mail.uni-mannheim.de) via ILIAS. Please make sure to regularly check the inbox or that e-mails
get forwarded in order to not miss important information.
You can contact me with the following e-mail address: christoph.steinert@uni-mannheim.de

**Attendance**: Even though attendance in lectures and seminars is not mandatory anymore, I
strongly advise you to regularly attend the seminar and to participate in class since we will discuss
and practice the material and skills that are necessary to successfully complete the seminar. While
not obligatory, it would be kind if you could inform me of any absences so I can adjust planning of
the seminar sessions accordingly.

**Late work policy**: In general, I will not allow extensions on any of the assessments. Start early
with them, so you do not run into time issues once the deadline approaches. However, should you
find yourself in an exceptional situation where you will not be able to turn something in on time,
please advise me of this as soon as you can. We will try together to come up with a solution.

**Evaluation and suggestions**: Suggestion for improvement and your feedback are welcome at any
time (either in-class or during a personal appointment with me). Also, I will appreciate if you fill
in the online evaluation from the university towards the end of the semester. I take your feedback
very seriously and will make every effort to ensure that you benefit from the seminar.

**Feedback**: Students are provided with detailed feedback on their research proposals. If you would
like to receive feedback on your presentations, feel free to contact me about it and I will provide
comments on the content and style of your presentation. Also, you can come to my office hour if
you need advice for the development of your final paper.

**Students with disabilities or chronic illness**: Contact me or the Studienbüro if you need
special assistance because of disabilities or chronic illness. Please do so early in the semester so we
can immediately make the appropriate accommodations.

**Academic Integrity**: Cheating and plagiarism can result in failing the course and possible expul-
sion from the university. To clarify, all the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else’s work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not

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1https://www.plagiarism.org/article/what-is-plagiarism
3.2 Assessment

It is expected that students participate regularly and actively in the seminar. In accordance with the most recent study regulations, course evaluations have two components: **Course requirements (Studienleistungen)** and **examinations (Prüfungsleistungen)**. Course requirements are graded as pass/fail, but students must pass all course requirements to be eligible to participate in the examination requirement. The examination requirement will be graded on a scale from 1.0 (*sehr gut*) to 5.0 (*nicht ausreichend*), and this will be the grade for the entire course. Further, there will be one voluntary element which gives students the opportunity to receive a bonus (of 0.3) on their final grade.

**Term Paper (= “Examination”)**

In order to receive the credit points for this class, students have to hand in an empirical research paper on a topic of their own choice in the context of human rights. Students are expected to come up with their own research question and to develop their own theory and hypotheses building on existing research. The empirical research paper must have 7,000-10,000 words and contain an original qualitative or quantitative analysis. The paper must include an introduction, a literature review and a theory section (can be combined), hypotheses, a research design section, an empirical section, and conclusions. The grade of the empirical research paper is equivalent to the overall grade of this seminar. The key criteria for the grading are the coherence of your theoretical argument, the inclusion of the relevant literature, the quality of the research design, the level of writing, and the explicit acknowledgement and discussion of the limitations of your study. If you feel like you need help with finding or developing a topic or research question, please make an appointment for an office hour meeting.

Term papers must be submitted latest by **January 20, 2023** at noon (12 am). The term paper has to be handed in as an electronic copy to my email address. You are expected to sign a statement of non-plagiarism, which you can scan in and attach to your term paper or hand in as a hard copy in my office. Should you fail to submit a term paper by the above mentioned deadline, you will receive the grade 5.0 (*fail*). It is not possible to retake the term paper since it is part of the overall assessment, which is only able to be retaken in its entirety in one of the following semesters.

“Course requirements’

- **Completion of the assigned reading and active participation**: This class is a seminar and therefore focuses on the in-depth discussion of the materials. The goal is to develop a collective understanding of the literature together with your colleagues. Hence, it is necessary that you complete the required reading by class time each week and come prepared to engage in the discussion of each text. You can identify the required readings by two asterisks (***) on the Syllabus. You are not expected to know all details of these readings, but to understand the key arguments and findings. The rest of the listed readings are optional and you are not expected to have read them in class if you are not assigned to present one of them.

- **Presentation of one optional reading**: Each student is expected to present one of the optional readings on the Syllabus together with another student in the course of the seminar. The presentation should take between 10 and 15 minutes and cover the key findings of the respective academic article. Please focus on the main research question, the key arguments, the hypotheses, the key logic of the research design, and the article’s main findings. Ideally,
you are able to connect the article’s arguments to the mandatory readings discussed in class. You may use Power Point or Latex for your presentation. You will be randomly assigned to the week when you have to present and you may chose one article among the optional readings (readings without **). In case you are unable to present in the week you have been assigned to, please contact me timely that we can change the slot with another pair of students. The presentation will not be graded.

- **Submission and presentation of research proposal:** You have the opportunity to hand in a 800-2,000 words research proposal for the term paper by **November 4, 2022** (to my email address) and to receive feedback on your research project. It should include the research question, a brief theory, working hypotheses, and the research design you are planning to use. Each student will shortly summarize their term paper idea during the “mini-conference” in the sessions 12 and 13 and receive feedback from another student. We will discuss the format of these presentations in class in session 11. You will receive feedback on your research proposal from your peers and your instructor, providing you with some suggestions for improvement for the final paper. The research proposal and your presentation will not be graded. It is strongly recommended to hand in a research proposal, but the task is voluntary.

- **Case study of a real-world example of systematic human rights abuse:** Each student has the opportunity to write a case study of a real-world case of systematic human rights abuse. The case study should cover a specific group of people in any given state that is target of systematic human rights violations (e.g. repression of the political opposition in Iran, human rights abuses against the LGBTQI+ community in Uganda, repression of the Hazara in Afghanistan, etc.). Please try to address the following questions: Which human rights are violated in this case? Who were the key actors involved in the human rights abuses? What is the political rationale for the systematic human rights abuse? Which domestic and international actors are involved in advocacy against these human rights violations? What political repercussions are linked to the repressive action? The case study should be submitted as a 2,500 words (+/-5%) essay. Please send me your ideas via email and we will decide together on a topic. This task is voluntary and will result in a bonus of -0.3 on your final grade.
4 Outline

Session 1: Introduction

Introduction to the seminar and explanation of the expectations. Human rights quiz.
No readings

Session 2: The concept of human rights

What are human rights? Where do they come from? How can they be justified?

- Kant, Immanuel. 1795. “Perpetual peace: A Philosophical Essay.”


**Session 3: Political institutions and human rights violations**

How and to what extent are human rights abuses malleable through political institutions? Under which conditions do political institutions restrain or facilitate human rights abuse? Which types of political institutions are most effective to curb human rights abuse?


Session 4: Targets of human rights abuses

Who is most likely to become a target of human rights abuse? Which types of individuals are especially at risk? Under which conditions are human rights abuses more likely in democracies?


Session 5: Types of human rights violations and the measurement of human rights

Which types of human rights violations occur under which circumstances? Which factors explain changes of repressive tactics? How can we measure human rights violations empirically?


• Steinert, Christoph Valentin. 2022. “The impact of domestic surveillance on political imprisonment: Evidence from the German Democratic Republic.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.


**Data:** The Human Rights Measurement Initiative

### Session 6: The outbreak of armed conflicts

Why are some states more prone to armed conflicts than others? Does economic inequality increase the risk of armed conflicts? How does this relate to human rights abuses?


**Data:** UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset  | The Correlates of War Project

### Session 7: Civilian victimization and conflict-related sexual violence

Which factors increase the likelihood of civilian victimization during armed conflicts? Why do levels of conflict-related sexual violence vary between conflicts? What explains restraint towards civilians?

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


**Session 8: UN Peacekeeping**

To what extent can UN Peacekeeping operations (PKOs) stabilize peace? Which factors influence the effectiveness of PKOs? How do PKOs affect the risk of electoral violence?


Session 9: Transitional Justice

How can means of transitional justice alleviate the consequence of armed conflicts?


• Krcmaric, Daniel. 2022. "Does the International Criminal Court Target the American Military?" American Political Science Review.


**Session 10: Intergovernmental human rights organizations and civil society organizations**

Which domestic and international actors are involved in advocacy against human rights abuses? Which factors influence ‘naming and shaming’ dynamics in the international arena?


**Session 11: Remedies against human rights violations**

What types of interventions are capable to prevent, or at least to diminish, the frequency of human rights violations?


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**Data:** UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset. Online access: https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/ucdp-data/

**Session 12: Student presentations of research proposals I**

During this session students will present their research ideas and receive comments by the course instructor and their peers.

The readings of this week focus on security alliances and the R2P. Key questions are: Which factors drive military interventions and are they motivated by normative concerns? How do security alliances shape patterns of inter-state wars? To what extent does the principle of collective security deter aggressors?


**Session 13: Student presentations of research proposals II**

During this session students will present their research ideas and receive comments by the course instructor and their peers.

The readings of this week cover human rights abuses in the digital age. How does the emergence of new information technologies affect the type and frequency of human rights violations? Is cyberwar a complement or a substitute of conventional warfare? Do cyber attacks increase the risk of conventional wars?


Data: [University of Maryland CISSM Cyber Attacks Database](#)

**Session 14: Leftover presentations and wrap-up**

If there have been left-overs from the previous session students will have the opportunity to present during the final session and receive comments by their peers. Further, we will synthesize and summarize the learning from this seminar.

*No reading*