

PSCI 2274

The Nature of War

Spring 2021

Instructor: Andrew Coe, andrew.j.coe@gmail.com

Office Hours: use my [online calendar](#) to schedule a meeting

Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:20–3:35pm, on [Zoom](#)

Final Exam: Monday, May 10, 9–11am

Description

Why do we inflict violence on each other? Why do societies experience civil war, and states fight wars with each other? How can we make it stop?

The last two decades have seen a massive outpouring of research on these questions, across the social sciences. Archaeologists are studying the way human beings fought before civilization, anthropologists study how the rise of agriculture and government affected human violence, and political scientists and economists are learning about why some modern countries are more prone to strife and war than others.

Thanks to these efforts, our understanding of human conflict—why it happens and how it can be prevented—has advanced by leaps and bounds. In this class, we will explore the science of human conflict. We will learn what is known about ancient human warfare. (Did you know that Native American societies, far from being made up of “peaceful savages” as they were once called, were actually far more violent than the United States is today?) We will think hard about where conflicts of interest come from, and why they are sometimes prosecuted and resolved violently. (Sex, money, and power...) We will delve into the history of human violence in all its forms. (What decade was the most peaceful in all human history? Believe it or not, the 2010s.) And we will evaluate the world’s ability to end wars, and the benefits and costs of doing so. (War might not always be worse than peace—it depends on the character of peace!)

Along the way, you will gain and refine a number of skills that will be useful in later classes, and in your eventual career. You will learn how to analyze controversial issues, dispelling the hype and

vitriol that often surrounds these in public commentary. You will practice communicating your assessments and judgments with calm, concision, and clarity. You will see how modern research in social science is done, and how it is applied to real-world problems. Finally, you will learn how to read and digest academic research, even when it uses mathematical or other techniques you don't understand.

Contacting Me: To meet with me, reserve a slot on my [online calendar](#). I'm happy to chat about course materials, assignments, exams, or whatever else is on your mind.

Students with Disabilities: If you need course accommodations due to a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me and/or the appropriate office as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity: Don't lie, cheat, or steal. Plagiarism is all three (think about it). Also, don't abet the bad behavior of others. If you catch a classmate breaking exam rules or copying another's work and don't report it, you're abetting it. Get caught doing any of these and the penalty is an F in the course, *at minimum*. For more detail, see the [Honor Code](#) and the related guide to [avoiding plagiarism](#).

Books

Please acquire the following two books; Amazon's prices for a hardcopy are listed. Both books are also available for free online through the Vanderbilt Library web portal.

1. Azar Gat. *War in Human Civilization*. Oxford University Press, 2008. \$40.
2. Steven Pinker. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. Penguin Books, 2012. \$27.

Requirements

Preparation and Participation (10%): Careful, thorough reading of the assigned papers before class and participating thoughtfully in class are essential to the value of this course. Though most meetings will be devoted to lecture, there will be ample opportunity for you to raise questions and engage in discussion with your classmates. You can also come by my office hours.

Short Assignments (30%): At three points during the semester, I will give you a short assignment to help you work through the readings.

Midterm (25%) and Final (35%) Exams: The exams will be closed-book and closed-notes. The midterm will be administered in class; the final on Saturday, December 14, from 9 to 11am. They will include multiple choice and short answer questions, and will also ask you to define some key terms from the readings.

Late Policy: If you need to, you may submit one short assignment up to five days late, with no questions asked as long as you email before the deadline to say you'll be taking the extension. However, everyone must take the midterm and final at the specified date and time. Exceptions to this policy for personal emergencies will be granted at my discretion.

Schedule and Readings

Readings are to be completed by the beginning of class on the date listed. Some of the readings build in a sequence: it will be easier to understand them if you read them in the order listed. The journal articles and working papers listed below will be available on the class website.

NOTE: Many of the papers listed below contain appendices that describe the mathematical details behind the paper's results. I will not test you on the material in these appendices, but I encourage you to read them if you are curious about the details.

The Evolution of Violent Conflict among Humans

What role did violence play in the evolution of human society? Is war part of basic human nature, or an artifact of civilization? How and why did early humans fight? How did the development of civilization alter human violence?

Tuesday, January 26: Overview of the class, no assigned readings.

Thursday, January 28: [60 pages]

- Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, Preface and Chapters 1–3.

Tuesday, February 2: [91 pages]

- Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, Chapters 4–7.

Thursday, February 4: [82 pages]

- Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, Chapters 8–9.

Tuesday, February 9: [92 pages]

- Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, Chapter 10.

Thursday, February 11: [78 pages]

- Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, Chapter 11.

Tuesday, February 16: [42 pages]

- Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, Chapter 12.

Thursday, February 18: [67 pages]

- Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, Chapter 13–14.

Tuesday, February 23: [58 pages]

- Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, Chapter 15.

Frameworks for Understanding Violent Conflict

Analytical frameworks for thinking about violent prosecution of conflicts of interest. Why is peaceful cooperation so common? Why are some countries more likely to engage in civil or interstate warfare than others? Political and economic factors that lead to war.

Thursday, February 25: [28 pages]

- Robert Kaplan. “The Balkans: Europe’s Third World.” *The Atlantic Monthly* 264.1 (July 1989): 16–22.
- James Fearon and David Laitin. “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation.” *American Political Science Review* 90.4 (1996): 715–735.

Tuesday, March 2: no readings

Thursday, March 4: [35+ pages]

- Read the Wikipedia page on the “Russo-Japanese War.”
- James Fearon. “Rationalist Explanations for War.” *International Organization* 49.3 (1995): 379–414.

Tuesday, March 9: no readings

Thursday, March 11: [92 pages]

- Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, Chapter 16.

Tuesday, March 16: [51 pages]

- Jack Hirshleifer. “The Paradox of Power.” *Economics & Politics* 3.3 (1991): 177–200.
- Jack Hirshleifer. “Anarchy and Its Breakdown.” *Journal of Political Economy* 103.1 (1995): 26–52.

The Long-Term Decline in Human Violence

The long-term trends in murder, rape, civil conflict, and interstate war, and their relationship to changes in human societies. The changing human psychology of conflict and cooperation. What explains the rising tide of peace?

Thursday, March 18: [58+ pages]

- Pinker, *Better Angels*, Preface and Chapters 1–2.

Tuesday, March 23: [70 pages]

- Pinker, *Better Angels*, Chapters 3.

Thursday, March 25: MIDTERM EXAM (in class)

Tuesday, March 30: [60 pages]

- Pinker, *Better Angels*, Chapter 4.

Thursday, April 1: [106 pages]

- Pinker, *Better Angels*, Chapter 5.

Tuesday, April 6: [83 pages]

- Pinker, *Better Angels*, Chapter 6.

Thursday, April 8: [104 pages]

- Pinker, *Better Angels*, Chapter 7.

Tuesday, April 13: [32 pages]

- Andrew Coe. “Modern Economic Peace.” Working paper, 2016.

Bringing an End to War

Should the world intervene to stop wars? Can it? How effective are peacekeeping, mediation, and the negotiation of settlements at permanently halting civil war? What about simply overthrowing violent regimes?

Thursday, April 15: [58 pages]

- James Fearon and David Laitin. “Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States.” *International Security* 28.4 (2004): 5–43.
- Halvard Buhaug and Kristian Gleditsch. “Contagion or Confusion? Why Conflicts Cluster in Space.” *International Studies Quarterly* 52.2 (2008): 215–233.

Tuesday, April 20: [38 pages]

- Virginia Fortna. “Does Peacekeeping Keep Peace? International Intervention and the Duration of Peace after Civil War.” *International Studies Quarterly* 48.2 (2004): 269–292.
- Kyle Beardsley. “Peacekeeping and the Contagion of Armed Conflict.” *Journal of Politics* 73.4 (2011): 1051–1064.

Thursday, April 22: [48 pages]

- Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter. “Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence.” *International Organization* 56.2 (2002): 263–296.
- Andrew Kydd. “When Can Mediators Build Trust?” *American Political Science Review* 100.3 (2006): 449–462.

Tuesday, April 27: [55 pages]

- John Owen IV. “The Foreign Imposition of Domestic Institutions.” *International Organization* 56.2 (2002): 375–409.
- Nigel Lo et al. “Ensuring Peace: Foreign-Imposed Regime Change and Postwar Peace Duration, 1914–2001.” *International Organization* 62.4 (2008): 717–736.

Thursday, April 29: [65 pages]

- Alexander Downes and Jonathan Monten. “Forced to Be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization.” *International Security* 37.4 (2013): 90–131.
- Goran Peic and Dan Reiter. “Foreign-Imposed Regime Change, State Power, and Civil War Onset, 1920–2004.” *British Journal of Political Science* 41.3 (2011): 453–475.