Introduction

Contentious politics is one of the core subfields of political science, reaching across International Relations, Comparative Politics, American Politics, and Political Theory. This course presents an introduction to contentious politics through a survey of the main concepts, theoretical debates, and methodological approaches in the subfield. Readings have been divided thematically around key concepts and topics of study. Broad themes that will guide this course include:

- Power and resistance to power
- Why men (and women) rebel
- The logic of political organization, collective action, and political violence

The goals of the course include, but are not limited to guiding students in:

- Developing a broad understanding of the major themes, theories, and methods in contentious politics
- Focusing on a general body of theoretical literature for future research (e.g. your dissertation)
- Understanding the construction and execution of successful research design

Course Requirements

Students are expected to participate actively in all discussions and to complete readings and assignments prior to each class. Note: Late work will not be accepted and incompletes will not be given except in extreme, unanticipated, and unpredictable situations.

1. Participation and Attendance

As this is a seminar class participation is essential to the success of the class and as such attendance is mandatory. Please contact me in advance of the class session if you are not able to attend. Students are allowed one absence before their grade is penalized. Any additional absences will be addressed on an individual basis. Participation is graded based on the student’s ability to demonstrate that he/she has grasped the reading and is conversant in the theory and methods presented by each author.

2. Reaction Papers

Each week students will write a 1-page reaction paper on the week’s reading (12 pt. font, Times New Roman, 1 inch margins). Reaction papers longer than 1 page will not be accepted. Reaction papers must
be emailed to me no later than midnight on the night before class (Sunday night). Students may miss one reaction paper without penalty.

The reaction paper is not a summary of the text, but rather a reflection on your own thoughts about the reading. Reaction papers should (1) include a concise summary of the argument and evidence from the reading, (2) assess the strengths and weaknesses of the argument, and (3) discuss the effectiveness of the methods used. Consider questions such as: What causal mechanisms are at work? What is the structure of the author’s argument? Does the work principally generate ideas, test causal hypotheses or develop theory, or some combination of these? What evidence is presented that is said to confirm or disconfirm the argument? Can you suggest a further or better way to evaluate the author’s claims? How does this reading advance our understanding of contentious politics broadly? It is particularly useful to use the reaction papers to reflect on previous readings and future themes of the course.

3. Class Discussant
Each week one student will be assigned as the discussant for that week’s readings. The discussant will be responsible for leading the discussion on those readings as well as preparing a brief outline of the research design for each reading. Discussant do NOT need to prepare a reaction paper for their discussant week. Each student will be a class discussant one time over the course of the semester.

The reading outline should include (1) the research question, (2) the main argument (e.g. the answer to the research question), (3) variables of interest, and (4) methodology for each reading. Where possible the causal argument should be diagramed. The total outline should be 1-page or less in length. Students are responsible for preparing copies of the outline for all members of the course. Copies of the outline should be distributed at the beginning of class. While leading the class, the discussant should examine key themes and questions on the topic and work to link the week’s readings with previous topics addressed in the class. The discussant should arrive in class with at least 3 discussion questions per reading. If you have questions on your reading, make an appointment to meet with me at least 24 hours in advance of class (not day of).

4. Final Writing Assignment
Each student will be responsible for completing a final writing assignment on a topic of the student’s choice, but directly related to course material. This assignment should seek to extend the already existing literature that has been covered in this course or take the research in a new direction (e.g. exploring unexamined arguments).

Assignment topics are due by March 2. On that date students should submit a one-page summary including: research question/puzzle, hypotheses, and a minimum of 5 sources (independent of course reading material) that will be consulted for the literature review. This topic must be pre-approved. Please set up an appointment in advance of the due date so that we can discuss your proposed topic.

The final writing assignment does not represent a complete piece of scholarship. Rather, it represents an article length paper up until the actual empirical analysis is undertaken: i.e., the puzzle, research question, literature review, theoretical contribution, hypotheses, and research design. Preliminary data analysis will be an additional benefit, but is not required. This assignment is designed to evaluate the student’s ability to develop an independent piece of research and to critically engage existing scholarship. The assignment will be graded on creativity, mastery of the existing literature, and overall research merit. The paper should not exceed 30 pages double-space (not including notes, tables, and references). The final paper will be due on the last day of class (April 27).
5. Writing Assignment Workshop Discussant

Each student will have the opportunity to ‘workshop’ their final paper. Papers will be assigned a discussant and presented during class in a Tilly workshop format. Authors will be given 2-3 minutes to discuss the motivations and goals of the project. Discussants will then have 10 minutes to discuss the piece and provide suggestions and comments. This discussion should assume that all class members have already read the draft. There will then be an additional 10 minutes of discussion from the class with an opportunity for the author to respond.

Authors should take this opportunity seriously and edit and revise their final paper according to the suggestions received in class. Draft papers are due to the discussant and the class one week before the workshop. Papers should be uploaded to the course’s Canvas cite. Workshop assignments will be made at the end of February.

Grading
10% Participation/Attendance
30% Weekly Reaction Papers
20% Class Discussant
10% Workshop Discussant
30% Final Writing Assignment

Readings
Readings for this course are designed to give students a necessary introduction to the major works and theories in Contentious Politics. These books, articles, and authors will appear again and again throughout your research and on the comprehensive exam for this subfield topic. Reading is essential and will be necessary to write thoughtful, informed reaction papers as well as to participate in class discussion. Students are responsible to bring a copy of the readings to every class.

Assigned books are listed on this syllabus in bold font. Many of these books will be available used online. When purchasing used books please pay attention to the edition as many of these books have been revised. Articles have been put on the course Canvas page.

Adding to the course readings, you are asked to subscribe to and follow the blog Political Violence at a Glance: http://politicalviolenceataglance.org. This blog covers contemporary questions regarding political violence and will be relevant for the material in the course. When relevant, material from the blog will be discussed in class.

Academic Integrity
Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at PSU, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Academic integrity includes a commitment by all members of the University community not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.

A Note on the Course
Due to the nature of the subject matter of this course at times you will be exposed to descriptions of violent acts (including mass killings and sexual crimes), confessions of perpetrators, testimony of victims, and difficult moral and ethical questions. If at any point you anticipate that particular readings or topics
will be difficult for you, please contact me in advance. Similarly, if after readings or a discussion, you feel unsettled or troubled in anyway, please contact me so that I can assist you in finding services on Campus to address your concerns.

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

*Week 1, January 13  Introduction to Course and Contentious Politics in Political Science*

** No reading assignment this week

**Additional Readings:**

**Theories of Contention**

*Week 2, January 27  Definitions*


**Additional Readings:**

*Week 3, February 3  Logics of Contentious Action*


**Mark Irving Lichbach. 1995. The Rebel's Dilemma.** University of Michigan Press, Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 3-32)


Additional Readings:


Tactics of Contention

Week 4, February 10  Protest and Protest Policing


Additional Readings:

Week 5, February 17 or 24  State Repression


Additional Readings:

Week 6, February 17 or 24  No Class

Week 7, March 2  Revolution
**Research topics due**


**Additional Readings:**

**SPRING BREAK**

**Week 8, March 16** Everyday Forms of Resistance


**Additional Readings:**

Week 9, March 23 No Class- ISA

Week 10, March 30 Gender


David Mason (1992) “Women’s Participation in Central American Revolutions: A Theoretical Perspective”, Comparative Political Studies 25(1)

Additional Readings:
• Caprioli, Mary (2005) “Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Equality in Predicting Internal Conflict”, International Studies Quarterly 49(2)
• Melander, Eric (2005) “Gender Inequality and Intrastate Armed Conflict”, International Studies Quarterly 49(4)

Variations of Contention

Week 11, April 6 Similarities and Differences
** Workshop 1 Papers due to Class**


Additional Readings:

**Week 12, April 13** Workshop Week 1  
**Workshop 2 Papers due to Class**

**Week 13, April 20** Workshop Week 2

**Week 15, April 28** Timing
**Final Paper Due in Class**


Additional Readings:
• "Understanding State Responses to Left vs. Right-Wing Threats" – David Cunningham, 2003. *Social Science History* 27: 3
• Special Issue on (De)Radicalization. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 2012. 6(1): 4-126.