

Peacebuilding and Development

Department of Political Science, Utah State University

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1 General Information

Instructor: Michael Findley

Phone: 512.749.3815

Email: mgfindley@gmail.com

Office Hours: Wed. 9–12 & by appt.

Office location: Main 328A

Office hours sign-up: [\[Link here\]](#)

Zoom link: [\[Link here\]](#)

Class Location: Main 318

TA: Zeeshan Saeed

TA email: zeeshan.saeed@usu.edu

TA office hours: Weds 11:30–2:30 & by appt.

Writing Fellows: Jacob Sagers & Audrey Lewis

2 Course Overview, Format, and Objectives

The nexus between peacebuilding and development stands as one of the most formidable challenges of our time. The devastating impact of conflict on societies is well-documented, and nowhere is the difficulty of international development more apparent than in countries ravaged by war. In these contexts, the collapse of governance, infrastructure, and social cohesion exacerbates poverty, fuels inequality, and perpetuates cycles of violence. Simultaneously, the absence of sustainable development efforts often undermines the fragile peace that may follow the cessation of hostilities, leading to the resurgence of conflict.

This course will explore the intricate relationship between peacebuilding and development, recognizing that sustainable peace cannot be built without addressing the underlying developmental deficits that fuel instability. We will embed rich case studies and practical policy discussions within a broader theoretical framework that accounts for the roots of war and paths to peace. By the end of the course, you should have a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities involved in fostering sustainable development in conflict and post-conflict settings.

In contrast to your lecture-based courses, which typically focus on making illustrative applications of others' research, this research seminar centers on giving you the opportunity to shift from being a passive consumer of knowledge to being an active producer of original knowledge. As this might be your first opportunity to produce original research, I will provide some structure to help you succeed. First, we will devote some time during each class session to discussions of scientific and policy inquiry. Second, we will conduct an omnibus study in which you can embed your own research question and ideas). Third, you will carry out your original research in stages with multiple feedback points throughout the semester.

3 Requirements

3.1 Readings

Please purchase the following book: Blattman, Christopher. 2022. *Why We Fight: The Roots of War and the Paths to Peace*. New York: Viking. Other readings are available on USU Canvas.

This is a small course, and active participation requires you to do the full reading for each class session. Please read critically and be prepared to comment on the readings in class.

3.2 Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation are worth *20% of your grade*. 10% of your grade is based on regular attendance, class discussion, and participation in mini-quizzes, writing activities. 10% of your grade is based on co-leading portions of class discussion. We will make discussion assignments during the first week of the class.

3.3 Writing Assignments

You will complete four related writing assignments that will be integrated into a larger paper that together will comprise an *original* research contribution. During the first weeks of the course, we will discuss your interests and identify possible research questions. We will tailor the research questions so that they can be studied from the perspective of citizens in countries where peacebuilding and development are salient concerns. We will then carry out a full-class survey in which your individual questions are embedded.

Assignment 1: Puzzle / Research Question

Identify a causal research question that interests you. The puzzle statement should specify a cause or explanatory variable (independent variable), an effect or outcome variable (dependent variable), and the causal mechanism connecting them. Explain why your question is worth answering by highlighting its real-world significance and personal relevance. Clearly state the effect or outcome of interest, the cause, and how the cause leads to the effect. Focus on selecting variables that can be measured reliably, though actual measurement will be addressed in future assignments. Consider a short, real-world example to motivate your puzzle. You may consult with the instructor to refine your question and arguments. *This assignment is worth 10% of your final grade and is due to the instructor/TA on Sep. 13 (Fri, 5 pm).*

Assignment 2: Argument

The goal of this assignment is to articulate your research question and develop a theoretical argument. Begin by connecting your explanatory and outcome variables, elaborating on the causal mechanisms. Avoid empirical analysis here; focus on theory. A brief literature review will help you refine your argument, synthesizing relevant works rather than discussing them one by one. Address assumptions, political actors, strategies, outcomes, and available information in your argument. Clarify how variations in the explanatory variable lead to changes in the outcome. Remember, the goal is to present a compelling argument that can be tested empirically later. *This assignment is worth 15% of your final grade. It is due to the writing fellow on Sep. 27 (Fri, 5 pm) for 5% of your grade. It is due to the instructor/TA on Oct. 11 (Fri, 5 pm) for 10% of your grade.*

Assignment 3: Design

In this assignment, you'll develop the research design for your study, including a survey with embedded experiments. Begin by defining your outcome and explanatory variables and discussing the causal mechanisms. Your subject pool and sampling plan should be clearly described, with attention to how they support external validity. Explain your method of random assignment for experiments, detailing how the intervention will be used to manipulate the outcome. Include a

brief discussion of your planned statistical and qualitative analyses, considering how both types of data will be collected and analyzed. Address potential limitations of your study and discuss alternative methods that might improve your design. You should also plan for IRB approval if you intend to publish your results. *This assignment is worth 15% of your final grade. It is due to the writing fellow on Oct. 25 (Fri, 5 pm) for 5% of your grade. It is due to the instructor/TA on Nov. 8 (Fri, 5 pm) for 10% of your grade.*

Assignment 4: Final Paper

The final paper will synthesize all elements from the course into a cohesive research project. Begin with an abstract summarizing the research question, hypothesis, intervention, and results. The introduction should capture the reader's attention with a compelling example or phenomenon, followed by a discussion of the research problem and a preview of your study. Your literature review should place your research in the broader context, critically analyzing relevant works. State your research question and hypothesis, and explain the causal mechanisms linking your explanatory variable to the outcome. In the research design section, describe your methods clearly so that other researchers could replicate your study. Present and analyze your empirical results, both quantitative and qualitative, and discuss how they support or contradict your hypothesis. Conclude by summarizing your findings and proposing directions for future research.

The final draft of the research paper should be approximately 15–20 double-spaced pages (1-inch margins, 12-pt font, any consistent citation style). The page count should include graphs, tables, and references but should not include the title page, abstract, or appendix. *This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade. It is due to the writing fellow on Dec. 3-ish (Tuesday, 5 pm, but TBA) for 5% of your grade. It is due to the instructor/TA on Dec. 17-ish (Tuesday, 5 pm, but TBA) for 25% of your grade.*

Writing Fellows Program

This course utilizes the support of the Writing Fellows Program. Writing Fellows are trained peer tutors who act as liaisons between professors and students to aid in course writing development. They do not grade or “fix” your writing; instead, they provide support throughout the writing process. Students in this course are required to submit designated writing assignments to a Writing Fellow, who provides written feedback and then meets with you for a one-on-one conference. Students can then make revisions before submitting the final draft to the professor for a grade. This cycle — drafting, feedback, and revision — is a hallmark of strong writing and learning. For this reason, working with your Writing Fellow, by submitting a draft and conferencing by the deadlines stated in the syllabus schedule, is a required element of this course (**please see the course grading policy**). On-time draft submissions and conference attendance is critically important; late draft submission acceptance and conference rescheduling is unlikely and only at the discretion of your Writing Fellow. Engagement with the Writing Fellow will be facilitated through a separate Canvas shell to which the Writing Fellow will add you.

3.4 Oral Presentation

In addition to the writing assignments, you will also give two short oral presentations that report on the design and findings of your research. Presentations will occur mid-semester and

during the final week of the course. More details to follow. *The presentations are worth 10% of your grade (5% for each presentation).*

3.5 Schedule of Important Dates / Grading

Date	Assignment	% of Grade
Sept 3 (Canvas)	Confirm understanding of syllabus	Required
Ongoing (In-class)	General class contributions	10%
Scheduled (In-class)	Co-lead two class discussions	10%
Sep. 13 (Fri, 5 pm)	Asg. 1 to Instructor/TA	10%
Sep. 27 (Fri, 5 pm)	Asg. 2 (Argument) to Writing Fellow	5%
Oct. 11 (Fri, 5 pm)	Asg. 2 (Argument) to Instructor/TA	10%
Oct. 25 (Fri, 5 pm)	Asg. 3 (Design) to Writing Fellow	5%
Nov. 8 (Fri, 5 pm)	Asg. 3 (Design) to Instructor/TA	10%
Dec. 3-ish (TBA)	Asg. 4 (Early draft of final paper) to Writing Fellow	5%
Dec. 17-ish (TBA)	Asg. 4 (Final paper) to Instructor/TA	25%
Weeks 7 & 15	Oral presentations	10%

4 Course Policies

4.1 Syllabus

Each of you needs to confirm (on Canvas) that you have read through the syllabus and that you understand all that is required of you. If you have larger course questions, please ask in class or by email. Also, readings for this course may be changed on an ad hoc basis. For the most part this will not happen, but if so, I will give as much notice as possible.

4.2 Personal Pronoun and Name Preferences

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructors with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to our records.

4.3 Make-up Exams and Assignments

No make-up exams or quizzes will be given unless either prior consent is obtained from the instructor or a valid excuse is obtained according to university guidelines. I will consent to give makeup exams only in the case of a documented emergency or some other commensurate event.

4.4 Assignment of Grades

Grades are assigned on the following scale: $A = 94-100$; $A- = 90-93$; $B+ = 87-89$; $B = 84-86$; $B- = 80-83$;... $F = 63$ or lower. A student has one week after an exam or homework assignment is graded to appeal in writing (typed) any disagreements concerning grading. An appeal needs

to specifically identify where and why the student believes additional points should be awarded. I reserve the right to re-grade the entire assignment or exam.

4.5 Online Resources

Course organization, announcements, and relevant files will be on Canvas. I will post lecture slides to Canvas after we complete each chapter.

4.6 Academic Integrity

USU students should seek to be completely honest in their dealings with others. They should complete their own work and be evaluated based upon that work. They should avoid academic dishonesty and misconduct in all its forms, including plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, cheating, and other academic misconduct. Students are expected not only to be honest but also to assist other students in fulfilling their commitment to be honest. The substitution of another person's work for the student's own or the inclusion of another person's work without adequate acknowledgment (whether done intentionally or not) is known as plagiarism. It is a violation of academic, ethical, and legal standards and can result in a failing grade not only for the paper but also for the course in which the paper is written. In extreme cases, it can justify expulsion from the university.

4.7 Use of AI/LLMs

The use of Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT is not only permitted but encouraged, much like the use of statistical software, programming languages, or any other academic tool. LLMs can be valuable resources for generating ideas, clarifying concepts, and even drafting initial responses. However, it is crucial that students learn to use these tools correctly and critically. Many materials produced by LLMs can be inaccurate, overly simplistic, or lack the necessary technical depth. Therefore, students are expected to verify the information, significantly refine outputs, and ensure that any work involving LLMs meets the academic standards of accuracy and rigor. Submitted work that relies too heavily on LLMs will earn a mediocre grade at best.

4.8 Classroom Civility

Regrettably, a handful of students occasionally demonstrate insensitivity to other students and to instructors by disrupting classes unnecessarily. Arriving late for class, packing up bags prior to the end of class, and cell phone use are all disruptive activities. Browsing the internet, checking email, and playing games on laptops are also inappropriate in class. Please do not waste your time or mine by getting distracted by other activities. In calculating the attendance and participation grades I will take into account whether you spent your time engaged in the discussion/lecture or whether you were distracted with other activities.

Moreover, I will not tolerate incivility of one opinion to another. It is exciting and healthy to exchange a diversity of opinions, but in no case should anyone demean another because of his or her viewpoint. If you have any questions about what classroom civility entails, please contact me.

4.9 Sharing of Course Materials

No materials used in this class — lecture slides, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets — may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the university's student honor code and an act of academic dishonesty. I am well aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure in the course or expulsion.

4.10 Class Recordings

No recording is allowed in class without my written consent. If approved, recordings cannot be shared with anyone in any form.

4.11 Other Policies

Effort: Each student is expected to make full effort in learning the material covered in the course. This implies that students will be held responsible for all material in the required textbook and all material presented during class. University guidelines suggest that a student should be completing at least two hours of outside personal study per each hour of class lecture (which roughly corresponds to at least 7-1/2 hours of outside personal study each week) in order to pass the course. If a student is having difficulty with the course, the student is expected to visit with me as soon as possible in order to remedy any deficiencies.

Accommodations: Students requiring accommodations for class or examinations need to notify me in the first week of the semester and then provide a reminder AT LEAST three days in advance of scheduled exams in order to make appropriate arrangements. The student is responsible for obtaining the appropriate verification/documentation per university guidelines.

Religious Holidays: You must notify me of your pending absence as far in advance as possible so that we can make plans for assignment completion as soon after the missed class(es) as possible. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Emergencies: Please be aware of general university procedures for emergencies, which generally include the following: 1. Occupants of buildings on campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside. 2. Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building. 3. Students requiring assistance in evacuation should inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class. 4. In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. 5. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the fire department, police department, or other professionals.

Sensitive Content: This is a course on war and violence, so the content and discussion will necessarily engage with sensitive material in each class session, all the readings, and in the assignments. Those topics may include the following: violence, kidnapping and abduction, sexual assault, abuse, racism, ethnic discrimination, religious discrimination, and sexism. Much of the material is emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with and some content may be particularly sensitive. Because I am not a mental health professional I do not understand all possible conditions that course material could affect, so if I need to be aware of any personal circumstances, please visit with me in office hours or provide an accommodations letter and I will be happy to adjust as possible. To the full extent possible, I will provide alternative readings, assignments, or discussion opportunities to adequately accommodate. More generally, I will do my best to make space for thoughtful, respectful, and meaningful discussion of difficult content each class session, while balancing the weightiness of the topics, including when possible advance notice of material that is more sensitive than usual for a course on violence. Students with concerns related to these topics may wish, and are encouraged, to consult with relevant counseling or mental health facilities (Some of this material adapted from [Link here]).

Family: I am not aware of an official university policy on children in the classroom. The following is an attempt to insure family friendliness while also maintaining a proper learning environment. [I borrowed heavily and adapted these policies from Melissa Cheyney's syllabus. [Link here]]

1. All exclusively breastfeeding babies are welcome in class as often as is necessary.
2. For older children and babies, unforeseen disruptions in childcare often put parents in the position of having to miss class to stay home with a child. While this is not meant to be a long-term childcare solution, occasionally bringing a child to class in order to cover gaps in care is perfectly acceptable.
3. I ask that all students work to create a welcoming environment that is respectful of all forms of diversity, including diversity in parenting status.
4. In all cases where babies and children come to class, please sit close to the door so that if your little one needs special attention and is disrupting learning for others' students, you may step outside until their need has been met. For my part, I will work with you should you need to step out so that you can remain caught up.
5. Finally, often the largest barrier to completing your coursework once you become a parent is the tiredness many parents feel in the evening once children have finally gone to sleep. While I maintain the same high expectations for all students in my class regardless of parenting status, I am happy to problem-solve with you in a way that helps you feel supported as you strive for school-parenting balance.

5 Tentative Course and Reading Schedule

5.1 Syllabus and Overview

5.1.1 Week 1 (8/27–8/29): Syllabus and SDGs/WDR 2011

- Readings:
 - Familiarize yourself with
 - * SDGs: [Link to UN site]
 - * Peace accords matrix: [Link here]
 - * 3ie evidence gap map for peacebuilding: [Link to 3ie evidence gap map]

5.1.2 Week 2 (9/3–9/5): The scientific study of war and peace

- Readings:
 - Questions: Gerring & Seawright (2022): Introduction to *Finding your Social Science Project*
 - Causality: Cunningham (2021; Chp. 1): Introduction to *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*
 - Generalization: Findley et al (2021): “External Validity”
- Data (Familiarize):
 - UCDP [Link here]
 - COW [Link here]
 - ACLED [Link here]
 - AidData [Link here]
 - Eirene Peacebuilding Database [Link here]
 - Al Maleh et al (2021): “Peacebuilding, Official Development Assistance, and the Sustainable Development Goals...”

5.1.3 Week 3 (9/10–9/12): The scientific study of war and peace (cont)

- Readings:
 - Kalyvas (2019): “The Landscape of Political Violence”
 - Sambanis & Schulhofer-Wohl (2019): “Sovereignty Rupture”
 - Farmer (1996): “On Suffering and Structural Violence”
 - Galtung (1969): “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research”

5.2 The Roots of War**5.2.1 Week 4 (9/17–9/19): Incentives for peace**

- Readings:
 - *Why We Fight*: Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2.

5.2.2 Week 5 (9/24–9/26): Rationalist explanations

- Readings:
 - *Why We Fight*: Chapters 4 & 5.

5.2.3 Week 6 (10/1–10/3): Psychological explanations

- Readings:
 - *Why We Fight*: Chapters 3 & 6.

5.3 Research Proposals

5.3.1 Week 7 (10/8–10/10): Design presentations

- Readings:
 - Edwards (2004): “How to Give an Academic Talk”

5.4 The Paths to Peace

5.4.1 Week 8 (10/15–10/17): Rules & enforcement / Interventions

- Readings:
 - *Why We Fight*: Chapters 9 & 10.
 - Findley (2018): “Does Foreign Aid Build Peace?”

5.4.2 Week 9 (10/22–10/24): Interdependence / Checks & balances

- Readings:
 - *Why We Fight*: Chapters 7 & 8.
 - Fearon et al (2009): “Can Development Aid Contribute to Social Cohesion after Civil War?”

5.4.3 Week 10 (10/29–10/31): Peace operations

- Readings:
 - Barnett et al (2007): “Peacebuilding: What Is In a Name?”
 - Autesserre (2015): “Trouble in Peaceland”
 - Arias et al (2017): “Data4Peace in Colombia”

5.5 Impact and Effectiveness

5.5.1 Week 11 (11/05–11/07): Macro impact

- Readings:
 - Doyle and Sambanis (2000): “International Peacebuilding”
 - Collier and Hoeffler (2004): “Aid, Policy, and Growth in Post-Conflict Societies”
 - Findley et al (2023): “Aiding War”
 - Dollar et al (2016): “Growth still is good for the poor”

5.5.2 Week 12 (11/12–11/14): Micro impact

- Readings:
 - Hartman et al (2021): “Engineering Informal Institutions: Long-Run Impacts..”
 - Kaplan and Findley (2024): “Employing Ex-Combatants”
 - Callen et al (2024): “Can Digital Aid Deliver During Humanitarian Crises?” (Policy report)

5.5.3 Week 13 (11/19–11/21): Policy Evaluation

- Readings:
 - Beath et al (2013): “Randomized Impact Evaluation of Afghanistan’s National Solidarity Programme”
 - Findley et al (2021): Endline report on the evaluation of the Regional Governance Activity in Colombia.
 - Campbell et al (2014): Independent External Evaluation UN Peacebuilding Fund Project Portfolio in Burundi 2007–2013

5.6 Directions**5.6.1 Week 14 (11/26): Where do we go from here?**

- Readings:
 - *Why We Fight*: Chapter 11 & Conclusion.
 - Cowser et al (2024): “Is Peacebuilding Effective”

5.6.2 Week 15 (12/3–12/5): Research paper presentations