Political Economy of Natural Resource Conflicts
G53.3400.004

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Course Description

This course is designed to introduce graduate students to the core concepts, processes, theories, and issues of natural resource conflicts. Since the mid-1980s, natural resource conflicts have become the focus of scholarly debate as the broadening concept of security has begun to include issues such as natural resources, environmental change, and natural resource degradation and depletion and its impact on international order and stability. Contemporary resource problems, rooted in the overuse and mismanagement of these resources and the subsequent degradation of ecosystems, often do not respect state boundaries and so present challenges that are local, international, and in some cases even global in nature. Moreover, the continuing human modification of our natural environment is, qualitatively and quantitatively, on a vastly greater scale than that witnessed in previous centuries. Increasingly, therefore, conflicts over natural resources are defined broadly to include conflicts over how to govern global commons such as the air, the oceans, fisheries, forests, and how to protect biodiversity. Both the scarcity and degradation of natural resources, as well as an abundance of natural resources, can be a source of conflict within and among states. The focus throughout this course will be on divergent theoretical approaches to natural resource conflicts at three levels of analysis: domestic, international, and global. Our objective is to gain an understanding of the nature of resource-based conflicts and to acquire the necessary tools and knowledge to tackle the challenges facing humanity in the 21st century. The course is organized around the division of natural resources into three different categories: 1) non-renewable resources (such as oil, strategic minerals and gems); 2) renewable (such as water, forest, and fisheries); 3) and global common pool resources (the air, the oceans, forests, and fisheries).

We will consider the various ways each category presents its own challenges and engenders different types of conflicts at the state, international, and global level.

This course addresses the following questions: How do countries secure natural resources crucial for their economy? Is there a causal relationship between natural resource scarcity and violent conflicts? What is the cause of conflict: natural resources scarcity as claimed by Neo-Malthusians or natural resource abundance as claimed by Cornucopians or neo-classical economists? How do countries design and implement policies related to energy, water, climate, and so on? What is the role of national and multinational oil companies in the world oil market? Are countries with abundant resources cursed? What is the relationship between natural resources and economic and political development? Is there a causal relationship between natural resources and authoritarian governments? Is the price of oil inversely correlated with the spread of political freedom? Could Nigeria have followed the same development trajectory as Denmark if it had not discovered oil? Do high commodity prices undermine democracy in oil and mineral rich countries, such Russia and Venezuela? What is the relationship between oil and minerals and civil wars or low intensity conflicts? How does resource security fuel tension between the great powers? How do institutions matter in tackling overarching environmental issues such as the degradation of forests, the issue of climate change? How do some groups overcome collective action problems? What is the role of institutions in the exploitation of natural resources? How did water become a source of contentious politics? How did the effective management of water conflicts one of the biggest challenges facing us today? How do we achieve effective global environmental governance in water? What role does the NGO, the UN, the WB, the WTO, and the ILC, other international organizations play in resolving natural resource based conflicts?

This course is divided into five parts. In Part I, we will review the key concept, terms, and issues in the literature focusing on the relationship between natural resources, security, environment, domestic,
international, and global conflicts. Part II concentrates on the resource curse (or lack thereof) and the relationship between natural resources and economic and political development and civil war. In Part III, the focus is on wars concentrates on how non-renewable natural resources, such as oil, strategic minerals, and gems are facilitators or causes of conflict within and between states. Detailed attention will be given to the international politics of oil and the relationship between oil, geopolitics, and the global economy. In Part IV, the focus shifts to renewable resources and more specifically to water. As a key component of critical ecosystem, water and its efficient, equitable, and sustainable management as one of the biggest challenges as the struggle for creating a global framework for the governance of water has become a source of contention. Part V deals with global common pool resources (the air, the oceans, forests, and fisheries). Finally, in Part VI, the focus is on institutional frameworks (or lack thereof) for governing natural resources, and thus on the collective action and bargaining problems challenging states in their attempt to achieve a sustainable development. We will explore contending theoretical approaches and their solutions for the peaceful resolution of conflicts over natural resources and their sustainable, efficient, and equitable governance.

Key topics for the course include (but are not limited to) the following: natural resource security, the sustainable development, the new colonialism, the lateral pressure hypothesis, the resource curse hypothesis, factor endowment hypothesis, frontier expansion hypothesis, open access exploitation hypothesis, the problem of commons, the tragedy of commons, the problem of sustainability of resources, property rights, negative externalities, the problem of global market failure, the problem of social cost, the problem of institutional choice, multilateralism, the problems of institution building and the role of institutions in governing commons, and collective action theories.

Course Requirements

This course will follow a seminar format. Requirements for this course are: 1) to attend all class meetings; 2) to participate actively in the class discussions; 3) to do all of the assigned reading for each week before the class and post at least two discussion questions and a two-page reaction précis on the blackboard by 12 PM on Monday, the day before the class week 2 through week 13 (8 total; see the guidelines for more information); 4) to give three 10 to 15-minute oral presentations accompanied by a class handout (on the selection of assigned readings and should be submitted by noon on the day of class); 5) to write an original 15-page research paper focusing either on the theoretical and conceptual issues covered in the course or on the application of these theories and concepts to one or more case studies that fit students’ own research interests; 6) to submit a research paper proposal describing your topic for my approval no later than October 14, 2010; 7) and to give a 10-minute oral presentation of your research paper on December 14, 2010. The final research paper is due on December 9, 2010, 15:00 PM.

Grading Criteria

Research Paper and Presentation (50%)
Oral presentations with handouts (5% each)
Class Participation and précises (35%)

Readings

There are several books and many articles required for this course. Most of the books and articles are available online at ebrary, JSTOR, ProQuest, Lexis-Nexis, other electronic databases, and or in a course packet available for purchase in the bookstore.


**Recommended Readings**


Topics and Readings


Week 1 (September 9): Introduction and sign-ups for presentations

During this meeting we will go over the syllabus and discuss the outline of the course, the research paper and presentations.

Assigned Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Week 2 (September 16): Concepts, Issues, and Problems

Assigned Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Part II: Natural Resources and Economic and Political Development

Week 3 (September 23): The Resource Curse

Assigned Readings:


**Week 4 (September 30): Natural Resources and Economic Development**

**Assigned Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Week 5 (October 7): Natural Resources and Political Development**

**Assigned Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Week 6 (October 14): Natural Resources and Civil Wars**

**Research Paper Proposals are due**

**Assigned Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


Part III: Resource Scarcity, Degradation, and Abundance as Facilitators of Conflicts

Week 7 (October 21): The Geopolitics of Energy

Assigned Readings:

Week 8 (October 28): International Politics of Oil

Assigned Readings:

Recommended Readings:

Week 9 (November 4): International Politics of Oil II

Assigned Readings:

Part IV: Water

Week 10 (November 11): Renewable Natural Resources: Scarcity and Degradation of Water Resources

Assigned Readings:

Recommended Readings:

Part V: The Global Commons

Week 11 (November 18): The Global Commons—the Atmosphere and the Oceans

Assigned Readings:

Recommended Readings:
Part VI: Institutions and Natural Resource Conflicts

Week 12 (December 2): Property Rights—Prerequisite for Resolution of Problems of Conflict and Development?

Assigned Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Week 13 (December 9): Collective Action and Bargaining Problems

Research Papers are due

Assigned Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Week 14 (December 14): Research Paper Presentations