IR 305: Managing Global Problems
Instructor: Brett L. Carter
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Course meetings: Monday/Wednesday, 3.30p-4.50p
Location: VKC 150
Course website: See Blackboard
Office hours: Wednesday, 6.20p-8p

Revised: January 6, 2019

Course Motivation and Requirements

The modern world is unprecedented in human history. Living standards have never been higher. Rates of violence have never been lower. More people live under democratic governments than ever before. The first part of this course documents these trends and, drawing from disciplines across the social science, attempts to explain them. The second part of the course surveys the challenges to this historical moment. We focus on the global implications of climate change, the resurgence of autocratic governments, the dynamics of civil resistance, the causes and consequences of income inequality in Western democracies, and the future of the post-World War II international order, among other topics.

The course has three requirements, which constitute the basis for grades. First, students are expected to have read all assigned materials prior to class and contribute substantially to class discussions. Weekly reading assignments will average roughly 100 pages. This will constitute 20% of final grades. Second, students will complete a midterm and final exam, which will constitute 25% and 35%, respectively, of final grades. The exams will require students to skillfully synthesize the course’s themes and draw on relevant scholarship. The midterm will be administered in class on Thursday, March 8; the final exam will be scheduled by the Registrar.

The course will feature two writing assignments, which, together, will constitute 20% of final grades. For the first assignment, due Friday, March 1, students will describe a global problem that they believe is either particularly urgent or particularly neglected. The essay should read as an argument for international attention, and so should be carefully substantiated with empirical evidence. For the second assignment, due Friday, April 28, students will propose a policy solution for the major global problem they described in the first essay. Again, this policy solution should be rooted in evidence; it should also anticipate and respond to counterarguments. Ideally, the two essays together will provide a foundation for an op-ed, which could be submitted to the New York Times, Washington Post, Huffington Post, or some other major outlet. There is no minimum length requirement, though neither essay should exceed 2,000 words.

The course is reading intensive, and many of the readings employ statistical techniques to adjudicate among possible answers to substantively important questions. Accordingly, the course is particularly well suited to students who have introductory training in basic statistics. Such training, however, is not required, and students without it are encouraged to enroll as well. To
that end, each class lecture will both summarize the weekly readings and thoroughly explain any
quantitative methods they employ. The course is designed to give students an appreciation for
quantitative approaches to social science.

All readings will be made available on the course website, save one: *Six Degrees: Our Future
on a Hotter Planet*, by Mark Lynas.

**Statement on Academic Conduct and Support**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own
words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the
discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards. Other
forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus*
and university policies on scientific misconduct. If you engage in plagiarism or any other form of
academic misconduct, you will fail the course. If you aid someone else’s misconduct, you will fail
the course.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are
encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity or to the Department of
Public Safety. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member
of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help
initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women
and Men provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage
describes reporting options and other resources.

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing.
Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not
English should check with the American Language Institute which sponsors courses and workshops
specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs
provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations.
If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information
will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by
means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Students requesting academic accommodations based on disability are required to register with
Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved ac-
commodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure
the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday,
8:30am-5:00pm. The office is in Student Union 301 and their phone number is 213.740.0776.

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1. [https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions](https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions)
2. [http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct)
3. [http://equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu)
4. [http://adminopsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety](http://adminopsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety)
6. [http://sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu)
7. [http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali](http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali)
8. [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html)
9. [http://emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)
Part 1: This Moment in Human History

Lecture 1: Introduction and Course Overview

Date: Monday, January 7

The introductory lecture provides an overview of the course. It outlines current political and economic trends across the world and situates them in historical context.

Lecture 2: The Politics of the Global Wealth Distribution

Date: Wednesday, January 9, and Monday, January 14

What is the global income distribution? How did it get this way? Why? This lecture focuses on why some countries are rich and others are not.


No Class

Date: Wednesday, January 16

University Holiday

Date: Monday, January 21

Lecture 3: Political Institutions and the Asian Take-Off

Date: Wednesday, January 23, and Monday, January 28

The global economic landscape has shifted dramatically since 2000. Most significantly, the share of the world’s population living on less than $2 per day has declined from roughly 45% to 22%. This change was largely driven by an economic take-off in South and East Asia. Why did this take-off occur? And what are its prospects for the future?
Lecture 4: The African Take-Off
Date: Wednesday, January 30, and Monday, February 4

Though it has received substantially less attention, Sub-Saharan Africa has enjoyed an economic take-off as well. This lecture attempts to understand the origins of this economic take-off. Why did it emerge? Is foreign aid responsible, and can it help?


Lecture 5: The Origins, Evolution, and Implications of Political Freedom
Date: Wednesday, February 6, and Monday, February 11

Liberal democracy is now the world’s most common form of government, and the only deemed legitimate by the international community. How did this happen? When? Does economic growth foster democracy? This lecture attempts to answer these questions. This lecture also focuses on what we know about the welfare effects of democracy. Do democratic governments provide better health care? Do they provide better education? Do they better protect fundamental human rights?


Lecture 6: Human Violence in Historical Perspective

Date: Wednesday, February 13, and Wednesday, February 20

Much recent political discourse would have us believe that the modern world is a uniquely dangerous place. Is this true? This lecture documents a secular decline in the rate of interstate and intrastate violence around the world, and attempts to understand why.


Lecture 7: The Rise of Income Inequality in the West

Date: Monday, February 25; Wednesday, February 27; and Monday, March 4

Lecture 2 made clear that the Western world has experienced exponential economic growth since the Industrial Revolution. This lecture focuses on a more recent economic change in the West: the rise of income inequality. This lecture places that rise in historical perspective, attempts to explain its origins, and probes its political and social effects.


Midterm Exam
Date: Wednesday, March 6

Part 2: Gun Violence in Comparative Perspective

Lecture 8: Gun Violence in Comparative Perspective
Date: Monday, March 18, and Wednesday, March 20

Violence is declining around the world. How, then, do we make sense of gun violence in America? What are the trends? Are trends in the United States so different than those elsewhere?

Peruse the Harvard School of Public Health’s Resource on Gun Violence: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/guns-and-death/


Part 3: The Crisis of the Post-World War II Order

Lecture 9: How the End of History was Announced
Date: Monday, March 25
To understand whether the post-World War II international order is in crisis – and, if so, to understand the stakes – this lecture returns to its creation: the moment when Francis Fukuyama announced “the end of history” in 1989.


Lecture 10: European Unification and the Origins of the Eurozone Crisis
Date: Wednesday, March 27, and Monday, April 1

This lecture probes the origins of the European Union: why and how it was constructed. It then probes the European Union’s economic decline, which may give way to its political decline as well. We focus particular attention on the European debt crisis, which economists predicted at the creation of the European Monetary Union.

Please listen to the “This American Life” podcast available on the course website.


Lecture 11: The Future of Europe
Date: Wednesday, April 3

This lecture focuses on the implications of the Eurozone crisis for the future of Europe, and of the European idea.


Part 4: New Contours in the Struggle for Freedom
Lecture 12: Authoritarian Resurgence and the Politics of Information
Date: Monday, April 8

As Europe and the United States have turned inwards, scholars and policy makers increasingly ask if the world is experiencing a democratic recession. This lecture asks why. In so doing, it also probes whether information is a force for democratic change.
Lecture 13: Civil Resistance, Violent and Non-Violent

Date: Wednesday, April 10, and Monday, April 15

The Colored Revolutions of the early 2000s and the Arab Spring of 2011 suggest the potency of “people power”: the capacity of non-violent civil resistance to force political change in closed regimes. Scholars have proposed a variety of reasons that non-violent resistance may be more effective than violent resistance. How persuasive is this evidence?


Part 5: Climate Change and Our Human Future

Lecture 14: Climate Change and Our Human Future

Date: Wednesday, April 17; Monday, April 22; and Wednesday, April 24
The course’s final lecture provides an overview of the scientific consensus on global climate change and explores its consequences. It focuses, in particular, on the effects of global climate change on food production and political violence.


Solomon M. Hsiang, Kyle C. Meng, and Mark A. Cane. 2011. “Civil Conflicts are Associated with the Global Climate.” *Nature* 476: 438-441. (Recommended)