Interrogating the uneasy relationship between politics and violence

Politics in general and political theory in particular have a complicated relationship with violence. In most instances, they aspire to minimize or, sometimes, rid human community of the threat or actualization of physical harm. Violence, the argument goes, must be confronted as either an integral part of human nature or as an aberration, but in either case, it must be overcome for there to be order, progress, etc. Yet, there is no political order, indeed, no politics, without some form of coercion, without the explicit or implicit use of physical and other forms of violence. Non-violence, seemingly a remedy for our violent circumstances/natures, alas, has not found place as a governing mode. Non-violent resistance, for instance, may lead to regime change or important changes in the regime itself, but, in the end, that “new” regime inevitably utilizes violence. Political sovereignty, in other words, depends upon violence—in the form of the police, the military, and, in a different way, through law and legal processes. Because violence is so tied to our political lives, we might even argue that sovereign power consists of being able to define and distinguish between acceptable violence (e.g., “law and order”) and unacceptable violence (e.g., “anarchy” and “terrorism”). Denouncing violence may make us feel better, but violence remains a real part of our political lives, posing a myriad of problems: Can we really distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable violence? What happens when “acceptable” violence becomes “unacceptable”? Is violence that is deemed unacceptable by the sovereign ever acceptable in resistance, say in colonial or other oppressive circumstances? Finally, what is the nature of a sovereignty grounded in violence and what are its limits, if any? In this course, we will think about but not resolve these and related issues. As theorists, our answers are always contingent and, therefore, not as important as finding and asking better questions. Consequently, in this course, by engaging key thinkers on the subject, we will consider violence as both an idea and as a socio-political phenomenon that, in the end, cannot be wished away.

Course Learning Outcomes

Because political theory is about ideas and their political manifestations, the student’s focus, should be on the ideas, their implications, and the many ways they have been and could be used (for good and ill). Like the thinkers we read, our experiences and beliefs are important, but also like these thinkers, those experiences and beliefs are not all there is. A critical analysis in political theory is, quite literally, a method of describing and evaluating an argument by separating that argument into its various parts or elements. Students will be challenged to do this in both their oral and written work in this course. Therefore, the following are both learning objectives for the course as a whole and to be applied to the works and authors we encounter in both your written and oral work in the course.

By the end of this course,

(1) Through direct engagement with trends in scholarship on violence and sovereignty, you will be able to identify, describe, and critically assess the various approaches to the difficulties raised by violence for politics and political life.

(2) You will be able to recognize and apply the methods of political theory to key questions of sovereignty, violence, and modern political life through research and reflection, written and oral communication, and both formal and informal modes of interpersonal interaction.

(3) You will be able to identify and practice select norms of the political science profession, including peer evaluation, presentation of work, and the development of a collaborative and scholarly intellectual community.

Canvas and the Format of the Class

Course materials, including the syllabus, other required readings, and assignments will be available on Canvas. Familiarize yourself with the way the course is structured on Canvas before the semester begins.

The format of the seminar is face-to-face and our seminar time will be student-driven presentation and discussion. All discussion and written work in the seminar is intended to develop your critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. Discussions and presentations are intended to develop your public voice to go with the voice trained and given expression in written work. In this course, you and your work are the show and your grade will reflect your performance.
POLS 5350–SOVEREIGNTY AND VIOLENCE (continued)

Textbooks. The following texts are required and available at the UT-Tyler Bookstore:
– Slavoj Zizek, Violence: Six Sideways Reflections (Picador, 2008)
– Talal Asad, On Suicide Bombing (Columbia University Press, 2007)
– All other REQUIRED texts are available on Canvas.

Course Requirements. All grading is done on a 10-point scale: A = 90-100; b = 80-89; C = 70-79...
ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE VIA EMAIL TO rleblanc@uttyler.edu BY 9AM ON THE DAY THEY ARE DUE.
LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. The formal requirements of the course and their relative impact on your grade are as follows:

(1) Attendance and Informal Class Participation 10%
In addition to the more formal participation requirements outlined below, students are expected to attend class weekly and to participate in our class discussions. This is not a lecture class; it is a seminar. Bring your readings, your questions, your answers, and your insights to class and be ready to articulate and discuss them. As you can’t do any of these things without being in class, attendance will be checked and part of your final grade.

(2) Reading Summaries 20%
Each week the student IS NOT preparing an essay, s/he will turn in summaries of each of the week’s readings. These summaries should be paragraphs of no more than 250 words per assigned reading (i.e., for each essay and/or chapter). Students will be called upon to present particular readings to the class, addressing (at least) the following: (1) What are the issues raised by the author? (2) How does s/he address them? and (3) What has the essay to say to the subject matter/discussion of this course?

(3) Semester Essays 2 x 20% each = 40%
Twice during the semester, each student will be required to write an essay in response to the week’s readings. These essays should be not less than 5 nor more than 6 pages in length (typed, 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins all round). Thoroughness, clarity, and economy of style are all to be valued.

WARNING: IGNORE THE FOLLOWING PAPER GUIDELINES AT YOUR PERIL:
(1) DO NOT try to avoid addressing the issues by talking about the author’s writing style, difficulty, etc. In this class, as in all of your graduate classes in political science, you are considered a professional willing to work to understand difficult material. You can always ask the teacher for help, too, but do it BEFORE the day you turn in/present your paper.

(2) Write in reasoned, professional terms. Use your best English: there is no excuse for misspellings; make sure all of your sentences have subjects, verbs, and objects; make sure they match in number; do not use contractions; write in paragraphs (change to a new but related thought = new paragraph) above all, do not write the way you speak! Write like a professional.

(3) Focus on one or two ideas or issues that are common to all the readings. Do not simply rehearse the argument of the author—in 5-6 pages, you do not have the time! Your task is to discuss the readings in terms of the one or two most important ideas or issues that you have identified. As a start, consider the issues raised in our discussions in class and where this author/idea fits. Add your own insights where appropriate. Raise questions and critical issues—do not rant.

(4) These are NOT research papers. Limit yourself to the text before you. The assignment is designed to get you to read closely, carefully, and analytically. Resist the urge to run to the internet. Force yourself to deal with the text, come to some understanding of the issues raised, and, in this way, when presenting your paper to your colleagues, everyone will have had access to the same material.

4) Final Essay 30%
A take-home final consisting of a comprehensive essay question will be given to students at the last class meeting. The essay will encompass all course materials covered and will be 6-7 pages in length.
**Syllabus**

Students are expected to have done the readings for the class day assigned and to come to class ready to discuss them. Students will be notified of any changes in the schedule of readings in a timely manner. DO NOT ASSUME that a reading will not be covered, e.g., that we appear to be behind and therefore will not “get to” that reading on time.

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**Jan 22 M**  
**Introduction: Violence and Politics**  
-- Evans and Carver, from *Histories of Violence*, Chapter 1, “The Subject of Violence” (pp. 1-13)  
-- Bernstein, from *Violence*, “Introduction” (pp. 1-11)  
-- Amitai Etzioni, “Notes for Antifa from a Former Terrorist” from *Boston Review* (on Canvas)  
-- Mark Bray, “Notes for Amitai Etzioni from an Antifa Historian” from *Boston Review* (on Canvas)

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**Jan 29 M**  
**Critical Beginnings—Weber and Benjamin**  
-- Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” (excerpt) (on Canvas)  
-- Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” (pp. 277-300) (on Canvas)  
-- Bernstein, Chapter 2, “Walter Benjamin: Divine Violence?” from *Violence* (pp. 46-77)

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**Feb 5 M**  
**Arendt—Violence and Power**  
-- Kimberly Hutchings, “Hannah Arendt” in Evans and Carver (eds.), *Histories of Violence*, Chapter 3 (pp. 31-47)  
-- Bernstein, “Hannah Arendt: On Violence and Power” from *Violence*, Chapter 3 (pp. 78-104)

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**Feb 12 M**  
**Agamben—Sovereignty and the “Sacred”**  
-- Giorgio Agamben, from *means without end* (Chapters 1-4; 9 on pp. 3-45 and pp. 103-107)

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**Feb 19 M**  
**Agamben and Mbembe—Sovereignty and Death**  
-- Giorgio Agamben, from *means without end* (Chapters 1-4; 9 on pp. 3-45 and pp. 103-107)  
-- Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics” (on Canvas)  
-- Marcelo Svirsky, “Giorgio Agamben” in Evans and Carver (eds.), *Histories of Violence*, Chapter 11 (pp. 177-192)

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**Feb 26 M**  
**Politics, Sovereignty, and Violence**

***FIRST ESSAY DUE to rleblanc@uttyler.edu by 9am***

-- FILM: *Battle of Algiers* (in class). Also available at:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_N2wyq7fCE&t=250s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_N2wyq7fCE&t=250s)

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**Mar 5 M**  
**Fanon: Violence and Anticolonial Liberation**  
-- Fanon, from *Wretched of the Earth*, Chapter 1 “On Violence” (pp. 1-51) (on Canvas)  
-- Jean-Paul Sartre, from *Wretched of the Earth*, (pp. xliii-lxii ) (on Canvas)
Mar 12 M  SPERRY BREAK

Mar 19 M  Fanon: The Cost of Liberation
--Fanon, from Wretched of the Earth, Chapter 5 “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” (pp. 181-234) (on Canvas)
--Lewis R. Gordon, “Frantz Fanon” in Evans and Carver (eds.), Histories of Violence, Chapter 4 (pp. 48-69)
--Bernstein, “Frantz Fanon’s Critique of Violence” from Violence, Chapter 4 (pp. 46-77)

Mar 26 M  Zizek: Violence on the Side
--Slavoj Zizek, from Violence (pp. 1-104)

Apr 2 M  Zizek: Violence and (In)action
--Zizek, Violence (pp. 105-218)
[--Recommended, NOT Required (no summary): Paul A. Taylor, “Slavoj Zizek” in Evans and Carver (eds.), Histories of Violence, Chapter 12 (pp. 193-214)]

Apr 9 M  Violence and Being/Political/Being
***SECOND ESSAY DUE to rbleblanc@uttyler.edu by 9am***
--FILM: Arna’s Children (in class). Also available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQZiHgbBBcI

Apr 16 M  Suicide Bombing and Other Violences
--Talal Asad, from On Suicide Bombing (pp. 1-65)

Apr 23 M  Sovereignty of Violence
--Asad, On Suicide Bombing (all)
--Mbembe, “Faces of Freedom” (on Canvas)

May 1 T  FINAL ESSAYS DUE to rbleblanc@uttyler.edu BY 12noon CDT.

Notes on Classroom Etiquette or THE RULES
--Class starts promptly. Be here on time. After the first week or so of the semester, you WILL be denied entry if you arrive more than 5 minutes late. Late arrival is disruptive to the classroom experience of your classmates and, perhaps even your professor. In any case, it works against the mission of the classroom. To this end, I suggest you not drive from class to class—gas is too expensive and we could all use the exercise.
--The format of the class is lecture, student presentation, and conversation. The classroom is a safe place to ask questions. But they should be questions that derive from work with and in the material and NOT because you did not do the assignment.
--You will not read newspapers, textbooks, or study for other classes while in this class. If you do so, you will be asked to leave—and in no uncertain terms.
--Turn all cellphones and other electronic devices off (or set to vibrate) for the duration of class. You are not to accept calls or engage in text messaging during class. If you do so, I will confiscate your device. If you are awaiting a call or message of extreme importance, I suggest you skip class.
--You may use a laptop, but only for the purpose of taking notes. If I catch you surfing the web, playing games, or engaged in some other activity not related to the work of the class, you will lose your laptop privileges.
--You are responsible for material missed due to absence. I suggest you exchange notes with other responsible students in any case, but particularly if you have to miss. I am happy to answer questions about this material, but will not rehearse my lectures or our class discussions.
Notes on Classroom Etiquette (continued)
--Some semesters, life gets in the way. Should you have one of these semesters, I am more than happy to talk to you about what to do. But if the trauma is too great, I strongly suggest you drop one or all of your courses. Your education is vitally important, but there are things that outrank even education sometimes—and you have to make that call when it is necessary. I cannot grade you on how well or poorly you deal with your life at given moments. Your grades reflect your performance in class—not how well you are dealing with other things. I wish all of us a semester in which these things aren’t issues.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION THAT MUST APPEAR IN EACH COURSE SYLLABUS

UT Tyler Honor Code Every member of the UT Tyler community joins together to embrace: Honor and integrity that will not allow me to lie, cheat, or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do. Students Rights and Responsibilities To know and understand the policies that affect your rights and responsibilities as a student at UT Tyler, please follow this link: http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php

Campus Carry We respect the right and privacy of students 21 and over who are duly licensed to carry concealed weapons in this class. License holders are expected to behave responsibly and keep a handgun secure and concealed. More information is available at http://www.uttyler.edu/about/campus-carry/index.php

UT Tyler a Tobacco-Free University All forms of tobacco will not be permitted on the UT Tyler main campus, branch campuses, and any property owned by UT Tyler. This applies to all members of the University community, including students, faculty, staff, University affiliates, contractors, and visitors. Forms of tobacco not permitted include cigarettes, cigars, pipes, water pipes (hookah), bidis, kreteks, electronic cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, snuff, chewing tobacco, and all other tobacco products. There are several cessation programs available to students looking to quit smoking, including counseling, quitlines, and group support. For more information on cessation programs please visit http://www.uttyler.edu/tobacco-free

Grade Replacement/Forgiveness and Census Date Policies Students repeating a course for grade forgiveness (grade replacement) must file a Grade Replacement Contract with the Enrollment Services Center (ADM 230) on or before the Census Date of the semester in which the course will be repeated. (For Fall, the Census Date is Sept. 12.) Grade Replacement Contracts are available in the Enrollment Services Center or at http://www.uttyler.edu/registrar. Each semester’s Census Date can be found on the Contract itself, on the Academic Calendar, or in the information pamphlets published each semester by the Office of the Registrar. Failure to file a Grade Replacement Contract will result in both the original and repeated grade being used to calculate your overall grade point average. Undergraduates are eligible to exercise grade replacement for only three course repeats during their career at UT Tyler; graduates are eligible for two grade replacements. Full policy details are printed on each Grade Replacement Contract.

The Census Date (Sept. 12th) is the deadline for many forms and enrollment actions of which students need to be aware. These include:
• Submitting Grade Replacement Contracts, Transient Forms, requests to withhold directory information, approvals for taking courses as Audit, Pass/Fail or Credit/No Credit.
• Receiving 100% refunds for partial withdrawals. (There is no refund for these after the Census Date)
• Schedule adjustments (section changes, adding a new class, dropping without a “W” grade)
• Being reinstated or re-enrolled in classes after being dropped for non-payment
• Completing the process for tuition exemptions or waivers through Financial Aid State-Mandated Course

Drop Policy Texas law prohibits a student who began college for the first time in Fall 2007 or thereafter from dropping more than six courses during their entire undergraduate career. This includes courses dropped at another 2-year or 4-year Texas public college or university. For purposes of this rule, a dropped course is any course that is dropped after the census date (See Academic Calendar for the specific date). Exceptions to the 6-drop rule may be found in the catalog. Petitions for exemptions must be submitted to the Enrollment Services Center and must be accompanied by documentation of the extenuating circumstance. Please contact the Enrollment Services Center if you have any questions.
**Disability/Accessibility Services** In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) the University of Texas at Tyler offers accommodations to students with learning, physical and/or psychological disabilities. If you have a disability, including a non-visible diagnosis such as a learning disorder, chronic illness, TBI, PTSD, ADHD, or you have a history of modifications or accommodations in a previous educational environment, you are encouraged to visit [https://hood.accessiblelearning.com/UTTyler](http://https://hood.accessiblelearning.com/UTTyler) and fill out the New Student application. The Student Accessibility and Resources (SAR) office will contact you when your application has been submitted and an appointment with Cynthia Lowery, Assistant Director of Student Services/ADA Coordinator. For more information, including filling out an application for services, please visit the SAR webpage at [http://www.utttyler.edu/disabilityservices](http://www.utttyler.edu/disabilityservices), the SAR office located in the University Center, # 3150 or call 903.566.7079.

**Student Absence due to Religious Observance** Students who anticipate being absent from class due to a religious observance are requested to inform the instructor of such absences by the second class meeting of the semester. (Revised 05/17)

**Student Absence for University-Sponsored Events and Activities** If you intend to be absent for a university-sponsored event or activity, you (or the event sponsor) must notify the instructor at least two weeks prior to the date of the planned absence. At that time the instructor will set a date and time when make-up assignments will be completed.

**Social Security and FERPA Statement** It is the policy of The University of Texas at Tyler to protect the confidential nature of social security numbers. The University has changed its computer programming so that all students have an identification number. The electronic transmission of grades (e.g., via e-mail) risks violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; grades will not be transmitted electronically.

**Emergency Exits and Evacuation** Everyone is required to exit the building when a fire alarm goes off. Follow your instructor’s directions regarding the appropriate exit. If you require assistance during an evacuation, inform your instructor in the first week of class. Do not re-enter the building unless given permission by University Police, Fire department, or Fire Prevention Services.

**Student Standards of Academic Conduct** Disciplinary proceedings may be initiated against any student who engages in scholastic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.

1. “Cheating” includes, but is not limited to:
   - copying from another student’s test paper;
   - using, during a test, materials not authorized by the person giving the test;
   - failure to comply with instructions given by the person administering the test;
   - possession during a test of materials which are not authorized by the person giving the test, such as class notes or specifically designed “crib notes”. The presence of textbooks constitutes a violation if they have been specifically prohibited by the person administering the test;
   - using, buying, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in whole or part the contents of an unadministered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program;
   - collaborating with or seeking aid from another student during a test or other assignment without authority;
   - discussing the contents of an examination with another student who will take the examination;
   - divulging the contents of an examination, for the purpose of preserving questions for use by another, when the instructors has designated that the examination is not to be removed from the examination room or not to be returned or to be kept by the student;
   - substituting for another person, or permitting another person to substitute for oneself to take a course, a test, or any course-related assignment;
   - paying or offering money or other valuable thing to, or coercing another person to obtain an unadministered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program or information about an unadministered test, test key, home solution or computer program;
   - falsifying research data, laboratory reports, and/or other academic work offered for credit;
   - taking, keeping, misplacing, or damaging the property of The University of Texas at Tyler, or of another, if the student knows or reasonably should know that an unfair academic advantage would be gained by such conduct; and
   - misrepresenting facts, including providing false grades or resumes, for the purpose of obtaining an academic or financial benefit or injuring another student academically or financially.
ii. “Plagiarism” includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another’s work and the submission of it as one’s own academic work offered for credit.

iii. “Collusion” includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any section of the rules on scholastic dishonesty.

iv. All written work that is submitted will be subject to review by plagiarism software.

UT Tyler Resources for Students

- UT Tyler Writing Center (903.565.5995), writingcenter@uttyler.edu
- UT Tyler Tutoring Center (903.565.5964), tutoring@uttyler.edu
- The Mathematics Learning Center, RBN 4021, this is the open access computer lab for math students, with tutors on duty to assist students who are enrolled in early-career courses.
- UT Tyler Counseling Center (903.566.7254)