

2011-12 GV 902 Theories of International Relations

Kristian Skrede Gleditsch
Department of Government
University of Essex
Email: ksg@essex.ac.uk

Course assessment for GV902

Students should hand in all assignments on time. Late submission of written work will be heavily penalized (a penalty of 3 marks for each working day they are late). Extensions to deadlines will be granted only under exceptional circumstances and only before the essay is due. Requests must be made in writing (not by email) and supported by documented evidence, such as a letter from a doctor explaining the relevant circumstances. For further details on extensions, see the relevant sections of the Postgraduate Handbook.

Written work will be marked on the basis of the treatment of the question/topic, argument, use of evidence, analysis, clarity, structure, command and use of literature, bibliographical research, imagination and originality. I often get asked if issues of language or presentation such as grammatical mistakes, awkward phrases, and typos etc. “matter”. The short answer to this is in principle “no”. Content matters more than presentation, and I recognize that students will come from different backgrounds and may face challenges in writing in a foreign language. However, I would strongly encourage you to pay a great deal of attention to these issues. Sloppy writing and grammar does not help make your ideas clear, and this will tend to distract from your work. These issues will be considered very important in the world outside the University, so it is in your best interest to pay close attention to this and use this as an opportunity to gain practice and experience in writing well.

Essays should be fully referenced, citing the source of ideas or facts contained in them. Students can use any established system of referencing used by a journal, but the references must be consistent.

A word count should be included on the cover page of any submitted work, and all submitted work should have page numbers.

It is a serious academic offence to submit work in which text has been copied from someone else, whether a book, an article, or another student, without acknowledging the source. The penalties for plagiarism are very severe; for details of what constitutes cheating, see the Postgraduate Handbook.

For some additional suggestions on writing papers with a focus on International Relations, see the very helpful list compiled by Paul Hensel at <http://garnet.acns.fsu.edu/~phensel/writing.html>.

Assignment 1: an hypothesis in IR (due week 4)

For this assignment you will need to identify an actual hypothesis in International Relations research. Any hypothesis would in principle do, but it should be related to international politics and be taken from something that has appeared in print in an academic publication.

You should describe what is the outcome/dependent variable/*explanandum* that is to be explained by the hypothesis, and what is the cause/independent variable/*explanans* set forward by the hypothesis to explain the outcome. What are the possible values that the dependent and independent variables could take on? This may or may not be explicitly identified in the original work, but try to be as explicit as possible in your answer.

You should also briefly describe the underlying theory or justification for why we should expect a relationship between the outcome/dependent variable and the independent variable. Comment on the character of the mechanism invoked: Is this a deterministic or a probabilistic proposition? Does it emphasize structural constraints or individual choice?

Indicate what the domain of the hypothesis is. Does it describe a general law that is applicable to many cases, or is it set forward as an explanation of an individual outcome or event? If it is an explanation of an individual event, could it in principle be applicable to explaining other events?

Does the hypothesis have observable implications that could be evaluated empirically? You do not need to comment on how one might test the hypothesis or whether the author has done this, the important thing is whether it could be done in principle.

Word limit: 500-1000 words (there is no target word count for this assignment per se, but your answer should certainly not exceed 1000 words).

Assignment 2: Review of literature on a research question in International Relations (week 10)

For this assignment you should write a review of the literature on a particular research question in International Relations.

Rather than try to summarize all individual contributions, you should take an analytical approach and synthesize the research that has been done on the question. What are the main positions and what are the sources of disagreement? How has this question been explored? Has there been any convergence of views or evidence of scientific progress over time?

A review of a literature should be systematic and comprehensive. List in an appendix what tools that you have used to identify the relevant literature. You should also identify the relevant journals or outlets where debates on the research question have taken place, and list these in the appendix. Read through the table of contents of these journals for the last 10-20 years to look for relevant papers that you might otherwise have missed.

A brief statement of the topic (no more than half a page) must be submitted to me for approval by Week 5 (at the latest).

The word limit for the literature review is 2,500-3,000 words

Assignment 3: Essay

The word limit is 2,500-3,000 words.

- 1) Briefly describe what is meant by the Westphalian model of sovereignty. Why does Krasner argue that this is an ideal rather than a description of reality? In what ways can the traditional notion of sovereignty “compromised” in present-day international politics, and what are the implications for the study of international relations?
- 2) The international system is frequently defined as a realm of anarchy, devoid of international authority. While this may be true of the system as a whole, it is not necessarily true of relations between particular states. How and why do authority relationships differ across dyads? Discuss with reference to specific examples.
- 3) The security dilemma under anarchy is the fundamental cause of war. Those who accept a “rationalist approach to war” merely re-describe this dilemma in modern language, but add nothing to our understanding of conflict. Discuss.
- 4) How may international regimes or institutions help (or not help) sustain cooperation in international politics? Discuss with reference to a specific issue area.
- 5) Discuss, with reference to a particular research question, whether international relations theory is cumulative, or whether we simply have an increase in incommensurate (large non-comparable) theories and perspectives.
- 6) The structure of the international system is always more central to understanding international politics than variation in the preferences or objectives of individual states.” Discuss.
- 7) “Invoking the end of the Cold War as a counterargument to Realism is misplaced and unfair. Realism simply points out conditions that make it impossible to avoid the potential for war, and the end of the Cold War does not imply that these have been invalidated in any way”. Is this argument a convincing defense of realism?
- 8) Hobbes was wrong. Life in the state-of-nature is not “short, nasty, and brutish”, but what individuals, groups, and ultimately states “make of it.” It is not inherent attributes of units that determine the consequences of the state-of-nature, but the social interactions of those who inhabit it. Discuss.
- 9) Most data sources suggest that there has been a notable decline in both interstate conflict and intrastate conflict/civil wars since the 1990s (see graph of proportion of countries in wars with more than 1000 deaths on subsequent page). This trend holds regardless of whether one looks at wars (i.e., conflicts with 1000+ deaths), smaller conflicts (25+ deaths), or the number of battle deaths from conflict (not shown). What factors may underlie this decline in the frequency of conflict? If you wish, you may focus on only interstate or intrastate conflict in your answer.

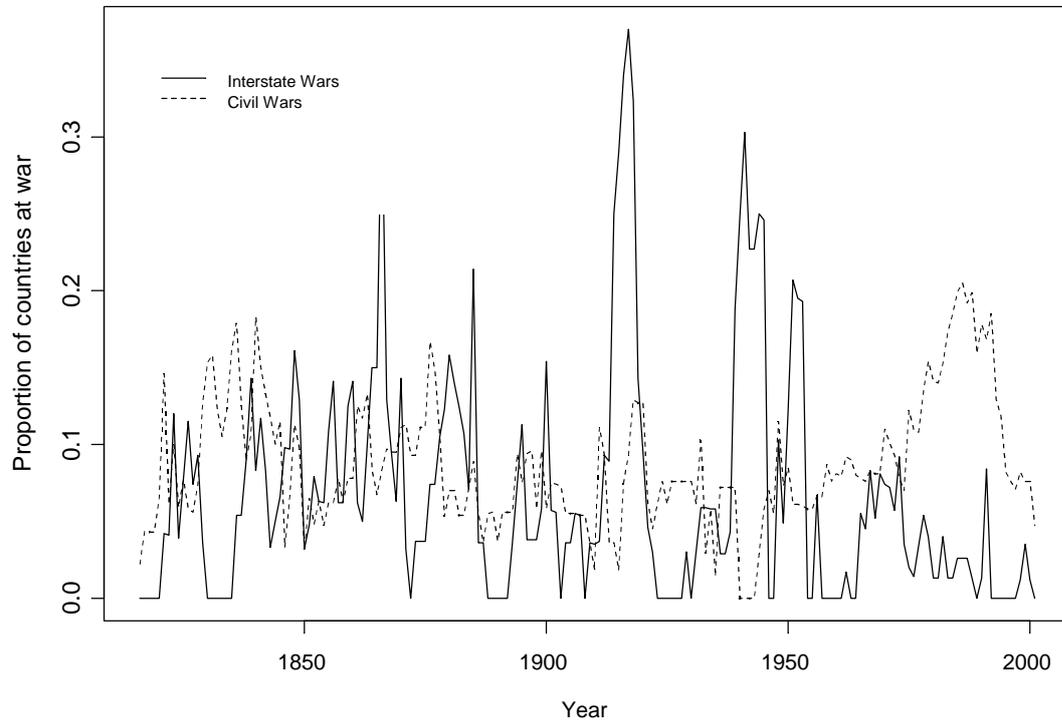


Figure taken from Ward, Michael D. & Kristian Skrede Gleditsch. 2004. "Globalization and Broccoli: Globalization's Impact on Poverty, Inequality, Conflict, and Democracy" in John O'Loughlin, Lynn Staeheli, and Edward Greenberg (eds.) *Globalization and its Outcomes*. New York: Guilford, pp. 159-181.