

Understanding International Conflict: Debates on Identity, Power, and War

15 June – 10 July 2026

CATEGORY Social Sciences, Politics, International Relations & History

COURSE STRUCTURE

You will receive a total of **45 hours of academic lessons** (one lesson equals 45 minutes; 15 hours per week). Lessons will comprise lectures, group work, discussion sessions, and excursions.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

HUWISU courses are grouped into different time tracks. Your course will take place in **Track B**

Monday: 9.00 am – 10.30 am & 11.00 am – 12.30 pm

Wednesday: 9.00 am – 10.30 am & 11.00 am – 12.30 pm

Thursday: 1.30 pm – 3.00 pm & 3.30 pm – 5.00 pm

COURSE LANGUAGE

This course is taught in **English**, including the readings. For the understanding of the texts and the discussions in class, a language-level of B2 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) is required.

TARGET GROUP

This course is for undergraduate students from all disciplines who are interested in Political Theory and International Relations.

No prior knowledge is required, as this is an introductory course. However, students should be ready to engage with abstract concepts and actively participate in discussions.

CREDITS & CERTIFICATES

Participants will receive **6 ECTS** credit points and a certificate if they attend regularly (at least 80% attendance), participate actively and fulfill all course assignments. Additionally, six weeks after the end of the course a Transcript of Records is issued by Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. All courses are accredited according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

In addition to the academic program, you are invited to **join our cultural and social program**. We offer a fine selection of interesting activities that aim to give you an unforgettable stay in Berlin. Through excursions, social gatherings, and sport activities, you have the opportunity to get to know the city, the university, and to meet students from all parts of the world. **Costs for these offers are included in the program fee**. Below, you find examples of previously offered cultural activities. You will be informed about the respective cultural program shortly before the start of the program via email as well as during the course period.



POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL GUIDED TOURS

- Federal Chancellery (*Bundeskanzleramt*)
- German Parliament (*Bundestag*)
- House of Representatives (*Abgeordnetenhaus*)
- Topography of Terror exhibition
- Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office

CULTURAL GUIDED TOURS

- Kreuzberg Tour
- Museum Island (*Museumsinsel*)
- Berlin Cathedral (*Berliner Dom*)
- Daytrip to Potsdam
- Exhibitions

SOCIAL GATHERINGS

- Welcome Session
- Beach Volleyball
- Farewell Get2gether

EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Preparation for lively discussions in the classroom: Be on time, have at least the required readings completed, and points in mind for discussion or clarification.

Assignments: Complete all assignments according to the specified requirements on the schedule including handing them over to the lecturer.

Commitment in class: Pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinions (classmates', lecturers').

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies (such as no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical) especially the academic honor code and the student code of conduct.

Attendance policy: No unexcused absences are permitted. Students must follow teachers' instructions to catch up on missed work – to excuse absence please contact the HUWISU office.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What motivates people to fight and die? What constitutes power in society? Why and under what conditions do different groups resort to violence against each other?

This course invites a reflection on these fundamental questions by considering multidisciplinary debates on social identities, using Germany's history as a backdrop for our discussions.

It familiarizes students with different theoretical discussions on the origins and sources of identities (self, group, society, State and combinations), their reproduction, maintenance, and challenges; as well as the different understandings of what constitutes power (material, institutional and symbolic/ideational) and its consequences (coercion and/or consensus).

Alongside the theoretical discussions, current empirical cases will be used to critically assess and debate the significance of social identities in interest formation and power struggles leading to conflict. While this does not privilege an in-depth approach to a single topic, it serves as an entry point, providing crucial building blocks to account not only for the causes of conflict, but also the pillars for peace, in our globalized, interconnected, yet highly fragmented world.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The aim of this course is to familiarize students with essential concepts and debates relevant to the study of international conflict in our times. By the end of the course, students will:

- Have developed an understanding of core concepts in the academic discussion of international conflict (such as anarchy, sovereignty, the State, international order and hegemony) from different theoretical perspectives (such as Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism), which will provide them with analytical tools for their own reflections and further;
- Have acquired the capacity to differentiate between actors, structures, processes, institutions at different levels of analysis (individual, societal and systemic or international);
- Be able to assess the different types and modalities of power (such as material or hard power, soft power, power as coercion and power as consensus) and how power both enables and constrains agency, specially at the systemic level;
- Have a more nuanced understanding of interest formation at the international level, which also includes an account of identities at the domestic level; and,
- Be able to think critically about "identity politics", and so be able to challenge deterministic and essentialist views, and establish its intersection with power relations and war in our times.

READINGS

Course readings will be posted to Moodle a week prior to the start date.

ASSIGNMENT INFO

The final evaluation for this course will be based on the following criteria:

Attendance and Participation: (20% of your grade)

In-Class Activities: (40% of your grade)

Oral Presentation: (40% of your grade)

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Isabella Franchini received her PhD with highest distinction from the Department of Political Science of the National University of Singapore and the Department of War Studies at King's College London. Her research interests include political and international relations theory, international conflict, national identities, Latin America, and Linguistics. She is a passionate teacher, a cosmopolitan person, and an animal lover, currently living in Berlin with her husband, daughter, and two cats.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Session 1: Course Presentation and Introduction of main concepts

Session 2: Realism, Anarchy and Security Dilemmas: the inevitability of war?

Session 3: The Liberal Response to War: Interdependence

Session 4: Field trip

Session 5: Social Construction of Reality: Anarchy is what States make of it?

Session 6: Identity as Social Roles: Do states play different roles?

Session 7: Field trip

Session 8: Identity and counterinsurgency

Session 9: Power and Hegemony: coercion or consensus?

Session 10: The Liberal Order, the West and the "Rest", and War in our times

Session 11: Field trip

Session 12: Final reflections and course conclusion