

The Politics of Atrocity Response in Post-Conflict Democracies

Spring 2026 / POLC-4010-01

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 2:00 – 2:50 pm

Dinwiddie Hall 108

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Office Hours: Fridays 12:00-1:30 or by appointment
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After armed conflict and authoritarian rule, societies often confront legacies of violence, atrocity, and repression. This course provides an in-depth, interdisciplinary introduction to the field of transitional justice, which addresses the political and legal efforts that societies undertake to address past human rights violations and lay foundations for rule of law and democracy.

Focusing on case studies from Latin America, Africa, and East Europe, students will examine transitional justice mechanisms such as trials, truth commissions, reparations, amnesties, and security sector reforms. The course investigates both global and domestic innovations, evaluating their effectiveness, limitations, and impacts on democracy, large-scale violence, and inequality reduction. By the end of the course, students will be equipped to critically assess transitional justice strategies and propose informed perspectives on policy dilemmas in post-conflict societies.

Course Objectives:

By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

1. Apprehend diverse theoretical approaches to reckoning with a violent past at the international and national levels, underscoring their respective advantages and challenges.
2. Examine real-world case studies to understand transitional justice mechanisms such as trial, truth commissions, reparations programs, and lustration and vetting.
3. Articulate your own thinking about the policy and practical implications of transitional justice efforts, considering both short- and long-term impacts.

Coursework and Evaluation:

- *Canvas.* There is a Canvas site for this course. To access readings, assignments, outlines, please visit <https://tulane.edu/mytulane>. I will also use this site to email the course when necessary. Please check the site regularly not to miss important course information.
- *Participation and attendance (10 points).* The success of this course depends on your active participation in each class. This includes careful and active listening across diverse perspectives and experiences. Come prepared for class with critical questions and reflections. Listen carefully to the viewpoints of others, avoid dominating the discussion, take risks and engage in respectful dialogue.
- *Quizzes (5 points each, totally 25 points).* You are expected to turn in 5 quizzes during the semester, which will cover any reading, film, or documentary through (including) the day of the quiz. These quizzes pursue a twofold objective. First, to test that you are grasping the basics of themes, especially since there is no midterm or final exam. Second, to encourage you to be engaged with the reading and additional materials.
- *Paper proposal (5 points).* You will turn in a 5-page research proposal, following attached guidelines.

- *Research paper (50 points)*. Each student should write a 3400–4000-word research paper on a transitional justice dilemma in Latin America, Africa, or Europe, either focusing on a specific country not covered in the course as a case or examining in greater depth one of the cases explored in the course. Papers are due by 5 p.m. on **May 4, 2026**.
- *Paper presentation (10 points)*. You will be asked to deliver a 10 minute “work-in-progress” presentation on your topic in the second half of the semester before the paper submission deadline. See attached guidelines.

Grade disputes:

If you believe a grade was assigned in error, you may submit a written explanation between one paragraph and one page in length. Your explanation should focus specifically on how the evaluation criteria were misapplied, instead of on how much time you spent or your typical academic performance. Please wait at least 24 hours after receiving a grade before contacting the instructor. All written disputes must be submitted within seven days of the grade being posted.

Late Policy:

Assignments may be submitted up to one week after the deadline, with a 3% deduction per day (including weekends). After one week, late work will not be accepted. Final research papers must be submitted on time—no exceptions. Extensions or incompletes will only be granted in cases of documented emergencies or illnesses.

Communication by e-mail:

Email is best used for brief and administrative matters, such as scheduling appointments or notifying the instructor of logistical issues. Substantive discussions—especially those concerning paper topics, feedback, or course content—should take place during office hours or scheduled meetings. Unless prior arrangements are made, email is not a substitute for attending office hours.

A note on course feedback: You will be asked to provide feedback on the course through a “mid-course review” on **March 20th**. Given the collective responses, your feedback may result in changes to the syllabus.

Resources:

Wellness, Care, and Emotional Responses to Course Material: To study violence can be emotionally as well as intellectually difficult. This course readings and classroom discussions will often focus on mature, difficult, and potentially challenging topics that include forced disappearance, genocide, forced displacement, and gender-based violence. The objective in this class is to not only engage in robust and nuanced analysis of violence, but to also consider and identify constructive responses to violence. In this way, we hope to move beyond the cynicism and despair that can come with in-depth readings of violence to consider the many ways people across the world are working to constructively transform violent conflict. That said, some of the readings may trigger emotional responses. Some of us will have emotional responses to the readings; some of us will have emotional responses to our peers’ understanding of the readings; all of us should feel responsible for creating a space that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful. Above all, be respectful (even when you

strongly disagree) and be mindful of the ways that our identities position us in the classroom. I expect everyone to come to class prepared to discuss the readings in a mature and respectful way.

Inclusive and Accessible Learning: Tulane University is committed to offering classes that are accessible. If you anticipate or encounter disability-related barriers in a course, please contact the Goldman Center for Student Accessibility to establish necessary accommodations. If approved by Goldman, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. I will never ask for medical documentation from you to support potential accommodation needs. Goldman Center contact information: goldman@tulane.edu, (504) 862-8433, accessibility.tulane.edu

Course Schedule and Readings

Week	Topic	Assignment
Week 1	01/12 Introduction to the course 01/14 What is transitional justice? 01/16 A genealogy of transitional justice	Watch: What is Transitional Justice? ICTJ
Week 2	01/21 Why transitional justice? 01/23 Does transitional justice “work”?	Bring computers to class (01/23)
Week 3	01/26 Interventions after the Cold War 01/28 Interventions: Yugoslavia Quiz #1 01/30 Library session with Melisa Balos & Juan Pablo Gómez	Quiz #1. 01/28
	02/02 Interventions: Rwanda & Kosovo 02/04 International trials 02/06 Writing session I	Watch: Tokyo Trial
Week 4	02/09 Domestic trials 02/11 The Argentine case. Benjamín García (University of Delaware, guest speaker) 02/13 Writing session II Quiz #2	Watch: Argentina, 1985 (film) Quiz #2. 02/13
Week 5	02/18 Amnesties 02/20 Amnesties	
Week 6	02/23 Truth Commissions I 02/25 Truth Commissions I 02/27 Truth Commissions II: Bosnia and Herzegovina & Peru	Paper proposal 02/23
Week 7	03/02 Truth Commissions II: South Africa & Colombia 03/04 Quiz #3 03/06 Writing session III	Quiz #3. 03/06
Week 8	03/09 Memorialization: Effects 03/11 Memorization: Rwanda & Sierra Leone 03/13 Library visit	Library visit
Week 10	03/16 Documentary. Quiz #4 03/18 Writing session IV 03/20 Writing session V	Watch: Dawnland (documentary) Quiz #4 03/16
SPRING BREAK		

Week 11	03/30 Political Support for Transitional Justice 04/01 Perspective getting & solidarity Natán Skigin (University of Georgia, guest speaker). 04/03 Elite cues	
Week 12	04/06 Reparations I: Conceptualization 04/08 Reparations I: Conceptualization 04/10 Reparations II: Effects	
Week 13	04/13 Reparations II: Property Restitution 04/15 Reparations II: Property Restitution 04/17 Quiz #5 Writing session VI	Quiz #5 04/17
Week 14	04/20 Lustration, Purges & DDR 04/22 Lustration & purges 04/24 DDR	
Week 15	04/27 Paper presentations 04/29 Paper presentations 05/01 Paper presentations	Research paper due May 4, 2026

Unit I: Conceptual and Historical Underpinnings

Week 1. Introduction to the course. What is transitional justice?

Watch: [What is Transitional Justice? | ICTJ](#)

Required reading

- Greiff, Pablo de (2012). “Theorizing Transitional Justice,” in Melissa Williams, Rosemary Nagy and Jon Elster (eds.) *Transitional Justice*, New York: New York University Press, 31-77
- Arthur, Paige (2009). “How ‘Transitions’ Reshaped Human Rights: A Conceptual History of Transitional Justice,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 31 (2), pp. 321–67.
- Teitel, Ruti (2003) “Transitional Justice Genealogy,” *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 16.

Week 2. Why transitional justice? Does transitional justice “work”?

Check: Global Transitional Justice Dataset:

https://ipekcinar.shinyapps.io/global_transitional_justice_dataset/

Transitional Justice Evaluation Tools: <https://transitionaljusticedata.org/en/>

Required reading:

- Olsen, Tricia, Payne, Leigh, and Reiter, Andrew G. (2010). “The Justice Balance: When Transitional Justice Improves Human Rights and Democracy,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, Volume 32, Number 4, November 2010, pp. 980-1007.
- Bates, Genevieve, Cinar, Ipek, and Nalepa, Monika (2010). “Accountability by Numbers: A New Global Transitional Justice Dataset (1946-2016)” *Perspectives on Politics* 18(1), pp. 161-184.
- Trejo, Guillermo, Albarracín, Juan, and Tiscornia, Lucía (2018). “Breaking State Impunity In Post-Authoritarian Regimes: Why Transitional Justice Processes Deter Criminal Violence In New Democracies,” *Journal of Peace Research* 55(6), pp. 787-809

Unit II: Political Transitions & Intervention

Week 3: Intervention after the Cold War

Required reading:

- Luttwak, Edward (1999). "Give War a Chance," *Foreign Affairs*, 78 (4), pp. 36-44
- Nye, Joseph S (1999). "Redefining the National Interest." *Foreign Affairs* 78 (4), pp. 22–35.
- Kuperman, Alan (2008). "The Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Intervention: Lessons from the Balkans," *International Studies Quarterly*, 52 (1), pp. 49–80
- Straus, Scott (2005). "Darfur and the Genocide Debate." *Foreign Affairs* 84(1), pp. 123-133.
- Roberts, A. (1999). "NATO's 'Humanitarian War' over Kosovo," *Survival*, 41(3), 102–123.

Unit III: Prosecutions and amnesties

Weeks 4 & 5. Trials: Global vs. Local

Watch: Tokyo Trial (available on Netflix, watch episode 1 and another episode of your own choice)

Required reading

- Loyle, Cyanne (2025). "Introduction" in *Escaping Justice. Impunity for State Crimes in the Age of Accountability*, pp. 1-21.
- Sikkink, Kathryn and Kim, Hun Joon (2013). "The Justice Cascade: The Origins and Effectiveness of Prosecutions of Human Rights Violations," *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 9 (1), pp. 269–85.
- Wright, Quincy (2017) "The Law of the Nuremberg Trial," *American Journal of International Law*, 41 (1), pp. 38-72.
- Bates, Genevieve (2024). "Backlash and Beyond: Three Perspectives on the Politics of International Justice", *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 16 (2), pp. 682–688

Week 6. Amnesties

Watch: Argentina, 1985 (film). **Quiz #2**

Required reading

- Jeffery, Renée (2014). "The Politics of Amnesty," *Amnesties, Accountability, and Human Rights*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 21-49.
- Escribà-Folch, Abel and Krmaric, Daniel (2017), "Dictators in Exile: Explaining the Destinations of Ex-Rulers," *Journal of Politics* 79(2), pp. 560-75
- Pion-Berlin, David (2004). "The Pinochet Case and Human Rights Progress in Chile: Was Europe a Catalyst, Cause or Inconsequential?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 36(3).

Unit IV: Truth Commissions & Memorialization

Week 7. Truth commissions I.

Required reading

- Hayner, Priscilla (2011). "Truth and Reparations," (Chapter 12), *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 215-33.
- Rowen, Jamie (2017). "Searching for Truth" (Chapter 1), *Searching for Truth in the Transitional Justice Movement*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Week 8. Truth Commissions II. Cases

Quiz #3: One interview from a selected topic on South African apartheid available here: <https://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/listunits.php> (select interviews from the multimedia sources tab)

Required reading

- Rowen, Jamie (2017). “Disruption. A Truth Commission in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Chapter 3), *Searching for Truth in the Transitional Justice Movement*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Theidon, Kimberly (2006). “Justice in Transition: The Micropolitics of Reconciliation in Postwar Peru,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*.
- Wilson, Richard A. (2001). “The Politics of Truth and Human Rights” (Chapter 3). *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State*. Cambridge University Press.
- Plana, Silvia and Herbolzheimer, Kristian (2023). “Diasporas Building Memory and Peace: The Role of the Diaspora with the Colombian Truth Commission,” (conference paper) Amsterdam University Press.

Week 9. Memorialization.

Library visit. Memorialization and truth-seeking in post-genocide Guatemala

Required reading

- Balcells, Laia, Palanza, Valeria, and Voytas, Elsa (2022). “Do Transitional Justice Museums Persuade Visitors? Evidence from a Field Experiment,” *The Journal of Politics*, 84 (1), pp. 496-510.
- Longman, Timothy (2017). “Symbolic Struggles” (Chapters 3), *Memory and Justice in Post-Genocide Rwanda*, Cambridge University Press.
- Bolten, Catherine (2014) “The Memories They Want: Autobiography in the Chaos of Sierra Leone.” *Ethnologie Française* 44 (3).

Unit V: Post-War Social Norms

Week 11. Political Support for Transitional Justice

Required reading

- Kijewski, Sara and Freitag, Markus (2016). “Civil War and the Formation of Social Trust in Kosovo: Posttraumatic Growth or War-related Distress?” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62(4), pp. 717-742.
- Skigin, Natán (2023). “Prosocial Behavior Amid Violence: The Deservingness Heuristic and Solidarity With Victims,” *Political Psychology*, 45, pp. 341-361
- Garbiras-Díaz, Natalia, García-Sánchez, Miguel, and Matanock, Aila (2023) “Political Elite Cues and Attitude Formation in Post-Conflict Contexts,” *Journal of Peace Research*.
- Haas, Nicholas and Khadka, Prabin (2020). “If They Endorse It, I Can't Trust It: How Outgroup Leader Endorsements Undercut Public Support for Civil War Peace Settlements,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 64(4), pp. 982-1000

Unit VI: Reparations

Week 12. Reparations I

Watch: Dawnland (documentary). **Quiz #4**

Required reading

- Greiff, Pablo de (2006) “Introduction – Repairing the past: Compensation for victims of human rights violations,” in *The Handbook of Reparations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Satz, Debra (2012). “Countering the wrongs of the past: The role of compensation,” in Melissa Williams, Rosemary Nagy and Jon Elster (eds.) *Transitional Justice*, New York: New York University Press.
- Duggan, Colleen and Abusharaf, Adila (2006) “Reparation of sexual violence in democratic transitions: The search for gender justice,” (Chapter 18) in *The Handbook of Reparations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Week 13. Reparations II. Cases

Required reading

- Voytas, Elsa (2025). “More than Money: The Political Consequences of Reparations,” *American Political Science Review*, pp., 1-20.
- Weintraub, Michael and Steele, Abbey and Pantoja-Barrios, Sebastián (2025). “The Bureaucracy of Reparations and Political Engagement,” *Comparative Politics*, 58 (1), pp. 1-24.
- Güiza-Gómez, Isabel and García-Montoya, Laura (working paper). “Land Dispossession on Trial: Socially Embedded Claims and Judicial Behavior in the Colombian Land Restitution Program.”
- Stefansson, Anders (2006) “Homes in the Making: Property Restitution, Refugee Return, and Senses of Belonging in a Post-War Bosnian Town,” *International Migration* 44(3), pp. 115-139

Unit VII: Security Sector Reform

Week 14. Lustration, Purges & DDR

Required reading

- Nalepa, Monica (2010). “Introduction (Chapter 1)” & “Hostages and Skeletons in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic (Chapter 4)”, *Skeletons in the Closet: Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-30.
- Tiscornia, Lucía (2023). “Police Reform in the Aftermath of Armed Conflict: How Militarization and Accountability Affect Police Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 61(3)
- Özerdem, Alpaslan (2013). “Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration,” *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*, pp.