

**The Politics of Crisis**  
proposal for a first-year seminar course  
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What political factors influence how governments and international institutions respond to crises? Do crises have lasting effects on politics? Are the politics of crisis different from politics as usual? This course investigates these questions by focusing on three different types of political crises: natural disasters, financial crises, and refugee crises. We view each of these topics through the lens of various theories in political science and use crises as a way of learning about accountability, moral hazard, collective action, populism, and political violence. The course will use fiction, film, and nonfiction on newsworthy topics to introduce students to the discipline of political science.

This course will focus on developing the skill of writing response and seminar papers. Students will write four 750 word response papers throughout the semester and will select two of these papers to develop into 1500 word seminar papers. Grading will also heavily emphasize class participation. In weeks 1 and 2, we will explicitly discuss how to write a response paper and how to participate meaningfully in seminar discussion.

Readings will include several articles as well as the following books:

Eggers (2009), *Zeitoun*

Mutter (2015), *The Disaster Profiteers*

Kindleberger (2000), *Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises*

Sorkin (2009), *Too Big to Fail*

1. Introduction: What is a crisis?

*“Natural” Disasters?*

2. Causes: Are disasters really natural? Who is most affected by disasters?
3. Accountability: Do disasters distort voters’ ability to “throw the rascals out”?
4. Moral Hazard: Do disasters create perverse incentives for governments to underinvest in disaster preparedness?
5. Political Violence: Why might disasters provoke political protest or violence?

*Financial Crises*

6. Causes: What is a financial crisis? How did the US financial crisis and subsequent Eurozone crisis happen?
7. Moral Hazard: Does bailing out a country create perverse incentives for firms and regulators?
8. Collective Action: Why is it so challenging for Europe to address the Eurozone crisis?
9. Populism: How do financial crises give rise to right-wing politics?

*Refugees*

10. Causes: What is a refugee? Where are the world’s biggest refugee flows? How can disasters, repression, and civil war produce international spillovers?
11. Populism: How do refugee flows give rise to right-wing politics?
12. Collective Action: Why is it so challenging for destination countries to share the burden of refugee flows?
13. Political Violence: Why might refugee flows provoke violent political conflict?
14. Wrap-Up: What are similarities in the types of crises we’ve discussed? Differences? Are the politics of crisis different from politics as usual?