Ethnic Politics and Conflict in South Asia
PSC 2993.10: Spring 2016
Wednesday/Friday, 11:10am-12:25pm
Phillips Hall 110

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Office hours: Wednesday 2-4

Course Overview and Goals
This course explores the politics of ethnicity in South Asia, focusing primarily on India, though
with some attention to other South Asian countries. The class has two main goals. The first is to
get students to think with greater clarity and depth about a concept—ethnicity—with which most
people are already familiar. The second is to gain an understanding of how ethnicity matters in
the context of South Asia, a region of the world in which ethnic politics is particularly relevant.
The two goals are inter-related; we explore ideas about ethnic politics that are potentially
applicable around the world through the particular experience of South Asia.

The course is divided into five sections. In the first section, we begin by thinking about what
ethnicity is and how the concept differs in social science from how it is used colloquially. The
second section of the course presents brief overviews of the main forms of ethnic identity in
South Asia: religion, caste, and language. Next, the third section considers where ethnic
identities come from and how particular identities become politically and socially salient. The
fourth section of the course then discusses some ways in which ethnicity matters in politics.
Finally, we conclude the course with an in-depth look at a particularly well-studied form of
ethnic conflict: Hindu-Muslim riots in India.

Learning Objectives
In successfully completing this course, students will learn:

• How social scientists understand the concept of ethnicity.
• About some of the major issues and conflicts involving ethnicity in South Asia, especially India.
• How to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a social science claim.
• How to write both analytically and argumentatively.

Disclaimer
The syllabus is subject to change slightly throughout the semester. Any and all changes to the
syllabus will be announced in class, and an up-to-date syllabus will always be available on the
course’s Blackboard site in the “Syllabus” section. However, I treat the syllabus as being akin to
contract. After we go over the syllabus on the first day of class, your continuation in the class is
an implicit agreement to abide by the terms of the syllabus and acknowledgement that you are
familiar with the class policies. At the same time, this syllabus outlines my obligations to you.
Any changes to the syllabus will be minor and will not result in additional work for you or
change important deadlines.
Course Requirements

Class Participation/Attendance (20%): This course largely revolves around discussion of the day’s assigned reading. Participation is therefore essential. I expect students to come to class having done the assigned reading and ready to participate. Class attendance is a necessary but insufficient requirement for receiving a good participation grade. Each day, students will receive a participation grade for the day: check plus (A equivalent), check (B equivalent), check minus (C equivalent). Absences will automatically count as an “F.” Most days, class will involve discussion of the day’s readings. However, days in which class is predominantly a lecture, attending class will typically be sufficient for receiving a check plus. To accommodate the fact that students have other commitments and obligations that do not always make perfect attendance possible, the lowest three participation grades will be dropped for the purposes of calculating your participation grades. The quality of participation is only weakly correlated with the number of times one speaks. High quality participation involves making thoughtful comments or questions that advance the discussion. If you are someone who is not naturally inclined to participate in class discussions, I suggest coming to class prepared with a few questions or comments, so you do not feel the need to come up with comments on the fly.

Presentations (15%): Each student will, in conjunction with another student, present to the class on an assigned course reading during the third, fourth, and fifth sections of the course. Assignments of presentation dates will be made in late January.

In-class activities (5%): There will be two in-class activities (February 5 and April 15) that will be turned in at the end of their respective classes.

Short papers (50%): Throughout the semester (on dates indicated below), students will turn in three short papers of increasing length (between two and four pages) throughout the semester, each worth 10% of the overall course grade. For each paper, the topic will be handed out one week in advance. The paper will be a short argumentative essay that answers a specific question. Although these papers are short, they are serious writing assignments. A high-quality paper will be organized and well written, and it will advance a clear, logical argument. The aim of these papers is improve your analytical writing skills. To that end, you will revise the second two papers in response to feedback. Each second draft will be worth 10% of your grade. Thus, the writing assignments consist of a first paper, a second paper, a revision of the second paper, a third paper, and a revision of the third paper. There is no guarantee that a revised paper will receive a higher grade than the original. Revised drafts turned in with virtually no revisions will receive lower grades than the first drafts. Students who receive an A on their first draft do not need to turn in a revised draft. They can, instead, elect to automatically receive an A for the second draft. Students must submit their first drafts along with the second drafts. Hard copies of papers are due at the beginning of class.

Exam (20%): There will be a cumulative exam during the finals period. The exam will be a mix of essays and short answer. Students may bring a single page of notes to the exam. Notes may be hand-written or typed on a single side of the paper.
Course Policies

- **Attendance.** Attendance is not, strictly speaking, required. However, repeated absences will significantly affect students’ attendance grades, which constitute a large part of the overall grade. As noted above, I drop the three lowest attendance grades, meaning that fewer than four absences will not affect your overall grade. In light of this policy, I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. Therefore, you do not need to notify me if and when you are going to absent. However, if you experience a major life event—severe illness, personal crisis, family emergency—that may cause you to miss a large number of classes, I encourage you to come to talk to me as soon as possible, ideally as soon as the issue presents itself.

- **Personal circumstances/Deadline accommodations.** If you are experiencing any personal difficulties—academic trouble, mental or physical health issues, personal problems, etc.—that are likely to interfere with your ability to complete the course requirements or to complete them in a timely way, please speak to me immediately or ensure that I am somehow notified. Any accommodation—extensions, rescheduled deadlines, frequent excused absences—require documentation of some kind. Without proper documentation, no accommodations will be made as it is virtually impossible for me distinguish, without some corroboration, between reasonable and unreasonable requests for accommodation. If you do not feel comfortable speaking to me about an issue, I encourage you to speak to someone else at the university—a dean, counselor, advisor, etc.—who can alert me that a situation has arisen. One particularly useful avenue is to contact an undergraduate advisor (http://advising.columbian.gwu.edu/undergraduate-advising).

- **Rescheduling.** Paper deadlines may not be rescheduled except 1) under extenuating circumstances that arise at the last minute (e.g., grave illness, death in the family) and are properly documented or 2) in prior consultation with the instructor because of a legitimate conflict (e.g., athletic meet, religious observance). Any requests for rescheduling must occur in the first two weeks of the semester. Requests made after the first two weeks will not be accommodated.

- **Late work.** I will almost never grant extensions less than 48 hours in advance of a deadline, so unless you are experiencing a grave crisis, do not ask. If you wish to turn a paper in late, that is your choice. Grades will be docked a partial letter grade for each day that it is late. Thus, a paper that would otherwise have received an A- would receive a B+ if it were turned in a day late. Papers are due at the beginning of class. Papers turned in after class has started may be treated as late papers. If you arrive to class late on the day a paper is due, please do not disrupt class by handing me your paper while we are in the middle of class. Late papers may be returned to you late; however the due date for revised papers will not change.

- **Laptops.** Students may not use laptops in class unless you have a note from Disability Support Services indicating that you require use of a laptop to take notes. The course is discussion-based, therefore you should be focused on the course discussion, not on your laptops. Academic research consistently shows that few people multi-task well and that multi-tasking diminishes one’s ability to complete any task well. If you do course readings on your laptops, you may bring laptops to class so as to have them available if we need to
looks at a particular portion of the reading; however, I encourage you instead to instead bring hard copies of the readings to class or to put the readings on some other reading device.

- **Grade disputes.** If you wish to dispute a grade on a quiz or paper, please email me at least 24 hours after papers/quizzes have been handed back indicating the nature of your concern. We can then set up a time to discuss the exam or paper in question. I will not discuss paper or exam grades immediately after they are handed back.

- **Grade scale.** For work that receives a letter, rather than numerical, grade I use the following scale to calculate grades: A = 95, A- = 92, B+ = 88, B = 85, B- = 82, C+ = 78, C = 75, C- = 72, D+ = 68, D = 65, F = 55.

**Disabilities and Tutoring**
Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. Such accommodations should be discussed as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester. For additional information please refer to: [http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/](http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/)

**Academic Integrity**
By taking this course, you are agreeing to abide by the University’s Code of Academic Integrity. It states: “Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” For the remainder of the code, see: [http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity](http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity). If you are unsure about any aspect of this policy the Writing Center ([http://www.gwu.edu/~gwriter/](http://www.gwu.edu/~gwriter/)) can provide assistance on citation or other aspects of writing papers. Claiming ignorance about how or when to cite sources is not an excuse for academic dishonesty. If I find that you have knowingly engaged in academic dishonesty, you will automatically fail the class.

**Electronic Etiquette**
- You should expect that I will respond within 24 hours to any email sent between Monday morning and Friday afternoon. You should not expect responses on weekends. I may respond more quickly, but doing so remains my prerogative.
- You should not expect responses to emails that ask questions whose answers are on the syllabus.
- For most questions that require a lengthy response, it is best to talk to me after class or in office hours.

**Required Readings**
There is one required book for this course, which is available at the GW Bookstore: Chandra, Kanchan, ed. 2012. *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. The book is also available on reserve at Gelman. All other readings will be available on the course’s Blackboard site.
**Class Meetings and Readings**
Classes marked with an asterisk (*) are ones in which there will be student presentations.

January 13 (W): *Introduction*

**Part I: What is ethnicity and to what extent can it change?**
January 15 (F): *Defining ethnicity*
  – Chandra, pp. 51-55 (to beginning of Section 1), pp. 58-64 (to beginning of Section 4)

January 20 (W): *What an ethnic identity is not*
  – Chandra, pp. 73-92 (to section on “Conceptual Autonomy”)

January 22 (F): *How to think about ethnicity and what is distinct about it*
**Paper 1 topic handed out**
  – Chandra, pp. 97-128 (to beginning of Section 9).

January 27 (W): *How ethnic identities change*
  – Chandra, pp. 132-142 (to section on “Modernization”), pp. 149-165 (from beginning of section 3 to beginning of Section 5)

**Part II: Ethnicity in South Asia**
January 29 (F): *An overview of language in South Asia*
**Paper 1 due**

February 3 (W): *An overview of religion in South Asia*

February 5 (F): *In-class activity*

February 10 (W): *An overview of caste in South Asia*
**Paper 2 topic handed out**

**Part III: Where do ethnic groups come from and how do they become politically salient?**
February 12 (F): *Colonialism* *


February 17 (W): *The census*

**Paper 2 due**

February 19 (F): *Class cancelled*

February 24 (W): *Modernization*

**Paper 2 handed back**

February 26 (F): *Grievances*

March 2 (W): *Electoral Competition*

**Paper 2 revision due**

March 4 (F): *Political Power*

Part IV: How ethnicity matters in politics?

March 9 (W): *Elections*

March 11 (F): *Criminality*

March 16 (W) and March 18 (F): *Spring Break*

March 23 (W): *Insurgency*
Guest lecture by Asgar Syed on the conflict in Kashmir
- Reading TBA
March 25 (F): Constitution-making
Guest lecture by Sam Frantz on Nepal’s constitution-making process
  – Reading TBA

March 30 (W): Democratic stability*
**Paper 3 topic handed out**

Part V: A case of ethnic conflict in-depth: Religious riots in India
April 1 (F): What becomes a “religious” riot?*

April 6 (W): Institutionalized riot systems
**Paper 3 due**

April 8 (F): Riots and Civil Society*

April 13 (W): Riots and Elections*
**Paper 3 handed back**

April 15 (F): Riots and Economic Growth
*Instead of class, you will have an assignment on Blackboard to be completed during class time.*

April 20 (W): Riots and Patronage
**Paper 3 revision due**

April 22 (F): Wrap-up