

Contemporary Global Crises & Humanitarian Politics | UPADM-GP 275

Day & time: Tuesday, 6:20-8:50

Location: Silver Center Room 412

Instructor: Anna Levy

Office hours: In-person or on Zoom by appointment.

Zoom Login: TBD

Course Description

This course digs deeply into the political economy, politics, infrastructure, design, incentives, and dilemmas related to current global crises, with specific exploration of what constitutes humanitarian action, aid, response, and ethics. Between the constellation of populations, authorities, and conditions shaping humanitarian emergencies, and the agencies, funders, states, and implementers deciphering transnational policies and approaches to them, class readings and discussions will be rooted in analysis from a wide variety of disciplines and day-to-day considerations, blending both practitioner and theoretical perspectives.

We will discuss ongoing humanitarian crises, and political decisions or paradigms framing them—from the roots of and response to perpetual humanitarian emergency, whether in Sudan, Venezuela, Gaza or the U.S-Mexico border; to the slow and fast emergencies like climate displacement and urban environment disaster or the compounding crises caused and created by a global pandemic overlaid onto existing national or local economic and political crises, among many others.

In the context of a growing number of these intersecting local, national, and global crises, we will focus on understanding and analyzing: the relationships between and among decision-makers and affected populations; the political economy of resource mobilization and distribution; the practical tools, frameworks, and blueprints used for response; questions of power in the context of emergency, and; historical determinants of humanitarian need, responsibility, and intervention.

Blending real-time, practitioner, historical, and theoretical perspectives, we will reflect on how crisis and humanitarian response are defined, what formal and informal governance and decision-making processes and practices are used during and following crisis, how to map different interests and factors that determine crisis trajectories, and different perceptions of success and failure, among other topics.

Throughout the course, which will utilize active learning modalities such as simulations, large and small group discussion, mapping and platform analysis, discussion of readings, guest speakers from a range of geographies, and individual reflection—and will engage such questions as:

- What are the political, social and economic underpinnings of contemporary development, emergency, and humanitarian discourse?
- How do the design of development and humanitarian infrastructure and technical systems contribute to or alleviate structural inequality within and across societies as part of long-term development paradigms or short-term emergency response?

- What does it mean to be an individual engaged in humanitarian, emergency, and development work as an affected population, as a decision-maker, as an insider or outsider? As an individual or as part of an institution? What are the historical and contemporary sources of these roles, norms, and practices?
- What are the origins and starting points of emergency? When can we say an emergency has ended?
- How does a focus on underlying causes and power relations change our analysis of the problems and solutions? Should politics be removed from practice & intervention, or should it be amplified?
- As people affected by emergency are not a monolith, how can we define 'local' and 'sovereign' in mapping competing interests and power dynamics within communities affected by emergency?
- Should we reform or abandon the current humanitarian/development aid system toward alternatives?

Readings and assignments

This is a living syllabus and may be adjusted during the semester. Please refer to this [google doc](#) as the syllabus, rather than downloading a version at the start of the semester which may change. *Assignments will not change in content or substance.*

All instructions, announcements, assignments, readings, and class resources will be shared through Brightspace except for your midterm project, which will be submitted in a Google Drive your group creates, and shares, with the professor.

It is expected that all readings are completed before class and are used to inform classroom discussion and participation.

This course is built heavily on group assignments as group work and cooperative planning is one of the core fixtures of engaging in or responding to crises.

Goals

The course has an ambitious range of **outcomes**. By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Differentiate the structures, stakeholders, and systems that shape power dynamics, emergency planning & decision-making, historically and at present.
- Examine the meaning of 'development and humanitarian aid' through multiple perspectives, including the lived experience of day-to-day emergency in balance with the policy and decision-making aspects of relief, remedy, or response.
- Engage class concepts with ongoing debates and policy decisions in the present related to emergency, humanitarian crisis, development, political economy and power relations in decision-making, and socio-political transitions relating to each.
- Define variable parts of crises, their causes and consequences, including: slow and fast emergency, perpetual or time-bound emergency, economic and political emergency among others.

- Consider variations of different crises, their causes and consequences, including: slow and fast emergency, perpetual or time-bound emergency, economic and political emergency among others
- Identify the disparities between the lived experience of people affected by crisis and institutional approaches which seek to manage, mitigate, and transform crises affecting them.
- Differentiate between micro-practices and macro-debates related to vulnerability, accountability, and innovation from institutional, individual, and political economic perspectives.
- Develop awareness of the evolution of tools, standards, and criteria for evaluating particular issues and programs, along with the politics of their origins
- Outline and develop policy briefs, practitioner focused assessments, and academic commentary that are well organized, professionally voiced, and formatted for workplace and public dissemination.

******As evolving university policies may lead to a chilling effect on classroom discussion related to global crisis and humanitarian politics, I will aim to incorporate new modalities for ensuring that space remains for asking questions, analyzing, and deepening student understanding of these themes.**

Assignments and Structure:

The course's structure involves a significant proportion of the class time given to interactive lectures and student-led discussions, guest speakers, potential site or exhibition visits, and facilitated exercises.

Policy on laptops: Please bring notebooks to class and be prepared to take notes by hand. Laptops will not be used for note-taking, but only as reference for readings.

No hybrid class option: Unfortunately, it is not possible to hold hybrid classes (remote and in-person at the same time). We will have a couple of classes entirely on Zoom, but will default to meeting in class. **Class participation is possible outside the classroom for up to two classes in the semester, by providing a 3-pg written analysis using 2-3 class concepts from class (see more in 'class engagement' below).

Course Textbooks:

There are no textbooks required for purchase in this course.

Please subscribe to the [New Humanitarian](#) and read the weekly digest/roundup throughout the semester.

We will occasionally have book chapters assigned as weekly readings, though they will be uploaded and available on Brightspace.

Policies:

Standards of academic integrity related to producing original work will be respected without exception. Students with questions or concerns about academic integrity along these lines are invited to speak with me at any time. Students with disabilities are welcome to utilize the university's disability services or talk to me. I am committed to making the course as accessible and as supportive as possible so that every student can benefit and contribute.

While using AI tools to help generate ideas, or support with English language editing, may make assignment completion easier—please note that your assignments all require analysis of specific scenarios, and AI generated responses will quickly fall short.

If assignments submitted in whole, or in part, are AI generated—the professor may ask students to provide a short verbal or written summary of their arguments which will be used for grading, instead of the AI generated assignment.

Grading:

%	Due	Assignment
30%	5 pm on 10/19	Midterm group assignment (two options)
	<p>Assignments will be considered submitted when a google drive folder shared with Professor Levy contains all required submissions.</p> <p>**Please assign one group member to finalize submissions by the deadline.</p>	<p>1) Analyzing a post-crisis plan using course concepts. In groups of four, you will have 10 days to complete an analysis of a post-crisis plan. I will provide four options for you to choose from—including peace agreements, short- and long-term disaster or recovery/rebuilding/response plans. <i>Your assigned group will have the option to use one of these or to propose your own as long as the focus is on a specific document which outlines elements of a plan.</i> The final submission should be 13-15 pages, 1.15 spacing, Times New Roman. You will have 10 days as a team to complete the midterm, which will be submitted in Brightspace by 5 pm on 10/19.</p> <p>2) Analyzing the strategy of a social movement responding to crisis through four interviews. In groups of four, you will identify a social movement or collective that focuses on challenging or transforming a particular crisis. Each team member will identify a participant in that movement (or expert of that movement) to interview, and the group will prepare a 6-page analysis of: (1) goals; (2) strategies; (3) challenges and setbacks; (4) critical turning points; (5) stories, sounds; and messages; (6) legacies. Each group will be required to submit a single Google Drive folder with all four interviews, a shared master interview guide and approach to ethical interviewing (including anonymity requests and disclosure of use), and final analysis document. Final written submissions should be 1.15 spacing, Times New Roman. The full folder with completed parts is due in a Google Drive folder shared with Professor Levy by 5 pm on 10/19.</p>
30%	12/10 & 12/17	Final group project: (1) In-class policy presentation and; (2) Brightspace submission of final policy brief
	<p>In-class group presentations will be held on 12/10.</p> <p>Final group policy briefs are due on Brightspace at 5 pm on 12/17.</p>	<p>Your final project will be the production of a policy brief and plan focused on a particular issue of interest that you have followed over the course of the semester. Drawing on course concepts, templates, technical and structural considerations, you'll submit both a written policy brief (10-12 pages, Times New Roman, size 11, 1.15 spacing) and give a 20 min presentation (10-15 mins for presenting and 5-10 mins for Q&A) presentation to your classmates on this plan.</p>

		The written component will be worth 15% of your grade and the oral/visual component will be worth 15% of your grade. Themes will vary widely and may range from education funding as slow and fast emergency in the US to comorbidities by race or ethnicity to post-war reconstruction to analyzing the economic impact of lockdowns to demilitarizing displacement among many, many other themes.
20%	Ongoing	Class engagement
		<p>Your full participation is both welcomed and anticipated both by coming to class and engaging thoughtfully in class discussions, completing all readings in advance of class discussions, and reflecting on the circumstances that enable and inhibit general participation in everyday life during periods of emergency. Please don't hesitate to communicate any special circumstances which inhibit your participation.</p> <p>Class participation outside of class—as related to course material and subjects—may be counted as participation up to twice during the course of the semester with the submission of a <i>3-pg written analysis of outside participation using 2-3 class concepts</i>.</p>
20%	10/1 & 11/12	Two short assignments (3 pages each)
		Two prompts will be shared three weeks before short assignment due dates, for which you will be asked to submit a 3-pg (or equivalent) response. Prompts will focus on skills development in emergency analysis as well as critical reflection on concepts of development and emergency. Each response will be worth 10% of your total grade. Submissions should be made by 5 pm on Brightspace on the respective dates they are due.

Semester Syllabus

Slight changes may be made to the syllabus to incorporate relevant topics, current events, or readings released throughout the semester. You'll receive Brightspace announcements regarding any related changes to readings a week in advance. Please refer to this syllabus for all final readings, assignments and class preparation activities. All communications, announcements, and updates will be posted through the Brightspace page.

<u>Session 1 (9/3)</u>	<u>Course intro and overview</u>	
<u>Session 2 (9/10)</u>	<u>What is humanitarian politics? The system [not] in transition</u>	
<u>Session 3 (9/17)</u>	<u>Mapping the contemporary humanitarian system</u>	
<u>Session 4 (9/24)</u>	<u>Perspectives on contemporary development paradigms as slow crisis</u>	
<u>Session 5 (10/1)</u>	<u>Planning: Incentives, implementers, decision-makers & constituencies / movements Dilemmas in contemporary humanitarian response</u>	Short assignment #1 due
<u>**Session 6 (10/8)</u>	<u>***Short 10/8 class with midterm prep and review – 6:20-7:30 pm</u> <u>***Discussion and investigation workshop with Elodie Toto on 10/13 on Zoom (10-11:30 am)</u>	Midterm Q&A / prep in class
<u>Session 7 (10/15)</u>	<u>No class - on a Monday schedule / Midterm week in teams (Midterm due 10/19).</u>	
<u>Session 8 (10/22)</u>	<u>Beyond crisis economies Politics of crisis recovery or transition</u>	
<u>Session 9 (10/29)</u>	<u>Contemporary states of emergency Possible guest speaker</u>	
<u>Session 10 (11/5)</u>	<u>Election Day Crisis implications of political transitions</u>	
<u>Session 11 (11/12)</u>	<u>Crisis compounded Case /Climate, land, and environmental injustice / Guest speaker TBD.</u>	Short assignment #2 due
<u>Session 12 (11/19)</u>	<u>Crisis compounded Case / Borders and [Non]-Citizenship</u>	Final project Q&A / prep in class
<u>Session 13 (11/26 – Possible Zoom class)</u> - <u>Crisis compounded Case and/or guest speaker TBD</u>		
<u>Session 14 (12/3)</u> - <u>Data, witnessing, documentation, storytelling Information as Intervention? & Solidarity Protection, Monitoring, Justice</u>		
<u>Session 15 (12/10)</u> <u>Final group policy presentations in class</u>		
<u>Final policy briefs due by email - 12/17 at 5 pm EST.</u>		

Session 1 (9/3) Course intro and overview

- Introductions
- About this course and this semester - syllabus review
- Brightspace tour - where to find course materials, structure, assignments, and scheduling

Reading:

- Roux, Anneke le. "Contesting 'invited spaces': where a ward committee and a social movement meet." *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, vol. 89 no. 1, 2015, p. 87-111.

Questions to consider:

- What is the difference between 'invited' and 'invented' spaces? Are they mutually exclusive spaces or do they overlap in meaningful ways?
- Who gets included & excluded in decision-making, agenda setting, and resource allocation in 'invited' and 'invented' spaces?
- How does each frame the participation of different populations in contributing to policies, institutions, and decisions related to their well-being—in the short- or long-term?
- What are the advantages and limits of 'invited' or 'invented' spaces in shaping or responding to different types of crisis?

Session 2 (9/10) What is humanitarian politics? The System [Not] In Transition

- Rakiya Omaar, Alex de Waal. "[Can Military Intervention Be "Humanitarian"](#)?" MERIP, 187-188 (March/April 1994)
- Joël Glasman, "[Goodbye to humanitarianism? How the liberal consensus on humanitarian principles is crumbling](#)" Centre for Humanitarian Action, 24 May 2024.
- [Hajooj Kuka](#). "A mutual aid volunteer reflects on a year of war in Sudan," *The New Humanitarian*, 22 April 2024.
- [Airwars](#). (Please browse 3-4 conflicts covered on the site and consider how better information is/n't
- "[The New York Community Trust and Robin Hood Announce The Funds for the Newest New Yorkers](#)," 31 July 2024.
- Alexander, Jessica. "[Then and Now: 25 Years of Aid Accountability](#)," *The New Humanitarian*, 27 April 2021.
- Fassin & Pandolfini 2010. *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*. New York: Zone Books. [Introduction](#) (pp 9-25)

Reflection questions:

- When do humanitarian responses enable, inhibit, or substitute for political responses?
- Is humanitarian intervention neutral both in theory and in practice? Please consider scenarios, examples, and evidence from the readings in answering this question.

Session 3 (9/17) | Evolution of the contemporary humanitarian system

- "[Evolving norms during and after decolonisation](#)," pgs 23-28 & Please look at the Annex on 37-39
- Currion, Paul. "[Network Humanitarianism](#)." Overseas Development Institute, 2018.
- "[Unfolding the Tapestry: Weaving Themes and Strategies of Feminist Crisis Response](#)," Feb 2024
- Sharid Bin Shafique, with Madeleine Maxwell, Zara Rahman and Sara Baker "[Digital ID in Bangladeshi refugee camps: A case study](#)." The Engine Room, 2020.
- [UN Security Meetings & Outcomes and Tables](#), United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Research Library.
- "[A growing map of resources to reimagine philanthropy and global development](#)." Global Fund for Children, 2023.
- Sabina Robillard, Teddy Atim, and Daniel Maxwe, "[Localization: A "Landscape" Report](#)." Feinstein International Center, 2021.

Session 4 (9/24) | Perspectives on contemporary development paradigms as slow crisis

- [Unequal scenes](#) [Please browse 3-4 aerial city views on this website and consider what we might predict about the differential impacts of a pandemic, typhoon, or imposition of martial law on the two visibly different sides of each city].
- Erle C. Ellis, Nicolas Gauthier, Kees Klein Goldewijk, Rebecca Bliege Bird, Nicole Boivin, Sandra Díaz, Dorian Q. Fuller, Jacquelyn L. Gill, Jed O. Kaplan, Naomi Kingston, Harvey Locke, Crystal N. H. McMichael, Darren Ranco, Torben C. Rick, M. Rebecca Shaw, Lucas Stephens, Jens-Christian Svenning, and James E.M. Watson. 2021. [People have shaped most of terrestrial nature for at least 12,000 years.](#) Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 118(17): 1-8.
- Gurminder K. Bhambra, Yolande Bouka, Randolph B. Persaud, Olivia U. Rutazibwa, Vineet Thakur, Duncan Bell, Karen Smith, Toni Haastrup, Seifudein Adem, “[Why Is Mainstream International Relations Blind to Racism?](#)”, Foreign Policy, July 2020.
- Amin, Samir (1974). “[Accumulation and development: a theoretical model.](#)” *Review of African Political Economy.* Published online, 03 Jan 2007. (pp 10-26).
- Horowitz, Andy. “[Pre-Existing Conditions: Pandemics as History.](#)” SSRC, 9 July 20.

Session 5 (10/1): Planners, political economy & decision-making | Dilemmas in contemporary humanitarian response

Through a series of scenario- and stakeholder-centered starting points, this session will reproduce the complexity of agency, information asymmetries, aspirational standards, and the power dynamics of decision-making in situations with incomplete or changing information, along with multiple and compounding risks & vulnerabilities for different populations.

Readings:

- Dreher, Axel and Valentin F. Lang. “The Political Economy of International Organizations.” [CESifo Working Paper Series No. 6077](#), 20 Sept 2016. (1-29)
- Rittel & Webber 1973. ‘Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning.’ Policy Sciences (4):155-169.
- Kerrie Holloway, Reem Al Masri and Afnan Abu Yahia. “[Digital identity, biometrics and inclusion in humanitarian responses to refugee crises,](#)” HPG working paper, ODI, Oct 2021 (read pgs 22-38).
- [Sphere Humanitarian Standards](#) handbook, revised in 2018.
- Jideofor, Nonso. “[Localizing Humanitarian Action,](#)” UNHCR Innovation Service, 2020-21.
- “[The creeping criminalisation of humanitarian aid,](#)” *The New Humanitarian.* 7 June 19.
- Leal Filho W, Fedoruk M, Paulino Pires Eustachio JH, Barbir J, Lisovska T, Lingos A, Baars C. “[How the War in Ukraine Affects Food Security.](#)” *Foods*, 2023

******Session 6 (10/8) |** This class has two parts: (1) A one hour in class review and Q&A for midterm, and; (2) A Zoom guest lecture and investigative research/journalism workshop with Elodie Toto on Sunday, 10/13 from 10-11:30 am EST. To accommodate Elodie’s Kenya time zone, this workshop will be held Sunday morning, 10/13.

10/13 from 10-11:30 am on Zoom | Elodie Toto - Guest Speaker | Elodie Toto is an environmental journalist for Mongabay covering the Congo Basin with DRC, CAR, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Cameroon. She has worked in radio, TV and print. She worked as a video reporter for AFP in Paris for 4 years, and was a correspondent for the BBC for 3 years in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where she co-directed a documentary on cobalt mining for the Dutch national TV, then went on to become regional video coordinator for Reuters in West and Central Africa. She now writes for Mongabay.

Week of 10/15 | No class — Wednesday class on a Monday schedule. You’ll be working with your groups to finalize your midterm this week.

Session 7 (10/22): Politics of crisis recovery or transition

- [Atlas of Environmental Justice](#) (Please browse 4-5 sites, take stock of the causes and drivers of each conflict, the stakeholders, and key actors)

- Kevin Fox Gotham and Miriam Greenberg. "Crisis Cities: Disaster and Development in New York and New Orleans." Chapter TBD. Oxford University Press, 2014. (Reading will be uploaded to Brightspace.)
- Fadwa Hodali Fares Akram Jason Kao Jennah Haque Jeremy C. F. Lin "[Gaza Reduced to 42 Million Tonnes of Rubble. What Will It Take to Rebuild?](#)" Bloomberg, 15 Aug 2024.
- Francis Tseng and Daria Vaisman, "[Covid-19 made 'unthinkable' reforms a reality in the US – now make them stick](#)" The Guardian, 13 April 2020.
- [Costs of War Project](#), Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University.
- Will Worley. "[International aid agencies pay the price for boom and bust](#)," *The New Humanitarian*, 29 Aug 2024.
- Angela Glover Blackwell in conversation with Khara Jabola-Carolus and Tanya Smith-Johnson "[Hawaii's Feminist Recovery Plan](#)." *Radical Imagination*, Aug 1, 2020.

Session 8 (10/29): Contemporary States of Emergency

Readings:

- Agamben, Giorgio. "[A Brief History of the State of Exception: An excerpt from *State of Exception*](#)." *University of Chicago Press*.
- William Shoki Interviewing Dr. Lassane Ouedraogo, "[Coup in Burkina](#)." Africa is a Country Talks, 1 Feb 2022
- Christian Bjørnskov and Stefan Voigt. "[Why do governments call a state of emergency? On the determinants of using emergency constitutions](#)," *European Journal of Political Economy* 54 (2018) 110-123.
- Mueller-Hsia, Kaylana. "[Anti-Protest Laws Threaten Indigenous and Climate Movements](#)," Brennan Center, 17 March 2021.

Session 9 (11/5): Elections and political transitions

We will spend this class discussing the implications of each respective party's policy proposals and plans on local, national, and global crises and humanitarian politics (including, but not limited to the United States).

- [Project 2025](#) (A Conservative action and policy agenda guiding a 2025 Presidential transition)
- [Democratic Party Platform 2024](#) (Released at the 2024 Democratic National Convention)

Session Session 10 (11/12): Crisis compounded | Climate, land, and environmental conflict

- Devereux et al 2012. '[Seasonality Revisited: New Perspectives on Seasonal Poverty](#)' in Devereux et al (eds) *Seasonality, Rural Livelihoods, and Development*. London: Earthscan.
- Is Climate Insurance a Global Shield, or does Climate-Related Loss and Damage Require a Different Approach?
- Why is Flint Water still not clean?
- [Climate Refugees: Gaps in the Present Protection Regime](#), Othering & Belonging Institute, University of California at Berkeley.
- Duncan Clark and Robin Houston. "[Global carbon map: Extraction, emissions, consumption](#)," [Globalcarbonmap.org](#) (Revised in 2019 for the Guardian).

Session Session 10 (11/19): Crisis compounded | Cases on borders and [non]-citizenship

In this session, we will draw on case studies and/or active learning simulations to navigate the complexity of crisis, and the policy decisions surrounding its origins, governance, and ways forward.

Readings:

- Laure Delacloche. "[What is refugee rentierism? An explainer](#)," *The New Humanitarian*, 14 Aug 2024
- Reidy, Eric. "[The COVID-19 excuse? How migration policies are hardening around the globe](#)," *The New Humanitarian*, 17 April 2020
- Amy Slipowitz, Jessica White, Yana Gorokhovskaia. "[No Way In or Out: Authoritarian Controls on the Freedom of Movement](#)," Freedom House, Special Report 2024.
- Chotiner, Isaac. "[India's Citizenship Emergency](#)." Dec 18, 2019

- Wilson-Smith, Henry. “[On the Move in a War Zone: Mixed Migration Flows to and through Yemen](#),” Migration Policy Institute, 6 Feb 2019.
- Gessen, Masha. “[The Right to Have Rights and the Plight of the Stateless](#).” New Yorker, May 3, 2018

Class 11 (11/26) | Crisis Compounded | Case TBD (Class potentially on Zoom for Thanksgiving travel)

Class 12 (12/4) | Data, witnessing, documentation, storytelling | Information as Intervention? & Solidarity | (Protection, Monitoring, Justice)

- [The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project](#), a disaggregated data collection, analysis, and crisis mapping project of dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events around the world.
- [Humanitarian Open Street Map](#) - (Browse popular maps on [Water/Sanitation](#) & [Gender Equality](#)) (Browse 3-4 projects and consider how locally produced spatial information impacts capacity for localized response.
- What are the ethics of war and conflict reporting in the age of social media and civilian reporting?
- Surveillance watch — political economy of global surveillance companies

Class 13 (12/11) | Group policy presentations