

## PhD Seminar: Politics of Conflict and Violence

### Motivation:

Publishing a successful journal article does not only require a sound research design but also persuasive framing, a theory section that outlines an intriguing puzzle, and a research strategy that anticipates common questions of peer reviewers and potential null results. This PhD seminar on political violence and conflict is designed to equip you with the skills to navigate these challenges effectively.

### Summary:

This seminar serves dual objectives for PhD students in political science. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive introduction to the essentials of research design and the process of academic paper writing within the field. Secondly, it involves an interactive element where students collaborate directly with the instructor to develop research papers that adhere to these high standards.

Although the seminar primarily focuses on the politics of conflict and violence, the principles of robust research it imparts are applicable across various subfields of political science. Consequently, this seminar is highly recommended for any PhD student pursuing research in political science.

### Structure:

The core of this course is the hands-on experience of composing research papers that explore the broad spectrum of topics within the politics of conflict and violence. The course includes a selection of readings, primarily utilized as a basis for discussing various facets of the paper-writing process. Emphasis will be placed on formulating research questions, jointly crafting a research design, and honing skills in framing arguments, conducting literature reviews, developing and testing theories, and exploring mechanisms. We will all be involved in aspects of the project but the students should take the lead, with the instructor's feedback, on writing the articles.

A key outcome of this seminar is the production of a full draft of a co-authored paper by each student in collaboration with the instructor (with the student being the lead author). This draft is expected to be in an advanced stage at the end of the course. An important aspect of our approach to reading and analyzing papers will be to focus not only on critique but also on understanding and emulating the successful strategies employed in these works.

### Weekly Assignments:

Clarification: All weekly assignments are to be submitted in the week **after** their listing on the syllabus (e.g. Week 1 assignment is to be submitted in Week 2). They should all be due 2 days before the next class unless specified otherwise.

## Week 1: Good questions with existing data

### Readings

- Samii, "[Methodologies for 'Political Science as Problem Solving'](#)"
- Angrist and Pischke "[Questions about Questions?](#)"
- For the following, focus on the introductions:
  - Zhou and Shaver, "[Reexamining the Effect of Refugees on Civil Conflict: A Global Subnational Analysis](#)"
  - Barnhart et al "[The Suffragist Peace](#)"
  - Schub, "[Informing the Leader: Bureaucracies and International Crises](#)"
  - Bove, Leo, and Giani "[Military culture and institutional trust: evidence from conscription reforms in Europe](#)"
  - Carey and Gohdes, "[Understanding Journalist Killings](#)"

### Discussion:

- What makes these good studies? Why are they so highly published?
- How were they able to conduct them without (much) original data collection?
- What follow up questions can we ask based on these?
- Instructor presentation of research ideas:
  - a. Diversionary tactics with refugees
    - Savun, Burcu. "Welcoming the unwelcome: Refugee flows, refugee rights, and political violence." *International Studies Quarterly* 66.1 (2022)
    - Fisk, Kerstin. "One-sided violence in refugee-hosting areas." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62.3 (2018): 529-556.
    - Savun and Gineste, "From protection to persecution: Threat environment and refugee scapegoating"
  - b. Journalist killings
    - Carey and Gohdes, "Understanding Journalist Killings"
    - Gohdes and Carey, "Canaries in a coal-mine? What the killings of journalists tell us about future repression"
    - Dorff, Henry, and Ley, "Does Violence Against Journalists Deter Detailed Reporting? Evidence From Mexico"
  - c. Effect of conscription on Y?
    - Bove, Leo, and Giani "Military culture and institutional trust: evidence from conscription reforms in Europe"

### Assignment:

- Next week, bring 2 research questions and design ideas. The questions should be answerable with data that's already publicly available (we'll be working on them during the semester). Prepare a slide deck for each question.
  - **For each idea, the slide deck has ~5 slides:** Framing, question/why it matters, relevant literature, research design, and data sources

## **Week 2: Research questions, designs, preliminary analyses (1)**

### Readings:

- Ashworth, Berry, and De Mesquita, "Theory and Credibility" Chapters 1-2
- <https://x.com/dandekadt/status/1730320334606188774?s=20>
  - If it doesn't work, try this:  
<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/69du73x088gz7tzn387ui/Screenshot-2024-01-10-at-17.23.32.png?rlkey=qz9rlwbfzknngit52f1n8oags&dl=0>
- Weingast, "[Caltech Rules for Writing Papers: How to Structure Your Paper and Write and Introduction](#)"
- **Sources: Political Violence Reading List**

### Discussion:

- Student presentations of their research questions
- How to improve research questions? What other data sources can be used? What other analyses can be used? Do we eliminate any questions?

### Assignment:

- Share 5 page research proposal. Include the following: Motivation, State of Literature, Theoretical Expectations, Research Design, Preliminary Analysis. Circulate via email 2 days before class.
- Preliminary analysis for research question. Prepare slide deck (~5 slides)
  - Slide deck reiterates previous week's in one slide. Then theoretical expectations, preliminary results, and quick interpretation

## **Week 3: Preliminary analyses (2)**

Readings: None

### Discussion:

- Student presentations
- What do we think about proposed analyses/results? Should we include additional analyses? What other tests can be used to explore potential mechanisms?

### Assignment:

- Presentation: Literature, theoretical framework, hypotheses, measurement

## **Week 4: Theory and hypotheses (1)**

Readings:

- Ashworth, Berry, and De Mesquita, "Theory and Credibility" Chapter 4
- For the following, focus on the theory:
  - Fearon, James D. "[Rationalist explanations for war.](#)" International organization 49.3 (1995): 379-414.
  - Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. "[Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war.](#)" American political science review 97.1 (2003): 75-90.
  - Cederman, Wimmer, and Min "[Why do ethnic groups rebel? New data and analysis](#)"

Discussion:

- What makes a good theoretical section? Why are theories in the papers above influential?
- Student presentations:
  - How convincing are theoretical frameworks? What's missing? What do we think of measurement?

Assignment:

- Continue the paper writing process. Include a short intro/overview from earlier memo (fixed after comments) And now add a literature review and theoretical framework section. Circulate to class 2 days before class next week.

## Week 5: Theory and hypotheses (2)

Readings:

- Student Memos.

Discussion:

- Comments on theoretical frameworks, how to improve them.
- Discuss the research design to be done

Assignment:

- Prepare a detailed presentation on research design.

## Week 6: Research Design (1)

Readings:

- Justin Grimmer, Margaret E. Roberts, and Brandon M. Stewart, Text as Data: How to Make Large Scale Inferences from Language. Chapters 3 and 15.
- Ashworth, Berry, and De Mesquita, "Theory and Credibility" Chapter 5
- Focus on research designs in these papers:
  - Schultz, "[Looking for Audience Costs](#)"
  - Boghart and Snyder, "[The Cost of Empty Threats](#)"

Discussion:

- Discuss research designs in papers above. How could they overcome data problems? Where else can scholars apply these methods?
- Student presentation

Assignment:

- Continue the paper writing process. Revise the previous sections following comments. Add data, measurement, and research design to the paper. Circulate to class 2 days before class next week.

## **Week 7: Research Design (2)**

Readings:

- Student Memos.

Discussion:

- Comments on paper throughout, with focus on research design.
- Discuss the analyses to be done

Assignment:

- Prepare a detailed presentation that includes all the results.
- Continue the paper writing process. Revise the previous sections following comments. Add analysis, results, AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, to the paper. Circulate to class 2 days before class next week.

## **Week 8: Analysis and results**

Readings:

- Student memos
- Alrababa'h Ala et al 2023 "[Learning from Null Effects: A Bottom-Up Approach](#)"

Discussion:

- Student presentations
- Discuss presentation of results in the memos and how to improve them/better ways of representing data

Assignment: Prepare framing presentation

## **Week 9: Framing, discussion, and conclusion (1)**

Readings:

- For the following: focus on the introduction and conclusion:
  - Mousa "[Building social cohesion between Christians and Muslims through soccer in post-ISIS Iraq](#)"
  - Finseraas and Kotsadam, "[Does personal contact with ethnic minorities affect anti-immigrant sentiments? Evidence from a field experiment](#)"
  - Alrababa'h et al "[Attitudes toward migrants in a highly impacted economy: Evidence from the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan](#)"
  - Kuhn, "[Journey Effects? Waiting Periods in European Transit Countries and Subsequent Economic Integration of Refugees in Switzerland](#)"

Discussion:

- Why is framing important? What makes for a good framing of the paper?
- Student presentations of framing

Assignment: Continue the paper writing process. Revise the previous sections following comments. Add introduction, conclusion to the paper. Circulate to class 2 days before class next week.

### **Week 10: Framing, discussion, and conclusion (2)**

Readings:

- Student Memos

Discussion:

- How to improve/clarify framing in the student memos?

Assignment:

- Prepare a 15 minute presentation of the entire paper

### **Week 11: Presentations**

Readings:

- <https://x.com/carlislerainey/status/1744335645361778954?s=20>

Discussion:

- Feedback on papers

Assignment:

- Revise entire paper, submit 2 days before next week's class

### **Week 12: Submit entire paper**

Readings:

- Weingast, "[Caltech Rules for Writing Papers: How to Structure Your Paper and Write and Introduction](#)"

Discussion:

- Feedback on papers