
PS 125
Analyzing Conflict

Winter 2023
TR 10:30–11:55AM
B133 Baxter Hall

Instructor:

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Baxter 104
Office Hours: By appointment
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Purpose

This course examines the causes of and solutions for conflict and political violence: Why does political conflict occur and how do we stop it? We focus on topics that are likely to appear in the media or discussed by policy makers: terrorism, ethnic violence, civil wars, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, wars over oil, the democratic peace, and international interventions. We study these phenomena using the rational choice framework and modern tools in data analysis. The goals of the class are to explain conflicts and their terminations as outcomes of strategic decision making and to understand the empirical strengths and weakness of current explanations.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- Identify key concepts and debates in the study of conflict.
- Solve and manipulate introductory mathematical models of conflict.
- Assess the validity and quality of evidence for theories of conflict.

Prerequisites

An ability to interpret statistical evidence is a prerequisite for mastery of course material. A review of background concepts and nomenclature will be presented in the first class meeting. We will also read and discuss several

mathematical models of conflict, but more class time will be devoted to analyzing these readings.

Evaluation

Grades will be determined as follows:

- Participation: 25%
- Response Essays: 25%
- Midterm exam: 25%
- Final Exam: 25%

Participation and attendance. During class, I expect you to contribute significantly in summarizing and discussing assigned readings. Although attendance is not mandatory, it is necessary for participation, which makes up a considerable portion of your final grade. Each week in class, I assign one to three papers on a certain topic, which are numbered in order of the amount of class time devoted to each paper. In addition, I mark the papers that you should read carefully with an asterisk, *. You should skim those without an asterisk. Here, skimming means briefly reading the abstract, introduction, and, if applicable, a table or figure summarizing the main results. All readings will be posted on Caltech's Canvas page.

Response Essays. For *three* classes besides the first class, write a response essay between 500–1000 words. In each essay, (a) briefly summarize the day's readings, (b) highlight an area of agreement or disagreement or compare their strength and weaknesses, and (c) articulate three additional questions that were raised from your reading/writing. To receive full credit, you should focus on (b). Your essay must address the unstarred readings if they exist for that class. The essays are due at 11:59pm the night before the class. Please email me at michael.gibilisco@caltech.edu. At least one of the three essays must be submitted before the midterm. Because you must submit your essays the night before the class, this means handing in one essay before Feb. 2. You are encouraged to read and discuss the articles with your colleagues, but you need to write your essays individually.

Exam format. The exams will follow a take-home format and you will have a few days (at least 72 hours) to complete each one. Each exam will consist of three types of questions. The first consists of identification of terms, and

the second will be a problem that asks you to work out a numerical example of a relevant game theoretical model. The third will be an essay to be no longer than 1000 words. The midterm is scheduled for Feb. 7. We will discuss arrangements for the final. If you expect that you will be traveling during the midterm, then let me know at least seven days a head of time to make alternative arrangements. All exams will be turned in via email. Of course, you may hand write the exam, but please email an electronic copy; *I will not accept hard copies*. Each exam will require you to read one additional article. As such, I will cancel one class for the midterm, so you can allocate class and reading time to the exam. No collaboration is allowed on the midterm or final exams, but the exam is open note so use any class materials including lecture slides, class notes, and assigned reading. You cannot consult homework solutions from prior years, and you must cite any use of material from outside references.

Academic Integrity

Please be familiar with Caltech's honor code ([url](#)) and the division's definition of plagiarism ([url](#)). Violations will be handled with the utmost seriousness.

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with Caltech Accessibility Services for Students (CASS). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an accommodation letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact CASS as soon as possible, since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations.

My Status as a “Responsible Employee”

As a faculty member, I am required to notify the Institute's Equity and Title IX Office when I become aware of discrimination, sexual harassment, or sex- or gender-based misconduct involving our community members. If one of my students shares such an experience with me, I can help connect them to support resources but will not be able to keep that information confidential as part of fulfilling my responsibility to make sure my students are offered the

opportunity to access information and support by the Institute. For more information, you can email equity@caltech.edu, go to equity.caltech.edu, or review the Institute's Sex- and Gender-Based Misconduct Policy.

If you have experienced such prohibited conduct and would like confidential support, please feel to contact Student Wellness Services; Taso Dimitriadis, Center for Inclusion and Diversity; or Teresa Mejia, Campus Sexual Violence Advocate.

Course Schedule

January 5: Introduction and regression

1. Syllabus
2. Regression Table Guide:

Jan. 10: Why war? Incomplete information

1. *Fearon, J., 1995. Rationalist explanations for war. *International Organization*, 49(3), pp. 379-414. [Focus on pages 379-401]
2. Reiter, D., 2003. Exploring the bargaining model of war. *Perspectives on Politics*, 1(1), pp. 27-43.

Jan. 17: Why war? Commitment problems

1. *Walter, B., 1997. The critical barrier to civil war settlements. *International Organization*, 51(3), pp. 335-364.
2. Fearon, J. and Laitin, D., 2008. Civil war termination. Manuscript, Stanford.
3. See Fearon (1995, 401-410) from last week.

Jan. 19: Do natural resources cause war?

1. *Caselli, F., Morelli, M. and Rohner, D., 2015. The geography of interstate resource wars. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(1), pp. 267-315.
2. Colgan, J., 2010. Oil and revolutionary governments: Fuel for international conflict. *International Organization*, 64(4), pp. 661-694.

Jan. 24: NO CLASS

1. I need to present some work away from Caltech. Use this time to read some background on Russian's invasion of and subsequent war with Ukraine. You will need to read these articles for the midterm anyway:
 - Kirby, J. and Guyer, J., Russia's War in Ukraine, Explained. *Vox*, March 2022
 - Beauchamp, Z. Why is Putin attacking Ukraine? He told us. *Vox*, February 2022.
 - Troianovski, A., Piece by Piece, Russia's Rationale for a Ukraine Invasion Is Put in Place, *New York Times*, February 2022
 - Sullivan, B., How NATO's expansion helped drive Putin to invade Ukraine, *NPR*, February 2022.
 - What you need to know about NATO expansion: Twitter thread by Paul Poast

Jan. 26: Democratic peace (evidence)

1. *Imai, K. and Lo, J., 2021. Robustness of empirical evidence for the democratic peace: A nonparametric sensitivity analysis. *International Organization*, 75(3), pp. 901–919.
2. Blank, M., Dincecco, M. and Zhukov, Y.M., 2017. Political regime type and warfare: Evidence from 600 years of European history. Manuscript, University of Michigan

Jan. 31: Democratic peace (theory)

1. *Bueno de Mesquita, B., Morrow, J.D., Siverson, R.M. and Smith, A., 1999. An institutional explanation of the democratic peace. *American Political Science Review*, 93(4), pp. 791–807.

Feb. 2: Audience costs (theory)

Note: You must arrive to class on time or else miss the in-class experiment & participation.

1. *Fearon, J.D., 1994. Domestic political audiences and the escalation of international disputes. *American Political Science Review*, 88(3), pp. 577–592.

Feb. 7: Audience costs (evidence) *Note: At least one response essay must be turned in before this class.*

1. *Partell, P.J. and Palmer, G., 1999. Audience costs and interstate crises: An empirical assessment of Fearon's model of dispute outcomes. *International Studies Quarterly*, 43(2), pp. 389–405.
2. Tomz, M., 2007. Domestic audience costs in international relations: An experimental approach. *International Organization*, 61(4), pp.821-840.
3. Weeks, J.L., 2008. Autocratic audience costs: Regime type and signaling resolve. *International Organization*, 62(1), pp.35-64.

Feb. 9: NO CLASS

1. Work on midterm exam

Feb. 14: Introduction to Civil War

1. *Fearon, J.D. and Laitin, D.D., 2003. Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war. *American Political Science Review*, 97(1), pp. 75–90.
2. *Collier, P. and Hoeffler, A., 2004. Greed and grievance in civil war. *Oxford economic papers*, 56(4), pp. 563–595.

Feb. 16: Where are the grievances?

1. *Lacina, B., 2014. How Governments Shape the Risk of Civil Violence: India's Federal Reorganization, 1950–56. *American Journal of Political Science*, 58(3), pp.720-738.
2. Cederman, L.E., Weidmann, N.B. and Gleditsch, K.S., 2011. Horizontal inequalities and ethnonationalist civil war: A global comparison. *American Political Science Review*, 105(3), pp.478-495.

Feb. 21: Humanitarian Interventions

1. *Kuperman, A.J., 2008. The moral hazard of humanitarian intervention: Lessons from the Balkans. *International Studies Quarterly*, 52(1), pp. 49–80. [Do not read the Kosovo Section, p. 64]
2. Spaniel, W., 2018. Only Here to Help? Bargaining and the Perverse Incentives of International Institutions. *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(1), pp. 14-22.

Feb. 23: Mass Killings

1. *Esteban, J., Morelli, M. and Rohner, D., 2015. Strategic mass killings. *Journal of Political Economy*, 123(5), pp. 1087–1132.
2. Valentino, B., Huth, P. and Balch-Lindsay, D., 2004. “Draining the sea”: mass killing and guerrilla warfare. *International Organization*, 58(2), pp. 375-407.

Feb. 28: Child Soldiers

1. *Beber, B. and Blattman, C., 2013. The logic of child soldiering and coercion. *International Organization*, 67(1), pp. 65-104.
2. Vargas, G.A. and Restrepo-Jaramillo, N., 2016. Child Soldiering in Colombia: Does Poverty Matter? *Civil Wars*, 18(4), pp. 467-487.

March 2: Why does terrorism occur?

Note: You must arrive to class on time or else miss the in-class experiment & participation.

1. Lapan, H.E., and Sandler, T., 1993. “Terrorism and Signaling.” *European Journal of Political Economy* 9(3):383-397.
2. Crisman-Cox, C., 2018. Enemies Within: Interactions Between Terrorists and Democracies. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62(8), pp. 1661–1685.

March 7: Who becomes a terrorist?

1. *Lee, A., 2011. Who Becomes a Terrorist?: Poverty, Education, and the Origins of Political Violence. *World Politics*, 63(2), pp. 203–245.
2. *Bueno de Mesquita, E., 2005. The quality of terror. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(3), pp. 515–530.

March 9: Counterterrorism in the Israeli-Palestinian Crisis

1. *Dugan, L. and Chenoweth, E., 2012. Moving beyond deterrence: The effectiveness of raising the expected utility of abstaining from terrorism in Israel. *American Sociological Review*, 77(4), pp. 597–624.
2. *Benmelech, E., Berrebi, C. and Klor, E.F., 2014. Counter-suicide-terrorism: Evidence from house demolitions. *Journal of Politics*, 77(1), pp. 27–43.
3. Fisher, M., 2012. “9 questions about Israel-Gaza you were too embarrassed to ask.” *Washington Post*
4. Beauchamp, Z.. 2017. “Everything You need about the Israel-Palestinian Conflict.” *Vox*.

Final Disclaimer

The schedule, policies, procedures, and assignments in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances, by mutual agreement, and/or to ensure better student learning.