

Conflict and Applied Data Sciences

(MPP Course: PPHA 38740)

Class Information

University of Chicago, Harris School

Instructor: Oeindrila Dube (odube@uchicago.edu)

Winter 2024

Class time: Monday 9 – 11:50 am

NOTE:

- **Since winter quarter starts Wednesday, 1st Week Class takes place Friday Jan 5th**
- **To make-up for MLK Holiday, 3rd Week Class takes place Friday Jan 19th**

Class location: Keller 0021

Instructor Office Hours: Wednesday 5-6 pm

(sign up via circulated google sheets)

TA Session Information

TA Section time / location: 5-6:20 pm Thursday, Keller 1002

A second section (held for a UG version of this course) is *tentatively* scheduled to be held: Friday 10:30 -11:50, Keller 2112.

You can attend either section.

TA Office Hours: Leah Luben luben@uchicago.edu: Thursday 1-2 pm

Varun Thampi varunthampi@uchicago.edu (grading TA): **TBD**

Modality

All lectures and TA sections are in-person. The lectures will not be recorded via zoom.

Course Objectives

Why do human beings engage in acts of violence? How can armed groups compel atrocities? How do we prevent cycles of violence, and aid countries recovering from war? Conflict stems from complex political, economic and psychological phenomena – answering these questions requires us to gain in-depth knowledge from cutting edge research on these topics, while developing a toolkit that helps us assess this research.

Thus the goals of this course are two-fold: to introduce students to key concepts in the study of conflict, and to develop the analytical skills needed to understand and assess key arguments advanced in this arena. It is ideal for students who want a deep understanding of the methodology used to produce key empirical findings.

Effective policymakers need to be able to discern whether evidence is credible. This course is designed to help you become an effective policymaker by focusing on the latest research findings around the causes and consequences of conflict, and by teaching you the data science methods used to derive those findings. Thus a major emphasis of the course will be learning how to think critically about empirical evidence, and learning the methods used in quantitative empirical analysis, such as fixed effects, differences-in-differences research designs, and instrumental variables estimation. Given this focus, previous coursework in statistics is a requirement to enroll in this course.

We will learn these methodologies by examining fundamental topics in conflict, drawing on literatures from economics and political science, as well as psychology. We will examine the role of economic shocks and ethnic divisions on civil war; and discern whether similar factors explain the rise of terrorism. In addition, we will study the consequences of conflict on socio-economic development, and examine the role of foreign aid and post-conflict reconciliation in helping countries emerge out of conflict.

Conflict Concentration

For Harris MPP students this course counts toward the **Global Conflict Studies Concentration** and is one of the recommended classes in the conflict sequence.

Course Requirements

There are 4 graded requirements for the course.

- 1) All students must complete **2 written memo assignments**. In these assignments, you will be asked to assess and answer a policy question, using a memo style format. While these policy responses should draw on content internal to the course, outside research about the institutional context or question in hand is welcome (although not required). The assignment will usually be posted 1 week to 10 days prior to the due date. These assignments should be typed, and should not exceed 3 pages in length (double-spaced, using 12 point font, 1-inch margins all around). Your grades on the written assignments will be based on both the quality of your writing as well as the clarity and content.

Note: These should be uploaded on Canvas by 5 pm on the date they are due.

- 2) All students will also be required to do a group project, and the size of the groups will be set based on the overall enrollment in the course but will typically be 5-6 people.

The project can focus one of the following:

- Find a conflict in the world today that has significance to you and describe its causes or consequences through the lens of the material from the course.

- Design an intervention that you think will resolve a particular conflict or prevent a certain conflict from recurring again, and explain why you believe it will prove effective in light of the material learned in the course.
- Some other idea your group propose sand talks to me about, that I ok.

The key to this project is nuanced analysis utilizing the frameworks and ideas advanced in the course. The goal of the presentation is to practice effectively communicating this analysis to an audience.

Presentations will start in week 4 of the class (**January 22nd**).

Each group needs to write up a brief (**2-page max, not including references**) proposed project idea and submit this to me by 5 pm, **2 Mondays** in advance of the presentation, and attain approval for the project. **Note:** The exception is if you are the first group to present (on January 22nd), in which case you can submit your project idea 10 days in advance of the presentation, on Monday January 12th. The proposal will be graded (10% of your overall presentation grade), and the late grading policy will apply.

For the presentation itself, your group will create a slide deck in power-point. **Note: The final presentation slides are due in to me by Thursday, 5 pm preceding the Monday you present.**

- 3) Class participation is also an essential part of the course. I expect active discussion and comments, and encourage questions, particularly on days that you are not presenting. To facilitate discussion, students will be asked to submit **a short comment** (1-2 paragraphs) on a pre-selected paper from **three of the classes**. The paper you can comment on are listed in the paper for comment/discussion part of the syllabus.

Note: All students must submit a comment for week 2 Jan 24th (on the Yanagizawa-Drott paper which focuses on ethnic divisions and civil conflict). You can then pick 2 other papers to comment on– from the other classes in weeks 3, 4, 5, 6 or 7. Note that you cannot comment on two papers from one class. Also, I encourage you do the comment assignments early so you can get feedback and learn what good responses are as preparation for the memo assignments.

When class is held on a regular schedule (on Mondays) the comment assignments will be due **Friday 5 pm preceding Monday's class.**

For the two classes that have been scheduled on Fridays (to make-up for the holidays and quarter starting late), the timeline will be different. **After the first class on Friday of week 1 (jan 5th), the comment will be due the next day, on Saturday Jan 6th (5 pm).**

When class is held on Week 3, the comment assignment will be due Wednesday Jan 17th (5 pm).

Comment assignments are also submitted on Canvas.

The comments should focus on the economics, political science, or psychology of the reading. You are also welcome to critique the papers – for example you might propose alternative explanations for the results, comment on the research design and propose follow-up work, or explain a flaw or concern with the research design. You can use the comment to discuss why you find the reading fits with a particular conflict case or appears to be at odds with it. The comments should not focus on small, idiosyncratic issues.

4) Finally, you will be required to take a **final exam**.

This exam will be open book and approximately 3 hours in length. This exam will take place during finals week and be of a “take-home” variety.

AI Policy

If you use Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, Bard or Llama 2:

- You are expected to cite the LLM you are using.
- You should take full responsibility for the accuracy of the content.
- You should review and edit any AI-generated content to avoid inaccuracy, biased outputs, and misinterpretations. Be aware that over-reliance on AI content without proper attribution may lead to unintentional plagiarism as LLM models have been accused of plagiarism. Ultimately, you need to review the content to ensure that contributions are appropriately credited.

Please be aware that relying on LLMs may limit your understanding of the material covered in this course.

Course Grading

30% - 2 Written memo assignments (15% each)

30% - Group project

15% - Class Participation based on written comments & verbal comments (including comments on other student presentations)

25% - Final Exam

For students taking the course Pass/Fail: To earn a passing grade, students must: complete and submit all assignments; do the group presentation; and take the final exam; and earn passing grades on all of these requirements.

Late Policy

For the memo assignments and the presentation, each day an assignment is late, a full grade is deducted (e.g., A- to B+). Starting from 30 minutes after the official deadline, your assignment is considered to be a day late, and two days late 24 hours after the official deadline, etc.

Note: You cannot submit late comment assignments, since we discuss the paper and comments in class on Monday.

If you anticipate not being able to turn an assignment in on time because of a serious emergency such as sickness, please alert me and the TA in advance, by writing me about the circumstances in advance of the time at which the assignment is due. I will consider extensions related to emergencies on a case by case basis.

Re-grading Policy

Feel free to discuss your grade with your TA to get clarification. If following this conversation, you think an error was made, ***please submit a re-grade request to me, with your TAs cc'd, on email, within a week of the assignment being handed back.*** Please include an explanation of the re-grade request: substantively discuss why you thought you answered the question or why you think a mistake may have been made. Please be aware that when you submit your assignment for a re-grade, and I examine the response in full, your grade can change to either a higher level if I agree with the substantive concern or to a lower level, if I see additional potential concerns with your responses.

Texts

Conflict is a new field within disciplines like economics, and there is no textbook that comprehensively covers the new and cutting edge material covered in the course. I have thus structured the class around published articles.

All articles will be uploaded on Canvas. Links are also provided below for most readings. Links such as www.jstor.org may only work from an on-campus computer or IP address. Scholar.google.com is generally another good way of locating references.

It is expected that you do all the readings before class, including the papers listed under the student presentation sections. The presentations are meant to be interactive with all students in the class participating, and not just the presenter. Thus having all students read the papers is essential for having quality discussion during class.

Academic Honesty & Plagiarism

Submitting another person's statements or ideas as one's own work is contrary to academic integrity. To do so is plagiarism or cheating, offenses punishable under the University's disciplinary system.

Proper acknowledgment of another's ideas, whether by direct quotation or paraphrase, is expected. In particular, if any written or electronic source is consulted and material is used from that source, directly or indirectly, the source should be cited and identified by author, title of source, and page number, or by website and date accessed. Any doubts about what constitutes "use" should be addressed to me.

Charges of academic fraud by students are subject to the University's policy on academic fraud / subject to the University's area disciplinary system. The complete statement of policy on academic honesty and fraud are here: <https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/Policies#Honesty>.

Tentative Syllabus

1. *** Friday January 5th – Introduction

Note: day change since first week of quarter starts on Wednesday

Note: no section this week

The first lecture covers the content of three papers as an introduction to the literature examining determinants of civil conflicts, and also covers interpreting regression tables.:

Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. 2004. "[Greed and Grievance in Civil War.](#)" *Oxford Economic Papers*. 56 (2004): 563-595.

Fearon, James D. and David D. Laitin. 2003. "[Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War.](#)" *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Feb., 2003), pp. 75-90

Do, Quy-Toan and Lakshmi Iyer. 2010. "[Geography, poverty and conflict in Nepal.](#)" *The Journal of Peace Research* 47(6): 735-748.

Meier, Gerald M., and James E. Rauch. (2005). "Appendix: How to Read a Regression Table", *Leading Issues in Economic Development*, Eight Edition, p. 561-566. (Posted on Canvas)

Note: all students must submit a comment assignment for week 2 and the comment is due on Saturday Jan 6th via Canvas (by 5 pm).

2. Monday January 8th – Ethnic Divisions and Civil Conflict

Montalvo, Jose G., and Marta Reynal-Querol. 2005. "[Ethnic Polarization, Potential Conflict, and Civil Wars.](#)" *American Economic Review* 95 (3): 796-816.

Michalopoulos, Stelios and Elias Papaioannou. 2015. [“The Long-Run Effects of the Scramble for Africa.”](#) *American Economic Review*.

Joan Esteban, Laura Mayoral and Debraj Ray, [Ethnicity and Conflict: An Empirical Investigation](#) with, *American Economic Review* **102** (2012), 1310-1342.

Paper for comment / discussion (required from all students):

*** Yanagizawa-Drott, David. [“Propaganda and Conflict: Theory and Evidence from the Rwandan Genocide.”](#) *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

3. **Friday** January 19th – The Economic Causes of Civil Conflict

Note: day change to make up class since Monday is MLK Holiday

Note: Section will be held only on Thursday 5 – 6:20 pm this week.

Edward Miguel, Shanker Satyanath and Ernest Sergenti, 2004. [“Economic Shocks and Civil Conflict: An Instrumental Variables Approach.”](#) *Journal of Political Economy* 112 (4), 119-144.

Dube, Oeindrila and Juan Vargas. [“Commodity Price Shocks and Civil Conflict: Evidence from Colombia.”](#) *Review of Economic Studies*. (2013) 80, 1384–1421.

Berman, Nick and M. Couttenier. [External shocks, internal shots: the geography of civil conflicts](#), 2015, *Review of Economics and Statistics* vol 97(4), pp 758-776.

Blair, Graeme, Darin Christensen and Aaron Rudkin, [“Do Commodity Price Shocks Cause Armed Conflict? A Meta-Analysis of Natural Experiments”](#), 2021, ESOC Working Paper.

Paper for comment / discussion:

Note: Comment assignment due Wednesday Jan 17th at 5 pm

*** [“This mine is mine! How minerals fuel conflicts in Africa”](#), (Nicolas Berman, Mathieu Couttenier, Dominic Rohner, and Mathias Thoenig), forthcoming in *American Economic Review*.

4. Monday January 22nd – Can Economic Factors Explain Terrorism?

Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, 2003. “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is there a Causal Connection?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (17) 4, pp. 119-144.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/3216934.pdf>

[“Relative Poverty, Perceived Violence, and Support for Militant Politics: Evidence from Pakistan.”](#) 2016 by C. CHRISTINE FAIR, REBECCA LITTMAN, NEIL MALHOTRA AND JACOB N. SHAPIRO. *Political Science Research Methods*

Eli Berman, Michael Callen, Joseph H. Felter and Jake Shapiro, [“Do Working Men Rebel? Employment and Insurgency in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Philippines.”](#) *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2011) 55 (4): 496-528

Benjamin W. Bahney, Radha K. Iyengar, Patrick B. Johnston, Danielle F. Jung, Jacob Shapiro Howard J. Shatz. [“Insurgent Compensation: Evidence from Iraq,”](#) *American Economic Review: Papers and Proceedings*, 2013, 103(3): 518-522.

Paper for comment / discussion:

Comment assignment due Friday Jan 19th at 5 pm

*** Benmelech, Efrain and Esteban Klor. [“What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?”](#) NBER Working Paper 22190

DUE DATE FOR ASSIGNMENT 1: Thursday January 25th

5. Monday January 29th – Social and Psychological Causes of Conflict

Littman, Rebecca and Betsy Levy Paluck. 2015. [“The Cycle of Violence: Understanding Individual Participation in Collective Violence”](#) *Advances in Political Psychology* 36(1): 79-99.

Victoroff, Jeff. [“The Mind of the Terrorist: A Review and Critique of Psychological Approaches.”](#) *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Feb., 2005), pp. 3-42

Merari, Ariel, Ilan Diamant, Arie Bibi, Yoav Brishi and Giora Zakin. [“Personality Characteristics of ‘Self-Martyrs / Suicide Bombers’ and Organizers of Suicide Attacks”](#) *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22:1, 87-101.

Paper for comment / discussion:

Comment assignment due Friday Jan 26th at 5 pm

***Jeremy Ginges, Scott Atran. [What Motivates Participation in Violent Political Action: Selective Incentives or Parochial Altruism?](#) *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Wiley, 2009, 1167, pp.115-123.

6. Monday February 5th – The Role of Foreign Aid

Berman, Eli, Jacob Shapiro and Joseph Felter. "[Can Hearts and Minds be Bought: The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq.](#)" *Journal of Political Economy*.

Crost, Benjamin, Joseph Felter and Patrick Johnston. 2014. "[Aid under Fire: Development Projects and Civil Conflict.](#)" *American Economic Review*.

Beath, Andrew, Fotini Christia and Ruben Enikopolov. 2016. "[Winning Hearts and Minds? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan.](#)" Working paper, MIT.

Paper for comment / discussion:

Comment assignment due Friday Feb 2nd

***Nunn, Nathan and Nancy Qian, "[US food aid and civil conflict,](#)" *The American Economic Review*, 2014, 104 (6), 1630–1666.

7. Monday February 12th – The Effect of Conflict on Social Cohesion

Bauer, Blattman, Chytilová, Henrich, Miguel, and Mitts. "[Can War Foster Cooperation?](#)" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*—Volume 30, Number 3—Summer 2016—Pages 249–274.

Rohner, Dominic, Mathias Thoenig and Fabrizio Zilibotti), "[Seeds of Distrust: Conflict in Uganda](#)" *Journal of Economic Growth*, 2013, 18 (3): 217-252.

Dell, Melissa and Pablo Querubin. 2018. "[Nation Building Through Foreign Intervention: Evidence from Discontinuities in Military Strategies.](#)" *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 133(2): P. 701–764

Paper for comment / discussion:

Note: this is the last week to submit a written comment assignment – it is due Friday Feb 9th at 5 pm

***Bauer, Michal, Alessandra Cassar, Julie Chytilová, and Joseph Henrich. 2014. "[War's Enduring Effects on the Development of Egalitarian Motivations and In-Group Biases.](#)" *Psychological Science* 25(1): 47–57.

DUE DATE FOR ASSIGNMENT 2: Tuesday February 13th

8. Monday February 19th – Reconciling and Rebuilding after Conflict

Brouneus, Karen. "[The Trauma of Truth Telling: Effects of Witnessing in the Rwandan Gacaca Courts on Psychological Health.](#)" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54(3) 408 – 437

Cilliers, Jacobus, Oeindrila Dube and Bilal Siddiqi. 2016. "[Reconciling after civil conflict increases social capital but decreases individual wellbeing](#)" *Science* (Paper).

Casey, Katherine, Rachel Glennerster and Edward Miguel. 2017. "[Reshaping Institutions: Evidence on Aid Impacts using a Pre-Analysis Plan.](#)" *Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Paper for discussion:

Note: we will discuss the following paper even though there are no written comments submitted this week

Paluck, E.L. (2009). [Reducing intergroup prejudice and conflict using the media: A field experiment in Rwanda.](#) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96, 574-587.

9. Monday February 26th : Remaining Final Presentations

****** Exam during exam week (Timed, 3-hour, open book exam)**

Tentatively scheduled for Monday March 4th 9 – 11:50 am