Conflict: Root Causes, Consequences, and Solutions for the Future

(PPHA 38740)

Course Information

University of Chicago, Harris School
Winter 2018
Class time: Friday 9-11:50 am
Room: 140C

Instructor: Oeindrila Dube (odube@uchicago.edu)
Office Hours: Wednesday 4:30-6 pm
Office location: Harris School, 303A
Teaching Assistant: TBA

Course Objectives

The goals of this course are to introduce students to key concepts in the study of conflict, and to develop the policy analysis skills needed to understand and assess key arguments advanced in this arena. Effective policymakers today are consumers of data science, with an ability to discern what makes empirical evidence compelling. Thus a major emphasis of the course will be learning how to think critically about empirical evidence, and to develop a better understanding of common methodologies used in empirical analysis, such as the use of fixed effects, differences-in-differences research designs, and instrumental variables estimation. This methodological emphasis will occur through the examination of fundamental topics in conflict. Drawing on economics and political science, as well as psychology, we will examine the role of economic shocks and ethnic divisions on civil war. We will also 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 recover from conflict.

Course Requirements

All students must complete 2 memo-style written assignments. In these assignments, you will be required to critically analyze the content of either one or two academic papers, and argue whether the author has presented sufficient evidence to support the conclusion and policy implication advanced in the paper. You will be asked specifically to assess both the conceptual claim and the validity of the empirical methodology in forming this assessment. Memos 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 of your points.

**Note:** These should be emailed to me and the TA by 5 pm on the date they are due. Each day an assignment is late, a full grade is deducted from the assignment. 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.

All students will also be required to do an in-class presentation, 20-30 minutes in length. You will be asked to select one of the papers designated under the student presentation section of each topic in the syllabus below, and present a brief overview, followed by an extensive assessment of the paper, in which you comment on the nature of the data, the empirical strategy and analysis, and offer suggestions for what other evidence would be needed to support the conclusion of the paper. The goal of the presentation is to develop the skills needed to translate the content of an academic paper into simple terms; critically analyze the content; and effectively communicate this analysis to an audience. (See presentation guidance for further details).

**Note:** The presentation slides are due in to me and the TA by **Wednesday, 5 pm**, the week in which you present.

Finally, you will be required to take an in-class final exam. The final exam will be held **Friday, March 16, 9-11:50 am**. There is no alternate exam time available.

**Course Grading**

30% - 2 Written Memo Assignments (15% each)  
20% - Class Presentation  
10% - Class Participation on non-presentation days  
40% - In-class Final Exam

**Texts**

All articles will be uploaded on chalk. 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.
Tentative Syllabus

1. January 5th – Introduction

We will go over the course requirements and assignments. We will also review how to read academic papers, and interpret regression tables in these papers. We will also cover the content of these two papers:


2. January 12th – Ethnic Divisions and Civil Conflict


Jha, Saumitra. 2013. Trade, Institutions and Ethnic Tolerance: Evidence from S. Asia, American Political Science Review


Papers for student presentations:


"This mine is mine! How minerals fuel conflicts in Africa", (Nicolas Berman, Mathieu Couttenier, Dominic Rohner, and Mathias Thoenig), forthcoming in American Economic Review.

**Papers for student presentations:**


**DUE DATE FOR ASSIGNMENT 1: Wednesday Jan 25th**

4. January 26th –Can Economic Factors Explain Terrorism?


**Papers for student presentations:**


5. February 2nd – Social and Psychological Causes of Conflict


Papers for student presentations


6. February 9th – The Role of Foreign Aid I


Paper for Student Presentations:


7. February 16th – The Role of Foreign Aid II


Papers for student presentations


DUE DATE FOR ASSIGNMENT 2: Thursday February 23rd

8. February 23rd – The Effect of Conflict on Social Cohesion


Papers for student presentations:


9. March 2nd – Reconciling and Rebuilding after Conflict


Cillers, Jacobus, Oeindrila Dube and Bilal Siddiqi. 2016. “Reconciling after civil conflict increases social capital but decreases individual wellbeing” Science (Paper and Appendix).


Papers for student presentations


10. March 9th - The Economic Consequences of Conflict


For student presentations: