**Conflict and Applied Data Sciences**  
**(PPHA 38740 / PBPL 28750)**

**Class Information**

University of Chicago, Harris School  
Instructor: Oeindrila Dube ([odube@uchicago.edu](mailto:odube@uchicago.edu))  
Winter 2022  
Class time: 9 – 11:50 am  
Class location: Keller 0007  
Instructor Office Hours: 4:30 - 6 pm Wednesdays, via Zoom  
(please sign up for slot on circulated google sheets)

**TA Session Information**

TA Section time: 12 – 1:20 pm Friday  
TA Office Hours: 10:30 am – 12:30 pm Wednesday (Leah Luben)  
9:30 am – 10:30 am Tuesday (Kashif Ahmed)

**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.

**Remote classes**

Per university policy, the first class (Monday Jan 10th) will be held remotely via Zoom. Classes held remotely will include both a pre-recorded lecture and a synchronous zoom component, in which we meet for up to a 2-hour interval. I will be upload pre-recorded lecture material, divided into modules of approximately 10-20 minutes in length. I will aim to post these lectures 5 days in advance of the synchronous class. It is essential that you watch the pre-recorded lecture *in advance of class*.

For remotely held classes, I will also ask you to email me any questions you have about the material by Saturday 6 pm, so we can discuss them during the synchronous part of the class. You are not required to ask questions (this is optional) but it will help you understand the material better if you engage through this mode.

During the synchronous component of the class, on Zoom:

- We will go through the questions about the pre-recorded lecture material
- We will have additional discussions on topics flagged in the pre-recorded material, so think about comments to make for these discussions.

Note that Jan 17th is a university holiday; and classes are currently scheduled to resume in-person Jan 24th.

**Cross-registration, Concentration and Certificate**

Owing to re-structuring that took place related to COVID-19, this course is cross-registered. For Harris MPP students it counts toward the **Global Conflict Studies Certificate** and is one of the recommended classes in the conflict sequence. For undergraduate Public Policy majors, it counts toward the **International Conflict and Development Policy Concentration**.

**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
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.

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 you propose and talk to me about, that I ok after discussing with you.

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 31st).

Each group needs 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 Jan 31st), in which case you can submit your project idea 10 days in advance of the presentation, on Friday January 21st. 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. I encourage you to meet me at least once before your presentation to discuss the content before you submit.

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 **four 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 3 other papers – from 3 other classes – you will write a comment on. Note that you cannot comment on two papers from one class.
These comments are intended to stimulate discussion and will be due **Friday 5 pm preceding Monday’s class.** The submission page will be open from the end of the second section of the previous class (around 4 pm Monday) and remain open until the due date. 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](#).

In past years, this exam has been administered on the last day of class. Owing to the shortened winter quarter schedule, the exam will instead be administered during finals week, to preserve the overall content of the course. This exam will be open book and of a “take-home” variety, approximately 3 hours in length.

**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

To earn a passing grade, students taking the course Pass/Fail 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 are 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

Note: Please watch the lecture material on video accessible Via Canvas prior to class come to class with any questions you may have from the lecture.

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:


2. January 17th – University Holiday - Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – No class


Note: all students must submit a comment assignment this week and the comment is due on Friday January 21st via Canvas (by 5 pm).


Paper for comment / discussion:


**Paper for comment / discussion:**

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

**DUE DATE FOR ASSIGNMENT 1: Thursday February 4th**

5. February 7th – Can Economic Factors Explain Terrorism?


   **Paper for comment / discussion:**


6. February 14th – Social and Psychological Causes of Conflict


**Paper for comment / discussion:**


7. February 21st – The Role of Foreign Aid


**Paper for comment / discussion:**


8. February 28th – The Effect of Conflict on Social Cohesion


Paper for comment / discussion:


DUE DATE FOR ASSIGNMENT 2: Tuesday March 1st

9. March 7th – Reconciling and Rebuilding after Conflict


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


Papers for student comment


Final Exam – Timed “Take-home” – Monday March 14th 9 am – noon