

Conflict and Applied Data Sciences

(MPP Course: PPHA 38740)

Class Information

University of Chicago, Harris School
Instructor: Oeindrila Dube (odube@uchicago.edu)
Winter 2025
Class time: Monday 01:30 pm - 04:20

NOTES:

- **First week of class, Monday lecture is rescheduled to take place Friday Jan 10th**
- **To make-up for MLK Holiday, 3rd Week Class takes place Friday Jan 24th**
- **Please see schedule below for times and locations of these make-up classes**

Class location: Keller 2112

Instructor Office Hours:
Generally, Thursdays at 5 pm starting January 16th – But see specific dates / times on google sheet linked below
Must sign up in advance [here](#)
Location: Keller 2015

TA Session Information

TA Section time / location: 10:30 am - 11:50 am Friday, Keller 2112

A second section (held for a UG version of this course) is scheduled: Friday 3-4:20, **Harper Memorial Library 130**

Section is mandatory, but you can attend either section.

TA Information / OH: Julian Martinez Correa jmartinezcorrea@uchicago.edu
TA Office Hours: Thursdays 11 am – 12 pm, location TBA

Modality

All lectures and TA sections are in-person. Zoom recordings will generally not be made available (with the exception of select make-up classes).

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 or so 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 27th**). After that each week, there will be 1 group presenting.

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 27th), in which case you can submit your project idea 10 days in advance of the presentation, on Friday January 17th. 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.
- I'll expect everyone to come into class with a comment to articulate or two about the designated papers in Week 2 (Yanzagizawa-Drott paper) and in Week 8 (Paluck 2009).
 - To further facilitate discussion, and help you learn what good comments are, I will also ask you to submit two written comments. These will be **short comments** (1-2 paragraphs) on a designated paper each week. The papers designated for comment are listed in the "paper for comment/discussion" part of the syllabus.
 - You can pick any 2 designated papers from 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 in the quarter so you can get feedback and learn what good responses are in 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.**

When class is held on Friday Jan 24th (during week 3), the comment assignment will be due Wednesday Jan 22nd instead.

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.**

The exam will be in-person, pen-and-paper. You can bring in any papers and printed materials, but you are prohibited from using computers or other devices. The exam will be 2 hours in length.

AI Policy

I do not prohibit use of AI tools, but have strict guidelines below.

While AI tools may offer valuable assistance in tasks, it is imperative that you do not let these tools become substitutes for your intellectual engagement with the material.

You should also be aware that these models produce only superficial responses to the assignments used in this course. (I have checked). When the TAs and I grade the written assignments, we reward more specific and deeper discussion of the ideas taught in class, evidence of reading closely, and thoughtful commentary. Thus, over-relying on AI tools on the assignments will likely limit your understanding of the material covered in this course, and likely worsen your performance on the final exam (for which you cannot use AI tools).

You are permitted to use AI tools as supplementary aids for refining your ideas, conducting research, and editing language to help with translation, spelling and grammar. But no more than 10% of any paragraph or assignment may be *generated* using AI tools. Relying on these tools beyond this violates the principles of academic integrity described below. When you use AI tools, you should also take full responsibility for the content they generate. You should review and edit any generated content to avoid inaccurate information and copyright infringement.

Also, instances where AI tools are used **for the memo assignments** must be acknowledged. When submitting the memo assignments if you used an AI tool, please add a brief disclosure statement at the end of the assignment which:

- Names the tool(s) used
- Describe use (refining initial ideas, providing research insights, improving your writing, etc.)
- Explains how you further modified the AI-generated content
- Offers a brief reflection of how using the tool helped you learn.

Example AI Disclosure: To write the text for this section of the syllabus, I prompted ChatGPT with the parameters of this course and asked it to generate ideas of what an AI policy should include. I supplemented this information by looking at sample policies from different universities and drafted guidelines to reflect what I believe is most applicable. I then asked ChatGPT to review the draft and identify ambiguities where I could be clearer in my instructions. Using ChatGPT helped me to recognize the importance of clearly defining what is acceptable to avoid unintended interpretations.

This disclosure statement does not count toward the page limit of the assignment.

Course Grading

20% - 2 Written memo assignments

25% - Group project

10% - Class participation based on attendance & verbal participation (including comments on other student presentations); as well as two written comments.

45% - 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.

Attendance

No one will be penalized for missing up to three lectures, since everyone faces circumstances like sickness, religious observance or family emergencies. However, please let me know if you expect more frequent absences and we can discuss.

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.

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>.

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.

Tentative Syllabus

1. *** Friday January 10th – Introduction

Note: No section this week

Note: class 1 is re-scheduled to the section time for **Friday 10:30 am – 11:50 am in Keller 2112**. Since section is mandatory, I expect most students to be able to attend at this time. If you need to, you also have the option of attending the UG section Friday 3 pm -4:20 pm but located in **Harper Memorial Library 130**. If you cannot make either, this specific class will also be made available through Zoom recording.

The first lecture will cover the content of the Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and the Fearon and Laitin (2003) readings. It will be helpful for you to understand the material better if you also review the Meier and Rauch (2005) article before class; but the content of this paper and Do and Iyer (2010) will also be covered in greater depth in section (during week 2).

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

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)

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

2. Monday January 13th – 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 discussion:

Note: we will discuss the following paper together even though there are no written comments submitted this week. Please prepare comments to articulate.

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

3. *****Friday January 24th 1:30 pm – 4:20 pm Keller 2112***** – The Economic Causes of Civil Conflict

Note: No section this week

Note: this class is a make-up class as required by Harris since Monday Jan 20th is MLK Holiday. If you cannot make this class, you are welcome to attend the UG version of this class will also run from 9 am – 12:20 pm on Jan 24th in Keller 2112. In addition, a Zoom recording will also be made available for 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 22nd 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 27th – 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.

"[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 24th at 5 pm

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

DUE DATE FOR MEMO ASSIGNMENT 1: Wednesday January 29th

5. Monday February 3rd – 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 31st 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 10th – 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 7th

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

7. Monday February 17th – 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 14th 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 MEMO ASSIGNMENT 2: Wednesday February 19th

8. Monday February 24th – 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 together 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 March 3rd: Remaining Final Presentations

***** Exam during exam week (Timed, 2-hour, open book BUT NO COMPUTER / DEVICES exam)**

Scheduled for Monday, March 10th 1:30 pm – 3:30 pm Keller 2112