

SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN CONFLICT ANALYSIS

CONF 811

FALL 2015

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Meeting Time: Wednesday, 4:30–7:10 PM
Classroom: Founders Hall 308
Office hours: By appointment, phone call
and walk-in

Questions and Goals

“I cannot give any scientist of any age better advice than this: the intensity of the conviction that a hypothesis is true has no bearing on whether it is true or not. . . . If an experiment does not hold out the possibility of causing one to revise one’s views, it is hard to see why it should be done at all.”

– P.B. Medawar

Why are civil wars so difficult to end and why are some more difficult than others? What kinds of attitudes do people form towards ‘others’ and how and why do they form them? Do Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) promote reconciliation among their participants?

These questions are linked not only by their clear substantive importance, but also by our ability answer them by using the scientific process. Social science demands that we construct theory that clearly defines its assumptions, is logically consistent internally, and engenders empirically verifiable hypotheses. In turn, quantitative methods allow us to rigorously compare cases across space and time; evaluate whether a hypothesis is generally true and/or especially relevant in certain types of cases; and/or engender empirical observations that demand new theories. Quantitative social science also points the way towards rigorous evaluation of interventions in conflictual situations. It also can inform practice and create excellent habits of mind.

Social scientific research is accompanied by its own pitfalls, however: poor data that insufficiently measure the relevant concept; a lack of attention to non-random selection (more on that later); analysis that is shoddy and opaque; the misapplication of a particular kind of model; and the deliberate distortion of otherwise sound analysis in order to mislead others or preserve one’s cherished ideas. Social science is often distrusted within our field, for complex reasons.

This class is therefore an introduction into social scientific research in our field. We will study: definitions of good social science; asking good research questions; connecting those to substantively and academically important debates; formulating answers to those questions; and designing research that allows us to test the veracity of that theory. Finally, we’ll discuss different forms of statistical analysis, using recent conflict research as examples of how innovative methods can be matched to crucial substantive questions. By the end of this class, you will learn how to *evaluate* quantitative research and *design* your own.

Note that this is *not* a class in statistical analysis. We will focus mostly on how to *design* research. We will spend some time studying different forms of statistical analysis to improve our interpretation of written work, but this will not be our main focus.

Details: Requirements, Grading, Etc.

“The harder I work, the luckier I get.” – Samuel Goldwyn

“Outside of a dog, a book is a man’s best friend. Inside of a dog, it’s too dark to read.” – Groucho Marx

Prerequisites

CONF 801 and acceptance in the doctoral program. All others require my permission, which should be obtained immediately.

Course Materials

The following books required and can be purchased in the Arlington branch of the GMU Bookstore or from online booksellers. They are listed in order of appearance in the syllabus.

- Frankfort-Nachmias, Chava and David Nachmias. 2015. *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, 8th Edition. New York, NY: Worth Publishers. “FNN” in the reading list.
- Medawar, Peter B. 1979. *Advice to a Young Scientist* New York: BasicBooks. “Medawar” in the reading list.
- Lave, Charles and James March. 1975. *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences*. New York, NY: University Press of America. ISBN-10: 0819183814. ISBN-13: 9780819183811. “Lave and March” in the reading list.
- Straus, Scott. 2008. *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*. Cornell University Press. “Straus” in the reading list.
- Kinder, Donald R. and Cindy D. Kam. 2009. *Us Against Them: Ethnocentric Foundations of American Opinion*: Chicago University Press. “Kinder and Kam” in the reading list.

Participation and Effort

This class will likely require more effort than the average discussion class at S-CAR. The assignments will require you to assess published research in conflict studies and propose your own research. This class is also demanding conceptually, so missing class or skipping readings will seriously impair your performance. I therefore would like to define precisely what this class will demand of you. By enrolling in this course, you agree to the following:

- You will attend every class and arrive on time; there are only fourteen meetings, so missing one means missing a big chunk of material. You will turn off *all* electronic devices; laptops may be left on for note-taking, but the wireless device must be turned off. You will give class your full attention. I will take attendance in every class. You are allowed to miss only one class meeting, regardless of the reason. After that one class, you will lose a half grade off your final grade per class missed, regardless of the reason. There are no exceptions to this policy.

- You will complete all readings *before* the class in question. *Do not fall behind — it will prove very difficult to catch up.* Read carefully and, above all, *think!* Take notes in preparation for assignments, take time to complete written assignments (see below), and prepare questions you wish to ask in class. Our readings are relatively short, but dense. I will expect you to understand the theory, research design, data collection strategies, and findings of our assigned readings.
- I will expect you to participate in the intellectual life of our class. There are three ways you should do so:
 - *In class.* At most, I will use only half of class time for lecture. Mostly, I will use a more Socratic approach — in other words, I will constantly pepper you with questions and ask your opinions regarding our subject material and the day’s assignment(s). You should consistently show that you have built a firm understanding of our reading for class; if you do not, I will know.
 - *Online.* E-mailed questions are also welcome and, if the class finds it useful, we can establish an online discussion board to maintain contact as a group during the week.
 - *In office hours.* I encourage you to come to office hours. I am flexible on meeting times.

Assignments and Grading

There will be three components to your grade in this course:

1. **Participation.** As discussed above, participating in class is required. It is worth **15%** of your grade.
2. **Article Review.** You will write three short (5–7 pages) papers in which you take apart a statistical piece of research in an area in which you are interested. These papers are each worth about **17%** of your grade (**50%** total). You will complete the papers as follows:
 - You will obtain my approval, either in person or via e-mail, of the article you’ve chosen by the beginning of class in **Week 2 (September 9)**.
 - The first short paper will describe the question the article tackles, the substantive significance of the question, and the theories being evaluated. It is due at the beginning of class in **Week 4 (September 23)**.
 - The second short paper describes and critiques the research design of the article or book. It is due at the beginning of class in **Week 9 (October 28)**.
 - The third short paper describes the data, analytical techniques, and findings of your paper. It is due at the beginning of class in **Week 13 (December 2)**.
3. **Dissertation Proposal.** You will write a long paper (20 pages, double-spaced), in which you propose a piece of quantitative research for a dissertation grant competition, such as the Jennings Randolph Peace Scholarship Dissertation Program from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). The paper will introduce the question at hand, describe its substantive importance, discuss your theoretical answer to that question, and then propose a research design to evaluate those theories. It can (and likely should) discuss a topic similar to that of your article reviews and should be the product of a semester’s worth of work. The paper is worth **35%** of your grade. The paper will be due on **December 16 at 5:00 PM**. Details on this assignment are forthcoming.

We'll talk about standards for specific assignments as they come up.

In this course, I will respond to your work using two channels: written feedback and grades. Students often pay more attention to the latter than the former and I implore you to resist that tendency. While grades rate your scholarship along an ordinal scale, comments detail your strengths and weaknesses as a scholar and how you can continue to develop your thinking. They are thus a fuller, more direct assessment of your performance.

That said, I know that many of you are concerned about your grades and I will do everything in my power to help you throughout the course. Yet I do have high standards for you, a function of the respect I have for your ability and ambition and a recognition that the academic and policy worlds outside of S-CAR are extremely competitive. I therefore simply will not allow you to produce work that is below your potential. Therefore, do not expect a high grade for minimal effort. In general, these will be the standards for your written assignments:

- **A:** Excellent work that thinks precisely, creatively and clearly. The research, if necessary for the assignment, is appropriate to the ideas under examination, creative, and exhaustive in nature. The paper is ready to begin the process of being transformed into published research or a doctoral dissertation.
- **A-:** Strong work that does everything an 'A' paper does but not quite as strongly. There are small gaps in the author's thinking and/or research. I would want the author to revise and resubmit the work before she committed to it for a published paper or doctoral dissertation.
- **B+:** About average work for a graduate student. The paper contains some strong ideas or research, but suffers from at least one major problem that remains unresolved (e.g., only weak research, ideas not fully thought out, etc.). The work is still several revisions away from being considered as a topic for a published paper or doctoral dissertation.
- **B:** Work that only barely rises to the standards I set for a graduate student. There may be a core idea that deserves merit, but the author fails to consider that idea fully. There are extensive problems with both the ideas and research.
- **B- or lower:** Failing work. There is virtually nothing deserving about the analysis in the paper. The author fails to develop a central theme or line of research. There are such massive problems in ideas and research that the author cannot expect to pass this class.

A word on extensions: no. All late assignments will receive a 0.

Course Outline

"There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics."

– Benjamin Disraeli (often attributed to Mark Twain)

This course will be split into three parts. During Part I, we will introduce principles of social science. We'll begin by discussing how the scientific method applies in social sciences, what is a good question for investigation, and how we evaluate a good answer. In Part II, we will discuss good research design. Once we have constructed an explanation we wish to evaluate, how do we test it? We'll focus on different ways of observing the world around us in ways that will generate data that can test our hypotheses. In Part III, we'll discuss different forms of analysis of the data we have collected. Throughout the class, we will use real research projects to illustrate how the principles we're discussing manifest themselves.

Part I. Theoretical Foundations

Week 1 (9/2). Introductions

Week 2 (9/9). Asking Good Questions (**Paper topic due**)

Week 3 (9/16). Formulating Good Answers

Part II. Research Design and Data Collection

Week 4 (9/23). General Principles of Research Design (**First short paper due**)

Week 5 (9/30). Experiments

Week 6 (10/7). Surveys

Week 7 (10/14). Non-Experimental Observation

Week 8 (10/21). Working from Qualitative Beginnings

Part III. Data Processing and Analysis

Week 9 (10/28). Measurement and Data Description (**Second short paper due**)

Week 10 (11/4). The Basics of Bivariate and Multivariate Relationships

Week 11 (11/11). Regression

Week 12 (11/18). Selection Bias and Endogeneity

Week 13 (12/2). Categorical Dependent Variables (**Third short paper due**)

Week 14 (12/9). Factor Analysis

FINAL PAPER DUE ON DECEMBER 16 AT 5:00 PM

Detailed Course Schedule**Part I. Foundations**

Week 1: September 2. Introductions

Week 2: September 9. Asking Good Questions (*Paper topic due*)

Concepts

FNN, Chapters 1–2

Medawar, Chapters 1–4, 6, 9, 11.

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1. Online.

“Positivism and Post-Positivism,” in *Research Methods Knowledge Base*.

<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/positvsm.php>. Online.

Mihic, Sophia, Stephen G. Engelmann, and Elizabeth Rose Wingrove. 2005. “Making Sense In and of Political Science: Facts, Values, and ‘Real’ Numbers.” In *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and its Epistemological Others*. Edited by George Stenimetz. Online.

Illustration: Why are some rebel groups worse than others?

Weinstein Jeremy, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1–23. Online.

Week 3: September 16. Formulating Good AnswersConcepts

Babbie, Earl. 2010. *The Practice of Social Research*. New York, NY: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning. pp. 19–23. Online.

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1 and 3. Online.

FNN, Chapter 2.

Lave and March, Chapters 1–2.

Illustration: Why are some rebel groups worse than others?

Weinstein Jeremy, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1–60. Online.

Part II. Research Design and Data Collection**Week 4: September 23. General Principles of Research Design (*First short paper due*)**Concepts (no illustration this week)

Lave and March, Ch. 3.

FNN, Chapter 3-4.

Re-read King, Keohane, and Verba, Chapters 1 and 3.

Tarrow, Sidney. 2004. “Bridging the Quantitative-Qualitative Divide.” In *Redesigning Social Inquiry*, edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. pp. 171–180. Online.

Week 5: September 30. ExperimentsConcepts

FNN, Chapter 5, 9

Illustration 1: Race and political campaigns

Valentino, N., V. Hutchings, and I. White, 2002, “Cues That Matter: How Political Ads Prime Racial Attitudes During Campaigns,” *American Political Science Review* 96(1): 75-90. Online.

Illustration 2: Development aid in post-war countries

Fearon, James D., Macartan Humphreys, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. 2009. “Can Development Aid Contribute to Social Cohesion After Civil War? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Post-Conflict Liberia,” *American Economic Review: Papers and Proceedings*, 99(2): 287–291. Online.

Illustration 3: The dangers of the World Cup

Bertoli, Andrew. “Direct Sports Competition and Interstate Conflict: Investigating a Randomized Natural Experiment.” Working paper.

Week 6: October 7. SurveysConcepts

FNN, Chapters 8, 10-11

Illustration: Genocide in Rwanda

All of Straus.

Week 7: October 14. Non-Experimental ObservationConcepts

FNN, Chapters 6 and 13

Achen, Christopher. 1982. *The Statistical Analysis of Quasi-Experiments*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Chapter 1 (pp. 1–15). Online.

Illustration: Horizontal inequalities and civil war

Cederman, Lars-Erik, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min. “Why do Ethnic groups Rebel? New Data and Analysis.” *World Politics* 62(1): 87-119. And associated materials TBA.

Week 8: October 21. Working from Qualitative Beginnings: Text as DataConcepts

FNN, Chapters 12-13

Grimmer, Justin and Brandon M. Stewart. 2013. “Text as Data: the Promise and Pitfalls of Automatic Content Analysis Methods for Political Texts.” *Political Analysis* 21: 267-297.

Illustration 1: How people talked about peace processes

Donohue, William A. and Daniel Druckman. 2009. “Message Framing Surrounding the Oslo I Accords.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53(1): 119-145. Online.

Illustration 2: Do Arabs hate Americans?

Jamal, Amaney, Robert Keohane, David Romney, and Dustin Tingley. “Anti-Americanism or Anti-Interventionism? Evidence from the Arabic Twitter Universe.” Working paper. Online.

Part III. Data Processing and Analysis**Week 9: October 28. Measurement and Data Description (*Second short paper due*)**Concepts

Moore, William. 2015. “Tilting at a windmill? The conceptual problem in contemporary peace science,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 32: 356-369.

FNN, Chapters 7, 14-15

Illustration 1: What is ethnocentrism?

Kinder and Kam, Introduction, Chapters 1–2.

Illustration 2: Everyday peace indicators

TBA

Week 10: November 4. The Basics of Bivariate and Multivariate RelationshipsConcepts

FNN, Chapter 16–17

Illustration 1: Some silly stuff

The contents of the webpage <http://www.tylervigen.com/>

Illustration 2: Why are some people more ethnocentric than others?

Kinder and Kam, Chapter 3.

Week 11: November 11. Regression

Concepts

FNN, Chapter 19

Illustration 2: Why are some people more ethnocentric than others?

Re-read Kinder and Kam, Chapter 3.

Week 12: November 18. Selection Bias and Endogeneity

Concepts

Achen, Christopher. 1987. *The Statistical Analysis of Quasi-Experiments*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Chapter 2 (pp. 1-15). Online.

Illustration: Are IMF agreements bad?

Vreeland, James Raymond. *The IMF and Economic Development*. Chapters 1 and 5. Online.

Week 13: December 2. Categorical Dependent Variables (*Third short paper due*)

Concepts

Kennedy, pp. 233–237. Online.

Illustration 1: Why do some people approve of terrorism?

Tessler, Mark and Michael D. H. Robbins. 2007. “What Leads Some Ordinary Arab Men and Women to Approve of Terrorist Acts Against the United States?” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51(2): 305–328. Online.

Illustration 2: Ethnocentrism

Kinder and Kam, Chapter 4

Week 14 December 9. Factor Analysis

Concepts

Re-read readings from Week 9.

FNN, Chapter 18

Are all patriots bigots?

de Figueiredo, Jr., Rui J. P. and Zachary Elkins. 2003. “Are Patriots Bigots? An Inquiry into the Vices of In-group Pride.” *American Journal of Political Science* 47(1): 171-188. Online.

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