Political Science 721: Civil War and Intrastate Instability

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Course Overview

Course Description: This class is an introduction to the scientific study of civil war and other forms of intrastate instability. This course straddles the comparative and international political perspectives on civil war processes. It will introduce students to the theoretical and empirical approaches to studying these topics, their causes and consequences. By the end of this semester students should have a strong grasp on the foundational topics in these literatures and should be able to critically evaluate existing research. Further, by the end of the semester students will have cultivated an ability to design their own research projects. Thus, a primary goal of this course is to help students transform from consumers of information on civil war and political violence to producers of theoretical and empirical advances in our understanding of these processes.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this course, you should be
- familiar with foundational literature in the scientific study of civil war and political violence
- able to read, analyze, and critique the extant research;
- able to recognize and formulate testable research questions;
- comfortable with theory generation, methodological rigor, and data analysis;
- able to analyze and critique statistical approaches to course subjects;
- able to craft your own research program that contributes to the literature.

Books: I will not require you to buy books for this class. All of the readings will be available through www.jstor.org, the University Library’s online journal catalogue, or will be available for photocopy from me.

Assessment

Readings: Each week, you will need to complete the readings prior to class. Read carefully and critically. Since this is a seminar course, our class discussions are very important to the success of the course. Be sure to pay attention to the reading workload each week. Some weeks have substantially more reading than others. Knowing this will allow you to plan ahead such that you can finish each reading prior to class. I cannot stress enough the importance of carefully reading all that is assigned for each week. If you are cramming the work into the night prior to class you likely will not have read with the depth that will be required of you in discussion.

Also, the amount of reading for this course is necessarily constrained by our limits on time. The field of scholarship on civil war is substantially larger than what you will be
exposed to here. If you plan to continue on this research path, reading more widely will pay dividends when you are preparing for your own research programs and when you begin formulating ideas for your dissertation.

**Questions that you should ask yourself when doing the readings:**
1. What is the research question? What phenomenon is the author trying to explain?
2. What is the author’s argument? What assumptions does the author make?
3. What factors are important to explaining this phenomenon? What theory does the author propose to answer the RQ?
4. What are the deficiencies of the literature that the author notes?
5. What method(s) does the author use to test his/her argument empirically? Is this approach appropriate for answering the RQ? Does this approach match the theory?
6. How well has the author answered the question? Can you think of alternative explanations for the results that the author provides.
7. What conclusions can we draw from this research?
8. What are the weaknesses of the author’s logic?
9. How can this research be improved or advanced?
10. What research ideas can be built upon this work, and how would you do it?!

**Leading Discussion:** The readings will be the foundation from which you will lead discussion. You will divide each of the meeting periods equally between you such that one of you will lead discussion each week. In leading discussion, you will be required to facilitate an open and wide-ranging analytical discussion of the readings and/or the topics that they address. In each class session, you should plan to spend a few minutes summarizing the readings, noting their contributions to the field, considering why they were assigned, and what is to be gained from them. After sufficiently summarizing the readings, you should be prepared with a substantial number of questions that you believe will provoke an interesting discussion regarding the value, purpose, or quality of the readings. Be critical, refer to the questions listed above, and be prepared to hold court for nearly the full duration of the class. *Importantly, I expect discussion leaders to use their time to facilitate an interesting discussion on how new research programs can be generated from what has been read in the assigned week and from weeks previous!* The class will benefit greatly if this is done successfully. This will take a substantial amount of preparation, so make sure to plan accordingly.

For those students who are not leading discussion in a particular week, bear in mind that just because you may not be a discussion leader, you are not exempted from doing the readings. Doing all of the readings is critical, as your care in doing the readings will manifest itself in the quality of your participation. Indeed, the success of the discussion is likely to be predicated more upon the willingness of the students to engage with their discussion leaders more so than it is predicated upon the discussion leaders’ ability to prod contributions from the rest of the class.

**Participation:** Rarely will I lecture in class. The students are expected to lead class sessions, taking discussions in productive directions, and learning from one another’s insights. I will direct you and help to facilitate, but the onus is on the students to make the class sessions satisfying. Your participation grade will be based on the quality of your contributions to the seminar. Be prepared to speak often on the strengths and weaknesses of the reading and directions for new research programs. If you do not participate regularly, you should not expect a satisfactory grade. If our discussions are
dynamic and unforced, your participation scores will not be a concern.

**Discussion Memos:**
You will write a 3-page (max) memo (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 font, 1” margins) for each class session in which you assigned to lead discussion. Each will focus on the readings for which you are leading discussion. Do not waste space summarizing the readings. Rather, each memo should outline how a research project could improve upon or advance the topics under study. I expect your critiques to be polished. These memos may be helpful to you as you are preparing for your final research paper. Your memos will be handed in prior to the start of class.

**Final Papers:**
You have two options for writing your final paper.

1. You may write a solo-authored paper of original scholarship, completed up to and including the research design. This means that your paper would include an introduction, a review of the literature, a theoretical argument complete with testable hypotheses, and a research design/data section which would delineate the means by which would test the hypotheses empirically. [Of course, you are welcome to write a solo-authored, fully complete manuscript. However, this is not required.]

2. You may write a fully complete coauthored [2 authors max] manuscript. In addition to all of the elements included in option #1, you would also conduct an empirical analysis, include an evaluation of the results, and write a discussion/conclusion section. If you choose this option, please choose your coauthor carefully. I will not accept complaints about a coauthor not pulling his/her weight. There will only be one grade assigned to both authors. There are no exceptions to this.

At some point in the early part of the semester, you will need to determine which topics and research questions appeal to your curiosities. This may require you to read ahead on topics that sound like they may be of interest to you. On the final week of class, you will present your papers in a 15 minute PowerPoint presentation, which will be followed by a Q&A session of at least 15 minutes.

You will be required to turn in this paper in segments:
-3/4: Turn in a document that states your research question and includes an annotated bibliography of at least 10 sources that notes the relevance of each source to your project (a few sentences on each are sufficient).
-4/1: First draft of your paper is due. For those choosing Option 1, please turn in a document of at least 15 pages in length that focuses on the advances your paper will make on the extant literature and delineates your theoretical argument. [In other words, this draft should include your introduction, literature review and theory section.] For those choosing Option 2, turn in the same material as Option 1 with the addition of a research design section.
-4/29, 5/6: Presentation, Q&A.
-5/11: Email me a copy of your final paper no later than 9am Monday morning.

Finally, you may not use a paper from another class, research practicum, or MA thesis to write this paper. However, you are encouraged to use your interests in these other research projects to extend the work that you have done previously to new topics, phenomena, research questions, etc.
Memos: 15%
Leading Discussion: 15%
Participation: 30%
Final Paper: 40%

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**Schedule of Readings**

**Jan 28**  **Introduction**

**Reading:** You need not read the following books. But if you want an accessible primer on what the quantitative research on civil war has found, the following two books are decent:


**Feb 4**  **Challenges Confronting the Study of Civil War**

**Reading:**

- Enterline. “A Guide to Writing Research Projects in Graduate Political Science Courses.” [GET THIS FROM ME]
- Also, spend time looking through several different datasets on civil war:
  -- Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute, Oslo Armed Conflict Data and it’s many associated datasets.
  -- Correlates of War Intra-State War Dataset
Feb 11  Civil War Causes
Reading:

Feb 18  Civil War Duration/Outcome
Reading:

Feb 25  International Components and Externalities I
Reading:

Mar 4  International Components and Externalities II
Reading: [Research Question and Bibliography Due]
Mar 11  Civil War Intervention & Intervention Consequences

Mar 18  Spring Break
Reading:  ● No Reading

Mar 25  Peacekeeping and Conflict Management

Apr 1  The Plight of Civilians I: Mistreatment & Repression
Reading:  [First Draft of Paper Due]

Apr 8  The Plight of Civilians II: Territorial Control v. Command & Control
Reading:  ● Kalyvas. 2006. The Logic of Violence in Civil War. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, Chapters 4 & 5. (While you’re not required to read chapters 6 & 7, if you are interested, you’ll find that these are integral to his argument).
Apr 15  The Plight of Civilians III: Factional Victimization (by Warfare Type?)

Apr 22  The Plight of Civilians IV: Effectiveness of Victimization

Apr 29  In-class presentations
Reading:  • No Reading

May 6  In-class presentations
Reading:  • No Reading

May 11  Final Papers Due
Monday Please email me a copy of your final paper no later than 9am on Monday morning. Late papers will not be accepted.