

# PBPL 28730

## Insurgency in South and Southeast Asia

Austin L. Wright

Harris School of Public Policy

Winter 2017

Public Policy Building, Room 224

TU/TH 1030-1150.

### Overview

*Insurgency in South and Southeast Asia* is a seminar course devoted to the study of (modern) armed rebellion across South and Southeast Asia. The primary audience is public policy students, as well as undergraduates in related social science fields. We will use cutting-edge theoretical and quantitative research to examine the causes and dynamics of a number of conflicts, from the Naxal movement in India to the Taliban in Afghanistan. The course will be organized around a set of core topics in the literature, with evidence from the region. Students enrolled in the course will have the opportunity to engage with ongoing field data collection efforts in Afghanistan, Indonesia, and Thailand. Course participants will be given prerelease access to newly declassified data on insurgent activity, in addition to a wealth of economic, geographic, political, and social information about key conflicts.

### Objectives

The course has three main objectives:

1. To clarify core questions in the study of insurgency and the challenges to providing reliable evidence to answer them.
2. To survey some of the most important recent contributions to the field and tying academic research on insurgency-related issues to policy.
3. To help students initiate research projects so they gain practical experience in developing an original argument, teasing out testable implications of existing or novel ideas, assembling and analyzing evidence, and (briefly) presenting this research to colleagues.

# Requirements

The course has the following requirements:

1. Class participation (15%). For this course to be enriching, students will need to complete the assigned readings before each meeting. Be prepared to engage in rigorous debate.
2. Leading the discussion (12.5%). Each meeting, one student will take a lead role in guiding the discussion of one reading. The role will primarily involve briefly summarizing the core question, argument, evidence, and findings of the reading.
3. Research design (5 pages) (25%). The research design assignment will lay out a plan for analyzing a key theoretical and/or empirical issue discussed in or related to the course. The research design should include:
  - A clear statement of an argument and/or empirical question derived from the literature or developed by the student. Although students do not need to suggest an entirely original theory, it is expected that each course participant will focus on a novel topic.
  - A detailed plan for developing and testing the argument or reevaluating the empirical question raised. What case studies or quantitative evidence will the project rely on? What is your identification strategy?
  - A preliminary assessment ('plausibility probe') based on a short overview of the case studies, simple descriptive statistics, and/or reduced-form regressions.
4. Research design presentations (5 minutes, 2-3 slides) (12.5%). During one meeting, students will briefly present their designs. An exemplar presentation will be shared, along with a template.
5. Research paper (20 pages) (35%). This paper will be based on the research design and should take into consideration feedback offered by the instructor and fellow students. Although submitting a research paper is strongly recommended, there will be an examination option available.

## Schedule and Readings

The course will be organized around core topics, drawing on readings with evidence from South and Southeast Asia. Required readings are listed numerically, while recommended readings are accompanied by an asterisk. To illustrate some points, a sequence of rebuttals will be listed (e.g., Week 1). Although not required, rebuttals offer insights into how researchers engage the merits of a published argument. Some weeks will list fieldwork, which denotes a presentation of ongoing data collection work.

### Week 1: Studying Insurgency

1. Blattman, Christopher and Edward Miguel. "Civil War." *Journal of Economic Literature* 48:1 (2010) : 357.
2. Angrist, Joshua D. and Pischke, Jorn-Steffen. 2009. Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricists Companion (Princeton: Princeton University Press), Chapters 1-2.
3. Weidmann, Nils B. 2016. "A closer look at reporting bias in conflict event data." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(1): 206218.

#### Recommended readings

- \*\*\* Fearon, James, "Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science." *World Politics* 43 (January 1991): 169-195.
- \* Dube, Arindrajit, Oeindrila Dube, and Omar Garcia-Ponce. "Cross-Border Spillover: U.S. Gun Laws and Violence in Mexico." *American Political Science Review* 107: 3 (August 2013)
- \* Imbens, Guido and Jeffrey Woolridge, "Recent Developments in the Econometrics of Program Evaluation." *Journal of Economic Literature* 47 (2009): 5-86.

#### Recommended rebuttal

- \* Pape, Robert. "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism." *American Political Science Review* 97:3 (August 2003): 343-361.
- \* Ashworth, Scott, Joshua Clinton, Adam Meirowitz and Kristopher Ramsay, "Design, Inference, and the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism." Online (August 2007).
- \* Pape, Robert. "Methods and Findings in the Study of Suicide Terrorism." *American Political Science Review* 102: 2 (May 2008): 275-277.
- \* Ashworth, Scott, Joshua Clinton, Adam Meirowitz, and Kristopher Ramsay, "Design, Inference, and the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism: A Rejoinder." Online (August 2008).

## Week 2: Aid and Conflict

1. Sexton, Renard. 2016. "Aid as a Tool against Insurgency: Evidence from Contested and Controlled Territory in Afghanistan." Forthcoming, *American Political Science Review*.
2. Crost, Benjamin, Joseph Felter and Patrick Johnston. 2014. "Aid under Fire: Development Projects and Civil Conflict." *American Economic Review*, 104(6): 1833-56.

### Recommended readings

- \*\*\* Berman, E., J. Shapiro, and J. Felter. 2011. "Can Hearts and Minds Be Bought? The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq." *Journal of Political Economy*. Vol. 119, No. 4, pp. 766-819.
- \* Nunn, Nathan and Nancy Qian. 2014. "U.S. food aid and civil conflict." *American Economic Review* 104(6):1630-1666.

## Week 3: Armed Political Orders

1. Staniland, Paul. 2012. "States, Insurgents, and Wartime Political Orders." *Perspectives on Politics* 10(2):242-264.
2. Christensen, Darin, Mai Nguyen, and Renard Sexton. "Borderlands: Political Reform, Resource Rents, and Violence in Myanmar." Working paper.

### Recommended readings

- \* Kalyvas, Stathis. 2006. *The logic of violence in civil war*. Cambridge University Press.
- \* Weinstein, Jeremy. 2007. *Inside rebellion: the politics of insurgent violence*. Cambridge University Press.

## Week 4: Taxation and Rebellion

1. Rana, Shan Aman. 2016. "The economic causes of terror: evidence from rainfall variation and terrorist attacks in Pakistan." Working paper.
2. Vanden Eynde, Oliver. "Mining Royalties and Incentives for Security Operations: Evidence from India's Red Corridor." PSE Working Papers n 2015-42. 2015.
3. FIELDWORK: Economic shocks and the technologies of rebellion in Afghanistan.

### Recommended readings

- \* Vanden Eynde, Oliver. "Targets of violence: evidence from India's Naxalite conflict." Forthcoming. *Economic Journal*.
- \* Scott, James C., *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (Yale University Press, 1976).

## Week 7: Counterinsurgency From Above

1. Dell, Melissa and Pablo Querubin. "Nation Building Through Foreign Intervention: Evidence from Discontinuities in Military Strategies." NBER working paper 22395.
2. Kocher, M. A., Pepinsky, T. B. and Kalyvas, S. N. (2011), "Aerial Bombing and Counterinsurgency in the Vietnam War." *American Journal of Political Science*, 55: 201-218.

### Recommended readings

- \* Miguel, Edward and Gerard Roland. 2011. "The long-run impact of bombing Vietnam." *Journal of Development Economics*, Volume 96, Issue 1, 1-15.
- \* Lin, Erin. "How War Changes Land: The long-term economic impact of US bombing in Cambodia". Working paper.

## RESEARCH DESIGN PRESENTATIONS

## Week 8: Counterinsurgency From Above, continued

1. Lyall, Jason. "Bombing to Lose? Airpower and the Dynamics of Violence in Counterinsurgency Wars." Working paper.
2. Johnston, Patrick B. and Annap K. Sarbahi. 2016. "The Impact of US Drone Strikes on Terrorism in Pakistan." *International Studies Quarterly*. (January 2016) 21:59
3. Abrahms, Max and Philip B. K. Potter. "Explaining Terrorism: Leadership Deficits and Militant Group Tactics." *International Organization* 69, no. 2 (Spring, 2015): 311-342.

## Week 9: Climate Shocks and Seasonality of War

1. Wright, Austin L. and Patrick Signoret. "Climate Shocks, Price Dynamics, and Human Conflict." 2016. Asia Foundation working paper.
2. Crost, Benjamin, Claire Duquennois, Joseph Felter and Daniel I Rees. 2015. "Climate Change, Agricultural Production and Civil Conflict: Evidence from the Philippines."
3. Bhavnani, Rikhil R and Bethany Lacina. 2015. "The Effects of Weather-Induced Migration on Sons of the Soil Riots in India." *World Politics* 67(04):760794.

### Recommended readings

- \*\*\* Miguel, Edward, Shanker Satyanath and Ernest Sergenti. 2004. "Economic shocks and civil conflict: an instrumental variables approach." *Journal of Political Economy* 112(4):725753.
- \*\*\* Hsiang, Solomon, Marshall Burke and Edward Miguel. 2013. "Quantifying the influence of climate on human conflict." *Science* 341: 6151.
- \* Dell, Melissa, Benjamin Jones and Benjamin Olken. 2014. "What do we learn from the weather? The new climate-economy literature." *Journal of Economic Literature* 52(3):740798.

## Week 10: Research Frontiers

1. FIELDWORK: Educational attainment under threat of insurgent violence: Evidence from Thailand.
2. Jayasuriya, Dinuk, Rohan Jayasuriya, Alvin Kuowei Tay, Derrick Silove. "Associations of mental distress with residency in conflict zones, ethnic minority status, and potentially modifiable social factors following conflict in Sri Lanka: a nationwide cross-sectional study." *The Lancet Psychiatry*, Volume 3, Issue 2, February 2016, Pages 145-153
3. Gilligan, Michael, Benjamin Pasquale and Cyrus Samii. (2014). "Civil War and Social Cohesion: Lab-in-the-Field Evidence from Nepal." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(3):604-619.

## RESEARCH PAPER DUE

# How to Read an Academic Paper

This syllabus appendix will give you a sense for how to read an academic paper (or book) and includes a checklist of important questions to consider whenever you are asked to evaluate a manuscript (in class or professionally). Although not all of these questions will be relevant to this course, they are worth considering as a reference point for future coursework. This summary is borrowed from Jacob N. Shapiro, one of my former advisors (who draws on similar checklists from Chris Blattman, Alain de Janvry, Elisabeth Sadoulet, and Macartan Humphreys, and the nice review pieces by Miller et. al. (2013)).

## Research question and hypothesis

- Is the researcher focused on well-defined questions?
- Are the questions interesting and important?
- Are the propositions falsifiable?
- Have alternative hypotheses been clearly stated?

## Substantive importance

- How does the paper inform the profession or the subfield more broadly? Did the argument, method or result change how you think about a broadly important question or issue?
- What is the most general application of this finding? Has the author made that case clearly and persuasively?
- If the question and issue is fairly specialized, is a major contribution in this sub field (or sub sub field) sufficiently important?
- Is there real-world importance of the issue? Is this something people making policy should know?

## Argument

- Does the theory clarify some pre-existing uncertainty? Secondly, is anything about the theory novel or surprising? Be careful here, what may seem second nature to you after reading a really nice theoretical argument likely did not immediately beforehand.
- Is the idea being presented simple and self-evident enough that a formal or detailed treatment of the theory is not required, or could a more formal treatment be useful in the main body or an appendix?
- Is the theory/model clear, insightful, and appropriate?
- Could the theory benefit from being more explicit, developed, or formal? Could it benefit from being simpler and less formal?

- Are there clear predictions that can be falsified? Are these predictions “risky” enough? Does the theory generate any prohibitions that can be tested?
- How are the theories predictions different from simpler alternatives? Are those differences important and testable?
- Could there be alternative models that produce similar predictions that is, does evidence on the predictions necessarily weigh on the model or explanation?
- Does the theory rely on substantively reasonable assumptions and have those been validated in some way?
- Is the theory actually a theory, or a just list of predictions?
- Does it feel like the theory was derived after the results, moved to the front of the paper, and then “tested” with data?
- Is the theory consistent with past literature and findings?
- Are elements that are excluded or simplified plausibly unimportant for the outcomes?
- Is the theory general or specific? Are there more general theories on which this theory could draw or contribute?

### **Empirical strategy (from theory to hypotheses and tests)**

- Is the empirical strategy related to or derived from the theory?
- Are predictions simply stated or are they derived logically?
- Is the theory needed to generate the hypotheses? Would other theories do so as well?
- Does the theory generate more hypotheses than considered?
- Does the theory suggest heterogeneous effects?
- Have all the relevant predictions and empirical strategies been employed?
- Does the paper ignore important descriptive analysis in favor of a jump to causal inference?
- Are there pieces of evidence (patterns, levels, etc) that would support the theoretical approach?
- Are there assumptions made in the theory that have not been tested or articulated?
- Is the approach inductive, deductive, or an exercise in data mining? Is this the right structure?
- Could the question be addressed with another approach?
- Does the theory suggest heterogeneous effects?
- Do the tests match the theory in that concepts in the theory are well-represented by the measures that author is using.

## Data and measures

- Are the data clearly described? Summary statistics? Clear statement of sources? Could you replicate what they did?
- Is the choice of data well-suited to the question and test?
- Could the data sources or collection method be biased?
- Is collection of key variables likely to be correlated in any way with outcomes? What about treatment status?
- Are there any worrying sources of measurement error or missing data?
- Have the authors described the consequences of any data problems for their inferences (e.g. magnitude and direction of bias)
- Are there sample size or power issues?
- Are there better sources of data that you would recommend?
- Are there types of data that should have been reported, or would have been useful or essential in the empirical analysis?

## Measurement

- Do they provide details of the measurement and construction of major variables
- Do the measures capture the objects specified by the theory? Are any proxies reasonable?
- If the data are from other sources, have they established the credibility of those sources or given evidence that they know enough about them to be sure the data are of high quality?
- If the data are from surveys, have they described enough of the survey procedures to provide evidence of quality?

## Causal identification and internal validity

- Is the “cause” clear? Is there a cause/treatment/program/fist stage?
- Is the specific method and counterfactual clearly defined? Is it compelling?
- Is the method for identifying the causal effect clear and compelling? Has statistical inference been confused with causal inference?
- Does the research design identify a very narrow or a very general source of variation?
- Does the analysis conform with the “latest technology” for that particular method?
- Useful trick: ask yourself, “What experiment would someone run to answer this question?”
- Did the author make any assumptions for identification (e.g. of distributions, exogeneity, etc)? Were these assumptions tested and, if not, how would you test them?

- Does the argument for exogeneity of treatment draw on knowledge of the treatment, or do they simply throw in standard panel data controls without justification?
- Is there selection not just in who receives the “treatment”, but in who we observe, or who we measure?
- Could differencing, or the use of fixed effects, exacerbate any measurement error?
- Are there concerns of attenuation bias or systematic measurement bias from measurement error?
- Are there concerns of reverse causality?
- Are there concerns of omitted variables?
- If using instruments, have they clearly discussed plausibility of exogeneity, exclusion restrictions and strength? Has the instrument been used previously to test a different causal relationship? If so there's an issue there for the exclusion restriction.
- Is matching confused with a solution for unobservable selection?
- Does their argument for identification have testable ancillary predictions and if so do they check them?

## Other aspects of empirical analysis

- Are the statistical techniques well suited to the problem at hand? Is the empirical model used consistent with the theory?
- What are the endogenous and exogenous variables? Is it clear?
- Has the paper adequately dealt with concerns about measurement error, simultaneity, omitted variables, selection, and other forms of bias and identification problems?
- Are the results demonstrated to be robust to alternative assumptions? How complete and persuasive are these robustness tests?
- Is the depth of robustness checks consistent with the seriousness of the issue at hand?
- Have they shown you where the results break and discussed what that tells us about the internal and external validity of the analysis.
- Does the disturbance term have an interpretation, or is it just tacked on?
- Are the observations i.i.d., and if not, have corrections to the standard errors been made? Have they discussed how standard errors are calculated.
- What additional tests of the empirical strategy would you suggest for robustness and confidence in the research strategy?
- Are there any dangers in the empirical strategy (e.g. sensitivity to identification assumptions)?
- Can you imagine a better, or alternative, empirical strategy?

- Look at the “not significant” effects: are they substantively large? Do the confidence intervals include very large effects?

## Results

- Are the results presented in an intuitive and clear way? Could this be improved?
- Do the authors do the simplest thing that makes the point or do they use unnecessarily complicated methods?
- Is substantive significance of results clearly explained and discussed, or is the focus merely on statistical significance?
- Do the results adequately answer the question at hand?
- Are the conclusions convincing? Are appropriate caveats mentioned?
- What variation in the data identifies the elements of the model?
- Are there alternative explanations for the results, and can we test for them? Do the results admit rival interpretations? If so is this important/acknowledged.
- Could the author have taken the analysis further, to look for impact heterogeneity, for causal mechanisms, for effects on other variables, etc?
- Is absence of evidence confused with evidence of absence?

## Scope and external validity

- Can we generalize these results?
- Is the population examined representative of the larger population of interest? If not are the implications of the findings different than what the authors say?
- Has the author specified the scope conditions?
- Are the conditions under which the relationship of interest is examined consistent with the conditions of interest for other scholars or policy makers?
- Have casual mechanisms been explored?
- Are there further types of analysis that would illuminate the external validity, or the causal mechanism at work?
- Are there other data or approaches that would complement the current one?
- Do any policy implications really follow from the results?

## General organization

- Has the study been presented in a way that it can be replicated?
- Is the paper laid out logically and follow, to some degree, the scientific method? If empirical, are there clear and logically ordered sections for theory, empirical strategy, data, measurement, results, etc.? If theoretical, do the authors lay out clearly the players and structure of the interaction, their utility functions, the resulting best responses, and then characterize the equilibrium of interest and its substantively important comparative statics?