

Final Paper

PSCI 220

October 24, 2014

Description

Your task is to write a research paper that evaluates a hypothesis about crisis diplomacy in light of a recent or historical case.

There are three relevant deadlines:

1. *Proposal* due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, November 5.
2. *Presentations* given in class on Monday, December 1, and Wednesday, December 3. We will arrange the presentation schedule the week before Thanksgiving Break. If you cannot be present in class on either or both of these days, you need to inform me *as soon as possible*.
3. *Paper* due in my hands by 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, December 11. **I will not accept late assignments.** You should turn in a hard copy to my mailbox in the political science office, or to me in my office (Commons 324). Please inform me in advance of any extenuating circumstances that will prevent you from turning in a hard copy. I will not accept papers by email without advance notice.

Research Design

Hypothesis

The goal of your paper is to evaluate a hypothesis about crisis diplomacy. The hypothesis must contain the components of a central answer to a research question:

1. Independent and dependent variables
2. The posited relationship between those variables
3. A mechanism to explain why that relationship holds

If this is unfamiliar to you, consult the course notes on "[How to Read Social Science Research](#)".

Your hypothesis should concern crisis diplomacy, broadly speaking. It should almost certainly fit in with at least one of the topics we have discussed (or will discuss) in class. You do not have to conjure up a completely original hypothesis; it is fine to take a hypothesis from existing political science research. (Of course, you must cite your sources when doing so.) If you do decide to come up with an

original hypothesis, prepare to address its relevance to the scientific study of crisis diplomacy.

Case Study

You will evaluate your hypothesis by examining how well its logic plays out in a historical or contemporary case of crisis diplomacy.

The main criterion to consider when choosing a case is its *relevance* to your hypothesis. Obviously, it must fit with the background conditions of your hypothesis: you can't use a border dispute between France and Germany to evaluate a hypothesis about negotiations with terrorists. You must also be able to observe the independent and dependent variables. For example, if your hypothesis is about the effectiveness of secret negotiations, you must select a case for which the once-secret negotiations have since come to light. A good question to ask when selecting a case: "Could this case have turned out in a way that would falsify my hypothesis?" If not, it is not relevant.

You must also keep in mind the *scope* of the case you select. Resist the temptation to take on more than you can handle. Suppose you wanted to evaluate a hypothesis about the conditions under which democracies follow through on their alliance commitments. "The history of NATO" is a case study that would be far too broad. "NATO intervention in the Afghanistan War" is more manageable, but still probably too much for a term paper. "British commitment to NATO in the Afghanistan War" would be better. Of course, you should be careful not to choose a case that's so minor or obscure that you can't find historical analyses of it.

If you're looking for a guide to reading historical material and using it to evaluate social science hypotheses, I recommend Marc Trachtenberg's book *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method*, which is available to Vanderbilt students online for free [through Elibrary](#).

Expectations

Proposal

The proposal should be no more than two pages long.¹ It should contain these two elements:

1. The hypothesis you are interested in evaluating. This hypothesis may be taken from one of the course readings (or some other existing political science research), or it may be something you came up with on your own.

¹ As always, page counts are based on a paper that is double-spaced, with one-inch margins and 12-point font.

If the hypothesis is taken from existing work, your proposal should identify that work. If it is novel, your proposal should identify how it fits in with the scholarly study of crisis diplomacy.

2. The case study you intend to carry out. The proposal should not just identify the historical case, but also explain its relevance to your hypothesis. To demonstrate the feasibility of the project, the proposal should also identify specific sources you plan to use for information about the case.

There is no grade for the proposal itself. However, I will not accept your final paper unless I have approved your proposal. It is possible that you will need to revise your initial proposal in order to receive approval. This requirement is for your own benefit: I want to ensure that your research design is feasible and has the potential to result in a satisfactory final paper.

Presentation

The presentation is a 5 minute talk about the essential components of your paper, followed by 2–3 minutes of Q&A.² The content of your presentation is up to you. To some extent, it will depend on how far your research has progressed by the time of the presentation. At a minimum, your presentation should tell us:

² We have two class days, or 100 minutes, to get through presentations by 12 students. That comes out to just over eight minutes each.

1. What is the central question?
2. What is the central answer?
3. What is the body of historical or contemporary evidence you have chosen to focus on, and why is it relevant to your central question?

The presentation counts for 20% of your final paper grade (hence 10% of your course grade). You will be graded on the clarity of the presentation and your facility at answering questions from the class.

We will determine the order of presentations the week before Thanksgiving break. If you decide to use slides, you must email the file to me by 5:00 p.m. the day before your presentation. It is usually safest to convert PowerPoint or Keynote slides to PDF format, since sometimes raw slide files show up differently on different computers.

Paper

The paper is a 15–20 page research paper. Twenty pages is a hard upper limit. I reserve the right not to read any content past 20 pages, and to reduce your grade for exceeding the limit.

You must cite every source that your paper draws upon. These include sources of ideas (e.g., course readings from which your hypothesis is taken) and sources of facts (e.g., a historical account that your case study uses). There is no downside to citing your sources. On the other hand, failure to cite sources is plagiarism—and thus an Honor Code violation—and will result in a failing grade. You may use any citation style you like (APA, Chicago, MLA, etc.), as long as you pick one and stick to it.

The paper itself counts for 80% of your final paper grade (hence 40% of your course grade). I will ask a number of questions in determining your grade. These include:

- Is the hypothesis relevant to the study of crisis diplomacy? Does the paper demonstrate a good understanding of the hypothesis and its relevance?
- Is the case study relevant to the hypothesis you have chosen? Does the paper make a convincing case for its relevance?
- How well does the paper operationalize the key variables?
- How complete is the assessment of the case evidence? Does the paper neglect any important facts, or spin the truth in order to support a particular point of view?
- Does the paper identify potential competing explanations and assess them in light of the case evidence?
- How clearly written is the paper?³ Is it easy to identify the hypothesis? Is the case evidence presented logically and coherently?

Notice that you will *not* be graded on whether the case study supports your hypothesis. I do not care if you are clairvoyant. I do care about intellectual honesty. If the evidence does not align with your hypothesis, say so, and explain why you think that might be the case. From a scientific standpoint, a “failed” experiment is just as interesting as a successful one.

Examples

Here are two examples (which you cannot use!) of good research designs for a term paper.

Communication between Allies in the Libya Conflict

Hypothesis: Allied states in a joint military operation will honestly reveal information to each other about their relative military advantages, but not about how long they are willing to participate in the conflict. This is because revealing your military advantages can help

³ A research paper does not have to be pompous or stuffy. It is possible to be scholarly and serious without using flowery language or convoluted sentence structures. I recommend reading George Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language” (<http://tinyurl.com/orwell46>) before you write your paper.

your allies coordinate efforts, but revealing your duration of willingness may encourage them to free-ride.⁴

- Scope condition: allied states in a joint military operation
- Dependent variable: whether information is revealed honestly
- Independent variable: type of information (relative military advantage or duration of willingness)
- Mechanism: coordination benefits of revealing military advantage, free-riding problems with revealing duration of willingness

Case Study: I will evaluate the interactions between the United States and France at the outset of their intervention in the Libyan Civil War in 2011. First, to measure what kinds of information was revealed, I will examine public statements about potential participation in the conflict by the American and French leaders in February and March 2011. I will also consult news reports and other secondary sources for any accounts of private negotiations between the U.S. and France. Second, to measure whether the information was revealed honestly, I will compare the leaders' statements to their countries' actions in the subsequent conflict.

Credible Commitments in the Fashoda Crisis

Hypothesis: Deterrent threats by democratic states are more likely to succeed when the opposition party supports the threat. Opposition support enhances the credibility of a threat because if the governing party were bluffing, the opposition could score political points by dissenting instead of supporting the threat.⁵

- Scope condition: democratic state making a deterrent threat
- Dependent variable: deterrence success
- Independent variable: opposition support
- Mechanism: opposition only supports credible threats

Case Study: I will examine the behavior of British and French politicians during the Fashoda Crisis in 1898. To measure opposition support of government threats, I will consult contemporaneous newspaper accounts and secondary historical writings to find public statements by opposition party leaders. In addition, to assess the proposed mechanism, I will particularly watch for evidence about (1) whether opposition parties considered the credibility of the threat before deciding to support it and (2) whether each country's government monitored the behavior of the other country's opposition party.

⁴ This hypothesis is taken from my own research—specifically, a chapter of my dissertation called “Communication between Allies”.

⁵ This hypothesis and case study are among the many in Kenneth Schultz's book *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

To measure deterrence success, I will examine diplomatic histories of the crisis and how it ended.