**Capstone: Forecasting Conflict Theme**

**Instructor: Thomas Chadefaux**

This research theme allows students the opportunity to develop a forecasting project. Forecasting political processes has become an increasingly central area of political science and social sciences in general, and has important practical implications. Governments, businesses, finance companies, all have an interest in predicting social phenomena. Conflicts have an major impact on economic, social, and political structures, and therefore, their anticipation is key to preventing them or at least to adjusting governments’ or businesses’ behaviour to their expected occurrence.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In this module, we will focus on predicting events related to the onset, unfolding, or termination of political violence (or the consequences thereof), such as terrorist attacks, interstate conflicts, civil wars, refugee flows, or human rights violations. Our goal will be to apply existing statistical methods (or develop new ones) to data on these processes, with the goal to anticipate their occurrence. The Research Methods skills taught in Junior Sophister (Research Methods A and B) are sufficient methodological training and background for students to take this Capstone theme. The skills acquired in this module can in turn be broadly applied beyond this class and are highly sought after by employers.

Students are free to choose and develop their own research project in consultation with the theme instructor. The project can employ any appropriate methodological approach of the student’s choosing, again in consultation with and advice from the instructor. The module will discuss methodological issues, available data, and the advantages and disadvantages of particular approaches.

Possible projects will mostly include combinations of:

1. A **substantive** **event** to forecast (interstate wars; civil wars; one-sided government violence; human rights violations; genocide; ethnic conflict; terrorist attacks; etc.)
2. A particular **unit of analysis**. Mainly, students may wish to forecast either the *timing* of an event (e.g., onset, attack, etc.) or its *geographical location* (e.g., predicting where terrorist attacks will occur).
3. A **process** to predict. This could be the onset, termination, incidence, recurrence, etc., of the substantive event.

Students will need to identify a gap in the literature (e.g, a new type of event, unit of analysis, or process to predict) and a method that is adequate for their particular topic, with the help of the instructor. They will aim to identify important predictors and to improve upon existing forecasts.

This module should be a very exciting opportunity for students who want to know more about war, conflict, and using data to forecast political events.

1. Students interested may wish to read the following article for a general introduction to forecasting in international relations: Schneider, Gerald, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Sabine Carey. “Forecasting in International Relations: One Quest, Three Approaches.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28.1 (2011): 5–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)