Capstone 2020/21 Political Science: Political Violence

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This research theme provides students with an opportunity to develop a project that seeks to investigate the causes and/or consequences of political violence. Students will have an opportunity to delve into questions related to three forms of political violence:

1. **Inter-state conflict:** violent conflict that occurs between states. Potential research questions (or variations of) related to inter-state conflict can include:
   1. What explains the decline of inter-state conflict in the post-WW2 period?
   2. How does regime type affect the propensity of a state to engage in inter-state conflict?
   3. Do international alliances increase or decrease (or leave unaffected) the likelihood of inter-state conflict?
2. **Civil conflict:** violent conflict that occurs between the state and domestic, non-state actors (rebel groups). Civil conflicts are typically contested for control of central authority or are wars of secession. Potential research questions related to civil conflict can include:
   1. Do widespread grievances or opportunities for profit motivate rebel groups?
   2. What kinds of policies are effective at reintegrating ex-combatants into society?
   3. Why are ethnic civil conflicts typically more common and longer than non-ethnic ones?
3. **Terrorism:** violence perpetrated by either a state or non-state actor that violates the laws and conventions of war, typically by targeting civilians. Potential research questions related to terrorism can include:
   1. Are democracies or autocracies more likely to be targets of terrorism?
   2. Is terrorism an effective strategy for extracting concessions from the state (non-state terrorism) or repressing dissent (state-led terrorism)?
   3. How does terrorism or the threat of terrorism affect citizens’ political and policy preferences?

Each student’s project can address a question similar to the ones posed above or one that delves into the intersection of multiple forms of political violence. Examples of the latter can include the following: when are state and non-state actors engaged in civil conflict more/less likely to employ terrorism? Is foreign military intervention effective at ending civil conflict?

Ultimately, the student will be free to develop their own research question/project in consultation with the theme instructor. However, the research questions above are intended to serve as guidance with respect to crafting an effective question/project. Students will employ an appropriate methodological approach of their choosing, again in consultation with the instructor. In that vein, during our meetings we will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of various methodological approaches as relevant to the study of political violence. Finally, in consultation with the instructor, the student will be free to decide whether to conduct cross-national analyses or focus on specific case studies (or combine the two approaches) in answering their research question. In the end, which approach the student selects will in part depend on what is appropriate for the question at hand.