# Research Methods for Political Science

## Beginning the Research Process

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# Logistics

- Groups: TA will randomly assign you to a group this week
- Ideally: Consult with TA before embarking on a particular project. Avoid disasters
- Contributions to be specified in the paper, per academic standards.
  - E.g., "Thomas designed the study, performed the analysis, contributed to writing section 1, 3 and 5. John performed the analysis, contributed to sections 2 and 5, etc."
- Due: week 13 on Blackboard

# What we care about

- Presentation
  - Tables and graphs
  - Writing / style
- Quality of the research question
  - Originality
  - Feasibility
- Quality of research design *rightarrow* Research design portion of the class
- Quality of analysis *rightarrow* Statistics portion of the class

# Quality of research design

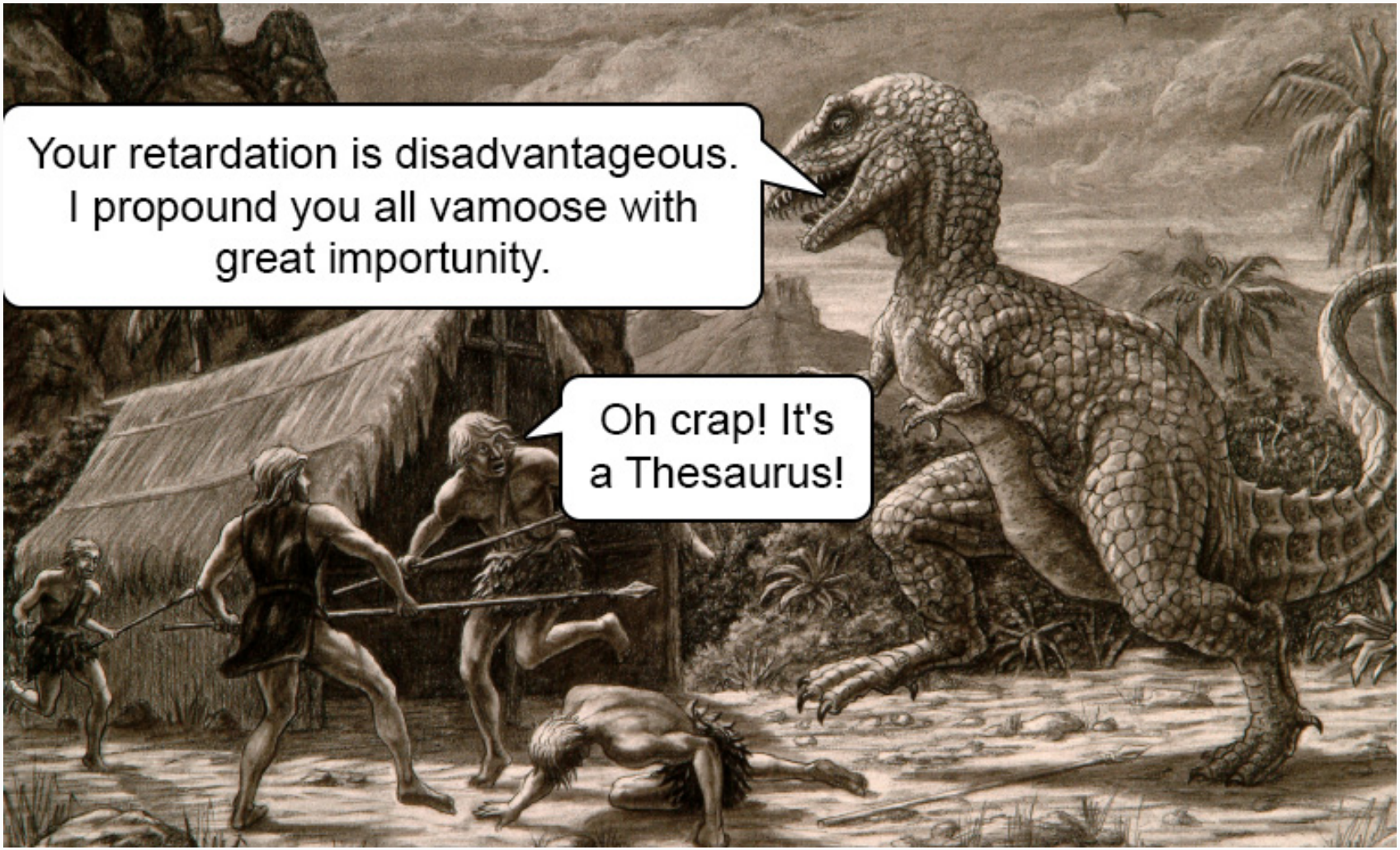
How do I know that you are right?

# Presentation

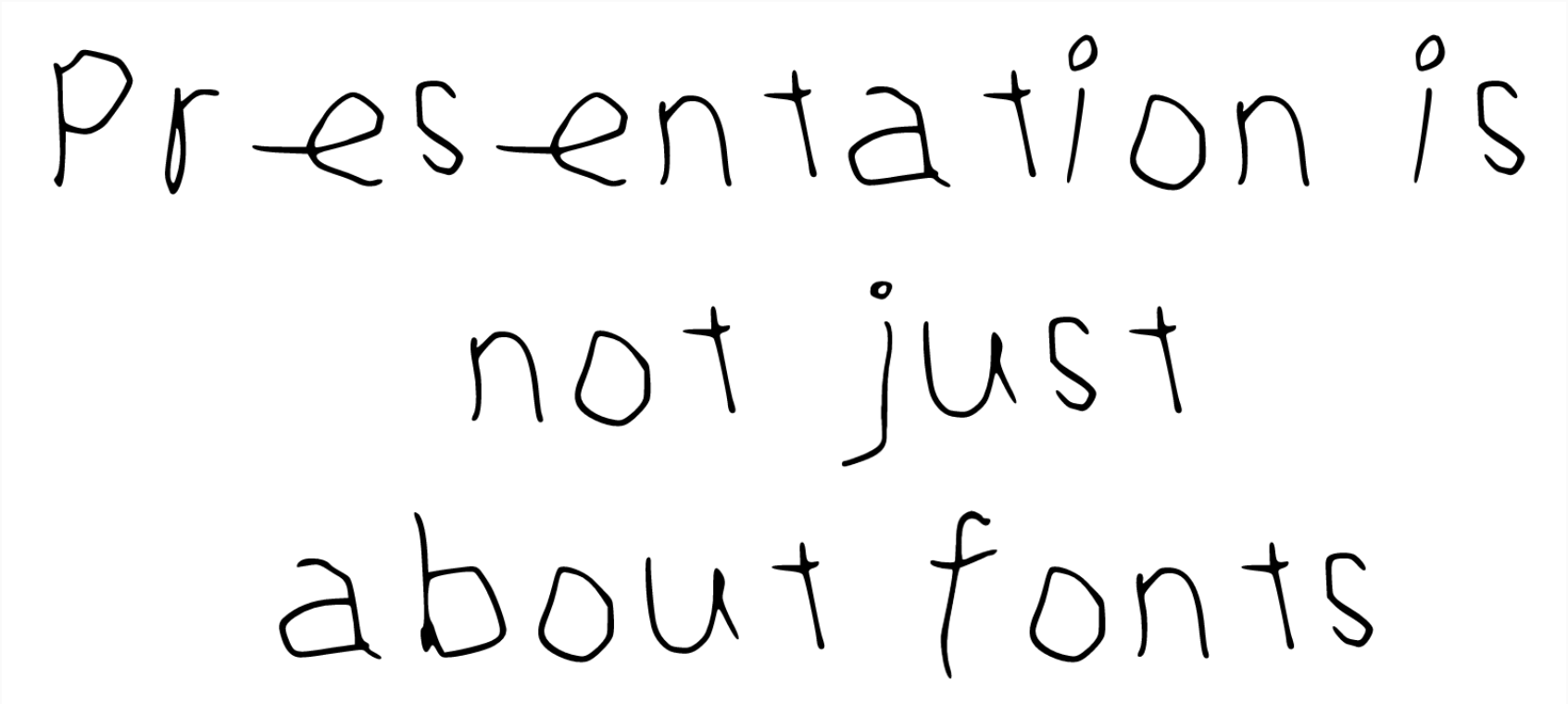
# Write clearly

- Paragraphs

# Write clearly



# Presentation matters



# Plagiarism

Cite, cite, cite (including yourself)!

https://libguides.tcd.ie/plagiarism/

# Good (and bad) research questions

# Finding your research question

- The most IMPORTANT task of the project
- The most DIFFICULT task of the project

# Often, questions start with a Why

- Why is voter turnout for local elections higher in some cities than in others?
- Why does the amount spent per pupil by school districts vary (within a state or among states)?
- Do small nations sign more multilateral treaties than large nations?
- Why did some members of Congress vote for the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 whereas others opposed it?
- Why do some nations have cap-and-trade programs for carbon dioxide emissions while others do not?

# Common mistakes: single issues

Choosing a discrete, factual issue. E.g., the following are not recommended:

- Why did Russia annex Crimea in 2014?
- Why was this minister chosen after the 2012 election?
- What caused World War I?

What is the problem with these? They don't vary!

# Common mistakes: single issues

Both $x$ and $y$ need to vary!

# Better questions

- ~~Why did Russia annex Crimea in 2014?~~
  Why are some satellite countries invaded but not others?
- ~~Why was this minister chosen after the 2012 election?~~
  Why do some cabinets choose younger ministers than others?
- ~~What caused World War I?~~
  When do rises in power lead to war?

# Common mistakes: Overly Descriptive

- How many trade disputes have been referred to the World Trade Organization (WTO) for resolution in the past five years?
- How many political parties are led by a woman?
- How much money was spent on national defense in each African country?

Factual observations are good starting points, however.

# Better questions

- ~~How many trade disputes have been referred to the World Trade Organization (WTO) for resolution in the past five years?~~

  Why do some countries refer issues to the WTO more than others?
- ~~How many political parties are led by a woman?~~

  Why do some parties have more women in leadership than others?
- ~~How much money was spent on national defense in each African country?~~

  Why do some African countries spend more on national defense than others?

# Normative questions

Avoid:

- Should: ~~Should Switzerland be part of the EU~~
- Good/bad etc: ~~Prime ministers that are part of the LDP party in Japan are good PMs~~

# But normative questions can lead to good research questions

- ~~Should Switzerland be part of the EU~~
  Does membership in the EU increase GDP (PS: very difficult question!)
- ~~Prime ministers that are part of the LDP party in Japan are good PMs~~
  What affects unemployment rates in Japan?

# What we want to see

$$x \to y$$

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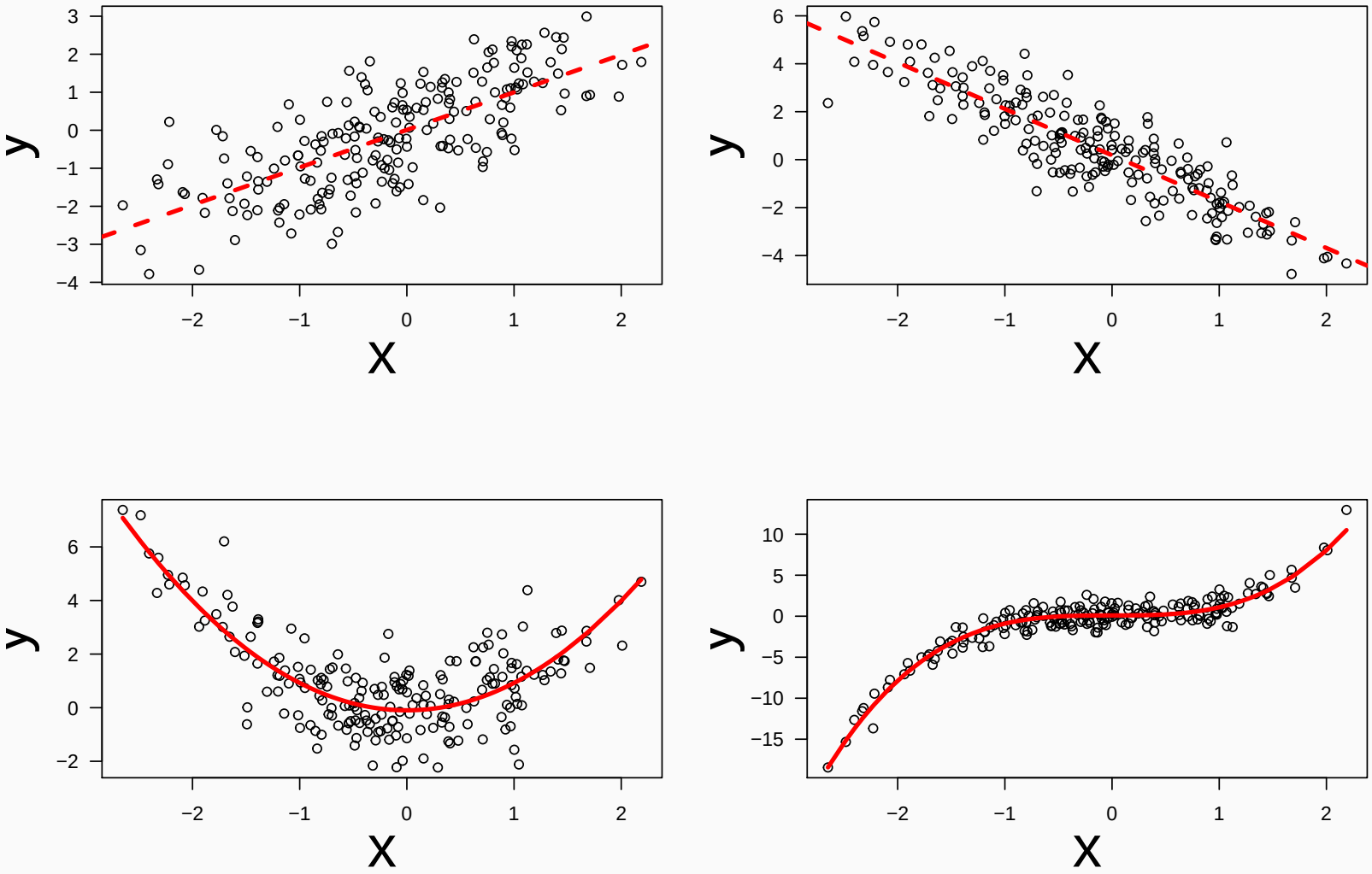
$x \to y$



# How to find a question?

# First step: find a topic

Find a subject that interests you.

We are flexible, but it cannot be on quantum physics (unless it relates to a political issue — e.g., "The impact of the CERN of voting patterns—a transnational study"!)

# Second step: the puzzle

That's hard. Political phenomenon that is not obvious.

# Where to look?

1. Read the news (hard)
2. Start from existing work, and extend/modify (easier) Literature review

# Good places to start

- Browse journals
  - American Political Science Review
  - American Journal of Political Science
  - International Organization
  - Journal of Peace Research
  - Comparative Political Studies
  - British Journal of Political Science
- Annual reviews of political Science
- Google Scholar

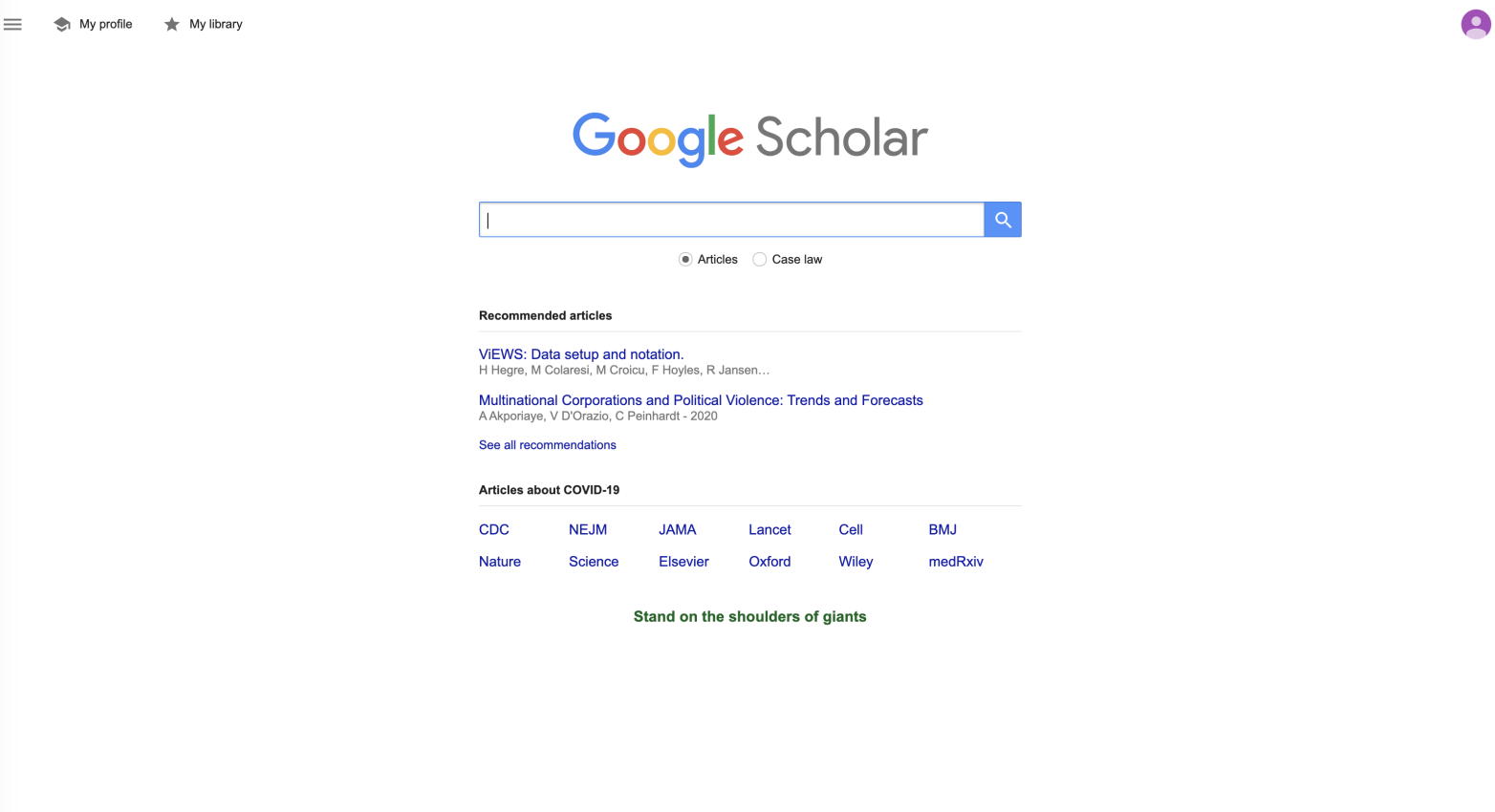
# Finding the relevant literature

# Why a “lit review”?

- Sharpen your topic
  - What has/has not been done
  - What is missing?
- Identify data sources
- Learn the methods used

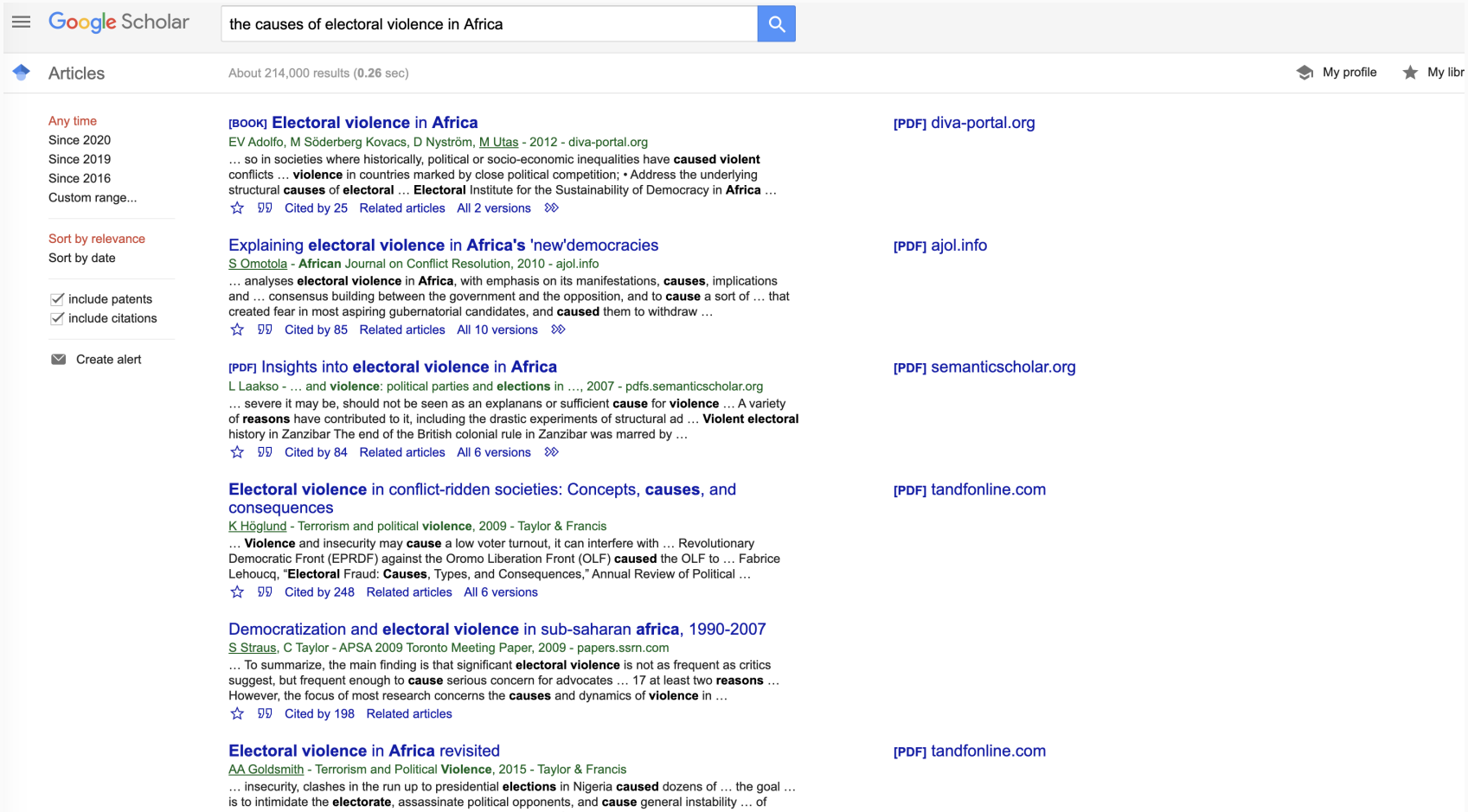
# How to use Google Scholar?

1. The easy part: go to scholar.google.com



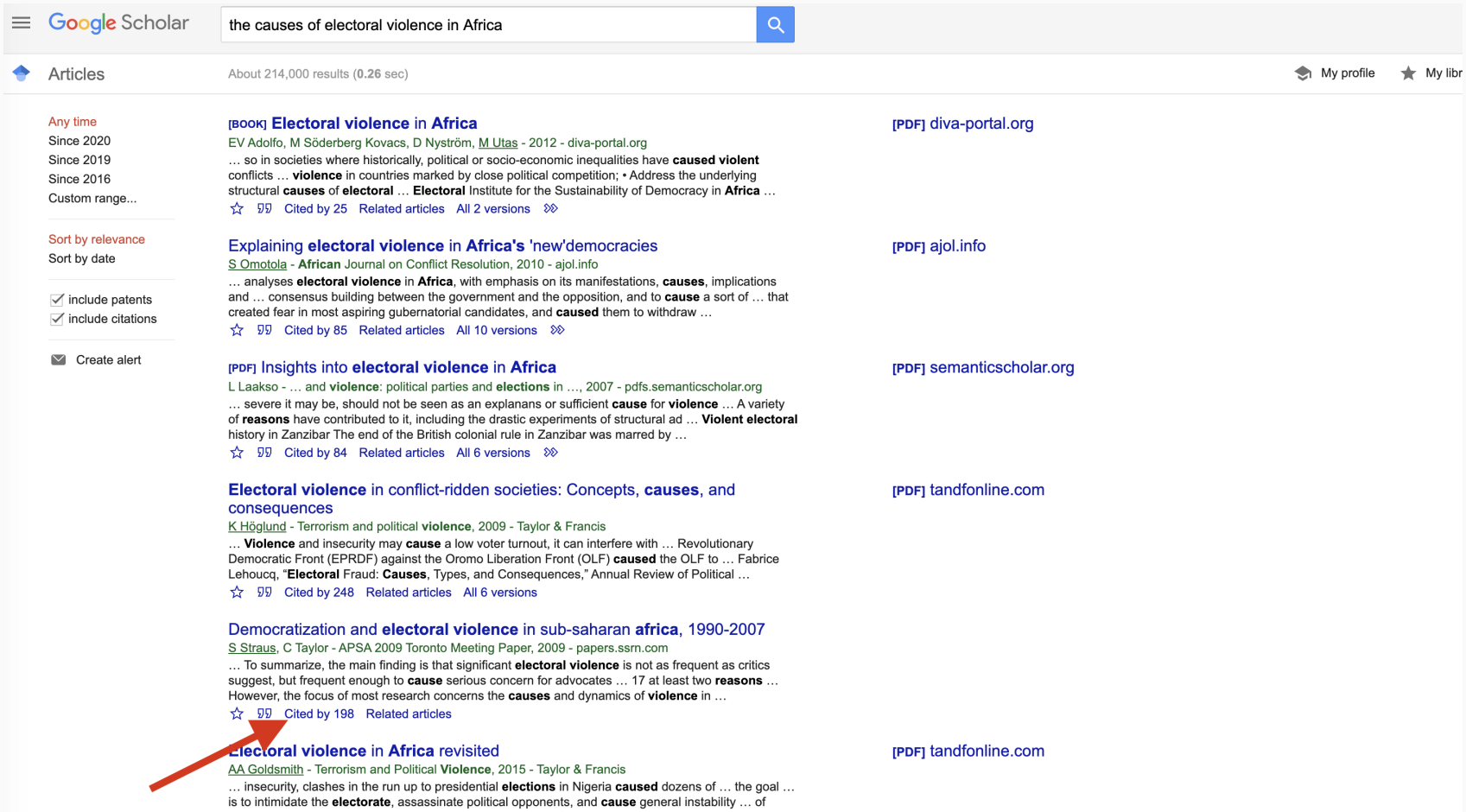
# How to use Google Scholar?

2. Try a question of interest, or keywords of interest. E.g., we want to know what has been written on the causes of electoral violence in Africa. You'll get results, typically ordered by relevance.

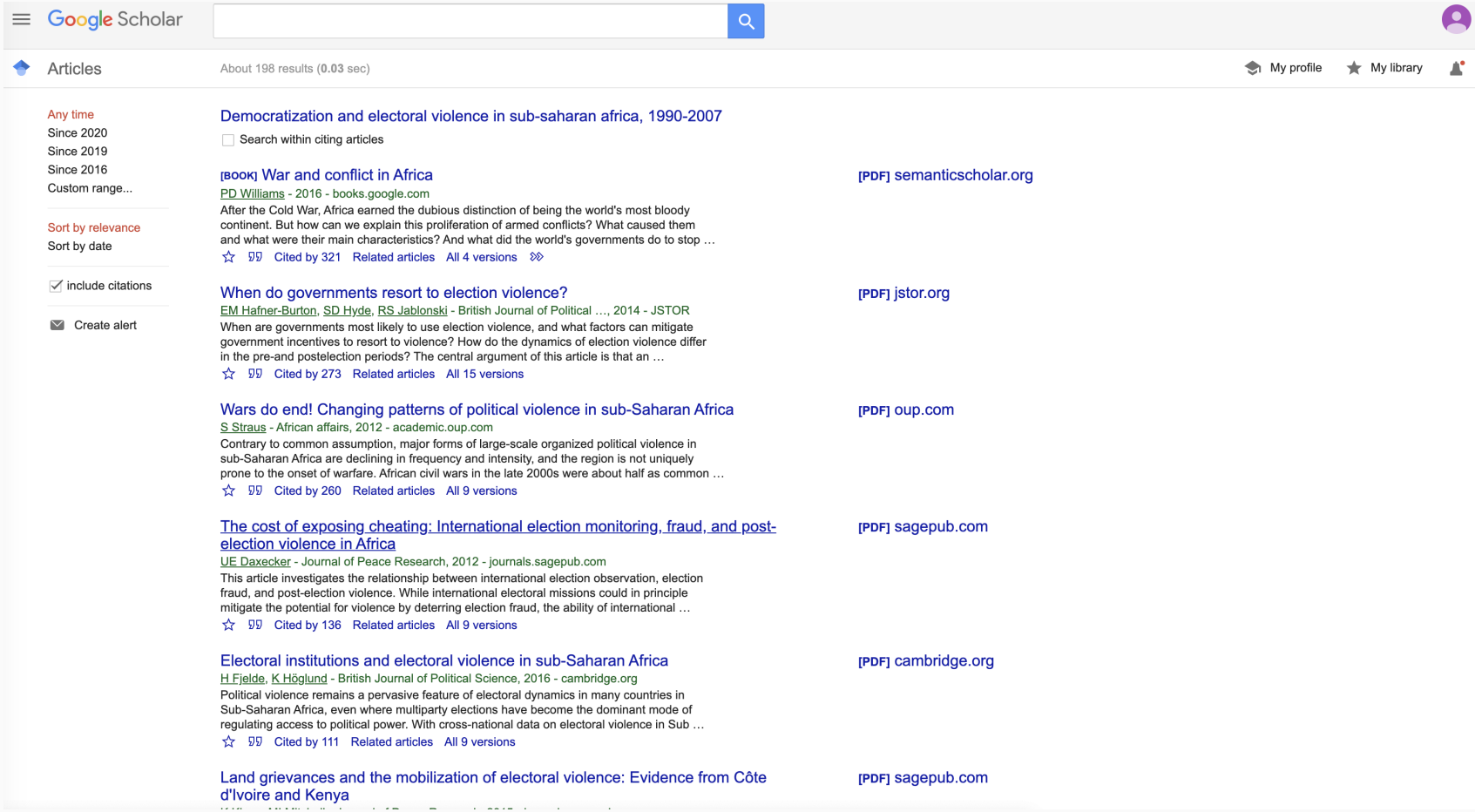


# How to use Google Scholar? Going forward in time

3. Skim a few. Once you find an interesting one, you need to know what has been written on the subject *since* that article was published. So look for articles which *cite* this article of interest



# How to use Google Scholar?



# How to use Google Scholar? Going backward in time

Now that you know the latest state of the literature, it's time to dig deeper and know what has been written before. It's usually better to start with the latest, else you can spend hours on the past, only to realize someone will have done what you intend to in the future.

To see the past, just look through the articles citations

most likely to occur – and how it can be mitigated – can inform the strategies of NGOs, international organizations and other interested actors, allowing them to better anticipate where measures aimed at preventing election violence are most likely to be useful.

REFERENCES


Amnesty International. 2001. *Zimbabwe-Amnesty International Report*.

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Banks, Arthur S. 2005. *Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive*. Databanks International. Available from http://www.databanksinternational.com/, accessed 29 March 2009.

Banks, Arthur S. 1975. *Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive: User's Manual*, 1–2. Binghamton: Center for Comparative Political Research, State University of New York.

Beaulieu, Emily. 2006. Protesting the Contest: Election Boycotts Around the World, 1990–2002. PhD Dissertation. University of California, San Diego.

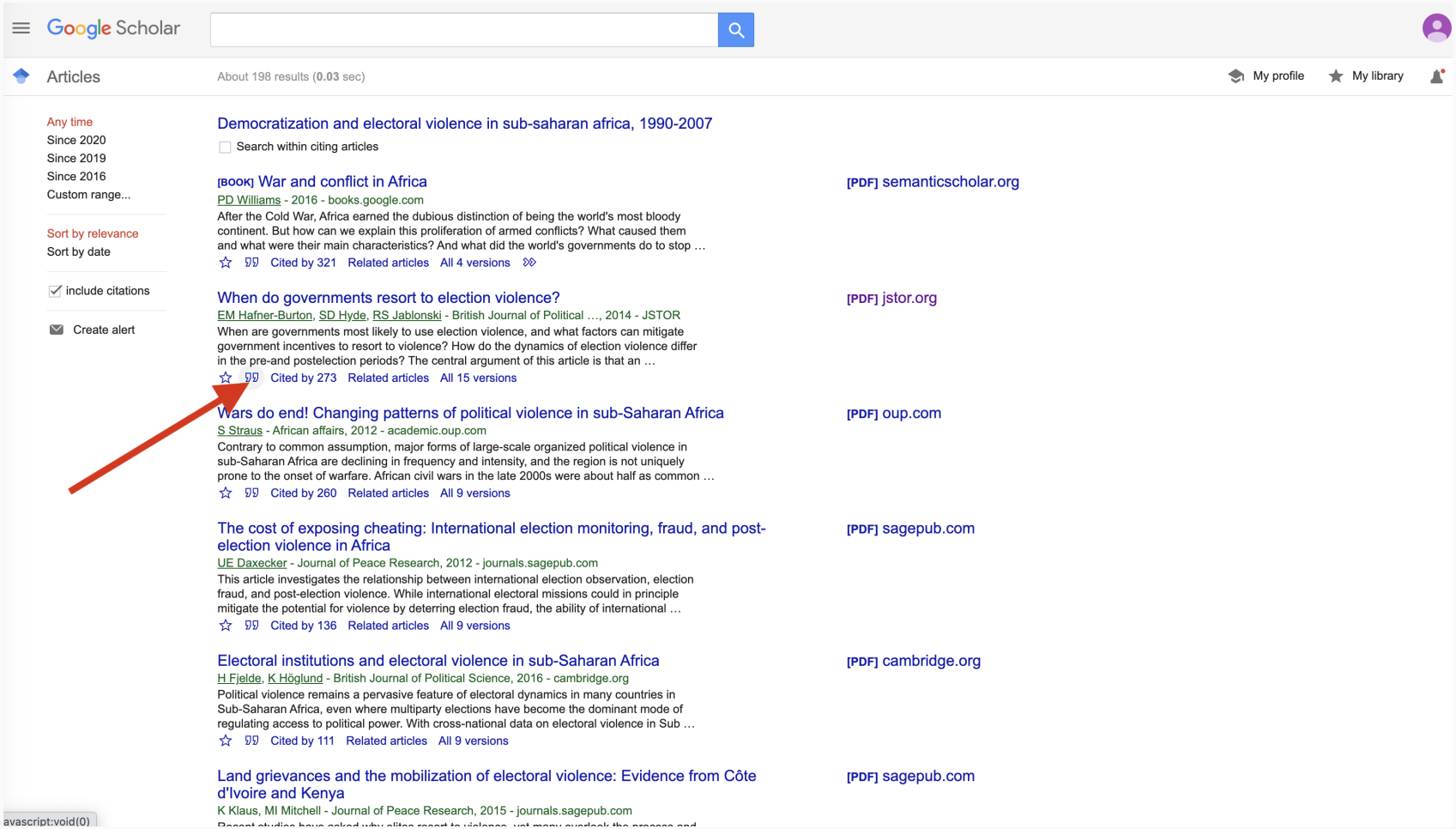
Blaydes, Lisa. 2010. *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Brownlee, Jason. 2009. Portents of Pluralism: How Hybrid Regimes Affect Democratic Transitions. *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (3):515–32.


[98] Analysis of this question is presented in Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2013.

[99] See, for example, Hoppen 1984; Keyssar 2009; Zeldin 1971.

# Google Scholar also helps with citations



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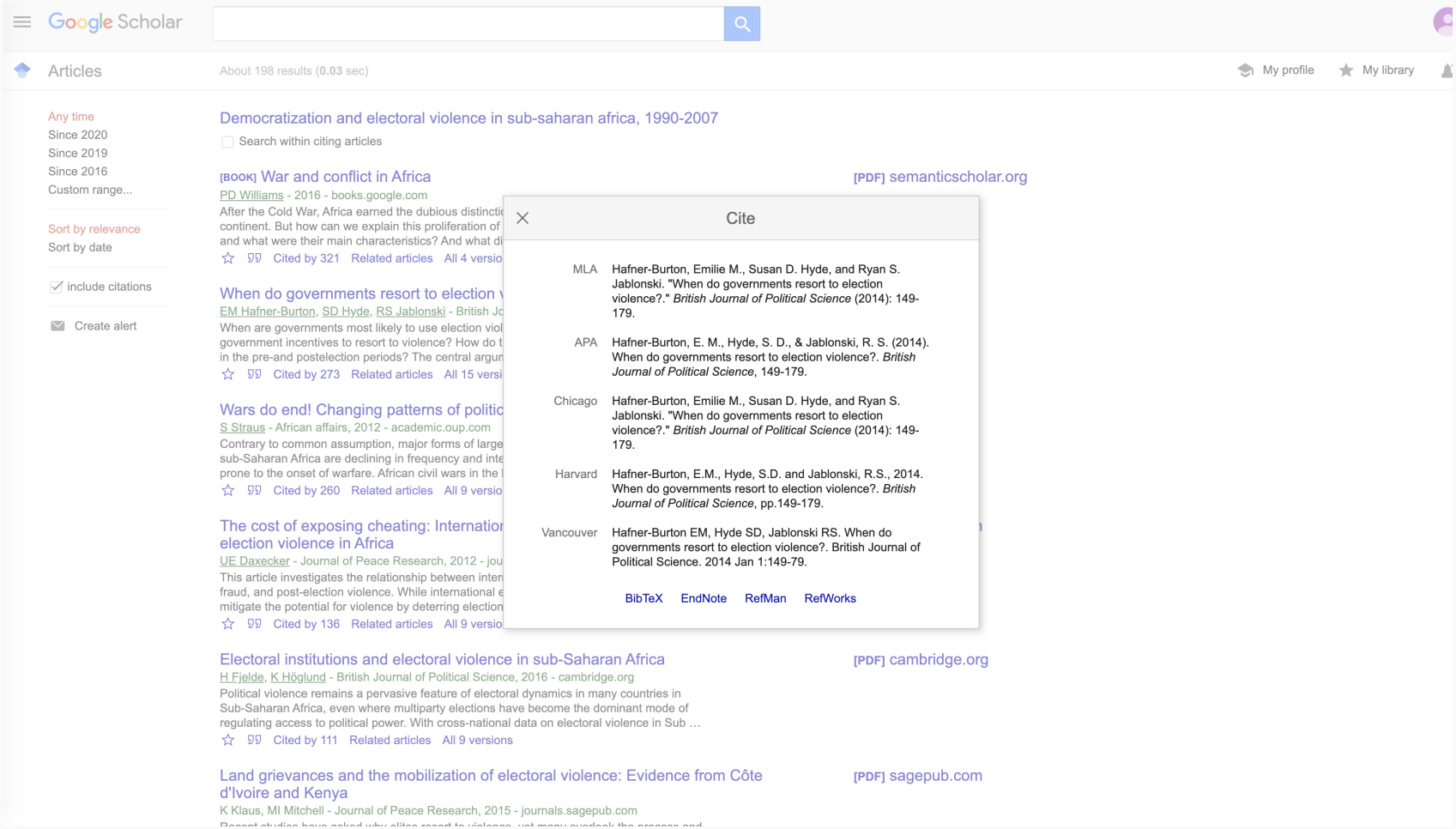

# Check your sources

Not all sources are equal. Just because it's published does not mean it's good.

- Where is it published? Is it a good journal?
- Was the article cited?
- Is the author reputable/credible?

# Reading the literature

A winnowing process:

- Start with the title
- Then the abstract
- Then skim
- Read only if it's really relevant

This way, you can go through dozens of sources quickly.

# Writing the literature review

# Writing the literature review: Do not...

- Do not include all articles that are vaguely relevant. If you are working on ethnicity and civil war, do not mention all the work on ethnicity, and then all the work on civil war. Only discuss the ones on ethnicity AND civil war

# Writing the literature review: Do not...

- Do not discuss each article one by one.
  - DO NOT: "Johnson studies ethnicity and conflict. He conducts an experiment on bla. He finds that blabla. Smith also studies ethnicity and conflict. He conducts a slightly different experiment. This is really boring to read (and write)."
- Instead, organize the discussion by topic.
  - DO: group the article by their focus. E.g.: "Research on ethnicity and civil war has focused in particular on the effect of ethnic fractionalization on political violence (Smith 2000, Johnson 2019). However, effects are limited (Kellog 2017) and methodological issues abound (Peter 2018)...

# Writing the literature review: Do . . .

Write a story. Walk the reader through the state of the art. And guide them toward your contribution: we know x and y. However, z remains unknown.

# Writing the literature review: examples

E.g., from Peter Andreas Drugs and War: What Is the Relationship? Annual Review of Political Science:

Some excellent accounts focus on the histories of particular drugs (Courtwright 2001, Herlihy 2002, Gootenberg 2008, Rasmussen 2008, Schrad 2016, Rappaport 2018), particular wars or types of war (McCoy 2003, Felbab-Brown 2009, Ahmad 2017), or geographic locations and time periods (Lintner 1999, Dikotter et al. 2004, Chin 2009, Kuzmarov 2009). Perhaps not surprisingly, political scientists have made the greatest contribution to the literature on the so-called war against drugs (which has taken on some of the characteristics of a real war), mostly focused on the United States and Latin America since the 1980s (Bertram et al. 1996, Kenney 2008, Felbab-Brown 2009, Bagley & Rosen 2015, Friesendorf 2015, Lessing 2018, Duran-Martinez 2018). These contributions, however important and insightful, have privileged illegal drugs such as cocaine in the contemporary era at the cost of glossing over the historical centrality of legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco.

# Writing the literature review: examples

Have a look at the Annual Review of Political Science (https://www.annualreviews.org/loi/polisci)

These are often amazing lit reviews, on a *vast* number of topics (and growing).