

Shreyas Meher

PhD Candidate in Public Policy & Political Economy

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Employment

Erasmus University Rotterdam , Rotterdam, Netherlands	Starting June 2025
Postdoctoral Researcher	
National Science Foundation (NSF) , UTD	2023 - Present
Research Assistant	
Project: Frameworks: Infrastructure for Political and Social Event Data Using Machine Learning	
Principal Investigator: Patrick T. Brandt	
The University of Texas at Dallas , Richardson, TX	2020 - 2023
Teaching Assistant	

Education

The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) , Richardson, Texas	2020 - 2025 (Expected)
Ph.D. Public Policy and Political Economy	
Chair: Clint Peinhardt	
Committee: Pengfei Zhang (Co-Chair), Patrick Brandt	
Dissertation: The Intersection of Politics, Economics, and Digital Space: A Trilogy of Investigations	
The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) , Richardson, Texas	2020
M.S. Management	
St. Xavier's College , Mumbai, India	2018
M.S. Public Policy	
Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies (NMIMS) , Mumbai, India	2016
B.S. Economics	

Research

Research Fields

Comparative Politics, Computational Social Science, International Political Economy,

Research Topics

Internet Censorship, Political Conflict and Violence, Large Language Models, Treaty Enforcement

NSF Funded Research

Frameworks: Infrastructure for Political and Social Event Data Using Machine Learning

Principal Investigator: Patrick T. Brandt

Grant Amount: \$1,589,016 - National Science Foundation [2023/08–2026/07]

As a **Research Assistant** on this project, I apply **cutting-edge machine learning technologies** to revolutionize event data extraction and analysis for political science. My work focuses on **Large Language Models**, developing both decoder and encoder architectures including:

- Fine-tuning **ConflLlama**, a specialized variant of Llama 3.1 for political conflict classification
- Implementing **efficient fine-tuning techniques** for models like **ConfiBERT**
- Developing **Group Relative Policy Optimisation (GPRO) RL models** (reward functions and finetuning)
- Creating **scalable training pipelines** from local development to HPC environments
- Optimizing models for **multilingual applications** across multiple languages

Publications

Brandt, P. T., Alsarra, S., D’Orazio, V., Heintze, D., Khan, L., Meher, S., Osorio, J., & Sianan, M. (2024). Introducing the ConfiBERT Family of Language Models for Political Science. *Political Analysis* (R&R). <https://arxiv.org/abs/2412.15060>

Kumar, S., Meher, S., & Zhang, P. (2025). Public Health Advocacy in Times of Pandemic: An Analysis of the Medicare-For-All Debate on Twitter During COVID-19. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(2), 223. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15020223>

Under Review

Democracy and Internet Control (with Pengfei Zhang) – Examining content control in democracies, revealing a unique approach compared to authoritarian regimes.

ConflLlama: Domain-Specific Adaptation of Large Language Models for Political Violence Classification (with Patrick Brandt) – Introducing ConflLlama, a specialized variant of Llama 3.1 fine-tuned for political conflict classification, demonstrating superior performance in event coding and conflict analysis tasks compared to traditional approaches.

Two Types of Censorship? An Assessment of the Informational Autocracy Thesis in the Online Space – Classifying autocratic internet filtering practices into distinct regimes and their implications.

Working Papers

Expanding the Horizons – Investigating the dynamics of international organizations through the lens of network structures.

Populism and the Price of Abandonment: Analyzing the Exit Dynamics from Bilateral Investment Treaties (With Clint Peinhardt) – Exploring the interplay between populist policies and the economic implications of withdrawing from international investment treaties.

Event Horizon: Revolutionizing Data Annotation with Reinforcement Learning – Presenting an innovative framework that fuses political science insights with cutting-edge computer science techniques to produce structured, transparent annotations for complex events.

Dissertation

Democracy and Internet Control: Theory and Evidence from Transparency Reports – Analyzes democratic approaches to internet censorship using data from Google and Twitter, revealing subtle yet significant content moderation strategies.

Two Types of Censorship? An Assessment of the Informational Autocracy Thesis in the Online Space – Testing how Guriev & Triesman’s IA theory holds in the realm of internet filtering practices in autocratic nations.

The Politics of Internet Blackouts: Investigating Digital Repression during the 2021 Farmer Protests in India – Focuses on India’s use of internet blackouts as a control mechanism during the 2021 Farmer Protests, highlighting the tactics of digital repression in a democratic context.

Teaching Experience

Instructor for [EPPS Math & Coding Camp](#) August 2024

- Taught coding section for incoming PhD students over a 5-day intensive program
- Covered topics including R programming, data manipulation, visualization, and linear regression
- Designed and delivered hands-on sessions on RStudio, ggplot2, and dplyr
- Developed and maintained an open source website for course modules and materials

Teaching Assistant for

EPPS 2301 - Research Design in the Social and Policy Sciences Fall 2020

SOC 4302 - Class, Status, and Power Fall 2020

IPEC 4301 - Political Economy of Industrialized Countries Spring 2021

PSCI 4396 - Selected Topics in Government and Politics (Afghanistan) Fall 2021

EPPS 6316 - Applied Regression Spring 2022

PPPE 6302/PSCI 6302 - Political Violence and Conflict in Cyberspace Fall 2022

EPPS 6313 - Introduction to Quantitative Methods Fall 2022

IPEC/PSCI 4318 - Foreign Aid and Development Spring 2023

Conference Presentations

International Studies Association (ISA) Chicago (2025)

Association for Public Policy and Management (APPAM) Washington DC (2024)

Society for Institutional & Organizational Economics (SIOE) Chicago (2024)

American Political Science Association (APSA) Philadelphia (2024)

Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA) Chicago (2024, 2025)

UTD PPPE Working Paper Series Richardson (2023)

NAPE, Houston Houston (2020)

Honors & Awards

University of Texas at Dallas (UTD), Richardson, Texas

The Colloquium for the Advancement of Free-Enterprise Education (CAFÉ) research scholar 2020

Book Contributions

Cognella Publishing, American Government & State and Local Government 2021

Skills and Languages

Skills: R, STATA, PYTHON, L^AT_EX, ARCGIS, C++

Languages: English (Fluent), Marathi (Fluent in reading and writing), Hindi (Fluent in reading and writing), French (Beginner)

References

Patrick T. Brandt

Professor of Public Policy, Political Economy,
and Political Science

School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences

University of Texas at Dallas

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Clint Peinhardt

UT System Regents' Outstanding Teacher

Professor of Political Science, Public Policy and
Political Economy

PhD Advisor for Public Policy and Political
Economy

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Pengfei Zhang

Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Political Economy

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