

Shreyas Meher

PhD Candidate in Public Policy & Political Economy

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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 prestigious project, I am integral in applying **cutting-edge machine learning technologies** to revolutionize the extraction and analysis of event data for political and social sciences. This project specifically leverages advancements in **Large Language Models**, where I develop and optimize both decoder and encoder architectures across multiple model families. My technical responsibilities include:

- Developing and fine-tuning **ConflLlama**, a specialized variant of Llama 3.1 optimized for political conflict classification and analysis
- Implementing **efficient fine-tuning techniques** for large language models such as **ConflBERT** while maintaining computational efficiency
- Developing **scalable training pipelines** from local development to high-performance computing environments
- Managing **distributed computing workflows** for processing large-scale political text data
- Optimizing model performance through advanced training techniques and memory management
- Expanding language models for **multilingual applications** in multiple languages
- Creating **comprehensive documentation and tutorials** using industry-standard frameworks

This role combines advanced technical implementation with innovative approaches to political science research, enhancing global understanding of political dynamics through sophisticated data analysis techniques. My work has enabled processing of massive text datasets while maintaining high standards of computational efficiency and accuracy in political event coding.

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	
St. Xavier's College , Mumbai, India	2018
M.S. Public Policy	
Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies (NMIMS) , Mumbai, India	2016

Research

Research Fields

Comparative Politics, International Political Economy, Computational Social Science

Research Topics

Investment Treaties, Internet Censorship, Political Conflict and Violence

Working Papers

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

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.

ConflLlama: Fine-tuning Large Language Models for Political Conflict Analysis (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.

How do Interest Groups adapt their Communication Strategy to Big Shocks? An analysis of the Medicare-For-All Debate on Twitter during COVID-19. (With Sushant Kumar & Pengfei Zhang) – Analyzing the contrasting social media strategies of health advocacy groups on Medicare-For-All during COVID-19, revealing the impact of narrative styles on public engagement and policy debate.

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

Introducing the ConflBERT Family of Language Models for Political Science (with Patrick Brandt, Vito D'Orazio & Javier Osorio) – Introducing ConflBERT, a specialized LLM for analyzing political violence and conflict, demonstrating superior performance and potential for multilingual expansion.

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.

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

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
Dean’s Excellence Scholarship	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

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Clint Peinhardt

UT System Regents' Outstanding Teacher

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