

# Shreyas Meher

PhD Candidate in Public Policy & Political Economy

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## Employment

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

## Education

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<b>The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD)</b> , 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	
<b>The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD)</b> , Richardson, Texas	2020
M.S. Management	
<b>St. Xavier's College</b> , Mumbai, India	2018
M.S. Public Policy	
<b>Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies (NMIMS)</b> , Mumbai, India	2016
B.S. Economics	

## Research

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### 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 **ConflBERT**
- 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

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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

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**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.

**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.

**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

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**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

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**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

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**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

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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

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

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

**Book Contributions**

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*Cognella Publishing*, American Government & State and Local Government 2021

**Skills and Languages**

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**Skills:** R, STATA, PYTHON,  $\text{\LaTeX}$ , ARCGIS, C++

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

**References**

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**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

University of Texas at Dallas

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**Pengfei Zhang**

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