Research Seminar:
Armed Organizations and Patterns of Political Violence
PLSC 355/741 and LAST 352

Why do some insurgent groups and some state militaries engage in broad repertoires of violence, including selective assassinations, massacres, sexual violence, torture, forced displacement, etc., while others limit their violence to selective assassinations? Why do some insurgent groups and some state militaries target civilians indiscriminately or according to civilians’ political or ethnic identity while others rarely target civilians? In this seminar we will analyze the differences in the repertoires and targeting of violence against civilians by armed organizations. Participants will discuss various theoretical approaches, including the role of territorial control in patterns of selective vs. indiscriminate violence in civil war, the role of the inversion of control in ethnic and political “cleansing,” internal discipline as a principal/agent problem, the contrast in recruits to groups controlling economic vs. social resources, the role of socialization and brutalization of combatants, and the role of ideology and discipline in Marxist-Leninist groups. Among the cases we will discuss are the German army at the Eastern Front in World War II, state and insurgent actors in El Salvador and Vietnam, and insurgent actors in Colombia, Peru, Uganda, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone.

Among other issues, participants will focus on the puzzle posed by restraint (narrow repertoires and targeting), particularly in conflicts that are asymmetric in the sense that one party to the conflict engages in a narrow repertoire while the other does not, or targets civilians to a very limited extent while the other does so on a much wider scale. Course reading draws on relevant literatures in political science, history, anthropology and sociology. Throughout the course we will consider the policy implications of our discussion: how might actors intervene to narrow repertoires and civilian targeting?

The course, a research seminar intended for graduate students and senior undergraduates, is organized as follows. Participants will spend the first ten weeks analyzing the extent to which different theoretical approaches explain observed repertoires of violence and patterns of targeting on the part of different organizations. In the remaining weeks of class, participants will discuss drafts of their final papers.

Pre-requisites: Undergraduate participants must have taken Introduction to Comparative Politics (PLSC 116) or its equivalent. For all participants, permission of the instructor is required.

Class Meeting: Tuesdays 7 - 8:50 pm. Rosenkranz, Rm. 102

Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:00 - 5:00 (sign up on office door), 115 Prospect Street, room 234.
**Requirements**: Participation in class discussion is expected. Participants are required to submit 6 2-page reviews of the weekly reading. Undergraduate participants will write a final paper of 15-20 double-spaced pages for the course, or a senior essay. Graduate students can write either a final research paper, a dissertation prospectus, or a research proposal. All participants will submit an abstract, outline, bibliography, draft, and the final paper. Those writing senior essays will submit more than one draft.

Some course readings will be posted on the course website. There are three required books for the course, soon to be available at Labyrinth Books:


**Course Outline and Reading**

1. **January 12. Introduction: variation in repertoires and targeting**

2. **January 19. The challenge of organized violence**

   “The direction, operation, and control of a human organization whose primary function is the application of violence is the peculiar skill of the officer.” Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 1957: 11


   latimes.com/news/printedition/asection/la-na-vietnam6aug06,0,92368.story

   latimes.com/news/printedition/asection/la-na-vietnam20aug20,0,690199.story

Elisabeth Jean Wood. 2009. Armed groups and sexual violence: when is wartime rape rare? *Politics and Society* 37, No. 1

Recommended


3. January 26. **Territorial control and information: selective vs. indiscriminate violence in civil wars**


Recommended:

4. February 2. Economic vs. social endowments: time horizon of recruits


Recommended:


5. February 9. Armed group institutions


James Q. Wilson. Chapter 9, Compliance. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do And Why They Do It*


Guest: Amelia Hoover, Yale University and HRDAG

Recommended:


February 16. *Group targeting: Ethnic and political “cleansing”*


Paper abstract due (post on server)

Recommended:


*February 23. Combatant socialization*


Dara Kay Cohen. Explaing Sexual Violence During Civil War: Evidence from Sierra
Leone. Unpublished paper


Recommended:

Dara Kay Cohen. Female Combatants and Violence in Armed Groups: Women and Wartime Rape in Sierra Leone. Unpublished paper


March 2. Marxist Leninist organizations: socialization, ideology, and organization


Recommended


[Spring break]

March 23. Combatant brutalization and the barbarisation of warfare


Due: abstract, outline and bibliography (post on server)

Recommended:


March 30. Reprisals and other atrocities as terrorizing communication


Recommended:


April 6, 13 and 20: Discussion of paper drafts

Final papers due April 26 (post on server)