Political Violence: A Relational Approach

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Main discipline: Sociology, Political Science, Political Sociology

Dates: 24 - 28 July 2017
Course Credits: 10 pts (ECTS)
Limitation: 25 participants

Objectives
This course aims to provide a guide, to students who already have a background in social science, towards the development of an independent investigation of political violence, including its causes, forms, and consequences. Research and theorization on political violence have been growing in recent years with focus on different forms, such as riots, guerrilla warfare, insurgency, genocide and civil wars. Within a relational approach, we will focus upon comparative research and approaches that seek to understand political violence in terms of the wider political context in which actors are located.

We will refer to critical empirical cases in order to illustrate general mechanisms and processes in ethno-nationalist, social-revolutionary, right-wing, religious motivated and single issue armed groups considered within the broader politics of contention. Similarities and differences among these cases will be addressed. Looking across-geographical areas and historical periods, the various sessions will discuss course readings as well as critical background, concepts, theories, and ideas that complement the readings referring to relevant studies in sociology, political science, history, geography, anthropology and psychology.
Key books for preparation to the course

- Bosi, Lorenzo, O'Dochartaigh, Niall and Daniela Pisoiu. 2015. *Political Violence in Context. Time, Space and Milieu*. ECPR PRESS.

Suggested further reading in general

COURSE OUTLINE

Monday July 24

Session 1: What is political violence?
In this first session we will focus on conceptualization of political violence. This will be done by reviewing the main approaches in social science research on political violence, while drawing attention to key contemporary debates.

Requested readings:


Suggested further readings:


Session 2: Relational dynamics at the onsets of riots
In this second session we will cover methodological issues informing the study of political violence. In particular, we shell address methodological practices (especially, qualitative interviews) as well as ethical issues in studying political violence and conducting fieldwork in contexts of violent conflicts.

Requested readings:


Suggested further reading:

Tuesday July 25

Session 3: Relational dynamics at the onsets of civil war
In the third session, we aim at expanding the reflection on causal mechanisms of political violence by addressing literature on civil wars. Going beyond roots-causes, we will single out the contribution of a relational approach to the field.

Requested readings:


Suggested further reading:


Session 4: Relational dynamics at the onset of clandestine political violence
The fourth session will address the interaction between contentious politics actors and the state in the process of conflict escalation. The policing of protest will be considered as an important barometer of the attitudes of the elites toward challengers.

Requested reading:


Suggested further reading:

**Wednesday July 26**

**Session 5: The emergence of armed groups**
The fifth session will address the emergence of armed groups, their justification of the choice of violent repertoires of action within the social construction of political conditions and the definition of the organizational goals. It will look at the key role played by relational dynamics among various actors involved in context.

Requested readings:


Suggested further reading:


**Session 6: Joining political violence**

In our sixth session we will look at how individuals join armed groups. We will consider variation among those who join armed groups in terms of different paths of mobilization as well as the nature of their participation in the armed group. We will situate individuals in their organizational and social context.

Requested readings:


Suggested further readings:

Thursday July 27

Session 7: Political violence and space
The seventh session will focus at how processes of political violence are embedded in dynamic social settings and physical space. We will look at how armed groups’ socio-spatial relationships enable and constrain their political options, including the resort to different violent repertoires.

Requested readings:


Suggested further readings:

Session 8: **Exiting political violence**

Our eight session will investigate how and when armed groups and individuals disengage from political violence. We will focus here on the reverse of mechanisms that had fuelled militarization, reflecting on counterterrorist policies but also at internal dynamics towards the deactivation of militant networks in armed groups.

**Requested readings:**


**Suggested further readings:**

Friday July 28

Session 9: Impact of political violence
The ninth session will look at how political violence matters. First we will underline the variety of potential outcomes of armed groups’ violent repertoires. We will then focus on the biographical outcomes of former armed activists.

Requested readings:


Suggested further readings:

Session 10: **How should we investigate political violence? Interviewing armed militants.**

In this last session we will cover methodological issues informing the study of political violence. In particular, we shall address qualitative interviews as well as ethical issues in studying political violence and conducting fieldwork in contexts of violent conflicts.

**Requested readings:**


**Suggested further readings:**


**The lecturers**

Professor [Donatella Della Porta](#) is Dean of the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Scuola Normale Superiore, where she directs the Center on Social Movement Studies (Cosmos). She also directs a major ERC project Mobilizing for Democracy, on civil society participation in democratization processes in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America.

Dr. [Lorenzo Bosi](#) is Assistant Professor at the Scuola Normale Superiore (SNS) and Research Fellow within COSMOS. His main research interests are in political sociology and historical sociology where his studies primarily focus on qualitative research of social movements and political violence. He is mainly interested in how and when contentious political actors shift forms actions across time and space and their impacts.