Political Violence and Revolutions
PS 118

Our current war with Iraq and the catastrophic destruction of the World Trade Center has compelled us to seek a deeper understanding of the causes, processes, and outcomes of political violence, including urban riots, hate crimes, ethnic conflict, terrorism, military coup d'état and revolutions. We will begin with a general survey of leading theoretical approaches. In particular, we will discuss psychological explanations that attribute violence to instinct, mental disorders and frustration; social structural theories that focus on the effects of social change, stratification and cleavages; resource mobilization approaches that emphasize the process of how conflicting groups arise, press opposing claims, and contend for power; and rational choice explanations that view conflict as resting on cost-benefit analysis of coercion and compliance. Next, we will examine the socio-economic profile of revolutionaries, terrorists and rioters, in an effort to understand which type of people engage in political violence, and why.

In the second part of the course, we will take a closer look at three modes of political violence -- urban riots, terrorism, and revolutions. We will conclude with a discussion of the outcome of political violence, in particular, structural changes in post-revolutionary society, the policy impact of urban riots, the fate of challenging groups, and determinants for their success and failure.

Texts

There is no required text for the course. A course pack will be ready for purchase from Course Reader Material on 1137 Westwood Blvd. (phone: 443-3303). On average, around 80 pages of required reading will be assigned per week, and students are expected to complete these following the schedule below, as class lectures often assume knowledge of the scheduled readings.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to do the required readings listed below and to attend class meetings. Course grade will depend on a mid-term (40%), and a final (60%) exam, both in-class exams with essay type as well as multiple choice questions. In addition, students who want to get a 4.0 for the course have to engage in an optional research project (due May 26th) collecting and analyzing data on political violence events and their putative factors from data handbooks and other sources to test various propositions. Students will be given the necessary assistance in choosing a research question, looking for sources, designing coding schemes, performing statistical analysis and using the computer. The midterm exam will be held on Wednesday, April 28th, and the final exam on Monday, June 14th, 6:30-9:30 p.m., at a room to be announced.
COURSE ORGANIZATION AND READING SCHEDULE

I. In their own words


II. Explaining Violence: Psychological and Structural Approaches


III. Explaining Violence: Process, Culture, & Rational Choice Approaches


IV. Perpetrators of Violence: Socio-economic Profile


V. Urban Riots


VI. Terrorism and 9/11


VII. Revolutions