The study of contemporary conflicts

Instructors
Dr. Olivier Schmitt
Associate Professor, department of political science
schmitt@sam.sdu.dk

Pål Røren
PhD Candidate, department of political science
roeren@sam.sdu.dk

Objective
This course will provide students with the necessary methodological and epistemological knowledge to embark on a research project on contemporary conflicts. Researching contemporary conflicts is fraught with specific empirical difficulties, notably when it comes to access to relevant data in and about a conflict environment. The class will teach students how to face those difficulties through presentations and discussions of recent research related to contemporary conflicts. It will give them the relevant skills to produce high-quality independent analysis in a research and/or policy environment. The skills acquired will be helpful first for the master thesis, and throughout their entire career whenever they will need to use analytical skills. By systematically illustrating the methodological discussions with examples of research on contemporary conflicts, students will simultaneously acquire in depth knowledge on the specific examples and understand the connections between data, methods, and analysis.

With this course, students will learn to:
- Understand the notion of causality, and its various meanings
- Understand the connection between theory development and empirical strategy
- Adjudicate knowledge claims based on an understanding of the fundamentals of epistemology
- Design a research project
- Select and apply the appropriate methods necessary to conduct this research project
- Collect and analyze the relevant data on contemporary conflicts
- Organize and present their results in a written and an oral form
- Assess the methodological quality of existing research and commentaries about contemporary conflicts

Course structure: One lecture per week, Mondays, 12.00-15.00, Room U56. Classes will involve a combination of lecturing and interactive class exercises.

Assessment: A research paper on a previously agreed-upon topic with the instructors. The paper must be maximum 15 pages (each with 2400 strokes incl. spacing, appendix and notes included, but table of content and bibliography excluded.) and in English. This page limit does not include title page and reference list.

Equity and Disability Policies: The University of Southern Denmark and us are committed to providing a supportive learning environment. If you are facing medical, emotional or personal circumstances that will affect your attendance and performance, please see us.
**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism will not be tolerated and could result in a grade of zero for the course or expulsion from the University.

**Mandatory readings**

There are two compulsory books for purchase, available from the bookstore.


Other readings are available through the library or on blackboard. The readings will be quite heavy during the first four weeks as they lay out the core epistemological foundations for conducting a research project. Please *do the readings* as they are necessary for the lecture and the in-class exercises, and for the writing of your research paper.

**Session 1: What to look for? Understanding causation**


Read the introduction, pp. 3-20.


Read chapters 2 and 3, “Inefficient Causation I and II”, pp. 46-98.

Readings for the in-class exercises


Read the introduction, pp. 1-24.


Session 2: Structuring a research design


Readings for the in-class exercises


Session 3: Case selection


Readings for the in-class exercises


Session 4: Concept development and measurement


Readings for the in-class exercises


**Session 5: Counterfactual analysis**


Read chapter 2, “Counterfactual Thought Experiments”, pp. 29-68.

Readings for the in-class exercises


**Session 6: Process tracing**


Readings for the in-class exercises


Session 7: Fieldwork and ethnographic enquiry


Readings for the in-class exercises


Session 8: Discourse analysis


Readings for the in-class exercises


**Session 9: Using archives (guest lecture by Jan Lemnitzer)**

**Session 10: Seminar on research papers**

Prepare a presentation on your research paper (including research question, lit. review, methods, sources).