

Democratic Peace Theory and the Importance of Social Scientific Analysis
(Or, How to Become An Expert Bull-Shit Detector)

Days/Times
Room Number

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How many times have you read or listened to political analysis and thought, “this guy is full of shit!” But can you articulate clearly why you find their argument lacking? Can you make a better one? In this class we will explore the factors that make for compelling political analysis. And we will identify tools to create meaningful political research.

As a vehicle for understanding what makes for good versus sloppy political analysis we will focus throughout the semester on one of the most popular and influential international relations theories: Democratic Peace Theory. In a nutshell, Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) argues that democracies do not go to war with each other, or at the very least that democracies are less likely to go to war with each other than they are to go to war with non-democracies. DPT has been incorporated into a variety of foreign policies and greatly informs policy-makers’ thinking about international relations. This is in part why George W. Bush justified the invasion and reconstruction of Iraq in October 2003 by explaining, “See, free nations are peaceful nations. Free nations don't attack each other. Free nations don't develop weapons of mass destruction.”

As this statement demonstrates, theories of international relations have a significant impact on how leaders develop foreign policies. It is therefore of the greatest importance that *those who practice social science* develop valid, reliable theories and that *citizens and policy-makers* know how to intelligently analyze and apply those theories. In this class, you will develop skills to critique political analysis and to promote responsible use of scholarly research in real-life politics.

Why You Should Take This Class: Course Mission and Learning Goals

1. You will become a more efficient, empowered, and skeptical *consumer* of political information. You will learn to *analyze* and *critique*, distinguish between observation and explanation, separate causes and effects, unpack the mechanisms behind causal relationships, bound or contextualize theory, and assess the practical applicability of different arguments.
2. You will become a more thoughtful, careful, and creative *articulator* of political argumentation.
3. You will learn to create a research design concerning a political issue (domestic or international) of interest to you – to clearly define your concepts, develop coherent measurement schemes, address competing explanations, and interpret results.

After taking this course, you will be able to apply these skills to answer a range of important policy questions, for example: “Was Democratic Peace Theory a valid justification for the Bush administration’s decision to invade Iraq?” And, “Should the Obama administration continue to invest significant resources in promoting democracy in China as a means of improving American security?” You will be able to tackle these questions – and any others pertaining to political causal relationships – because you will have learned how to conduct reasoned, critical social scientific analysis!

Who Should Take This Class: Everyone!

This course is designed for anyone who is motivated to take it. There are no prerequisites; the only requirement is that you are interested in achieving at least some (if not all) of the learning goals listed above. No knowledge, familiarity, or comfort with scientific methods, math, science, or international politics is necessary. My job is to make this information accessible and interesting to all – I will work with you as a class and individually to make sure we are all getting as much out of the course as possible, regardless of differing academic backgrounds.

Of course, because the class is about consuming and producing social research it may be particularly appealing if you are considering a career in government, the non-for profit community, consulting, academia, law, business, or education. People in these professions are frequently charged with summarizing, analyzing, and conducting research. And this is certainly a useful course for anyone considering an advanced degree in social science disciplines. But again, this is a course designed for anyone interested in improving his or her powers of interpretation, analysis, and argumentation.

What You Will Do In This Class: Assessment & Learning Activities

The following assignments are designed to help you achieve the learning goals listed above and chart your progress during the semester. There may appear to be many assignments, but please don’t let that intimidate you. With more assignments come more opportunities to practice your new skills and improve your grade throughout the course. More information on each assignment will be given in class at the appropriate time during the semester and we will do lots of in-class activities to empower you to succeed at these assignments.

Diagramming Causal Statements (1 points each – 5 points total)

This assignment is intended to help students gain practice in sniffing-out the causal claims embedded in popular political discourse. Five times during the term I will ask you to analyze a brief newspaper article or a transcript from a television or radio show. I want you to: 1) underline any causal claims made in the piece, 2) circle any causes, 3) put squares around any outcomes, 4) make a causal diagram of at least two causal claims in the piece including any causal mechanisms (whether explicitly or implicitly) cited in article; 5) identify any underlying assumptions that are required to support those claims. I will demonstrate and we will practice effective causal diagramming techniques during class as a practice for this assignment. (These are pass/fail assignments.)

Practicing Efficient Annotation (1 point each – 5 points total)

Being able to move efficiently through a high volume of text is an important life-skill, and a critical component in conducting good research. You have to know what has been written on a given topic before you can design a viable research program. Therefore, I want students to hone their annotation skills in this class. Five times during the term students will submit an annotated document to make sure their annotation skills improve during the course. I will demonstrate and we will practice effective annotation and reading techniques during class as a practice for this assignment. (This is a pass/ fail assignment.)

Finding and Citing Sources (2.5 points each – 5 points total)

Being able to distinguish between helpful and reliable sources, on the one hand, and irrelevant or unreliable sources, on the other hand, is critical to assessing and conducting research. So is the ability to properly cite sources. In this assignment you will be given a question and be asked to collect 5 reliable sources on that topic. I will demonstrate and we will practice source collection during class before these assignments. (This is a pass/ fail assignment.)

Reading Rubrics (1 point each – 20 points total)

For each reading we do I would like you to fill out a Reading Rubric (which I will provide¹). This assignment is not designed to make sure you read every word of every article. On the contrary, it is designed to help you read effectively, read with purpose, and give you an incentive to do all your reading as efficiently as possible (as opposed to spending a lot of time with just one article and neglecting the others). By completing these rubrics before class we will also be able to have more productive, detailed conversations about the reading during class. Each class I will collect five student's rubrics, collecting a total of 20 from each student over the course of the term. (This is a pass/ fail assignment.)

Comparison of Two Articles (20 points)

To develop your powers of analysis and criticism I will provide you with two articles on the same topic, asking you to describe and compare the quality of argument and evidence in a five page written response. This assignment will be given mid-way through the term, and asks you to make the same kinds of assessment as the reading rubrics but in a comparative, more in-depth format.

In-Class Participation (20 points)

During the term there will be multiple and varied opportunities to develop your BS detection skills during class. We will discuss the content, merit, and weaknesses of assigned readings in both small groups and as an entire class, you will write reaction

¹ In short, the rubric asks to you briefly answer the following: 1) What is the central question or puzzle? 2) What is the causal statement or answer? 3) What evidence does the author use to support this argument? 4) How does this relate to other readings we have done? 5) What are the strengths and weaknesses of this argument versus the competing ones? 6) This class emphasizes the interaction of theory and practice – how does this pertain to theoretical debates and/or actual policy/decision-making?

papers to help you practice analyzing and critiquing social science literature, and we will create causal diagrams of theories to get practice in breaking-down political arguments and familiarize ourselves with these theories. All these forms of participation demonstrate your engagement with course themes and help you achieve the course's learning goals.

Mid-Term and End-of-Term Exams (first one is worth 20 points; end-of-year is worth 25 points – 40 points total)

To help you solidify and retain your understanding of course content and themes I will give you two short exams, one mid-way and one at the end of the term. These will test your knowledge of the reading, terms and concepts central to the course, and your ability to analyze and critique political arguments and theories. Students will generate most of the exam questions themselves, each week submitting three possible exam questions based on your readings or discussions: one fill-in-the-blank question, one multiple choice question, and one short essay question.

Create Your Own Research Design (40 points)

Imagine that your audience is a government agency where you are a research assistant, a consulting firm where you are an analyst, a law firm where you are a legal advisor, or a graduate program where you are an MA, PhD, JD, or MBA student. Creating and executing sound research is essential in all of those contexts – this assignment will give you step-by-step training in how to conduct rigorous research and analysis. At the beginning of the term you will pick a political outcome or phenomena you are interested in and, over the course of the semester, develop a research design to explain that outcome. You will not conduct the research itself, rather you will design a plan for conducting the research in a systematic, reasoned, and responsible way. Different portions of the assignment will be due sequentially over the course of the semester to allow for feedback, revision, and to give you the time to execute each component. The sequence will be as follows (more details on each component will be delivered in class):

- Step One: Define the Outcome. (Due week two)
- Step Two: Decide How to Measure the Outcome. (Due week four)
- Step Three: Identify Three Possible Causes of the Outcome. (Due week seven)
- Step Four: Decide How to Measure those Causes. (Due week nine)
- Step Five: Decide How to Assess Relationship between Causes and the Effect of Interest. (Due week eleven)
- Step Six: Decide What Implications You Would Draw from Different Findings. (Due week thirteen)
- Step Seven: Submit compiled research design to your assigned peer reviewers. Then submit the final design with their feedback and mine incorporated. (Due week fifteen)
- Step Eight: A day after the final research design is submitted you will also submit a reflective letter discussing what you learned from the assignment, what changed in your opinions or skills, what you would change about you design or do differently if you could start over, and how the assignment could be improved to better enhance your learning and enjoyment of the process. (Due week fifteen)

I will not assign a final grade until the end of the semester, but will comment on each component as submitted to provide you with plenty of feedback and guidance as you craft your design. It is important that you spread the work across the entire semester, so each

time a student fails to turn in a component on time their final grade will be reduced by 5 points. We will also conduct peer reviews at each step so you benefit not only from my feedback but from your peers' as well. In class we will read and discuss model research designs, identifying their strengths and weaknesses so that you can emulate the best practices in your own project.

Tips for Successful Performance in the Course:

Read Assignments – and This Syllabus – Carefully

Make sure you know what is expected of you and what the goals of a given assignment are well before it is due, and if you are at all confused seek clarification from me, or from your peers, as soon as possible. Save yourself the frustrating of spending hours completing an assignment that is different from the one I have given you!

Participate in Class Actively, Creatively, and Respectfully

Discussion is an essential part of the class. Showing up is important, but not nearly enough. You are expected to engage the readings thoughtfully and to participate actively. This course covers a substantial range of readings and concepts - discussion is your opportunity to clarify and critique these arguments and make sure you get the most out of the material. In addition to *participating* actively, I expect you to *listen* actively. I encourage heated debate, but let's keep it clean and be kind to one another! You show respect to your peers and to me by arriving on time and arriving prepared.

Help Me Help You. Help Me, Help You.

If something about the course doesn't work for you let me know so we can make sure to amend the course in ways that benefit you. Please tell me in advance if there are impediments to your learning and participation so that we can get in front of such problems. However, please don't email me at midnight before an assignment is due to ask for help. Think ahead about your schedule and feel free to come to me in advance so we can discuss strategies for successfully completing the different activities. I strive to reply to emails promptly (within one business day of receipt), turn back assignments promptly (within a week of the due date), and treat students fairly by applying standardized grading templates (which you will be given in advance of any assignment). I welcome feedback and enjoy speaking with students outside of class during office hours or by appointment!

Weekly Reading and Discussion Schedule

Week	Theme/ Question	Reading	In-Class Activities	Assignment
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What Happened to the Girls in Le Roy?” An introduction to the difficulty and intrigue in social scientific analysis. 	Susan Dominus, “What Happened to the Girls in Le Roy” New York Times, March 7, 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions/ ice-breakers. • Think-pair-share. • Group diagramming. 	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is social science? • What is theory? • What is causality? 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Design (RD): Step One

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicing Annotation (PA)
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is democratic peace theory? • What do we mean by democracy? 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Causal Diagramming (CD)
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What causes the democratic peace? 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RD: Step Two • PA
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some critiques and alternatives to democratic peace theory? 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CD • Finding Sources (FS)
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we know if we are right about the democratic peace? • How successful are experimental and statistical methods in testing the democratic peace hypothesis? 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PA
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How successful are formal model and qualitative methods in testing the democratic peace hypothesis? 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RD: Step Three • FS
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the differences between experimental, statistical, formal, and qualitative research designs? 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CD • PA
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the relative advantages and disadvantages of these different research designs? 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RD: Step Four
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does it matter for policy how we interpret and apply democratic peace theory? 		Mid-Term Exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of Two Articles
11	No reading/ discussion.		Review exam/ paper assignment results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RD: Step Five • PA
12				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CD
13				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RD: Step Six
14				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CD
15				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RD: Step Seven and Eight
16			Final Exam	