



Conflict Vulnerability Assessment

University of Denver

M.A. Program in Conflict Resolution

CRES 4870

Syllabus

Winter 2015

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Course Meets: Wednesdays, 6pm-8:50pm, January 7-February 5

Overview

Conflict Vulnerability Assessment is an intensive, short-term graduate course in the concepts and methodologies for exploring underlying structural causes of conflict, potential and actual pathways of escalation, and the efficacy of ameliorative institutions and processes. Assessing vulnerability to conflict – armed conflict, or war, and armed violence – has become a critical first step for the design and creation of early warning systems and for designing conflict prevention interventions. Models to conflict vulnerability assessment – particularly at the country level, but also at the level of sub-regions, provinces, or cities – have proliferated in recent years, as has the effort and capacity of the research community to monitor (mostly quantitative) indicators that reflect the depth or intensity of conflict vulnerability. This course evaluates the models and approaches various global public policy agencies, especially international development organizations, have developed to assess a country or community's vulnerability to violent social conflict such as high levels of interpersonal and community-level violence, and the escalation into riots, clashes, or armed conflict within the society or between state and non-state social forces.

The models and approaches to conflict vulnerability analysis are informed by social-science theories of the root causes of violence emanating from social-structural variables (such as identity), economic factors (such as inequality), patterned discrimination, material drivers, and of the role and capacity of governance institutions (formal and informal) to mitigate underlying root-cause drivers of conflict. Moreover, approaches to conflict vulnerability assessment must take into account pathways of conflict escalation, or of the conditions under which social tension can escalate into deadly violence and when conflict suppression or management capacities prevent such escalation. Conflict vulnerability assessment has become a mainstream element of policy making in a variety of settings, from city governments to national security agencies to international development organizations.

In a research-colloquium setting, the five-week course will explore:

- Theories and concepts that inform contemporary conflict vulnerability instruments;
- Methodological considerations in conflict vulnerability assessment;
- Critical analysis of leading conflict vulnerability instruments used in the field of international development (with broader application);
- Review of common approaches to undertaking comprehensive vulnerability assessment;
- How vulnerability assessment findings inform early warning system design; and,
- Guidelines to link research findings to preventive action strategies.

Participants in the course will select a setting of their choosing at the local/community, societal, or country level as their principal work in the course. Over the five-week period, participants will produce a summary vulnerability assessment and an issue brief that is a more deeply researched analysis of a particular conflict driver.

Course Design and Objectives

The course is designed to provide advanced graduate students in the University of Denver's MA Program in Conflict Resolution. The principal objective is to provide an introduction and overview to the burgeoning scholarly and policy-related research in conflict vulnerability assessment, particularly at the country or city level in international settings. However, students with primarily U.S. domestic experience and application in social work environments may also find the course's perspectives and content beneficial to domestic application in communities affected by or vulnerable to intergroup tensions and conflict. The course is also designed to improve participant capacities for professional report writing and for the presentation of research findings for policy-maker or practitioner audiences.

The principal objective of the course is to underscore the importance of theory-informed models to vulnerability assessment (and to critical analysis of extant models), to appreciate the variety of methods through which assessment occurs, and to formulate systematically the linkages between vulnerability analysis and application in practice through early-warning system design and through the design of programs and projects for conflict amelioration.

Pedagogically, the course is designed to facilitate understanding of vulnerability assessment by course participants and skill building on research and writing of detailed assessments. In consultation with the course instructor, each participant will choose a setting in which to conduct an assessment. The seminars will explore the theoretical and conceptual antecedents of vulnerability models, critically evaluate indicators and data needs, and serve as a forum for sharing approaches and lessons learned from other participants. Each course session features an introductory presentation on the theme, a practical exercise for application, and discussion on the relevance of that day's theme to student projects.

Products and Assessment of Student Performance

There are two student "deliverables" for the course.

1. **Summary Conflict Vulnerability Brief.** The first is a summary conflict vulnerability statement of 1,500 words that addresses each of the component elements of a comprehensive assessment. This product can be drawn from extant assessments and other country- or other-context specific reports.
2. **Assessment Brief of a Principal Driver.** The second product is an in-depth, evidenced-based, and well-researched report of 2500-3,000 words that explores the case in depth on a particular principal conflict driver (social/cultural, psychological, demographic, economic, political, regional, or other factor). This product should mirror what would be a principal sub-section of a comprehensive assessment, including some reference to conceptual orientations or theoretical perspectives that inform the assessment. It should represent extensive research effort that is quite focused in order to reach the depth of research that would typically be found in a professionally prepared assessment.

Terms of reference for the overall structure and format of the assessment report will be discussed at the first course period. Participants will also meet individually with the course instructor for scheduled consultations. Grades are assigned on the following weighting: 20%, seminar preparedness and participation; 30% Summary Brief; 50% Assessment Brief.

Course Readings and Materials

Readings provide essential background knowledge for our seminar discussions; all course participants are expected to read this material and be ready to discuss the concepts, findings, and applications of the material in the seminar. Each course session will feature a readings-related discussion in which the course participants will lead a critical review of the reading's principal arguments and findings and the implications of these readings for overall themes of the course session. *Most recommended or prioritized readings are denoted below with an asterisk.

For course content, students should consult the Canvas online module, located at canvas.du.edu (see CRES 4870). The module contains additional reading materials, a few external web-links to important sites on the Internet, and opportunities for online discussion. The module may be used occasionally for assessment, uploading of course products (papers, etc.) and for other purposes such as course announcements.

The optional or recommended background text for the course is Matthew Levinger, *Conflict Analysis: Understanding Causes, Unlocking Solutions* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2013). The book can be purchased online at: <http://bookstore.usip.org/books/BookDetail.aspx?productID=358273>.

Schedule and Associated Recommended Readings

Jan 7 Introduction to Conflict Vulnerability Assessment

*Sanam Anderlini. N., 2006, "Mainstreaming Gender in Conflict Analysis: Issues and Recommendations," Social Development Papers, no. 33, World Bank, Washington, DC.

Available at: http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2006/02/13/000090341_20060213143713/Rendered/PDF/351500Mainstreaming0gender0WP3301Public1.pdf

DFID. 2002. *Conducting Conflict Assessments: Guidance Notes*. London: DFID.

*Jonathan Goodhand. 2000. "Research in Conflict Zones: Ethics and Accountability." *Forced Migration Review* 8, available at <http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR08/fmr8full.pdf>.

*Jenna Slotin, Vanessa Wyeth, and Paul Romita. 2010. "Power, Politics, and Change: How International Actors Assess Local Context," International Peace Institute at <http://www.ipinst.org/publication/policy-papers/detail/294-power-politics-and-change-how-international-actors-assess-local-context.html>

*Lawrence Susskind and J. Thomas-Larmer, 2000. "Conducting a Conflict Assessment," in L. Susskind, S. McKernan and J. Thomas-Larmer, *The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement*, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, pp. 99-135.

Jan 14 Trends and Patterns in Armed Conflict

Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development. 2010. "More Violence, Less Development: Examining the Relationship between Armed Violence and MDG Achievement" Geneva Declaration Report September 2010. At: http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/MDG_Process/MoreViolenceLessDevelopment.pdf

*Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research. *Conflict Barometer 2010*. http://hiik.de/en/konfliktbarometer/pdf/ConflictBarometer_2009.pdf.

Themnér, Lotta & Peter Wallensteen, 2013. "Armed Conflict, 1946-2012." *Journal of Peace Research* 50(4): 509.

Evaluating Root Causes

*Cynthia J. Arnson and I. William Zartman. 2005. *Rethinking the Economics of War: The Intersection of Need, Creed, and Greed*. Washington: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press: pp. 1-23 and 256-284.

Scott A. Bollens. 2009. "Comparative Research on Urban Political Conflict: Policy amidst Polarization." *The Open Urban Studies Journal* 2, 1-17. (Also see www.conflictincities.org.)

Hålvard Buhaug, Nils Petter Gleditsch, & Ole Magnus Theisen. 2008. *Implications of Climate Change for Armed Conflict*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. Available online at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/>

James Fearon and David Laitin. 2000. "Review: Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," *International Organization* 54 (4): 845-877.

Håvard Hegre et.al. "Predicting Armed Conflict 2010-2050." *International Studies Quarterly*, (2012): 1-21.

Donald Horowitz. 2001. "The Calculus of Passion," in *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 522- 566.

Alexandre Marc, et al. 2013. *Social Dynamics and Fragility: Engaging Societies in Responding to Fragile Situations*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

Arne Öhman. 2005. "Conditioned Fear of a Face: A Prelude to Ethnic Enmity?" *Science* 39 (5735) (29 July 2005): 711-713.

Donald Rothchild and Alexander L. Groth. 1995. "Pathological Dimensions of Domestic and International Ethnicity," *Political Science Quarterly* 110 (1): 69-82.

Frances Stewart and Graham Brown et al. 2009. "Fragile States." CRISE Working Paper No. 51. Oxford: Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, CRISE. Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford.

Charles Tilly. 2002. "Violence, Terror, and Politics as Usual." *Boston Review* (Summer): 21-4.

*United Nations Environment Program. 2004. *Understanding Environment, Conflict and Cooperation*. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/unep.pdf>

*World Bank. 2011. "Vulnerability to Violence" in the World Development Report 2011, pp. 73-93.

Case Study: South Africa

Jan 21 **Models and Methodologies**

Roundtable on Data Sources and Conflict-Related Research in the Digital Age

Readings for Models

Country Indicators for Foreign Policy/Carleton University. 2001. "Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Risk Assessment Template," available at: <http://www.carleton.ca/cifp/docs/studra1101.pdf>.

*SIDA (Sweden International Development Agency). 2006. *Manual for Conflict Analysis*. Available through the GSDRC Exchange Resource Site on "Conflict Analysis," at <http://www.gsdr.org/go/conflict/chapter-1-understanding-violent-conflict/conflict-analysis-framework-and-tools>.

World Bank *Conflict Analysis Framework*. Available at:
<http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/67ByDocName/ConflictAnalysis>

*USAID Conflict Vulnerability Assessment Framework. Available at:
http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/conflict/publications/docs/CMM_ConflAssessFrmwrk_May_05.pdf)

*UNDP Oslo Governance Center and German Center for International Development. 2009.
User's Guide on Measuring Fragility
[http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs09/Fragility_Users_Guide_\(web\).pdf](http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs09/Fragility_Users_Guide_(web).pdf)

*Barry Hughes, Jonathan Moyer, and Timothy Sisk. 2011. *Vulnerability to Intrastate Conflict: Evaluating Quantitative Measures*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace
Peaceworks No. 72. At:
http://www.usip.org/files/resources/Vulnerability_to_Intrastate_Conflict.pdf

UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, "Conflict Related Development Analysis," October 2003.

Case Study: The Terai Region of Nepal

Jan 28 **Linking Assessment to Program and Projects Design for Conflict Prevention**

Alexander George and Jane E. Holl. 1997. *The Warning-Response Problem and Missed Opportunities in Preventive Diplomacy*. Available at
<http://carnegie.org/fileadmin/Media/Publications/PDF/The%20Warning-Response%20Problem%20and%20Missed%20Opportunities%20in%20Preventive%20Diplomacy.pdf>.

United Nations, Office of the Secretary General. 2011. Report of the Secretary General, *Preventive Diplomacy, Delivering Results*. 26 August 2011, S/2011/552.

*Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict. 2006. *Early Warning and Early Response: Conceptual and Empirical Dilemmas*. Available at:
<http://www.peaceportal.org/documents/127900679/127917167/Issue+paper+1-+Early+Warning+and+Early+Response.pdf>

Catherine Barnes, 2006. Agents for Change: Civil Society Roles in Preventing War and Building Peace, Issue Paper No. 2, available at:
<http://www.gppac.net/documents/130221585/0/Agents+for+Change.pdf>.

*Odendaal, Andries. 2010. An Architecture for Building Peace at the Local Level: A Comparative Study of Peace Committees, Discussion Paper, available at:
http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/crisis%20prevention/UNDP_Local%20Peace%20Committees_2011.pdf.

Feb 4 **Capstone Seminar: Presentation of Student Research** **Exercise: Predictions: Mostly Likely Scenarios**