Writing Assignment 1

This assignment requires you to develop a causal model to explain a phenomenon relevant to politics, incorporating at least one political variable (e.g. political institutions, public policy, ideology, etc.).

**Developing Your Causal Claim**

Your task is to develop a model that explains one (1) of the following phenomena:

## Option 1: WAR

War is costly. According to Professor of Political Science Neta C. Crawford, the United States has already spent or appropriated approximately $4.2 trillion on military involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria—about 22% of the nation’s 2016 GDP.[[1]](#footnote-1) Of course, monetary expenditures do not capture the additional cost in terms of human life and suffering. In August 2016, Crawford estimated that the ongoing in conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan have resulted in 173,000 civilian and military deaths and 183,000 serious injuries.[[2]](#footnote-2)

These are nowhere near the most costly military conflicts in which the U.S. has engaged, and there are additional social, political, and economic costs associated with war that you might imagine. Since war is so costly, scholars of international relations have puzzled over why there is so much militarized conflict in the world. What could explain the frequent occurrence of such a devastating and costly phenomenon?

## Option 2: CRIME

Securing public safety is one of the primary purposes of the modern state. One way to measure performance in relation to this function is to keep track of crime rates. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the violent crime rate in 1996 was 636.6 per 100,000 people. By 2015, the rate was 372.6, a decrease of about 41%.[[3]](#footnote-3) According to the United Nations, the U.S. intentional homicide rate in 1995 was 8.11 per 100,000, and had decreased by nearly 40% to 4.9 by 2015. Meanwhile, the countries of Venezuela, Guayana, and Costa Rica saw upticks in crime rates over the same period, from 20.34 to 57.1, 14.97 to 19.4, and 5.3 to 11.8 per 100,000 people, respectively.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Even within U.S. states, crime rates can vary considerably; College Station has a violent crime rate of 2.21 per 100,000, while nearby Houston’s is 9.69.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Why do some countries, states, cities, or time periods exhibit higher crime rates than others? Some have suggested an economics story. Others have proposed a model focusing on trust. Still another idea is that laws or policies play the key role. What do you think?

**Option 3: POLARIZATION**

We looked at some evidence in class that polarization is increasing among members of the U.S. House of Representatives. The Pew Research Center has collected some evidence that the public in general is growing more ideologically polarized. In particular, Pew researchers have highlighted the growth of “deeply negative” views among partisans of their opponents since 1994. In 1994, 16% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning Independents, and 17% of Republicans and Republican-leaning Independents registered “very unfavorable” opinions of members of the opposite party. By 2014, the percentages were 38% and 43%, respectively.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Why are U.S. citizens and their congressional representatives apparently growing more ideologically polarized? There have always been conflicts of interest and vision in American politics. What would cause these divisions to grow more pronounced? What causes polarization?

Structuring Your Paper

Your essay should contain the following four (1) sections:

## Section 1: Introduction

Give an overview of your paper and explain why others should care about your ideas. Make sure to include a clear thesis statement that lays out your argument.

## Section 2: Speculation

Lay out your causal model. For example, explain the factors that cause war, and the process by which they do so.

Beware of caring too much about being right. I care mostly about you clearly explaining creative and imaginative ideas. This is the most important component of the paper (and will probably be the longest).

## Section 3: Argumentation

Marshal support for your model. Remember—we are still in the model-building phase. The point of this paperis *not* for you to try and demonstrate that empirical evidence proves your claim. Instead, work out the logic of your model more completely. Why does your model make more sense than obvious alternatives someone might suggest? What are the features that make it particularly compelling and give it a high degree of explanatory power?

## Section 4: Conclusion

Again, give your readers an overview of the paper and leave them with a takeaway—your key point.

Notes

* You must submit the initial submission (i.e., a polished draft, *not* a rough draft) through eCampus before class on Friday, February 28.
* I do not tolerate plagiarism. You can find the Honor System Rules [here](http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu/Rules-and-Procedures/Rules/Honor-System-Rules#Plagiarism). You should note that even seemingly minor violations can become a permanent addition to your transcript.
* You should reference sources as needed. However, I strongly recommend that you sketch out your basic ideas before looking at others’ ideas. I want this paper to be at least 80% about your own ideas and at most 20% about others’ ideas.
* The paper must contain at least 1,000 words. I welcome additional effort, but I encourage you to focus on fitting more content into 1,000 words rather than submitting a 2,000 word paper.
* You should make the paper look and sound professional, but I encourage you to be creative and playful with your prose. Remember, others will read your writing. Make it enjoyable.
* You should write the paper so that someone who has not had this class could read it. Perhaps imagine writing to your parents. Suppose this person is interested in politics—they’ll be excited to read your ideas—but not knowledgeable about statistics (e.g., they don’t know what a standard deviation is).

Formatting

* 12 point, Times New Roman Font, for the main body text.
* Double-space the main body of the text.
* Use section and subsection headings, with larger or different font as you see fit.
* 1 inch margins.
* Include your name, the title of your paper, and the word count on the first page of your paper.
* Beyond the points above, I simply want your paper to look professional and give you room to match the format to your aesthetic preferences. See the “Under Review” papers on the research section of my website to see how I typically format my papers.

References

For matters of style, I refer you to the APSA style manual [here](http://www.apsanet.org/Portals/54/APSA%20Files/publications/APSAStyleManual2006.pdf). For an example of how to format the paper (title, name, sections, references, etc.) see a paper of mine [here](https://github.com/joshuaalley/public-goods-test/blob/master/manuscript/test-pubgoods-allies.pdf) (you do not need to include an abstract in your paper).

1. Neta C. Crawford, “US Budgetary Costs of Wars through 2016: $4.79 Trillion and Counting Summary of Costs of the US Wars in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan and Homeland Security,” Watson Institute, Costs of War. Accessed 19 September 2017. Retrieved from <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2016/Costs%20of%20War%20through%202016%20FINAL%20final%20v2.pdf>; “Real Gross Domestic Product, Chained Dollars,” Bureau of Economic Analysis, National Data. Accessed 19 September 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?ReqID=9&step=1#reqid=9&step=3&isuri=1&903=6>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Crawford, “Update on the Human Costs of War for Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001 to mid-2016,” Watson Institute, Costs of War. Accessed 19 September 2017. Retrieved from <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2016/War%20in%20Afghanistan%20and%20Pakistan%20UPDATE_FINAL_corrected%20date.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Crime in the United States,” Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division. Accessed 18 September 2017. Retrieved from <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2015/crime-in-the-u.s.-2015/tables/table-1>. Violent crime includes “murder, rape (legacy definition), robbery, and aggravated assault.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “International homicides (per 100,000 people),” [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](http://www.unodc.org/). Aggregates compiled by The World Bank. Accessed 18 September 2017. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “College Station,” Neighborhood Scout. Accessed 19 September 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/tx/college-station/crime>; “Houston,” Neighborhood Scout. Accessed 19 September 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/tx/houston/crime>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Political Polarization in the American Public,” Pew Research Center. Accessed 19 September 2017. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/section-2-growing-partisan-antipathy/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)