Research Highlights
2016
Welcome to the Annual Research Highlights from the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford. It presents an overview of our research covering some of the many projects started, finished or underway during the last year.

As you will see from the following pages, our work spans the globe – from Belgium to Afghanistan and from Botswana to Iran. This ambition in geographical scope is matched by the range of methods of study; the projects showcased here demonstrate innovative approaches in both quantitative analysis and in new theoretical developments. Our approach is interdisciplinary, with roots in history, philosophy and the social sciences, and in all our work we emphasise the highest standards of scholarship.

We seek to produce research which has an impact both within academia, and in the wider world. We believe that rigorous academic analysis can help make sense of our rapidly changing world, and in so doing help to resolve some of the world’s most intractable political conflicts.

I am very proud that Oxford continues to lead the world in the study of Politics and International Relations, and I hope that you enjoy reading about our research. If you would like to know more about any of our projects, visit our website, www.politics.ox.ac.uk, or email enquiries@politics.ox.ac.uk
Determinants of Public Legitimacy: Survey Evidence from Afghanistan

Jasmine Bhatia
with Professor Nancy Bermeo and Dr Akitaka Matsuo (Centre for Experimental Social Sciences)

Funder: International Growth Centre
Additional support received from Nuffield College

For a state to succeed, its people must have trust in its institutions.

The development of legitimate state institutions at both national and subnational levels is critical, but often leaders of fragile states and international donors lack information about what the public want from those institutions.

This project hopes to shed light on the key components of public legitimacy by conducting fieldwork in Afghanistan, a state where the public institutions’ lack of legitimacy is undermining the ability of the state to govern effectively. The project uses a series of survey experiments to measure how incidences of corruption and insecurity impact on public trust in government institutions, both at local and central levels. The survey experiments will also measure citizens’ leadership preferences, and their willingness to exercise an ‘exit’ option, through migration.

By shedding light on public preferences, the research will contribute to an important debate about the effects of corruption and insecurity on public legitimacy, and will provide policy-makers with rigorous evidence. This will help support better leadership, develop strategies to address migration issues, and prioritise aid expenditure more effectively and efficiently.
Measuring Peace Consolidation
Professor Richard Caplan

Funders: British Academy; UK Department for International Development

Between 1945 and 2013, 105 countries suffered a civil war. Of these, more than half experienced a relapse into violent conflict after peace had supposedly been achieved. How do we recognise a stable peace in countries emerging from violent conflict? And how can those tasked with building peace and ending war measure their progress?

This project looks at the ways in which peacebuilding organisations (such as the United Nations, NATO, the World Bank, and others) understand the elements of a stable peace and what it requires. What are the factors that contribute to post-conflict peace stabilisation?

The project will also examine how peacebuilding organisations have assessed their progress. How do the organisations differ, and what do their conclusions and assessments mean for how we measure peace?

If those involved in post-conflict recovery are to make informed judgements and plan effectively, they need to understand what sort of peace they are working towards. This project aims to increase awareness of the importance of ‘strategic assessment’ and good practice within peacebuilding organisations, and inform discussion and debate about how we can best measure peace consolidation.

“How do we recognise a stable peace in countries emerging from violent conflict?”
Nationalism, Democracy and Statebuilding in Russia and Ukraine

Dr Paul Chaisty and Professor Stephen Whitefield

Funder: The John Fell OUP Research Fund

The current political crisis involving Russia, Ukraine and the West is rooted in complex historical understandings of state, national and regional identities. How do these identities mobilise political support and how are they changing?

Previous research suggests that the nature and strength of the political regimes in Russia and Ukraine will depend a great deal on the ways in which citizens and elites imagine their future – and how they attempt to bring that future into being.

By conducting surveys in Russia and Ukraine, using representative samples of the populations of both countries, this project seeks to unpick the elements which make up the national identity of Russians and Ukrainians, with particular emphasis given to Ukraine’s varied and contested regions, such as Eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

Professor Whitefield and Dr Chaisty have published on ‘Putin’s nationalism problem’, and working papers on ‘Dimensions of Nationalism in Putin’s Russia and their Political Correlates’ and ‘Citizens’ Attitudes towards Institutional Change in Contexts of Political Turbulence: Support for Regional Decentralisation in Ukraine’ are forthcoming.

This research considers the ways national identity translates into support or opposition to democratic or authoritarian forms of government. It addresses questions of how national identity might influence attitudes towards European integration, and how preferences and identities are changing.

“Previous research suggests that the nature and strength of the political regimes in Russia and Ukraine will depend a great deal on the ways in which citizens and elites imagine their future.”
The Political Economy of Democracy Promotion Project
Dr Nicholas Cheeseman and Dr Susan Dodsworth

Funder: Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Are efforts to promote democracy working? How can we improve the prospects for democracy across the world?

Since the Cold War, there have been many attempts to promote democracy across the world, whether in new democracies or countries that have returned to democracy after a period of authoritarian rule.

However, we still have a relatively limited understanding of what does and does not work in democracy promotion. Furthermore, the last few years have not been good for democracy. According to US think-tank Freedom House, 2015 was the 10th year in a row that an overall drop in global freedom has been recorded. It is essential that we develop our knowledge of where (and when) democracy promotion works best, and how it can be made more effective. Democracy promotion has been controversial, and some have questioned whether it works at all. Many of the organisations that work to promote democracy have been wary of being too transparent, lest it undermine their ability to do their work. The potential evidence is there, but until now, researchers have not been able to access it.

The Political Economy of Democracy Promotion Project aims to change this, bringing together academics, policy makers and practitioners working on democracy promotion. The project is the first to be able to examine the evidence base generated by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, and will take an innovative approach, embedding fieldwork within democracy promotion programmes in several countries, including Pakistan and Ukraine. This will allow researchers to examine how democracy promotion looks on the ground, and will allow the project to focus on those the programmes are intended to benefit.

The results of the project will be shared with policy makers and practitioners, both through policy papers and through face-to-face meetings and workshops. By fostering dialogue and opening new channels of communication between democracy promoters and researchers, the project seeks to improve the work of democracy promotion across the globe.

“By fostering dialogue and opening new channels of communication between democracy promoters and researchers, the project seeks to improve the work of democracy promotion across the globe.”
In Greece, national assets are up for sale. Everything from Athens’ water infrastructure, to the Olympic stadium, or the country’s main ports at Piraeus and Thessaloniki. As part of the bailout deal struck in July 2015, the proceeds of these sales must go into an independent fund to repay Greece’s international creditors.

For many Greeks, this feels like selling off the family silver, only to hand the proceeds back to those demanding its sale. The programme was controversial, and only went ahead after major concessions, including that the privatisation fund be run from Athens and that part of its proceeds must be spent locally in Greece. Ultimately, the demand for local control and benefit was a plea for ownership.

Greece offers a more extreme but not isolated example, as the past decade has witnessed the resurgence of the ‘owner state’. Government economic intervention and national bailouts have signalled a new era of public indebtedness, whilst in other states oil revenues or trade surpluses have seen governments storing impressive levels of wealth in new Sovereign Wealth Funds.

Who is liable for state debts, and who benefits from state dividends? These are tough choices for governments, and raise pressing questions of political theory. Who is the rightful owner of state property: citizen, tax-payer or government? Can the state be an “owner” in its own right, or is it always merely a steward of others’ property?

By re-evaluating the classic theories of the state, and developing a new framework for the relationship between states and citizens, this project offers a practical framework which can guide the distribution of the benefits and burdens of the modern state’s public property. Based on extensive interviews with treasury officials across the globe – from key figures in Greece’s Syriza government, to off the record discussions with the managers of the UAE’s vast holdings, the value of which has never been disclosed, this research will provide practical solutions to difficult theoretical problems.

Dr Cummine’s research is published in her recent book, Citizens’ Wealth: Why (and How) Sovereign Funds Should be Managed by the People for the People, Yale University Press, 2016.
What is the relationship between parents’ political beliefs and their children’s attitudes? How do we develop our political attitudes, and how are our moral beliefs about the world formed?

These questions are central to our understanding of politics, but we still do not understand the development of the cognitive processes which shape our political attitudes and allegiances.

This project takes methods and theory from experimental psychology and behavioural economics to shed light on a question which is central to our understanding of politics.

Using specially created cartoons, which show two characters (“Timmy the Turtle” and “Billy the Bird”), interacting in various ways, the project sets out to measure (using an Implicit Attitude Test (IAT) as well as economic games), how children aged from four to fourteen perceive others’ sharing. Children’s perceptions of sharing are then compared with their parents’ political beliefs, as measured by both a questionnaire and behavioural economic games.

The use of these experimental methods will allow the project to begin to examine how children develop politically, and how this affects their attitudes towards resource distribution, equality and sharing. This is the first time such a study has even been undertaken, and the results have the potential to challenge our understanding of political development.

“Ideology, Voting and Implicit Cognition
Dr David Doyle
with Professor Catherine De Vries, Professor Kim Plunkett (Department of Experimental Psychology) and Janette Chow (Department of Experimental Psychology)

Funder: John Fell Fund

“What is the relationship between parents’ political beliefs and their children’s attitudes?”
The Politics Violence Frontier
Dr Elizabeth Frazer
with Professor Kimberly Hutchings (Queen Mary University of London)

Funder: John Fell OUP Research Fund

What kinds of justifications do we have for deciding whether to act violently or non-violently?

Where do we draw the line between political action and violent action?

How do activists justify various forms of action? And does acting politically need a different kind of justification than acting violently?

In the pursuit of social order, governments and states seek to justify, and to control, the use of force. Meanwhile, claims for justice, rights, or social change frequently lead to conflict with forces of ‘order’, and violent confrontation often results. The frontier between politics and violence is one of the most pressing political problems of our time, both within states and internationally.

Many people draw a line between politics and violence – we talk of a group laying down their arms, and entering into a political process. But it is not that simple. For some people, armed struggle is part of the political process, and justifiable for political ends. There is also a grey area when non-violent action can be considered as violent – where it is used in a way which is somehow aggressive, or when it provokes violence in others.

This project is conducting fieldwork to ask current political activists about their understandings of the politics-violence frontier. What kinds of actions may we engage in, and what kinds of justifications do we have for deciding to act violently or non-violently. Initial fieldwork has taken place in Italy. The project is now conducting initial analysis, and aims to design a larger comparative study of the politics-violence frontier across a range of cases of political activism in Northern and Southern Europe.
Drugs and Revolution: Ideology, Policymaking and the Margins of Civil Society in Iran

Maziyar Ghiabi
Supervised by Dr Philip Robins

Funder: Wellcome Trust Society & Ethics

The relationship between drugs and politics is an unusual one. No other material product has been the object of such systematic control by states, and this has occurred with exceptional conformity across the globe.

Iran represents an outstanding case study of the War on Drugs. It is at the crossroads of international drug routes, it has one of the world’s highest rates of drug ‘addiction’ (estimated at between 2-3% and 6-7% of the entire population), and it is now progressively becoming a producer country for synthetic, industrial drugs, such as methamphetamines (known as crystal meth or shisheh, ‘glass’). The Iranian state draws its legitimacy from religious morality and social puritanism, and so the issue of drugs presents a substantial challenge. How has the state responded?

This research reveals that drug addiction has produced a crisis in Iran, with surprising effects. While the issue of drug trafficking has been dealt with using security-oriented and militaristic methods, the Islamic Republic has, since the early 2000s, implemented programmes of support for drug users, providing everything from clean syringes, injecting paraphernalia, condoms and substitution drugs (such as methadone). This has institutionalised ‘harm reduction’ in the laws of the state, and has also made these services available to categories of people, such as prisoners, sex workers and vagrants, who have been otherwise regarded as immoral, deviant and ‘counter-revolutionary’. Perhaps most surprisingly, most of this progressive programme expanded markedly during the mandate of Iran’s ‘neo-con’ president Mahmud Ahmadinejad.

This research is based on extensive fieldwork carried out in Iran between 2012 and 2015, which also allowed engagement with several national and international drug policy agencies. In addition to examining press coverage of the issue dating from 1979-2014, Maziyar Ghiabi has conducted extensive interviews with current and former drug users, and has visited methadone clinics, drug-using and homeless shelters, as well as licensed and unlicensed treatment camps. The project has also involved interviews with former and current government officials, representatives from the UN and NGOs, and medical experts.

“This research reveals that drug addiction has produced a crisis in Iran, with surprising effects.”
As the world’s second and third largest economies, and neighboring naval powers with expanding military capabilities, the relationship between Japan and the People’s Republic of China is arguably one of the most significant in the international realm.

Cooperation between the two countries could deliver strong mutual benefits in security, economic development and environmental protection. And yet, the relationship between Japan and China has been prone to repeated episodes of mistrust, tension and mutual recrimination. Why?

Within the discipline of International Relations, three factors are commonly used to explain the instability of relations between Japan and China: security issues, economic ties, and emotion. But while much scholarly attention has been given to the conventional security and economic dynamics at work in the relationship, emotion has generally been treated as a dark matter, both ubiquitous and intangible.

What does it mean to say the relationship is shaped by emotions? The adjective ‘emotional’ can and has been used to describe everything from nationalist outbursts, sentiment reflected in polls, and even the personal attitudes of policymakers on both sides. Although pundits and commentators often cite the influence of emotion, we still lack a clear understanding of what role emotion actually plays in the relationship between these two powers.

The goal of this project is to explore the ways emotion can operate within international relations and to provide a new vantage point for understanding the dynamics of Sino-Japanese relations. Conducting research in both Tokyo and Beijing, this project will reconstruct and assess events and incidents from the last 15 years that exemplify the nature of the tensions between the countries. It will draw on Japanese and Chinese source materials to explore the analytical value of explanations that include emotion. In doing so, it will aim to replace folk theories and implicit assumptions about emotion with a theoretically rigorous and empirically grounded account.

A better understanding of the emotional dynamics can help to inform efforts to short-circuit cycles of mutually damaging escalation in Sino-Japanese relations and thus contribute to defusing disputes which threaten the stability not just of relations between China and Japan, but also East Asia and the wider world.
Electoral Competition and the Distribution of Development: Evidence from Botswana

Professor Robin Harding
with Mary Clare Roche (PhD candidate, University of Rochester)

In the 1990s, a wave of protest and a democratic global climate led to the fall of autocratic regimes and a series of elections across the African continent. More or less competitive elections were held in dozens of African countries. Much has been written on the subsequent prospects for democracy, but scholars still know little about the effects of this transformation in governance on the distribution of development resources. Do African governments use public resources to help win votes? And if so, how?

Up until now, it has been difficult for those studying the distribution of development resources in Africa to know which changes were a response to the introduction of democracy. The transition to democracy in the 1990s came at the same time as increased pressure from donors to target development resources in particular ways, and it is difficult to separate the two causes of changing patterns of distribution.

Whilst undertaking fieldwork in Gaborone, Botswana’s capital, Professor Harding came across historical village census records in the library of the University of Botswana, data which could provide the key to separating electoral pressure from donor demands, allowing us to understand the allocation of development resources.

By using this rare historical data from Botswana – a country where, unusually for Africa, elections have been held consistently since independence in the late 1960s – the project team will be able to separate the impact of electoral competition from the changed donor pressures of the 1990s. The project will code and digitise census and electoral data from 1970 up to the 1990s, and geo-reference this to maps of historical electoral districts. This will allow a comparison between information on the distribution of development resources and the results of local elections throughout the period.

The resulting conclusions will increase our understanding of the impact of electoral competition on the all-too-scarce resources necessary for development. This detailed knowledge is essential for the design of political institutions which allow for inclusive and sustainable development.

“Up until now, it has been difficult for those studying the distribution of development resources in Africa to know which changes were a response to the introduction of democracy.”
Putting Frontier Research into Action: Co-designing Security Policies to Tackle Violent Non-state Groups in Peripheral Spaces

Dr Annette Idler
External Partners: United Nations (UN System Staff College and UN Colombia)

Funder: Higher Education Innovation Fund

Conflicts involving militias, paramilitaries, rebels, cartels, or terrorist organisations (collectively referred to as violent non-state groups) are the most lethal form of violence in the world today. The fierce urgency of current crises demonstrates the need to learn lessons from those conflicts which have been peacefully resolved.

In Colombia, peace negotiations between Colombia’s government and the rebel group FARC hold out the promise of an end to more than five decades of violent conflict, which has left 220,000 dead and produced a refugee crisis second in scale only to that of Syria. Colombia’s borderlands are the regions that have been most affected by the conflict, but are also fertile grounds for myriad cartels and gangs involved in multiple forms of transnational organised crime. These border areas require a tailor-made post-conflict strategy for the best hope of a successful resolution.

This project aims to inform such a strategy, and through fieldwork and interviews across Colombia’s most troubled regions, the research has provided a better understanding of how local people are affected by the conflict, and their visions of a sustainable peace. By creating a bridge between marginalised groups and decision makers, Dr Idler’s research plays a vital role in ensuring that peacebuilding policies reflect on-the-ground realities.

Working in partnership with the United Nations, the project will provide training and materials to equip both UN staff and governments. Dr Idler has co-designed a training module for UN staff, has facilitated UN training in Jordan and has published a policy briefing, circulated to staff from humanitarian agencies, international governments, and the UN. These initiatives will help the UN to learn from previous conflicts and to tackle violent non-state groups in a variety of marginalised regions. The project therefore aims to enhance the security of the thousands of people still living in Colombia’s borderlands, and take lessons learnt to other war-torn regions such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

“The fierce urgency of current crises demonstrates the need to learn lessons from those conflicts which have been peacefully resolved.”

www.politics.ox.ac.uk
The Cyber Studies Programme
Director: Dr Lucas Kello
Funder: The European Social Fund and the Estonian Government

“New technologies have profound implications for our political and social structures.”

New technologies have profound implications for our political and social structures. The cyber revolution in particular is transforming the world we live in, and affects not just our personal lives, but also the dealings of states. Innovations in the use of information technology, for example, have drastically reduced the distance between the state and citizen and have enabled new modes of political organisation. Digital media have created multiple channels of interaction within and between nations. Some of these changes contribute to the cohesion of states and the stability of the ‘states’ system; others disturb familiar political and social orders.

There is a pressing need for greater understanding of how cyberspace effects the affairs of states and their peoples. We have yet to decipher the meaning of this transforming technology for the political, social and economic world. What are the political and societal implications of the cyber revolution, and how should we respond?

Launched in 2014, the Cyber Studies Programme’s research covers a number of topics arising from the cyber revolution, including the threats posed by cyber-attacks, the development of online voting, and the privacy and security implications of digital identification systems. In partnership with one of the world’s most advanced digital societies, Estonia, the research also focuses on the country’s pioneering initiatives, such as “e-residency”, an initiative which challenges traditional notions of residency, citizenship and territoriality.

The Programme combines its research agenda with a teaching programme which seeks to provide students in non-technical fields with the analytical and practical skills necessary to understand and respond to the threats and opportunities of the current cyber age. So far, the Programme has trained more than 800 university students and practitioners at its international training sessions. By December 2018, that number will grow to over 1,600.

By expanding and deepening our understanding of the cyber revolution, the Programme will create a new body of knowledge with potentially profound implications for the study of politics and related disciplines, as well as for the practice of government and diplomacy.
The European Union is facing fundamental challenges, many of which are driven by issues of identity and different perspectives on European history. But what is European history? This project seeks to understand which elements of the past are interpreted as being part of a European history, and how. Who drives a Europeanisation of history and what implications does this have for a sense of collective identity?

European Memory refers to the ideas that people hold about what Europe represents. Rather than assuming that “Europe” has a fixed meaning and fixed boundaries, this research looks more closely at what “Europe” means when the term is used in public debate. What forms of shared European history and identity exist in public discourse, and what experiences and expectations are woven into this? From Antiquity to the Renaissance, to the Holocaust and Soviet totalitarianism, how does the memory of these “mnemonic signifiers” impact on the decisions taken today, and how have historical experiences shared between European countries shaped their politics?

Collective memory changes constantly, and this project analyses the process by which evolving and differing interpretations of events and history interact, compete and coexist. The project therefore studies how the many ways people understand European history has changed after decisive moments – EU enlargement in 2004, terror attacks in London and Madrid, the financial crisis of 2008, the migration crisis of 2013/14, or ‘Brexit’. How does the way that European Memory is invoked vary between Europe’s “core” and “periphery”? Who has the power to define and use European Memory to achieve their political goals? Focusing on the past decade, and systematically studying press output from across six European countries (UK, France, Poland, Spain, Italy and Germany), this project uses advanced methods of qualitative content analysis and quantitative discourse analysis to understand patterns of European memory, the way the discourse is expressed and by whom, and how it has changed over time.
Democratic Legitimacy and Political Identity in Belgium, Switzerland and the European Union
Dr Joseph Lacey

“Divided societies may require more rather than less democracy to be sustainable.”

Do divided societies actually benefit from being more democratic? Since the 19th century, the dominant view in political theory has been that political systems made up of multiple public spheres, each with different social and political identities are likely to struggle for legitimacy. This, it is argued, leads to poor quality political institutions and ultimately the break-up of the political system through devolution or secession. This tendency is expected to be compounded when the population speak different languages.

The European Union demonstrates nearly all of these features. The traditional view would seem to be that it is doomed to failure. The UK’s ‘Brexit’ referendum appears to bear this out, as claims of undemocratic rule and missing political legitimacy motivated calls to ‘take back control’. The referendum has led to further demands for similar votes across Europe. How can the EU reform to meet these challenges?

There are some multilingual political systems which have managed to survive, and the ways in which these states have managed to hold themselves together offer lessons for the European Union. By taking the examples of the Belgian and Swiss systems, this project challenges the assumption that multilingual democracies are weak, and examines the reasons behind the unexpected endurance of some multilingual political systems. In advocating the unorthodox view that divided societies may require more rather than less democracy to be sustainable, this project will draw important lessons for the European Union as it faces the necessity of reform.
The Ideological Dynamics of Mass Killing
Dr Jonathan Leader Maynard

“If we wish to counter dangerous ideologies and political extremism, then a better understanding of how such ideas take root is essential.”

“Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities” – Voltaire

The mass killing of civilians, both in and outside armed conflict, is one of the greatest challenges facing human civilisation. Around twice as many civilians as soldiers were killed by deliberate political violence in the 20th century, and recent events in Darfur, Syria and Iraq, as well as the rise in terrorism since 2001, highlight the endurance of mass killing into the 21st century. How can political ideas drive such violent actions?

This project examines the role of ideology in mass violence against civilians, and attempts to understand the ways in which ideology drives violence. A wide range of scholars, governments, international organisations and public commentators agree that ideology matters, but its precise role in violence is poorly understood.

Through empirical study, this project will clarify how we should understand, evaluate and theorise ideology in research on political violence. Drawing on six case studies, examining the role of ideology in mass killing by Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union under Stalin, the Allied powers in their aerial bombardment of Germany and Japan, the terrorist campaigns of Daesh and Al Qaeda, the Rwandan Genocide and the Guatemalan Civil War, the project will develop theoretical and empirical understanding of the role ideology plays in mass killing.

The findings of this project will further our understanding of how ideology can make mass killing more likely, and the role it plays in legitimating and encouraging violence. If we wish to counter dangerous ideologies and political extremism, then a better understanding of how such ideas take root is essential.
On 2 September 2015, newspapers across Europe published images of the body of three-year old Aylan Kurdi, who drowned as his family tried to reach Europe. Did these images affect the media’s coverage of the refugee crisis? If so, what differences were there between European countries, and how was coverage influenced by the political leaning of newspapers?

The research project ‘How Europe’s Media Covered the Migration Crisis’ was a collaboration between EJO partner organisations on a study of how the media covered the migrant crisis. The project found that media sympathy for refugees, even after the devastating photos of the drowned boy on the beach, was largely superficial and fleeting. At the same time, the study found large variations from country to country, both in their coverage of Aylan Kurdi, and in their coverage of other major developments in the migrant crisis at the time. The study was widely quoted across media from the Washington Post, the Guardian, National Public Radio New York, the BBC, and elsewhere across Europe, and itself has added to the debate about the media and the migrant crisis.

The project has now concluded, but has provided the basis for further collaborations including a study looking at European media coverage of Brexit (ongoing). The European Journalism Observatory is a unique online network, which interprets and shares research into the media through 12 partner websites around Europe.
Socialism and Utopia
Dr David Leopold

Is there a place for utopian ideas in political theory? The appropriate relation between political theory and utopian ideas has become a much discussed topic for those studying political thought.

This project is concerned with a historical aspect of that topic and is focused on the hostility towards ‘utopian’ forms of socialism that can be found in the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. This project suggests that the character and foundation of that Marxian hostility has often been misunderstood, and demonstrates that Marxian hostility is both more muted, and more clearly defended, than is typically appreciated.

Marx and Engels are not only enthusiastic about the critical dimensions of utopian socialism, but also offer a contextual, historically sensitive, defence of its founding generation (writers and activists like Charles Fourier and Robert Owen). They do, nonetheless, criticise utopian socialists’ attempts to imagine a perfect society as undemocratic, unnecessary and impossible.

Although their criticisms are ultimately unsuccessful, their underlying reasoning reveals much about the nature of Marxian thought. The aim of this project is to deliver a better understanding of the historically influential views of Marx and Engels, an effective critique of certain aspects of those views, and a moderate defence of non-Marxian socialisms against some of their criticisms. Is there still a place for utopian thinking in politics?

“Is there still a place for utopian thinking in politics?”
The Digital News Report
Dr David Levy and Dr Rasmus Kleis Nielsen
with Nic Newman and Dr Richard Fletcher

Funders: The Digital News Report is supported by 12 different sponsors across foundations, news organisations, media regulators and universities, including a large grant from Google’s Digital News Initiative

‘The News’ has historically been the most important source of information about politics and public affairs. However, the ways in which people get their news are changing. The rise of digital media has had profound effects on the ways in which people understand the world, as well as posing great challenges for the industry built around providing news.

The Digital News Report started with five countries in 2012 and has since grown to cover 26 countries in 2016. It presents unique data which map trends in the production and consumption of digital news, and the differences between these trends internationally. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report is published annually, and has a dedicated website, digitalnewsreport.org, which makes the report, additional analysis and underlying data available to all. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report has become a central reference point for evidence-based discussions of news and media developments across the countries covered, and is frequently the basis for professional, industry, policymaker and academic discussions. The data is also used by the Reuters Institute and others to provide in depth academic analysis.

What are the implications of our changing news habits for the news industry for politics and for society?

“The Reuters Institute Digital News Report has become a central reference point for evidence-based discussions of news and media developments.”
How to Allocate Resources for Policing

Professor Iain McLean
with Anika Ludwig (Research Officer, Nuffield College) and Mike Norton (PhD candidate)

Funder: Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)

“The 43 Policing areas in England and Wales together spend over £11 billion a year. How do they decide to spend it? This project looks at the resource allocation processes of the UK’s territorial police forces. Does the presence of a Police and Crime Commissioner make a difference to the ways police funds are spent? Is good practice in resource allocation effectively shared across the profession?

The ways budget decisions are made may reflect regional priorities, differences in size, shape and organisational structure of police forces, or the presence or lack of systematic financial decision-making. Little is known about the processes by which resources are allocated within the police and generalised public expenditure procedures are not specific enough to allow us to understand financial decision-making within police forces.

This research project includes interviews with Police and Crime Commissioners, Chief Finance Officers and other senior stakeholders. Frank and detailed discussions allow examination of the basis for financial decision-making and the ways resource allocation does or does not reflect policing priorities. Whilst the media often talk about “bobbies on the beat” as a priority, professionals within police forces almost never do.

The findings from this research will help public finance and accountancy bodies such as CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) provide guidance for resource allocation. The journal articles, policy papers and events arising from this research will support the sharing of good practice across the profession and in government. The research will also inform the public spending review in 2017.

“Little is known about the processes by which resources are allocated within the police.”
What are the underlying values which should guide policy on immigration? In all areas of policy, open debate of the values which inform decision-making is an essential part of the democratic process. Since immigration has implications for many other areas of public provision and economic policy, such public scrutiny is even more important. Yet, the topic of immigration remains fraught and the unprecedented refugee crisis playing out in Europe has heightened the already acute political challenges bound up with public debates.

Professor Miller’s writing and research in political philosophy has worked to set a framework for thinking about how immigration can work under democratic control. He has sought to define principles and apply criteria that will stand public scrutiny and provide a robust defence for difficult decisions. How can we balance competing demands of refugees with the needs of existing citizens, and how can we provide principles and concepts which will allow governments to set priorities and policy?

Miller’s conceptual clarification highlights a distinction between ‘refugees’ and ‘economic migrants’; between individual human rights and the requirements for democratic controls; and between individual freedom of movement within countries and between countries. He sets out the moral obligations states have to protect refugees, to address the factors that force people to flee and to accept ‘burden sharing’ between countries in managing admission of refugees. He considers the serious challenges to ‘freedom of movement’, a fundamental principle of earlier visions of the European Union in the context of the current refugee crisis.

Since 1948, the majority of the Palestinian people live as refugees. It is not only the people who are scattered across the world; with them are the memories, records and knowledge essential to understanding this contemporary history of Palestine, its people and its politics.

Focusing on the three decade long revolutionary period of the 1950s, 60s and 70s, and sponsored by the British Academy, this project has gathered original sources to create a university-level online curriculum through which to teach or learn about the Palestinian Revolution through the eyes of the participants.

The materials available through the project’s website are in both Arabic and English, extending the reach and value of this scholarly work. Archival sources collected for the project include memoirs, communiqués, pamphlets, literary works, photos, posters, and film, along with radio clips and songs. The website also hosts a substantial new oral history collection: nearly 100 video interviews were conducted with those who took part in the experience. Refocusing attention away from political elites and toward the pivotal role played by popular organising and mid and lower level cadres, this project will help make this little-known history more widely available.

"The project aims to capture a sense of the debates, ideas and culture of a period which has, until now, lacked scholarly attention."
Digital Intermediaries, News Media, and Political Communication
Dr Rasmus Kleis Nielsen
Funder: Tietgen Foundation

How do we access news? Social media and search engines are increasingly acting as ‘intermediaries’ – curating and filtering the news that people read. What are the implications of this change for political communication? How will this change how journalists and political campaigns operate?

This project uses interviews with stakeholders across digital intermediaries and news media organisations as well as secondary sources. The research examines how developments in news and political media are unfolding across four countries—France, Germany, the UK, and the US, and will help us understand the wider social and political implications. In the face of this rapid change it is only now that ‘digital intermediaries’ are coming to terms with their position of power and responsibility. At the same time, news media organisations are having to adapt to a changing environment, and policy makers are trying to understand it. This research involves the key stakeholders, and will help policymakers, intermediaries and news media to better understand the rapidly evolving situation, and to develop appropriate responses.

“It is only now that ‘digital intermediaries’ are coming to terms with their position of power and responsibility.”
How is Human Rights Law being used in Latin American courts?
Dr Ezequiel Gonzalez-Ocantos

Until the 1980s and 1990s, judges in Latin America were inconsequential bureaucrats, playing a minor role in a legal system which left little room for interpretation. The arrival of a rights-centred legal worldview from Europe and the United States changed that. Courts in Latin America have become increasingly assertive, with their rulings effecting policy across a wide range of areas, including health care, immigration and the environment.

How and why did this shift take place? This project aims to investigate this, and in particular the role of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which over the previous two decades has become increasingly influential in setting standards of state behaviour, and in setting the tone for domestic courts.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights is institutionally weak, and vulnerable to non-compliance and neglect. This makes the increasing influence and authority of the court in discussions about indigenous rights, due process or freedom of expression all the more surprising. This success against the odds can tell us a great deal about how the seemingly empty promises of international law can in fact be incredibly influential.

This project will investigate how the court has built this influence, and will go beyond the usual approach of treating institutions as a cohesive whole by interviewing the people who make up the courts – the judges, lawyers and clerks. By understanding the ambitions, outlooks and strategies of those in the Inter-American Court and in local courts, the project will develop an understanding of how international human rights law diffuses into national courts.

As Latin American governments face fiscal crises, and Europe withdraws funding, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights is likely to come under increasing pressure. This research will help to assess its importance, and provide empirical evidence for its successes.

“As Latin American governments face fiscal crises, and Europe withdraws funding, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights is likely to come under increasing pressure.”
Does Leadership in Peacekeeping Matter?
Professor Andrea Ruggeri

Funder: British Academy

“Does diversity in the composition of UN peacekeeping operations affect their ability to resolve conflicts?”

Does diversity in the composition of UN peacekeeping operations affect their ability to resolve conflicts? Does a cultural distance between mission leadership and the national contingents make it easier or harder to stop conflict and protect civilians? Can differences between political and military leadership jeopardise a mission’s effectiveness?

This project aims to create a comprehensive dataset on UN peacekeeping leadership in all the post-Cold War UN missions, including information on Secretary General Representatives and Military Chiefs.

The research will explain how diversity within political and military leadership in UN missions and between UN mission leadership and peacekeepers in the field influences a mission’s capacity to protect civilians and stop fighting.
What do migrants send 'home' in addition to, or even instead of, money? Are migrants agents of political and social change in their homelands?

This project extends the discussion of migrants' impacts to include 'political' and 'social' remittances. We know a lot about the developmental impacts of migrants' economic remittances, but much less about the ideas, identities and practices which migrants send home or carry with them when they return.

The project explores the factors that determine whether and how migrants stay in touch with their homelands. Do these patterns of interaction differ by migrant group and/or historical period? How do migrants understand their new social, political and economic environment? Does the experience of migration change political and personal identities? Do migrants affect political change in their homelands? And, what is the relationship between economic, social or political remittances?

Based on a broad spread of historical and contemporary data, this research seeks to understand the complex links between migrants and their home countries, across a range of time periods. The project is studying the records of East European and German migration to the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries, data on the backgrounds of returning migrants who took political positions in post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe, and quantitative and qualitative data on contemporary Polish and Ukrainian migrants.

Understanding the impacts of migration is important both for academia and for public policy, and provides insights into some of the most pressing problems in the world today, such as the dynamics of migrant integration over time, the implications of a lived transnationalism from the migrants’ perspective, and the spread of norms related to democracy, the rule of law and diversity.
The Impact of Institutions: The Implications of Economic Reforms for Human Capital and Skills

Dr Adam Saunders

Funder: British Academy

Since the 1970s, the United Kingdom has undergone transformational economic and social change. Deindustrialisation and labour market reforms may have increased labour market flexibility and the responsiveness of the labour market, but has this been at the expense of the retention of vital occupational skills? What are the long-term social and economic ramifications of these changes, and what legacy have they left in the present day?

This project seeks to answer an often-overlooked aspect of these questions: the impact of such changes on individuals in the workplace, and their contribution to individual and national prosperity – human capital and skills.

Using data stretching from 1975 to 2013, this project combines quantitative analysis with archival research and interviews with policymakers, employers and trade union leaders to trace the impact of the UK’s changing labour market on human capital and skills. The UK case is illuminated through comparison with 19 other similarly developed economies. The analysis has also been extended to China, which has enabled comparison with a very different economy. What significance do welfare and labour market institutions hold for human capital development and socio-economic inequality in a rapidly expanding economy? How do these patterns compare to the UK?

This research is valuable to policymakers and business leaders as they attempt to retain the competitiveness of British industry in an increasingly global marketplace. How can policymakers and business leaders create the institutions and conditions which provide the skills that modern industry needs?

“How can policymakers and business leaders create the institutions and conditions which provide the skills that modern industry needs?”
Governments the world over often behave opportunistically to increase their chances of re-election.

Leaders may time elections to take advantage of favourable developments, exploit opposition weakness, or to “cut and run” before their popularity wanes. These tactics are often obvious and we would expect voters to disapprove of such strategies, since they seem unfair and could distort the role of elections as instruments of accountability. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that prime ministers fear such reactions. But how do considerations of fairness affect voter responses to government opportunism? To date, this question remains unexplored. This project uses a survey experiment to shed light on the importance of fairness in voter reactions to opportunism, particularly focusing on the timing of elections.

The project’s findings will lay the foundations for a better understanding of electoral responses to government opportunism, and will contribute to debates about retaining or introducing fixed election dates (which restrict strategic elections) in the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

“How do considerations of fairness affect voter responses to government opportunism?”
Practical Political Economy for Resource Governance Reform

Dr Ricardo Soares de Oliveira
with Ian Gary (Associate Policy Director - Accountable Development Finance, Oxfam America)

Funder: ESRC Impact Acceleration Grant

Revenues from oil, gas or mineral resources have the potential to transform a country and the lives of its citizens, by reducing poverty and increasing prosperity. But it is rare that countries and their citizens do benefit from their natural resources. Why?

Many of the problems that remain in resource-dependent countries are political, rather than technical. Problems are often framed as “technical capacity gaps” that need external assistance. Yet governments can fill these gaps if they define them as political priorities.

Aid donors increasingly understand the political nature of their work but often downplay or sidestep political questions because they are difficult to address. NGOs and civil society groups can be uncomfortable addressing political and power issues because they don’t wish to “rock the boat” and risk their sources of funding.

Political economy research can help to illuminate and address many of these difficult political issues. This project identifies ways that insights from political economy can be used in the work of NGOs and local civil society organisations who are seeking to reform the governance of extractive industries.

With a global Extractive Industries Program which now operates in more than 30 countries, Oxfam is working to address negative power dynamics in resource-dependent countries and has commissioned political economy research in several cases.

However, this research often explains why things are the way that they are (“who gets what and why”), rather than clearly articulating how to create change. There is a clear gap between what researchers produce and what NGO staff and partners need.

This project will work with Oxfam America to address these shortcomings, and to bring insights from political economy to bear in ways which can influence policy and produce change.

“Many of the problems that remain in resource-dependent countries are political, rather than technical.”
Measuring Government Policy with Text Analysis
Dr Radoslaw Zubek and Dr David Doyle

Funder: John Fell OUP Research Fund

Most governments would claim to support business, but is government policy enhancing business activity or constraining it? Are government regulations becoming more or less business friendly? Is government policy more favourable to some sectors of business than others? These and similar questions are ones that citizens and businesses ask every day.

It has been difficult for social scientists to measure governments’ business policies. Until now, such assessments have mainly been made through broad-brush surveys of regulatory environments, which have been limited in scope and frequency. This project offers a better way of measuring the effects of government policy on business.

By applying advanced computational linguistics in order to undertake a computerised text analysis of government policy, the project will provide a detailed picture of government policy. Since June 2004, all UK legislation has contained an explanatory memorandum detailing the impact of the legislation on businesses. This valuable material has until now been overlooked, but it provides an unparalleled opportunity to look in detail at the impact on business of each and every piece of legislation issued by the government – regardless of the policy field.

“Most governments would claim to support business, but is government policy enhancing business activity or constraining it?”

The project will provide citizens and businesses with highly sought information on the business friendliness of government policy. There is also increasing interest in the link between government actions and the decisions of economic actors such as businesses, households and banks. The results of this project will help give us a clearer idea of that relationship, and help us understand how markets respond to changes in legislation.
Political structures and processes have profound effects on the distribution of resources necessary for human life, on the degree of autonomy that human beings enjoy as they pursue their lives, and on people’s capacities to live free from the threat of violence. Politics is at the heart of human life. Our vision is a world with a wider understanding of political power and process. This is what we study and this is what we teach.

The study of politics, government and international relations at Oxford has a long and distinguished history. We are proud to be recognised internationally for our rigorous and valuable research, as educators of leaders and professionals in a wide variety of fields and as trainers of the next generation of teachers and researchers.

We seek to deepen scholarly understanding of government, politics and international relations and to contribute to practical solutions to problems of power, conflict and injustice in political and social life. We believe that sharing expertise and ideas can play a role in solving problems of power, conflict and injustice, and bringing researchers, policy makers and practitioners together is part of the way we work.

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