

## “Cultivating Causal Literacy in the Political Science Classroom”

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How might educators cultivate causal literacy in the classroom? Political literacy is the ability to mindfully analyze, proffer, and evaluate causal claims about how a real-world situation has emerged and how various real-world interventions might unfold if attempted. Scholars, including psychologists and political scientists, observe that too often real-world actors fail to adequately understand the problems they confront; moreover, the “theories of action” that underlie many real-world interventions are superficial, tacit, or altogether absent. Drawing from the comparativist Craig Parsons’s work on causal logics and the political theorist William Connolly’s work on complexity in politics, I describe two sets of classroom practices that educators might use to improve students’ understanding of real-world problems and the mindful crafting of interventions to address these problems. These core skills inherent in these practices, which compose an experiential-learning environment, include privileging a journal article’s or chapter’s causal story; aggregating several causal stories together to create a framework; and applying these causal stories to a real-world historical or contemporary political challenge to propose an intervention. I use the literature on civil wars as an example.

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Real-world actors, especially those negotiating high-stakes situations wherein politics and lives hang in the balance, confront challenges related to both normativity (What is the right thing to do?) and efficacy (How can I attain my political aims?). The latter, which relates linking means to ends, requires causal literacy. My aim is to show one way political scientists can help cultivate causal literacy among students and, thereby, their judgment; however, unspecified and undertheorized obstacles hinder this cultivation.

Students—whether they become soldiers, diplomats, development-aid experts, civic leaders, activists, noncombatants, stateless persons, policymakers, or politicians—will exercise judgment as they negotiate an obstacle course comprising tangled thickets of natural,

institutional, psychological, economic, technological, ideational, and (possibly) lethal factors. Citizens' decisions may be more or less intuitive (based on gut feeling) or more or less informed and deliberate (integrative of scholarship, experience, and local knowledge). Integral to political action are those implicit or explicit causal claims about how the world works and how various interventions in the world might unfold.

S  verine Autesserre refers to these practical causal claims as "theories of change," which she finds are too often unspecified or superficially considered by the community of real-world actors she studies; i.e., "peacebuilders," including political leaders, diplomats, humanitarian and development-aid workers, military peacekeepers, and the staff of non-governmental organizations. Common among these actors is their striving to achieve organizational and collective objectives in high-stakes, perilous situations.<sup>1</sup>

All persons, not just peacebuilders, are susceptible to the shortcomings in causal literacy Autesserre describes. Psychologists have unveiled the "illusion of explanatory depth," a cognitive bias whereby persons evince overconfidence about the degree to which they understand how things work.<sup>2</sup> This bias relates to everyday causal processes, such as how a light bulb works, but it is especially applicable to complex policy issues, such as the dynamics of economic and health-care policies. When pressed to render explicit their causal understanding of a policy question, persons will revert to giving reasons for their preferences as opposed to proffering causal explanations.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore no surprise that political actors make frequent errors in the field of national security,<sup>4</sup> including the failure to link military means to political ends as revealed in, say, the close-out of a war. For instance, Aaron Rapport finds that political and military leaders will suspend the application of feasibility criteria and apply instead desirability criteria when assessing long-term military and political objectives.<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Meiser, a

scholar who has observed military leaders are too often susceptible to “PowerPoint nirvana,” whereby presentation slides depict an array of interventions albeit with no causal logic specifying how these interventions will engender desired outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

A common ritual among political scientists who study some aspect of security studies is to insert a formulaic, valedictory sentence in the abstract that reads something like, “This argument has real-world policy implications for...”<sup>7</sup> The presumption is that the scholar has unveiled a real-world dynamic pertaining to foreign policy, diplomacy, war, conflict termination, nonviolent resistance, or humanitarian-relief efforts that practitioners would not otherwise discern via intuition alone. As a former practitioner, I see firsthand—in the classroom, in military planning, and in operational settings—the value of political science. For this reason, I try—in my role as a teacher—to introduce these scholarly findings in the classroom. Yet I’ve discovered two unexplored problems as I attempt to traverse the theory-practice gap.

Bridging the gap is not a problem of relevance;<sup>8</sup> it is a two-step technical problem. First, how, in nuts-and-bolts terms, are students to sift through and use the bountiful multiplicity of complementary and competing scholarship relevant to the political problems they study? One solution is for the scholar to cultivate among students the ability to distinguish between types of causal explanation. This cultivation enables students to both organize a vast array of scholarship as well as critically examine causal claims about the world and potential interventions that arise in practical deliberations. I propose that students categorize causal elements and causal stories in accordance with Craig Parsons’s elegant four-fold typology of causal elements and stories.

The second problem relates to the world’s complexity. Political scientists tend to focus on tightly specified causal claims; i.e., stories that focus on independent and dependent variables

while holding all else constant. How are students to reconcile political science's these  $X \rightarrow Y$  causal claims with the complexity that suffuses the problems students study and, perhaps, hope to solve? I propose the teacher should cultivate among students an emotional and cognitive appreciation for the world's complexity. One approach is to impart to students the political theorist William Connolly's frame of a "world of becoming," whose principal categories include an appreciation for "widely distributed agency," emergence, and "durational time."

### **The problem of causal analysis**

Craig Parsons, a scholar of comparative politics, describes the situation of graduate students in political science who must "confront a shapeless and near-limitless mass of scholarship" in their studies.<sup>9</sup> If graduate students, who are ensconced in the world of apprentice scholarship, encounter this daunting task, the challenge facing the undergraduate student or graduate student in a practitioner program hoping to learn from political science is much greater.<sup>10</sup> A teacher who curates scholarship can help mitigate the students' or laypersons' confusion, but even a curated selection of scholarship can appear shapeless without some way to bin the various scholarly claims into more manageable "conceptual containers." If these conceptual containers can do double work by equipping the political actor to understand, break down, and build up causal claims in the same way that the periodic table allows chemistry students to understand, break down, and build up chemical compounds, so much the better.

Causal claims are implicit in all political thinking. Increased attention to causality and its specification can enhance actors' judgments. An attention to causal claims helps in the evaluation of fellow actors' and one's own causal claims as they relate to two questions,

including “Why are things as they are?” and “What can we do to help effect a desired change in the environment?”

Causal mechanisms provide one way to approach causal specification. In fact, Ian Shapiro recommends thinking in capacious terms about causal mechanisms as an integral part of scientific work:

Scientists start with questions about the world, usually (but not always) with some aspect of it that seems counterintuitive or difficult to comprehend, and they try to explain the apparent facts or anomalies....The ways in which scientists show how outcomes are produced by causal mechanisms depend on the nature of the question being asked....The injunction to describe how causal mechanisms work entails no fixed set of methodological implications for the practice of science; there is no single correct method of causal analysis.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Rudra Sil and Peter Katzenstein advocate for the use of causal mechanisms to “develop complex causal stories at the level of middle-range theory.”<sup>12</sup> My framework for the exercise of political judgment encourages students to use the concept of causal mechanisms to unearth the causal stories implicit in their thinking about how the world works and how their interventions might play out.

Parsons proffers four logics of causal explanation centered on mechanisms.<sup>13</sup> These logics, with the necessary definitional adjustments in place, are sufficient to analyze any scholarly work aiming to tell a causal story. He does redefine common scholarly terms, including the terms structural, institutional, and psychological, in idiosyncratic ways; however, his redefinitions are thoughtful, compelling, and—for students—manageable. Moreover, his distinctions, apart from the terms he uses to label them, do capture base-level differences among the types of causal stories scholars and laypersons tell. Parsons argues, “these logics capture the range and most fundamental debates of a very wide range of explanatory literatures.”<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, he explains that his typology provides “the basic logical segments out of which explanatory arguments can be built.”<sup>15</sup>

Parsons’s effort is ambitiously elegant yet appreciative of complexity. His four building blocks may be combined into complex causal stories that are susceptible of contestation: “In making them [the four logics] analytically separable....I also try to make them abstractly compatible, such that we could imagine a world in which all were operating while we debate how much variants of each contributed to any given action.”<sup>16</sup> Although intended for scholars, political actors may use Parsons’s building blocks to inject critical rigor into explanation, prediction, and (thereby) judgment.

Parsons makes a compelling case that his fourfold map of causation and retooled glossary surpass previous typologies in terms of comprehensiveness and coherence. Given my project’s pragmatic aims, I am unconcerned with minor theoretical challenges to the typology. If theoretical shortcomings in Parsons’s causal map were to manifest themselves *practically* (a challenge that I have yet to encounter in the scholarly literature or in my classroom), the typology would not cease to serve as a go-cart for the more precise articulation of and argument over causal claims. His book’s principal merits for my project are pragmatic; i.e., Parsons elegantly and plausibly argues that four logics are sufficient to compose and analyze *any* conventional account of causal explanation in politics.

### **Parsons’s logics**

Parsons’s first logic is structural-materialist:

Its core logic explains people’s choices as a direct function of their position in a ‘material’ landscape—an obstacle course that is at least treated as if it were composed of intersubjectively present physical constraints and resources. These constraints and resources are presented as exogenously given. They may be dynamic, but they are not manipulable by people over the temporal scope of the argument.<sup>17</sup>

Parsons's second logic is institutional:

A distinctively institutionalist claim, I suggest, argues that the setting-up of certain intersubjectively present institutions channels people unintentionally in certain directions at some later point.<sup>18</sup>

Parsons's third logic is ideational:

[I]deational causal claims trace actions to some constellation of practices, symbols, norms, grammars, models, beliefs, and/or identities through which certain people interpret the world.<sup>19</sup>

Parsons's fourth logic is psychological:

I defined psychological logic as claims about the causal effects of hard-wired mental processes that depart from a simple rational model. In most cases they point to irrational biases, misperceptions, instincts or affects. They can also explain preferences prior to rational action.<sup>20</sup>

The typology attributes causality to practically unalterable material or material-like structures (e.g., terrain, distribution of natural resources, global capitalism), institutional path dependence leading to unintended consequences (e.g., the U.S. electoral college's effect on today's presidential campaigns and politics), ideas specific to a person or persons (e.g., identity, religion, practices, norms), or the irrational consequences of hard-wired mental processes (e.g., the heuristics and biases that behavioral economists such as Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky, and Richard Thaler identify).<sup>21</sup>

No actor can avoid thinking in terms of bracketed causality, especially at the moment of intentional action. Every proposed intervention includes an implicit hypothesis about how actions X, Y, and Z will help engender outcomes A, B, and C. The use of Parsons's fourfold typology (or something very much like it) can help political actors rigorously specify causal claims integral to justifying competing understandings of the world and proposed interventions. This rigor is especially obligatory when contemplating high-stakes interventions. Moreover, Parsons's typology helps political actors to make sense of and organize a vast array of

complementary and competing causal claims whether proffered by local stakeholders, expert practitioners, analysts, or scholars with topical (e.g., negotiated settlements), regional (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa), or functional expertise (e.g., monitoring and evaluation of development-aid projects).

### **The problem of agency amidst complexity**

A fundamental challenge confronts the citizen who, as a political actor, hopes to consult scholarship and intervene in the world. The scholarship the political actor consults is, with few exceptions, bracketed insofar as it focuses on the relationship between a few variables.

However, the world in which the actor intervenes is replete with complex sociopolitical dynamics. Hence, it is helpful to help students see how, for any given situation, several bracketed dynamics are in play (or potentially in play) simultaneously, and these relationships compose the causal “messiness,” the term Rudra Sil and Peter Katzenstein use to characterize the real-world complexity actors face.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it is impossible for the political actor to conceive of any intentional intervention in anything but bracketed terms; i.e., “If I do X, Y, and Z, I think (and hope) to get outcomes A, B, and C.” Given that inefficacy and unintended consequences pervade real-world action, the political actor must come to grips with the world’s messiness and adopt an ethos of intervention that acknowledges complexity and guards against despair.

The political theorist William Connolly attempts to prepare the practitioner for the emotional challenges that accompany real-world action in a messy world. He situates his readers within the “problematic of political action in a world of becoming.” Sometimes we, as political actors

need to act with dispatch, and sometimes with militancy, in particular situations of stress. The fact that we are not consummate agents in such a world, combined with the human tendency to hubris, means that we must work to cultivate wisdom under these very

circumstances. These two dictates, engendering each other while remaining in tension, constitute the problematic of political action in a world of becoming.<sup>23</sup>

Actors must cultivate a sense of fallibility to mitigate hubris while also cultivating the wisdom necessary to counter existential despair in the face of political inefficacy. Psychologists and behavioral economists have amply documented the cognitive biases of the illusion of explanatory depth and overconfidence.<sup>24</sup> Scholars, particularly those concerned with national-security policy and strategy, acknowledge that strategic despair is a real possibility as set forth in Eliot Cohen's<sup>25</sup> and Richard Betts's<sup>26</sup> substantial critiques of strategic nihilism, which is an intellectual and emotional posture that eschews any hope in political efficacy.

I propose that the wisdom to understand and intervene responsibly in political situations comes from consulting, among others persons' (scholars' and citizens') causal stories. These stories, when aggregated, can help the student map his understanding of what is relevant in the world in a particular situation. Put otherwise, the aggregation enables the student—in one view—to meditate upon the complexity of the various relationships that obtain (or might obtain) in political situations.

### ***Widely distributed agency***

Connolly envisions a world comprising systems, which he idiosyncratically calls force-fields. A force-field is, "roughly speaking....any energized pattern in slow or rapid motion periodically displaying a capacity to morph, such as a climate system, biological evolution, a political economy, or human thinking."<sup>27</sup> Practically every element that political scientists might describe as an independent or dependent variable is a force-field. Capitalism and evangelical Protestant faith are force-fields.<sup>28</sup> So too are a virus, a human life, a solar system, a geological formation, a season, a climate pattern, a civilization, a species, and a body-brain circuit.<sup>29</sup> The forces that engender a world war, genocide, protest movements, or climate-induced humanitarian

disaster are force-fields as well. These forces constitute, comprise, and compose a multiplicity of open systems, each “marked by different degrees of agency.”<sup>30</sup> Put otherwise, these force-fields, whether living or not, are agentic insofar as they have an effect on the world. Moreover, these force-fields are equivalent to Parsons’s causal elements, which compose the nouns in scholars’ theories about how the world works.

Connolly’s understanding of agency is capacious. He sees “a heterogeneous world composed of interacting spatio-temporal systems with different degrees of agency.”<sup>31</sup> Persons act on the world, but so too do other material and immaterial things. Connolly’s concept of *widely distributed agency* encompasses these proto-agentic, or auto-unfolding, forces that operate at different scales, like a virus that *seeks* to spread or a hurricane *aiming* for the Gulf Coast. Force-fields, or systems, also include micro forces within the human person such as cancer,<sup>32</sup> a will-complicating alcoholism,<sup>33</sup> the mood-inducing effects of a room’s color or the sound of a word,<sup>34</sup> “memory-soaked” projections and perceptions,<sup>35</sup> and the effect of “culturally-coded” mirror neurons.<sup>36</sup> Energized, macro patterns external to the human person are also agentic; e.g., the effects of economic, political, cultural, interplanetary, and climate systems. Humans too are agentic, but so too are these non-personal micro and macro open systems.

### ***Emergence***

When two or more systems converge, the interaction gives rise to the possibility of emergent causality.<sup>37</sup> These fusions may cause a change to one or more of these systems, or perhaps a completely new system may emerge. This “something new,” in turn, is untraceable to conventional causal mechanisms. The effects of these interactions, to include the emergence of a

new system, is not susceptible to causal tracing: “An element of mystery or uncertainty is attached to emergent causality.”<sup>38</sup>

Emergence is not susceptible to analysis, whereby one can identify the distinct independent variables and mechanisms that have led to the creation of a new force-field or system. Emergent outcomes are not wholly traceable to tidily specifiable causes, and an exhaustive knowledge of causes today will not enable prediction of an emergent outcome tomorrow. Gaps often exist between what causal mechanisms can explain and what comes to be. Emergent causality—with all its mystery and uncertainty—accounts for much of these gaps’ role as causal sinkholes. Although we can likely imagine causal links between today’s newspaper headlines and yesterday’s, emergence—whereby numerous self-organizing systems interact and create new dynamics—is the mechanism that prevents us from predicting tomorrow’s headlines from today’s newspapers. The key is to understand that the reductive causal stories put forth by political scientists and theorists constitute the very force-fields, or open systems, that compose the world’s complexity or messiness Connolly describes.

Familiar examples include easy to find. Think of Max Weber’s famous thesis about the “elective affinity” between Protestantism and capitalism.<sup>39</sup> Or think of two weather systems about to collide. Or perhaps think of the results of the intersection of the Electoral College, the evolution of Supreme Court campaign-finance decisions, the unfolding of the American two-party system, the practice of gerrymandering congressional districts, and the history of American slavery and civil-rights struggles.

### *Durational time*

Connolly intends for the political actor to “grip” the reality of emergence<sup>40</sup> since “[t]hinking, culture, and politics are sites *par excellence* of emergent causality.”<sup>41</sup> Given that emergence is a fundamental part of politics (or at least a plausible description of it), meditation on its role in high-stakes politics while in the calm of a classroom environment should dampen both hubris and despair during a crisis. Connolly recommends his readers to engage in a sort of meditation he calls “durational time.”<sup>42</sup>

A person who confronts a political situation might attempt to mindfully discern the various material and immaterial “force-fields” that have converged or crystallized to create the situation. For example, consider tracing the political turmoil that arises in the wake of the combined effects of an array of force-fields, including (i) the Covid-19 virus, (ii) the manifold history of U.S. race relations (iii) a policeman’s killing of George Floyd, and the (iv) the policy preferences of a U.S. president. Or consider the confluence of force-fields that leads to the surgical mask’s newfound political symbolism that, prior to 2019, the surgical mask simply did not possess.

Durational time encourages the students to think historically. For instance, what force-fields contributed to U.S. war in Vietnam? The PBS documentary, *The Vietnam War*,<sup>43</sup> provides a superb illustration of thinking in durational time.

The documentary begins with an American soldiers patrolling in Vietnam, coming under enemy fire, and evacuating their casualties. The film then moves forwards and backwards in time to show links between different historical periods and the soldiers on patrol. The film reveals how Ken Burns and Lynn Novick perceive the confluence of different events, including: French colonialism in Indochina, Vietnamese nationalism, World War I, the person of Ho Chi Minh, his undelivered correspondent to Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Harry Truman, the idea

of communism, the Japanese occupation of Vietnam in World War II, Lenin's anti-colonial writings, the creation of the Viet Minh, writings of Mao Zedong, the U.S. Office of Strategic Services' collaboration with Ho Chi Minh, the Cold War, the person of Charles de Gaulle, the accidental shooting of an American lieutenant colonel by the Viet Minh, the British presence in Vietnam, the Viet Minh's defeat of the French counterinsurgency, the U.S. friendship and support to France, the Korean War, the domino theory of communist expansion, the Kent State shootings, and the protests during the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

Parsons causal logics help students to proffer and challenge well-considered, tightly specified causal claims about how the world works and how potential interventions might play out. Connolly's frame of a world of becoming help students become accustomed to the world's messiness, which is attributable to the confluence—through history—of various material and immaterial forces. Although scholars and practitioners may understand the causal spin any specific force-field might exert on a political outcome, Connolly's approach helps students appreciate that it is impossible to fully trace (or predict) a political outcomes to any specific set of causal forces.

### **Application Exercises**

I provide here two sets of exercises. The first set of exercises aims to instill in students the skill of understanding and applying Parsons's causal logics as applied to actual political situations. The second set of exercises aims to allow students to build frameworks that integrate lessons from an entire course or a portion of a course. Students can then apply these frameworks to actual situations to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play. One key idea is that both scholars and citizens proffer causal stories to describe the world. Scholars can consult

ordinary citizens' stories to enrich their hypothesis-formation. Citizens can consult scholars' stories to look more deeply and comprehensively into the political situations they confront.

### ***Exercise Set #1***

Step 1: Perhaps allow students to read this paper.

Step 2: The teacher reviews the four causal logics in class and provides one or two examples.

Step 3: The teacher selects and plays for students audio or video clips illustrating each of the four causal logics. An easy way to do this is to search National Public Radio's *Morning Edition* for examples. Each news story is approximately three to five minutes and downloadable.

Examples of psychological logics are easier to get from the show NPR show *Hidden Brain* or YouTube video segments by the behavioral economists Dan Ariely or Daniel Kahneman.

Step 4: Once the students have a good grasp of the logics, break the students into, say, three or four groups. Select stories (in audio or written form) that touch upon the same theme albeit from different perspectives. Assign the stories such that each group has a student reading a different story. Have them, on a whiteboard or blackboard, combine the elements of each story.

Step 5: Have the students identify the various "force-fields" or historical traces that have converged to create the political situation. Have the students discuss how the concept of emergence applies to the case as well as how emergence hinders "prediction" and certain efficacy in politics.

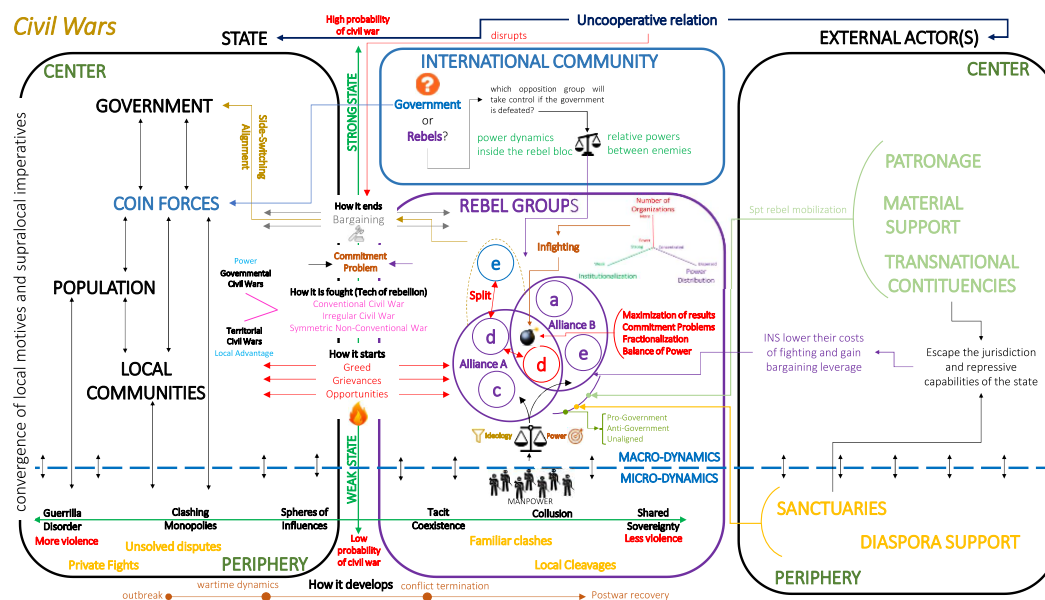
Step 5: Once the students have created the mapping, ask the students to explore how they might intervene in the situation to obtain a desirable result.

### ***Exercise Set #2***

Step 1: Once students have a good grasp of the logics, ask them to work through the lesson's readings to discern the causal logics at play in each. If the teacher has assigned journal articles, for instance, each student should attempt to identify the article's causal story and the type of logic or logics it asserts.

Step 2: As each student to create and depict a visual framework that aggregates the causal stories of several related lessons (See Figure 1) . Another option is to have students, working collaboratively, to create the framework. If there are multiple groups, the groups can share their frameworks. This exercise allows teachers to ensure each students has a good grasp of the logics.

Figure 1: Sample of a student-produced framework



Step 3: Pick a new story or video clip that is sufficiently rich that students can apply their new frameworks to the case. Ask students to explain how the curriculum materials, which are

aggregated into a framework, allow the students to see more deeply and comprehensively into the problem.

Step 4: Have the students identify the various “force-fields” or historical traces that have converged to create the political situation. Have the students discuss how the concept of emergence applies to the case as well as how emergence hinders “prediction” and certain efficacy in politics.

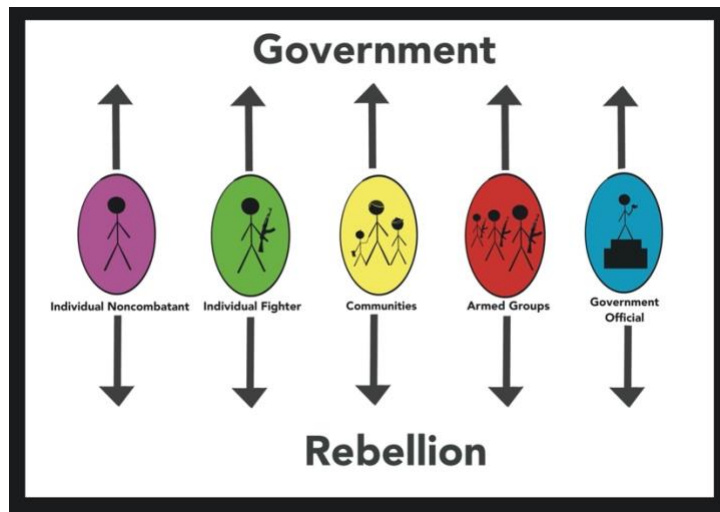
Step 5: Ask students to explore how they might intervene in the situation to obtain a desirable result.

### **Example**

U.S. military thinkers and theorists of counterinsurgency explain that a civil war is a bipolar contest between a government, on the one hand, and a rebellion or insurgency on the other.<sup>44</sup> The noncombatant population sits between these two antagonists. Both the government and the rebellion are competing for the population’s support. A dominant approach to counterinsurgency is the population-centered or “hearts and minds” approach, which seeks to protect the population from the insurgency as well as alleviate the population’s grievances.

American policymakers and military practitioners, assuming the foregoing bipolar model of counterinsurgency to be in play, believe that the principal problem in counterinsurgency is the Identification Problem.<sup>45</sup> Given that the rebels hide amongst the population, the central task is for the counterinsurgent forces to identify or distinguish the rebels from noncombatants. The hope is that citizens, preferring counterinsurgents to the rebels, will provide “tips” to the counterinsurgents that reveal the rebels’ identities.<sup>46</sup>

Figure 2: The bipolar model

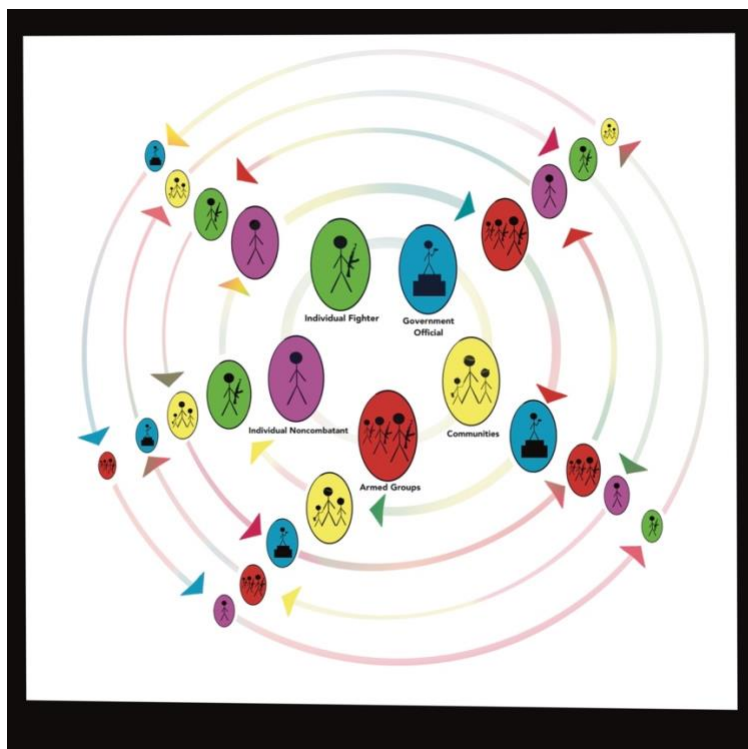


If counterinsurgency theorists and military practitioners see a civil war in bipolar terms (Figure 2), contemporary scholars of civil wars provide a different picture. Their work, when aggregated, challenges the bipolar model. Adherents of the U.S. version of counterinsurgency believe that most actors—individual citizens, individual fighters, communities, armed groups, and even government officials—are choosing whether to support the rebels or the insurgency. The basis of these decisions are fundamentally about whether the rebellion or government will provide better governance in terms of addressing the population’s grievances. Civil-war scholars, however, depict a much wider array of motivations.

I highlight only some of this scholarship here. Stathis Kalyvas argues that individual citizens will provide false tips to the counterinsurgents.<sup>47</sup> Such persons will denounce a fellow citizen for being a member of the insurgency when, in reality, the denounced person is merely a personal or local political rival. Informing falsely on the rival is convenient way to get rid of the rival. Oliver Kaplan suggests that communities may cooperate in ways with a rebel group simply to stay alive, not because the community supports the insurgency’s aims.<sup>48</sup> Vera

Mironova finds that fighters will switch to one group to another not because of ideological alignment, but because the other groups provides better material support to the soldier or family in case of injury or death, respectively.<sup>49</sup> Fotini Christia finds that an armed group will switch sides in order to join the winning side of the war; however, if the armed group anticipates that it will not get an adequate share of the victor's spoils, it will break with the winning coalition.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Lee Seymour finds that armed groups will join to the side that brings the group political or military patronage.<sup>51</sup> Paul Staniland finds that armed groups will switch sides in order to survive as an organization,<sup>52</sup> and he finds that government officials will cooperate—either openly or secretly—to achieve shared aims.<sup>53</sup>

Figure 3: The kaleidoscopic model



These scholars findings, when aggregated, reveal not a bipolar landscape wherein actors are deciding only whether to support the government or the rebellion, but a kaleidoscopic

model (Figure 3) replete with side-switching and the decisive influence of local, material interests such that a war's "master cleavage" is peripheral to their considerations.

## Conclusion

The example reveals how undergraduate students and graduate students in practitioner programs can use political science to help them better understand and, perhaps, intervene in the world with more efficacy and responsibility. By, first, attending to the causal logics of individual pieces of scholarship and, next, aggregating these pieces of scholarship into frameworks, they gain a richer appreciation of the world's messiness, albeit with the skills necessary to intervene confidently and without hubris.

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<sup>1</sup> Séverine Autesserre, "International Peacebuilding and Local Success," *International Studies Review*, 19, 1, 2017. See also, Severine Autesserre, *The Frontlines of Peace* (Oxford 2021), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Rozenblit and Frank Keil, "The Misunderstood Limits of Folk Science: An Illusion of Explanatory Depth," *Cognitive Science*, 26, 5, September 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Philip M. Fernbach, Todd Rogers, Craig R. Fox, and Steven A. Sloman, "Political Extremism is Supported by an Illusion of Understanding," *Psychological Science*, 24, 6, April 25, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Zelickow, "To Regain Policy Competence: The Software of American Public Problem-Solving," *Texas National Security Review*, 2, 4, September 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Aaron Rapport, The Long and Short of It: The Cognitive Constraint of Leaders' Assessment of 'Post-War' Iraq," *International Security*, 37, 3, Winter, 2012/13.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey W. Meiser, "Ends + Ways + Means = (Bad) Strategy," *Parameter*, 46, 4, 2016/2017, 82.

<sup>7</sup> Michael G. Findley and Joseph K. Young, "The Weakest Link? Scholarship and Policy in Intrastate Conflict," and Daniel Maliniak, Susan Peterson, Ryan Powers, and Michael J. Tierney, "Supply- and Demand-Side Explanations," in *Bridging the Theory-Practice Divide in International Relations*, ed. Daniel Maliniak, Susan Peterson, Ryan Powers, and Michael J. Tierney (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020), p. 186, 233.

<sup>8</sup> Michael C. Desch, *Cult of the Irrelevant: The Waning Influence of Social Science on National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Parsons, 4.

<sup>10</sup> That other scholars attempt such brush-clearing typologies is indicative that aspiring political scientists find these efforts useful. See, for instance, Andrew Bennett, "The Mother of All Isms: Causal Mechanisms and Structured Pluralism in International Relations Theory," *European Journal of International Relations*, 19, 2013.

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- <sup>11</sup> Shapiro and Wendt, "The Difference that Realism Makes," 40-41.
- <sup>12</sup> Sil and Katzenstein, "Analytical Eclecticism," 421. Italics are in the original.
- <sup>13</sup> Craig Parsons, *How to Map Arguments in Political Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 22-25.
- <sup>14</sup> Parsons, 12.
- <sup>15</sup> Parsons, 15.
- <sup>16</sup> Parsons, 3.
- <sup>17</sup> Parsons, 64.
- <sup>18</sup> Parsons, 67-68.
- <sup>19</sup> Parsons, 131.
- <sup>20</sup> Parsons, 161.
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- <sup>27</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, 5.
- <sup>28</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, 87-88.
- <sup>29</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, 73.
- <sup>30</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, 30.
- <sup>31</sup> Connolly, 22. An insightful reflection on non-human agency is Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
- <sup>32</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, 24.
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- <sup>34</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, 47.
- <sup>35</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, 51.
- <sup>36</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, 26.
- <sup>37</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, 173.
- <sup>38</sup> Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, 174.
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