

The Diffusion of Protest: How Social Movements Spread

RESEARCH ARTICLE WORKSHOP

Summer 2026

bgpopescu.net/teaching/research_workshop/research_protest_diffusion.html

Details

Instructor: Bogdan Popescu

Program Duration: 10 Weeks (10 mentor meetings)

Structure: One-on-one, remote weekly sessions for 1 hour

Course Description

This course is an intensive, hands-on introduction to writing a research article in the social sciences, with a focus on political science, sociology, or economics. By the end of the course, students will have developed and refined a complete research paper through a series of iterative assignments and structured feedback. The course integrates methodological training, substantive readings, and practical writing skills. Course content is divided into weekly units covering both technical skills and theoretical content. This course is demanding, but it's designed to give you the tools to write your first publishable article. I am here to guide you every step of the way.

This course introduces students to the study of protest and social movements through four thematic modules: the microfoundations of collective action, the diffusion of protest across places, the role of focal events and communication technology, and the consequences of protest. Students begin by asking why anyone protests at all—engaging the collective action problem in Olson, the tipping-point logic of Granovetter's threshold models, and Kuran's account of why mass uprisings take even their participants by surprise. The course then turns to the central empirical puzzle—how protest spreads from one place to the next—through Andrews and Biggs's event-history analysis of the 1960 lunch-counter sit-ins, Hedström's study of the spatial contagion of the Swedish labor movement, and Flückiger and Ludwig's recent evidence on how the Black Lives Matter protests diffused through online social networks. The third module examines what accelerates diffusion: focal "trigger" events and communication technology, drawing on Enos, Kaufman, and Sands's study of the 1992 Los Angeles unrest, Steinert-Threlkeld's work on social media during the Arab Spring, and Chau, Hassan, and Little's account of how communication technology helps protesters coordinate under the shadow of repression. It concludes by asking when protest actually works—engaging Chenoweth and Stephan's evidence on nonviolent resistance, Mazumder's evidence on the persistent effects of the civil rights movement, and Naunov's experimental evidence on how protesters' gender shapes public reactions to protest and repression. Throughout, students acquire foundational quantitative skills in R and apply them to geocoded, time-stamped protest event data, culminating in an empirical research paper that connects theories of diffusion to a real protest wave.

Assessment will be based on the progressive development of a research project, including submission of a research question, proposal, outline, draft, and final paper, as well as in-class presentations. No prior experience with coding or statistics is required, but students should be ready to engage with challenging material in a supportive, step-by-step environment.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course the students will be able to:

- Develop a research question and transform it into a publishable paper.
- Master essential academic tools including reference managers (e.g., JabRef), markdown-based word processing, and professional presentation software.
- Write each section of a paper: abstract, introduction, argument, methods, literature review, findings, discussion, and conclusion.
- Conduct basic quantitative analysis in R, including data merging, regression modeling, and visualization.
- Understand and apply core methods in social science research, including qualitative methods, difference-in-differences (DiD), and regression discontinuity design (RDD).
- Create a personal academic website using GitHub Pages to showcase their work.

Weekly Presentations

Students will deliver a 20-minute presentation on a topic assigned in advance. Presentations should include a clear introduction, main points, and conclusion. Use visual aids (e.g., slides) effectively, ensuring text is legible and visuals are relevant. Practice beforehand to stay within the time limit and maintain a confident, professional tone. Be prepared to answer 2-3 questions from peers or the instructor during and after the presentation. Remember to cite your sources and avoid reading verbatim from slides or notes.

In addition to summarizing the key arguments or findings, your presentation should include critical analysis of the material. Highlight what the author does not address, the limitations of their research, or potential problems in their analysis or methodology. Think about how the research could be improved, expanded, or connected to broader themes discussed in class, and incorporate these insights into your presentation.

Each week, you will give a short presentation on that week's readings. You can download the [template for the paper presentation at this link](#).

How weekly homework works: after each meeting, your homework has two components: (1) the slide decks listed under the current week, and (2) the readings listed under the *following* week. The readings must be completed before the next meeting — they are the basis of your weekly presentation and of our discussion.

Readings — two compulsory, one optional. Depth beats coverage. Each week lists two compulsory readings and one optional reading. Your presentation should center on the two compulsory texts — the ones I expect you to understand thoroughly, including their argument, method, and limitations. The optional reading is the most methodologically demanding of the three: read it if you have time, and we can discuss it in the meeting, but if you don't get to it, that's fine. Understanding two papers well is worth far more than summarizing three shallowly, especially in the early weeks while you are also learning R.

The slide decks come in **two kinds, and they are not completed the same way**:

- **Conceptual slides** — those listed under *Research Design and Presentation* — are meant to be **read and understood**. Take notes and bring questions.
- **Coding slides** — those listed under *Statistics and R Programming* — are **exercises to reproduce, not reading**. “Going over” a coding session means opening a new Quarto (`.qmd`) document and **typing out and running every code example yourself**, chunk by chunk, until each one executes without error, and then **saving the file**. Reading the slides or watching the code run is *not* the same as completing the session.

What counts as a completed coding session. For every coding session, before the meeting where it is due you should have:

1. A saved `.qmd` file that reproduces every example from the slides, together with its rendered HTML output;
2. All required packages installed and loading without error (e.g., `library(ggplot2)`, `library(dplyr)`);
3. Any datasets used in the slides downloaded and saved in the same folder as your `.qmd`;
4. The ability to **explain and modify** the code — in the meeting I may ask you to change an example and re-run it on the spot.

Keep everything in one structured folder (a separate subfolder per week), and bring that folder — including the `.qmd` files, not just the rendered HTML — to every meeting. Getting stuck on an error is fine and expected: save what you have, note where it broke, and we will work through it together. What does not work is arriving without the files.

Research Paper

The research paper should provide an extensive background on the topic and a clear contribution to the literature. The analysis should include some quantitative analysis to test hypotheses. The statistical part of the research project involves using data (collect and prepare the data to run quantitative analyses and produce graphs) and specialized software (R). For topics on protest and social movements, rich publicly available data include the [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project \(ACLED\)](#), the [Mass Mobilization Project](#), the [Crowd Counting Consortium](#) (fine-grained U.S. protest events, ideal for the Black Lives Matter wave), the [NAVCO data project on nonviolent and violent campaigns](#), and [GDELT](#).

The final paper should be approximately 15–20 pages double-spaced (somewhat shorter or longer is acceptable depending on the target journal’s requirements) and should engage critically with the literature, citing at least 5–10 papers in the field.

Research Paper Template

Use the following as a starting point for writing your own research paper:

- [Research Paper Template](#) | [Replication](#)

Research Paper Examples

This section provides two complete examples of finished research papers and presentations. These are not templates to copy, but illustrations of different research designs. Use them to see how arguments, methods, and findings can be structured and communicated in practice.

- **Quantitative Example**
 - [Research Paper \(Quantitative\)](#) | [Replication Files](#)
 - [Presentation \(Quantitative\)](#) | [Replication Files](#)
- **Qualitative Example**
 - [Research Paper \(Qualitative\)](#) | [Replication Files](#)
 - [Presentation \(Qualitative\)](#) | [Replication Files](#)

Recommended Optional Books

Writing Articles

Coppedge, M. 2012. *Democratization and Research Methods*. Cambridge University Press.

Halperin, S., & Heath, O. (2012). *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Punch, K. F. 2014. *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Van Evera, S. 1997. *Guide to methods for students of political science*. Cornell University Press.

Statistics

Cunningham, Scott. 2021. *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*. Yale University Press. <https://mixtape.scunning.com>.

Ismay, Chester, and Albert Y. Kim. 2019. *Statistical Inference via Data Science: A ModernDive into R and the Tidyverse*. Chapman and Hall / CRC. <https://moderndive.com/>.

Huntington-Klein, Nick. 2021. *The Effect: An Introduction to Research Design and Causality*. Boca Raton, Florida: Chapman and Hall / CRC. <https://theeffectbook.net/>.

Keyes, David. 2024. *R for the Rest of Us: A Statistics-Free Introduction*. San Francisco: No Starch Press. <https://book.rfortherestofus.com>.

Llaudet, Elena and Imai, Kosuke. 2023. *“Data Analysis for Social Science.”* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Warne, Russell T. 2018. *“Statistics for the Social Sciences: A General Linear Model Approach.”* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Causal Inference

Bauer, Paul C. and Dennis Cohen. 2023. *Applied Causal Analysis (with R)* <https://bookdown.org/paul/applied-causal-analysis/>.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Lovelace, Robin, Nowosad, Jakub, and Jannes Muenchow. 2021. *Geocomputation with R*. <https://bookdown.org/robinlovelace/geocompr/>.

Mieno, Taro. 2023. *R as GIS for Economists*. <https://tmieno2.github.io/R-as-GIS-for-Economists/>.

Week 1

- Intro to the Course - 2026-07-30

Homework 1: Research Design and Presentation: Go over:

- [The Topic and Research Question Slides](#)
- [Quarto Presentations Slides](#)

Homework 2: Statistics and R Programming — reproduce and run every code example in your own Quarto .qmd file (not just read):

- [Operations and Objects in R Slides](#)
- [Intro to Statistics Slides](#)

Homework 3: Readings: Read the Week 2 readings (listed below) and prepare a short presentation on them for the Week 2 meeting.

Deadline: Syllabus - 2026-08-01

Week 2

Why People Protest: Collective Action and Thresholds - 2026-08-06

- Granovetter, Mark. 1978. "Threshold Models of Collective Behavior." *American Journal of Sociology* 83 (6): 1420–1443. [[PDF](#)]
- Kuran, Timur. 1991. "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989." *World Politics* 44 (1): 7–48. [[PDF](#)]
- **Optional:** Olson, Mancur. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. C1 [[PDF](#)]

Homework 1: Research Design and Presentation: Go over:

- [Essential Tools for Writing a Paper Slides](#)
- [The Abstract and the Argument Slides](#)

Homework 2: Statistics and R Programming — reproduce and run every code example in your own Quarto .qmd file (not just read):

- [Working with Data in R Slides](#)

- [Dplyr and Basic Visualization Slides](#)

Homework 3: Readings: Read the Week 3 readings (listed below) and prepare a short presentation on them for the Week 3 meeting.

Deadline: Research Question (with descriptive data on a protest wave) - 2026-08-12

Week 3

The Spread of Protest: Diffusion, Networks, and Space - 2026-08-13

- Andrews, Kenneth T., and Michael Biggs. 2006. "The Dynamics of Protest Diffusion: Movement Organizations, Social Networks, and News Media in the 1960 Sit-Ins." *American Sociological Review* 71 (5): 752–777. [[PDF](#)]
- Flückiger, Matthias, and Markus Ludwig. 2025. "The Structure of Online Social Networks and Social Movements: Evidence from the Black Lives Matter Protests." *Journal of Public Economics*, art. 105373. doi:10.1016/j.jpubeco.2025.105373. [[PDF](#)]
- **Optional:** Hedström, Peter. 1994. "Contagious Collectivities: On the Spatial Diffusion of Swedish Trade Unions, 1890–1940." *American Journal of Sociology* 99 (5): 1157–1179. [[PDF](#)]

Homework 1: Research Design and Presentation: Go over:

- [Literature Review Slides](#)
- [Writing the Research Proposal:](#) question, hypotheses, literature, methods

Homework 2: Statistics and R Programming — reproduce and run every code example in your own Quarto . qmd file (not just read):

- [Visualizing Data Distributions in R Slides](#)
- [Modeling Relationships Between Variables Slides](#)

Homework 3: Readings: Read the Week 4 readings (listed below) and prepare a short presentation on them for the Week 4 meeting.

Deadline: Research Proposal - 2026-08-19

Week 4

Triggers and Technology: Focal Events, Media, and Social Media - 2026-08-20

- Enos, Ryan D., Aaron R. Kaufman, and Melissa L. Sands. 2019. "Can Violent Protest Change Local Policy Support? Evidence from the Aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles Riot." *American Political Science Review* 113 (4): 1012–1028. [[PDF](#)]
- Steinert-Threlkeld, Zachary C. 2017. "Spontaneous Collective Action: Peripheral Mobilization During the Arab Spring." *American Political Science Review* 111 (2): 379–403. [[PDF](#)]

- **Optional:** Chau, Tak-Huen, Mai Hassan, and Andrew T. Little. 2025. “Communication, Coordination, and Surveillance in the Shadow of Repression.” *American Journal of Political Science* 69 (3): 995–1009. [[PDF](#)]

Homework 1: Statistics and R Programming — reproduce and run every code example in your own Quarto . qmd file (not just read):

- [Interpreting Binary and Multivariate Regression Models Slides](#)
- [Differences-in-Differences Slides](#)
- [Data Visualization in R - 1 Slides](#)

Homework 2: Readings: Read the Week 5 readings (listed below) and prepare a short presentation on them for the Week 5 meeting.

Deadline: Research Paper Outline - 2026-08-26

Week 5

When Protest Works: Tactics, Repression, and Outcomes - 2026-08-27

- Chenoweth, Erica, and Maria J. Stephan. 2011. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. New York: Columbia University Press. C1 [[PDF](#)]
- Mazumder, Soumyajit. 2018. “The Persistent Effect of U.S. Civil Rights Protests on Political Attitudes.” *American Journal of Political Science* 62 (4): 922–935. [[PDF](#)]
- **Optional:** Naunov, Martin. 2025. “The Effect of Protesters’ Gender on Public Reactions to Protests and Protest Repression.” *American Political Science Review* 119 (1): 135–151. [[PDF](#)]

Homework 1: Research Design and Presentation: Go over:

- [Methods Slides](#)
- Writing the Paper Outline

Homework 2: Statistics and R Programming — reproduce and run every code example in your own Quarto . qmd file (not just read):

- [Regression Discontinuity Design Slides](#)
- [Data Visualization in R - 2 Slides](#)
- [Data Visualization in R - 3 Slides](#)

Week 6

Replication: Difference-in-Differences - 2026-09-03

Homework 1: Research Design and Presentation: Go over:

- [Findings, Discussion, Intro, and Conclusion Slides](#)
- [Making a website on GitHub: username.github.io](#)

Deadline: Milestone - 2026-09-09

Week 7

Replication: Regression Discontinuity Design - 2026-09-10

Homework: Write:

- Work on Research Design, Data, Research Methodology

Week 8

Paper Development - 2026-09-17

Homework: Write:

- Work on Research Design, Data, Research Methodology
- Finish First Draft

Deadline: First Draft - 2026-09-23

Week 9

Paper Feedback - 2026-09-24

- Writing an academic CV and publishing on your personal website
- CV template:
 - [tex file](#) (open the tex file in quarto and compile after updating it with personal details)
 - [pdf file](#)

Homework: Write:

- Revise Paper: Methods
- Write academic CV and post on website

Week 10

Paper Development - 2026-10-01

Deadline: Revised Final Paper - 2026-10-08