Core Graduate Course in International Relations
POL-GA 1751
Spring 2016
Bruce Bueno de Mesquita
Monday 4-5:50
Seminar Room 217, 19 West 4th Street.

Office hours: Tuesday 9-12, 2-4, or whenever my door is open.
The core graduate course in international relations is designed to explore the main issues and research strategies in the study of international relations. Despite the “core” nature of this class I do not intend it to be a survey of the entire field. I believe that it simply impossible to cover all the pertinent questions in international relations in a single class. Rather than superficially skim many topics, we shall examine a limited set of problems and focus on the theories and methods used to tackle them. It is much better to take your intuitions about how the world works and develop them in a scientific manner than it is to recall what everyone has previously said on a topic. Good questions pursued in an appropriate way make for good research! Knowing everything that has been written in the past does not!

I have limited the number of readings each week. I want us to focus on the key concepts in the arguments made, the logic used, the falsifiability of these arguments and how they are or could be tested. There is a strong focus on articles by people at NYU and the sort of topics they research: I make no apology for this. First, I believe that these are some of the most important developments in the field. Second, this is the material I can most effectively teach. Third, it helps NYU students identify the research interests and methodological approaches of the NYU faculty.

Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the week’s readings, with special emphasis on the way in which hypotheses are developed, the fundamental elements of research design, and with ideas about how the research questions in the readings might be better examined or about future directions in research on the topic under discussion. Critiques of the reading assignments should focus on any problems in logic or evidence and should offer concrete and feasible ideas about how to improve on the research. Students will be assigned to lead the discussion of the readings.

Each student will write one short paper (about 5 pages) and one longer paper (whatever length is appropriate to convey the motivation, develop the research design, and provide either formal proofs or empirical tests of key propositions). The two papers can be on the same or on different topics. The short paper should focus on situating an original research idea within its relevant literature. The short paper should discuss the research design, the structure of the theory if original, data sources if relevant, and present preliminary tests of one or more hypotheses using data available for downloading from the web or other sources. The final, longer paper should derive hypotheses either from arguments in the literature or from an original model and provide careful statistical analyses of testable claims that follow from the argument. This paper should not simply be a rehash of research by others, but a significant original research undertaking.
The readings are predominately articles. However, in addition I am assigning Robert Powell’s In the Shadow of Power (Princeton University Press, 1999) and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph Siverson and James Morrow’s The Logic of Political Survival (MIT Press, 2003).

If students have specific research interests then please let me know ASAP and we can potential substitute them into the syllabus.

January 23: Introduction to key conceptions

January 30: System Structure and Conflict: Neo-Realism and Power Transition


February 6: Nature of War

February 13: Deterrence and Alliances
Fearon, “Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs,” Journal

Recommended Readings:

**February 20: Presidents Day**

**February 27: Individual Leaders and Audience Costs**

**March 6: Leader survival and leader choice**

Recommended: Logic of Political Survival, Chapter 3.

**March 13: Spring Recess**

**March 20: Institutional Differences in Leader Choice.**
March 27: Assessment of the Democratic Peace

April 3: Institutions, Leader and Bargaining

Recommended Readings:
On paying for war:

April 10: Foreign Aid as a Tool of Domestic and Foreign Policy

April 17: Civil War Issues


April 24: Terrorism

May 1: Conflict and Institutional Change

May 8: Student Research Presentations (we might need to arrange additional time for this)