

ONLINE COMMUNICATION AND THE ORGANISATION OF PROTEST CAMPS

Summer Term 2024

Freie Universität Berlin

Forschungsprojekt mit Nachwuchsforschenden – X-Student Research Group

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Time:	Monday, 18:00 - 20:00
Location:	Garystr. 55, Room: 55 - 302b
Office Hours:	By appointment or after class.

1. Course Description

In many countries, protest camps have emerged as a part of the ecosystem of political protests, initially as part of international summits in the early 2000s. They quickly became an important part of popular uprisings in autocracies. While the scholarly literature has given significant attention to the public-facing aspects of popular uprisings and how, for example, violence or protest size are linked to autocratic resilience, little is known about the "backstage" aspects of these uprisings.

This X-Student Research Group will conduct a case study of a protest camp using Telegram data and is directly linked to the ERC-Project [LOOPS \(The Logistics of Popular Uprisings in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes\)](#). The project deals with questions such as: What basic logistics are required and provided in popular uprisings in competitive authoritarian regimes? Is it limited to portable toilets, cooking stations, and medical support or does it extend to different social needs (for example organized yoga classes, prayer stations or gardening)? What level of professionalization in logistics that meet basic human needs is present and observable in protest camps? Does it reflect the bottom-up claims of protest organizers?

It is a research-oriented course based on the main ideas of the LOOPS project. The course is designed in an interactive way that consists of teaching blocks and input by the instructor as well as independent research by the students. As such, all stages of a research process in Sociology/Political Science are covered in this course.

2. Target Audience and Course Objectives

The X-Research project is directed towards Master's students who have an interest in Computational Social Science Methods. This includes students from programs of Political Science, Sociology or any related fields as well as students from Computer Science who share an interest in the Social Sciences. Students do not need particular knowledge or need to meet any pre-requirements. However, they should be able and willing to read English literature and participate in English during the course. Also, a prior knowledge of R and/or Python is an advantage. This is, however, no formal requirement as long as students are willing to learn some basic coding skills in R and/or Python which will be taught during the course. As students will work in teams, different levels of R and/or Python are seen as advantages as students will be able to help each other.

On the one hand, students will learn state of the art research on protest camp research with a strong focus on online communication strategies. The course will focus on protest literature and explores what we know so far. However, it aims to go beyond that as especially logistics and professionalisation of protest camps are still an understudied area in protest research. Thus, we will discuss new concepts and approaches to the logistics and professionalisation of protest camps. This will be done in close cooperation with the LOOPS research project.

As such, students will learn how to read scientific papers and discuss them in class. We will focus on pitfalls, but also strengths of the required readings, so that students are prepared to conduct their own research.

3. Participation in an X-Student Research Group and Course Requirements

Students from all universities within the Berlin University Alliance are allowed to register for the X-Student Research Group. To register for the X-Student research group, please check out the following [Link](#).

Students can receive 6 LP for participating in the X-Student Research Group. The credit points can be earned in the interdisciplinary compulsory elective area (üWP) (überfachlichen Wahlpflichtbereich (üWP)) / in the free elective area (im freien Wahlbereich) / in the compulsory elective area (im Wahlpflichtbereich) / in the study area General Vocational Preparation (ABV) (im Studienbereich Allgemeine Berufsvorbereitung (ABV)) for both Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes. In addition, for some compulsory elective modules have been approved by the examination boards. Upon application to the responsible examination board, there is the possibility of individual crediting in your own degree programme. Possibilities for credit transfer should be clarified in advance with the examination office in advance.

Requirements:

Students are required to have done the assigned readings before each class. Further on students are required to actively participate in the course and take part in the discussions and the collaborative work. As such, students have to define their own sub-research questions in relation to LOOPS main research questions. They will also collect their own data of a protest camp from Telegram channels using web-scraping methods that are taught in class. After the data collection, students will apply different computational methods depending on their own research question and evaluate their data. In the end, students will present their work (data collection and analysis) in a poster format which the students will then also be able to present at the Berlin Conference of Student Research on **October 2, 2024**. No exam or other formal requirements are expected.

4. Course Outline

Week 1 (April 15): Protests and Protest Camps

- Introduction to protest literature with a focus on protest camps and its peculiarities
- Overview of research project LOOPS and which questions we aim to answer
- **Literature:**
 - Frenzel, Fabian, Feigenbaum A. , and McCurdy P. 2014. Protest Camps: An Emerging Field of Social Movement Research. *The Sociological Review* 62 (3): 457–74.
 - Bishara, D. (2021). The Generative Power of Protest: Time and Space in Contentious Politics. *Comparative Political Studies*, 54(10), 1722–1756.

Week 2 (April 22): Protest in Authoritarian Regimes– **Literature:**

- Frenzel, Fabian, Feigenbaum A. , and McCurdy P. 2014. Protest Camps: An Emerging Field of Social Movement Research. *The Sociological Review* 62 (3): 457–74.
- Bishara, D. (2021). The Generative Power of Protest: Time and Space in Contentious Politics. *Comparative Political Studies*, 54(10), 1722–1756.
- Diamond, L. (2002). Elections Without Democracy: Thinking About Hybrid Regimes. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 21–35.
- Abonga, F., Kerali, R., Porter, H., & Tapscott, R. (2020). Naked Bodies and Collective Action: Repertoires of Protest in Uganda’s Militarised, Authoritarian Regime. *Civil Wars*, 22(2–3), 198–223.(additional)
- Gandhi, J., & Przeworski, A. (2007). Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(11), 1279–1301. (additional)

Week 3 (April 29): Protest Camps in Authoritarian Regimes

- Overview of protest camps in authoritarian regimes (possible cases for the research project)
- Students should start thinking of questions they are interested in and that they aim to answer during the course of the X-Student Research Group

– **Literature:**

- Malthaner, S. (2014). Fieldwork in the Context of Violent Conflict and Authoritarian Regimes. In D. della Porta (Hrsg.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* (S. 0). Oxford University Press.
- Fruhstorfer, A. & Kittel R. (2024). The conceptualization and measurement of protest camp logistics in authoritarian regimes. Working Paper.
- Eltantawy, N., & Wiest, J. B. (2011). The Arab Spring— Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory. *International Journal of Communication*, 5(0), Article 0.

Week 4 (May 6): *Hands-On-Session:* Online Communication and Protest - Session 1

- Overview of computational social science methods to analyse our data
- Introduction to R or Python (yet to be decided)
- Practical session: Working with R/Python → **Please bring your Laptop!**

– **Literature:**

- Mosca, L. (2014). Methodological Practices in Social Movement Online Research. In D. della Porta (Hrsg.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* (S. 0). Oxford University Press.

Week 5 (May 13): *Hands-On-Session:* Online Communication and Protest - Session 2

- Practical session: Working with R → **Please bring your Laptop!**

Week 6 (May 20): Pfingsten - no course!**Week 7 (May 27):** *Hands-On-Session:* How to Scrape Telegram Data - Application

- Using R/Python to scrape Telegram data with the API → **Please bring your Laptop!**

- How to save the data (data set structure, data cleaning etc.)

Week 8 (June 3): Short Recap and Research Question

- What have we learned so far? What is still missing to conduct research?
- Final decision on research question that we aim to answer during the course of the X-Research Group
- Overview on Research Ethics
- **Literature:**
 - Milan, S. (2014). The Ethics of Social Movement Research. In D. della Porta (Hrsg.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* (S. 0). Oxford University Press.
 - Minkoff, Scott L. 2018. A Guide to Developing and Writing Research Papers in Political Science. Website: www.scottminkoff.com/guides/ , last accessed July 2022.

Week 9 (June 10): *Hands-On-Session:* Data Collection and Data Management:

- Students will collect data based on the protest camp and research question they decided on
- Students will start collecting data through the Telegram API → **Please bring your Laptop!**

Week 10 (June 17): *Hands-On-Session:* Data Collection and Data Management:

- Students will continue collecting data through the Telegram API
- Students will also clean and save the data for further analysis → **Please bring your Laptop!**

Week 11 (June 24): *Hands-On-Session:* Analysis of the Data

- Introduction to qualitative image analysis
- Introduction to quantitative text-analysis
- Which analysis is most useful for our data?
- **Literature:**
 - Doerr, N., & Milman, N. (2014). Working with Images. In D. della Porta (Hrsg.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* (S. 0). Oxford University Press.

Week 12 (July 1): *Hands-On-Session:* Analysis of the Data

- Students will apply different methods in order to answer the pre-defined research question → **Please bring your Laptop!**

Week 13 (July 8): *Hands-On-Session:* Analysis of the Data

- Students will apply different methods in order to answer the pre-defined research question → **Please bring your Laptop!**

Week 14 (July 15): Pizza and Presentation Session

- What are our results? What are their implications?
- How can we present these results to a broader audience? Poster Format!
- What did we not find out and how could we address that in future research?
→ **Please bring your Laptop!**