



College of Business
and Public Policy
UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE

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The CBPP Economics Department
invite you to attend the following

Faculty & Student Seminar

Friday, April 20, 2018

3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m., RH303



Atin Basuchoudhary
Professor, Economics & Business
Virginia Military Institute

Predicting Civil Conflict

Abstract: This book should interest anyone interested in identifying the causes of civil conflict and then doing something to end it. In fact, we suggest a pathway through the book for the lay reader interested in approaches to end civil conflict. Civil conflict is a persistent source of misery to humankind. There is, however, a lack of a comprehensive scientific theory of the sources of civil conflict even though the question of cooperation or conflict is at the heart of political economy. This book introduces machine learning to explore whether there can even be a unified theory of conflict. A good theory must explain how the sources of conflict cause civil conflict. These causal relationships should predict civil conflict. Machine learning uses predictive accuracy to scientifically choose between competing sources of conflict identified in the literature. This theoretically agnostic “picking” has the added benefit of offering some protection (or even immunity) against many of the problems noted in the current literature; i.e. the tangled causality between conflict and its correlates, the relative rarity of civil conflict at a global level, missing data, and spectacular statistical assumptions. This book argues that the search for a unified theory of conflict must begin among these more predictive sources of civil conflict. In fact, there is a clear sense that game theoretic rational choice models of bargaining/commitment failure predict conflict better than any other approach. This suggests that the search for a theory of civil conflict must begin here. In addition, the algorithms highlight that conflict is path dependent; i.e. it tends to continue once started. This is intuitive in many ways – though roundly ignored as a matter of science. It should not.