



Research Seminar

Mobilizing under Uncertainty From Fleeing to Fighting in War-Time Abkhazia

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How do ordinary people navigate the uncertainty of war's onset to arrive at different mobilization decisions, from fleeing to fighting in civil war? This talk will draw on 180 in-depth interviews with participants and non-participants in the Abkhaz mobilization in the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 and participant observation in carefully selected locales across Abkhazia. In contrast to the common approaches to mobilization that assume ordinary people's knowledge of the risk involved in mobilization and their decisions to mobilize based on this knowledge, I argue that people come to perceive the anticipated risks, or threats, of mobilization in different ways and this process shapes their mobilization trajectories. When faced with violence and war, individuals do not simply choose to fight (or not) based on a given notion of risk, but draw on their preceding experiences of inter-group conflict and social networks at the time of mobilization to understand who requires protection and how to provide it. This argument highlights a previously overlooked dimension of mobilization, that is, how ordinary people come to perceive the threat of civil war under conditions of uncertainty. I develop this argument through the mechanism of collective threat framing to explain how information filters through national, local, and quotidian social structures to reach embedded individuals and affect their variable threat perceptions and mobilization decisions.



Prof. Dr. Shesterinina is Assistant Professor in Politics/International Politics at the University of Sheffield. Prior to taking up this position, she was a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Postdoctoral Fellow (2015-2016) at Yale University, affiliated with the Program on Order, Conflict, and Violence. She holds a PhD (2014, first class) in Political Science from the University of British Columbia. Dr. Shesterinina's interests lie at the intersection of international relations, comparative politics, and qualitative methodology. Her field-intensive research explores the internal dynamics of and international intervention in contemporary armed conflict, with a focus on ordinary people's mobilization under uncertainty and civilian protection norms and practices. Her work has been published in the *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, and *International Peacekeeping*.

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