

Exam questions Methodology Course (HUMR 5191), Spring 2016

Below please find three ‘situations’. Choose one of them and use it as a departure point for writing a text that contains the following elements:

- 1 Deduce a human rights-relevant research question from the situation described.
- 2 Explain briefly why you believe this research question is plausible and researchable.
- 3 Elaborate a research plan for answering the chosen research question (or exploring the relevant issues).
- 4 Give a sketch of the resulting research in the form of an outline of an essay or thesis, i.e., a text that demonstrates your methodological and editing abilities rather than answering the question as such.

The maximum length of the assignment is 5,000 words including footnotes.

Situation 1

Multistan, a middle-income country with diverse religious traditions and an ethnically and linguistically mixed population, is in the midst of a severe political crisis that over the last years has taken on the characteristics of a full scale civil war. This situation has led to much human suffering in the form of, inter alia, intense political persecution, widespread damage of property and infrastructure. The armed conflict between the government forces and different armed groups has resulted in an increasing number of dead and missing persons as well as a swelling stream of refugees and internally displaced persons. Attempts at initiating negotiations between the government and opposition groups, from the UN system as well as the international community, in the form of shifting alliances of world powers, regional powers and neighbouring states, have failed partly because the opposition is deeply divided internally as to why there is a crisis and how to overcome it and partly because also the outside world is as similarly divided. In some cases there are appears to be close links between internal factions and external actors, thus adding to the complexity of the conflict.

Multistan can be one of several countries in the Middle East or the surrounding area which are both quite recent creations as nation-states as well as current political expressions of centuries-old traditions with state-level organisation and multicultural communities. Choose one of them to provide your answers to the initial questions with the required empirical detail for fleshing out a research question.

Situation 2

Armoria is a low- to middle-income country comparatively hardly hit by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Over the last 20 years a rising percentage of the population has been diagnosed as HIV positive and even though of late the death rate has fallen, accompanied by a lessening of the speed with which it has been spreading, the disease in question continues to be the perhaps most formidable threat to the general health situation in Armoria.

Since it gained independence from colonial power 50 years ago, Armoria has succeeded in building a comparatively stable democratic political system and a reasonably robust economy, thanks to general political stability and abundant natural resources. The population consists of two large and several smaller ethnic groups, the largest two adhere to different religions and speak very different languages; however, by most standards a large majority identifies with the present government system in so far as it incorporates clear measures of group representation. From time to time there are signs of ethnic conflict, notably in the area of health-related and religious custom, however, social and economic disparities, typically tied to patterns of uneven rural/urban development, appear to be as important for the way people participate in politics.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic now affects some 15 % of the population. This means shortage of qualified manpower in many sectors, not least government itself, and increasing poverty in the hardest hit areas as breadwinners become ill and die leaving their children alone. There is disagreement about the origins of HIV/AIDS in Armoria, some claim it began in urban, homosexual and ethnically mixed areas (with international presence as well), others claim it first appeared among indigenous groups in remote areas. On the popular level, there is also strong disagreement about the nature of the disease and the manners through which it spreads even if the national health system officially follows the standards for diagnostics and treatment as defined and recommended by the WHO.

Situation 3

After a number of serious terrorist attacks on civilians and civilian objects resulting in hundreds of persons killed or wounded and a heightened risk of impending attacks, the government of Arkadia decides to impose stricter measures to enhance national security. Some of these measures include increased electronic surveillance and bulk collection of information, the possibility of security detention for prolonged periods of time, and the flying of suspects to other countries in order to extract relevant information from them. Many countries cooperate with the government of Arkadia in this latter initiative which is commonly referred to as a programme of ‘extraordinary renditions’.

There have been many inquiries into allegations of ‘extraordinary renditions’ and reports detailing related human rights violations. The Minister of the Interior of a European State confirmed, in particular, that the national law-enforcement authorities, acting upon a valid international arrest warrant issued by Arkadian authorities, had detained Mr El-Sharif and

kept him incommunicado for a couple of weeks under the constant supervision of agents of their national intelligence agency. Mr El-Sharif had later been handed over to the custody of an Arkadian Intelligence Agency “rendition team” at the national airport and flown out of the country. Upon being released a few months later in the same European country by Arkadian authorities, Mr El-Sharif is considering all available options and grounds for pursuing an individual complaint concerning his treatment by the Arkadian government and by the authorities of the European State.