What is Political Violence?

CONTEXT

Grade Level & Class
This lesson was designed for a 12th grade, AP Comparative Politics course, but may also serve in World History courses, depending on the age and maturity level of the students. As Comparative Politics is taught thematically, political violence can be addressed at any point; but considering examples are prevalent across time and space, it may be beneficial to introduce the concept as soon in the course as possible so students can identify examples as they arise.

Topic
Developing students’ understanding of the concept of political violence through the examination of various examples and non-examples in order to ascertain the concept’s critical attributes.

Length
One 90-minute class in block scheduling, or two 45-minute classes in a traditional schedule.

Instructional Model
This lesson follows the “concept formation model,” which enables students to develop their own understanding of a certain concept through comparing and contrasting diverse examples, identifying critical attributes, defining and labeling the concept, and applying their understanding to new examples. This model encourages higher order thinking processes, including synthesis of knowledge, application of understanding, and evaluation of examples.

Overview
In this lesson, students will formulate an understanding of the concept of political violence. After an engaging “hook” to stimulate interest, students will be provided with several examples of political violence, taken from different regions and time periods. They will use a data-retrieval chart to collect data on and begin analyzing the examples with guided questions. The chart will help them in the next activity, in which they compare and contrast the examples to identify the critical attributes of the concept. Students will then create their own definition and label of the concept addressed through the examples to solidify their understanding and enable generalization beyond the examples provided. In the third part of the lesson, students will apply their conceptual understanding to new examples and non-examples, using evidence to justify why they are or are not examples of the concept. Students will modify non-examples and identify their own examples to further practice using the concept.

Rationale
Political violence is (unfortunately) extremely widespread, regardless of time period or geography. Because of its perpetual reoccurrence throughout history, as well as
its continued relevance today, political violence is an important concept for students in Comparative Politics and history to understand. By approaching it through the concept formation method, students will not only “form a robust understanding of [a] significant concept in the content area,” but will also construct and organize their knowledge in a way that will help them recognize and translate the concept to new situations (Larson & Keiper, 164). Political violence is a concept well suited to this model because it is omnipresent, significant, and clearly defined in terms of essential attributes. This model works within students’ zones of proximal development, facilitating their understanding of a concept while also utilizing higher order thinking skills, including comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Background Information
Unlike in history courses, AP Comparative Politics will be taught thematically, interspersing concepts and ideas such as states and nations, democracy and authoritarianism, and globalization and political economy with case studies of individual countries. As a result, a lesson on political violence can easily work at any point in the curriculum, provided it is placed in context with case studies. Before approaching the subject, students should have a clear understanding of the difference between states (as a political unit) and nations so they can comprehend the origins and implications of different forms of political violence. It also may be helpful to have examined different forms of government before addressing the subject, in order to provide a foundational context for the concept and how it operates in different circumstances.

Objectives
After this lesson, the student will be able to do the following:

**Academic**
1. Understand the concept of political violence and describe its critical attributes (AP Comparative Politics Goal).
2. Apply knowledge of the concept to new situations in order to identify examples and non-examples of political violence.
3. Analyze the causes and consequences of events and developments, and place these in the context of the institutions, values, and beliefs of the periods in which they took place (NCSS Theme 2).
4. Understand the historical development and evolving functions of various structures of power, authority, and governance, both in U.S. society as well as in other parts of the world (NCSS Theme 6).

**Intellectual**
1. Analyze and interpret basic data relevant to comparative government and politics (AP Comparative Politics Goal).
2. Compare and contrast examples across countries and derive generalizations (AP Comparative Politics Goal).

ASSESSMENT

This lesson affords many opportunities for the teacher to determine whether students have grasped the concept of political violence, can describe its essential characteristics, can apply their understanding to new examples, and can demonstrate the skills necessary for such analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

1. As students work in pairs to complete the data-retrieval chart and the chart analysis, the teacher should walk around the classroom, provide encouragement, and ask questions to promote “digging in” to the examples. From this informal assessment, the teacher will be able to see how well students can break down, compare, and contrast the examples.

2. During the whole-class discussion on the examples differences and similarities, the teacher will be able to assess student understanding of the concept based upon quality and extent of responses. The teacher will likewise observe the clarity and organization of student knowledge as they work to identify the critical attributes of the concept.

3. Asking students to share and compare their own definitions and labels of the concept will allow the teacher to see and address any misunderstandings in their grasp of the concept.

4. Having students complete and turn in the classification examples analysis and assignment will enable the teacher to ascertain the extent of individual understandings of the concept, and whether they can apply this understanding to identify new examples, modify non-examples to be examples, and discover examples on their own. After reviewing student work, the teacher will return the worksheet for students to keep, providing feedback as necessary to clarify and reinforce understandings of the concept.

5. Assessment of student understanding of the concept will continue throughout the course, as students have opportunities to encounter, recognize, and analyze other examples of political violence.

CONTENT AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Resources

- Link to news broadcast (hook)
- Computer and Projector (with audio)
- Class set of data retrieval examples
- Class set of classification examples
- Individual copies of data retrieval chart
- Individual copies of chart analysis
Concept Definition
Political Violence is (1) the use of force or violence (2) that is politically charged or motivated (3) and operates outside of state control (4) apart from war or crime.

Preparation
1. Set up link on the computer and be ready to show it on the projector once students are settled.
2. Have desks arranged in a way that facilitates both pair- and whole-class work.
3. Have copies of materials organized in a way that facilitates easy distribution.

Hook
1. Introduce concept formation model to students, explaining purpose and outlining procedure of the lesson.
2. Show news broadcast of recent protests in Amsterdam over anti-squatting law. Briefly discuss—What action is taking place? Why are civilians protesting?

Data-Retrieval Examples and Chart Analysis
1. Describe the examples and chart handouts and explain what students are to do.
2. Pass out class set of data-retrieval examples (asking students not to write on them) and individual data-retrieval charts (for students to write on and keep).
3. Model and work through the first example together as a class, to be sure students understand the assignment. Encourage students to work in pairs.
4. As students are working, walk around the classroom to monitor progress while passing out the chart analysis worksheet (also for students to write on and keep).
5. Once students are finished completing the chart, have them use the data gathered in the chart to work on the chart analysis differences and similarities.
6. As students finish up, bring their attention back to whole-class discussion. Solicit examples of differences from around the room, writing each on the board until they are all there. If students are missing ideas, ask questions that will help guide their thinking to the bigger issues (i.e. time, place, individual vs. group, violence from within or without, etc.).
7. Do the same with students for the similarities.
8. Once all the similarities are on the board, ask students what critical attributes they can identify, based on these similarities. Encourage students to respond to each other as they synthesize the essential concept characteristics. Be prepared to guide them with questioning if they miss important characteristics.

Defining and Labeling the Concept
1. Ask students to individually come up with their own definition for the concept, based on the critical attributes, as well as to “name” or “label” the concept as they see fit. Ask for volunteers to share their definitions and labels.
2. Share with students the real term for the concept.

Classifying Concept Examples
1. After students have gained a better understanding of the concept through collecting and analyzing data and creating their own definition, tell students they will now apply their knowledge to new examples.

2. Pass out class set of Classification Examples (ask students not to write on) and individual Classification Analysis worksheets.

3. Either with a partner or working individually, have students read and classify the provided summaries to determine whether they are examples or non-examples of the concept. If they are, students must provide their rationale and support of why they think so. If they are not, students must describe what would need to be different for the non-examples to be examples. (Whatever is not completed in class can be completed for homework, in addition to the short assignment.)

4. If time allows, students can compare and discuss their answers as a class.

**Conclusion**

1. Ask students if they can think of any examples (perhaps from recent months) of political violence that they have heard about recently in the news. Use this as a transition to discussing the homework assignment, which asks students to find an example from one of the six case-study countries.

2. Go over the homework assignment with the class, allowing them to ask any questions they may have before they leave.

3. If students do not finish the classification examples analysis, have them complete it at home.

**Differentiation**

As this lesson requires a lot of reading as well as higher order thinking skills, I utilize a variety of partner work and whole class discussion in order to assist students who might be weaker in these areas. Having partners will help break down the reading load, and enable students to immediately discuss their thoughts and have practice before sharing with the whole class. The chart and analysis worksheet automatically scaffold student construction of knowledge by providing guiding questions to lead students to the main ideas of the concept. By going over differences, similarities, and critical attributes as a whole class, all students will be able to recognize the essential characteristics of the concept. All students should practice using their understanding with the classification examples, but weaker students could simply identify examples vs. non-examples, while students needing more of a challenge can modify the non-examples to be examples. Likewise, in the homework assignment, students could have the choice whether to find an example of political violence from history, or to write one on their own that would contain the critical attributes.

**Adaptation**

For students in need of special accommodations and modifications (for IEPs, 504 plans, etc.), this lesson can be adapted in a variety of ways. The examples can be read aloud to students as needed, or presented to students in other versions (simplified text, media, etc.) that still contains the critical attributes. Students can also determine essential characteristics by looking at less than the four examples provided. Allowing partner work and reviewing as a whole-class enables students to talk to others, thereby scaffolding
their own understanding through social interaction. The variety of activities provided will also hopefully hold student interest. Specific needs will be addressed more in depth as they arise, but generally, students will be provided with individualized instruction as much as possible.

**Reflection**

An advantage of the concept formation model is that virtually no prior knowledge is needed as long as the examples provided are clear, concise, and contain the critical attributes the students will need to identify. That being said, ideally this lesson will be taught early enough in the semester so that students can use their knowledge of political violence as they encounter other examples in their case studies, yet not before students have gained a foundation of nations vs. states so that they can recognize the fact that instances of political violence occur outside of state control.

A possible issue in the implementation of this lesson might arise due to the different reading levels and working speeds of students. Pairing them with partners and giving them questions to discuss should help to even out disparities and allow time for slower workers to complete their work. Going over the differences, similarities, and critical attributes as a class will enable slower workers who may not have finished to still gain the essential knowledge of the lesson.

Additionally, this lesson does contain a lot of reading and pair-work, so the teacher can help maintain focus by walking around the room, asking students guiding questions to probe deeper into the examples, and refocusing students as a whole class from time to time to share ideas and allow opportunity for formative assessment.