Research Assistant, Political Violence & Election Monitoring (Fall to Spring Internship)

About the Organization: The Bridging Divides Initiative (BDI) is a non-partisan research initiative that tracks and mitigates political violence in the United States. BDI supports efforts to grow and build local community resilience through elections and other periods of heightened risk, laying the groundwork for the longer term to bridge the divides we face as a nation.

We do this by 1) producing action-oriented and responsive research to fill existing gaps and empower local leaders; 2) enabling cross-sector collaboration, so individuals and organizations are better prepared to mitigate risk and respond to crisis when it does arise; and 3) helping to drive the policy and community response. Over the last three years, BDI played an essential role in supporting a wide range of actors preparing for and responding to political violence and democratic crisis. Our data, analysis, and tools continue to help a diverse coalition of national and local decision-makers better target their interventions. BDI is based at the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA), co-hosted by the Empirical Studies of Conflict. Please visit https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/ for more information.

Position Overview: The Bridging Divides Initiative is looking to bring on several Research Assistants to support one of two ongoing research activities and related larger projects:

1. Bi-weekly Situation Report (SitRep), informing BDI's Project 'Building and Modeling Structures for Early Warning,' and
2. The Threats and Harassment Dataset (THD), informing BDI's Project 'Understanding Threats and Harassment to Local Officials.'

Research Assistants are expected to work remotely with the BDI team, which will support them as they lead and manage their efforts. You can read more on the responsibilities and qualifications of each of the two types of roles we're hiring for below.

(1) Building and Modeling Structures for Early Warning

A functional U.S. "Early Warning, Early Response" effort relies on shared information and rapid distribution within and between key sectors of the existing response ecosystem. BDI's core monitoring and analysis work (conducted as part of the work informing the Situation Report), delivered reliably through BDI's verified distribution network, has proven an essential part of the U.S. early warning infrastructure. The Situation Report (SitRep) is a biweekly report in which the BDI team synthesizes information from a wide variety of sources across the U.S., and helps to make it digestible to people in a position to take action on it. It functions as a resource to help others understand emerging trends or new contexts, along with rapid alerts. Such monitoring work helps to inform broader analysis and assessments (for example, see this assessment by NPR, with input from BDI).

Research Assistants will focus on issues of political violence, extremism, and election-related conflict, and will develop skills in secondary research and open-source intelligence (OSINT) methods, live event monitoring, and distilling complex socio-political
events for diverse audiences. Research Assistants will conduct team-based research, project management, and investigate trends on a community, state, regional, and national level.

To support work on the SitRep, Research Assistant responsibilities can include:

- Monitoring news sources, social media, and secondary reporting for relevant events in a particular geographic area, and evaluate the need for rapid alerts.
- Producing and contextualizing trends over time by including quantitative analysis of longitudinal data.
- Consulting with frequently-used resources, such as the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) and Crowd Counting Consortium.
- Engaging with online monitoring resources provided by key partners, including ethnographic reports on emerging online trends and other actor-based monitoring.
- Contributing to data-driven case studies situated in conflict analysis and community impact measures, based on the length of commitment and availability.

**Qualifications:** Research Assistants wishing to support work on the SitRep should have demonstrated experience in many or all of the following core competencies:

- Interpersonal and communication skills
- Reliably meets project deadlines
- Ability to work independently to locate and interpret information from multiple sources
- Familiarity with a variety of social media platforms
- Ability to evaluate source credibility
- Analytical and critical thinking skills that aim to contextualize ongoing events
- Ability to receive and incorporate feedback
- Familiarity with MS Office suite (Word, Excel) & Google Drive (Docs, Sheets, Forms)
- Familiarity with common research tools (NexisUni, ProQuest, Google News Alerts)
- Experience conducting desk-based research

(2) Understanding Threats and Harassment to Local Officials

A purposeful mixed methods and participatory approach, BDI's work advances essential understanding of where, who, and how threats are most directly impacting officials and our democracy at its most local level. Within this project, the Threats and Harassment Dataset (THD) is a first-of-its-kind database that tracks threats against local officials across the United States. Through systematic documentation of threats against and harassment of local officials, the dataset helps to identify and monitor trends (soon, in near-real-time). Such work allows BDI to get the right data into the hands of communities and policymakers in order to drive research-informed interventions, especially in advance of the upcoming election season. Such work contributes to BDI's broader
efforts to better understand threats and harassment to local officials (for example, see this assessment by the Washington Post, with input from BDI).

Research Assistants will focus on the collection, review, and management of data on threats against and harassment of local officials. Research Assistants will gain experience conducting detail-oriented tasks through mastering methodology, producing and managing quantitative data, as well as developing skills in secondary research and open-source intelligence (OSINT) methods. Research Assistants will be part of a team, and will gain experience in project and data management.

To support work on the THD, Research Assistant responsibilities can include:

- Monitoring news sources, social media, and secondary reporting for relevant events in a particular geographic area and recording incidents into a spreadsheet.
- Engaging with online monitoring resources provided by key partners, including ethnographic reports on emerging online trends and other actor-based monitoring.
- Ensuring the quality, consistency, and reliability of data.
- Contributing to data-driven case studies situated in conflict analysis and community impact measures, based on the length of commitment and availability.

**Qualifications:** Research Assistants wishing to support work on the THD should have demonstrated experience in many or all of the following core competencies:

- Interpersonal and communication skills
- Reliably meets project deadlines
- Ability to work independently to locate and interpret information from multiple sources
- Analytical and critical thinking skills that aim to master and apply complex methodology
- High level of attention to detail
- Ability to receive and incorporate feedback
- Familiarity with MS Office suite (Word, Excel) & Google Drive (Docs, Sheets, Forms)
- Familiarity with common research tools (NexisUni, ProQuest, Google News Alerts)
- Experience conducting desk-based research

**Timeline:** Start date for the position is ASAP. Approximate hours: 10-20 per week. The role is envisioned as a 6-month minimum engagement over the fall semester and winter break. While the BDI team will work with Research Assistants to accommodate their schedules, Research Assistants are expected to adhere to the schedules to which they have committed. Those
seeking longer-term opportunities are strongly encouraged to note this in their application materials.

Compensation: $17 for undergraduate students; $25/hour for those with a degree.

How to apply: Apply via the Princeton JobX portal for undergraduates or graduate students, providing a resume and short letter of interest. You may email bdi@princeton.edu to confirm your application is received or with any questions. Applications will be considered incomplete until these materials are received. Applicants interested in either role (SitRep or THD) should apply to this posting, noting any preference, and will be considered for both positions in interview.

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Posted: August 2023 - No matter who you are, BDI is a place you can call home. We know that our unique perspectives make us stronger, smarter, and well-positioned for success. We value and rely on the collective voices of our team to help guide our work on challenging issues. That's why we're proud Princeton is an equal opportunity employer and all qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to age, race, color, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, disability status, protected veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.