

Buffett Undergraduate Research Fellowship Opportunity

The unthinkable fight? Democracy and violence across borders

Faculty Mentor: Shmuel Nili, Professor, Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences

Project Synopsis: This book project pursues two aims. The book's first aim is to offer a general account of the idea of "the unthinkable," which has been heavily under-studied in moral and political philosophy. The second aim, driving the bulk of the project, is more specific and applied. The faculty mentor wishes to show how a better theoretical grasp of "the unthinkable" can help address concrete moral questions concerning the relationship between democracy and violence, especially across international borders. Among these questions: can it be permissible to launch a military operation that will harm innocents abroad, in order to stave off a dangerous demagogue who might win an upcoming election at home? Can a democratic government send soldiers to support a manifestly unjust war abroad, to prevent them from fomenting a coup at home? Can democratic governments close their borders to citizens of a fellow democracy that has just been invaded by a dictatorship, in order to get them to stay and resist the invaders?

Project Term: Summer and Academic Year 2026

Project Location: Remote

Job Description: The student researcher will provide substantive RA support on two main fronts. First, reading drafts of the evolving book, and offering feedback based on (1) their direct impressions of the text, and (2) their engagement with the relevant background literature, parts of which they are already familiar with, and other parts they will familiarize herself with in the course of the summer and subsequent quarters. Second, following up on ongoing conversations regarding the book project (roughly every one to two weeks), the student will pursue historical and empirical sources under the faculty mentor's guidance to further the normative arguments at the center of the book.

Time Commitment: 15 flexible hours per week

Number of available positions: One, preselected