

Political Violence and the Jihadist Movement
George Washington University
Department of Political Science
PSC 2993

Spring 2023
Hall of Government 102
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:35-10:50 am

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Course Description

Why do armed groups use terrorism? How does ideology influence armed group behavior? Why do individuals join jihadist groups? Why do armed groups fracture? What are the causes and consequences of armed group cooperation and competition? How do militant leaders impact armed group dynamics? Why do armed groups use extreme forms of violence? Are counterterrorism operations effective? How do jihadist groups compare with right-wing organizations?

Seeking to gain insight into these questions and others, this course provides an introduction to the political violence literature. Rather than examining interstate conflict, we will focus on substate violence involving armed groups, exploring the alliances, leadership, internal dynamics, political strategies, and tactics of militant organizations. The first class of each week is designed to introduce students to different concepts and theories in the political violence literature. The second class of the week is more applied, taking an in-depth look at specific case studies. Case materials focus primarily on the jihadist movement.

In recent decades, jihadist groups have played a leading role in numerous civil conflicts. We will utilize concepts and theories from the political violence literature to help understand the behavior of jihadist organizations operating across Africa, the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia, including Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, the Islamic State, Jemaah Islamiya, and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat. Rather than lumping jihadist groups into one monolithic category, we will compare organizations in disparate conflict settings, highlighting important similarities as well as differences between groups. In addition to cross-case comparisons, we will examine the internal dynamics of various jihadist groups, moving beyond unitary actor assumptions.

This course has four major goals: (1) to learn about key concepts and theories in the political violence literature; (2) to gain knowledge of the histories and behavior of different jihadist groups in multiple regions; (3) to understand how to evaluate arguments using different types of data sources; and (4) to gain familiarity with conducting research on armed groups.

Course Requirements and Grades

Class Participation (15%)

Students are expected to come to every class prepared to discuss and ask questions about the required readings. Participation will be assessed on the quality, rather than quantity, of students' contributions to class. Please email me if you have any questions or concerns about attendance.

Group Presentation (15%)

Students will work together in groups (2-3) and research one jihadist group. Students should sign up for one case study from the presentation list by emailing me their top three choices during the first week of class. This assignment allows students to delve deeper into the histories of different jihadist groups. Useful sources for this assignment include the [Mapping Militants Project](#), [Global Terrorism Database](#), [Armed Group Dataset](#), and the [Big, Allied and Dangerous Database](#).

The presentation assignment revolves around two components. First, each group will write one paper examining different aspects of the assigned organization. This includes detailing the organization's a) formation and history, b) leadership, c) allies and rivals, d) primary tactics, and e) current status. Papers should be *five double-spaced pages* in length and must be emailed or handed to me at the start of class. Second, groups will orally present their case study in class the same day that papers are submitted. Presentations should last around *10 minutes*.

Mid-Term Exam (30%): Thursday, March 9

The mid-term exam will cover material from the first eight weeks of classes. Students will be expected to identify and discuss different theories, concepts, and jihadist groups. The mid-term, which will be administered during class, will consist of identifications and a short essay. For students that have to miss class, the make-up exam will be during student hours in Week 10.

Final Paper (40%): Thursday, May 11

Option 1: Literature Review

This option involves writing a literature review surrounding one particular topic in political violence research. This essay is designed to evaluate students' ability to evaluate, critique, and synthesize key arguments from one theoretical literature in a short, organized, and well-crafted essay. Students may delve deeper into one of the subjects we covered during the semester or research a different political violence topic. In doing so, students should answer:

- 1) When and why did research on this topic begin?
- 2) What are the key concepts, arguments, and areas of disagreement in this literature?
- 3) What are the theoretical and/or methodological limitations of research on this topic?
- 4) What are potential avenues for future research on this topic?

The paper should be between *8-10 double-spaced pages* in length. Students should email their topic of choice by *Thursday, March 30*.

Option 2: Short Research Paper

This option involves drafting a research project that they may continue working on following the completion of this course. Students will be evaluated based on the organization of their paper, information presented, and the quality of each section. This research proposal contains four primary parts:

- 1) Research question
- 2) Short literature review
- 3) Methodology
- 4) Tentative argument

The paper should be between *8-10 double-spaced pages* in length. Students should email their topic of choice by *Thursday, March 30*.

Class and University Policies

Student Hours

Student hours will be held every Wednesday from 3:00-5:00 pm via zoom. This is your time! Please use this as an opportunity to come and ask questions about the course or anything else that might be helpful for you. Students should sign up for a particular 15-minute slot prior to 3:00 pm.

Course Readings

All readings will be posted on blackboard or are accessible via the syllabus. Students are expected to carefully analyze the readings, coming to class with questions and discussion points.

Papers

Writing assignments should use Times New Roman and font size 12. Margins should be one-inch on all sides. You may use MLA or APA formats for citations as long as the method is consistent.

Grading Scale

100-93 [A], 92-90 [A-], 89-87 [B+], 86-83 [B], 82-80 [B-], 79-77 [C+], 76-73 [C], 72-70 [C-], 69-67 [D+], 66-63 [D], 62-60 [D-], 60 and below [F].

Deadlines

Assignments submitted after the deadline of the designated day will be automatically penalized one partial letter grade (e.g., A → A-, B+ → B). An additional penalty of a partial letter grade will be deducted for every 24 hours the assignment is late. However, please discuss with me if extensions on assignments are needed.

Plagiarism

All assignments submitted by students must be original work. Any plagiarized work will result in an automatic 0 and disciplinary action. If you are uncertain about how to cite others' opinions, please ask me. For further information on what constitutes plagiarism and the disciplinary measures associated with it, see consult the university's [Code of Academic Integrity](#).

Class Discussions

Please treat fellow classmates with respect. Different perspectives are welcome and students should be tolerant of other viewpoints. Disrespect of other students will not be tolerated.

Electronic Devices

Laptops may be used only to consult the readings or for taking notes. Please do not use laptops for other purposes. Cell phones should be turned on silent and only used in emergency situations.

Mental Health

Throughout the course, we will be discussing difficult topics. If issues arise with any of the readings or course topics, please let me know if I can help out in any way. The university's counseling number is 202-994-5300 and no appointments are needed for counseling support.

Useful Websites on Political Violence and Jihadist Groups

- <https://warontherocks.com/>.
- <https://www.lawfareblog.com/>.
- <https://www.longwarjournal.org/>.

Course Overview

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Strategy

Week 3: Tactics - Islamic State

Week 4: Organization - Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat

Guest Speaker: Sara Harmouch, American University

Week 5: Leadership - al-Qaeda

Week 6: Cooperation - Islamic State - Khorasan Province

Week 7: Competition - Jabhat al-Nusra

Guest Speaker: Regine Schwab, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt

Week 8: Mobilization - Jemaah Islamiya

Mid-Term Week

Week 9: Spring Break

Week 10: State Violence - al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

Week 11: Gender - Boko Haram

Guest Speaker: Tara Chandra, University of California, Berkeley

Week 12: Extra-Lethal Violence - Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis

Week 13: Crime - Al-Shabaab

Guest Speaker: Katharine Petrich, Middlebury Institute of International Studies

Week 14: Right-Wing Groups - Atomwaffen Division

Week 15: Ethics

Guest Speaker: Meili Criezis, American University

Week 1: Introduction

Tuesday, January 17

- Introduction to course

Thursday, January 19

- Anne Stenersen, "Jihadism after the 'Caliphate': Towards a New Typology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 5, no. 47 (2022): 774-793.
- Oren Nimni, "[Defining Violence](#)," *Current Affairs*, September 17, 2017.

Week 2: Strategy

Tuesday, January 24

- Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 49-80.

Thursday, January 26

- Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (eds.), *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), chapter 13.

- Thomas Hegghammer, "[The Ideological Hybridization of Jihadi Groups](#)," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, November 18, 2009.

Week 3: Tactics - Islamic State

Tuesday, January 31

- Danielle Gilbert, "The Logic of Kidnapping in Civil War: Evidence from Colombia," *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 4 (2022): 1226-1241.
- Michael C. Horowitz, "Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism," *International Organization* 64, no. 1 (2010): 33-64.

Thursday, February 2

- Mara Redlich Revkin and Elisabeth Jean Wood, "The Islamic State's Pattern of Sexual Violence: Ideology, Institutions, Policies and Practices," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6, no. 2 (2021).

Week 4: Organization – Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat

Tuesday, February 7

- Jacob Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), chapter 2.
- Evan Perkoski, *Divided Not Conquered: How Rebels Fracture and Splinters Behave* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 1-33.

Thursday, February 9: Guest Speaker: Sara Harmouch, American University

- Alex Thurston, *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel: Local Politics and Rebel Groups* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 27-62.
- Daniel Byman and Asfandiyar Mir, "[How Strong is al-Qaeda? A Debate](#)," *War on the Rocks*, May 20, 2022.

Week 5: Leadership - al-Qaeda

Tuesday, February 14

- Barak Mendelsohn, "Casting Shadow: Founders and the Unique Challenges of a Terrorist Group's First Leadership Change," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2021).
- Katherine Sawyer, Kanisha D. Bond, and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Rebel Leader Ascension and Wartime Sexual Violence," *The Journal of Politics* 83, no. 1 (2020): 396-400.

Thursday, February 16

- Tricia Bacon and Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault, "Al Qaeda and the Islamic State's Break: Strategic Strife or Lackluster Leadership?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 42, no. 3 (2019): 229-263.
- Barak Mendelsohn and Colin P. Clarke, "[Zawahiri's Legacy and Prospects for an al-Qaeda Revival](#)," *Lawfare*, Tuesday, August 2, 2022.

Week 6: Cooperation - Islamic State - Khorasan Province

Tuesday, February 21

- Tricia Bacon, “Hurdles to International Terrorist Alliances: Lessons from Al Qaeda’s Experience,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 1 (2017): 79-101.
- Assaf Moghadam, “[Terrorist Affiliations in Context: A Typology of Terrorist Inter-Group Cooperation](#),” *CTC Sentinel* 8, no. 3 (2015): 22-25.

Thursday, February 23

- Amira Jadoon, “Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” (2018).
- Christopher W. Blair, and Philip B.K. Potter, “The Strategic Logic of Large Militant Alliance Networks,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 8, no. 1 (2022): 1-22.

Week 7: Competition - Jabhat al-Nusra

Tuesday, February 28

- Megan Farrell, “The Logic of Transnational Outbidding: Pledging Allegiance and the Escalation of Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 57, no. 3 (2020): 437-451.
- Tore Refslund Hamming, “The Al Qaeda-Islamic State Rivalry: Competition Yes, but no Competitive Escalation,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32, no. 1 (2020): 20-37.

Thursday, March 2: Guest Speaker: Regine Schwab, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt

- Regine Schwab, “Escalate or Negotiate? Constraint and Rebel Strategic Choices Towards Rivals in the Syrian Civil War,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2021).

Week 8: Mobilization - Jemaah Islamiya

Tuesday, March 7

- Julie Chernov Hwang and Kirsten E. Schulze, “Why They Join: Pathways to Indonesian Jihadist Organizations,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30, no. 6 (2018): 911-932.

Thursday, March 9

- *Mid-Term*

Week 9: Spring Break

Week 10: State Violence - al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

Tuesday, March 21

- Bryce Loidolt, “Were Drone Strikes Effective? Evaluating the Drone Campaign in Pakistan Through Captured al-Qaeda Documents,” *Texas National Security Review* 5, no. 2 (2022).
- Joshua A. Schwartz and Matthew Fuhrmann, “[Do Armed Drones Reduce Terrorism? Here’s the Data](#),” *TMC: The Washington Post*, August 18, 2022.

Thursday, March 23

- Audrey Kurth Cronin, “Why Drones Fail: When Tactics Drive Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 92 (2013).
- Elisabeth Kendall, “Contemporary Jihadi Militancy in Yemen: How is the Threat Evolving?” *Middle East Institute* (July 2018): pgs. 11-17.
- Scott Shane, “[The Lessons of Anwar al-Awlaki](#),” *New York Times*, August 27, 2015.

Week 11: Gender - Boko Haram

Tuesday, March 28

- Amira Jadoon, Julia Maria Lodoen, Charmaine Noelle Willis, and Nakissa Puneh Jahanbani, "Breaking the Glass Ceiling? Female Participation in Militant Organizations in Islamic State Affiliates in Southeast Asia," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 8 (2022): 1774-1796.
- Jason Warner and Hilary Matfess, "Exploding Stereotypes: The Unexpected Operational and Demographic Characteristics of Boko Haram's Suicide Bombers," *Combating Terrorism Center* (2017): 28-44.

Thursday, March 30: Guest Speaker: Tara Chandra, University of California, Berkeley

- Aisha Ahmad, "'We Have Captured Your Women': Explaining Jihadist Norm Change," *International Security* 44, no. 1 (2019): 80-116.
- Tara Chandra, "[Russia Is Using Rape as a Weapon in Ukraine. The West Must Hold Putin Accountable](#)," *The Daily Beast*, November 27, 2022.

Week 12: Extra-Lethal Violence - Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis

Tuesday, April 4

- Lee Ann Fujii, "The Puzzle of Extra-Lethal Violence," *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 2 (2013): 410-426.
- Simone Molin Friis, "'Behead, Burn, Crucify, Crush': Theorizing the Islamic State's Public Displays of Violence," *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 2 (2018): 243-267.

Thursday, April 6

- Tamar Mitts, Gregoire Phillips, and Barbara Walter, "Studying the Impact of ISIS Propaganda Campaigns," *Journal of Politics* 84, no. 2 (2022): 1220-1225.
- Robert A. Pape, Michael Rowley, and Sarah Morell, "[Why ISIL Beheads Its Victims: The Islamic State's Brutality Has a Strategic Logic](#)," *Politico*, October 7, 2014.
- Aaron Y. Zelin, "[The Massacre Strategy: Why ISIS Brags about its Brutal Sectarian Murders](#)," *Politico*, June 17, 2014.
- Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "[ISIL's International Expansion: What Does Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis's Oath of Allegiance Mean](#)," *War on the Rocks*, February 25, 2015.

Week 13: Crime - Al-Shabaab

Tuesday, April 11

- Nicholas Barnes, "Criminal Politics: An Integrated Approach to the Study of Organized Crime, Politics, and Violence," *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 4 (2017): 967-987.
- McKenzie O'Brien, "Fluctuations Between Crime and Terror: The Case of Abu Sayyaf's Kidnapping Activities," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 2 (2012): 320-336.

Thursday, April 13: Guest Speaker: Katharine Petrich, Middlebury Institute of International Studies

- Katharine Petrich, "Cows, Charcoal, and Cocaine: Al-Shabaab's Criminal Activities in the Horn of Africa," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2019).

- Christopher Anzalone, "[The Life and Death of al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane](#)," *CTC Sentinel* 7, no 9 (2014): 19-23.

Week 14: Right-Wing Groups - Atomwaffen Division

Tuesday, April 18

- Anna A. Meier, "The Idea of Terror: Institutional Reproduction in Government Responses to Political Violence," *International Studies Quarterly* 64 (2020): 499-509.
- Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, Alexandra Phelan, and Ayse D. Lokmanoglu, "Gendered Radicalisation and 'Everyday Practices': An Analysis of Extreme Right and Islamic State Women-Only Forums," *European Journal of International Security* 8, no. 2 (2023): 227-242.

Thursday, April 20

- Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee, and Nicholas Harrington, "The Right-wing Terrorism Threat in Europe," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (March 2020).
- Jacob Ware, "Siege: The Atomwaffen Division and Rising Far-Right Terrorism in the United States," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (2019).

Week 15: Ethics

Tuesday, April 25: Guest Speaker: Meili Criezis, American University

- Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Case of Jihadology and the Securitization of Academia," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 33, no. 2 (2021): 225-241.
- Meili Criezis, "[Challenging the Gatekeepers: The Experiences of Women of Colour Researchers in the Terrorism Studies Field](#)," *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*, November 28, 2022.

Thursday, April 27

- Review