

POLS 3429: POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Monday 4:00-6:30pm in FSB 220

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Office Hours: Monday Noon-2pm in Oak 409A

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Political conflicts in the 21st century no longer resemble the great wars of the past. Once dominated by states and international disputes, today's conflicts more commonly involve a *non-state actor* like a terrorist, rebel, or insurgent group. Organizations like Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Islamic State operate very differently from traditional armies: they rarely wear uniforms, they are unconstrained by borders and fronts, and instead of avoiding civilian casualties, they often inflict them intentionally.

This course introduces students to various forms of political violence that are fundamental to international security in the 21st century. Throughout the semester, students will learn about why individuals and groups take up arms; how and why nonstate actors decide upon specific strategies of violence; how states fight back; why and how foreign interventions occur; and finally, how conflicts end. Students will also learn in-depth about two specific organizations (Al Qaeda and the Islamic State) as well as two ongoing conflicts (Iraq and Afghanistan).

This course has three goals:

1. Teach students to recognize the various forms of political violence and to understand the basic causes, consequences, and dynamics;
2. Dispel widely-held misconceptions about political violence;
3. Prepare students to critically and logically evaluate news media, academic research, political discourse, and foreign policy options as they pertain to political violence.

READINGS

One textbook is required for this course: *The Politics of Terror*, written by Erica Chenoweth and Pauline L. Moore (Oxford University Press, 2018). Most weeks will have one to two chapters assigned in addition to other readings. Academic journal articles are available via Husky CT, and everything else has corresponding links. There is a significant amount of reading assigned each week and students are expected to complete this prior to our discussions.

GRADING

1. Midterm Exam (30%)

The midterm exam will be administered during our scheduled class time on October 9th. Students can expect a series of short-answer questions, and they will be allowed to reference their notes when taking the exam.

2. Final Exam (30%)

The final exam will be administered on the date and time assigned by the registrar. The exam will consist of short-answer questions and one essay question, and students will be allowed to reference their notes when writing their answers.

3. Module Exercises (30%)

Students are required to complete a double-spaced, one-page assignment for every module (2 per week). Makeups and re-dos are not allowed. Exercises will be graded pass/fail but the cut-off to pass is a "B."

- Assignments must be submitted to Husky CT before class each week.
- There are 20 exercises in total but only 19 are required (with passing grades). Thus, 19 = 100%. 18 = 95%. 17 = 89%. 16 = 82%. 15 = 74%. 14 = 65%. 13 or below = F.

4. Participation (10%)

Participation is critical to the success of this course. Students are expected to come to each class prepared, having completed the assigned readings, and ready to engage with the material. Students may meet with me throughout the course to assess their participation grade.

CLASSROOM POLICIES

Technology: Students cannot use laptops, tablets, and other devices during lectures. The research on this is clear: without laptops students take better notes, learn more, get better grades, and pose fewer distractions to those sitting around them (as measured by their neighbors' grades). Evidence also suggests that students enjoy classes more when laptops are disallowed, and in hindsight they overwhelmingly support these policies. Sometimes devices will be necessary for group projects and in-class assignments, and these dates are indicated on the syllabus. Exceptions are also available for students with legitimate needs.

Deadlines: Students should be prepared to take exams when they are scheduled and to submit assignments when they are due. Exceptions to these deadlines must be approved in advance. Failing to do so may result in grade deductions.

Grade Disputes: In the event that a student wishes to dispute their grade on an assignment, the following procedure may be used. First, students must wait at least 48 hours after the

assignment has been handed back. Second, students must email me a typed summary of why they believe the grade is unfair. After meeting to discuss the assignment, I will then reevaluate the grade. However, revised grades may be higher or lower than the original, and this new grade will be final. Grade disputes submitted more than ten days after the assignment is handed back will not be considered.

Students with Disabilities: The University of Connecticut is committed to protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and assuring that the learning environment is accessible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability or pregnancy, please let me know immediately so that we can discuss options. Students who require accommodations should contact the Center for Students with Disabilities, Wilbur Cross Building Room 204, (860) 486-2020, or <http://csd.uconn.edu>.

Communication: The best way to contact me is via email. I will try to respond to all emails within 24 hours, but do not expect a reply within 12 hours or outside of normal business hours. Therefore, if you have questions leading up to an exam or assignment deadline, make sure to reach out to me well in advance. If you have questions that require a lengthy or detailed response, please talk to me after class or during office hours to save us both time.

Academic Integrity and Personal Conduct: Students are expected to act in accordance with the Guidelines for [Academic](#) and [Personal](#) Integrity at UConn. Regarding AI, submitting ChatGPT-generated text as your own work would be an act of plagiarism insofar as it would involve passing off the work of others as your own. For these reasons, you are not allowed to use this ChatGPT or other similar tools to produce essays or other academic work for this class, unless otherwise explicitly permitted to do so. The university has AI detection software that distinguishes between AI generated content and human generated content.

Missed Classes: When absent, it is the student's responsibility to review lecture slides and to get notes from their peers. While I am happy to answer questions about the week's material in office hours, it would be infeasible for me to fully recount the lectures on a personal basis.

GRADING SCHEME

<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Lower Bound</i>	<i>Upper Bound</i>
A	94	100
A-	90	93
B+	87	89
B	84	86
B-	80	83
C+	77	79
C	74	76
C-	70	73
D+	67	69
D	64	66
D-	60	63

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**August 28:
Introduction.**

- No reading.

2

**September 4:
Labor Day, no class.**

3

**September 11:
Studying Political Violence****MODULE 1: HOW WE STUDY POLITICAL SCIENCE**

1. Franco et al. "What are qualitative methods?" *Introduction to Political Science Research Methods*.
2. Franco et al. "What are quantitative methods?" *Introduction to Political Science Research Methods*.
3. Resnick, Brian. "What a nerdy debate about p-values shows about science – and how to fix it." *Vox*, 31 July 2017. [Available here](#).
4. Evers, Cameron. "The Weird Science of Forecasting Global Crisis." *War is Boring*, 20 July 2016. [Available here](#).

→ Module Exercise: Find at least one story in the news that references a research finding. In no more than one page, describe the methodology: is it quantitative or qualitative? What kind of data is used? What hypotheses are tested? Do the authors have an incentive to find a statistically-significant effect? Finally, could the study be conducted with another methodology (i.e. qualitatively for quantitative methods and the inverse)?

MODULE 2: HOW WE STUDY POLITICAL VIOLENCE

1. Kalyvas, Stathis. “The Landscape of Political Violence.” *Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, 2019.
2. *Politics of Terrorism*, Chapter 1, “Introducing Terrorism.”
3. Review the two main databases for information on political violence.
 - (a) The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) website (<https://www.acleddata.com/> and especially the methodology <https://www.acleddata.com/methodology/>
 - (b) The Global Terrorism Database (<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/> and especially the codebook <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook.pdf>. Here, pay attention to the data collection methodology and definitions.

→ Module Exercise: Follow the news this week and find at least three instances of different forms of political violence. In no more than one page: summarize them, consider how they are similar, how they are different, whether it makes sense to study them together or separately, and whether the causes of all three are similar or distinct.

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September 18:
Strategic and Organizational Approaches

MODULE 3: THE STRATEGIC APPROACH

1. *Politics of Terrorism*, Chapter 2, “The Strategic Approach.”

→ Module Exercise: Describe how the strategic approach – perhaps with slight modifications – could also explain the behavior of other sorts of groups. Maybe consider political parties, business firms, student groups, university administrations, etc.

MODULE 4: THE ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH

1. *Politics of Terrorism*, Chapter 3, “The Organizational Approach.”
2. “What about different types of armed groups?” in Evan Perkoski, *Divided not Conquered: How Rebels Fracture and Splinters Behave*, Oxford University Press, 2022. Available on Husky CT.

→ Module Exercise: Read [this news story](#) about the Islamic State’s attack on Kabul Airport during the US withdrawal. How would the organizational approach and the strategic approach explain this event? Which one do you find more useful?

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**September 25:
Psychological and Ideological Approaches**

MODULE 5: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

1. *Politics of Terrorism*, Chapter 4. “The Psychological Approach.”

→ Module Exercise: How does the psychological perspective differ from the strategic and organizational perspectives? For instance, consider their different assumptions and understandings of political violence, their different implications for preventing political violence, how one might study them, and so on.

MODULE 6: THE IDEOLOGICAL APPROACH

1. *Politics of Terrorism*, Chapter 5. “The Ideological Approach.”

→ Module Exercise: Describe two ideologies that are linked to violence in the United States. Are these ideologies unique to the US? Can the ideological approach explain why violence occurs and how these groups behave?

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**October 2:
The Structural Approach and Theory Review.**

MODULE 7: THE STRUCTURAL APPROACH

1. *Politics of Terrorism*, Chapter 6. “Structural Approaches.”
2. James Fearon, “Grievances and Civil War,” *Monkey Cage Blog*, April 2014. [Available here](#).

→ Module Exercise: Apply structural theories to the United States. What factors make political violence more or less likely? What types of political violence are most and least likely? Should the US government try to influence any of these factors to prevent violence?

MODULE 8: EVALUATING THE DIFFERENT THEORIES

1. No reading. I will also answer questions about the midterm.

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**October 9:
Midterm Exam**

- The midterm will be administered in class. You may reference any of your written notes.

**October 16:
The Logic and Form of Political Violence**

*We will be in class for half of our scheduled time; you are expected to use the remainder to watch *The Battle of Algiers*.*

MODULE 9: THE STRATEGIES AND TACTICS OF VIOLENCE

1. Arreguin-Toft, Ivan. "How the weak win wars: A theory of asymmetric conflict." *International Security* 26.1 (2001): 93-128. *Only pages 93-112.*
2. Stanton, Jessica A. "Terrorism in the context of civil war." *The Journal of Politics* 75.4 (2013): 1009-1022. *Only pages 1009-1013.*
3. *Politics of Terrorism*, Chapter 9. "Suicide Terrorism."

→ **Module Exercise:** Read [this report on Al Qaeda's coordinated bombing attack on Madrid](#). How does it conform to the strategy of violence as described in the readings?

MODULE 10: *The Battle of Algiers*

1. In lieu of lecture, watch *The Battle of Algiers* (121 minutes), [available here](#).
2. "What Does the Pentagon See in 'Battle of Algiers'?" *New York Times*, 7 September 2003.

→ **Module Exercise:** Reflect on the film and how it relates to our course. Which theories of political violence help explain the film's events? How did France try to defeat insurgents? How did the insurgents try to win (i.e. what was their strategy)?

**October 23:
Al Qaeda and the War in Afghanistan**

MODULE 11: AL QAEDA

1. Watts, Clint. "The Three Versions of Al Qaeda: A Primer." *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, December 2013. [Available here](#).
2. Mendelsohn, Barak. "Al-Qaeda's Franchising Strategy." *Survival*, 53:3 (2011): 29-50. *Pay special attention to pages 39-47. Feel free to skim the rest.*
3. Clarke, Colin and Barak Mendelsohn. "Al-Qaeda is being Hollowed to its Core." *War on the Rocks*, 24 February 2021. [Available here](#).

→ **Module Exercise:** Review some of the documents from West Point's *Harmony Program*, [available here](#). Discuss one or two documents that you find interesting. What are they about? What can we learn from them? Are they surprising in any way? Do they shed light any of the topics we have studied so far?

MODULE 12: AFGHANISTAN AND US INTERVENTION

1. Holan, Angie Drobnic. "The Afghanistan War: A Simple Explanation." *Politifact*, 12 October 2009. [Available here](#).
2. Lake, David. "Why Statebuilding Didn't Work in Afghanistan." *Political Violence at a Glance*, 17 August 2021. [Available here](#).
3. "Is Washington Right to Leave Afghanistan?" *Foreign Affairs*, 22 June 2021. [Available here](#).
4. Byman, Daniel. "Don't expect an al-Qaida reboot in Afghanistan." *Brookings*, 4 May 2021. [Available here](#).

→ **Module Exercise:** Describe something you *do not* understand about the events in Afghanistan. How might our course material so far help you understand it?

**October 30:
Conflict Termination and Foreign Intervention**

MODULE 13: HOW ARMED GROUPS AND POLITICAL CONFLICTS END

1. Howard, Lise M, and Alexandra Stark. “How Civil Wars End.” 9 February 2018.
2. *Politics of Terrorism*, Chapter 15. “How Terror Groups End.” [Available here](#).
3. Fearon, James. “Obstacles to Ending Syria’s Civil War.” *Foreign Policy*, 10 December 2013. [Available here](#).

→ Module Exercise: Pick an armed group – terrorist, insurgent, rebel – that is no longer active and describe how it ended. Does it confirm to insights from the readings?

MODULE 14: FOREIGN INTERVENTION AND INFLUENCE

1. Drezner, Dan. “What does intervention mean for U.S. foreign policy in 2020?” *Washington Post*. [Available here](#).
2. Eikenberry, Karl W. and Stephen D. Krasner ““Good Enough” Governance: Humility and the Limits of Foreign Intervention in Response to Civil Wars and Intrastate Violence.” American Academy of Arts and Sciences. *Only read the section titled “Factors Impacting Policy Options and Responses”* [Available here](#).
3. *Politics of Terrorism*, Chapter 11. “State Sponsorship of Terrorism.”

→ Module Exercise: people have argued that the US both should and should not intervene in the Syrian Civil War. Based on our readings so far, which side would you take? And if you support intervention, what would it look like?

**November 6:
Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency**

We will be in class for half of our scheduled time; you are expected to use the remainder to watch Restrepo.

MODULE 15: COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERINSURGENCY

1. *Politics of Terrorism*, Chapter 13. “Counterterrorism Instruments.”
2. *Politics of Terrorism*, Chapter 14. “The Politics of Counterterrorism.”
3. “Interview with David Kilcullen.” *International Review of the Red Cross* 93.883 (2011). [Available here](#).

→ **Module Exercise:** Head-hunting, or killing senior terrorist and insurgent leaders, is a tactic commonly employed by the US. After reading [this news story](#) about the assassination of Ayman al-Zawahiri, describe whether you think this is a good strategy.

MODULE 16: *Restrepo*

1. In lieu of lecture, watch *Restrepo* (93 minutes, available on Husky CT).

→ **Module Exercise:** Reflect on how the film relates to what we’ve learned about counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and defeating armed groups.

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**November 13:
Political Nonviolence**

Please bring laptops to class!

MODULE 17: THE LOGIC OF NONVIOLENCE

1. Stephan, Maria J., and Erica Chenoweth. "Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict." *International Security* 33.1 (2008): 7-44.
2. Watch "The Success of Nonviolent Resistance" (about 12 minutes), by Erica Chenoweth. [Available here](#).
3. Zunes, Stephen. "Supporting non-violence in Syria." *Foreign Policy*, 2012. [Available here](#).
4. Watch *Bringing Down a Dictator* (56 minutes), [available here](#).

→ **Module Exercise:** Consider why an organization seeking political change might choose to use violence or nonviolence. Do you think groups are free to choose? What might drive groups towards one or the other? Do you think the readings apply to/shed light on groups seeking political change in the US?

MODULE 18: USING DATA TO STUDY NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

1. No reading. Please bring laptops to class.

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**November 20:
Thanksgiving Recess, no class**

**November 27:
The Iraq War and the Islamic State**

MODULE 19: IRAQ

1. "Overview: The Iraq War." *The New York Times*, 5 October 2007. [Available here.](#)
2. Walt, Stephen M. "Top 10 Lessons of the Iraq War." *Foreign Policy*. [Available here.](#)
3. Salam, Reihan. "We Never Should have Left Iraq." *Slate*, 12 June 2014. [Available here.](#)

→ Module Exercise: Describe something you *do not* understand about the events in Iraq. How might our course material so far help you understand it?

MODULE 20: THE ISLAMIC STATE

1. Watch "The Rise of ISIS," *Vox*, 16 December 2015. [Available here.](#)
2. Coles, Isabel and Ned Parker. "How Saddam's men help Islamic State rule." 11 December 2015. [Available here.](#)
3. Read Chapters Three (Cubs of the Caliphate) and Five (From Rebel Fighter to Believer to Defector) from *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate* (Speckhard and Yayla, 2016.)

→ Module Exercise: Consider how the defectors' testimony relates to themes we have discussed in class. Does it shed light on which theory (strategic, organizational, etc) is correct? Does it raise any other questions? Does it align with or undermine popular perceptions about the Islamic State?

**December 4:
The American Context**

MODULE 21: THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE US.

1. Plumer, Brad. "Eight facts about terrorism in the United States." *Wonkblog (The Washington Post)*, 16 April 2013. [Available here.](#)
2. Perliger, Arie. "Homegrown Terrorism and Why the Threat of Right-Wing Extremism is Rising in America." *Newsweek*, 4 June 2017. [Available here.](#)
3. Worth, Kaitie. "Lone Wolf Attacks Are Becoming More Common – And More Deadly." *Frontline*, 14 July 2016. [Available here.](#)
4. Lopez, German. "There are huge racial disparities in how US police use force." *Vox*, 1 November 2018. [Available here.](#)
5. Barnes, Julian E. "C.I.A. Concludes That Saudi Crown Prince Ordered Khashoggi Killed." 16 November 2018. [Available here.](#)

→ Module Exercise: Reflect on the types of political violence America experiences and recent trends in American political violence. What best explains it? What can't our course explain? What are the biggest challenges to lowering rates of political violence?

MODULE 22: THE JANUARY 6TH ATTACK ON THE US CAPITOL.

1. Watch "Day of Rage" (*New York Times*, 30 June 2021). [Available here.](#)
2. Rapoport, David C. "The Capitol Attack and the 5th Terrorism Wave." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 33.3 (2021): 912-916.
3. Perkoski, Evan. "The attack on the Capitol was a success. So what happens next?" *Political Violence at a Glance*, 12 January 2021. [Available here.](#)

→ Module Exercise: Draw on course material to explain why the January 6th attack occurred.