



GEO 4024C/AFS 4935/GEO6938: Terrorism and Space

University of Florida - Department of Geography

Credits: 4. Prerequisites: Any course with a GIS prefix

Class Number: 26416. This course is offered on Tuesday 10:40-11:30 AM (Matherly Hall 0002) and Thursday 10:40-12:35 PM (Norman Hall 1001)

Updated: 4/18/23

Instructor

Dr. Olivier J. Walther, Department of Geography, 3205 Turlington Hall, (352) 273-4739, owalther@ufl.edu. Office hours: Tuesday 11:45 AM – 12:45 PM and 3:50 – 4:50 PM or by appointment.

Overview

Space is a fundamental dimension of terrorism. Geography not only provides the physical framework upon which terrorism attacks are conducted but also shapes the strategies of political actors. Space can act as a facilitating or constraining factor of terrorism as well as a source of dispute when states and terrorist organizations fight over territory. Space can also enable conflicts to spread geographically, possibly across borders, as in the Middle East and West Africa today. The interest for the geography of terrorism has experienced a strong growth after 9/11 and the emergence of global Jihadist organizations such as Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State whose space of action and rhetoric contrasts with the local agenda of most terrorist organizations.

Against this background, the objective of *Terrorism and Space* is to introduce you to the systemic study of international terrorism and its spatial implications. The course will critically discuss the dual concerns for geography as an influence on and a source of terrorism. We will first discuss the origins of contemporary terrorism as well as the various motivations of ideologically-oriented, ethno-nationalist, and religious organizations. After providing a theoretical foundation, we will examine how a spatial approach can contribute to better understand the diffusion of terrorist organizations across the world, with a particular focus on Africa.

Terrorism and Space puts a strong emphasis on using geographically-referenced data to map the types of factors that fuel international terrorism. Nine workshops will be organized to introduce you to spatial analysis, a rapidly growing field of research in geography and conflict studies. We will apply some of the most fundamental tools developed by spatial analysis, such as density or clustering, to investigate the onset and diffusion of terrorism across time and space. You will also be able to identify how terrorist organizations make use of places, distance, identity, territories and borders to conduct their attacks. Finally, you will be able to collect and analyze your own data using one of the most comprehensive databases on violent incidents in the world.

Schedule and readings

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
Jan 10, 12	Course introduction. Defining terrorism (Hoffman 2017, 1-35)	Course introduction. Defining terrorism (Hoffman 2017, 36-44)
Jan 17, 19	The origins of contemporary terrorism (Hoffman 2017, chap. 2)	The internationalization of terrorism (Hoffman 2017, chap 3)
Jan 24, 26	State-sponsored terrorism (Hoffman 2017: 269-280)	Workshop 1. Terrorism databases (Bowie and Schmid 2011)
Jan 31, Feb 2	The threat of Al Qaeda (Sciolino and Schmitt 2008)	Workshop 2. Working with ACLED data (Raleigh et al. 2010)
Feb 7, 9	Causes of terrorism (Hoffman 2017: 298-314; Sageman 2008: 16-24)	Workshop 3. Working with ACLED data (ACLED 2020)
Feb 14, 17	Individual work on mid-term paper (no class)	Individual work on mid-term paper (no class)
Feb 21, 23	Religion and terrorism (Hoffman 2017, 83-100)	Workshop 4. Mapping ACLED data (ACLED 2020)
Feb 28, Mar 2	Jihad and global Islam (Mandaville 2020, 328-349)	Workshop 5. Conflict networks (OECD 2021, chapter 3)
Mar 7, 9	The crime-terrorism nexus (Petrich 2021)	Guest lecture, Dr. Steven Radil, USAFA (Castan Pinos and Radil, 2020). Mid-term paper due March 10 at 11:59PM
	Spring break	
Mar 21, 23	The structure of terrorist networks (Krebs 2002)	Dismantling terrorist networks (Price 2019)
Mar 28, 30	Terrorism, space and place (Medina and Hepner 2013: 23-32)	Workshop 6. Mapping places with ArcGIS (Medina et al. 2011)
Apr 4, 6	Terrorism and distance: the near and far enemy (Hafez 2011)	Workshop 7. Mapping point patterns with ArcGIS (Medina and Hepner 2008)
Apr 11, 13	Terrorism and cities (OECD 2023: chapter 1)	Workshop 8. Mapping the intensity and diffusion of violence with ArcGIS (OECD 2020: 61-76)
Apr 18, 20	Terrorism and borders (D'Amato 2018)	Workshop 9. Mapping transnational actors with ArcGIS (Radil et al. 2022)
Apr 25	Course overview, questions and answers Final paper due April 26 at 11:59PM	/

Final grade

Attendance and participation	10 points
Mid-term paper	40 points
Final paper	50 points
Total	100 points

The major assessment components of this course include:

- Regular attendance and participation. Students are expected to be at every class meeting throughout the entire class session, and must not be reading other materials or use their cell phones. Participation entails responding to questions directed by the instructor and participating in peer-initiated discussions as well.
- Mid-term paper (2000 words including bibliography). In this descriptive paper, you will use the existing literature to discuss the origins, ideology, objectives, strategy and challenges of a terrorist organization of your choice. The selected organization must be active in 2022-23. For more information, see “How to write your mid-term paper” on [Canvas](#). The mid-term paper is due **March 10 at 11:59PM on Canvas**.
- Final paper (4000 words including bibliography). This analytical paper will use the ACLED dataset to map and critically discuss the temporal and spatial evolution of an active terrorist organization in the world. For more information, see “How to write your final paper” on [Canvas](#). The final paper is due **April 26 at 11:59PM on Canvas**.

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following numerical scale:

A: 93-100+, A-: 90-92, B+: 87-89, B: 83-86, B-: 80-82, C+: 77-79, C: 73-76, C-: 70-72, D+: 67-69, D: 63-66, D-: 60-62, E: <60, E1: stopped attending, I: incomplete. For more information, visit UF’s [Grading Policies](#).

Literature

- ACLED (2020). Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset Codebook, <https://acleddata.com/resources/general-guides/>
- Bøås, M., Cissé, A. W., & Mahamane, L. (2020). Explaining Violence in Tillabéri: Insurgent Appropriation of Local Grievances? *The International Spectator*, 55(4), 118-132.
- Bowie, N. G., & Schmid, A. P. (2011). Databases on terrorism. In *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*. New York, Routledge, 312-358.
- Castan Pinos, J., & M. Radil, S. (2020). The territorial contours of terrorism: A conceptual model of territory for non-state violence. *Terrorism and political violence*, 32(5), 1027-1046.
- Curiel, R. P., Walther, O. & O’Clery, N. (2020). Uncovering the internal structure of Boko Haram through its mobility patterns. *Applied Network Science*, 5(1), 1-23.
- D’Amato, S. (2018). Terrorists going transnational: rethinking the role of states in the case of AQIM and Boko Haram. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 11(1), 151-172.
- Hafez, M. M. (2011). Takfir and violence against Muslims. In *Fault Lines in Global Jihad*. London, Routledge, 41-62.
- Hoffman, B (2017). *Inside Terrorism*. New York, Columbia University Press.

- Krebs, V. (2002). Mapping networks of terrorist cells. *Connections*, 24(3), 43-52.
- Mandaville, P. (2020). *Islam and Politics*. London, Routledge.
- Medina, R. M., & Hepner, G. F. (2011). Advancing the understanding of sociospatial dependencies in terrorist networks. *Transactions in GIS*, 15(5), 577-597.
- Medina, R. M., Siebeneck, L. K., & Hepner, G. F. (2011). A geographic information systems (GIS) analysis of spatiotemporal patterns of terrorist incidents in Iraq 2004–2009. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 34(11), 862-882.
- Medina, R., & Hepner, G. (2008). Geospatial analysis of dynamic terrorist networks. In *Values and Violence: Intangible Aspects of Terrorism*. Springer, Berlin: 151-167.
- Medina, R. & Hepner, G.F. (2013). *The Geography of International Terrorism. An Introduction to Spaces and Places of Violent Non-State Groups*. Boca Raton, CRC Press.
- OECD (2020). *The Geography of Conflict in North and West Africa*. Paris, OECD.
- OECD (2021). *Conflict Networks in North and West Africa*. Paris, OECD.
- OECD (2022). *Borders and Conflicts in North and West Africa*. Paris, OECD.
- OECD (2023). *Urbanisation and Conflicts in North and West Africa*. Paris, OECD.
- Petrich, K. (2021). The Crime–Terror Nexus. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*.
- Pinos, J., & M. Radil, S. (2020). The territorial contours of terrorism: A conceptual model of territory for non-state violence. *Terrorism and political violence*, 32(5), 1027-1046.
- Price, B. C. (2019). Targeting top terrorists: How leadership decapitation contributes to counterterrorism. *International Security*, 36(4), 9-46.
- Radil, S. M., Irmischer, I., & Walther, O. J. (2022). Contextualizing the relationship between borderlands and political violence: a dynamic space-time analysis in North and West Africa. *Journal of borderlands studies*, 37(2), 253-271.
- Raleigh, C., Linke, A., Hegre, H. & Karlsen, J. (2010). Introducing ACLED: An armed conflict location and event dataset. *Journal of Peace Research*, 47(5), 651-660.
- Sageman, M. (2008). *Leaderless Jihad*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Sageman, M. (2014). The stagnation in terrorism research. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26(4), 565-580.
- Sciolino, E. & Schmitt, E (2008). A not very private feud over terrorism. *The New York Times*, June 8.
- Walther, O. J. & Christopoulos, D. (2015). Islamic terrorism and the Malian rebellion. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 27(3), 497-519.

Software

Students must have their own laptop or desktop computer. We will work with two programs (Excel, ArcGIS) available on [UF Apps](#). The students are responsible for installing the software on their own computer or accessing UF Apps. The instructor cannot be held responsible for any damage or malfunction resulting from the installation or use of the programs.

Other information

Please review the University’s policies regarding [student conduct and conflict resolution](#), available through the Dean of Students Office [website](#). Any violations of the Student Honor Code will result in a failing grade for the course and referral to Student Judicial Affairs.

A course description is available here: <https://one.ufl.edu/soc/>

Books and articles can be accessed using UF's Libraries: <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/>. To find a scientific journal, please go to [Journals](#) or use [Google Scholar](#).

The course is delivered in person. It includes lectures, discussions, tutorial exercises, and case studies. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with [university policies](#).

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the [Disability Resource Center](#) (352-392-8565) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter, which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/>

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. For additional information, please visit the [University website](#).

This syllabus represents current plans and objectives. As the semester proceeds, those plans may need to change to enhance the class and student learning opportunity. Such changes, communicated clearly, are not unusual and should be expected.