



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

University of Florida - Department of Geography

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

This course is offered on Tuesday 10:40-11:30 AM (Norman Hall 1001) and on Thursday 10:40-12:35 PM (McCarty Hall B G108)

Updated: 1/28/2025

Instructors

Dr. Olivier J. Walther, Department of Geography, 3131 Turlington Hall, (352) 273-4739, owalther@ufl.edu. Office hours: Tuesday 11:45 AM – 2 PM or by appointment.

Mr. David G. Russell, Department of Geography, Grinter Hall 425, david.russell@ufl.edu. Office hours: Thursday 12:45 AM – 1:45 PM or by appointment.

Overview and Objectives

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 groups 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.

Weekly Topic Schedule, Assignments, and Exams

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
Jan 14, 16	Course introduction. Defining terrorism (Hoffman 2017, 1-35)	Course introduction. Defining terrorism (Hoffman 2017, 36-44)
Jan 21, 23	The origins of contemporary terrorism (Hoffman 2017, chap. 2)	The internationalization of terrorism (Hoffman 2017, chap 3)
Jan 28, 30	State-sponsored terrorism (Hoffman 2017, 269-280)	Workshop 1. Terrorism databases (Bowie 2021)
Feb 4, 6	The threat of Al Qaeda (Sciolino and Schmitt 2008)	Workshop 2. Working with ACLED data (Raleigh et al. 2023)
Feb 11, 13	Causes of terrorism (Hoffman 2017: 298-314; Sageman 2008: 16-24)	Guest lecture: Stephen Bryant, University of Cincinnati
Feb 18, 20	Religion and terrorism (Hoffman 2017, 83-100)	Workshop 3. Working with ACLED data (ACLED 2024)
Feb 25, 27	Jihad and global Islam (Mandaville 2020, 328-349)	Workshop 4. Mapping ACLED data (ACLED 2024)
Mar 4, 6	The crime-terrorism nexus (Petrich 2021)	Workshop 5. Conflict networks (Walther et al. 2021)
Mar 11, 13	The structure of terrorist networks (Walther et al. 2023a)	Dismantling terrorist networks (Price 2019) Mid-term paper due March 15 at 11:59PM
	Spring break	
Mar 25, 27	Terrorism, space and place (Medina and Hepner 2013: 23-32)	Workshop 6. Mapping places with ArcGIS (Medina and Hepner. 2011)
Apr 1, 3	Terrorism and distance: the near and far enemy (Hafez 2011)	Workshop 7. Mapping point patterns with ArcGIS
Apr 8, 10	Terrorism and cities (Radil et al. 2023)	Workshop 8. Mapping the intensity and diffusion of violence with ArcGIS (Walther et al. 2023b)
Apr 15, 17	Terrorism and borders (D'Amato 2018)	Workshop 9. Mapping transnational actors with ArcGIS (Radil et al. 2022)
Apr 22	Course overview, questions and answers	No class. Final paper due April 28 at 11:59PM

Important Dates to Remember

Semester Begins: Jan 13, 2025

First Day of Class: Jan 14, 2025

Drop/Add Ends: Jan 17, 2025

Midterm Paper Due: Mar 15, 2025, at 11:59PM

No Class, Spring Break: Mar 17-22, 2025

Final Paper Due: Apr 28, 2025, at 11:59PM

Reading Days: Apr 24-25, 2025

Grades Visible: May 5, 2025

Course Format, Activities, and Basis for Evaluation

The class will meet twice a week for lectures, discussion and exercises. Readings will be assigned from the required textbook and additional scholarly papers. Students are expected to read and study the materials prior to the class period in which they will be discussed. Attendance and active engagement in discussions and group learning activities is expected. There will be one mid-term paper and one final paper.

Class Participation: Class participation is worth 10% of the final grade and will be evaluated on the basis of both attendance and participation in class discussions and group activities. 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. Students may be excused from absences with appropriate documentation according to the [university policy](#).

Mid-term and final papers: The mid-term paper is an empirical essay worth 40% of the final grade (2000 words including bibliography). The aim of this descriptive paper is to discuss the origins, ideology, objectives, strategy and challenges of a terrorist organization of your choice. The selected organization must be active in 2024-25. For more information, see “How to write your mid-term paper” on Canvas. The final paper is an empirical essay worth 40% of the final grade (4000 words including bibliography). The aim of this analytical paper is to use ACLED data 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.

Assignments and Papers	Percent of Final Grade
Class Participation & Attendance	10
Mid-term Paper	40
Final Paper	50

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.

Required Texts and Useful Online Resources

The recommended textbook for the course is *Inside Terrorism* by Bruce Hoffman (2017, Columbia University Press). Other assigned academic readings will be available via UF Canvas. A tentative list of additional readings is given below:

ACLED (2024). Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset Codebook, <https://acleddata.com/knowledge-base/codebook/>

Bowie, N. G. (2021). 40 terrorism databases and data sets: A new inventory. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 15(2), 147-161.

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.

Mandaville, P. (2020). *Islam and Politics*. London, Routledge.

Medina, R. M., & Hepner, G. F. (2011). Advancing the understanding of socio-spatial dependencies in terrorist networks. *Transactions in GIS*, 15(5), 577-597.

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.

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.

Radil, S. M., Walther, O., Dorward, N., & Pflaum, M. (2023). Urban-rural geographies of political violence in North and West Africa. *African Security*, 16(2-3), 199-222.

Raleigh, C., Kishi, R., & Linke, A. (2023). Political instability patterns are obscured by conflict dataset scope conditions, sources, and coding choices. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1), 1-17.

Russell, D. G., & Radil, S. M. (2022). Landscapes of Control: The Geography of Counterinsurgency in the Sinai, Egypt. *The Arab World Geographer*, 25(2-3), 98-118.

Sageman, M. (2008). *Leaderless Jihad*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.

Sciolino, E. & Schmitt, E (2008). A not very private feud over terrorism. *The New York Times*, June 8.

Walther, O. J., Radil, S. M., & Russell, D. G. (2021). Mapping the changing structure of conflict networks in North and West Africa. *African Security*, 14(3), 211-238.

Walther, O. J., Prieto-Curiel, R., Padron, J., & Scheuer, J. (2023a). Mapping the travel geography of the 9/11 network. *The Professional Geographer*, 75(5), 855-869.

Walther, O. J., Radil, S. M., Russell, D. G., & Trémolières, M. (2023b). Introducing the Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator of political violence. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 35(3), 533-552.

Materials and Supplies: Laptop Computer and technical skills

This course will be held in classrooms with no computer terminals. Students must provide their own computer on which to work on assignments during and/or outside of class. Any required software will be available on students' laptops through UF Apps at <https://info.apps.ufl.edu> or via computers located in computer labs on the UF campus. The instructor cannot be held responsible for any damage or malfunction resulting from the installation or use of the programs.

To complete your tasks in this course, you will need a basic understanding of how to operate a computer. The course will introduce you to the following programs: Excel, ArcGIS Pro, available on [UF Apps](#). Watch this [video](#) to access UF Apps or read *Accessing ArcGIS Pro: A Comprehensive Guide for UF Students* available on Canvas.

Make-Ups and Grades

Late Work: All assignments must be submitted before their respective deadlines unless you have a letter of accommodation from the university.

Examination Policies and Reading Days: Course policies are consistent with university policies on during-term exams, final exams, reading days, and make-up exams. Students must notify the instructor as soon as possible in case of absence during an exam and provide documentation as to the reason for the absence. If deemed an excused absence, the student will be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up the missed exam. More details can be found [here](#).

Grade Dissemination: You can access your scores at any time using the Grade function in Canvas. The instructor will post grades within about one week of the due date of each assignment and the mid-term exam.

Grading Policies for Assigning Grade Points: Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points may be found [here](#).

Grades of “Incomplete”: The current university policy concerning incomplete grades will be followed in this course. An incomplete grade may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor as an interim grade for a course in which you have completed a major portion of the course with a passing grade, been unable to complete course requirements before the end of the term because of extenuating circumstances, and obtained agreement from the instructor and arranged for resolution of the incomplete grade. Instructors are not required to assign incomplete grades.

Technology and Media

Email: It is vital that students maintain an active UF email account. This tentative syllabus is subject to change, and any changes will be transmitted to you via your UF email account and Canvas. Students should email the instructor if they have questions about any of the lectures, readings, assignments, or exams. You should expect a response within about 24 hours during weekdays. The instructor will reasonably expect similar time frames for responses to emails sent to students.

Canvas: Course materials such as lectures, readings, the syllabus, and assignment instructions will be available through [Canvas](#). You will also find all due dates and grades on Canvas. Students must activate their UF GatorLink account to use Canvas. If you need help learning how to perform various tasks related to this course or other courses that utilize Canvas, please consult the above webpage. You may also contact the UF Computing Help Desk at (352) 392-HELP (4357) or helpdesk@ufl.edu

Online Course Evaluation: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. 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://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

Recordings and Notes: It is not permitted to sell notes or recordings from this class without written consent of the instructor. Nor are students permitted to disseminate recordings of the instructor lecturing or post copies of assignments or exams on the internet.

Student Expectations

Disabilities Statement: Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) 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.

Academic Conduct Policy: As a student at the University of Florida, you have committed yourself to uphold the Honor Code, which includes the following pledge: "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity." You are expected to exhibit behavior consistent with this commitment to the UF academic community, and on all work submitted for credit at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." It is assumed that you will complete all work independently in each course unless the instructor provides explicit permission for you to collaborate on course tasks. As part of your obligation to uphold the Honor Code, you should report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. It is your individual responsibility to know and comply with all university policies and procedures regarding academic integrity and the Student Honor Code. Violations of the Honor Code at the University of Florida will not be tolerated. Violations will be reported to the Dean of Students Office for consideration of disciplinary action.

Citation and plagiarism: When quoting a book or an article, make sure that the source is cited properly and that your paper is not plagiarized, wholly or in part. Turnitin will be used to detect plagiarism. General statements must be presented as follows: Defining terrorism is allusive task (Hoffman, 2017). Excerpts must be presented in quotation marks to show that a particular portion of your paper is from a different source. Include the author's name, the date, and page numbers, as follows: According to Sageman (2008: 18), "no one is born a terrorist".

References must be placed at the end of the paper, not in footnotes, and sorted alphabetically. Use Google Scholar or the UF Library website to export your references in MLA, APS, Chicago or any referencing style you want. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) programs such as ChatGPT is not allowed in this class and will be considered plagiarism. You must be the sole author of your work.

Campus Resources for Students:

Academic Resources

- E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or email to Learning-support@ufl.edu.
- Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling. <http://www.crc.ufl.edu>
- Library Support, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>
- Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>
- Student Complaints, <https://hr.ufl.edu/>

Health and Wellness Resources

- U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit <https://umatter.ufl.edu/> to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit <https://counseling.ufl.edu/> or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit <https://shcc.ufl.edu/>.
- University Police Department: Visit <https://police.ufl.edu/> or call 352-392-1111 (or 911 for emergencies).
- UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608.
- GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit <https://gatorwell.ufsa.ufl.edu> or call 352-273-4450.

Instructional materials for this course consist of only those materials specifically reviewed, selected, and assigned by the instructor(s). The instructor(s) is only responsible for these instructional materials.