

POS 4931 Violent Islamic Extremism

Please note that this class takes place online (zoom)

Class Meeting Time: Tuesday 1:55 PM to 2:45 PM
Thursday 1:55 PM to 3:50 PM

Class Venue: online - make sure you can access the zoom platform through canvas

Professor: Sebastian Elischer
Office: Anderson Hall 212
Office Hours: Tuesday: 11AM-12 PM (online)
Thursday: 4 PM-6 PM (online)
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Class Description

It is hardly possible to overstate the long-term effects of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on American foreign policy, the relationship between the West and the Middle East, societal relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, the contemporary public discourse about Islam, and academic curricula. The class introduces students to what Islamic radicalization is (and what it is not), how Islamic radicalization and Islamic terrorism differ from other types of extremism, the complex and manifold nature of radicalization processes as well as the strategies designed to counter religious radicalization. The class focuses on the interconnectedness of the manifold drivers of radicalization and the extent to which states have fostered or undermined these processes. To examine these issues and questions, we analyze the origins and activities of prominent Islamic extremist organizations including Al Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram and others. The empirical case studies cover all world regions. The class critically discusses how “strong states” such as for example, the United States, France or the United Kingdom counter radicalization attempts and engage with terrorist organizations. The class pays equal attention to the strategies of “weak states” such as for example Nigeria or Mali. Given the complexity of the topic and the poor public understanding of the drivers of radicalization, the class requires students to read a lot, think a lot and work independently (a lot). Students enrolling in this class must be genuinely interested in the topic, willing to work through an extant reading list and prepared to challenge their own biases.

Desired Outcomes

By the end of the semester students will have a thorough understanding of the key concepts guiding research on radicalization and violent extremism. Students will comprehend the nature and the effects of different deradicalization strategies. Finally, students will be able to identify the modus operandi of Islamic extremist organizations from across the world. The class prepares students for positions in research, policymaking, advocacy and government.

Requirements, Assignments and Grading

The course is for advanced undergraduate students, who are willing to invest a significant amount of time in this topic. Students must read the assigned material by Tuesday morning of each week. In class I do not regurgitate the content of the required reading. The discussions in class build on the required reading. Therefore, students must read the material *in advance* to comprehend the class discussion. I expect students to attend all classes and to participate actively in them. If you cannot make it to class, please let me know prior to the class in question. Please consult with university policies which circumstances qualify as reasonable absences and what kind of paperwork these circumstances require. If your performance is affected by circumstances beyond your control, I need to know before the due date of the assignment(s). In case of a personal emergency make sure to contact me as soon as possible via email. I will try my best to accommodate your circumstances. Timing is of the essence.

In order to get full credits, students have to pass several assignments:

1. Regular attendance and *active* participation in class (on zoom). If students miss more than two classes without a reasonable excuse, your grade inevitably will suffer. Attendance and *active* participation account for 10% of your final grade. When thinking about your grade for attendance and active participation I will give more weight to the latter.
2. One *group presentation* in class/ on zoom (as part of a group of students 3-5 depending on the size of the class). The presentation should last at least 25 minutes but not more than 30 minutes. **All group presentations take place during Week 12 and 15 (on zoom).** I will divide the class into groups during the first two weeks of the semester. Each group will present about the origins and the trajectory of a violent Islamic extremist organization. To prepare for the oral presentation, presenters must make adequate use of academic materials (books by academic publishing houses, peer-reviewed journal articles and other suitable sources), which are not included in the required reading. I strongly encourage you to discuss the content of your presentation with me during my office hours. Make sure your group discusses your presentation with me *at least two weeks* prior to your presentation. I will help groups to identify suitable literature and a general sense of direction your presentation should take. The *oral presentation* accounts for 25% of your final grade. I will provide more detailed information about this assignment throughout the semester.
3. Three online assignments. **The first online assignment takes place on September 24; it accounts for 15% of your final grade.** The first assignment covers everything we discuss in class between Week 1 and Week 4. **The second online assignment takes place on November 12; it accounts for 10% of your final grade.** The second assignment covers an academic study about a prominent global jihadist. I will distribute extracts from the study around one week prior to the test. The idea here is that you read the text independently. The assignment will ask you a number of questions related to the content of the additional reading. **The third and final online assignment takes place between December 14 and December 18. It accounts for 25% of your final grade.** It covers everything we discuss between Week 6 and 15 including the content of all student presentations. During the semester, I will provide additional information about each of the three assignments.

Grading scale

A	93 or above	B	84-86	C	75-77	D	67-69
A-	90-92	B-	81-83	C-	72-74	D-	64-66
B+	87-89	C+	78-80	D+	70-72		

Policies on Persons with Disabilities

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. It will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Anyone with a disability should feel free to see me during office hours to make the necessary arrangements.

Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism

All students should observe the University of Florida's standards of academic honesty. In the event that a student is found cheating or plagiarizing, he/she will automatically fail the course and will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs and to the Department Chair and Graduate Coordinator for possible dismissal from the program. Acts of plagiarism include:

- Turning in a paper or another assignment that was written by someone else (i.e., by another student, by a research service, or downloaded off the Internet);
- Copying, verbatim, a sentence or paragraph of text from the work of another author without properly acknowledging the source through a commonly accepted citation style and using quotation marks;
- Paraphrasing (i.e., restating in your own words) text written by someone else without citing that author;
- Using a unique idea or concept, which you discovered in a specific reading, without citing that work.

Policy on Late Assignments

I understand that sometimes there might be reasons why an assignment cannot be handed in on time. If you anticipate such a situation, please contact me asap. This **MUST** happen prior to the deadline of the assignment or prior to the class that you are missing.

Policy on Virtual Classes

Our class sessions may be audio-visually recorded for students in the class to refer back and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate verbally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials is prohibited. **Please note: as a general rule I do not intend to audio-visually record classes.**

Books

Students are required to purchase the following books:

Berger, J.M. (2018): *Extremism*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Byman, Daniel (2015): *Al Qaeda, The Islamic State and the Global Jihadi Movement. What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Neumann, Peter (2016): *Radicalized. New Jihadists and the Threat to the West*. New York: I.B. Tauris.

I will make every effort to post the required readings on the university's online e-learning system. This might not always be possible. At the beginning of the semester, the political science librarian will give a lecture about how students can make best use of the library and other resources. Students should familiarize themselves with the Global Terrorism Dataset (DTA): <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED): <https://www.acleddata.com/> and the following two journals:

Terrorism and Political Violence: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ftpv20/current>

Studies in Conflict & Terrorism: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uter20>

There are many other sources you should also consult when preparing for the various assignments.

Class Calendar

Any of the sessions may be subject to change. To follow the discussions in class you need to do all the required readings prior to the Tuesday meeting

Week 1, September 1 and 3: Getting Started

Organizational meetings, expectations and assignments, how to make best use of the library and other academic resources, discussion of syllabus, outline of key concepts, clarification of terminology, and overview of key themes in radicalization research.

Berger (2018): Chapter 2 and 3.

Week 2, September 8: What is Violent (Islamic) Radicalization/ Extremism? I

How does violent Islamic extremism resemble and differ from other types of violent and non-violent extremism? What does the term “radicalization” refer to? How does radicalization differ from extremism and terrorism? What can we learn from communist radicalization and extremism that shaped politics in Western Europe in the 1970s and contemporary right-wing (or fascist) extremism in the United States? What are the differences and commonalities between religious radicalization, religious polarization and violent religious extremism? *Please note: There is no class on September 10 due to other professional commitments.*

Neumann (2016): p.1-54.

Berger (2018): Chapter 5

Hoffman, Bruce (2017): *Inside Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press, Chapter 4.

Week 3, September 15 and 17: What is (Islamic) Radicalization/ Extremism? II

Neumann (2016): p.1-54.

Berger (2018): Chapter 5

Hoffman, Bruce (2017): *Inside Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press, Chapter 4.

Week 4, September 22 and 24: The Ideological Origins of Islamic Extremism

We discuss the content and the trajectory of the Salafi creed and the evolution of quietist Salafism into political and jihadi Salafism. Not all violent Islamic extremists are Salafis and not all Salafis are violent extremists. But Salafism is the strand of Islam most associated with contemporary Islamic extremism. We take a closer look at ideological developments within Islam. We discuss why Muslims frequently are the target of violent Islamic extremist organizations.

Bymann (2015): Chapter 4

Maher (2016): *Salafi-Jihadism. The History of an Idea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 3-20.

Wiktorowicz, Quintan (2005): “A Genealogy of Radical Islam.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28 (1): 25–97.

The first online assignment takes place on Thursday, September 24 between 3 PM and 3:50 PM. It covers everything we have discussed in class between Week 1 and Week 4 including the material we discuss on September 24 prior to the exam. The grade accounts for 15% of your final grade.

Week 5, September 29 and October 1: The Drivers of Islamic Radicalization

Scholars generally agree that radicalization processes are inherently complex and process-driven. We take a look at these processes, isolate some particularly salient drivers of radicalization and discuss common deradicalization strategies.

Schuurman, Bart (2018). *Becoming a European Homegrown Jihadist*. Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, Chapter 2.

Hafez, Mohammed, and Creighton Mullins (2015): "The Radicalization Process: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38 (11): 958–75.

United Nations. 2015. "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism." United Nations. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674.

Week 6, October 6 and 8: Dislocation and Exclusion: Islamic Radicalization in France

Cultural alienation in combination with economic and political exclusion can foster radicalization processes. We examine the political and historical context of France, the first Western country to experience violent Islamic extremism. We examine France's colonial legacy and how it influences the relationship between France and its growing Muslim-minority.

Bowen, John (2010). *Can Islam Be French?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, Chapter Two.

Kepel, Gilles (2015). *Terror in France*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Chapters 4 and 5.

Farhad Khosrokhavar (2016): The New European Jihadism and Its Avatars. *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 2 (2): 1-29.

By the end of Week 6 all groups need to inform me about the content of the group presentation!

Week 7, October 13 and 15: Dislocation and Exclusion: Islamic Radicalization in the UK and the Netherlands

Building on our insights from last week, we discuss the evolving relationship between the state, society and Islam in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

Cesari, Joyceline (2009). *The Securitisation of Islam in Europe*. Brussels: Changing Landscape of European Liberty and Security.

Hugh, Barnes (2006). *Born in the UK: Young Muslims in Britain*. London: The Foreign Policy Centre.

Schuurman, Bart (2018). *Becoming a European Homegrown Jihadist*. Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, Chapter 3-4.

Week 8, October 20 and 22: Al Qaeda, 9/11 and The War Against Terror

How, when and why did Al Qaeda form and what led to the attacks on 9/11? How do Western countries fight and otherwise engage with Al Qaeda? How do European counter-terrorism approaches differ from American approaches? Can current counter-terrorism approaches be regarded as suitable and effective? Can extremists ever be defeated for good?

Byman (2015): Chapter 1, 2 and 3.

Week 9, October 27 and 29: The Rise and Fall of ISIS

How does ISIS differ from Al Qaeda? What does the rise of ISIS tell us about the relationship between weak statehood and Islamic radicalization? Which political factors and grievances facilitated the rise of ISIS?

Byman (2015): Chapter 8

Stern, Jessica and Berger, J.M (2016). *ISIS. The State of Terror*. USA: Harper Collins, Chapter 2 and Chapter 8.

Efraim Benmelech & Esteban F. Klor (2018): What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Published Online First.

Week 10, November 3 and 5: Weak States: Fertile Ground for Jihadi Infiltration?

Building on insights from previous classes we discuss if weak states are particularly susceptible to the spread of jihadi groups.

Laurent de Castelli (2014). Mali: From Sanctuary to Islamic State. *The RUSI Journal* 159 (3): 62-68.

Newmann, Edward (2007). Weak States, State Failure and Terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19 (4): 463-488.

Week 11, November 10 and 12: No meetings. Preparation for Second Assignment.

The second online assignment takes place on Thursday, November 12 between 3 PM and 3:50 PM. Prior to Week 11 I will upload additional texts on canvas. You should use this week to read through the material. The assignment is meant to train your skills as an independent scholar. The grade accounts for 10% of your final grade.

Week 12-15: Group Presentations with Case Studies from Across the Globe

Each class will feature one or two student presentations about an individual case study, i.e. a violent Islamic extremist organization, the factors that gave rise to its formation, how a state or a group of states is engaging with that group and whether or not state strategies in fighting this group have been successful.

Week 12, November 17 and 19: Case Studies – Europe (3 groups)

Week 13, November 24: Case Studies –Russia (1 group)

Week 14, December 1 and 3: Case Studies – Africa and the Maghreb (3 groups)

Week 15, December 8 and 10: Case Studies – Asia and the Middle East (3 groups)

The third and final assignment covers everything we have discussed between Week 5 and Week 15 (including the content of the student presentations). The assignment will be available online between Monday, December 14 and Friday, December 18. The grade accounts for 25% of your final grade.