



GEO6938/4938: Terrorism and Space

University of Florida - Department of Geography
Spring 2021

Credits: 1-4. Prerequisites: entry-level knowledge of GIS
Class Number: 25056. Tuesday 11:45-1:40 and Thursday 11:45-12:35

Updated: November 9, 2020

Instructor

Dr. Olivier J. Walther, Department of Geography, 3205 Turlington Hall, (352) 273-4739, owalther@ufl.edu. Office hours: 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. These skills are in high demand in government jobs, international organizations, and in the private sector.

Schedule and readings

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
Jan 12, 14	Course introduction (Sageman 2014, Walther and Miles 2018: chap.1)	Defining terrorism (Hoffman 2017, chap.1)
Jan 19, 21	The origins of contemporary terrorism (Hoffman 2017, chap. 2)	The internationalization of terrorism (Hoffman 2017, chap 3)
Jan 26, 28	State-sponsored terrorism (Hoffman 2017: 269-280, Martin and Prager 2019: chap.5)	Workshop 1. Terrorism databases (Bowie and Schmid 2011)
Feb 2, 4	The threat of Al Qaeda (Hoffman 2008, Sageman 2008a, Sciolino and Schmitt 2008)	Workshop 2. Working with ACLED data (Raleigh et al. 2010)
Feb 9, 11	Causes of terrorism (Hoffman 2017: 298-314; Martin and Prager 2019: chap.4, Sageman 2008: 16-24)	Workshop 3. Working with ACLED data (ACLED 2020)
Feb 16, 18	Religion and terrorism (Hoffman 2017, chap. 4)	Workshop 4. Mapping ACLED data (ACLED 2020)
Feb 23, 25	Jihad and global Islam (Mandaville 2020, chap. 7)	Workshop 5. GIS and geospatial data (Medina and Hepner, chap. 4)
Mar 2, 4	The crime-terrorism nexus (Leuprecht et al. 2017)	Guest lecture
Mar 9, 11	The structure of terrorist networks (Krebs 2002, Hulst 2011) Mid-term paper due March 2nd at 8PM	Dismantling terrorist networks (Martin and Prager 2019: 506-544, Price 2019)
Mar 16, 18	Terrorism and place (Medina and Hepner 2013)	Workshop 6. Mapping places with ArcGIS (Medina et al. 2011)
Mar 23, 25	Terrorism and distance: the near and far enemy (Hafez 2011)	Workshop 7. Mapping point patterns with ArcGIS (Medina and Hepner 2008)
Mar 30, Apr 1	Terrorism and identity: Boko Haram (Dowd 2018, Curiel et al. 2020)	Terrorism and identity: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Walther and Christopoulos 2015)
Apr 6, 8	Terrorism and borders (Arsenault and Bacon 2015, D'Amato 2018)	Workshop 8. Mapping transnational actors with ArcGIS (Trémolières et al. 2020: 17-30)
Apr 13, 15	Terrorism and territory (Elden 2007, Radil and Castan Pinos 2019)	Workshop 9. Mapping the intensity and diffusion of violence with ArcGIS (Trémolières et al. 2020: 61-76)
Apr 20	Course overview, questions and answers.	No class. Final paper due April 23rd at 8PM

Final grade

Online 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 online attendance and participation. Students are expected to be at every online 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 assignment (at least 2000 words). In this descriptive paper, you will use the existing literature to discuss the origins, ideology, objectives, and strategy of a terrorist organization of your choice. The selected organization must be active in 2020. For more information, see “How to write your mid-term paper” on [Canvas](#). The final paper is due **March 2nd at 8PM on Canvas**.
- Final paper (at least 4000 words). 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 23rd at 8PM 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/>
- Arsenault, E. G., & Bacon, T. (2015). Disaggregating and defeating terrorist safe havens. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38(2), 85-112.
- Bowie, N. G., & Schmid, A. P. (2011). Databases on terrorism. In *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*. New York, Routledge, 312-358.
- 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.
- Dowd, C. (2017). Nigeria’s Boko Haram: local, national and transnational dynamics. In *African Border Disorders*. New York, Routledge, 135-155.
- Elden, S. (2007). Terror and territory. *Antipode*, 39(5), 821-845.
- 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.
- Hoffman, B. (2008). The myth of grass-roots terrorism: Why Osama bin Laden still matters. *Foreign Affairs*, 87(3): 133-138.
- Hulst, R. van der (2011). Terrorist networks: The threat of connectivity. In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis*. London, SAGE, 256-270.
- Krebs, V. (2002). Mapping networks of terrorist cells. *Connections*, 24(3), 43-52.
- Leuprecht, C., Walther, O., Skillicorn, D. B. & Ryde-Collins, H. (2017). Hezbollah's global tentacles: A relational approach to convergence with transnational organized crime. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 29(5), 902-921.
- Mandaville, P. (2020). *Islam and Politics*. London, Routledge.
- Martin, G. & Prager, F. (2019). *Terrorism. An International Perspective*. Thousand Oaks, SAGE.
- 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.
- Price, B. C. (2012). Targeting top terrorists: How leadership decapitation contributes to counterterrorism. *International Security*, 36(4), 9-46.
- Radil, S. M., & Castan Pinos, J. (2019). Reexamining the four waves of modern terrorism: A territorial interpretation. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1-20.
- 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. (2008a). Does Osama still call the shots? Debating the containment of al Qaeda's leadership. *Foreign Affairs*, 87(4): 163-166.
- 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.
- Trémolières, M., Walther, O. & Radil, S. (2020). *The Geography of Conflict in North and West Africa*. Paris, OECD.
- Walther, O. J. & Christopoulos, D. (2015). Islamic terrorism and the Malian rebellion. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 27(3), 497-519.
- Walther, O. & W. Miles (eds) (2018). *African Border Disorders. Addressing Transnational Extremist Organisations*. New York, Routledge.

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.

Ethics

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.

Other information

The course is delivered online. It includes online 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](#). 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](#) of use [Google Scholar](#).

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.aa.ufl.edu/>

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.