

**Psychology of Political Violence and Terrorism**  
**JLC-496**  
**Spring 2016**

**Instructor:** Dr. Thomas Zeitzoff, Assistant Professor.

**Schedule:** Thursdays 5:30-8:00PM, Ward 103

**Office:** Ward 249.

**Office hours:** W 11:00AM-12:30PM, Th 2:00PM-3:30PM or by appointment.

**Email:** zeitzoff@american.edu

**Course Description**

Why do people participate in political violence or terrorism? What do psychological theories say about decisions to participate and how individuals and groups respond to violence? How do these psychology theories compare to "rational" explanations of terrorism and political violence. How do canonical psychological experiments and theories help explain violence and terrorism? The purpose of this course is to teach you to explore these, and other related questions in a rigorous, analytical way.

**Objectives (things you will know after taking this class)**

1. Be able to distinguish between rational choice and psychological explanations for violence.
2. Have a factual understanding of a number of important instances of political violence.
3. Be familiar with a number of prominent psychological theories and experiments and relate them instances of political violence.
4. Strengthen writing and argumentation skills as it relates to analyzing political and psychological phenomenon.
5. Analyze a particular instance of political violence applying theories from psychology to better understand it.

**NOTE:** Some of the materials used in this course are graphic or disturbing in nature. We do not discuss these things lightly, nor are they presented purely for shock value. Rather, we observe the words of Eli Wiesel that are carved into the entrance the US Holocaust Museum, "for the dead and the living, we must bear witness." Thus, we must both bear witness and try to understand the violence, in order prevent it in the future.

**Readings**

There are no required books for this course. All of the readings and materials are available on the course website, or at a given url where indicated. You are required to do all the readings—both theoretical and for the presentation background—for each class.

**Laptop and Cellular Phones Policy**

I strongly discourage the use of laptops. While laptops are wonderful inventions, and improve communication and efficiency, the research on their effect on learning outcomes in the classroom is unambiguous. Laptops are distractions (to both you and others), lead to dictation, rather than synthesis during note taking, and harm attention (see studies below)—all leading to worse learning outcomes.

Turn off your cell phone during class and do not bring it out. It is very distracting to others. Off means it does not ring or vibrate. The first time I see your phone out I will ask you a question related to the material. If I see it out again, I will ask you to leave the class.

- Bowman, Laura L., Laura E. Levine, Bradley M. Waite, and Michael Gendron. "Can students really multitask? An experimental study of instant messaging while reading." *Computers & Education* 54, no. 4 (2010): 927-931.
- Fried, Carrie B. "In-class laptop use and its effects on student learning." *Computers & Education* 50.3 (2008): 906-914.
- Yamamoto, Kevin. "Banning laptops in the classroom: Is it worth the hassles?" *Journal of Legal Education* 57 (2007): 477.

### **Sharing of Course Content**

Students are not permitted to make visual or audio recordings, including live streaming, of classroom lectures or any class related content, using any type of recording devices (e.g., smart phone, computer, digital recorder, etc.) unless prior permission from the instructor is obtained, and there are no objections from any of the students in the class. If permission is granted, personal use and sharing of recordings and any electronic copies of course materials (e.g., PowerPoints, formulas, lecture notes and any classroom discussions online or otherwise) is limited to the personal use of students registered in the course and for educational purposes only, even after the end of the course.

Exceptions will be made for students who present a signed Letter of Accommodation from the Academic Support and Access Center. See: How Do I Request Accommodations?

< <http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac/Accommodations.cfm> >

To supplement the classroom experience, lectures may be audio or video recorded by faculty and made available to students registered for this class. Faculty may record classroom lectures or discussions for pedagogical use, future student reference, or to meet the accommodation needs of students with a documented disability. These recordings are limited to personal use and may not be distributed (fileshare), sold, or posted on social media outlets without the written permission of faculty.

Unauthorized downloading, file sharing, distribution of any part of a recorded lecture or course materials, or using information for purposes other than the student's own learning may be deemed a violation of *American University's Student Conduct Code* and subject to disciplinary action (see Student Conduct Code VI. Prohibited Conduct).

## Academic Integrity

I take issues of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. Please familiarize yourself with the AU Academic Integrity Code. I regard violations of this code seriously and will immediately refer the matter to the dean. If you have any questions about the course, or more general requirements about the code, please do not hesitate to talk to me.

## Assessment

**\*\*Note:** Each unexcused absence will result in the loss of 4 points on your final grade. More than three unexcused absences will result in failure for the course\*\*

### **Participation (10%)**

Success in the course depends on regular attendance and discussion. Students must do ALL of the assigned readings before class and be prepared to answer questions and ask them. Attendance alone is insufficient to succeed. Discussion will be evaluated on both quality and quantity of comments, particularly during the presentations. You should also be prepared for the fact that I may call on you randomly--so come prepared.

### **Response Papers (20%)**

You will write four ~500 word (2-pages, double-spaced) response papers. See below for the dates. The goal of these papers is to strengthen your skills in critically evaluating arguments. We will discuss expectations in class.

### **Violent Event Presentation (10%)**

In order to broaden our knowledge about different instances of political violence and connect our theoretical readings to concrete cases, we will have two briefings per class (~30 minutes each). These will be student-led. You will sign up to present once for the semester (most likely with a partner). For the first 10 minutes of your brief you will put the violent event in context and will cover the actors (perpetrators, victims, external actors), motivation, kind of violence, and results of the violent event. For the last 20 minutes of your brief, you will lead the class in a discussion linking the theoretical readings to the topic at hand. Finally, as part of the presentation, you will also fill out a violence catalog sheet that will be used by the whole class (due the Wednesday before your briefing by 11:00pm). The events from the violence presentations will be on the midterm exam, and the violence catalog will serve as a useful study guide.

### **Midterm (30%)**

One in-class midterm will be held on **February 25<sup>th</sup>**

### **Political Violence Event Project (30% total)**

You will select an event (not discussed in class) of political violence. You will then use the theories and literature we have discussed in class to provide a concise policy brief that

provides the background for the event and actors, motivations for the different actors' actions and the end result. As part of this project you will:

- Complete a one-page rough draft that outlines the general event **due March 31<sup>st</sup> (5%)**
- Have a one-on-one meeting scheduled with the Professor the **week of April 4-7<sup>th</sup>**
- A 4-page final paper due **April 21<sup>st</sup>, the last day of class (12.5%)**
- A 15-minute Oral Exam, that will be scheduled for **April 26-28<sup>th</sup> (12.5%)**

More detailed rubric and expectations of the assignment will be discussed when the project is assigned.

**\*\*NOTE: LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED\*\***

### Classroom Courtesy

Classroom courtesy is an essential component of creating an effective learning environment. All students have the right to learn without unnecessary distractions. These distractions include: cellphones, talking during lectures (unless recognized by the instructor), reading newspapers, falling asleep, etc. If you need a cell phone for emergency purposes, leave it on vibrate. Laptop use is also restricted. Unless you have a documented learning need, or are instructed by the professor, do not bring a laptop to class.

Entering and leaving are also significant sources of distraction. It is your responsibility to be on time and to stay for the entire period. In circumstances where you need to leave early, tell the professor beforehand. Repeated disruptions of class will lead to a reduction in your final grade.

Most importantly, class discussions of the issues in political science, criminology, and justice, can lead to strong feelings and heated debate. Because this is a college classroom, all discussion must be respectful and scholarly.

### *Scholarly Comments*

- Are respectful of diverse opinions and open to follow up questions and/or disagreement
- Are related to class and/or the course material
- Focus on advancing the discussion about issues related to the course and/or course material rather than personal beliefs, and
- Are delivered in normal tones and a non-aggressive manner.

### *Unacceptable Comments*

- Are personal in nature. This includes attacks on a person's appearance, demeanor, or political beliefs.
- Include interrupting the professor or other students. Raise your hand and wait to be recognized.

- Often use the discussion to argue for political positions and/or beliefs. If political discussions arise, they must be discussed in a scholarly way (see above).
- May include using raised tones, yelling, engaging in arguments with other students and being threatening in any manner.
- Include ignoring the professor's authority to maintain the integrity of the classroom environment.

### **Syllabus Change Policy**

This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice. These changes may come via e-mail. Make sure to check your university-supplied email regularly. You are accountable for all such communications.

### **Students Resources**

If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please do not hesitate to consult with me. In addition to the resources of the department, a wide range of services is available to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements.

***Academic Support Center*** (x3360, MGC 243) offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals, and services for students with learning disabilities. Writing support is available in the ASC Writing Lab or in the Writing Center, Battelle 228.

***Disability Support Services*** (x3315, MGC 206) offers technical and practical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical or psychological disabilities. If you have a disability and might require accommodations in this course, please notify me with a letter from DSS or ASC early in the semester so that we can make arrangements to address your needs.

***Counseling Center*** (x3500, MGC 214) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources.

**Writing Center** in 228 Battelle-Tompkins offers free, individual coaching sessions to all AU students. In your 45-minute session, a student writing consultant can help you address assignments, understand the conventions of academic writing, and learn how to revise and edit your own work. The Center offers appointments on the hour from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, and 3 to 6 p.m. on Sundays. Call [202- 885- 2991](tel:202-885-2991) to arrange a session.

***Center for Diversity & Inclusion*** is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, Multicultural, First Generation, and Women's experiences on campus and to advance AU's commitment to respecting & valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy. It is located on the 2nd floor of Mary Graydon Center: [202-885-3651](tel:202-885-3651), email is [cdi@american.edu](mailto:cdi@american.edu).

**Dean of Students Office** (x3300, 408 Butler Pavilion) offers one-on-one meetings to discuss academic, adjustment, and personal issues that may be interfering with a student's ability to succeed academically. The DOS office also verifies documentation for students who have medical or mental health issues that cause them to be absent from class.

### **Emergency Preparedness**

In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site ([american.edu/emergency](http://american.edu/emergency)) and the AU information line at (202) [885-1100](tel:885-1100) for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/college-specific information.

### **Week 1 (January 14) Why Political Violence?**

Chapter 1. Tilly, Charles. *The politics of collective violence*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

### **Week 2 (January 21) Comparing and Contrasting Rational and Psych Theories**

**\*\*Response Paper 1 Due\*\***

#### Theory

- Blattman, Christopher, and Edward Miguel. "Civil war." *Journal of Economic Literature* (2010): 3-57.
- Gurr, Ted. "Psychological factors in civil violence." *World Politics* 20.02 (1968): 245-278.
- Fearon, James D. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49.03 (1995): 379-414.

## Presentations

- Immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi
  - Abouzeid, Rania. "Bouazizi: The Man Who Set Himself and Tunisia on Fire" *Time* (2011).
- Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966
  - Scott, Margaret. "The Indonesian Massacre: What did the US know?" *The New York Review of Books* (2015).

## **Week 3 (January 28) Cognition and Biases**

### Theory

- Quattrone, George A., and Amos Tversky. "Contrasting rational and psychological analyses of political choice." *American Political Science Review* 82.03 (1988): 719-736.
- Introduction. Gilovich, Thomas, Dale Griffin, and Daniel Kahneman. *Heuristics and biases: The psychology of intuitive judgment*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

### Presentations

- Killing of Alan Berg 1984
  - "The murder of Alan Berg in Denver: 25 years later." *The Denver Post* (2009).
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- 2000 Ramallah Lynchings
  - "WHOSE HOLY LAND?: THE VICTIMS; Israel in Shock as It Buries Mob's Victim." *The New York Times* (2000).

## **Week 4 (February 4) Ideology and "Moral" Violence**

**\*\*Response Paper 2 Due\*\***

### Theory

- Ginges, Jeremy, et al. "Psychology out of the laboratory: the challenge of violent extremism." *American Psychologist* 66.6 (2011): 507.
- Jost, John T., Brian A. Nosek, and Samuel D. Gosling. "Ideology: Its resurgence in social, personality, and political psychology." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3.2 (2008): 126-136.
- Skitka, Linda J., and Elizabeth Mullen. "The dark side of moral conviction." *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 2.1 (2002): 35-41.

## Presentations

- “Great Terror” USSR (1930’s)
  - P 1-10. Gregory, Paul R., Philipp JH Schröder, and Konstantin Sonin. "Dictators, Repression and the Median Citizen: An Eliminations Model of Stalin's Terror (Data from the NKVD Archives)." (2006).
- Attacks against Secularists Bloggers in Bangladesh
  - Subramanian, Samanth. “The Islamist War on Secular Bloggers.” *The New Yorker* (2015).

## **Week 5 (February 11) Ethnic and Group Violence**

**\*\*Assign Final Project and Dates for One-on-one rough draft meetings, and Oral Exam\*\***

### Theory

- Chapters 1-4 (\*\*Pay special attention to Chapter 4.). Harvey, Oliver J., B. Jack White, William R. Hood, and Carolyn W. Sherif. *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robbers Cave Experiment*. Norman, OK: University Book Exchange, 1961.
- Mueller, John. "The Banality of “Ethnic War”." *International Security* 25.1 (2000): 42-70.
- Tajfel, Henri. "Social psychology of intergroup relations." *Annual review of psychology* 33.1 (1982): 1-39.

## Presentations

- 2000 Kaduna Riots
  - “ ‘200 dead’ in Kaduna riots.” *BBC* (2000).
- Black July (anti-Tamil pogroms)
  - Remembering Sri Lanka's Black July *BBC* (2013).

## **Week 6 (February 18) Is Terrorism Unique?**

**\*\*Response Paper 3 Due\*\***

### Theory

- Atran, Scott, Robert Axelrod, and Richard Davis. "Sacred Barriers to Conflict Resolution." *Science* 317 (2007): 1039-1040.
- Victoroff, Jeff. "The Mind of the Terrorist A Review and Critique of Psychological Approaches." *Journal of conflict resolution* 49.1 (2005): 3-42.

- Bloom, Mia. "Chasing butterflies and rainbows: A critique of Kruglanski et al.'s 'Fully committed: suicide bombers' Motivation and the quest for personal significance'." *Political Psychology* 30.3 (2009): 387-395.

### Presentations

- King David Hotel Bombing
  - Ellis, Niv. "Blowing Up the King David Hotel." *Tablet* (2012).
- Bombing of Dresden during WWII
  - Taylor, Alan. Remembering Dresden: 70 Years After the Firebombing (2015). <http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2015/02/remembering-dresden-70-years-after-the-firebombing/385445/>

### **Week 7 (February 25) \*\*Midterm\*\***

### **Week 8 (March 3) Honor and Revenge**

#### Theory

- Cohen, Dov, et al. "Insult, aggression, and the southern culture of honor: An 'experimental ethnography'." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 70.5 (1996): 945.
- Fehr, Ernst, and Simon Gächter. "Altruistic punishment in humans." *Nature* 415.6868 (2002): 137-140.
- Atran, Scott. "ISIS is a revolution." (2015).

#### Presentations

- Yezidi Revenge Killings
  - Otten, Cathy. "Yazidis Get Revenge On ISIS In Sinjar." (2015) *The Daily Beast*.
  - Fordham, Alice "An Iraqi Town Is Retaken From ISIS, And Looting And Retribution Begin." *NPR* (2015).
- Honor Killings in Pakistan
  - Holt, Gerry. "Why do families kill their daughters?" *BBC* (2014).

### **Week 9 (March 10) NO CLASS SPRING BREAK**

## **Week 10 (March 17) Guest Lecture TBD**

## **Week 11 (March 24) Torture and Repression**

**\*\*Response Paper 4 Due\*\***

### Theory

- Skim, but pay attention to Section 2. Milgram, Stanley. "Obedience to Authority." (1978).
- Chapters 1-2. Zimbardo, Philip. *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. Random House LLC, 2007.
- Huddy, Leonie, et al. "Threat, anxiety, and support of antiterrorism policies." *American journal of political science* 49.3 (2005): 593-608.

### Presentations

- Dirty War Argentina
  - "Q&A: Argentina's grim past." *BBC* (2005)
- Forced Disappearance in Egypt under Al-Sisi
  - Cunningham, Erin and Heba Habib. "Egyptian groups: Government has been kidnapping students, activists." *The Washington Post* (2015).

## **Week 12 (March 31) Leadership**

**\*\*Rough Draft Due\*\***

### Theory

- Introduction and Chapter 1. Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce , and Alastair Smith. *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior is Almost Always Good Politics*. Public Affairs, 2011.
- Introduction. Stam, Allan C., Michael C. Horowitz, and Cali M. Ellis. *Why Leaders Fight*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

### Presentations

- Killing of Samuel Doe
  - Law, Bill. "Meeting the hard man of Liberia" *BBC* (2006).
- 1973 Chilean Coup d'état
  - Worth, Katie. "The Other 9/11." *Slate* (2013).

### **Week 13 (April 7) \*\*One-on-One Meetings\*\***

### **Week 14 (April 14) Genocide and Mass Killing**

#### Theory

- Darley, John M. "Social organization for the production of evil." *Psychological Inquiry* 3.2 (1992): 199-218.
- Goldhagen, Daniel J., Christopher R. Browning, and Leon Wieseltier. *The "Willing Executioners"/"Ordinary Men" Debate*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2006.
- Zimbardo, Philip G. *A situationist perspective on the psychology of evil: Understanding how good people are transformed into perpetrators*. New York: Guilford Press, 2004.

#### Presentations

- 1982 Hama Massacre
  - Amos, Deborah. "30 Years Later, Photos Emerge From Killings In Syria." *NPR* (2012).
  -
- Cambodian Genocide
  - "Genocide in Cambodia 1975–1979." *US Holocaust Museum*.  
<http://www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/cases/cambodia/introduction/cambodia-1975>

### **Week 15 (April 21) Is Violence Declining?**

- Chapter 1 and selections. Pinker, Steven. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. Penguin, 2011.
- Beauchamp, Zach. "This fascinating academic debate has huge implications for the future of world peace." *Vox* (2015)

**Oral Exams (April 26-28)**