Course Description
This course will provide an overview of a wide range of topics and theories dealing with political violence, with a particular focus on terrorism and insurgency. Students will explore various theories on political violence, the forms it takes, those that use it, and how its targets’ respond to it. Students will gain particular insight into why terrorism constitutes a distinct form of political violence and review the leading research on its causes, consequences, and the current terrorist threat landscape. The class will also explore governmental policy responses to terrorism and insurgency.

Course Objectives
By the conclusion of this course, students should:
1. Be able to distinguish between various forms of political violence; including terrorism, insurgency, rebellion, revolution, and civil war.
2. Have an understanding of the major questions and theories related to political violence, especially terrorism.
3. Increased understanding of social science research through participation in a terrorism research project.
4. Increased awareness of current and ongoing issues related to political violence, from the Syrian Civil War to the changing face of al-Qa’ida.

Course Requirements/Grading

Class Participation (30%)
Participation is more than attendance; it includes active and thoughtful participation in all elements of the class. This course will be taught as a seminar built around the class discussion and exercises, which means that we will all be dependent on the efforts of others’ participation to determine the success of our learning experience. Active and thoughtful participation is dependent on a thorough reading of the material as well as preparation for any exercises to be conducted in class.

I suggest preparing a couple “talking points” before class, especially on weeks that you do not write a reading reflection paper. In addition to your thoughts, opinion, and analysis of the weeks readings, these talking points could include questions on a topic you find confusing and why you are unclear on the matter so that these questions may be addressed in class. If you have a question or are confused, there is likely someone else in the same position.

Reading Reflection Papers (30%)
You are required to write six (6) reading reflection papers throughout the semester, each worth 5% of your overall grade. You choose which six weeks to write on based upon your interest in the weeks’ topics. Reading reflection papers should be between 1-2 pages, Times New Roman, double space, 1” margins.

Reflection papers should provide original insight or observation based on the readings for the week. They may discuss on your opinion or thoughts (ie why you find something interesting or insightful; a point you disagree with or are unclear on and why), identify larger themes between assigned readings (“connect the dots” of readings that week or across weeks), or apply the theories or themes of the readings to ongoing or recent world events. Reflection papers are NOT summaries of the readings. Instead they should reflect your original thoughts and analysis on the week’s topic. These papers are designed to help drive class participation as well as evaluate your understanding of the course topics as we move through the semester.
Final Research Project (40%)
There are two options for final research projects. Everyone will be required to do a short presentation on their final research projects during our final class. The first is to write a traditional research paper exploring a key issue or question related to political violence. These traditional research papers should be similar to many of the academic articles we read in class, exploring a key research question, testing a hypothesis or set of hypotheses, and applying a theoretical lens to the topic. The second is to do a comprehensive historical paper on a terrorist, rebel, or insurgent organization or set of organizations. In addition to a historical time line of organizational behavior and government response this project will review the literature on the group and theoretical findings that have been made about this group. Both papers should be approximately 15 pages in length, Times New Roman, double space, 1” margins.

Questions
Education is about learning. This class is about material you have probably not covered before in this context. If you have questions or things are unclear – ask questions. Ask them in lecture and feel free to ask or email the instructor whenever for further clarification.

Course Accommodations
“Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of Disabled Student Services (Campus Center 137, 442-5490). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations (http://www.albany.edu/studentlife/dss/Accommodation.html).” If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course please also inform the instructor as soon as possible.

In addition, the instructor will make every effort to accommodate difficulties arising from religious observance. You are asked to bring any possible conflicts to the instructor’s attention as soon as possible. Students should not expect that, if they do poorly on an assignment, to claim, at that time, the need of an accommodation. This statement is to preclude that problem, and allow people with a need for accommodations to be treated fairly and appropriately.

Academic Honesty
Plagiarism or cheating in any form will not be tolerated. Please familiarize yourself with the university’s Standards for Academic Integrity (http://www.albany.edu/graduatebulletin/requirements_degree.htm#standards_integrity). If you are involved in plagiarism the penalty will be failure in the course and you will be reported to judicial affairs. In this one regard there are no second chances. If you are not sure if something violates standards – ask. If you are not sure whether to cite or not to cite – cite. Every student should go through the following tutorial (it is short, I promise) http://library.albany.edu/usered/plagiarism/.

Ombudsperson
“Usually appointed by the government or by parliament but with a significant degree of independence, who is charged with representing the interests of the public by investigating and addressing complaints of maladministration or violation of rights.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ombudsman). One student will be asked to volunteer to act as an ombudsperson and can meet with me to offer anonymous feedback from students in terms of the direction the course is going and bring to my attention any problems with reading, assignments or other material.

Readings
All readings will be posted to a shared gmail account setup for the class. The login information is as follows:

pad554.spring14@gmail.com
TerrorismPV14
Course Calendar

Week 1 (1/23)  
Introduction

Week 2 (1/30)  
Motivations for Political Violence – Structural Causes
Readings:

Week 3 (2/6)  
Motivations for Political Violence – Grievance: Ideology, Religion, and Ethnicity
Readings:
5. Osama bin Laden 1996 and 1998 Fatwas (click years to link to PBS full text)

Week 4 (2/13)  
Motivations for Political Violence – Rational Actor
Readings:

No Class on 2/20

Week 5 (2/27)  
Revolutions
Readings:
   a. A climate of change
b. Revolutionary potential: How many more to go?

c. Fertile Croissant

d. Political Islam: The power of religion

e. Youth: Give us a chance

f. The economy: The haves and the have-nots

g. Constitution-building: The long march

h. After Egypt’s double spring: Keep going

4. Ibish, Hussein. “Was the Arab Spring Worth It?” Foreign Policy. 17 June 2012.

5. Walt, Stephen M. “Are US Interests REALLY at Stake in Egypt, Syria, Etc?” Foreign Policy. 22 August 2013.

Week 6 (3/6) Rebellion, Insurgency, and Civil War

Readings


Week 7 (3/13) Terrorism Overview

Readings


No Class on 3/20

Week 8 (3/27) Terrorist Behavior: Strategies, Tactics, and Targets

Readings:


Week 9 (4/3)  State Sponsored Terrorism
Readings:

Week 10 (4/10)  A Study in Terrorist Adaptability: The Evolution of al-Qa’ida
Readings:

Week 11 (4/17)  Foreign Fighters, Diasporas, and Homegrown Violent Extremists
Readings:

Week 12 (4/24)  Government Responses to Political Violence
Readings

Week 13 (5/1) How Terrorism Ends
Readings:

Week 14 (5/8) Final Presentations