

PLSC 486K – Insurgency & Counterinsurgency

Course Description:

This course investigates the similarities between two distinct types of guerilla warfare – insurgency and terrorism – and the government response – counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. Beginning with an examination of historical examples as a foundation, we'll explore how these tactics and actors have evolved. Without overlooking military aspects of “irregular” war, the course focuses on the underlying socio-economic, political, collective action and resource constraints that drive the decisions of conflict actors.

Terrorism is too often considered a phenomenon distinct from more traditional forms of civil conflict such as insurgencies. This course is structured around an opposing argument; terrorists are just a form of insurgents or rebel fighters. By treating terrorism as a form of guerilla warfare, we can study past insurgencies and counterinsurgency operations to better understand the current context of terrorism and successful counterterrorism policies.

As this is a senior seminar, participation in class discussions is imperative. Students are expected to be critically engaged with the assigned reading and contribute each week to analysis of the material we cover. Doing so forces a weekly discussion of research methodology, theory building and formulating hypotheses. By the end of the semester, students will have an understanding of how to use research methods to study components of guerilla warfare and will practice these skills in a final term paper.