

Draft Version: Understanding Extremism in the 21st Century
Executive Education Course
Please email any questions directly to Dr. Zacharias Pieri: zpieri@usf.edu

Executive Education Course
Dr. Zacharias Pieri

Understanding Extremism in the 21st Century

Extremism and its consequences are among the top policy priorities in contemporary society and at the forefront of governments' security agendas. Yet the way in which we examine and understand extremism has not received adequate emphasis, and the impacts of policy on combating extremism has not been well understood. The goal of this course is to impact the ways in which decision makers of policy and strategy think about the evolving nature of extremism and security, and to better enable contextualized and effective policies on extremism to emerge. To do this, in this course we examine what extremism is – its relationships with religion, ethnicity, grievance, and other factors. The course lays the foundations for understanding and explaining extremism, how extremist movements form and recruit, how they carry out their activities, and how the digital age is impacting on strategy and communications. We consider key figures, texts, and beliefs that contribute to extremism across a number of contexts, and examine these within their contexts. While the core focus of the course is on understanding violent extremism, time will also be spent on considering forms of non-violent extremism, and the impacts these have on the milieu of extremism. The course asks participants to assess current trends and to further envisage what extremism looks like in 20-30 years time. In doing so we will attempt to identify methods of disempowering, challenging and delegitimizing extremism – in short, crafting effective and resonant policy. Some of the key questions the course will cover include:

- What is extremism and why do definitions matter?
- Can we identify common cross-cultural themes of extremism?
- How do we conceptualize non-violent extremism?
- How does non-violent extremism affect the milieu of extremism?
- Can/should non-violent extremism be used as a partner in delegitimizing violent extremism?
- How can we identify legitimate and effective partners for countering extremism at the community levels?
- What are the processes by which extremism comes to be violent?
- How do extremist movements recruit members?
- How is technology impacting on extremism?
- How is Islamic State changing the dynamics of extremism?
- Homegrown extremism – how do we deal with this?
- How can we use current trends to predict the future of extremism?
- How can we craft effective counter-extremism policy?
- Who are the stakeholders in countering extremism and why does this matter?

This course is divided into four parts. The first lays the foundations of understanding important issues through focusing on key theories and developing a framework through which we conceptualize extremism. We consider current policies on extremism and security, examine key

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themes of extremism, and consider how and why groups and individuals come to be classified as extremist. The second part of the course builds upon the knowledge gained in the first part and seeks to understand non-violent extremism in today's world. The important question here for decision makers on policy and strategy is that of, what effect does non-violent extremism have? The third part focuses on violent extremism in the contemporary period through examining case studies of different VEOs. In order to do this, the classes will focus on key exponents of violent extremism; examine their ideologies and how they relate to beliefs and practices. Important to this section will be an understanding of how individuals and groups form ideology, how they recruit and mobilize others into action, and how they justify that action. Key figures, texts, and beliefs are examined and considered within their historical contexts. In addition to this, the third section of the course will also consider homegrown extremism and the ways in which this issue intersects with the wider question of crafting policy to effectively combat extremism. The fourth part of the course asks decision makers of policy and strategy to think about the ways in which extremist movements will develop in the next 20-30 years. To do this we look at patterns of global change, and consider whether the geo-political and cultural terrains in which extremist movements currently operate have means of stemming these movements, or whether they will actually grow.

Outcomes:

Each of the course sections is geared towards providing participants with the tools and analytic framework needed to effectively engage in developing and articulating more effective policy in combating extremism. Participants will learn how to analyze when windows of opportunity are likely to open, predict the parameters of change, and advise on how to prepare for and respond to these changes. The course will specifically:

- 1) Develop participants' understanding of what extremism is and how religion, politics, and other grievance factors can combine to create a potent force for global disorder.
- 2) Develop participant's understanding of the importance of contexts and the impacts these have on the way extremism is shaped.
- 3) Arrive at an understanding of how and why religion has been used by extremist in the contemporary period to perpetrate acts of violence and terrorism – this requires understanding of the way in which religious texts have been interpreted as well as social and psychological forces at play.
- 4) Develop participants' understanding of how violent narratives have been challenged and prepares participants to identify opportunities for combating extremism
- 5) Through analyzing current global trends participants will hone their skills in predicting the parameters of change in extremism and to articulate ways of responding to change.

Assessment:

Participants, who are taking this course with the intention of gaining a certification, are expected to complete one critical essay on a selected topic related to the course. Participants will do the following:

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1. Submit their proposed theme and thesis question for approval
2. Submit a paper outline with annotated bibliography
3. Conference with the Professor to discuss the proposed paper
4. Submit the completed paper

Each paper will be 10-15 double spaced pages in length, will use Times New Roman 12 pt. font, and will have 1-inch margins. Research papers will include a scholarly bibliography that will not count to the page limit. Students must use a minimum of 8 scholarly sources, and must cite in accordance with academic conventions.

Course Outline:

DAY 1

8:00 – 8:30 a.m. Program Registration and Breakfast

8:30 – 9:00 a.m. Welcome and Introductions

9:00 – 9:45 a.m. Contextualizing extremism

The aim of this session is to introduce participants to a better understanding of what extremism is. It seeks to examine the influence of the rapidly changing nature of extremism on security and on policy countering extremism.

- Overview of the course
- Defining extremism:
 - Non-violent extremism
 - Violent extremism
 - Religious extremism
 - Political extremism
 - Rethinking extremism

9:45 – 10:30 a.m Common Themes of extremism

This session seeks to introduce participants to the core themes at the heart of contemporary forms of extremism. The goal is to highlight that grievances can often be legitimate, and can be alleviated before the point of radicalization.

- Key themes of contemporary extremism
 - Irredentism
 - Religion & the quest for purity
 - Anti-West & Beyond
 - Gender and sexualities
 - Poor governance & corruption

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10:15 – 10:30 a.m. Break

10:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Overview of policy decisions on extremism and countering extremism

The aim of this session is to introduce students to key decisions of policy and strategy that have been taken on issues of extremism. This sets the stage for conceiving of ways to improve policymaking later in the course.

- Review of Programs to counter violent extremism:
<http://www.strategicdialogue.org/CounterNarrativesFN2011.pdf>
- Countering Violent Extremism in America:
<https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/CVE%20in%20America%20.pdf>

12:15 – 1:15 p.m.

Lunch & Networking

1:15 – 3:00 p.m.

Non-violent extremism:

Not all extremism is violent-extremism. In this session, we consider non-violent extremism and its impacts on the milieu of extremism. Participants are encouraged to deliberate on whether non-violent extremism can serve as a force to challenge violent extremism as well as the ethical implications of this. We will further discuss ways of identifying shifts in non-violent extremism as a means of better formulating policy on countering extremism. Finally we consider the key stakeholders here as well as means of developing collaborative partnerships in formulating more nuanced and effective policy.

- Case study: Tablighi Jamaat (TJ):
 - This is Islam's largest movement with 80 million followers around the world. TJ is often considered as a non-violent and apolitical organization, yet significant questions remain as to the impact its teachings have on the radicalization process.
 - We will examine the way TJ contributes to the milieu of extremism by looking at its activities in Mali/Gambia/UK
 - We will consider arguments that TJ is a bulwark to violent extremism.

3:00 – 3:15 p.m. Break

3:15 – 4:50 p.m. **Exploring Policy on countering extremism through building partnerships with non-violent extremism.**
Participants are encouraged to deliberate on whether non-violent extremism can serve as a force to challenge violent extremism as well as the ethical implications of this. We consider the key stakeholders here as well as means of developing collaborative partnerships in formulating more nuanced and effective policy.

Case study: Britain's use of non-violent extremists:

- Overview of the context
- Key policy decisions
- Stakeholders and partners in counter-extremism
- Successes and Failures of the Policy
- Ethical implications

4:50 – 5:00 p.m. **Review and Reflection**
This session seeks to review and discuss the main themes of Day One.

5:00 p.m. **Adjournment**

Day 2

8:00 – 8:30 a.m. **Breakfast and Networking**

8:30 – 8:45 a.m. **Review of Learning Outcomes from Day One 1**

Morning: Case Studies – Violent Extremism

8:45 – 10:15 a.m. Homegrown extremism (London & Paris attacks)

- What do we know?
- Definitions
- Profiles
- Actions
- Crafting effective policy

10:15 – 10:30 a.m. **Break**

10:30 – 12:00 a.m. The changing nature of violent extremism – IS and Affiliates:

- Information technology in driving recruitment and spread of ideology

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- Looking at jihadist poetry and literature to better understand motivations/countering-ideology
- Changing nature of extremism
- Boko Haram

12:00 – 1:15 p.m.

Lunch with Guest Speaker

1:15 – 3:15 p.m.

Understanding Extremism in the 21st Century

This last section of the course asks participants as decision makers of policy and strategy to think about the ways in which extremist movements will develop in the next 20-30 years. To do this we look at patterns of global change, and consider whether the geo-political and cultural terrains in which extremist movements currently operate have means of stemming these movements, or whether they will actually grow. In addition we reconsider ways in which to identify important stakeholders and partners in crafting effective and resonant policy.

1. Conceptualizing extremism in the future
2. Identifying stakeholders and partners
3. Crafting effective strategy and policy

3:15 – 3:30 p.m.

Break

3:30 – 4:30 p.m.

Application and Practice of Processes

4:30 – 5:00 p.m.

Course Overview and Wrap-Up

5:00 p.m.

Adjournment

5:00 – 5:45 p.m.

Post-Program Networking with Colleagues and Faculty (*optional*)