UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Violent Extremism and Criminal Policies

2627-5-A5810258

Learning objectives

Knowledge and Understanding
Mastery of socio-criminological approaches to the phenomenon of violent extremism and its associated conflicts.

Applying Knowledge and Understanding
Interpretation of violent extremism in its multiple forms through case studies; ability to apply qualitative methodologies; ability to develop interdisciplinary dialogues; critical analysis of related criminal policies.

Judgement Autonomy
Ability to critically and independently reflect on socio-criminological discourse concerning the intersection of violence, radicalization and extremism.

Communication Skills
Proficiency in socio-criminological language.

Ability to Learn Independently
Acquisition of cognitive tools to update one's knowledge and apply it to the socio-cultural contexts in which the phenomenon of violent extremism takes shape.

Contents

The course will deal with the complex phenomenon of violent extremism using a comparative and interdisciplinary approach to help students explore both its pragmatic and its theoretical challenges.

Drawing on emergent literature in the field of interactionist, narrative, cultural and critical criminology, the course will analyze different models of radicalization into violent extremism and will examine the possible ways of responding to violent extremism in terms of criminal policies.

Detailed program

The course will deal with the complex phenomenon of violent extremism using a comparative and interdisciplinary approach to help students explore both its pragmatic and its theoretical challenges.

The introduction to the course will be dedicated to the controversial definition of violent extremism. Drawing on emergent literature in the field of interactionist, narrative, cultural and critical criminology and after having analyzed different models of radicalization into violent extremism, the course will highlight: how the processes of violent radicalization can have multiple and complex factors and therefore we need to counter linear explanations of cause and effect; that it is necessary to go beyond a simplistic and reductive vision of the relationship between religion and violence, on the one hand, and of the rigid distinction between violent and non-violent extremists, on the other; that violent radicalization is a dynamic, complex and multidimensional psycho-social process.

The final part of the course will examine the possible ways of responding to violent extremism in terms of criminal policies: from anti-terrorism (counter-terrorism, CT) to preventive approaches that make use of non-coercive methods (CVE, Countering Violent Extremism) – including prevention, intervention and rehabilitation programmes with a link to the field of restorative justice.

Prerequisites

Good skills in learning, writing and oral communication in English.

Teaching methods

The course will be delivered in English. Throughout the course, the active role of the students will be enhanced and they will be able to put into practice the proposed theoretical and methodological approaches through opportunities for discussion and also through the use of videos and simulations.

- 20 two-hour lessons held in presence, with a first part in frontal mode (DE) and a second part aimed at involving students in an interactive way (DI).
- 1 two-hour lesson delivered remotely.

Assessment methods

Oral exam: it will be a discussion based on the course texts and on the topics covered in class. During the oral exam, it is also possible to discuss a written work previously agreed upon with the professor and developed starting from the theoretical contents indicated in the bibliography.
No mid-term assessments are scheduled.
The final mark is based on the student's knowledge of the course contents, critical understanding, ability to apply socio-criminological concepts and analytical tools, quality of argumentation, and appropriate use of disciplinary terminology.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Borum, R. (2012), "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories." Journal of Strategic Security 4, 4: 7-36.

Borum, R. (2012), "Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research." Journal of Strategic Security 4, 4: 37-62.

Caviglia, F., . and Cecchini, L. (2009),) "'Narrative models of political violence: Vicarious experience and '"violentization' violentization" in 1970s Italy"'. In P. Antonello, and A. O'Leary (Eds.) Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Political Violence in Italy 1969-–2009. Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, UK.

Ceretti, A., Natali, L. (2020) Exploring Violent Cosmologies From a "Radical Interactionist" Approach. Critical Criminology. (open access: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10612-020-09536-y)

Ceretti, A., Natali, L. (2025). Restorative justice, radical interactionism and narrative criminology. Widening the boundaries of victim-offender mediation. In F. Reggio, B. Pali (Eds.), Widening the Restorative Lenses. Expanding Interdisciplinary, Historical and Philosophical Perspectives in Restorative Justice (pp. 253-277). Leida : Brill Academic Publishing.

Dickinson, T., Topalli, V., Wright, R. (2026) A Criminology of Time, The British Journal of Criminology, Volume 66, Issue 1, pp. 23–39.

Greenwood, M.T. (2025), An Existentialist Approach to Violent Extremism. In S. Lakhani, and A. Amarasingam (eds), The Sociology of Violent Extremism: Theoretical and Sociological Approaches. New York, NY, 2025 (pp. 15-32).

Ilan J, Sandberg S. (2019) How 'gangsters' become jihadists: Bourdieu, criminology and the crime–terrorism nexus. European Journal of Criminology, 16(3): 278-294. doi:10.1177/1477370819828936

McCulloch, J., Walklate, S., Maher, J. et al. (2019) Lone Wolf Terrorism Through a Gendered Lens: Men Turning Violent or Violent Men Behaving Violently? Critical Criminology 27, 437–450

Presser, L., Sandberg, S. (2019) Narrative Criminology as Critical Criminology. Critical Criminology 27, 131–143. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-019-09437-9

Ravagnani. L. (2021) Rehabilitation work with convicted offenders outside of prison: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_ad-hoc_rehab_outside_of_prison_20201120_en.pdf

Ruiz Yamuza, FG., Ravagnani, L. (2018) Countering Islamic radicalisation in prison through restorative justice based programmes. ERA Forum 18, 611–626. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12027-018-0515-6

Sandberg, S, and Colvin, S. (2020) 'ISIS is not Islam': Epistemic Injustice, Everyday Religion, and Young Muslims' Narrative Resistance, The British Journal of Criminology, 60 (6): 1585–1605, https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azaa035

Sandberg, S. and Andersen, J.C. (2019), Opposing violent extremism through counter-narratives: Four forms of narrative resistance, in Fleetwood, J., Presser, L., Sandberg, S., Ugelvik, T. (Eds.) The Emerald Handbook of Narrative Criminology. Emerald Publishing.

Silke, A., & Veldhuis, T. (2017). Countering Violent Extremism in Prisons: A Review of Key Recent Research and Critical Research Gaps. Perspectives on Terrorism, 11(5), 2-11.

Sunde, H.M., Ilan, J., Sandberg, S. (2020). A cultural criminology of "new" jihad: Insights from propaganda

magazines. Crime, Media, Culture. doi:10.1177/1741659020915509

Wibisono, S., Louis, W. R., & Jetten, J. (2019). A Multidimensional Analysis of Religious Extremism. Frontiers in psychology, 10, 2560. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02560

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