

SENT ON BEHALF OF DEAN AMANEY JAMAL

Dear SPIA community,

Last August, Kyle Rittenhouse shot and killed two protestors and wounded a third in Kenosha, Wisconsin. During his trial, he emotionally broke down on the stand, saying he was acting in self-defense. Today, he was acquitted of all six charges against him, including three of which were homicide related.

My heart feels heavy as I write this. As dean of a School of Public and International Affairs, I believe people have a right to assembly. I also believe that, during events like the protests following the shooting of Jacob Blake, it is the job of formal law enforcement bodies — not individual citizens — to ensure public safety. I fail to comprehend the idea of a minor vigilante carrying a semi-automatic rifle across state lines, killing two people, and being declared innocent by the U.S. justice system. Yesterday's ruling sets a dangerous precedent.

Rittenhouse is not a racial minority, and some would say this is another example of biases and leniencies embedded within the justice system. That may be true. What we do know without a doubt is there are racial inequities in nearly every strand of the American fabric. Today's verdict employs me to ask you — our current and future public servants — to investigate our policies and practices within the justice system and beyond. How can we use evidence-based research in pursuit of the public good? What role do we play, and what obligation do we have to serve?

It feels like an immeasurable, daunting task. I'm sure there are days in which you feel like giving up. In those moments, remember: Democracy is not a guarantee. We must always act with our feet, evoke change with action. We must always remain part of the policy solution. *People. Policy. Progress.* This is the basic order of our work. In between is passion, grit, tenacity. It is our moral duty to support and advance public policy that makes the world better.

Resources are available for our students. [Sue Kim](#), our TigerWell outreach counselor, is available for virtual drop-in visits. Dr. David Campbell from Counseling and Psychological Services will host a virtual space for SPIA students to process the Rittenhouse Trial on Monday, November 22 at 5:00pm ET. Interested students can use this link: <https://princeton.zoom.us/j/97466747447>

With regards,

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*Amaney A. Jamal*

*Dean, School of Public and International Affairs*

*Edwards S. Sanford Professor of Politics and International Affairs*

*Director: Bobst-AUB Collaborative Initiative*

*Director: Workshop on Arab Political Development*