

POLS 429: International Terrorism  
Lecture 3 (01.17.20): What is Terrorism, Vol.2

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# Overview

- 1 Quick review
- 2 Defining Terrorism
- 3 The Public View
- 4 Extra Material

# Review

## WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- Trends in global terrorism: Where? How much? Main difference?
- Why should we study terrorism?
- Historical evolution of terrorism.
- Defining terrorism: Why?
- How governments define terrorism.

Questions??

# How to define terrorism

## SCHOLARS

- Terrorism - a legitimate act.
- Problem of using legitimacy. [▶ Quotes](#)
- Subjective → Contested.
- Implications?
  
- Instead, scholars focus on objective aspects of terrorism.
- Observed characteristics of terrorism.
- Why?

# How to define terrorism

## Observed characteristics:

- 1 Violence: use, or explicit threat to use, violence.
- 2 Identity of perpetrators:
  - Non-state actors.
  - What about state actors?
- 3 The targets:
  - Non-combatants: civilians, journalists, government officials.
  - Uniformed military in a non-combat setting: Jerusalem 2017 attack - 4 dead.

# How to define terrorism

## Observed characteristics (cont.):

- 1 Psychological effects:
  - Foster psychological reactions: fear and anxiety.
  - Wide audience beyond direct victims.
- 2 Explicit political objective:
  - Government: removal of incumbent, defeat a rival.
  - Territory: control or reject control of particular territory, establish a new country.
  - Distinguish terrorism from other forms of violence.

# How to define terrorism

## OUR DEFINITION

### Terrorism (Chenoweth and Moore, 2018)

The intentional use or threat of using force by a non-state actor to evoke fear in a population to affect a political outcome.

# Public view of Terrorism

## TERRORISM DEFINITION - MULTIPLE ANGELS

- 1 Government agencies
- 2 International organizations
- 3 Academic scholars

## **Public definition of terrorism, why?**

- 1 Terrorism targets the public.
- 2 Public opinion matters in politics:
  - Impacts policy-making
  - National security debates
  - Electoral outcomes.



# Public view of Terrorism

How science helps investigate public views of terrorism?

- 1 Data collection.
- 2 External validity with (relatively) large samples.
- 3 Methods - control confounders makes findings stronger.

## Huff and Kertzer, 2018:

- Public defines terrorism along objective AND subjective dimensions
- Objective information → immediate.
- Subjective information → less direct and takes longer to acquire.
- **Method:** a conjoint experiment (AMCE) [▶ Ex.1](#) [▶ Ex.2](#)

# Public view of Terrorism

## OBJECTIVE DIMENSION: "facts on the ground"

- Descriptive characteristics of the event.
- Violence as the most basic element.
- Information about the target of the attack.

## SUBJECTIVE DIMENSION: "Why?", "Who?"

- Measurement: internal attribute, strategic misrepresentation
- Focus on actor.
- Media framing.

# Public view of Terrorism

## THE OBJECTIVE DIMENSION

- Type of tactic - violent or nonviolent.
- Method - bombing/shooting/hostage taking. ▶ Tactic
- Severity - number of casualties. ▶ Severity
- Target - civilian or noncombatants.
- Location - in the US or not. ▶ Target

# Public view of Terrorism

## THE SUBJECTIVE DIMENSION

- Type of actor - group or lone individual. ▶ ActorType
- Motivation - social category.
- Motivation - goal of attack. ▶ Motivation

## WHAT IS TERRORISM? (PUBLIC VIEW)

- 1 Objective
  - Violent attack.
  - High severity.
- 2 Subjective
  - Group (especially those affiliated with foreign actors).
  - Muslim, Right and left wing ideologies.
  - Political goals.

# Controversies in definition

## TERMS MIX-UP

*Terrorist = Rebel = Insurgent = Freedom Fighter*

- Terrorism is a tactic, one of several used by groups
- Terrorists use insurgency methods (ISIS, Hizballah, Hamas).
- Most cases of terrorism are within civil conflicts.
- Implications for government.

## Recommended readings

A few more studies on the topic of definition:

- 1 Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur, and Sivan Hirsch-Hoeffler, "The Challenges of Conceptualizing Terrorism", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2004), pp. 777-94
- 2 Ariel Merari, "Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Winter 1993), pp. 213-251.

The incident: a shooting.

The shooting occurred at a church in a foreign democracy with a history of human rights violations.

There were two individuals killed in the shooting.

The shooting was carried out by a Muslim individual with a history of mental illness.

New reporting suggest the individual had been in an ongoing personal dispute with one of the targets.

Figure: Terrorism?

The incident: a bombing

The bombing occurred at a police station in a foreign dictatorship.

There were no individuals killed in the bombing.

The bombing was carried out by a Muslim organization.

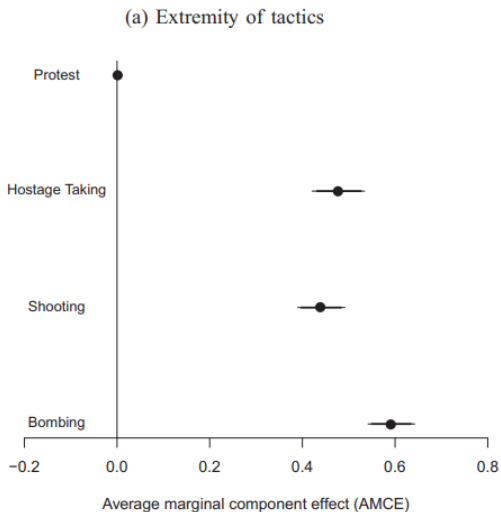
New reporting suggest the incident was motivated by the goal of overthrowing the government

Figure: How about this?



# Public View of Terrorism

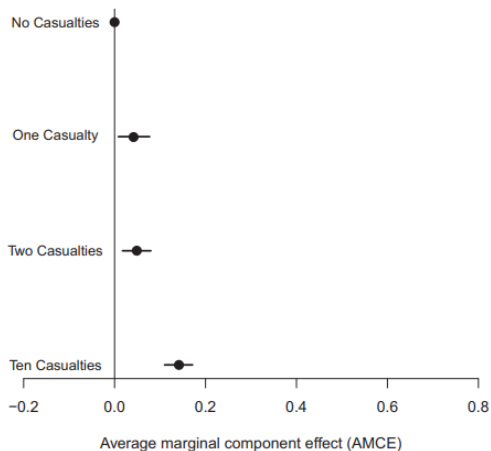
WHAT TACTIC/METHOD IS TERRORISM?



# Public View of Terrorism

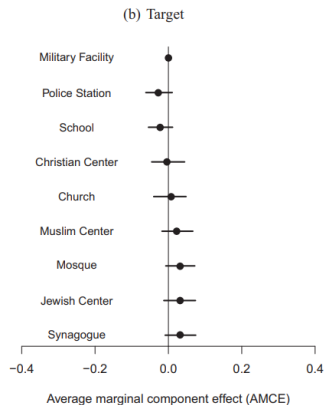
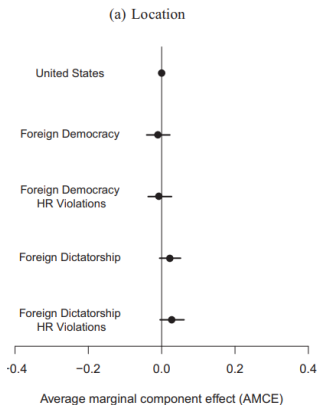
## SEVERITY OF ATTACK AND TERRORISM

(b) Severity of violence



# Public View of Terrorism

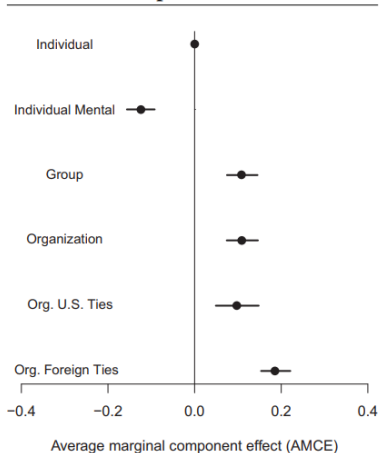
## WHAT TARGET OR LOCATION IS TERRORISM?



# Public View of Terrorism

## TYPE OF ACTOR AND TERRORISM

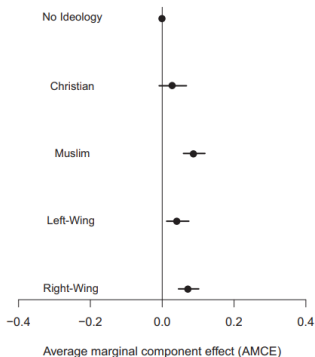
**FIGURE 4 The Political Purposiveness of the Perpetrator**



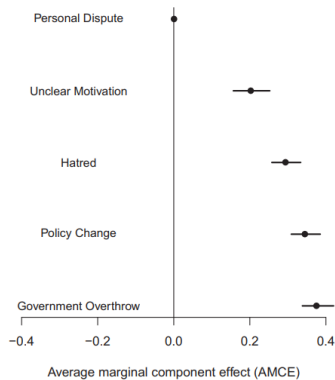
# Public View of Terrorism

## MOTIVATION AND TERRORISM

**FIGURE 5 Social Categorization Effects**



**FIGURE 6 Motive Attribution Effects**



# Defining Terrorism

## CHALLENGES: HOW TO ADDRESS LEGITIMACY?

- *"The difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist lies in the reason for which each fights. For whoever stands by a just cause and fights for the freedom and liberation of his land from the invaders..."*
- *"The idea that one person's 'terrorist' is another's 'freedom fighter' cannot be sanctioned. Freedom fighters or revolutionaries don't blow up buses containing non-combatants..."*