

POLS 429: International Terrorism

Lecture 5 (01.24.20): The Study of Terrorism: Data

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Spring 2020

Overview

- 1 Quick review
- 2 Terrorism Data
- 3 Data Limitations
- 4 Progress
- 5 Extra Material

Review

WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- Terrorism research - main challenges.
- Crenshaw's framework (1981) - three levels of Causation
- How data contributed to study terrorism.
- More diverse tools to study terrorism - statistical models, game theory and networks analysis

Questions??

Data Collection

URGENT EFFORTS

- September 11, 2001: 'a watershed moment' for terrorism research.
- Government stimulate research.
- The time gap between study and publications.
- Filling the gap? Journalists (Steve Coll and Lawrence Wright).
- Yet, most investigative journalism is not systematic analysis of terrorism, its causes, consequences etc. [▶ Post](#)

The State of Terrorism Research

LARGE DATABASES ON TERRORISM

- 1 GTD - Global Terrorism Database (1970-2016).
- 2 ITERATE - International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events (1968-2016)
- 3 RAND (1968-2009)

Some features:

- Event databases - news reporting.
- Coding multiple aspect of every terror event: date, location, target entity.
- Separate domestic and transnational terrorism.

Databases: The Global Terrorism Database

- Easy to search and classify information.
- Visualization tools: charts, maps, interactive tools.
 - Global Terrorism incidents ▶ Global2017
 - A World of Terror (*Link*)

Be the Researcher...

- Open the GTD database (google "GTD database"), select "advanced search".
- Select time frame: 2010-2015.
- Region: Middle East and North Africa (MENA).
- How many incidents?
- How many suicide attacks?

Data limitations

A lot of information, but...

- Definition and methodology - GTD versus CPOST.
- Databases rely on news reporting.
- Problems for analysis:
 - 1 Access to reliable information (secondary sources).
 - 2 Misrepresentation or framing of information.
 - 3 For small scale events - not much information (perpetrators and their motive).

Difficult to overcome

- To prevent such risks, researchers may collect their own data.
- Personal, financial and professional risks.

Type of Data

ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS

- Large databases → information about the setting.
- Individual terrorists??

The Challenges of Individual data collection

- Practical - ethics, method and data reliability.
- Theory - direction of causality.
- External validity - can we generalize specific attackers to the general 'terrorist population'?

The Study of Terrorism

- Challenges can be addressed, but never really solved.
- Social science research is hard, our conclusions are always based on probabilistic estimates.

"...humans are more complex. They catch the fire of terrorism in myriad ways - some environmental, some individual (or more likely, in most cases, a mix of the two); and unlike metals, they are strategic - they interact with the environment (including government counter-measures) and adapt in unpredictable ways."
(Stern 2014)

Stagnation?

Growth in terrorism research presented many important and interesting findings:

- Environmental conditions that facilitate terrorism.
- Organizational dynamics and participation in terrorism.
- The strategic calculations of individuals who participate or endorse terrorism.
- Individual level studies - the lack of personality effects.

Better Primary Data

SAGEMAN (2014) - A JUSTIFIED CRITICISM

- Intelligence community - access to most reliable data.
- Yet, it mostly lack skills (and time) for systematic analysis.
- Since the end of cold war - less cooperation and sharing of information with academic community.

ENHANCE COLLABORATION

- Improve cooperation between scholars and the intelligence community.
- **Challenges:** IC organizational failures; Reluctance to share information with "outsiders"

Recommended readings

More studies on the topic of terrorism research:

- 1 Sandler, Todd and Walter Enders, "Applying Analytical Methods to Study Terrorism," *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2007), pp. 287-302.
- 2 Gaibullov, Khusrav and Todd Sandler, "What We Have Learned About Terrorism since 9/11", *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol, 57, No. 2 (2019), pp. 275-328.
- 3 Wright, Lawrence. *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, (2006).

Check these databases:

- 1 Big Allied and Dangerous (BAAD)
- 2 Minorities at Risk (MAR) project
- 3 Profiles on Individual Radicalization in the United States (PRIUS)

Terror Narratives

Post (2007):

"When one has been nursed on the mother's milk of hatred and bitterness, the need for vengeance is bred in the bone."

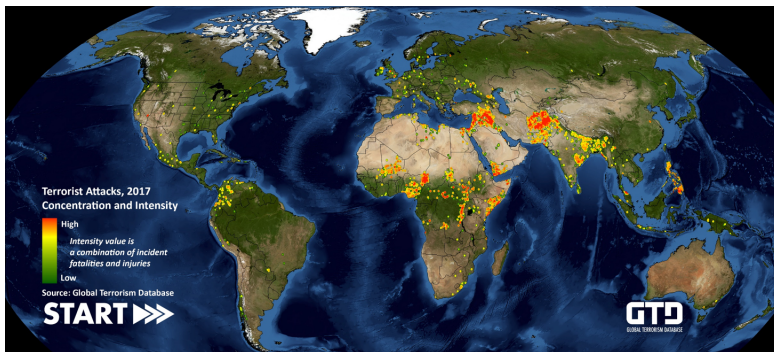


Figure: Global Terrorism 2017