POLS 429: International Terrorism
Lecture 09 (02.03.2020):
Explaining Terrorism - The Organizational Approach, Vol. 2

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Spring 2020

Overview

Introduction

WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- Main features - human behavior rooted in social environment, inner-group dynamics and external group competition.

- Contrasts with strategic approach.

- Assumptions - organizational survival, internal and external conflicts, motivation to join terrorism.

Questions??

The Organizational Approach - Implications

- Implications $\rightarrow$ specific conflicts or terror groups over time.

(1) A dense and competitive organizational environment leads to more attacks

- Multiple groups compete to 'display their voice'.
- Use terrorism to "stand-out" (or amplify their actions).

Evidence/Examples

- Dense interest group section $\rightarrow$ more attacks.
- Extensive protest activity $\rightarrow$ more terrorism .

The Organizational Approach - Implications

(2) Violence escalates during leadership crises

- Phases of instability.
- A small motivated radical faction try to establish its own authority - a more violent approach (Pearlman 2009).
- Leaders approve lethal and risky attacks.

Evidence/Examples

- Targeted killings policy $\rightarrow$ more lethal attacks.
- Palestinian groups during 2nd Intifada. ▸ TargetedKillings

The Organizational Approach - Implications

(3) Groups modify behavior to out-do their rivals

- **Outbidding** - competition and escalation.
- The Market-Share model (Bloom 2004) - groups fight within the same political space and compete for their "share" in the marketplace.
- More prevalent when no actor has monopoly on using force (or actor is weak).

Evidence/Examples

- Lethal attacks: Pakistan (2014) and Chechnya (2004).

The Organizational Approach - Implications

(4) Terror groups attack competitors and rivals

- Intense, competitive environment $\rightarrow$ every interaction with other groups is "zero-sum".
- Fight on resources, recruits, attention and influence.

Evidence/Examples

- Hamas and Fatah (Gaza, 2007): over 100 dead and 500 injured.
- Peru - Guzman faction ("Shining path") .

The Organizational Approach - Implications

(5) Groups do not always claim successful attacks

- Groups assess the reaction of their base and act accordingly (Bloom 2005).
- Positive reaction - claim credit to enhance status and prestige.
- Negative view - no credit claim, even if attack succeeds

Evidence/Examples

- 2nd Intifada - positive public reactions led multiple Palestinian groups to claim credit for same attacks.
- Claim credit for attacking government assets, not civilians .

The Organizational Approach - Implications

(6) Terror groups rarely abandon their adopted tactics

- Groups may stick with ineffective tactics:
  1. "Calling card" - symbolizes a unique brand.
  2. Switching costs.

Evidence/Examples

- Calling Cards - Hamas usage of Rocket launching.
- Adopt suicide bombing - more likely for new groups or those related to a network that its members already use tactic.

The Organizational Approach - Implications

(7) Groups endure even after accomplishing their goals, or when violence is no longer necessary

- Main goal is organizational survival.
- Terror groups persist by adjusting their stated political goals.

Evidence/Examples

- Al Qaeda as a "protean army" (Stern 2003).
- Internal conflict after achieving political goals $\rightarrow$ group splintering and new factions re-frame goals to sustain fight.

The Organizational Approach - Implications

(8) Terror groups avoid from or disrupt negotiations

- Negotiations/political settlement $\rightarrow$ compromise group' survival.

Evidence/Examples

- Columbia: attack by ELN (leftish faction) to spoil peace talks between government and FARC (Spring 2016).
- Positive relationship between terror attacks and duration of armed conflict.
- Attacks during peace negotiations re-ignite civil conflicts.

The Organizational Approach - Implications

(9) Recruits join the groups for social and not political motives

- Recruits prioritize social benefits over political objectives when joining the group.
- If the group collapse, members continue to seek such benefits in other group settings.

Evidence/Examples

- Syria (2014):
    1. Over half joined due to inspiration from other group member.
    2. Almost half joined because of friends.
    3. 17% mentioned family pressure.

The Organizational Approach

COUNTERING TERRORISM

- Repression is not likely to reduce terrorism.
- Policy must focus on fragmenting groups from within - governments should try to enhance internal conflict.
- Offer benefits to deserters $\rightarrow$ accelerate a group's demise.
- Challenge: requires high quality human intelligence to infiltrate groups and sow internal conflicts (Cronin 2009).
- Contain and prevent the emergence of contentious environments which are "fertile ground" for such groups.
- US COINTELPRO program.

The Organizational approach - Criticism

Critique 1: Mixed or limited empirical support

- Not much consistent evidence (comparable cases) for outbidding and competitive group dynamics.
- Chenoweth (2010): more attacks are associated with the emergence of new groups in a diverse organizational environment, especially in emerging or mid-level democracies.
- Evidence when incorporating multiple forms of dissenting behavior (social movements and political parties) (Moore et al. 2011).

The Organizational Approach - Criticism

Critique 2: Predicts "too much" terror events

- Terrorism is not automatic where social mobilization occurs.
- Tactical innovation $\rightarrow$ more attacks.
- Yet, terror data displays peaks and valleys in operations.

The Organizational Approach - Criticism

Critique 3: Indeterminate Outcomes

- Model assumptions and contradicting outcomes - competition vs. cooperation between organizations.
- Intense competition $\rightarrow$ lethal attacks (Pakistan 2014).
- Cooperation $\rightarrow$ lethal attacks (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008).
- The end result - assumptions about competition and cooperation **both** predict more lethal attacks.
- Theory is indeterminate and cannot be falsified.

The Organizational Approach - Criticism

GAPS AND UNANSWERED PUZZLES

Despite strong explanatory power, still several missing questions:

- Why some individuals mobilize to terrorism while others remain a "level below" and prefer non-violent protests?
- How can we explain distinctions between radicals and moderates within groups?

- Some of the answers are based on Individual level factors - our next topic...

Recommended readings

More studies on the topic of organizational approach to terrorism:

1. Asal, Victor, and R. Karl Rethemeyer. "The nature of the beast: Organizational structures and the lethality of terrorist attacks." *Journal of Politics*, 70, no. 2 (2008): 437-449.

2. Bloom, Mia M. "Palestinian suicide bombing: Public support, market share, and outbidding." *Political Science Quarterly*, 119, no. 1 (2004): 61-88.

3. Byman, Daniel. "Buddies or burdens? Understanding the Al Qaeda relationship with its affiliate organizations." *Security Studies*, 23, no. 3 (2014): 431-470.
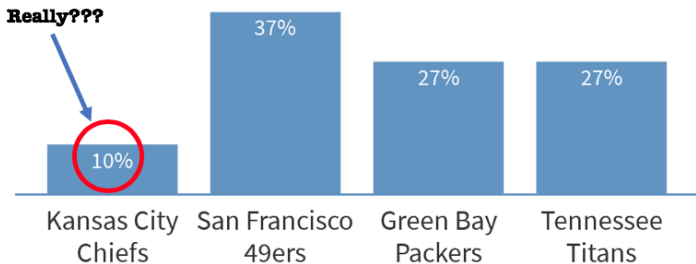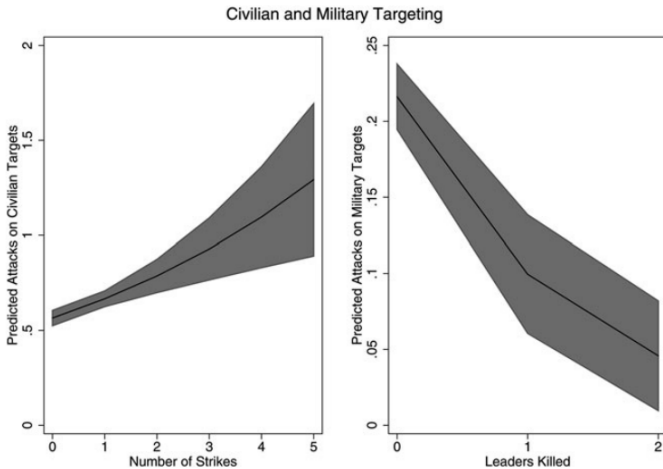
Figure: January 17, 2020

Figure: Targeting leaders and Terror attacks