

Differentiation and the Severity of Terrorist Attacks

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The Logic of Outbidding

- In competitive political environments, organizations may use violence to distinguish themselves from other groups (e.g., Crenshaw 1981, 1985, Horowitz 1985, Bloom 2005).
- To distinguish themselves from competitors, terrorist organizations may:
- Little empirical evidence to support the first expectation (Young and Findley 2012, Nemeth 2013, Conrad 2013).
- Evidence for the second expectation has largely focused on suicide terrorism.

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Differentiation and the Quality of Violence

- If the public is uncertain about the legitimacy or credibility of one organization versus another:
 - Violence demonstrates capability and credibility (Kydd and Walter 2006).
 - May assist in recruitment, public support.
- But in “saturated” political markets, more violence may not effectively differentiate the organization from others.
- Under such circumstances, the *quality* of violence employed may be more useful than the *quantity*.
- Increased domestic competition should increase the incentives for terrorist organizations to engage in more “shocking” or severe attacks.

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Hypotheses

- Hypothesis 1: States with more armed groups will experience more severe types of terrorist attacks than states with fewer groups.
- Hypothesis 2: States that experience a greater number of terrorist attacks will experience more severe types of terrorist attacks than states that experience fewer terrorist attacks.

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Measurement: State Level

Table: Frequency Distribution of Maximum Target and Attack Severity Levels

| Target Severity Level | Obs. | Obs. | Attack Severity Level |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| No Attacks | 6960 (77.70) | 6915 (77.20) | No Attacks |
| Infrastructure | 92 (1.03) | 29 (0.32) | Infrastructure/Unarmed Assault |
| Combatants & Government | 406 (4.53) | 793 (8.85) | Kidnapping |
| Civilians | 1499 (16.74) | 1220 (13.62) | Armed Assault |

Unit of analysis is country year
(Percentages in parentheses)
Data: GTD

Measurement: Organization Level

Table: Frequency Distribution of Maximum Target Severity by Organization

| Target Severity Level | Obs. |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| No Attacks | 1260 (71.63) |
| Infrastructure | 6 (0.34) |
| Security Personnel | 338 (19.22) |
| Civilians | 155 (8.81) |

Unit of analysis is organization year
(Percentages in parentheses)

Data: MAROB-ME

Results & Implications

- Countries experience more severe types of attacks when there are more terrorist groups operating, and when there is an increase in the number of terrorist groups.
- Countries experience more severe types of attacks when there is a greater number of terrorist attacks overall.
- Preliminary evidence at organization level.
- Organizations respond to increased competition, but not necessarily with more violence.
- The quality of violence may be more important than the quantity.

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