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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### Table: Frequency Distribution of Maximum Target and Attack Severity Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Severity Level</th>
<th>Obs.</th>
<th>Obs.</th>
<th>Attack Severity Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Attacks</td>
<td>6960</td>
<td>6915</td>
<td>No Attacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(77.70)</td>
<td>(77.20)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Infrastructure/Unarmed Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.03)</td>
<td>(0.32)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combatants &amp; Government</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>Kidnapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4.53)</td>
<td>(8.85)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilians</td>
<td>1499</td>
<td>1220</td>
<td>Armed Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.74)</td>
<td>(13.62)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

(City)
Measurement: Organization Level

Table: Frequency Distribution of Maximum Target Severity by Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Severity Level</th>
<th>Obs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Attacks</td>
<td>1260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(71.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Personnel</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(19.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilians</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8.81)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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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