

Preanalysis plan: Terrorism and support for counterterrorist policies

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Introduction

Democracies are under pressure from terrorist activities. Not only terrorist attacks, but also the sheer threat of terrorism places strains on democratic government (Davis et al. 2004; Dragu & Polborn 2014). Protection of citizens is a paramount task for the state. On the one hand, if citizens feel that law and order is under threat, the authority of government might possibly be undermined. On the other hand, measures to safeguard citizens against violent threats run the risk of weakening the very foundations of democracy. Stern policy measures like searches without warrants, arrests, telephone tapping, and prolonged detention without charge or trial may be rational methods for defending the safety of citizens, but they are also infringements on civil and political rights. Hence, the dilemma between security and freedom is most significantly felt in democratic states. There is a compelling need for more empirical knowledge about how democracies deal with this dilemma. To what degree are democratic states resilient in the sense that they are capable of sustaining freedom and civil rights when terrorism appears to threaten the safety of their citizens?

How citizens perceive and react to terrorism is crucial for understanding democracies' resilience against the challenge from terrorism. We therefore study how citizens understand terrorism and under which conditions citizens support counterterrorist policies. Specifically, we're interested in how attributes of both violent and non-violent incidents – including the type and severity, the target and location, and the social category of perpetrators and their motivation – affect (1) citizens perceptions of incidents as terrorism and (2) their support for *preventive* counterterrorist policies in the area of arrest, detention, and surveillance. Also, we interested in (3) the link between citizens perception of incidents as terrorism and their support for preventive counterterrorist policies.

Our research design is comparative and experimental. We examine variation in perception of terrorism and support for counterterrorist policies among citizens in three Nordic countries: Norway, Sweden and Iceland. We have designed a conjoint experiment with realistic scenarios given as vignettes to survey respondents. A defining feature of conjoint experiments is that they can handle complex choice situations where several attributes has an important

influence on the judgment (Auspurg, Hinz and Sauer, 2017). In the context of our study, conjoint experiments are ideal because they allow us to study how citizens perception of terrorism and support for counterterrorist policies are affected by different violent and non-violent incidents.

Terrorism and counterterrorist policies

Our approach to study the link between terrorism and support for counterterrorist policies builds on Huff and Kertzer's (2017) study of how American citizens define terrorism. Terrorism is a "form of violence that functions by attracting public attention" (Huff and Kertzer 2017, 55), and therefore it is important to understand what citizens think terrorism is. Using a conjoint experiment, Huff and Kertzer (2017) show that American citizens categorization of incidents as acts of terrorism is influenced by the type and severity of violence, but also the attributed motivation for the incident and social categorization of the actor. In contrast to scholarly definitions of terrorism, the target and the location of the incident does not influence American citizens classification of the incident as terrorism. An important implication of Huff and Kertzer (2017) is that how the incident is framed by the media may have an important impact on whether the incident is considered terrorism.

Counterterrorism, broadly speaking, are actions initiated to prevent, detect, manage and respond to terrorism. We focus on preventive policies that provide the police, military forces and intelligence services with powers in the area of arrest, detention, and surveillance. Specifically, we focus on commonly used preventive actions such as tapping phone calls, monitoring internet traffic, keeping people detained without a trial, randomly stop and search people on the streets. We focus on these measures because they are implemented through legislation in wide range of countries and are also are also infringements on civil and political rights such as privacy, due processes, free speech and non-discrimination. In short, the preventive counterterrorism policies we study tap directly into the security-freedom dilemma.

Hypotheses

We develop hypotheses for three questions. First, which incident attributes does citizens associate with terrorism (incident attribute→terror)? Second, which incident attributes affects support for counterterrorist policies (incident attribute→support)? Third, does citizens that perceive incidents as terrorism show higher support for counterterrorist policies (terror→support)? We will also explore a potential interaction effect between certain incident attributes and perceiving incidents as terrorism on support for counterterrorist policies (incident→terror→support). Finally, we will explore heterogenous treatment effects, for

example if incident attributes on citizens support for counterterrorist policies varies with individual attitudes and background characteristics.

Hypotheses: How does Nordic citizens define terrorism?

We expect Nordic citizens to classify incidents as terrorism similarly to American citizens. Although Nordic countries traditionally have been considered as peaceful, low-risk countries (Nordenhaug and Engene 2008), their citizens have been exposed to substantial media coverage of terrorist attacks over a long time period. More recently some of them have also experienced fatal terrorist attacks in their own countries, as well as in many nearby European countries.¹

To arrive at our hypothesis, we outline Huff and Kertzer's (2017) findings in more detail. They show that the *type of tactic* employed in an incident is integral to American citizens' perception of terrorism. Violent tactics (hostage takings, shootings and bombings) are significantly more likely to be classified as terrorism than non-violent tactics (protest). Moreover, American citizens more strongly link bombings to terrorism than other forms violent tactics (hostage takings and shootings). The *severity* of the incident also informs citizens classification of incidents as terrorism. The more casualties the incidents caused the more likely it is that individuals classify it as terrorism. Compared to violent tactics, however, the relative effect size of casualties is small.

Huff and Kertzer also find that more subjective criteria about the social categorization of the actor and the actor's motivation also matters for American citizens' perception of terrorism. Incidents performed by collectives (groups and organizations) are more likely to be classified as terrorism than those carried out by individuals. In contrast, incidents carried out by actors with mental illness are less likely to be classified as terrorism. Moreover, compared to incident performed by actors with no ideology, incidents performed by Muslims, left-wing and right-wing actors are more likely to be classified as terrorism. Finally, compared to personal disputes incidents identified by unclear motivations, hatred, policy change and government overthrow are more likely to be classified as terrorism.

Thus, based on Huff and Kertzers findings, we outline the following six hypotheses:

H1: Violent tactics are more likely to be classified as terrorism than non-violent tactics

H2: The higher the number of casualties, the more likely the incident is classified as terrorism

¹ Five people died in Stockholm in the 2017 attack by an Islamic Fundamentalist, while 77 died in the 22/7 attack in Oslo and Utøya conducted by the right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik. Moreover, citizens in the Nordic countries have also been exposed to several major terrorist attacks in Europe such as the Paris attacks in November 2015 (130 people killed), the bombs in Brussel in March 2016 (32 people killed), the attack in Nice in July 2016 (84 people killed), and the attack in Barcelona in August 2017 (13 people killed) (Nesser et al. 2016).

H3: The target and location of incidents is not linked to classification of incidents as terrorism

H4: Incidents performed by collectives are more likely to be classified as terrorism than incidents performed by individuals

H5: Incidents carried out by actors with an identified social category are more likely to be classified as terrorism compared to incidents carried out by non-identified actors

H6: Incidents motivated by policy goals are more likely to be classified as terrorism than personal disputes.

Like Huff and Kertzer (2017), we test these hypotheses through estimating Average Marginal Component effects (AMCE) (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014). We will also explore interaction effects between different incident attributes through estimating estimate average component interaction effects (ACIE) (Hainmueller et al. 2014).

Hypothesis: Under which conditions do citizens support counterterrorist policies?

We expect that citizens react differently to terrorism than other forms of violence. Terrorism instills fear, anger and anxiety into societies. Fear and especially anger toward terrorism has been associated with support for repressive measures, stronger support of civil liberties restrictions, increased intolerance and prejudices against groups and minorities in society. Recent observational studies show that citizens update their risk perception based on experience with terror and terrorist threats. Citizens are willing to trade off civil liberties for security measures after updating their risk perception (Bozzoli and Müller 2011). Thus, when citizens are exposed to an incident they perceive as a terrorist incident, we should expect them show higher support for counterterrorist policies.

It is not clear, however, which incident attributes that generate support for counterterrorist policies. Is support for counterterrorist policies driven mainly by the direct risk associated with the incident attribute (i.e. the general risk for individuals is higher under a bombing incident than a protest). Or is support for counterterrorist policies also driven by the social categorization of the perpetrator and their motivation?

Fear, anger, and anxiety trigger greater attentiveness among citizens and render them “more susceptible to persuasive advertising, and framing effects, thus making political manipulation easier” (Brader & Wayne 2015: 216). Opinion research show that citizens’ attitudes are contingent on how political questions are framed (Bloch-Elkon 2011; Berinsky 2015; Druckman & Lupia 2016). Threatening events and a common external enemy can push the population to support policies that weaken the legal safeguards for certain social groups in the population. Terrorism creates an impression that the authorities do not have the necessary

control (Altheide 2006), and citizens might be willing to support far-reaching policies in order to avoid fear, especially when it comes to groups that differ from themselves (Sunstein 2004).

An important and testable implication of this literature is that citizens support for counterterrorist policies may vary with how incidents are framed. For example, a violent incident performed by Muslim or right-wing extremist may generate higher levels of support than a violent incident performed by non-identified perpetrator. We expect that support for counterterrorist policies varies with the perceived risk associated with various incident attributes, but also by the identity, organization and motivation of the perpetrators. Thus, we outline the following five hypotheses²:

H7: Violent tactics are more likely to generate support for counterterrorist policies than non-violent incidents

H8: The higher the number of casualties, the more support for counterterrorist policies

H9: Incidents performed by collectives are more likely to generate support for counterterrorist policies

H10: Incidents carried out by actors with an identified social category are more likely to generate support for counterterrorist policies

H11: Incidents motivated by policy goals are more likely to generate support for counterterrorist policies than personal disputes.

To test these hypotheses we will estimate AMCEs. We will also explore interaction effects between different incident attributes through estimating estimate average component interaction effects (ACIE).

In addition, based on the above literature, we expect that citizens that perceive incidents as terrorism is more likely to support counterterrorist policies than those that do not. Therefore, we outline the following hypothesis:

H12: Citizens that perceive incidents as terrorism are more likely to support counterterrorist policies than those who do not perceive incidents as terrorism.

To test H12 we will estimate regression models with support for counterterrorist policies as the dependent variable and citizens classification of incidents as the independent variable. We will

² We do not have a specific expectation related to the target and location of the incident.

control for confounders that may affect citizens classification of incidents as terrorism, such as party preferences, gender, and personality traits. Our test of h12 conditions on a posttreatment variable and thus suffers from posttreatment bias (Montgomery, Nyhan and Torres 2018).

A related question which we will explore is whether there is an interaction effect between incident attributes and citizens perception of incidents as terrorism on support for counterterrorist policies. That is, citizens exposed to similar incident attributes may show higher support for counterterrorist policies depending on whether they perceive the incident as terrorism. To explore these interaction effects, we will estimate ACIEs. Interaction effects between incident attributes and classification of incidents as terrorism also suffers from posttreatment bias, and findings must be interpreted accordingly.

Heterogenous treatment effects

We also plan to explore other relevant heterogenous treatment effects. Citizens' perceptions of certain incidents as terrorism may be affected by individual attitudes and background characteristics. Huff and Kertzer (2017) show that individuals "high in Islamoprejudice" have a higher probability of classifying incidents carried out by Muslims as terrorism, and a lower probability of classifying incidents carried out by Christians as terrorism. We do not have similar measure of Islamoprejudice in our data but we will test other relevant variables including party preferences and gender.

Similarly, we may expect that the effect of incident attributes on citizens support for counterterrorist policies varies with individual attitudes and background characteristics. Two individual characteristics that are relevant are party preferences and gender. Attitudes towards security-related issues have a clear political dimension (Klar 2013). Issues of law and order are strongly associated with conservative ideology. Moreover, whereas conservatives consider rights as 'situational and contingent', liberals view them as something that 'government cannot take away' (Davis & Silver 2004, 31). Thus, we may expect that citizens with right-wing partisan preferences exposed to certain incidents show stronger support for counterterrorist policies than citizens with left-wing preferences.

Although males have a higher likelihood of being victims to violence, females tend to fear violence more than males do (Huddy et al. 2002, 490). Similarly, the risk of terror attacks seems to invoke more fear among females than for men, while men become more angry. Previous studies by some of the involved researchers suggest that females are more supportive of phone surveillance than men are. Thus, when analyzing heterogeneous experimental treatment effects, gender is an important variable to consider.

To explore heterogenous treatment effects we will estimate ACIEs.

Research design

To answer our research questions, we have designed a survey instrument fielded in three Nordic countries: Norway, Sweden and Iceland. The survey data will be generated through three probability-based survey panels with representative samples of their respective populations: The Norwegian Citizen Panel (NCP) at the University of Bergen, The Social Science Research Institute at the University of Iceland (SSRI), and the Swedish Citizen Panel (SCP) at the University of Gothenburg. Each national survey panel provide approximately 1200 respondents, amounting to a total of approximately 3600 respondents. The conjoint experiment has been piloted among the NCPs pilot group to ensure the scientific and ethical qualities of the survey.

To examine the effect of incident attributes on classification of incident as terrorism and public support for counterterrorist policies, we rely on a conjoint survey experiment. The design is a replication of Huff and Kertzer (2017) with two important differences. First, we have adjusted the design to make it suitable for the Nordic context. Second, we extended the design to measure outcome variables that measure public support for counterterrorist policies.

The experiment is designed as a “ratings based conjoint”. Respondents are presented with one incident and are then asked whether they considered the incident to be terrorism or not. Following this classification task, respondents are asked to rate their support for various pre-incident counterterrorist policies. Like Huff and Kertzer (2017) our conjoint experiment includes the following seven incident dimensions: tactic, target, location, casualties, actor description, actor type and actor motivation (see survey instrument section for all incident attributes). To adjust the design to the Nordic context, we changed the target of incidents to the three Nordic countries included in our study. More specifically, we fixed the location treatment based on the survey provider. For example, participants taking part in the survey fielded by NCP are exposed to an incident taking place in Norway. The various attributes included in the different incident dimension are also adjusted to fit the Nordic context.

In addition, to examine heterogenous effects, we include a standard battery of questions related to a respondent’s political attitudes and demographic profile. All variables measuring individual attitudes are measured pre exposure to treatments.

Survey instrument

Our conjoint experiment is part of a larger survey. Before respondents are presented with the terror conjoint, they are made aware that the topic of the following questions is related to

terrorism and emergency management. The first item in the terror survey is the conjoint experiment. Table 1 show the vignette with the different incident attributes.

We now ask you to consider a hypothetical incident in the Nordic countries, and then evaluate a set of subsequent questions.

The incident [protest/sabotage/hostage taking/shooting/bombing] occurred at [military facility/police station/school/church/mosque/synagogue] in [Norway/Sweden/Iceland]. There were [none/one/two/three] persons killed in the [protest/sabotage/hostage taking/shooting/bombing]. The shooting was carried out by [an/a Christian/a Muslim/a left-wing extremist/a right-wing extremist] [organization/group/individual/mentally ill person]. News reports suggest [that there was no clear motivation for the incident/the incident was motivated by the goal of changing government policy/the incident was motivated by hatred towards the target].

Would you classify this incident as an act of terrorism?

- Yes, this is terrorism
 - No, this is not terrorism
-

The next question is designed to measure citizens support for seven counterterrorist policies implemented to prevent the incident. The question is:

Imagine that government authorities had suspicion that the incident was imminent. How much do you agree that government authorities should have the right to:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Keep people detained as long as they like without trial	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tap people's phone calls	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Randomly stop and search people on the streets	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Monitoring peoples e-mail and internet communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Monitor/wiretap rooms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Close off parts of city spaces	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Let armed police or military patrol the streets	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

In addition to the main conjoint experiment, the survey also includes other post treatment questions related to citizens attitudes towards civil liberties and freedom, perception of terrorist threats, trust in government institutions, and the capacity of political parties to handle terrorist threats.

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