TERRORISM AS A CHALLENGE TO LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

Leena Malkki
Dr. Soc. Sc., University Lecturer
Centre for European Studies
University of Helsinki
THIS LECTURE

• Terrorism
  • A few words about the term

• Terrorism and Europe – where do we stand?

• Democracy – cause or cure for terrorism?
  • Terrorism statistics, with focus on Europe and the Nordic countries
  • Quick look at theoretical research

• Counterterrorism
  • Developments since 9/11, with focus on Europe
  • Dilemmas of preventing violent extremism
TERRORISM
"IS THIS TERRORISM?"
THREE PERSPECTIVES

• **Legal perspective** – Does the act meet the criteria for terrorist intent as defined in the legislation?

• **Discursive perspective** – What has the act been called in the public debate?

• **Academic research** – Does the act meet the academic definitions of terrorism?
LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

• No widely accepted definition
• Defined in national legislation and EU Directive
• Determines the punishment for terrorist acts and powers of authorities
EU DEFINITION OF TERRORISM

• Based on defining terrorist intent (2002/475/JHA):
  • seriously intimidating a population, or
  • unduly compelling a government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, or
  • seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organization.

• Besides terrorist attacks, also an increasing number of related activities criminalised (training, financing, incitement, leading a terrorist organisation....)
DISCURSIVE PERSPECTIVE

• An act of violence becomes terrorism only when it is labelled as such.
• The question of how to call an attack is strongly linked with ideas about what needs to be done.
ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

- Definition should be neutral and applied systematically
- Necessary for building theories on terrorism

FREQUENCIES OF DEFINITIONAL ELEMENTS OF "TERRORISM"  
(Eubank et al 2004)

- Violence, force 71%
- Political 60%
- Threat 41%
- Strategy, tactic 31%
- Group/movement/organisation as perpetrator 29%
- Victim-target differentiation 25%
- Civilians, noncombatants, neutrals, outsiders as victims 22%
- Fear, terror 22%
TERRORISM AS STRATEGY/TACTIC

ACTOR ➔ VICTIMS
  
  attacks

TARGETS ➔ Psychological effect
  
  produces

Psychological effect ➔ Political (religious) objectives
  
  furthers

attempt to influence

Political (religious) objectives

Psychological effect

Produces

Attacks
TERRORISM AND EUROPE – WHERE DO WE STAND?
TERRORIST ATTACKS, 2012-2015
(Global Terrorism Database)

- Iraq
- Pakistan
- Afghanistan
- India
- Nigeria
- Somalia
- Yemen
- Libya
- Ukraine
- EU-countries
- Philippines
- Rest of countries
TERRORIST ATTACKS IN THE EU (Europol; incl. also plots)
ATTACKS/PLOTS PER COUNTRY (Europol)

Diagram showing the number of attacks/plots per country from 2007 to 2016. The countries listed are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK.

The y-axis represents the number of attacks/plots, ranging from 0 to 1200. The x-axis represents the years from 2007 to 2016.
Victims Of Terrorist Attacks In Western Europe
Number of persons killed by terrorist attacks 1970-2015

- United Kingdom
- Spain
- Italy
- France
- Germany
- Other

2015 total: 161
2016 total: 238

Munich 17 killed
Bologna 85 killed, Munich 13 killed
Lockerbie 270 killed
Omagh 28 killed
Madrid 191 killed
London 52 killed
Norway 77 killed
Paris 147 killed

* News Reports
Source: Global Terrorism Database
JIHADI TERRORISM IN WESTERN EUROPE

Figure 1: Number of Well-Documented Jihadi Terrorist Plots per Year in Western Europe

TERRORISM AND
DEMOCRACY
”Experience tells us that that democracies are better equipped than autocracies to stand up against terrorism. They offer constructive outlets for political grievances, they create opportunities for mobility and prosperity that provide alternatives to violent extremism, and they tend to have more effective institutions.” – Hillary Clinton (2012)

“They hate our freedoms — our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”

- George W. Bush (2001)
Regime type and average annual terrorist attacks, 1970-2010 (GTD)

Source: Erin Chenoweth, ”Terrorism and Democracy”, Annual Review of Political Science 16 (2013)
COMPETING EXPLANATIONS FOR TERRORISM-DEMOCRACY LINK

• Structural approach
  • Civil liberties
  • Publicity
  • Underreporting bias
  • Institutional design

• Strategic approach

• Political approach

(Chenoweth 2013)
CIVIL LIBERTIES EXPLANATION

• Due to civil and human rights, democracies provide better opportunities for terrorist groups to operate

• Sentences for terrorism can be expected to be more lenient

• However:
  • No empirical evidence that these issues would have influenced decisions to engage in terrorism
  • Does not explain variance in the frequency between countries with similar civil liberties practices, or over time
  • Analyses of the link between civil liberties and terrorism show it to be negative
PUBLICITY EXPLANATION

• Freedom of the press creates incentives for terrorism to attack the state

• However:
  • Empirical research does not support this argument
  • Many countries have extensive media freedom but little terrorism – and many countries with less free media have a high number of terrorist attacks
  • Diffusion of information technology makes media freedom of a given state partly irrelevant
UNDERREPORTING EXPLANATION

• Authoritarian regimes tend to deliberately underreport terrorist attacks
• Terrorist attack databases indeed have several problems (most of them based on media reports)
• Reported terrorist attacks tend to correlate with changes in press freedom → but what does that mean?
• However,
  • No conclusive empirical evidence on underreporting
INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN
EXPLANATION

• Link between terrorism and party systems, judicial practices, electoral rules etc.
• Several studies, conflicting results
• Relationship clearly complicated, difficult to present generalisations based on current research
STRATEGIC APPROACH

• Democracies targeted because they are more likely to make concessions in the face of terrorist attacks
  • Publics more sensitive to civilian casualties

• However,
  • Empirical research indicates that terrorism generally not a very effective tool for coercion
  • Assumption about the sensitivity of the public and its ramifications is flawed
POLITICAL APPROACH

• How particular policies relate to the level of terrorist attacks
• Left-wing regimes seem less likely to experience domestic terrorism than right-wing regimes ... and the other way around for transnational terrorism
• Also evidence that underrepresentation in the government, economic discrimination and ethnic discrimination increase terrorist activity
• Robust human rights practices correlate with low levels of terrorism
• Wealthy advanced democracies encounter more terrorism if they pursue aggressive and provocative policies abroad
COUNTERTERRORISM
**BIG PICTURE**

- International cooperation in counterterrorism has broadened significantly after 2001
  - Intensity – many more international treaties, forms of cooperation, actors involved etc.
  - Scope – includes a wider array of policy areas, stronger investment on prevention
- "War on terror" has also increased the benefits of labelling political opponents as terrorism
Concern about societal tensions and decreasing social cohesion

Terrorism more destructive, changes in organisational forms

Increasing pressures to pre-empt terrorist plots

What can be to ensure that as few people as possible become interested in terrorist activities?
ACADEMIC ARTICLES MENTIONING "RADICALISATION"


Figure 1. Articles mentioning radicalisation in thirty peer-reviewed journals from 1990-2011
CHALLENGES IN PREVENTING VIOLENT RADICALISATION

• How to predict who will radicalise?
• How does this fit together with the principles of liberal democracy (freedom of speech, religion etc.)?
• What kind of unintended consequences preventative policies can have?
  • Suspect communities, "good muslim"
  • Discouraging radical political thinking