

# Political Science Research Paper

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Political Science

# Wilcox

The Connection between Income Inequality and Terrorism

THROUGH OUT THIS PAPER I WILL DISCUSS  
THE CONNECTIONS THAT LEAD TO TERRORISM.  
THROUGH ANALYSIS OF DATA I WILL ALSO  
SHOW HOW INCOME INEQUALITY PLAYS A  
ROLE AND REVEAL WHAT THE DATA SUPPORTS  
AS THE MOST PROMINENT CAUSE OF  
TERRORISM.

Amber Wilcox  
4-27-2015

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Political Science 400W

4/8/2015

## **The Connections between Terrorism and Income Inequality**

### **Introduction**

Terrorism as defined by Akanni is the “deliberate and systematic use of violence designed to destroy, kill, maim and intimidate the innocent in order to achieve a goal or draw national/international attention”(p.66 2015). Martha Crenshaw defines terrorism as “deliberate and systematic violence performed by small numbers of people” (p.406, 2015). While precise definitions of terrorism vary, they have common elements, including the use of force to change political or social objectives. For the purpose of this paper I will be adopting Akannis’s definition of terrorism in that it is planned violence that intends to generate public attention to bring about political change to achieve a goal.

The causes of terrorism can be approached through different angles. Why do people become terrorists? As to why people become terrorist is a valid question and one that requires analysis through multiple perspectives including political, economic, cultural and psychological perspectives. Terrorist incidents around the world continue to occur from car bombings, to suicide bombings to events such as the Boston marathon bombing two years ago, the World Trade Centers in 2001, and the recent shootings in

Paris and San Bernardino. It is important that we begin to look into why these events happen and what leads individuals to participate in these horrific events. In this paper I will delve deeper into the different contributing factors that lead to terrorism along with testing my theory of income inequality causing terrorism. Through my research, I found that I did not have enough data to show income inequality statistically significantly affecting terrorism, but my research still shows that income inequality can still be considered significant.

### **Explanations: Factors leading to Terrorism**

While there are many explanations as to why terrorism happens, we cannot conclude that a specific factor is the sole cause of terrorist activity. However, we can take into consideration the multitude of factors that lead to and promote terrorism. While many researchers have different views on how much each factor may actually affect terrorist-violence, many scholars have identified a number of potential factors, including religion, culture, government legitimacy, military intervention, government instability, and income inequality.

Two important areas that play a role are ideological and cultural factors. In Martha Crenshaw's "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century" Crenshaw looks into the minds of those who participate in terrorist activities and how they come to that action. Crenshaw found that rather than then individual characteristics leading to terrorism behaviors, ideological commitment and group solidarity are more likely to be determinants of terroristic behavior (Crenshaw 2015). While Crenshaw has a

strong point ideology is not the only factor that may be a determinant of terroristic behavior. Taking into account other scholarly articles there are arguments made that religion, culture, individual views, legitimacy, military intervention, type of regime, political power, and income inequality also play an important role in the cause of terrorism.

### **Religion**

When we focus on religious factors when looking at terrorism, we can see that members who are more religiously based are more willing to commit to acts of suicide. With members willing to die for their cause the amount of casualties rise along with the death toll (Crenshaw 2015). Religious groups and organizations, based on what their religious beliefs are, also have the ability to bring together individuals who have common interests and are more likely to be able to expand their beliefs to new members. Perhaps one of the most known terrorist acts related to religion is between the Shia and Shiits. These two groups, while based on the same religion, attack each other due to a few differences in what they believe. A simple difference in opinion has led to years of war and death. In a study involving Islamic extremism, Noricks found that “there is evidence that a well-established religious identity actually protects against violent radicalization” (Noricks p.39 2009.). This comes to show that often recent converts are the most extreme. Studies also show that these individuals have a longing and personality to want to “fit in” with a certain group, and to find their identity within that group (Crenshaw 2015). This want and need to find their identity within a group can lead to violence since they are more willing to sacrifice for the cause and the group.

While it is shown that religion in itself is not a cause for terrorism (and does not lead to violence), findings reveal that when religion resides within a society that is enclosed among a culture of violence where movements for social and political change are more likely to occur, religion gives birth to terroristic violence (Noricks 2009). This leads into how an individual's ideology and how their political views plus their extreme views of religion lead to terrorism.

### **Culture**

Culture itself, like religion, is not the sole cause for terroristic behaviors. Societal and cultural settings have a great influence on the likelihood of terrorism. If a society's culture places value on violence and promotes violence itself, it is more likely to see citizens within that society as more prone to accept violent behaviors. Individuals within societies that have a more war oriented society historically are more likely to accept violence in their own lives. Culture also affects how the government reacts to their citizens. Noricks states that individuals themselves are not prone to violence (Noricks 2009) but rather socialization to violence depends on factors such as the level as to which political violence is accepted, the regularity of the violence, and the justification for political violence in society (Noricks 2009). These factors all contribute to how much violence occurs within a society; if a society is more willing to take part in violence, the extremes of the violence themselves are more likely to increase due to this acceptance. Not only are individuals within these societies more inclined toward violence, but a culture that has a background with violent acts is more likely to continue in those acts because "norms and historical traditions render terrorism more socially acceptable" (Noricks).

### **Legitimacy and the view of the Citizens**

Another common factor within the causes of terrorism is the connection to political, social and economic characteristics in a society (Noricks 2009). These factors expand into areas such as how individuals view their state's poverty, how they view the wealth of the state, repression within the state and the security that the state gives them. These can all be included under how one views the legitimacy of their state. (Noricks 2009). These factors make for a broad range of issues that are current not only through non-democracies but democracies such as the United States. It would be an illogical presumption to assume that poverty levels or differences within social hierarchy would automatically lead to terrorism. To understand how these factors affect and influence terrorism, we must first look at how each aspect can contribute to the attitude of helplessness that leads individuals to extreme acts such as terrorism.

Legitimacy through a state means that the state has the respect and is able to hold their citizen beliefs that they are able to provide and keep citizen's safe. When a state loses this ability, legitimacy begins to crumble. Once a state becomes illegitimate and shows weakness they are susceptible to uprisings, with individuals raising against their own government the violence within that state also increases; "Terrorist use violence to achieve political change" (Akkanni p.66 2014). As we can see if a state is illegitimate and weak it creates a "ripe permissive condition for terrorism" (Noricks 19 2009). Knowing that legitimacy is a factor in terrorism, we must ask how legitimacy comes about in the first place. Many agree that delegitimizing occurs when there is change within a country, such as groups blocking state decisions, and in some cases can come about because of

international events (Noricks). One major way that a state loses its legitimacy is its failure to provide for and protect its citizens. This is possible through multiple aspects such as not being able to provide military protection, sufficient resources (Noricks 2009) and also through poverty and repression. In a study by Akanni focusing on unemployment in Nigeria we can specifically see how the unemployment rate being so low, threatens the very stability of the nation's economy. We can see through Nigeria's case that when there are high levels of income inequality and poverty the state starts to lose its legitimacy and the people begin to turn on the government. This instability of the economy not only calls into question the legitimacy of the nation but also promotes more violent behavior as citizens become more prone to violent behaviors (Akanni 2014). Citizens are more likely to join in riots against their government and anti-government behaviors in an attempt to change the way their government is working.

Political power within government is also a connection to terrorism and is connected with the legitimacy of the state. One of terrorism's root causes can be inequality. Political inequality encompasses much more than just the inequality by which officials are elected or what votes and bills are passed. This inequality of elected officials means that citizens within a state may not have as much as a vote, or even be able to vote. This inequality can lead to opposition within the public, leading to a "development of strong opposition movements" (Noricks p.21) and can also lead citizens to question how legitimate their state is. This rise can lead to individuals feeling repressed and marginalized, leaving them to feel as if the only way out is by Partaking in violence.



## **Military Intervention**

It is not an uncommon occurrence for the United States to intervene within another country; for years the United States has used military intervention for multiple reasons. When another state intervenes in another state's government or comes into the country using military power, military intervention is being put to use. While military intervention can have benefits and create solutions, it can cause chaos as well. We can specifically see this when we look at America's intervention in Iraq. Aryn Baker, comments on how America was not welcomed and looks into how the war was intensified. Looking at wars in connection with terrorist activities, data suggest that "war has intensified the grievances of the Muslim world against the U.S. and increased opportunities for terrorist to target foreigners arriving in Iraq" (Lis p. 2011). Rather than military intervention or war solving the problem of terrorist activity it rather reduces terrorism in richer countries and transfers it to other countries (Lis 2011). The data suggest that repression, military intervention, and war heightens and spreads terrorism rather than the intended outcome of peace.

## **Instabilities with in Governments**

Not only does the legitimacy of the state and military intervention affect the amount of terrorist activity, but issues with the government may also have an affect on terrorist activity. One way that a government can become instable is when a government changed the type of regime they have. Research shows that while democracies are more

likely to host terrorist activities rather than non-democracies it is new democracies that are more likely to experience violence rather than established democracies (Noricks 2009). This is most likely because the society itself has not aligned to democratic values and has a hard time changing stances.

Another way that a government may become instable is through population growth. The growth in population can cause stress when the population surpasses the government's ability to provide services. This can create social stresses and press toward change (Noricks). This stress that they begin to feel towards change can then lead to groups coming together in hopes of stopping the government from changing or to push their own political motivations onto the government. With citizens overwhelming the government, citizens could start to view the government as being weak, and this weakness can then lead to terrorism.

### **Income Inequality**

While all of these factors are important factors as to why terrorist become terrorist, a factor that I want to specifically focus on in this research is income inequality. While I could not find any research specifically referencing income inequality, I started my research first over the income gap and unemployment. As we see throughout research, countries such as Nigeria have certainly been affected by terrorism because of the large income gap and unemployment levels throughout the country. Noricks found that there was a positive connection between high unemployment rates and those that are involved in terrorist groups (Noricks). While Noricks found that this was a positive

relation to terrorism, I wanted to dig further into the issue and look how income inequality as whole could affect terrorism. By using the GINI coefficient, I began to gather data to compare to terrorist incidents occurring within countries.

Using the above literary research and data from World Bank and the RAND database I begin to look into what factors significantly influence terrorism.

## **Data and Methods**

### **Countries and terrorist incidents**

Finding the countries incidents of terrorist attacks was my first objective in starting the research process. I found my data through the RAND database site and was able to download the data and look at what countries had the most terrorism, what countries had the least, and what countries had none. The RAND Database of World Terrorism Incidents is an online research database that collects data from 1968 all the way to 2009 compiled together. The RAND Database consists of over 40,000 terrorist incidents that have been coded and detailed. On the RAND Database I was able to compile together the number of incidents that a country experiences within the years of 2005-2009. By the data in RAND being organized separately I was able to easily obtain the number of incidents to create my first dependent variable. The RAND Database also included the number of incidents separate from the number of fatalities. With this, I was able to see how many individuals were actually affected compared to the number of incidents that occurred. In the graph below I have separated the incidents and

fatalities and have included the number of countries affected by both fatalities and incidents.

### Frequency of Countries Incidents and Fatalities

<u># incidents</u>	<u># of countries</u>	<u># of fatalities</u>	<u># of countries</u>
0-2	158	0-5	181
3-8	23	6-10	4
9-14	6	11-16	4
15-19	2	17-22	2
21-30	4	23-27	2
		28-34	2
31-38	3	35-40	3
44-51	2	41-49	0
57-76	2	50-59	1
116-196	4	60-69	2
200-291	6	70-79	4
300-399	2	80-89	0
500-599	1	90-99	1
600-699	0	100-199	2
700-799	1	200-299	2
800-899	2	300-399	2
900-999	0	500-599	2
1000-1999	2	1000-1999	3
9000-9999	1	3000-3999	1
		25808	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>		<b>219</b>

My findings concluded that 129 countries did not experience terrorism between 2005 and 2009. The other countries that did experience terrorism experience a wide range between the number of incidents and fatalities. Through the incident sum reports I was able to see that the majority of countries did not experience terrorist activity, and the majority that did experienced between 1 and 12 incidents. As the number of incidents and

fatalities rise, the number of countries decreases, until we see an outlier in the data. The difference between the highest number of incidents and the second highest was shocking to say the least. Thailand coming in at 1765 terrorist incidents was the second highest in terrorist incidents, until we put in the number of incidents Iraq experienced, coming in at 9671. With the wide range of change between the two it is clear to see how the data is shocking in how much of an outlier Iraq is compared to every other country.

After looking at the sum of incidents occurring, I then went on to look at the sum of fatalities occurring as a result of those incidents. Out of 161 countries that experienced terrorism, 129 experienced no fatalities, indicating that 32 countries that experiences terrorism did not have any fatalities. Iraq also held the highest number of fatalities coming in at a total of 25,808, far more than any other country.

### **Gini Index and Terrorism**

Having determined my independent variables I went on to for my independent variable. To get my independent variable of income inequality, I decided to use the GINI Index from the World Data Bank. The World Data Bank defines the Gini index as a measurement to measure the distribution of income and consumption between individuals or households and how much it deviates from an equal distribution based on a 0 to 100 scale, 0 representing perfect equality and 100 represent perfect inequality. Using the World Data Bank I was able to find data on the Gini index between the years of 2005 and 2009.

When starting my research the Gini index seemed a reliable way to see the relationship between inequality and terrorism. Using the average figures of each country through 2005 and 2009 in the Gini index there still remained a rather large amount of missing data. Out of all the countries 102 did not have any data between those years, leaving only 117 valid results. This missing data in itself is problematic in testing my hypothesis. I found that of countries with GINI data, 46 had no terrorist incidents, and for the countries that did not have GINI data, 83 countries were incident free. Looking at the countries that did have incidents and data on the Gini index showed that 71 countries had incidents and 19 incidents occurred in countries with no data. Looking at this data it is clear to see that countries without Gini data were, in fact, less likely to have terrorist activity.

Looking at the correlation between the Gini index and terrorism there was no real relationship between the two. The correlation between the GINI Index was at a  $-.110$  for incidents and  $-.115$  for fatalities, with the significant level of  $.237$  for incidents and  $.217$  for fatalities, showing no significance between the two.

Using the World Bank, I was able to acquire data on each of the variables mentioned above. The World Data Bank defined social inequality as the measure of social equality through multiple aspects including gender, public resource use, social protection and labor, and politics. They then measured this data on a scale between 1 and 6, 1 being low equality and 6 being high equality. I then also pulled data on the logistics of the countries, which includes the perception of the countries efficiency where they measured it on a low (1) to high (5) scale. From here I went on to get data on the ODA, which was defined as the net official developmental assistance that gave grants and loans

to countries to promote economic development. From here I went on to get data on the public sector management that shows on a low(1) to high (6) scale that includes the amount of property rights, rule based governance, efficiency of revenue, and the accountability and corruption in the public sector. I then used the data to show what variables had a negative effect, meaning no real relationship with terrorism, and the variables that had a positive effect, showing a significant relationship to terrorism.

### **Other Possible Variables affecting Terrorism**

From the Gini index I then went on to find other possible variables that could affect terrorism. These variables include social inequality, logistics, official development received, and the public sector management. In referring back to the literature research it was not surprising to see that an individual's view of the efficiency of their government(logistics) and the amount of rights to property, governance efficiency, and corruption (public sector) are the only significant factors in the causes of terrorism.

### **Findings**

### Significance of Findings Table

Variable	Coef. Estimate (Standard Error)	P-value
Constant		.058
GINI	-5.970 (3.240)	.073
Logistics	307.033*	.001
ODA	-1.369	.420
Public	238.294*	.021
Social	-168.454	.081
<b>2005-2009 findings</b>		<b>P&lt;.05</b>
$R^2$	.361	
N	.44	

In the above chart we can see through the different factors which of the variables had the most impact in relating back to what causes terrorism. The only positives that we see are through logistics and the public sector. This shows that both of these variables have a positive relationship to terrorism, showing that countries which measured on the lower side of the scale were more likely to experience terrorist incidents. Those that do face income inequality are more likely to experience terrorism but it is not statistically significant. Statistically significant factors leading to terrorism include corruption and efficiency of the country.



## **Conclusion**

After looking at the data that I have collected through the incidents that have occurred within a country along with the data on the GINI, logistics, ODA, Public, and social variables I have come to the conclusion that rather than individuals who experience income inequality within their own lives leading to terrorism, it is rather individuals who doubt the efficiency and experience corruption within their government. Although there was no significant evidence between income inequality and terrorism, we must take into consideration the amount of missing data. Future research could also possibly be done in determining what other factors have a higher significance than the ones that I have found and possibly do research on the significance of poverty in relation to terrorism.

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