

Exploring the Shadows of Terror: The Influence of Terrorism on Public Opinion and Democratic Values*

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In an era where terrorism intersects with global politics, understanding its repercussions on public attitudes towards democracy is crucial. This paper replicates and extends the data analysis of effects of terrorism on public political opinion, considers various expressions of terrorism and a variety of research methodologies by analyzing findings from previous research. Our findings indicate that terrorism leads to an increase in outgroup hostility and a shift towards political conservatism, and observes variations in rally-'round-the-flag effects. These reactions are influenced by the nature of the terrorist threat and the sociopolitical context. Through this exploration, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on the implications of terrorism for democratic societies.

1 Introduction

As we entered the 21st century, terrorism has emerged as a central concern in global politics, influencing international relations and shaping the societal landscape across the world. This phenomenon has not only reshaped diplomatic engagements but also transformed societal dynamics on a global scale which prompts a critical examination of terrorism's broader implications, particularly its impact on public attitudes towards democracy. In an with regular occurrence of terrorist incidents, the impact of terrorism on public opinion has emerged as a critical area of research, bringing up attention to how incidents of terrorism reshape public attitudes towards outgroup hostility, political conservatism, and national unity.

Building upon this foundation, our study aims to replicate and extend the analysis by *Amélie Godefroidt* in 2022, published in American Journal of Political Science (**Godefroidt202?**),

*Code and data are available at: https://github.com/Sinanma/Terrorism_And_Citizens_Political_Attitudes. Replication on Social Science Reproduction platform available at:

which highlighted the significant impact of various forms of terrorism on public attitudes, from local insurgencies to global campaigns.

This paper delves into the complex dynamics of terrorism’s influence on public political opinion. It extends the discourse beyond conventional analysis to explore how various expressions of terrorism—ranging from domestic to international incidents—affect public attitudes, with a particular focus on outgroup hostility, political conservatism, and rally-’round-the-flag phenomena. Despite a growing body of research in this field, there remains a significant gap in understanding the holistic and nuanced effects of different forms of terrorism across diverse sociopolitical contexts. To address this gap, we systematically analyze and integrate findings from prior research, employing a variety of methodological approaches to offer a comprehensive overview of terrorism’s impact on public sentiment.

Our investigation reveals that terrorism indeed prompts significant shifts in public opinion, leading to an increase in outgroup hostility and a tilt towards political conservatism, alongside observable variations in national unity rallying effects. These reactions are found to be deeply influenced by the nature of the terrorist threat and the specific sociopolitical context in which they occur. The findings underscore the critical role of context in shaping public responses to terrorism, highlighting the importance of considering the diversity of terrorism expressions and the sociopolitical landscape when evaluating its impact.

This research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the implications of terrorism for democratic societies by providing empirical evidence of terrorism’s subtle yet significant influence on public political attitudes. By shedding light on the conditions under which terrorism most profoundly affects public sentiment, this paper aims to inform policymakers and scholars alike, guiding the development of strategies that bolster democratic resilience in the face of terror. This paper is organized as follows: an overview of the methodological framework used in our analysis, a presentation of the findings, a discussion contextualizing these results within the broader implications for democracy, and concluding remarks that suggest directions for future research and policy considerations.

2 Data

2.1 Source

Our study is based on a detailed examination by Amélie Godefroidt published in 2022 in the American Journal of Political Science. This important research looks into how terrorism affects what people think about democracy and politics, using a wide range of examples from small local attacks to large international ones. We aim to do more research based on Godefroidt's work, using her collection of data from 241 papers, which cover 326 studies and provide 1,733 measurements of how terrorism influences people's political views. This collection of information, gathered through careful research and organization, is the main resource for our study as we explore the complex effects of terrorism in different settings around the world.

2.2 Methodology

Our approach to expanding on the original study involves a detailed process known as meta-analysis. This means we take a closer look at a bunch of studies already done on how terrorism changes people's opinions and combine their results to get a clearer picture. Following the steps outlined by Godefroidt, we gather, sort out, and examine data from various sources, focusing on 1,733 data points that show the relationship between terrorism and public opinion. We make sure all these points can be compared fairly by converting them into a standard format and adjusting them so they all point in the same direction. This makes our analysis strong and trustworthy. We also add new studies to the mix and use more sophisticated statistical methods to handle the data better, aiming to deepen our understanding of terrorism's impact on how people feel about democracy, strangers, and political beliefs in different parts of the world.

We used the following functions: (`readxl?`), (`ggplot2?`), (`ggpubr?`), (`dplyr?`) in (R Core Team 2022) to create figure and analyze data.

3 Results

Our analysis, visualized in Figure 1, presents a multifaceted view of terrorism studies over the last three and a half decades.

Temporal Trends in Data Collection and Publication Panel A: The Year of Data Collection indicates a notable increase in studies on terrorism following significant global events, such as the 9/11 attacks and the rise of the Islamic State (IS). These pivotal moments appear to catalyze research interest, suggesting a reactive pattern in the academic community to explore terrorism's societal effects following high-profile incidents.

Panel B: Corroborating this trend, the Year of Publication shows a parallel surge in scholarly outputs, with peaks also corresponding to the aftermath of major terrorist events. The data implies that not only does the occurrence of terrorism prompt more research but also hastens the dissemination of findings, potentially reflecting an urgent need to understand and address the immediate impacts of these events.

Variability in Terrorism Measures Panel C: The Terrorism Measures graph illustrates the diversity of metrics used to gauge terrorism's impact. Acts of violence and threat exposure are the most commonly studied, indicating a research emphasis on direct experiences and perceptions of terrorism. Meanwhile, measures of fear and anger, while less frequent, point to an emerging interest in the affective responses terrorism elicits.

Diversity in Types of Terrorism Studied Panel D: The Type of Terrorism chart reveals an overwhelming focus on Islamist terrorism, overshadowing other ideologies and forms of terrorism. This skew suggests a potential blind spot in the literature, where state terror and extreme-right terrorism are relatively underexamined, despite their significance in certain regions and contexts.

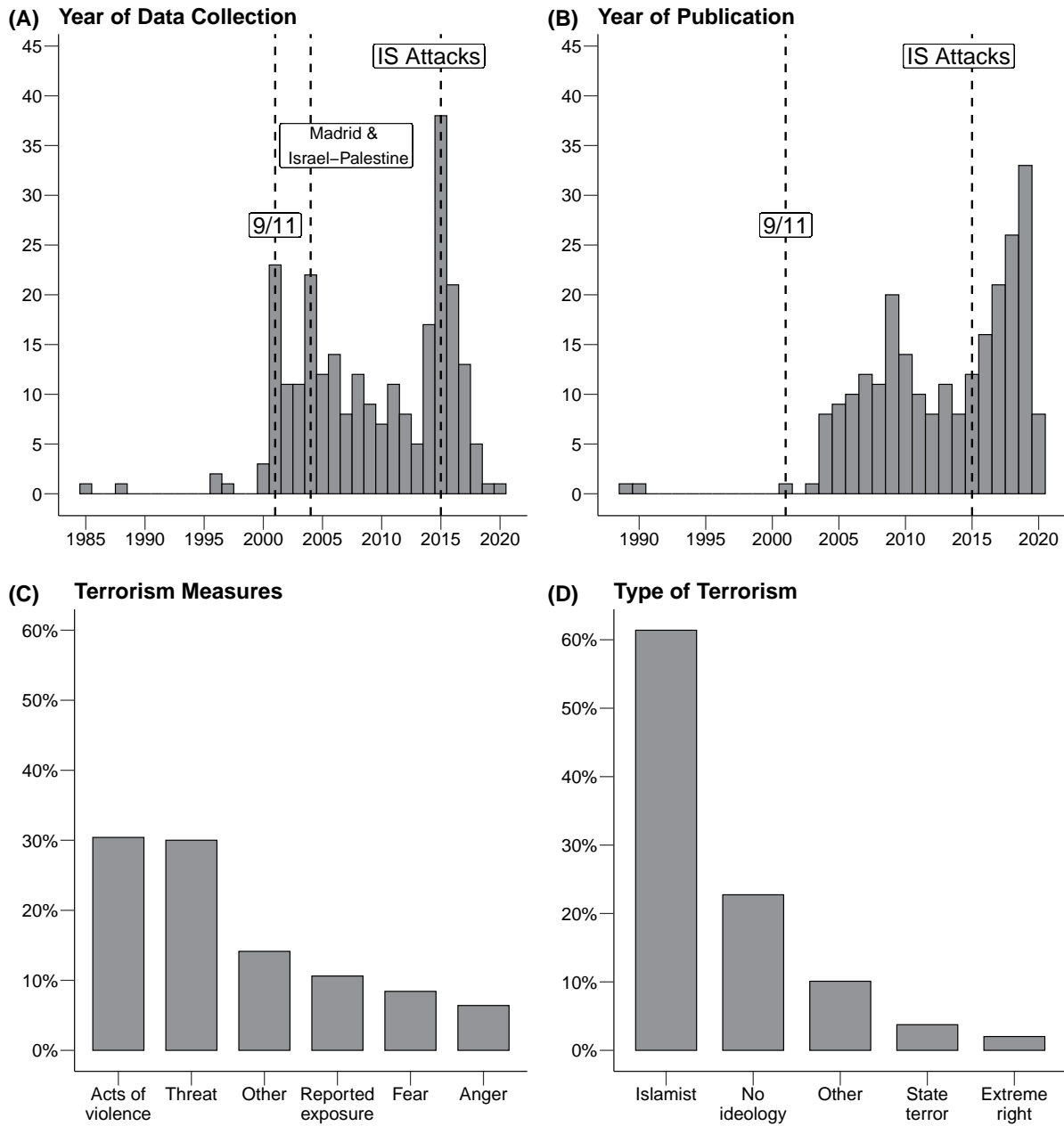


Figure 1: Summary of Data Included in theMeta-Analysis

Diverse Reactions to Ideological Terrorism Outgroup Hostility: Our analysis, represented in Figure 2, underscores that while all forms of ideological terrorism lead to outgroup hostility, the response is strongest in the face of Islamist terrorism. This could reflect media portrayal and public perception biases, where Islamist acts are more closely associated with the concept of terrorism. Interestingly, other ideologies, or the absence of an ideological label, provoke less intense reactions, suggesting a nuanced public sensitivity to the context and framing of terrorist events.

Conservative Shift: A conservative shift in public opinion was noted across all ideological forms of terrorism, but it was less pronounced for ‘No ideology’ cases. This suggests that the presence of a clear ideological motive in terrorism might be a key driver in swaying public opinion towards conservative policies and viewpoints.

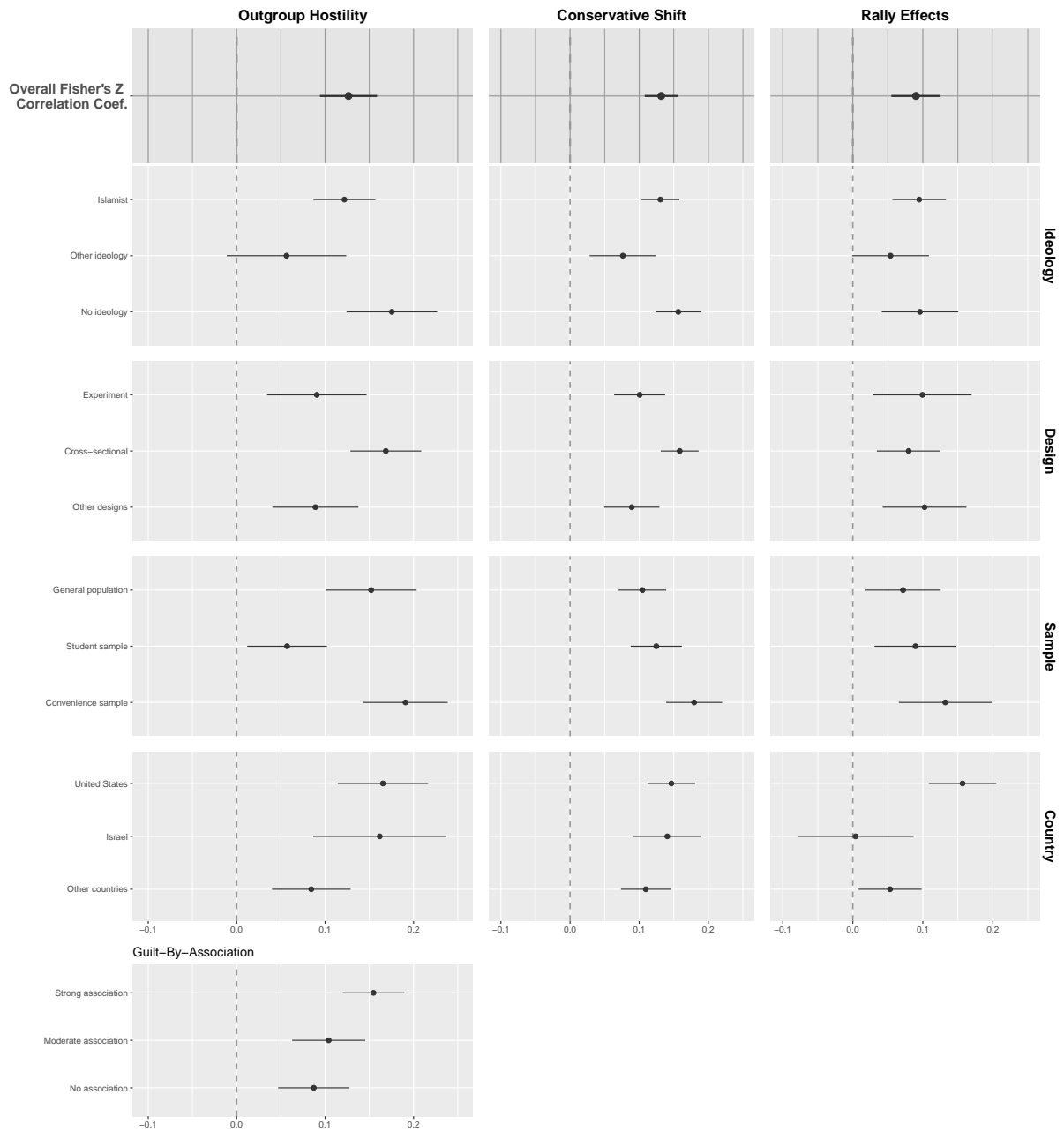
Impact of Research Design on Perceived Threat Rally Effects: When examining the influence of research design, experimental designs showed a more marked rally effect compared to cross-sectional studies. This difference indicates that the controlled environment of an experiment, often simulating a direct terrorism threat, might amplify the unifying sentiment among the participants.

Influence of Sample and Country Specifics General Population vs. Targeted Samples: The general population samples showed a more consistent increase in outgroup hostility and conservatism across the board, as opposed to student or convenience samples. This highlights the importance of sample representativeness in gauging the true pulse of public opinion in response to terrorism.

Geographic Variations: The country-specific analysis revealed that the United States and Israel, both countries with prolonged experiences of terrorism, showed stronger correlations across all three measures compared to other countries. This may be attributed to the higher frequency of terrorist incidents and the consequent heightened public awareness and reaction in these nations.

Guilt-by-Association Effects Lastly, the ‘Guilt-by-Association’ section of Figure 2 provides an intriguing insight into how strong associations with terrorism significantly affect public attitudes, more so than moderate or no associations. This underscores the powerful role of narrative and association in shaping public sentiment post-terrorism.

We used the following additional functions: (**broom?**), (**dotwhisker?**), (**cowplot?**), (**metafor?**) in (R Core Team 2022) to create Figure 2.



4 Discussion

4.1 Findings

This study has sought to replicate and extend the influential work of Amélie Godefroidt (Godefroidt (2023)) on the impact of terrorism on citizens' political attitudes. Our findings affirm Godefroidt's conclusions, highlighting a definitive influence of terrorist acts on increasing outgroup hostility and political conservatism among the public. Consistent with previous research, we find that these attitudes are significantly shaped by the nature of the terrorism, with Islamist terrorism evoking a more pronounced response in public opinion than other forms of ideological terrorism.

4.2 Ethical Implications and Bias

The ethical considerations of studying such a sensitive topic are paramount. Our methodology, a rigorous meta-analysis, ensures a responsible approach to exploring the connections between terrorism and public sentiment. We also acknowledge potential biases inherent in the original studies included in our analysis, such as the over-representation of Islamist terrorism and under-representation of other forms of ideological violence.

4.3 Limitations

Our study is not without limitations. The reliance on secondary data limits our ability to account for all potential confounding variables. Additionally, the focus on published literature may introduce a publication bias, as studies with significant findings are more likely to be published.

4.4 Future Research

Future research should aim to address these limitations by incorporating primary data collection, exploring a wider range of terrorist ideologies, and examining the impact of terrorism in non-Western contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insight into the long-term effects of terrorism on political attitudes.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, our replication and extension of Godefroidt's work contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between terrorism and political attitudes. It is clear that terrorism has a substantial impact on public sentiment, and this knowledge is crucial for policymakers and scholars in developing strategies to maintain democratic resilience in the face of terrorism.

References

- Godefroidt, Amélie. 2023. “How Terrorism Does (and Does Not) Affect Citizens’ Political Attitudes: A Meta-Analysis.” *American Journal of Political Science* 67 (1): 22–38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12692>.
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