



# POLI 150: Terrorism

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## Today's Class

- Midterm Information
- Civil War Causes
- Are Terrorists Rational?
- Government Responses to Terrorism



## Midterm Logistics

- Date: 3/4 (next week)
- Format: current events, multiple choice, and short answer
- Material: everything up to and including Monday, 3/2



# Midterm Study Tips

- 1 Class notes
- 2 Slides
- 3 Textbook
- 4 Supplemental readings (concepts, findings)



## Last Class

- Civil wars begin because of grievance or greed
- Self-determination conflicts are common, deadly, and complicated
- Group level factors that encourage conflict are factors that solve collective action problem
- Regimes that lack avenues for participation and repressive capacity are especially at risk



## Other Country-Level Factors

- Wealth: impoverishment leads individuals to be more desperate and poor states are usually weaker than rich countries
- Population: more populous countries have a larger recruitment pool
- Size: the larger the area, the harder to police
- Terrain: mountainous or jungle terrain makes hiding from the state easier



## International Factors

- States often support rebel groups with common interests in a variety of ways
- Can also support rebels who are fighting countries with which they are fighting, leading to proxy wars
- Diaspora groups can also lend economic support to groups (i.e. Irish Americans supporting the IRA)



## Example: Libya in 2011

- Group factors: tribal ties, profits from oil
- Country factors: able to 'hide' in Eastern region
- International factors: Western intervention





# Civil War as Bargaining Failure

- Why do states and rebels fight rather than reach negotiated settlements?
- Rational explanations for war help to explain civil wars as well
- Commitment problems abound!



# Information Problems in Civil War

- Difficult to gauge rebels capabilities
- Less pre-war diplomacy is possible, meaning that less information is shared
- However, given how long civil wars tend to last, scholars are skeptical about the importance of information problems



# Commitment Problems in Civil War

- Shifting power: downturns in economy create incentives for rebels to fight now
- States cannot credibly commit to honor the terms of an agreement once the rebels disarm
- Rebel leaders cannot fully control their members, so cannot credibly commit to the cessation of violence
- These commitment problems make peace agreements that end civil wars rare and require third-party enforcement



## Issue Indivisibility in Civil War

- Territory often has cultural significance
- States have incentives to claim that its entire territory is indivisible
- The chain-store paradox applied to civil conflict suggests that states have incentives to fight rather than settle to deter future challenges



# Why Do Civil Wars Last So Long?





# Strategies of War





## Civil War Duration

- Long durations largely due the strategy of insurgency, in which small lightly-armed units engage in hit-and-run attacks
- Well suited for groups that are small and weak
- Undermines confidence in governments and seek to provoke attacks to increase recruitment pool
- Rebels can blend in with civilians, making them hard to find



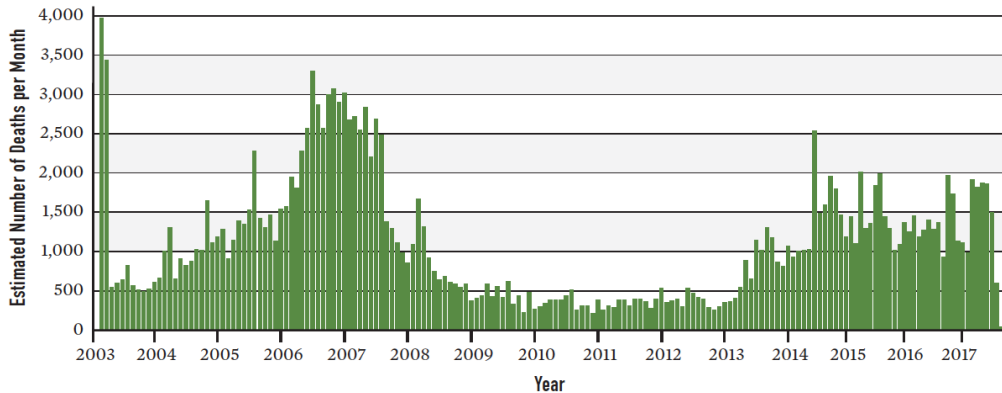
## Indiscriminate Attacks & COIN

- One option for countering insurgency is indiscriminate violence
- Has evidence of working (e.g. LTTE), but can alienate civilians
- Another option is counter-insurgency (COIN); a “hearts and minds” approach
- Gives the population an interest in the government, and has been somewhat effective for the U.S.





# COIN in Iraq



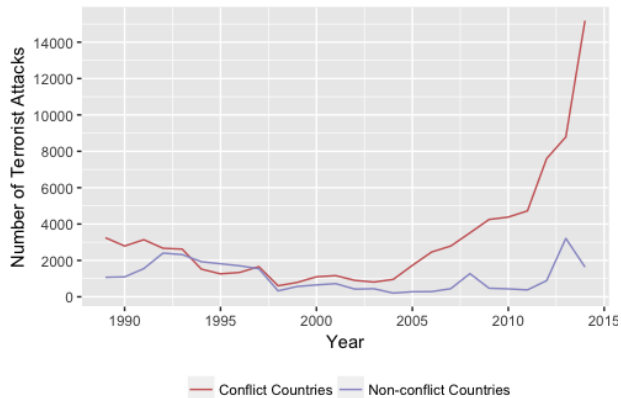


## What Can Be Done?

- International institutions can help in a number of ways
- Intervention to impose costs on civil actors using force
- Helping maintain peace following the cessation of violence has been possible
- Cutting off finances of rebel groups (e.g. Kimberly Process)
- Encouraging development of domestic institutions is best to prevent conflict, but is a tricky proposition



# Terrorism in Civil Conflicts



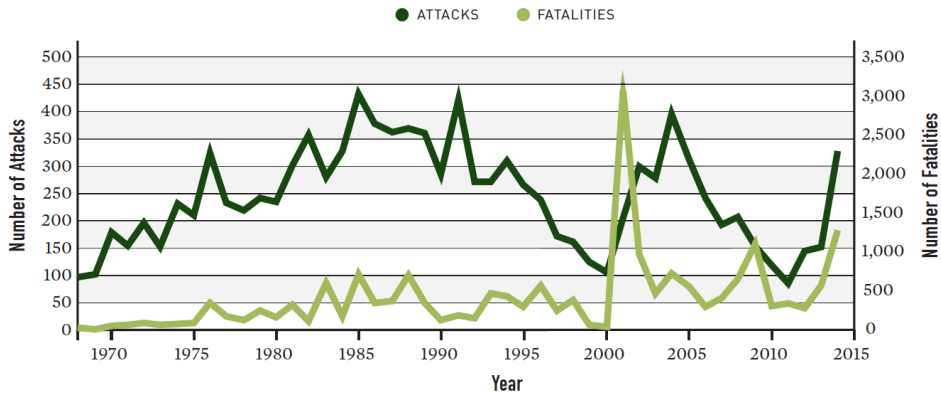


# What is Terrorism?

- Premeditated threat or use of violence against noncombatants by individuals or substate actors to obtain a political objective by inducing fear in a larger audience
- Over 100 different definitions by various bodies
- Can be transnational or domestic



# Transnational Attacks over Time





# Puzzles of Terrorism

- Are terrorists rational?
- Why do actors use terrorism?
- Does it work?
- What can be done?



# Terrorists: Rational or Fanatics?

- Our study of international actors explicitly assumes that they are rational decision-makers
- Public discourse suggests that terrorists are fanatics
- Are terrorists rational?



# The Rationality of Terrorism

- Rationality refers to the behavior, not preferences
- The costs are high, but so are other forms of contention
- Randomness can be rational
- Given these facts, we can consider terrorist tactics to be rational





## A Weapon of the Weak

- Actors using terrorism are generally weak in two ways: capabilities and recruitment pool
- Nonstate actors can rarely match the strength of the state
- Therefore, they must engage in asymmetrical warfare, like insurgents
- This material weakness also impacts how they organize: in networks and within sympathetic populations



# Recruitment Problem

- Groups using terrorism are also usually weak relative to their demands
- Typically comprised of extremists, meaning that their interests are not widely shared
- Limits the size of their recruitment pool
- Extremists are also often politically excluded



## Why Do Groups use Terrorist Tactics?

- The combination of material weakness and difficulty in recruiting pushes groups to use terrorism
- Violence because they are politically isolated, and asymmetric warfare because they are materially weak
- Back to bargaining: why don't states and terrorist groups reach negotiated settlements?



# Terrorism & Bargaining Failure

- **Incomplete Information:** clandestine by nature; terrorists have incentives to misrepresent strength; groups use attacks to signal resolve instead of more benign actions
- **Commitment Problems:** disarming after deal; groups' ability to maintain control; cannot commit to agreeing with additional future opponents
- **Indivisible Issues:** many organizations using terrorism have religious motivations



## How Do Actors Use Terrorism?

- **Coercion:** inducing policy change by threatening future violence (implicitly or explicitly)
- **Provocation:** a strategy meant to cause indiscriminate violence that pushes individuals to join or be sympathetic toward groups' causes
- **Spoiling:** sabotaging a possible peace deal between a moderate group faction and other party
- **Outbidding:** occurs when two or more actors devoted to the same cause attack to signal superiority



# Does Terrorism Work?

- Huge debate about whether or not terrorism is effective
- Much of the debate about whether or not terrorism works boils down to how we define *success*
- Maybe only ‘works’ when goals are small or change is easy

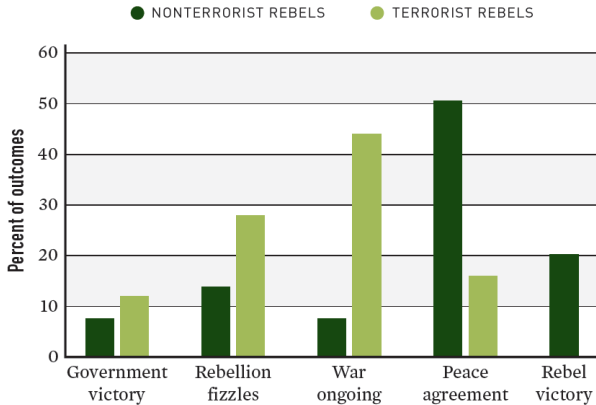


## Fortna's Findings

- Fortna looks at the difference in outcome of rebel groups that use or do not use terrorist tactics
- She finds that nonterrorist rebel groups are more successful
- However, wars last longer when rebels use terrorist tactics
- Rebels face a dilemma: terrorism might help a group survive, but might not allow it to achieve its goals



# Terrorist Rebels in Civil Wars







## What Can Be Done?

- **Deterrence** might not work because of fears of provocation
- **Preemption** is materially and politically costly
- **Defensive measures** also carry costs and are not totally effective
- **Criminalization** requires international cooperation
- **Negotiation** can be subject to bargaining failures, but has sometimes been successful



## What Should Be Done?

- How threatening is terrorism?
- Drug overdoses, car accidents, diseases, are more deadly
- More likely to drown in bathtub, die in a deer-accident, or be struck by lightning
- To what extent should states be focusing their resources on combatting terrorism?