

POLS 429: International Terrorism
Lecture 8 (01.31.2020):
Explaining Terrorism - The Organizational Approach

Rotem Dvir

Texas A&M University

rdvir@tamu.edu

Department of Political Science
Spring 2020

Overview

- 1 Quick review
- 2 The Organizational Approach
- 3 Assumptions
- 4 Extra Material

Review

WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- Implications: coercive effectiveness and costly signals, compromise, credit claiming, learn from success and failures and substitution in methods, locations and perpetrators.
- Policy implications: restricted military action, invest in defense measures, deter suicide bombing.
- Criticism: rational assumptions, ineffective terrorism, no credit claiming ("calling cards" methods).
- An abstract approach to study a complex social phenomenon.

Questions??

- Social science research, data, public opinion and policy ▶ Ex.

The Organizational Approach

DEFINITION & MAIN FEATURES

- The organizational approach, the organizational model, socio-organizational approach, social network approach, social movement organizational approach (SMO).
- A social perspective - human behavior and social environment.
- Emphasize the inner-working of groups and interactions with other groups.
- Using network analysis to map important factors: rivalries, alliances, structure and more. [▶ TerrorNetworks](#)

The Organizational Approach

CONTRASTS WITH STRATEGIC APPROACH

- The relational aspect of behavior - social status within the environment is more important than a political goal.
- Internal dynamics of groups are contested.
- Process focus - main goal → group survival
- Terrorism → tactical innovation to ensure survival.
- A different kind of 'game'.

The Organizational Approach

TERRORISM AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

- Terrorism depends on density and intensity of the environment in which groups operate. [► Syria](#)
- Violence is more 'diverse':
 - 1 Inter-group: groups target organizations that represent their rivals.
 - 2 Intra-group:
 - Target rivals within internal competition.
 - "Outbid" other groups and gain most support among constituency.

The Organizational Approach

THE USE OF VIOLENCE



► WhatMessage?

The Organizational Approach

MAIN STRENGTHS

- ① A powerful explanation within protracted conflicts:
 - Multiple groups involved in conflict (nonviolent, political parties, social movements).
 - Internal group conflicts.
- ② Timing of terror waves - escalation at the end of a (nonviolent) protest cycle.
- ③ Why terror occurs in unexpected situations?
Democracy as a precondition for terrorism.

The Organizational approach

ASSUMPTIONS

- Account for limitations of the strategic approach.

For example:

- 1 Why groups attack one another?
- 2 Why terrorist persist in attacks when the outcomes do not seem to match their goals?
- 3 What leads to internal turmoil in terror groups?

The Organizational Approach - Assumptions

Assumption 1: Organizational survival above all

- Primary goal → secure the organization, not strategic success or any political objective.
- Most actions are intended to achieve this goal.
- Examples: recruitment, maintain public support, gain media coverage, locate financial support, eliminate internal and external threats.
- Political goals are second-order objectives.
- Contention and no consensus on these goals.

The Organizational Approach - Assumptions

Assumption 2: Organizations are not unitary actors

- Organizations are fragmented and fractured.
- Disagreements over objectives, and the best methods to accomplish them.
- Examples:
 - 1 US, 1969: Students for Democratic Society (SDS) and the split of 'Weather Underground'.
 - 2 Ireland: Multiple groups, many views [▶ IrelandGroups](#)

The Organizational Approach - Assumptions

Assumption 3: Organizations must manage internal conflicts

- Constant internal conflict - a perpetual state of instability.
- The emergence of "splinter groups" that are more radical (R-IRA attack in 1998 in Omagh).
- Leaders (managers):
 - Always on the lookout for internal collapse.
 - Invest in keeping members' discipline and identify challengers.
 - "Prove their worthy" and risky operations.

The Organizational Approach - Assumptions

Assumption 4: Organizations must manage external competitors

- Groups compete for resources, influence, and recruits.
- Increased inter-group violence: efforts to match-up brutality and attempts to "up the ante".
- Examples:
 - 1 Ireland (P-IRA versus UDF).
 - 2 Italy ("Strategy of tension").

The Organizational Approach - Assumptions

Assumption 5: Recruitment is based on social concerns

- Join terrorism for social benefits:
 - Belong to a meaningful collective entity.
 - Strong bonds with 'like-minded' others.
 - Enhance one's identity through social interactions.
- Inner-group connections and increased suspicion of authority figures (the group's leadership).
- External threats and increased likelihood of "split off" from main group (represent the source of threat).
- Example: Afghanistan (1990's).

The Organizational Approach - Assumptions

Assumption 6: Culture, structure and tactical repertoire shape behavior

- Groups form around a shared definition of their overarching goal → rationalize use of violence.
- Creates a unique identity for members.
- Groups specialize in certain tactics - IED, Suicide attacks.
- Example: Weather Underground
 - Radical Marxist revolutionary view.
 - Tactic - Bombing unoccupied governmental building.
 - Cultural elements - reject monogamy, patriarchal and racial hierarchies, drug-use.

Recommended readings

More studies on the topic of strategic approach to terrorism:

- ① Max Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Spring 2008), pp. 78-105.
- ② Allison G. Smith, "The Implicit Motives of Terrorist Groups: How the Needs for Affiliation and Power Translate into Death and Destruction," *Political Psychology*, Vol. 29, no. 1 (February 2008), pp. 55-75.
- ③ Lindsay Heger, Danielle Jung and Wendy H. Wong, "Organizing for Resistance: How Group Structure Impacts the Character of Violence," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 24, Issue 5 (2012), pp. 743-768.

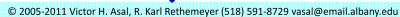


Figure: Mapping Terrorism Networks

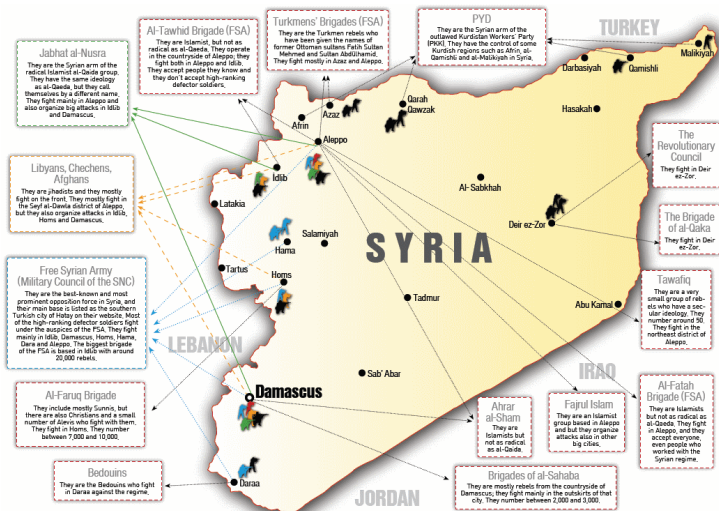




Figure: Organized Crime "outbidding", Gotham city

TABLE 3.1 Differing Perspectives on Ends and Means in the Conflict over Northern Ireland

		Ends	
		Moderates	Radicals
Means	Moderates	Civil rights for Catholics in Northern Ireland through nonviolent mass mobilization (NICRA)	Full reunification with Ireland through political action (Sinn Féin; 32 County Sovereignty Movement)
	Radicals	Devolution and autonomy through armed action (Provisional Irish Republican Army after 1997)	Full reunification with Ireland through armed action (Provisional IRA through early 1990s; Continuity Irish Republican Army; Real Irish Republican Army)

Challenges of studying social issues

Opinions

It took us months to contest a flawed study on police bias. Here's why that's dangerous.

- Fatal police shooting and racial biases.
- Data and approach in social science.
- Fatal shooting data → ignore non-fatal encounters!!!
- Link:
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/01/28/it-took-us-months-contest-flawed-study-police-bias-heres-why-thats-dangerous/>