

What are you afraid of? **Public trust in government protection, government information and the perceived risk of terrorism**

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Background

The tragedy of 9/11 brought terrorism to the forefront in the United States. Following large-scale terror attacks, people place more trust in the government to protect them; post-9/11 there was a large increase in trust placed in the government following several decades of cynicism (Chanley, 2013; Sinclair & LoCicero, 2010; Chanley, 2002). Fear of terrorism is a positive predictor of trust in the government for protection, driven by a need to seek support and security under significant threat of harm (Sinclair & LoCicero, 2010). Trust wanes over time and distrust of officials is a substantial problem in emergency management which results in reduced information exchange (Savoia, Lin, & Viswanath, 2013). People tend to trust that health and fire departments, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provide more honest information compared to other local, state, and federal government agents (Kano et al, 2008). People who trust information more have a higher probability of cooperating in certain emergency situations (Lasker, 2004). However, increased social distance (i.e. local versus federal) reduces the willingness of people to cooperate and sacrifice for others (Hoffman, McCabe, & Vernon, 1996).

Little work has been done to examine the association between how well people think the government can protect them from terrorism and whether they believe they are at risk or if they believe the information provided to them about terrorism by those agencies is honest. Here we assess the theoretical construct of perceived risk of terrorism as well as trust in organizational information and protection, particularly from local, state, and federal agents. This project will be useful to those working in emergency preparedness, national security, and public information to determine barriers that they may face in disseminating information effectively to target audiences. This is critical to understand public trust in the government and how that may affect their trust in their ability to protect the population from serious threats.

Objectives

The objectives of this project are to:

1. Determine whether perceived risk of terrorism is associated with trust in the effectiveness of the government to protect people from terrorism
2. Determine whether trust in government information about terrorism is associated with trust in the effectiveness of the government to protect people from terrorism
3. Determine whether the level (local, state, or federal) of government from which protection from terrorism is received modifies the association between perceived risk of terrorism and trust in the effectiveness of the government to protect people from terrorism
4. Determine whether the level (local, state, or federal) of government from which protection from terrorism is received modifies the association between trust in government information about terrorism and trust in the effectiveness of the government to protect people from terrorism

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Approach

Our study will examine trust in government protection from terrorism and the association with perceived risk of terrorism and trust in government information about terrorism. Our independent variables will be trust in effectiveness of the government to protect people and our dependent variables will be perceived risk of terrorism and trust in government information about terrorism.

The data source for the project is the National Survey of Disaster Experiences and Preparedness (NSDEP), 2007-2008 (Bourque, 2014). The survey consisted of a national sample of high-risk areas with potential terrorist targets such as Washington D.C. and New York City and low-risk areas which comprise the remaining continental US. Between April 13, 2007 and February 13, 2008, 3,300 households completed the telephone interview survey. The questionnaire assessed public behavior and opinion on emergency preparedness, mitigation and avoidance strategies; planned actions, and perceptions of hazards, with particular focus on terrorism. Demographic information was also collected. The study population for our project will include all households that completed the survey from April 13, 2007 and February 13, 2008.

We will use the following variables in our analysis: honesty of information from all sources and by local, state and federal designation; risk of terrorism in own community in 6 months and lifetime; whether terrorism risk is serious; trust in local, state, and federal governments to protect people from terrorism, age, sex, race, income, education, whether they received information from mostly official sources about terrorism after 9/11, and whether they believe the information received. Most variables will remain coded as in the original data. However, the variables for perceived risk will be recoded to binary variables which include those responding 4 and 5 (5 is “definitely will happen”) out of a 5 point scale as perceiving a risk of terrorism in their community. In addition, the seriousness of the risk of terrorism will also be recoded as those perceiving a seriousness of 4 or 5 (i.e., 5 is “extremely serious”) on a 5 point scale as perceiving a serious risk versus those who do not. In addition, honesty of local, state, and government agents will be aggregated into these three categories and into three separate variables.

For our analysis, we will use R (3.5.1). First, we will determine descriptive statistics for our study population including age, sex, race, education level, and income. For logistic regression modeling, we will use an ordinal logistic regression to model trust in government protection in those with a perceived risk of terrorism versus those without that perceived risk as well as those who perceive the government information honest compared to those who do not. To ensure reproducibility, we will utilize R Markdown to document coding for cleaning and statistical analyses, our data will be stored in a cloud location with access for both members, and we will independently conduct the data analysis and ensure comparable results.

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Appendices

A. References

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B. Project timeline

3/21/19 – Initial meeting for clarity on project direction; start data cleaning

3/28/19 – Finalize data cleaning and ensure code is working; create analysis plan for results

4/3/19 – Compare analyses conducted and cross-check results, if significantly different, de-bug; create project presentation outline and plan (PPT, paper, abstract, etc.)

4/10/19 – Complete rough draft of presentation; double-check cleaning and analyses

4/17/19 – Finalize presentation methods and complete project

C. Roles

Lat'Anna – Data analysis, presentation

Stephanie – Data cleaning, Data analysis