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# Can terrorism make us feel safer? Risk perceptions and worries before and after the July 22nd attacks

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### ABSTRACT

The present investigation examines the effect of the July 22nd, 2011 Oslo/Utøya massacres on short- and long-term risk perceptions and worries among tourists. Convenience samples of tourists to Norway rated the perceived risk regarding Norway as a destination and regarding terrorism occurring in Norway, as well as their worries about terrorism during their current trip to Norway. Data were collected in 2004, 2010, 2011 (before and after July 22nd), and in 2012. Results show that risk perceptions and worries are relatively low. Perceived risk remained unchanged from 2004 until 2011, and did not change immediately after the attacks. However in 2012 perceived risk for Norway as a destination and worries about terrorism declined. Possible explanations for these unexpected findings are being discussed.

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### Introduction

The July 22nd terror attacks in Norway in 2011 were two sequential terrorist assaults against the government and the civilian population in Oslo and against participants of a summer camp on the island of Utøya organized by the youth division of the Norwegian Labour Party. The first attack was a car bomb killing eight and injuring over 200 people. In the second attack, the perpetrator opened fire at the participants of the summer camp, killing 69 and injuring over 100 of them, many under the age of 18. The massacre was the deadliest attack in Norway since World War II, and a survey found that on average, one in four Norwegians knew someone affected by the attacks (Skjeseth, 2011). The current

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paper aims at investigating the effect of these attacks on short- and long-term risk perceptions and worries among Norwegian and international tourists to Norway.

### *Literature Review*

Within the social sciences there has been an extensive focus on both man-made and natural disasters in the postmodern society during the last two or three decades. [Nolen-Hoeksema \(2010\)](#) claims that mass media have created the impression of burgeoning of natural disasters, political crises, and acts of war and terror since the beginning of the millennium. Examples of such crises include the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the USA, the “War on terror”, the 2004 Madrid train bombings, the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami in the Indian ocean, the 2005 bomb attacks at London’s transport system, the threat of a pandemic “Swine flu” (2009–2010), and the German *E. coli* incident of 2011. [Beck \(1992\)](#), coining the idea of a “risk society”, claims that in today’s societies we are all exposed to new, man-made risks such as pollution and crime, which directly result from modernization itself.

This increased focus on different types of risk is accompanied by an ever increasing number of publications on the subject both within generic and applied fields, including tourism. Examples from the more generic domain include [Gigerenzer \(2006; Gaismaier & Gigerenzer, 2012\)](#) who claims that following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, highway fatalities especially around New York City increased due to a substitution of driving for flying which was caused by a fear of dread risk, that is a fear of risks which are low in probability, but high in their catastrophic potential. Another example are [Fischhoff, de Bruin, Perrin and Downs \(2004; Fischhoff, Gonzales, Lerner, & Small, 2005\)](#) who showed that emotions like fear and anger can influence risk estimates as well as behavioral choices.

Examples from the tourism literature include risks related to adventure tourism or backpacking ([Callander & Page, 2003; Elsrud, 2001; Larsen, Øgaard, & Brun, 2011](#)), drug use ([Uriely & Belhassen, 2006](#)) food ([Larsen, Brun, Øgaard, & Selstad, 2007; Larsen & Brun, 2011](#)) and health related risks ([Cosens & Gin, 1995; Lepp & Gibson, 2003](#)). Several studies have also focused on the impact of terrorism, war and political instability on travel choice and risk perceptions among tourists. Some of this research is based on the analysis of tourism statistics following acts of terror (see for example: [Neumayer, 2004; Yang & Wong, 2012](#)). In many cases the number of tourists has been shown to decline after terrorist attacks, for example in Spain ([Enders & Sandler, 1991](#)), Northern Ireland ([Pizam, 1999](#)), Egypt ([Wahab, 1996](#)), China ([Gartner & Shen, 1992](#)) and the USA ([Lepp & Gibson, 2003](#)).

Another line of research has focused more directly on how tourists perceive the risk of terrorism. For example [Sönmez and Graefe \(1998\)](#) found that risk perceptions influenced destination choice among tourists, [Reisinger and Mavondo \(2005\)](#) found perceptions of risk to be correlated with travel anxiety. [Gray and Wilson \(2009\)](#) found that political hazards including terrorism were perceived as more risky than physical hazards like the weather and social hazards like for example a strange culture. Political hazards also decreased participants desire to travel to a greater extent than physical and social hazards did. In contrast [Sjöberg \(2005\)](#) showed that perceived terrorism risk was quite low in a Swedish sample, and that participants judged their own risk to be lower than that of others. Also [Uriely, Maoz, and Reichel \(2007\)](#) and [Fuchs, Uriely, Reichel, and Maoz \(2012\)](#) have shown that tourists who disregarded governmental advisories and traveled to destinations threatened by terrorism reported low to moderate perceived risk about terrorism, and used different rationalizations to reduce their concerns.

An understandably very limited number of studies have directly compared tourists risk ratings before and after a terrorist attack. [Larsen, Brun, Øgaard, and Selstad \(2011\)](#) found a direct effect of terror attacks on tourists risk judgments. Comparing before and after measurements they found that participants reported increased perceived risk for Madrid as a holiday destination following the 2004 train bombings and for London as a holiday destination after the 2005 bomb attacks on London’s transport system. They also reported that participants’ general desire to travel and risk judgments for other destinations remained unaffected. Furthermore [Brun, Wolff, and Larsen \(2011\)](#) found that the percentage of tourists who believed the world had become more dangerous as a consequence of the “War on terror” increased after the terrorist attacks in London and Sharm el Sheik in 2005, and that tourists worried more about terror after these attacks.

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