



The effects of the electoral calendar on terrorist attacks



Valentina A. Bali^{a,*}, Johann Park^{b,1}

^a Department of Political Science, Michigan State University, 324 South Kedzie Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA

^b Political Science and Public Administration, Mississippi State University, 105 Bowen Hall, P.O. Box PC, MS 39762, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28 January 2013

Received in revised form 4 March 2014

Accepted 4 March 2014

Available online 17 March 2014

Keywords:

Terrorism

Elections

Domestic terrorism

Transnational terrorism

ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to study the linkages between the timing of terrorist events and elections. As strategic actors terrorists may respond to electoral environments by altering the frequency of their attacks around election times. Focusing on democracies, we examine variations in transnational and domestic terrorist incidents before elections over a 40 year span. We find distinct pre-electoral changes in the incidence of terrorist events. In the ITERATE data set, where only transnational terrorist events are included, terrorist activities decline in election months, while in the partitioned GTD data set, where only domestic terrorist events are kept, terrorist activities rise in election months. The findings suggest electoral calendars can dissuade and attract terrorist threats, depending on the origin of the threat, but these effects occur only very close to election time.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Since a seminal study by Sandler et al. (1983), scholars have long contended that many facets of terrorists' actions are not capricious but in fact can respond to specific strategic goals and political circumstances (Berman and Laitin, 2008; Berrebi and Klor, 2006; Berrebi and Lakdawalla, 2007; Bueno de Mesquita, 2007; Kydd and Walter, 2002; Lapan and Sandler, 1988; Pape, 2003). Who is recruited, and then who is targeted, how they are targeted, and when they are targeted, among others, are dimensions that scholars of terrorism have found to be non-arbitrary in particular when examining long-standing conflicts (Barros et al., 2006; Benmelech and Berrebi, 2007; Clauset et al., 2010; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2001). From this conception of terrorists as relatively "rational" or strategic actors, it is reasonable to hypothesize that terrorists might also take into consideration the electoral calendar as a relevant dimension in their decisions. After all, the eventual

consequences can be substantial. For example, the Madrid train bombings of 2004, three days before the Spanish general elections and with scores of casualties and injured, provide a striking example of what the timing of a terrorist event can produce. While pre-electoral polls suggested a winning margin for the incumbent Popular Party, the terrorist event, later established to have been conducted by Islamic militants, seemed to have helped derail in a matter of days the 4% advantage of the government party (Bali, 2007; Colomer, 2005; Montalvo, 2012; Torcal and Rico, 2004). While other transnational and domestic terrorist events have been clearly smaller in scale than the Madrid bombings, and in fact some may have responded to an opposite logic, one of de-escalation right before an election, the research puzzle still remains: in general, have terrorists exploited the electoral calendar in deciding the timing of their events?

The goal of this paper is to examine the linkages between the timing of terrorist events, transnational and domestic, and elections. If, as some scholars have argued, one of terrorists' goals is to influence policymaking (Pape, 2005) then electoral times could prove to be particularly fecund times to do so. Remarkably, this line of inquiry has not been systematically explored in both broad cross-

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 517 432 4491.

E-mail addresses: baliv@msu.edu (V.A. Bali), johann.park@msstate.edu (J. Park).

¹ Tel.: +1 662 325 2711.

national settings and across extended periods of time although both the elections and terrorism literatures, as we detail in the next section, imply this line of inquiry merits attention. For example, pre-electoral periods may incite more terrorist activities because the electorates are more attentive to politics at those times, and interest groups are more strenuously vying for influence. On the other hand, pre-electoral times may inhibit terrorist activities because terrorist groups may have more opportunities to non-violently channel their dissent, or they may fear more aggressive retaliation from the government. In general, election times may enhance certain integral features of democracies and consequently further influence the prospects for terrorist events.

There may be various ways in which electoral calendars influence, up or down, terrorist activity. The main goal of this study is to estimate the net impact of these electoral influences. This is important in order to build upon our previous knowledge on elections and terrorism, by providing a much needed empirical benchmark, but also in relation to security considerations and potential electoral consequences. In this study, we analyze country-month level data from the broad cross-national terrorism datasets ITERATE (1968–2008) and domestic GTD (1970–2008) to elucidate whether electoral months display differential levels of terrorist events. The analyses reveal that election months can both significantly deter and attract terrorist threats, depending on the origin of the threat, transnational or domestic; these effects occur close to election day.

2. Background considerations and expectations

The concept and definitions of terrorism are multiple and some of them are disputed (Gibbs, 1989; Hoffman, 2006; Norris et al., 2003; Schmid and Jongman, 1988; Wilkinson, 2001; Young and Findley, 2011), yet, by now many definitions share several elements in common. In one such definition terrorism is understood to be “the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012). One frequent ingredient found in many of the definitions of terrorism refer to these acts of violence or threats as being “calculated,” “premeditated,” “systematic,” “purposive,” or “deliberate” (Hoffman, 2006; Norris et al., 2003; Wilkinson, 2001). Although many terrorist events seem after the fact indiscriminate and irrational, they often respond to a clear logic of purposeful intimidation. This intimidation may be aimed at internal or external audiences. More specifically, terrorist incidents can be classified as *domestic* or *transnational* depending on the nationality of the key actors involved. Domestic terrorist incidents occur when the main perpetrators, victims, and target audience are all from the same country; otherwise, if any of these three actors differ in nationality the event is deemed transnational (Mickolous et al., 2009; Li and Schaub, 2004).

This study will explore whether the schedule of terrorist acts, domestic and transnational, is deliberately linked with the calendar of electoral politics. There are several strands of research on terrorism and elections that are relevant for developing expectations. Broadly, this research stems from statistical work on terrorist trends, conflict-specific work

on governments and terrorist groups, institutional research on regime type and terrorist activity, research on elections and citizen engagement, and finally research on rally effects and the diversionary use of force. At this point, there is little previous research that directly examines the relation between terrorist timing and elections across both a broad array of democracies and extended periods of time. There are two notable exceptions. In a preliminary study, Aksoy (2010) finds in the European context that proximity to elections increases domestic terrorist attacks among countries with more electoral disproportionality. In a descriptive study, Newman (2013) finds terrorist violence generally (as measured in GTD) increases closer to an election date among a sample of 117 countries between the years 2000 and 2005. Both studies then contribute to the line of research addressed in this study, but the first study is geographically bounded while the second study focuses on a very short period of time, without simultaneously controlling for background country characteristics.

2.1. Trends in terrorist event series

To begin with, the research on trends of terrorist events has suggested the presence of cycles when examining aggregate series. More specifically, Enders and Sandler (1993, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2005) have examined in depth long-term trends in transnational terrorist events using time series techniques with the popular ITERATE data set. Their spectral analyses reveal that terrorist events with casualties display cycles between 4 and 5 years long (Enders and Sandler, 2000). That is, this is the period (or primary frequency) that most explains the variance of the series after de-trending. Secondary cycles are close to 2 years. As Enders and Sandler (2000) conjecture the cycles might be explained through various mechanisms of contagion, world political events, and swings in public opinion, including those related to electoral calendars. Thus, global trend analyses of transnational terrorism have identified some periodicities and terrorists' strategic attention to election times may be contributing to them.

2.2. Conflict-specific research

Plenty of conflict-specific research and game-theoretic work has addressed the calculated interplay between governments and terrorist groups (for early work see, Lapan and Sandler, 1988; Sandler et al., 1983), often finding that the activities of terrorist groups are highly responsive to the existing political context (Bueno de Mesquita, 2005, 2007; Clauset et al., 2010; Enders and Sandler, 1993, 2005; Gassebner et al., 2008; Gould and Klor, 2010; Hoffman, 2006; Kydd and Walter, 2002; Pape, 2003). Two cases of long-standing struggles with terrorism, those of Israel and Spain, have motivated much of this work.

In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Berrebi and Klor (2006, 2008) find that terrorist activity levels vary depending on the party in power (e.g., more events when the left-wing party is in power) and in turn they influence the electorate's support for a given party. Clauset et al. (2010) find that Palestinian groups' strategies, including violent attacks, are very sensitive to existing political

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1051794>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1051794>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)