

Counterterrorism: the State of Scholarship, Directions for Future Data Collection and Analysis

By Mariya Y. Omelicheva

The prominence of counterterrorism analyses in the context of the broader scholarship on terrorism has increased recently as a result of the growing recognition of the inseparable nexus of terrorism and counterterrorism. Terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid, and London also triggered exceptional academic interest in the topic of states' responses to terrorism. A bulk of this research has been predominantly descriptive and exploratory in character with the case studies of a handful of established democracies dominating the field. The scholarship of this type has provided invaluable knowledge about individual governments' experiences with combating terrorism and advanced our understanding of the discrete and specific factors affecting counterterrorism policies. Yet, if we aim to understand the general explanatory power of various influences on states' responses to terrorism and make valid predictions and prescriptions for the future behavior; it is necessary to compare states' counterterrorism measures across time and space. Regrettably, the number of studies based on the systematic empirical analyses aimed at accounting for differences and similarities in a broad range of counterterrorism policies across multiple cases have been disappointingly limited.

What has inhibited explanatory research in the area of counterterrorism is insufficient conceptual work. The shortage of data suitable for cross-sectional longitudinal studies of states' responses to terrorism has also decelerated the advancement of knowledge. Several organizations now maintain global and regional databases on terrorist incidents. There are, however, no datasets containing information on different aspects of states' counterterrorism programs. While the quantity of information collected on the counterterrorism efforts by various states' agencies has significantly increased, the conceptual cacophony in the field and the lack of defined theoretical frameworks has hampered the utilization of this data for systematic comparative analyses.

The goal of this essay is to prompt conversation among all interested scholars on the meaning and theory of counterterrorism and invite practical steps toward the development of a databank of states' counterterrorism responses. This essay proposes a simple, yet, comprehensive conceptualization of counterterrorism developed for the purpose of comparative analysis of states' responses to terrorism. It also suggests a pertinent methodology – event data collection techniques – for systematic collection and analysis of data on different aspects of counterterrorism.

Conceptualizing Counterterrorism

The conceptualization of counterterrorism has been complicated by the elusiveness and variability of the empirical phenomenon it seeks to describe. In practice, counterterrorism is not well-defined. In its broadest and fullest sense, counterterrorism spans across numerous policy areas. It is carried out by almost every governmental agency, not only those authorized with law-enforcement, intelligence, and defense functions.

Counterterrorism measures do not stop at states' borders. As the threat of terrorism blurs the boundaries between internal and international security, the concept of counterterrorism also blurs the distinction between foreign and domestic policy dimensions. As a result of this multiplicity of measures and actors involved in combating terrorism, many analysts sidestep conceptualizing what counterterrorism means in favor of describing some of the empirical manifestations of the concept. However, a definition of the respective conceptual requirements for counterterrorism is a prerequisite to a methodical examination of governments' responses.

In the abstract, counterterrorism can be thought of as a mix of public and foreign policies designed to limit the actions of terrorist groups and individuals associated with terrorist organizations in an attempt to protect the general public from terrorist violence. As a type of policy, counterterrorism encompasses a range of actions (e.g., freezing financial assets of terrorist organizations), specific decisions (e.g., a decision to join international treaties aimed at addressing different aspects of terrorism), general guidelines (such as provisions allowing for the use of military forces on the territory of other states), observable behaviors of states (e.g., police raids on possible terrorist sites), and verbal pronouncements of policy makers (e.g., promises of military and economic aid to other states struggling with terrorism).

The literature on counterterrorism has spawned a number of typologies designed to organize a wide range of states' responses to terrorism within classificatory schemes. It has been common, for example, to classify states as "soft-" or "hard-liners" citing diplomacy, negotiation, intelligence analysis, and social reform as examples of the "soft" approach, and the use of military forces, legal-repressive means, and economic sanctions as instances of the "hard-line" strategy.[1] Another typology classifies states' counterterrorism policies into the "criminal justice" and "war" modes. In the former, police is accorded the primary responsibility to struggle with terrorism under the strict observance of the rule of law, whereas in the latter model military is afforded all means to subdue terrorist actions.[2]

Despite their general usefulness, these and similar classifications of counterterrorism are suboptimal for the analysis of a wide range of counterterrorism policy choices. Dichotomizing multiple counterterrorism measures conceals important variations and dimensionality of counterterrorism policies. The existing typologies do not take into account the international realm of policy responses and are not well-attuned to current political, legislative, institutional, preventive, and punitive practices of counterterrorism. In addition, the existing classifications have been developed and applied for analyses of counterterrorism policies in democratic states, where commitment to human rights principles is considered to be intrinsic to any approach to terrorism.

In studies of counterterrorism, two dimensions of counterterrorism policies, namely, the *scope* and *brutality* of states' responses to terrorism are particularly useful for analysis. The two dimensions embrace all commonly used counterterrorism typologies and reflect a wide range of measures that can be adopted by states and international organizations to preempt, disrupt, or destroy terrorists and their support networks. The scope and brutality

dimensions are also conducive to studying the effectiveness of counterterrorism policies and their impact on human rights.

The scope dimension indicates the breadth of counterterrorism measures and is accounted for by a number of counterterrorism actions that a state undertakes in different areas of public and foreign policy. To identify and categorize responses that can be observed on the scope dimension of counterterrorism, this study relied on the framework for international and national counterterrorism measures developed under the auspices of the United Nations and formalized in the UN Security Council Resolution 1269 (1999) and Resolution 1373 (2001). The *brutality* dimension epitomizes the breaches of individuals' rights that often occur in states' counterterrorism practices.[3] It refers to the extent to which a state is willing to breach its commitment to non-derogatory human rights in the name of combating terrorism and is accounted for by the number of extrajudicial killings, instances of torture and physical abuse, unlawful detentions, trials, and disappearances of the suspects of terrorism. A complete classificatory framework, as well as a coding scheme for the scope and brutality of governments' counterterrorism measures, can be found [here](#).

Collecting Data on Counterterrorism

Currently, there are no datasets on states' counterterrorism policies that can be used for cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. This essay suggests using *event data* collection techniques for generating data on governments' responses to terrorism. This method of data acquisition converts verbal and physical actions of states conveyed in the language of reports into specific codes. The latter, then, can be used for a systematic analysis of the reported activities of states.[4]

The majority of efforts aimed at the systematic analysis of international and domestic activities of states take the form of the examination of events (i.e. verbal and physical actions recorded in various sources). Event data provides one of the closest approximations of states' political activity consisting, mostly, of discrete actions and communications directed from one actor to another over time.[5] The open press and other types of systematic reports describe states' political activity, while researchers study states' behavior by reading these reports and assigning to the observed activities nominal or ordinal codes.[6] The largest data sets of international and domestic behavior – The Behavioral Correlates of War, MAR – the Minorities at Risk, WEIS - the World Events Interaction Survey, and others - were created through the systematic computer or human-coding of events.

Any event - a policy decision, action, or verbal pronouncement - can be described in a natural language sentence containing an actor or a set of actors as its subject and object, and a set of actions as its verb.[7] News reports and other accounts of political activities contain such descriptions of events in the form of "who" did "what" to "whom," "when," and "why". These descriptions can be converted into data sets by recording the dates of events and assigning codes to actors, targets, and the types of events. For instance, in the following headline, "Russian Duma to Consider Bill on Fighting Terrorism" (TASS Jun

19, 1998) the source of action is Russia represented by its legislative body; the target of action is World; and the type of action is intent to pass legislation. This description of the event can be converted into the event data record:

980611 RUS WORLD 031

where the six-digit number is a date of the event, RUS is the source of action, WORLD is the target, and 031 is the event code. The mapping of event codes onto the descriptions of events is completed through a process of content analysis of leading sentences, paragraphs, or full reports. This content analysis can be performed by human coders or specialized software on the basis of a coding scheme that identifies political actors and specifies various types of events representing a range of states' counterterrorism responses.

An outcome of the event data collection is an event dataset composed of a long string of records consisting of numbers and codes representing dates of events, sources and targets of action, and types of events. In this form, an event dataset is unsuitable for statistical or graphical examination. Before event data can be displayed graphically or analyzed by standard statistical software, it must be aggregated or scaled. To avoid the loss of validity and information due to aggregation, the aggregation rules must closely correspond to the concepts describing empirical phenomena of interest. The concept of the *scope* of counterterrorism denotes how widely a state's counterterrorism measures spread across different areas of public and foreign policy, or, how diverse or concentrated the state's responses to terrorism are within any particular realm of policy responses (e.g., security sweeps, target hardening, or legislative work). The rules for calculating the *diffusion index* closely approximate the conceptual meaning of the *scope* of counterterrorism. The diffusion index, which originates in econometrics, is designed to measure concentration and diversification of the market. Diffusion is the inverse of concentration calculated by squaring the market-share of each of the firms operating in the market, and then adding up those squares.[8] The higher values on the diffusion index denote greater diversification, whereas the lower values stand for more concentration.

To obtain a measure of the scope of counterterrorism responses one should calculate a diffusion index D calculated by taking an inverse of a sum of the shares (%) of each type of counterterrorism responses within the total number of events recorded for a given state per year. The diffusion index D is, then, multiplied by a total number of events carried out by a state in a given year.

The scores on the scope dimension of counterterrorism responses were calculated using these aggregation rules. The received measures reflect the number of policy areas in which a state adopts counterterrorism measures, the relative amount of actions undertaken in those policy areas, as well as the amount of counterterrorism actions relative to other states included into the analysis. The measures of the scope can be used for testing the effectiveness of various types of counterterrorism policies, as well as for ferreting out factors that steer governments toward the adoption of certain kinds of responses to terrorism.

The purpose of this essay is to suggest an expedient way to think about and study states' responses to terrorism as a way to underscore the importance of better conceptualization and data collection techniques in the area of counterterrorism studies. The essay also aims at encouraging the development of datasets suitable for a wide range of comparative and longitudinal analyses of various aspects of states' counterterrorism programs. Critical reflections and feedback are invited on the proposed classificatory schemes of state's counterterrorism policies. The author also welcomes advice and collaboration on the process of moving the data-gathering efforts on counterterrorism to automated machine coding.

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[1] Miyaoka, T. 1998. "Terrorist Crisis Management in Japan: Historical Development and Changing Response (1979-1997)." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 10: 23-53; Wilkinson, P. 1986. "Terrorism: International Dimensions." In *The New Terrorism*, ed. William Gutteridge. London: Mansell.

[2] Crelinsten, R.D. 1989. "Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism and Democracy: The Assessment of National Security Threats." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 1 (2): 242-69. See also Chalk, P. 1994. "EU Counter-Terrorism, the Maastricht Third Pillar and Liberal Democratic Acceptability." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6 (2): 103-45; Pedahzur, A., and M. Ranstorp. 2001. "A Tertiary Model for Countering Terrorism in Liberal Democracies: The Case of Israel." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13: 1-27.

[3] UN OHCHR. 2003. *Digest of Jurisprudence of the UN and Regional Organizations on the Protection of Human Rights While Countering Terrorism*. <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/2/digest.doc>.

[4] Burgess, P. M., and R.W. Lawton. 1972. *Indicators of International Behavior: An Assessment of Events Data Research*. Beverly Hills: Sage. For an extensive discussion of event data see Schrodtt, P. and D.J. Gerner. 2000. *Analyzing International Event Data: A Handbook of Computer-Based Techniques*. Unpublished Manuscript. October 30. http://web.ku.edu/keds/papers_dir/automated.html.

[5] Schrodtt and Gerner 2000, Ch.1, p.39

[6] Schrodtt and Gerner 2000, Ch1, p.1

[7] Schrodtt and Gerner 2000, Ch.1, p. 4

[8] Foldvary, F.E. 2001. "The Measurement of Inequality, Concentration, and Diversification." *Journal of Interesting Economics*. <http://www.daviddfriedman.com/JIE/jie.htm>.