Introducing Government Actions in Terror Environments (GATE) Dataset

Laura Dugan

Erica Chenoweth

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Abstract

Much effort has been exerted to develop terrorist incident databases that capture details of terrorist attacks across the globe. With these data, scholars and policy experts can observe patterns of attacks across regions, by specific terrorist organizations, and over time. Further, such data allow us to assess the relationship between possible causal factors, such as political climate and economy on the inception and rise of terrorist violence. These databases also allow us to assess the effectiveness of government interventions on reducing terrorism. Consequently, quantitative analysis of terrorism has grown substantially over recent years. Yet, when we raise the question of what does and does not work to reduce terrorist violence, we are limited to only those interventions that are explicitly publicized as counterterrorism. Missing from analysis are government actions that fall outside the purview of counterterrorism, yet plausibly affect terrorist violence either directly through the organizations or indirectly through their constituencies. This paper introduces a new way to collect data on what governments do and presents descriptive accounts of conciliatory and repressive actions by governments relative to terrorist attacks in several countries. We also present an overview of findings that assesses the effects of conciliatory and repressive actions that are targeted both discriminately and indiscriminately on terrorist violence.

Introduction

When conceptualizing counterterrorism, we naturally think of large-scale military operations that aggressively target terrorist operatives. Such actions align with US President Reagan's 1981 proclamation "Let terrorists beware that when rules of international behavior are violated, our policy will be one of swift and effective retribution." Indeed, later US presidents followed through on Reagan's threat by bombing Iraq's military intelligence headquarters in 1983, attacking Afghanistan and Sudan with missiles in 1998, and leading wars in Afghanistan and Iraq since the early 2000s. Retribution follows a basic tenet of the US criminal justice system that severe punishment will deter law breaking, which appeals broadly to both policy makers and the public (Beccaria [1764] 1983). It assumes that human beings—even terrorists—are rational, self-interested actors who seek to minimize personal cost while maximizing personal gain (Ross and LaFree 1986; Paternoster 1987).

The appeal of conceptualizing counterterrorism as aggressive responses to terrorism is unsurprising, especially after unprecedented attacks like those on September 11th in the US, and the more recent atrocities by ISIS in the Middle East and Europe. People want revenge and will generally support retaliation in the aftermath of an atrocity. President Bush's approval ratings soared when he used phrases like "wanted dead or alive," that the US would "smoke them out," and "bring it on" (CNN 2001; Knowlton 2001; Associated Press 2003). The US public generally supported its military's invasion of Afghanistan that demonstrated resilience and strength while destroying al Qa`ida training camps. Further, the November 13th attacks in Paris has increased momentum for coalitions to stop ISIS through bombing campaigns.

Despite the popularity for retributive counterterrorism, it is unclear that such efforts actually deter terrorism. While al Qa`ida, it has not orchestrated another attack approaching the magnitude of 9/11 since the US decimated its camps, its popularity soared after the US invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq (Moghadam 2008), which has inspired some of the deadliest terrorist groups that are active today, including Boka Haram and al-Shabaab. This suggests that repressive counterterrorism could lead to unexpected backlash. In fact, some have argued that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have undermined US legitimacy because of the perceived low value that seemed to be placed on Afghan and Iraqi lives (Roberts 2002; Scott and Ambler 2007). Others claim that Osama bin Laden's intent behind the 9/11 attacks was to elicit a US response that would kill Muslims and lead to further retaliation (Benjamin and Simon 2005). This sort of "jujitsu" strategy is designed to provoke a harsher response to terrorism than the original attack, increasing grievances against the government and strengthening the loyalty of those following the terrorist organization (McCauley 2006).

Some empirical evidence substantiates the concern that repressive counterterrorism could lead to backlash. Evaluations of counterterrorism efforts in Northern Ireland find that repressive policies by the British government to suppress terrorist activity increased rioting (Peroff and Hewitt 1980; White 1989) and terrorism (LaFree, Dugan, and Korte 2009). Other findings show that despite the immediate success of repression by the Iranian government during the 1979 Islamic revolution of subduing protests, protests later grew more frequent (Rasler 1996). Research by Sharvit et al, (2013) shows increases in Palestinian terrorism after the large scale military operation by Israel, Operation Defensive Shield. Similarly, Argomaniz and Vidal-Diez (2015) found that some

aggressive responses to Basque terrorism by Spain increased the risk of more ETA attacks. This evidence suggests that terrorism can emerge as a response to perceived injustices, such as government repression, that inspire groups to mobilize in retaliation (Brym and Araj 2006; Araj 2008). In other words, despite the political appeal of relying on harsh retaliation to deter terrorism, such efforts could fuel more conflict.

Yet, we still need to punish lawbreakers, even if such actions fail to deter future attacks. Perhaps other efforts beyond repression can effectively reduce terrorism risk. Indeed, governments may have effectively stopped some terrorist attacks through lesser known actions that fall outside the purview of typical counterterrorism (Dugan and Chenoweth 2012). This paper argues that the conceptualization of counterterrorism should be broadened to include other acts by governments that might affect terrorists or their constituencies. By broadening how we think of counterterrorism, we can assess the effectiveness of conciliation, target hardening, and campaigns that affect the civilians that the terrorists purportedly defend.

Of course, in order to assess the effectiveness of government actions, we need data that document what governments do. This paper describes the process of constructing the Government Actions in Terror Environments (GATE) database that chronicles for select countries a broad set of government actions that are relevant to terrorist conflicts (Chenoweth and Dugan 2010; Dugan and Chenoweth 2013). GATE data have been collected beginning in 1988 in Algeria, Canada, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, and Turkey.[1] GATE data are currently being coded for the United States, and data collection has begun for Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and the United Kingdom.

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[1] GATE data for Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, and Turkey currently end in 2004, but are currently being updated to 2012. GATE-Canada is available through 2013.

The original five countries were selected as pilot cases due to their prolonged experience with terrorist violence as well as their inherent interest to the policy community. By combining GATE with data from the Global Terrorism Database, we can assess the impact that a wide range of government responses to terrorism have had on the incidence of terrorist attacks within these countries.

The remainder of this paper delineates the process of collecting GATE data, briefly describes the data for several countries, and presents a sample of findings that assess the effectiveness of different strategies for specific conflicts in a subset of countries.

Collecting GATE

This section outlines six steps used to collecting GATE data. The process begins with a thorough review of the terrorist conflicts in each country, including well-known efforts to control terrorism. We then download news stories from open source databases using broadly defined search terms, and narrow the stories through computer programs so that research assistants can code relevant events.

Step 1: Downloading News Stories Relevant to Specific Country

In order to get the a pool of stories from which we extract and code GATE data, the GATE team either uses the Factiva database to download Reuters news stories or LexisNexis to download stories from a broader set of sources. Search terms either include portions of the country's name (e.g., Israel*) or key words of government actors. Reuters news stories have been used for most countries because of its consistent editorial control and its tendency to use a simpler sentence structure and vocabulary than alternative news sources such as the *Washington Post,* the *New York Times,* or other international wire services (Schrodt and Gerner, 1994). For the original GATE countries, we used simple

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search terms to extract tens of thousands of stories from June 1987 through December 2004. The first date marks the beginning of the Reuters archive, and 2004 was delineated by the original grant. The following search term resulted in the reported number of stories: "Algeria*" 52,575, "Egypt*" 109,694, "Israel*" 243,448, "Leban*" 67,107, "Turk*" 152,998.

For the United States, there was no simple search term that would indicate that the Reuters news story was relevant to the United States or its nationals. However, because GATE-USA actions were restricted to federal actors, we used search strings that listed relevant federal agencies and their leaders since 1987 resulting in 1,980,197 stories.[2] Because of difficulties in downloading Reuters news stories from Factiva, we used LexisNexis to search for stories from fifteen international and Canadian Anglophone news sources using search terms that mentioned Canada, its provinces, or its capitals. This resulted in 14,757,500 stories.

Step 2: Extracting the Lead Sentences from the Stories

For this step, we used a Python program written by Philip Schrodt, the developer of the TABARI software that we later used for Step 3, to extract the lead sentences from the downloaded stories. Using the lead sentence instead of the entire article is surprisingly accurate and considerably more efficient (Schrodt, 2006). Further, the deeper the text reader goes into an article, the more noise it picks up, reporting inaccuracies. In essence,

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[2] These include National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), National Security Agency (NSA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), President, Department of State, Department of Treasury, Department of Defense, Department of Justice, Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, Executive office of the President, Senate Committee on Terrorism and Homeland Security, and Senate Committee on Crime and Terrorism.

the lead sentence reports the event, and the remaining article elaborates on the details of the event, including back-stories of earlier relevant events.

Once the lead sentences were extracted, they were saved in a text file that is used in the next step.

Step 3: Extracting Politically Relevant Stories and Coding Key Elements

This step was conducted using Textual Analysis by Augmented Replacement Instructions (TABARI), which searches the lead sentences and identifies observations that match the criteria of an extensive set of dictionaries designed to capture international and domestic activity (Schrodt, 2006). We used dictionaries that listed nouns, verbs, and formal names and positions of persons from around the globe, focusing especially on persons relevant to terrorism in the specific countries. We supplemented the TABARI team's dictionaries from names extracted from the GTD and other sources. Since TABARI is an automated text-coding program, it also coded the lead sentences based on verb and noun pattern recognition, resulting in codes for each actor, action, and target of the action. We also attached a unique identifier, the date, and lead sentence to each observation.[3]

Step 4: Filtering Stories to "Only" Include those that Match GATE Criteria

GATE events include any action by the government actors that are directed toward terrorist organizations that threaten the country or the terrorists' constituencies. For countries where the terrorist constituency is discernable by an ethnic or religious identity (e.g., Palestinian, Kurdish) TABARI codes simplified this process. However, for countries like Canada and the US, relevant constituencies share codes with other

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[3] Because LexisNexis used many sources without unique identifiers, unique identifiers were added later.

civilians. Further, instead of having one or two major terrorist threats, Canada and the United States have been targeted by a diverse range of smaller movements including environmentalist or animal rights extremists, anti-abortionists, right-wing extremists, and al Qa`ida inspired groups making it more difficult to identify relevant actions.

For this reason, we used code to removed Canadian and US stories that were clearly irrelevant to the GATE criteria. These include stories where both the actor and target were government entities, and where other nationalities were represented. However, regardless of the nationality, all targets that are coded as terrorist organizations were kept. Finally, because the US involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been cited as a grievance source for Islamic extremists who target the US, and because we have already downloaded the lead sentences for Israel, we merged into these data, all Israeli-Palestinian stories with United States involvement. After this filtering process, anywhere from 3,000 to 138,000 stories remained for human coding. This number is especially high for Canada given the broad range of original sources.

Step 5: Reviewing Cases by Hand

A set of consistent coding rules were constructed for all GATE countries, with supplemental tasks giving to Canadian and US coders to identify the constituency of the different terrorist threats and the relevant location of the action. Also, because Canada and the US had the largest number of irrelevant stories (for reasons described in step 4), research assistants first reviewed the stories for relevance, marking those that were clearly irrelevant for removal.

During the filtering process above, we also used the verbs identified by TABARI to autocode a scale that delineates where the act falls on a scale from conciliation to

repression shown in Table 1. The scale features distinctions in the intensity of the action as well as its relative placement of the action on a conciliation-repression spectrum, similar to the Goldstein scale (1992). Research assistants evaluated this code for accuracy. Actions were also autocoded for and reviewed for whether the event was directed toward a discriminate or indiscriminate target based on the nature of the verb pattern. Discriminate actions are those that attempt to single out "guilty" or "suspected" parties from uninvolved parties (e.g., made an arrest). Indiscriminate actions are those that directly affect uninvolved people (i.e. those that are not suspected of involvement in terrorist activity; e.g., raided a town). Finally, actions were coded for whether they were material or nonmaterial. Material actions are those that involve physical contact between state and nonstate actors, whereas nonmaterial actions are not physical (i.e. they are typically verbal actions, such as a decision or a sentencing).

Table 1. Seven-Point Guide for the Conciliatory-Repression Scale

1=accommodation
- appeasing or surrendering to adversary
- making full concessions according to opponent's demands
- action required

2=conciliatory action
- making material concessions
- taking action that signals intention to cooperate or negotiate with opponent

3=conciliatory statement or intentions
- expressing intention to cooperate or showing support
- verbal expression short of physical action

4=neutral OR ambiguous
- no clear moves toward or away from resolution of conflict
- includes all attempts to ask for help from a third party to resolve the conflict
- requires more context to determine whether it is conciliatory or repressive
- includes all infighting over Palestinians within the Israeli government

5=verbal conflict
- express intent to engage in conflict or threaten
- decline to cease ongoing conflict; maintain the status quo during conflict

- short of physical action

6=physical conflict
- physical or violent action aimed at coercing opponent
- no apparent intention to kill

7=extreme deadly repression
- physical action exhibiting intent to kill
- torture or severe violence (such as severe beatings), which could easily kill someone


Step 6: Cleaning the Final GATE Dataset

After coding, the principal investigators cleaned the final data by 1) reviewing all cases marked for removal,[4] 2) reviewing all cases that were flagged for review, 3) review all stories that were marked as including multiple actions, 4) review and removed all stories that were marked as duplicates, and 5) looking up the original stories for those that were marked as missing relevant information needed to complete the coding.

Describing GATE Data

This section provides a brief description of key variables found in the complted GATE countries. Figure 1 shows the number of government actions relevant to terrorism for each of the five Middle Eastern countries in GATE for the years 1988 through 2004. As we can see, Israel initiated more than three times the number of actions that Turkey initiated; and the other three countries initiated fewer than 1,000 reported actions over the seventeen year period cover by the data. Despite the large differences across these countries, we point out that the documented 307 actions by the Lebanese government are still more than what has been previously available for a single country.

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[4] For the US and Canada the review of removals was only used for a subset of cases.
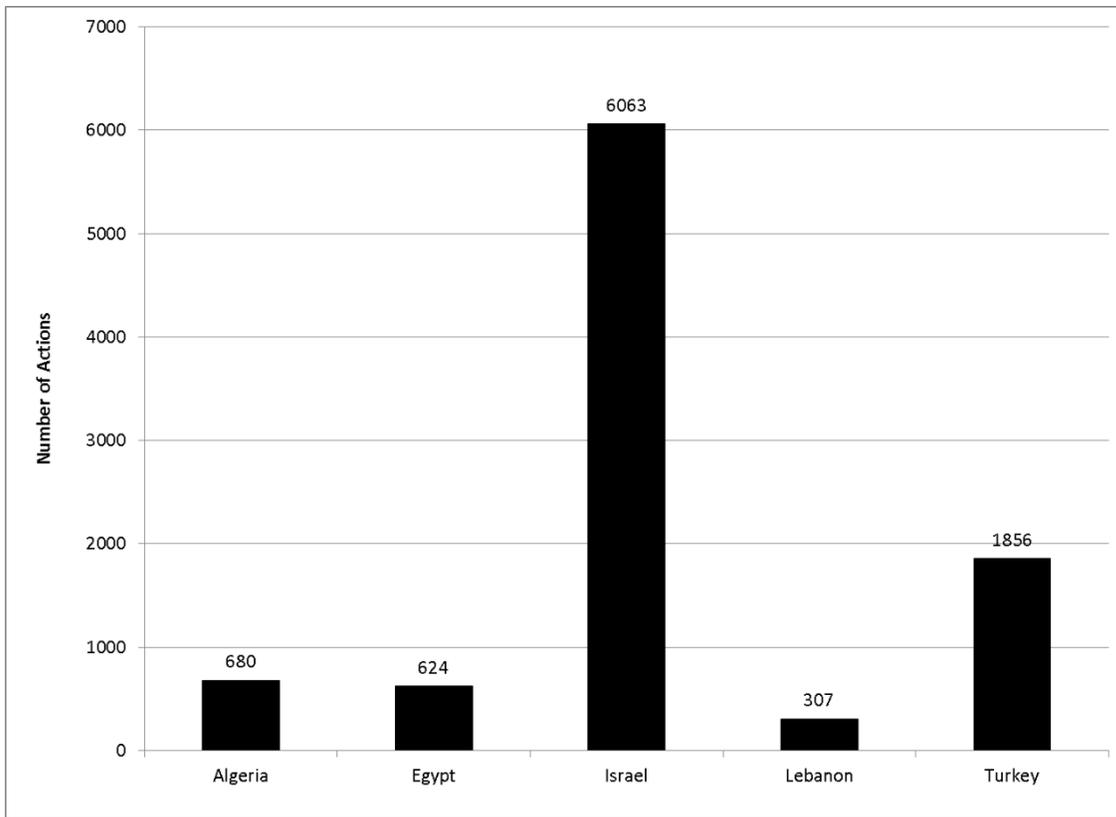
Figure 1. Total Number of Government Actions by Country, 1988-2004

GATE-Canada is excluded from this figure because its years range from 1985 to 2013. It includes 7,612 actions. We expect that GATE-USA will be much larger than the others as there are already more than 6,000 GATE actions during the Clinton administration alone.

We now look within the government actions and examine the percent distributions based on the type of actions across several dimensions: repressive vs. conciliatory, discriminate vs. indiscriminate, material vs. nonmaterial, and by the type of actor. Table 2 presents the percent of actions that fall into each category. Actions are marked as conciliatory when their code in the Conciliatory-Repressive Scale (in Table 1) is marked as 1, 2, or 3. Conversely, actions are marked as repressive when their code is marked as 5, 6, or 7. When considering the percent of discriminate cases versus indiscriminate and

material versus nonmaterial, we only present the percent discriminate and material

because each only has two possible outcomes (i.e., percent indiscriminate = 100 – percent

discriminate). We include both the percent repressive and conciliatory because a subset

of cases are considered neutral (item 4 in table 1), making the summation of the percent

repressive and the percent conciliatory less than 100.

Table 2. Percentage of Government Actions that Fall into each Category

	Algeria	Canada	Egypt	Israel	Lebanon	Turkey
Repressive	82	59	90	63	72	76
Conciliatory	14	41	9	28	17	9
Discriminate	55	37	66	22	48	62
Material	70	26	84	64	54	69
Political Actor	30	68	22	45	48	33
Military Actor	47	12	13	46	31	41
Police Actor	9	8	51	4	5	11
Judiciary Actor	14	12	15	4	15	14

When we examine the percent of actions that are repressive and conciliatory, we

notice two things. First, all six countries are more likely to resort to repressive actions

than conciliatory actions, ranging from 59% to 90%. Also apparent is that Egypt is much

more likely to rely on repressive tactics than the other countries, whereas Canada and

Israel appear to be more open to trying conciliatory tactics. This may be due to the nature

of the conflicts in each country. Canada has no primary terrorist conflict, and the primary

conflict in Israel is with Palestinian terrorist organizations, which have a large civilian

constituency. These figures suggest that Canada and Israel may have made explicit

efforts to accommodate the needs of the aggrieved. In contrast, in Egypt the primary

terrorist activity occurred in the mid-1990s, when a variety of Islamist groups launched

an internal war against Hosni Mubarak's regime. These acts were accompanied by

massive increases in repression, while conciliatory acts remained virtually nonexistent.

Indeed, when they did occur, conciliatory acts generally consisted of prisoner releases of accused Islamists or members of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, the Egyptian regime and Egyptian terrorists generally met violence with violence during this period of high conflict.

When we consider the distribution of discriminate actions across countries, some interesting differences emerge. Here, Israel and Egypt mark the endpoints on the range, with Israel having the fewest relative discriminatory acts (22%) and Egypt having the most (66%). The low percentage of discriminate actions by the Israeli government suggests that it did not distinguish between Palestinian civilians and Palestinian terrorists. In contrast, Algeria, Turkey and Egypt seemed to target their actions toward specific suspects without involving innocent civilians. The distribution of material actions ranges from 26% in Canada to 84% in Egypt. In fact, Canada is the only country less that is more likely to make intangible gestures over tangible actions. This is likely because a large portion of the Canadian actions are related to setting policy that might appease or enrage the constituencies of extremists. In contrast, the large percentage of material actions in Egypt suggest that it is the most aggressive of the GATE countries.

Finally, when we consider the primary actors of the government actions we see that Egypt once again stands out. For the other five countries, either the military or politicians implemented around 80% of the actions. In Egypt, nearly 60% of terrorist relevant actions are perpetrated by police. This makes sense in the Egyptian system, because the 500,000-strong police force was the primary body charged with maintaining internal security under Hosni Mubarak. In Israel, Turkey, and Algeria, the military represented the plurality of actions, with politicians following close behind. In Canada and Lebanon

this trend is reversed: politicians claimed the most actions, with the military following close behind.

We now compare conciliatory and repressive actions to terrorist attacks in Israel and Turkey in Figure 2. This figure presents two bar graphs (a. Israel and b. Turkey) that depict repressive actions with the black bars and conciliatory actions in the gray bars; both are measured by the scale for government actions on the left side of the graph. Terror attacks are shown by the solid black line; and its scale is shown in the right axis of each graph. These countries were selected for brevity, as the other comparisons are available upon request.
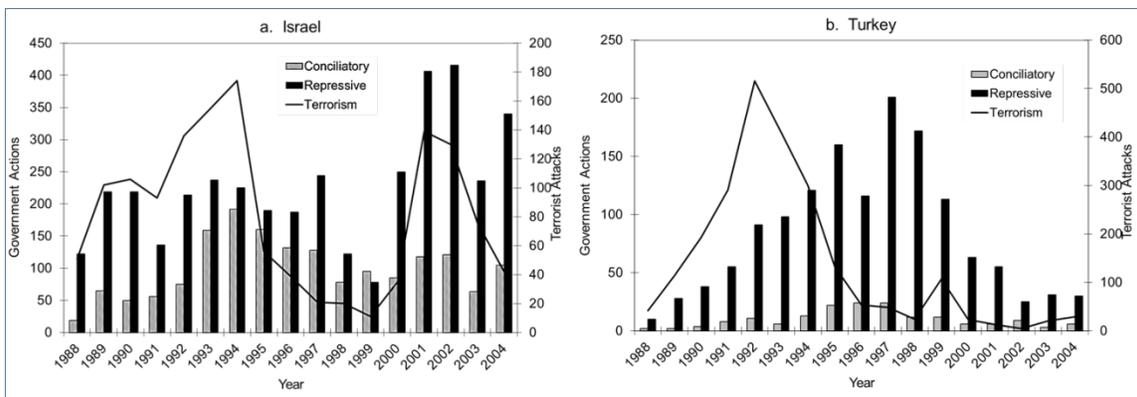

Figure 2. Conciliatory and Repressive Government Actions and Terrorist Attacks in Israel and Turkey, 1988 through 2004

Turning first to the Israeli case shown on the left (a. Israel) of this figure, we see that that during the First Intifada in Israel (1987-1993), the Israeli government employed persistent repressive action, which it later combined with conciliatory action culminating in the Oslo accords (September 1993). It seems that terrorist violence dropped when both types of actions were being taken. During the Second Intifada (2000-2005), the Israeli government acted with a record high frequency of repressive actions. In fact, when we look closer to the types of actions during that period, we discover that most actions were

extremely repressive with the intent to kill (scale 7). While this figure does not tell us whether governments must use repression to stop terrorism, it does suggest that less repressive means, as were used during the First Intifada, might also be promising in reducing terror attacks.

Assessing Effectiveness using GATE Data

Dugan and Chenoweth (2012) use GATE-Israel data to assess the effectiveness of discriminate and indiscriminate conciliatory and repressive actions by Israel directed toward Palestinians. That paper uses Generalized Additive Models (GAM) and Negative binomial regressions to estimate the effects of government actions in one month on Palestinian terrorist attacks during the following month. The key findings are that when significant, repression is associated with more terrorism (backlash) and conciliation is associated with less terrorism. This findings is especially strong when the actions are indiscriminate and during the Second Intifada. Figure 3 presents the GAM models for conciliatory and repressive indiscriminate actions during the Second Intifada.
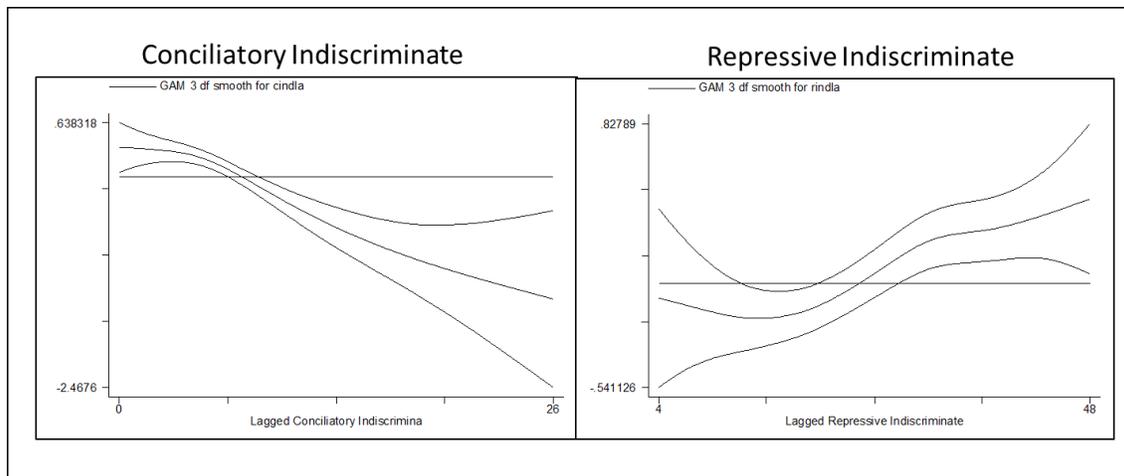
Figure 3. Effects of Israeli Actions on Palestinian Terrorism during the Second Intifada

Preliminary findings of GATE data for other countries have shown similar results. For the remaining Middle Eastern countries, repression is either ineffective, or associated with more terrorism; and conciliation is either ineffective or associated with less terrorism. More nuanced analysis from Canada and the United States suggests that different constituencies respond differently to conciliation and repression. A preliminary analysis of actions relevant to rightwing constituencies in the United States during the Clinton years suggests that discriminate repression (i.e., deterrence) is effective in reducing terrorism, while indiscriminate conciliation is associated with more terrorist and extremist violence. Analysis of Canadian GATE data suggests that al Qa`ida inspired extremism was very sensitive to actions by the Canadian Military in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

This paper has two important purposes. First it urges readers to reconsider conceptualizing counterterrorism to include more nuanced behavior by governments that could elicit a reaction from terrorist organizations or their constituencies. By expanding how we construct counterterrorism, we are better able to develop insight into what works and what does not work in different contexts. As the findings from the US show, deterrence might work in specific circumstances, even if it often fuels conflict elsewhere.

The second purpose of this paper is to introduce the GATE data collection. While this process requires many resources, the findings thus far demonstrate the importance of continued efforts. We are currently working with programmers to develop less burdensome strategies to collect GATE data and expect to be able to produce findings more quickly.

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