

WORKING PAPERS

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FISIP UNIVERSITAS ATMA JAYA
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“NEW TERRORISM” = HIGHER BRUTALITY ? AN EMPIRICAL TEST OF THE “BRUTALIZATION THESIS”

Sebastian Jäckle and Marcel Baumann

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TENTANG LABORATORIUM SOSIOLOGI

Laboratorium sosiologi, Program studi Sosiologi, Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta didirikan pada tahun 1998. Letupan gagasan yang mendasarinya adalah kegiatan untuk menerapkan teori dalam mewujudkan kerja-kerja praktikum penelitian.

Seiring dengan dinamika dan perkembangan aktivitas, Laboratorium sosiologi pun semakin menemukan posisi institusional dan fokus kegiatan. Secara institusional, Laboratorium Sosiologi adalah organisasi dibawah program studi Sosiologi, yaitu proses belajar mengajar, penelitian dan pengabdian. Penerjemahan pihak ketiga fungsi tersebut adalah kerja kerja seperti pengumpulan data, praktikum penelitian pemnuatan film dokumenter, diskusi bulanan, seminar dan penerbitan. Secara khusus, sebagai bentuk pengatuan dan pendalaman akan aktivitas pengabdian, laboratorium sosiologi selalu mengedepankan kerja jejaring.

Dengan demikian, tak berlebihan kiranya jika keberadaan pengembangan sosiologi, baik ilmu maupun institusi.

"NEW TERRORISM"= HIGHER BRUTALITY? AN EMPIRICAL TEST OF THE "BRUTALIZATION THESIS"

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Abstract

This article focuses on the so-called "brutalization" of terrorism. The brutalization thesis as part of the larger theoretical concept of "new terrorism" argues that "new terrorism" is more brutal than "old terrorism." Many scholars claim that the 9/11 attacks mark the beginning of a new era of terrorism that has lifted international as well as domestic terrorism to a new level of violent brutality. Others argue that this process had already started in the early 1990s. After discussing possible ways to operationalize a brutalization of terrorism, for example focusing on suicide bombings or terrorist attacks against soft targets, this article tests the empirical credibility of the brutalization thesis regarding both potential starting points. Data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) shows that only three out of nine indicators increased significantly during the 1990s, partially backing the idea of a general brutalization, whereas increasing numbers of suicide attacks and beheadings after 9/11 support the notion of a qualitative change in terrorism and its brutality connected with the idea of maximizing media and public attention. Yet, these developments are regionally limited and the brutality of this "new terrorism" exceeds the levels known from the zenith of "old terrorism" in the 1970s and 1980s in only a few cases.

Keywords: Beheadings; brutalization; Global Terrorism Database (GTD); new terrorism; soft targets; suicide attacks

Introduction

Terrorism has always been brutal. There is no way of denying that. Yet, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, questions arose as to whether a new form of terrorism had developed that had shifted to a new level of violent brutality. Quickly afterwards, the thesis of an increasing terrorist brutality became a significant part of a broader theoretical concept, which is usually summed up by the term "new terrorism." The concept of "new terrorism" is constructed around four main propositions:¹

- (1) Whereas "old terrorism" was rooted in local political struggles, "new terrorism" is motivated on religious grounds.
- (2) On an operational level, terrorist organizations that are associated with the term "new terrorism," for example Al-Qaeda, are structured in the form of horizontal networks. By contrast, "old terrorism" was organized hierarchically.
- (3) New terrorist organizations are willing to use biological, chemical, or even nuclear weapons of mass destruction—and to a large degree they have the capacities of doing so.
- (4) "New terrorism" is much more violent and brutal than old terrorism. We call this the "brutalization thesis" of "new terrorism."

This article focuses on the last proposition of the new terrorism argument: the brutalization thesis. Our central aim is to empirically analyze its credibility. Moreover, we add a temporal component to the general brutalization question and ask—assuming we detect any signs of brutalization at all—when exactly this period of high brutality began. We concentrate on two potential starting points

¹ Ersun N. Kurtulus, "The 'New Terrorism' and Its Critics," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 6 (2011): 476–500.

students of terrorism have been discussing. Following Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, some regard the early to mid-1990s² as the beginning of this era of new and more brutal terrorism, while others see the 9/11 attacks as the point when the brutality level of terrorism shifted to another quality.

In order to answer these questions, this paper will take a two-step approach. We first discuss different methods and ways to operationalize the term "brutality" of terrorism. Secondly, we analyze empirical data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) in light of these operationalizations.³ Doing so enables us to show whether there has been a significant brutalization of terrorism in the last 15–20 years—or not. Our quantitative approach does not require us to engage in the general debate surrounding the thesis of "new terrorism" in a normative sense. Our analysis rather focuses exclusively on one specific proposition of the concept of "new terrorism"—namely the brutalization thesis. Such an approach differs from a large part of the state of the art. Most researchers either argue in favor of or against the thesis of "new terrorism." Indeed, most of these research projects are explicitly theory-guided or of a normative nature. While these approaches created very valuable findings that raised our general understanding of terrorism, they often lack coherent empirical tests of their conclusions. That is the lacuna we wish to fill with this article. We limit the scope of our analysis to an empirical test of the brutalization thesis which has

² Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, "America and the New Terrorism," *Survival* 42, no. 1 (2000): 59–75.

³ The GTD enables a very comprehensive overview of worldwide terrorist activities. During our period of investigation from 1970 to 2011, the dataset lists more than 100,000 cases of terrorist attacks.

been put forward by a number of scholars.⁴

The article is structured as follows: The second section gives an overview of the discussion about the brutalization thesis, which is part of the broader theoretical concept of "new terrorism." The third section elaborates on different ways of understanding and consequently measuring the concept of brutalization of terrorism. We identify nine indicators of brutalization. As indicated above, our aim is not to develop an exclusive and concise definition but to present several strategies to look at brutalization of terrorism from different points of view. In particular, we will put a special emphasis on the distinction between "soft" and "hard" targets. The fourth section describes the GTD. On that basis, we conduct the empirical test of the brutalization thesis in the fifth section. The final section summarizes the results.

A brief research overview: "Old" versus "new terrorism"

The major difficulty of terrorism research seems to be the starting point: defining the core subject, namely the term "terrorism." Easson and Schmid, for example, collected more than 250 different definitions of terrorism.⁵ While this problem of disputed definitions of terms might be a common and general feature of social sciences, the problem becomes extremely severe with respect to the term "terrorism." Many scholars argue that

⁴ On the brutalization thesis, see for example Herfried Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2004), 99ff.; Peter Neumann, *Old and New Terrorism* (Cambridge, England: Polity, 2009); Simon and Benjamin (see note 2 above).

⁵ Joseph J. Easson and Alex P. Schmid, "250-plus Academic, Governmental and Intergovernmental Definitions of Terrorism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*, edited by Alex P. Schmid (London: Routledge, 2011), 99–157.

the term carries (too) much ideological, political, or normative baggage to be defined. We will not take part in these general debates but instead follow a pragmatic approach. We adopt the GTD definition, which is coherent in nature and can be regarded as a widely accepted standard within terrorism research.⁶ Firstly, in order to be defined as a "terrorist act," an incident has to be an "intentional act of violence or threat of violence by a non-state actor."⁷ Secondly, at least two of the following three criteria have to be met, as well:

- (1) "The act must be aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal."
- (2) "There must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) other than the immediate victims."
- (3) "The action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities."⁸

The "definition problem" cannot be evaded either when discussing the thesis of "new terrorism." Many authors use this term to make the claim that a fundamental strategic change in

⁶ For other studies using this definition see, for example: Vani K. Borooah, "Terrorist Incidents in India, 1998–2004: A Quantitative Analysis of Fatality Rates," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21 (2009): 476–98; Walter Enders, Todd Sandler, and Khusrav Gaibullov, "Domestic Versus Transnational Terrorism: Data, Decomposition, and Dynamics," *Journal of Peace Research* 48 (2011): 319–37; Joseph K. Young and Laura Dugan, "Veto Players and Terror," *Journal of Peace Research* 48 (2011): 19–33.

⁷ GTD (Global Terrorism Database) 2013, "Data Collection Methodology," <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/using-gtd/> (accessed May 11, 2013).

⁸ GTD (Global Terrorism Database) 2013, "Codebook. Inclusion Criteria and Variables," <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook.pdf>, 6 (accessed May 11, 2013).

the character of terrorism has happened. More specifically, this means that old terrorism has been a domestic threat—confined to nation-states; while “new terrorism” has developed into a global threat.⁹ Many authors also try to support the thesis of “new terrorism” by analyzing the (allegedly) new quality of terrorist violence, which is in their eyes the key criterion to distinguishing between “old” and “new terrorism.”¹⁰ French philosopher André Glucksmann puts this point in another way:

The “human material” has no value for the terrorists who prove the strength of their convictions and the power of their weapons with the murder of the disarmed, whoever they may be and whatever they may think, whether believers or not.¹¹

Within the logic of this argument, “old terrorism” is characterized by acts of violence within certain ethical limits, i.e., a limited use of violence. Thus, regarding the quality of violence of “old terrorism,” attacks were only carried out against so-called “legitimate targets.” This means that only “representatives” of the hostile state, which is the enemy of the terrorists, may be attacked and killed: policemen, soldiers, or members of the government who are viewed as “legitimate targets” according to the logic of “old terrorism.” Thus, organizations which are associated with “old terrorism” are aware of the *ius in bello* criterion which is an essential part of the so-called just war doctrine. The just war

⁹ Herfried Münkler, *Der Wandel des Krieges. Von der Symmetrie zur Asymmetrie* (Weilerswist:Velbrück, 2006), 234.

¹⁰ See, for example, Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

¹¹ André Glucksmann, “The World of Megaterrorism,” *Wall Street Journal*, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB107964901046859583> (accessed March 21, 2004).

doctrine goes back many centuries (e.g., to Thomas Aquinas), and was applied to the conduct of warfare. Over the centuries, the doctrine has become an integral part of international law. In order for a war to be “just,” it has to be fought over legitimate reasons (*ius ad bellum*) and it has to be fought within certain ethical limitations (*ius in bello*). The central criterion is the strict distinction between combatants and non-combatants: for legitimate warfare, civilian immunity has to be the key ethical principle. Deaths and injuries of the civilian population may only happen accidentally (collateral damage); otherwise this would be a clear violation of the *ius in bello* criterion and could be classified as a war crime. Michael Walzer applies the just war doctrine and its ethical criteria to moral considerations regarding the use of violence by terrorists.¹² On that basis, the thesis of “new terrorism” assumes that organizations associated with “new terrorism” would not adhere to the *ius in bello* criterion. By contrast, “new terrorism” would make unlimited and uncontrolled use of violence with the objective of maximizing “lethal damage”: “New terrorism” does not make any distinctions between civilians and soldiers and, accordingly, between soft and hard targets. This point becomes eminent in the empirical test.

There is a long list of proponents of the thesis of “new terrorism.” Notable authors are, for example, Walter Laqueur, who perceives a “radical change of terrorism,”¹³ Peter Neumann, who traces the beginning of “new terrorism” back to late modernity

¹² Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, [1977] 2000); Michael Walzer, “Terrorism and Just War,” *Philosophia* 34, no. 1 (2006), 3–12.

¹³ Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism—Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

and the effects of globalization,¹⁴ or Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, who made a similar argument in their essay, "America and the New Terrorism," which had already been published in 2000.¹⁵ In this essay, they pointed out that unlimited violence, i.e., violence beyond any ethical limits, alongside religious motivation are the main characteristics of "new terrorism."

However, there is also a long list of researchers rejecting the thesis of "new terrorism." A starting point of these critiques can be seen in a debate in the journal *Survival* on the above-mentioned article by Simon and Benjamin.¹⁶ Some scholars base their criticism on terminological arguments. Accordingly, the label "new" is appropriate only if it is applied to something entirely new, something that has never been there before.¹⁷ Kurtulus, however, points out that this understanding of the adjective "new" would imply that "there can never be anything new in society since the 'new,' as a matter of fact, always has the relics of the old and the old always carries the seeds or the embryonic appearance of the new."¹⁸ Other authors criticize the thesis of "new terrorism" in the context of the 9/11 attacks. For example, Copeland rejects the notion that the 9/11 attacks are

the major "representative" or "symbolic" event constituting the "new terrorism." He argues that the underlying trends are older, and in fact similar in nature to events that happened during the peak times of political terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁹ Tucker, Duyvesteyn, and Field make the case that none of the features that are used to indicate the phenomenon of "new terrorism" are new at all: kidnappings, hijackings, bombings, attacks on civilians, etc.²⁰ Therefore, as these authors argue, we should not speak of a radical change or a revolution of terrorism, but rather look at terrorism as an evolutionary development.²¹ Spencer takes this criticism one step further when he not only deems the distinction between "old" and "new terrorism" an artificial one but also warns that the terminology poses a threat. He thinks that it could allow governments "to justify a whole new set of rushed restrictive governmental countermeasures without these being democratically debated, publicly discussed, independently monitored or even necessary."²²

Authors like Richard Jackson build on this criticism and advocate a critical turn in terrorism research.²³ They established a new

¹⁴ Neumann (see note 4 above).

¹⁵ Simon and Benjamin (see note 2 above).

¹⁶ Olivier Roy, Bruce Hoffman, Steven Simon, and Daniel Benjamin, "America and the New Terrorism: An Exchange," *Survival* 42, no. 2 (2000): 156–72.

¹⁷ For this argumentation see Isabelle Duyvesteyn, "How New Is the New Terrorism?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 5 (2004): 439–54, 450; Anthony Field, "The 'New Terrorism': Revolution or Evolution," *Political Studies Review* 7, no. 2 (2009): 195–207, 200.

¹⁸ Kurtulus (see note 1 above), 481.

¹⁹ Thomas Copeland, "Is the 'New Terrorism' Really New? An Analysis of the New Paradigm for Terrorism," *The Journal of Conflict Studies* 21, no. 2 (2001): 7–27.

²⁰ David Tucker, "What's New About the New Terrorism and How Dangerous Is It?," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 13, no. 3 (2001): 1–14; Duyvesteyn (see note 18 above); Field (see note 17 above).

²¹ Field (see note 17 above), 195.

²² See Alexander Spencer, "Questioning the Concept of 'New Terrorism,'" *Peace, Conflict and Development* 8 (2006): 5. In addition, an exclusive focus on the new terrorism could lead to a neglect of other forms of terrorism: See Spencer, *ibid.*: 33.

²³ Richard Jackson, "The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism

discipline, which is now commonly called Critical Terrorism Studies, in contrast to the so-called traditional terrorism research. Proponents of Critical Terrorism Studies argue that the one-sided focus on 9/11 has created a systematic bias of traditional terrorism research. Thus, Jackson is highly critical of the thesis of "new terrorism," because this thesis was drawn based on such systematic bias. Central to critical terrorism research is the desire for a paradigm shift, namely to dissociate the research agenda from the "9/11 focus." Our analysis partially follows this idea as we empirically test whether 9/11 can really be regarded as a starting point of a new and more brutal form of terrorism or whether this development—if it can be detected at all—already began in the decade prior to the 9/11 attacks.

This brief research overview shows that while during the last 15 years there has been an intense debate about "new terrorism," there still seems to be no consensus. What is obvious, however, is that almost every author who supports the thesis of "new terrorism" tries to coin his or her own terminology for it. Laqueur uses the term "postmodern terrorism,"²⁴ the French philosopher Glucksmann speaks of "mega terrorism,"²⁵ Carter of "catastrophic terrorism,"²⁶ while Sprinzak applies the term "megalomaniac

Studies," *European Political Science* 6, no. 3 (2007): 244–51; Richard Jackson, "Knowledge, Power and Politics in the Study of Political Terrorism," in Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning, eds., *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda* (London: Routledge Chapman & Hall, 2009), 66–84.

²⁴ Walter Laqueur, "Postmodern Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 5 (1996): 24–36.

²⁵ Glucksmann (see note 11 above).

²⁶ Ashton Carter, John Deutch, and Philip Zeliko, "Catastrophic Terrorism: Tackling the New Danger," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 6 (1998): 80–94.

hyperterrorist."²⁷ There seems to be a second obvious point: Most of the research lacks systematically comparable, empirical evidence showing that the supposedly new, catastrophic (mega-) terrorism is more brutal than "old terrorism." This is where our article starts from.

How can brutalization be operationalized?

As indicated in the previous section, we do not advance a specific understanding of brutalization of terrorism, but we present different ways of looking at it and the respective empirical indicators. Each operationalization promotes different emphases. None of them is sufficient in depicting the complete concept of brutalization, but taken together they paint a quite comprehensive picture. We distinguish between nine possible ways to operationalize brutalization:

- (1) more terrorist attacks;
- (2) more fatalities due to terrorist attacks;
- (3) more fatalities per terrorist attack;
- (4) more suicide attacks;
- (5) more terrorist attacks against soft targets;
- (6) more fatalities due to terrorist attacks against soft targets;
- (7) average number of fatalities due to terrorist attacks against soft targets;
- (8) more suicide attacks against soft targets;
- (9) more beheadings.

The first indicator is the absolute number of terrorist attacks. It understands brutalization from the perspective of a society's

²⁷ Ehud Sprinzak, "The Lone Gunmen: The Global War on Terrorism Faces a New Brand of Enemy," *Foreign Policy* 127 (Nov./Dec. 2001): 72–73.

perceived anxiety level. An increasing number of attacks per year leads to a higher level of terroristic threat, which would as a consequence increase feelings of insecurity within the affected population. A high number of terrorist attacks therefore transforms citizens' perceptions of everyday life into a permanent state of fear, which can be regarded as a form of brutalization.

The second indicator is the number of people who are killed by terror attacks each year. Similar to the first indicator, it determines brutalization at the level of society in terms of a scenario of increasing threat. In this regard, it can be seen as brutalization if the hazard of falling victim to a deadly terror attack rises for each citizen alike to a notable magnitude.

The third indicator is the number of deaths per terror attack, which implies a qualitative change in terrorism. This indicator specifies to what extent terror attacks have become more brutal over the years, as they cause more deaths on average. In our analysis we only use data on fatalities. Although a growing number of (heavy) injuries would clearly speak for a brutalization of terrorism as well, we do not employ this indicator due to its poor reliability and the many data gaps the GTD exhibits for injuries caused by terrorist attacks.

The number of suicide attacks is the fourth indicator. It also stands for a qualitative change in terrorism that can be seen as a distinct form of brutalization. Suicide terrorists sacrifice their own lives for a "greater end." This indicator determines brutalization not only from a victim's perspective, but also from the point of view that suicide terrorists are used as tools and therefore exploited by terrorist organizations planning the suicide attacks.

The first four indicators presented above will then be analyzed again, focusing exclusively on the subsample of terrorist attacks

against soft targets. The distinction between soft and hard targets goes back to the *ius in bello* criterion of the just war doctrine, which is based on the central proposition of civilian immunity (see above). We coded non-combatants, civilians, civilian facilities, or infrastructure as soft targets, and the police, the military, and other governmental institutions as hard targets. For all four indicators, higher numbers related to soft targets in comparison to those related to hard targets would indicate a brutalization of terrorism. In other words: If terrorist organizations increasingly break the conventions of legitimate internal warfare, this would indicate a brutalization of terrorism. The seventh indicator, the average number of deaths by attacks against soft targets, can be seen as a measure of the terrorist "efficiency," pointing out the relationship between economic logic (maximum benefit with minimal effort) and the logic of unrestricted warfare (maximum lethality, especially among civilians).

The ninth and final indicator focuses on a specific form of killings that most people regard as particularly shocking and brutal: beheadings. Terrorists cutting off the heads of their victims either when they are still alive or after the actual killing has already taken place (as an extreme form of mutilation and desecration of corpses) want two things. First, they want to present themselves as being highly decisive in pursuing their goals and second, the beheadings shall serve as deterrence and warning for their opponents. Furthermore, this form of willful homicide is often associated with a strict interpretation of Islamic law (e.g., death penalties in Saudi Arabia, which are also executed by decapitation in public places). Therefore, Islamist terrorists could use beheadings to show their religious resoluteness. Since 2014, when ISIS started to publish videos of decapitations, this form of terrorism has received a lot

of media attention. With our dataset ending in 2011, we cannot depict these latest killings, yet we can show whether beheadings have become a popular instrument of terrorism only during the last decades (particularly within Islamist terrorist organizations), or whether decapitations have always been part of terrorist operations.

In the empirical part of the article, we investigate all nine indicators in detail, based on data from the Global Terrorism Database (see next section). Yet, one caveat has to be kept in mind. We can only analyze terrorist acts that are listed in the GTD. This also means that we can only observe what has really happened in terms of terrorism—i.e., actually executed terrorist attacks. It may be the case that increasing budgets for counterterrorism operations after 9/11 (in the U.S. but also in other countries) helped to prevent many terrorist attacks. These “attempted” attacks would otherwise have contributed to an increased brutalization. Yet, it is extremely difficult to assess the effectiveness of counterterrorism operations. Increasing budgets alone cannot exactly tell how many lives these extra dollars have saved. For the United States, there are several authors questioning the very high government spending on anti-terrorism operations (about 16 billion U.S. dollars annually)²⁸ as being disproportionate with respect to the cost-benefit ratio,²⁹ or even not constructive at all. For example, Bjørn Lomborg brings forward the argument that an increase in defensive measures would only result in a shift in the terrorists’ targets. His conclusion challenges the simple

²⁸ Drew DeSilver, U.S. Spends Over \$16 Billion Annually on Counterterrorism (2013). <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/09/11/u-s-spends-over-16-billion-annually-on-counter-terrorism/> (accessed September 11, 2013).

²⁹ John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, “Evaluating Counterterrorism Spending,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 28, no. 3 (2014): 237–48.

notion of “more money = higher security.”

Since 2001, the world has spent about US\$70 billion on increased homeland security measures. Predictably, this has reduced the number of trans-national attacks by about 34 per cent. However, on average, terrorism has claimed 67 more deaths each year. The rise in the death toll has occurred because terrorists are responding rationally to the higher risks imposed by greater security measures.³⁰

Not knowing to what degree counterterrorism measures actually prevent terrorist attacks or if they perhaps even provoke more brutal terrorist acts against less protected targets, and also lacking comparable data on the amount and effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures—particularly when leaving the U.S. and Western context—we believe that the best we can do is to focus on those terrorist attacks that actually happened and depict this empirical reality as accurately as possible.³¹

The Global Terrorism Database (GTD)

The GTD is appropriate for our analysis because of its clear definition of terrorism and its structure that has several advantages for our research question. Listing more than 100,000 terrorist incidents since 1970, it is the most comprehensive

³⁰ Bjørn Lomborg, “Is Counterterrorism Good Value for Money?” *NATO Review*, April 2008 edition. http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2008/04/ap_cost/en/index.htm.

³¹ This does not mean that the counterfactual question of how brutal terrorism would be if there had not been any increase in the counterterrorism budgets, does not provide a relevant research question in its own right. Indeed, there is a lack of empirical work on how effective anti-terrorism measures actually are in reality. This is a question further research should definitely tackle.

dataset on domestic and international terrorism. Table 1 presents the advantages of the GTD—with regard to questions of “new terrorism”—and compares it to 16 alternative datasets on terrorism. The GTD dataset proves to be the most suitable; all the others are struggling with specific shortcomings. For example, the TWEED dataset, created by Engene, only includes domestic terrorism in 18 Western European countries through 2004.³² Thus, the geographical as well as the temporal focus is too narrow for testing the brutalization thesis. The RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents (RDWTI) does not provide the same amount of information as the GTD either. The number of attacks listed in it (36,000 between 1968 and 2009) show that the RDWTI does not fulfill its self-proclaimed standard of being “the gold standard for comprehensive information on international and domestic terrorism.”³³

This is the case because the RDWTI has recorded domestic attacks only since 1998. Before that point, it only covered international acts of terrorism. The last data included in the RDWTI comes from 2009, which is another disadvantage for our analysis of “new terrorism.” Nevertheless, there are also three problems with the GTD that should be mentioned:

- (1) The GTD codes all terrorist attacks as separate events if they happen either at different points in time or at different

³² Jan Oskar Engene, “Five Decades of Terrorism in Europe: The TWEED Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 44, no. 1 (2007): 109–21.

³³ RAND (Research And Development Corporation) 2012, “RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents.” <http://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/terrorism-incidents.html> (accessed May 11, 2013). ³³ RAND (Research And Development Corporation) 2012, “RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents.” <http://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/terrorism-incidents.html> (accessed May 11, 2013).

places. In general terms, this definition is useful, but it is problematic for series of attacks. The GTD codes individual elements of such a series of attacks separately (e.g., the four planes hijacked on 9/11), which makes no sense regarding our research question. In order to avoid a distorting effect, we merged all incidents that were part of a series of attacks into a single case (based on the multiple incidents variable, we did this using further information from the GTD concerning location, terrorist group, target, and timing of the attack).

- (2) The GTD dataset does not contain reliable information for the year 1993. The data is only partially available and it is unclear whether certain types of attacks or attacks in specific regions of the world are missing systematically. The GTD itself refers to aggregated data for 1993, which should be used as an alternative.³⁴ We refer to this aggregated data where it is possible, e.g., for the total number of attacks and the total number of fatalities (also separated by country). For all other cases, e.g., the number of suicide attacks, which is not listed separately in the aggregated data, we interpret the data based on the means of the years before and after 1993.
- (3) The database also includes attacks which cannot be termed as terrorist attacks without any doubt, because there is a grey zone between crime and terrorism. Overall, this applies to 5.76 percent of the cases. We decided to code all these incidents as acts of terrorism, as the overwhelming portion of these doubtful cases (95.4 percent) took place after 1998. By doing so, we include all attacks that are of potential terrorist nature particularly for the period after 2001, which is most relevant for our research question. Hence, we put the brutalization thesis to a “tough test” under the conditions of a

³⁴ GTD (Global Terrorism Database) 2013 (see note 8 above).

Table 1. Comparison of datasets on terrorism.

Database	Access	Period of time	Kind of data	Unit of analyses	Website
Global Terrorism Database (GTD)	Free, publicly available	1970–2011 (ongoing)	Domestic and International Terrorism	Terrorist attack	www.start.umd.edu/gtd/
Worldwide Incidents Tracking System (WITS)	Free, publicly available	2004–09 (ongoing)	Domestic and International Terrorism	Terrorist attack	http://wits.nctc.gov/ (currently not available)
International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events (ITERATE)	Commercial (\$50 per year of data)	1968–2008 (ongoing)	Transnational and International Terrorism	Terrorist attack	http://www.vinyardsoftware.com/home.html
MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base	Free, publicly available	1968–2008 (Ended March 2008)	Domestic and International Terrorism	Terrorist attack	www.mipt.org (database is no longer online)
RAND Worldwide Terrorism Incidents Database (RWTID)	Free, publicly available	1968–2009 (ongoing)	Domestic Terrorism (since 1998) and International Terrorism (since 1968)	Terrorist attack	http://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/terrorism-incidents.html
Country Reports on Terrorism (United States Department of State)	Free, publicly available	2004–today	Domestic and International Terrorism; no dataset but an annual report	Terrorist attack	http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/
Terrorism in Western Europe (TWEED)	Free, publicly available	1950–2008	Domestic Terrorism in 18 West European countries	Terrorist attack	http://folk.uib.no/sspje/tweed.htm
South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP)	Free, publicly available	Different periods for every country	Domestic and International Terrorism in South-Asia	Terrorist attack	http://www.satp.org/
The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT)—Terrorist Incident Database	Unclear	1975–2008	Mainly attacks in the Middle East	Terrorist attack	www.ict.org.il/
Political Terror Scale (PTS)	Free, publicly available	1976–2007	Global	Political violence and terror (measured annually by a Five-Point Scale)	www.politicalterrorsscale.org
The American Terrorism Study, 1980–2002	Free, publicly available	1980–2002	Investigations on domestic security and terrorism in the US	Dataset built on arraignments	http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/4639

Database	Access	Period of time	Kind of data	Unit of analyses	Website
The European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT)	Free, publicly available	Since 2006	Terrorist attacks in the EU; no dataset but an annual report	Terrorist attack	https://www.europol.europa.eu/latest_publications/37
Global Pathfinder	Accessible with password	Unclear	Terrorist attacks, mainly in the Asia-Pacific Region	Terrorist attack	http://www.pvtr.org/ICPVTR/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=277&Itemid=113 http://vkb.isvg.org/Special:isvgsearch
The Institute for the Study of Violent Groups (ISVG) Database	Accessible with password (without password only 200 cases can be selected)	Since 2008	Information about Extremism, Terrorism, and Transnational Crime	Unclear	
The Monterey WMD Terrorism Database	Accessible only for administration staff and soldiers of the US	1900–today	Attacks that include weapons of mass destruction (ABC weapons)	Attack	http://wmddb.mlis.edu/
Iraq Body Count	Free, publicly available	2003–today	Civilian deaths in attacks in Iraq after the invasion in 2003	Terrorist attacks against soft targets	http://www.iraqbodycount.org/

Table based on Bowie and Schmid, including our own amendments and updates.⁴³ Grey fields indicate problems for the test of the brutalization thesis.

most-likely design. If, despite the comprehensive selection of cases, no evidence for brutalization can be found, this would be a significant finding.³⁵

The GTD contains more than 75 variables describing individual acts of terrorism. They provide information about the date/time and site of the attack as well as information about the terrorist organization that carried it out, the type of attack (e.g., bomb attack or hostage-taking), the tactics/weapons that were used, and the damage/victims. For our analysis, the following variables are the most relevant ones:

³⁵ The GTD also lists a very specific category of terrorist attacks affecting almost exclusively the United States. These are attacks on abortion clinics. We subsume the 251 cases in this category (0.2 percent of all cases) to soft targets.

- **nkill:** indicates the number of confirmed deaths of a terrorist act. The attackers that were killed are counted as well
- **suicide:** indicates if it was a suicide attack
- **targtype1:** indicates the primary attack target. Based on the 22 categories that are listed for this variable, we draw our distinction between soft and hard targets
- **multiple:** indicates whether the attack was part of a larger series of attacks. For the empirical test of the brutalization thesis, we summarize larger series to one incident (serial encoding). The original GTD coding is only used for comparison purposes
- **year:** indicates the year in which the attack took place, or in the case of a larger series, the year of the first attack
- **region:** indicates the region where the attack took place³⁶
- **country:** indicates the country where the attack took place

However, the GTD variables make no distinction between soft and hard targets. As explained above, this distinction is central to our analysis of the brutalization thesis. Based on the information from *targtype1*, we therefore constructed a dummy distinguishing between soft and hard targets.

Empirical test of the brutalization thesis

The following sections separately present the nine indicators for the period from 1970 to 2011. If the brutalization thesis is correct, there should be a clear shift towards a higher level of brutalization starting either during the early 1990s or with the 9/11 attacks. In each

³⁶ The dataset distinguishes between eleven world regions: Western Europe, Eastern Europe, North America, Central America and the Caribbean, South America, Australia and Oceania, Russia and CIS, Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa.

section, we will investigate to what extent empirical data confirm one of these two dates as being the starting point of a brutalization of terrorism. We examine all indicators first on a global scale and then compare them by breaking the analysis down to world regions.

The number of terrorist attacks

Regardless of whether we look at raw numbers or numbers standardized to the world population, which has grown significantly since 1970, a clear picture emerges (see Figure 1).³⁷ The number of attacks per year increased steadily beginning in the late 1970s, until it reached its peak in 1992. Afterwards, the number of attacks decreased substantively until it reached a level comparable to the 1970s for the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, beginning in 2005, there was a clear rise in the attack numbers so that by 2011 the brutality level of the early 1990s had been reached again.

Turning to the number of terrorist attacks broken down by world region (Figure 2), certain waves of terrorist activities can be detected. Since the 1970s, different regions had peaks (and lows) of terrorist attacks. In the 1970s, the graph shows that the vast majority of attacks happened in Western Europe and North America. By the mid-1970s, the number of attacks in Central and (a bit later) in South America increased significantly. Around 1982, about 65 percent of all attacks worldwide happened in these regions. The shift of terrorist activities to other world regions becomes obvious by the fact that until the mid-1980s, 80 percent of the attacks took place in Europe or the Americas. Since 2005, their combined share dropped well below

³⁷ In general, we use non-standardized numbers for the amount of attacks, deaths, and suicide attacks in the remainder of the article. Whenever it makes particular sense, we standardize on yearly population data by the World Bank (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>).

can hardly be derived from our data, the analyses show that in some regions or countries (in particular Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan), sharp increases in the level of "brutality" can be found. Therefore, it could be argued that on the regional level one could indeed speak of a new quality of terrorism—particularly when taking into account suicide attacks and beheadings as the two most relevant qualitative changes in the form of terrorism that could be observed during the last decades. Whether these changes that are regionally limited entail much higher levels of brutality than, for example, the waves of terrorist attacks that took place in South America in the 1980s can nevertheless be questioned on the basis of the data presented here.

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