

Moral Anger and Self-Mobilization: Explaining Individual-Directed Terror in the United States

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Abstract

Over the past decade, acts of terror committed by those who act at their own direction have increased in frequency across the United States. The number of attacks committed by members of groups, however, has fallen. The study of terrorism maintains its assertion that these acts do not need to be separated by the nature of the perpetrator, group member or otherwise. This leaves a gap in research, one which is vital to study to promote public safety. This paper addresses this gap and investigates why some places experience more individual-directed acts of terror than others, using the past two decades in the United States as a study. More severe grievances, an inability to communicate in the political system, more potential target locations, and increased societal violence could contribute to increased instances of attacks. On the other hand, less access to the means to carry out an attack, and a more repressive government, could decrease the instances. Estimating the effects through multivariate regression models, this study finds that more severe grievances within a state and an inability to participate in the political process increase the number of attacks, while increased violent repression from the state decreases the number.

1. Introduction

In 2000, there was one individual-directed act of terror in the United States, according to both the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and the Profiles of Radicalized Individuals in the U.S. (PRIUS) database. The number of attacks hovered around nine a year for the next decade and a half, until 2014, when there were 24 individual-directed acts of terror. In 2016 there were 43, and in 2017 there were 63. Moreover, attacks have not increased uniformly across state lines. Some states have never experienced such an attack, while others have been plagued by them for years, even when adjusted for population differences.

This type of terror attack – where a person acts independently from a group and, instead, at their own direction – is often studied in conjunction with group-directed acts of terror. However, the assumption that both forms of terrorism have the same triggers or motivations, impacts, and potential resolutions, means that the study of the phenomenon is ignoring key differences. With the recent upsurge in frequency of attacks within the United States, and the danger to public safety that it poses, it has become more important than ever to study why some individuals decide to commit acts of terror alone. In this paper I aim to contribute to the study of a phenomenon that has gripped the attention of the nation. Using a cross-sectional study, I explore why some locations experience more acts of individual-directed terrorism than others.

I argue that more severe grievances will provide more motivation for individuals to act, especially if they feel as though the state is unable or unwilling to execute justice. If politically fringe or extremist individuals feel like they have been silenced by the political system and have been ignored by the ruling party, they are more likely to turn to acts of terror to communicate their grievances, albeit violently. If they can access the means to carry out an attack and there are more symbolic locations to strike, more attacks can be expected. If violence is already common within a

society there will be fewer social barriers against its use, and an individual might be less inclined to find non-violent solutions, turning instead to terrorism. Finally, if a state is more repressive, there is less access to means and target locations, and it would be more difficult for an individual to carry out an attack. Examining U.S. states and the District of Columbia, I find that grievances and an inability to participate in the political sphere both increase the frequency of attacks. On the other hand, a more repressive state reduces the expected number of such attacks.

The definition of the term ‘terrorism’ and terms surrounding it are hotly debated, so I begin with an outline of the literature on the different understandings of the key terms used in this paper. Then, I review the existing literature surrounding individual-directed terrorism, and, building from those works, I advance my hypotheses to explain the cross-sectional differences in the frequency of attacks. These hypotheses are evaluated in multivariate regression models, and I conclude with a discussion of these results, their implications for real-world policies, and the gaps that are still left in the study of this phenomenon.

2. Defining ‘Terrorism’

The definition of the word ‘terrorism’ is hotly debated both among pundits and in academia. In politics it has been manipulated for political capital, vilifying opponents while at the same time protecting the wielder in an impervious moral armor. It casts the perpetrators as an absolute moral evil and the definers (not the victims) as an absolute morally good, making any discussion about the definition morally coded.¹ From a criminological framework, terrorism seeks to change or abolish the law, as opposed to crime which simply seeks to subvert it.²

Legally, the U.S. Department of State defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents”.³ The USA PATRIOT Act of 2001, however, narrows the definition of domestic terrorism, adding the stipulation that the acts of violence are used as a means to change government policy or conduct. The F.B.I., nonetheless, defines domestic terrorism as simply “domestic acts of violence in furtherance of political, religious, racial or social ideology.”⁴ The Global Terrorism Database uses a set of criteria to define terrorism, “The incident must be intentional, must entail some level of violence or immediate threat of violence, and the perpetrators of the incidents must be sub-national actors. In addition, at least two of the following three criteria must be present: the act must be aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal, there must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) than the immediate victims, and it must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities.”⁵

Some studies examine homicides committed by political extremists, treating them as acts of terror, using the ideological motivation as the defining factor of terrorism.^{6,7} Other authors argue that it is not the motivating factor or the goals of the act, but rather how the perpetrator chooses their victims that should be the defining characteristic of terrorism. While the target location is highly specific and symbolic, any victims are substitutable with others.⁸ Who they are is unimportant to the perpetrator, and it is this indifference which defines terrorism.

3. Defining ‘Individual-Directed’

Acts of terror committed by those who act alone is often given different names, like ‘lone wolf,’ ‘lone actor,’ or ‘individual-directed.’ Bakker and de Graaf define a ‘lone wolf’ as “a person who acts on his or her own without orders from – or even connections to – an organization.”⁹ Burton and Steward, however, dispute the very idea of a person who acts alone, arguing instead that because a person cannot be radicalized in a vacuum, lone wolves cannot be separate from the groups and therefore cannot act independently.¹⁰ It is for this reason that I believe the term ‘individual-directed’ terrorism is the most useful. It describes where the decision to commit the act originates but does not presuppose of involvement of others in the radicalization process.

4. Individual-Directed Terrorism in the Literature

Grievances, wrongs or perceived wrongs which the perpetrator is trying to right, motivate terrorism. The perpetrators see themselves as victims in a world on the brink of collapse and find shelter in an ideology which provides a path out of the chaos.^{11, 18} Places which are undergoing rapid demographic shifts, particularly racial ones, and low to medium incomes have an increased likelihood of experiencing an individual-directed terror attack.^{12, 13} A lack of deterrence

emboldens perpetrators who feel entitled to act without restraint.^{13, 14, 15} Other authors have identified high levels of immigration or an influx of refugees, the election of Barack Obama and of Donald Trump, and an increasingly vocal and active extremist presence in mainstream social media as contributing to acts of terrorism.^{15, 16}

Some authors have framed terrorism as a form of political communication, although the perpetrator's ability to communicate varies. Sweeney and Pereliger argue that the perpetrators react because they see their communities changing without their consent and their only ability to voice their grievances is an act of violence.¹⁴ Philips also frames terrorist action as a form of violent communication with a larger audience in Mexico and Gattinara et al. examines the same phenomenon of terrorism as communication in Italy.^{14, 17} This becomes necessary when the perpetrator feels excluded from the legitimate political process, either through a cultural shift away from the political salience of extremist parties, or through public repression of extremist ideas.^{14, 16}

Places that tolerate, or even support violence have also been identified as places which have an increased likelihood of experiencing individual-directed terrorism. Windisch et al. argue that extremist groups and ideologies weave a narrative of violence into the worlds they create, which in turn mirrors the world their proponents see.¹⁸ These violent practices were also found to minimize the psychological and social barriers which prevented the use of serious violence.^{14, 15} Freilich et al. found that areas known to be harboring hate group had a higher likelihood of experiencing acts of violence.⁷ Other acts of violence have also been argued to trigger terrorist action.¹³ Copycat events, where individual-directed terrorism inspires other, similar acts, are one of these trigger events, as 'Black Swan' events, which cataclysmically change the way people view the world, like 9/11 or the Great Depression.^{9, 18} Anders Breivik's 2011 attack in Norway, one of the most publicly covered individual-directed acts of terror in this century, has been cited in the manifestos left behind by other actors who later carried out similar acts.¹⁸

5. Theoretical Foundations

The definition of terrorism is wrought with political and academic disputes. While this ongoing definitional debate is vital to understanding the phenomenon, for this study I will use the definition provided by the GTD. Its codebook sets out certain criteria to operationalize terrorism; "the incident must be intentional, must entail some level of violence or immediate threat of violence, and the perpetrators of the incidents must be sub-national actors. In addition, at least two of the following three criteria must be present: the act must be aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal, there must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) than the immediate victims, and it must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities."⁵

5.1 Grievances

At its core, terrorism seeks redresses for wrongs committed against an individual, group, or community. It does so because the law is unable provide justice, and those who feel that they have been wronged are motivated to find alternative ways to pursue what is "right." These perceived injustices are grievances which motivate terroristic action, following Collier and Hoeffler's model of grievances.¹⁹ These grievances could be rooted in fears of economic change, racial diversity, or religious persecution. Manifestations of those grievances could come in the form of industry loss, demographic shifts, and cultural change. When a person has more severe grievances, especially those that impact their daily lives and the lives of those around them, that individual would have more motivation to seek redress. Since the law is not a viable option (a person cannot, for instance, sue to stop demographic shifts), they must resort to other options. Terrorism provides one alternative which might result in an individual feeling that justice has been served.

Hypothesis 1: In locations where a perpetrator has more perceived grievances, there will be an increased likelihood of individual-directed terrorism.

5.2 Political Communication

Not only is terrorism an attempt to remedy grievances, but it is also a form of political communication, albeit a violent and single-sided one.²⁰ Other forms of political communication, like voting, donating to campaigns, or engaging in political dialogues, are more acceptable and legal. Terrorism poses higher costs, both socially and financially, and could prove fatal for the perpetrator. Terrorism is, therefore, much less attractive than legal alternatives. However, when a person believes other means of political communication are no longer viable options to advance their goals,

they might turn to terrorism to air their grievances. Legal alternatives can be stymied, especially for voters on the political extreme, when one party has a wide margin of support within a community and does not need to accommodate “fringe” voters. In this kind of situation, the ruling party does not need to win over every possible voter to win an election as they would in a tighter race. Instead, the party might try to appeal to the general public and essentially ignore extremist voters for fear of alienating their main supporters if they adopt extremist platforms. These fringe voters, who might feel left behind and shut out of the political system, are deprived of a political voice. One way these voters might try to communicate with the political world is through violent terroristic action.

Hypothesis 2: In places where the ruling party has a significant electoral majority in the political system, there will be an increased likelihood of experiencing individual-directed terrorism.

5.3 Opportunity

Despite sufficient motivation to commit an act of terror, if a person does not have the resources to do so, an attack cannot occur. The more readily accessible resources are, the easier it is to carry out an attack. In some locations, for example, it is easier to buy a gun than it is in others. Across the United States knives or other similar weapons can be easily purchased at household stores. More complex means, like chemical weapons or explosives, might be more challenging to obtain. If a person does not have access to the means to carry out an attack, they will be deterred, either abandoning their efforts, or at least greatly delaying them.

Hypothesis 3a: Places that have more opportunities for individuals to access means will have an increased likelihood of individual-directed terrorism.

In addition to gaining the motivation and the means to carry out an attack, a potential perpetrator also needs the opportunity to strike. The choice of a target is an essential part of a terror attack, as it is highly symbolic of the perpetrator’s perceived grievance(s).⁸ This could be a historically Black church, a synagogue, or a government landmark. Security check points, car bomb sweeps, organized surveillance, and armed guards, might deter a perpetrator.¹

Hypothesis 3b: Places that have more vulnerable target locations have an increased likelihood of experiencing an individual-directed act of terror.

5.4 Tolerability of Violence

Security checkpoints at vulnerable target locations could be an indication that the community, or at least the group at risk, has decided not to tolerate violence. On the other hand, places that regularly experience elevated levels of violence and do not utilize anti-violence measures might have normalized the inherent risk of an attack. Not only is the risk normalized, but the violence itself could be normalized. The danger of experiencing a violent act may become a typical part of life. Some members of the community might even tacitly support the acts, even if they do not carry out the action themselves. For example, racially motivated attacks, such as cross-burning, property damage, and physical attacks regularly committed by active hate groups, like the KKK, could make a community numb to the violence. For an individual living in such an environment, there is little to deter the use of violence to seek redress for grievances or communicate in the political world.

Hypothesis 4: Places that regularly experience societal violence will have an increased likelihood of experiencing individual-directed terrorism.

5.5 Regime Type

While violence may be part of daily life in an authoritarian regime, state-sponsored violence is unlikely to increase the likelihood of individual-directed terrorism. Authoritarian regimes employ repressive, violent techniques to control their populations, restricting movement, access to means, and political communication. This protects the regime from dissent by the population. Not only are there more opportunities to carry out an attack in a democracy, as citizens are free from state-sponsored repression, but terroristic action might be more successful in achieving its goals. Democracies, Pape argues, are more likely to make concessions to terrorist attacks in order to deter further violence.²¹

Hypothesis 5: Democracies will have an increased likelihood of experiencing individual-directed terrorism.

6. Empirical Indicators

The unit of analysis for my study is U.S. states, including the District of Columbia. Although D.C. is not a state, I treated it as such for the purpose of this study. I did not, however, include insular territories like Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands. These territories tend to have different grievances than the rest of the country and a history of nationalist and separatist violence. My dependent variable is the number of incidents of individual-directed acts of terror in each U.S. state. I used the data for the United States from 2000 to 2017 from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and removed any attacks which were perpetrated by a group (if a group claimed responsibility or was legally linked to the incident) or which had unknown perpetrators. This means that I erred on the side of caution when removing unknowns and might have undercounted some incidents. I also removed any labor disputes, union, or strike-related violence, as well as abortion-related attacks, as these are known as single issue incidents and are regarded as separate within the literature. I also did not include any incidents that, while committed by an individual, were done on the orders of a state actor, foreign or otherwise. Lastly, I included only incidents which resulted in injury or loss of life rather than property damage or hate speech.

I cross-checked the recorded incidents from the GTD with the PRIUS database, adding any uncounted incidents and removing any duplicates. PRIUS uses the same criteria for and definition of terrorism as the GTD, but filters events through the FBI's extremist crime database, so their dataset includes some incidents that do not appear in the GTD. I included only attempted, failed, or successful executions of plots, as opposed to ill-defined plots, which are also included in the database. Thus, I can expand the scope of the research while maintaining the integrity of the definition. In order to control for population, I calculated the number of attacks in each state per 100,000 residents, using Census data.

In total, I identified 291 attacks, with each state experiencing an average of 5.71 attacks for the total time frame. Several states did not have any incidents at all (Alaska, Hawai'i, Idaho, Maine, Rhode Island, South Dakota, and Wyoming), but some states had many. The distribution of these attacks is shown in Figure 1. On the higher end, California had 45 acts, New York had 28, and Texas had 20. These are also the most populous states, so it is important to control for that increased population. Populations ranged from 578,934 (Wyoming) to 39,399,349 (California), with an average of 6,375,434 residents. It is also important to note that this population variance could skew the results for some low population states and the District of Columbia and could bias findings. As the nation's capital we might expect more attacks there because of its symbolic value, especially as terrorism is a form of political communication, and D.C. is the heart of the American political system. The mean number of attacks per 100,000 residents was 0.122. The most attacks per 100,000 residents occurred in D.C. (1.725). As Figure 2 shows, D.C., Nebraska, Vermont, and Montana are all outliers, and which have lower than average populations. Further statistical description for the dependent and independent variables is shown in Table 1.

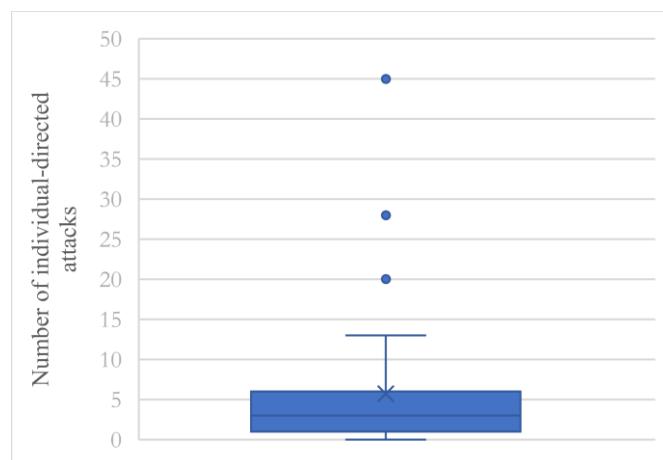


Figure 1: Box plot of the distribution of individual-directed terror attacks

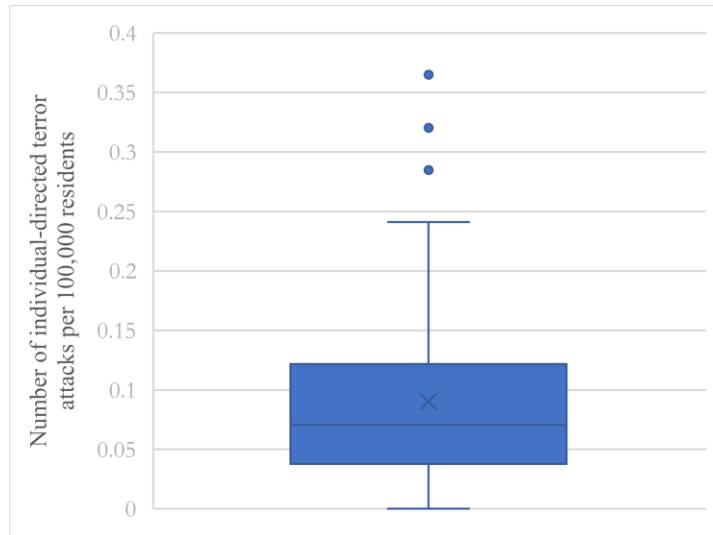


Figure 2: Box plot of the distribution of individual-directed terror attacks per 100,000 residents

My independent variable for my first hypothesis is the severity of grievances or motivations to commit acts of terror. While some grievances might be deeply personal, economic inequality could be one way to measure larger societal grievances. Economic inequality could make a society more divided between the “haves” and the “have-nots,” as well as make any existing ideological, ethnic, or religious divisions more salient. Economic inequality might not cause other grievances, but it could exacerbate them. To measure this concept, I gathered the Gini coefficient for each U.S. state from the American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2010, which is the latest available data. The coefficient is scaled from 0, absolute economic equality, to 1, which is absolute economic inequality. The most equal state was Utah, and the least was D.C. with an average coefficient of 0.466. As Figure 3 shows, there exist three outliers, with D.C. and New York on the higher side, and Utah on the lower.

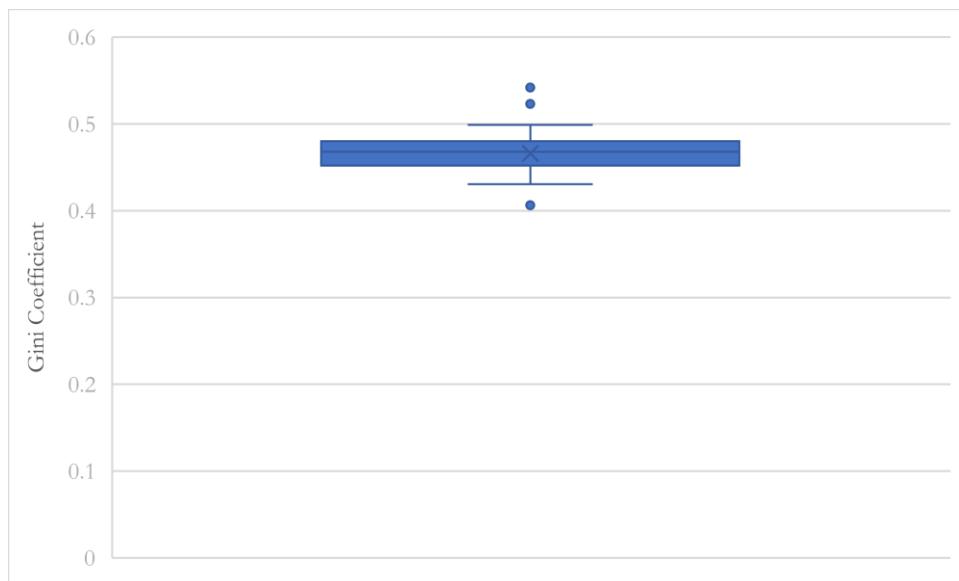


Figure 3: Box plot of the distribution of Gini coefficients

My independent variable for my second hypothesis is the degree of control that a party has over the political system in a state. To measure this, I gathered the margin of victory by the victorious party in the 2016 presidential election results as published in the *New York Times*. This ensures that all voters consider the same candidates and parties during the same period of time. This is constrained on a 0 to 100 scale, with 0 if the two parties received the exact same

number of votes, and 100 if one party won by 100% of the vote. The average margin of victory was 18.4%. The tightest race was Michigan with a margin of victory of 0.2%, while the biggest victory was D.C. with a margin of more than 80%.

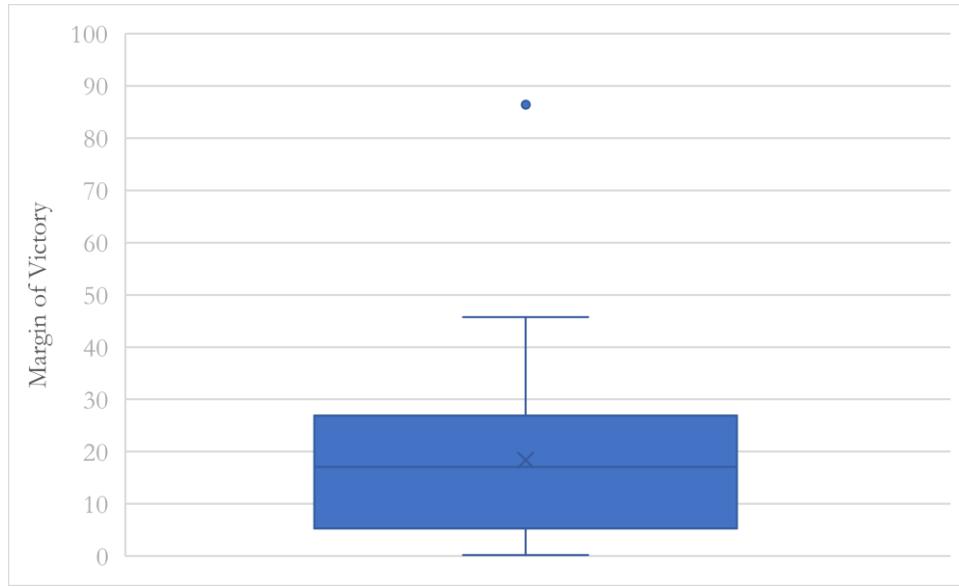


Figure 4: Box Plot of the distribution of the margin of victory in 2016

My independent variable for the first part of my third hypothesis is a measurement of access to means. I chose to use the number of restrictive, as opposed to permissive, gun laws that each state has on the books to measure this concept. While this is not a perfect measure, data on knife purchases or bomb-making materials is virtually non-existent. I gathered this data from the RAND State Firearm Law Database. The mean number of restrictive gun laws a state has was 16.33. Both New Mexico and North Dakota have just 5 restrictive gun laws, while California has 49. As Figure 5 shows, there were two outliers, California and Hawai'i.

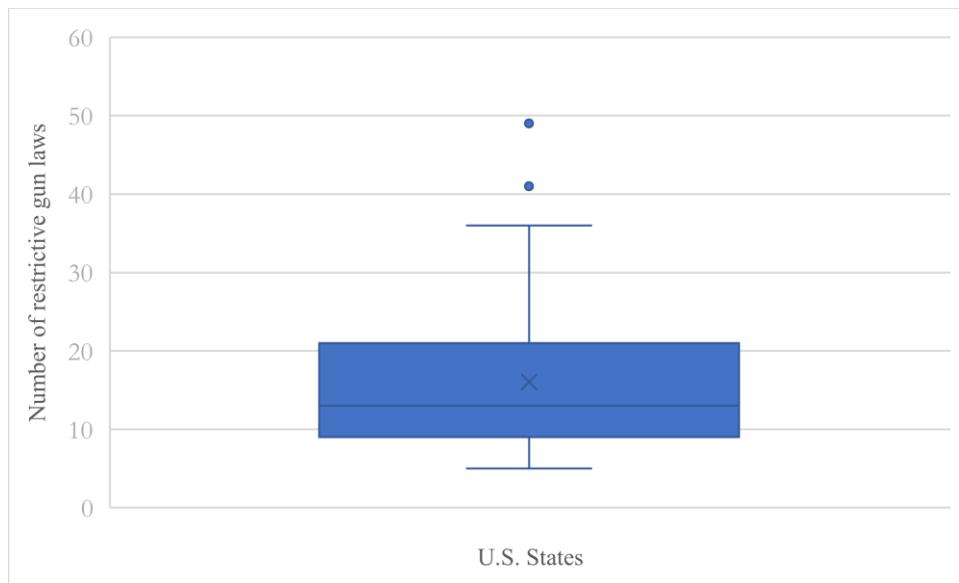


Figure 5: Box Plot of the distribution of the number of restrictive gun laws

My independent variable for the second part of my third hypothesis is access to potential target locations. I broke this down into two main categories: state-based targets and religiously based targets. Places of worship and highly symbolic government-run buildings are especially vulnerable and are often targets in the observed data. However, this is also not a perfect measure, as some attack targets may be chosen based on personal connections that a perpetrator might have, or private property could be targeted. To measure this, I gathered the number of National Historical Landmarks, as designated by the Department of Interior, and the number of places of worship in each U.S. state, per 100,000 residents to account for population. I gathered the number of places of worship from the Homeland Infrastructure Foundation-Level Data (HIFLD), which is funded through the Department of Homeland Security. The mean number of these potential targets in each state per 100,000 residents was 18.52. Nevada had the fewest potential targets, while Maine had the most. As Figure 6 shows, Maine is an outlier, as well as Alabama and D.C.

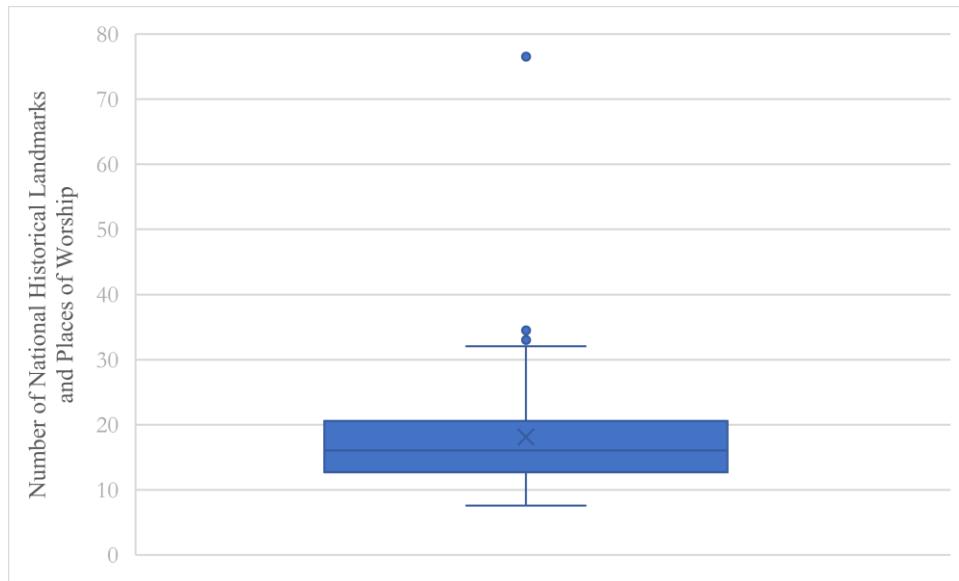


Figure 6: Box Plot of the distribution of the number of National Historical Landmarks and places of worship

My independent variable for my fourth hypothesis is the degree of societal violence within a state. While there exist databases to measure societal violence internationally, like the Societal Violence Scale, there is not a similar mechanism for the U.S. states. To measure this variable, I used the F.B.I. violent crime statistics for 2016 to calculate the number of violent crimes per 100,000 residents for each state, as shown in Figure 7. The more violent crime exists within a state, the more it could be part of daily life and may be normalized. There were 394 violent crimes per 100,000 residents on average. Maine was the least violent, whereas D.C. was significantly more violent than other places.

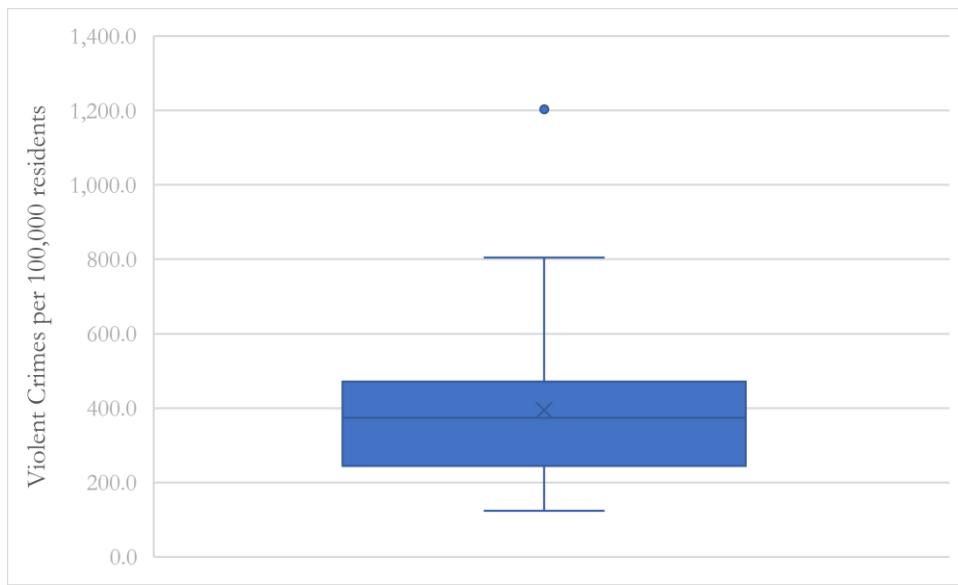


Figure 7: Box Plot of the distribution of the number of violent crimes per 100,000

My independent variable for my fifth hypothesis is regime type, and therefore, the degree of state-sponsored repression. Like for societal violence, there are many databases which measure political repression available, like the Political Terror Scale, there are none which examine U.S. states and the District of Columbia. To measure this concept, I used the rate of people killed by local, state, or federal law enforcement from 2013 to 2017 per 100,000 residents. State-sponsored violence, like police brutality, could restrict citizens' freedom of movement and, therefore, access potential target locations and means to an attack. States which use violence indiscriminately against their own people might be less democratic, as voters would be unlikely to re-elect a leader that used systematic, indiscriminate violence against them. On the other hand, violent repression targeting one minority group with the approval of the majority might actually have more democratic support. This potential dichotomy is something to be aware of when trying to measure democratic repression. The average number of people killed per state is four. Rhode Island is the least repressive, New Mexico tops out at over 10. As shown in Figure 8, there exist two outliers – New Mexico, at a rate of 10.11, and Oklahoma, at 8.31.

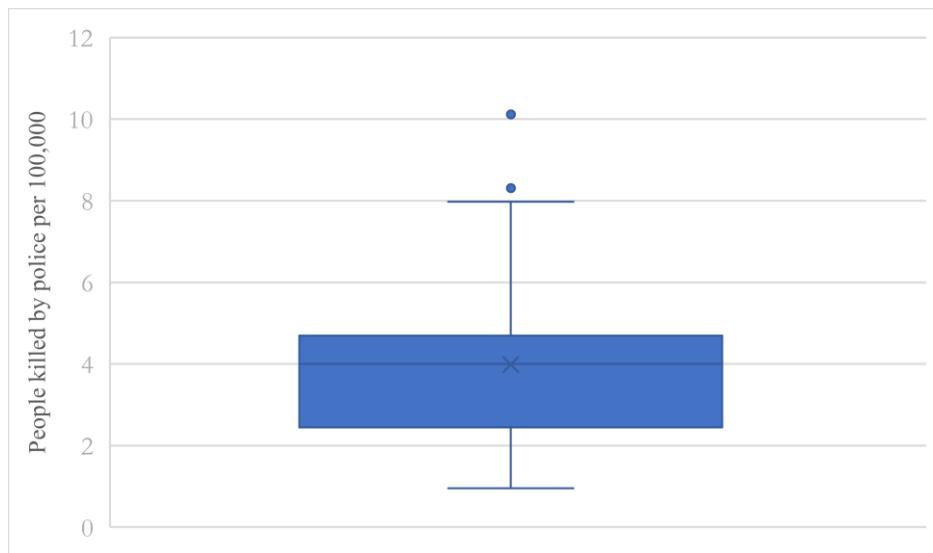


Figure 8: Box Plot of the distribution of people killed by police per 100,000 residents

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for each variable

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Attacks per 100,000	0.12	0.24	0.00	1.72
Gini coefficient	0.47	0.02	0.41	0.54
Margin of victory	18.38	15.31	0.23	86.41
Restrictive gun laws	16.33	9.89	5.00	49.00
Targets per 100,000	18.52	10.65	7.57	76.55
Violent crime per 100,000	394.17	186.06	124.00	1203.50
People killed by police per 100,000	4.04	1.93	0.95	10.12

7. Analysis

I estimated two multivariate linear regression models to test my hypotheses, one with all states and D.C., as shown in Table 2, and one without D.C., as it is often an outlier. I anticipated that the coefficients for Hypotheses 1 (the severity of grievances), 2 (political communication), 3b (number of target locations), and 4 (degree of societal violence) would be positive, while the coefficients for hypotheses 3a (access to means) and 5 (degree of repression) to be negative. I found this to hold true for all hypotheses except 3a for Model 1.

Table 2: Comparison of Models 1 and 2

	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	-0.894 (-0.559)	0.034 (-0.267)
Gini coefficient	1.581 (-1.254)	0.397 (-0.584)
Margin of Victory	0.006 (-0.001)	0.0002 (-0.0009)
Restrictive Gun Laws	0.00005 (-0.002)	-0.002 (-0.001)
Targets per 100,000	0.001 (-0.002)	-0.003 (-0.001)
Violent crimes per 100,000	0.0005 (-0.0001)	-0.0001 (-0.0001)
People killed by police per 100,000	-0.022 (-0.017)	-0.002 (-0.008)

For the first hypothesis, the Gini coefficient, which measures economic inequality, there is an estimated 1.58 additional attacks per 100,000 residents when the coefficient goes from 0 to 1 – absolute equality to absolute inequality. The more severe the grievances within a state, the more attacks are estimated to occur. However, this effect, while large, is misleading. When this effect is adjusted for the observed range (0.136), there is an increase of 0.215 attacks per 100,000 residents. If Utah, which has the lowest Gini coefficient of 0.41, suddenly had as much economic inequality as D.C., which has the highest coefficient, they would experience an estimated 6.67 additional attacks when adjusted for population. This is more than a 400% increase, as Utah has only experienced 2 such attacks in the past two decades.

The estimated coefficient of the second independent variable, which is measured by the margin of victory of the winning party, is also positive, as anticipated by the political communication hypothesis. The wider the margin of

victory enjoyed by a party within a state, the more attacks that state was estimated to experience. While the coefficient for this variable may seem small (0.006), the victorious party won, on average, by about 20%. In New York, where the winning party won by 22.49%, there would be an additional 29.65 attacks than if the party had received an equal number of votes as its opponent. For North Carolina, where the winning party only won by 3.66%, there would only be an additional 2.53 attacks compared to if the margin of victory had been zero. This effect can be large, depending on the margin of victory, and it is statistically significant.

The estimated coefficient of the first segment of the third hypotheses is positive, which was not anticipated, although the effect is extremely small. The more restrictive the gun laws, and, therefore, the harder it is to access the means, and additional attacks occur. This could be a manifestation of grievances, especially if a person aims to change restrictive gun laws through an act of terror. If a state like South Dakota, which has the fewest restrictive gun laws, were to suddenly increase their laws to the same number as the state with the highest, there would be an anticipated 0.02 additional attacks for the state after adjusting for population. This is a negligible effect, and it is not statistically significant.

The estimated coefficient of the second part of my third hypothesis, however, was positive, as expected. For every added target location, there is an increased 0.0013 attack per 100,000 residents. While this, again, might seem small, the effect is not as insignificant. If Nevada, which has the fewest potential target locations, were to suddenly match the state with the greatest number of locations, they would experience an additional 2.71 attacks.

The estimated effect of my fourth hypothesis was anticipated to be positive, and this held true. The more societal violence a place experienced, the more acts of individual-directed acts of terror they might see, and this effect is estimated to be substantial. If Maine, the least violent state, became as violent as the most violent one, they would experience 8 more individual-directed acts of terror. This finding is statistically significant.

The estimated effect of my fifth and final hypothesis was negative, as predicted. The more people killed by police was an indication of the severity of repression, and with increased repression, there were decreased attacks. If New Mexico, which had the highest levels of police killings, decreased repression to the level of the least repressive state, they would experience 4.31 more attacks. Likewise, if Rhode Island increased its level of repression to the level of New Mexico, they would experience 2.17 fewer attacks.

I also estimated a regression model without the District of Columbia, as shown in Table 2. The direction of the effect of Hypotheses 3a (access to means), 3b (access to target locations), and 4 (tolerability of violence) changed, while the others stayed the same. Hypotheses 1 (grievances) and 2 (political communication) were still positive, as expected, and Hypotheses 3a and 5 (regime type) were negative, as expected. Hypotheses 3b and 4, however, were not in the direction predicted by the hypotheses, and both are in the opposite direction as the Model 1.

For the Gini coefficient in the second model, there is an expected 0.39 increase in attacks per 100,000 residents when the coefficient goes from 0 to 1. This is smaller than modelled in Model 1, but still has a noticeable effect. Using Utah as an example again, if the state were to suddenly have as much economic inequality as D.C., they would experience an additional 4.22 attacks, more than a 300% increase.

The estimated effect of the second hypothesis is positive, as anticipated by the hypothesis, and consistent with Model 1. In New York, which the winning party won by 22.49%, there would be an increase of 0.138 attacks compared to a highly competitive or close race, which is much less than estimated in Model 1.

The estimated effect of the first part of the third hypotheses is negative, as anticipated by the hypothesis. The coefficient has a larger effect than in Model 1, although the overall impact is still small. If a state like South Dakota, which has the fewest restrictive gun laws, were to suddenly increase their laws to the same number as the state with the highest, there would be an anticipated 0.685 attacks for the state, after adjusting for population. This is still a small effect, and it is still not statistically significant.

The estimated effect of the second part of my third hypothesis was also negative, inconsistent with both my previous model and hypothesis. For every added target location there is a decreased 0.002 attack per 100,000 residents. While this, again, might seem small, the impact is not as insignificant. If Nevada, which has the fewest potential target locations, were to suddenly match the state with the greatest number of locations, they would experience a decrease in attacks with 5.46 fewer incidents. This effect is statistically significant.

The estimated effect of the final hypothesis was negative, as predicted, and which is consistent with the first model. If New Mexico decreased repression to the level of the least repressive state, they would experience 0.527 more attacks. Likewise, if Rhode Island increased its level of repression to the level of New Mexico, they would experience 0.266 less attacks. These impacts are not as large as the first model nor is the effect statistically significant.

8. Discussion

There are significant differences between the two models, but there are also similarities, as shown in Table 2. Both models supported hypotheses 1, 2, and 5. Model 1 also had findings to support hypotheses 3b and 4, and model 2 found support for hypothesis 3a. The biggest difference in the models was the inclusion or exclusion of the District of Columbia. This location is important and likely to be an anomaly for several reasons. Firstly, D.C. is the nation's capital, so people could be motivated to come to the area for the highly symbolic target locations. This could explain the change in direction for hypothesis 3b when D.C. was excluded. The District also has a very small population, in large part because it is less than 70 square miles in size. D.C. is also an outlier for both the Gini coefficient and the margin of victory, so finding support for the hypotheses without the outlier is a useful finding. D.C. also has a very high crime rate, which impacted the directionality of the estimated effect of the fourth hypothesis.

Another issue to contend with is the paucity of data available. As noted, there are many databases for the variables examined in comparative and international relations, but those databases do not examine U.S. states. Furthermore, the GTD had been sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security but was defunded by the Trump administration in 2017. Their data, therefore, does not go beyond that year. Although, according to Christopher Wray, head of the FBI, 2018 experienced more attacks than ever before (Eligon 2018). This might be an influx of copycat events or caused, in part, by an increasingly violent national political rhetoric. If this study could be expanded to include the most recent data, political scientists and policymakers could learn more about individual-directed acts of terror and how to stop them before they occur. Additional analyses that examine the variation over time and states in a panel study rather than a cross-sectional one could also be possible.

9. Conclusion

The results of this study particularly support three of my hypotheses. Two factors increase the frequency of attacks – the severity of grievances and the inability to participate in the political process. Simply put, locations with more individuals who have something to say and no legitimate way to say it, are more likely to experience an attack. On the other hand, violent repression from the state reduces the likelihood of experiencing such an attack. On their face, these findings have highly controversial policy implications. It would seem that reducing the grievances of extremist individuals, giving them a larger voice in the political system, and increasing the level of repression from the state would decrease the violence. However, I believe that these findings, when examined more closely, present other possible solutions which could have a better overall effect on society.

Addressing economic inequalities for example, which exacerbate other grievances, could be one way to reduce violence. Another way is through improving law enforcement and community relationships and building trust. The first signs of a potential attack are often most visible by those with whom an individual interacts most often – family and friends. Improving communication between law enforcement and those who might suspect an attack might be imminent could help stop the violence before it starts. For this to happen, of course, the state must see individual-directed acts of terror as a serious problem that the nation faces.

Another problem which complicates the policy implications of addressing this kind of terrorism is that historically the term 'terrorism' has been used as a weapon against political opponents. Because the word holds strong moral implications for many, it shields the person or group accusing the other of committing acts of terrorism, in an impermeable coat of unquestionable moral goodness, branding the other as unjustifiable and cruel. The term can be easily corrupted for political gain, rather than a part of an attempt to make a society safer from acts of violence.

While this study was able to shed some light on the phenomenon, there is still much that has yet to be examined. Why the number of individual-directed attacks have increased nationally is a vital question of our time. Is this increase specific only to this country, or does it expand to others? If the data were available, I would break down this study to a county level or, better yet, a neighborhood one to expand the scope. This would also help examine why some individuals are more inclined to act than others. Lastly, I believe it is important to examine how individuals fund their acts of terror.

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