The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited

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Abstract

Terrorists attack civilians to coerce their governments into making political concessions. Does this strategy work? To empirically assess the effectiveness of terrorism, the author exploits variation in the target selection of 125 violent substate campaigns. The results show that terrorist campaigns against civilian targets are significantly less effective than guerrilla campaigns against military targets at inducing government concessions. The negative political effect of terrorism is evident across logit model specifications after carefully controlling for tactical confounds. Drawing on political psychology, the author concludes with a theory to account for why governments resist compliance when their civilians are targeted.

Keywords

terrorism, coercion, civilian targeting, political psychology

It is widely believed that terrorists attack civilians to coerce their governments into granting concessions (e.g., Crenshaw, 1990; DeNardo, 1985; McCormick, 2003). Scholars are deeply divided, however, on the efficacy of this

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tactic. In the 1980s and 1990s, terrorism specialists claimed that the tactic seldom induces government compliance (Cordes et al., 1984; Crenshaw, 1986; Held, 1991; Wilkinson, 1986). Political scientists gravitated to the opposite stance around the turn of the century, maintaining that terrorism often leads to major political concessions (Kydd & Walter, 2006; Lake, 2002; Pape, 2003, 2005; Sprinzak, 2000). The pendulum has recently swung back, with several studies contending that terrorism does not pay politically (Abrahms, 2006a, 2006b; Cronin, 2009b; Edwards, 2009; Rose & Murphy, 2007). The policy relevance of this debate requires little elaboration: The question of whether terrorism will advance the political agendas of its practitioners is understandably a paramount concern to the international community.

The following analysis contributes to the debate in five main ways. In the first section, I summarize the relevant scholarship and assess its methodological basis. In the second section, I build on those preliminary studies to establish a new research design for empirically testing terrorism's utility in coercing political concessions. In the third section, I present my findings from an original data set of 125 violent substate campaigns. My principal finding is that terrorist campaigns are an inherently unprofitable coercive tactic because governments resist complying when their civilians are the focus of substate attack. Compared to guerrilla campaigns against military targets, terrorist campaigns against civilian targets are a poor method of coercion, even when the political objectives of the perpetrators, their fighting capability, and that of the target country are held constant. The negative political effect of civilian targeting is significant and substantial across logit model specifications. In the fourth section, I highlight the valence of this finding by subjecting it to a series of robustness checks. The study concludes by positing a theory for why governments resist accommodating perpetrators of terrorism.

Debating the Effectiveness of Terrorism

Terrorist groups possess two types of goals: process goals and outcome goals. Process goals are intended to sustain the group by securing financial support, attracting media attention, scuttling organization-threatening peace processes, or boosting membership and morale often by provoking government overreaction. The outcome goals of terrorists, by contrast, are their stated political ends, such as the realization of a Kurdish homeland, the removal of foreign bases from Greece, or the establishment of Islamism in India. An important difference between process goals and outcome goals is that unlike the former, the latter can be achieved only with the compliance of the target government. A research consensus finds that acts of terrorism are indeed

effective in advancing process goals (Atkinson, Sandler, & Tschirhart, 1987; Bloom, 2005; Kydd & Walter, 2002; Mueller, 2006), but empirical research on outcome goals has lagged. Historically, data sets have neglected to code the political outcomes of substate campaigns. This omission has impeded efforts to analyze terrorism's efficacy in exacting political change (Abrahms, 2006b, p. 43; Gurr, 1988, pp. 120, 125).

The debate over terrorism's efficacy typically focuses on outcome goals. To assess terrorism's utility for accomplishing them, studies have relied on formal models (Bueno de Mesquita, 2005; Lake, 2002; Lapan & Sandler, 1993; Overgaard, 1994), a case study (Dershowitz, 2002; Edwards, 2009; Hoffman, 2011; Murphy & Rose, 2007; Staniland, 2009), or the same handful of celebrated campaigns (Atran, 2004; Kydd & Walter, 2006; Pape, 2003; Sprinzak, 2000). Each of these approaches, however, has inherent limitations: Formal models do not necessarily capture empirical reality (Morton, 1999), a single case study is insufficient for establishing trends (Bates, Grief, Levi, Rosenthal, & Weingast, 1998), and the repeated use of the same salient cases indicates that they are atypical and therefore lack generalizability (Drezner, 1998). To date, only two studies have examined a sample of more than 10 campaigns to evaluate terrorism's utility in attaining political ends (Abrahms, 2006b; Pape, 2003; also see Pape, 2005).

Robert Pape (2003) analyzes the outcomes of 11 suicide campaigns and claims that terrorism is a profitable political tactic because six succeeded. This conclusion has drawn fire from several angles. First, Pape's sample size clearly is modest, and 10 of the 11 campaigns were directed against the same three countries (Abrahms, 2006b, p. 46). Second, he purports to demonstrate that terrorism regularly achieves its outcome goals, but his sample also includes campaigns to achieve process goals, such as winning back a prisoner to sustain the group (Abrahms, 2006b; Crenshaw, 2007, p. 143; Hoveyda, 2005, p. 535). Third, within the coercion literature, the persistent absence of political progress is normally treated as evidence of campaign failure (Byman & Waxman, 2002, pp. 27-28). His sample thus suffers from selection bias by excluding ongoing campaigns, even those that have failed politically for decades (Moghadam, 2006, p. 713). Fourth, Pape "exaggerates" the political successes of several campaigns, particularly those waged by Palestinian groups (Abrahms, 2006b, p. 46; Moghadam, 2006, p. 708). Fifth, he characterizes all of the campaigns in his sample as terrorist, even though most of them focused on military targets and are hence cases of guerrilla campaigns. As Jeff Goodwin (2006) points out, "It is a mistake, therefore, to refer to these campaigns as 'terrorist' in nature, as Pape does" (p. 317). Indeed, there is an emerging consensus that terrorist and guerrilla campaigns should be

analytically distinguished: By most definitions, the former are directed mainly against civilian targets, whereas the latter are directed mainly against military targets (Abrahms, 2006b, p. 55; Ganor, 2002, p. 296; Moghadam, 2006, p. 710; Nolan, 2002, p. 669; Schmid & Jongman, 2005, p. 14; Wilkinson, 1986, p. x).

In response to Pape, I (Abrahms, 2006b) produced an alternative study testing terrorism's effectiveness as an instrument of coercion. My sample consisted of 42 outcome goals from the groups designated by the U.S. State Department as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs). This list includes groups such as Hamas that mainly attack civilians as well as groups such as the Tamil Tigers that mainly attack military personnel. I found that the FTOs that mainly attack military targets regularly achieve their policy demands, whereas the FTOs that mainly attack civilian targets tend to fail politically. Unlike guerrilla campaigns, I concluded, terrorist campaigns are a losing political tactic. This conclusion is also debatable, however, because of three main limitations with that preliminary research design. First, the study arguably suffers from the opposite selection bias. Although Pape increases the coercion rate by excluding ongoing campaigns, I may have inadvertently decreased the coercion rate by restricting analysis to actively violent groups if former FTOs renounced violence and then won removal from the State Department's biennial list upon realizing their demands (Chenoweth et al., 2009, p. 181). Second, the study does not code which FTO campaigns were directed against military targets versus civilian ones. Instead, I coded the FTOs themselves in terms of their predominant target selection since inception. This approach could also underestimate the coercive utility of terrorist campaigns if a group that historically attacked mostly military personnel had greater political success in its campaigns targeting civilians or if a group that historically attacked mostly civilians had less political success in its campaigns targeting militaries. Third, the study lacks sufficient control variables. I controlled for the nature of FTO objectives, but not for FTO capability. This is problematic if groups resort to terrorism when they are too weak to engage military forces (see Walsh & Piazza, 2009). If this dynamic exists, then group capability is likely an important omitted variable affecting the outcomes of FTO campaigns independent of their tactics. Conversely, the study does not control for the capability of the target country. This is also problematic if, as the literature indeed suggests (see Fearon, 2005; Weinberg & Eubank, 1994), terrorists are more likely than guerrillas to attack countries with greater capabilities.

In sum, relatively little systematic empirical research exists on terrorism's utility for coercing government concessions. This lacuna is striking given the

international attention to terrorism since the September 11, 2001, attacks and the tradition within political science of analyzing the political consequences of violence (e.g., Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Cochran & Downes, 2011; George, 1991; Kocher, Pepinsky, & Kalyvas, 2011; Lyall, 2010; Pape, 1996; Schelling, 1966). Only two studies have tested a medium-sized sample of observations, and their competing findings are undermined by methodological shortcomings. These preliminary studies do, however, provide guidance for more rigorous analysis.

Testing Terrorism's Political Effectiveness

This study tests whether terrorist campaigns are an effective tactic for achieving outcome goals—not simply whether groups that use terrorism tend to achieve them. These are related yet discrete research inquiries. Terrorism is conceivably an effective coercive tactic even if its practitioners inconsistently succeed in inducing government compliance (Pape, 2003, p. 9). Conversely, groups that use terrorism may regularly obtain their policy demands, but only by relying on other forms of coercive leverage, such as guerrilla campaigns against military targets (Abrahms, 2006b, p. 55).

To determine empirically whether terrorism is an effective instrument of coercion, I employ a new data set based on the campaigns waged by every group ever designated an FTO. My sample consists of the 125 campaigns waged by these 54 groups to achieve their political platforms, as specified in RAND's Terrorism Knowledge Base (TKB). Because coercion involves the application of pressure, I define a campaign as one in which an FTO wages multiple attacks that killed at least one person from the target country for the stated purpose of exacting a strategic concession.[1] The unit of analysis is therefore not the FTOs themselves but their campaigns to coerce target countries into revising their policies.[2]

Even the most comprehensive data sets do not purport to contain information on the universe of terrorist groups, which remains unknown because of their clandestine nature (Cordesman, 2001, p. 57; Laqueur, 1977, p. 166; Taylor & Jodice, 1983, p. 181). A common objection to large-*N* studies on terrorism is thus the representativeness of their samples (Newman, 2006, p. 760). For four reasons, I analyze the campaigns of FTOs in particular. First, prior studies (Abrahms, 2006b; Kydd & Walter, 2006; Pape, 2003, 2005) have focused on the FTOs to assess terrorism's coercive effectiveness, reaching divergent conclusions. Second, the FTOs are natural groups to test terrorism. The FTO list excludes government campaigns against civilians and

groups involved in protracted civil wars of attrition, which are normally regarded as conceptually distinct from terrorist campaigns as traditionally defined (Davis & Cragin, 2009; Noricks, 2009; Schmid & Jongman, 2005). Third, the FTO list comprises important groups not only to the fields of comparative politics and international relations but also to the broader international community, such as Al-Qaeda, its affiliates, Hezbollah, Hamas, the Tamil Tigers, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia. Fourth, although assembled by the State Department, the FTO list includes a broad diversity of terrorist groups with respect to their capabilities, geography, political demands, and even tactics. This range of groups is presumably why terrorism scholars often analyze them to make empirical observations about terrorist behavior more generally (e.g., Berrebi, 2003; Byman, 2005; Cronin, 2006; Kydd & Walter, 2006).

In the coercion literature, success is measured by the extent to which the target government adjusts its behavior to accord with the coercing party's given preferences (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Pape, 1996; Smith, 1996). In the terrorism literature, the preferences of terrorists are typically assumed to be reflected in their political platforms (Crenshaw, 1988). In keeping with other research on terrorist coercion (Abrahms, 2006b; Pape, 2003; Schelling, 1991), the dependent variable is thus the degree to which the FTO campaigns advanced their policy demands by forcing government compliance. Coding for this variable was performed by an independent team of research assistants from Cornell University applying the following criteria: a "complete success" denotes full attainment of a campaign's stated political objective, a "complete failure" indicates the absence of perceptible progress in inducing political change, and a "partial success" or a "near failure" describes middling outcomes in descending degrees of political achievement.[4] In the empirical tests that follow, I investigate the political consequences of the 125 substate campaigns both as a binary success–failure variable and as an ordered variable with four possible outcomes.

This study examines a battery of potentially relevant independent variables to ascertain the determinants of the substate campaign outcomes. These independent variables fall into four general categories: the tactics of the FTO campaign in terms of its target selection, the fighting capability of both the FTO and target country, and the stated political objective of the FTO campaign. Below, I explain the rationale for testing these variables as well as my methodology and data sources.

The tactics of FTO campaigns are a potential explanation for variation in the political outcome. In interstate conflict, studies find variable coercion rates depending on whether the violence focuses on a country's military

personnel or civilians (Art & Cronin, 2003; Pape, 1996). Conveniently, this distinction in target selection is also the convention for differentiating guerrilla and terrorist campaigns (Ganor, 2002, p. 296; Goodwin, 2006, p. 317; Hoffman, 2006, p. 35; Schmid & Jongman, 2005, p. 14; Wilkinson, 1986, p. x). Following this convention, I code each of the 125 substate campaigns as either guerrilla or terrorist depending on whether the target country's deaths were mainly to its military or its civilians, as defined by the Department of Homeland Security (see Global Terrorism Database, 2009). Roughly half of the campaigns were guerrilla because they focused their attacks on the country's military. For example, Al-Qaeda-in-Iraq's campaign to oust the United States from Iraq is designated guerrilla because 99% of the Americans killed have been military personnel. By contrast, the Kurdistan Workers' Party campaign against Turkey to establish an independent state is designated terrorist because 99% of the Turks killed have been civilians. Using a discrete variable for target selection is preferable to a continuous variable for several reasons. Because the coercing party in international relations invariably uses a hybrid of coercive levers, the standard approach is to concentrate on the dominant source of pressure (e.g., Art & Cronin, 2003; Byman & Waxman, 2002; George, 1994; Pape, 1996).[5] More important, a discrete variable is more accurate than a continuous one because collectors of events data are far less likely to miscode the dominant target selection of a substate campaign than to inadvertently omit particular terrorist or guerrilla attacks (see Drakos & Gofas, 2006). Indeed, there is no consensus across empirical sources on the exact ratio of attacks against civilian versus military targets. There is a consensus, however, across data sources that the FTO campaigns were generally bimodal in their target selection, training their violence mainly on the target country's civilians or military. For the targeting data, I rely on the GTD, the Coalition Casualty Count (CCC) database, and several case-specific secondary sources.[6]

FTO capability is also a potential explanation for variation in the political outcomes of substate campaigns. Unsurprisingly, studies of interstate conflict find that the capability of the coercing party is positively related to the likelihood of winning concessions (e.g., Art & Cronin, 2003). Researchers might be inclined to use the number of FTO-inflicted casualties as a proxy for group capability, but this measure is problematic for two fundamental reasons. Militant groups occasionally increase their level of violence when they are waning (Cronin, 2009a). Furthermore, if groups rely on terrorism when weak, then higher casualties conceivably signify lower capability. I also do not test campaign duration because this could introduce endogeneity into the model: Campaigns may be prolonged precisely because they are failing politically. In accordance with a RAND (2008) study, I include three broad measures of

FTO capability. The first is the peak membership size of the FTO.[7] The second is the FTO's life span, in years, at the start of its campaigns because older groups have usually developed superior organizational capacity (Singh et al., 1986). The third measure is whether or not the FTOs received external support, for which I employ a dichotomous variable coded 1 when they benefited from the assistance of foreign states or charities and 0 otherwise. Unlike the RAND study, I also test whether the FTO employed suicide missions because these enhance the lethality of attacks, require additional manpower, and are said to boost coercive effectiveness (Pape, 2003, 2005). For these data, I rely on RAND's TKB, the Center for Defense Information's Terrorism Project, and Assaf Moghadam's comprehensive suicide mission data set.

The capability of the target country also merits consideration. In studies of economic sanctions, as would be expected, countries with greater capability are less susceptible to coercion (Drezner, 1998; Hart, 2000). The same causal logic potentially applies against substate campaigns. I operationalize four variables to test the capability of the target countries. First, following Walsh and Piazza (2010), I use the World Bank's World Development Indicators and the Center for International Comparisons's Penn World Table to test the logged per capita gross domestic product for the year in which the target country suffered the greatest number of campaign-related deaths. In comparative research, it is common to lag independent variables because their presumed affect on the dependent variable does not occur immediately. I do not lag these independent variables because governments, when fighting against a substate campaign, tend to reassess their political positions during the period of maximum bloodshed.[8] Second, I use data from the World Penn Table to test the logged populations of the target countries. Third, I test the fighting capability of the target countries with data from the Correlates of War's Composite Index of National Capability, an aggregate indicator of military power (e.g., army size) and economic power (e.g., energy consumption). Fourth, I use Polity IV to test the regime type of the target country, which supposedly affects its ability to resist substate campaigns (Abrahms, 2007; Lyall, 2009, 2010; Weinberg & Eubank, 1994).[9]

Coercion studies invariably find that the nature of the policy demand influences the success rate, with the greater the government's anticipated cost of granting the demand, the lower the likelihood of compliance (Art & Cronin, 2003; Byman & Waxman, 2002; George, 1994). In fact, several studies posit that the size of the objective is the key variable affecting the political outcomes of substate campaigns (see Abrahms, 2006b; Kydd & Walter, 2006; Pape, 2003, 2005; also see Piazza, 2009). In both the coercion

and international mediation literatures, there is a general consensus on how governments rank political objectives. A campaign defined as having a "maximalist" objective is fought to induce the target government into ceding power or altering its ideology, whereas a campaign defined as having a "limited" objective is fought to achieve ends that would not directly imperil the government or its citizens' fundamental way of life (Abrahms, 2006b; George, 1971; Greig, 2005; Marinov, 2005; Pape, 2003; Rothman & Olson, 2001). Examples of the former include the Mujahedin-e Khalq's campaign against Iran to end clerical rule and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine's campaign against Israel to establish Marxism in historic Palestine. Examples of the latter include ETA's campaign against Spain to permit the creation of a relatively small Basque state within that country and the Continuity Irish Republican Army's campaign against the United Kingdom to allow Northern Ireland to secede. To test the effect of the campaign's political objective, I employ a dichotomous variable coded 1 if the objective is maximalist and 0 if it is limited.

Are Terrorist Campaigns Politically Effective?

FTOs sometimes triumph: Of their 125 campaigns, 38, or approximately 30%, successfully coerced the target country into at least partially complying with the policy demand. Figure 1 adds important insight, however, demonstrating a clear difference in the coercion rates of guerrilla and terrorist campaigns. The number of FTO campaigns that targeted a country's military personnel is about the same as the number that targeted civilians: 60 and 64, respectively, or 48% and 51%. Yet the guerrilla campaigns, which target a state's military, account for 36 of the successful cases of coercion. The lone case in which a terrorist campaign even partially achieved its policy demand was the highly publicized Spanish decision to withdraw from Iraq in response to the March 11, 2004, Madrid train station bombings.[10] In this case, the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group attacked Spanish commuters days before the prime ministerial election, which helped to elect the antiwar candidate José Luis Rodríguez-Zapatero, who then fulfilled his pledge to bring the Spanish troops home. Scholars and policy makers alike highlight this salient case as proof that terrorism is chillingly effective for gaining political concessions (see Rose & Murphy, 2007). The data suggest, however, that the so-called 11-M campaign is an outlier. Across model specifications, I find that target selection matters greatly. When FTOs rely on a guerrilla campaign, it often succeeds in achieving their stated political goal.
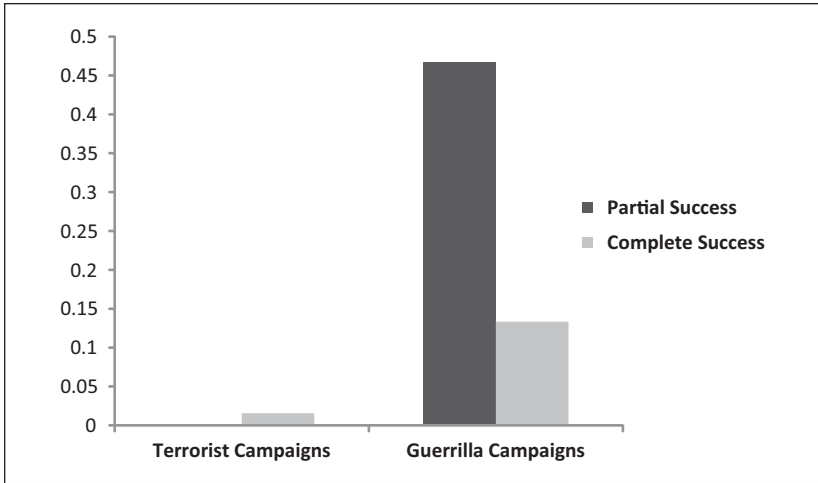
Figure 1. Proportion of campaigns achieving partial or complete success, disaggregated by target selection

But when these same groups rely on a terrorist campaign, it nearly always fails regardless of their capability, that of the target country, or even the nature of their political demands. Terrorist campaigns are hence an ineffective coercive tactic.

Table 1 displays results of four multivariate regression models. Column 1 presents results of a standard logit model using a binary variable for success or failure of the FTO campaigns: A complete success or partial success is coded as 1, and a complete failure or near failure is coded as 0. In cases where a group wages multiple campaigns, these may not be fully independent of each other, so I also calculate robust standard errors with observations clustered by FTO (Fortna, 2008). Holding other factors fixed, the target selection of an FTO campaign is highly significant and substantively more important than any other explanation offered in the terrorism, coercion, or international mediation literatures. The nature of the political objective has a fairly large effect in the expected direction; that is, campaigns fought to achieve maximalist goals are predictably less likely to succeed. The size of FTO membership is also significant but substantively meaningless, and the coefficient is in the wrong direction, a function of Al-Qaeda's status as a large, ineffective outlier. When campaigns from this FTO are dropped, group size has no statistically significant effect. No other variables achieve statistical significance. Even with this admittedly blunt coding of the dependent variable, the evidence strongly

Table 1. Determinants of Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) Campaign Success

	Logit	Ordered logit	Ordered logit without Al-Qaeda	Ordered logit without Iraq, Afghanistan
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Civilian target (1/0)	−7.33** (2.39)	−4.06*** (0.76)	−3.19*** (0.85)	−4.20*** (0.89)
Maximalist objective (1/0)	−6.82*** (2.01)	−1.69*** (0.52)	−1.89** (0.64)	−1.85** (0.64)
FTO capability				
Peak membership (100s)	−0.012* (0.005)	−0.009*** (0.002)	−0.003 (0.004)	−0.01*** (0.003)
FTO life span (in years)	0.004 (0.04)	0.01 (0.05)	0.04 (0.03)	0.06* (0.03)
External support (1/0)	0.27 (1.35)	0.70 (0.52)	1.04 (0.61)	1.03 (0.68)
Suicide tactics (1/0)	0.09 (0.72)	0.30 (0.53)	0.93 (0.80)	0.88 (0.83)
Target capability				
Polity IV score	−0.26 (0.13)	0.07 (0.07)	0.03 (0.09)	0.04 (0.10)
Per capita GDP (log)	1.41 (1.53)	−0.03 (0.51)	1.17 (0.75)	0.63 (0.78)
Material capabilities (log)	0.54 (0.39)	0.33 (0.24)	0.03 (0.39)	0.25 (0.44)
Population (log)	−0.36 (0.50)	−0.16 (0.26)	047 (0.34)	0.31 (0.36)
Constant or cut points	−17.17 (62.75)	−18.87	−73.01	−111.76
		−17.43	−70.02	−108.46
		−14.44	−68.94	−106.91
Pseudo R^2	.67	.29	.29	.35
N	117	117	70	73

Logit (column 1) and ordered logit (columns 2, 3, 4) estimations with standard errors in parentheses. In the logit model, complete failures and near failures are coded 0, and partial successes and complete successes are coded 1. The four dependent variable outcomes in the ordered logit models are complete failure, near failure, partial success, and complete success.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 2. Marginal Effects of Statistically Significant Variables

	Marginal effect (change of probabilities)			
	Complete failure	Near failure	Partial success	Complete success
Mil → civ target	0.77	−0.12	−0.55	−0.10
Lim → max objective	0.40	−0.16	−0.22	−0.02

Probabilities are calculated holding all other independent variables at their means.

suggests that substate campaigns directed against civilians are an unprofitable way to coerce their governments into making concessions.

In column 2 of Table 1, I add nuance to the dependent variable by employing an ordered logit model with four campaign outcomes: complete success, partial success, near failure, and complete failure. In this improved version, I include the full set of independent variables from the benchmark model and again calculate robust standard errors with observations clustered by FTO. The results remain the same: Targeting civilians has a large, significant negative effect on substate campaign outcomes ($p < .001$). As expected, campaigns fought to achieve maximalist objectives are also significantly less likely to be successful, but the impact of target selection is substantially greater.

To interpret the impact of the significant variables, I calculate in Table 2 their marginal effects coefficients, holding all other variables fixed. Row 1 shows that an FTO campaign is 77% more likely to completely fail when directed against a country's civilians, as opposed to its military. Conversely, when a campaign is directed against a country's military rather than its civilians, the odds of achieving at least partial success increase by 55%. Row 2 presents the marginal effects coefficients for the nature of the campaign's political objective, as a means of comparison. When a discrete change is made from limited to maximalist objectives, the odds of complete failure increase by only 40%, and the odds of obtaining at least partial success decrease by just 22%. Furthermore, when the target is civilian, not military, the odds of achieving complete success decrease by 10%, though this figure declines by only 2% when the campaign objective is maximalist as opposed to limited. As noted, coercion studies routinely find that the nature of the political objective is the critical determinant of campaign outcomes. When it comes to the success rates of substate campaigns, however, target selection is evidently an even more consequential factor.
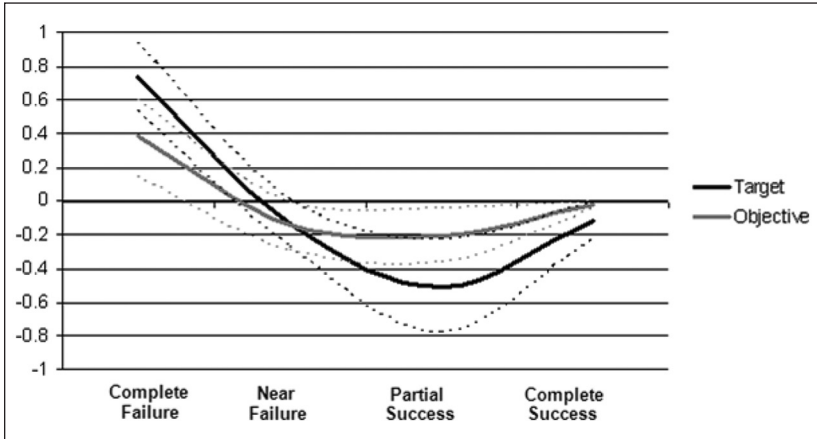
Figure 2. Change in probability of campaign outcomes

Figure 2 illustrates visually the change in outcome probabilities for the two statistically significant independent variables: the campaign's target selection and political objective. A change in targeting from military to civilian generates high positive odds for complete failure, and the likelihood of partial success or even near failure falls sharply. In other words, although guerrilla campaigns are a productive way for groups to compel at least partial compliance, terrorist campaigns are an almost surefire way to obtain no concessions at all.[11] The campaign's political objective follows a similar pattern: Adopting maximalist goals increases the odds of complete failure and decreases the chance for any level of political success. Yet the magnitude of change is clearly weaker than for the campaign's target selection. In sum, across model specifications the tendency for governments to comply depends more on the substate campaign's targeting than on any other explanation in the terrorism, coercion, or bargaining literatures.

Robust Results

These findings were subjected to numerous robustness checks. First, because Al-Qaeda and its affiliates are sometimes regarded as sui generis (Crenshaw, 2008), I dropped their campaigns from the data set and recalculated the ordered logit model shown in column 2 of Table 1. This decision simultaneously addresses the spurious significance of group

membership size. Column 3 presents the results: The campaign's target selection remains both statistically and substantively the most significant variable. Second, I reran the models dropping the ongoing campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq because of the fluidity of these theaters. The results, presented in column 4, remain unchanged.[12] Third, I examined whether the poor success rate of terrorist campaigns is driven by the fact that they are more likely than guerrilla campaigns to take place inside of the target country. The effect of distance is generally neglected in political science, but to wage distant campaigns governments incur additional costs of supply and transport (Johnston, 2009; Mearsheimer, 2001). The findings stand after controlling for whether the FTO campaigns were waged at home or abroad. Fourth, to confirm that terrorist campaigns are politically ineffective even when they employ suicide attacks, I reran the models interacting the FTO campaigns that used suicide missions and targeted civilians. The interaction term is insignificant, and targeting civilians remains both statistically and substantively the most important variable. Fifth, I reran the models using Freedom House scores for both political rights and civil liberties instead of the Polity IV index to verify that the findings do not hinge on employing one popular data set for regime type over another. Similarly, I reran the models with RAND's more nuanced codings of the FTOs' political objectives instead of the more common binary classification scheme from the international mediation literature.[13] Sixth, I reran the models lagging the independent variables pertaining to the target country's capability to allay concerns of potential endogeneity; testing them at the start year of the campaign rather than at its peak year of violence does not attenuate the findings. To make certain that the models do not suffer from multicollinearity owing to the inclusion of several related measures of target country capability, I also reran the models testing each of them independently; the capability of the target country remains a statistically insignificant factor in the determination of substate campaign outcomes. Seventh, I tested the models using the logged value for FTO membership because the range spans as many as three magnitudes and there is slight bimodality in the distribution. Eighth, I examined whether guerrilla campaigns tend to kill more people than do terrorist campaigns because that tendency would arguably account for their variable coercion rates; in fact, the number of civilians killed in terrorist campaigns generally exceeds the number of military personnel killed in guerrilla campaigns.[14] Ninth, I recoded several cases to challenge the valence of my findings. Because of the missing data for the Khmer Rouge's campaign to replace the Lon Nol government, I initially elected to code this special case as undetermined in terms of target

selection. As a robustness check, however, I recoded the targeting as primarily against civilians, which cuts against my central finding because the campaign was completely successful in ousting the incumbent regime. Changing this data point has virtually no effect on the coefficients. I also checked my assessments of FTO campaign success against those made in previous studies. In general, coding of the dependent variable corresponds closely to prior assessments. For a couple terrorist campaigns, however, I deemed the outcomes less successful than did Pape (2003). Even when these discrepant cases are recoded as complete successes, targeting civilians remains a highly significant ($p < .001$) predictor of government noncompliance.

Finally, I paid attention to the possibility of a selection effect in which terrorist campaigns fail because only weaker groups engage in them. To address this potential concern, I disaggregated the data into campaigns waged by small and large FTOs, using the median of 1,000 members as the breakpoint.[15] Their overall success rates are similar: Small groups achieved partial or complete success in 30% of their campaigns compared to 29% for large groups. More important, both sizes of groups struggled to coerce in their terrorist campaigns. For small FTOs, their guerrilla campaigns often succeeded, but all 51 of their terrorist campaigns failed, except for the Spanish outlier. The results are equally stark for large FTOs: all 11 of their terrorist campaigns failed, though I added the questionable case of the Khmer Rouge after recoding its target selection against my main findings. I also applied the fully specified ordered logit model discretely to the campaigns waged by small and large FTOs, using a dummy variable to control for group membership size.[16] In all of these analyses, target selection remains the key determinant of campaign success, both statistically and substantively. As a further check, however, I also examined the political success rates of the FTOs that engaged in both guerrilla and terrorist campaigns. Among these multitactical groups, an appreciably lower success rate in their campaigns against civilians would suggest that target selection matters independently of group capability. Indeed, these multitactical groups achieved at least partial success in 31 of their 46 guerrilla campaigns, while completely failing in all nine of their terrorist campaigns, except for Al-Qaeda's near failure to coerce the Afghan government into adopting Sharia law. In other words, when an FTO wages a guerrilla campaign, it is frequently successful in coercing at least partial compliance. When that same group wages a terrorist campaign, however, it fails nearly systematically.

This study may even overestimate the ability of terrorist campaigns to coerce strategic concessions, for five reasons. First, FTOs are endowed with

far greater capabilities than most other groups that use terrorism (Bankoff, 2003, pp. 423-424; Deisler, 2002, p. 406). Because my sample is restricted to the campaigns of FTOs, it is thus a "hard test" for demonstrating the coercive ineffectiveness of terrorism. Second, the literature on coercion emphasizes that it is more likely to succeed when a campaign is fought to obtain a clearly articulated political demand (Abrahms, 2006b; Byman & Waxman, 2002, p. 15; George & Simmons, 1994, p. 280), and all 125 campaigns meet this criterion. This decision rule excluded from analysis a large number of terrorist campaigns that have been fought to achieve unidentifiable political ends, which are unwinnable since coercion requires government compliance (see Hoffman, 1997; Schelling, 1991). Third, case studies illustrate that terrorism can exacerbate the perpetrators' grievances (Abrahms, 2006a, 2006b). Although backfiring is worse for the coercing party than the null result (Byman & Waxman, 2002, p. 35), none of the models assesses additional penalties for politically counterproductive substate campaigns. Fourth, this study does not compare the political effects of terrorist campaigns to nonviolent protest, which is surprisingly effective (Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008, 2011). Finally, the one seemingly clear-cut terrorist campaign success in my sample is perhaps illusory. Case studies on the 11-M campaign highlight that it played only a secondary role in ending Spanish involvement in Iraq (Biezen, 2005; Blakeley, 2006; Lago & Montero, 2006; Rigo, 2005). Moreover, the most thorough study concludes that "the confluence of conditions present in the Madrid case is probably quite rare and possibly unique" (Rose & Murphy, 2007, p. 188).

The results are also consistent with three related research programs. First, a growing body of evidence indicates that terrorist campaigns shift electorates to the right, undermining government support for concessions (Berrebi & Klor, 2006, 2008; Chowanietz, 2010; Jentleson, 1992, p. 62; Mueller, 2006, p. 184; Wilkinson, 1986, p. 52; also see Gould and Klor, 2010). In a recent review of this literature, a RAND study reports, "Terrorist fatalities, with few exceptions, increase support for the bloc of parties associated with a more-intransigent position. Scholars may interpret this as further evidence that terrorist attacks against civilians do not help terrorist organizations achieve their stated goals (e.g., Abrahms, 2006)" (Berrebi, 2009, pp. 189-190). Second, the civilian victimization literature normally finds that government campaigns against the population are also politically unproductive (on this literature, see Downes, 2008, p. 5).[17] Third, comparativists are increasingly finding that rebel campaigns against civilians in protracted civil wars reduce the likelihood of gaining the compliance of either the government (Fortna, 2008) or the local population (Kalyvas, 2006).[18] This conclusion is

supported by the fact that many important insurgent leaders in recent history such as Carlos Marighela, Che Guevara, Mullah Mohammad Omar, Regis Debray, and Vo Nguyen Giap have warned their foot soldiers that attacking civilian targets is counterproductive (e.g., Fishman, 2006; Guevara, 1969, p. 105; Wilkinson, 1986, pp. 59, 100). Terrorism specialists caution that conflating these anticivilian campaigns with terrorist campaigns can lead to inaccurate, misleading results (Abadie, 2006, pp. 50-56; Davis & Cragin, 2009, p. xii; Schmid & Jongman, 2005, p. 3). Yet such findings only bolster the evidence that terrorist campaigns will remain ineffective even if their practitioners manage to increase their membership roster and lethality by orders of magnitude.

Why Terrorism Fails to Induce Government Compliance

Although terrorist campaigns are an effective tactic for achieving process goals, the foregoing analysis offers the strongest empirical evidence to date that terrorist campaigns are an ineffective tactic for achieving outcome goals. In terrorist campaigns, the low coercion rate is not simply an artifact of the weakness of the perpetrators, the nature of their demands, or the strength of government opposition. Rather, the evidence indicates that governments resist complying when their civilians are the focus of substate attack. This empirical finding invites theoretical questions, particularly as to why governments dig in their political heels when groups target their populations.

To understand why terrorism is a suboptimal instrument of coercion, it is useful to review how this violent tactic is supposed to work in the first place. In theory, terrorism operates as a communication strategy that signals to the target country the costs of noncompliance; terrorism allegedly coerces government accommodation when the expected cost of the violence against civilians exceeds the expected cost of making the concession (see Kydd & Walter, 2006; Lapan & Sandler, 1993; Overgaard, 1994; Pape, 2003). This bargaining logic lacks external validity, however; in fact, the literature on terrorism suggests that it is a flawed coercive tactic precisely because it is a flawed communication strategy.

Studies on media coverage of terrorism consistently find that it seldom amplifies the political demands of its perpetrators. Independent studies (see Hewitt, 1993) have analyzed international coverage of IRA terrorism and Canadian coverage of Iranian terrorism, reaching the identical determination that "the terrorist motives and goals were ignored" (pp. 46-47). Based on these studies, Christopher Hewitt (1993) concludes that media coverage of

terrorists exhibits "a tendency to depict their acts as ones of senseless bestiality" (p. 52). Michael Kelly and Thomas Mitchell (1984) have produced the most ambitious study on the media's coverage of terrorist demands. Their content analysis of terrorism articles in the *New York Times* and *Times* of London reveals that historically "less than 10 percent of the coverage in either newspaper dealt in even the most superficial way with the grievances of the terrorists" (p. 287). Terrorists struggle to broadcast their demands even when the perpetrators emphasize them, are highly educated, and speak the majority language of the target country (Schmid & de Graaf, 1982). As Alex Schmid and Janny de Graaf (1982) illustrate via the Weather Underground, "The terrorists could bomb their names on to the front pages, but they could do next to nothing to make sure that the message intended by their bombings was also the message transmitted" (p. 111). Bonnie Cordes likewise observes that "although terrorism is often described as a form of communication, terrorists are rather poor communicators" because "the violence of terrorism is rarely understood by the public" (p. 1). Kelly and Mitchell (1984) go even further, noting that the use of terrorism seems to "sap . . . its political content" (p. 287).

As a rule, target countries do not even locate the preferences of terrorists in their political platforms. Rather, target countries tend to infer from the extreme nature of their tactics that the perpetrators evidently harbor correspondingly extreme political intentions. This misperception that terrorists invariably harbor radical political ends closes the bargaining space even when it should objectively exist. Brian Jenkins (1978, p. 227) and David Rapoport (2004, p. 49) lament that because of the extreme methodology of terrorism, its practitioners are routinely seen as "political extremists" or "zealots." Similarly, Paul Wilkinson (2002) affirms that because of the immoderate nature of their tactics, terrorists are reflexively perceived as politically "incorrigible," reducing confidence in bargaining with them. Even political scientists confound the extreme means of terrorists with their presumed ends; formal models, for instance, take as exogenous that with their radical methods, terrorists are apparently motivated by radical preferences, precluding a mutually acceptable compromise solution (e.g., Berrebi & Klor, 2006, 2007; Bueno de Mesquita & Dickson, 2007). This observation was foreshadowed in the prescient work of Immanuel Kant (1795), who hypothesized centuries ago that even in wartime unrestrained tactics are politically counterproductive because they inadvertently signal that the perpetrators maintain limitless intentions. Terrorism exemplifies this kind of anti-Kantian tactic, undermining trust in its perpetrators to credibility commit to a political compromise.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. For these data, I rely on the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and the Coalition Casualty Count (CCC) database. My requirement of at least one death is based on the State Department's criterion for determining if a terrorist attack is "significant."

2. The number of campaigns exceeds the number of foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) because many of these groups have waged multiple campaigns. Ansar al-Islam, for example, has waged two campaigns: one against Iraq to establish Sharia law and one against the United States to expel it from Iraq.

3. Several scholars (e.g., Fortna, 2008; Sambanis, 2008) have recently claimed that the standard definition of terrorism ought to be expanded to include this type of substate violence. Establishing a uniformly accepted definition of terrorism is clearly beyond the scope of this analysis.

4. To illustrate, an example of a complete success is Hezbollah's expulsion of American peacekeepers from Lebanon in 1984; a complete failure is Aum Shinrikyo's total lack of progress in establishing a communist society in Japan; a partial success is the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia's accomplishment of controlling substantial territories throughout that country; and a near failure is ETA's weak record in establishing an independent Basque state in Spain. For uniformity in the coding process, I supplied more specific instructions for evaluating campaigns to eject occupying countries: a complete success signifies the total withdrawal of the target country; a complete failure describes a campaign in which the target country did not reduce its troops; a partial success refers to a campaign in which the target country has either reduced its troops or officially expressed its intentions to do so; and a near failure describes a withdrawal from less than 10% of the contested territory, with no official declaration to terminate the occupation.

5. To eject Iraq from Kuwait in 1991, for example, Washington used diplomacy, economic sanctions, and ultimately military force, which is credited with the positive political outcome.

6. For one campaign, the Khmer Rouge's to replace the Lon Nol government, the target selection is undetermined: GTD data on the group begin too late, in 1978, after the group had assumed power, the Khmer Rouge is not included in the CCC data set, and there is no consensus in the historical literature on whether the group attacked mostly civilians or military personnel en route to power.

7. Group memberships ranged in size from 40 (Japanese Red Army) to 50,000 (Al-Qaeda).

8. Perhaps the most salient examples are the Spanish decision to withdraw from Iraq in the immediate aftermath of the March 11, 2004, Madrid train attacks; the American decision to invade Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001, attacks; and the French decision to promptly pull out of Lebanon in response to the October 23, 1983, Beirut barracks bombing.

9. The predominant view is that liberal countries are weaker counterterrorists because they suffer from two constraints: (a) commitment to civil liberties prevents democracies from adopting sufficiently harsh countermeasures and (b) low cost tolerance limits their ability to withstand substate attacks. Lyall (2010) and I (Abrahms, 2007) do not find empirical support for this line of argument.

10. Adding the numbers of successful guerrilla campaigns to successful terrorist campaigns does not equal 38 because of the missing targeting data for the Khmer Rouge's campaign.

11. Complete success is hardest to achieve, so the change in probabilities generated from changes to these independent variables does not substantially differ from zero.

12. This robustness check concurrently preempts a potential objection to my research design—that guerrilla campaigns are more likely to succeed because sometimes multiple groups wage them in pursuit of a common political goal. In my sample of substate campaigns, Afghanistan and Iraq are the only theaters that conform to this scenario.

13. My appreciation to the participants of the Program on International Security Policy at the University of Chicago for making this useful suggestion, among others. RAND lists six types of political objectives that militant groups commonly strive to achieve: regime change, territorial change, policy change, empire, social revolution, and status quo (e.g., Jones & Libicki, 2008).

14. This finding is robust regardless of how averages are calculated.

15. As already demonstrated, none of the measures for group capability is significant. I focus here on membership size because this is the most common measure of group strength" (Asal & Rethemeyer 2008; Chenoweth & Stephan 2011; DeNardo 1985; Lake 2002). When an FTO had 1,000 members, I coded the group as small because the next smallest group had 3,000 members, suggesting a more natural breakpoint after, rather than before, the 1,000-member median.

16. The model is unable to converge for the large FTOs because of excessive cam-
     paign clustering. When FTOs with 1,000 members are coded as large, the model
     converges and the coefficient on civilian targeting remains negative and signifi-
     cant ($p < .001$). The number of campaigns waged by small and large FTOs totals
     121, not 125, because of missing data for the membership sizes of Ansar al-
     Sunnah and Hizbul Shabaab.
17. This position is not uniformly accepted (e.g., Lyall, 2009).
18. To be exact, Kalyvas (2006) shows that in civil wars rebel attacks on civilians,
     when perceived as indiscriminate, are counterproductive for gaining the alle-
     giance of the population.

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