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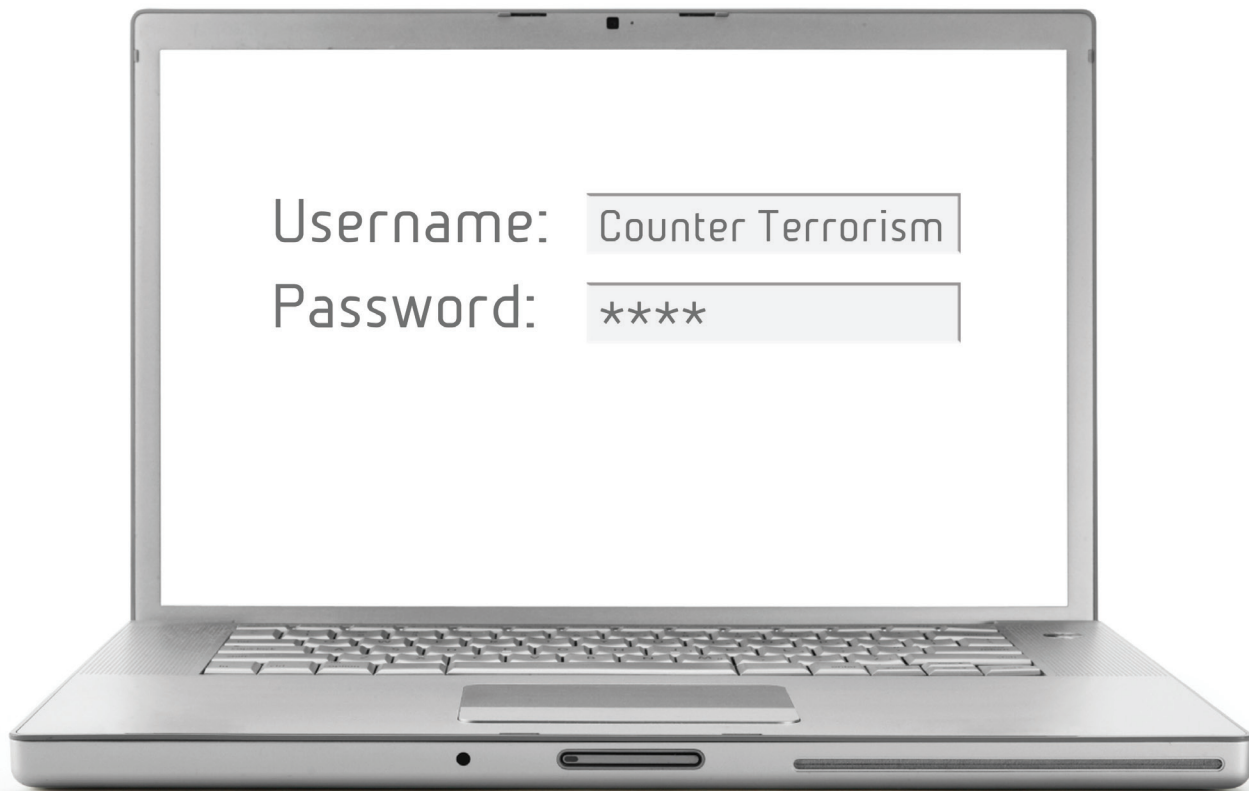
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C A N A D I E N N E

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*Asking the right questions in  
the Empirical Measurement of Security,  
Terrorism and Counter Terrorism*

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*Poser les bonnes questions dans l'évaluation  
empirique en matière de sécurité,  
de terrorisme et de contre terrorisme*



ACS • AEC

Association for Canadian Studies • Association d'études canadiennes

# FEDERALISM AND IDENTITIES CANADIAN ISSUES SPRING 2013 LE FÉDÉRALISME ET LES IDENTITÉS THÈMES CANADIENS PRINTEMPS 2013



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# INTRODUCTION

Jack Jedwab

Quelles sont les bonnes questions à poser lorsque l'on tente de mesurer empiriquement le terrorisme et les efforts de lutte contre le terrorisme? Ce questionnement est central dans le développement de procédures de recherche efficaces dans ce domaine de recherche important. L'étude du terrorisme et du contre-terrorisme comporte plusieurs facettes, plusieurs desquelles ne peuvent pas être quantifiées. Dans ce numéro de *Diversité canadienne*, nous avons demandé à des spécialistes d'ici et d'ailleurs de partager leurs observations et leurs idées sur les défis liés à la tentative de mesurer empiriquement des phénomènes tels que le terrorisme et le contre-terrorisme. Les auteurs s'entendent que des progrès considérables ont été réalisés depuis le début du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle dans le développement de base de données et dans la collecte de données pertinentes. Alors que certains auteurs discutent des limites liées à la mesure de phénomènes sociaux tels que le terrorisme, la plupart s'accordent pour affirmer que davantage de recherches empiriques est nécessaire. Paradoxalement, alors que des spécialistes sont invités à répondre à certaines questions autour de ce phénomène dans ce numéro de *Diversité*, de nouvelles questions prennent forme à leur tour à travers ces dix articles, ouvrant donc la voie à de nouvelles avenues de recherche pour le futur. La prise en considération du contexte dans lequel l'évaluation des opinions du public est effectuée est cruciale dans l'étude du terrorisme et du contre-terrorisme. De plus, tout effort en vue d'établir une analyse réussie des tendances en matière d'opinion publique nécessite l'élaboration de questions qui examinent les stratégies proposées et les objectifs convoités par les législateurs dans ce domaine d'étude délicat.

Deux sondages détaillés sur les opinions des Canadiens autour de la sécurité, du terrorisme et du contre-terrorisme, mené par la firme Léger Marketing pour l'Association d'études canadiennes (AEC), sont utilisés comme point de départ pour certains de ces articles. Le but de ces sondages était d'établir un ensemble de questions formant une base à partir de laquelle les opinions du public pourraient être observées et suivies sur une certaine période de temps, permettant ainsi de renseigner les chercheurs, les législateurs et les dirigeants communautaires à propos des inquiétudes personnelles et collectives ressenties par rapport à la sécurité nationale, à la menace du terrorisme au Canada et ailleurs, à leur niveau de confiance envers les institutions et les différents groupes sociaux, à leurs perceptions quant à l'état des relations entre les différents groupes sociaux, à leurs raisonnements autour du terrorisme, à leur disposition à dénoncer des activités suspectes, et à leur perception du degré d'efficacité des mesures légales et éducationnelles visant à contrer le terrorisme. Plusieurs questions fermées ont été conçues afin de nous permettre d'avoir un aperçu des opinions présentes dans la société canadienne. Un sondage

réalisé en novembre 2012 avait demandé aux répondants de définir la notion de terrorisme et d'identifier les mesures qui sont installées pour combattre ce phénomène. Une question fermée additionnelle demandait aux individus d'établir les causes fondamentales qu'ils attribuent au terrorisme. Le premier article résume les résultats de ces deux sondages.

Ghosh et Bhui examinent les données recueillies en 2012 par l'Association d'études canadiennes et notent que c'est les individus les plus âgés qui sont les plus préoccupés par la menace du terrorisme et par les conflits interethniques; c'est également cette population qui reconnaît avoir les opinions les plus négatives envers les Musulmans. Ghosh et Bhui suggèrent que de plus amples études devraient être menées afin de mieux pouvoir identifier les sources de cette antipathie envers les Musulmans et de vérifier si cette antipathie est uniquement liée aux préoccupations envers le terrorisme ou s'il existe des causes sous-jacentes à celle-ci. Les auteurs considèrent que davantage de recherche est également nécessaire afin de mieux comprendre le rôle des médias dans la formation des opinions autour du terrorisme. De son côté, Sokora passe en examen des études qui ont été menées sur les attitudes du public autour du terrorisme et du contre-terrorisme. Il recommande que des recherches plus approfondies soient réalisées à propos du niveau de soutien du public envers le financement de mesures visant à combattre le terrorisme, de l'idée que restreindre certaines libertés civiles puissent réduire l'activité terroriste et sur le degré d'association qui peut exister entre les opinions à propos des Musulmans et celles à propos du terrorisme et du contre-terrorisme.

Bartlett et Miller affirment que bien que mesurer les succès de la prévention du terrorisme soit essentiel, cet exercice est extrêmement difficile à réaliser. Les auteurs élaborent sur « un paradoxe lié à la mesure »; l'intérêt du public envers les activités du contre-terrorisme baisse lorsque celui-ci est efficace, alors qu'il est à son apogée suivant une attaque. Les auteurs suggèrent trois aspects dans la recherche sur la prévention du terrorisme qui nécessitent plus d'attention; premièrement, nous devons reconnaître qu'il n'existe pas uniquement une seule façon de mesurer le terrorisme; deuxièmement, plus d'attention devrait être accordée à l'étude des médias sociaux afin de déterminer les changements qui se produisent dans les opinions publiques et leurs conséquences sur l'efficacité de certaines politiques; et finalement, l'évaluation de l'efficacité des méthodes utilisées lors de la lutte contre le terrorisme doit être communiquée d'une manière claire au public. Ceci signifie que, dans la mesure du possible, les résultats du travail des services de sécurité et de renseignements doivent être rendus publics.

Freilich et Chermak s'étonnent de l'intérêt relativement peu élevé dirigé envers l'utilisation de sources ouvertes lors de l'étude du terrorisme. À travers leur article, ils présentent un aperçu des



procédés utilisés dans la création de la United States Extremist Crime Database (la première base de données nationale en son genre permettant de retracer les crimes violents et les crimes financiers ayant eu lieu à l'intérieur des États-Unis). Les auteurs décrivent quelques leçons importantes qui ont été tirées lors de la création de la ECDB. Un des points forts de la ECDB est que, contrairement à des projets plus statiques qui procèdent à une collecte de données à un point précis dans le temps, celle-ci est une base de données à grande échelle ouverte qui fait l'objet de continuelle mises-à-jours. De nouvelles informations sont ajoutées à la ECDB aussitôt que celles-ci deviennent disponibles.

Chenoweth observe que depuis le 11 septembre, la recherche sur le terrorisme et le contre-terrorisme a évolué de façon considérable. Parmi les avancées positives soulignées dans son article, il y a la quantité accrue et la qualité des informations qui sont partagés, un meilleur accès aux informations disponibles, et une diminution dans l'écart entre la recherche et l'élaboration de politiques. Il existe cependant plusieurs défis auxquels doivent faire face les chercheurs œuvrant dans ce domaine. Un de ces défis est que plusieurs études ne prennent pas en considération le rôle que peut jouer l'État lors du développement de comportements terroristes. Souvent, par exemple, le types de régimes politiques (démocratique, autoritaire, etc.), les habilités militaires, les antécédents relatifs aux droits de la personne et l'aide étrangère ne sont pas considérés comme pouvant potentiellement avoir une influence dans le développement d'activités terroristes. Chenoweth discute également du manque d'efforts mis dans l'évaluation de l'efficacité de certaines politiques. Afin de surmonter ces difficultés, elle recommande l'utilisation de données désagrégées permettant ainsi l'amélioration des résultats obtenus par les techniques empiriques, aussi que d'éviter de se baser sur une source d'information unique et utiliser une variété de technologies.

Littlewood soutient que bien que les Canadiens considèrent la probabilité d'une attaque terroriste visant directement le Canada comme étant faible, le problème du terrorisme est compliqué par le fait que le Canada peut faire office de base de soutien dans l'élaboration d'attaques terroristes. Son article passe en revue des recherches récentes sur les « militants étrangers » afin de déterminer les implications potentielles que ceux-ci peuvent avoir sur les efforts de lutte contre le terrorisme au pays. Bien que le Canada n'ait pas été dans la mire d'activités terroristes récentes, il soutient que celui-ci a une longue histoire liée au terrorisme. Il ajoute que le Canada est souvent impliqué dans « les guerres des autres », comme se fût par exemple le cas avec l'attentat à la bombe du vol 182 d'Air India en 1985. Les sociétés multiculturelles doivent être à l'affût de leur potentiel de devenir des proies aux activités terroristes, et le Canada doit porter une attention particulière afin de ne pas faciliter des activités terroristes à l'étranger. Sous cet angle, il conclut qu'un réseau transnational dense de mécanismes de lutte contre le terrorisme nécessite d'être mis en place dans un avenir proche.

Veldhuis et Kessels se penchent sur les efforts de déradicalisation et de réintégration des individus reconnus coupables d'extrémisme violent. Ils attribuent le manque de données sur l'étendue et la nature de la menace terroriste à l'incertitude concernant l'efficacité des politiques sur ce sujet. Les auteurs pressent les chercheurs à passer au-delà des témoignages anecdotiques et des hypothèses non-fondées vers une analyse de données plus globale qui peut ainsi servir à l'élaboration et l'implémentation de programmes visant la réhabilitation et la réintégration de délinquants criminels violents.

De son côté, Hull fait l'observation qu'un progrès soutenu s'est produit dans l'utilisation de méthodes quantitatives lors de l'étude du terrorisme. Après les attentats du 11 septembre, un effort accru a été mis afin d'étendre les méthodes empiriques sur l'étude du terrorisme et d'introduire des indices afin de quantifier les attentats terroristes. Il fait référence en particulier à l'étude sur le terrorisme et le contre-terrorisme de l'Université du Maryland (University of Maryland's Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) qui a répertorié plus de 100 000 attaques terroristes qui ont eu lieu à travers le monde entre 1970 et 2012. Il note que bien que les bases de données quantitatives soient utiles aux décideurs politiques et aux individus œuvrant dans la lutte contre le terrorisme, des questions entourant les dynamiques régionales et la façon que les différents gouvernements réagissent au terrorisme, entre autres facteurs, nécessitent d'être pris en considération avec beaucoup de prudence lors de la tentative de prévision de futures attaques sur la base d'un ensemble de données unique.

Amarasingam et Stewart soutiennent que des questions importantes doivent être adressées afin de compléter les sondages à échelle nationale effectués par l'AEC. Les auteurs soutiennent que plus de précisions doivent être amenées lorsque que l'on demande à des individus de définir le terrorisme puisque les réponses fournis par les participants manquaient de clarté. Il est également nécessaire d'avoir une meilleure compréhension de ce que signifie une diminution lorsque les répondants se mettent d'accords pour affirmer qu'il y a une diminution du terrorisme. Finalement, un plus grand choix de réponses devrait être disponible lorsque l'on interroge les participants à propos de ce qu'ils considèrent être les causes fondamentales du terrorisme. Les auteurs suggèrent que ce type de questions fermées dirige les réponses des participants, provoquant ainsi 52 % des répondants de choisir le « fondamentalisme religieux » comme étant la cause principale du terrorisme. Les auteurs soulignent l'importance de la recherche qualitative; celle-ci permet un aperçu plus précis des opinions publiques sur le terrorisme.

# INTRODUCTION

Jack Jedwab

What are the right questions when it comes to the empirical measurement of terrorism and counterterrorism? This issue is central in the development of a research agenda in this important field of inquiry. There are many facets to the study of terrorism and counterterrorism, not all of which can be quantified. In this edition of *Canadian Diversity*, we invited experts from Canada and abroad to share their observations and insights into the challenges associated with doing empirical work on terrorism and counterterrorism. The authors point to the considerable progress that has been made since the beginning of the 21st century in the design and collection of relevant data. While some identify the limits in quantifying the phenomenon, they generally acknowledge the need to do more empirical work. Paradoxically, while the publication invites contributors to reflect on the best questions, the ten essays raise their own questions and in doing so suggest several avenues for future research. The context or circumstances within which the measurement of public opinion occurs is critical when it comes to terrorism and counter-terrorism. Moreover, any effort to do successful trend analysis regarding public perceptions requires a set of questions that carefully considers the proposed strategies and desired objectives of policy-makers in this highly sensitive area of inquiry.

Detailed surveys of public perceptions of Canadians around security, terrorism and counter-terrorism conducted by the firm Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS) provided a focal point for certain essays. The objective of the surveys was to establish a set of questions that could form the basis for monitoring/tracking perceptions over time so as to provide researchers, policy-makers and community leaders with an ability to periodically assess such issues as individual and group concerns over national security, perceptions about the threat of terrorism both in Canada and abroad, trust in communities and institutions, perceptions of the state of intergroup relations, perceived justification for terrorism, the degree of readiness to report suspicious activity, and the perceived effectiveness of various legal and educational responses to terrorism. Multiple closed questions were employed to provide insights. A November 2012 survey invited respondents to define the notion of terrorism and to identify initiatives aimed at combating the phenomenon. An additional closed question focused on the perceived root causes of terrorism. The first essay summarizes the results of the two surveys.

Ghosh and Bhui comment on the 2012 data sets from the Association for Canadian Studies noting that concerns over terrorism appear to be more acute amongst from the older cohort which appears more concerned with ethnic conflict and holds more negative attitudes towards Muslims.

They recommend that research be carried out so as to help better identify the source of this antipathy and whether it is solely related to concerns about terrorism or other underlying causes. They suggest research is needed to further comprehend the role of the media in shaping perceptions of terrorism. For his part, Soroka explores the literature on public attitudes about terrorism and counter-terrorism. He recommends further research on public support for increased investment in counterterrorism measures, how people believe that sacrificing civil liberties will reduce terrorism and increased attention at the intersection between attitudes about Muslims and attitudes about terrorism and counter-terrorism.

Bartlett and Miller note that while measuring the success of counterterrorism is essential, it is extremely difficult. The authors describe as a 'measurement paradox' the surge in interest after a terrorist attack and the decline in interest where prevention is deemed as more effective. They suggest three things that need more attention when it comes to research on prevention work; first, recognizing that there is no one single way to measure, second, that there is a greater need to focus on social media to understand attitudinal changes and their impact on policy effectiveness and, finally, that evaluations of counterterrorism effectiveness must be communicated in a way that makes sense to the population. Hence, the overall work of security and intelligence services must be made public as much as possible.

Freilich and Chermak express surprise at the relatively few efforts to employ open source methodologies in studying terrorism. They provide an overview of the process used to create the United States Extremist Crime Database (the first of its kind national database to track violent and financial crimes committed by domestic extremists). They describe a number of critical lessons learned in the process of creating the ECDB. Amongst the strengths of the ECDB is that unlike projects that are static and collect data at one point in time, it is a large-scale ongoing effort. The ECDB provides updates as soon as new information becomes available.

Chenoweth remarks that since 9/11, research on terrorism and counter-terrorism has evolved considerably. Amongst the positive developments that she highlights are the increased volume and quality of shared knowledge, the improved data availability and access, and a narrowing gap between research and policy. A number of key challenges remain in the field. One challenge is that some researches exclude the role played by the State, which some scholars do take into account when they study terrorist behaviour. Often, for example, the type of regime is not identified (e.g. democratic, authoritarian, etc.), nor are military capabilities, human rights records, or foreign aid outlays as potential causes of terrorism. Chenoweth also refers to



the relatively few efforts put on comparing the effectiveness of different policies. To overcome these challenges, she recommends the use of disaggregated data in order to improve empirical techniques and findings, the avoidance of relying on a single data source and the use of a variety of technologies.

Littlewood contends that while Canadians generally regard the threat of terrorism to be low in terms of direct attacks, the use of Canada as a base to support terrorist activities illustrates the complexity of the threat. He focuses on recent research on 'foreign fighters' in an effort to highlight some potential implications for Canadian counter-terrorism efforts. Despite not recently enduring a systematic terrorist campaign, he points out that Canada has a long history of terrorism. He adds that Canada often has to deal with 'Other People's' Wars, such as the 1985 bombing of Air Flight 182. Multicultural societies must thus be attuned to the potential for terrorism and the problem of Canada exporting terrorists to conflicts abroad. Given this, he concludes that a dense web of transnational counter-terrorism mechanisms will need to be put in place in the foreseeable future.

Veldhuis and Kessels look at the deradicalisation and re-integration of convicted extremist offenders. They attribute the lack of data about the extent and nature of the threat to uncertainty over the effectiveness of relevant policies. They urge researchers to move beyond anecdotal evidence and untested assumptions towards comprehensive data analysis that inform the development and implementation of rehabilitation and reintegration programs for violent extremist offenders.

For his part, Hull observes that there has been steady progress in the application of quantitative research to the study of terrorism. In the aftermath of 9-11, there was a determined effort to expand empirical research on terrorism and introduce indices to quantify terrorist attacks. He refers specifically to the University of Maryland's Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) that has logged over 100,000 terrorist attacks globally between 1970 and 2012. He notes that, while quantitative databases are useful for policy makers and counter-terrorism practitioners, issues arising from regional dynamics, and amongst other factors, varying government responses to terrorism call for prudence when making forecasts on the basis of a single dataset.

Amarasingam and Stewart contend that the national surveys undertaken by the ACS reveals that there are important follow up questions that need to be asked. They contend that more precision is needed when respondents are asked to define terrorism as their responses are insufficiently clear. It is necessary to better understand what is meant by decline when respondents agree that there has been a reduction in terrorism. Finally, more options need be made available when asking a closed question about the root causes of terrorism. They suggest that the closed format/forced responses made available in the ACS survey reinforce the choice of "religious fundamentalism" by 52% of respondents. The authors stress the value of qualitative work to provide more in-depth insight into public views around terrorism.

# MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF EMPIRICALLY MEASURING PUBLIC VIEWS AROUND SECURITY, TERRORISM AND COUNTER-TERRORISM: A CANADIAN CASE STUDY

**Jack Jedwab** is presently Executive Director of the Association for Canadian Studies. From 1994-1998 he served as Executive Director of the Quebec Region of the Canadian Jewish Congress. He holds a doctoral degree in Quebec history from Concordia University. He has written essays in books, scholarly journals and in newspapers across the country. He is the founding editor of the magazines *Canadian Issues* and *Canadian Diversity*. He has authored several major government reports including 'Going Forward: the Evolution of Quebec's English-Speaking Community' published by the Commissioner of Official Languages and *A Stock-Taking of Recommendations in the Fight Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Other Manifestations of Intolerance in Canada, 1980-2000* for the Canadian Secretariat for the United Nations World Conference Against Racism.

## **ABSTRACT**

The essay discusses the challenges of empirically measuring public perceptions around the threat of terrorism, concerns over security and opinions about counter-terrorism. Observations are made based principally on two very detailed surveys amongst Canadians that examined a wide range of potential factors shaping opinion on the issues. It is contended that long-term trends in opinion are difficult to establish due to the impact of major events or incidents on attitudes towards security, terrorism and counter-terrorism. Trend analysis needs to compare opinion to measure inside the time-frame where a major incident occurs and ideally outside that period to properly determine the impact on the public's perspective. The essay stresses the high importance that needs to be assigned in the formulation of questions around security, terrorism and counterterrorism.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Cet article examine les défis liés à la tentative de mesurer empiriquement les perceptions du public à propos de la menace du terrorisme, des inquiétudes liées à la sécurité et des opinions sur la lutte contre le terrorisme. Je vais discuter de deux sondages très détaillés qui ont été réalisés auprès de la population canadienne qui examinent une vaste gamme de facteurs ayant une influence potentielle sur les opinions du public sur ces sujets. Il est souvent soutenu qu'il est difficile d'établir des tendances à long terme à propos des opinions du public à cause de l'impact que des événements ou des incidents imprévus majeurs ont sur les attitudes du public envers la sécurité, le terrorisme et le contre-terrorisme. L'analyse des tendances en matière d'opinions publiques doit idéalement pouvoir comparer les opinions au moment qu'un incident majeur se produit aux opinions prévalant avant ou après ce moment afin d'être en mesure de mieux déterminer les effets qu'un tel incident peut avoir les attitudes du public. Cet article met l'accent sur l'attention particulière qui doit être accordée lors de la construction de questions sur la sécurité, le terrorisme et le contre-terrorisme.

The importance of analyzing public perceptions regarding national security cannot be underestimated in the development of approaches to combat terrorism. Understanding such perceptions requires a careful assessment of the factors that underlie those concerns held by the population. There is a sort of dialectic between the policy community's assessment of national security and the one made by an individual or group. When the respective assessments are in sync, effective responses to threats of terrorism are more likely to emerge.

Policy-makers increasingly wish to convey the message that protecting national security is a shared responsibility between the state and its citizens. Not surprisingly therefore, policy-makers seek cooperation with civil society around security issues and view outreach to communities as a key element in combating terrorism. Policy-makers legitimately wish to influence public attitudes and behaviour when responding to threats around national security. Therefore, it is important that a Government's assessment of the level of threat be regarded as credible by the public. In the United States, the National Terrorism Advisory System, or NTAS, communicates timely information about terrorist threats to the public, government agencies, first responders, airports and other transportation hubs, as well as to the private sector. It is vital to the process that the public view the NTAS assessment as credible. But achieving such credibility requires that policy-makers understand the considerations that inform public perceptions when it comes to national security and the threat of terrorism.

Monitoring attitudes about the threat of terrorism is no simple task. For one thing, opinion about the nature and level of threats can shift depending on the time and place that relevant information is gathered. Opinions can change sharply around the time of a major incident and the degree to which public attention is directed towards an incident can severely modify perceptions about security needs. The measurement of opinion in the midst of a crisis presents a challenge in the effort to establish patterns over time. In the aftermath of a crisis, policy and program may represent a quick response to the perception of an immediate security need. How the measures introduced are viewed by the public is also subject to change when the crisis subsides. The response to an immediate security need when expressed by an important segment of the population may have an impact on the public's confidence in those institutions that are tasked with the population's security needs. Assessments of opinion around security in the absence of any threat may result in insufficient focus on the part of the public relative to the security situation. This

too makes for a serious challenge in the effort to design a set of measurable indicators to follow changes in opinion across time when it comes to questions about national security and the threat of terrorism.

Beyond the challenge arising from the context or circumstances within which the measurement of public opinion occurs is the critical matter of selecting the best questions to ask when it comes to security and counter-terrorism. Any effort to do successful trend analysis regarding public perceptions requires a set of questions that carefully considers the proposed strategies and desired objectives of policy-makers in what is widely seen as a highly sensitive area of inquiry. In short, it is necessary to first establish what it is that we wish to know about national security and counter-terrorism in order to select the right questions.

The formulation of the question is also critical as it is vital to avoid suggesting an answer to the prospective respondent. An essential element in the construction of a questionnaire is to include themes where connections can be established between the responses. For example, understanding the relationship between the salience of identity, the range of anxieties around security and the perceived threat of terrorism require that some assumptions be made about where causal relationships between them will likely arise.

It is with the above considerations in mind that a very wide range of questions were selected for inclusion in the surveys designed by the Association for Canadian Studies to provide useful insights into public perceptions amongst Canadians around security, terrorism and counter-terrorism. The ultimate objective of the ACS surveys was to establish a set of questions that could form the basis for monitoring/tracking perceptions over time so as to provide researchers, policy-makers and community leaders with an ability to periodically assess such issues as individual and group concerns over national security, perceptions about the threat of terrorism both in Canada and abroad, trust in communities and institutions, perceptions of the state of intergroup relations, perceived justification for terrorism, the degree of readiness to report suspicious activity, and the perceived effectiveness of various legal and educational responses to terrorism. The data sets compiled in two web-based surveys respectively conducted over the periods of March and November 2012 by the firm Leger Marketing enabled us to look more in-depth at where there was convergence/divergence across the selected areas of inquiry. For example, we looked at the significance of various concerns underlying those most and least worried about terrorism.

The large representative national samples in both surveys also provided opportunities to examine various demographic differences (i.e. age, gender, region, income, etc.) in opinions around security, terrorism and counter-terrorism. The age of the respondents was by far the most significant consideration in diverging views over the issues.

The March 2012 survey was characterized by a substantial number of closed questions broaching the themes previously identified. Analysis of the results of the March 2012 survey highlighted the need to ask a set of open questions to test assumptions made about the public's level of knowledge about the issues. Therefore, in November 2012, a set of open questions invited respondents to define the notion of terrorism and to identify initiatives aimed at combating the phenomenon. An additional closed question was added which focused on the perceived root causes of terrorism.

Rather than summarizing the vast amount of survey data generated thus far, in the section below, we attempt to summarize key findings by raising several of the questions that informed the survey and offering brief responses that arise from the results.

**Q.1 How do Canadians define Terrorism?**

A. One in three Canadians said they didn't know or simply refused to respond. Amongst those who did respond, most referred to the use of force or violence to support political or religious ideologies, or a particular set of values.

**Q.2 Are Canadians worried about terrorism?**

A. The surveys reveal that Canadians are evenly divided over the issue, but there is a considerable difference on the basis of age with two-thirds of the youngest group (18-24) not being worried compared to four in ten over the age of 65 who are not worried.

**Q.3 Do Canadians believe that over the last decade terrorism has declined in the world?**

A. No. Some two in three Canadians do not agree that terrorism has declined in the world over the past decade.

**Q.4 Do Canadians believe that international efforts to combat terrorism are working well?**

A. More Canadians agree (45%) than disagree (39%) that international efforts to combat terrorism are working well. The rest said that they didn't know.

**Q.5 Are Canadians worried about the possibility of a terrorist attack in Canada?**

A. Some 44% are worried about the possibility of a terrorist attack in the country (52% are not worried). Concerns are stronger amongst persons over the age of 65 (50%) compared to those between the ages of 18 and 24 (30%).

**Q.6 Name one or two actions that Canada has taken over the past five years to combat terrorism?**

A. Some 35% prefer not to respond and nearly 10% admit they don't know. The most common responses were enhanced airport security/ new flight restrictions/ a No-fly list and enhanced border security/ stronger border patrol/ prevention of known terrorists from entering Canada.

**Q.7 Amongst the most and least worried about terrorism, in which segment of society is the gap largest in terms of levels of trust?**

A. Immigrants. Amongst those most worried about terrorism, some 49% don't trust immigrants compared with 31% of those least worried about terrorism.

**Q.8 Are there sizeable gaps around various other anxieties amongst the most and least worried about terrorism?**

A. Absolutely! 85% of those most worried compared with 35% of the least worried want more security at airports and public buildings. About 61% of those most worried compared with 27% of the least worried believe everyone should be required to carry a national identity card at all times to show to a police officer upon request.

**Q.9 Are Canadians most worried about terrorism exposed to more prejudice about religious minorities?**

A. No. Those most worried about terrorism report relatively similar rates of exposure to negative comments about Muslims than do those least exposed to such prejudice. But those most worried are far more likely to agree that discrimination against Muslims is their fault (63%) than those least likely to worry about terrorism (30%).

**Q.10 Canadians who are most worried about terrorism also more preoccupied by relations between Muslims and non-Muslims and do they hold more negative views of Muslims than those who least fear terrorism?**

A. Those who worry most about terrorism are only slightly more inclined to worry about Muslim-non-Muslim relations than those who are least worried. Those who worry most about terrorism hold somewhat more negative views (51%) than those least worried (39%).

**Q.11 To what degree are those worried about terrorism also preoccupied by imported conflicts?**

A. To a significant degree. About 85% of those most worried about terrorism, compared with 53% of those least worried, agree that they are concerned with the tensions that arise from historic conflicts that originate outside of Canada between certain racial, religious and cultural communities.

**Q.12 Do Canadians think that there is any justification for acts of terrorism?**

A. Relatively few Canadians think that there is justification for acts of terrorism; about one in eight believe there can be. However, amongst those between the ages of 18 and 24, some one in four feel there might be a justification for terrorist acts, compared with 7% of Canadians over the age of 65.

**Q.13 If they knew a member of their community might commit a serious crime, would Canadians report it to the police?**

A. Definitely, some nine in ten Canadians say they would.

**Q.14 Amongst three possible choices when asked about the root causes of terrorism to what do Canadians refer?**

A. Most Canadians think it's religious fundamentalism (52%), followed by poverty and economic inequality (18%), and Western Foreign Policy (16%). There is however an important difference amongst Canadians between the ages of 18 and 24 who selected the three options to a roughly similar extent.

**Q.15 Do Canadians who more frequently follow news about world events offer a different assessment of the threat of terrorism than those who do so with less frequency?**

A. Not really. Those who follow world events most often are only somewhat more likely to worry about the possibility of a terrorist attack and to think that terrorism has declined globally over the past decade. Although they appear more worried about the prospect of a terrorist attack in Canada, the difference is attributable to the high percentage of people not following world news saying that they don't know.

**Q.16 What do Canadians who more frequently follow news about world events believe is the primary or root cause of terrorism?**

A. The more they follow world news the more they think the root cause is religious fundamentalism. Those who follow world news less closely think that it is poverty and economic inequality.

**Q.17 Are Canadians prepared to give up civil liberties in order to curb terrorism?**

A. Two consecutive surveys revealed that six in ten Canadians do not feel that it is necessary to give up civil liberties to curb terrorism. Seven in ten Canadians also disagree that the Government should have the right to put people suspected of terrorism in prison without a trial.

**Q.18 Do Canadians want to learn more about religions other than their own and are they favorable to government supporting dialogue between religious groups?**

A. They are divided over the extent to which they want to learn more about religious groups and less inclined to endorse government support for dialogue between religious groups. For the purposes of this study, the key issue is that those most worried about terrorism are least interested in learning more about other religions and least supportive of dialogue. They favour legal remedies to a greater extent and more security in public places is their overall preference.

# PERSPECTIVES ON SECURITY, TERRORISM AND COUNTER-TERRORISM

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## **ABSTRACT**

Canadian studies show that those with concerns about terrorism appear to be from older cohorts, have negative perceptions of Muslims, be concerned about ethnic strife and immigration and be more likely to favour measures to combat terrorism that impact on civil liberties. Given that the studies show there is a high level of antipathy towards Muslims, further research is needed to identify the source of this antipathy.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Des études canadiennes démontrent que les individus ayant le plus d'inquiétudes envers le terrorisme semblent être plus avancés en âge, faire preuve d'une attitude négative envers les Musulmans, ressentir de l'inquiétude face à l'immigration et aux différends qui peuvent émerger entre les individus provenant de différentes cultures et être favorables à l'instauration de mesures visant à combattre le terrorisme qui limitent les libertés civiles. Puisque les études démontrent qu'il existe un fort degré d'antipathie envers les Musulmans, une recherche approfondie doit être réalisée afin d'identifier les sources de cette antipathie.

## **BACKGROUND**

Since 9/11, tackling terrorism has become an important issue for Western Governments. Over the last decade, there has also been an emergence of homegrown terrorism with young Muslims often born and brought up in the West allying themselves with radical Islamist movements and advocating violence to achieve their goals. This has resulted in terrorist attacks, such as the London Bombings, and with young Muslim men travelling abroad to become foreign jihadi fighters in conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. The Toronto 18 bomb plot in 2006 and the possible involvement of two Canadian citizens in the recent attack on an Algerian gas facility by Al-Qaeda militants give an indication of the problem of homegrown terrorism within Canada itself.

There have been numerous strategies employed by Western Governments to combat terrorism that provide law enforcement agencies with greater powers such as longer periods of detention without charge, more invasive surveillance measures, and wider stop-search powers. The

Canadian Anti Terrorism Act introduced after 9/11 was controversial due to its widely perceived incompatibility with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in particular because of the Act's provisions allowing for secret trials, pre-emptive detention, and expansive security and surveillance powers. Concerns have been voiced in the UK that similar measures have alienated Muslims, thus fuelling the potential of recruitment for terrorist activities (Kundani, 2009). There has also been increasing concern that the multicultural policies adopted by Western Governments have in fact hampered integration and resulted in Muslim communities leading parallel lives which provide fertile territory for extremism to develop. (Cameron, 2011).

## **KANISHKA PROJECT**

There is a lack of empirical research conducted in Western democracies on the issue of terrorism (see Silke, 2009, for an excellent analysis); consequently, many counter-terrorism strategies are based on secondary



research. In order to redress this knowledge gap, the Canadian Government launched the Kanishka Project, an initiative aimed at investing in research on pressing questions for Canada on terrorism and counter-terrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism. One of the commissioned projects, led by Dr Jack Jedwab of the Association of Canadian Studies, has looked at what Canadians perceive to be at the heart of the problem of terrorism, and how terrorism has affected their country and their views on acceptable and effective means to combat terrorism. The project has conducted two surveys thusfar, involving a total of 3,700 Canadians.

### WHAT IS TERRORISM?

**Findings:** Canadians responding to the surveys saw terrorism as something that involved force or violence and which was driven by political or religious motivation. Around a third of Canadians were unable or unwilling to define terrorism, a situation which reflects a possible uneasiness about discussing the topic. In terms of the causes of terrorism, Canadians felt religious fundamentalism was the primary cause of terrorism, rather than poverty and foreign policy. The vast majority of Canadians felt that terrorism had not declined over the last decade and this view became more pronounced in relation to age. Canadians who were most concerned with terrorism appeared to be from an older age cohort and had more negative and less trusting views about Muslims. Those most concerned about terrorism were also more concerned about conflicts occurring outside Canada, were more likely to view ethnic conflicts in Canada as being a problem and felt that Muslims were at fault for their own discrimination. People who were concerned about a domestic terrorist attack in Canada also felt that immigration and ethnic diversity were a threat to national identity.

**Comment:** Other studies have found that concerns about terrorism have changed in relation to the immediacy of an attack. Huddy *et al.* (2002a) found that after 9/11, there was a sharp increase in the level of concern with regards to terrorism, but by early 2002 (Huddy *et al.* 2002,b), concerns with regards to being a victim of terrorism fell back to levels expressed prior to 9/11. In Australia, following the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005, which were the most significant terrorist attack involving Australian citizens, concern peaked after both attacks but subsided thereafter (Cummins, 2005). Younger people have been found to be less concerned about terrorism, while less educated and migrant groups have been found to be more concerned about terrorism. Interestingly, some academics have pointed out that perceived concerns of terrorism may be highly exaggerated if we consider that

an American citizen has a one in 80,000 chance of being a victim of terrorism, which is the equivalent of being hit by a meteor (Mueller,2006).

### RELATIONS WITH MUSLIMS

**Findings:** Muslims were the least trusted community in Canada, significantly less so (trusted) than immigrants as a whole, with older cohorts expressing this distrust to a greater extent. Those who held negative views about relations with Muslims were also more likely to support stronger security measures and less likely to support educational measures such as interfaith dialogues or learning about other religions.

**Comment:** In the UK, similar negative attitudes towards Muslims have been found, with around three quarters of British people believing that Muslims had a negative impact on the country (Tzorztkis, 2010), while more than half of Britons linked Islam with extremism (You Guv, Exploring Islam, 2010). Merolla and Zechmeister (2009) found Americans had become less trusting of Muslims and were in favour of policies that may Stigmatize Muslims in order to combat terrorism. In the US, further work has been done on the origins of this Muslim antipathy. Park *et al.* (2007) felt that social communication may play a role in the formation of these roles. When individuals were exposed to negative information about terrorist activities involving Arabs, their prejudice against them increased, but when showed positive information, their prejudice was moderate. Kalkan *et al.* (2009) conducted more in depth work about the origins of this antipathy and felt this anti- Muslim sentiment may have originated prior to September 2001 when Muslims were viewed as an outgroup in a similar way to illegal immigrants, welfare recipients, and gay and lesbian communities.

### STRATEGIES TO COMBAT TERRORISM

**Findings:** Canadians as a whole were not in agreement with measures such as ID cards, detention without trial, and the restriction of civil liberties. Those who favoured giving up civil liberties were more likely to be from older cohorts and hold more negative opinions with regards to Muslims. Those most concerned about terrorism were also far more likely to support the idea that everyone should carry identity cards that could be shown to authorities upon request, and also to support the idea of giving up civil liberties. Younger Canadians were most likely to have a positive outlook towards multicultural policies and those who were advocates of multicultural policies were less favourable of legislative measures such as identity cards and the lack of protection under human rights law for

those under suspicion of terrorism. Those who favoured abandoning civil liberties were likely to have fears about immigration. In terms of educational measures (such as learning about other religions), those who were in favour were less negatively concerned about immigration and more positive about relations with Muslims. Canadians who felt terrorism had declined in the last ten years were more likely to cite foreign interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq as an effective strategy than those who did not feel that the terrorism threat had subsided.

Comment: In the US, Merolla and Zechmeister Merolla and Zechmeister (2009) also found that people who were more concerned about being victims of a terrorist attack were more willing to trade civil liberties and more supportive of the US being active abroad. Davis and Silver (2004) found that Americans with a greater sense of threat were less likely to support civil liberties. Researchers found that these sentiments could be linked to the degree of trust one feels towards their government. The less people trust their government, the less willing they are to trade off civil liberties for security, regardless of their level of threat, which also yielded differences in terms of ethnicity. African Americans are much less willing to trade civil liberties for security than whites or Latinos, even with other factors taken into account. In the UK, a Home Office (Dstl2010) review of opinion polls and surveys seeking to be representative of the general UK population tends to show majority agreement, or support for, certain counter-terrorism measures even though they may erode civil liberties. However, the evidence shows there is less support within samples of UK Muslim populations who have stronger negative perceptions of counterterrorism legislation and perceive it as violations of civil liberties and human rights.

## INFLUENCE OF MEDIA

Findings: The media was also found to have played a part in framing individual perceptions. The extent to which people follow news about the world had some impact on whether they worry about terrorist attacks in Canada and whether they feel that an irreconcilable conflict between Western societies and Muslim societies exists. Those most likely to follow news about world events were also most likely to identify religious fundamentalism as the principal factor behind terrorist activities, while those who never follow world events were most likely to withhold their opinion on the subject and were more likely to answer with “I don’t know.”

Comment: There is evidence that regular viewers of TV news were likely to perceive the terrorist threat as high (Nisbet and Shanahan, 2005). Nacos *et al.* (2007) found that in the US, perceptions of terrorism were not simply dependent on the volume of news dedicated to reporting on terrorism but were also linked to the particular source of information that delivers this news and moves public opinion. It was found that the President and his administration had the biggest influence on the public’s perception of the terrorist threat. When Lewis (2004) analysed the role of the media during the Iraq War, they found that media coverage throughout the war shifted public opinion to an avowedly pro-war stance. It was believed that media coverage from journalists embedded within American and British troops was a significant factor in this shift.

## CONCLUSIONS

D<sup>r</sup> Jedwab’s study demonstrates that those with concerns about terrorism appear to be from older cohorts, have negative attitudes towards Muslims and be more concerned about ethnic strife and immigration. They also are most likely to favour measures that may impact civil liberties over measures that are educational in nature. Given the studies show there is a high level of antipathy towards Muslims in Canada, further research is perhaps needed to identify the source of this antipathy and whether this is solely related to concerns about terrorism or whether there are other underlying causes. Other studies have shown that Muslims (Dstl, 2010) and other minority groups (David and Silver, 2004) display the greatest opposition to counter terrorism legislation, thus further research is required in terms of perceptions according to race, religion and ethnicity. This is especially pertinent with regards to the fact that in the surveys individuals with the greatest concerns about terrorism appeared to also have concerns about immigration and ethnic strife, which has potential implications for social cohesion. There is also clear evidence that the media can be influential in building perceptions. In this current digital age, there are a myriad of forms of media and social communication and it is important to see how these can affect an individual’s perception of terrorism. Given how the surveys demonstrate that civil liberties and multiculturalism are interwoven into the public discourse surrounding terrorism, it is imperative to find out how opinions on these issues are framed.

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# PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS TERRORISM AND COUNTER-TERRORISM: AN OPINION RESEARCH AGENDA

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the literature on public attitudes about terrorism and counter-terrorism. It suggests three areas for further research on public opinion: support for levels of spending, tolerance for reduced civil liberties in order to reduce terrorism, and the intersection between attitudes about Muslims and attitudes about terrorism and counter-terrorism.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Cet article passe en revue les écrits à propos des attitudes du public sur le terrorisme et le contre-terrorisme. Nous évaluons qu'il existe trois domaines où une recherche plus approfondie sur l'opinion du public est nécessaire : le soutien du public face au degré d'investissement dans les mesures visant à contrer le terrorisme, la tolérance du public envers des restrictions imposées sur des libertés civiles afin de combattre le terrorisme, et le point de convergence entre les attitudes envers les Musulmans et les attitudes envers le terrorisme et l'anti-terrorisme.

The last decade has seen an upward shift in Canadians' (and Canadian survey researchers') attention to foreign affairs. The discussion is in some ways very different than it was pre-9/11. First, there is more of it. But the new debate also focuses on themes that were less salient in previous years, including terrorism and counter-terrorism. The salience and central themes of the foreign affairs debate have changed.

The same can be said of the framing of terrorism and counter-terrorism, of course. Pre-9/11, these issues were seen predominantly (but not exclusively) as foreign affairs issues. Post-9/11, they are more clearly thought of as issues of domestic public safety as well. Modern survey researchers interested in foreign affairs, public safety, terrorism and counter-terrorism are, in sum, analyzing quite a different policy environment than they were in the 1990s.

That said, there are other ways in which the study of public attitudes on these issues is still similar to the pre-9/11 era. For instance, Canadians continue to weigh the costs and benefits of (increasingly dangerous) peacekeeping missions (see Martin and Fortmann 1995). And survey researchers continue to work with a remarkably small body of work on Canadian attitudes on both foreign affairs and public safety issues.

There is still, in short, relatively little research exploring the structure of Canadians' attitudes on foreign affairs and public safety, and particularly little on new issues in terrorism and counter-terrorism. The sections that follow thus try to set an agenda for those interested in public opinion surveys on these issues. The paper begins with a review of what we already know, with a focus in particular on attitudes on foreign affairs. Themes in the broader literature on public opinion on this theme may be useful as we build a literature on terrorism and counter-terrorism, after all, and there is growing US literature on terrorism attitudes that may be helpful for Canadian researchers as well. I then turn to a discussion of three survey questions — a partial agenda, perhaps, for researchers interested in understanding the structure of Canadian attitudes towards terrorism and counter-terrorism.

## **PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS: A CHANGE IN CONTEXT**

Writing in the mid-1980s, Nevitte and Gibbons (1986) argued that the lack of public debate on foreign affairs was not a product of a disinterested or ignorant public; nor was it a function of a public that had reached a consensus on foreign affairs issues. The lack of public debate was, in their

view, a consequence of political parties not having organized around the issue. Parties did not mobilize preferences on foreign affairs. Foreign affairs thus played a relatively small role in Canadian politics.

The situation is now somewhat different. Parties are starting to stake claims on issues of foreign affairs, and on the foreign/domestic issues relating to terrorism and counter-terrorism as well. 2007 saw major debates on laws related to arresting and detaining suspects without a warrant, and compelling witnesses to testify in instances related to terrorism. More recently, the Harper Government released their counter-terrorism plan *Building Resilience Against Terrorism*. That plan reflected, among other things, a view apparent in Harper's earlier (September 2011) CBC interview: "the major threat is still Islamicism." Harper's plans, both in 2007 and in 2012, provoked a good deal of debate and discussion within the policy community. Public debate has increased as well.

The public opinion literature has yet to catch up with this resurgence in public attentiveness to issues surrounding terrorism and counter-terrorism. There has been some recent interest in foreign affairs issues by Canadian political behavioralists, to be sure. Fletcher and colleagues have explored the sources of attitudes towards the Canadian mission in Afghanistan (Fletcher *et al.* 2009; Fletcher and Hove 2012); I have, along with some colleagues, explored the impact of photos on public support for military engagement in Afghanistan (Soroka *et al.* 2012). But we are only starting to get a sense for what Canadians' foreign affairs attitudes are in the post-9/11 era. And attitudes towards terrorism and counter-terrorism have received much less attention.

This is less true in the US, where there is a good deal of survey data and analysis on terrorism and counter-terrorism issues, both before and after 9/11. That literature can, in some ways at least, serve as a guide to Canadian researchers. So too can recent polls from the ACS, polls which provide one of the most recent glimpses of Canadians' attitudes on a range of terrorism- and counter-terrorism-related issues.

### THREE AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There are certainly many different areas worthy of further study where public opinion on terrorism and counter-terrorism is concerned. I want to highlight three, drawn from a combination of the existing literature, and the new ACS surveys. Each is illustrated in part by questions fielded by the ACS last year.

#### 1. "We need more security at places like airports and public buildings."

What are Canadians' attitudes towards spending/policy on the military, and on related counter-terrorism measures at home? The flaw with existing data is that we

do not have measures of general policy support — for spending, for security, etc. — over time. We cannot as a consequence put current results in comparative context.

Are Canadians greatly concerned about foreign conflicts and terrorism? 20% of Canadians cite these as the "most important global issues" in the 2010 Focus Canada survey conducted by the Environics Institute. This is a sizable proportion. But 57% of Canadians cited those same two issues in the 2002 survey. Clearly, concerns about war and terrorism are decreasing. Over-time comparisons are of fundamental importance. And over-time comparisons are possible when we work with general questions about more or less spending (or levels of security), rather than (or at least alongside) whatever specific policy the most recent debate is about.

#### 2. "In order to curb terrorism in this country, I am ready to give up some civil liberties."

One of the most interesting questions where counter-terrorism is concerned is whether publics are willing to sacrifice civil liberties in order to allow for more effective counter-terrorism measures. There has been a debate in US literature on this topic; a recent paper by Mondak and Hurwitz (2013) suggests that there is no "terror exception": Americans' acceptance of infringements on civil liberties for the sake of counter-terrorism is not markedly larger than it is for the sake of reducing crime. These results, the authors suggest, raise serious questions about a sizable minority of Americans' commitments to civil liberties. It is worth noting, then, that although the questions are slightly different, the distribution of opinion in the US survey does not appear to be very different from what the ACS finds in Canada. Here too, there may be real variance in citizens' concern about civil liberties. But whether there is a special "terror exception" where tolerance for reduced civil liberties is concerned, we do not know.

#### 3. "There is an irreconcilable conflict between Western societies and Muslim societies."

To what extent do Canadians share the Harper Governments' concern about Muslim fundamentalists in particular? The confluence of attitudes about terrorism and attitudes about Muslims is presently a difficulty in most Western societies, but it would seem to be of particular importance in an ethnically diverse country such as Canada. In short, attitudes about Muslims affect not just Canadian governments' interactions with foreign states — they affect Canadians' interactions with each other.

There is certainly a wealth of work on attitudes about immigration and multiculturalism in Canada. And this seems to be an important time to consider the intersection of what we know about Canadians' attitudes towards



diversity and Canadians' attitudes about terrorism. What does the literature on immigration and multiculturalism attitudes tell us so far? There is far too much good work to summarize here, but there are a few recent findings from web-based experiments that point towards some interesting avenues for further work. First, when asked about support for specific immigrants, in contrast with the US, Canadians do *not* appear to systematically penalize Middle Eastern immigrants (Harell *et al.* 2012). Second, Canadians' support for multiculturalism funding is no smaller, and indeed greater, for a hypothetical Turkish-Muslim association than for a Portuguese-Catholic association; but that support decreases when the president of the association appears in a hijab (Stolle *et al.* 2012). Canadian support for multiculturalism is not unconditional, then, but Canadians do not appear to exhibit the same levels of concern about Muslim immigrant as do Americans.

How are attitudes towards immigrants affected by attitudes and policies on terrorism and counter-terrorism? Thus far, we do not really know. The combination of questions on Muslims and terrorism in the ACS surveys is a first step, but there clearly is much more still to be done.

## DISCUSSION

There are at least two reasons to study public attitudes on terrorism and counter-terrorism (and, indeed, on most domains of public policy). The first is simply to understand where public opinion comes from, and what it looks like. How do individuals think about foreign affairs? Are their attitudes on foreign affairs issues greatly influenced by media, or by their own personal experiences? Do they draw links between their attitudes on foreign affairs and their attitudes on domestic issues?

The second reason to explore public attitudes on terrorism and counter-terrorism is that these attitudes can matter for the evolution of public policy. Not all foreign affairs policy is highly responsive to public preferences, of course. But existing work shows that Canadian defense spending follows Canadians' spending preferences (Soroka and Wlezien 2005), and there is a sizable body of literature, mainly focused on the US, but comparative as well, suggesting that sustaining military action for any extended period requires public support (e.g., Aldrich *et al.*, 2006; Baum and Groeling, 2010; Berinsky, 2009; Soroka, 2003).

Note that believing public preferences matter for policy makes understanding the structure and sources of those preferences particularly important. Governments respond to publics, and foreign policy is thus at least partly dependent on what the public thinks. It follows that understanding public attitudes about terrorism and counter-terrorism is an important part of understanding the possibilities and pitfalls for policy in this area.

The preceding review suggests several areas are particularly worthy of further study. We need to explore whether Canadians want more or less counter-terrorism policy — whether they are asking for more, or for less, policy right now is not entirely clear. We need to better understand Canadians' attitudes toward sacrificing civil liberties in order to achieve (perhaps) better security. We also need to consider the intersection between attitudes about terrorism and attitudes about immigration and diversity, particularly Muslim immigration and diversity. These are just some of the most significant issues that deserve the attention of survey researchers over the next few years.

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# BUILDING THE UNITED STATES EXTREMIST CRIME DATABASE (ECDB): LESSONS LEARNED

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper accomplishes two objectives. First, it provides an overview of the process used to create the United States Extremist Crime Database, the first of its kind national database to track violent and financial crimes committed by domestic extremists. Second, it discusses several critical lessons that have been learned in the process of creating the ECDB.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Cet article poursuit deux objectifs. En premier lieu, il offre un aperçu du procédé utilisé lors de la création d'une base de données américaine sur les crimes liés à l'extrémisme (United States Extremist Crime Database, ou ECDB), la première base de données en son genre au États-Unis qui trace le bilan des crimes violents et des crimes financiers qui sont commis par des extrémistes à l'intérieur du pays. En second lieu, nous discutons de plusieurs leçons cruciales qui ont été apprises au cours de la création de la ECDB.

This essay explains how we created the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB). We outline nine important lessons we have learned from this process that could aid the development of a Canadian Extremist Crime Database.

## INCLUSION CRITERIA

For a crime to be included in the ECDB it must satisfy a two-pronged test. The first prong is behavioral, and requires that an illegal violent act or financial scheme be committed inside the United States. Violent incidents include homicide events, incidents where extremists are killed by police, and in some cases arsons, bombings, attempted homicides or foiled/failed plots. Financial crimes are often committed in the context of larger criminal operations involving multiple perpetrators and jurisdictions over an extended period of time. Sometimes it is difficult to categorize financial crimes as distinct incidents because of the ambiguity that exists with spatial and temporal distinctions. To capture the nuances in financial crime cases, we developed the concept of “financial scheme” (Belli 2011). The financial scheme is defined as an illicit financial operation involving a set of activities (i.e. techniques) carried out by one or more perpetrators to obtain unlawful gain or other economic advantage through the use of deliberate deception.

The second prong is attitudinal, and requires that, at the time of the incident or scheme, at least one of the suspects who committed this act subscribed to an extremist belief system such as the far-right, eco/animal rights extremism, or Al-Qaeda affiliated/inspired ideologies. We conducted extensive literature reviews to craft descriptions of these extremist ideologies and our definitions are available upon request.

## IDENTIFYING CRIMES<sup>1</sup>

The ECDB was developed in stages. The first stage identified relevant crimes committed by supporters of these extremist movements in the United States from a variety of source types. In fact, we identified and then reviewed over 50 different sources. These sources include specific volumes, databases, and general search strategies. Here we provide a sample of some of these sources. For example, we reviewed official sources such as the FBI’s *Terrorism in the United States* and the National Counterterrorism Center’s Worldwide Incidents Tracking System (WITS) database to identify violent crimes. Financial crimes were documented from various Department of Justice agencies that issue press releases and provide links to indictments, and convictions concerning financial crimes. We also looked at private watch-groups such as the *Southern Poverty Law Center* and the *Anti-Defamation League*.

Existing terrorism databases such as the American Terrorism Study and the Global Terrorism Database were examined. Some sources like the RAND-MIPT database include rich data on indictments and other court proceeding documents. Relevant incidents were extracted for the ECDB. Scholarly and journalist accounts were also reviewed. Finally, media publications provide important open source materials and we conducted systematic searches for additional incidents in a variety of general newspapers and locally archived newspaper databases. Many of the watch-group and media sources also track the non-violent financial crimes committed by these extremists.

## GATHERING OPEN SOURCE INFORMATION ON IDENTIFIED CRIMES

In the second step, each violent criminal incident, financial criminal scheme, and related perpetrators and victims were systematically searched in 26 web-engines and existing terrorism databases, official sources, and watch-group reports to uncover as much relevant open source information as possible. (A listing of these web-engines is available upon request).

Searchers used key information about the crime, suspect names, victim names, and names of the organizations or business entities linked to the schemes/incidents to conduct online searches. To insure that the searches are thorough, searchers use different spellings of suspects and victims’ names, and various permutations. The searchers also systematically search by location to identify court documents. To capture the most relevant media accounts, the searchers focus on obtaining information from national outlets as well as the newspapers specific to the region where the event or scheme occurred or where the suspect or victims resided.

These searches uncover all published open source materials on each case, such as media accounts, government documents, court records, indictments, appellate court decisions, videos, blogs, books, watch-group reports, extremist movement produced materials, and scholarly accounts. This information is digitally archived and searchers organize it by source type starting with the most reliable.

## CODING CRIMES

In the final stage, the open source information is provided to a research assistant coder. These coders search their assigned violent and financial cases to verify that the original searches are complete (they also note any other incident/scheme mentioned in the materials, compare that list to the master file, and add any missing cases). If

the original search materials are incomplete, the coder conducts targeted follow-up searches (e.g., searching specific names, group names, etc.) to fill in missing values.

The ECDB is relational and it collects data on multiple units of analysis by gathering information on the incidents/schemes, perpetrators, victims and target, the social ties between and among the suspects and victims, and the financial crimes, the business entities linked to the schemes. The coders use the open source materials to code variables found in these forms that are connected to an online database.<sup>2</sup>

## RELIABILITY ISSUES

Scholars have raised concerns about the conclusions reached relying solely on open sources. These concerns include possible inconsistencies and gaps in available information, inaccuracies, and bias in some sources of information (LaFree 2010; Sageman 2004). It is surprising that there are few methodological pieces that evaluate the use of open source methodologies in studying terrorism. The ECDB has attempted to address some of these concerns by assessing reliability.

Again, our uncovered search materials contained documents from different source types that occasionally contained conflicting information. These discrepancies implicated reliability issues related to source type. In these situations greater weight is granted to the more “trusted” source. Similar to Sageman (2004) “in decreasing degrees of reliability... [we favour] court proceedings subject to cross examination, followed by reports of court proceedings, then corroborated information from people with direct access to information provided, uncorroborated statements from people with that access, and finally statements from people who had heard the information secondhand.” Table 1 lists the source types in decreasing degrees of reliability.

**Table 1: Ranking of source reliability**

1. Appellate court proceedings
2. Court proceedings subject to cross examination (e.g., trial transcripts)
3. Court proceedings or documents not subject to cross examination (e.g., indictments)
4. Corroborated information from people with direct access to information provided (e.g., law enforcement and other key informants)
5. Uncorroborated statements from people with that access
6. Media reports
7. Watch-group reports
8. Personal views expressed in blogs, websites, editorials or Op-Ed, etc

Because the ECDB uses multiple coders, we addressed inter-rater (i.e., coder) reliability. Importantly though, unlike projects that are static and collect data at one point in time, the ECDB and other terrorism databases are large-scale ongoing efforts. The ECDB updates values as new information becomes available. Such a process requires substantial resources of money, time, and efforts to keep the databases current. It is difficult to engage in standard inter-rater reliability practices. Nevertheless, we address this important issue in a number of ways. First, coders are trained. New coders initially code previously coded cases and both sets of values are compared. We created a listserv of ECDB personnel and instruct coders to share difficult issues. In this way, inconsistencies are addressed early in the coding process. Second, coding abnormalities are continually checked across coders. Third, open source coding occurs in stages, which increases the chances that all available information from open sources is captured. Conducting targeted searches based on information uncovered during the initial search presents another opportunity for coders to recheck past work of fellow coders. Fourth, filling in values for certain ECDB variables requires little interpretation as the variables capture basic facts such as a perpetrator’s race, age, or gender.

Fifth, and most significantly, we have begun validating our violent incidents and financial schemes by verifying that coders systematically applied the coding rules when creating relational records for perpetrators, victims, targets, and their networks. Where coding inconsistencies occurred, records are being updated and corrected so that coding procedures will be uniform across all research assistants and incidents. Similarly, we are verifying that each incident and scheme has the correct number of perpetrators and correct files in Access. We are fixing incorrectly coded IDs, and missing relational connections between codebooks.

## NINE LESSONS LEARNED

Our experience in building the ECDB has identified a number of important lessons that are useful for endeavors to build similar databases:

(1) We conducted an initial measurement of inter-rater reliability for selected individual and situational characteristics of far-right homicides and found coder agreement between 89% and 98% of the time. When coders disagreed it was usually not because of differences in the values coded, but because one coder found a document that contained information that could be coded, while the second coder did not find it. *It is thus important to have multiple coders both search and code each incident when using open-source materials. Training, open discussion of discrepancies and updating cases is critical.*

(2) It is important to use resources to fill in missing values. Once data is preliminarily ready for analysis, time must be invested for additional cleaning and using resources to fill in missing data. For example, across several projects, we have been able to search additional databases (e.g., state, local, and federal inmate locators; online local court dockets; FBI's Supplemental Homicide Report; the social security death index; online national record aggregators such as Ancestry.com and Archives.com; and news aggregates), and were able to fill in 99-100% of certain variables' values (e.g., perpetrator/victim race, sex, age, their relationship; weapon used). *Thus, studies that use "subject matter experts" for key variables to conduct intensive targeted searches of selected data sources should be able to fill in the overwhelming number of values for these variables. Such efforts take time but the advantages are significant.*

(3) We examined selectivity bias. We looked at 10 sources (such as the FBI, the Anti-Defamation League, etc) that the ECDB used to identify far-right homicides (Chermak, Freilich, Parkin & Lynch, 2012). After examining these sources' similarities and differences, we normalized their criteria to accurately assess variations in the events they included. We used a "catchment-re-catchment" analysis and found that the inclusion of additional sources resulted in an increasing number of events that were identified in previous sources. Collectively the sources appeared to be approaching capturing the universe of eligible events. *Thus, using multiple sources- and ideally all relevant sources- to identify the cases you are interested in should minimize the danger of selectivity bias.*

(4) The ECDB does not limit itself to acts labeled terrorist by the FBI and prosecuted on the federal level. Most American terrorism databases and definitions, such as the ones used by the FBI, require terrorist acts to use "force or violence" and exclude non-violent financial crimes. This is an important omission because the ECDB has identified over 700 financial schemes that were committed by far-rightists and Al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, and similar extremists in the U.S. The total financial loss incurred by these schemes is over \$650,000,000. Far-rightists most commonly committed tax avoidance crimes, while Islamic extremists committed money-laundering and provided material support to terrorists.

Similarly, over 35% of far-right and 48% of Al-Qaeda supporters' ideologically motivated homicides were committed by lone actors. Over 80% of tried far-right suspects in the ECDB who committed ideological homicide incidents were prosecuted on the state-level. Unlike the ECDB, the FBI and many American domestic terrorism studies exclude violent lone actor attacks and incidents prosecuted on the state-level. *Thus, data collection should*

*not be limited to "terrorism" as defined by the FBI or other government bodies. Including financial crimes will allow scholars and law enforcement to investigate crimes that cost society hundreds of millions of dollars, and significantly also could be related to violent terrorist activity. Similarly, many claim that attacks by lone wolves are difficult to prevent and pose a greater challenge than attacks committed by organized groups. The first step to crafting effective policies is to provide law enforcement officials with the best knowledge and practices available from empirical data that collects this information.*

(5) The ECDB has identified over 370 homicide incidents committed by far-rightists in the U.S. since 1990. Over 150 of these homicides were ideologically motivated. During this same period, the ECDB has identified 30 homicides, 12 attempted homicides and 66 ideologically motivated foiled plots committed by Al-Qaeda supporters. Our preliminary analysis has found that these far-right and Al-Qaeda attacks differ in their spatial and temporal variation (i.e., they occur in different counties and states and in different years) and the characteristics (e.g., race) of the perpetrators who commit these crimes differ. *Thus, it is important to disaggregate terrorist and extremist criminal acts to uncover different patterns that might exist across ideological groupings. The comparative analysis provides opportunities for devising intervention strategies. In addition, our inclusion of foiled plots provides insights into effective strategies that prevent terrorist acts.*

(6) The ECDB tracks ideologically motivated and non-ideological crimes committed by extremists. Most terrorism databases exclude crimes committed for non-ideological reasons. Only around 40% of fatal far-right strikes were ideologically motivated and 20% were non-ideological, but were related to the extremist movement. These non-ideological but movement-related homicides include incidents involving internal organizational disputes (e.g., killing an informer or fatal attacks over drugs or women). Another approximate 40% of attacks were not ideologically motivated, but were committed for personal motivations such as greed. *Thus, focusing only ideologically motivated crimes misses important information.*

(7) Most existing terrorism databases use rules that label an incident or perpetrator terrorist and include it or label it non-terrorist and exclude it. The reality, however, may be more complex. In response, the ECDB created strength of certainty variables for perpetrators (based upon the open source information, how certain are we the suspect adheres to an extremist ideology) and incidents (based upon open sources, how certain are we the act is ideologically motivated). Both variables are coded on a scale from 0-4 (0=non-ideological; 4=undisputed evidence of ideology). This scale captures



if the perpetrators committing ideologically motivated crimes exhibit different levels of commitment to their ideology, and if ideologically motivated acts exhibit different levels of motivation for their etiology. A preliminary examination indicates that nearly 10% of the suspects committing these ideologically motivated homicides were not extremists and close to 20% only received a “1” or a “2” regarding our certainty of their association to the movement. ECDB data thus undermine the traditional distinction between political extremism and non-ideological offenders. These results may support the convergence thesis that methods and motives driving political extremists and opportunistic offenders sometimes coincide. *Thus, focusing only on binary measures (extremist versus non-extremist) could miss important nuance that could be useful to both policymakers and scholars.*

(8) Most terrorism databases focus on the event-level. A few focus on the perpetrator level, but they usually only collect demographic or network information. The ECDB, on the other hand, collects information on target and victim characteristics and includes individuals who were injured, killed, or targeted. We have found that far-right homicide attacks claimed well over 600 lives (over 435 excluding victims of the Oklahoma City bombing). Over 9% of these victims were representatives of law enforcement, correctional officers, or private security guards killed in the line of duty. Interestingly, among the universe of all homicide victims, law enforcement victims usually account for less than 1% of this total in a given year. *Thus, ignoring victims and assuming they are randomly selected, and a representative sample of the population with no risk patterns to uncover misses important information.*

(9) Again, most terrorism databases collect information on one unit of analysis (e.g., event or perpetrator) and are flat files. The ECDB is relational and collects data on incidents/schemes, perpetrators, victims and target, the social ties between and among the suspects and victims, and, for financial crimes, the business entities linked to the schemes. *A relational database allows for analysis across the variables found in the various codebooks. For example, a relational database allows a researcher interested in the characteristics of all Hamas perpetrators involved in a specific type of scheme (e.g., Ponzi) to merge variables from these two different codebooks to create a new distinct dataset. A non-relational database does not have the capabilities to answer such questions.*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This section and the ones that follow that describe how we built the ECDB draw heavily from Freilich, Chermak, Belli, Gruenewald & Parkin's (in press) piece.

<sup>2</sup> While the open source search files are primarily used by our coders to input values for the variables in our codebooks, they also can be used for qualitative research such as case studies and discourse analysis, etc (see for e.g., Freilich and Chermak, 2009; Freilich, Chermak and Caspi, 2009).

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# PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: MEASUREMENT PARADOXES AND PITFALLS

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## **ABSTRACT**

The authors examine the difficulties inherent in measuring counter-terrorism prevention work, suggesting that there is a “measurement paradox”: evaluating of prevention work is essential, extremely difficult, and cannot always be widely published. Because evaluating prevention work requires measuring a non-event, there is a risk of declining public support for successful prevention efforts. The authors speculate that this paradox may worsen in future, and suggest some ways which policy makers might respond.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Les auteurs de cet article examinent les difficultés inhérentes dans la tentative de mesurer les effets de la prévention du terrorisme et suggèrent qu’il existe un « paradoxe lié à la mesure » des résultats de ce travail : l’évaluation des efforts de prévention du terrorisme est essentielle, extrêmement difficile à effectuer, et les résultats de ce travail ne peuvent pas toujours être rendus publics. Puisque évaluer les efforts de prévention du terrorisme nécessite de mesurer un évènement que l’on veut prévenir, un « non-évènement » en quelque sorte, il existe un risque que l’intérêt du public envers les efforts de prévention réussis se détériore. Les auteurs émettent la supposition que ce paradoxe peut s’aggraver dans l’avenir et suggèrent quelques avenues que les législateurs devraient explorer afin d’éviter que cela ne se produise.

In this short commentary, we focus on the difficulties of measuring the effectiveness of initiatives designed to prevent terrorism. Preventing terrorism before it takes place is an important part of any counter-terrorism strategy, particularly given the homegrown threat we currently face. Although it is difficult to define precisely because it covers so many different policy areas, Charles Farr, head of the UK’s Office of Security and Counter Terrorism, sums up prevention strategies as targeting “that much larger group who feel a degree of negativity, if not hostility towards the state, the country, the community, and who are, as it were, the pool in which the terrorists can swim.”<sup>1</sup> Draining this pool of support has become an increasingly important part of security on both sides of the Atlantic.

In all public services, we need to know what works and what does not, and this is no more true and important than in the discharge of the Government’s principal responsibility: making society dependably and predictably

safe and secure. Public money spent to that end must also be spent responsibly, accountably, and effectively, even if sometimes outside of the public’s direct gaze. In fact, given that counter-terrorism spending is sometimes quite secretive, often expensive, and occasionally a matter of life and death, creating an evidence base to gauge effectiveness is arguably *more* important here than with any other public service.

However, stopping a problem before it arises always poses ethical and practical questions; in counter-terrorism, it involves sensitive issues of theology, integration, identity, and the legitimate purview of the state. Pathways to terrorism are varied, complicated, and unpredictable, and it is difficult to pinpoint where and when “prevention” should take place. Indeed, linear, mono-explanatory models of the journey into terrorism have been widely criticized by several leading experts. Our research at the think tank Demos suggests that, for at least some home-



grown terrorists, the move from extremism to terrorism is extremely quick, and is partly driven by excitement about the idea of violent activity as much as being a natural evolution from an extreme group or ideology.<sup>2</sup>

This makes it very difficult to know what to measure. Good prevention work could be aiming at a very wide range of things, including attitudes — such as general support for terrorist activity — and behaviours — such as encouraging communities to share information with law enforcement agencies if they spot it, or stimulating or helping communities to work to combat radicalization directly. Other more specific aims might include targeted de-radicalisation of certain individuals, or encouraging them to disengagement. (John Horgan’s landmark work on the subject found that most “reformed” terrorists had disengaged, but could not be said to have “de-radicalized”).<sup>3</sup> Even if you know what to measure, robustly measuring change caused by any single government intervention is difficult because these kinds of causal associations are strewn with “confounding variables.” In short — a lot of other things going on also affect any measured outcome. Ultimately, the most important successful outcome of prevention is that something *doesn’t* happen. Measuring its success is often therefore a matter of counter-factuals: the “what ifs” that cloud around something that did not happen, but would, or might, without an intervention.

These sorts of problems are usually, and best, confronted with careful, peer reviewed, and open academic work. This leads to the often painstaking ensconcing of any measurement, any finding, in the caveats, finesses, and qualifications that make them helpful. In sensitive prevention work, this is not always possible.

Thus: measuring the success of prevention work is essential, it is extremely difficult, and cannot always be widely published. Taken together, we believe this creates something we call “the measurement paradox.” This paradox leads to an important pitfall. Following a terrorist attack, successful, botched or foiled, there is usually a surge in public interest and support for counter-terrorism measures and spending. Paradoxically though, the better the prevention work, the greater likelihood that support for, and interest in, will decline. In some ways they are like sporting referees: no-one ever notices the best ones. We speculate that the evolution of the terrorist threat — such as increasing cyber security — could make this pitfall even more dangerous. At its most serious it could lessen public understanding of and support for the very measures needed to keep us safe.

So what to do when faced with this paradox? It would be hubristic to claim to have answered this question. But in our view some recognitions are important, and some measures can help.

First, it is important to recognize there is no one single way to measure prevention work — certainly not at meta-level. Some very specific prevention activities, such as very targeted police and community-led interventions are more amenable to measurement than others, such as general community-building initiatives. The cost of evaluation must also be considered: there is little point in undertaking a large population level longitudinal survey, testing every possible variable in search of a statistically significant improvement in community level attitudes following a small localized project. Sometimes basic output measures — “was the money spent in the way proposed?” — might be enough.

Second, there are new ways to measure. Other fields, such as advertising and marketing, confront the same need to understand attitudinal changes in order to measure their equivalent of policy effectiveness, “ROI” — return on investment. They have increasingly turned to the emerging field of social media analysis. The explosion of social media has created digital-social worlds that are more measureable and quantifiable than any other; they are, simply, the largest constantly refreshing evidence base of human attitudes we have ever created. Harnessing this new data can help understand how far government interventions have reached the public, or how the public responds in real time to a counter-terrorism operation, but as we argued in a recent paper, “Intelligence,” there is still much work to do to turn broad metric measurements on social media — or “SOCMINT, social media intelligence” — into something valid and useful.<sup>4</sup>

Third, an important reason that we create evidence bases for policies is to establish legitimacy and accountability for the taxpayer. Any evaluation of counter-terrorism must be communicated in a way that makes sense to, and commands confidence from, the governed. That means the work of security and intelligence services overall must be independently reviewed — including prevention work — and results made public as far as possible, redacted where necessary. In the UK, this is done by the Intelligence and Security Committee, comprised of security cleared Members of Parliament. But equally, these organs of oversight and communication must be trusted. In a context of low levels of institutional trust, we believe there is scope for making the public more directly involved in this process: security cleared members of the public involved in an auditing role looking at security service spending, overall use of powers. Similarly, direct public communications are a good thing on the whole — and are important to raise understanding and awareness of the threat, its scale and severity, and the work being undertaken to counter it. The current UK Terrorism Threat Levels struggles with the twin imperatives of open

government and operational discretion. It is hard to know what to make of an announcement that, as happened in July 2011, the threat, then “substantial” rather than “severe,” meant that an attack was no longer “highly likely” but only “a strong possibility.” Divulging some of the measures that underlie these judgments would be simplest: the number of successful terrorist attacks, how that number was arrived at; investigations carried out; the arrests; and intelligence used in prosecutions. Some countries do this, others do not. In Denmark, intelligence agencies publish an unclassified assessment of their judgment of the threats facing the country. The release of Joint Intelligence Committee assessments should be regularized, codified, de-politicized, and made widely available.

Overall, measuring counter-terrorism effectiveness will always remain vital, difficult to do, and difficult to communicate. It is an inexact science, and will remain so. It is acceptable to live with some imprecision — provided that guiding imperatives remain a desire to publicly evidence efforts as far as possible, and ensure the understanding and consent of the governed.

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# THE GOOD, THE BAD, & THE PROMISING: THE STATE OF RESEARCH ON COUNTER-TERRORISM<sup>1</sup>

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since 9/11, research on terrorism and counter-terrorism has changed dramatically. This article briefly summarizes some positive developments in research on counter-terrorism, discusses five remaining challenges to improved study of this complex subject, and identifies three promising trends that might help researchers and policymakers to overcome these challenges.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Depuis les attentats du 11 septembre, la recherche autour du terrorisme et du contre-terrorisme a changé de façon radicale. Cet article propose un bref aperçu de quelques changements positifs qui se sont produits dans la recherche en matière de contre-terrorisme, examine cinq points qui nécessitent d'être améliorés dans l'étude de ce sujet complexe, et élabore sur trois tendances encourageantes qui pourraient être utiles aux chercheurs et aux législateurs afin de surmonter les défis liés à ce domaine.

Since 9/11, the terrorism and counter-terrorism research landscape has changed dramatically. In this article, I briefly summarize some positive developments in research on counter-terrorism, discuss five remaining challenges to improved study of this complex subject, and identify three promising trends that might help researchers and policymakers to overcome these challenges.

## **THE GOOD**

We know far more about terrorism and counter-terrorism today than we did 10 years ago. For instance, we now know that terrorism is not just a problem of weak and failed states. Terrorism does not just happen where people hold grievances. Instead, terrorism often happens in countries as they undergo transitions toward or away from democracy. We also know that terrorism rarely occurs in isolation from other forms of conflict, such as civil war, insurgency, or even large-scale protest. We now know that the relationships among terrorist groups — alliances or rivalries — often shape the behavior of these groups in important ways. And we also know that policy choices — to fight wars, occupy foreign lands, commit human rights violations, discriminate against large numbers of people,

or to improve human rights practices and provide foreign aid to civilian populations — can influence the degree to which a country experiences terrorism. Three key trends have led to improved research on terrorism.

### **1. Increased volume and quality of shared knowledge**

Before 9/11, even high quality research on terrorism tended to receive less attention in mainstream social science fields. This is no longer the case. As Young and Findley (2011) point out, articles on terrorism and counter-terrorism routinely appear in all of the top journals in political science. From 2002-2008, the number of articles on terrorism in the top 9 political science journals more than tripled compared with the entire 1980-2001 period. A discipline that once saw terrorism as a minor strategic nuisance now treats it as an important subject of inquiry, and this attention has produced a large number of groundbreaking studies.

### **2. Improved data availability and access**

For scholars wishing to study terrorism, data has always been a problem. Early generations of terrorism databases were limited to one type of terrorism (e.g. transnational terrorism), proprietary, or both. Renewed

interest in the topic and the sudden inflow of financing to support related research led a number of different research groups to collect global data on terrorism. As a consequence, researchers now have access to high-quality, publicly-available data on terrorism. The Global Terrorism Database is perhaps the most widely used of these new databases. It features nearly 100,000 domestic and transnational terrorist events from 1970-2010 and is publicly available for browsing or download. It also allows users to filter incidents based on how they define terrorism. This allows researchers to make theoretically-informed choices about which types of observations to include and exclude from their studies on a highly controversial topic.

### 3. Narrower gap between research and policy

Another positive development in the field is the fact that policymakers are interested in and communicate about high-quality terrorism research much more today than ever before. This is perhaps largely due to significant terrorist incidents, which have led governments to invest in research consortia such as the Kanishka Project in Canada and the Department of Homeland Security Centers of Excellence in the United States. Nonetheless, a narrowing gap between research and policy through consortia like these promises to improve policy outcomes in the long run.

## THE BAD

Despite recent progress, the field remains troubled by a few key research challenges. I consider five of them below.

### 1. Leaving the state out

One of the most ironic trends in terrorism studies is to virtually ignore the role of the state's behavior in explaining terrorist activity. Although this trend is changing (e.g. Dugan and Chenoweth 2012), few articles on terrorism actively consider how the state's behavior might encourage, provoke, or hinder terrorist activity. As a consequence, researchers have little consensus on the most effective ways to reduce terrorist violence while improving the lives of civilians and protecting minorities. Scholarship on terrorism should therefore "bring the state" back in — not just to improve collective knowledge on how state behavior affects violence, but also to address policymakers' needs in improving government legitimacy and performance in this regard.

### 2. Overaggregation

Some scholars do take the state into account when they study terrorist behavior. Many cross-national time-series analyses, for example, identify the regime type (e.g. democratic, authoritarian, etc.), military capabilities, human rights records, or foreign aid outlays as potential

causes of terrorism. These covariates, however, are overaggregated and are often more aptly described as "characteristics" rather than "behaviors." For instance, most of these indicators are only measured annually, whereas states can often behave quite differently from week to week or month to month. From a policy perspective, it is less useful to know how a country's annual level of democracy might increase or decrease its propensity to be the target of terrorism, and more useful to know how policymakers' specific choices might affect terrorism.

### 3. Little attempt to compare relative effectiveness of different policies

Some researchers do attempt to break down state characteristics and look at state policies. However, they often do so by selecting a certain policy — say, targeted assassinations — and ask whether or not such policies "work." The problem is that they rarely consider what other policy choices are available and therefore do not assess how effective they are relative to their alternatives. The most important (and policy-relevant) question is not whether targeted assassinations work, for example, but whether targeted assassinations work better than any other options policymakers have at their disposal.

### 4. Tendency to ignore non-repressive tools

In thinking about policy options, most researchers immediately assume that such tools must be repressive in nature. Most research has therefore focused on policies such as targeted assassinations, drone strikes, collective punishment, torture, and indiscriminate repression. The focus on coercion obscures the fact that policymakers often have much wider ranges of policy options available when dealing with terrorist groups. In a study of Israeli state actions from 1987-2004, for example, Laura Dugan and I found that only conciliatory actions aimed at improving the status quo for the general Palestinian population were correlated with a reduction in Palestinian violence toward Israelis (2012). It is more realistic and potentially more fruitful, therefore, to consider the diverse set of policy tools available to policymakers aiming to reduce violence.

### 5. What works? Metrics of success

Most studies use a decline in terrorist attacks as evidence that a counter-terrorism policy has worked. But ascertaining policy effectiveness is harder than it sounds. A mere association between government actions and a decline in terrorism does not necessarily mean that the policy "worked." For one thing, not all terrorist attacks are equal. Ten nonlethal attacks are far less consequential than a single mass-casualty attack. Second, many other factors may explain a decline in terrorist attacks. In 2007,

terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda in Iraq declined markedly. Some observers credited the American “troop surge” with the decline, but others cited the onset of a homegrown Sunni militia and the cessation of a (largely completed) ethnic cleansing campaign in Baghdad as primary causes of the decline in AQI violence. Moreover, in some conflict environments, a decline in violence may possess a hidden implication — that a militant group is actually quite powerful in the territory in which it is based and therefore does not need to use violence to coerce compliance. Other metrics of success are more subtle, focusing on the trade-offs between ending terrorist violence and maintaining rights and privileges of democratic governance. From a more normative perspective, if a government loses popular legitimacy and subverts its own civil liberties but stamps out terrorist violence, it is difficult to argue that a given policy was successful. More comprehensive and illuminating metrics would focus not just on a decline in the number of attacks, but also on the decline in the number of violence-related fatalities and the long-term improvement of civil liberties and human rights — all while controlling for a variety of other potential confounders.

## THE PROMISING

There are three trends in the field that I think will improve the field’s ability to overcome the challenges I laid out above.

First, collecting disaggregated data is already helping scholars to improve empirical techniques and findings. Some scholars focus on disaggregating the actors involved (Conrad, *et al.* 2013), whereas others focus on disaggregating time (Dugan and Chenoweth 2012) and space (Berman, *et al.*, 2011). All of these efforts will help researchers to better understand the causal processes underway and make more informed policy recommendations.

Second, a recent trend is to avoid relying on a single data source — especially in quantitative analyses — and to validate all findings using several different data sources. This practice reflects a healthy skepticism of the data’s validity, which is a perfectly appropriate attitude to take toward data that claims to measure a highly controversial and contested concept. By cross-validating findings on multiple different terrorism data sets, researchers are on safer ground making empirical claims that might be used to inform policy.

Third, scholars have begun to make use of the variety of technologies available to researchers today. Whether using web-crawling techniques to pull data from social media sites or running agent-based models to identify unexpected trajectories of group behavior, such tools promise to help researchers develop and test new

propositions. Moreover, the field has begun to incorporate innovative methods to test causal claims. Relying on quasi-experimental study designs, for example, has the potential to identify causal associations with greater certainty than the standard typical cross-national time-series approach. Interdisciplinarity has been a positive trend in this regard, exposing terrorism researchers to a variety of different methods and approaches that can help us to better understand these complex phenomena.

## CONCLUSION

The research trends described above accompany a decline in global terrorist violence. Although terrorism remains relatively common in a few countries — Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Somalia, and Colombia — it is on the decline virtually everywhere else in the world. But the fact that terrorism is largely contained to a small number of countries is likely reversible, depending to some extent on the policies states embrace. The field has come a long way in the past decade in helping to make sense of global trends, as well as national and local dynamics. By continuing to improve data collection and validation practices and using innovative, multidisciplinary approaches of inquiry, scholars can continue to correct the conventional wisdom where necessary, and perhaps even advocate for effective and just approaches to reducing global violence — whether it emanates from terrorists or states themselves.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article is adapted from a lecture delivered at the Kanishka Project Conference in Ottawa, Canada in November 2012.

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# FOREIGN FIGHTERS: A REVIEW OF RECENT FINDINGS THROUGH A CANADIAN LENS

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## **ABSTRACT**

The terrorism threat to Canada is understood to be low in terms of direct attack, but the history of terrorism in Canada and the use of Canada as a base to support terrorist activities illustrates the diversity of the threat and the problem of terrorism. Developments in 2012 and 2013 suggest Canadian terrorism has a foreign fighter dimension and recent research on “foreign fighters” is summarised here to tease out some potential implications for Canadian counter-terrorism efforts and the need for a richer and more complete understanding of the scale and scope of the terrorism problem Canada faces.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

La menace terroriste envers le Canada est considérée comme étant faible pour ce qui en est d’une attaque terroriste directe; cependant, l’histoire du terrorisme au Canada et l’utilisation du Canada comme base de soutien aux activités terroristes témoignent de la diversité de la menace et du problème du terrorisme. Des événements s’étant produits en 2012 et 2013 suggèrent que le terrorisme au Canada comporte une dimension de « militant étranger » ; cet article propose un résumé de quelques recherches récentes sur ce genre de terrorisme et sur ses implications sur les efforts de lutte contre le terrorisme au Canada et sur le besoin d’acquiescer une compréhension plus complète de l’importance et de l’étendue du problème du terrorisme auquel fait face le Canada.

In December 2012 the *Global Terrorism Index* (GTI) released its 2011 report and ranked Canada as 74<sup>th</sup> out of 158 states, thus placing Canada in the “low” category based on the number of incidents, fatalities, injuries and property damage. The data, and the methodology that is intended to result in a score that “indicates the impact of a terrorist attack on a society in terms of the fear and subsequent security response”<sup>1</sup> suggests Canada faces a threat of terrorism, but that the threat, and the impact of it, is low.

The claim that Canada faces a low threat from terrorism is not incongruent with other observations. Indeed, the release of the Government’s Counter-terrorism Strategy in February 2012 — *Building Resilience Against Terrorism*<sup>2</sup> — avoids strident language and focuses on the diverse nature of the threat and that Canada is not immune from attack. Despite not having suffered a systematic terrorist campaign, Canada has a long history of terrorism.<sup>3</sup> In fact, our history of terrorism demonstrates unequivocally the diversity of the threat and that Canada is periodically targeted. Canada often has to deal with “Other People’s

Wars”<sup>4</sup>; moreover, outliers can be extremely destructive: viz. the bombing of Air Flight 182 in 1985. Multicultural societies must thus be attuned to “other people’s wars” and the potential for terrorism, or support to terrorist activity that can emerge from violent conflicts in seemingly faraway places. However, the last decade has also produced a new kind of terrorist threat to Canada: the phenomenon of “homegrown” terrorism and the radicalization to violence of individuals seemingly assimilated into Canada purposefully targeting Canada. Indeed, the latest annual public report of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) notes that the “threat of ‘home-grown’ extremism is of paramount concern to Canadian national security.”<sup>5</sup> The best known cases are those tied to the 11 convictions and guilty pleas under the Toronto-18 arrests (2006).

A further dimension of the threat has an international component, albeit with a national connection; namely suspected terrorist activity by Canadians abroad. This is the foreign fighter.<sup>6</sup> Testimony in 2012 noted that between 45 to 60 individuals have left Canada suspected of having



the intention of joining an on-going campaign. Two recent events, the Bulgarian bus bombing in 2012 and the Algerian natural gas facility attack in January 2013 indicate Canadians, or individuals with Canadian passports, were involved in both attacks.<sup>7</sup> Individuals have been arrested prior to departure to other states and at least one Canadian is understood to have been killed in Somalia fighting for Al Shabaad.<sup>8</sup> Understanding the “Muslim Foreign Fighter” appears to be of increasing relevance to Canadian counter-terrorism policies.

## THE FOREIGN FIGHTER

Does the labelling of a discrete type of violent actor represent anything more than a further parsing of “terrorist” or an additional blurring of the actors within the spectrum of violence that encompasses civil wars, insurgency, transnational terrorism, terrorism and political violence? Disaggregating the terrorist threat is of significant importance in a counter-terrorism context. Burke’s categorization of the “the 9/11 Wars” is a useful method?<sup>9</sup> In his attempt to analyse the various conflicts which flowed from September 11, 2001, Burke labelled them “the 9/11 Wars” indicating that these “can only be understood as part of a matrix of ongoing, overlaid, interlinked and overlapping conflicts” that have their origins in local, regional, and international events as well as contemporary and historical temporal frames.<sup>10</sup> At the local level, Burke argued the conflicts were “a mass of private battles, fratricidal skirmishes, communal clashes” whereas the national level was about group identity and political power; at the final, international level, Burke suggested that the conflicts could, but not necessarily should, “be integrated into an overarching cosmic conflict pitting the West and its allies against radical Islam.”<sup>11</sup> Each level offered a different lens or prism on the conflict, but the “generalizations, with their easy assumptions and seductive simplicity, at best highlighted only one element of the overall conflict, and at worst obscured and distorted the nature of the phenomenon they supposedly described.”<sup>12</sup> There are few reasons to contest the claim that the 9/11 wars had multiple levels; indeed, lessons for Afghanistan and Iraq indicate clearly the requirement to understand the interaction between local, national, and international dimensions of the conflicts. Generalizations and assumptions have also obscured terrorism and the study of terrorism, terrorist groups, and individuals active in terrorism:<sup>13</sup> as Hegghammer notes with regret “the view that radical Islamists are all the same has proved remarkably resilient”<sup>14</sup> despite considerable empirical research to the contrary<sup>15</sup> and increasing knowledge of the diversity of radicalization processes.<sup>16</sup>

Over the last decade Al-Qaeda-inspired terrorism – by which I mean terrorism inspired by the narrative and/or activities of Al-Qaeda — has been broadly defined into groups that compose: first, an Al-Qaeda core presumed to be based in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region; second, Al-Qaeda affiliated groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb; and, third, Al-Qaeda-inspired groups, cells, and individuals that have no formal ties or contact with Al-Qaeda core.<sup>17</sup> The last of these categorizations fit under the “homegrown” terrorist. Canadians going abroad to conduct violence, and evidence of Canadians conducting acts of terrorism overseas, is one more area of concern. A related issue is that foreign fighters will conduct, or organize, acts of terrorism within Canada upon their return.

Data on individuals known to have travelled abroad to take part in a terrorism is sketchy, but Hegghammer has attempted to collate such data.<sup>18</sup> He estimates that foreign fighters leaving the United States, Western Europe, Australia and Canada between 1990 and 2010 to fight abroad outnumber individuals from western democracies seeking to conduct terrorism at home by a ratio of four to one: 258 domestic terrorists and 900 foreign fighters. When the 2001 to 2010 period is assessed in isolation, the ratio approaches three to one. If correct the homegrown terrorism problem is smaller than the foreign fighter problem. Of course, homegrown terrorism threats are direct threats and justifiably more resources and effort are allocated to counter it. Nevertheless the observation has significant counter-terrorism implications since, as Hegghammer notes, “when Western jihadists first considered using violence they were... more likely to join a distant warzone than attack at home.”<sup>19</sup>

In speculating why this is so, he suggests: (1) more opportunities exist abroad than at home, not least because attacks at home have become increasingly difficult and, even if successful, are often single events due to arrest or death; (2) travelling abroad might be more attractive in terms of training and experience; and, (3) norms against attacking the homeland exist: foreign fighting is perceived as legitimate whereas domestic attacks are viewed as illegitimate.<sup>20</sup> Hegghammer himself recognizes that the normative constraints against attacking the homeland appear to have weakened since 1998 and he concludes that the constraints have weakened because foreign fighting has become more difficult over time and domestic terrorism has been encouraged by an increasing number of ideologues.<sup>21</sup>

Do foreign fighters return? The data indicate only one in nine foreign fighters come home to perpetrate attacks. The impact of these individuals — the “veteran effect” — however appears to be significant in terms of

attack planning, of the ability to radicalize those around them, the ability to bring the attack to fruition, and the lethality of such attacks if perpetrated. Thus, one of the conclusions reached is that “Western jihadists may not all be equally motivated to attack in the West. In fact, the tentative data presented here indicate that most prefer to fight outside the West and that most foreign fighters do not ‘come home to roost.’ However, the data also point to a veteran effect that makes returnees significantly more effective operatives.”<sup>22</sup> Even allowing for the tentative nature of the data, responding to the foreign fighter problem should not be based on empirically unfounded assumptions or generalizations concerning the threat they pose: some data may be better than no data in this respect.<sup>23</sup> It also offers some corroboration and perhaps contextual explanation for why there have been so few homegrown violent extremists.<sup>24</sup>

From a counter-terrorism perspective, portions of Hegghammer’s findings are encouraging for Canada: the norm against attacking the homeland is something that can be strengthened and made more resilient; active engagement with communities perceived to be at risk of radicalisation to violence and/or targeted as potential recruiting grounds for violent extremists can reduce risk; efforts to counter the Al-Qaeda narrative may also help; travelling abroad to fight can be made more difficult; and, international efforts to stymie foreign fighters, financial flows, and procurement activities can also be enhanced.

Other aspects of it, and other research, are less encouraging. The degradation of the norm against attacking the homeland is a concern and the ability of the narrative to attract recruits remains powerful. Mendelsohn suggests that foreign fighters are becoming less important in theatres of conflict abroad for a variety of reasons, including concerns about infiltration, capabilities, and local knowledge and experience, but those individuals are being used in non-combat roles: as potential returnees to conduct terrorism at home; as potential recruiters; and as media and communication experts to target diasporas at home.<sup>25</sup> As with radicalization to violence, the foreign fighter “‘problem’ is actually several problems that should be disaggregated for designing effective policies. Kaplan proposes that we divide the fighter’s ‘life cycle’ into the pre-war mobilization phase, the war stage, and the post-war period.”<sup>26</sup> In essence, it all points to requiring a deeper understanding of the terrorism problem.

What then might all this mean for Canada? If Canada previously imported terrorism in the form of “other people’s wars,” then the foreign fighter problem suggests Canada also exports terrorists to conflict abroad. That is, of course, not a new phenomenon, but the nature of the threat indicates the dense web of transnational counter-terrorism

mechanisms will have to remain in place for the foreseeable future. Moreover, it may, as Hegghammer argues, be time to “consider abandoning the fuzzy term ‘homegrown terrorism’ and accurately differentiate terrorist violence domestically and abroad.”<sup>27</sup>

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- <sup>20</sup> Hegghammer [2013]: 6-13.
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- <sup>25</sup> Mendelsohn [2011].
- <sup>26</sup> Mendelsohn [2011]: 202.
- <sup>27</sup> Hegghammer [2013]: 13.

# ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS TO OPTIMIZE DETENTION AND REHABILITATION POLICIES FOR VIOLENT EXTREMIST OFFENDERS<sup>1</sup>

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this article, based on a larger research paper, we posit that the current understanding of detention and rehabilitation of violent extremist offenders is at risk of being sub-optimal. We highlight several questions that we feel require empirical scrutiny before policy interventions can be truly optimised.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

À travers cet article, qui est basé sur un rapport de recherche beaucoup plus large, nous soutenons que l'approche actuelle envers la détention et la réhabilitation de délinquants extrémistes violents n'est pas la meilleure qui soit. Nous allons dégager quelques questions qui, selon nous, nécessitent un examen empirique plus approfondi avant que des changements efficaces puissent être apportés à nos politiques.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, the de-radicalisation and re-integration of convicted extremist offenders has become one of the most rapidly developing areas in the countering violent extremism domain. Several states have introduced policies to manage and facilitate the re-entry process of extremist prisoners back into society.<sup>2</sup> These efforts seem to suggest that extremist prisoners produce unique correctional challenges in most countries, that their rehabilitation requires extraordinary attention, and that existing policies are judged unfit to address these issues. However, when one sets out to get hold of comprehensive analyses of the suggested problems, unambiguous problem-definitions

are hard to find and conclusive data about the extent and nature of the perceived threat appear not readily available.<sup>3</sup> Hence, although the increased attention for extremist rehabilitation is commendable, it is a fair question whether we really have a clear view of the (extent of the) problem and, consequently, whether the designed policies are suitable to tackle it.

In this article, we suggest that gaps exist in our knowledge of detention and rehabilitation of extremist offenders. To illustrate this, we explore two frequently discussed areas of concern, namely the risk of violent extremist contagion among prisoners and the risk of recidivism among released extremist offenders, and

point out some implicit assumptions that we feel require closer scrutiny and empirical underpinning. As a comprehensive literature review or complete assessment of implemented policies is beyond the scope of this article, the purpose is merely to draw attention to some of the key empirical questions that require answering before policy interventions can be truly optimized.

## QUESTIONS CONCERNING EXTREMIST CONTAGION AMONG PRISONERS

The potential spread of extremist ideologies throughout the prison system is probably the most frequently mentioned concern in relation to the detention of extremist offenders.<sup>4</sup> The presence of radicalised prisoners appears to trigger images of violent belief systems spreading like wildfire among the inmate population, with regular prisoners adopting violent ideologies brought into the prison by terrorist offenders and extremists.

The presumably dominant causes for this phenomenon are generally sought at structural, social and individual level factors. First, prisons are in themselves seen as conducive environments for (sometimes) extremist ideologies, especially under conditions of overcrowding, gang domination and poor management. For instance, Maruna *et al.*<sup>5</sup> suggest that prisoners are confronted with existential life questions and that conversion to religion can be a coping strategy that imbues the experience of imprisonment with purpose and meaning, and offers a sense of control over an unknown future. Second, prisoners may be dependent on fellow inmates for basic needs like security, friendship and a sense of belonging and are therefore susceptible to persuasion and charismatic influence,<sup>6</sup> making them a vulnerable population for extremist individuals or groups trying to recruit inmates for extremist purposes.<sup>7</sup>

When scanning the relevant literature for concrete data on these issues, a few observations stand out. First, to our knowledge, quantitative assessments of how often violent extremist acts among prisoners have occurred in different countries, let alone of the responsible underlying mechanisms of inmate radicalisation, do not (publicly) exist. Generally, publications on inmate radicalisation rely on qualitative, often anecdotal evidence of inmate radicalisation. One of the most frequently offered examples is “Shoe Bomber” Richard Reid, who was allegedly radicalized in prison before attempting to blow up an American Airline flight in December 2001.<sup>8</sup> Reid was said to have converted to Islam while imprisoned for petty crimes and to have turned to violent ideologies after his release.<sup>9</sup> Another example is the 2004 case of Kevin James, who was suspected of recruiting several prisoners to an extremist group he founded in prison and inciting them to plot terrorist attacks in the Los Angeles area.<sup>10</sup>

Second, despite the scarcity of evidence, the debate about prison radicalisation can be politicized and vulnerable to unsubstantiated rhetoric.<sup>11</sup> For example, in 2010, British think tank RUSI warned that “some 800 violent radicals” are to be released into British society in the coming five to ten years.<sup>12</sup> The Ministry of Justice quickly refuted the number and explicitly disagreed that jihadist radicalisation occurred at a rapid speed in prisons in the United Kingdom (UK).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in 2005, author J.M. Waller proclaimed that radical Islamists groups dominate United States (US) prisons and that the number of recruited prisoners should be estimated between 15-20% of the prison population.<sup>14</sup> However, Waller’s bold claims appeared unsupported by data,<sup>15</sup> and Waller was criticized for not substantiating his statements.<sup>16</sup>

Fortunately, other authors base their claims on more validated data and outline a more nuanced perspective. In his 2012 book *The Spectacular Few*, Mark Hamm<sup>17</sup> builds on years of prison research and concludes that although prison radicalisation is too serious a concern to be ignored, only a minor proportion of the inmate population is at risk of turning to terrorism. In general, countries in the West can be said to face a minor threat of inmate radicalisation. Of the forty-six publicly reported cases of domestic jihadist radicalisation in the US between 2001 and 2009,<sup>18</sup> only one appeared to have involved radicalisation in prison.<sup>19</sup>

Although rare, cases like Reid, James and others<sup>20</sup> indicate that prison radicalisation can produce security concerns and deserves serious consideration. Nevertheless, it turns out to be surprisingly difficult, if not impossible, to identify documentation (or experts, for that matter) that provides an evidence-based and unambiguous account of the degree and nature of radicalisation among inmates and that specifies the contribution of the prison context in this process.

Consequently, important questions remain unanswered, of which we will mention only a few. Above all, exact figures are required to answer questions like:

- How large are the numbers and proportions of inmates with a terrorism or extremist background in prison per country?
- Are these prisoners mostly individual operators or embedded in larger, structured networks?
- How often has violent radicalisation among inmates and prison staff been reported in prison?
- How often have extremist offenders attempted to recruit fellow inmates, how often have these attempts been successful and, importantly, how often and why have they failed?
- How often have (successful and failed) terrorist plots been hatched in prison?



- What are the conversion rates, how often does conversion involve violent radicalisation and, in turn, how often does conversion eventually lead to acts of terrorism?
- To what extent do terrorist networks overlap with other criminal or extremist networks, within as well as beyond prison walls?

Second, questions remain about the underlying social and psychological dynamics responsible for causing prison radicalisation, including:

- Under what circumstances are inmates more at risk of turning to violent extremism, during as well as after imprisonment?
- What is the role of the prison experience in the radicalisation process? For example, under what circumstances and for whom can the prison experience become conducive to violent radicalisation, both during and after imprisonment?
- To what extent are social-psychological dynamics of inmate radicalisation similar or different among prison populations in different parts of the world, and which macro, meso and micro-factors could explain observed variances?

## QUESTIONS CONCERNING RECIDIVISM AND POST-RELEASE EXTREMISM

A second often mentioned issue related to extremist prisoners concerns the risk of recidivism and post-release extremist or criminal activities. This risk is not unique to extremists: recidivism rates among prisoners are high in general, with Western countries like the US,<sup>21</sup> the UK<sup>22</sup> and the Netherlands<sup>23</sup> experiencing average re-incarceration rates between 40% and 50%. In general, prisoners are known to face difficulties re-integrating into society<sup>24</sup> and the need to prepare inmates for their release and manage the re-entry process is evident.

When it comes to extremist offenders, however, data on recidivism rates are scarce. In 2008, former US State Department terrorism analyst Dennis Pluchinsky argued that sufficient anecdotal evidence exists to suggest a tendency for released global jihadists to return to terrorist activities, while at the same time admitting that comprehensive statistics are lacking and that the number of released jihadists is yet too small to detect trends in post-release outcomes.<sup>25</sup> Occasionally, accounts of alleged extremist recidivism reach the news, like when nine graduates of the Saudi rehabilitation programme were arrested for re-joining terrorist groups in 2009, forcing Saudi officials to adjust the previously claimed 100% success rate of the program.<sup>26</sup> More recently, the US Director of National Intelligence reported that 27.9%

of the 599 released Guantanamo Bay detainees were either confirmed or suspected of re-engaging in extremist activities.<sup>27</sup> However, in general, these accounts reflect singular examples and as yet, the existing body of data and research on extremist prisoners is too small to allow for meaningful conclusions.

Again, important questions remain about the extent to which post-release violent extremism poses a problem. First, there is a lack of reliable statistics on re-entry outcomes for extremist offenders, leaving questions like:

- What are the recidivism rates among terrorism offenders in different countries and to what extent and why are these different from general recidivism rates?
- What proportion of released extremist offenders manages to find and maintain employment and housing after release?
- Which specific individuals have re-offended and, equally important, who are those that have refrained from recidivism and why?
- To what types of crime do recidivists return? For example, do re-offenders usually relapse in extremist activities or do they tend to fall back on petty crime?

Second, more conceptual questions remain concerning the underlying processes of recidivism and re-integration outcomes:

- What type of public reactions do terrorism offenders encounter upon release? Are they confronted with stigmatisation or, alternatively, received with appreciation by the community? Which country-level, community-level and individual-level factors play a role?
- How long after release are ex-prisoners at the highest risk of re-offending? Is this after a month, a year, ten years? What consequences does this have for rehabilitation and reintegration policies?
- To what extent do the confinement conditions (e.g. security level, segregation or dispersal policies, overcrowding) influence prisoners' self-image and post-release outcomes like psychological health and social skills?

To be sure, one faces a number of methodological challenges when trying to obtain answers to these questions.<sup>28</sup> Prisons are complex research settings. Researchers have limited access (albeit understandably) to inmate populations and interviewing or observing prisoners may be hindered by restrictive visiting policies or the monitoring of researcher-prisoner interactions. Inmates may be reluctant to trust and engage with analysts and may not be (or feel) truly free to decide to participate in research or not, or may be easily influenced by even modest incentives. Also, the concepts involved are inherently



difficult to define and measure. Years of research have not produced a universally accepted definition of crucial terms like radicalisation, extremism and terrorism,<sup>29</sup> which are politicized concepts and vulnerable to political use and exploitation. Such intangible concepts make it difficult to establish causality and to isolate the role of the prison context in (post-release) radicalisation or recidivism.<sup>30</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Our intention has been to draw attention to several questions concerning the detention and rehabilitation of extremist prisoners that we feel require empirical scrutiny in order to optimize policy and program design in this area. Problem analysis is a crucial element in the policy chain and theoretical and empirical examination of the current situation and its underlying mechanisms can assist policymakers in making accurate policy decisions.

As such, we argue for an increased investment in efforts to achieve comprehensive problem assessments, which we feel is essential to develop evidence-based and tailored detention and re-integration policies. On the one hand, there is a need for pragmatic and policy-oriented data gathering and analysis that produces concrete figures on, among other issues, recidivism rates, both non-violent and problematic conversions among inmates, terrorist plots conceived or coordinated in prison, etc. On the other hand, there is a need for more fundamental, theory-driven research into the underlying mechanisms responsible for causing and changing issues concerning the presence of extremist offenders in correctional systems.

To emphasize, by no means do we aim to suggest that prisons are unimportant environments for violent extremist radicalisation and recruitment. In contrast, given the importance of effective, evidence-based, goal-oriented, and time- and resource-efficient policies, we aim to emphasize the need to move beyond anecdotal evidence and untested assumptions towards structural and comprehensive research and data analysis in order to inform the development and implementation of rehabilitation and reintegration programs for violent extremist offenders.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a larger research paper: Veldhuis, T. M. & Kessels, E.J.A.M. [2013] *Thinking before Leaping: The Need for More and Structural Data Analysis in Detention and Rehabilitation of Extremist Offenders*. ICCT — *The Hague Research Paper*. Retrieved from <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Veldhuis-Kessels-Thinking-before-Leaping-February-2013.pdf>.

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<sup>5</sup> Maruna, S., Wilson, L. & Curran, K. [2006] Why God is often found behind bars: Prison conversions and the crisis of self-narrative. *Research in Human Development*, 3(2&3): 153-58.

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<sup>8</sup> Hamm, M. S. [2007] *Terrorist Recruitment in American Correctional Institutions: An Exploratory Study of Non-Traditional Faith Groups Final Report*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.

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<sup>10</sup> Ballas, D. A. [October 2010] *Prisoner Radicalization*. FBI Law enforcement Bulletin. Retrieved at <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/law-enforcement-bulletin/October-2010/confronting-science-and-market-positioning>; Ilardi (2010); Hamm (2007).

- <sup>11</sup> Rappaport *et al.* [2012].
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- <sup>15</sup> Rappaport, Veldhuis & Guiora [2011].
- <sup>16</sup> E.g. Hamm, M. S. [2009] Prison Islam in the Age of Sacred Terror. *British Journal of Criminology*, 49(5): 681.
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- <sup>20</sup> See for a more in-depth discussion of evidence concerning prison radicalisation Ilardi [2010]; Hamm [2012] or Rappaport *et al.* [2012].
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- <sup>28</sup> For reasons of focus we limit ourselves to mentioning only a few of several challenges in accurate problem analysis. For a more elaborate discussion of both methodological and fundamental issues, please refer to an extended version of this paper: Veldhuis, T. M. & Kessels, E.J.A.M. [2013].
- <sup>29</sup> See for a critical discussion of the relevant terminology Schmid, A. [2013, forthcoming] *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation and Counter-Radicalisation: Where Do We Stand in Our Understanding?* ICCT — *The Hague Research Paper*.
- <sup>30</sup> See Ilardi [2010].

# CONTEXTUALISING VS. FORECASTING: DEFINING THE ROLE OF DATABASES IN THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF TERRORISM

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## **ABSTRACT**

In recent years the application of quantitative research to the study of terrorism has been one of the hallmark progressions of the field. While this is indicative of the modernisation of terrorism studies, counter-terrorism practitioners must be clear in defining the role that quantitative research should play in the empirical study of terrorism. This paper will attempt to provide an argument for limiting the ends of quantitative databases to the contextualisation of terrorist attacks, rather than an attempt to use databases for forecasting attacks.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Au cours des dernières années, l'application des méthodes de recherche quantitative lors de l'étude du terrorisme a été un des progrès marquant de ce domaine. Alors que ceci est un indicateur de la modernisation de l'approche face à l'étude du terrorisme, les individus œuvrant dans la lutte contre le terrorisme devraient avoir une idée claire du rôle que la recherche quantitative devrait jouer dans l'étude empirique du terrorisme. Cet article propose des arguments afin de limiter les bases de données quantitatives à la contextualisation des attaques terroristes, plutôt que d'utiliser celles-ci afin de tenter de prévoir d'éventuelles attaques.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The quantification and modelling of terrorism is in part a by-product of the broader trend within physics and economics of applying statistical models, more commonly associated with the “hard sciences,” to the social sciences. Sociophysics, as this discipline is frequently called, began to take root within the physics and economics communities in the 1970s as an attempt to apply models used within statistical physics to social phenomena (Galam, 2004). The greatest advocate of the utility of sociophysics is the French physicist Serge Galam, and his models have been applied to social events such as voting patterns, the fragmentation or coalition of political parties, opinion dynamics, and decision making (Galam, N.D). This trend within the hard sciences converged with the explosion of literature and research on another social phenomena, terrorism, following the September 2001 attacks on the United States.

Following the 2001 attacks, practitioners and academics realized the serious dearth of field data that existed within the empirical study of terrorism (Arce *et al.*,

2011), and in recent years there have been several attempts to quantify terrorism, with actual terrorist attacks being the indices used. The University of Maryland's Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) currently operates the most comprehensive event database of terrorism. Its Global Terrorism Database (GTD) has logged over 100,000 terrorist attacks globally between 1970 and 2012. While databases such as the GTD are significant insofar as the aforementioned lack of field data can begin to be rectified, there is little discussion within the empirical literature about what quantitative databases are actually useful for. As Jenkins and Bond have noted, there has been a desire for an empirically-based early warning system that has the ability to forecast political crises long before 9/11 (Jenkins & Bond, 2001).

While the political crises of the 1980s and 90s were marked by instable regimes and humanitarian crises, the 21<sup>st</sup> century thus far has seen Western regimes' primary political instabilities stemming from transnational and domestic terrorism. It is perhaps a natural process for the

increasing data available on terrorism to be used for such an early warning system. The remainder of this paper will discuss what the ends of such empirical tools should be for researchers, with the assertion that quantitative data is useful for contextualising past events, but that policy makers and academics should avoid the temptation to turn quantitative datasets to “game” outcomes and attempt to develop an algorithmic early warning system.

## THE UTILITY OF QUANTITATIVE DATABASES

What questions should academics and policy makers be asking when observing empirical studies of terrorism such as START’s Global Terrorism Database? For 2011, START’s dataset allows us to break down the incidences of terrorism globally, and trends can be elicited. For example, Iraq in 2011 had the greatest share of any nation of worldwide terrorist attacks (25%), while South Asia as a region saw the greatest proportion (48%) (START Consortium, 2012). This data presents two important utilities for counter-terrorism practitioners. Firstly, the quantification of attack indices allows policy makers to rationalize counter-terrorism resource allocation. For instance, despite the insistence by some that al-Qaeda Central is the primary transnational threat (Hoffman *et al.*, 2011), the empirical analysis shows the increased profile of the groups’ affiliates, and the decline of the central groups attack profile. Quantitative databases are therefore useful for policy makers and counter-terrorism practitioners to speak about the current threat environment with more confidence and credibility, and move beyond the at times sensationalistic narrative about which areas or groups are, or are not, a serious threat.

Further, terrorism is unfortunately an increasingly apparent phenomenon, and quantitative databases allow policy makers and practitioners the ability to elicit trends from a very large dataset. As Sandler notes (2011), the GTD is particularly useful for recording terrorists’ responses *during* ongoing terror incidents, such as the sequencing of the release of hostages. The issue going forward however is that policy makers will always attempt to design and implement a system that extracts as many correct signals as possible and therefore serves as an early warning system (Bussiere & Fratzscher, 2008). While there are significant obstacles to creating such an early warning system, Koenraad Van Brabant (2012) has identified a particular scenario whereby incident statistics may be useful in forecasting terrorist attacks. He notes that it may be possible to forecast as to the nature of one emerging threat, or group, in one region if it develops conditions that mirror a similar threat in another region. For example, the dataset of attacks perpetrated by al-Qaeda in Iraq may allow policy makers to speculate as to the likely impact of the growing

al-Qaeda movement in northern Africa. However, regional dynamics, differing government responses to terrorism, and other factors make it necessary for a strong qualitative caveat when attempting to use one dataset to forecast impact across regions.

## THE LIMITS OF QUANTITATIVE DATABASES

The limits of a quantitative approach to terrorism in general, and quantitative databases in particular, are many. It is for this reason that the ends of quantitative databases need to be clearly limited to the contextualisation of the current and/or past threat environment, and not be used as a tool to forecast terrorist attacks.

Firstly, quantitative databases have inherent methodological flaws. While this is an issue across subjects, the nature of terrorism makes this concern particularly acute. As Hellerstein (2008) notes, data entry is often corrupted by “spurious integrity” issues, whereby the user does not have data for a certain field and thus makes an estimate as to the most-logical entry. This issue is apparent within the GTD, where of the 417 incidents that took place within December 2012, approximately 50% do not contain a confirmed entry in the “perpetrator” index. The fact that many groups, the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban in particular, often claim responsibility for attacks carried out by unaffiliated groups compounds the problem of spurious integrity, as well as creates an impression from a quantitative perspective of an exaggerated profile. This issue should give pause to those who are quick to use quantitative databases in order to forecast future events.

While the inherent issues of data collection and entry issues of quantitative databases present limitations as to their utility, perhaps the largest obstacle that the nature of terrorism presents to quantitative forecasting is what a Chatham House report has termed “high-impact, low-probability events,” or HILPs. Drawing our attention to terrorism as an HILP, the report states that “Unforeseen shocks, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks raise questions of how we build capacity to respond to an event that has not been conceived in advance as a realistic threat or whose frequency is unknown” (Lee & Preston, 2012). While terrorist attacks are in and of themselves unfortunately not HILPs, there are particular types of terrorist attacks which *are* HILPs. These events, such as 9/11 or the Anders Breivik shooting, are the type of attacks that pose the greatest risk to society, and quantitative databases’ ability to mitigate risk therefore must be measured against HILPs.

Breivik’s attack, which killed seventy-seven people, draws attention to the weaknesses of the GTD database in two respects. Firstly, the GTD does not allow users to search attacks that have been carried out by individuals with no affiliation with a terrorist group. While this is a

simple data entry issue that can be easily resolved, more worrying is the fact that from a quantitative standpoint, Breivik's attack is a significant outlier. Norway is nearly immune from terrorist attacks, and before Breivik's 2011 attacks, only two people had been killed by terrorist attacks in the country (START Consortium, N.D). While this attack represents a quantitative anomaly, the qualitative approach can be useful. For instance, one month before the attack, Matthew Goodwin, one of the leading experts on right-wing extremism in Europe, cautioned about the possibility of a far right-wing "lone wolf" actor carrying out a serious attack (Arnot, 2011). While it is difficult to institutionalize expert opinion into any sort of formal early warning system, there are several cases where qualitative, subject matter experts have forewarned terrorist attacks,<sup>1</sup> and this advances perhaps the strongest case for restraint when using quantitative analysis to forecast terrorist attacks.

## CONCLUSION

While the increasing availability of data in the counter-terrorism field is a positive indication of the maturation of the field, there has been little, if any, discussion as to the ends of quantitative databases. This paper has attempted to present a case for using quantitative databases such as the GTD for contextualising what is often a very large body of information and incidents. The case for using quantitative databases for forecasting terrorist attacks, however, is tentative at best. Not only do quantitative databases have inherent flaws in and of themselves, the nature of terrorism means that data collectors and analysts will often have to interpret information subjectively and within broader contexts, which quantitative databases will often fail to capture. Policy makers should therefore be clear in their expectations of quantitative databases, and rely upon them for contextualisation rather than forecasting.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps most famously, former National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection, and Counter-terrorism for the United States Richard Clarke's warnings about al-Qaeda's desire to attack the US homeland.

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# RESEARCHING TERRORISM AND SECURITY: ASKING THE RIGHT (FOLLOW-UP) QUESTIONS

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## **ABSTRACT**

While survey research is useful for providing a clear sense of the characteristics of large groups of people, it is less helpful for the study of terrorism and society. With such a method, individual contexts are sacrificed in favour of comparability and *generalizability*. As scholars have noted, surveys are strong on *reliability* but weak on *validity*, because accurately researching topics such as terrorism *depend* on taking individual contexts seriously.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Alors que la recherche par sondages est utile dans la description de caractéristiques générales de certains grands groupes d'individus, ce genre de méthode est moins efficace dans l'étude du terrorisme et de la société. Dans la méthode par sondage, les contextes individuels sont souvent sacrifiés en faveur de l'aspect de comparaison et de généralisation. Comme plusieurs spécialistes l'ont déjà noté, la force des sondages est dans leur *fiabilité* et leur faiblesse est dans leur *validité*; une recherche précise de sujets tels que le terrorisme *dépend* d'une prise en compte sérieuse des contextes individuels.

While the academic and policy literature on terrorist movements around the world seemingly grows by the week, what is relatively less studied is how individuals conceive of, understand, and think about terrorism in their everyday lives. Bombs do not explode every day on Canadian streets, but individuals on a daily basis move in and out of a national security apparatus, characterized by identification cards, airport security, and the like. However, their *perception* of the existence of such an apparatus and its effectiveness is less well understood. Needless to say, how Canadians define terrorism, understand its prevalence, and see it directly affecting their lives, may determine the kinds of policies they support or reject. It is vitally important, then, to have a clear gauge of how Canadians think about these issues. The Association of Canadian Studies' (ACS) Kaniska-

funded project, *Canadian Perspectives on Security, Terrorism, and Counter-Terrorism*, begins to fill some of these gaps in the academic literature. The first round of national surveys undertaken by ACS, while producing many important insights, reveals quite clearly that important follow-up questions need to be asked.

The importance of the right follow-up question during interviews or surveys became evident during field research for both of our doctoral dissertations. Amarasingam's dissertation probed identity formation, tensions, and affinities within the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Canada, particularly since the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka in 2009. He argued that members of the diaspora community, through demonstrations, newly formed organizations, and changes in individual identity, are adopting new strategies aimed at disassociating Tamil

nationalism from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, or Tamil Tigers), re-branding it in the language of human rights, and marketing it as a transnational political movement. In addition to asking questions about activism and ethnic identity, he also inquired about the role of religion in their lives and the significance it had for interpreting political developments in Sri Lanka. One particular interviewee's response is noteworthy because it highlights not only some of the limitations of survey research, but also the importance of being able to dig deeper into the initial answers provided by participants. When asked about his religious identity, one Tamil man in Toronto responded: "If I had to *fill out a form or something* I would put down Roman Catholic, but I guess my own religious belief is — I would like to call it universal."

Such an answer creates many problems for academics that are equally relevant for research involving large-scale surveys. When they have to "fill out a form or something," individuals will often select: (1) options that they do not understand or do not understand very well, (2) options that they believe other participants may have selected, or, as in the case of the interviewee mentioned above, (3) options that allow them to remain identified with their culture and upbringing even if their *current* beliefs are radically different. Because this was a one-on-one interview, Amarasingam was able to ask the necessary follow-up questions, inquiring about how he defined Roman Catholicism, what he meant by "universal" and how it differed from his Roman Catholic upbringing, and why he still felt the need to select Roman Catholicism on a survey questionnaire. While it is unfair to argue that *initial* answers given by research participants, whether in face-to-face interviews or large-scale surveys, can rarely be taken at face value, it is true that they often invite further questions and call for clarification.

Similarly, Adam Stewart, in his doctoral research on the transformation of religious identity among Canadian Pentecostals, detected as much as a 19% variation between the responses that participants provided to the exact same questions presented to them in both a self-administered survey and a follow-up interview. When either: (1) given the opportunity to ask a clarifying question during the follow-up interview or, alternatively, (2) having the opportunity to subsequently investigate the language contained in a particular question on the survey instrument on their own, participants often changed their responses to the same question during the follow-up interview.

When Stewart, for instance, asked one interviewee attending a Canadian Pentecostal congregation if he believed that receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit after conversion was an important part of the Christian life — historically the single most important indicator of religious identity within the Pentecostal tradition — the interviewee responded by saying: "Now, you might need to elaborate a bit more on the baptism of the Holy Spirit." After the interviewer clarified how the term Spirit baptism was being used in the study, the interviewee replied: "Then I am going to answer that with a 'no,'" reversing the way that he answered the same question on the survey. When asked the same question, another interviewee responded: "See, on the survey, I answered 'yes' and then I found out what that actually means... I just assumed that it meant that the Spirit came and lived inside of you. I didn't realize it meant that you developed the other stuff, like the gifts of the Spirit." This interviewee, who previously answered in the affirmative when asked this question on the survey instrument, similarly reversed her answer during a follow-up interview, demonstrating how crucial the use of both mixed-methods research and, particularly, follow-up interviews are for conducting social research.

Some preliminary survey results provided by the Association for Canadian Studies show that participants, when asked how they would define terrorism, gave answers that were quite scattered. Indeed, 21% of respondents selected "I don't know," with another 12% refusing to answer. It is evident, however, that participants carried with them some notion of "terrorism" gleaned from news sources and popular culture when answering subsequent questions. When asked whether terrorism had declined in the world over the last decade, 66% answered in the negative. One is left to wonder what exactly they believe to have declined. Similarly, organizers of the survey inquired about what people see as the root causes of terrorism. For this particular question, the respondent is forced to make a choice between poverty and economic inequality, religious fundamentalism, and Western foreign policy (military intervention in overseas conflicts). The fact that 52% chose "religious fundamentalism" provides some clues about the general perception of terrorism that people carry with them even when answering other questions in the survey.

While we are somewhat critical of survey research in general, we do recognize its strengths. Surveys are most useful for giving researchers a broad sense of the characteristics of a large group of people (i.e., generalizability), whether students at a university or citizens of a state. Standardized questions enable clear measurement of the results, which can easily be compared with results from other groups who have also completed the survey. In survey research, then, “observer subjectivity” is all but eliminated. In other words, *individual context* is sacrificed in favour of comparability. As many scholars have pointed out, survey research is strong on *reliability*

but fairly weak on *validity*. This is because accurately researching topics such as terrorism and counter-terrorism *depend* on taking individual contexts seriously. We may discover that 40% of Canadians support Al-Qaeda, but further in-depth probing is necessary to adequately understand the varied reasons that inform such support. Approximate indicators such as “agree/disagree” often fail to capture nuance, complexity, and emotion. While some of these weaknesses can be fixed within the area of survey design, more fruitful results could be obtained through follow-up interviews during which more contextual questions are asked.



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