Terrorism in the Modern Day

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Terrorism has plagued the international community for decades, yet in recent times there has been a drastic increase in casualties. If terrorism continues on this path it will cost more innocent people their lives. By comparing the ideologies of different groups with a most similar case design, I plan to show whether terrorists are exploiting a certain ideology or if some ideologies have led to an uptick in terrorist activity.

**Methods**

By utilizing a most similar case design, I wanted to create a comparative study that looked at how ideology, specifically Salafist ideology, impacted the effectiveness of terrorist groups in achieving their goals. The goal of this case design is to have all variables identical except in one instance; for this study, the one variable that changes would be ideology. Some of the groups analyzed in this study were:
- Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Salafist)
- Hezbollah (Non-Salafist)
- Hamas (Non-Salafist)
- Muslim Brotherhood (Non-Salafist)

By plotting statistical data from the Global Terrorism Index and doing a qualitative comparison between these groups, it became clear which groups were most effective at causing casualties and which groups were able to create policy changes.

**Background information**

This global map shows where terrorist incidents occurred in 2015. Though few places were fortunate enough to have zero incidents, most episodes of violence occur in the Middle East, Africa, and Southern Asia.

- Over the last two decades the world has seen an uptick in terrorist activities.
- Terrorist attacks have become deadlier within the last decade, especially after 2011 when many Salafi Jihadist groups formed and exerted control (Jones, 2014).
- While the Western world is rightfully concerned about extremist ideology spreading, it is important to remember the people it affects daily.
- Just like the rest of the world they too are worried about the fringe groups that present in our world today.
- Though we hear their name less in the news, Al Qaeda still poses a threat to many people in the world.
- Additionally, it is important to note that many people in the countries where Al Qaeda operates also disapprove of the groups actions.

**Discussion**

The goal of this project was to find if terrorist are exploiting a certain ideology (Salafist Jihadism) or if this ideology is leading to more terrorists. Currently the results are inconclusive though with further work an answer should be found.

**Policy Implications**

Policy makers should continue to eliminate the environmental instabilities that lead to extremist gaining a foothold within the public sphere.
- Additionally counter terrorism units should evaluate if their approach is effectively deterring groups from turning to more violent methods of achieving policy goals.

**Future Recommendations**

- A larger look is needed at the statistical data available to determine how effective casualties are in producing policy change.
- Potentially look at how the Arab spring created a vacuum within the Middle East due to the collapse of regimes, and determine what effect this had on terrorist behavior.
- A larger sample of groups could produce more conclusive results in determining what effect ideology has on the groups’ goals.
- Finally, consideration should be given to how closely these groups are to following the ideologies they claim to represent.

**Conclusion**

While it is clear that in this case study the Salafist group ISIL inflicted the most casualties, other less violent groups seemed to have greater success in achieving policy goals. This does not answer the question regarding why more groups have turned to a Salafist ideology but it does leave hope that the political situation within afflicted countries can improve and lead to less violent outcomes.

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