

# Terrorism and Human Rights

## Editors' Introduction

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The articles in this symposium explore the relationships between terrorism and government respect for human rights. These relationships have wide-ranging implications for the study of politics. Terrorism is seen as a major threat to political stability in many countries. Respect for internationally recognized human rights is a fundamental responsibility of national governments. Can governments prevent terrorism while also respecting human rights, or must authorities trade off some human rights to reduce terrorism? If the latter is the case, which human rights can or should be sacrificed for the goal of stopping terrorism?

These issues are at the core of contemporary debates about counterterrorism policy. Consider first the possibility that terrorism leads governments to subsequently restrict human rights. This relationship is debated every time a country becomes the victim of a terrorist campaign. After the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, many people inside and outside of the government concluded that it was appropriate—indeed, necessary—to respond by limiting rights. The argument was that rights such as freedom of movement and speech made it much easier for terrorists to plan and organize their attacks. Others concluded that such restrictions would undermine American democracy in fundamental ways. Although legal scholars and political philosophers have often debated these issues in abstract terms, too little systematic evidence exists about how governments actually respond to terrorist attacks. An important objective of the articles in this symposium is to develop a better understanding of how and why political authorities respond to terrorist violence.

A second concern is how respect for human rights influences terrorist attacks. On this issue, a remarkable transformation has taken place within the policy community. Until a

few years ago, the dominant conclusion was that limiting rights was a valuable, if unfortunate, tool for suppressing terrorist groups. More recently, the opposite conclusion has gained much prominence in policy circles. A key turning point in the dialogue was the publication of the U.S. military's new counterinsurgency doctrine manual in 2007. A central conclusion of this new doctrine was that respecting the rights of the local population was a critical component of successful counterterrorist and counterinsurgency policies. The rationale for this viewpoint was that violation of internationally recognized human rights creates widespread grievances against American forces and the indigenous governments they are supporting. Shortly thereafter, American and international military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan began placing a much higher priority on the provision of security and economic opportunities. But important unanswered questions about this relationship remain as well. In particular, it is not clear that a strategy aimed at countering insurgency will also be effective in stopping the actions of smaller and more militant terrorist groups who are less reliant on support from the general population.

These concerns span the traditional subfields of political science, and the contributions to this symposium draw on expertise in the areas of comparative politics, international relations, American government, and political philosophy. Our own article begins by summarizing what we do and do not know about the relationships between terrorism and human rights. We highlight two conclusions of recent research. The first is that, contrary to the concerns of many human rights advocates, governments do not always respond to terrorist attacks by restricting rights. It appears instead that the relationship is more complicated, with terrorist attacks prompting restrictions of some rights but not others. The second conclusion is that human rights abuses by governments are a powerful predictor of subsequent terrorist attacks. Our findings are preliminary, however, and in the remainder of the article, we suggest strategies that future research could use to gain a better understanding of how rights relate to terrorism. Our focus is on further disaggregating these two concepts and developing more granular data. In a brief empirical analysis, we show that disaggregating the concept of physical integrity rights into its four components—political imprisonment, torture, extrajudicial killings, and disappearances—allows us to

reach more specific conclusions about which abuses lead to more terrorism.

The following article by Emilie M. Hafner-Burton and Jacob N. Shapiro highlights some of the shortcomings of and contradictions in the extant research in this area, and lays out specific research designs with the goal of moving this work forward. They point out that terrorism and human rights abuses both have many causes, making it difficult to untangle the relationships between them. They are also likely to be endogenous, with terrorism influencing government attitudes toward rights, which in turn affect the behavior of terrorist groups. Untangling these relationships presents important research challenges, and Hafner-Burton and Shapiro suggest innovative ways that scholars could tackle such problems.

The articles by Will H. Moore and Michael C. Desch explore how characteristics of democratic rule mediate the relationships between human rights and terrorism. We might expect that democracies would be far less likely to engage in repression in response to terrorist threats. Both Moore and Desch show that the relationship is more complicated. Moore discusses recent research that concludes that democracies do regularly violate core human rights, particularly when they face violent threats such as terrorism. At the same time, though, democracies respond with somewhat less repression than do nondemocracies. He argues that the next logical step in comparative research is to disaggregate democracy into its component parts, such as elections and bills of rights, to determine which are the most effective in preserving rights. Desch shows that despite differences in their rhetoric, the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama have both been willing to restrict the rights granted to detainees and have countenanced substantial collateral damage from missile strikes from unmanned aerial vehicles in Pakistan. Desch explains this contradiction between U.S. ideas and actions as the result of a long-standing inability of American liberalism to understand and appreciate the interests of illiberal foes.

Contributions from Jennifer S. Holmes and Linda Camp Keith and from Darius Rejali and Paul Gronke explore how citizens and political leaders conceptualize human rights after terrorist attacks. Both use micro-level data from American politics to explore more general issues about the relationships between terrorism and rights. Holmes and Camp Keith investigate how U.S. asylum policy has changed since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Using a new dataset, they show that political considerations—such as the presence of Al Qaeda in the applicant's home country or whether or not the applicant speaks Arabic—play an increasingly important role in post-September 11 asylum decisions. Their careful study marks an important contribution to our understanding of how the American political system has changed its treatment of human rights in response to the increased threat from terrorism. Rejali and Gronke analyze the support of American citizens for the use of torture as a counterterrorism policy. Drawing on new and archived survey data, they show that a majority of Americans have not supported the use of torture. This finding is surprising, since the conventional wisdom holds that many Americans are willing to violate individual rights if they believe that doing so will reduce future terrorist attacks. It also suggests that public opinion could become an important influence for restraining the authorities' willingness to violate fundamental human rights in some circumstances.

The final article by Mia Bloom expands on the conclusion that violations of human rights fuel terrorism using descriptive case study based on fieldwork. Bloom investigates how the abuse of women by occupying powers influences local support for insurgents and terrorists. She shows that military occupation frequently leads to the infliction of violence against local civilian women. Such violation of the fundamental rights of women leads to the radicalization of others in the society under occupation, who are then primed to support political violence against occupying forces. Finally, Bloom documents that terrorist groups strategically exploit this phenomenon by recruiting female operatives to undertake attacks and using violence against women as political fodder. ■

## SYMPOSIUM AUTHORS

**Mia Bloom** is an associate professor of international studies and women's studies at Penn State University and a research fellow at the International Center for the Study of Terrorism. Her major areas of research include suicide terrorism, women and terrorism, and the deliberate use of rape as a strategy during war. She can be reached at [mub27@psu.edu](mailto:mub27@psu.edu).

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ability of courts to constrain states. He is currently co-directing, with Courtenay Ryals Conrad, the *Ill Treatment and Torture data project*, and his research can be found in the *American Journal of Political Science*, *International Studies Quarterly*, and *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, among others. He can be reached at [will.moore@fsu.edu](mailto:will.moore@fsu.edu).

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