START
NATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR THE STUDY OF TERRORISM AND RESPONSES TO TERRORISM

AUXILIARY DATASET

Ideological Motivations of Terrorism in the United States, 1970—2016

Between 1970 and 2016 terrorist attacks in the United States were motivated by a variety of ideological perspectives. In order to facilitate analysis of the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) with respect to ideological patterns of terrorism in the United States, the GTD team conducted supplemental research to generate this auxiliary dataset that classifies attacks in the United States by ideology. GTD data files and documentation can be downloaded from the GTD website.

DATA AND REPORT

Dataset (last updated October 2017):
https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/SACQNK

Report:
Miller, Erin. 2017. "Ideological Motivations of Terrorism in the United States, 1970--2016." Background Report, START. College Park.
http://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_IdeologicalMotivationsOfTerrorismInUS_Nov2017.pdf

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VARIABLES

The dataset includes 14 variables. In addition to the *eventID*, which can be used to link the auxiliary data to the full GTD, there are six ideology categories and seven sub-categories. Note that if a subcategory is "Yes" the parent category must also be "Yes."

EventID: Global Terrorism Database unique event identifier (link to the full dataset)

Environmental extremism:
(*ENVIRONMENTAL*)
Violence in support of biodiversity and bio-centric equality (the view that humans have no legitimate claim to dominate earth). Characterized by the belief that the earth and/or animals are in imminent danger, that the government and parts of society such as corporations are responsible for this danger, that this danger will ultimately result in the destruction of the modern environment and/or whole species, and that the political system is incapable and/or unwilling take action to preserve the environment, and/or support biological diversity.

Left-wing extremism:
(*LEFT-WING*)
Violence in support of a revolutionary socialist agenda and the view that one is a protector of the populace. Characterized by disdain for capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism, and by a Marxist political focus and pro-communist/socialist beliefs, or support for a decentralized, non-hierarchical sociopolitical system (e.g., anarchism).

Right-wing extremism:
(*RIGHT-WING*)
Violence in support of the belief that personal and/or national way of life is under attack and is either already lost or that the threat is imminent. Characterized by anti-globalism, racial or ethnic supremacy or nationalism, suspicion of

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centralized federal authority, reverence for individual liberty, and/or belief in conspiracy theories that involve grave threat to national sovereignty and/or personal liberty.

Subcategories:

Sovereign Citizen (*RIGHT-WING-SOVEREIGN*)
Anti-Government (*RIGHT-WING-ANTIGOV*)

Religious extremism:
(*RELIGIOUS*)
Violence in support of a particular faith-based belief system and its corresponding cultural practices and views, sometimes in opposition to competing belief systems. Characterized by opposition to purported enemies of God, nonbelievers, or perceived evildoers; striving to forcibly insert religion into the political or social sphere through the imposition of strict religious tenets or laws; and/or bring about end times.

Subcategories:

Christian (*RELIGIOUS-CHRISTIAN*)
Jewish (*RELIGIOUS-JEWISH*)
Islamic (*RELIGIOUS-ISLAMIC*)
Shia (*ISLAMIC-SHIA*)
Sunni (*ISLAMIC-SUNNI*)

Nationalist/separatist extremism:
(*NATIONALIST-SEPARATIST*)
Violence in support of ethnic or geo-political self-determination. Characterized by regional concentration and a history of organized political autonomy, traditional rule, or regional government, and a commitment to gaining or regaining political independence.

Single issue extremism:
(*SINGLE*)
Violence in support of advancing a specific or narrowly-defined cause. This belief may be associated with any space on the political spectrum.

VALUES FOR ALL IDEOLOGY VARIABLES

[blank] = Unknown
0 = No/Not indicated
1 = Yes

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Inferences vs. Evidence

The classification of ideologies is intended to be conservative with respect to making inferences in the absence of explicit evidence. For example:

- Attacks motivated by environmental extremism are often also motivated by an underlying left-wing ideology. In fact several of the most active environmental extremist groups openly espouse leftist beliefs. However, environmental extremism is not inherently leftist, so if the only information available indicates environmental extremism, but no reporting about the perpetrator or perpetrator group indicates left-wing extremism, the attack would be classified as environmental but not left-wing extremism.
- Likewise, if an abortion-related target were attacked with no information about the perpetrators, the attack would be classified as a case of single issue extremism. If reports indicated that the perpetrator was motivated by Christianity, it would be coded as religious extremism and Christian extremism in addition to single issue extremism. Although anti-abortion ideology most commonly coincides with Christianity, it is not inherently or exclusively Christian. If reports further suggest that the attacker was motivated by right-wing extremism, the attack would also be classified as right-wing extremism. In the United State the anti-abortion movement generally aligns with right-wing politics, but anti-abortion beliefs are not inherently right-wing. In other words, one isn't opposed to abortion because of a right-wing political perspective; they're more likely to

align with right-wing politics because they're opposed to abortion and in the United States the right-wing best shares this view.

Instrumental vs. Incidental Identity

As an event-level dataset, the GTD captures information about the attributes of each terrorist attack recorded. Although the ideological beliefs of perpetrators are important for classifying the ideological motivations of the attack, the purpose of this dataset is not to comprehensively document all facets of the perpetrator's identity, only those that were plausibly instrumental to the motivation for the attack.

This is most relevant with respect to individual perpetrators who did not act on behalf of a formal organization. If source documents identified the religious identity of a perpetrator who was explicitly motivated by environmental extremist views, the attack would not be classified as an act of religious extremism unless there were an indication that the perpetrator's religious beliefs were instrumental to the execution of the attack.

Generalizability

Terrorism is a narrowly defined type of violence, even within the broader spectrum of ideologically motivated violence. The GTD defines terrorism as the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation. In the application of this definition, the database does not include unsubstantiated threats, nor does it include plots or conspiracies that the perpetrators did not attempt to execute. The GTD does not include acts that occurred in the context of a law enforcement operation, such as a traffic stop or warrant execution. The GTD does not typically include violence stemming from interactions that were spontaneous or reactive. This might include clashes erupting at protests or riots, or violent hate crimes. The GTD does not include violence carried out by state actors.

Note that classification of terrorist attacks by ideology can be unclear, particularly when perpetrators of attacks identify with more than one ideological group or perspective, which may or may not be relevant to the motivations for the attack itself. The classification of terrorist activity by ideology does not characterize an entire population or ideological movement as violent.

Feedback

In addition to working on ongoing data collection, the GTD team continually aims to improve the existing data. Input from users who are familiar with particular cases or contexts is extremely valuable to this effort. Users are welcome to send corrections, additional information, or general feedback to gtd@start.umd.edu.