

The Softest of Targets

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One important area in the analysis of terrorism where there is very little academic research, especially of a quantitative nature, is that of terrorist target selection. More specifically our study investigates what factors may lead a terrorist organization to target civilians. Our project uses the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism's (MIPT) Terrorism Knowledge Base to analyze terrorist attacks against civilian targets, both international and domestic, for the years 1998-2005. Our analysis points to group ideology – specifically religion and ethnonationalism – as the decisive factor in turning to target civilians, while organizational factors such as group size and network centrality seem to impact the magnitude of civilian targets attacks.

This article on civilian targets is nearly ready to send out for publication. In the future we would like to explore targeting patterns of not only civilians, but explore the factors involved in terrorist campaigns that target hard targets, such as the military. Examining the relationship between targets and tactics used to execute the attack is another possible related area for future research that I have already begun exploring.