

# A further exploration of state fragility and terrorism

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## The State as Situational Context

- The state provides the situational context of the individual
  - The situation is defined as "the perceptive field of the individual at a given point in time" (LaFree and Birkbeck, 1991: 75)
- The situation frames and structures a (minimally) rational actor's available opportunities and the choices he makes (Cornish and Clarke, 1986)
- An actor in one situational context may perceive opportunities differently (more/less) than that same actor in another situational context
- The state provides the situational context from which an actor's available opportunities (for terrorism or non-terrorism), his perceptions of those opportunities and the choices he makes for action are structured and framed

## How does Fragility affect the Situational Context?

- Fragility is defined as "civil conflicts, political crises, and massive human rights violations that are typically associated with state breakdown" (Esty et al. 1995: 1)
  - Includes four specific types of events: revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, adverse or disruptive regime transitions, and genocides or politicides or "complex" which means more than type of fragility co-occurring
- States that are fragile and at risk of collapse provide a situational context in which formal institutional control over the actions of its citizens has broken down
- Thus, a rational actor, weighing the costs and benefits of his actions in a fragile state may view the costs (risk of capture, punishment) as particularly low and choose to act, given sufficient benefits of his actions

## Defining Terrorism: The Global Terrorism Database

- Global Terrorism Database (GTD1), an incident-based dataset which covers 1970-1997, is the largest open-source data source on both domestic and international terrorism currently available
  - 60,761 incidents
- Terrorism is defined in the GTD1 as "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence to obtain a political, economic, religious or social goal through fear, coercion or intimidation" (Dugan, LaFree and Fogg 2006, 410)
  - To guard against confounding terrorism and state fragility, I filtered out all incidents in which the target of the incident was any nation's military, incidents against which may have been included as indicators of state fragility

## Defining State Fragility: The Political Instability Task Force Data

- Examined all states over 500,000 population for evidence of state fragility for the years between 1970-1997;
- Ever-fragile states are those that experienced a period of fragility anytime during 1970-1997; Never-fragile states are those that did not experience any fragility
  - Total of 162 states, 81 of which were classified as ever fragile
  - The number of states experiencing fragility by year ranged from a low of 20 in 1974 to a high of 37 in 1992
  - Out of a possible 4536 state-years (162 states x 28 years), 751 (17%) were state-years of fragility

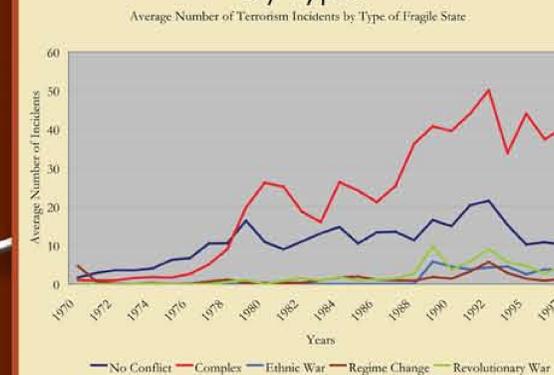
## Terrorism Incidents in Ever-Fragile States vs. Never-Fragile States



## Terrorism Incidents in Ever-Fragile States vs. Never-Fragile States

- The number of incidents are averaged over the number of states by fragile state status
- During the early 1970s, never-fragile states experienced more incidents than ever-fragile
- After 1976, incidents in ever-fragile states experienced a dramatic increase which peaked in 1992 (39/state), far outnumbering incidents in never-fragile states
- Fatalities: Largely the same pattern, though never-fragile states experience far fewer average fatalities than ever-fragile states

## Terrorism Incidents in Fragile States by Type



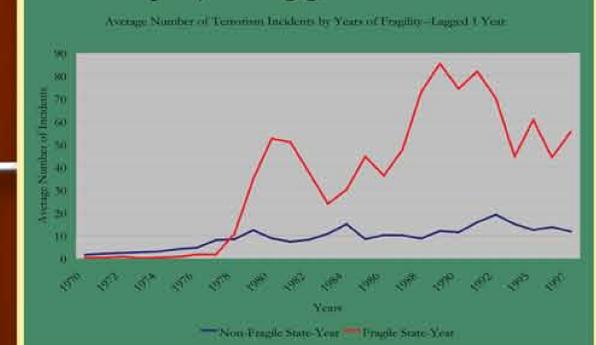
## Terrorism Incidents in Fragile States by Type of Fragility

- Again, in the early 1970s, never-fragile states experience more incidents on average than any of the ever-fragile states
- The increase in incidents on average starting from 1976 in ever-fragile states is largely due to incidents in "complex" fragile states—states that experienced more than one type of fragility during the same period
  - There are few incidents in states experiencing regime change or ethnic war on average
  - Beginning in 1989, states experiencing revolutionary war experience 5-10 incidents per year on average
- Fatalities: Largely the same picture, though for a period (mid-1985 to mid-1994), states experiencing revolutionary war are responsible for large peaks in fatalities on average

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## Terrorism Incidents by State-Years of Fragility—Lagged One Year



## In-Fragility States vs. Out of Fragility States—Lagged One Year

- This specification creates 4356 observations—28 years for each of 162 states—and classifies each state-year by level of terrorism and whether the state was fragile at the time
  - When fragility is classified as over, the state switches back into the non-fragile category
  - The onset and endpoint of failure were set as one year after the actual occurrence (see LaFree, Dugan and Fahey, 2007 for the non-lagged version)
- The trends are the same; in the early 1970s, out of fragility states experienced more incidents on average than in-fragility states
- By 1978, in-fragility states reached and then surpassed out of fragility states in the amount of incidents on average
- Fatalities: Follows the same pattern, though prior to 1978, there were few to no fatalities in either in-fragility or out of fragility states

## Conclusions

- There does appear to be a relationship between state fragility and terrorism incidents
- There also appears to be a relationship between state fragility and fatalities, though this likely involves a lack of adequate medical care in fragile states
  - Likely, this relationship is recursive, making it hard to model well statistically and conceptually
  - In addition, fragility involves many dimensions, some of which may be related to more or less terrorism
    - For example, an adverse regime change to a totalitarian government should impact levels of terrorism differently than a complete governmental collapse
- Overall, the relationship between fragility and terrorism deserves more attention