

Media focus on VEO activity can increase VEO activity.

67; 68

General Description of the Literature:

The role of the media in VEO activity is a relatively popular topic in political science, economics, and, to a lesser extent, criminology. Scott (2001) and Rohner and Frey (2007) explore the question of whether the media can actually drive the incidence of terror. The topic is also covered in general texts on terrorism by Combs (2011) and Nacos (2012). The literature is interesting and well-done, but more empirical work is needed in this area to directly address how media focus affects VEO activity.

Detailed Analyses

67: *Media focus on VEO activity can increase VEO activity.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: Several empirical studies address aspects of the hypothesis; however, there are many intricacies to the relationship, therefore, causation is difficult to prove. Scott (2001) observes a crowding-out effect in terms of media coverage. In other words, one terrorist incident necessarily takes away media coverage from another. This may explain why terrorism did not increase precipitously between 1969 and 1984. However, this competition for media coverage may push terrorists to find new and creative ways to garner attention. The article is quantitative and uses ITERATE terror data and NYT coverage to capture media attention. Nelson and Scott (1992) use Granger causality (a method that does require an a priori direction of causality and thus does not require a specific hypothesis) to show that media coverage does not influence terrorism. Combs (2011), in general, would agree that media attention does not necessarily lead to more terror. She takes on Schmid and de Graaf (1982) who had earlier suggested that media coverage can disinhibit, arouse, or cause learning: each dynamic leading to more terror. Combs argues that media coverage alone is unlikely to influence acts of terror and that factors other than simply 'learned behavior' are at work. Combs (2011, 184, citing the 1976 Report of the Task Force on Disorders and Terrorism) writes that the tension between press freedom and national security can be balanced by: a sharp reduction in the interviews during VEO hostage standoffs and other VEO actions, and circumspection in the coverage of all VEO actions. Rohner and Frey (2007) also look at the relationship between terror and the media (expecting it to be non-recursive or a feedback relationship). They use game theory (useful for showing interactions between players). The game assumes that media and terror groups each benefit from violent acts (see also Nacos 2012, 270-271). Like Nelson and Scott they also use Granger models (with MIPT terror data and with NYT to proxy media coverage), but they find a positive relationship between media coverage and terror. Rohner and Frey (2007) suggest that subsidizing quality journalism and not attributing violent acts to specific groups can undermine the incentive for VEOs to carry out attacks. In other words, we should work to disassemble the common interest game between media and VEOs, whereby each benefits from acts of terror. Summarizing several empirical studies, Nacos (2012) reports evidence that media coverage makes certain forms of terror contagious (see H27 for more coverage of this).

Empirical Support Score: 2 = Multiple qualitative and/or quantitative studies with mixed results (i.e., some in favor, some against the hypothesis) but more negative than positive findings.

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Applicability to Influencing VEOs: As discussed in the summary above, there is solid evidence of a link between VEOs and the media. It is reasonable to seriously consider this as an area for influencing VEOs.

Applicability Score: Direct: At least some of the empirical results directly concern the context of influencing VEOs.

68: *Reducing the media's contribution to the perceived visibility of attacks increases deterrence.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: While this is only an ancillary policy conclusion at the end of their paper, Rohner and Frey (2007) suggest that not attributing violent acts to specific groups can undermine the incentive for VEOs to carry out attacks. Nacos (2012, 270-274) also cites work that implies reducing media attention could reduce the number of terror acts. Looking at terror against American interests in the 1980s, Combs (2011, 181) would argue that the relationship between terror and the number of articles is context specific and not simple copycat behavior. For example, hijackings went down in 1980s in spite of many articles written on the topic. Other factors contributed to the decline of hijacking, such as better airport security policies (as pointed out above, more control variables such as this need to be employed in modeling the relationship between the media and VEOs). Like Scott (2001) above, Combs admits that VEOs might change to more imaginative strategies. Schmid and de Graaf refer to this as the 'built-in escalation imperative'. On the whole Combs (2011, 182) discourages policy intervention via the media as a means of influencing VEOs. She cites Schmid and de Graaf (1982, 72) who write that limiting press freedom would give credence to the common VEO claim that democratic states are not as democratic as they make out to be.

Empirical Support Score: 2 = Multiple qualitative and/or quantitative studies with mixed results (i.e., some in favor, some against the hypothesis) but more negative than positive findings.

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: This is also a reasonable area for influencing VEOs. Several authors argue that changes in the way the news is reported could work to reduce terror.

Applicability Score: Direct: At least some of the empirical results directly concern the context of influencing VEOs.

General Comments

There are other articles and books that look at media and VEO but many are not empirical and are not summarized here.

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