

Effects of Terrorism on United States Citizens

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of terrorism on United States citizens. The research consisted of 256 participants. Closed ended surveys were provided to the participants. The questions for the study were “Have you ever changed, modified, or canceled plans due to the fear, or concerns of being a victim of terrorism (recreational plans, travel plans, etc.), and How often do you think about the possibility of you, a family member, or friend being a victim of terrorism. Kruskal-Wallis Test, Mann-Whitney U Test, Chi-square, Fisher Exact Test, and Shapiro-Wilk Test were conducted to determine the extent to which terrorism was related to the outcome measured.

Terrorism is rooted in political and religious ideology. The primary purpose of the aforementioned is to create a paralyzing fear in society that results in changes of behavior, practices, beliefs, as well as to alter or modify thought patterns. However, despite the casualties, American citizens experience both domestically and abroad due to terrorist attacks, the probability of being a victim is extremely low.

According to the U.S. State Department (2015), the number of American citizens killed overseas and in the United States as a result of incidents of terrorism between 2001 and 2013 is 3,380. The aforementioned is much less, than the number of Americans killed each year in the United States by gun violence.

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The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) found that from 2001 to 2013, 406,496 people died by firearms on U.S. soil (2013 is the most recent year CDC data for deaths by firearms is available). Despite low casualty statistics as a result of terrorism, U.S. citizens experience feelings of fear of victimization.

The presence of social media contributes significantly to citizens' perception of terrorism and victimization. The ease of sharing immediately, abundantly, and repetitively terrorist activities via social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, coupled with saturated air time on terrorist groups through media outlets creates a fallacy that manipulates the accuracy of the perceived level of threat of American citizens as a result of terrorism. The aforementioned often results in modifying recreational plans, altering travel routes and destinations, as well as targeting and discriminating against specific groups of people that may fit a specific profile.

The purpose of this research was to examine the effects of terrorism on United States citizens. The results of the study assist in identifying how often American citizens change, modify, or cancel plans due to fear, or concerns of being a victim of terrorism. It also identifies how often United States citizens think about the possibility of themselves, a family member, or a friend being a victim of terrorism. Identifying the aforementioned allows American citizens to understand whether or not the aims of terrorism are effective, and if so, recognize measures that can be taken to decrease and or eliminate its effectiveness.

Literature Review

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, there were many studies conducted on terrorism, and how it affects United States citizens.

As the number of terrorist attacks increased both domestically and internationally, so did the amount of research on perceptions of safety, victimization, fear, and anger. However, while many researchers identified the aforementioned factors in their studies, the literature did not address the understanding of how or at what rate the factors contributed to a change in behavior.

In a study titled "Effects of Fear and Danger On perceived Risks Of Terrorism: A National Field Experiment" Lerner, Roxana, Gonzales, Small, and Fischhoff (2003) examined how emotion effects citizens responses to risk. Their research included 973 participants. The independent variables included age, race, gender, and education level. The dependent level included effects of citizen's responses to risk.

The results of the study conducted by Lerner et. al. (2003) suggested fear increased risks estimates and plans for precautionary measures; anger did the opposite. The study also found that males had less pessimistic risk estimates than did females, emotion differences explaining 60 to 80% of gender difference (Lerner et. al., 2003). Since the publication of their research, there has been an increase in the use of social media and an elevation of transparency as it relates to acts of terror. As a result, the level of fear due to terrorism, and the way in which people respond may have changed.

Like Lerner et. al, May, Herbert, Cline, and Nellis (2011) examined attitudes about terrorism utilizing criminological literature about fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization. The study consisted of a sample of 1,617 adults. The research and its participants were limited to the state of Kentucky which made it difficult to generalize the findings beyond the geographical location.

The results of the study suggests both fear of terrorism and perceived risk of terrorism were geography based (May et. al., 2011).The research also argued that gender was significantly related to both, suggesting a link based on socialization experiences of men and women (May et. al., 2011).However, while the study was able to correlate fear to perception of risk, it did not identify how citizens responded and at what rate to the aforementioned factors.

While other studies concentrated primarily on fear, and perception of risk and victimization due to terrorism, Nellis, and Savage (2012) examined the correlation between fear of terrorism victimization and media consumption. Their research consisted of 572 residents of New York, and Washington, D.C. Telephone interviews were used as the primary form of data collection.

The results of the research suggests that exposure to terrorism-related news is positively associated with perceived risk of terrorism to self and others and with fear for others, but not for self (Nellis & Savage, 2012).While this research identified specific factors that contributed to fear of risk, it did not consider what the responses of citizens due to their fear were. As a result, like many of the other studies, there still remains a gap in the literature between acknowledgments of fear as it relates to terrorism victimization, and how citizens are responding to the fear.

Many of the studies conducted on citizen's fear of terrorism victimization concentrate on perceptions, and media. However, Nellis (2009) examined gender differences in fear of terrorism. Her sample size consisted of 532 citizens from New York City, and Washington, D.C. The results of the study suggest women differ from men in predictors of their terrorism fears as well as engagement in terrorism-related avoidance and information-seeking behaviors (Nellis, 2009).

While Nellis's research began to examine gender differences and the responses as a result of terrorism between males and females, it is limited to specific locales. In addition, multiple terrorist attacks, and plots domestically, and internationally have occurred and been covered by mainstream media outlets in the United States which may contribute significantly to the changes in perceptions and responses to terrorism between 2009 and 2016. As a result, it is important to understand if the results of the study can be generalized beyond Washington, D.C., and New York City, and if the results are still consistent with the current climate of terrorism.

Summary

The presence of media outlets, and social media, has created an expedited form of transparency for citizens as it relates to acts of terrorism, and terrorist plots. As a result, United States residents have unlimited access to material that allows for their arrival at inaccurate conclusions of the possibility of terrorism victimization. The aforementioned often turns into fear.

However, despite the diligence of previous studies, there is still a significant gap in the literature on how citizens respond to their fear of terrorism victimization. In addition, researchers have not examined how often Americans think about terrorism victimization for themselves, family, and or friends.

As a result of the primary purpose of terrorism being to instill fear, and fear is controlled via thoughts, it is important to identify how often people are thinking about terrorism victimization. While changing and or modifying plans can be a direct indicator of the presence of fear, constant thought of victimization, and the stress that derives as a result can also prove to be an indicator.

Identifying the rate at which plans are changed as well as how often thoughts of victimization are occurring, can assist researchers, policy makers, and law enforcement with understanding how effective is terrorism on United States citizens.

Methodology

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of terrorism on United States citizens. While the results of most terrorist attacks are deaths, and injuries, the primary purpose of terrorism is to inflict fear in an attempt to change behaviors, practices, and beliefs. This research will provide an understanding of the effectiveness of terrorism by identifying the rate at which certain behaviors occur by American citizens as a result of being fearful for themselves, or their family being a victim of a terrorist act.

Target Population, Participant Selection, and Sampling Procedure

The target population of this study consisted of American citizens that were 18 years of age or older. From this population, 256 participants made up the sample size for this research. Random sampling was used to obtain the participants for the research. The aforementioned method of sampling was selected because it creates good internal validity. All races and genders were eligible to participate.

Data Collection Procedures

Closed ended surveys were provided to the participants. Each survey was administered electronically and consisted of five closed ended questions. All of the responses of the participants were confidential.

Information received from the survey was the participant's race (coded as 1 for White, and 2 for Black, 3 for Hispanic, 4 for Asian, and 5 for Other), age (coded as 1 for 18-24, 2 for 25-34, 3 for 35-44, 4 for 45-54, 5 for 55-64, 6 for 65-74, and 7 for 75 or older), gender (coded as 1 for male and 2 for female), change or modification of plans due to fear of terrorism victimization (coded as 1 for yes, and 2 for no), and the frequency of thoughts about terrorism victimization for oneself, family, and or friends(coded as 1 for never, 2 for 1 time per month, 3 for 2 times per month, and 4 for 1 time per week or more).

Data Analysis

The questions created for this study were "Have you ever changed, modified, or canceled plans due to the fear, or concerns of being a victim of terrorism (recreational plans, travel plans, etc.), and How often do you think about the possibility of you, a family member, or a friend being a victim of terrorism". In the study, the independent variables were race, age, and gender. The dependent variables were the rate at which plans are modified or changed due to fear of terrorism victimization, and the frequency of thoughts about terrorism victimization for oneself, family, and or friends. A Kruskal-Wallis Test, Mann-Whitney U Test, Chi-square, Fisher Exact Test, and Shapiro-Wilk Test were conducted to determine the extent to which terrorism was related to the outcome measured.

Results

Description of Sample

The final sample consisted of 256 participants. As shown in table 1, the majority of the sample was female (57.4%). African American and White participants each consisted of approximately 35% of the sample.

Participants of Hispanic decent consisted of the next largest racial category (21.1%). Asian and other racial categories each accounted for fewer than 5% of the sample size.

The study's two dependent variables were responses to the following questions:

1. Have you ever changed, modified, or canceled plans due to the fear, or concerns of being a victim of terrorism (recreational plans, travel plans, etc.)?
2. How often do you think about the possibility of you, a family member, or friend being a victim of terrorism?

For brevity purposes, the first dependent variable was referred to as Changed Plans and the second dependent variable as Thinking about Terrorism. The Changed Plans variable was dichotomous (yes, no). The "no" responses accounted for 72.1% of the total. The Thinking about Terrorism variable had a sample mean of 2.15 on a 4 point scale ranging from never to once per Week or More. Its standard deviation was 1.143.

All tests involving the Changed Plans variable was conducted using the chi-square or Fisher exact test. Since the Thinking about Terrorism variable is continuous, the issue of whether tests of hypotheses should use parametric or nonparametric methods rests on whether the variable is distributed normally in the various subgroups on which it was to be compared. The significance of this variable's departure from normality in the independent variable and Changed Plans subgroups was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Table 2 presents the results of those tests. The results in Table 2 indicate that in virtually all subgroups, the distribution of the "Thinking about Terrorism" departed significantly and substantially from normality. Consequently, nonparametric methods were used to test hypotheses specifying "Thinking about Terrorism" as the dependent variable.

Rate of Change of Plans Due to Terrorism Compared to Rate of Thinking about Terrorism

The Changed Plans subgroups differed in the frequency with which they thought about terrorism. This hypothesis was tested using the Mann-Whitney U test. The mean ranks were 165.03 for the "Yes" group and 114.26 for the "No" group. The test produced a $U = 3862$, for which the Z transform was -5.112 , $p < .001$. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. The group that reported having changed plans due to terrorism concerns reported a significantly higher frequency of thinking about terrorism than the group that reported that they did not change plans.

Gender and Change of Plans Due To Terrorism Concerns

The genders differed in the frequency with which they reported having changed plans due to terrorism concerns. The contingency table summarizing these frequencies is presented as Table 3.

The test statistic was computed to be $\chi^2(1) = 14.485$, $p < .001$. The null hypothesis consequently was rejected. The rate of changing plans due to terrorism concerns was significantly higher for females than for males.

Age and Change of Plans Due To Terrorism Concerns

There were differences between age groups in the frequency with which respondents reported having changed plans due to fear of terrorism. Table 4 shows the aforementioned. The test statistic was calculated to be $\chi^2(3) = 22.621$, $p < .001$.

The null hypothesis consequently was rejected. The age groups differed significantly in the rates at which they changed plans due to terrorism concerns. The research suggests, as age increases, citizens are less likely to change their plans due to being fearful of being a victim of terrorism. These differences exhibited a significant and substantial inverse linear relationship with age.

Race and Change of Plans Due To Terrorism Concerns

There were no differences between racial groups in the frequency in which respondents reported having changed plans due to terrorism concerns. The contingency table summarizing these frequencies is presented as Table 5. The test statistic was Calculated to be $\chi^2(4) = 7.399$, $p < .116$. The null hypothesis was consequently not rejected. There was no evidence in this study's data that the relative frequency of having changed plans due to terrorism concerns differs between racial groups.

Frequency of Thinking about Terrorism

As it related to the frequency of thinking about terrorism, the independent variable subgroups were compared on their mean ranks. The mean ranks of these subgroups are presented in Table 7. While Americans of all ages, races, and genders often thought about terrorism, there was no significant difference between the frequencies of thought by the aforementioned categories.

Table 6 displays how often each of the participants thought about themselves, their family members, or friends being a victim of terrorism as well as a breakdown of the aforementioned based on gender, age, and race.

Gender and Frequency of Thinking about Terrorism

There were no significant differences between the genders in the frequency with which they thought about terrorism. This hypothesis was tested using the Mann-Whitney U test. The test produced a $U = 6864$, for which the Z transform was -1.934 , $p = .053$. Consequently, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Age and Frequency of Thinking about Terrorism

There were no significant differences between age groups in the frequency with which they thought about terrorism. This hypothesis was tested using the Kruskal-Wallis test. The test statistic was calculated to be $\chi^2(3) = 3.314$, $p = .346$. The null hypothesis was consequently not rejected. There was no evidence in this study's data that the age groups differ in frequency of thinking about terrorism.

Race and Frequency of Thinking about Terrorism

There were no significant differences between racial groups in the frequency with which they thought about terrorism. The test statistic was calculated to be $\chi^2(4) = 3.467$, $p = .483$. The null hypothesis was consequently not rejected.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The results of the research suggests that future studies should concentrate on other factors contributing to fear of terrorism victimization such as socioeconomic status, education level, and rate of domestic and international travel. All of the aforementioned may have an impact on how citizens process the threat of terrorism, and or the rate at which they believe they are in situations or locations that can be the target of attacks. In addition, the current research was a quantitative study that used statistical analysis to calculate the results. However, it is recommended that future studies are either qualitative in nature or mixed methods to capture the reasons why citizens believe they have a greater chance of being victimized.

Conclusion

The research examined how often American citizens changed their plans due to being fearful of being a victim of terrorism, as well, as how frequently they thought about themselves or others being a victim of terrorism. Identifying the aforementioned, allows for the understanding of how effective terrorism is on United States citizens. Although the possibility of being harmed by an act of terrorism is significantly lower than being a victim of gun violence in the United States, the fear of terrorism victimization is a constant thought for many Americans.

The primary purpose of terrorism is to create a paralyzing fear in society that results in changes of behavior, practices, beliefs, as well as to alter or modify thought patterns.

While the research suggests that many citizens are not changing their plans, it does show that many citizens are thinking about themselves and those they care about being a victim of terrorism on a consistent basis. As a result, due to continuous thoughts based on fear, the research suggests that the aims of terrorism are successful.

Table 1: Frequency Distributions of Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent	
			Non-missing	Percent
Gender	Female	147	57.6	57.4
	Male	108	42.4	42.2
	Total non-missing	255	100.0	99.6
	Missing	1		.4
	Total	256		100.0
Age group	18 - 24	77		30.1
	25 - 34	78		30.5
	35 - 44	67		26.2
	45 or older	34		13.3
	Total	256		100.0
Race	Black	92		35.9
	White	88		34.4
	Hispanic	54		21.1
	Asian	10		3.9
	Other	12		4.7
	Total	256		100.0

Table 2: Results of Shapiro-Wilk Tests of Departures from Normality of Thinking about Terrorism in the IV and Changed Plans Subgroups

Variable	Group	Shapiro-Wilk Statistic	df	Sig.
Gender	Female	0.844	146	0
	Male	0.763	108	0
Age group	18 - 24	0.816	77	0
	25 - 34	0.822	78	0
	35 - 44	0.807	66	0
	45 or older	0.792	33	0
Race	Black	0.791	91	0
	White	0.843	87	0
	Hispanic	0.799	54	0
	Asian	0.713	10	0.001
	Other	0.877	12	0.08
Changed Plans	Yes	0.864	69	0
	No	0.767	185	0

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of Gender and Changed Plans

Gender	Changed Plans		Total
	Yes	No	
Female	53	93	146
Male	16	92	108
Total	69	185	254

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of Age Group by Changed Plans

Age	Changed Plans		Total
	Yes	No	
18 - 24	35	42	77
25 - 34	20	58	78
35 - 44	11	55	66
45 or older	3	31	34
Total	69	186	255

Table 5: Cross-tabulation of Race by Changed Plans

Race	Changed Plans		Total
	Yes	No	
Black	26	65	91
White	19	69	88
Hispanic	21	33	54
Asian	1	9	10
Other	2	10	12
Total	69	186	255

Table 6: Frequency of Thought of Terrorism By Gender, Age, and Race

		How often do you think about the possibility of you, a family member, or friend being a victim of terrorism?				
Variable	Category	Never	Once per month	Twice per month	Once a week or more	Total
Gender	Female	48	43	28	28	147
	Male	52	24	11	21	108
Total		100	67	39	49	255
Age	18 - 24	28	20	11	18	77
	25 - 34	28	21	12	17	78
	35 - 44	28	16	10	13	67
	45 or older	16	10	6	2	34
Total		100	67	39	50	256
Race	Black	41	20	13	18	92
	White	27	26	16	19	88
	Hispanic	22	16	6	10	54
	Asian	6	1	1	2	19
	Other	4	4	3	1	12
Total		100	67	39	50	256

Table 7: Mean Ranks of IV Subgroups on Frequency of Thinking about Terrorism

IV	Category	N	Mean Rank
Gender	Female	147	135.31
	Male	108	118.06
	Total	255	
Age Group	18 - 24	77	134.0
	25 - 34	78	133.43
	35 - 44	67	125.93
	45 or older	34	109.79
	Total	256	
Race	Black	92	123.35
	White	88	139.07
	Hispanic	54	123.93
	Asian	10	108.7
	Other	12	127.54
	Total	256	

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