

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF FRENCH TERRORISM FROM 1972 TO 1997

Project Title: French Terrorism 1972-1997 – Les liaisons dangereuses¹

Project Lead: Gary LaFree

Other Project Researchers: Lorraine Tournyol du Clos, Amber Stoesser

Overview

In academia, French terrorism has been a largely unexamined phenomenon. There have been even fewer quantitative analyses despite the fact that France has been subjected to a large and varying body of terrorist threats. In this article, we use the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) to create an initial description of the multifaceted terrorism (separatists, religious extremists and political extremists) that the French have faced. We discuss terrorism historically (the dynamics of each form of terrorism and government reactions), chronologically (trends and seasonality), geographically and tactically. In addition, we examine the interactions between groups. In this article, the GTD sheds light on the links between terrorist incidents or terrorist groups on French soil. It also gives new interpretations of what happened during the last 30 years of the 20th century and provides a few clues as to reasons behind the mutations and threats France has been subjected to since then.

Project Background

France is unique with the distribution of its territory. As a result, geography plays a large role in French terrorism for both logistic and ideological reasons. For this analysis, we have divided France into three separate geographical groups: the French continent, Corsica and DOM-TOM (overseas departments and territories). The French continent is 551,000 km² and consists of 60,067,000 inhabitants while Corsica is 8,680 km² and 273,000 inhabitants and the DOM-TOM are collectively home to 1,667,436 inhabitants.

Method

The Global Terrorism Database served as the source of the 2,204 incidents that occurred in France, Corsica and the DOM-TOM over 25 years. Using time series analysis methods, trends were created using simple descriptive statistics of terrorism over time and place. Through correlation analyses, we

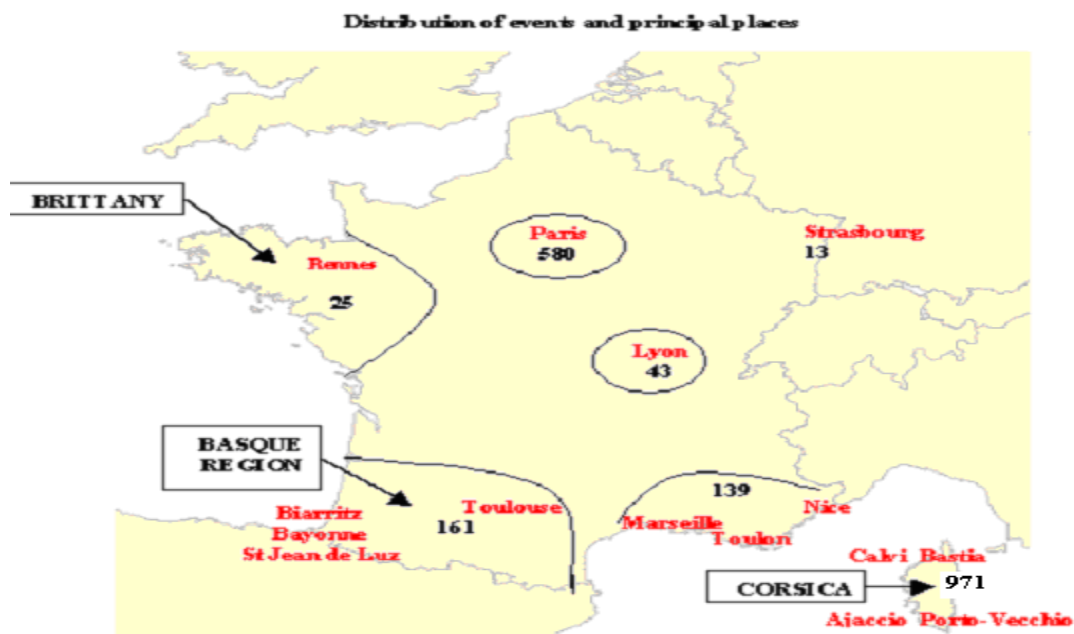
¹ This title refers to the famous French book by Choderlos de Laclos “Dangerous Liaisons” (1782) within which subtle links between events and groups of people lead to an unexpected suicide and deaths.

compare groups' trends and geographical distribution over time. We also isolate monthly impacts by using a smoothing model with a moving average order of 12 to examine the seasonality of Corsican activity. By using Principal Component Factor Analysis (PCA) we highlight affinities between groups by crossing information regarding operating modes between the principal groups.

Interim Findings

Some preliminary supported or suggested the existence of different links and themes:

1. Terrorism in France is highly geographically centralized.
 - Nearly 50% of all attacks in France are located on Corsica.
 - 8 cities on the French continent account for 79% of all the attacks.
 - There were also links among geographical areas with a possible copycat relationship between the different separatist movements (e.g., the Corsicans and the Basques).
 - Regions with a large concentration of politically important and economically prosperous cities were attacked more frequently
 - The South of France (the PACA region) is home to the major ports and tourist locations of Marseille (58 attacks) and Nice (29 attacks).
 - Cities with important transportation centers were also attacked frequently.
 - Lyon (31 attacks), the second largest city of France, is also a major rail hub connecting Northern and Southern France via high speed train.



2. Chronologically, the Corsican terrorist organizations showed trends in seasonality.

- There were recurring periods of peak terrorist activities occurring in the early parts of the year as well as another peak in May.
 - The periods where there are lower than average numbers of attacks coincides with the summer months.
 - The summer months are a peak period of tourism, a chief industry in Corsica.
 - These trends could reveal that either the Corsicans are trying not to destroy their economy by driving the tourists away or that they lack ample opportunities to attack with the influx of tourists.
3. In general, separatist violence is one of the keys themes in French terrorism
- Corsican terrorists are by far the most prolific of any French group.
 - Basques in Southwestern France were also important, but they do not play as big of a role in France as the Basques in Spain.
 - Generally speaking, the separatists are less fatal and cause fewer casualties in comparison to other groups.
 - The Corsicans engage in coordinated multi-site attacks known as “blue nights.”
 - These attacks are not nearly as fatal as the attacks of 9/11, 3/11 and 7/7; however they still offer an interesting further research direction.
4. The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) revealed interesting affinities among the groups.
- That Corsicans are different from their fellow separatists the Basques
 - The Basques were more similar to extreme leftist groups and Armenian groups.
 - Breton groups acted more similarly to Turks, Kurds and ideological groups such as Anti-Nuclear groups and Neo-Nazi groups.
 - Middle Eastern and Islamic groups are not the same, at least during this time period.
 - The two types of groups had different operating modes and different reasons for acting.
 - Middle Eastern groups were more interested in drawing attention to their political causes while Islamic groups were seeking to create an Islamic state through violent means.

Future Directions

Future research should focus on

- The effectiveness of counterterrorism policies.
 - France has instituted 4 distinct policy platforms between 1970 and the present to varying degrees of success and failure.
 - A more systematic statistical analysis should be utilized to determine which policies led to a reduction or increase in terrorism.

- Group dynamics and evolution.
 - The blue night phenomenon is an interesting course or research as it refers to the multiple incident attacks that were popular among Corsican terrorist groups. Researchers should look at the manner by which groups use multiple attacks and what factors predict the use of multiple attacks.
 - Some French groups, such as Action Directe, desisted over time while other groups became more frequent over time, such as the Corsicans. Thus, the groups' trajectories and susceptibility to counterterrorism measures should be examined.
 - Corsican terrorism follows a seasonal pattern that decreases during the summer economic high season possibly due to tourism. It may be useful to compare terrorist trends with economic and tourism patterns.