

Terrorism and preference for democracy: Evidence from Africa

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- **How do terrorist attacks influence citizens preference for democracy?**

Terrorism in Africa

- Terrorism is salient all across Africa
- The relationship of terrorism and democracy in Africa is not well studied
- Terrorism presents a threat to democracy

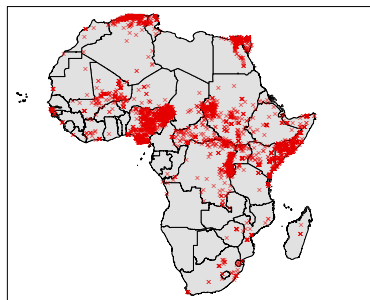


Figure: Terrorist attacks in Africa 2005-2015 listed in Global Terrorism Database (GTD, University of Maryland (2019))

Terrorism - A Threat to Democracy

- Failure of the state to provide safety
- Increased threat perception in citizens in France, 2015 (Strebel and Steenbergen, 2017)
- Negative correlation between pro-democratic attitudes and terrorism in Pakistan (Rehman and Vanin, 2017)
- Citizens seem willing to give up democratic liberties/values for security in Western contexts (Byman, 2019, Colantone and Stanig, 2018)

Terrorism and social cohesion

- Traumatic events can inspire pro-social behavior and create cohesion
 - In-group solidarity (+) after Paris 2015 attacks (Van Hauwaert and Huber, 2020)
 - Natural disasters (+) trust Cassar et al. (2017)
 - Rally around the flag effects, e.g., during the pandemic Leininger and Schaub (2020)
- Pro-social behavior and social cohesion are important for democratization

Terrorism and democratization

- Regime transitions as a "tug of war" between citizens and the elite (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2001, 2005, Przeworski, 2005, 2006, Fearon, 2011). (Typical assumption: Citizens are always pro-democracy)
- Open debate: Does democracy enable terrorism? (Ghatak et al., 2019, Eubank and Weinberg, 2001, Li, 2005)
- Whether the threat to democracy argument or the social cohesion argument holds empirically is critical for the outcome of the tug of war

Empirical Analysis - Data

- LHS: Stated preference for democracy from Afrobarometer (AfB); which statement is closest to the respondents opinion:
 - A: *"Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government."*
 - B: *"In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable."*
 - C: *"For someone like me it doesn't matter what kind of government we have."*
- RHS: Terrorist attacks from GTD: *"...use of illegal force or violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion or intimidation."*

Empirical Analysis - Identification

- Usual concern is endogeneity (Abadie, 2006), either through confounders or when change in preference for democracy directly causes terrorism
- Matching AfB interviews with terror attacks by country and timing
- Choosing small time frames around a terrorist attack such that the exact timing within the time frame is as good as random
- Identifying assumption: Within the short time frame the attack date is orthogonal to observed or unobserved variables that may influence regime preference

Empirical Analysis - Regression Equation

$$\mathbf{D}_{i,a} = \alpha + \beta \mathbf{after}_{i,a} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{i,a} + \delta_a + \varepsilon_{i,a}, \quad (1)$$

- $\mathbf{D}_{i,a} = 1$ if democracy is the preferred form of government
- $\mathbf{after}_{i,a}$ treatment indicator = 1 if post attack interview
- $\mathbf{X}_{i,a}$ control variables: age, gender, education, religion, past and present economic living conditions, employment status, distance to the event and week day, satisfaction with democracy, condition of democracy
- δ_a attack fixed effects (equiv. to country-year)

Empirical Analysis - Main Result

Table: Linear regression on binary indicator of democracy being the preferred form of government.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
After attack	0.027*** (0.009)	0.028*** (0.009)	0.032*** (0.010)	0.034*** (0.010)
<i>Controls added</i>				
Attack FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Distance, day of week		✓	✓	✓
Demogr., econ.			✓	✓
Dem. cond., satis.				✓
<i>N</i>	14728	14728	12499	11966

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Empirical Analysis - Main Result - Interpretation

- What does a 2.7 - 3.4 pp increase in preference for democracy mean?
- Net persuasion of 8.0%-8.6% of those **not** reporting democracy as the preferred form of govt..
- **Significant increase in preference for democracy.**

Empirical Analysis - Shrinking time frames

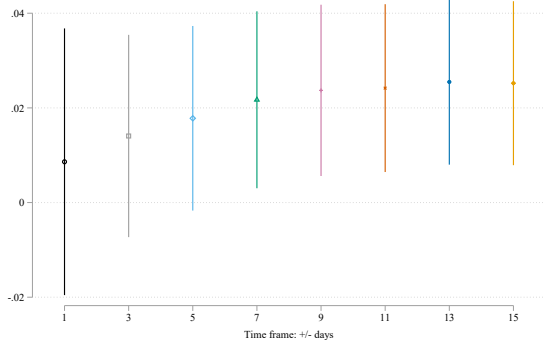


Figure: Marginal effect of terrorist attack on preference for democracy across time frames of increasing length. Specifications including no additional controls. Spikes represent 95% confidence intervals.

Empirical Analysis - Spatial Confounding

- Spatial confounding is a so far unaddressed issue for studies comparing survey responses across time (especially event-study or RDD designs)
- The issue arises from no random temporal patterns of fieldwork
- If interview locations are not randomized over time and treatment depends on timing, selection into treatment covaries with geographic characteristics

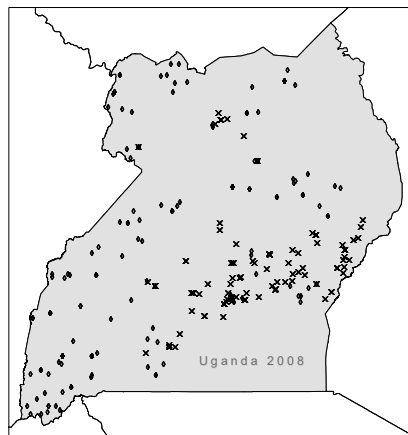


Figure: Uganda 2008, ◇: pre-attack, ×: represents post-attack.

Empirical Analysis - Spatial Confounding - Buffer Zones

- Using only spatial clusters of heterogeneous treatment status
- Dropping clusters of homogeneous treatment status by buffer zones
- Observations not falling into the buffer zone of an obs. with the opposite treatment status are dropped

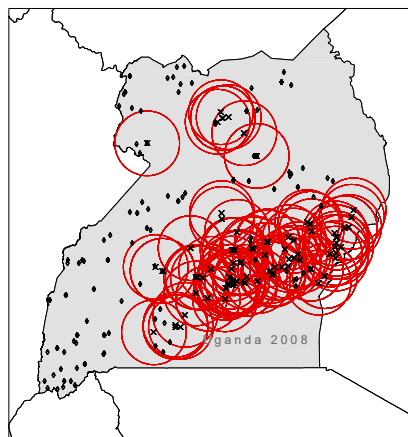


Figure: Uganda 2008, \diamond : pre-attack, \times : represents post-attack. Radius $r \approx 56\text{km}$

Empirical Analysis - Spatial Confounding - Results

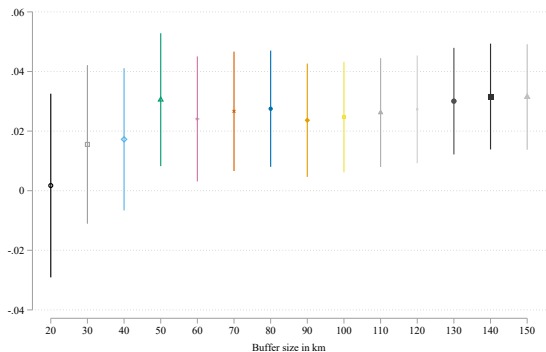


Figure: Marginal effect of terrorist attack on preference for democracy by a range of buffer zone radii. Minimal specification without controls. Spikes represent 95% confidence intervals.

Conclusion - Implications for Democratization

- In a tug of war for democratization between citizens and the elite the present results show terrorism does not weaken but increase the force on the pro democratic side
- Contrary to popular concern citizens become more pro-democratic in the immediate aftermath of terror attacks
- Elites' response is **not** investigated here but could be an interesting avenue for future research

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Shrinking Time Frames Full Set of Covariates

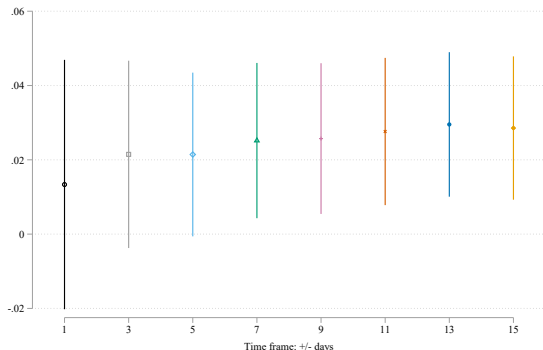


Figure: Marginal effect of terrorist attack on preference for democracy across time frames of increasing length. Specifications including the full set of controls. Spikes represent 95% confidence intervals.

Empirical Analysis - Spatial Confounding - Results

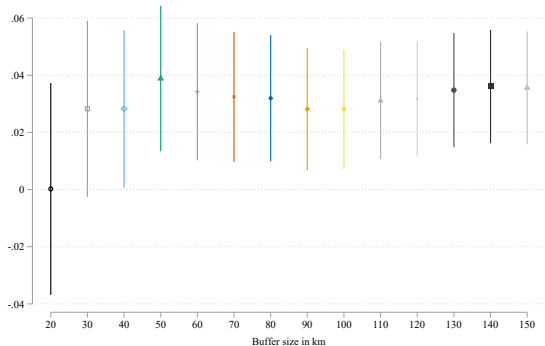


Figure: Marginal effect of terrorist attack on preference for democracy by a range of buffer zone radii. Specification without full set of controls. Spikes represent 95% confidence intervals.

Empirical Analysis - Regime Condition

Table: Linear regression on perceived regime condition (RC).

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	RC	RC	RC
After attack	0.023 (0.019)	0.029 (0.019)	0.034 (0.020)
<i>Controls added</i>			
Attack FE	✓	✓	✓
Distance, day of week		✓	✓
Demogr., econ.			✓
<i>N</i>	14466	14466	12266

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Outcome measures as how democratic the present state is perceived on a 4 point scale. [back to main](#)

Empirical Analysis - Regime Condition

Table: Linear regression on satisfaction with democracy.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Sat	Sat	Sat
After attack	-0.031 (0.020)	-0.032 (0.020)	-0.044** (0.022)
<i>Controls added</i>			
Attack FE	✓	✓	✓
Distance, day of week		✓	✓
Demogr., econ.			✓
<i>N</i>	14723	14723	12592

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Outcome measures as how satisfied the respondent is with how democracy works in the given country on a 5 point scale.

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