

What Is a Terrorist Group? Conceptual Issues and Empirical Implications

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Researchers increasingly conduct quantitative studies of terrorist groups, which is an important advance in the literature. However, there has been little discussion of what constitutes a “terrorist group,” regarding conceptualization or measurement. Many studies of terrorist groups do not define the term, and among those that do, definitions vary considerably. The lack of clarity leads to conceptual confusion as well as sample selection issues, which can affect inferences. To address these issues, this article offers an in-depth analysis of the term and its use. It explores definitions in the literature, and then discusses different samples used. Empirically, the article demonstrates how sample selection can affect variable values. It also shows that a non-representative sample, such as the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organization list, can lead to inaccurate generalizations. Ultimately, I present a straightforward “inclusive” definition, and argue for its practicality. Other suggestions are made for a more effective and cohesive research program.

Keywords concepts, definitions, quantitative analysis, terrorist groups, terrorist organizations

A number of studies in recent years have systematically examined terrorist groups, providing important information about the lethality, longevity, and other attributes of these organizations. This line of investigation is an essential contribution to the literature, as much of the other terrorism research has used countries as the unit of analysis, ignoring the terrorist group context in which the majority of attacks occur. However, compiling lists of terrorist groups raises serious questions, and the literature has largely sidestepped them.¹

What is a terrorist group? The concept of *terrorism* has been extensively discussed in the literature.² Is any group that uses terrorism, to any degree, a terrorist group? To what extent does it matter if a group occupies territory or uses non-terrorist tactics such as firefights with military troops? To what extent does it matter if a group is motivated more by illegal gains than affecting political or social change?

These questions are fundamental for the study of terrorism because scholars attempt to draw general inferences from their studies of terrorist groups, yet most do not define the universe to which inferences are applicable. In other words, they

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do not make clear what they mean by a terrorist group. Of the studies that offer explicit definitions, some use relatively liberal definitions of terrorist groups, while others use much more restrictive definitions. Definitional inconsistencies, and the lack of discussion thereof, occur in spite of the importance of conceptual clarity and the related issue of appropriate measurement in political science and the social sciences generally.

A substantial body of work makes clear the importance of explicit definitions and operationalization in social science. Geddes writes that in order for research to be useful, conceptual classification criteria should be “concrete, unambiguous, and public, so that other scholars can understand the basis for the analyst’s judgments.”³ Yet in the study of terrorist organizations, explicit definitions and operationalization, clearly grounded in theory, are often absent. Definitions are important for empirical research. Peters argues, “If we cannot clearly define and then measure a concept it is difficult to include it in a comparative study.”⁴ Goertz and colleagues assert that concepts are crucial for proper case selection.⁵ They argue that the construction of concepts, and their measurement, can lead to selection bias which affects research findings.

Regarding terrorist groups, conceptual differences and lack of discussion thereof lead to several problems. First, at the most basic level, there is confusion over the term *terrorist group*. It is unclear what scholars are studying. Second, research results depend on the sample studied, so this raises questions about generalizability of conclusions. Third, research on terrorist groups could speak to studies of other types of groups, such as insurgent groups and transnational criminal organizations. However, it is unclear to what extent these concepts overlap or are otherwise comparable. This is related to a fourth and perhaps more fundamental issue: research is only able to be reproduced, compared against, and generally useful to the wider literature if other scholars have a clear understanding of measurement criteria—and perhaps more so if the criteria are commonly accepted. When scholars do not make explicit their definitions or operationalization, or use understandings that are different from other scholars’, this can reduce the ability of future studies to fruitfully draw on the research. These issues lead to a less coherent and ultimately less useful body of literature.

Understanding terrorist groups conceptually is not simply a theoretical concern. To evaluate counterterrorism policy, and to understand terrorist group behavior for other policy ends, it is essential to know if a notion of “terrorist group” matches up with the ideas of other analysts. When researchers attempt to determine if a policy is working, they might study its consequences on a sample of terrorist groups. Are these groups representative of terrorist organizations generally? Are the kind of “terrorist groups” in one study comparable to the “terrorist groups” analyzed in another study? These questions are crucial for useful policy analysis, but the current body of research does not provide clear answers. Furthermore, government agencies can be somewhat idiosyncratic with definitions⁶ and the labelling of terrorist groups, as can be seen with the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations, discussed below. This compounds problems. If researchers could be more prudent in their use of terminology, one hopes that perhaps governments may eventually follow suit.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows. First, I briefly explain what I mean by “terrorism” and “group.” Then I review research on terrorist groups, highlighting that there is often a lack of discussion between scholars or citation of other work when defining the concept. I present evidence of the problem: substantial variation in definitions employed. Some studies do not offer a definition of terrorist groups,

while most others use understandings of terrorist groups that I describe as either “inclusive” or “exclusive.” Empirically, I show differences across samples, and explain how this can affect the generalizability of results. Then, I present an argument for a relatively inclusive definition, discussing its advantages. The article concludes with other suggestions for more effective research on terrorist groups.

Preliminaries: On “Terrorism” and “Groups”

This article lacks the space for an in-depth treatment of the term “terrorism,” which has been discussed in great detail elsewhere. However, key elements in widely accepted definitions include: (a) intentional violence; (b) that the violence is used to spread fear in a wider audience; and (c) political motivation.⁷ The third point is the most debated of the three, but Schmid’s survey of 109 definitions found that 65% specified a political motivation.⁸ Many other definitions explicitly include the requirement that attacks target civilians or noncombatants, but this seems to be implicit in definitions referred to above, with the notion of fear and a wider audience.

Regarding the term “group,” this paper uses “group” and “organization” synonymously. James Q. Wilson referred to organizations as formal, voluntary associations.⁹ He indicates that *formal* means an entity with a defineable membership and a group name. Terrorist organizations, in this formal sense, are worth understanding because of the many thousands of people they have killed in recent decades, and the mobilization issues and structural attributes that they share can help explain their behavior.

The idea of a “group” is probably intuitive to most readers, but research on network structure terrorist groups, “bunch of guys” collectives, and lone wolf terrorists suggest nuance that is worthy of future investigation.¹⁰ For example, loosely organized groups raise questions about when a person is actually a member of a group, or if a formal group exists at all. An individual who downloads instructions from a terrorist group’s public website, but has no additional contact with the group, probably should not be considered a group member. Regarding lone wolves, this phenomenon is increasingly occurring in the United States, but globally, lone-actor terrorism is very rare.¹¹ For the purposes of this article, Wilson’s understanding of organizations is used, with the caveats that some terrorist groups are not as formally organized as others, and the boundaries of group membership and identity are worthy of continued research.

Terrorist Groups in the Literature

Terrorist groups are an important concept and area of empirical investigation in terrorism studies. This line of research takes into consideration the fact that terrorist attacks by unaffiliated individuals are rare, and therefore most attacks are a part of a campaign by a specific group with particular political goals, mobilization issues, structure, and other organizational characteristics. Focusing on the organization as a unit of analysis can tell us a great deal about terrorism generally.¹² Many scholars have conducted case studies of individual terrorist groups, usually implicitly or explicitly designed to tell the reader more about wider phenomena.¹³ Additionally, formal models are increasingly used to explain terrorist group behavior.¹⁴

Other studies have examined large samples of terrorist groups, often claiming to examine *all* terrorist groups of the past several decades. Subjects engaged by

quantitative research on global samples include terrorist group lethality,¹⁵ why some groups adopt suicide terror,¹⁶ how political competition affects the emergence of new terrorist groups,¹⁷ the effectiveness of leadership targeting/decapitation,¹⁸ involvement in nonviolent politics,¹⁹ and group duration/failure.²⁰

Because terrorist groups are so widely studied, one might think that the literature contains thorough discussion of what constitutes a “terrorist group.” It does not. The lacuna is surprising because other types of groups in the political science literature, such as minority ethnic groups²¹ and political parties,²² have been the subject of much discussion relating to their conceptualization and measurement.

One set of articles in the 1990s included discussion of operationalization of terrorist groups, but to a limited degree. Eubank and Weinberg’s 1994 study of democracy and terrorism inspired a great deal of debate about regime type and political violence, and also drew attention for its measurement of terrorist groups.²³ It was among the first global quantitative analyses of terrorist organizations.²⁴ The authors did not offer a definition of the term in their theoretical section, but for the empirical analysis selected 379 groups that they considered “terrorist groups” from the more than 2,000 groups listed in the *World Directory of Terrorist and Other Organizations Associated with Guerrilla Warfare, Political Violence and Protest*.²⁵ Eubank and Weinberg’s criteria included the following specification: “Groups were chosen for inclusion in our analysis if they were labeled ‘terrorist,’ ‘urban guerrilla,’ or ‘death squad,’ or if their reported activities included assassinations, bombings, kidnappings, or skyjackings for a wider political purpose beyond harming the immediate target.”²⁶

Several scholars directly responded to the study, raising a number of questions, including about Eubank and Weinberg’s operationalization of terrorist groups. Hewitt questioned the logic of including urban guerrillas but not rural guerrillas.²⁷ Sandler suggested that Eubank and Weinberg’s conception of terrorist groups incorrectly excluded a number of organizations.²⁸ For example, he argued that certain groups in Afghanistan should have been included because they were “guerrilla groups that engaged in bombings and other acts of terrorism to achieve a political goal. Moreover, these groups sought a political purpose that went beyond the suffering inflicted on their victims.”²⁹ Both Hewitt and Sandler suggested that Eubank and Weinberg used too exclusive of an operationalization of terrorist groups.

Such discussion among scholars provides valuable substance for understanding terrorist group conceptualization and measurement. Unfortunately, these contributions to the literature have mostly been overlooked by more recent studies of terrorist groups. Nine years after Eubank and Weinberg’s article was criticized for its sample selection, Weinberg and Pedahzur’s important book on terrorist groups and political parties used almost the same operationalization of terrorist groups—without discussion of Hewitt or Sandler’s critiques.³⁰

It should be noted that this approach, using an operationalization of terrorist groups without reference to (admittedly scarce) previous discussions of terrorist group measurement, is not unusual. On the contrary, it is the norm. Few studies cite critiques such as Hewitt’s and Sandler’s.³¹ Furthermore, there has been little analysis of the concept, and basically no consideration of implications of different definitions. Most studies of terrorist organizations have tended to either avoid defining the concept or offer a definition without justification or discussion. Either of these choices ignores contrasting definitions in the literature, and related questions of how different definitions might affect inferences.

Table 1. Selected studies, by approach to definition of “terrorist group”

Approach	Citation
No definition offered	Rapoport 2001, Karmon 2005, Cronin 2006, Jordan 2009
Terrorism is a tactic, so no group is inherently a terrorist group	Merari 1993, Tilly 2004, Jackson et al. 2005, Findley and Young 2012
Inclusive definition	Explicitly: Weinberg 1991, Jones and Libicki 2008, Young and Dugan 2010, Asal in Asal et al. 2012, Carter 2012, Price 2012, Phillips forthcoming, 2014; Implicitly: e.g., Asal and Rethemeyer 2008, Enders and Sandler 2012
Exclusive definition	Crenshaw 1991, Della Porta 1995, Cronin 2009, Sánchez-Cuenca and de la Calle 2009, de la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca 2011, Shapiro and Siegel 2012

The following sections discuss approaches to terrorist group definition in the literature. Some studies offer no definition of the term, and others argue that terrorism is a tactic and not a way to classify groups. Other studies, however, offer what are considered inclusive or exclusive definitions. This review of terrorist group research is not all-inclusive, but highlights a number of studies from recent decades. Some of the studies discussed, along with each study’s respective approach to definition, are listed in Table 1.

A Concept With No Definition?

A number of important works on terrorist groups do not offer a definition of the term. For example, Rapoport, in the introduction to his edited volume *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, does not discuss concepts or criteria for inclusion in the book.³² Cronin’s first article on the demise of terrorist groups does not define the term, although her later works do.³³ Karmon’s book on cooperation between terrorist groups never offers a definition, nor does Jordan’s article on how leadership targeting affects terrorist groups.³⁴ These are just a few examples among many.

One possible reason for the lack of explicit definitions of terrorist groups in works on the subject is that authors think the term is simply unable to be defined. This is similar to the notion of an “essentially contested concept,” one that is permanently subject to revision and speculation.³⁵ Walter Laqueur adopts this approach with the concept of terrorism. He has written several prominent books on the subject, but famously refuses to define it.³⁶ Part of Laqueur’s justification is that the meaning of the word, while contested, is self-evident enough. “Ten years of debates on typologies and definitions have not enhanced our knowledge of the subject to a significant degree. . . . [T]he study of terrorism can manage with a minimum of theory,” Laqueur wrote in the 1980s, in response to a survey of experts.³⁷ Laqueur’s understanding of terrorism is similar to the oft-quoted Potter Stewart definition of pornography: one knows it when one sees it. Yet it is not clear that we know terrorist groups when we see them. Definitions differ, and samples studied differ as well.

Another potential reason for why some authors do not define the term *terrorist group* is that terrorism might “only” be a tactic, and therefore no group is inherently a terrorist group. This is what one group of RAND scholars explicitly argues in their study of terrorist group organizational learning.³⁸ Other researchers discuss terrorism as a tactic,³⁹ and Findley and Young make a strong argument for doing so when studying civil war.⁴⁰ Abrahms sometimes uses the term “multitactical groups” to refer to organizations using both terrorism and guerrilla warfare.⁴¹ It is not clear, however, how many scholars, such as the RAND co-authors, find the concept “terrorist groups” to lack utility. This is another point that could be addressed by more explicit discussion of the subject.

A more likely reason that many important studies of terrorist groups do not define the term is because the authors use a relatively inclusive understanding of the term—basically any group that uses terrorism. (A more specific definition is discussed below.) Analysis of some of the studies without explicit definitions suggests that this seems to be the case. While some of these studies appear to implicitly use an inclusive definition of terrorism, it is not immediately clear to readers, nor is there any consensus that researchers should use such a definition.

Inclusive Definitions

Some studies of terrorist groups offer explicit definitions of the concept, and they can be divided into those that offer inclusive definitions, and those with more exclusive definitions. Most of the works that use what I call inclusive definitions say something along the lines of, “a terrorist group is any group that uses terrorism.” There are often caveats. This conception is comparable to Sánchez-Cuenca and de la Calle’s action-based, as opposed to actor-based, notion of terrorism.⁴² What is important is the action—using terrorism—more than any other particular attribute of the group. Asal refers to this type of definition as one based on ethics, arguing that groups using terror (he specifically mentions attacking civilians) are ethically distinct actors, regardless of other differences among them.⁴³

For example, Jones and Libicki suggest the following: “A terrorist group is defined as a collection of individuals belonging to a non-state entity that uses terrorism to achieve its objectives.”⁴⁴ Regarding caveats, they add that the group should have some sort of command and control structure. Carter offers a similar meaning, and includes a clarification of what he means by “terrorism” within the definition: “A terrorist group is defined as a group that uses terrorist tactics, meaning it deliberately targets civilians in pursuit of political goals.”⁴⁵ Price suggests a similar definition: “organizations consisting of more than one person that engaged in violence with a political purpose aimed at evoking a psychological reaction in an audience that extended beyond the targeted victims.” He notes that lone-wolf terrorists are not included in this definition.⁴⁶ Most concisely, Young and Dugan offer the following: “A terrorist organization is then defined as a group that uses terrorism as described above.” To their credit, they then discuss and justify this definition choice.⁴⁷

A final example is Weinberg’s: “Terrorist groups are organizations that rely, partially or exclusively, on [terrorism] to achieve their political ends.”⁴⁸ This definition is basically inclusive, but it is helpful because it explicitly makes clear two points. First, a group can use terrorism partially or exclusively. This is important because as we shall see below, other authors find the partial use of terror sufficient for excluding a group from the terrorist group label. Second, it specifies that the use

of terrorism is to meet political ends. This might seem obvious, since many or most definitions of terrorism specify the acts are to achieve *political* goals. However, Weinberg's specificity here is crucial because it implies the group, and not just one particular act, must have a political end. This is useful for separating terrorist groups from criminal groups—although of course this, too, is debated.⁴⁹ Authors using inclusive definitions, and for that matter most authors using no definition, seem to at least implicitly exclude criminal groups from their definitions. This is discussed more below.

Also implicit in the inclusive definitions above is that terrorist groups are subnational organizations. This is discussed explicitly in some articles, but when one reviews the list of groups that authors consider terrorist groups, they are subnational actors. State terror is an important area of study, but most scholars consider terrorism, and therefore terrorist groups, to be subnational phenomena. The inclusive definition can now be summarized: *Terrorist groups are subnational political organizations that use terrorism.*

Note that this definition has three elements: a) groups must be subnational,⁵⁰ b) groups must be political, and, c) groups must use terrorism. With this definition in mind, one can look at studies that do not use an explicit definition of terrorist groups, and try to infer if the authors are implicitly using this understanding of the concept. Discussion of terrorist group characteristics, as well as examples of specific groups or data sets used, suggest that some studies without stated definitions appear to share this inclusive definition.⁵¹

One additional note is that while an inclusive definition of terrorist groups involves a relatively expansive understanding of the concept, it does not mean that operationalization should involve any group that has been called a terrorist group by anyone. Below, when discussing empirics, I refer to “ultra-inclusive” operationalization, which basically does not filter possible non-terrorist groups from broad lists compiled for other purposes.

Exclusive Definitions

A different set of studies on terrorist groups uses more exclusive definitions of the term. One key distinction some authors make is between groups that do not hold territory (“terrorist groups”) and groups that do (“guerrillas”). Another distinction is to what extent the group uses terrorism—with some scholars arguing that a group must primarily use terrorism, as opposed to other types of violence or non-violent action.

Perhaps the most extensively-argued case for dividing terrorist groups and guerrilla groups is made by de la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca. They assert: “terrorist groups are underground groups with no territorial control.”⁵² Groups that hold territory, by contrast, are guerrilla groups. This distinction is important for them, as they suggest that holding territory dictates the behavior, including tactical choices, of subnational groups.⁵³ The distinction suggests that a number of groups commonly described as terrorists—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the PKK, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula—are guerrillas and not terrorist groups. Laqueur makes the same distinction based on holding *rural* territory, asserting that “urban guerrilla” is a contradiction in terms.⁵⁴ With territorial possession being crucial for delineating guerrillas from terrorists for these scholars, it follows that terrorist groups are defined by being clandestine or underground.⁵⁵

Other scholars make their definition of terrorist groups exclusive by basing it on the extent to which a group uses terrorism. In particular, several studies suggest that a group must use terrorism to a substantial degree. For example, Cronin uses the following definition of terrorist groups in her book on group longevity: “For the sake of economy, entities that engage *primarily* in this type of violence will be called ‘terrorist groups’ here” (italics added).⁵⁶ Shapiro and Siegel offer a definition similar to Cronin’s: “For purposes of this exercise we define terrorist organizations as any whose use of violence *regularly* violated the principles of distinction and proportionality under the law of armed conflict for at least one year of their existence” (italics added).⁵⁷

This distinction, that terrorist groups must “primarily” or “regularly” use terrorism, is also employed by Crenshaw in her operationalization of terrorist groups in one of the first studies of terrorist group duration.⁵⁸ She focuses on the following sample: “autonomous organizations, whether left, right, or separatist in orientation, that rely *significantly* on terrorism as a strategy of opposition to regimes in power. It excludes mass-based independence movements against foreign occupiers in colonial contexts” (italics added). This operationalization is exclusive for several reasons, but of relevance here is the idea that groups must rely “significantly” on terrorism.

Table 2 compares basic elements of the inclusive definition with those of exclusive definitions. Note that the exclusive definitions tend to contain the basic “inclusive” criteria—subnational, political, and using terrorism—but that each exclusive definition adds an additional criterion upon which to narrow the set of possible groups. Using de la Calle and Sánchez’s terminology, I refer to the two exclusive definitions as either action-based or actor-based. This table includes definitions associated with quantitative studies, but there is virtually an unlimited spectrum of types of definitions. For example, while most scholars suggest that terrorist groups are politically motivated, there has been debate about whether Mexican drug trafficking organizations might be terrorist groups in spite of their mainly criminal motivations.⁵⁹ At least one policy article argues that the Mexican groups are terrorist organizations because they use terrorist or terrorist-like tactics.⁶⁰ This suggests a more liberal definition. The definitions in Table 2, however, represent the most common understandings of terrorism discussed in the literature.

Table 2. Elements of inclusive and exclusive terrorist group definitions

Item	Inclusive definition	Exclusive definition, action-based	Exclusive definition, actor-based
Elements	1. Subnational 2. Political 3. Uses terrorism	1. Subnational 2. Political 3. Uses terrorism 4. Primarily uses terrorism vs. other tactics	1. Subnational 2. Political 3. Uses terrorism 4. Does not hold territory
Example of author using definition	Carter 2012	Cronin 2009	Sánchez-Cuenca and de la Calle 2009

Note: These are summaries of each author’s definition.

Table 3. Terrorist group conceptualization, intension vs. extension

Intension	Minimalist	Political and criminal organizations	Inclusive	Exclusive, action-based	Exclusive, actor-based
Subnational Political		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Uses terrorism	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Primarily uses terrorism vs. other tactics				Yes	
Doesn't hold territory					Yes
Extension	<i>Broad</i>	←—————→			<i>Narrow</i>
Example		Longmire and Longmire IV 2008	Carter 2012	Cronin 2009	Sánchez-Cuenca and de la Calle 2009

Note: This table uses Sartori's (1970) notions of intension vs. extension, and is based on a table by Kurtz (2000).

Table 3 includes a broader spectrum of definitions, showing the necessary conditions for each conceptualization. This table draws on Sartori's notions of the intension vs. extension of concepts, and reproduces Kurtz's table analyzing the concept "peasant."⁶¹ Sartori argues that there is a tradeoff between how broadly the concept can be applied and the concept's specificity. The definitions in Table 3 are sorted by how broadly they apply—their extension—which is inversely related to the number of necessary conditions for each definition—the intension. Authors proposing alternate definitions can consider what conditions are necessary for inclusion, and how that affects the number of groups to which their definition applies.

Overall, the tables show that there are clearly distinguishable definitions of terrorist groups, and some authors are explicit about their use of one or the other. Inclusive, exclusive action-based, and exclusive actor-based definitions are the most common, but certainly other conceptualizations are employed as well. Furthermore, as noted, some authors argue that the term is undefinable, while others still argue the term is not helpful because groups can use terrorism but this does not inherently make them a "terrorist group."

Empirical Implications of Conceptual Differences

These differences of definition, and of measurement, have empirical implications. Different or undefined understandings of terrorist groups lead to different samples studied. This section briefly illustrates the problem, in two ways. First, it shows that data sets based on different definitions can have different average dependent variable values. Second, it shows how atheoretical sample selection might produce misleading results. Examples of potentially atheoretical sample selection refer to the use of the

U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organization list. The purpose of this section is to draw attention to how conceptual differences lead to different samples analyzed, and how this can affect research, including results.

Most quantitative studies of terrorist groups in recent years have used inclusive definitions. However, as discussed above, some scholars exclude groups from their understanding of the concept if the group either holds territory or does not use terrorism as its primary tactic. Do these differences in conceptualization translate into meaningfully different samples of terrorist groups?

Terrorist group longevity has been the subject of more quantitative attention than any other organization-level topic of inquiry. However, authors have used different criteria for inclusion in their studies, and this has resulted in samples that are different in important ways—including the longevity of sample members. Table 4 compares some studies. Note that the first two studies, Blomberg et al. 2010 and Vittori 2009, are described as “unfiltered,” meaning the authors largely used off-the-shelf data on groups without removing or adding groups for theoretical reasons.⁶² This could also be described as “ultra-inclusive,” more than inclusive because the authors used extant lists compiled for other purposes, with less scrubbing of the lists for groups that might not fit theoretical understandings of terrorist groups.

The comparison in Table 4 demonstrates that there is substantial variation in dependent variable values—terrorist group longevity—across samples. Average terrorist group age is as low as 2 years in one sample, but 21 years in another. The sample with the highest mean group age is the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organization list. Generally, more exclusive data sets have longer-lasting terrorist groups. This seems to be because the groups that have been removed are not as durable. In other words, the exclusion used in exclusive definitions apparently leads to the removal of less-durable groups. Beyond dependent variable values, it is not clear if other aspects of the data change considerably across samples. It is difficult to further compare the samples because they include different terrorist group attributes, the independent variables of the respective studies. However, the table makes clear that different conceptualization and measurement of terrorist groups results in markedly different values of average group longevity.

The samples shown in Table 4 differ because authors have different ideas about conceptualization. This manifests itself when the authors measure their concept. Other research, regardless of conceptualization, has measurement issues that result in a different kind of research problem. Studies that have used a non-representative subsample of terrorist groups are likely making inaccurate generalizations about the wider universe of terrorist groups. Here I refer specifically to the use of the U.S. list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations.

The U.S. Department of State, since 1997, has kept a list of designated foreign terrorist organizations, informally referred to as the FTO list.⁶³ It is used to sanction persons or entities that might provide support to the listed groups. In the Spring of 2014, there were 57 groups on the list.⁶⁴ Scholars have used the FTO list to empirically evaluate claims about the effectiveness of terrorism, terrorist group longevity, whether weak states are especially susceptible to the existence of terrorist groups, and as a source of descriptive data motivating research projects.⁶⁵

Is the FTO list an appropriate sample of terrorist groups to study? This depends on one’s research question. If one is interested in foreign groups targeting the United States, the sample could be appropriate. To test hypotheses about terrorist groups or terrorism in general, however, the FTO list is problematic. The groups on the list are

Table 4. Global samples of terrorist groups used in longevity studies

Study	Source of data	Type of definition and measurement	Number of groups	Average age of groups, in years
Blomberg, Engel, and Sawyer 2010	ITERATE	Unfiltered/ ultra-inclusive	1,414	2
Vittori 2009	TKB	Unfiltered/ ultra-inclusive	100 (random sample of 897)	4
Phillips forthcoming, 2014	GTD, Asal and Rethemeyer's (2008) TKB collection	Inclusive	600	11
Jones and Libicki 2008	TKB	Inclusive	648	11
Carter 2012	TKB via Jones and Libicki 2008	Inclusive	648	11
Blomberg, Gaibullov, and Sandler 2011	GTD	Inclusive	367*	12
Cronin 2009	TKB	Exclusive	450	13
Crenshaw 1991	Janke 1983 and other sources	Exclusive	77	14
Cronin 2009, subsample of U.S. FTOs	U.S. State Department FTO list	Exclusive	42	21

Note: ITERATE=International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events. TKB= Terrorism Knowledge Base (Rand-Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism). FTO= Foreign Terrorist Organization. Average group ages comes from authors' descriptive data, or, when available, analysis of their data.

*Blomberg et al. likely have a smaller number of groups than other studies using an inclusive definition because of data, not definition. They include groups for which they find organizational *and* attack data, and attack data are not available for many groups.

not representative of the universe of terrorist groups, whether one uses common exclusive or inclusive definitions, for at least three reasons. First, the groups must be “foreign” to the United States, so all U.S. terrorist groups are excluded. Second, listed organizations must “threaten the security of U.S. nationals or the national security,”⁶⁶ excluding foreign groups focused on domestic concerns. Third, groups must target the U.S. to such a degree that the U.S. decides to put them on the list. This likely excludes otherwise “qualified” groups that are not very powerful or are so new that the State Department has not yet completed the process of deciding to list the group.⁶⁷ Because of the relatively high bar for inclusion on the list, FTOs tend to have larger memberships and survive much longer than typical terrorist groups.

The FTO list, then, is a very specific subset of terrorist groups, and nothing like a random sample.

This non-representativeness is apparent in the studies that use the FTO list for analysis. Regarding Cronin's duration studies, she primarily uses a 450-group sample. However, as shown in Table 4, she also analyzes the subsample of FTOs, and finds substantial differences. The mean group age in the 450-group sample is 13 years, but the mean group age for the FTOs is 21 years. Regarding studies of terrorism's effectiveness, Krause notes an interesting contrast: Abrahms, using the FTO list, finds terrorism to be *ineffective*, while Pape, using a different sample, finds suicide terrorism to be *effective*.⁶⁸ Krause argues that sample selection plays a role in divergent results. "[D]ifferences in standards of measurement and case selection drive this supposed debate over the effectiveness of terrorism, rather than an actual dispute over the historical record," he writes.⁶⁹

A final example of the FTO list and potentially misleading inferences comes from Berman's book on religious terrorist groups.⁷⁰ It contains a section called "Terrorist Organizations—Why So Few?" This heading might be confusing to scholars who have seen the more than 1,000 organizations listed in the Global Terrorism Database, or the lists of hundreds of groups discussed above. But readers discover that Berman says there are so few because he is referring to the FTO list as all dangerous groups in the world. This part of Berman's work is just descriptive, and meant to motivate the discussion, not test hypotheses. However, it illustrates how the use of a certain sample of terrorist groups, in this case the FTO list, can affect conclusions.

This section has attempted to briefly display how inconsistency or agnosticism over conceptualization and measurement of terrorist groups can affect empirical research. Studies of terrorist organizational longevity have compiled lists of terrorist groups, and these lists are considerably different—notably in average dependent variable values. Variation in mean group longevity appears to be related to sample selection, as groups in more exclusive samples tend to have higher longevity. It is unclear if sample selection affects the distribution of independent variables, but this would raise further issues. This section also demonstrated that the FTO list is a non-representative sample of terrorist groups, and therefore is probably not appropriate for drawing inferences about terrorist organizations generally or terrorism in general.

Ways Forward: Argument for an Inclusive Definition

With the above issues in mind, there are a number of ways that research on terrorist organizations can improve. The most important step is to use an explicit definition of the concept. This is crucial for letting readers know what precisely is being analyzed, and helps readers understand the broader class of phenomenon to which a study is applicable. Ideally and space permitting, explicit definition should be accompanied by discussion or justification. A few recent studies have offered such discussion,⁷¹ and it contributes substantially to the literature. It is worth noting that not every study of terrorist organizations needs several pages reviewing all potential definitions. This has been a pitfall of research on terrorism generally, over that concept. An explicit definition, however, and some discussion of the choice, offers important depth to research and helps lay groundwork for related studies.

Given the importance of definitions, and the existence of two primary classes of terrorist group definition (inclusive and exclusive), which has more validity? Research design could justify the use of virtually any conceptualization of terrorist

group. There is no “true” definition. For most purposes, however, an inclusive definition seems to capture the idea best, and offers a number of advantages.

A terrorist group is a subnational political organization that uses terrorism. As discussed above, this definition summarizes the idea of an inclusive understanding of terrorist groups. I argue that this definition is generally preferable for at least four reasons. First, it is already common in the literature—at least implicitly. Beyond the studies explicitly using the definition, analysis of additional studies which do not declare definitions suggests that they employ the inclusive definition (see Table 1). This common usage among scholars is not consensus, and is insufficient on its own to indicate the value of the definition. However, it suggests a certain amount of face validity. It also meets an important benchmark of conceptualization, familiarity. Gerring argues that the degree to which a definition makes sense depends on the degree to which it fits with established usage, and the inclusive definition scores highly in this regard.⁷²

A second argument in favor of the inclusive definition is that governments likely treat a group as a terrorist group whether it uses a little or a lot of terrorism; whether it holds territory or not. In other words, the factors that encourage some scholars to exclude organizations from the conceptualization of “terrorist group” are likely overlooked by states. This is consistent with Asal’s argument that groups using terrorism are ethically distinct from other dissident groups, and therefore an important category of group.⁷³ This suggests that any subnational political groups using terrorism face particular challenges and exist in a certain political context, regardless of other distinctions.

The inclusive definition is not only practical because of how states treat any group that uses terrorism. A third reason, related to the second, is that the use of terrorism fundamentally differentiates a group from other types of groups. Theoretical distinctions between groups that use terrorism and other types of groups are generally greater than any distinction one can make between sub-categories of groups using terrorism.⁷⁴ Territory-holding groups that use terrorism have a great deal in common with terrorist groups that do not hold territory—and a great chasm exists between either of these groups and criminal groups, for example. Non-violent political groups are also substantially different from any type of group that employs terrorism. This demarcation made by the use of terrorism differentiates these groups from other types of groups, and differentiation is another of Gerring’s benchmarks of a concept’s value.⁷⁵

For an example of how the use of terrorism differentiates terrorist groups from other types of groups, consider the case of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The group is widely considered to be a terrorist group, but it started occupying some territory in 2011 and increasingly has fought the Yemeni military in traditional firefights. Has the fundamental nature of the group changed? This is a theoretical question, but I would argue that for most purposes the answer is no. These could be considered differences in degree, not type. Or, one could argue that AQAP became a different type of terrorist group—one that also occupies territory or uses additional non-terrorist tactics—but remains a terrorist group.

Fourth, regarding quantitative analysis, the inclusive definition can be thought of as a way to generate a baseline sample that can later be reduced for further analysis of sub-categories. For example, primary models can be on samples gathered based on the inclusive definition, with later checks done on a sub-sample that excludes territory-holding groups. Additionally, potentially controversial terrorist

group attributes (e.g., territorial control, attacks on military targets) can be taken into consideration with control variables. These are discussions of operationalization, which is different from conceptualization, but there are obvious connections between the two.⁷⁶

Conclusion

What is a terrorist group? Scholars have increasingly sought in recent years to examine terrorist groups generally and draw inferences about them. Some of this work has been qualitative, but many studies are quantitative. This body of research is important, but raises serious questions about how we define terrorist organizations. Many authors have never offered an explicit definition, and explicit definitions offered vary substantially.

This article sought to review the literature, noting definitions that exist. Research usually falls into one of three categories: not using an explicit definition, using an inclusive definition, or using an exclusive definition. It also pointed to differences in empirical samples gathered, and suggested that these differences can lead to substantial differences in conclusions reached about terrorist groups. This was shown to be the case with research on terrorist group longevity. Additionally, the use of a non-random sample—such as the FTO list—can further lead to non-generalizable findings. The article then suggested that a more inclusive definition of terrorist group offers advantages for a number of reasons. The inclusive definition is “a subnational political organization that uses terrorism.”

There are a number of further questions that could be addressed when discussing the definition of terrorist groups. Some examples include: If terrorist groups must be subnational, what degree of connection to a state removes them from this category? For example, the *Autodefensas* in Colombia had substantial connections to the state, but many scholars still consider them “terrorist groups,” and not necessarily state terror. The Anti-Terrorist Liberation Group in Spain in the early 1980s is a similar example, but probably closer to state terror. If terrorist groups must be political, where exactly is the dividing line between these groups and criminal groups? If a group gets involved in the legal political process, at what point does it stop being a terrorist group? These questions have been addressed somewhat by the literature, but are hardly resolved. Continued discussion of this important subject will contribute substantially to the understanding of terrorism.

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Notes

1. McCormick asserts that in the study of terrorism, definitional differences persist over many important issues, including “the definition of a terrorist organization, in contrast to a group or organization that sometimes employs terrorism” (47). See Gordon H. McCormick, “Terrorist Decision Making,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 6 (2003): 473–507. Important exceptions are Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca and Luis de la Calle, “Domestic Terrorism: The Hidden Side of Political Violence,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 31–49; Luis de la Calle and Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, “What We Talk About When We Talk about

Terrorism,” *Politics and Society* 39, no. 3 (2011): 451–472; and Victor Asal, Luis de la Calle, Michael Findley, and Joseph Young, “Killing Civilians or Holding Territory? How to Think About Terrorism,” *International Studies Review* 14, no. 3 (2012): 475–497. However, the conceptual focus of these works is on terrorism more than on terrorist groups. Asal’s six-page section of the ISR article is the only work solely about terrorist organizations.

2. See for example Alex P. Schmid and Albert Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1988); Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur, and Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler, “The Challenges of Conceptualizing Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 777–794; and de la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca, “What We Talk About When We Talk about Terrorism” (see note 1 above).

3. Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 145.

4. B. Guy Peters, *Comparative Politics: Theory and Methods* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 107. See also 80–108. See also Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 109–112.

5. Gary Goertz and James Mahoney, “Concepts in Theories: Two-Level Theories,” in Gary Goertz, ed., *Social Science Concepts: A User’s Guide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 237–268; Gary Goertz and J. Joseph Hewitt, “Concepts and Selection (on) the Dependent Variable,” in Goertz (*Ibid.*), 156–179.

6. For a list of 10 different definitions of “terrorism” from different U.S. federal government entities, see Schmid and Jongman, *Political Terrorism* (note 2 above), 32–33.

7. See Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, *The Political Economy of Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); and Schmid and Jongman, *Political Terrorism* (note 2 above).

8. Schmid and Jongman, *Political Terrorism* (note 2 above), 5.

9. James Q. Wilson, *Political Organizations* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 31.

10. For example, see John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001); Scott Atran, “Who Becomes a Terrorist Today?” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 5 (2008): 3–10; Mark Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Ramón Spaaij, “The Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 33, no. 9 (2010): 854–870.

11. Spaaij, “The Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism” (note 10 above) examines a sample of 15 countries, from 1968–2007, and finds that about 1% of attacks were carried out by so-called lone wolves.

12. See Martha Crenshaw, “An Organizational Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism,” *Orbis* 29, no. 3 (1985): 465–489.

13. See Martha Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism in Context* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); David C. Rapoport, ed., *Inside Terrorist Organizations* (London: Frank Cass, 2001); and Brian A. Jackson, John C. Baker, Kim Cragin, John Parachini, Horacio R. Trujillo, and Peter Chalk, *Aptitude for Destruction: Organizational Learning in Terrorist Groups and Its Implications for Combating Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005).

14. See Jacob N. Shapiro and David A. Siegel, “Underfunding in Terrorist Organizations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (June 2007): 405–429; Navin Bapat, “State Bargaining with Transnational Terrorist Groups,” *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (March 2006): 213–229; Harvey E. Lapan and Todd Sandler, “To Bargain or Not To Bargain: That Is the Question,” *American Economic Review* 78, no. 2 (May 1988): 16–21; and Jacob N. Shapiro and David A. Siegel, “Moral Hazard, Discipline, and the Management of Terrorist Organizations,” *World Politics* 64, no. 1 (January 2012): 39–78.

15. Victor Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer, “The Nature of the Beast: Organizational Structures and the Lethality of Terrorist Attacks,” *Journal of Politics* 70, no. 2 (2008): 437–449; Michael C. Horowitz and Philip B. K. Potter, “Allying to Kill: Terrorist Intergroup Cooperation and the Consequences for Lethality,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (forthcoming).

16. Michael C. Horowitz, “Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovation: The Case of Suicide Terrorism,” *International Organization* 64, no. 1 (2010): 33–64.

17. See Erica Chenoweth, "Democratic Competition and Terrorist Activity," *Journal of Politics* 72, no. 1 (January 2010): 16–30.

18. Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009): 719–755; Bryan C. Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *International Security* 36, no. 4 (2012): 9–46.

19. See Leonard Weinberg and Ami Pedahzur, *Political Parties and Terrorist Groups* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

20. S. Brock Blomberg, Khusrav Gaibulloev, and Todd Sandler, "Terrorist Group Survival: Ideology, Tactics, and Base of Operations," *Public Choice* 149, no. 3 (December 2011): 441–463; David B. Carter, "A Blessing or a Curse? State Support for Terrorist Groups," *International Organization* 66, no. 1 (January 2012): 129–151; Brian J. Phillips, "Terrorist Group Cooperation and Longevity," *International Studies Quarterly* (forthcoming, 2014); Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qaeda* (Washington, DC: RAND, 2008); Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Martha Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 69–87; Joseph K. Young and Laura Dugan, "Why Do Terrorist Groups Endure?" (paper presented at *International Studies Association*, New Orleans, LA, February 2010); S. Brock Blomberg, Rozlyn C. Engel, and Reid Sawyer, "On the Duration and Sustainability of Transnational Terrorist Organizations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no. 2 (2010): 303–330.

21. See James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ordinary Language and External Validity" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, September 2000) and Ted Robert Gurr, ed., *People Versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century* (Washington, DC: USIP, 2000).

22. See Alan Ware, *Political Parties and Party Systems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

23. William Eubank and Leonard Weinberg, "Does Democracy Encourage Terrorism?," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 417–435.

24. The unit of analysis of the study is country, but each country is coded as either having terrorist groups in it or not. The article is probably the first to conduct quantitative analysis involving terrorist groups globally, but several years earlier Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines" (see note 20 above) assembled a global list of terrorist groups for descriptive analysis.

25. This directory appears at the end of Schmid and Jongman, *Political Terrorism* (see note 2 above). For a similar directory, see Peter Janke, *Guerrilla and Terrorist Organizations: A World Directory and Bibliography* (Brighton, UK: Harvester Press, 1983).

26. Eubank and Weinberg, "Does Democracy Encourage Terrorism?" (see note 23 above), 421.

27. See Christopher Hewitt, "Some Skeptical Comments on Large Cross-National Studies," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 439–441.

28. See Todd Sandler, "On the Relationship Between Democracy and Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 1–9.

29. *Ibid.*, 5.

30. Weinberg and Pedahzur, *Political Parties and Terrorist Groups* (see note 19 above).

31. One exception is Chenoweth, "Democratic Competition and Terrorist Activity" (see note 17 above), who discusses some of Sandler's concerns when justifying her research design.

32. Rapoport, *Inside Terrorist Organizations* (see note 13 above).

33. See Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 7–48.

34. Ely Karmon, *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organizations: Revolutionaries, Nationalists and Islamists* (Leiden: Nijhoff Publishers, 2005); Jordan, "When Heads Roll" (see note 18 above).

35. Walter Bryce Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (1955): 167–198.

36. For example see Walter Laqueur, *No End To War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Continuum, 2003), especially 232–238.

37. Schmid and Jongman, *Political Terrorism* (see note 2 above), 3.

38. Jackson et al., *Aptitude for Destruction* (see note 13 above), 2. The authors say they use the terms “‘terrorist group’ and ‘terrorist organization’ as shorthand for ‘group that has chosen to utilize terrorism’” (Ibid.).

39. Ariel Merari, “Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 213–251; Charles Tilly, “Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists,” *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 1 (2004): 5–13. Note that Merari still uses the term “terrorist group.”

40. See Michael G. Findley and Joseph K. Young, “Terrorism and Civil War: A Spatial and Temporal Approach to a Conceptual Problem,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 2 (June 2012): 285–305.

41. See Max Abrahms, “The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited,” *Comparative Political Studies* 45, no. 3 (February 2012): 366–393.

42. Sánchez-Cuenca and de la Calle, “Domestic Terrorism:” (see note 1 above).

43. In Asal et al., “Killing Civilians or Holding Territory?” (see note 1 above).

44. Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End* (see note 20 above), 3.

45. Carter, “A Blessing or a Curse?” (see note 20 above), 130.

46. Price, “Targeting Top Terrorists” (see note 18 above), 9.

47. Young and Dugan, “Why Do Terrorist Groups Endure?” (note 20 above), 5–8. They also offer a caveat: “*Only when groups threaten or perpetrate violence in an attempt to influence a third party can they be considered terrorist groups*” (8, italics in original). However, this might not be necessary because attempting to influence a third party is included in many common definitions of terrorism.

48. See Leonard Weinberg, “Turning to Terror: The Conditions Under Which Political Parties Turn to Terrorist Activities,” *Comparative Politics* 23, no. 4 (July 1991): 437.

49. For example, see Sylvia M. Longmire and John P. Longmire IV, “Redefining Terrorism: Why Mexican Drug Trafficking is More than Just Organized Crime,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 1, no. 1 (November 2008): 35–51.

50. This term does not exclude transnational groups. It simply excludes states and groups of states.

51. For example Enders and Sandler, *The Political Economy of Terrorism* (see note 7 above) and Asal and Rethemeyer, “The Nature of the Beast” (see note 15 above).

52. See de la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca, “What We Talk About When We Talk about Terrorism” (see note 1 above), 465.

53. The authors acknowledge that there is a spectrum of behavior and group types, where terrorist groups can engage in other types of violence and guerrilla groups can use terrorism, but that “core of terrorism” is terrorist acts perpetrated by terrorist groups. See also Sánchez-Cuenca and de la Calle, “Domestic Terrorism” (see note 1 above). For a critique, see Findley and Young, “Terrorism and Civil War” (see note 40 above).

54. Laqueur, *No End To War* (see note 36 above), 237–238.

55. Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 114. Della Porta offers a definition of terrorism in the Schmid and Jongman book that explicitly mentions “clandestine political organizations, of small dimensions.” See Schmid and Jongman, *Political Terrorism* (note 2 above), 37.

56. Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends* (see note 20 above), 7.

57. Shapiro and Siegel, “Moral Hazard, Discipline, and the Management of Terrorist Organizations” (see note 14 above), 44.

58. Crenshaw, “How Terrorism Declines” (see note 20 above), 75.

59. See for example Shawn Teresa Flanigan, “Terrorists Next Door? A Comparison of Mexican Drug Cartels and Middle Eastern Terrorist Organizations,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 2 (March 2012): 279–294 and Phil Williams, “The Terrorism Debate Over Mexican Drug Trafficking Violence,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 2 (March 2012): 259–278.

60. Longmire and Longmire IV, “Redefining Terrorism” (see note 49 above).

61. Giovanni Sartori, “Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 64, no. 4 (1970): 1033–1053. Sartori also famously warns about “concept stretching,” increasing extension to the point that the concept becomes meaningless. He argues that this is a problem when extension is increased through obfuscation, and not through the reduction of attributes (1041). Marcus J. Kurtz, “Understanding Peasant Revolution: From

Concept to Theory and Case,” *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (February 2000): 93–124. Kurtz’s graph is reproduced and discussed in Goertz, *Social Science Concepts* (note 5 above).

62. Blomberg et al. include all of the groups connected to attacks in the ITERATE data. ITERATE contains only transnational attacks, so this list likely excludes groups that only carry out domestic attacks. This low mean age could be in part due to the fact that groups with more transnational attacks are not as durable as other groups. See Blomberg, Gaibulloev, and Sandler, “Terrorist Group Survival” (note 20 above). Vittori’s data seem to be less ultra-inclusive or unfiltered because she says she does remove 10 groups from the random sample, mostly if they do not appear to have attacks associated with them. This is more filtered than Blomberg et al.’s, but apparently not as thoroughly scrubbed as other data collections. See Jodi Vittori, “All Struggles Must End: The Longevity of Terrorist Groups,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 3 (2009): 444–466.

63. See Audrey Kurth Cronin, *The “FTO List” and Congress: Sanctioning Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Center, 2003).

64. See U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, September 28, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>.

65. For example see Max Abrahms, “Why Terrorism Does Not Work,” *International Security* 31, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 42–78; Edward Newman, “Weak States, State Failure, and Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 4 (October 2007): 463–488; Eli Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends* (see note 20 above); Abrahms, “The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited” (note 41 above).

66. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations* (see note 64 above).

67. There are a variety of reasons an otherwise qualified group might not be listed. For example, a State Department official said Nigerian group Boko Haram was not listed, in spite of being foreign and having threatened to attack the United States, in part because “it would serve to enhance their status.” See Shaun Tandon, “Nigerian Christian Urges U.S. Action on Islamic Group,” *Agence France-Presse*, July 11, 2012. The removal of groups from the list involves idiosyncrasies as well, as the case of Mujahideen-al-Khalq has shown.

68. See Peter Krause, “The Political Effectiveness of Non-State Violence: A Two-Level Framework to Transform a Deceptive Debate,” *Security Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013): 259–294; Abrahms, “Why Terrorism Does Not Work” (see note 65 above); Robert Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 3 (August 2003): 343–361.

69. Krause, “The Political Effectiveness of Non-State Violence” (note 68 above), 267. Abrahms makes an argument about the tactic of terrorism vs. guerrilla warfare, and does not explicitly argue that the FTO list is representative of all terrorist groups. However, Krause’s point is the same as mine: sample selection can influence results. For a response from Abrahms, see “Response by Max Abrahms,” *H-Diplo | ISSF*, June 29, 2013, <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Krause-Abrahms-response.pdf>.

70. Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent* (see note 65 above), 13–15.

71. For example, *ibid.*, and Young and Dugan, “Why Do Terrorist Groups Endure?” (note 20 above).

72. See John Gerring, “What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation,” *Polity* 31, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 357–393. Gerring lists eight criteria for evaluating concepts: familiarity, resonance, parsimony, coherence, differentiation, depth, theoretical utility, and field utility. Note that some of the criteria refer to the value of having a concept (such as “terrorist group”) and that value was argued earlier in the article, and is different from the discussion of the value of the inclusive definition in particular.

73. Asal in Asal et al., “Killing Civilians or Holding Territory?” (note 1 above).

74. There are of course exceptions. If one’s research looks at consequences of guerrilla warfare vs. consequences of terrorism, it might be useful to sort groups into “terrorist groups” (exclusively defined) and “guerrilla groups.”

75. Gerring, “What Makes a Concept Good?” (note 72 above).

76. See Goertz, *Social Science Concepts* (note 5 above), 2–3.