

# PSC/IR 106: Terrorism

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# Outline

- Rationality of Terror
- Face of Terror
- Spoiling
- Definition of Terrorism

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# Strategy and Terrorism

- Terrorism is strategic
- Common criticism of rational choice modeling of terrorism: “people who kill themselves are not rational”
  - We don’t need to understand why people are okay with killing civilians to understand *how* they behave

# A Brief Rant about Mathematical Modeling

- In math world, rational  $\neq$  sensible.
- “Rational” means that an actor’s preferences are **complete** and **transitive**
  - Complete: For any outcomes  $a$  and  $b$ , the actor prefers  $a$  to  $b$ , prefers  $b$  to  $a$ , or is indifferent
  - Transitive: For any outcomes  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$ , if the actor prefers  $a$  to  $b$  and  $b$  to  $c$ , then he also prefers  $a$  to  $c$

# Which of these People Is Rational?

## Person 1

- “I prefer the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim to the New York Yankees. I also prefer the New York Yankees to the Chicago Cubs. And I prefer the Chicago Cubs to the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim.”

## Person 2

- “I prefer blowing myself up to kill five people to working a 9-5 desk job. I prefer working a 9-5 desk job than being in Will’s class. And I prefer blowing myself up to kill five people than being in Will’s class.”

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What group is responsible for the most suicide terrorist attacks?



**Sri Lankan  
Civil War,  
1983-2009**

Is religious fanaticism and belief  
in the afterlife necessary to  
commit suicide attacks?



**Atheists**

Are all suicide bombers male?



**About 1/3  
female**





**Discovered that a fake pregnancy is  
a great way to hide a bomb**

American Airlines  
# 11



Al Suqami



Waleed M. Alshehri



Wail M. Alshehri



Alomari



Atta

American Airlines  
# 77



Moqed



Almihdhar



Nawaf Alhazmi



Salem Alhazmi



Hanjour

United Airlines  
# 93



Alghamdi



Al Haznawi



Alnami



Jarrah

United Airlines  
# 175



Al-Shehhi



Alghamdi



Al Qadi Bannhammad



Hamza Alghamdi



Alshehri

Are terrorists poor?



Terrorists come from poor regions, but  
terrorists themselves are not.

Our biggest problem is the hordes of young men who beat on our doors, clamoring to be sent. It is difficult to select only a few. Those whom we turn away return again and again, pestering us, pleading to be accepted.

— Hamas Leadership

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# Puzzle

- Terrorist attacks are not randomly distributed
  - Clumping around peace talks
    - What does this say about terrorists' responsiveness to incentives?
    - Why this clumping?

# Preferences

- Home and foreign state negotiate
- Foreign state wants peace
- Foreign is unsure whether home wants peace

# Preferences

- If Home wants peace, it will actively police extremists within its country
  - Foreign thus does not want peace with uncooperative Home types

# Preferences

- Extremists always want conflict
  - Need to convince Foreign that Home is uncooperative regardless of Home's true type

# Monitoring Problem

- Policing is not fully effective
  - Even if a peace-loving Home tries to stop extremists, it might fail
- Policing effort is hard to observe
  - Foreign can thus only make inferences based on whether an attack has occurred, not on what Home did to (possibly) stop an attack

# Updating

- Suppose no attack occurred
  - What should Foreign infer about Home?

# Updating

- Suppose an attack occurred
  - What should Foreign infer about Home?

# Updating

- Suppose an attack occurred
  - What should Foreign infer about Home?
    - It cannot know for sure that Home is uncooperative
    - But its belief that Home is uncooperative increases

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What makes a terrorist  
a terrorist?

# Common Qualities

- Violent

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- Violent
- Targeting of civilians

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- Violent
- Targeting of civilians
- Political goals

One man's terrorist is another  
man's freedom fighter.