Iranian State Strength & Domestic Terrorism:
How Iran Came to be the Cool Spot in a Hotbed of Terrorism

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between domestic terrorism and state strength in Iran from 1978 to 2010. It seeks to understand the specific factors that are most influential in determining the ebb and flow of terrorism. Despite Iran's position in a region fraught with terrorism, Iran has experienced very low levels of terrorist activity, and yet literature focusing on terrorism in Iran is largely absent. In order to gain a better understanding of how the strength of the state impacts domestic terrorism, this study utilizes various dimensions of state strength highlighted in the literature, including economic data and coercive capacity. In addition, I also consider several alternative explanations of terrorism, such as authoritarianism and historical and/or major event, in the context of Iranian domestic terrorism. The analysis reveals that the economy, Iranians' confidence in the state, and historical and/or major events are most significant in determining the high levels of terrorism that Iran experienced during this period.

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Introduction

Iran experiences very little terrorist activity relative to its neighbors, which makes it an anomaly in the region. It is seated between three countries that regularly experience terrorist activity or are bases for terrorists: Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Because of this, when Iran does experience terrorist activity, it is unique and therefore should be studied. In this thesis, I explore the relationship between incidences of domestic terrorism and its correlation to regime strength in contemporary Iran. It is commonly accepted that the strength of the state impacts the amount of terrorist activity that occurs in that state. If the state is strong, it is able to maintain control and provide for its citizens and if citizens can be accommodated in such a way, then they are less likely to resort to violence, and in this case, terrorism (Hendrix, 2010, 273). By understanding the Iranian state and how it handles terrorism and terrorist groups, the thesis hopes to contribute to a better understanding of terrorism in Iran and elsewhere and how to combat it.

Terrorism has been a hot topic for society and academia for many decades, especially after the 9/11 attacks in New York City. Entire books and journals are dedicated to better understanding terrorism; what causes it, what factors make a state more susceptible to it, what kind of people are more likely to involve themselves with it, etc. (Piazza, 2008; Crenshaw, 1981; Von Hippel, 2002). Studies that focus on terrorism specifically in the Middle East are so numerous that they can be found with a few clicks of the mouse. A researcher can find hundreds of articles on terrorism in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. And yet, Iran, a country in the middle of the most terrorist laden region in the world, a country that should experience more terrorist activity than it does, has hardly had any of its terrorist activity studied, in part due to its international isolation after the 1979 revolution.

Iran has rarely left the limelight of the world stage, constantly sparking the curiosity of scholars and the average citizen alike. Now, Iran is finally reopening its doors to the rest of the world for the first time since the revolution. If Iran is to re-enter the international community, more must be understood about it and its terrorist activity in a time where terrorist organizations like ISIS are leading many of the world leaders to war. This is why my question—do peaks in incidences of Iranian domestic terrorism correlate to or undermine regime strength and stability in contemporary Iran—is more important today than ever before. The purpose of this research is to discover why and when terrorism increases and decreases within Iran. If Iran can be better understood during a time where relationships between Iran and the rest of the world are normalizing, then the way in which people talk about Iran can be better informed and policies regarding Iran can be improved. Because Iran has such low incidences of terrorism, Iran is therefore anomaly in the region, and by understanding Iranian domestic terrorism, or rather the lack thereof, it could potentially be helpful in combating domestic terrorism elsewhere.

Background
The Iranian Government Before & After the Revolution
        To best understand how Iran has dealt with terrorism and dissent now and in the past, it is necessary to understand the structure and history of the Iranian government during the time period being studied (approximately 1978-2010). The government of Iran under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was, without a doubt a strong dictatorship (Cleveland and Bunton, 2013, 271). After the democratically elected Prime Minister Mossadeq was removed in a coup d'état orchestrated by the United States and Britain, the Shah was determined to never lose control over his country again and to ensure this, the Shah gave power to himself and to the very loyal military (Cleveland and Bunton, 2013, 271-273). In an attempt to further legitimize his absolute rule over Iran the Shah tried to create a false history about the Pahlavi family in Iran, attempting

to explain that his lineage went back thousands of years in Persian history (Cleveland and Bunton, 2013, 276).

As the 1970s continued the Iranian economy faltered due to the failure of the Shah's own economic policies, adding fuel to the fire of discontent (Cleveland and Bunton, 2013, 352). Instead of making the political and civil reforms the public wanted, the Shah and his government decided to crackdown on protesters; the Shah instituted marshal law and attempted to ban the demonstrations that were occurring more and more frequently (Cleveland and Bunton, 2013, 353). The Iranian government—despite the Shah's half-hearted attempts at making it resemble something close to a parliamentary monarchy—was as repressive and unrepresentative as it could get. Even the Shah's beloved military would eventually turn against him, too. Unfortunately, the government that resulted from the revolution was not the democracy that the revolutionaries wanted.

Initially, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini installed a moderate cabinet that was intended to "restore administrative order and economic stability" after the revolution; however, this cabinet's power was contained by the Council of the Islamic Republic (Cleveland and Bunton, 2013, 354). The Council was made up of religious leaders chosen by Khomeini, who ultimately had control over the Council itself (Cleveland and Bunton, 2013, 354). The initial cabinet was essentially powerless, the Council had the final say over anything the cabinet attempted to do, and Khomeini was sitting at the top of it all (Cleveland and Bunton, 2013, 354). Although it was a temporary government, it hinted at what was to come.

The eventual Islamic Republic's government was a combination of elected and unelected officials that ruled over the elected (Cleveland and Bunton, 2013, 356), with the unelected being the true holders of power. As Image 1 shows, the power structure of the Iranian government—

despite "republic" in the official name of the country—becomes unbalanced in favor of the clerics; the Supreme Leader becomes the key power-holder (Keshavarzian, 2010, 236). It is the Leader who chooses the members of the Guardian Council, which in turn approve of all legislation that passes through the parliament (Keshavarzian, 2010, 236). The Guardian Council also determines who can run for any political position at all (Keshavarzian, 2010, 236). For example, anyone can put their name in to run for president, but all candidates must first be approved by the Guardian Council, and only then can the electorate vote from the set of candidates chosen and approved by the council (Keshavarzian, 2010, 236). It is clear that the Islamic Republic puts the power in the hands of into those that are unelected and not the people. The Iranian government has remained an autocracy despite what the revolutionaries fought for and were promised.

Image 1

Source: Keshavarzian, Arang. 2010. "Iran." In *Politics & Society in the Contemporary Middle East,* ed. Angrist, Michele P. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 237.

Brief History of Domestic Terrorism in Contemporary Iran

In this study, I focus on domestic terrorism in Iran from 1978 (the beginning of the

Iranian Revolution) through 2010 (the end and aftermath of the Iranian Green Movement), much

of which has been perpetrated by the Iranian Mojahedin-e Khalq, a prominent Iranian terrorist

organization that has a lengthy history in Iran. This group is one of the more studied (although not enough) Iranian terrorist organizations. Literature regarding Iranian domestic terrorism is few and far between, and most information regarding Iranian domestic terrorism is in the form of raw data simply stating that it happened. However, it does appear that there are groups in Iran who have goals of attacking the Iranian government. Because of the nature of the Iranian government it is difficult to determine if these Iranian terrorist groups are motivated politically or religiously. Moreover, when domestic terrorism does occur, Iran has either been unwilling or unable to disclose any information about who committed the act and why, leaving data sources with a lot of "unknown" perpetrators. The group that Iran seems to be willing to admit to is the Mojahedin-e Khalq.

The Mojahedin-e Khalq formed prior to Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution from the Iranian Liberation Movement, an organization that formed out of concern for religious Iranians during the secular rule of the Shah (Abrahamian, 1992, 81). This is not to say the Liberation Movement wanted or desired a theocratic government; the organization supported democracy and especially the democratically elected Prime Minister Mossadeq (Abrahamian, 1992, 81). The Liberation Movement was a recognized political party, but in June of 1963 the Pahlavi regime crushed all moderate groups, including the Liberation Movement, with violence after demonstrations broke out due to previous restrictions placed on political groups by the monarchy (Abrahamian, 1992, 84). The lack of action on the part of the Liberation Movement caused a "generational split," leading the younger members of the Liberation Movement to form their own group called the Mojahedin-e Khalq (Abrahamian, 1992, 84-85). The Iranian Mojahedin, unlike its predecessor believed that peaceful protests were no longer the way to reach their goals, instead they turned to armed struggle and became a terrorist organization (Abrahamian, 1992, 85, 98).

The ideology of the new Mojahedin became a "combination of Islam and Marxism," (Abrahamian, 1992, 92). In their official handbook, the Mojahedin stated, "'We say 'no' to Marxist philosophy, especially the atheism. But we say 'yes' to Marxist social thought, particularly to its analysis of feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism'" (Abrahamian, 1992, 92). Like the Liberation Movement, the Mojahedin was staunchly against the influence of Western states over Iran, especially that of the United States, but still wanted to maintain an important role for Islam in the increasingly secular Shah's Iran. (Abrahamian, 1992, 92). The Mojahedin wanted the working class to rule Iran, and like the oil industry under Mossadeq they wanted Iranian industries to become nationalized, and perhaps most importantly, they wanted to sever all ties to the West (Keddie, 2006, 243).

Unfortunately, after the revolution the Mojahedin did not get the support that they wanted or anticipated from Ayatollah Khomeini. After meeting with the Ayatollah, who told the Mojahedin that he could do little to help them, the Ayatollah delivered a speech in which he called the group hypocrites and accused them of secretly trying to destroy Islam and the Islamic community despite their public declaration of support for Islam (Abrahamian, 1992, 150-51). In 1975 the Mojahedin left Islam behind for good (Abrahamian, 1992, 149). Instead the Mojahedin turned strictly to Marxism for three primary reasons: 1) "disillusionment" with the ruling clergy, especially the Ayatollah who denounced them, 2) little support from the educated intelligentsia who traditionally were secular, but had become more religious in post-revolutionary Iran, and 3) "ongoing dialogue with left-wing intellectuals" (Abrahamian, 1992, 149). They attempted to regain trust and support from the Iranian government during the Iran-Iraq War by offering to defend the borders from the Ba'athists. The Iranian government, however, was uninterested, and

even went as far as arresting members on the front lines and sending them back home (Soroush, 2008, 121-22).

In the summer of 1981 the Mojahedin attempted to start a new revolution, which was ultimately unsuccessful and resulted in the Islamic Republic executing protesters (Abrahamian, 1992, 219). These executions led to a "reign of terror" committed by the Mojahedin, perhaps their most active period yet (Abrahamian, 1992, 219). The Mojahedin attacked the Islamic Republican Party (the ruling party) headquarters, killing Mohammad Beheshti, (a leader of the party and 1979 revolution) and at least seventy of his supporters (Abrahamian, 1992, 220). In the fall of 1981 the Mojahedin conducted daily terrorist attacks, including suicide attacks, primarily attacking clerics (Abrahamian, 1992, 220-21). However, the regime responded in turn and began assassinating members and leaders of the group, and by 1982 the Mojahedin encouraged remaining members in Iran to flee (Abrahamian, 1992, 223).

By the mid-1980s, the Iranian Mojahedin was viewed as something more closely resembling a cult rather than the political and social movement it used to be, even going as far as giving the Mojahedin leader the title of *Rahbar* or "guide" (Abrahamian, 1992, 260). They had not given up on bringing revolution back to Iran, believing that eventually people will find themselves too frustrated and tired of the Islamic Republic, and when they do the Mujahedin would return to replace the Islamic Republic with a democratic Islamic republic (Abrahamian, 1992, 261).

Over the thirty-two years studied, Iran experienced 551 terrorist attacks, of these the Muhajedin committed seventy-nine, the majority of terrorist attacks recorded have unknown perpetrators. Figure 1 shows a graph of these incidences of terrorism from 1978 to 2010, visibly marking hot-spots in the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. Similarly, as can be seen in Figure 2,

the Mujahedin was especially active at the same peaks in Figure 1. Moreover, the Mujahedin was inactive during the timeframes in which terrorism was at its lowest in Iran, as can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.
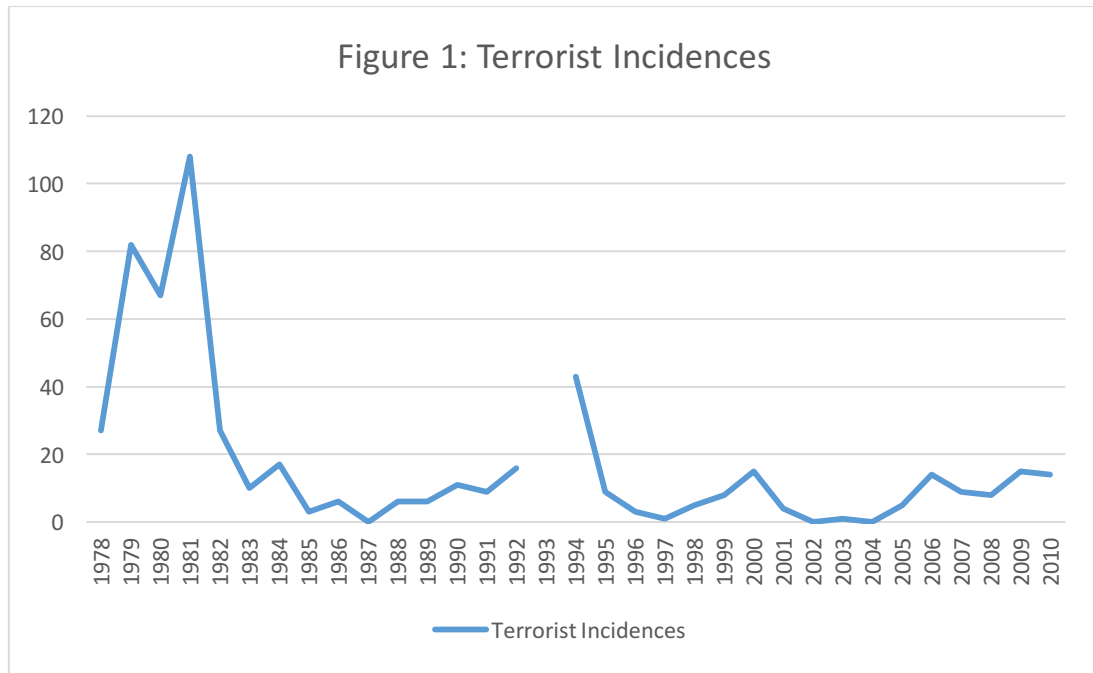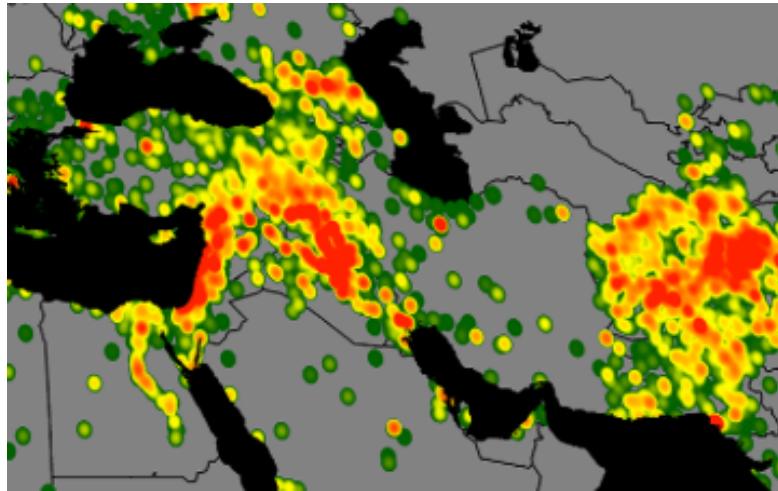

(Sourced from the Global Terrorism Database)
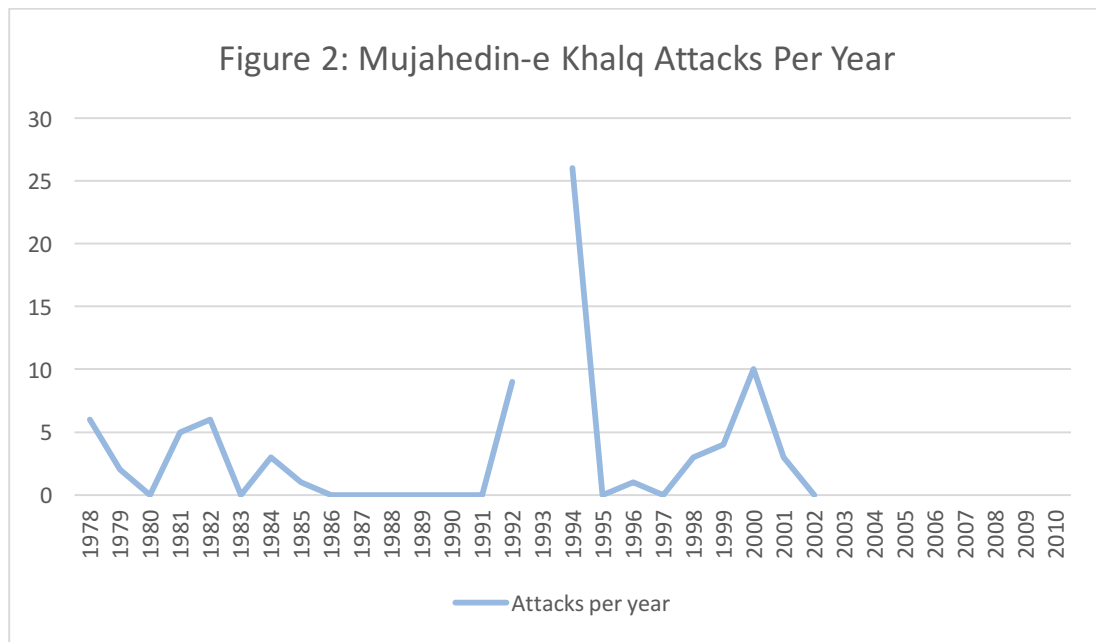
(Sourced from the Global Terrorism Database)

While the Mujahedin-e Khalq does represent a significant number of terrorist attacks in Iran, they have gone dormant along with other Iranian terrorist groups, both known and unknown and terrorism in Iran has, for the most part, disappeared. The image (Image 2) below shows just how much of an anomaly Iran truly is in the region. The image shows via color how prevalent terrorism is geographically from 1970 to 2015. Green spots indicate a low incidence of terrorism and changes to yellow to orange to red with increasing terrorist activity. Iran is the state near the center of the map where there are barely any blips of terrorist activity. In fact, Iran's borders are almost perfectly outlined by terrorist activity in the neighboring countries; however, there is some spillover specifically in Balochistan Providence in the southwest and Kurdish populated areas in the northern regions of Iran. While there is very little information regarding Iranian terrorist organizations, some attention is given to violent activity in these two regions, especially incidences involving the Baloch and Kurds.

Iranian Kurdistan is primarily near the northeastern border as well as along the northwestern tip of Iran (Dahlman, 2002, 274, 284). As Image 2 shows, these two regions along the borders are quite active with terrorist activity. The Baloch people live in the southeast of Iran and, similarly, terrorist activity is also higher there than it is in most other areas of Iran (Javid and Jahangir, 2015, 92). Furthermore, years in which there are higher levels of terrorism also correlate with the periods where terrorist activity was higher in cities located predominately Kurdish and Baloch areas. Historically, Iran has been unkind to the Kurds and the Baloch (Javid and Jahangir, 2015, 98; Dahlman, 2002, 285). However, these areas are not the most commonly afflicted areas; data from the Global Terrorism Database indicate that large cities, and especially Tehran experience significantly more terrorism than Iranian Kurdistan and Balochistan.

Image 2

(Sourced from the Global Terrorism Database)

Literature Review
Why & When Terrorism Occurs

The existing literature provides a set of key factors that precede the formation of a

terrorist or terrorist group, including state development, society's acceptance of (or indifference

to) and/or response to violence against the state, and how the government is able to respond to

terrorism (Crenshaw, 1981, 381). In particular, there is a set of four indirect factors that tend to

indicate when a terrorist group will form and/or become active: (1) modernization, (2)

urbanization, (3) the society's acceptance and history of violence and terrorism against the state,

and (4) the government's response, or the lack of response to terrorism (Crenshaw, 1981, 381-

82). In the formation of a terrorist group modernization and urbanization play key roles because

the results of this kind of development tend to create targets for terrorists and can provide

avenues in which terrorists can attack. For example, think of a city transportation system.

Historically buses have been used in terrorist attacks as targets (Palestinian targeting Israeli

buses), and buses literally transport people, including terrorists. Urbanization and

modernization—combined with a society that has a history of violence against the state and a

state that cannot combat the violence—act as prerequisite conditions that leads to the creation of terrorists and terrorist groups.

In the case of Iran, many of these precipitating factors exist and historically have preceded violence used against the state: modernization, urbanization, and a history of social facilitation (especially during the 1979 Iranian Revolution). In fact, a majority of these factors were reasons for so much of the Iranian population to rise up against the monarchy, including known terrorist groups like the Iranian Mojahedin. However, even during that dark time in Iranian history terrorism was not widely used; indeed, mass mobilization won the revolution. However, these precipitant factors are not enough alone for terrorist activity to develop, there are still other *direct* factors that are necessary.

Direct causes of terrorism relate primarily to the terrorist actors themselves as well as the government of the nation. There are five direct causes of terrorism: a clear issue that is only a problem for a portion of the population, limited political participation, a disillusionment of the state by an actor (usually someone from a minority group), the populace's own indifference to the ruling government, and a triggering event (Crenshaw, 1981, 383-83). This usually is an event in which the government responds violently, or more violently than what a population has become used to (Crenshaw, 1981, 384). Like the precipitating factors these direct factors have been present in Iran, in fact all of these direct factors were present and spurred the Iranian Revolution. They also have been present more recently when Iranian citizens mobilized and protested after the 2009 presidential elections; the protests were peaceful (at least by the protesters themselves) and the protesters never used terrorism. Why is Iran such an anomaly? Given that many precipitating factors and the majority of direct causes of terrorism were present,

(i.e., all the ingredients for terrorist activity were present) there was little, if any, terrorist activity.

Because the precipitants and direct causes of terrorism are so varied and each does not rely on the other, many states can be vulnerable to terrorist attacks. However, these factors do not make clear what *kind* of states are the most vulnerable, nor what kind of states create and facilitate terrorist groups and attacks.

State Strength & Terrorism

In order to understand what kind of state produces and is susceptible to terrorism it is important to understand what makes a state strong and what makes a state weak. The majority of the literature agrees that there are four key factors that make up a strong state: control over their territory, ability to provide services for citizens, limited challenges to the state's authority (Hanlon et al., 2012, 30), and last (which necessarily precedes the first three), a centralized government (Piazza, 2008, 470). First, strong states have authority over the physical territory of their state (Hanlon et al., 2012, 30). By being able to control the borders they are in turn able to control who or what comes into and goes out of their state. Control over the boundaries of the state is absolutely necessary for the security of the state, and in the context of terrorism, territorial control hinders the exportation and importation of terrorists and/or terrorist groups (Avdan and Gelpi, 2016, 12).

Second, a strong state must be able to provide key services for citizens, this includes "maintaining a monopoly on the use of force and providing security to all its inhabitants" (Hanlon et al., 2012, 30). The security aspect of this factor means that the state's citizens are protected and the state can then in turn supply citizens with the services all strong states tend to supply: welfare systems, sound infrastructure, health services, education, economic services, etc. Moreover, by being able to provide these kinds of services and securities a state is also able to

avoid the infiltration of another competing group, for example a terrorist organization, who could claim that they can provide for the citizens better than the state. The ability to provide its citizens with services leads to the third key indicator of a strong state: vulnerability to challenges to legitimacy (Hanlon et al., 2012, 30).

Last, and most important for the existence of the first three factors is a centralized government (Piazza, 2008, 470). A fully functioning centralized government is necessary for a state to be able to control its own borders, protect its citizens and provide other services, and maintain legitimacy (Piazza, 2008, 470). These factors indicate that weak states are more susceptible to conflict and terrorism, this happens to be the leading arguments about where terrorism flourishes as well as occurs.

It is not enough to understand what makes a state strong or weak. In the case of Iran, it is similarly necessary to know what makes authoritarian regimes strong and stable. Like non-authoritarian states, authoritarian states need control over their territory, they need to be able to provide services for citizens, limit challenges to the state's authority, and have a centralized government (Hanlon et al., 2012, 30; Piazza, 2008, 470). Authoritarian states especially need effective "infrastructural mechanisms" that make their rule and power durable, the most important of which are their coercive capacities, their ability to tax or in one way or another "extract revenue," the ability to conduct effective censuses, and to establish constituency "dependence" (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 20). First, the state's coercive capacity must be used effectively and not "indiscriminately;" in fact, "coercive capacity can enhance authoritarian durability even when it is rarely used" because it is an indicator that the citizens of the state *know* and *believe* that the state is strong and acts of dissent will not go unpunished (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 20). In fact, when authoritarian regimes used their coercive capacity freely, the dissidents

frequently gain sympathy and followers (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 20). Iran has a history of using coercion both effectively and ineffectively. For example, towards the end of the Shah's rule, he used violence against his citizens even during peaceful protests, and in 2009 the Iranian regime was able to quell the biggest protest the country had seen since 1979, but unlike the Shah avoided mass slaughter (Cleveland and Bunton 2013, 353, 499).

Authoritarian states are also strong if they have a steady source of revenue (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 20). Some authoritarian states rely on the money made from oil wealth, but authoritarian power is threatened if, for example, sanctions are placed on their oil or if the state can no longer extract and refine as much oil as they had grown accustomed to, and the citizenry no longer benefits from the oil money. However, if an authoritarian state can tax citizens and have a steady source of money, the ruling regime does not need to worry about losing power if they lose their top resource (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 21).

The ability to conduct effective censuses makes authoritarian states stronger by giving them access to nearly all citizens (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 21). This is the idea that a society is "more 'legible,'" or the idea that a society that is recorded in one way or another is easier to surveil, and therefore is easier for a state to conduct "targeted coercion… co-optation and negotiation," (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 22). This "legibility" also works to make a citizen believe they are essentially trackable by the state and the threat of coercion from the state is likely if the citizen was to act against the ruling regime (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 22). Moreover, the state's ability to use coercion to target specific groups or individuals (as opposed to all citizens) benefits from "legibility" and further enhances the state's rule (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 22).

To strive, authoritarian states need to establish "dependence" among those being rule (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 20). Iran needs to establish this dependence in two parts of society: the

citizens themselves and the religious establishment. Despite the promise of shared power between the religious and the secular in Iran, for the most part Iran is ruled by the clerics (see Image 1). In turn, these religious rulers rely on the good favor of the Supreme Leader to keep them in power. The citizens, on the other hand rely on the government as a whole to supply them with government services. The new government after the revolution ensured this dependence by comparing their welfare services to those of the Shah. For example, the rule of the Shah was fraught with corruption and the economy—despite the oil money—never seemed to benefit anyone but the Shah's favorites (Keshavarzian, 2010, 243). To demonstrate that the new Islamic Republic would be different, the government focused on the development of the rural community so that the wealth of the cities would reach them, too (Keshavarzian, 2010, 244). The new regime made the society more "legible" through the development of rural society, *and* established further dependence by reaching the rural villages (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 23; Keshavarzian, 2010, 244).

Economics & Terror

In addition to the four previously mentioned factors, there are more specific economic factors that indicate when a state is heading towards weakness and/or failure. Economically, citizens in weak and/or failed states experience a decline in the standard of living because corruption within the government allows the ruling elite to favor itself and other specific groups of people (Rotberg, 2002, 128). There also tends to be "exchange shortages" (Rotberg, 2002, 128) causing further economic decline. Economic decline in these states also leads to the problems of state capacity and delivery of services to the people. It is in these economic declines where citizens find a "concrete grievance" and are more likely to choose violence to express their discontent with the government (Crenshaw, 1981, 383). However, there are conflicting arguments that state that there is no real evidence that shows poverty and terrorism are related

(Piazza, 2006, 160). In a study comparing poor and uneducated Palestinians with their wealthier and educated counterparts in regards to the use of suicide terrorism against Israel, there was little to no difference between the two: a poor Palestinian was not more likely to commit an act of terror than a wealthy Palestinian (Piazza, 2006, 161).

If these theories were applied to the Iranian case, they would suggest either during economic decline Iranians would be more likely to use violence against the state because the state has become weak. Yet Iran has experienced significant economic decline and yet it does not experience the high levels of terrorism expected. Unfortunately, the other explanation which states there is little connection between poverty and terrorism is insufficient as well; while Iran has not experienced as much terrorism as its neighbors, it has experienced terrorism and that terrorism has corresponded with economic decline (Piazza, 2006, 160). Because these theories do not fully explain the terrorism situation in Iran then it is sufficient to say that economic conditions alone are not enough to act as a determinant of why and when domestic terrorism in Iran may or may not occur.

State Failure & Terror

There is a wide body of literature that attempts to determine what kind of states produce the most terrorist activity and export the most terrorists. One of the leading arguments is that terrorist activity happens in failed states. Unlike strong states, weak and/or failing states do not have a functioning centralized government or the ability to protect the people living in the state. Moreover, these states are more likely to house terrorist groups, generate terrorist groups, and be the target of terrorist attacks precisely because of the state's inability to monopolize force and violence in their own states; these states cannot act as a state should and create order within its own borders (Piazza, 2008, 470). Even worse, in some cases, it is not the state's lack of authority and capacity that is the only problem, it is also the state's "unwillingness" to prevent terrorist

groups from forming or taking hold (Reinold, 2011, 244). Because of the underlying economic and political problems, these same states lack the "authoritative capacity" that is necessary to deliver the goods and services that their citizens need (Piazza, 2008, 470).

This lack of authority also undermines a state's legitimacy. The state's legitimacy matters for numerous reasons. First, legitimacy must be recognized by the populace, and if it is recognized as right and just then the probability of the state facing challenges (both internally and externally) is significantly diminished (Hanlon et al., 2012, 31). Second, the state legitimacy must be sourced; i.e., a genealogical legitimacy via a monarchy, or in the case of Iran, the claim to rule is from a divine source (Burnell, 2006, 548).

However, if there is a lack of authority and legitimacy is under scrutiny, terrorist organizations are abler to establish and organize their group without interference from the state. In cases where the state lacks all authority and can no longer provide goods and services for its citizens, some terrorist groups begin to act as the state and deliver the goods and services that the state cannot. With all of these factors in mind, weak and/or failing states become inordinately susceptible to terrorist activity. This does not adequately explain why terrorist organizations are able to flourish, or at a minimum establish themselves, outside of weak and/or failing states. Iran has exhibited some of the characteristics of a weak state, especially during the early years of the Islamic Republic because the state was in chaos; there was no centralized government. However, the regime was able to establish itself after a few years and since then has experienced little terrorist activity. After the early 1980s under very few definitions would Iran be considered a weak or failed state and according to the previously mentioned indicators of state strength, Iran is indeed strong. These explanations do explain why Iran experiences low levels of terrorism,

however, it is not adequate in explaining why, despite its strength, Iran nevertheless experience terrorism and house established terrorist groups.

While much of the literature focuses on weak states as the ideal breeding ground for terrorist groups and terrorist activity, there is adequate evidence in the United States alone that terrorist groups exist in and attack strong states. It cannot be denied that terrorist groups tend to be most successful in weak and/or failing states where they cause the most damage and deaths (Newman, 2007, 475), but there are strong states, like the United States and some European countries, and although they do not experience the same high levels of terrorist activity, they nevertheless experience terrorist activity. Perhaps, as it has been suggested, it is not weak states that are "breeding grounds" (Von Hippel, 2002, 35), but the strong, authoritarian states like Iran that produce terrorists. There is empirical data that demonstrates that terrorists and terrorist groups can thrive in "strong states" (Newman, 2007, 464) and indeed take advantage of the services these strong states offer (Newman, 2007, 464). In addition to considering the type of state, the "social and political environment" (Newman, 2007, 464) of the state is also significant and should be incorporated into the analysis. For example, a terrorist group may stand a better chance operating not necessarily in a weak and/or failed state, but in a state where politicians may use the presence of terrorism to bolster their campaign and could even be willing to provide support to a terrorist group to make their point (Newman, 2007, 469). Similarly, the strength or weakness of a state may have less of an impact on terrorist groups if they are operating in a state where violence, and especially violence against the state has been and is socially acceptable (Newman, 2007, 469).

This indicates there is a methodological problem in how terrorism and state strength are studied (Newman, 2007, 472). It is not the condition of the state that should be the deciding

factor (nor is it a very strong one) to determine why terrorism does or does not occur there (Newman, 2007, 464). The flaw in believing weak and failed states are the homes and producers of terrorists and terrorist organization is that it allows for the creation of a set of very problematic assumptions (Newman, 2007, 467). The main problem in putting so much emphasis on the condition of the state is that it creates the assumption that if a state is strong then terrorist organizations simply cannot thrive there, and more importantly, if a weak state becomes a strong state, or becomes stronger in any way, then this increase of state strength would cause a decrease in terrorist activity (Newman, 2007, 467). There is no weight given to how much support a terrorist group may receive from other groups and actors within the state, it is simply assumed that if there is no state structure then a terrorist group can operate well within that state.

It cannot be denied that weak and failing states have a connection to terrorist activity, but the determinants used to measure the connections are not enough; studies that use the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Failed State Index (FSI) both demonstrate that there are states considered weak (based on the conditions/indicators that the indexes utilize) by the indexes that experience insignificant terrorist activity (Newman, 2007, 481). The measures that have been used most commonly in studies attempting to understand where terrorist groups form and call home are incomplete (Hendrix and Young, 2014, 331); states that are considered strong by the same conditions and indexes *have* experienced terrorist activity, one of the best examples being the United States (Newman, 2007, 481). Studies that posit that weak and failing states are the ideal location for terrorist groups to flourish *may* be right, but the indicators used are not enough to prove the correlation (Newman, 2007, 483). By only considering the strength or the weakness of the state, there is only a partial understanding of where terrorism happens.

State Capacity & Terrorism

Instead of focusing on economic and political factors, a focus on state capacity can offer a broader picture of the kind of state where terrorist activity occurs. Indeed, there is a "positive relationship between military capacity and terror attacks and a negative relationship between bureaucratic/administrative capacity and military attacks" (Hendrix and Young, 2014, 351). There are various explanations for these findings. First, the military may be a target for terrorists itself as government spending on the armed forces often is seen as a sign of political corruption (Hendrix and Young, 2014, 351), a "concrete grievance," and thus key direct factor for terrorist activity (Crenshaw, 1981, 383). Second, having better bureaucratic capacity can mean a state is capable of suppressing dissent because it can either address it violently or it can prevent terror events from occurring by being able to address possible public grievances driving the violence (Hendrix and Young, 2014, 351). Understanding state capacity can offer another dimension in which to analyze how Iran has been able to quell or avoid terrorist activity despite its very precarious location.

Moreover, a focus on state capacity can also explain what may cause dissidents decide to resort to violence and terrorism. If a state has both the ability to accommodate dissenters and repress dissenters, they are less likely to take up arms, or in this case, commit acts of terror (Hendrix, 2010, 273). For example, if a marginalized political party can be incorporated by the state into the larger political system, i.e., accommodated, they are decreasingly likely to use violence against the government (Hendrix, 2010, 273). Similarly, if a state can effectively stop terrorists before they attack, i.e., if they have effective tools of repression (Hendrix, 2010, 273), like police forces, again, terrorist groups are less likely to attack in the first place. However, repression can cause problems of its own; if a state overuses repression, the actions of the state can be used by the terrorist group to gain sympathy from the citizenry (Sanchez-Cuenca and de

la Calle, 2009, 41). However, if repression is used wisely, this kind of state capacity appears to go hand-in-hand with the general indicators of strong states.

These explanations of state capacity can provide a more rounded picture of why terrorism happens and what Iran has done to prevent it from happening more frequently. Interestingly, Iran has used state repression both before and after the 1979 Revolution. Towards the end of his rule, the Shah's use of repression against dissidents was excessive and was a uniting force for the revolution and ultimately resulted in his exile. However, when the Islamic Republic used excessive repression, it has worked well for the government, quelling dissenters despite that, according to the theory, dissenters should have gained strength and become more violent against the regime.

The authoritarian nature of the Iranian government may explain Iran's low levels of terrorist activity. Literature states that terrorism in autocracies varies depending on the kind of dictatorship and how answerable it is to its citizens, or how much "audience cost" the regime generates (Conrad, Conrad, and Young, 2014, 540). More specifically the literature states personalist regimes experience less terrorism than single party or military dictatorships because they have lower audience costs (Conrad, Conrad, and Young, 2014, 547). This understanding of the differences in authoritarian governments can help explain the Iranian anomaly. Comparatively, Iran experiences less terrorism than its neighbors, but it does nevertheless experience terrorism, and despite Iran's democratic aspects, most of the Iranian government is controlled by one man who holds the highest governmental and religious position in Iran for life, as illustrated in Image 1. In this way, Iran could be understood as a personalist autocracy.

Political Parties & Terrorism

It can go without saying that politics plays a very important role in the frequency or likelihood of terrorism. Weak and/or failing states generally are not democratic and lack the

characteristics associated with democracies, i.e., branches of government, bureaucracy, freedom of civil and political rights (including the ability to create political parties), etc. (Rotberg, 2002, 128-129). Alternatively, if the state present some of the characteristics of democracy, the regime may so much influence over the branches of government that they only function in a way that pleases the ruling elites (Rotberg, 2002, 128-29).

In some cases, terrorist groups begin as political parties, take, for example, the Iranian Liberation movement that ultimately led to the creation of the Mujahedin-e Khalq or the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria. But what causes them to turn to violence? We know that in the case of the Iranian Mujahedin, there was a generational split as well as disappointment with the Liberation Movement that led to the formation of the terrorist group (Abrahamian, 1992, 85). However, there is a deeper calculation that occurs that causes a political party or group to turn to violence. There are two complementary explanations: structural cause and/or strategy (Danzell, 2011, 86). In some cases, political groups are hindered by "structural" institutional blockages, turning to violence to overcome them (Danzell, 2011, 86). In other cases, political groups may weigh the costs against the benefits of violence as a strategy, and if the benefits outweigh the costs of violence, they also are more likely to turn to terrorist tactics against the state (Danzell, 2011, 86). These two explanations can contribute to the understanding of terrorist groups in states like Iran where there are *many* institutional factors working against political groups, but it is not an explanation as to why Iran does not experience more terrorism. Because there are so many institutional blockages, with this explanation in mind, more terrorist activity should be expected.

The nature of the dominant ruling political party also influences when another political group decides to turn to terrorism in combination with the previously mentioned explanations.

Because right-wing, conservative parties can and frequently do create policies that in turn create "institutional factors" (Danzell, 2011, 86) that restrict political parties and groups, following the logic of the structural explanation, groups will be more likely to use violence against the state when right-wing conservative parties are dominant (Danzell, 2011, 86) than when "leftist" parties are dominant (Danzell, 2011, 86). Moreover, right leaning parties can tend to be exclusive and isolate other political parties, changing how a group may evaluate the cost/benefit calculation of strategically turning to violence (Danzell, 2011, 86).

There is also the importance of the type of political system in place. If the government is a democratic system that uses "proportional representation," (Danzell, 2011, 101) then there is a lessened chance that political parties will resort to violence, whereas majoritarian systems indicate a heightened chance that political parties will turn to violence (Danzell, 2011, 101). Unfortunately, these explanations do not completely answer why Iran has been able to avoid terrorism seemingly so well, in fact, Iran's case works against this explanation; Iran is ruled by hardline right-wing politicians and is a very conservative government in general. Like the other explanations, ruling political parties, their ideology, and the governmental system is not enough to explain the anomaly that is Iran.

These studies, though in some cases are very thorough, still do not provide a complete picture that explains why terrorism occurs, especially because so much of the focus has been on transnational terrorism and not domestic terrorism. A look into the world of domestic terrorism may provide a better understanding in the case of Iran's domestic terrorism issues (or lack thereof) because international terrorism is "sporadic" whereas domestic terrorism is a "permanent challenge" (Sanchez-Cuenca and de la Calle, 2009, 41). Furthermore, if a state that uses the "optimal mix of repression and concessions" (Sanchez-Cuenca and de la Calle, 2009,

41) against terrorist groups can be studied, it could explain a way to combat more than just domestic terrorism. Because Iran is such an anomaly in the region, a better understanding of the Iranian state and how it has responded to terrorism will better explain where terrorism happens and what kind of states produce or, in the case of Iran, do not produce terrorist groups.

Data & Methods
Data
The data for this study primarily pertain to the number of incidences of terrorism within Iran, as well as data to measure state strength via the factors previously mentioned. To best analyze domestic terrorism within Iran, the study required records of terrorist attacks in Iran: the frequency of domestic terrorist attacks committed by Iranian terrorist groups, the period(s) in which there were peaks in terrorist incidences or extremely low levels or terrorist activity (approximately 8), and where the majority of the attacks occurred. This data helped determine first, whether or not terrorism was and is especially prevalent in Iran in the first place; second, the data helped determine the dates in which there were significant peaks in terrorist incidences indicating a time period in which to look for certain events that may have contributed to spike in terrorism; last, the data was also helpful in providing specific dates to look at for economic to measure the strength of the state. The data was collected in between 1978 (earliest date of terrorism data collected by the Global Terrorism Database) and 2010. The study also considered periods of time in which terrorist activity was especially low for comparison purposes.

To measure state strength, I used economic data as well as data relating to the perceived state strength and Iran's international presence. This specific data worked as a way to measure state strength on multiple levels; economic data alone is not enough to determine the strength of a state. It was also important to determine what historical events were happening at the time of terrorism peaks that may have influenced state strength, as well as how the place in which the

majority of the terrorist influenced or encouraged terrorist activity (what kind of infrastructure did the area have, how did it relate to the strength of the state?).

Collection Methods

Almost the entirety of the data came from secondary sources via online and library research. Data for terrorist attacks came from the Global Terrorism Database. For state strength, the study used multiple sources: The World Bank for economic data, Freedom House for social policy data, and the World Value Survey for how the state is perceived. This data came from online research and only from the designated time period and only at a time in which the terrorism data shows that there is a peak or significant increase in terrorist activity or a drastic decline in terrorist activity. The study only used these specific points because of the lack of terrorist activity in Iran; for the most part, terrorism activity is low and whenever there are peaks they are anomalies. This study also used library research to find historical events that were occurring during the specific time in which there were peaks in terrorist activity in Iran.

Analysis Methods

To analyze the data collected the study used a case study approach in which each case was made up of three groups of data. The first group was made up of the terrorism data at a point in time in which there was a peak in terrorist incidences or an especially low level of terrorist activity. The next group of data was made of up the data indicating whether the state was strong or weak at the time. The third and last group of data was significant historical or political event that may or may not have occurred during the given time. Table 2 depicts the peaks in terrorism, whether the Iranian regime would be considered strong or weak, as well as any historical event(s). Together, the three groups made up an entire case and then were compared to other cases where terrorist activity was also high and cases when terrorist activity was low. By conducting the analysis in this way, it became easier to see the variables that differed in each

case, and allowed for a more specific focus on the one or two variables that differed between cases in which terrorist activity was high and cases where terrorist activity was low, and in cases where state strength was high or where state strength was low.

Analysis & Discussion
Economy

One of the indicators of state strength is economic strength, where strong economies generally indicate a strong state (Rotberg, 2002, p. 128). Moreover, the stronger the state, the less likely for terrorism is to occur (Piazza, 2008, 470). However, based on the data, it appears a strong economy does not necessarily indicate a decline or absence of terrorism. Instead, it is the improvement of the economy that truly matters. Keeping in mind that during most of these time periods, Iran has not had a strong economy. For example, in 1994 the Iranian economy was struggling and the number of terrorist incidences was as high as it had been at the start of the revolution (see Figures 4 and 5). The data displayed on Figure 5 is the number of terrorist incidences in the specific years where terrorism was high or low. For example, in 1979 and 1981 terrorism was especially high, and then again in 1994, though not as high. When considering the economic data in Figure 4, where GDP per capita is displayed for the same years, there were no significant improvements in the economy in 1979 or 1981. Similarly, in 1994, there was a drastic increase in terrorist activity (see Figure 5) and there was a severe decline in Iran's economic health (see Figure 3 and 4). However, in 2002 the economy improved significantly and there were zero terrorist incidences that year. Similarly, in 2009 when terrorist activity should have been high because of the conflict caused by the contested presidential elections that year, it was relatively low comparatively and the GDP in 2009 had skyrocketed (see Figures 4 and 5). Furthermore, when comparing GDP per capita year by year (see Figure 3) and terrorist incidences year by year (see Figure 1), the data follows the same trend; significant economic
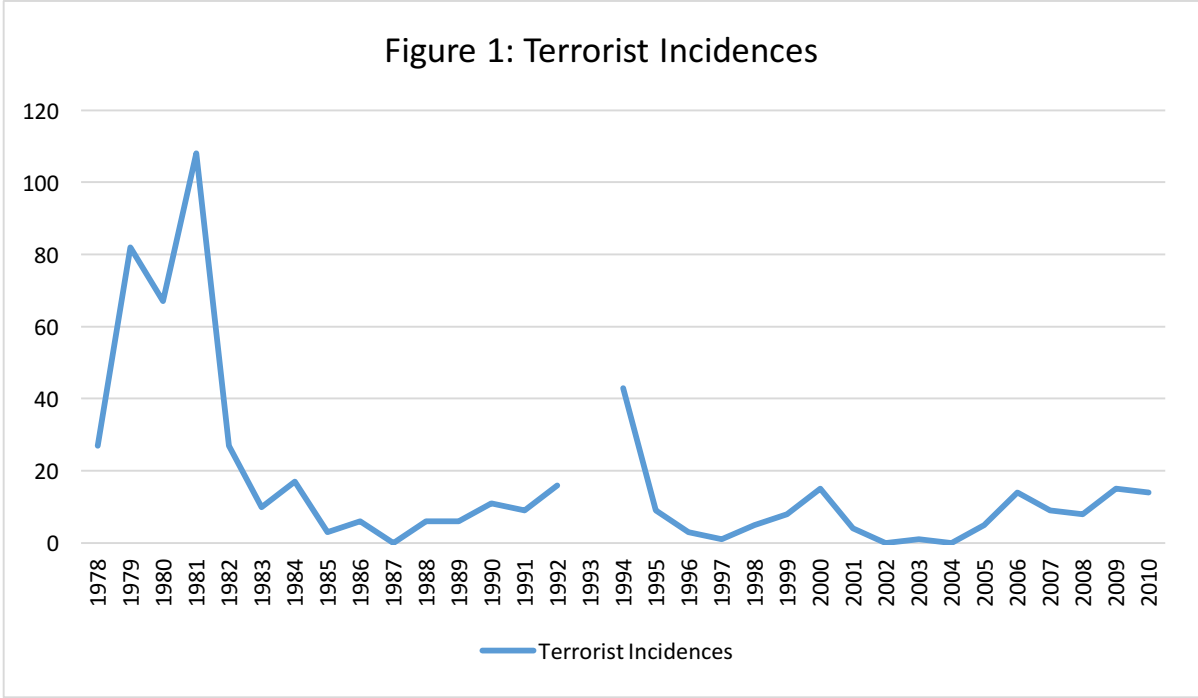
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improvement results in a decline in terrorist activity. The data indicates it is not necessarily a good economy that causes terrorist activity to decline, but changes in the state of the economy (i.e., whether there was improvement in economic performance or not). .

Conversely, Piazza's (2008) study indicated the relationship between the economy and terrorism is an insignificant predictor of terrorism, whereas state failure is more significant (83). In the study state failure is characterized as "severe political instability suffered by a government" where "severe political instability" can include "revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, adverse regime changes, and genocides and politicides" (Piazza, 2008, 80). This is a definition of state failure is primarily relates failure to political conflicts and crises, not to the economy. But historically, Iran experienced severe political instability in the late 1970s during the Iranian Revolution when, along with the government, economic health was also absent. Furthermore, In the 1990s, though Iran was not undergoing a revolution, Iran was experiencing a decline in foreign trade due to embargoes placed by the United States on Iran and its oil. There was significant foreign debt, and political corruption was running rampant after the privatization of previously "nationalized industries" (Keddie, 2006, 264-265). All of these factors caused political instability for the ruling clerics *and* these are generally economic issues. Such economic issues are indicators of state weakness on its way to failure (Rotberg, 2002, 128-129). The definition of state failure provided by Piazza (2008) attempts to separate state failure and economy, but it cannot be done; state failure can and should include economic factors as "political instability" (80). Moreover, even if state failure and economic failure can be separated, then the data concludes, especially given the data in 1994 when for the most part there was political stability, that the economy does indeed play an important role in the increase of terrorist incidences.
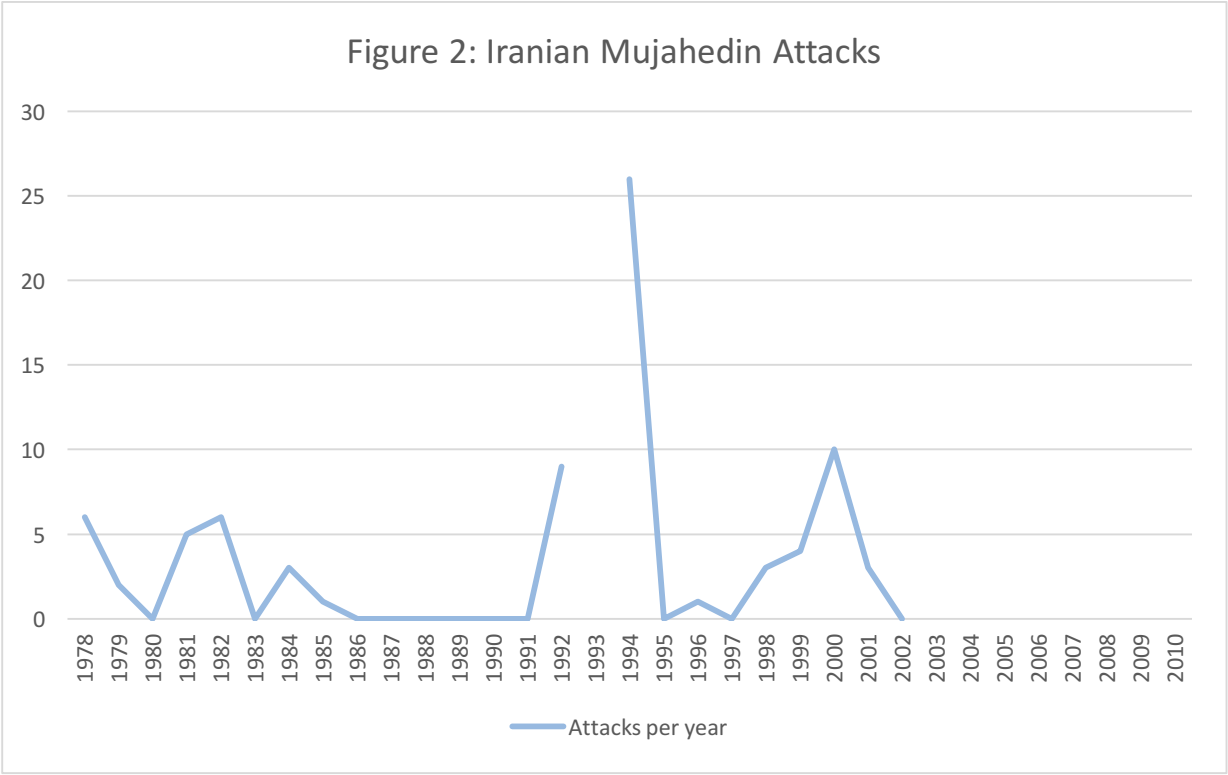
Furthermore, to focus the study on domestic terrorism, Figure 2 presents the incidences of terrorism conducted solely by the Iranian Mojahedin. When these attacks are isolated (before their disappearance in 2002) Figure 2 shows that the Mujahedin's activity was heightened during times in which the Iranian economy was low and low and the group's activity decreased at times when the Iranian economy was healthier. For example, in 1986, the Iranian economy was relatively healthy and the Mujahedin was quiet compared to 1993-1994 when Iran was experiencing economic decline (see Figures 2 and 3).
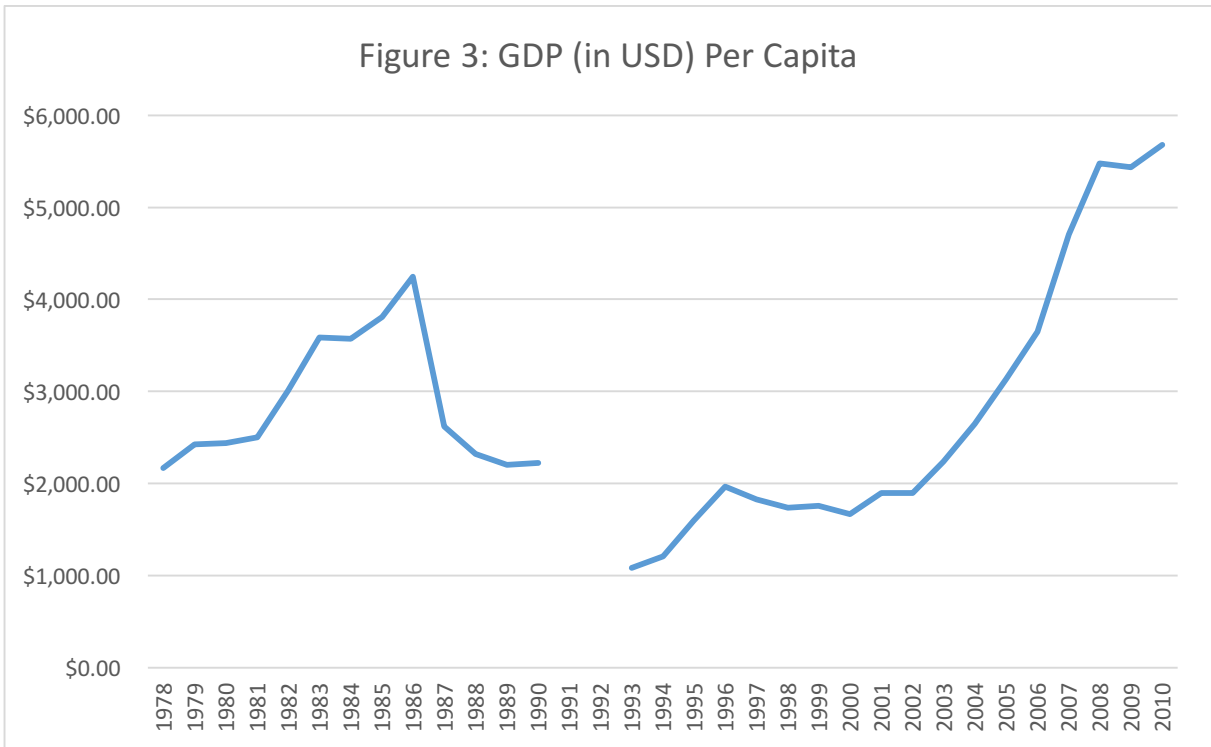
During the specified years (1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1986, 1987, 1994, 2002, and 2009 or the years in which terrorism was either high or low), the total terrorist incidences follow a similar pattern where terrorism declines as the economy improves (see Figures 4 and 5). However, 1981 does stand out in that the economy from 1978 to 1981 was fairly steady (see Figures 3 and 4), neither truly declining nor improving, but terrorist incidences spike that year (see Figure 5). This is perhaps an indicator of Piazza's (2008) argument proving correct. But because so much of the data follows the expected trend then 1981 (see Figure 5) is perhaps an indicator that economic data alone is not enough to analyze neither international nor domestic terrorism.

Figure 1: Terrorist Incidences
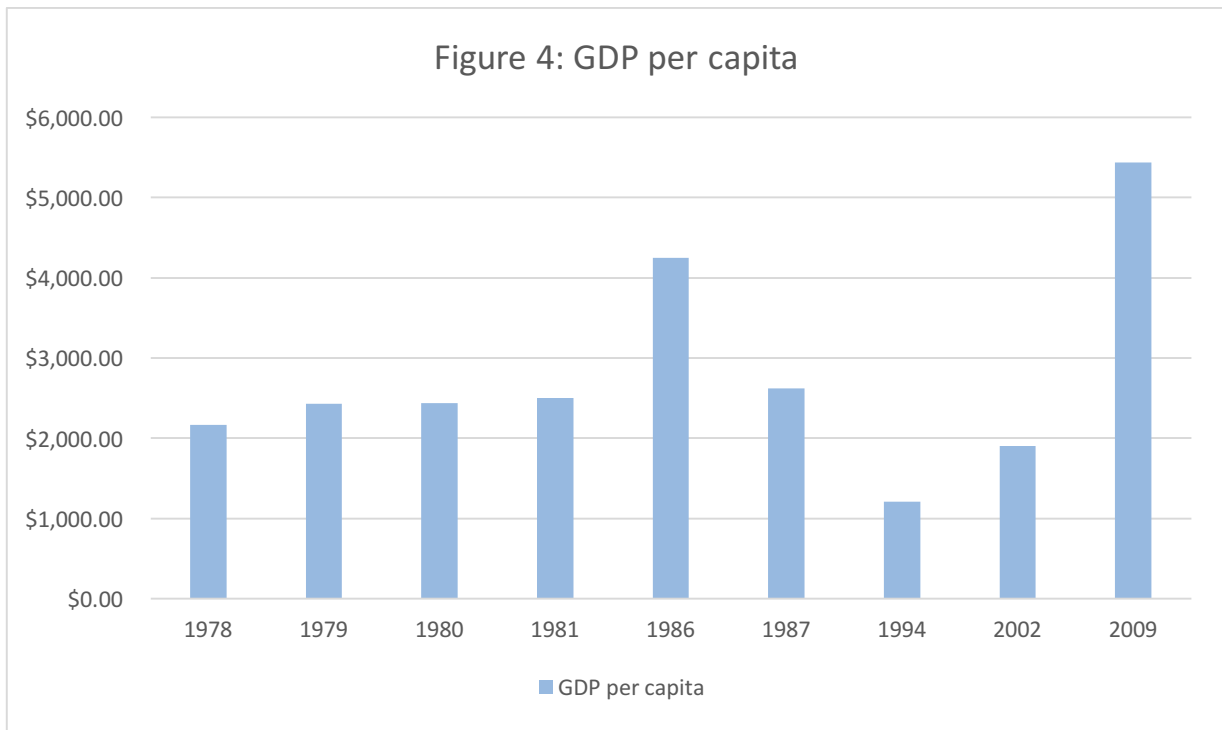
(Sourced from the Global Terrorism Database)

Figure 2: Iranian Mujahedin Attacks

(Sourced from the Global Terrorism Database)

Figure 3: GDP (in USD) Per Capita

(Sourced from World Bank)

Figure 4: GDP per capita

(Sourced from World Bank)

Figure 5: Terrorist Incidences

(Sourced from the Global Terrorism Database)

Figure 6: Mujahedin Attacks
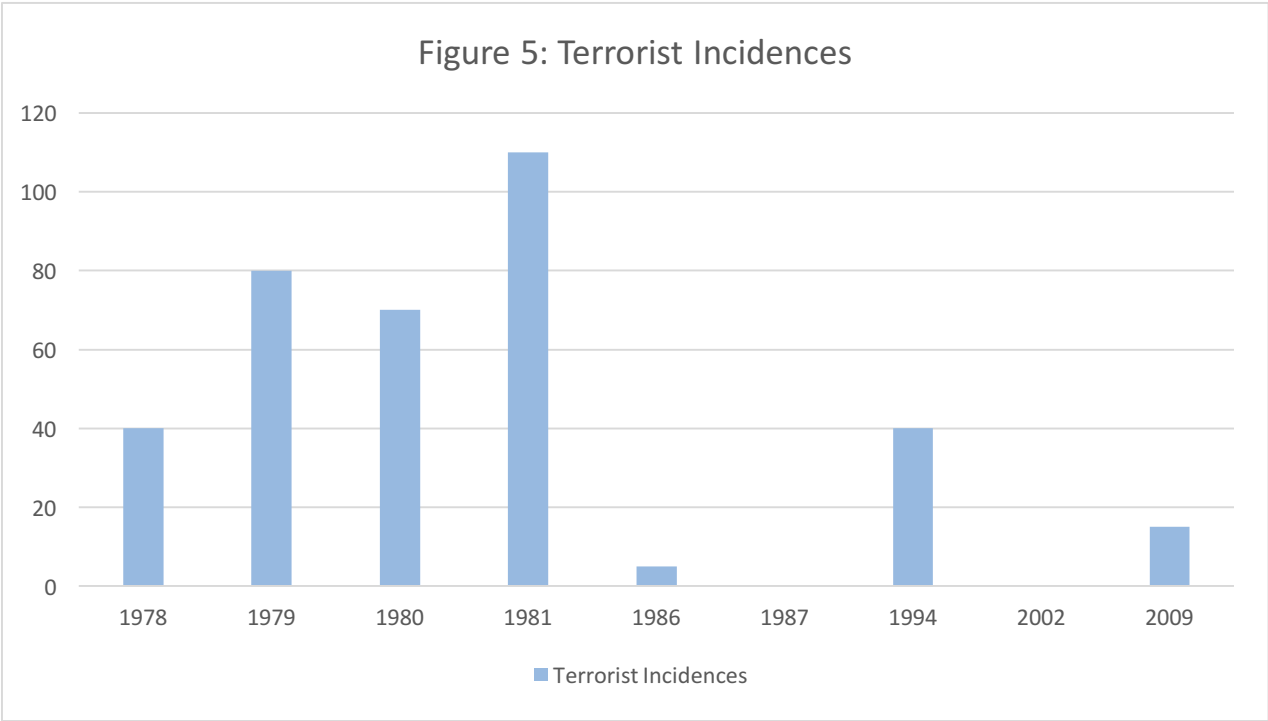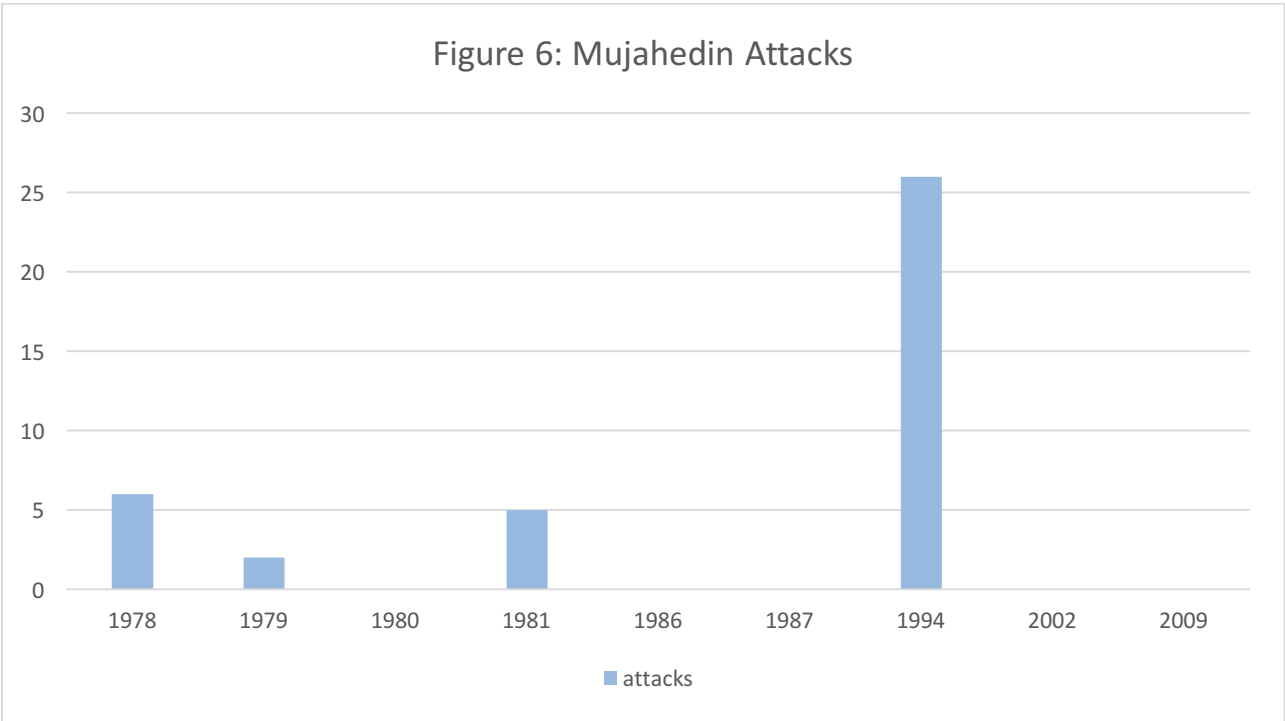
(Sourced from the Global Terrorism Database)

Human & Civil Rights
Perception of the State

Terrorism and dissent is less likely to occur if the populace perceives and believes the state has the coercive capacity to squash dissenters but it also is capable of conceding at the right moments (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 20; Sanchez-Cuenca and de la Calle, 2009, 41). To determine how citizens of Iran perceive the state, the study used data from World Value Surveys, which asks respondents how much confidence they have in their government. In addition, to better guage Iran's coercive capacity, I use data from the World Bank on Iran's military spending, the military being a coercive apparatus. Unfortunately, World Value Surveys only surveyed Iran in the fourth (2000 to 2004) and fifth (2005-2009) waves.

In both waves, the specific question was: "I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?" (World Value Surveys, Wave 4, 2005; World Value Surveys, Wave 5, 2010). State perception is significant in that how a potential terrorist or dissent views the state influences whether or not they may not act (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 20). Though this question does measure coercive capacity, it is a rough, though far from perfect, indicator of the population's perception of the government's capacity. Below I discuss coercive capacity and its relationship to terrorism using military spending.

While terrorism in Iran was not as prevalent after 1994, there was a spike in 2000 (see Figure 1). For the Fourth Wave, 897 people surveyed, or 35.4%, the majority answered that they had "quite a lot" of confidence in the Government (see Figure 7). The third highest response in the survey where 494 people, or 19.5 percent of the people responded that they did not have very much confidence in the government (see Figure 7) corresponding to the spike in terrorist activity

in 2000 (see Figure 1). Figure 9 shows how much Iran spends on military as a percent of GDP. In the early 2000s, military spending was only a small portion of Iran's GDP, especially when compared to the war years of the late 1980s. This may indicate Iran's coercive capacity was not perceived as especially strong by those who participated in the survey.

In the fifth wave of surveys people who responded that they did not have very much confidence in the government was the highest response where nearly half of all people surveyed selected "not very much" (see Figure 8). Similarly, the time frame of the fifth wave corresponds to a significant increase in terrorist incidences from 2005 to 2006 and remains fairly steady to 2010 (see Figure 1). However, military spending did increase from 2005 to 2006 and then declined significantly in 2007 only to increase again nearly half a percent from 2008 to 2009 (see Figure 9). This is interesting because it would be expected that if military (a coercive apparatus) spending increased, then terrorism would decline because terrorism and dissent is less likely to occur if the populace perceives and believes the state has the coercive capacity to squash dissenters, but is also capable of conceding at the right moments (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 20; Sanchez-Cuenca and de la Calle, 2009, 41). From 2002 to 2009 terrorism in Iran increased from zero incidents to fifteen incidents (see Figure 5). Although increases in incidents of terrorism correspond to a decline in citizens' confidence in the government, the decline in the confidence of the government does not correspond to a decline in military spending. Responses from Wave 4 (see Figure 7) affirm the connection between terrorism and perception of the state, specifically the state's coercive capacity in the form of military spending (see Figure 9). Similarly Wave 5 (see Figure 8) confirms the connection between heightened terrorism and the low perception of the state, but indicates that it does not necessarily correspond to the coercive capacity as it relates to military strength. However, this could be explained by the idea that government spending on
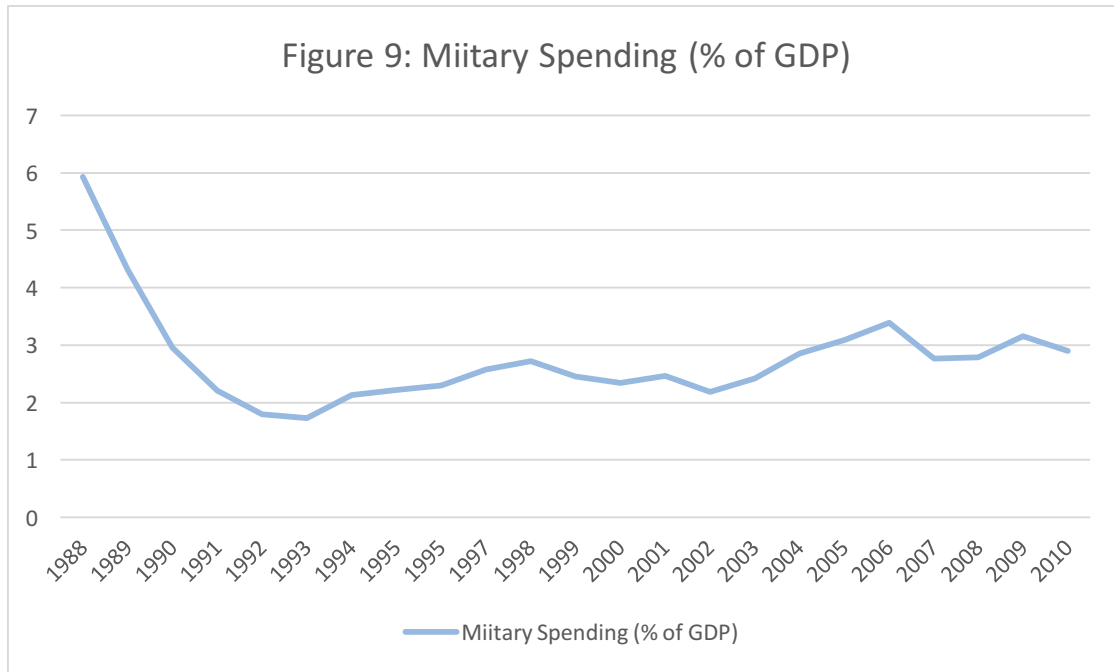
the military is often is seen as a sign of political corruption (Hendrix and Young, 2014, 351),

which establishes a "concrete grievance" and thus key direct factor for terrorist activity

(Crenshaw, 1981, 383).
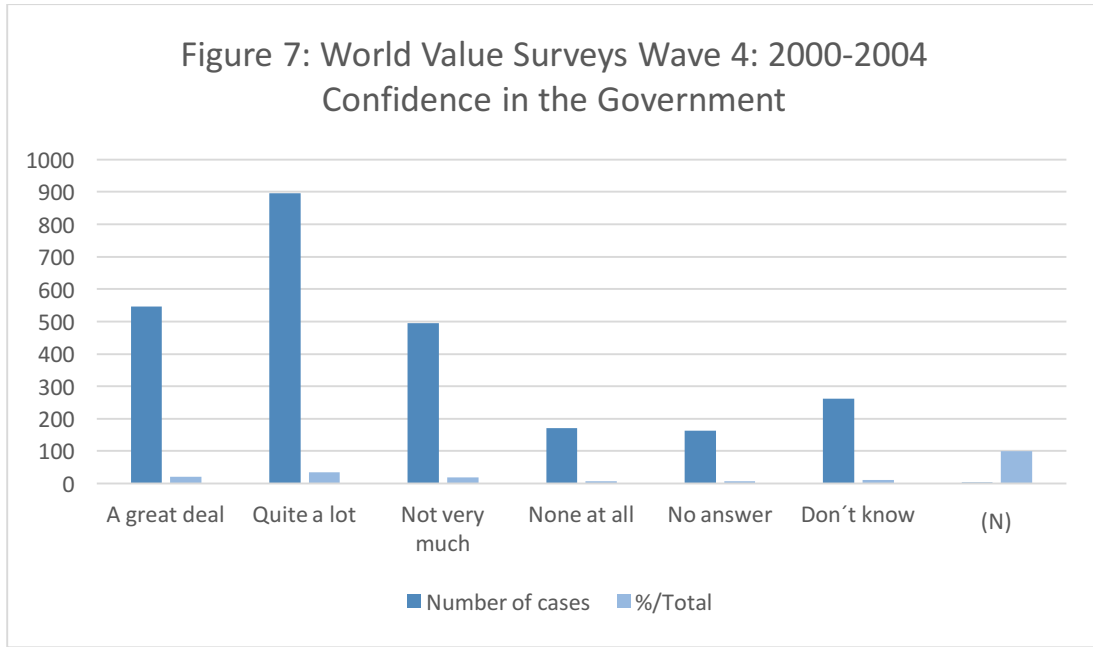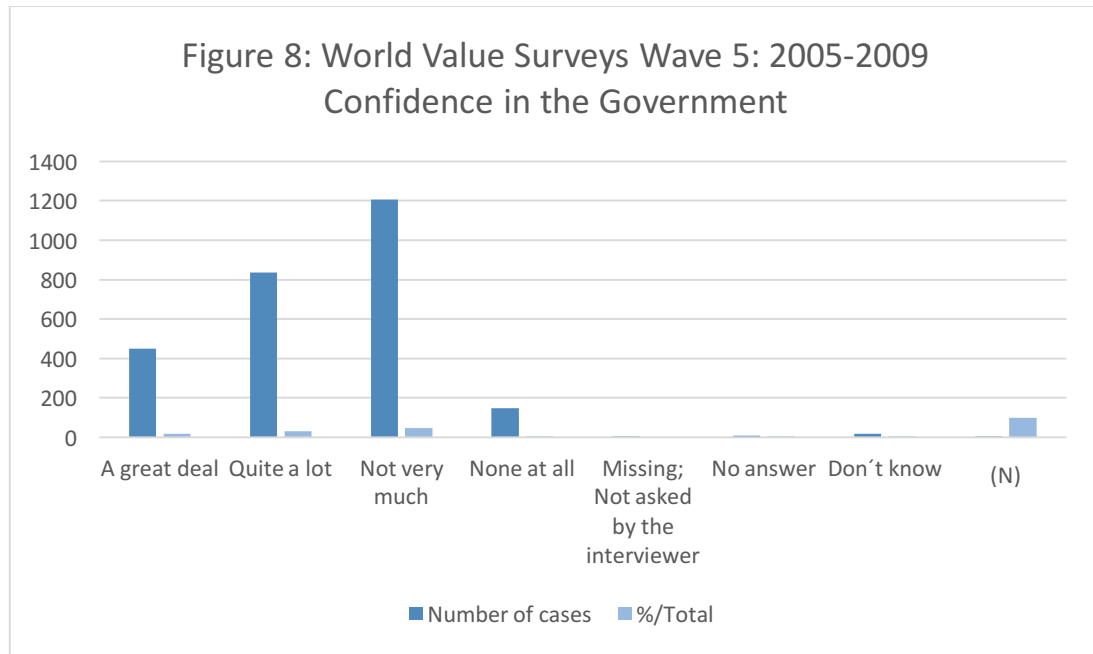
(Sourced from World Value Surveys)

(Sourced from World Value Surveys)

Figure 9: Miitary Spending (% of GDP)

(Sourced from the World Bank)

Historical & Major Events

Historical or major events occurring at or near the time of the peaks and valleys in terrorist incidences is also important as terrorist activity can be spurred on by a number of things, including major political or social events and/or changes, these events can provide terrorists with justification to their actions or give terrorists more potential targets or grievances (Lis, 2011, 772). Historical incidences corresponding to the peaks in incidences of terrorism include:

- 1978: low level of terrorist activity – beginning of the Iranian Revolution

- 1979: high level of terrorist activity – end of the Iranian Revolution, Khomeini returns, beginning of the Iranian Hostage Crisis

- 1980: small decline in terrorist activity – Iraq invades Iran and begins the Iran-Iraq War

- 1981: high level of terrorist activity – release of the American hostages, beginning of the Reagan administration

- 1986: low level of terrorist activity– Iran-Contra Scandal

- 1987: no terrorist activity – UN tries for a ceasefire, Iran is unresponsive, US attacks Iranian ships and oil rigs; significant decline in Iranian economy; nearing the end of Iran-Iraq war; year before the mass execution of political prisoners

- 1994: high level of terrorist activity – re-election of reformist Rafsanjani as Iranian president; a year before the United States places an embargo on Iran, ceasing all trade, including oil; very unhealthy economy with blatant corruption

- 2002: low level of terrorist activity – beginning of "Nuclear Iran" suspicions, Iran linked to "Axis of Evil" with Iraq and North Korea, US recently invaded neighbor Afghanistan

- 2009: small increase in terrorist activity – re-election of controversial President Ahmadinejad, questions about election fraud, largest civilian protests and riots since 1979

These historical events cannot be measured and analyzed in the same systematic and numerical way as the previous data. However, these historical events *can* be associated with the other data. For example, war impacts the economy and political events can result in changes civil and political rights. First, in 1978 when terrorist incidents are low (see Figure 5) the Iranian Revolution had only just begun and protests had largely remained peaceful. Then in 1979 when the revolution was in full swing and the Shah used violence indiscriminately against his citizens, terrorism spiked. The Shah's violent actions gave terrorists more reason to respond against the Shah with their own violence, increasing terrorist activity. The year 1994 also supplied terrorists with new grievances and targets because the relationship between the United States and Iran was especially strained due to the impending embargoes. Moreover, the Iranian economy was historically unhealthy (see Figure 4), and the government's attempt to liberalize the economy resulted in obvious corruption. The year 2002 demonstrates why domestic terrorism may decline as a result of major events because it was not the Iranian government giving terrorists new

grievances or targets, but the United States who had just invaded Iran's neighbor, Afghanistan, the year before. The US had also included Iran in the infamous "Axis of Evil" alongside Iraq (Iran's historical enemy) and North Korea, a communist country. In 2009 there was another spike in terrorism (though very low compared to 1979) that corresponds to the year in which there was contested presidential election results. In 2009, historical events gave terrorists multiple new grievances and targets: (1) the Iranian government did very little to hide the election fraud, (2) the Iranian government responded to peaceful protests with violence, (3) the Iranian volunteer militia, the Basiji, made a reappearance using indiscriminate violence against protesters, and (4) the police and Revolutionary Guard responded with indiscriminate violence while sometimes dressed in plain clothes.

Authoritarianism

As previously mentioned, weak states experience the most and the deadliest terrorist attacks; based on the criteria given and the data collected there have been times where Iran was a weak state (Newman, 2007, p. 475). For example, in 1978 through the revolution and the early years of the Islamic Republic the government was in chaos, there was little control, and the economy was a mess. As expected, Iran did experience high levels of terrorist activity (see Figure 5, 1979-1981). There have also been times, however, where Iran would be considered a weak state but Iran experienced very little terrorism, such as in 2002. The situation in 2002 was made worse by the population's low confidence in their government (see Figures 7 and 8) and the tainting of Iran's international image with the United States' designation of Iran as part of the "Axis of Evil." Nevertheless, there was no terrorist activity in 2002. Perhaps this was because people were too distracted by the surrounding events—the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States and the increasing hostilities to the west between Iraq and the United States—to focus on the problems at home. Or perhaps it was something else. As it has been previously discussed,

none of these factors alone are enough to determine what makes terrorism more likely to occur, and in some cases (2002, 2009) none of the factors highlighted in the previous literature appear sufficient to explain the variation in terrorism in Iran during this period. Perhaps it is not the condition of the state that matters, but instead the nature of the state.

A state that gives its citizens civil, political rights, and human rights can be an indicator of a strong state (Rotberg, 2002, 132). With Iran's low ratings on the civil liberties and political rights dimensions, accompanied by the previously mentioned economic problems, the literature and the data point to a weak Iranian state in the 1990s, and it is in a weakened state where terrorist activity finds a home (Rotberg, 2002, 128). However, civil liberties and political rights can measure authoritarianism and, as the literature suggests, Iran may not have been weak because of its authoritarian power, rather its authoritarian power may in fact make it a strong state (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 16).

The nature of the state plays a role in how and when terrorism occurs. Democratic regimes, according to the literature, are more vulnerable to terrorist attacks than authoritarian regimes. As previously discussed in the literature review, authoritarian regimes have strong "institutional foundations," specifically infrastructural mechanisms, which include the state's coercive capacity, the ability of the state to create dependence, and the ability of the state to record and register its citizens (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 16, 20). If these infrastructural mechanisms are present, dissidents and terrorists are less likely to act because they know the state has the ability to surveil and keep track of them, and believe the state will be willing and able to respond to their acts. Moreover, when they rely on the state for certain services that cannot be obtained elsewhere this will also decrease the willingness to act (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 20-23).

One way to measure authoritarianism is to use Freedom House's ratings, which consider human rights (including LGBT), civil rights, access to and freedom of the press, policy and legislation, free elections, and religious freedom to measure a state's freedom on a scale of one to seven with seven being "Not Free." In the case of Iran, the Freedom House data indicate that during the time frame studied Iran was considered authoritarian ("Not Free"). From 1978 to 2010, Iran was, for the most part, rated as a six (indicating an authoritarian regime type) and never less than five. One example of the restrictive political environment is that in 1992, despite the state officially allowing the formation of political parties, no political party applicants were approved (Keddie, 2006, 266). Under this theory, the fact that Iran was considered "Not Free" for most of the years studied explains why terrorism has been so low in Iran. However, Iran's authoritarianism cannot alone explain the period spikes of high levels of terrorism. Like other theories, these theories indicate that understanding terrorism in Iran, or lack thereof, is complex, requiring the consideration of more than one factor to gain a more complete understanding of how state strength and terrorism interact in Iran.

Looking to historical and major events is also helpful in determining the nature and capacity of the state. For example, the response of the Iranian government in 2009 demonstrates Iran's infrastructural mechanisms (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 20). After the Green Movement disappeared, the Iranian government tortured and executed political prisoners who had been arrested during the protests that had erupted following the contested 2009 presidential election (Ebadi, 2010, 289). Authoritarian regimes, however, must not overuse their coercive apparatuses. Authoritarian regimes are particularly strong when they do not have to use their coercive apparatuses, but simply instill the fear of the use of coercion and repression (Slater and Fenner, 2011, 20; Sanchez and de la Calle, 2009, 41). When Iran executed the political prisoners, it did

not announce or make the executions public; it was only after the executions that people began to learn of what had happened (Ebadi, 2010, 289). While the Iranian government may have made many arrests, it did not conduct a mass execution or use its coercive capacity indiscriminately. Acts like this are exactly what make authoritarian regimes strong.

As Image 1 showed, Iran is largely ruled by one man, the Supreme Leader, who appoints many other powerful political leaders. Those leaders then depend on the success of the Supreme Leader to maintain their own power. In this way, Iran is, at least in some way, a personalist dictatorship. As the literature has suggested, personalist dictatorships face lower audience costs and are less answerable to their citizens (Conrad, Conrad, and Young, 2014, 543). Ultimately, citizens are less likely to act against the Supreme Leader because it is unlikely that their actions will cause significant politic change; other political leaders will not act on behalf of the citizens because their own power rests in the hands of the Supreme Leader (Conrad, Conrad, and Young, 2014, 543). This suggests that the nature of Iranian authoritarianism is another way to understand the relative lack of terrorism in Iran compared to its immediate neighborhood.

Table 2

| Year | Group 1 | Group 2 | | | Group 3 |
	Terrorist Incidents	*GDP per capita*	*Freedom House Status*	*State perception*	*State Strength*	*Historical Event*
1978	27	$2,167.86	Not Free		Weak	Beginning of the revolution
1979	82	$2,426.19	Partially Free		Weak	Revolution; end of revolution Return of Khomeini Beginning of Hostage Crisis
1980	67	$2,440.31	Partially Free		Weak	Iraq invades Iran Release of American hostages
1981	108	$2,499.42	Partially Free		Weak	Beginning of Reagan admin.
1986	6	$4,249.41	Partially Free		Strong	Iran Contra Scandal
1987	0	$2,619.83	Partially Free		Partially weak	UN tries for a ceasefire US attacks Iranian ships and oil rigs Drastic decline in economy
1994	43	$1,207.39	Not Free		Weak	Rafsanjani re-elected US to place trade embargo on Iran
2002	0	$1,900.05	Not Free	Low confidence	Weak	"Nuclear Iran" suspicions Iran as part of the "Axis of Evil" US recently invaded neighbor Afghanistan
2009	15	$5,437.82	Not Free	Sig. low confidence	Strong	Contested re-election of Pres. Ahmadinejad Resulting in largest protests since 1979 Basiji murder of Neda Agha-Sultani

Summary

Through various sources of data, there is proof that not one factor of state strength or a characteristic of a strong/weak state that can fully explain why terrorism does or does not happen. Each factored studied was accurate in some instances and inaccurate in others. First, economic data is mostly an accurate predictor or indicator of why domestic terrorism occurs in Iran (with the exception of the year 1981), but alone is not enough. Second, data from Freedom House is not an accurate indicator of terrorism either, if it were then terrorist activity should have been high during the entire time frame studied because most of the time Iran was considered "not free." At its best it was considered "partially free" and there were both incidences of high and low terrorist activity (see Table 1). Third, how citizens perceive the state is a mostly accurate in indicating the incidences of terrorism where terrorism was heightened when people had less confidence in the state (see Figures 5, 7, and 8), but it only correlated with an increase in military spending in the Fourth Wave and not the Fifth Wave (see Figures 7, 8, and 9) indicating that how citizens perceive the state as more indicative of the occurrence of terrorism than coercive capacity. Fourth, historical events are for the most part accurate indicators of heightened terrorist activity because they can give terrorist groups or potential terrorists new grievances and targets; for example, in 1994 Iran was experiencing a historically unhealthy economy and blatant governmental corruption, there was also a spike in terrorist activity that year (see Figure 5). Last, authoritarianism as an indicator of a strong state is also fairly accurate in explaining why Iran has had, in general, a low amount of terrorist activity because of its ability to use coercive capacity enough to scare people but not enough to incite mass mobilization against the regime.

(Table 1) Freedom House Scores & Status: 1978-2010

Year	Political Rights	Civil Liberties	Status	Level of Terrorism (attacks)
1978	6	5	NF	Low (27)
1979	5	5	PF	High (82)
1980	5	5	PF	Slight decline (67)
1981	5	5	PF	High (108)
1982	6	6	NF	
1983	6	6	NF	
1983	6	6	PF	
1985	5	6	PF	
1986	5	6	PF	Low (6)
1987	5	6	PF	Low (0)
1988	5	6	NF	
1989	6	5	NF	
1990	6	5	NF	
1991	6	5	NF	
1992	6	6	NF	
1993	6	7	NF	
1994	6	7	NF	High (43)
1995	6	7	NF	
1996	6	7	NF	
1997	6	7	NF	
1998	6	6	NF	
1999	6	6	NF	
2000	6	6	NF	
2001	6	6	NF	
2002	6	6	NF	Low (0)

2003	6	6	NF	
2004	6	6	NF	
2005	6	6	NF	
2006	6	6	NF	
2007	6	6	NF	
2008	6	6	NF	
2009	6	6	NF	High (15)
2010	6	6	NF	

Conclusion

This study found that there is not one single factor of state strength that can fully explain why Iran does experience terrorism, or why it does not (for the most part) have an active domestic terrorist community. The economy, historical and major events, and Iran's authoritarianism supply the most complete explanation for why Iran does not experience as much terrorist activity as its neighbors. Increases in terrorist activity tend to correspond to a decline in Iran's economy, a low level of confidence in the government, and historical and/or major events.

There were some challenges and drawbacks to the study, including the availability of data where many indexes that would have been helpful in analyzing domestic terrorism in Iran did not include enough data. For example, World Value Surveys only began conducting surveys in Iran in 2000. Furthermore, this study could have been more expansive if it had included analysis of another state like Saudi Arabia where there is a similar lack of terrorist activity. There was also a problem of limited information and previous literature because the majority of terrorist literature focuses on transnational terrorism, not domestic terrorism, despite the fact that terrorism in general is a "local phenomenon" (Newman, 2007, 646). This makes it hard to know how much

the strength of a state influences domestic terrorism. For example, Piazza finds no significant relationship between poor economies and terrorism, but both of the studies from 2008 only consider transnational terrorism (77; 470). Both Newman (2007) and Sanchez-Cuenca and de la Calle (2009) recognize that domestic terrorism is a different beast than transnational and international terrorism and should therefore be studied independently (464; 32). This study does not focus on transnational terrorism which may be why there is limited support in existing explanations for terrorism in Iran as transnational terrorism, like domestic terrorism, is not a major problem. While there may not be a relationship between the economy and *transnational terrorism*, data in the study indicate that economic health is, at a minimum a factor in determining the occurrence of domestic terrorism in Iran.

Despite these setbacks this study is helpful in understand domestic terrorism in Iran; it proves that understanding terrorism requires many different factors and indicators and it also provides partial explanations for why terrorism does and does not occur in Iran which could help not only understand terrorism, but also understand Iran as a country. Further research should focus on Iran's coercive capacity and its infrastructural mechanisms because this study only hints at how influential Iran's coercive capacity is on terrorism, but I believe it may be influential in determining future regime changes for Iran as well. There should also be further research on domestic terrorism, not just in Iran, but in other states as well. If there was more literature and research on how states like Iran avoid domestic terrorist activity as well as literature on states that have trouble avoiding domestic terrorism, then the international community may benefit by learning what ways or policies have been effective or ineffective, and potentially reduce terrorist activity. If the world can have a better understanding of Iran then the way the international community talks about and views Iran could change how other countries and the United Nations

pass legislation, policy, and resolutions regarding Iran, potentially making such things more helpful and effective. As Iran re-enters the international community, understanding the country that has remained a mystery for so long could not be more relevant. By understanding the causes of terrorism in Iran, and how Iran avoids higher levels of terrorist activity (with the exception of authoritarianism) the rest of the world could potentially learn something from Iran that helps them combat terrorism within their own state.

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