Social Psychology and Fear of Terrorism

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We argue that an individual’s general view of human nature is a crucial determinant of her fear of terrorist attacks. Those people who have a negative view of human nature, i.e., believe that people cannot generally be trusted, are more likely to believe that a terrorist attack will take place in their country than those who tend to trust others. This means that the social psychology of individuals is a major factor in explaining fears of terrorism that has heretofore been ignored. We test our argument and alternative hypotheses in an ordered probit analysis. The results of the analysis show that our argument is confirmed and that a person’s social psychological disposition toward trusting others is a powerful predictor of expectations of terrorist attacks.
One of the most hotly debated issues in advanced industrialized democracies today is the prevention of terrorism. As terrorist attacks by groups like Al Qaeda and its affiliates and ideological allies have taken place in the West and elsewhere since 2001, there has been a great deal of discussion about the policies necessary to thwart or prevent new attacks. Some have argued that the possibility of new spectacular attacks along the lines of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US, the 2004 Madrid train bombings, or the 2005 transport attacks in London, or worse, are reason enough to greatly expand the resources and government powers dedicated to preventing terrorist attacks. Others have argued that the threat of attack is greatly exaggerated and the public is being made to worry unduly.

One of the factors that will play an important role in whether governments will take more expensive and/or intrusive measures to prevent terrorist attacks is the level of public concern in the country over a possible attack. One can surmise that a government that wants to devote new resources and policies into preventing a terrorist attack will want to have public backing for such measures. Because these measures can be quite expensive and come at the cost of personal privacy and other civil liberties, a government in a democracy would be wise to gather popular support for the measures rather than incur the wrath of the electorate.

Several studies have shown that the more citizens fear a terrorist attack in their country, the more likely they are to accept more aggressive measures on the part of the state to prevent terrorist attacks (Crowson, Debacker, and Thoma 2006; Gadarian 2010; Jost and Napier 2012; Kaltenthaler and Miller 2012; Kam and Kinder 2007). These include greater state powers to interrogate suspects, greater powers of surveillance, and even the ability of the state to legally torture terrorist suspects (Crowson et al, 2006). The sense of threat can create heightened xenophobia and opposition to immigration among those who are already prone to it (Kaltenthaler and Miller 2012; Le Vine and Campbell 1972). Thus, fears of terrorism can give governments a political environment for aggressive counterterrorism measures that they otherwise would not have.
This raises an important question: What causes a citizen to fear that a terrorist attack will happen in her country? This paper is devoted to answering this question.

We use the word “fear” of a terrorist attack because people tend to think sociotropically about political issues. In other words, even though the attack may not target them personally, they are still concerned about it (Kinder and Kiewit 1981). We also know that when it comes to terrorism, the average individual grossly overestimates the chances that a terrorist attack in the country will affect them personally (Marshall et al 2007; May et al 2011; Sunstein 2003). This is particularly true once a terrorist attack has already occurred (Sunstein 2003). People assess the probability of an attack based example of an attack that is already in their mind. The more salient the example of risk for people, the more they will fear a recurrence of that risk (Tversky and Kahneman 1974). This is particularly true for risks that are hard to control (Slovic 2000). A momentous terrorist incident, such as the September 11, 2001 attacks, which affected a large number of people, albeit in a small area, raised the risk saliency for people for the incidence of terrorist attack. The more the attack came to mind, the more an individual would predict it would happen again, even if it did not happen close to her and she is an unlikely target of attack. Sunstein (2003: 122) argues that people engage in what he calls probability neglect, which means that when people think about a particularly bad incident that has occurred, such as a flood, a tornado, or a terrorist attack, and was viewed as beyond their control, they will fear it happening again and hurting them, despite the realistic probability that it will never happen again, and particularly not to them personally.

We argue a crucial factor that shapes a person’s fear that his country will be the victim of a terrorist attack is his general predisposition toward human nature. In other words, if a person has a positive view of human nature, i.e., generally thinks people are good, we posit that such a person is less likely to expect a terrorist attack is imminent compared to those who have negative view of human nature. A very useful insight into one’s view of human nature is how much the individual trusts other people in general. If a person tends not to trust others, it can be assumed that the individual has a dim view of the motives of others and an expectation that they may do the individual
harm. Thus, a person who is, in general, more distrustful of others is more likely to think that others are plotting to harm him in a terrorist attack than someone who does not expect harm from others, all other things being equal. Therefore, the fear of terrorism may be largely shaped by a very basic human social psychological predisposition that is developed early in life.

This notion of how much one trusts others in general is a central aspect of a person’s social psychology. Thus, we argue social psychology needs to play a bigger role in analysis of fears of terrorism. While the actual physical environment related to terrorism is certainly important, e.g., the incidence of terrorism, we contend that there are also personal psychological attributes that must be explored to understand why there is variation in the expectations that people have of an imminent terrorist attack.

The notion that an individual’s view of humanity (trustworthy-not trustworthy) will condition her perceived probability that a terrorist attack will happen in her country is our central contention. This argument is distinct from the argument that has been made about the relationship between the political conservative’s personality traits and their emphasis on risk and fear of death (Crowson et al. 2006; Jost and Napier 2012). We contend that it is an individual’s social psychological predisposition toward humanity that helps generate predictable proclivities to fear a terrorist attack will happen.

We seek to test our argument about the relationship between individual-level trust/distrust of others and fears of terrorism. We test our argument and alternative hypotheses in an ordered probit analysis to determine the relative usefulness of these possible explanations in illuminating the important factors in why people think the way they do about the likelihood about terrorist attacks.

The project will explore the individual-level determinants of variations in expectations about terrorist attacks in several countries in Europe and Israel. The twenty-nine countries included in the study are: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United
Kingdom. The issue of terrorism is more important in some than others because they have had very different experiences with terrorism at home. Thus, the European states and Israel represent a diverse mix of experiences with terrorism. Israel, Spain and Great Britain have experienced very deadly terrorist attacks within the last decade. Those attacks were carried out by violent Islamist extremists, often with ties to Al Qaeda. France, Ireland, and Sweden have all seen Al Qaeda cells discovered domestically but have not experienced significant attacks at the hands of Al Qaeda-inspired groups. Thus, the inclusion of countries with experience with terrorist attacks carried out by violent Islamist extremists and those that have not had such incidents allows us to determine, to a degree, if such terrorist incidents play a role in shaping opinion toward terrorism in the countries. These countries are also used as the sample for this research because they have complete data for the relevant variables we employed from the European Social Survey (Round 5, 2009-2010).

**The Dependent Variables**

The dependent variable in this study centers on individual-level expectations about terrorism. Expectations are measured at the individual level and applied to individual respondents across the European states. The 2009-2010 European Social Survey captures survey data regarding expectations about terrorism. The ESS question that best captures this is: *Do you think a terrorist attack somewhere in [country] during the next twelve months is…* The respondent is then given the options of *very likely, likely, not very likely, or not at all likely.*

The pooled breakdown of the dependent variables is presented in Table 1.

[ Insert Table 1 here. ]

In the pooled breakdown of answers to the question, it is apparent that among the twenty-nine countries’ respondents, the majority did not think a terrorist attack in the country was very likely in
the coming year. More than 62% of the respondents believed that a terrorist attack was not at all likely or not very likely. Those who believed that a terrorist attack was likely or very likely came to 37.6% of the sample. Thus, on the average, respondents seem less, rather than more, concerned that a terrorist attack will occur in their country in the coming year. The distribution of average responses for the sample can be misleading in that there is significant cross-national variation in expectations of a terrorist attack in the coming year.

Table 2 shows the breakdown of expectations of a terrorist attack in the country during the coming year by country. The countries are ranked from having the highest perceived expectation of terrorist attacks in the coming year among respondents to those countries that have the lowest respondent expectations of terrorist attack in the coming year.

[ Insert Table 2 here. ]

As is evident in the table, Israel’s sample perceives a very high probability that the country will experience a terrorist attack in the coming year (91%). This makes sense given the high incidence of terrorist attacks in Israel. The top five countries that follow Israel have all either experienced significant Al Qaeda attacks or have had multiple cells and plots discovered in the country. On the other end of the list of countries included in the analysis there is Cyprus, where the average respondent believes that there is only an 11.1% chance of a terrorist attack in the country in the coming year.

While the country averages of expectations of terrorist attacks are instructive for comparative purposes, we are concerned with the variation among individuals in terms of their expectations that their country will experience a terrorist attack in the coming year. By identifying the individual and contextual-level factors that condition citizens to fear or not fear a terrorist attack, we can better understand the mechanisms that shape fears of terrorists striking a person’s country. So, what factors account for the differences in attitudes toward the perceived likelihood of a terrorist attack in the coming year? The rest of this study is devoted to answering this question.
The Argument: The Effect of Social Psychology on Fears of Terrorism

We know from multiple empirical studies that several factors play a role in shaping individuals’ fears about terrorism. Most of the studies of fear of terrorist attack have treated terrorism as a form of crime and build off the literature about fears of crime (Marshall et al 2007; Nellis 2011; Raviv et al 2000; Sjöberg 2005; Slovic 2002). These studies have explored variables such as age, gender, education, race, attitudes toward immigrants, and experience with crime. Most have argued that terrorism is just another form of crime so it is logical to use the fear of crime models to explore fears of terrorism.

We contend that terrorism is not just another form of crime, and that is particularly true of the terrorism that has occurred in the last fifteen years or so. In particular, we make reference to the terrorism committed by groups such as Al Qaeda. This is terrorism devoted to mass casualty, simultaneous attacks. It is much more frightening to some because it seems to hold no regard for boundaries of civilian targets and it seems intent on maximum death and destruction. While technically the attacks committed by Al Qaeda and its fellow-travelers are crimes, they are more likely perceived as acts of war on the country by a large proportion of the society experiencing the attacks.

We believe that the crime-based studies of fears of terrorism have missed an important element that shapes fears of terrorism: an individual’s social psychology. In particular, we posit that an individual’s general trust in others (social trust) is a crucial factor in how an individual views terrorism. We contend that a person’s baseline view of humanity in general must be explored as a source of fear of terrorism. We argue that the more a person expects the worst from people in general, the more likely that person is to expect terrorists to attack her country in the near future.

Why do we make this assertion? If an individual believes that people, in general, are not trustworthy, or in other words, cannot be trusted to not want to harm or take advantage of the individual, then it is logical that such a person would think that terrorists would want to harm him. Terrorists, who have harm of others as a central aim, would seem particularly threatening to those
who expect harm from others in general. Thus, the heightened fear of harm that would exist among those who do not trust others would extend, most certainly, to those who contemplate the probability of attack by terrorists.

Publicity is central to terrorists’ actions. Terrorists need publicity in order to achieve their aims. Because terrorists cannot make the changes in politics or society that they want to achieve on their own, as they are generally too weak to do so, they depend on the general public to act in response to their terrorist actions. This can mean pressuring their government to change its policies or removing the government itself. In any case, terrorism must have publicity to be effective. If the public is unaware of the actions of the terrorists, the terrorists have committed their attacks in vain.

This logic will lead terrorists to launch attacks that they think will gain them maximum publicity without alienating the audience meant to achieve the desired political change in response to terrorism. This means terrorist actions are generally highly salient acts. They will make into the news, particularly if they are in an individual’s country and if it is a spectacular attack. This has important implications for those who have already low levels of social trust. Those with low levels of social trust will learn of terrorist actions and process that information in ways that are different from those with relatively higher levels of social trust.

Someone with relatively high levels of social trust, i.e., a more positive view of human nature, will view a terrorist attack as a single, tragic incident and only possibly develop a slightly higher fear that such an attack could befall her community again. The greater effect is on someone with already low levels of trust. Someone who has low levels of social trust, i.e., has a dim view of human nature, will develop a heightened anxiety about the possibility of attack in their community. Those with relatively low levels of social trust will already fear their fellow man before the attacks, and it is only logical that the attacks would reinforce that fear. And as the terrorism of the last decade has included several “spectaculars,”1 9-11, the Madrid train bombings, the London transport

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1 A “spectacular” is a terrorist attack that is a mass casualty attack meant to cause great panic. It differs from a terrorist action that may only target one or a small group of individuals. Spectacular terrorist attacks will logically cause more fear because of the very large and destructive nature of the attack. The
attacks, etc., these incidents will foster an even greater sense of anxiety over further possible attacks. Thus, spectacular terrorist attacks will have profound fear-inducing effects on those with low levels of social trust. The individual with relatively low levels of social trust will be much more convinced that another major attack is coming from the terrorists because they expect more harm to come from those who have already demonstrated their willingness to inflict harm.

Another factor that can add to anxiety produced by the attacks of Al Qaeda and associated groups is the people committing these terrorist attacks are largely viewed as “foreign.” Al Qaeda operatives or people motivated by Al Qaeda’s ideology are citizens from other countries, typically Muslim countries, or are Muslim immigrants, or their children. While this is not always the case, it is more often than not the pattern. This would play a role in the thinking of those with low levels of social trust. We know from previous research, that those with low levels of generalized trust, are less trusting of people perceived as “different” than those who have relatively higher levels of social trust (Citrin and Sides 2008; Kam and Kinder 2007). This means that the “new” terrorism afflicting the West, carried out largely by Islamist militant groups, will heighten the anxiety of those with relatively low levels of social trust because the terrorist perpetrators are viewed as those who are “foreign.” Because the attacks are committed by those viewed as members of an “out-group,” there would be an even greater expectation that more harm will come from them since they would be trusted even less than those who are part of the “in-group.”

Thus, if we combine the spectacular nature of the Al Qaeda attacks, the fact that they were perceived to be committed by foreigners or immigrants, we have the components of a mix that will deeply heighten the anxiety of those with lower levels of social trust. We contend that in the present environment of terrorist threat in the West, individuals with relatively low levels of social trust will be much more convinced that a terrorist attack in imminent in their country compared to those who have higher levels of social trust.

The psychological effects of a spectacular attack on the population can be deep and lasting (See Marshall et al 2007).
Alternative Perspectives on Public Opinion toward the Risk of Terrorism

**Education**

Some empirical studies have pointed to the role played by education in individuals’ fears of terrorism (e.g., Sjöberg 2005). Some have argued that the more educated have less fear of terrorism relative to the less educated (Sjöberg 2005). It seems that education plays a role in risk assessment, because the more educated are more aware of the actual nature of the threat compared to the less educated, who generally less well-informed about the threat. When people have vague notions that a threat exists, but do not know the actual details about that threat, they have a tendency to overestimate that threat (Johnson and Tversky 1983). That is why a general threat of a fairly undefined nature can be more frightening to a public than a well-understood and defined threat. Thus, the less educated are more likely to predict that their country will be attack within the coming year than the relatively more educated.

Others have argued that the more educated have more of a fear of terrorist attack than those with lower relative levels of educational attainment. In a study done in Canada, Lemeyre et al. (2006) found that the more educated Canadians feared a terrorist attack more than the less educated Canadians. The authors in this study indicate that awareness of terrorism is related to fears of terrorism. Those who are not very aware of terrorism will be less fearful of a terrorist attack in the country. We will test both hypotheses in this study.

**Media Exposure**

An individual’s exposure to media reports about terrorist incidents has been shown to play a large role on an individual’s relative anxiety about terrorist attacks (Gadarian 2010; Johnson and Tversky 1983; Kam and Kinder 2006; Lemeyre et al 2006; Marshall et al. 2007). Marshall et al (2007) found that the more exposure that a person has to media reports concerning terrorism, the more likely that person is to expect a terrorist attack. Johnson and Tversky (1983) found that the type of
terrorist attack reported in the media had an impact on the amount of fear that was generated. The more spectacular the attack, the more fear the media consumer would feel about the attack.

This raises an important point about how the media covers terrorist attacks. Not all terrorist attacks are covered the same. The more spectacular the attack, the more the media will dwell on the attack and even, in some outlets, sensationalize it (see Lemyre et al. 2006). Thus, the media has the power to convey images and narratives that can have profound impacts on citizens in the wake of a terrorist attack. It has been shown that the more the media shows frightening images related to a terrorist attack, such as the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center falling, the more anxiety that breeds in the public that is watching (Marshall et al. 2007)

These findings lead to a possible hypothesis about the link between the media and fear of terrorist attacks. It would mean that more people are exposed to media stories about terrorist attacks, the more they would fear a terrorist attack in their country.

**Gender**

There has been a fairly long-standing argument that gender influences how an individual perceives her chances of being attacked. Research on fear of crime has shown that women are more likely than men to expect to be the victim of crime, even though statistically they are not more likely to be crime victims (Warr 1984). In fact, women are less likely to be the victims of crime compared to men. This misplaced fear may stem from the perception that many women have that they are more vulnerable to attack because of their weakness relative to males (Nellis 2009). It is this perception of vulnerability that makes women believe they are more likely to be attacked.

But studies have also shown that women are more likely than men to expect a terrorist attack in their country (May et al. 2011; Nellis 2009; Slovic 2002). This is a bit harder to explain as terrorism is almost never a one-on-one crime. Terrorism usually targets groups of people and women would be just as likely to be in a group targeted by terrorists than men. It may very well be that women fear terrorism more than men because of the socialization process both genders
undergo. Some have argued that women are socialized into thinking that they are the weaker sex and more likely to be victimized in general (Ferraro 1996). Men, on the other hand, are socialized to view themselves as protectors and not the passive objects of attacks. In any case, men are less likely to expect a terrorist attack in the country within the coming year.

Age

Research on the fear of terrorism has shown that older people are more likely to expect a terrorist attack in their country than younger people (Lemeyre et al. 2006; May et al 2011; Sjöberg 2005.) As in the case of general crime, the elderly are more likely than the younger people to expect to be victims. Similar to the case of women, this fear is not based on the reality of the situation because the elderly are less likely to be the victims of attack compared to younger people.

So what accounts for this heightened fear of terrorism among the elderly? Like with women, it seems to be the sense of vulnerability relative to younger people. Older people likely feel less secure and expect the worst because they believe they cannot defend themselves. While this fear is not based on objective reality as terrorists rarely search out vulnerable people on an individual basis but rather strike groups of people, and do not generally base it on their ability to fight back.

Thus, as with women, a sense of vulnerability increases the probability that the elderly think a terrorist attack will occur. Thus, we will test the hypothesis that the older one is, the more likely one is expect a terrorist attack in the country in the coming year.

The Incidence of Terrorism

One of the things we know from studies of perceptions of terrorism risk is that people who have been in the vicinity of terrorist attacks, tend to have higher expectations of crime risk than those who have not experienced a terrorist attack nearby (Lemyre et al. 2006). While it does not mean that those who live far away from a terrorist attack never fear one happening close to them, those localities or countries that have had direct experience with terrorist attacks, particularly in the
relatively recent past, are more likely to have citizens who will fear a terrorist attack again (Huddy, Khatib, and Capelos 2002; Marshall et al 2007).

This was shown in studies that were carried out after the 9-11 attacks on New York and Washington. Most of the research was carried out in New York, and showed that those who lived in Manhattan, near the world trade center, had significantly greater fears of further attacks compared to those who lived further away from “Ground Zero” (Marshall et al 2007). A study in Canada showed that Canadians have much less fear of terrorism compared to Americans because Canada has never been the site of a recent terrorist attack (Lemeyre et al. 2006).

The logic of these studies would indicate the more a country experiences terrorist attacks, the more its citizens would fear such an attack in the near future. This hypothesis will be tested in this study.

**Ideology**

Some scholars have explored the relationship between an individual’s ideology and her perception of the risk of a terrorist attack (Crowson, Debacker, and Thoma 2006; Echebarria-Echabe and Fernandez-Guede 2006; Jost and Napier 2012). The general argument of these scholars is that individuals with Right-wing authoritarian political views are more likely to view the world as a dangerous place. Right-wing individuals tend to higher expectations of attacks from the “enemy” and grow in their expectations, as attacks occur, even if they are not in their vicinity.

Jost and Napier (2012) argue that this Right-wing anxiety about attack is borne of a psychological need for security among some people. Right-wing individuals do not like a world with uncertainty and chaos and such conditions produce anxiety in them. Terrorism expressly intended to produce a world of uncertainty and fear and would, thus, feed into a Right-wing individual’s conviction that the world is filled with hostile individuals. This yields the hypothesis that those who self-identify as Right-wing, will be more likely to fear an imminent terrorist attack in their country than those who do not self-identify as Right-wing.
Data and Research Design

The next phase of this study is to test empirically our hypothesis outlined above, while controlling for alternative hypotheses. Given the limited nature of the dependent variable and the clustering of respondents within countries, we use ordered probit regression with clustered standard errors by country to estimate the effects of social trust and other factors toward fears of terrorist attack. Primo, Jacobsmeier, and Milyo (2007) argue that the clustering of observations within units can produce methodological problems, primarily overestimating the statistical significance of unit level variables. Of the two common approaches for dealing with clustered data, clustered standard errors and multi-level modeling, they find that clustered standard errors offer a more direct and pragmatic solution, especially when the researcher is analyzing a large number of cases. Given the large number of observations in our analysis and our focus on individual rather than country-level factors, we use clustered standard errors in our pooled analysis.

To determine the relative impact of the independent variables in explaining the variance in our dependent variables, fear of a terrorist attack in the country within the year, we also calculate the first differences. This means we calculate the change in the probability of a respondent indicating positive attitudes toward immigration when the independent variable of interest is increased from its minimum to its maximum value while holding all remaining independent variables constant at their mean or median values.

The data for the study was taken from the most recent European Social Survey (ESS) Round Five with interviews conducted between 2009 and 2010. The ESS data offers remarkable depth and breadth. Respondent answers to a similar set of questions across such a large number of European countries at approximately the same time provide considerable opportunities to conduct sweeping cross-national analyses. The individual-level data for this particular analysis was taken from surveys conducted in five of the European Union member states (as of 2009). One of the marked benefits of
the European Social Survey data set is the large number of cases. Just under 10,000 individual cases are examined in this study. The large number of cases helps solve the problem of multicollinearity that arises when variables such as education, income, and gender, which may be highly correlated, are used in the same model (Corlett 1990).

Independent Variables

The independent variables that we employ in this analysis come from our argument about the role of social trust in shaping fears of terrorism and the other major arguments made by scholars about that factors that influence citizen fears of terrorism.

In our analysis, we also seek to test a series of alternative hypotheses to determine their relative predictive power compared to our social trust explanation.

The role of respondent ideology is tested using a question from the ESS that asks the respondent to place herself on a ten point scale from right to left. The specific hypothesis to be tested is that those who place themselves closer to the most Left end of the ideological spectrum would be less worried about the likelihood of terrorist attack in the country in the coming year.

We are interested in assessing the role that the amount of education plays in influencing attitudes toward the probability of terrorist attack. To measure this variable, we use a question from the ESS that asks: What is the highest level of education you have received? Our hypothesis is that the higher the level of education attainment, the less likely one would be worried that a terrorist attack will happen in the country within the year.

To measure age, the respondent was asked: And in what year were you born? Gender was measured by the observation of the interviewer if the respondent was male or female and coded accordingly. Women are more likely than men to believe that their country will experience a terrorist attack in the year. The older an individual is, the more likely that person is to believe that her country will experience a terrorist attack within the year.
Media exposure was ascertained through a series of questions in the survey. The amount of TV the respondent watched was measured by a question that asked: *And again, on an average weekday, how much of your time watching television is spent watching news or programmes about politics and current affairs?* The respondent had a range of choices from 0, which was no time at all, to 7, which was 3 hours. Radio exposure was measured by a similar question: *And again on an average weekday, how much time listening to the radio is spent listening to news or programmes about politics and current affairs?* The respondent had a range of choices from 0, which was no time at all, to 7, which was 3 hours. For newspaper reading, the question asks: *And how much of this time is spent reading about politics and current affairs?* The respondent had a range of choices from 0, which was no time at all, to 7, which was 3 hours. Internet usage related to political news was measured by: *And now, using this card, how often do you use the internet, the World Wide Web or e-mail—whether at work or at home—for your personal use?* The respondent had a range of choices from 0, which was no access at home or work, to 7, which was used every day.

To measure incidence of terrorism, we have included a measure of the number of terrorist events that have occurred in a respondent’s country since 2002 according to the Global Terrorism Database housed at the University of Maryland.

We include a series of control variables as well. We believe it is important to control for a respondent’s citizenship status as this could affect how she thinks about terrorism. To ascertain the citizenship status of the respondent a question was employed that asked: *Are you a citizen of [country]?* Along the same lines, we control for immigrant status. The question used for this asks: *Were you born in [country]?”* It was also considered important to capture whether the respondent’s parents are/were immigrants. This was ascertained through: *Was your father born in this country? Was your mother born in this country?”* Further, we control for religious identity. We have created dummy variables for Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, Other Christian, Jew, Muslim, and Eastern Religions. We also have included two variables to control for the percentage of the respondent’s country that is Muslim (gained from Pew’s *The Future of the Global Muslim Population* Report in 2010) and is foreign-born.
(from the United Nations’ *World Population Policies*). These are included in case there is some effect caused by having numbers of immigrants or Muslims, who may be perceived with suspicion by some, within the national context.

**Results**

Given the limited nature of the dependent variable and the clustering of respondents within countries, we use ordered probit regression with clustered standard errors by country to estimate the effects of factors on support for immigrants. Primo, Jacobsmeier, and Milyo (2007) argue that the clustering of observations within units can produce methodological problems, primarily overestimating the statistical significance of unit level variables. Of the two common approaches for dealing with clustered data, clustered standard errors and multi-level modeling, they find that clustered standard errors offer a more direct and pragmatic solution, especially when the researcher is analyzing a large number of cases. Given the large number of observations in our analysis and our focus on individual rather than country-level factors, we use clustered standard errors in our analysis.

To determine the relative impact of the independent variables in explaining the variance in our dependent variable, we calculate the first differences. This means we calculate the change in the probability of a respondent indicating support for immigration when the independent variable of interest is increased from its minimum to its maximum value while holding all remaining independent variables constant at their mean or median values.

The results of the ordered probit analysis are presented in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Our primary explanatory variable—social trust—performs as predicted. Respondents who do not believe that others can be trusted are more likely to believe a terrorist event is likely to occur
in their country at the .01 level of significance. Thus, one’s view of humanity does play a significant role in determining how one predicts the likelihood of terrorist attacks.

Looking at education, we find that respondents with higher levels of education are actually more likely to fear a terrorist event happening in their country in the next year. Thus, our findings offer evidence to refute Lemeyre et al. (2006) and their findings in Canada in a previous study. Thus, the more educated fear a terrorist attack more than the less educated do. It could be that the more educated have learned more about terrorism than the less educated, the more educated have a heightened awareness and thus fear of them.

Turning to the third category of explanation, media attention, we find no support for these hypotheses. There is no relationship present between exposure to any form of national media (television, radio, newspaper, or internet) and fears of terrorism within a country.

Looking at gender, we do not find any significant relationship that would indicate that male respondents are any more likely to expect a terrorist event to occur within their country in the next year. With age, however, we do find a significant relationship (at the .10 level) that suggests older respondents are more likely to believe a terrorist event is likely to occur in the next calendar year. This confirms the often stated hypothesis that older individuals are more afraid of terrorist attacks than younger individuals.

If we look at a country’s past incidence of terrorist events, we find a significant relationship (at the .10 level) indicating that the more attacks a country has experienced, the more likely respondents are to believe another attack is likely in the coming year.

With ideology, we do not find any significant relationship between Left-wing and Right-wing identification and beliefs about the likelihood of a terrorist event occurring.

Turning to our control variables, we find no relationship between our two context variables—percentage of the country’s population that is immigrant and the percentage that is Muslim—and our dependent variable. With the religion dummy variables, we only find one significant relationship. Individuals who practice the Muslim faith are significantly less likely to
believe a terrorist attack is likely in their country within the next year. Given the demographic trends in Europe, this result is not overly surprising. Our four control variables examining citizenship and immigration status are all insignificant predictors in our model.

Given that we use ordered probit, the coefficients reported in Table 3 do not represent the marginal effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. As a result, we report the first differences separately within the table. Our most substantively important predictor is ultimately the incidents of terrorism within a country. If we move the number of incidents of terrorism from its minimum to maximum value while holding all other variables at their appropriate measures of central tendency, it increases the likelihood of a respondent believing a terrorist attack is likely in their country by 36.4%. Given that vast spread in the number of terrorist incidents within the countries in the study, it is not surprising that this variable would have the greatest substantive impact. Social trust is the second most substantive predictor. When we move respondents from least trusting to most trusting, we see a 5.1% decrease in the likelihood of believing a terrorist attack will occur in the country in the next year. Age and education are our other significant predictors and demonstrate less substantive impact (3.3% and 2.1% respectively).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study is premised on the argument that social psychology is a key factor in how one thinks about the likelihood of terrorist attacks. We posited that a person’s general view of other people will shape, to a great extent, if s/he expects people to want to do them harm. If a person has a dim view of humanity, i.e., does not think that others can generally be trusted, that person will be more likely to expect a terrorist attack in her country than a person who has more positive view of humanity and generally trusts people. It is logical to surmise that people who expect others to do them harm will be more likely to predict that terrorists are plotting to attack them.

This argument was born out in the analysis. We did, indeed, find that people with relatively lower levels of social trust are more likely to expect a terrorist attack in their country than those who
have relatively higher levels of social trust. This is an important finding for a couple of reasons.

First, one’s level of social trust is, by adulthood, largely immutable. Upon reaching adulthood, one does not fluctuate between trusting and not trusting people, for the most part. Thus, there is a significant portion of the population, albeit it will vary across country and across time, that is not reacting to the actual incidence of terrorism in their country when they calculate the odds that their country will be hit by a terrorist attack. They are instead basing this supposition on a basic psychological predisposition toward other people. We saw in the results of the analysis that the incidence of terrorism is the most important predictor of whether a person expects a terrorist attack in her country within the year, but there are those who expect a terrorist attack in countries that have not yet experienced terrorist attacks. Some people are simply psychologically primed to expect the worst of their fellow men, despite not having experienced harm first-hand. Those people are not likely to change from having that predisposition.

Second, terrorist attacks may have an impact on the younger generations that make them more likely to distrust others. Since we know that most people have their basic views on humanity shaped by their early adolescence, what happens during their childhood is crucial to their adult views on humanity. Children who experience violence and the threat of violence will likely grow up with a much more negative view of humanity than those who have grown up in an environment of peace and expectations that no one will harm them. Thus, those countries that are particularly plagued by terrorist attacks will raise a generation of adults who are relatively lacking in social trust and will likely be willing to accept harsher measures to prevent terrorist attacks.

The political implications of this study are important. Politicians who want to use the fear of terrorism to their advantage can take away from this study that there is a constituency in every country that fears terrorism, regardless of the actual incidence of terrorist events in their country. If a politician is keen to seek advantage from that fear, it is not hard to do. Witness the far Right parties in Nordic Europe, which has experienced relatively little terrorism, who have made careers playing on the fears of some citizens that their country is under imminent threat of attack. While
these parties have not gained popularity simply on the threat of terrorism, it has played a major role in their ascendency. If politicians can convince the fearful that they will protect them, they can often make careers out of it.

Another political implication of this research is that terrorism is changing the nature of politics in many of the countries examined in this study. While class cleavages and battles over distribution of resources will persist as important factors motivating politics, the politics of domestic security is rising in importance in many countries. As noted above, we may be witnessing the rise of a less trusting generation of voters in some countries. Those voters may shift more of the emphasis away from economic policy issues and more to issues of law and order and immigration. Those adolescents who develop a lasting distrust of others in their formative years may come to shape a very different polity in their adult years.
Table 1  Pooled Dependent Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you think a terrorist attack somewhere in [country] during the next twelve months is... (n = 51,653)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all likely</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very likely</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very likely</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2  Percent of Respondents Believing a Terror Attack is Likely or Very Likely

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pooled</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3  
**Fear of Terrorism Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>b</th>
<th>se(b)</th>
<th>First Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Trust</td>
<td>-.043</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Watch</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td></td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Listen</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td></td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Read</td>
<td>-.006</td>
<td></td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Usage</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td></td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td></td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidence of Terrorism</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td></td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Population Muslim</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td></td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Population Immigrant</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td></td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td></td>
<td>.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td></td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Orthodox</td>
<td>-.170</td>
<td></td>
<td>.216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>-.126</td>
<td></td>
<td>.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td></td>
<td>.284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>-.330</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Citizen</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td></td>
<td>.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td></td>
<td>.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in Country</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td></td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad Born in Country</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td></td>
<td>.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom Born in Country</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td></td>
<td>.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(constant)</td>
<td>-.637</td>
<td></td>
<td>.202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wald chi²(15) test  
4254.69  ***

Total observations (N)  
23492

Note. Results generated using Ordered Probit Regression with standard errors corrected for clustering on countries.

*p<.1,  **p<.05,  ***p<.01
References


