

Question 1: What is terrorism?

Terrorism is a contested term with hundreds of definitions from academia, law enforcement agencies and international organisations, among others. Even non-specialists have an idea of what terrorism is, though they lack a more precise, concrete, and truly explanatory description of the word. This lecture identifies the key elements that distinguish a terrorist act from other forms of political violence and analyse what factors affect how and when the term is used.

Discussion questions

1. What elements do you believe are necessary to define an act of political violence as ‘terrorism’?
2. Why do certain acts of violence get labelled as ‘terrorism’ whilst others do not?
3. What factors influence the use of the term ‘terrorism’ or ‘terrorists’?

Essential readings

- Brinson, Mary E., and Michael Stohl. 2012. “Media Framing of Terrorism: Implications for Public Opinion, Civil Liberties, and Counterterrorism Policies.” *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 5 (4): 270–90.
- Richards, Anthony. 2014. “Conceptualizing Terrorism.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37 (3): 213–36.

Further readings

- Antúnez, Juan Carlos, and Ioannis Tellidis. 2013. “The Power of Words: The Deficient Terminology Surrounding Islam-Related Terrorism.” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 6 (1): 118–39.
- Appleby, Nicholas. 2010. “Labelling the Innocent: How Government Counter-Terrorism Advice Creates Labels That Contribute to the Problem.” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 3 (3): 421–36.
- Baele, Stephane J., Olivier C. Sterck, Thibaut Slingeneuer, and Gregoire P. Lits. 2017. “What Does the ‘Terrorist’ Label Really Do? Measuring and Explaining the Effects of the ‘Terrorist’ and ‘Islamist’ Categories.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, October, 1–21.
- Erlenbusch, Verena. 2015. “Terrorism and Revolutionary Violence: The Emergence of Terrorism in the French Revolution.” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 8 (2): 193–210.
- Ganor, Boaz. 2002. “Defining Terrorism: Is One Man’s Terrorist another Man’s Freedom Fighter?” *Police Practice and Research* 3 (4): 287–304.
- Karaffa, C.A. 2015. “The Social Construction of Terrorism.” *Sociology of Crime Law and Deviance* 20: 67–87.
- Ramsay, Gilbert. 2015. “Why Terrorism Can, but Should Not Be Defined.” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 8 (2): 211–28.
- Shanahan, Timothy. 2010. “Betraying a Certain Corruption of Mind: How (and How Not) to Define ‘Terrorism.’” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 3 (2): 173–90.
- Weinberg, Leonard, Pedahzur, Edahzur, and Hirst-Hoefler, Sivan. 2004. “The Challenges of Conceptualizing Terrorism.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16 (4): 777–94.

Non-peer reviewed resources

- Crenshaw, Martha. "Understanding Terrorism: What is Terrorism?" *Stanford CISAC - Security Matters*, March 6, 2015.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHo15RLTTJc&t=0s&list=PLQuFFWGIjJmPCjCJuHemcQH7Ic5exSwEH&index=14>.
- Aaronson, Trevor. 2019. "Terrorism's Double Standard: Violent Far-Right Extremists Are Rarely Prosecuted as Terrorists." *The Intercept*, March 24, 2019.
<https://theintercept.com/2019/03/23/domestic-terrorism-fbi-prosecutions/>.
- "CrossTalk: Labelling Terrorists." *RT*, April 24, 2015.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC1gesfMrq4&t=0s&index=23&list=PLpalbbnmwJfGBwiHLDFNmVF3rPyUI8wM4>.
- "Defining Terrorism: A Conversation with Martha Crenshaw". *Terrorism 360. A podcast with Gary Lafree*, <https://soundcloud.com/user-823068075/martha-crenshaw>.
- "[Inside Story - Who defines 'terrorism'?](#)" *Al Jazeera English*, June 14, 2016.
- Terrorism Waves: A Conversation with David Rapoport." *Terrorism 360. A podcast with Gary Lafree*, <https://soundcloud.com/user-823068075/epi-8-terrorism-waves-a-conversation-with-david-rapoport>.
- Wolfendale, Jessica. 2017. "The Moral Questions in the Debate on What Constitutes Terrorism." *The Conversation*, December 12, 2017. <https://theconversation.com/the-moral-questions-in-the-debate-on-what-constitutes-terrorism-86990>.