INTRODUCTION

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What are the right questions when it comes to the empirical measurement of terrorism and counterterrorism? This issue is central in the development of a research agenda in this important field of inquiry. There are many facets to the study of terrorism and counterterrorism, not all of which can be quantified. In this edition of Canadian Diversity, we invited experts from Canada and abroad to share their observations and insights into the challenges associated with doing empirical work on terrorism and counterterrorism. The authors point to the considerable progress that has been made since the beginning of the 21st century in the design and collection of relevant data. While some identify the limits in quantifying the phenomenon, they generally acknowledge the need to do more empirical work. Paradoxically, while the publication invites contributors to reflect on the best questions, the ten essays raise their own questions and in doing so suggest several avenues for future research. The context or circumstances within which the measurement of public opinion occurs is critical when it comes to terrorism and counter-terrorism. Moreover, any effort to do successful trend analysis regarding public perceptions requires a set of questions that carefully considers the proposed strategies and desired objectives of policy-makers in this highly sensitive area of inquiry.

Detailed surveys of public perceptions of Canadians around security, terrorism and counter-terrorism conducted by the firm Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS) provided a focal point for certain essays. The objective of the surveys was to establish a set of questions that could form the basis for monitoring/tracking perceptions over time so as to provide researchers, policy-makers and community leaders with an ability to periodically assess such issues as individual and group concerns over national security, perceptions about the threat of terrorism both in Canada and abroad, trust in communities and institutions, perceptions of the state of intergroup relations, perceived justification for terrorism, the degree of readiness to report suspicious activity, and the perceived effectiveness of various legal and educational responses to terrorism. Multiple closed questions were employed to provide insights. A November 2012 survey invited respondents to define the notion of terrorism and to identify initiatives aimed at combating the phenomenon. An additional closed question focused on the perceived root causes of terrorism. The first essay summarizes the results of the two surveys.

Ghosh and Bhui comment on the 2012 data sets from the Association for Canadian Studies noting that concerns over terrorism appear to be more acute amongst from the older cohort which appears more concerned with ethnic conflict and holds more negative attitudes towards Muslims. They recommend that research be carried out so as to help better identify the source of this antipathy and whether it is solely related to concerns about terrorism or other underlying causes. They suggest research is needed to further comprehend the role of the media in shaping perceptions of terrorism. For his part, Soroka explores the literature on public attitudes about terrorism and counter-terrorism. He recommends further research on public support for increased investment in counterterrorism measures, how people believe that sacrificing civil liberties will reduce terrorism and increased attention at the intersection between attitudes about Muslims and attitudes about terrorism and counter-terrorism.

Bartlett and Miller note that while measuring the success of counterterrorism is essential, it is extremely difficult. The authors describe as a 'measurement paradox' the surge in interest after a terrorist attack and the decline in interest where prevention is deemed as more effective. They suggest three things that need more attention when it comes to research on prevention work; first, recognizing that there is no one single way to measure, second, that there is a greater need to focus on social media to understand attitudinal changes and their impact on policy effectiveness and, finally, that evaluations of counter-terrorism effectiveness must be communicated in a way that makes sense to the population. Hence, the overall work of security and intelligence services must be made public as much as possible.

Freilich and Chermak express surprise at the relatively few efforts to employ open source methodologies in studying terrorism. They provide an overview of the process used to create the United States Extremist Crime Database (the first of its kind national database to track violent and financial crimes committed by domestic extremists). They describe a number of critical lessons learned in the process of creating the ECDB. Amongst the strengths of the ECDB is that unlike projects that are static and collect data at one point in time, it is a large-scale ongoing effort. The ECDB provides updates as soon as new information becomes available.

Chenoweth remarks that since 9/11, research on terrorism and counter-terrorism has evolved considerably. Amongst the positive developments that she highlights are the increased volume and quality of shared knowledge, the improved data availability and access, and a narrowing gap between research and policy. A number of key challenges remain in the field. One challenge is that some researches exclude the role played by the State, which some scholars do take into account when they study terrorist behaviour. Often, for example, the type of regime is not identified (e.g. democratic, authoritarian, etc.), nor are military capabilities, human rights records, or foreign aid outlays as potential causes of terrorism. Chenoweth also refers to

the relatively few efforts put on comparing the effectiveness of different policies. To overcome these challenges, she recommends the use of disaggregated data in order to improve empirical techniques and findings, the avoidance of relying on a single data source and the use of a variety of technologies.

Littlewood contends that while Canadians generally regard the threat of terrorism to be low in terms of direct attacks, the use of Canada as a base to support terrorist activities illustrates the complexity of the threat. He focuses on recent research on 'foreign fighters' in an effort to highlight some potential implications for Canadian counter-terrorism efforts. Despite not recently enduring a systematic terrorist campaign, he points out that Canada has a long history of terrorism. He adds that Canada often has to deal with 'Other People's' Wars', such as the 1985 bombing of Air Flight 182. Multicultural societies must thus be attuned to the potential for terrorism and the problem of Canada exporting terrorists to conflicts abroad. Given this, he concludes that a dense web of transnational counter-terrorism mechanisms will need to be put in place in the foreseeable future.

Veldhuis and Kessels look at the deradicalisation and re-integration of convicted extremist offenders. They attribute the lack of data about the extent and nature of the threat to uncertainty over the effectiveness of relevant policies. They urge researchers to move beyond anecdotal evidence and untested assumptions towards comprehensive data analysis that inform the development and implementation of rehabilitation and reintegration programs for violent extremist offenders.

For his part, Hull observes that there has been steady progress in the application of quantitative research to the study of terrorism. In the aftermath of 9-11, there was a determined effort to expand empirical research on terrorism and introduce indices to quantify terrorist attacks. He refers specifically to the University of Maryland's Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) that has logged over 100,000 terrorist attacks globally between 1970 and 2012. He notes that, while quantitative databases are useful for policy makers and counter-terrorism practitioners, issues arising from regional dynamics, and amongst other factors, varying government responses to terrorism call for prudence when making forecasts on the basis of a single dataset.

Amarasingam and Stewart contend that the national surveys undertaken by the ACS reveals that there are important follow up questions that need to be asked. They contend that more precision is needed when respondents are asked to define terrorism as their responses are insufficiently clear. It is necessary to better understand what is meant by decline when respondents agree that there has been a reduction in terrorism. Finally, more options need be made available when asking a closed question about the root causes of terrorism. They suggest that the closed format/forced responses made available in the ACS survey reinforce the choice of "religious fundamentalism" by 52% of respondents. The authors stress the value of qualitative work to provide more in-depth insight into public views around terrorism.