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Impact of a Refugee Crisis on the Increase of TERRORIST Incidents

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Abstract

It is not news that terrorism incidents have consistently been occurring around the world since the 1970s with an increase in the recent years. In 2015 alone, there were 11,774 terrorist attacks worldwide resulting in approximately 28,300 casualties and 35,300 people injured. Therefore, it is not a surprise that terrorism has become one of the most controversial issues that our society currently is facing. One of the many debates surrounding the topic of terrorism is the causes and motives. This is partly because of the lack of a unified definition of terrorism. Therefore, the definition of terrorism must be explored.

In Europe, there has been an increase in terrorist attacks in the past few years. Specifically, after the Syrian refugee crisis began in April 2011, terrorist attacks have almost doubled from 2013 to 2015. However, there are very few studies that examine the relationship between a major refugee crisis and terrorism. The study reviewed two major studies with contradictory findings. One study suggested that in countries hosting refugee terrorist attacks increased, while the other found no link.

The purpose of this study is to explore whether a sudden refugee crisis, such as the Syrian refugee crisis, has an impact on the increase of terrorism incidents. Data compiled by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism at the University of Maryland were analyzed. This data included terrorism incidents (e.g., bombings, armed assaults, and assassinations) and comprised of incidents reported within 120 months during January 2006 to December 2015. ARIMA interrupted time-series analysis was used to measure the data.

In an attempt to address gaps in the literature regarding the link between refugee crises and terrorism, the study hypothesized that the flow of the Syrian refugees in Europe was positively associated with the number of terrorist incidents in Europe. The findings indicated that 10 months after the Syrian refugee crisis there was a significant increase in terrorist attacks. Lastly, Policy implications, limitations and suggestions for future study were discussed in discussions and conclusion.

[Keywords] Syrian Refugee Crisis, Terrorism in Europe, ARIMA Interrupted Time-Series Analysis, Intervention, Control Mechanism

1. Introduction

Since 1970, terrorism incidents have been increasing around the world. According to Country Reports on Terrorism in 2015, there were 11,774 terrorist attacks worldwide; there were approximately 28,300 killed, and

35,300 were injured[1]. In light of this situation, terrorism is debated to be one of the most serious problems that our society is currently facing. In response to these massive attacks, law enforcement and policy makers

have been focused on implementing counterterrorism strategies. The West has been developing counterterrorism policies since the end of the 1970s. In order to implement successful counterterrorism strategies, political will is an essential notion. For instance, political will allows the West to strike out against terrorist groups and facilities, put pressure on nations that were assisting terrorism, apply the rule of law to terrorists as criminals, and extend the international discussion of terrorism[2].

Terrorism issues have received considerable academic attention over the past several decades. To date, some scholars have studied the link between social structural factors (political situation, state of the economy, regime type, ethnic cleavages, and physical terrain) and terrorism[3][4][5][6][7][8]. Only a few studies examine the link between the flow of refugees and terrorist incidents. Even though Europe has been the center of the Syrian refugee crisis in the recent years, there is no empirical research on the link between the Syrian refugee crisis and terrorism in Europe. Thus, the current study is designed to empirically assess the effect of the Syrian refugee crisis on the level of terrorist activity in Europe. The main goal of exploring this topic is to bring more accuracy and precision towards academic research to help in establishing effective counterterrorism strategies.

The following sections present an overview of terrorism and other related issues as they pertain to this topic. In order to elaborate on the topic of this study, a review of the relevant literature is briefly presented. Additionally, the methods used in the study are explained. Lastly, an application of the results is provided to offer suggestions for future research and possible policy implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Background of terrorism and the Syrian refugee crisis

In order to better explain the breadth of this study, the definition of terrorism must be explored. In the book of "Perspectives on Terrorism", Freedman and Alexander (1983) contend that terrorism is defined as "the use of violence when its most important result is not the physical and mental damage to the direct victims but the psychological effect produced by someone else; terrorism also involves the emotion and the motivation of the terrorist; violence may result in death, injury or destruction of property, or deprivation of liberty[9]." Conversely, Martin (2006) defines terrorism as politically motivated violence, which normally targets civilian and administrative government entities with an intention to terrorize someone else, instead of the direct victims[10].

Recently in Europe, there have been multiple instances of terrorist attacks. According to Europol, in 2015 European nations experienced an increase in terrorist attacks compared to the previous year[11]. They reported a total of 211 completed, foiled, or failed terrorist attempts of which approximately 103 were in the United Kingdom alone and about 75 were in France[11]. Additionally, over 1070 individuals were arrested in the European Union for terrorism-related offenses[11]. <Figure 1> indicates that the number of terrorist incidents which occurred in Europe from 2008 to 2015 (372 in 2008; 346 in 2009; 393 in 2010; 291 in 2011; 361 in 2012; 418 in 2013; 1172 in 2014; 1005 in 2015) and the number of asylum seekers in Europe.

Figure 1. Terrorism incidents in europe vs. asylum seekers in europe (2008-2015).

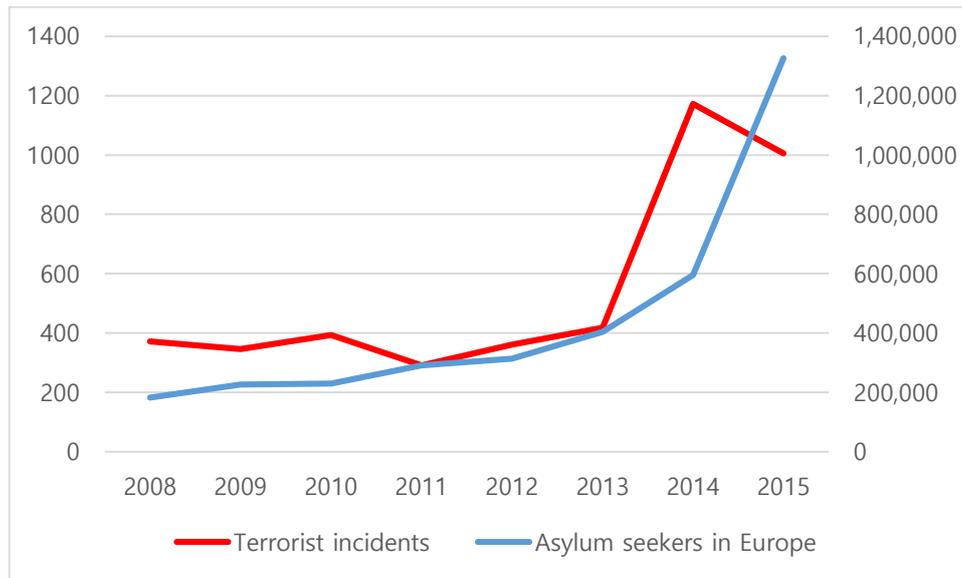
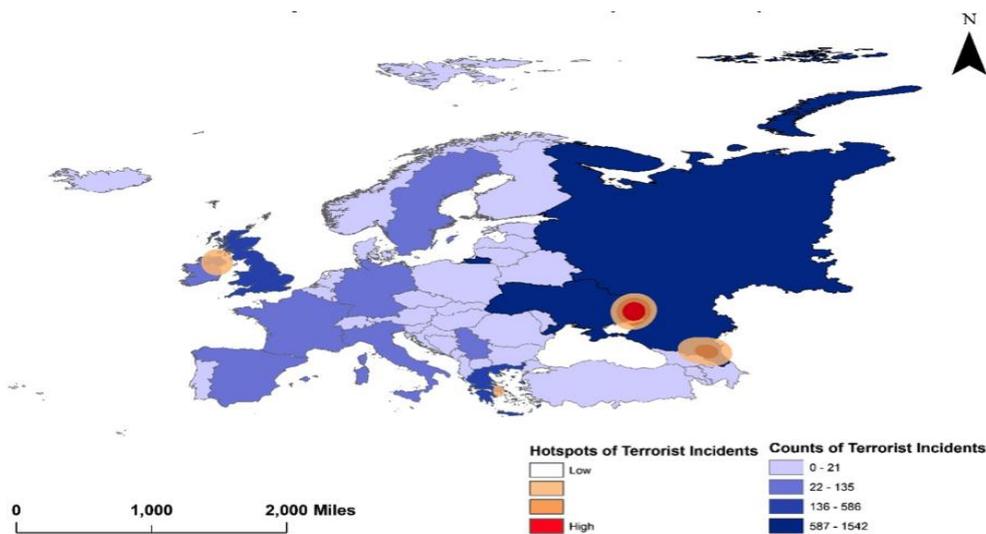


Figure 2. Terrorist incidents in europe (2006-2015) .



Using a Geographic Information System (GIS) produced <Figure 2>. <Figure 2> illustrates the 4 nations where the most terrorist incidents have occurred in the: Russia, Ukraine, Greece, and United Kingdom. This map also demonstrates that there are spatial concentrations for terrorist attacks. Interestingly, the most common hotspots for terrorist attacks in Europe are clustered in the region of Eastern Europe (e.g., Russia and Ukraine) specifically the areas closest to the region of the Middle East Asia (e.g., Syria).

Many European countries are also facing asylum issues. The number of asylum seekers in Europe has increased in recent years with a particularly large increase in 2015. <Table 1> and <Figure 3> show the total number of first-time applications for each year since 2008. Due to uprisings against President Bashar al-Assad in 2011, Syria has been at war forcing millions of Syrians to seek asylum[12]. Initially, Syrian refugees sought asylum mainly in neighboring countries, but as the

war continues and more Syrians fear persecution, asylum seekers have also turned to European countries[12]. As a result of this increase in asylum seekers, European nations have been faced with foreign policy issues, and political controversy has risen between members of the European Union[13]. For instance, with Greece's economic crisis, the separation of the United Kingdom from the EU, tensions between different European nations and Russia, and terrorist threats, the Syrian refugee crisis adds more fuel to a fire that has been burning for quite some time[13].

This Syrian refugee situation has created tensions between members of the EU because many European nations are clashing in regards to how to respond to the situation. On the one hand, countries like Germany and Sweden have received backlash from other EU nations because they have provided asylum to approximately 900,000 refugees. While countries like France and the UK, on the other hand, have provided asylum to less than 20 percent of that[13]. Additionally, response to this crisis has resulted in further nationalistic sentiment from many European countries, and while they continue to debate whether to shut down their borders, other problems are emerging.

As discussed earlier, it is not clear whether or not the rise of terrorism attacks in Europe is directly linked to the Syrian refugee crisis. However, because refugees from other countries are also seeking asylum, many religious and political tensions may arise between refugees from different backgrounds[14]. Thus, according to Fargues (2014), some refugee camps and shelters may become potential hubs for terrorist group activity[14].

2.2. Research on refugees and terrorism

Little attention has been given to empirically examining the relationship between refugees and terrorism. Currently, there are only two main empirical studies assessing the link between refugees and terrorism. First, the work of Choi and Salehyan (2013) represents the most salient research on refugees and terrorism[3]. They examined whether an in-

flux of refugees impacts domestic and international terrorism. Using a cross-sectional time-series analysis of data collected in 154 countries between 1970 and 2007, the research found that countries hosting refugees experienced increases with both domestic and international terrorism[3]. Second, Randahl(2016) also examined the relationship between the number of refugees in a country and the incidence and magnitude of terrorist attacks in the same country[15]. The study employed panel data for 161 countries for the years 2002-2012. The findings revealed that countries hosting refugees did not experience a significant increase in the number of terrorism incidents in the 161 countries studied[15]. To address the gaps in the literature regarding the link between refugee crises and terrorism, the following hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis. The Syrian refugee crisis in Europe was positively associated with the number of terrorist incidents in Europe. As more refugees seek asylum in European nations, terrorist attacks was increased.

3. Methods

3.1. Data

This study used data compiled by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism at the University of Maryland. The analyzed data, which included acts of terror (e.g., bombings, armed assaults, and assassinations) and is comprised of a 120-month period from January 2006 to December 2015.

3.2. Measures

Dependent variable. The dependent variable in this study is the frequency of terrorist incidents per month. The total number of terrorist incidents in Europe was 4,660 and the average number of terrorist incidents per month was 39 for 10 years.

Intervention variable. The effect of the Syrian Crisis on the level of terrorist attacks in Europe is analyzed as intervention variable. The terrorist attacks occurred before April

2011, were coded as zero following the (k-1) model.

3.3. Analytic strategy

Auto Regressive Integrated Moving Average Model (ARIMA) is the proper statistical technique for the present study since “ARIMA models posit a random shock, at, as the driving force of a time series process, Y_t ” [16]. McCleary, Hay, Meindinger, and McDowall (1980) emphasize the principle regarding “the present input, at, will have a greater impact on the present output than any earlier input” [16]. In other words, the impact of a past occasion (or input) on present occasions diminishes as time passes [16]. For example, ARIMA models have been utilized to assess the impacts of new traffic laws [17][18][19][20] or the impacts of gun control laws [19][21][22][23]. Overall, the ARIMA model estimated the effect of the Syr-

ian refugee crisis on the level of terrorist activity (output). The type of interventions was the abrupt and constant change.

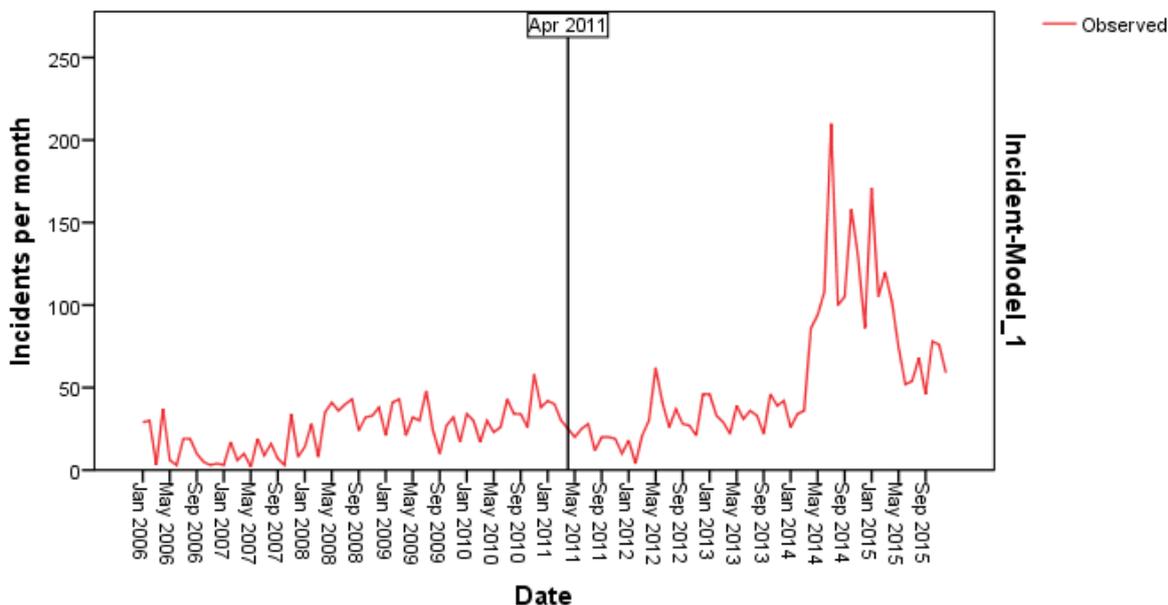
An ARIMA model considered in this study has the following form [24]:

$$\hat{Y}_t = \mu + Y_{t-1} - \theta_1 e_{t-1}$$

4. Results

The present study begins with a descriptive analysis of the data by constructing a figure that illustrates the number of the terrorist attacks in Europe over the 120-month period (see Figure 3). The vertical line represents the flow of the Syrian refugees to neighboring countries on April 2011. <Figure 3> demonstrates that the effect of the intervention was shortly delayed because some terrorists in refugee groups might need to take a time to naturally spread into the European countries.

Figure 3. Terrorist incidents in Europe over time (N = 120 months, 2006-2015).



ARIMA model was employed to analyze whether the intervention (Syrian refugee crisis) effects on increasing terrorist incidents in Europe. After constructing the univariate ARIMA model, the automatic multivariate

transfer function procedure in SPSS 22.0 to assess the impact of Syrian refugee crisis on the number of terrorist incidents in Europe. Model description is ARIMA (0|2) and Ljung-Box Q statistic (18) is 13.805 with a p-value

(.681). <Table 1> indicates that the intervention (Syrian refugee crisis) is statistically significant with the positive effect on the frequency of the terrorist incidents in Europe.

The findings of this study also suggest that terrorism incidents increased by 66% per month approximately 10 months following the Syrian refugee crisis.

Table 1. ARIMA model parameters.

					Estimate	SE	t	p-value
Incident model_1	Incident	Natural log	Difference		1			
			MA	Lag 1	.656	.075	8.719	.000
	Intervention	No transformation	Delay		10			
			Numerator	Lag 0	-1.411	.511	-2.760	.007
				Lag 1	-2.026	.510	-3.972	.000
		Difference			1			

5. Discussions and Conclusion

In response to the need for literature involving the connection between a refugee crisis and terrorism, the present study hypothesized that the Syrian refugee crisis resulted in an increase in the number of terrorist incidents in Europe. In fact, the findings of this study reveal that the effect of initiating the Syrian refugee crisis was shortly delayed but the frequency of the terrorist incidents in Europe has dramatically increased 10 months after this refugee crisis. It must be noted that the Syrian refugee crisis was a causal factor that led to an increase of terrorist attacks in Europe. As a consequence, the findings of this study support Choi and Salehyan (2013)'s study[3].

Overall, the results of the current study provide an insight into the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on terrorism in Europe. Policy implications can be derived from the findings of this study. Some argue that individual nations actively should host all the Syrian refugees without any hesitation in order to protect the refugees' human right. Indeed, it is crucial to protect and relieve people from the desperate situations. However, it is possible that some terrorist groups manage to penetrate refugee camps and shelters, causing political or religious violence such as

terrorism and guerrilla strategies. Accordingly, the current study suggests that before individual nations in Europe admit hosting these asylum seekers, they implement a higher level of control mechanisms to check security risks of refugees in order to avoid conflating terrorism with refugees in Europe. In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks, the United States and Canada attempted to improve control mechanisms to diminish the threats of terrorism. Control mechanism efforts included: "1) imposition of visa requirements on travelers from specific countries; 2) pre-screening abroad to interdict undocumented arrivals in partnership with transportation companies; 3) limiting the number of refugee arrivals by implementing a safe third country mechanism; 4) the use of Advanced Passenger Information (API) lists with full reservation details to facilitate interdiction at airport/port/train station of entry by disembarkation teams to detect and prevent entry of improperly documented, undocumented, and unwanted arrivals; 5) screening at airport/port/train station of entry to attempt to identify security risks in partnership with other countries through sharing information; 6) pre-screening of refugee claimants by the security and intelligence service; 7) using high-tech systems to detect security risks and fraudulent documents

(passports, visas, and refugee identity documents)” [25]. In order to reduce conflation of terrorism in refugee camps and shelters, European countries can benchmark the control mechanisms implemented by the United States and Canada. The methods used by the United States and Canada can help enforce security levels against the potential increase of terrorist attacks within refugee groups.

There is a limitation of the present study that must be addressed. The present study has assumed that the number of terrorism incidents by non-Syrian refugees has not varied in the years 2006-2015, whereas the number of terrorist incidents by the Syrian refugees has been varied within that time frame. This is because between 2006-2015, there have not been other interventions that have affected terrorism with the magnitude of the Syrian refugee crisis. Thus, the study did not distinguish terrorist incidents committed by the Syrian refugees from terrorist incidents committed by perpetrators belonged to other terrorist groups. In other words, there was uncertainty regarding the exact number of terrorist incidents fostered by the Syrian refugees and non-Syrian refugees. If so, it may be somewhat limited to generalize the findings of this study to articulate the link between the Syrian refugee crisis and terrorism in Europe. To address this possibility, future studies should use the specific data of terrorist incidents occurred by the Syrian refugees. Nevertheless, the present study makes significant contributions to the criminological literature because this is the only study to empirically examine the link between the Syrian refugee crisis and terrorist incidents in Europe. Moreover, this study may provide law enforcement and policy makers a roadmap for these infrequently unveiled issues: refugees and terrorism.

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