

## **Terrorist Group Survival as a Measure of Effectiveness**

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### **Introduction**

Some terrorist groups only carry out one attack and then disappear, while others wage campaigns of terror for decades. Why do some terrorist groups last much longer than others? A growing body of research provides in-depth empirical evaluation of this important question (Cronin 2006, 2009; Daxecker and Hess 2013; Gaibulloev and Sandler 2014). However, there has been little effort to consolidate the findings that exist thus far.

The topic of terrorist group endurance is pertinent to the theme of the special issue, the effectiveness of terrorism, because endurance can be seen as a component of effectiveness. Terrorist groups need to survive before they can hope to achieve political success. “The minimum goal of any organization is survival,” argues Crenshaw (1987), drawing on classics of organizational theory (Wilson 1974). In spite of the importance of understanding terrorist group longevity, there is still confusion regarding why some groups last longer than others. A dozen or so quantitative analyses of global samples of terrorist groups have sought to understand group endurance, as this manuscript explains, but results are mixed. Few variables are consistently associated with group endurance.

One set of factors that shows some association with group longevity involves interorganizational dynamics – in particular, terrorist group cooperation and competition. Some studies find cooperation helps group survive, and other studies find a link between competition and group endurance. Cooperation and competition are interesting because research has shown that terrorist group alliances are associated with group lethality (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008, Horowitz and Potter 2014), and terrorist group competition has been argued to contribute to innovations and more extreme violence (Bloom 2004, 2005; Conrad and Greene 2015).

Both types of intergroup relationships are fairly common among terrorist organizations. Examples can be seen in the Syrian conflict. The local al Qaeda affiliate, al Nusra Front, cooperates with various terrorist groups in the country (Mapping Militants Project, n.d.). This cooperation offers substantial benefits to al Nusra Front, including access to the arms that Western countries have given the relatively moderate groups (Hubbard 2015), and the increased power of joint attacks (Lister 2015a, The Daily Star 2014). Throughout the world, almost half of all terrorist groups have cooperated with other terrorists at one point or another (Phillips 2014).

Regarding competition, al Nusra Front has engaged in violent rivalry with Hezbollah and ISIS, among other groups. After Hezbollah took over a town in Syria, al Nusra Front took revenge by using a car bomb in Lebanon to kill a Hezbollah leader (Al Jazeera 2014). Tit-for-tat attacks have been a frequent occurrence in the rivalry between the groups. As in other contexts, the competition does not seem to be destroying either group. In fact, it is

extremely rare that a violent rivalry seriously harms terrorist organizations. On the contrary, there is some evidence that competitive relationships can lead to innovation, new motivations, and other benefits for involved terrorist organizations (Bloom 2004, Phillips 2015a).

The focus on interorganizational relationships, as well as the outcome of terrorist group longevity, is consistent with the literature's increased emphasis on organizational dynamics of political violence (Christia 2012, Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour 2012; Shapiro 2013). Quantitative studies have increased substantially in recent years, building on important early research (Crenshaw 1985, 1987), and introducing new sources of data (Jones and Libicki 2008, Asal and Rethemeyer 2008). Organizational studies are important because they acknowledge that violent nonstate actors differ in important ways, and their heterogeneity is helpful for explaining violence.

The next section argues that group longevity is a form of organizational effectiveness. The third section explores the literature on terrorist group longevity, and shows that studies have not found many factors consistently associated with this outcome. The fourth section describes cooperation among terrorist groups, and explains how cooperation can help groups endure. The fifth section explains competition among terrorist groups, and argues that this type of relationship can counterintuitively contribute to group longevity. Competition encourages civilians to pick a side, helps terrorist groups to learn, provides new incentives for group members, and can spoil peace talks that might otherwise lead to groups' demise. The final section offers suggestions for additional research on terrorist group longevity and interorganizational relationships.

## **1. Group longevity as one measure of effectiveness**

Terrorism is the premeditated use or threat to use violence by individuals or subnational groups to obtain a political or social objective through the intimidation of a large audience beyond that of the immediate victims (Enders and Sandler 2012, 4). Terrorist groups are subnational political organizations that use terrorism (Phillips 2015b, 231). Terrorist group longevity can be seen as one dimension of "effectiveness." There are many ways to measure effectiveness, but a group surviving to bomb another day indicates a degree of accomplishment.

Longevity is a crucial objective for terrorist organizations, as the quote in the introduction to this article suggests: "The minimum goal of any organization is survival" (Crenshaw 1987). Similarly, Krause (2013) argues, "The fundamental purpose of any political organization—armed or unarmed, state or non-state—is to maximize its strength and ensure its survival." Continuing to accomplish the goal of survival, then, is an achievement in itself. It is especially an accomplishment since many terrorist groups do not even last a year (Rapoport 1992), although this depends on the sample analyzed (Jones and Libicki 2008, Phillips 2015b). Given the challenges of terrorist group longevity, continued survival can be considered a degree of effectiveness because groups need to continue to exist before they can even consider accomplishing other types of goals, such as political change. Independently of survival as a means to other types of effectiveness, survival can also

become a goal of its own, in the Weberian sense (Della Porta 1995, 84), or for intragroup psychological reasons (Crenshaw 1981, 396-397).

Beyond terrorism, other areas of research consider group endurance an important outcome, a basic objective of any group. Organizational studies scholars frequently analyze the longevity of licit groups – such as labor unions or manufacturers (Hannan and Freeman 1988, Wagner 2013). Organizational studies generally assume the importance of longevity for groups (Simon 1964). A classic study of organizational mortality uses “success” as a synonym for “survival” (Baum and Oliver 1991, 215). Scholars of social movements justify their focus on movement longevity by arguing that it “is consistent with the emphasis in the organizational literature on survival as the primary goal of organizations” (Cress and Snow 1996, 1096). Assuming that survival is a primary organization goal, then as long as groups survive – while their peers fall to the wayside – they are achieving a degree of success, accomplishing one of their goals.

Another reason longevity can be considered a type of effectiveness is that it is an indicator of achieving important organizational goals. This is especially relevant given Krause’s (2013) argument that there are three types of effectiveness: tactical, organizational, and strategic. Regarding organizational effectiveness, he argues that terrorist groups fortify themselves with the mobilization of recruits, funds, and support. Weinstein (2007, 42) argues that recruiting is the “classic challenge” of rebel groups, and other resources help these groups recruit. This mobilization of resources is essential for group endurance, so I posit that continued survival an indicator of success at these goals. If terrorist groups are unable to accomplish mobilization goals and survive, they are unlikely to be able even try to accomplish their strategic or political goals. Therefore groups that are effective in terms of endurance are more likely to be successful with other types of goals.

[Table 1 about here.]

Are long-enduring terrorist groups more successful in other regards, such as achieving political goals? The notion that endurance itself could contribute in important ways to groups’ eventual political or strategic success is supported by some data, shown in Table 1. Jones and Libicki’s (2008) data on hundreds terrorist organizations codes how each group “ended” if it was not still in operation at the end of the group’s study, 2006. One type of ending is “victory,” such as being on the winning side of a civil war, or being granted concessions sufficient enough to cause the group to give up terrorism. For the 405 terrorist groups that ended at some point between 1968 and 2006, the average survival was 7 years, as Table 1 indicates. However, for the groups that ended via “victory,” their average survival was almost 12 years. Endurance is a goal of its own, but it also may give terrorist groups crucial tools they need for their eventual strategic success.

Group longevity seems to be associated with goal achievement by other types of political groups, as indicated in Table 2. The Minorities at Risk project has data on organizations that claim to represent ethnic groups in the Middle East (Asal, Pate, and Wilkenfeld 2008). Ethnopolitical groups, like any political group (including terrorists), generally hope to have an impact on politics, and one way to measure that impact is if the group has been given

concessions by the state. Negotiations are a step toward concessions, often denied by states, so they are also worth analyzing.

[Table 2 about here.]

Among Middle Eastern ethnopolitical groups, the mean age of groups that receive concessions from the state is 33 years. Groups that engaged in negotiations, but did not receive concessions, have an average age of 30 years. However, the mean age of groups that never entered talks with the state or receive concessions is 22 years. This is consistent with other data: Cronin (2009, 212-215) analyzed negotiations in her study of terrorist organizations, and found a strong association between group age and negotiations with the state. In general, older groups are more successful, in political terms. States face many actors that want attention, including a seat at the negotiating table. The state may eventually give in to some degree, but it appears that this is less likely with newer groups. Organizations need to survive before they are likely to achieve some strategic or political goals. As a result, longevity in itself is a degree of effectiveness.

## **2. Research on militant group longevity**

The past 10 years has seen a surge in analysis of terrorist group longevity, particularly quantitative studies. Earlier research set the groundwork for longevity research, from theoretical studies of groups (Crenshaw 1987) to case studies (Ross and Gurr 1989, Cronin 2006) to analysis of descriptive data on dozens of terrorist organizations (Crenshaw 1991). However, the introduction of global databases of hundreds of terrorist groups paved the way for researchers to look at trends in essentially the universe of terrorist groups in the modern era of international terrorism.

Monographs by Jones and Libicki (2008) and Cronin (2009) explored the various ways that terrorist groups might end, and looked for some factors associated with ending in general. The books include a great deal of important information, including the finding that very few terrorist groups end as a result of military strategies. The way most groups have ended was either via police work or through integration into non-violent politics (Jones and Libicki 2008). Each book drew on this historical exercise to infer lessons that could be applied toward efforts against al Qaeda. More recent books have also studied group longevity. Weinberg (2012) explores how groups can end either via failure, success, or transformation. Della Porta's (2013) book on clandestine political violence contains a chapter on ways that groups end, including both group and individual factors.

[Table 3 about here.]

A wave of recent quantitative research seeks to determine what factors are associated with longevity generally, often looking at global samples. Many of the studies are described in Table 3, in terms of what independent variables were found to be associated with longevity in the various studies. The studies chosen are included based on their comparability: they are of global samples, using some of the same independent variables. The table includes, to my knowledge, every article with multivariate analysis of terrorist group survival on a global sample that controls for both organizational and state attributes. Studies without

state-level attributes (Vittori 2009, Pearson et al. 2015), for example, are not as comparable with the others. Some variables are measured somewhat differently in distinct studies, but they are comparable enough to include. It is important to note that not every single variable from each study is shown in the table. For space reasons, only variables analyzed in at least several studies are included.

Interestingly, Table 3 suggests that very few factors are associated with terrorist group longevity across multiple global studies. The variable that is linked to group longevity in the most studies is group size, in terms of the number of members of the group. This variable is positively related to group endurance in six of the seven studies that include it.<sup>1</sup> Group size is said to be a measure of group strength. The fact that strong groups are more likely to survive is consistent with the idea that longevity is a type of success. Group size is probably endogenous to many other factors, so this is worthy of more nuanced research.

Another variable positively related to group longevity in multiple studies is the population size of the country that the group is primarily operating in or targeting. It is statistically significant and associated with longevity in four of the eight studies that include it. Country population is theorized to encourage group longevity because it is more difficult for the state to successfully crack down on groups when there is a large population in which they can hide. Scholars could think more creatively about what population represents, and how it might condition the impact of other factors.

Interestingly, another country-level variable stands out for its *lack* of relationship with group longevity: state democracy. Country regime type is said to be crucial for explaining why some countries experience more terrorism than others (e.g., Chenoweth 2013), but it does not appear to be related to terrorist group survival. This suggests that causes of terrorist group endurance are distinct from causes of terrorism more generally. It is also noteworthy that other factors theorized to be important for political violence – such as country ethnic fractionalization, or religious goals for terrorist groups – are not robustly related to terrorist group longevity. As a result, as we seek to understand terrorist organizations, we need to move beyond explanatory factors that are theorized to be important for terrorism more generally, and think about specific organizational dynamics.

This lack of consistent results should encourage researchers to go back to the theoretical drawing board, to think about what other factors might explain terrorist group survival. One issue, as discussed, is that a number of the independent variables included in longevity models are important for explaining terrorism, in terms of the number of attacks in a given country or country-year. However it seems likely, especially given the evidence in Table 3, that different types of factors explain terrorist group longevity. A second and related issue is that of data availability. Organizational attributes are difficult to gather for clandestine groups, especially for all groups around the world over decades.

A number of independent variables used in various studies are not shown in Table 3 because they are only use in one article, and space issues prevent the inclusion of every variable ever used. However, some of the other independent variables found to be important in single studies include state sponsorship (Carter 2012), repression (Daxecker and Hess 2013), and leadership removal (Price 2012). Both sponsorship and repression

have complex conditional relationships with group survival, but leadership removal seems to be unconditionally associated with a decreased likelihood of terrorist group survival. Other studies might want to include at least leadership removal as a control variable in their own analyses.

Two variables shown in Table 3 that do have some association with group longevity, but are not included in many articles, are terrorist group alliances and inter-organizational competition. Of the three studies to include a measure of terrorist group alliances, all three find it to be related to group longevity. Results are more mixed for competition, but it is noteworthy that competition is measured distinctly in different studies. For example, some studies measure competition as the number of terrorist groups in the same country (Gaibulloev and Sandler 2013, Young and Dugan 2014), while others measure it as direct violence between terrorist groups (Phillips 2015a). Cooperation and competition, as interorganizational relationships that might affect terrorist group longevity, are explored more below.

### **3. Alliances and longevity**

In June of 2014, 10 members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), strapped with suicide vests and armed with rifles and grenades, attacked Karachi's Jinnah International Airport, killing dozens of people in addition to themselves. Investigators learned that the IMU carried out the attack with the support of another terrorist organization. The IMU supplied the personnel, and the Pakistani Taliban provided the local support network and helped to plan the attack. This was only one of a series of attacks where the IMU and the Pakistani Taliban teamed up to assault various Pakistani targets, from the governor's mansion to a local airbase (Roggio 2014).

This is just one example of terrorist groups working together to carry out attacks. Around the world, terrorist organizations train together, help each other with logistical support, and fight side-by-side in joint attacks. Sometimes this cooperation is between groups with similar goals, like the groups attacking Jinnah International Airport. However, there are also many examples of, for example, left-wing groups paring up with ethnonationalist groups (Karmon 2005). A growing body of work looks at cooperation between militant groups, from groups strictly described as terrorist groups (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008, Moghadam 2015) to rebel groups in civil war (Fotini 2012). For example, Moghadam (2015) argues that there are four types of terrorist group affiliations, ordered from lowest to highest degree: transactional cooperation, tactical cooperation, strategic partnerships, and mergers.

Why do terrorist groups work together? There are a number of hurdles to terrorist group cooperation (Bacon 2015). Bond and Bapat (2012) note that there are risks to terrorist group cooperation, as groups cannot trust each other. Additionally, cooperation could make groups more vulnerable to counterterrorism efforts, as government infiltration of one group could lead to information about the group's allies as well. Cooperation can turn into dependence or competition (Mendelsohn 2011, 42– 44). Some terrorists, such as Peru's Sendero Luminoso, have avoided cooperation with other groups (Halloran 1987).

In spite of the potential drawbacks of terrorist group cooperation, many groups engage in it. This is likely to be for several reasons, initially outlined in a previous article (Phillips 2014). First and most directly, interorganizational cooperation facilitates resource transfers between militant groups. Second, cooperation helps groups carry out more and more impressive attacks. These reasons together can help terrorist groups survive.

Regarding cooperation between terrorist groups helping them to share resources, this is consistent with research on other types of organizations. Wiewel and Hunter (1985) suggest that “resource exchange” is one of the most important ways that groups benefit from interaction. McAdam (1996) argues that *allies* are one of the important attributes of the opportunity structure for social movements. Lichbach (1995, 255–256) argues that “coalitions” between dissident groups can help with resource sharing. When sharing resources, groups do not have as much of a need to try to mobilize new members or gather other assets on their own. Cooperation can help groups meet their needs relating to personnel, training, weapons, and information, among other essentials.

For example, Lashkar-e-Taiba reduced its personnel needs through cooperation. When it wanted to attack more in India’s primary cities (as opposed to Kashmir), it could have recruited new members and built up a new logistics infrastructure. Instead, it teamed up with groups in the areas it wanted to attack (Tankel 2009). Latin American terrorists, like groups elsewhere, have conducted joint training and collaborated on kidnaping to raise funds. Latin American terrorist groups also cooperated with European groups (for example, Johnson 1993). Loyalist groups in Northern Ireland coordinated to order arms from abroad—a transaction that likely would have been less efficient if each group tried to interact with weapons dealers on its own (The Guardian 1988).

Interorganizational ties are also important to helping groups learn new tactics, such as suicide bombing (Horowitz 2010). In the Syrian Civil War, there is widespread cooperation among terrorist groups including resource sharing. Much to the chagrin of the United States, weapons it donated to “moderate” groups have been shared, as discussed above, with the al Qaeda-affiliated al Nusra Front (Lister and Razek 2014). These examples show how collaboration helps groups obtain resources and skills, which are crucial to groups’ continued longevity.

Cooperation can also help groups attack more effectively, which then helps them gather resources and survive. The IRA used its connections to the Red Army Faction to kill off-duty British troops in West Germany (Owen and Evans 1988). In Northern Ireland around the same time, the British police reported that the Ulster Defence Association and Ulster Volunteer Force were “jointly planning assassinations” (Dettmer 1989). More recently, Colombia’s FARC cooperated with the IRA, and FARC attacks “increased in their proficiency after the arrival of IRA members” (Seper 2002). The FARC has also planned attacks with ETA on Colombian officials in Spain, and the groups enjoyed “mutually beneficial logistical and tactical connections” (Berti 2009). Across the globe, terrorist organizations with more allies tend to be more lethal (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008, Horowitz and Potter 2014, Pearson et al. 2015).

Attacks are a different outcome than group longevity, but increased violence can serve as propaganda to help recruit new members or show the group's relevance. This in turn can contribute to group endurance. Hoffman (2006, 247-249) argues that a terrorist group's ability to attract attention is often based on the success of their attacks. The "success" of attacks can be measured various ways, but joint efforts can help make attacks possible as well as more lethal. Increased visibility through attacks can then draw recruits and donations (e.g., Bloom 2004). An invigorated attack campaign can also pressure the government to offer concessions, which can provide essential support to terrorist groups' continued efforts. Overall, cooperative ties contribute to resource aggregation, the facilitation of attacks, and the related mitigation of mobilization concerns, which in turn should help terrorist organizations survive.

Quantitative tests find support for the assertion that terrorist group cooperation is associated with group endurance (Price 2012, Phillips 2014, Pearson et al. 2015). This relationship holds even when taking into consideration factors such as the number of members in the group, its primary motivation (religion, ethnicity, etc.), and attributes of the country in which the group primarily operates. Analysis shows that the apparent effect of alliances on group endurance is not simply a function of older groups that happen to develop alliances when they are old. Many groups develop cooperative ties when they are young, and this helps them to survive. Furthermore, it seems that alliances provide the most longevity benefits in environments where terrorist groups usually have a difficult time surviving – countries with strong counterterrorism capabilities, and authoritarian countries (Phillips 2014).

#### **4. Competition and longevity**

Cooperation is of course not the only kind of interaction among terrorist groups. Groups also frequently compete. While cooperation often happens transnationally and even globally, competition usually occurs within one country. Sometimes this competition can manifest itself as organizations contend for popular support, as often happens between militant groups seeking to represent the same ethnic group, such as Palestinians, Tamils, or Northern Ireland's Catholics or Protestants (e.g., Bloom 2004). Popular support is important because it can lead to more resources including members and donations. Krause (2013, 272-273) argues that rivalry can help determine success at the organizational level, as groups attack others to improve their own position among the various groups competing for support.

Competition between organizations with similar political goals, such as groups seeking a nation state for their shared ethnic group, or groups seeking to bring communism to a country, can be described as *intrafield rivalry* (Phillips 2015a). Examples include the Tamil Tigers and Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization in Sri Lanka, and Fatah and Hamas in the Palestinian territories. This competition between groups seeking support from the same wider community can lead to more extreme tactics, a process describe as "outbidding" (Bloom 2004, 2005). A second type of competition is *interfield rivalry*. Interfield rivalry is violent competition between groups with substantially different or opposite political goals, such as right-wing vs. left-wing organizations, or groups representing distinct ethnic communities. Examples include the FARC and the Autodefensas in Colombia, the PKK

and the Grey Wolves in Turkey, and the IRA and Ulster Defence Association in Northern Ireland. Sometimes interfield rivalries involve pro-state groups, as in the cases of the Autodefensas and the Grey Wolves, as well as the Anti-Terrorist Liberation Group in Spain. It is debatable to what extent these groups are “terrorist groups” or actual state entities (e.g., Romero 2003, Pope 1992, Woodworth 2002).

Whether intrafield or interfield, competition can also be somewhat indirect, as groups compete in terms of ideas or by denouncing each other. Competition often takes a more direct form, however, as groups directly attack each other. For example, as discussed in the introduction, al-Nusra Front has fought in a violent rivalry with various groups. Left-wing groups of Colombia attacked each other for years, while also fighting with the right-wing or pro-status-quo Autodefensas. In Northern Ireland, the IRA attacked state targets, but also frequently engaged in violence with groups representing Protestant communities.

Competition among militant groups is increasingly the focus of scholarly research. Abrahms (2008, 90-92) argues that “terrorist fratricide” is one of the important puzzles of terrorism. Staniland (2012) shows that such behavior can encourage group members to defect and join pro-state militias. Competition can lead to more violence, or new types of violence (Bloom 2004, 2005; Chenoweth 2010; Conrad and Greene 2015; Cunningham, Bakke & Seymour 2012). What should we expect regarding group longevity?

Previous research outlined four ways that competition should affect group longevity (Phillips 2015a). First, these relationships can encourage unaffiliated civilians to support a group. Violent rivals could directly coerce support of civilians, or the support could come because attacks on the group inspire public sympathy. Regarding coercion, during conflicts, uninvolved civilians are sometimes forced to seek protection with a particular group, which can then compel them to provide support (Humphreys & Weinstein 2006). Regarding competition leading to new public support, but not coerced by the group, there is evidence for this as well: A study of Northern Ireland residents finds that political violence victimization, or having a friend or family member victimized, makes a person more likely to support militant groups and oppose weapons decommissioning (Hayes & McAllister 2001). Right-wing terrorism in Argentina in the early 1970s increased public support for the left-wing groups (Gillespies 1995: 214), and anti-ETA terrorism in the 1980s increased sympathy for ETA (Reinares & Alonso 2007: 125).

A second way that having a violent rival can help terrorist groups is that the competition can encourage groups to learn and innovate. Competition enables groups to learn new tactics as they engage each other, and it forces them to adopt new tactics if they want to survive. Terrorist groups update their behavior as new information becomes available (e.g. Enders & Sandler, 1993; Im, Cauley, and Sandler 1987; Jackson et al., 2005), and they are especially likely to learn from groups with which they have a relationship. Kenney (2007) shows that “competitive adaptation” occurs as illicit networks and governments interact, and such evolution is also likely between same-type actors. Direct competition between terrorist groups can lead to innovations (Bloom, 2004), consistent with research on firms (Porter 1985; Barnett and Hansen 1996).

The third way that violent rivalries should contribute to terrorist group longevity is by providing new incentives for group members and potential members. Crenshaw (1985), drawing on Wilson (1974), argues that non-material incentives such as “purposive” and “solidary” incentives can be important for terrorist group mobilization. Purposive incentives are the sense of purpose provided to members by the organization’s original political goal. However, once a group has a violent rival, a new, additional purpose appears: fight the rival. Related to purposive incentives, the focus on the “other” can bring together group members, deepening their bonds. These are “solidary incentives,” to use Wilson’s (1974) term. The paradoxically helpful nature of intergroup violence regarding group solidarity is comparable to arguments that state repression can reinforce the cohesiveness of terrorist groups (Post 1987, McCauley 2006).

The final mechanism through which violent rivalries can contribute to terrorist group longevity is in spoiler situations (Pearlman 2009; Stedman 1997), by disrupting peace talks that could otherwise cause groups to disarm. Spoiler behavior often occurs between moderates and extremists, where the latter try to undermine peace efforts (Kydd & Walter 2002). Sometimes an extant group attacks a relatively moderate group. In other cases, a facing the prospect of possible government talks, radicals splinter off of a primary group to form a new, more extreme group (Buono de Mesquita 2005). In Northern Ireland, more extremist republican groups such as the Irish National Liberation Army or the Irish People’s Liberation Organization increased their attacks (against various types of targets) whenever the relatively moderate IRA was talking to the British government. This was done to intentionally sabotage the peace process (McKittirick and McVea 2000, 218). These dynamics are all spoiling among intrafield rivals.

Spoiling also happens between interfield rivals, such as when groups attack to prevent concessions to their enemies. For example, the Autodefensas in Colombia repeatedly attacked to prevent concessions to their rivals the ELN and the FARC (e.g., Romero 2003; 24, 125). Such violence can cause the government to sever negotiations that could have led to voluntary group demobilization. A group in a violent rivalry might attack its rival, the state, or random civilians to spoil peace talks involving the rival. Regardless of who is attacked, spoiler behavior sometimes shuts down peace talks. As a result, terrorist groups that might be close to giving up violence in exchange for concessions instead endure.

The association between terrorist group violent rivalry and group endurance is supported by global tests on hundreds of groups (Phillips 2015a). The empirical analyses take into consideration the possibility that it could be only ex ante strong or durable groups that have rivalries. Taking many factors into consideration, groups with rivals are generally more likely to endure than groups without rivals. However, additional tests suggest that when rivalry types are divided into intrafield and interfield, only interfield rivalries – competition between groups with substantially different political goals – are associated with increased endurance. Some other studies have found competition related to longevity as well (Price 2012).

The idea that rivalry contributes to group endurance, as opposed to destroying them, is also consistent with analysis of descriptive data on terrorist groups (e.g., Jones and Libicki 2008, Cronin 2009) and process tracing regarding how groups actually end. Analysis of such data

suggests that there are very few cases of groups actually ending as a direct consequence of violent rivalry. Perhaps the only clear cases were in Sri Lanka in the 1980s, when the Tamil Tigers or LTTE inflicted so much damage on intrafield rival groups that they all got out of the terrorism business. This is consistent with the notion that competition is especially beneficial for the “top dog” group in a country (Young and Dugan 2011). In this one case, the “top dog” was able to eliminate rivals, but such annihilation by another terrorist group is rare.

A note regarding the importance of the counterintuitive finding that competition is usually associated with endurance: Many governments have supported or at least turned a blind eye to violence between terrorist groups, hoping that it weakens or possibly destroys them. Sometimes states directly support one of the rivals – as is currently occurring in the Syrian civil war. There has also been at least partial state support for right-wing or pro-status-quo terrorist groups in many countries. The finding that terrorist group rivalry seems to offer benefits to involved militant organizations should raise serious questions about government policies to aid or tolerate such competition.

## **Conclusion**

This essay has sought to draw attention to the growing line of work on terrorist group longevity, and argued that longevity can be considered one measure of organizational effectiveness. It showed evidence that this is likely to be true. It also systematically reviewed recent quantitative global analyses, suggesting that few factors consistently explain terrorist group longevity. This includes variables that are important in the study of terrorism generally, such as democracy. It then considered arguments for why terrorist group interactions – cooperation and competition – seem to play an important role in group endurance. It also provided illustrative examples of terrorist group cooperation and competition throughout the world. Overall, this suggests that for explaining an organizational phenomenon such as group survival, organizational factors are crucial. *Interorganizational* factors in particular, group relationships, seem important for group endurance.

A number of questions remain for future research. First, what are some other measures of militant group effectiveness, and are they related to interorganizational cooperation and competition? Some possible measures of effectiveness include group size, lethality, popularity, fundraising achievements, and types of government concessions. Of these outcomes, interorganizational relationships have been only been analyzed with respect to organizational lethality. Terrorist group cooperation is associated with group lethality (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008, Horowitz and Potter 2014), but the link between competition and lethality is less clear (Findley and Young 2012, Nemeth 2013). How do cooperation and competition affect other types of group effectiveness, such as group size or group popularity?

Second, group longevity was argued to be a type of organizational effectiveness, but Krause (2013) argues that militant groups can also be evaluated regarding their tactical and strategic effectiveness. Are these three types of effectiveness related? Are groups that survive (an element of organizational effectiveness) also especially likely to carry out

attacks well (tactical effectiveness) and achieve political goals (strategic effectiveness)? Is this the case with terrorist groups with allies or terrorist groups in rivalries?

Third, while this manuscript discussed terrorist group longevity, should cooperation and competition have similar effects on the endurance of rebel groups engaged in civil wars – and on civil wars in general? A growing literature looks at interorganizational dynamics of civil conflict, with a strong focus on group fragmentation (Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour 2012). Some work suggests this leads to civil war longevity (Cunningham 2006). How else do interorganizational dynamics affect civil war longevity? What are the differences between the endurance of particular groups, and the durability of the wider conflict?

Fourth, it was shown that there are few factors consistently associated with terrorist group longevity. However, this conclusion comes from analyses of hundreds of terrorist groups, basically all of those known to exist in the world over decades. If smaller samples of terrorist groups are used, do we see different conclusions? For example, perhaps it is worthwhile to divide the many small terrorist groups from the larger organizations such as the FARC, the IRA and the Islamic State. Industrial organization literature tells us that group dynamics, including endurance, is quite different between small and large firms (Geroski 1995). Does the same difference occur with terrorist groups? This would make sense in terms of analyzing more comparable units, and also because of the related issue of debates about differences between terrorist groups and other types of violent actors (De la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca 2011).

Overall, terrorist group longevity is an important aspect of group effectiveness, but it is unclear why some groups survive much longer than others. Interorganizational relationships seem to play a role, but much work remains to fully understand terrorist group endurance. Continued research on this subject can shed light on important puzzles related to organizational dynamics of terrorism, including the effectiveness of terrorist groups.

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## Tables

**Table 1. Duration of non-surviving terrorist groups in Jones and Libicki (2008)**

Ending type	Number of groups	Average duration
“Victory”	27	12 years
All other ending types	378	7 years
Total	405	7 years

**Table 2. Duration of Middle Eastern ethnopolitical organizations**

	Number of groups	Average duration
State made substantial concessions	3	33 years
State made some concessions	19	33 years
State negotiated with group	19	30 years
State never negotiated with group	68	22 years
Total groups	109	26 years

**Table 3. Variables' relationships with terrorist group longevity in select global studies**

	Country pop.	Country wealth	Country democ.	Country ethno-diversity	Group size	Trans-national group	Group religious goals	Group alliances	Inter-group competition
Blomberg, Engel, and Sawyer 2010	+	+	Mixed	n.s.					
Blomberg, Gaibullov, and Sandler 2011	Mostly n.s.	Mixed + and n.s.	Mixed + and n.s.	Non-linear	+	-	+		
Carter 2012		-	n.s.			Mostly +	Mixed + and n.s.		
Price 2012		-	n.s.		n.s.		n.s.	+	Mostly +
Daxecker and Hess 2013	+	n.s.	n.s.		+	n.s.	Mostly n.s.		
Gaibullov and Sandler 2013	Mixed + and n.s.	Mostly n.s.	Mixed + and n.s.	Mostly n.s.	+	Mixed + and n.s.	+		Mixed + and n.s.
Gaibullov and Sandler 2014	Mixed + and n.s.	Mostly n.s.	Mostly n.s.	Mostly n.s.	+	Mixed + and n.s.	Mixed		Mixed + and n.s.
Young and Dugan 2014	Mixed + and n.s.	-	n.s.	n.s.		+			-
Phillips 2014	+	n.s.	n.s.		+		n.s.	+	
Phillips 2015a	+	n.s.	n.s.		+	Mixed + and n.s.	n.s.	+	+

Notes: n.s. = not statistically significant. Variables shown are those used the most frequently; not every variable from each study is shown. Empty cell means the study did not include the variable. Not all variables are measured the same way.

## Note

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<sup>1</sup> The one study that did not find a statistically significant relationship was that of Price (2012). This study measured size differently than other studies, using the estimated size of the group, via one of four (later logged) values: 10, 100, 1,000, or 10,000. The other studies use an ordinal variable (0-3) instead of the logged larger numbers. Price's article does not contain description of all control variable results, but he kindly sent me a more detailed description of the variables and results. I thank him for this contribution.