

Definitions of Terrorism

Title 22, U.S. Code (State Department, CIA)

“premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents”

The State Department adds...

“The term ‘non-combatant’ ... is interpreted to mean, in addition to civilians, military personnel (whether or not armed or on duty) who are not deployed in a war zone or a war-like setting.”

U.S. Code of Federal Regulations

“the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives”

U.S. Department of Defense

“the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies. Terrorism is often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs and committed in the pursuit of goals that are usually political”

U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency

“the use of force or violence against persons or property in violation of the criminal laws of the United States for purposes of intimidation, coercion, or ransom”

United Nations Security Council

“criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism, are under no circumstances justifiable by considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other similar nature”

Common Criteria:

- Motive
 - Political
 - * What counts as a political motive?
 - * In what ways are religious motives political?
 - The “bake sale” rule
 - * Some organizations have stated doctrines/manifestos, and so everything they do might be considered terrorism.
 - * Is it more useful to refer to “terrorist organizations” or “terrorist actions”?
- Perpetrator
 - State vs. nonstate
 - What about state-sponsored violence?
- Target
 - Discriminate vs. indiscriminate
 - * Is an attack against a particular group of people terrorism? A hate crime? Both?
 - * Are assassinations terrorism? To whom are they sending a message?
 - Civilian vs. combatant
 - * Who is a combatant? How do we know?
- Tactics
 - Violence against people vs. against property
 - * Is burning a mosque terrorism?

Law suggests that we think about terrorism not as a list of criteria, but as either...

- a **strategy**
- an act of **symbolic and provocative violence**, or
- a **cultural construct**

Which approach do you find most useful? Most in line with how most people think about terrorism? Why?