

Human Rights Violations in the Name of Countering Terrorism

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Abstract

Why do some states abide by international law to counter terrorism, while others routinely violate human rights and use broad definitions of terrorism to suppress political dissent? The lack of data differentiating human rights abuses in the name of counter-terrorism from other settings have impeded comparative investigations on this topic. To fill this void, I analyze new global data on counter-terrorism human rights violations using a supervised machine learning approach and latent variable model. I show that countries are more likely to violate human rights in the context of counter-terrorism when there is greater political exclusion of ethnic groups, especially in democracies. Framing out-groups as terrorists can be particularly useful for governments that wish to stifle dissent, provide legality for abuses, and avoid public backlash for violations. This study demonstrates the effectiveness of violent framing strategies and the limitations of democratic institutions regarding human rights.