



Does Target-Hardening Result in Deadlier Terrorist Attacks against Protected Targets? An Examination of Unintended Harmful Consequences

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Summary

Research within the counterterrorism discipline has suggested that there are potential unintended negative consequences of situational terrorism prevention strategies such as displacement of attacks towards less secure targets. Hsu and McDowall seek to answer whether target hardening strategies result in more attacks against aviation and US diplomatic targets. The authors find no increase in the number or proportion of incidents after target hardening, suggesting no evidence for the negative unintended consequences of situational prevention strategies.

Methods

Data for this study comes from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) to include total counts of the number of incidents targeting aviation targets and US diplomatic targets from 1970 to 2001. The cutoff of 2001 was to measure the impact of target hardening measures prior to the counterterrorism changes as a result of the 9/11 attacks. Two major target hardening interventions were examined; 1973 with increased airport security worldwide and 1985 with enhanced protection of US embassies and diplomats. Using the Box-Tiao method in time series analysis, the study measures the total count of incidents that result in at least one casualty as well as the proportion of incidents measuring the number of incidents with a casualty divided by the number of total attacks for each target.

Results

The time-series plots show no significant difference in the number of attacks after the intervention strategy for both aviation and diplomatic targets. The statistical analysis found the same results, suggesting no significant difference after target hardening strategies were employed in 1973 and 1985. As a result, the authors suggest that increasing number of attacks against hardened targets is not an unintended consequence of situational prevention as some previous research might suggest.

Implications

This is important for law enforcement and counterterrorism efforts that employ situational crime prevention strategies. The research further expands the literature on the diffusion of future crime as a result of reducing opportunities. The authors urge for future studies to replicate this model post 9/11 to examine the effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts and situational prevention.