

INCIDENTS OF TERRORISM IN THE UNITED STATES, 1997–2005

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ABSTRACT. The geography of terrorism remains underexplored. By focusing on the spatial patterns of terrorist attacks, the settings and land uses in which attacks occur, and the methods used to perpetrate violence, this analysis helps build a theory of terrorism geography. Between 1 January 1997 and 11 September 2005, 178 terrorist incidents occurred in the United States. Analysis of these incidents suggests three insights. At the national scale, terrorism in the United States clustered in large urban areas, with regional differentiation of terrorist motives and targets. At the scale of individual attack sites, terrorist motivations pinpointed offices, clinics, and public spaces; right-wing violence, military, government, and infrastructural targets; and religious terrorism, commercial and special land uses. At the scale of individual interactions, terrorists crossed paths with victims in various ways. For example, the 2001 anthrax-attack letters and lone-wolf terrorism created alternative intersections of perpetrators with victims. *Keywords:* land use, methods, targets, terrorism, United States.

Spaces can be at the heart of terrorist conflicts. Radical Islam's interest in Mecca and Medina is an example of a place-based spatial focus. In the 1960s Puerto Rican nationalist groups such as Los Macheteros executed attacks in the United States to promote independence of their homeland. In this sense, land control can be the strategic focus of terrorist campaigns. Past terrorist incidents in the United States targeted specific places—for instance, women's health clinics, ski resorts, or office buildings—in a strategic way in order to deliver messages to citizens and governments. Terrorists often perpetrate violence close to coveted real estate, and terrorist attacks reflect strategic spatial considerations embedded in targets and in methods used to commit crimes.

In any violent event, terrorist actors must either personally intersect the individuals, groups, or physical facilities targeted or have deposited timed explosives, firebombs, or other attack vectors designed to harm bystanders or property. Donald Black argues that the “geometry of terrorism” involves physical proximity combined with high social polarization, but his theory of collective terrorist violence says nothing about the spatial characteristics of terrorist targets or the functions performed at attack sites (2004). How and where do terrorist actors intersect victims in space? Criminology's routine activities theory predicts that criminal attacks occur where unguarded targets—that is, the victims of crime—go about their daily business of working, living, and playing (Felson 1998). A twist of terrorism geography is that places are often the victims of terrorist attacks, as when places are targets because they host some activity—a government building, a health clinic, or a pristine natural environment, for example. The geography of terrorism requires a broader conception of victimization in which the places of terrorist incidents are an

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