

Research Note: Using the ITERATE and DOTS Databases

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Abstract

For more than three decades, Vinyard Software's two ITERATE (International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events) datasets have set the standard in events research for terrorism researchers. It has recently been supplemented by the DOTS (Data on Terrorist Subjects) biographies project, which covers all terrorists, supporters, and other individuals mentioned in the ITERATE project.

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For more than three decades, Vinyard Software's two *ITERATE (International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events)* datasets have set the standard in events research for terrorism researchers. It has recently been supplemented by the *DOTS (Data on Terrorist Subjects)* biographies project, which covers all terrorists, supporters, and other individuals mentioned in the *ITERATE* project.

The textual version of *ITERATE* covers the genesis of contemporary international terrorism from 1960 through today. It is available in MSWord/WordPerfect format, and is based upon the chronologies published by Ed Mickolus, Todd Sandler, Jean Murdock, Peter Flemming and Susan Simmons with Greenwood Press and Iowa State University Press.

ITERATE's numeric version, in Excel format, covers 1968 through today, coding the incidents discussed in the textual chronologies. It combines a family of four distinct but interrelated files, which count the most salient components of international terrorism:

- Common File 1968–2007
- Hostage File 1968–2007
- Fate File 1968–1987 (Update in Progress)
- Skyjack File 1968–1987 (Update in Progress)

All variables and values for the data have remained constant. New values, however, are added with the emergence of new terrorist groups and types of terrorist activity.

ITERATE data are derived from Vinyard's textual chronology of international terrorism, which employs inter alia an exhaustive search of major media, research, news and information services. A partial list of media sources includes *AP*, *UPI*, *Reuter*, *CNN*, *MSNB*, *AFP*, *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *LA Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *al Jazeera*. The chronology also incorporates information obtained from interviews with

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government officials, scholars, and former hostages/others involved in international terrorist incidents. Additional sources include relevant manuscripts and scholarly publications dealing with the subject. Finally, the chronology uses many official government chronologies, including those published by the NCTC, FBI, CIA, US Department of State, and FAA. All of these sources have been consistently used since the inception of the database. To ensure accuracy, *ITERATE* is updated daily and corrected constantly. Coding of the chronology ensures a high level of transparency wherein researchers are able to review and dissect individual cases from both a textual and numerical context. Researchers can also select subsets of the data for review, and alter variable values in specific cases.

The largest and the most comprehensive of the *ITERATE* files is the Common File, which covers 1968–2007 (we're working on this year's data as well). Its key features include:

- 41 years of continuous coverage
- 13,087 cases (1,295,613 characters)
- 42 variables accounting for:
 - 187 locations (states/territories/protectorates) of international terrorism
 - 9 distinct types of venues of international terrorism
 - 26 identifiable types of incidents
 - Over 1,300 different terrorist groups
 - 164 nationalities of terrorists and terrorist groups
 - 175 nationalities of victims (states, IGOs and NGOs)
 - Over 100,000 immediate victims
 - Over 50,000 victims wounded
 - Over 20,000 fatalities
 - Logistic success of international terrorist incidents

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Key features of other files include:

- 14 variables in the Fate File, covering:
 - Nationalities involved
 - 29 distinct fates of terrorists such as death, escape, jail sentence and asylum
 - Extradition requests and their outcomes
- 41 variables in the Hostage File, covering:
 - Hostage-taker behavior including demands for media coverage, prisoner releases, political change and ransom
 - Types, amounts, and sources of ransom
 - Terrorist behavior involving deadlines
 - Terrorist behavior toward hostages
 - Types of negotiators and their behavior
 - Outcome of incidents
 - Length of incidents
 - Nationalities involved
- 27 variables in the Skyjack File, covering:
 - Types of aircraft involved (118 identified)
 - Airlines involved (over 200)
 - Location of incidents
 - Number of victims and casualties
 - Types of weapons employed
 - Duration of incidents
 - Outcome of skyjackings

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The *ITERATE* dataset is a particularly valuable research tool for dissecting the dynamics of international terrorism. Each of its four files can be used separately, or in conjunction with one another. Incident codes for each event enable immediate cross-reference, with data from the Fate, Hostage and Skyjack Files, expanding incident information found in the Common File. This dataset is designed with a high degree of functionality so that it is compatible for use with other non-terrorism related data. For instance, analysis of much of the *ITERATE* data can be combined with various social, political, economic or geopolitical indices. Data from *ITERATE* are easily selected out or copied for research directed at one specific aspect of international terrorism and its relationship to external forces. Incident numbers used in the numeric version of *ITERATE* are cross-referenced in the textual version, which gives even more detail on the specifics of incidents. New variables can be added to the existing dataset by the user to enhance specific types of analysis. *ITERATE* readily lends itself to addressing a wide array of research questions at many different levels of analysis. Examples of these include:

- Annual patterns of international terrorism
- International terrorism frequency and intensity
- Victims of international terrorism
- *Modus operandi* of international terrorist groups
- International terrorist group behavior *vis-a-vis* theatres of operations and national targets
- Tangible outcomes of international terrorist incidents
- Primary venues of international terrorism
- Benchmarks of international terrorist activity
- Theoretical frameworks and typology development

ITERATE provides a wealth of information for those who wish to analyze international terrorism beyond selective or anecdotal references. *ITERATE* is a dynamic dataset that continually serves as a basis for new and companion data. Functional aspects of this dataset permit significant means for exploring the intricacies of international terrorism and identifying the underlying factors that ultimately define this form of violence. Hundreds of scholars, journalists, government officials, and security practitioners in two dozen countries have successfully and effectively used

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ITERATE over the last 30 years to gain a more thorough comprehension of international terrorism and bolster extant knowledge through the presentation of empirical evidence.

Vinyard's new dataset, *DOTS* (Data on Terrorist Suspects), provides textual biographic information on every terrorist covered by the chronology. The 15,000-item database serves as a compendium of biographies of leaders, perpetrators, financiers, defendants, detainees, persons of interest, conspirators, and others, including aliases and Arabic honorifics or *kunyas*, receiving mention in any of the international incidents appearing in *ITERATE* and other sources from 1960 to the present day.

The datasets are available via Vinyardsoftware@hotmail.com on the Internet or via postal services at Vinyard Software, Inc. 2305 Sandburg Street, Dunn Loring, VA 22027-1124. Vinyard's new website, www.vinyardsoftware.com, is under construction. It will include examples of research conducted by Vinyard affiliates and clients using *ITERATE* and *DOTS*, and a discussion/social network database for terrorism researchers to develop collaborative projects.

Further Reading

Among the projects that have drawn on *ITERATE* and *DOTS* are examinations of terrorism's impact on growth, studies that quantify how policy can cause unanticipated substitutions, indicate trends and seasonality in terrorism, identify and quantify policy effectiveness, indicate the determinants of hostage taking success, measure the impact of political rights on terrorism, investigate the event dynamics of hostage taking, etc.

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Publications by Other Scholars

A recent Internet search of ITERATE and DOTS-based terrorism research generated more than 23,000 citations. This is a very small sampler of such research:

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