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Kirssa Cline Ryckman and Mike Ryckman. "All Politics is Local: The Domestic Agenda of Terror Groups and the Study of Transnational Attack." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 2:1 (February 2017): 55-73. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogw026>.

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Review by **Seung-Whan Choi**, University of Illinois at Chicago

This article is a welcome addition to the literature on transnational terrorism. The primary contribution is that it provides a dyadic research design that will enable future generations of researchers to examine the relationship between a terrorist group's domestic agenda and transnational attacks. Because the dyadic setting designates one side as the terrorist group's home country and the other side as the target country, it will help future generations evaluate exactly which side is responsible for acts of transnational terrorism. Simply put, the dyadic data collection helps scholars discover empirical evidence that can be brought to bear on the theoretical reasoning on blowback put forward by previous scholars such as and James Piazza and myself, Robert Pape, and Chalmers Johnson.¹ This article indeed identifies the empirical pattern on the blowback phenomenon: major powers' troop deployments and third-party interventions are likely to increase the risk of transnational terrorist events. This review discusses three strengths of this article and then moves onto four weaknesses that could be addressed in future work.

The first strength of the article is the new dataset created by the authors. Kirssa Cline Ryckman and Mike Ryckman express their concerns about the limitations of previous data collections that are either proprietary or limited in scope. They see the data limitations as major obstacles for scientific progress in the area of transnational terrorism. With good cause, they create a dyadic dataset out of the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), a freely available raw dataset posted at <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/> for public use. The data compilation is very thorough and careful. Every small detail of the process is well documented in the article and online appendix. Future generations of graduate students and scholars will benefit greatly and should take full advantage of Cline Ryckman and Ryckman's dyadic model building as the base model for their own research projects. This should help future generations save an enormous amount of time for compiling their

¹ Seung-Whan Choi and James Piazza, "Foreign Military Interventions and Suicide Attacks," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61:2 (2017): 271-297; Robert Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review* 97:3 (2003): 343-361; Chalmers Johnson, "American Militarism and Blowback: The Costs of Letting the Pentagon Dominate Foreign Policy," *New Political Science* 24:1 (2002): 21-38.

own dyadic datasets and comparing their results with previous findings. With the time saved, future researchers should devote their efforts to further cumulating the scientific knowledge on acts of transnational terrorism.

The second strength of the article is that the replication materials are publicly posted in the Cline Ryckman Dataverse at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/kcryckman>. As I point out in my recent book,² replication data makes future generations better able to disseminate and increase scientific knowledge by being able to utilize the previously established work of fellow scientists at low costs. The posted replication materials should advance our scientific progress and help provide better policy recommendations.³

The third strength of the article is related to a possible release of domestic terrorism data. The creation of the dyadic data of transnational terrorism appears to cause Cline Ryckman and Ryckman to classify domestic terrorist incidents from the GTD. If this is correct, they should release the domestic dataset in the Kirssa Ryckman Dataverse for public use. This release would be of great service to the terrorism research community that has a growing interest in examining the causes and consequences of domestic terrorism that consists of the majority of modern terrorist events.⁴ The separation of domestic versus transnational terrorism is done only in the study of Walter Enders, Todd Sandler, and Khusrav Gaibulloev whose efforts end in 2007.⁵ This data span is seven years shorter than that of Cline Ryckman and Ryckman. Because future researchers are keen to learn the dynamics of domestic terrorism that occurred in more recent years, they should wholeheartedly welcome the arrival of the updated and well-defined data collection.

While I commend the authors for their painstaking efforts on the dyadic data collection, I offer four criticisms below. The criticisms should help the authors continue to conduct their search for scientific truth in the area of transnational terrorism and future generations learn from some of the weaknesses that appear in the authors' work.

The first drawback of the article comes from the data cleaning process. To create the dyadic data on transnational terrorism, Cline Ryckman and Ryckman rely on the GTD during the period from 1970 to 2014. The original compilers of the GTD gathered 141,966 terrorist incidents in total during the relevant period; however, only 51,999 incidents (37%) were available for the authors to convert from the monadic to dyadic data setting. The data cleaning process requires the authors to drop a majority of the terrorist incidents due mainly to those acts being having been carried out by unidentified perpetrators of transnational terrorism.

² Seung-Whan Choi, *New Explorations into International Relations: Democracy, Foreign Investment, Terrorism and Conflict* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016).

³ The replication materials should also include the authors' note on how to replicate the log-file, and the dataset in Stata format rather than the tab limited format. In addition, the Stata do-file needs some revisions to include several missing variables.

⁴ See Seung-Whan Choi and James Piazza, 2016, "Ethnic Groups, Political Exclusion, and Domestic Terrorism," *Defence and Peace Economics* 27:1 (2016): 37-63; James Piazza, "Poverty, Minority Economic Discrimination, and Domestic Terrorism," *Journal of Peace Research* 48:3 (2011): 339-353.

⁵ Walter Enders, Todd Sandler, and Khusrav Gaibulloev, "Domestic versus Transnational Terrorism: Data, Decomposition, and Dynamics," *Journal of Peace Research* 48:3 (2011): 319-337.

This problem was observed by Laura Dugan, one of the original compilers of the GTD, in 2010: “nearly half of the attacks in the GTD are unattributed to any terrorist organization.”⁶ The heavy dropping of the terrorist incidents that took place in certain countries during a certain time period is likely to introduce estimation bias in the statistical analysis of Cline Ryckman and Ryckman despite the fact that they tried to defend their decision on removing the missing observations by citing the unpublished work of Arva and Beielser.⁷

This is not to suggest that the authors’ dyadic dataset is short of scientific rigor. As noted, they rigorously followed the scientific standards for their data collection process and then ended up with only 51,999 events of transnational terrorism. In other words, they are not responsible for the majority of the observation dropping given the fact that the original collection of the GTD inherently lacks the perpetrator information on too many incidents. For the sake of advancing scientific progress, I believe that both the dyadic data creators and the original GTD compilers should continue to work on their sides. While the former should seek to improve their research design in the future, the latter should try to collect more accurate information on the perpetrators. Ideally, these two groups should combine their efforts in order to ensure that their ‘improved’ research endeavors are better presented in the scientific community of transnational terrorism.

The second weakness of the article is related to the unit of analysis. The authors’ statistical analysis focuses on countries rather than terrorist groups. Because a certain group of researchers believe that transnational terrorism is initiated by terrorist groups, they tend to deny the findings of empirical research whose unit of analysis is the country-year. Cline Ryckman and Ryckman’s article is subject to the same criticism, though they try to fend off such criticisms in their concluding remarks. This criticism might sound unfair or unjustifiable given that countries are often considered to be the main targets of transnational terrorism and a majority of terrorist groups reside within a country’s territory.

The third limitation of the article is the way Cline Ryckman and Ryckman present their research. I wish that the authors put their theoretical expectations before the discussion of the data collection process. Because the authors quickly dive into detailing their data collection on the second page of the article, their research sounds like a purely empirical exercise presented in a data article. Many political scientists are still reluctant to welcome empirical discussions or details of variable operationalization before seeing the theoretical reasoning behind it. This is not true for most economists, who have no reservations about purely empirical pieces. In any event, the authors should have incorporated the subsection, ‘Transnational Target Selection’ into the subsection ‘The Domestic Agenda of Transnational Terrorists’, and then expanded the two subsections in order to make their research idea sound original instead of simply repeating what previous studies say about blowback. By tracing militarily powerful countries whose foreign policy behavior should be distinguished from minor powers, the authors could develop their own innovative ideas and, for empirical analysis, turn to the data collection of Military Intervention by Powerful States, 1945-2003, compiled by Patricia Sullivan and

⁶ Laura Dugan, “The Making of the Global Terrorism Database and What We Have Learned about the Life Cycles of Terrorist Organizations,” Unpublished paper, 2010, 16.

⁷ Bryan Arva and John Beielser, “Dealing with Missing Data in Group-Level Studies of Terrorism.” Paper presented at the APSA Annual Meeting, 30 September 2014.

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Michael Koch.⁸ In this way, readers could better appreciate the originality of the empirical endeavors put forward by the authors.

The fourth weakness of the article is the causal time order. According to Table 4, only two predictors—troop deployment and terrorist incidents—are set at time $t-1$, while the other predictors are set at time t . There is no detailed discussion regarding this modeling decision. For example, the readers are in the dark as to why democracy variables are assumed to affect terrorist incidents in the same year, while the troop deployment has to have a one year lagged effect on the events of transnational terrorism. In addition, the modeling includes the interstate war variable at time t , while the troop deployment variable is set at time $t-1$. When there is an interstate war, it usually involves the deployment of soldiers on the ground. Accordingly, we can expect that the impacts of these two variables on transnational terrorist events should occur in the same year.

In closing, despite some criticisms raised above, Cline Ryckman and Ryckman's article makes an important contribution to the empirical terrorism research. I hope that future researchers use the dyadic models as their basic research design to further explore who and what are liable to transnational terrorist acts.

Seung-Whan Choi is Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His research interests include terrorism, conflict studies, and research methods. His work has been published in prestigious journals such as the *American Journal of Political Science*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Oxford Economic Papers*, and elsewhere. His recent book is *New Explorations into International Relations: Democracy, Foreign Investment, Terrorism and Conflict* (University of Georgia Press, 2016).

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⁸ Patricia L. Sullivan and Michael T. Koch, "Military Interventions by Powerful States 1945-2003," *Journal of Peace Research* 46: 5 (2009): 707-718.