

## The Use of Violence by Ethnopolitical Organizations in the Middle East

**Project Title:** Terrorism and Ethnopolitical Violence: Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior

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### **Overview:**

Analyses of organizational-level characteristics demonstrate distinct changes over the past three decades in the behavior and ideologies of organizations that represent the interests of ethnopolitical groups in the Middle East. A smaller percentage of these organizations use violence now as compared to past periods, while a larger proportion than before engages in electoral politics or protests.

### **Project Background:**

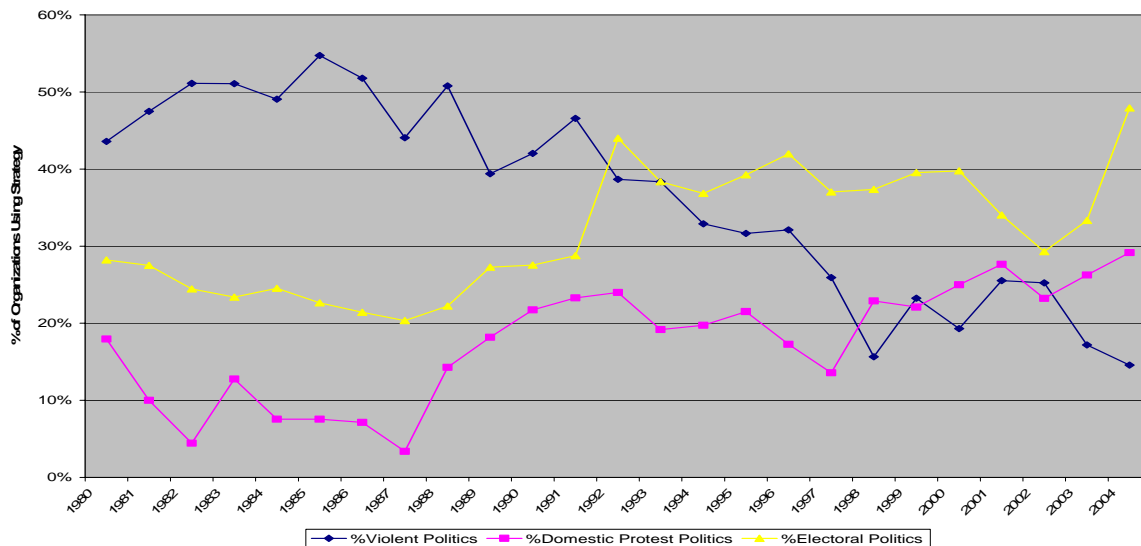
The fundamental question underlying this research focuses on the identification of those factors that motivate some members of ethnic minorities to become radicalized, to form activist organizations, and to move from conventional means of politics and protest into violence and terrorism. Focusing initially on the Middle East, the Minorities at Risk and the Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior (MAROB) projects provide information on the characteristics of those ethnopolitical groups and organizations most likely to employ violence and terrorism in the pursuit of their perceived grievances with local, national, or international authority structures.

### **Interim Findings:**

This project has identified 102 organizations representing the interests of all 29 ethnopolitical groups in the Middle East and North Africa, operating between 1980 and 2004. While the majority of these organizations use no violence at all in pursuing their goals, one third of the organizations did employ terrorism as a strategy at least once during this period.

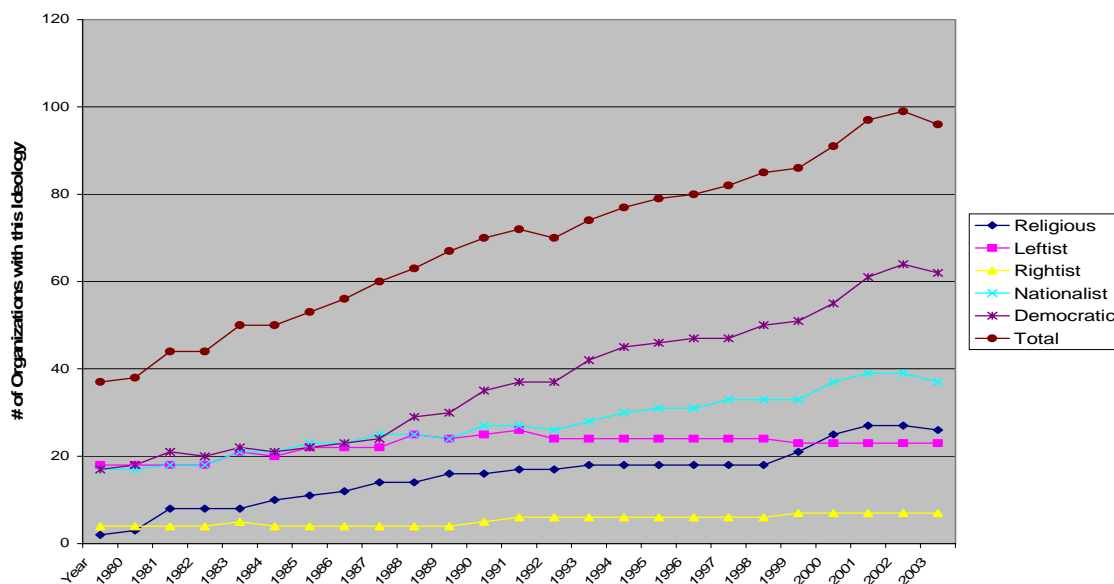
There have been significant changes in the practice of ethnic politics in the Middle East during this period (1980-2004). The most interesting pattern is that the proportion of organizations using violence as part of their repertoire has developed in two waves (see Figure 1), with the first peaking in 1986 when 52 percent of all organizations used violence, with a gradual decline through 1998 when only 16 percent used violence, followed by a second wave which peaked in 2001, when 26 percent of organizations used violence, followed by another decline to the lowest proportion of the entire period, 14 percent. This general decline in the number of organizations using violence has occurred in the context of an overall increase in the number of organizations, which stood at 39 in 1980 and 96 in 2004. We should note though that these data, which terminate in 2004, do not fully capture the developments in Iraq since the United States invasion.

**Figure 1. Strategies of Ethnopolitical Organizations in the Middle East, 1980-2004**



One of the largest changes related to ethnopolitical organizations in the Middle East across this period has been in their ideological motivation. While the number of organizations on a traditional left-right political continuum has remained fairly stable, the number of organizations motivated by *religion* (i.e., that advocate policies that incorporate religion into public life), *nationalism* (defined as desiring either independence or autonomy for a group of peoples), and *democracy* has risen dramatically (see Figure 2). The number of Middle East organizations that seek to incorporate religion into public life has risen from only two in 1980 to 23 in 2004. Some theorists expect that this religious orientation should be associated with a rise in violence and terrorism. Our preliminary findings show only moderate support for this relationship.

**Figure 2. Shifts in Ideology of Ethnopolitical Organizations in the Middle East**



Potentially even more hopeful has been the rapid rise in organizations that support democracy, with an increase from 17 in 1980 to 62 in 2004. While some organizations that advocate democracy also use violence as a strategy, organizations in this category are significantly less likely to use violence than those organizations that do not claim to be committed to democracy.

#### **Methods:**

MAROB collects data on 150 variables, in the following general categories:

1. Organizational Characteristics (e.g. ideology, leadership, grievances)
2. Organization-State Relations (e.g. repression, negotiations)
3. External Support (e.g. foreign state, diaspora)
4. Organizational Behavior (e.g. types of violence, targets of violence, location of violence)

#### **Future Directions:**

MAROB researchers are extending their Middle East analyses to ask questions and develop models about particular transnational minorities (e.g., Kurds), about particular countries (e.g., Israel and the West Bank and Gaza), and about organizations representing a particular minority inside a country (e.g., Shi'a in Iraq). In addition, data collection is being gradually extended to other regions, with coding underway currently for post-Communist societies.

#### **Contact Information:**

To provide feedback, or for any correspondence relating to this project, or for a copy of the full report on this topic (including a list of the organizations studied), please contact:

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