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ABSTRACT

In the light of contemporary terrorism and security policies, especially after the events of September 11, 2001, the protection of human rights has become increasingly complex. Although extensive research has been conducted on counter-terrorism, little attention has been paid to the analytical perspective of academic experts on the impact of security policies in conflict-affected societies. This study addresses this gap by examining the political impact of terrorism on human rights from the perspective of academic experts in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. This study used a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 political science professors from private universities, and the data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify underlying patterns and recurring themes related to security, emergency measures, and the protection of human rights. The study findings show that long-term and disproportionate security measures severely restrict freedom of expression, personal privacy, and the right to a fair trial. The study also shows that the lack of a clear definition of terrorism creates legal ambiguity and often blurs the line between terrorism and national liberation movements. The main conclusion of this study is that effective counterterrorism is possible only when there are transparent laws, proportionate emergency measures, and a serious commitment to international human rights standards, so as to achieve a sustainable balance between security and freedom.

KEYWORDS

Emergency measures, Human rights, International conflicts, Legal conflicts, Terrorism

1. Introduction

The security threats of the contemporary world, especially terrorism, have not only changed the nature of state security policies but also have had a profound impact on the fundamental principles of human rights protection. After the events of September 11, 2001, many countries implemented strict anti-



terrorism laws and emergency measures, which resulted in severe restrictions on freedom of expression, personal privacy, the right to a fair trial, and freedom of movement. Although these measures are justified in the interests of ensuring security, practical experience shows that disproportionate and long-term security policies conflict with international human rights standards. Although existing research examines the legal and political impacts of international events, wars, and terrorist attacks, little attention has been paid to the analytical perspective of academic experts in conflict-affected societies, especially how security policies conflict with the concept of human rights in practice. This gap is particularly important in societies that are both affected by terrorism and are also experiencing problems of legal and political instability. This study addresses this gap by examining the political impact of terrorism on human rights from the analytical perspective of political science teachers in Nangarhar province, Afghanistan. The main argument of the paper is that an effective fight against terrorism can only be legitimate and sustainable if there is a balanced framework between security measures, the rule of law, and international human rights. This study attempts to show that transparent laws, proportionate emergency measures, and scientific-legal analysis can create a realistic balance between security and freedom. Like 9/11, there have been many other large-scale, coordinated terrorist attacks around the world that have not only killed people but also changed the security and political policies of countries. The Madrid train bombings in 2004 killed 193 people and tightened European security policies (de Ceballos et al., 2005). The 7/7 attacks in London in 2005 killed 52 people and changed anti-terrorism laws in the UK (Anderson, 2017). The 2008 Mumbai attacks lasted three days and killed 166 people, further straining relations between India and Pakistan (Constantino, 2020). In 2015, simultaneous attacks on a concert hall in Paris and elsewhere killed 130 people and led to France declaring a state of emergency (Breedon & Alderman, 2025). In the same year, two major bombings targeted protesters in Ankara, Turkey, killing more than 100 people (Shaheen & Letsch, 2015). The Westgate shopping mall attack in Kenya in 2013 killed 67 people, and the Bali bombings in Indonesia in 2002 killed 202 people (Kwadwo Amankona, 2016). All of these events, like 9/11, have led to significant changes in global security debates, policymaking, and anti-war strategies.

2. Literature Review

Terrorism is one of the most controversial concepts in international law, politics, and security. Many researchers believe that terrorism is not just a criminal act, but also has political, legal, and social dimensions (Cassese, 2006; Fletcher, 2006). However, there is still no single, universally accepted definition of terrorism. This problem has led to some armed movements being labeled as terrorism from the perspective of one state, but as freedom movements from the perspective of another state or group (Neumann, 2008). In recent years, the concept of terrorism has been examined not only in terms of physical violence but also in terms of political interpretation and power. Schmid (2012) argues that the lack of a single, universally accepted definition of terrorism has allowed states to use the term for political purposes. In his view, this situation not only creates legal instability but also blurs the line between armed movements, political opposition, and terrorist acts. This problem is even more acute in countries with weak political legitimacy and weak legal institutions.

At the UN level, the relationship between counter-terrorism efforts and human rights has become a significant academic debate. Foot (2007) shows that although the UN has attempted to integrate human rights standards into counter-terrorism policy, in practice, security priorities often

override legal obligations. This contradiction is particularly evident when states acquire broad powers in the name of international security, without effective international oversight.

At the regional level, the EU's anti-terrorism laws provide a good example of the conflict between legal development and human rights. Dumitriu (2004) argues that the EU's broad definitions and preventive security measures, if applied without strict legal constraints, undermine freedom of expression, privacy, and the right to a fair trial. This argument shows that even advanced legal systems face serious challenges in maintaining the balance between security and freedom.

International legal instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) allow states to restrict certain rights during a state of emergency, but these restrictions must be legal, necessary, proportionate and temporary (ICCPR, Art. 4; ECHR, Art. 15). However, contemporary research shows that many states use emergencies as a tool for permanent governance rather than as a short-term solution, which weakens the rule of law and judicial oversight (Duffy, 2025).

Recent research also highlights the broader social and developmental consequences of armed conflict and terrorism. Vesco et al. (2024) argue that protracted conflicts erode the foundations of human development, weaken state institutions, and erode social trust. This research demonstrates that terrorism is not only a security threat but also a serious obstacle to economic growth, education, and social stability. In addition, new literature focuses on the political framing of terrorism. Ojo (2023) shows how states use the term terrorism to suppress political dissent and separatist movements. In his view, this political framing allows for the use of state force under the guise of legal legitimacy and justifies human rights violations.

Terrorism and armed conflict have a profound impact on all aspects of human rights. The rights to life, personal security, freedom of expression, and the right to a fair trial are the most vulnerable fundamental rights (Duffy, 2025; Sobol et al., 2023). International reports show that civilians are the most vulnerable victims in contemporary conflicts, and security policies often lead to widespread restrictions on rights. Researchers emphasize that if counter-terrorism measures are not in line with international human rights standards, they will face a crisis of legitimacy.

After 2001, many states implemented strict laws and emergency measures against terrorism. According to international legal instruments, states can restrict certain rights during a state of emergency, but these restrictions must be proportionate, temporary, and subject to the supervision of the law (ICCPR, Article 4; ECHR, Article 15). However, the literature shows that in practice, these principles are not always respected, and protracted emergencies lead to persistent human rights violations (Bonfont, 2024). This situation makes the balance between security and freedom even more difficult.

Existing studies cite the Palestinian-Israeli, Russian-Ukrainian, and Sudanese conflicts as examples in which terrorism, war, and security policies are accompanied by widespread human rights violations (OCHA, 2023; Upadhyay & Mehrotra, 2025). These studies show that disproportionate military and security measures seriously endanger the lives, dignity, and basic needs of civilians. However, most of these studies focus on the international or state level, and little attention is paid to the local analytical perspective of academic experts.

Despite the extensive literature examining the nexus between terrorism, security, and human rights, little attention has been paid to the analytical perspectives of academics and practitioners in conflict-affected societies. In particular, it is not yet clear how these practitioners assess the balance between security policies, emergency measures, and human rights. This study addresses this gap by examining the issue from the perspective of political science professors in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, and attempts to provide a local and analytical scholarly perspective alongside international debates.

3. Data and Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was used in this study, as the aim was to gain a deeper and more analytical understanding of the relationship between terrorism, security policies, and human rights. Qualitative design allows for the detailed exploration of the scholarly perspectives, experiences, and analytical understandings of experts, which is appropriate to the nature of the subject matter of this study.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

The research participants were selected through purposive sampling. This method was used because the participants should have academic and professional experience in the fields of political science, international relations, human rights, and security studies. Based on these criteria, 15 political science professors from private universities in Nangarhar province were selected for the study, so that the data would have scientific validity.

3.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. The interview guide was designed to capture participants' analytical perspectives on security, terrorism, emergency measures, and human rights restrictions. Each interview lasted approximately 15 to 25 minutes on WhatsApp Call, and the data were recorded in the form of notes and a transcription.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed through thematic analysis. This section followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model, which included data identification, initial coding, theme extraction, theme review, definition, and final analysis. Four main themes emerged from this analysis:

- 1) The widespread threats to human rights posed by contemporary conflicts
- 2) The legal ambiguity between terrorism and national liberation
- 3) The problem of proportionality of emergency measures
- 4) The need for law, transparency, and international cooperation

3.5 Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles of the research were observed. Participants were recruited voluntarily, informed consent was obtained, and their identities were kept confidential. All data were used for academic purposes only, and confidentiality was maintained due to the sensitivity of the topic.

3.6 Limitations of the Study

Although the study provides important scientific findings, it also has some limitations. The study focused only on lecturers at private universities in Nangarhar province, which may limit the

generalizability of the results. Furthermore, due to the sensitive nature of terrorism and conflict, some participants may have expressed their views cautiously.

4. Results

The findings of this study are based on interviews conducted with 15 political science professors from private universities in Nangarhar province. Based on thematic analysis, four main themes emerged that explain the relationship between terrorism, security policies, and human rights.

4.1 Widespread threats to human rights due to contemporary conflicts

All participants emphasized that contemporary armed conflicts and terrorist activities directly affect the fundamental rights of civilians. From the professors' perspective, the rights to life, personal security, and human dignity are the rights that are most at risk. Participants indicated that in international conflicts, civilians are often the main victims of war, and this situation is in clear conflict with international human rights standards. According to data obtained through a semi-structured interview with a key informant: "The biggest victims in contemporary wars are civilians, and this situation is in clear conflict with international human rights principles." A senior academic participant explained that "Terrorism is not just a security problem, but it is a serious threat to human life and dignity." An interview participant indicated that "When war breaks out, the first right that should be protected the most is lost, namely the right to life." According to data obtained through a semi-structured interview with a key informant, "In many international conflicts, the killing and displacement of civilians have become commonplace, which is a clear violation of human rights." This finding implies that if security policies are designed solely based on military and security logic, the protection of civilians will take on a secondary role. This situation conflicts with international human rights standards and undermines the moral and legal legitimacy of states. This theme is directly related to the central research question, as it shows how terrorism and security responses to it affect the practical implementation of human rights.

4.2 The legal ambiguity of "terrorist to one person, freedom fighter to another."

A key finding of the interviews was that the lack of a single and clear definition of terrorism creates serious legal problems. The lecturers explained that this ambiguity leads to some armed movements being investigated by states under the heading of terrorism, while their political and historical background is not fully taken into account. According to the participants, this situation hinders the implementation of justice and negatively affects the legitimacy of the law. An interview participant indicated that "Until there is a clear and accepted definition of terrorism, justice will always be a political victim." According to data obtained through a semi-structured interview with a key informant, "Many armed groups are labeled as terrorists by governments, but their historical and political background is ignored." A senior academic participant explained that "The phrase 'terrorist to one person, freedom fighter to another' is the greatest challenge to international law." According to data obtained through a semi-structured interview with a key informant, "It is this ambiguity that undermines international law and raises questions about the legitimacy of the law." The implication of this finding is that law enforcement is becoming politicized, and justice is becoming subordinate to power. This situation not only leads to human rights violations but also has a profound negative impact on the rule of law. This theme is relevant to the research question because it demonstrates how legal problems in defining terrorism disrupt the balance between security policies and human rights.

4.3 Emergency measures and the problem of proportionality

The participants emphasized that states can restrict certain rights during a state of emergency, but these restrictions must be proportionate, temporary, and subject to the supervision of the law. In the lecturers' view, practical experience shows that in many cases emergency measures take a long-term form and severely undermine freedom of expression, personal privacy, and the right to a fair trial. This situation increases the risk of human rights violations and negatively affects state legitimacy. An interview participant indicated that "States of emergency are supposed to be temporary, but in many countries they become permanent." According to data obtained through a semi-structured interview with a key informant: "Freedom of expression and personal privacy are severely compromised in the name of security." A senior academic participant explained that "When the balance is lost, security policy itself becomes a tool for violating human rights." According to data obtained through a semi-structured interview with a key informant: "The right to a fair trial is the first victim when emergency laws are applied without control." This finding implies that prolonged emergency measures severely undermine freedom of expression, privacy, and the right to a fair trial. This situation increases the concentration of power and weakens judicial oversight, which in turn increases the risk of human rights violations. This theme answers the central question of the research, as it shows how security measures can become a means of restricting rights rather than protecting them.

4.4 The need for law, transparency, and international mechanisms

The interview results show that the participants consider the rule of law to be fundamental for the balance between security and freedom. The lecturers believed that transparent laws, independent judicial institutions, and international monitoring mechanisms could limit the abuse of security policies. Participants emphasized that adherence to international human rights standards not only ensures the protection of rights but also strengthens the legitimacy of counter-terrorism policies. A senior academic participant explained that "Security without law is just force, not legitimacy." According to data obtained through a semi-structured interview with a key informant, "Transparent laws and independent courts prevent security policies from becoming instruments of repression." According to the government must translate these policies into action." An interview participant indicated that "International monitoring mechanisms are an important deterrent against arbitrary actions by states." According to data obtained through a semi-structured interview with a key informant, "International human rights standards not only protect rights, but also strengthen the legitimacy of counter-terrorism policies." This finding implies that compliance with international human rights standards not only protects the rights of individuals but also strengthens the legitimacy of states' counterterrorism policies. Without international mechanisms, security policies take the form of the use of force. This theme is relevant to the research question, as it reveals what conditions can create a sustainable balance between security and freedom.

4. Discussion

The findings of the study show that the most serious impact of terrorism and contemporary armed conflicts is on fundamental human rights principles. The analytical perspective of the lecturers shows that security measures, if implemented without proportionality and legal oversight, undermine rights rather than protecting them. These results show that the problem is not terrorism alone, but rather the types of security responses that become the norm over time. Also, the concept of "someone's

terrorist, another's freedom fighter" is not just a theoretical debate from the participants' perspective, but a practical legal problem that poses serious challenges to the process of justice. This situation shows that the lack of a clear definition of terrorism provides the basis for the selective application of the law. The findings of this study are broadly similar to the results of international studies. As Duffy (2025) and Sobol et al. (2023) argue, disproportionate state of emergency measures lead to systematic human rights violations. Similarly, Cassese (2006) and Fletcher (2006) have emphasized the legal ambiguity of the definition of terrorism, which is fully consistent with the views of the participants. However, the uniqueness of this study is that it examines the issue from the perspective of academic experts in conflict-affected societies, and not only from the perspective of international institutions or state policies. This local analytical perspective fills a gap that has been largely ignored in many international studies. The study's findings have important messages for policymakers and legal institutions. First, states should adopt clear and limited definitions of terrorism so that it is possible to distinguish between national liberation movements and terrorist acts. Second, state of emergency measures should be temporary, proportionate, and subject to judicial review. Third, independent oversight institutions and international human rights mechanisms should be actively strengthened to ensure the legitimacy of security policies. The local value of this study lies in the fact that it provides an analytical perspective from university professors in a conflict-torn society like Afghanistan, who are directly affected by war, terrorism, and security policies. This context adds to the analytical depth of the findings, but there are also some limitations to the study. The study focused only on professors at private universities in Nangarhar province, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, this study provides an important foundation for future, larger studies.

5. Conclusion and Future Direction

The study shows that terrorism not only destroys lives and property but also destabilizes governments, weakens social structures, threatens peace and security, and limits economic and social development. Its indirect effects are seen in the actions of states, which sometimes lead to violations of human rights, especially personal freedom and dignity. The views of the lecturers show that it is difficult to distinguish between terrorists and national liberation movements, which is a major challenge in the practical implementation of counter-terrorism laws. The study shows that maintaining a balance between security and human rights is a shared responsibility of national and international actors.

Future directions:

- 1) Legal and policy frameworks: Develop international standards to distinguish terrorists from legitimate resistance movements and ensure proportionality of emergency measures.
- 2) Implementation of human rights: Strengthen mechanisms to protect human rights during counter-terrorism operations, in particular through judicial oversight and transparent law enforcement.
- 3) International cooperation: Increase information exchange and joint actions between states, international organizations, and researchers.
- 4) Education and awareness: Raise public awareness of human rights, security, and counterterrorism laws to support state legitimacy in emergency response.
- 5) Research gaps: Examine the impact of counterterrorism policies on migration, humanitarian assistance, and social stability.

Ultimately, an effective counterterrorism strategy seeks to balance security needs with human rights. Implementing the above recommendations can help states control terrorism, protect human rights, and promote national and international security.

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