PT

PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

A journal published by

International Centre for Counter-Terrorism

in partnership with

Universiteit Leiden

HANDA CSTPV

The Handa Centre for the Study
of Terrorism and Political Violence

About

Perspectives on Terrorism

Established in 2007, *Perspectives on Terrorism* (PT) is a quarterly, peer-reviewed, and open-access academic journal. PT is a publication of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), in partnership with the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) at Leiden University, and the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) at the University of St Andrews.

International Centre for Counter-Terrorism

The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), founded in 2010, is a think-and-do tank based in The Hague, Netherlands. We provide research, policy advice, training and other solutions to support better counter-terrorism policies and practices worldwide. We also contribute to the scientific and public debates in the fields of counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism, notably through our publications and events.

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The Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) is a scientific institute specialising in security issues. ISGA is embedded in the Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs of Leiden University. ISGA originated from the Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism (CTC) and the Centre for Global Affairs, and today focuses on multidisciplinary research and education within the international scientific field of security studies.

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Words of Welcome

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to announce the release of Volume XIX, Issue 3 (September 2025) of *Perspectives on Terrorism* (ISSN 2334-3745). This Open Access journal is a joint publication of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) in The Hague, Netherlands; the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) at University of St Andrews; and the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) at Leiden University. All past and recent issues can be found online at https://pt.icct.nl/.

Perspectives on Terrorism (PT) is indexed by JSTOR, SCOPUS, and Google Scholar, where it ranks No. 3 among journals in the field of Terrorism Studies. *Jouroscope™,* the directory of scientific journals, has listed PT as one of the top ten journals in the category "free open access journals in social sciences", with a Q1 ranking. Now in its 19th year of publication, PT has close to 8,000 registered subscribers and many more occasional readers and website visitors in academia, government and civil society worldwide. Subscription is free and registration to receive an e-mail of each quarterly issue of the journal can be done at the link provided above. The Research Articles published in the journal's four annual issues are fully peer-reviewed by external referees, while Research Notes and other content are subject to internal editorial quality control.

In the first article of this issue, Mackenzie B. Hart, Shannon J. Linning, Ivana Zdjelar, and Garth Davies demonstrate how the "crime-involved places" (CS4) framework can be applied to analysing the role of online networks in terrorist radicalisation. Then Levi West, Michael Platow, Helen Taylor, and Emily Corner describe a theoretical framework, anchored in reciprocal determinism, that can be used for reconceptualising the processes of radicalisation. Next, Stephen Bryant and Michael Loadenthal explain how the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's digital media releases, distributed via Telegram, support its military campaign, chronicle its history, and reflect the group's overall objective to increase its popularity amongst the Palestinian people and within the wider geopolitical spaces in which they function. Then Daniel Milton explores how mass casualty attacks are distinct from the tens of thousands of other terrorist attacks that have taken place over the past several decade, and why they require different kinds of research and analysis. And in the final research article of this issue, Marco Nilsson explores the links between an individual's interest in joining the Swedish Salafi-jihadist movement and their criminal background.

In our Research Notes section, Michael Logan, Gina Ligon, and MacKenzie Harms introduce the Leadership for the Extreme and Dangerous for Innovative Results (LEADIR) database, containing information on 280 terrorist groups and 295 terrorist leaders active between 2008 and 2017, and describe ways in which LEADIR can be used for research. Our Resources Section begins with an extensive bibliography on Hezbollah, compiled by Associate Editor Judith Tinnes. And finally Book Review Editor Joshua Sinai reviews a book on Jemaah Islamiyah by Kumar Ramakrishna.

This issue of the journal has been produced in collaboration between James Forest, Rashmi Singh (who will become Editor-in-Chief in January), and Managing Editor Anna-Maria Andreeva, with considerable assistance from Noemie Abtan, for which we are very grateful.

<div align="right">Prof James Forest, Editor-in-Chief</div>

Applying Networks of Crime-Involved Places (CS4) to Online Radicalisation

Mackenzie B. Hart*, Shannon J. Linning, Ivana Zdjelar, and Garth Davies

Abstract: Though still a subject of debate, radicalisation is generally understood as the process through which an individual adopts an extremist ideology and its associated views. As such, radicalisation explains why terrorist violence occurs. In contrast, this research article seeks to understand how radicalisation occurs using crime-involved places (CS4). CS4 offers a framework for understanding how a network of crime-involved places—crime sites, convergence settings, comfort spaces, and corrupting spots—facilitates criminal events. This article argues that CS4 can be used to understand online crime-place networks, specifically, those relevant to the radicalisation process. Here, we apply CS4 to online places using two examples of radicalised individuals who travelled to join the Islamic State. Our findings demonstrate that using the CS4 framework can help improve our understanding of the online ecosystem relevant to radicalisation and how these places function as venues for radicalisation.

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* Corresponding author: Mackenzie B. Hart, Simon Fraser University. Email: mbhart@sfu.ca

Introduction

Though still the subject of debate, radicalisation is generally understood as the process through which an individual adopts an extremist ideology and its associated views and ideals. It is also generally accepted that much, if not all, of this process can occur online. As such, radicalisation explains *why* extremist/terrorist violence occurs. In contrast, this article seeks to understand *how* radicalisation occurs online using crime-involved places (CS4). CS4 provide a framework for understanding how a network of crime-involved places—crime sites, convergence settings, comfort spaces, and corrupting spots—facilitates criminal events. While originally applied to physical (or offline) spaces, we argue that using CS4 can help us understand how *online* places are relevant to the radicalisation process.

Our discussion will progress as follows: first, we will introduce environmental criminology and the CS4 framework. Second, we explore radicalisation and its relationship to the Internet. Third, we will illustrate how CS4 can be used to understand online radicalisation by using examples of two members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Aqsa Mahmood and Mohammed Khalifa. The stories of these two individuals can help us grasp how online places function as venues for radicalisation. Finally, we discuss the implications of CS4 for radicalisation research.

What is Environmental Criminology?

Most traditional approaches in the field of criminology focus on *criminality*, exploring the biological, social, demographic, and historical factors that influence an individual's propensity for deviance.[1] In other words, they seek to understand *why* someone engages in criminal behaviour. In comparison, environmental criminology is a collection of theories and approaches that strive to understand *how* crime events occur. This means exploring additional factors outside of the offender themselves.[2] The crime triangle (Fig. 1) encapsulates the three basic components necessary for crime to occur – an offender, a victim/target, and a location/place.[3]

Figure 1: The Crime Triangle
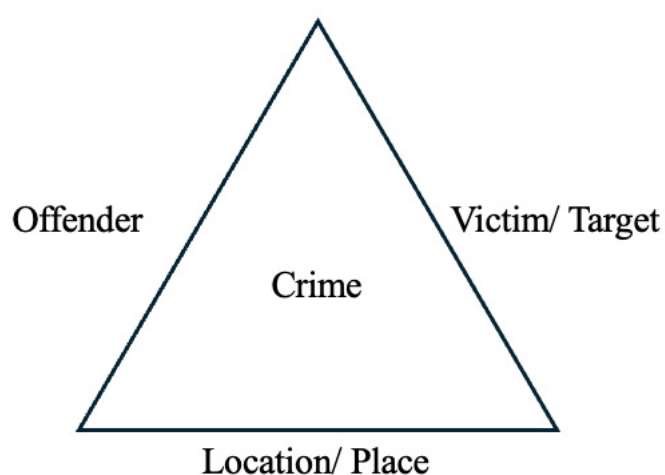
Wortley and Mazerolle explain that the crux of environmental approaches to criminology is the notion that criminal behaviour is shaped by its setting.[4] Indeed, certain places at certain times are more likely to experience criminal events because they have more opportunities for crime. Places that host a disproportionate amount of crime are often referred to as hot spots. The relationship between crime and place is now accepted by most criminologists; however, "the level at which places most directly influences crime" remains the subject of some debate.[5]

What is a Place?

While it may seem relatively straightforward, Madensen and Eck highlight that the term *place* has been used ambiguously in criminology research.[6] For example, a place can refer to any number of things, including a country, region, city, neighbourhood, street, or residence. To resolve this confusion, the authors propose a typology of proprietary, proximal, and pooled places. A *proprietary place* is a property, typically a single address, with an identifiable owner, such as a bar or shop. *Proximal places* are physically close clusters of proprietary places, such as street segments, with various owners. Think of a hypothetical city block comprising six private dwellings, two shops, and a restaurant. Finally, *pooled places* are a more abstract group of proprietary places with subjective inclusion criteria. This subjectivity underscores the need for environmental criminologists to be specific and define the type (or types) of places they are researching.

So far, our discussion of places has been about the sites where crimes occur, but these are only the most obvious locations relevant to a criminal event.[7] Returning to the crime triangle, we can see that a crime requires the convergence of a motivated offender and a suitable target/victim in both time and space. This convergence does not occur passively; instead, most crime is an intentional process that necessitates the use of multiple places.[8] Like everyone else, individuals engaging in criminal activity have needs that are met by visiting a variety of places. A gang member may commit crimes such as robbery or assault at different locations around a city, but they also require places to sleep, eat, meet with fellow gang members, acquire weapons, and plan illegal activities. There are many places, in addition to the location of the crime, that are necessary for it to occur.[9] Together, these locations are known as a *crime place network.* Crime place networks provide the infrastructure that allows individuals and groups to engage in crime, run illicit networks, and commit acts of violence.[10]

How Environmental Criminology has been Applied to Terrorism

Terrorism scholars have explored the role of physical places like radical mosques[11] and prisons[12] in facilitating the radicalisation process. Prior research on place-based radicalisation has also focused on diaspora communities/neighbourhoods.[13] In addition, there is a growing body of literature applying theories of environmental criminology—like crime pattern theory and situational crime prevention—to terrorist attacks and extremist violence.

Brantingham and Brantingham's *crime pattern theory* contends that an offender's routine criminal and non-criminal activities form recognisable patterns that occur in an *activity or awareness space,* which can be used to determine how, where, and when they may be most likely to engage in criminal behaviour.[14] Recognising an offender's activity pattern then allows us to understand macro-level crime patterns and target/victim selection.[15] The authors also suggest that specific crime types are likely to have similar/comparable patterns and crime templates. Crime pattern theory has been used in the spatial-temporal analysis of terrorist attacks in Iraq,[16] Spain,[17] Pakistan,[18] and Ireland.[19] It has also been used at the cross-national/

international level.[20] Research has also applied crime pattern theory to the geospatial structure and operation of terrorist cells in Turkey,[21] as well as lone actors in the United States.[22]

The bulk of research done at the intersection of environmental criminology and terrorism has used situational crime prevention (SCP). Like crime pattern theory, SCP suggests that understanding the underlying opportunity structures of specific crime types simultaneously reveals ways in which to reduce these opportunities.[23] Put another way, understanding crime patterns can inform specific prevention efforts and interventions.[24] Clarke and Newman's seminal work *Outsmarting the Terrorists* identifies four SCP-inspired components of terrorism's opportunity structure: targets, weapons, tools, and facilitating conditions.[25] Although their initial work was mostly theoretical, SCP has since been successfully applied to different methods of terrorist attacks, such as assassinations[26] and vehicular ramming,[27] as well as different ideologies like eco-terrorism.[28]

Researchers have also explored how SCP can be used in online contexts.[29] Recent studies have assessed the utility of SCP in preventing the operation of illegal online markets for medicine[30] and stolen data.[31] Critically, Holt, Griffith, Turner, Greene-Colozzi, Chermak, and Freilich have quantitatively examined nation-state-sponsored cyberattacks, using Clarke and Newman's terrorist opportunity structure to identify successful avenues for prevention.[32]

In a systematic review, Freilich and colleagues found that the number of SCP and terrorism studies has increased, particularly in peer-reviewed journals over the last 15 years.[33] More recently, Freilich and colleagues identified over 100 studies on SCP and terrorism published between 2006 and 2020.[34] And though many publications were conceptual, the authors noted an increased number of empirical papers suggesting that "SCP could be a promising strategy for reducing and preventing terrorism."[35]

Thus, environmental criminology and SCP show great potential to assist researchers and practitioners in reducing terrorism. However, a new environmental criminology framework, crime-involved place networks (CS4), has emerged in research and practice. And this framework has yet to be introduced into the terrorism literature.

CS4

Crime-involved places (CS4) is a framework developed by environmental criminologists and used for explaining the network of places involved in the facilitation of crime (see Table 1). CS4 is an acronym made from the first letters of the four types of crime-involved places: crime sites, convergence settings, comfort spaces, and corrupting spots. The first CS refers to *crime sites*, which we have already discussed above. In sum, crime sites are proprietary places where crime occurs.[36] Felson first recognised the importance of the second CS–*convergence settings*– in the context of co-offending.[37] Convergence settings are public places that support crime by acting as an arena for current and potential offenders to meet.[38] They are social spaces used for an array of activities, including strengthening existing relationships, recruiting new offenders, exchanging information, selling goods, and planning future crime.[39] Relatedly, Hammer introduced the idea of *comfort spaces*, where offenders go to access basic needs like food, shelter, and entertainment.[40] Comfort spaces serve three main functions: rest/relaxation, storage, and staging/preparation.[41] They differ from convergence settings in that they are private (not public) offender-controlled places.[42] While illegal activities can and do take place at comfort spaces, they are usually limited to preserve their function and anonymity. The fourth and final CS refers to *corrupting spots*, or proprietary places, often legitimate businesses, that encourage

crime at another place.[43] Importantly, places can be categorised as more than one CS; they can be different things to different people. For example, a bar can be both a convergence setting–a place where offenders and non-offenders socialise and consume alcohol–and a corrupting spot selling illegal drugs from a backroom.

Table 1: *General online and offline examples of CS4*

	Original Definition	Offline Place	Online Definition	Online Place
Crime site	Specific places where crime occurs	An apartment	Specific online places where ideologically motivated crime occurs (Ex: location of terrorist violence, website collecting financial support, etc.)	A website selling illegal weapons
Convergence setting	Public places where offenders routinely meet	A bar frequented by offenders and non-offenders	Publicly accessible website, social media platform, or application, where offenders regularly meet/ converge with non-offenders	A public Facebook group
Comfort space	Private meeting, staging, and supplying locations	A warehouse owned/ rented by an offender	A private – invite only/ password protected – website, social media platform, or application	A private Telegram channel
Corrupting spot	Places that encourage criminal activity in other locations	An autobody shop that buys and sells stolen cars	A website, social media platform, or application that encourages criminal activity in other locations	A Facebook page posting official terrorist/ extremist content

Researchers have suggested that "with some modification", the CS4 framework could also be applied online.[44] To this end, Madensen and Eck discuss how online places include both individual websites and pages, as well as the devices that allow us to access them.[45] Eck, Linning, and Herold also note how social media platforms can act as virtual corrupting spots, allowing offenders to post content promoting crime.[46] Here, publicly accessible websites are proprietary places, as most are owned and operated by a distinct entity. In contrast, a social media platform like Facebook is both a proprietary and a proximal place. While all the accounts, groups, and pages on Facebook are "owned" by Meta, they are also owned and operated by the individuals using the platform. For example, the administrators of a private Facebook group can control who has access to the space and what is posted there, so long as the content abides by the platform's terms and services. Table 1 summarises the original CS4 definitions and proposes online equivalents. This article argues that CS4 can be used to understand online crime-place networks, specifically, those relevant to the radicalisation process.

What is Radicalisation?

Terrorism is purposely designed to cause fear and shock as a means of achieving an ideological, political, or religious objective. Like our above discussion of traditional criminological research, these unfathomable acts have led many to ask *why* an individual would commit terrorist violence. For the purposes of this article, extremism is defined as the conviction that a particular in-group's success–even its survival–is dependent on violent or "hostile actions taken against an out-group."[47] Terrorism is considered here as the means (the violent actions taken) to achieve extremists' goals. Consequently, early terrorism research focused on building and evaluating terrorist profiles, centred around the search for a terrorist personality, or a specific psychological trait or disorder that explains terrorist violence.[48] However, just as there is no single psychological theory that explains non-ideologically motivated violence, there is no psychopathology of terrorism.[49] Indeed, in his biographical analysis of 172 terrorists, Sageman found that these individuals exhibited a lower level of psychological disorders than the general population.[50] Similar findings ushered in the shift from looking at terrorist profiles to *pathways* of engagement and the concept of radicalisation.[51]

Simply speaking, radicalisation is the process of engaging with and ultimately adopting an extremist ideology. Radicalisation is therefore the pathway to extremist violence/terrorism, or "what goes on before the bomb goes off."[52] But radicalisation does not always (or even usually) lead to violence. McCauley and Moskalenko explain why very few individuals who adhere to an extreme ideology justifying violence act on their beliefs by proposing a "two pyramids" model of radicalisation that distinguishes between opinion and action.[53] Thus, the radicalisation process can be broken down into *cognitive radicalisation*, or an individual's internal development of extremist ideas, and *behavioural radicalisation*, which is how these views then influence their actions. In this way, radicalisation can foster both violent and non-violent engagement, including activities such as recruiting, creating content, and fundraising. Crucially, an individual can also become cognitively radicalised without having these ideas influence their behaviour.

While there are still many questions about the relationship between cognitive and behavioural radicalisation, there is consensus that radicalisation is an inherently individual phenomenon. To lend some organisation to this radical muddle, terrorism researchers and practitioners have developed a plethora of models that seek to outline the radicalisation process and its necessary components. It is beyond the scope of the current discussion to give an in-depth review of these models; instead, our goal in the section below is to highlight some of the key factors in the radicalisation process, the role of the Internet, and how online places can support it.

Radicalisation, like crime, is a process requiring a combination of ingredients. Consequently, radicalisation models look at what factors and steps are necessary for it to occur. As discussed above, McCauley and Moskalenko separate radicalisation into two pyramids, each with varying degrees of severity for radical thought and action. Other models, like Moghaddam's staircase, conceptualise radicalisation as a linear process, starting with feelings of unrest and culminating in terrorist violence.[54]

In contrast, Sageman proposes a four-pronged model focusing on the interaction of moral outrage, resonance with personal experience, framing through ideology, and mobilisation through networks.[55] Moral outrage explains the underlying emotions at play as an individual increasingly views the world as unjust. These feelings are amplified as they resonate with an individual's personal experiences and grievances. Extremist ideologies provide the framework for making sense of these feelings and experiences. Berger explains how, at their core, all extremist ideologies identify a crisis facing an in-group and attribute its cause to a specific out-group.[56] Crucially, extremist ideologies also claim that this crisis (or crises) can only be

resolved through hostile, and typically violent, action against the out-group. While ideology is important, Sageman argues that exposure to extremist ideas/content alone is not enough to cause someone to radicalise; instead, it is socialisation with other in-group members that amplifies moral outrage, provides personal experiences, and aids in the formation of collective identities which increase the likelihood of action, violent or other.[57] Indeed, in his discussion of al-Qaeda, Sageman remarks that without networks, "we would have a lot of angry young Muslims, but no real terrorists".[58] Importantly, social networks exist in both the physical and online worlds.

What Role Does the Internet Play in Radicalisation?

The Internet contains all the ingredients necessary for radicalisation as outlined in Sageman's four-pronged model: exposure to ideology, personal experiences, moral outrage, and a network of like-minded individuals. Neumann explains how developments in communication technology, and particularly the Internet, have been instrumental in the evolution of terrorism from *old to new*.[59] While *old* terrorist groups were formally structured and hierarchical, *new* terrorism has been characterised by increasingly informal networks often formed in virtual spaces. Berger also recognises that, "when communication technology changes, extremism changes as well."[60]

The Internet allows for easier and more widespread access to extremist propaganda and other useful information, like bomb-making manuals, city maps, building blueprints, etc. It also facilitates communication and coordination between members of terrorist groups.[61] In other words, the Internet does not just give individuals access to information that they did not have before; it has fundamentally changed the way that we communicate, build relationships, and form identities. In particular, the Internet has aided in the development of transnational virtual communities, connecting individuals in a novel social environment.[62] As individuals interact online, they form *hybrid identities* that are not limited to their physical location.[63] Simultaneously, issues occurring in an individual's locale are increasingly likely to become embedded "within a transnational narrative."[64] Access to the Internet alone does not lead to radicalisation, but it does offer "more opportunities to become radicalised."[65] Over time, the Internet, and particularly social media, have assumed the role of offline places–churches, mosques, community centres, etc.–as the setting for meetings and discussions between current and would-be extremists.[66]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, social media (SM) platforms and other online spaces specifically designed to promote social networking have become particularly valuable for terrorist groups looking to garner new sympathisers, supporters, and official members. As discussed above, SM does not just expose individuals to extremist messaging; it increases the likelihood that these "messages will resonate with someone in that audience" through social interaction.[67] As much as SM platforms are about creating new communities, they are also isolating individuals within these communities.[68] Groups of like-minded individuals can become increasingly insular, forming echo chambers, or spaces where the same messages, emotions, and worldviews are repeated and reinforced, with little to no exposure to opposing information.[69] Furthermore, SM platforms have been intentionally developed to be addictive, encouraging people to spend more and more time there.[70] In this way, the Internet, and SM platforms in particular, are a venue for radicalisation. Using CS4 can help us understand which online places are relevant to radicalisation and how.

Methodology

Gaining access to official data from government, police, and security services is difficult, especially when it pertains to extremism/terrorism.[71] Similarly, information on radicalisation is also sensitive and hard to access in part because of the risk that, if made public, it could act as a sort of 'how to' guide for other individuals. Due to these data access issues, criminology and the study of rare events like terrorism/radicalisation have increasingly relied on open-source data and particularly structured datasets created using open sources. Despite this, there remains a lack of transparency and methodological rigour when using these data.[72]

In this research article, we draw on two examples that demonstrate the utility of applying CS4 to radicalisation. While the examples were not selected from a dataset, we identified and constructed them using data gathered from open sources. Open sources are publicly available information found in news media, academic publications, research reports, court records, government documents, and social media content.[73] Some of these sources are more reliable than others, and this variability necessitates that researchers assess and report on the credibility of the types of open sources they use.[74]

Freilich, Chermak, Connell, Klein, and Greene-Colozzi organise open sources into eight categories and rank them from most to least credible.[75] The three most reliable types are different forms of court proceedings and documents. The fourth and fifth sources are "corroborated information from people with direct access to the information provided" and uncorroborated statements from the same people.[76] The authors list media reports as the sixth most credible of the eight types of open sources. They also recognise that there is a spectrum of reliability within media sources, wherein mainstream news agencies are more trustworthy than fringe sites. This is because larger and more reputable organisations generally abide by stricter journalistic standards and are more likely to have their publications reviewed by editors and publishers.[77] Importantly, media reports can also include statements from more reliable open sources like court proceedings, and corroborated/uncorroborated information from people with access.[78] Media reports may also suffer from the "fog of war", in that facts presented in earlier documents may later be questioned or disproven.[79] Despite these concerns, LaFree and Gill highlight that the shortcomings of open source data are often the same for official sources.[80] Indeed, media sources are considered "uniquely useful in the study of terrorism" due to the newsworthiness of these events and their perpetrators.[81]

We selected two examples of radicalisation–Aqsa Mahmood and Mohammed Khalifa–using purposive sampling, for three reasons. First, both individuals were radicalised to the same group and extremist ideology. As will be discussed below, ISIS is infamous for its use of the Internet and SM, making them an obvious choice to investigate online radicalisation. Second, both were publicly touted as having been radicalised online and travelled to ISIS territory alone, minimising the role that offline socialisation played in their radicalisation process. Similarly, because Aqsa and Mohammed radicalised and travelled in 2013, their cases reflect a shared context within the broader trajectory of ISIS's organisational evolution. Having joined ISIS, both individuals continued to operate online on behalf of the group. Third, these cases also illustrate how individuals of different genders, backgrounds, and geographic locations underwent comparable radicalisation processes within similar online spaces.

We accessed open-source information about these examples through Google, Google Scholar, and our university library catalogue. The search terms for both individuals included variations of their name and group affiliation. For example, the search terms used for Aqsa Mahmood were: "aqsa mahmood", "aqsa mahmood AND radicalisation", "aqsa mahmood AND ISIS", and "aqsa mahmood AND islamic state". We then ranked sources according to the credibility index

proposed by Freilich, Chermak, Connell, Klein, and Greene-Colozzi and selected the most reliable.[82] For Aqsa, this included one government document, two research reports, and six media sources. We constructed Mohammed's case using two government/court documents and two media sources.

The limitations and concerns associated with using open-source data discussed above apply to the current study. To mitigate these, we selected the most credible sources available. For example, we chose media sources produced by reputable, mainstream agencies like the *BBC* and *The Washington Post*; however, it is still possible that the information presented in them is incorrect. In order to limit the chance that new or contradictory information would be revealed, we selected some of the earliest documented ISIS travellers/foreign fighters. These cases were selected using purposive sampling. While this ensures that they provide the information necessary to apply the CS4 to online radicalisation and have high internal validity, it also increases the risk of selection bias and limits their generalisability to other individuals, time periods, and extremist groups/ideologies.

The next section applies the CS4 framework to the radicalisation of Aqsa Mahmood and Mohammed Khalifa. As evidenced by their actions, both individuals were behaviourally radicalised. They travelled to Syria, joined ISIS, and engaged in different supporting roles while living in ISIS-controlled territory. However, because we are interested exclusively in online radicalisation, which may or may not result in criminal activity, we will not discuss crime sites below. Therefore, we refer to our application of CS4 as CS3 (excluding crime sites).

Applying CS3 to Two Examples of Online Radicalisation

In June 2014, ISIS captured the city of Mosul and announced the founding of a caliphate in its territories in northern Syria and Iraq.[83] Following the declaration of the Caliphate in February 2014, ISIS's goals expanded into the realm of state building. While the group continued to commit acts of violence against those living within their territory and abroad, it also sought to recruit individuals willing to travel to and ensure the population and functioning of the Caliphate. It is estimated that over 53,000 individuals from 80 countries travelled to join ISIS.[84] Most of these travellers were exposed to ISIS and its ideology through the Internet, and especially social media platforms.[85] The complex, online network of official ISIS propaganda outlets and unofficial supporters/disseminators that developed was referred to by the group internally as *media jihad*.[86] As governments and social media platforms alike struggled to respond to ISIS's online presence, the group succeeded in generating "an unprecedented wave of jihadist extremist recruitment…"[87]

Aqsa Mahmood

At 19 years old, Aqsa Mahmood was one of the earliest documented female travellers to Syria. She left her home in Glasgow, Scotland, to join ISIS in November 2013.[88] In the months that followed, her family and their lawyer repeatedly referred to Aqsa as a "bedroom radical"[89] who had been "brainwashed" by watching ISIS content and extremist sermons online.[90] It is also believed that Aqsa was in contact with individuals who helped her coordinate her travel to Syria.[91] One of those individuals appears to have been her alleged boyfriend, Adeel lhaq, who was later convicted of facilitating the travel of others to Syria.[92] His exact role in Aqsa's journey remains unclear, and the two appear to have only met once in person. After being separated by their parents, only Aqsa made the journey to Syria, where she married another ISIS member. All the ingredients that contributed to Aqsa's radicalisation seem to have originated online. Interestingly, more is known about her online presence after her arrival in Syria, where she became an integral part of ISIS's media jihad, which will be discussed more below.

Figure 2: *Aqsa Mahmood's CS3*
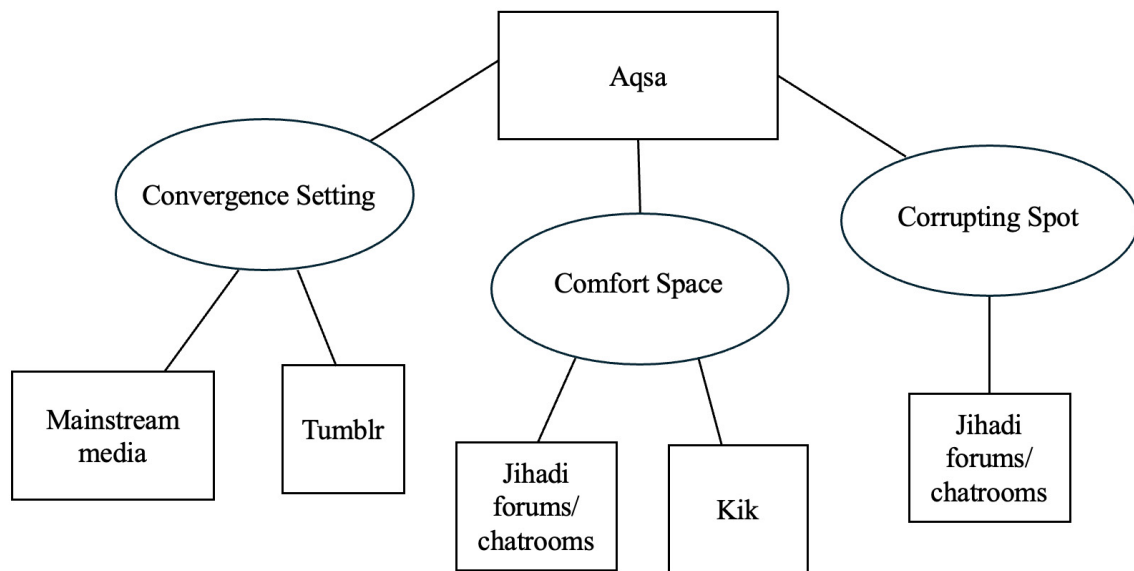
During her radicalisation process, online spaces acted as venues for Aqsa's convergence with both ideas and individuals. Her family remembers that she was troubled by news about the Syrian civil war, and Aqsa posted conservative Islamic sermons to her public Tumblr account, although we do not know where she originally accessed them.[93] These public spaces exposed Aqsa to current events and ISIS's foundational ideology. Aqsa also used jihadi forums/chatrooms and the messaging application Kik.[94] While we don't know what she said or whom she spoke to (because these spaces provide encrypted communications), it is likely that Aqsa used them to interact with, or at least listen to, other extremists in a more private setting. Due to their privacy, it is also likely that these places acted as corrupting spots, encouraging illicit activity in other places. As discussed above, cognitive radicalisation does not automatically necessitate action or a change in behaviour. Crime is not the definitive outcome of engaging with extremists or their content. However, Aqsa was behaviourally radicalised; she travelled to join ISIS and remained active in online spaces on behalf of the group while living in the Caliphate (discussed below). Ultimately, Aqsa is believed to have died in ISIS-occupied territory as the actions of the global coalition against Daesh intensified.

Mohammed Khalifa

In July 2022, the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia sentenced Mohammed Khalifa to life in prison for conspiring to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organisation, resulting in death.[95] Mohammed was born in Saudi Arabia, before moving to Canada as a young child.[96] While at a university studying computer science, he began watching videos of the Arab Spring online and joined forums devoted to discussing fundamentalist interpretations of Islam.[97] He also began listening to radical preacher Anwar al-Awlaki, who Mohammed says ultimately convinced him to leave Canada and join the jihadist movement.[98]

Looking for advice on how to travel to and enter Syria, Khalifa claims to have reached out to at least two different militant groups over email, Facebook, and Twitter, though he received no replies.[99] Ironically, Mohammed found the information he needed in an online, mainstream news article by PBS's Frontline.[100] In November 2013, he left Canada on the pretense of travelling to Cairo to explore the possibility of moving to Egypt. Once Mohammed reached the Syrian

border, he decided to join the Muhajireen al Ansar, which merged with ISIS not long after.[101] In April 2014, Mohammed joined ISIS's media and propaganda division, where he became one of their head English-speaking translators and narrators.[102] Mohammed was captured by Syrian Democratic Forces in 2019 while fighting in ISIS territory.[103]

Figure 3: Mohammed Khalifa's CS3
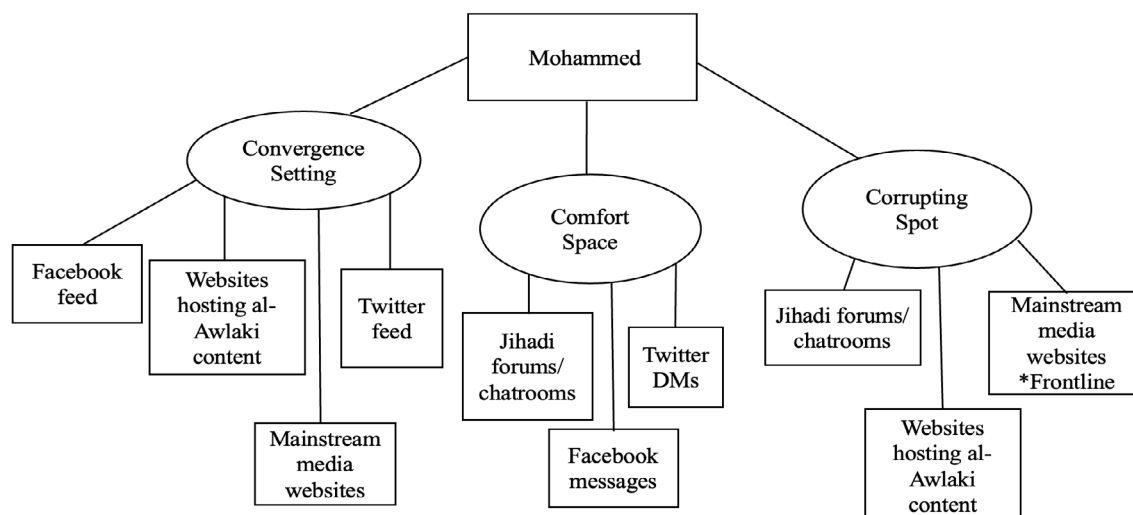
During his radicalisation process, Mohammed was active in multiple convergence settings–Facebook, Twitter, web pages, and mainstream media sites. These public places were also home to extremists and their content, like Anwar al-Awlaki. Interestingly, Mohammed used the private places within these same venues as comfort spaces to interact with offenders. For example, although ultimately unsuccessful, he used Facebook, Twitter, and email to contact multiple illegal militant groups with the intention of joining. However, the information that Mohammed needed to facilitate his travel and recruitment into a criminal group was gleaned from Frontline, a public mainstream media source. In this way, Frontline inadvertently acted as Mohammed's corrupting spot, a legitimate business promoting crime (joining an illegal organisation) at another spot.

Discussion

Both Aqsa and Mohammed were present in online spaces corresponding to the CS3 during their radicalisation (Table 2). Here, specific websites/platforms on the Internet (e.g., Tumblr, Facebook) became convergence settings—public places where offenders (radicalised individuals) and non-offenders (non-radicalised individuals) meet. For example, both engaged with online content disseminating radical interpretations of Islam. Aqsa and Mohammed were also exposed to images and footage of the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war, through mainstream media coverage and likely through other sources.

As their cognitive radicalisation progressed, it seems possible that these convergence settings also became corrupting spots. Initially, the two individuals may not have paid much attention to content supporting violent jihad; however, the more that they were exposed to these messages, the more likely it is that they resonated over time. To use Sageman's language, as Aqsa and

Mohammed began to frame international events through an extreme ideology, support this interpretation with personal experiences, and feel moral outrage, these convergence settings became corrupting ones. Unfortunately, we do not know the order or timing of which online places they visited and when. Although neither individual was reported to have engaged with official ISIS propaganda during their radicalisation, something–or someone–gave them the idea of travelling to Syria. *Where* this idea was introduced to them would then also be an example of an online corrupting spot; a space stimulating crime elsewhere, i.e. supporting/joining a terrorist group.

Table 2: Mohammed Khalifa and Aqsa Mahmood's Online CS3

CS3	Mohammed Khalifa		Aqsa Mahmood	
	Personal radicalisation	Post-radicalisation	Personal radicalisation	Post-radicalisation
Convergence Settings	• Facebook • Twitter • Websites hosting al-Awlaki content • Mainstream media	----	• Tumblr • Mainstream media	• Tumblr • Twitter
Comfort Spaces	• Jihadi forums/chatrooms • Facebook • Twitter • Email	•Translator network (platform unknown)	• Jihadi forums/chatrooms • Kik	• Twitter DMs • Surespot
Corrupting Spots	• Jihadi forums/chatrooms • Frontline (mainstream media)	• Official ISIS propaganda videos	• Jihadi forums/chatrooms • Kik	• Tumblr • Twitter DMs

Unfortunately, many of the details of Aqsa and Mohammed's online activity are unavailable. This is partially due to the deliberate removal of their digital footprints as part of government and tech companies' efforts to reduce ISIS's presence online. As both individuals' travel was surprising to their loved ones, it appears that no one saw the need to monitor their online behaviour. The lack of information is also because some of the online places they used were designed to be private, employing mechanisms like end-to-end encryption that make accessing them legally, ethically, and functionally challenging. By virtue of them being private, we know the least about Aqsa and Mohammed's online comfort spaces. While both individuals appear to have had comfort spaces like jihadi chatrooms, we do not know exactly who they spoke to, nor what was said. Frustratingly, these private places may also be the most important when it comes to radicalisation. As Sageman argues, socialisation is the key to adopting and engaging in behaviours aligned with radical views, and comfort places are crucial venues for social interaction between criminals, increasing group cohesion.[104]

Both Aqsa and Mohammed went on to become part of ISIS's *media jihad*. After their physical locations changed following their travel to Syria, the online places they frequented also shifted and were used for different things. Aqsa has been described as "one of the main recruiters of females for the terror group, using social networks such as Twitter, Tumblr and the encrypted app Surespot…"[105] For example, on her Tumblr blog, Aqsa posted a checklist for other women looking to immigrate to Syria, which included advice on which toiletries, underwear, electronics, and medication to bring.[106] The blog post also warned potential travellers not to use their home Wi-Fi network to search for ISIS content and to avoid downloading anything until arriving in Syria.[107] In this way, Tumblr became a corrupting spot which stimulated crime (travelling to join a terrorist group) in other locations.

Aqsa was extremely active on Twitter, where she adopted the pseudonym Umm Layth and garnered over 2,000 followers before being shut down in late 2014.[108] Aqsa used her account to praise terrorist attacks perpetrated by ISIS supporters in the West, commend executions in ISIS territory, and post photos of weapons and daily life in Syria.[109] Her parents also believe that she spoke to fellow UK traveller, Shamima Begum, through Twitter direct messaging (DMs); however, the details of their conversation have not been confirmed.[110] Like on her Tumblr blog, Umm Layth also tweeted a list of tips for making the journey to ISIS territory.[111] Here, Twitter acted as both a corrupting spot and a convergence setting (see Figure 4), where her tweets were read by potential ISIS sympathisers and would-be members.

Figure 4: *Single Platform Operating as Multiple Crime-Involved Places*
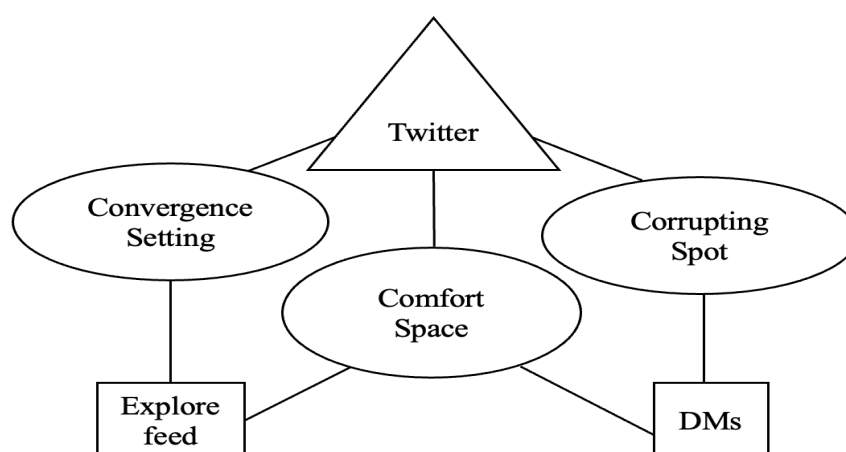
After watching Anwar al-Awlaki during his radicalisation process, Mohammed was given the opportunity to create official ISIS propaganda aimed at spreading the group's ideology, garnering sympathisers, and inspiring new members. In this role, Mohammed also managed a cluster of international ISIS supporters who translated the group's content.[112] Most infamously, Mohammed narrates and stars in "The Flames of War" videos.[113] In this way, Mohammed became responsible for the ultimate corrupting spot, producing content calling for and supporting acts of violence. After travelling, Aqsa and Mohammed were present in online spaces on behalf of ISIS, whose leadership used these places with strategy and intent.

Writing about conflict and contemporary warfare in general, Thomas Nissen explains how both state and non-state actors (including terrorist groups) have weaponised SM, particularly in situations of asymmetric conflict.[114] Nissen suggests that we think of the online world as a subset of the physical conflict zone rather than an altogether separate realm. Here, online spaces are particularly useful for strategic communications or "psychological warfare purposes", facilitating the spread of certain narratives/messages that seek to alter beliefs and ultimately behaviour.[115]

ISIS's use of strategic communications and their weaponisation of SM has been well researched. The group inspired an abundance of content, using both official and unofficial members in its production and distribution. Hughes and Meleagrou-Hitchens use the term *virtual entrepreneurs* to refer to the individuals involved in supporting ISIS online.[116] In relation to ISIS-inspired violence, virtual entrepreneurs include official and unofficial ISIS members, who engage in direct plotting, encouragement, and facilitation.[117] Furthermore, both the messages

of ISIS's online content and where it was (and continues to be) spread were purposely chosen to achieve its long-term goals.[118] The strategic messaging conveyed by ISIS propaganda has been compared to that of a brand, pushing a specific narrative and even a lifestyle.[119] In this way, the group used SM to reach a large audience of individuals who may have been primed for radicalisation.

Table 3: *ISIS Online Spaces (2014-2015)*

CS4	Example
Convergent Settings	Social media platforms: • Facebook (public group/ page) • Twitter • Tumblr • Telegram (public channels) • YouTube News outlets/ websites: • Frontline
Comfort Spaces	Private social media: • Facebook (private groups/ pages/ Messenger) • Twitter (direct messaging) • Telegram (1:1 messages/ private/ invite only channels) • WhatsApp • Jihadi chatrooms/ forums
Corrupting Spots	Official terrorist controlled/ operated websites: • ISIS outlets: Al-Hayat Media Centre, al-Furqan Media Centre • Dabiq (online magazine) • Social media posts inciting violence

Aqsa and Mohammed's participation in the media jihad offers a snapshot of a specific time in ISIS's online operations (Table 3) when the bulk of the group's activities took place on Twitter. Winter characterises 2014 as "the year that Salafi-jihadist propaganda went mainstream."[120] Berger and Morgan found that between September and December 2014, ISIS had at least 46,000 Twitter accounts producing pro-ISIS content on the platform.[121] By 2015, the group used Twitter to spread all its official propaganda.[122] ISIS's presence was so strong that from February to July 2016, Twitter was removing around 40,000 pro-ISIS accounts per month.[123] However, between July/August 2015 and January 2017, there was a 48% drop in ISIS's production of official propaganda.[124] This decline in online activity corresponded to significant losses of ISIS's physical territory in Syria and Iraq. Their decreased presence on Twitter also signalled a general change in the online spaces used by the group.

As SM platforms began to respond to their use of public convergence settings, ISIS moved to less popular, and therefore more private, places. For example, the one-to-one messaging application Telegram began to host public channels in 2015, allowing channel operators to share content with multiple channel members simultaneously.[125] ISIS's presence on Telegram grew as its use of other mainstream SM like Twitter dropped. Even as ISIS lost most of its physical places, its online ecosystem endured. Lakomy found that ISIS-operated accounts continued to avoid detection and removal, and quickly re-established those banned by law enforcement and tech companies.[126] At the beginning of 2021, there were at least 130 online places affiliated with ISIS, including 28 websites and blogs, 9 SM accounts, and 74 file-sharing applications.[127]

What's Next...?

As research scholar JM Berger has observed: "When the study of radicalisation as a process becomes fixated on contents, the results are a bewildering mess that distorts analytical efforts. A content-driven approach produces a menagerie of competing theories that make sense only in the context of a single movement at a single point in time..."[128]

This article has introduced the idea of using the CS4 (or CS3) framework to understand online places pertinent to radicalisation. Online spaces are relevant to radicalisation regardless of the result of this process: cognitive radicalisation (changes in thought), and/or behavioural radicalisation (changes in action). Using CS4 and thinking of the online ecosystem as akin to physical locations in a crime-place network has the potential to help researchers, practitioners, law enforcement, and national security agencies understand *how* online spaces are used by extremist actors. In other words, CS4 can help us understand how online spaces act as venues of radicalisation. This is not to say that extremist content should be ignored; the messages and narratives transmitted by extremist groups are important. What we are arguing is that we should not just be asking *why*, but also the complementary questions of *how* and *where* radicalisation occurs, particularly online.

CS4 provides us with a tool to understand the venues of online radicalisation: where do individuals converge with extremists and their messages; where do they access propaganda; where do they discuss potential action, even violence? As Madensen et al. remind us, if locations in crime place networks are not identified or responded to, offenders will continue to use them to their advantage.[129] The functionality, structure and design of many of these online places remain unchanged, meaning that they have the potential to be used in the same way by different terrorist/extremist groups. However, we acknowledge that this article applies the CS4 framework to two examples. Using multiple data sources—government/court documents, research reports, and media sources—increased the internal validity of our findings. Nevertheless, future researchers should identify additional cases of ISIS-affiliated individuals and make use of existing open-source databases to explore whether the application of the CS4/3 to online radicalisation is generalisable. Such research should also be expanded to consider how different extremist groups/ideologies use online spaces as venues for radicalisation.

Mackenzie B. Hart is a PhD student in the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University. She is also the Coordinator for the Canadian Network for Research on Security, Extremism, and Society (CANSES). Her research focuses on right-wing extremism, conspiracy theories, and nihilistic violent extremism.

Shannon J. Linning is an assistant professor in the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University. She researches the concentration of crime at places and how property owners can reduce crime opportunities at places. Her work appears in journals such as the British Journal of Criminology, Crime Science, and the Journal of Quantitative Criminology.

Ivana Zdjelar is an MA student in Criminology at Simon Fraser University. Her research explores how extremist forums and websites are owned, run, and moderated and how that shapes extremist behaviour. She is also a Research Specialist with the Canadian Network for Research on Security, Extremism, and Society (CANSES), and has published in the Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism.

Garth Davies is a professor in the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University. He is also the Director, of the Canadian Network for Research on Security, Extremism, and Society (CANSES).

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Beyond Antecedents: The Application of Reciprocal Determinism to Understanding Radicalisation Process(es)

Levi West*, Michael J. Platow, Helen Taylor, and Emily Corner

Abstract: This article proposes a novel theoretical framework for (re)conceptualising the process(es) of radicalisation. Whilst the concept of radicalisation, as a social and psychological process, has been ubiquitous within recent popular, political, and policy discourse, it remains relatively immature and intangible. Indeed, it has received inadequate theoretical or conceptual consideration. In an attempt to rectify this, the current paper proposes a novel, dynamic, conceptual framework anchored in the reciprocal determinism approach articulated by Bandura.[i] This novel framework recognises and articulates the inherently multicausal dynamics of what is known as radicalisation. In proposing this framework, this article seeks to: a) move the field beyond the static identification of the antecedents approach that has guided much of the research examining radicalisation, and in doing so, b) provide a more comprehensive, empirically evidenced, and dynamic, theoretical grounding that has the potential to offer greater explanatory value for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. greater explanatory value for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers.

Corresponding author: Levi West, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University. Email: Levi.West@anu.edu.au

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Introduction

On 11 March 2015, Islamic State (IS) announced that then 18-year-old Australian Jake Bilardi (under his nom de guerre, Abu Abdullah al-Australi) had undertaken a suicide bombing in Ramadi, Iraq.[1] The actions undertaken by Bilardi were the culmination of a cognitive shift in his beliefs, most often referred to as radicalisation, with Bilardi going from identifying as "an Atheist school student in affluent Melbourne to a soldier of the Khilafah preparing to sacrifice my life for Islam."[2] According to the psychological concept of reciprocal determinism, Bilardi's cognitive shift (radicalisation) impacted, and was impacted by, his social contexts and the behaviours he engaged in within these contexts. In the below illustration of Bilardi's radicalisation process, we highlight the importance of considering the interactions between Bilardi's cognitions, his social contexts, and the behaviours he carried out in these contexts prior to his suicide bombing.

Bilardi was described by his father as a "shy and lonely", "violent" child who "did not fit in" with peers.[3] In his own writings, Bilardi noted that his older brother first exposed him to political contexts that helped shape his worldview.[4] Further, shortly after his mother died from cancer in 2012, he reportedly converted to Islam[5] and began engaging with "brothers and sheiks,"[6] some of whom were linked to the Hume Islamic Youth Centre in Melbourne, a site linked to multiple terrorist plots and foreign fighters.[7] These experiences helped facilitate a shift in Bilardi's social identity (from an identity based on being a lonely son, brother, and atheist, to one that was based on being a sociable, politically aware, Muslim convert). This shift in identity afforded changes in Bilardi's interpretations of himself and the world, filtering his interpretation of—and leading him to seek out more radical—social contexts. For example, by 2013, Bilardi's postings on Yahoo Questions had escalated from benign questions about sport and computers to defending the Taliban and Islamic State.[8] Despite having established a radical social identity both online and in person, which reinforced his cognitive engagement with his extremist ideology, Bilardi struggled to obtain the necessary logistical guidance he needed to make his way to Iraq and Syria. In 2014, with the assistance of Misrad Kandic, now convicted of providing material support to a foreign terrorist organisation,[9] Bilardi travelled from his home in Melbourne to Istanbul, then on to Syria, and ultimately to Iraq,[10] translating his cognitive engagement into material action.

In the pursuit of understanding what radicalisation *is*, the field of terrorism research is replete with case examples like Bilardi's. However, despite the significant and enduring presence of radicalisation as part of the counter-terrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism discourse, it remains both a relatively immature and unrefined concept. While it has become ubiquitous within research and policy circles, both to describe the trajectory towards terrorist violence and as something that necessitates countering, it has been grossly under-conceptualised, and the empirical basis upon which it has been researched has historically lacked theoretical foundations. Given that radicalisation as a concept provides the basis for substantial authorities and powers to be ascribed to the State, and that those authorities and powers frequently entail coercive action and the deprivation or curtailing of liberties, it is incumbent on the research community to strengthen the empirical and theoretical understanding of the concept. This article presents an argument for the adoption of a novel framework for understanding radicalisation. Further research is currently being conducted to empirically assess the validity of the framework. The following sections first outline the requirements for this framework, before moving to examine the literature underpinning the elements of the framework. Additionally, this article introduces the proposed conceptual framework and articulates its constituent elements.

The Need for Theoretical Framing

As psychologists have long acknowledged,[11] when seeking to understand and explain human behaviour, we tend to favour developing unidirectional or bidirectional causal models that emphasise relationships between either individual or social variables (antecedents) and resultant behaviours. This is no different in the examination of radicalisation and terrorist behaviour.[12] However, in reality, the relationships between antecedents and behaviours are all interdependent.[13] This interdependency is most commonly referred to as reciprocal determinism.[14] Importantly, reciprocal determinism focuses on explaining the relationships between the underlying contexts, processes, and behaviours from which antecedents emerge, and not the antecedents themselves. Within the assumptions of reciprocal determinism, cognitive processes affect and are affected by how we navigate social environments by determining what will be observed and how it will be understood, ultimately facilitating how we psychologically and physically position ourselves, and thus behave, in any given specific context. These causal processes are not unidirectional. Behaviours are self-regulated due to changes in social environments and the parameters upon which our cognitions operate. Reciprocal determinism also emphasises that the relative influence exerted by each of the three elements (cognitive processes, social contexts, behaviours) will vary for different individuals and under different circumstances. Figure 1 highlights the continuous interplay proposed in reciprocal determinism.

Figure 1: *Continuous interplay of Cognitive, Environmental, and Behavioural Processes as described in Reciprocal Determinism*
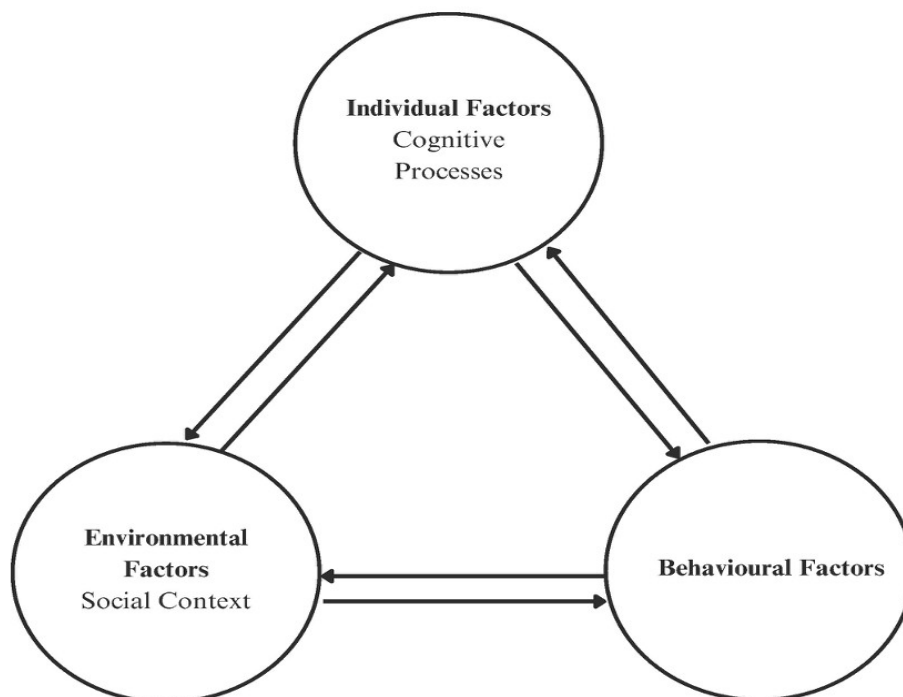
Whilst the concept of reciprocal determinism has been readily accepted in psychological research and has been applied to explain a wide variety of behavioural outcomes,[15] including crime,[16] it has yet to be used in the study of radicalisation and terrorist behaviour.[17] This is, unfortunately, not surprising. Relative to comparable fields investigating human behaviour, the academic inquiry of radicalisation and terrorism remains in its infancy. It has undoubtedly improved its empirical rigour following the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11th, 2001.[18] There is now a consensus that no single antecedent can explain radicalisation or terrorism.[19] However, to date, most empirical research investigating radicalisation and

terrorism has focused on the repetition of static descriptive analyses, with a trend toward offering descriptive prevalence estimates of the presence of a wide range of antecedents.[20] For example, in their systematic review and meta-analysis of 127 studies published between 2007 and 2021, Wolfowicz and colleagues identified over 100 behavioural antecedents related to radicalisation.[21] The antecedents that have been identified across the field now form the basis for a wide array of risk factors that are included in current and emerging risk assessment and management protocols used to counter radicalisation and terrorism.

Despite these empirical advancements and application to practice, most existing analyses in static form only scratch the surface in our attempts to understand the relevance of the identified antecedents as drivers of radicalisation and terrorism. In the rare instances where research has used dynamic analytical procedures to tackle this problem, it has exposed and reinforced the complexity of interactions between antecedents that co-occur in individuals who undertake terrorism,[22] and exposes a continuing problem elucidated by Wolfowicz and colleagues,[23] who highlighted that despite a wealth of empirical research, two fundamental questions remain: why do only some individuals radicalise when most of those exposed to similar conditions do not, and why do only some radicalised individuals turn to violence, whilst the majority do not?

These questions cannot be answered without a coherent and empirically verified theoretical grounding.[24] Without such a grounding, it will never be possible to determine why and how specific antecedents are related. Across the field, there is a distinct lack of theoretically or empirically focused investigations seeking to understand the reciprocal interactions between the contexts, processes, and behaviours that underpin the identified antecedents. This means that existing research outcomes—and by extension, the practice of risk assessment—are descriptive and explanatory only of the specific cases and contexts where the antecedents were identified. Without a coherent and empirically verified theoretical explanation of the reciprocal interactions between the elements underpinning the known antecedents, existing findings are only able to offer a limited explanation of any causal relationships between antecedents, *which* antecedents are important in the process of radicalisation, or the *specific circumstances* in which they are important.

Taking this as a starting point, this discussion explores the potential for the application of reciprocal determinism to bolster the theoretical grounding of our understanding of the process(es) of radicalisation. The most empirically comprehensive research that examines radicalisation continuously highlights that it is the interaction between antecedents that offers insight into radicalisation.[25] The framework of reciprocal determinism can offer a structure which moves our understanding beyond the description of the presence of antecedents and towards the acknowledgement of the importance of interactions *between* the contexts, processes, and factors that underpin the antecedents.

Radicalisation as a Concept

The concept of radicalisation, whilst frequently cited across scholarly, public, and policy domains, remains relatively underdeveloped. Scholars have consistently highlighted that the term emerged into public consciousness following the 9/11 attacks.[26] For example, Neumann noted that, following the attacks, it "became very difficult to talk about the 'root causes' of terrorism…so experts and officials started referring to the idea of 'radicalisation' whenever they wanted to talk about 'what goes on before the bomb goes off.'"[27]

It is relatively uncontroversial to state that the term radicalisation has become associated, most acutely, with the PREVENT programme in the United Kingdom, and has been applied, at least during the War on Terror, disproportionately to Islamic communities in Western jurisdictions.[28]

This conceptualisation has resulted in skewed data collection that places emphasis on religious motivations. As a result, work in this area is encumbered with a secondary problem of implying, or explicitly reinforcing, the flawed premise that Islam, or Muslims, are at greater risk of radicalisation than the general population.[29]

Therefore, this discussion, while continuing to utilise the term *radicalisation,* considers it a process of *belief adoption* in the agnostic sense. A core assumption that informs this research is that any assessment of a specific ideology or belief framework as 'extreme' or 'radical' is necessarily subjective and context dependent,[30] and that the process by which an individual adopts beliefs and undertakes behaviours anchored in or informed by those beliefs, remains consistent, regardless of any assessment of the 'extremity' or presentation of those beliefs. The proposed framework in this research reflects the consistent nature of belief adoption,[31] independent of ideological specificity, character of particular belief frameworks, or nuances in behaviours observed across different ideological presentations.

It should be noted that the critique of radicalisation and its conceptualisation, which is inherent in this article, should not be read as an explicit criticism of the foundational work that has brought radicalisation scholarship to its current position. Indeed, the foundational work of scholars such as Silke,[32] Horgan,[33] Victoroff,[34] Kruglanski,[35] Post,[36] McCauley and Moskalenko,[37] have, amongst numerous others, all contributed immensely to the refinement and development of the specialist body of knowledge that has concentrated on understanding radicalisation. The work undertaken herein builds on and seeks to extend that previous scholarship.

Despite the above-noted seminal research, the growth in the adoption of the term radicalisation has outpaced the empirical advancements in our understanding of what radicalisation *is*. There is a common acceptance throughout the literature, and a large number of radicalisation models, that radicalisation is a process rather than an outcome.[38] In 2023, Corner and Taylor identified 99 unique radicalisation models that have been developed across the field.[39] These models were designed to capture the relationships between antecedents related to the process of radicalisation, and whilst all models treat the adoption of attitudes and behaviours characteristic of terrorist ideologies as a process, this is where the commonalities end. Corner and Taylor identified 786 unique antecedents included across the 99 models. Over time, model design has increased in complexity, in part due to the continual identification of antecedents, and currently, the most coherent models draw from the theoretically robust discipline of criminology and embrace, rather than ignore, the complexity of what radicalisation is.[40]

Despite this shift, the models have received criticism from a range of scholars, who highlight the continued lack of theoretical and empirical validation.[41] Further, and relatedly, the lack of validation likely spans from the models' purpose; models have been designed to offer descriptive narratives of the process of radicalisation. These narratives are grounded in the examination of unidirectional (and in some instances, bidirectional) relationships between antecedents.

However, as argued in reciprocal determinism, the examination of relationships between antecedents can only offer limited insight into any process with a behavioural outcome. This includes radicalisation. Empirical research focusing on the process(es) of radicalisation has demonstrated the complexity of interactions between the previously identified and presumed stable antecedents, highlighting their ontological instability.[42] It is the application of reciprocal determinism, and thus the focus on continuous reciprocal interactions between the contexts, processes, and behaviours that antecedents emerge from, that distinguishes the current research from much of the previous. By examining the ubiquitous and fundamental processes that underpin antecedents, analysis can further our understanding of radicalisation by moving

beyond static descriptions of *what is* to a dynamic causal explanation of *why it is so*. It is through understanding this *why* that research outputs can be refined and, ultimately, that practitioners will be empowered to identify and manage the *who*, *when*, and *where* of radicalisation.

A (Dynamic) Conceptual Framework

Therefore, following the arguments presented within reciprocal determinism, this article assumes that individual cognitive processes will impact and be impacted by the social contexts in which people find themselves. Further, the behaviours that individuals conduct due to these cognitive processes and social contexts will also impact an individual's cognitions and their social contexts. These continuous reciprocal interactions have important implications for understanding the relationships between the currently identified social, cognitive, and behavioural antecedents related to radicalisation. In order to collate this assumption, we present a conceptual framework (Figure 2).

In contrast to the existing frameworks and models, which tend to concentrate on the presence of antecedents across the process of radicalisation, the dynamic framework proposed here seeks to offer an advanced understanding of what radicalisation is. Ultimately, this framework proposes that radicalisation is the result of normal, knowable, continuous interactions between individuals' behaviours, and their social contexts and cognitive processes. The framework looks beyond examining relationships between individual antecedents of radicalisation, and towards understanding the development of a radical social identity following the interaction between the cognitive processes and the radical social contexts in which an individual experiences, interprets, and understands reality.

Whilst the framework proposed here does highlight elements previously identified in the literature as antecedents, for example, individual cognitive processes, these are included as they are tangible, empirically verified components of the processes and contexts within the framework. It is also important to note that the outcome of radicalisation is contingent on the interactions between processes and should in no way be construed as suggesting that the presence of specific antecedents named in the model, for example, low self-efficacy, in and of itself, are in any way an indicator of an individual holding radical views or being likely to adopt radical views. This research also does not propose that an additional series of antecedents would provide any further explanation of radicalisation, but instead seeks to provide a dynamic understanding of the mechanisms by which an individual adopts *radical* beliefs.

Figure 2: *Conceptual Framework*
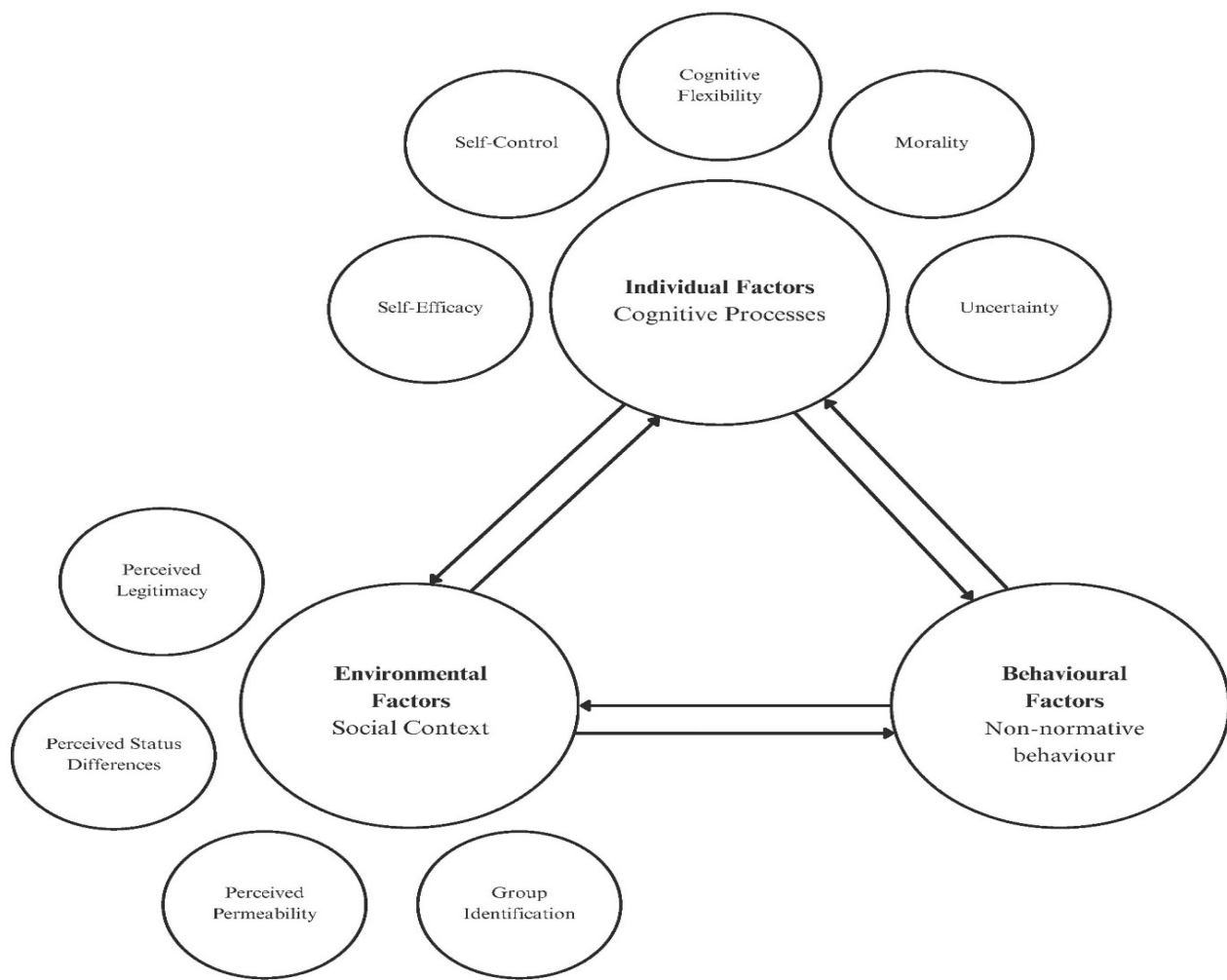
Informed by the concept of reciprocal determinism, the following sections will focus on examining the existing literature regarding the role of the social context, cognitive processes, and (non-normative) behaviours in the process(es) of radicalisation. The following sections will articulate broad definitional parameters for the concepts being deployed and the meaning they carry in the context of the proposed research.

The Social Context

Since the inception of the field of terrorism studies, one of the most consistent research directions in the exploration of radicalisation and terrorist behaviour has been the focus on the role of radical social groups. First posited by Süllwold[43] and later championed as *the* cause of radicalisation for over three decades,[44] the influence of radical social contexts continues to permeate the literature on radicalisation. However, much like other research directions, to date, we know very little about *why* social contexts are critical in the process of radicalisation. In 2020, a substantial systematic review of the antecedents of radicalisation toward violent extremism was conducted.[45] The research teams identified over 1500 empirically verified antecedents of radicalisation across 306 empirical studies. The most commonly identified antecedent was engagement with a radical social group, identified in 131 investigations. Theoretical interrogation of this antecedent highlighted that it was primarily underpinned by the degree to which people *identified* with specific social groups.[46]

Furthering these findings, this current research builds on this empirical reality of the influence of radical social contexts and embeds it within a well-established social-psychological theoretical approach: the social identity approach (SIA). The SIA comprises two interlinked theories: social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorisation theory (SCT).[47] SIT provides a detailed analysis of intergroup behaviours in particular, with conceptual emphasis on intergroup social comparisons, intergroup status hierarchies, and the legitimacy of these hierarchies.[48] SCT expands on SIT, and articulates the series of social-psychological processes by which people come to see themselves – and act – not only as unique individuals, but as members of social groups.[49] Therefore, while SIT highlights that people *are* members of groups, SCT provides insight into the psychological basis by which group membership is instantiated within any given person.

Fundamentally, the SIA proposes that all individuals perceive themselves as either belonging (in-group) or not belonging (out-group) to a range of social categories or contexts they are embedded within.[50] These social contexts may be based on independent inclusionary criteria, like gender, ethnicity, and nationality, or they may be based on the acceptance of sets of attitudes and/or beliefs (e.g., 'we pro-lifers,' 'we environmentalists,' 'we true believers').[51] This sense of belonging is critical in the development of identification with groups.[52] When individuals' identities become that of their in-group(s), their new identities have cognitive, evaluative, and affective consequences for individuals' self-concepts,[53] which impact their ongoing selection of social contexts and the behaviours they perform within and outside of these contexts.[54]

The SIA offers an analysis of social membership that, although not readily applied in research examining radicalisation,[55] has been applied successfully to analyses of an extensive range of contexts, including prejudice and stereotyping,[56] leadership and influence,[57] procedural and restorative justice,[58] organisational behaviour,[59] and education.[60] From the perspective of the SIA, radical group membership is understood to relate to the self-defined, subjective, identity-related, social group memberships that individuals *believe* they are part of. Therefore, according to the SIA, individuals *believe* and *act* as if they are members of the radical group, even if it is not objectively clear that they maintain physical access to the group. This is an important conceptual and practical advance for research examining radicalisation, which to date has focused on examining tangible physical relationships between individuals.

Research examining the impact of social contexts on identity has collectively identified four key tenets of the SIA: group identification, perception of status differences between groups, perception of legitimacy of intergroup status differences, and perception of permeability between groups. Bettencourt and colleagues explain the relationship between these tenets; individual identification and collective intergroup attitudes are a function of the need for positive social identity (and thus self-concept). These attitudes operate within the specific socio-structural context – whether the social hierarchy is perceived as both stable and legitimate and whether group boundaries between low- and high-status groups are perceived as permeable.[61] These tenets will now each be explored in turn.

Group identification

Group identification refers to the extent to which our identities relate to the social groups we are members of, and the extent to which we adopt, internalise and place value on our group memberships. This can be both self and externally defined.[62] As noted above, our identification with groups has important consequences for our own self-concept. In our efforts to enhance our self-concept, we are driven to positively evaluate the groups we identify with (in-groups) by comparison to other groups that we do not identify with (out-groups).[63] Our identification with our in-groups also has consequences for the behaviours performed by the group. According to

the SIA, perceived or anticipated changes in the intergroup social context (threats to existing social hierarchy) will impact the importance of group identification, and existing group identities become more relevant to the identity of the individuals within and can manifest in higher willingness to support or resist social changes.[64] This can present as low-status groups challenging higher-status groups and higher-status groups resisting changes that would destabilise their status.[65]

There is extensive evidence demonstrating that high group identification leads to a higher likelihood of responding to a threat to the identity and status of the in-group,[66] and that collective actions of disadvantaged and low-status groups are primarily driven by those with high group identification.[67] However, research has also identified that this expectation is defied in those conducting radical action: in radical groups, the endorsement of radical action is more likely among those who have lower group identification than high,[68] and those more likely to endorse radical action perceive other (non-endorsing) members of the in-group as lacking solidarity and commitment to the cause.[69] These seemingly aberrant findings have been theorised as related to the distinction between moderate and radical collective action. Jiménez-Moya and colleagues noted that as those who identify highly with the in-group are more motivated to protect the positive evaluations of the group (to enhance their own self-concept), they may be less motivated to endorse radical action, as such behaviours transgress socially accepted values and norms and potentially negatively impact their group's status.[70]

Perceived stability of status differences

As demonstrated above, the perception of status differences (and their stability) between groups is intrinsically linked to group identification. Group status refers to the current position of the in-group in the social hierarchy compared to other out-groups (low to high), and status stability refers to the likelihood that the identified status differences can change (e.g., low-status groups can advance to a high-status and vice versa).[71] The stability of inter-group status differences is measured through the perception that alternatives to the current status structure are considered not feasible or possible.[72] According to Brandt and colleagues, in our quest to improve our social identity and own self-concept, we are highly motivated to see ourselves, our in-groups with which we identify, and the wider social systems in which we and our groups operate, in a positive light.[73] This is completed through inter-group comparisons, with members of high-status groups more easily achieving positive social identities as compared to low-status groups, who are less able to view the social system – in which they exist further down the social hierarchy – in a positive light.[74]

Perceived legitimacy of status differences

To enhance perceptions of the in-group (and self-concepts), individuals are motivated to accept the legitimacy of the status differences between groups.[75] According to many SIA scholars, the legitimacy of perceived intergroup status differences is independent of the stability of the status structure.[76] However, the initial intentions of Tajfel and Tuner were to highlight that these two tenets are closely interrelated, with more unstable status hierarchies having a higher likelihood as being perceived as illegitimate,[77] Indeed, Caricati and Sollami argued that in a societal hierarchy where the status differences between groups are perceived as illegitimate, low-status groups are more likely to question the superior position of the high-status groups. This can also result in less discrimination towards low-status groups from high-status groups as they experience a threat to their social identity. Further, when the societal hierarchy is perceived as legitimate, low-status groups are more likely to accept their position and high-status groups are more likely to discriminate against low-status groups in an effort to stabilise their social identity.[78] Meta-analyses have identified support for this hypothesis, demonstrating that unstable status hierarchies that are perceived as illegitimate are most at risk for the rejection of the status hierarchy by low-status groups.[79]

Perceived permeability between groups

The perception of the permeability of boundaries between groups plays a key role in determining a group's response to the perceived status differences.[80] Tajfel and Turner highlighted that permeability of group boundaries is measured by the extent to which individual group members are able to shift their group membership.[81] According to the SIA, a status hierarchy that has permeable boundaries affords individuals in low-status groups the opportunity to adopt individual upward mobility strategies to increase their own status (and thus self-concept). This is particularly true when the status differences between groups are perceived as legitimate.[82] However, when boundaries between groups are perceived as impermeable, those within low-status groups instead seek to adopt collective strategies to enhance their identity (and thus the self-concepts of group members) and the group's place in the status hierarchy.[83] Such collective actions are also more likely when the existing status structure is perceived as unstable.[84]

Mummendey and colleagues noted that it is the perceived impermeability of boundaries that has the greatest impact on the existing status hierarchy.[85] If the perceived status differences are deemed stable and legitimate, engagement in collective action is less likely, as it is driven by the perception that intergroup structures can be changed (even if the status differences are seen as illegitimate). In the context of radical groups, Louis and Taylor argued that low-status radical groups are more likely to compete with the high-status government groups if there is a perception of unjustified inequality of status.[86]

Cognitive Processes

As noted, reciprocal determinism highlights that cognitive processes both shape and are shaped by external social environments and behavioural responses. These processes determine how individuals interpret experiences and anticipate outcomes, thereby guiding actions as well as being subsequently reshaped by the outcomes of those actions. By unpacking specific cognitive mechanisms identified as related to radicalisation, this section proffers evidence of how cognition continuously interacts with social identity and behaviour in the context of radicalisation.

The existing literature related to cognitive processes and radicalisation has tended towards treating cognition independently of behaviours and social contexts or social identity. Many of the earlier approaches to understanding radicalisation identified the importance of 'cognitive openings,'[87] although this research was more often informed by a Social Movement Theory perspective, rather than cognitive psychology explicitly. Newer scholarship has more explicitly dealt with cognitive psychological perspectives and radicalisation specifically, but has primarily continued the approach of treating it as a distinct aspect of the radicalisation process. McCauley and Moskalenko's influential two pyramids model, drawing in part on earlier work by Borum,[88] goes as far as to distinguish between "radicalization of opinion separately from radicalization of action." Furthermore, as Wolfowicz et al have highlighted, much of the existing literature has "…emphasized the need to differentiate the cognitive from the behavioral outcomes of radicalization."[89]

This article draws on the conceptualisations articulated by Bandura and notes that, irrespective of any assessment of behaviour, social identity, or cognition, the relationships between our individual and social antecedents and our behaviours are all interdependent.[90] This necessitates further refinement of our understanding of radicalisation to try to understand the relationships between cognitive processes, social identity, and behaviour, rather than treating behaviour and cognitive processes as distinct or separate processes. This does not contradict the consistent findings that only a small number of those who radicalise engage in violent action, but rather seeks to identify any correlation between the cognitive processes and social identity characteristics of those who do.

The literature on cognitive processes and ideology, and extremism and radicalisation specifically, has been strengthened by the recent scholarship of Zmigrod, whose work has refined the understanding of both the relationship between cognition and ideology[91] and extremism[92] generally, as well as working on specific aspects of cognition and its predictive capacity regarding extremism.[93] This work, at the frontier of political psychology and neuroscience, reinforces the importance of cognition to any appreciation of radicalisation.

The elements of cognition that are articulated below, and are incorporated into the dynamic model proposed herein, have all been demonstrated to have a substantial role in the radicalisation process, across the literature in the field. As with the social identity elements above, existing literature has empirically demonstrated the role of the cognitive processes in radicalisation, and as such, warrants consideration as part of the model proposed. Each of the elements is discussed in turn below.

Cognitive (in)flexibility

Cognitive flexibility is generally defined as the ability to switch between mental processes in order to generate appropriate behavioural responses to environments.[94] It is critical in moderating our thoughts and actions to unexpected environmental changes in an adaptive manner,[95] resulting in creative problem solving, greater resilience, and higher quality of life.[96] In presenting cognitive flexibility, individuals are both able to adequately shift their attention to capture environmental and situational changes and, based on their understanding of available options, interpret the meaning of these changes for their behaviour.[97] Studies have consistently demonstrated that higher levels of cognitive flexibility are inversely related to a range of negative outcomes associated with criminal behaviour.[98]

Cognitive flexibility has been dutifully investigated in examinations of non-normative and radical behaviour. Earlier studies observed an inverse linear relationship between conservatism and racism and cognitive flexibility. As cognitive inflexibility increased, studies demonstrated increased evidence of conservatism and racism. These studies also highlighted that cognitive inflexibility is related to intolerance to ambiguity, a preference for group-based hierarchies, and a tendency to view out-groups as a threat to social order.[99] More recent research has validated these findings, identifying similar (inverse) relationships between cognitive flexibility and a range of ideological preferences, including right-wing attitudes,[100] nationalism,[101] and authoritarianism.[102] Moving beyond beliefs, authors have also noted that cognitive inflexibility is more readily identified in those who express support for political violence.[103] The results from these studies and meta-analyses support the notion that cognitive flexibility plays a role in non-normative behaviour. The rigidity in mental processing not only reduces adaptability to diverse environments but also reinforces binary distinctions, such as in-group versus out-group, which in turn may amplify susceptibility to radicalising social contexts.[104]

Self-control

Self-control is a foundational cognitive process that governs behavioural regulation. According to Inzlicht and colleagues, self-control "refers to the mental processes that allow people to override thoughts and emotions." Control over these processes allows individuals to adapt their behaviour across situations.[105] It is commonly accepted that self-control is demonstrated when individuals are able to adjust their behaviour and sacrifice an immediate reward in anticipation of a future, larger reward.[106] Low self-control has long been identified as a key risk factor for general delinquency and crime, with Gottfredson and Hirschi elaborating that those who have lower levels (or lack) of self-control are characterised by impulsivity, insensitivity, and risk-taking behaviours.[107]

Given the well-established link between self-control and deviance and crime, it is not surprising that the investigation of non-normative behaviours associated with radicalisation has included investigations of self-control, and several studies highlight this link. For instance, in a sample of 684 young adults in the United Kingdom, low self-control and criminogenic exposure were significantly related to a potential for conducting both political and violent extremism. In a sample of 4,855 Finnish adolescents, Näsi and colleagues identified low self-control as a predictor of hate-motivated assaults.[108] Rottweiler and colleagues highlighted that poor self-control was related to exposure to radical social contexts (those with lower self-control scores were more likely to report having friends or peers with extremist attitudes) and related non-normative behaviours (greater readiness to perform violent acts on behalf of an extremist group), irrespective of espoused ideology.

In a further study, Rottweiler and Gill noted self-control as a key mediator in the relationship between conspiratorial beliefs and violent extremist intentions: those who hold conspiracy beliefs and demonstrate lower self-control are more likely to espouse intentions to commit violent extremism compared to those who demonstrate higher self-control. Corner and colleagues also identified a number of behavioural outcomes related to self-control, such as thrill seeking, impulsivity, inflexibility, and problems controlling anger. These behavioural antecedents were each identified across a sample of 125 lone-actor terrorists (with prevalence rates ranging from 28 percent to 38 percent). However, in a demonstration of the problems with identifying tangible antecedents representing cognitive processes, these items were unable to be analysed to determine their relevance in radicalisation.[109] Moreover, while individuals may hold radical or conspiratorial beliefs, only those with reduced self-control are likely to translate these cognitions into real-world violent behaviours. In this sense, self-control may moderate the relationship between radical ideology and non-normative behaviour.[110]

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's subjective belief in their capacity to perform the behaviours needed to achieve a specific outcome.[111] Self-efficacy is reflected in an individual's confidence in their ability to exert control over their own social contexts, internal motivations, and behaviours.[112] As noted by Schwarzer and Luszczynska, when individuals have high self-efficacy, they are more likely to believe they can master specific behaviours and feel more confident in overcoming challenges to mastering such behaviours. When individuals have low self-efficacy, they are less likely to act instrumentally to master the specific behaviours.[113]

Drawing on the work of Bandura,[114] Schlegel posited that in the context of non-normative behaviour, an individual's exposure to radical narratives and propaganda may increase their sense of self-efficacy and thereby their belief in being able to carry out violent acts.[115] As compared to the other cognitive processes discussed here, however, self-efficacy has received relatively little attention in empirical research examining radicalisation. In their examination of autobiographical data from terrorist offenders, Corner and colleagues identified that offenders classified as resilient demonstrated high self-efficacy, as well as a long-term lack of negative psychological reaction to the experience of stressors before, during, and after engagement in terrorism. This suggests is that those with high self-efficacy are less likely to experience adverse psychological effects of having being involved in terrorist behaviours.[116] Similarly, in their research on self-control, conspiratorial beliefs, and violent extremism discussed earlier, Rottweiler and Gill identified that individuals with high self-efficacy (alongside low self-control and weak law-related morality) have a stronger positive relationship between conspiracy beliefs and intentions to commit violent extremism.[117] These findings suggest that self-efficacy does not operate in isolation but evolves, and is reinforced, through feedback loops with group norms and behavioural engagement. Further, these results highlight the interdependency of

self-control, self-efficacy, and morality, and lend support for the consideration of these processes in a reciprocal concept.

Morality

Haidt defined morality as "...interlocking sets of values, practices, institutions, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible."[118] Whilst many examinations of morality focus at the individual level,[119] specifically the degree to which morality is important to an individual's personal identity and their behaviours,[120] according to research, morality is closely related to existing social contexts.[121] Ellemers and colleagues highlight the role of morality in the regulation of behaviours within social contexts, noting that morality is central to individual's perceptions of their social identity as related to their in-groups.[122] Moreover, Leach and colleagues highlighted that the level of identification with an in-group is directly related to ascribed in-group morality – the more someone believes their in-group is moral, the more they are inclined to identify with that in-group.[123]

In the context of radicalisation, much of the theoretical direction examining morality has sought to understand the role of moral disengagement in non-normative behaviour. Bandura,[124] among others,[125] theorised the role of moral disengagement in terrorism, referring to it as the processes whereby individuals' "construe their mission and view themselves in carrying it out. They regard themselves as 'freedom fighters' in a war of liberation from oppressive rule, corruption, and humiliation."[126] Bandura highlighted that radicalised individuals undertake advantageous comparisons, euphemistic language, displacement and diffusion of responsibility, disregard or distortion of harmful consequences, attribution of blame, and dehumanisation to facilitate moral disengagement.[127] Confirming these assertions, research has highlighted that ISIS propaganda frequently deploys euphemistic language and frames acts of violence as 'martyrdom operations,'[128] and far-right groups use dehumanising metaphors (e.g., 'invasion' narratives) to justify violence against immigrants.[129] Furthermore, recent scholarship by Zimmerman has highlighted that the "Incel vernacular is endowed with...socio-moral value that Incels use to identify and organise "others,"[130] as has the work of Capelos et al.[131]

In recent empirical endeavours, researchers have focused on determining whether a shift in morality is required to engage in non-normative behaviour. In an examination of 66 former terrorists and 66 non-criminals in Colombia, Baez and colleagues demonstrated that, out of a range of cognitive elements, terrorists were best distinguished from non-criminals on the basis of their moral judgement.[132] Further, Baez and colleagues concluded that the morality of the terrorist sub-sample was reflective of a focus on the outcome(s) of the intended actions rather than the intentions underlying the actions.[133] In their examination of 684 young adults, Perry and colleagues identified that low personal morality, alongside low self-control, was predictive of political extremism. This relationship was also identified for violent extremism; however, it was also moderated by exposure to criminogenic social contexts.[134] Finally, in their examination of the relationship between conspiracy beliefs and violent extremist intentions, Rottweiler and Gill highlighted that, alongside self-control and self-efficacy, law-related morality[135] has an impact on the relationship between conspiracy beliefs and intentions to conduct violent extremism.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty refers to a cognitive state derived from a lack of information regarding the probability of future events or possible outcomes.[136] Uncertainty, and the stresses associated with it, have been given substantial attention across SIA research, specifically in relation to the role of uncertainty in the formation of self- and group-identity.[137] Hogg argued that uncertainty motivates individuals to identify with social contexts that reduce, control, or protect from the negative feelings that uncertainty induces.[138] Further, it is also argued that feelings of uncertainty may arise when group members feel that their personal beliefs, attitudes, and values conflict with others in the group, motivating individuals to seek out alternative in-groups to alleviate the negative impact of uncertainty.[139] In later work, Hogg applied this theorising to explain both radicalisation[140] and extremism.[141] He demonstrated that social groups that offer a concrete worldview with strong distinctions between in-groups and out-groups, and strong behavioural norms are better placed to reduce uncertainty, and that such characteristics are more readily seen in extremist groups (as opposed to non-extremist political groups).[142] The rise of conspiratorial movements during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as QAnon, demonstrates how societal uncertainty drives individuals toward radical narratives that offer closure and clear social binaries, further demonstrating the relationship between uncertainty and extremism, given the aforementioned relationship between conspiratorial tendencies and extremism.[143] Recent scholarship by Vanderween and Droogan,[144] which drew on analysis of the Islamic State's *Dabiq* by Ingram,[145] further reinforces the relevance of uncertainty to understanding extremism, in particular in the context of propaganda and manifestos, especially as understood through the lens of Ingram's 'crisis, solution, justification' model.[146]

Compared to the extensive theoretical investment, there has been less attention paid to empirical research that interrogates the relationship between radicalisation and uncertainty. Gøtzsche-Astrup examined the relationship between uncertainty and radical intentions and behaviours in 4,806 US-based adults, concluding that individuals demonstrating higher levels of uncertainty are more likely to express an intention to engage in political violence as opposed to activism.[147] In a later experimental study, Gøtzsche-Astrup further identified that, in 2889 adults in the US and Denmark, uncertainty was identified as significantly related to intentions to engage in political violence.[148] The conclusions of Gøtzsche-Astrup allow us to surmise that as individuals seek to reduce uncertainty through alignment with ideologically rigid groups, their resulting behaviours – such as participating in protests or online radical discourse – can further reinforce their commitment to the group.

The above evidence has demonstrated that cognitive processes do not function in isolation. Rather, they evolve in conjunction with an individual's social identity and behavioural patterns through reciprocal interactions. By examining how these internal processes interact continuously with social and behavioural elements, it may be possible to gain a more dynamic understanding of why only some individuals radicalise, and why fewer still go on to commit acts of violence.

Non-Normative Behaviour

The above sections have highlighted the nature of the social and cognitive processes that have been theoretically and empirically associated with multiple forms of non-normative behaviour. As noted, according to reciprocal determinism, behaviours are both driven by and drive our cognitive and social processes. Therefore, in this discussion, it is necessary to acknowledge that non-normative behaviours are not simply an outcome of interactions between radical social contexts and cognition.

The SIA highlights the function of a number of behavioural outcomes to achieve a positive social identity (and thus self-concept) that groups can conduct.[149] Each of these strategies is determined by both the social status structure and the individual and collective cognitive processes. As previously noted, the first strategy is to improve one's (personal) social identity by shifting membership to a high-status group. This strategy is more readily undertaken in contexts with high permeability between groups. A second strategy is to make comparisons with other out-groups (particularly those with a higher social status) on dimensions (e.g., morality, cultural values) to improve the identity of the low-status in-group.[150] This is more likely when perceived permeability is low and perceived legitimacy is high.[151] The final strategy, and of particular interest in this research, is that of competition. Here, low-status groups undertake a collective strategy to mobilise and compete with the high-status group in an attempt to shift their social status upwards and improve their social identity.[152] Such strategies, known as collective action, are undertaken when the existing status structure is perceived as both unstable and illegitimate.[153]

There is a wide range of empirical support for collective action.[154] Indeed, in a meta-analysis, van Zomeren and colleagues highlighted the range of research that supports the theory that collective action is a competitive strategy for upward social mobilisation.[155] The meta-analysis highlighted the causal effects of perceived injustice, perceived efficacy, and social identity on collective action. In further work, research expanded to focus on examining collective action through the inclusion of relative deprivation and resource mobilisation.[156] However, as noted by Tausch and colleagues, the supporting evidence for these conceptual models is grounded in normative behaviours, such as social protest and demonstrations.[157] Across three surveys, Tausch and colleagues highlighted that the interactions between social identity, efficacy, and emotions differed across normative and non-normative behavioural outcomes.[158]

Conclusion

This article proposes a novel framework that seeks to address some of the acknowledged deficiencies in the existing literature on radicalisation. These deficiencies, as detailed above, have resulted in problematic policy settings, and the development of a series of approaches to the prevention of radicalisation that this research, and the proposed framework, seeks to refine and strengthen. The framework has the potential to significantly enhance the existing understanding of radicalisation, and to potentially provide the basis for the development of more reliable assessments of an individual's radicalisation, irrespective of their specific ideological disposition, or their position pre- or post-offending.

Subsequent research, as part of the Office of National Intelligence-funded project that underpins this work, is undertaking a series of general population surveys that seek to test, refine, and validate the framework articulated herein. This research, including longitudinal data collection and a series of multi-factor experimental studies, is seeking to demonstrate the merits and utility of shifting away from a focus on antecedents and towards an examination of the processes that underpin their development. The dynamic framework builds on the increasingly nuanced and sophisticated work on radicalisation that has increasingly sought to address the deficiencies of the field. As noted in this article, there is a growing body of radicalisation research that is reflecting on the core assumptions of the field and aims to strengthen how radicalisation is conceptualised.[159]

This article argues that, in the context of understanding and ultimately working to counter radicalisation, examining the interactions between behaviours, social identity processes and

cognitive processes is particularly valuable precisely because the examination is of interactive *processes*, and not merely the *presence* of antecedents or the unidirectional relationships between them. It is intended that this research will provide the start point for an enriched, nuanced, and empirically informed understanding of radicalisation and provide a basis for further research into the process(es) by which individuals ultimately progress to participation in terrorist violence. Furthermore, it is intended that this framework and subsequent empirical evidence will inform the development of more empirically informed and more reliable assessment tools that enable practitioners to provide more calibrated and effective interventions, while also potentially informing more nuanced and sophisticated policy settings and approaches by government and others engaged in the work of countering radicalisation and terrorism.

Dr Levi West is a Research Fellow at the Research School of Social Science at the ANU. Prior to joining ANU, Levi was the Director of Terrorism Studies at CSU. His doctoral research won the Terrorism Research Initiative's Thesis award in 2022.

Prof Michael J. Platow is Professor of Psychology at the School of Medicine and Psychology at the ANU. Michael has published extensively on the social-psychology of leadership and social influence. He is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia.

Dr Helen Taylor is a lecturer in Criminology at the Centre for Social Research and Methods. Helen has undertaken research on radicalisation, with a particular interest in right-wing extremism and hate crimes. Dr Taylor has extensive experience conducting large-scale systematic reviews relating to radicalisation and terrorism.

Dr Emily Corner is an Associate Professor at POLIS: The Social Policy Research Centre at the ANU. Prior to joining the ANU, Emily was a Research Associate at the Department of Security and Crime Science at UCL. Her doctoral research won the Terrorism Research Initiative's Thesis award in 2016.

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Remembering the Past Within the Present: Military Video Releases of Palestinian Islamic Jihad

Stephen Bryant and Michael Loadenthal*

Abstract: With the global community's gaze toward ongoing conflicts within the Middle East, and specifically the violence occurring in the Gaza Strip, there has been increased reporting and analysis of Hamas' presence and activity within the region. However, there has been limited analysis of the actions and messaging of other prominent regional groups, such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). This research utilises a Visual Content Analysis to assess the messaging of PIJ throughout six years of the group's digital media releases distributed via Telegram. The group's releases demonstrate the utility and centrality of narrative development and dissemination within the wider discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and inter-Palestinian power struggles. The video releases of PIJ demonstrate that a core functionality of their online media presence is to establish their group's history and to assert narrative control. This narrative speaks of the group's victories in past battles, the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and the demonisation of its enemies. Through brand management, post-production editing, and careful storytelling, PIJ utilises its social media to support its military campaign, chronicle its history, and increase its popularity amongst the Palestinian people and within the wider geopolitical spaces in which it functions.

Keywords: Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, visual analysis, content analysis, narrative theory

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* Corresponding author: Michael Loadenthal, University of Cincinati. E-mail: loadenml@ucmail.uc.edu

Introduction

The ongoing violence in the Gaza Strip has ushered in an increased analysis of Hamas' armed actions targeting Israeli forces, and its role as a resistance movement throughout history. However, within the realm of the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and its armed wing, the Al Quds Brigade (سدقلا ايارس), remain understudied subjects. While there are dozens of book-length treatments of Hamas,[1] only a few exist centering on PIJ.[2] Within the existing PIJ analyses, few of these focus on the *digital* activities and *cultural* productions of the group's armed Brigade. Therefore, this study adopts a Visual Content Analysis approach to understand the digital-cultural productions of PIJ. Due to the availability of multi-year video archives on the group's Telegram channel,[3] the researchers chose these ephemera as our basis, examining 993 videos produced between 2017 and 2023.

Chiefly, this research seeks to engage with and answer several research questions, namely: *What role does PIJ's public-facing Telegram channel serve? How do the cultural products it circulates shape the narrative through which the organisation portrays itself, its enemies, and the wider conflict dynamics? How does this platform connect PIJ's history with its activities in the present and its potential future*? Through first identifying and excavating the narrative components of PIJ's media, we can better understand how the movement operates, sustains, and competes for power within a crowded universe of armed actors. Among other findings, the researchers note that the media productions of PIJ strive to not only document contemporary military operations but also to preserve, commemorate, recirculate, and elevate the actions of past attackers with nearly identical frequency each year, indicating these videos serve as another means of PIJ's "mnemonic counterviolence,"[4] wherein a group emphasises and commemorates the past, often idealising it, in order to challenge what currently exists. Through analysis of these videos, this research assesses the development of the group's messaging and how PIJ has established itself in this digital space.

Organisationally, PIJ distinguishes itself from other Palestinian factions with its specific focus on armed actions and its blanket rejection of political processes of normalisation and inclusion in existing governance structures. While Hamas, Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and other regional groups maintain political, social service *and* military units, PIJ is primarily focused on armed resistance efforts in the long-standing conflict with Israel and its occupation of Palestine, and does not participate in formal political processes,[5] nor does it have a formal social service (e.g., schools, medical centres, job placement sites) focus, except within refugee camps outside of Palestine.[6] While PIJ does operate "dozens"[7] of NGOs, religious, educational, and medical facilities, as well as some youth services, the group still has a significantly limited degree of engagement in formal political and social spaces in comparison to multiple sub-state violent groups within the region.

While PIJ's activity in political and social spheres has been comparatively low, they have been decidedly active on the military front. According to a 2023 event-driven study of Palestinian armed activity in the West Bank occurring 2022-2023, PIJ was the *most active* perpetrator of political violence–approximately four times as active as Hamas, and also outpacing Fatah-aligned factions such as the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and the newly established, Nablus-based, Lion's Den.[8] The study notes that PIJ's "power base" has resided in Gaza, an assertion supported by contemporary scholarship.[9] According to an in-progress study of Palestinian activity throughout the 2023-2025 Israel-Hamas War, PIJ has been responsible for 20 percent of attacks, compared to 31 percent by Hamas (the largest perpetrator of attacks).[10] According to further analysis of data collected by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), inclusive of 8,238 events (January 2016 through May 2024), PIJ was responsible for 7 percent (555 events), and Hamas 29 percent (2,352 events). This represents a notable

underrepresentation of PIJ's activity due to ACLED's inclusion of attacks by "unidentified armed groups" (3,081 events) and Lebanese Hezbollah (933 events).[11] Adjusted to exclude these non-Palestinian and unnamed armed actor categories,[12] PIJ represents 13 percent (555 of 4,131 events) of the recorded violent incidents.[13] Further utilising ACLED, and restricting data to *only* activity associated with PIJ (n=668), the group's activity is recorded as predominantly "explosions/remote violence," which speaks to their military focus. Hamas'[14] presence in ACLED, while more frequently recorded, is shown to engage less frequently in remote violence but is more commonly involved in battles, strategic development, and violence against civilians. This comparison is shown below:

Table 1: PIJ and Hamas activity as measured by ACLED

	PIJ (n=668)	**Hamas (n=3,155)**	**Difference**
Explosions/remote violence	65%	43%	+22% PIJ
Battles	19%	32%	+14% Hamas
Strategic developments	17%	24%	+7% Hamas
Violence against civilians	0.3%	2%	+1% Hamas

PIJ's significant military activity makes them well-deserving of attention and study due to their sustained, high activity and prominence in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip theatres of armed conflict. ACLED's event-driven analysis, complementary to the present (digital media) event-driven analysis, shows the large role PIJ plays in the conflict and its position vis-à-vis Hamas. Despite Hamas being understood as the popular leader of Palestinian armed movements[15] and the Gaza government responsible for the "bloodiest [attack] in Israel's history,"[16] PIJ remains a key driver of the broader conflict with the State of Israel.

For these reasons–both the lack of scholarly attention and PIJ's notable military activity–the researchers began the present line of inquiry. This study seeks to engage with the contemporary history of PIJ through a Content Analysis-based, Visual Analysis-informed framework. In practice, this approach is built around the core elements of Content Analysis—unitising, sampling, recording/coding, and analysis as described by Krippendorff[17]—and informed by the contributions of later methodologists.[18] This 'classic approach' to Content Analysis is used to establish the sampling, coding schema, and data architecture, while key metrics of Visual Analysis[19] are added to contribute variables and values. Variables explicitly added from a Visual Analysis framework include 'Scripted v. Amateur', 'Obfuscation', and 'Special Effects'. Through this multi-modal framework, and a reading of *how* PIJ represents itself via videos distributed on social media, the researchers can determine not only the organisation's outward-facing narrative, but also aspects of how it operates behind the scenes, in zones of conflict, and vis-à-vis other political, social, economic, and religious forces in Palestine, Israel, and the wider geopolitical region.

To do so, we first situate this study within the literature on Hamas and PIJ, juxtaposing their approaches to resistance and connecting PIJ's approach to resistance with their use of digital platforms to further the group's aims. Second, we review the methodological approach taken in this study, providing explanations for key terminology used throughout the discussion, while also presenting the coding criteria and detailing how intercoder reliability was maintained as the researchers' recorded values for each video. A copy of the final codebook is also provided for review.[20] Following this, the key findings of this study are shared. Finally, these findings are analysed to further understand PIJ's mediatisation of their resistance efforts and how the group's Telegram channel serves as another avenue for the group to promote its desired narratives and engage in mnemonic counterviolence.

Literature Review

Within the context of Palestinian armed actors, there has been a tendency to focus on Hamas. Hamas rose to political power within the governance structures in the Gaza Strip in 2006, but the historical roots of Hamas and other regional groups, such as the PIJ, can be traced back to the 1970s. Hamas, like PIJ, places great importance on anti-colonialism and anti-secularism. However, Hamas has incorporated a formal political element to its resistance efforts, deeming formal political engagement a logical extension of its military practices and creating another avenue for resistance to continue beyond sites of armed struggle and conflict.[21]

In contrast, PIJ has adopted a policy of resistance and is committed to remaining an armed movement until the Israeli occupation ends, choosing not to engage in semi-legal, quasi-state governance structures or formal democratic practices.[22] Engaging in these structures and practices would conflict with one of these groups' objectives—to actively resist the occupation of Palestine by the "Israeli entity."[23] PIJ is a unique movement to study in recent Palestinian history, as it is considered a pioneer in the struggle against the Israeli occupation during the First Intifada (1987-1993). It was created as a resistance organisation, specifically as an alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood.[24] PIJ presents its identity primarily as a jihadist-nationalist movement, engaging in violent resistance against the State of Israel. Ideologically, PIJ is distinct, rejecting negotiations with the Israeli government, a two-state solution, and the recognition of the Israeli state.[25] PIJ also decried the legitimacy of the Palestinian National Authority.[26] This policy informed PIJ's self-exclusion from the 2006 elections that eventually ushered in Hamas as the governing authority in the Gaza Strip. PIJ has also rejected all peaceful settlements with the Israeli state.[27] Even with this stance in opposition to formal political structures and engagement, PIJ has received the support of many Palestinians and, at times, has had greater approval than Fatah, the West Bank-based Palestinian political party.[28] PIJ has remained a consistent movement within the region but has not adjusted its strategy to infiltrate existing political governance structures within the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, raising questions about how PIJ has remained relevant and active within the region since it was established, as well as the movement's precise theory of change.

Part of how PIJ has maintained its relevancy and continued its activities is through the use of electronic materials and engagement on virtual platforms. Although there is not much data regarding the exact date PIJ began engaging in what has been referred to as "digital jihad," it is believed that Hamas and PIJ started incorporating "hacktivists" into their activities in the late 1990s.[29] The hacktivists assisted in military operations and attempted to achieve the goals of these groups.[30] However, there is limited literature on PIJ's recent use of electronic warfare, with much of this scholarship focusing on surveillance and data resistance.[31] It is widely known that numerous militant Islamist and jihadist movements have used digital means to not only stifle the activities of their enemies but also to promote their group, its culture, history, and its activities through disseminating text, audio, videos, and images across multiple platforms.[32] Despite ample scholarship focused on the violent exchanges throughout the history of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship, scant attention has been paid to the video productions of PIJ and other non-Hamas groups. With a greater systemic analysis given to PIJ's video content, more can be revealed regarding the group's understanding of itself, its enemies, and its priorities.

Methodology

Our preliminary analysis is based on a review of 993 videos distributed by PIJ on the group's Telegram channel, established on October 7, 2017, and featuring more than 258,000 followers.[33] Telegram serves as an ideal platform for analysis as it allows groups to curate multimedia content easily, and is notoriously lax in its content moderation, often allowing channels supporting violent non-state actors to remain online for years.[34] Of this initial pool of 993 videos, the researchers constructed criteria to determine primary and secondary coding. Videos with less analytical value (i.e., those showing *non*-military matters) were only coded for broad taxonomic values, while those that met secondary criteria were coded for a variety of variables focused on technical aspects of video production and content. All coding was completed by the two authors.

For a video to be judged as requiring secondary (i.e., advanced) coding, it had to feature military operations and training, military-styled attacks, or documentary videos of the aforementioned militarised activities. The video had to be produced by PIJ and published on the group's official Telegram channel. These *secondary coding* criteria are simplified below. For a video to receive secondary coding, it had to meet all five criteria, namely:

1. Produced by Palestinian Islamic Jihad/Al Quds Brigade, *and,*
2. Distributed via the group's official Telegram channel, *and,*
3. Feature a military operation, military capacity, or military training, *or,*
4. Feature an attack retrospective, *or,*
5. Feature a documentary of the aforementioned areas (i.e., military operations or attacks, military capacity, military training).[35]

If videos were determined to *not* centre on military activity, they received only primary coding—taxonomic, genre-based coding. Videos were sorted for primary coding *only* if they met *any* of the following conditions:

1. The video is part of a series honouring a named martyr, leader, or other named person; or,
2. The video features a spokesperson delivering a statement; or,
3. The video is a duplicate (e.g., high and low-quality releases); or,
4. The video features a speech or other audio over the top of a video (i.e., B-roll–supplemental footage inserted into main footage to add to the narrative, improve transitions, or overall enhance the visual material); or,
5. The video shows no activity (e.g., audio over still image); or,
6. The video was produced by someone other than PIJ (e.g., Al Jazeera) or an armed faction other than Palestinian Islamic Jihad (e.g., Joint Operations Room, Hamas).

Although this primary/secondary preliminary sorting was derived after a detailed review of the video's contents, the taxonomy utilised by PIJ is also visible through how the videos are templated and styled, as seen in the item preview function available within Telegram groups (see Image 1).

Image 1: *Selection of the First 20 Videos Displayed in PIJ's Telegram, Published May 2023.*

In this preview, one can see videos likely to showcase famed martyrs (e.g., those with lengths of 2:18, 5:26, 1:21, 2:01), videos featuring spokespeople (e.g., 8:22, 4:58), and those more likely to feature the documenting of military activity (e.g., 3:39, 2:36, 4:28, 1:20, 7:10).

Utilising this schema to evaluate 993 videos yielded a final sample of 643 videos marked for primary coding, and 350 marked for secondary coding. Publication dates spanned from November 2, 2017, to December 31, 2023. A breakdown of these categories is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: *Primary Versus Secondary Video Coding Categories*

Primary coding	Secondary coding
525–Honoring a named person	350
59–Duplicate	
38–Spokesperson	
28–Non-PIJ or other armed group	
18–Audio atop B-roll	
8–Audio only	
N = 643	**N = 350**
Total sample = 993	

Utilising the aforementioned sampling schema, the researchers generated a viable collection of videos suitable for test coding. Thirty preliminary videos were chosen at random, and in the first cycle, descriptive attribute coding was completed.[36] From there, additional videos were coded, and through a process of authoring memos, the coding pair iteratively added, modified, and removed variables over several weeks until arriving at a final coding schema. From there, second-cycle coding methods focusing on pattern[37] and axial coding[38] were used to refine values and coding categories. The coders met weekly to discuss edge cases and conduct tests for intercoder reliability,[39] redundantly coding videos for comparison. To ensure intercoder reliability, the researchers conducted pilot testing of variables and values, followed by the authoring of a preliminary iterative codebook, followed by several rounds of revision.[40] Once the codebook was stable, the researchers selected cases at random for pilot testing and calculated reliability scores using Cohen's Kappa (CK), a way of statistically assessing the degree of agreement between coders, to develop and maintain intercoder reliability. Several rounds of comparative coding and variable refinement were completed until a CK value of 0.9 was established.[41]

Data coding focused on description and sorting with a specific focus on the military, technical, and production-centric categories of analysis. These codes were implemented through a Content Analysis framework—most closely resembling a blended descriptive-inferential[42] approach—establishing analytical constructs to 'operationalize how the [video] texts are connected'[43] to identify patterns. While these descriptive and inferential coding categories informed some variables (e.g., Video Type, Featured Weapon), more technical approaches derived from Visual Analysis-informed coding categories focused on video production methods.[44] Although not universally *visual* features—for example, post-production effects, scripting, sound, and narration—these production-focused variables were essential to describe *how* videos were manufactured and the decisions behind those approaches. This approach privileges a typological sorting into video *types,*[45] not unlike complementary Content Analyses (some of which are genre-driven), recurrent in recent studies of political violence.[46] In the end, the coding pair decided on a 16-variable codebook using 87 distinct values. Edge cases, issues of questionable inclusion, or variable/value modifications were discussed and decided in recurrent weekly meetings.

Findings

The average length of the 350 military-only videos was 2 minutes 37 seconds, with a median length of 1 minute 53 seconds. Compared to a dataset combining 16 Gaza-based, Palestinian factions (n=1,242),[47] including PIJ, the videos in the PIJ military sample are more than a minute longer. The complete corpus of 350 videos contains more than 918 minutes of content, with videos ranging from 00:09 to 40:00. The longer videos are a feature found less commonly in the Gaza War data, with the longest video being 8 minutes 31 seconds. Thus, one can say overall that when compared to other factions' productions during the surge of videos that occurred in the 2023-2025 war, PIJ's military videos are longer on average *and* amongst individual productions.

Respectively, the videos serve two major functions: honouring those killed in the conflict in service of the group, and recording and reminding supporters of current and past attacks. Within the military-only dataset (n=350), most videos reminded viewers of historic attacks, and secondarily, served to record contemporary military activity. After these aims, the third most common military category is videos that promote military activity and personal sacrifice through a positive portrayal of the group's activity (i.e., motivational: positive), and videos showing training and preparation with military tactics. Very few videos serve alternative functions such as longer-form documentaries on military topics, threats to the military, advertisements for future releases, motivational releases displaying Israeli violence or the hardships of the Palestinian people (i.e., motivational: negative), and threats to the civilian population. With a greater number of videos emphasising narratives of martyrdom and historic attacks, it is evident that PIJ views itself as an organisation that exists beyond the present era.

Table 3: Video Type (inclusive of primary and secondary videos)

Video Type	Frequency	Coding Category	Ranking (n=350)
Honoring martyrs	525	Primary	
Recalling historic attacks	115	Secondary	1
Documenting contemporary military operations	108	Secondary	2
Motivational (positive)	77	Secondary	3
Spokesperson	38	Primary	
Training and preparation	22	Secondary	4
Audio atop b-roll video	18	Primary	
Non-PIJ video/other armed group	28	Primary	
Documentaries	8	Secondary	5
Threat to IDF	7	Secondary	6
Advertisement for future release	5	Secondary	7
Motivational (negative)	5	Secondary	8
Threat to Israeli citizenry	3	Secondary	9

Throughout the videos chronicling past and present attacks, the largest category of videos showcased more than one weapon type in a given video. Videos often showed rockets and mortars fired together, or attacks involving rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and range weapons (i.e., rockets, mortars, drones). When a single weapon system is the focus, most videos feature rockets being fired, and the use of firearms, typically military-styled rifles (e.g., AK-47, Type 56), or mortars fired from launching tubes.

Table 4: *Featured Weapons in Videos*

Featured Weapon Type	Frequency	Percentage of Sample
Variety of weapons	125	36%
Rocket	88	25%
Firearm	34	10%
Mortar	30	9%
N/A (No weapon shown)	25	7%
Suicide bombing	19	5%
Drone	9	3%
IED (Excluding rockets and mortars)	9	3%
Guided Missile (Kornet, ATGM, SAM-7)	7	2%
RPG	2	0.6%
Knives and other sharp objects (pitchforks, axes, etc.)	1	0.3%

Interestingly, 7 percent of videos do not show a weapon. Also notable is that suicide bombings, a tactic often associated with PIJ and other factions active in the second Palestinian intifada,[48] are only featured in 19 videos, 5 percent of the sample. Even in their historical recounting of victories, these emblematic attacks are rare in the sample. Less frequent videos show the use of small drones, improvised explosive devices, short-range guided missiles, rocket-propelled grenades, or bladed weapons.

The videos most commonly do *not* show the result of PIJ's attacks. In 38 percent of military videos, the impact of a ranged weapon is not shown. While some videos report the target of a strike, such as ground forces soldiers (6 percent), their vehicles (4 percent), or military sites (3 percent), *combined*, these clearly-targeted impacts only occur in 84 videos (24 percent). In the majority of videos, the impact of attacks is unknown or unclear, or the video does not show an attack and focuses on some other manner of military activity, such as training, or communicates motivation or a threat. This provides insights into what PIJ might be intending for their audience to perceive as central in these videos.

Table 5: Target Type

Target type displayed in video	Frequency	Percentage of Sample
No impact shown	133	38%
N/A	53	15%
Multiple target types	26	7%
Unknown	24	7%
Israeli civilians	24	7%
Training only (no target)	23	7%
IDF ground forces (people)	20	6%
IDF ground forces (vehicles)	15	4%
IDF military bases, checkpoints, and other hardened targets	12	3%
IDF ground forces (people and vehicles)	8	2%
IDF ground forces (people and vehicles) and military sites	4	1%
Armed Palestinians	3	0.9%
Structure of unclear ownership	2	0.6%
IDF naval forces	2	0.6%

Beyond the *target* of attacks, when viewed in terms of the *tactics* displayed, the findings are remarkably similar to those recorded in the Featured Weapon variable.

Table 6: Tactic Type

Tactic type displayed in video	Frequency	Percentage of Sample
More than one tactic displayed	113	32%
Rocketry	84	24%
N/A	61	17%
Mortars	30	9%
Suicide bombing	18	5%
Shooting	11	3%
Detonations/bombings	9	3%
Guided missile	7	2%
Drone	6	2%
Sniper fire	4	1%
Reconnaissance	3	0.9%
Other	2	0.6%
Rocket-propelled grenade	2	0.6%

Shifting focus from *what* is shown towards a focus on *how* it is communicated, the two researchers examined the methods of production used throughout the video releases. One particular means of understanding these cultural-military productions is from the perspective of a technical craft, focusing on the *production* side, what sociological theorist Erving Goffman termed the "backstage." The backstage is a site, unseen by the audience, wherein "the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course,"[49] in this case, by the venue of production. While PIJ's media productions have a glossy front stage, the unseen portions tell of the technical, economic, social, and political practices at play throughout their creation. Within the technical crafting of videos, PIJ serves to enact "backstage control"[50] to foster a well-curated performance for its intended audience. This staged reality is influenced by the platform not only as a matter of infrastructure but also prefiguring the manner through which the content engages within a public discourse.[51]

Peering behind the curtain, into this backstage "production site,"[52] allows us to understand the objects in question from within an additional layer of scrutiny. The table below includes a summary of this technical analysis.

Table 7: *Elements of Technical Video Production*

	Most frequent		Mid-frequency				Least frequent	
Scripted v. unscripted video	36% Mix of scripted and unscripted (126)		34% Unscripted (120)				30% Scripted (104)	
Narration	73% No narration (254)		15% Narration throughout (51)				13% Partial narration (45)	
Sound	41% Recorded sound combined with music (143)		37% Music only (128)		14% Recorded sound only (50)		8% Silent or mostly silent (29)	
Obfuscation	53% No obfuscation (186)		22% Obfuscated places (76)		17% Obfuscated people and places (59)		8% Obfuscated people (29)	
Digital effects	57% Multiple effects (198)	29% No effects (100)	9% Captioning (32)	2% Animation (8)	1% Slow motion (5)	<1% Target markers (3)	<1% Presentation slides (2)	<1% Split screen (2)

Sixty-six percent of PIJ's videos analysed contain some elements of scripted video, with nearly a third made up of mostly or entirely scripted content. Thirty-four percent of videos coded as *unscripted* are made up of videos filmed on the scene, often of military attacks, and are less closely manufactured and less polished. Scripted content in this manner is defined as video materials crafted intentionally, typically involving complex scene settings, costuming, multiple cameras, B-roll footage, and a variety of post-production methods, including cutaway shots, establishing shots, and overlays. Nearly a third (28 percent) of the videos contained some degree of narration, another element of post-production editing, and a key component of narrative construction. On the issue of sound, 78 percent of videos utilised music, with 41 percent combining this with recorded sound (e.g., explosions, gunfire, speaking). Only 22 percent of films did not use music, with 14 percent utilising *only* recorded sound without additional layers.

Concerning digital obfuscation—post-production effects added to conceal the identity of individuals or the location of operations—more than half (53 percent) of videos utilised *no* obfuscation. The remaining 47 percent added some degree of post-production, digital obfuscation hiding people's identities (8 percent), the physical environment to thwart geolocation (22 percent), or both (17 percent). These trends are related to the types of videos produced. For example, it is far more common to hide geographic location for ranged weapon videos (e.g., rocket or mortar launches) and far less likely to employ any obfuscation when celebrating historical attacks, as the operational value for security forces is reduced. Whether or not a video uses post-production video effects, such as captioning or animation, is similarly reflective of the video type. Notably, most videos (57 percent) that employed digital effects utilised multiple types within a single video. A *single* digital effect was used in less than 15 percent of videos, and 29 percent included *no* effects. Therefore, when video effects *were* employed, they were most likely to occur alongside others.

Understood in the aggregate, the most common type of PIJ-produced video is thus made up of a mix of scripted and unscripted (i.e., 'amateur') video, is not narrated, contains a mix of music and recorded sound, and adopts multiple digital effects but *not* obfuscation. This manner of video shows a high degree of both technical sophistication and focus. The commonality of scripted content and post-production music and effects points to the emphasis PIJ places on the technical production side of content. It also offers a lens into what this group might perceive as intriguing or "eye-catching" to its worldwide audience.

Analysis and Discussion

Sub-state armed movements have garnered global media attention throughout various crises, conflicts, and wars, often organising their actions to coincide with well-publicised events and significant dates, such as anniversaries.[53] Historically, the chances of any group or movement having sustained and constant media attention were limited,[54] requiring those who want media attention to gain it through shocking actions that display the actor's identity, reason for mobilising, and what they're requesting.[55] With the emergence of the Internet and the rapid development of various digital platforms where information could be disseminated, sub-state groups, like PIJ, were able to develop their own digital materials, with members working similar to a production team, developing narratives and highlighting things significant to the group without the need for journalists or reporters to notice and document these activities. Therefore, groups like PIJ can capture their resistance efforts, publish them, and promote them as they see fit, while also controlling the narrative developed through the various materials they disseminate.

The Mediatisation of Resistance and Violent Groups

Digital platforms serve numerous purposes for violent movements. These platforms often offer anonymity, require little to no cost, and experience limited censorship, which in turn means there's a low chance people will be apprehended by governments for engaging in these spaces.[56] Digital platforms frequently assist violent movements in collecting and disseminating information, building a community, recruiting, and motivating people to support the movement's activities.[57] However, due to the volatility of virtual cultures, it's unsurprising that jihadis have been concerned with recording their activities, so they can be passed on to future generations, which has been observed with jihadist groups within the Middle East, specifically the Islamic State.[58] Consistent with this understanding are the ways that PIJ's Telegram page has functioned to promote the group's past and present militant activities.

The attacks portrayed in these videos also primarily focused on contemporary military technologies, with some videos specifically examining new weaponry developed by PIJ. These videos tend to place specific focus on the weapon, how it is used by PIJ against the group's enemies, or its potential uses in the future. A plurality of the videos assessed in this study display more than one weapon used by PIJ members (36 percent), closely followed by rockets (24 percent), which could display a sense of sophistication in the group's operations. This serves as a unique contrast to the limited number of videos that displayed less technical or untechnical means of engaging in resistance, such as a single video where individuals were presented using knives and other sharp objects (e.g., pitchforks, axes). Emphasising the group's technical and strategic capabilities could serve as a means of showing a global and domestic audience that PIJ is not an unorganised ragtag militant organisation, but one that has the means of posing a threat to its enemies, and as such, the group should be taken seriously.

The complexity of PIJ is also perceivable in these videos through the tactics displayed. Of the PIJ videos assessed in this study, a plurality showed PIJ using more than one tactic in their attacks and manoeuvres against the Israeli state (32 percent), which is followed by the use of rockets (24 percent). Using more than one tactic and presenting these tactics in a digital format could further promote the image of PIJ as a sophisticated resistance organisation with varying capabilities to engage with the Israeli occupation. Messaging of this nature serves multiple purposes, including encouraging others to join the resistance, showing that PIJ has increased and is actively increasing its capacity to threaten Israeli forces, and that PIJ has the capabilities to directly challenge, harm, and potentially upend the ongoing conflict with the "Israeli entity."

There is an interesting juxtaposition between the complexity and vagueness of PIJ's attacks. PIJ presents itself as a complex, sophisticated militant organisation by displaying the technologies, battlefield tactics, and warfare strategies utilised to resist the Israeli state, although most commonly, the targets chosen in these videos are unclear or unseen. The greatest proportion of the videos did not show any impact of the weapons used by PIJ in its attacks (38 percent), with the next leading category being "N/A" (i.e., not applicable) (15 percent), accounting for training videos, and others where an attack against a defined target is *not* the focus. This serves as an interesting contrast to the various ways PIJ has presented its capabilities and the threat it poses to the Israeli state.

One could reasonably expect that a majority of PIJ's videos would explicitly show the damage done by attacks or the ways the group has made progress in resisting the Israeli occupation through targeting individuals, vehicles, buildings, and other institutions. This would be, if the primary goal of these videos is to show the military prowess and might of PIJ. While these videos may present various acts or themes, they are also a part of the larger cycle of PIJ conducting attacks, recording and remembering these attacks, honouring the fallen, and encouraging others to persist in their resistance. These videos of militant activity and military capabilities appear to serve the greater purpose of preserving the history and culture of the groups and the identity of Palestinians, with the Telegram channel serving as a virtual archive.

Preservation of Identity, Culture, and History
The desire to preserve PIJ's understanding of culture, identity, and history has been articulated as a driver of PIJ's "original" identity, prior to its erasure by Israeli colonisation.[59] Numerous videos on PIJ's Telegram channel promoted counter-narratives of historic clashes with Israeli forces, with a majority of videos that met the criteria for secondary coding focusing on past military activities and resistance efforts. Whether the narratives presented on PIJ's Telegram are factual is immaterial to the purpose they serve. The narratives presented in these videos serve as a means of resisting hegemonic power by distorting images of the dominant power

and its presentation of reality, such as the Israeli government's framing of all Palestinians as "terrorists," even those not affiliated with a violent group.[60] Through these videos, PIJ can show itself as champions of Palestinians and challenge the hegemonic narratives promoting and encouraging Israeli occupation of Palestine. This approach to countering Israeli occupation and narratives, through commemorating and emphasising what previously existed, has been termed "mnemonic counterviolence" by Erik Skare and has been observed in speeches and writings of leaders within PIJ throughout history.[61] However, mnemonic counterviolence is not limited to the physical documents and speeches of personnel within PIJ, but is observable in PIJ's materials promoted on their Telegram channel throughout its existence.

The content observed in the videos assessed in this study does not deviate from the assessment that PIJ predominantly focuses on the past, with an emphasis on preserving Palestinian identity, culture, and history. These videos highlight the resistance efforts of PIJ throughout its history and indicate that the group will continue to resist through armed struggle until the occupation of Palestine ends and the Israeli occupation is no more, and this perceived function of the group has been corroborated by leadership within the group.[62] The emphasis of the videos assessed in this study overwhelmingly focused on militarised resistance efforts, both past and present, with significantly fewer videos encouraging future violent acts. Functionally, PIJ's presentation of its military efforts serves as a means of connecting past members to those in the present and bringing forth potential new allies within a shared sense of unity across generations.

These videos serve as a mechanism that illustrates how resistance has been ongoing across generations. This can be observed in the number of videos released around significant dates throughout PIJ's history, such as suicide bombings and successful operations, and is also evident in some videos being published on the same day each year to commemorate significant events. Videos including narration (28 percent) and music (78 percent) also provide PIJ a way to express the narrative they want viewers to receive and potentially elicit a supportive response from them. Videos of this nature foster the belief that resistance must continue, encouraging others by showing them previous resistance efforts and reminding them of those who had been committed to this armed struggle in previous generations.

Continuing to engage in these forms of struggle is presented as necessary to end the oppression, but also as a way of honouring those who have struggled as part of this resistance in the past. The importance of honouring those who have struggled against the Israeli occupation is evident in the significant number of videos in the secondary coding category that display and explain historic attacks conducted by PIJ, with the second-greatest number of videos that were coded capturing and detailing *contemporary* military operations. Frequently, these videos will list the names of contributors to these resistance efforts, and even when the names are not shared, these fighters are praised for their actions and commitment to the PIJ's goals.

The claim of honouring those who have struggled against the Israeli state as part of PIJ is further supported by the substantial number of videos that honour martyrs (65 percent) by recounting their lives, reading their wills, having their family members speak about them and PIJ, expounding upon their role in operations where they gave their lives for the resistance, and so on. Videos honouring martyrs were by far the greatest number published by PIJ on Telegram, often with the martyrs' faces and names being widely utilised and celebrated. These videos allow for the martyrs and their acts to be recognised, not only by those physically located within the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip but also worldwide, including among the Palestinian diaspora.

By presenting these videos alongside those displaying historical and contemporary attacks conducted by PIJ, cycles are created wherein attacks occur, are recorded, displayed, and remembered; those who become martyred during these attacks are recognised for their service to PIJ, and in remembering them current and future fighters are encouraged to continue in their struggle, which may lead to future attacks that become memorialised, and more martyrs that are remembered. This cycle presents an understanding of armed resistance wherein violence serves a preservative rather than a transformative function. The absence of a significant future orientation of this group displayed in these videos solidifies the understanding that while PIJ video releases may be multifaceted in nature, they often use displays of violence to further other aspects of the group's identity and goals. In the case of PIJ, while these videos showcase the technological and military capabilities of the group, they also offer a glimpse into the group's history and present, and invite people to join their future endeavours. Their Telegram channel serves as a digital platform to maintain aspects of the group's identity, culture, and collective memory, while further building upon its preservation attempts as time passes. The videos seek to justify the violence undertaken and show that in undertaking this violence, even when one loses their life, they will be honoured and remembered, and their legacy may contribute to future resistance efforts, thus keeping the previously mentioned cycle in motion.

Connecting those who fought in the past with those currently fighting and potential fighters in the future doesn't require those viewing these videos to focus on the impacts of PIJ's attacks. Rather, the emphasis of these videos should be on those lost in the attacks, the group's military capabilities, its history of clashing with the "Israeli entity," and its ability to effectively engage with the Israeli state to achieve a liberated Palestine. While showing the impacts of PIJ attacks and manoeuvres could bolster the narrative, seemingly developed in these videos, regarding PIJ's constant and continued resistance against Israel, showing the impacts is not central to connecting the legacy of former fighters to the present struggle, and the continuance of resistance efforts from PIJ's history into the present.

Conclusion

PIJ's production of video content serves the purpose of both establishing and circulating narrative *and* propaganda, meant to evoke its original meaning, that which propagates the faith, "conveying one's particular version of the truth to allies and opponents alike."[63] Without necessarily being based upon untruths, the content catalogue constitutes a visually persuasive advertisement for the group, promoting its recollection of history, understanding of self, and negative portrayal of the enemy. These videos serve as a means of presenting the current activities of PIJ as well as the activities of PIJ throughout history, with the Telegram channel serving as a digital archive. The storage of videos, photos, links, and conversations allows PIJ members and those interested in the group to engage with the group not only as it currently exists but also with how it has existed and developed over time, therefore, allowing this Telegram channel to not only serve as a space for communication, but also as a digital archive of PIJ's actions, and development. This process is facilitated through the deployment and engagement with digital platforms, products, and services–entities that contain within themselves their own operational logics, governance terms, and social conditions.[64]

The commercial realities of these platforms (including Telegram) create not only the opportunity for engagement but also the "cultural, organizational, and material structures"[65] through which users engage. In this manner, platforms as digital spaces have organised interactions[66]–organised *for the user* by the owning entity. In their discussion of analysing digital platforms, Lindgren and Krutrök argue that a platform analysis directs focus *away* from the content,

and instead on "the ways in which the technologies…shape the production, consumption, experience, impact and distribution of that content."[67] For Telegram, it appears that the stability, availability, security, and lack of content moderation provided by the platform drive PIJ and other violent non-state actors to rely on it. Moreover, PIJ's project of establishing, maintaining, and circulating a conflict narrative via video *requires* that reliable stability–something made possible by Telegram's archival functionality, which would have been difficult via a microblog (e.g., Twitter), commercial streaming service (e.g., YouTube), or a traditional social media platform (e.g., Facebook, Instagram).

Within the realm of mobilising for political violence, the group is establishing the digital space as not only a site of connection for current supporters and sympathisers with PIJ, but also as a space for remembering the past, which encourages individuals to familiarise themselves with the history and legacy of the group as a way of motivating future engagement and struggles against Israel. As a mechanism for connecting PIJ fighters and supporters across time and locations, this digital space offers a unique opportunity to encourage people to engage in resistance as a means of connecting them to the legacy of fighters who have resisted and died in their ongoing struggle. Through this platform and the continued production of these videos, legacies of resistance and the sacrifice of fallen martyrs are connected to those currently resisting, and these legacies have the potential to be further connected to those who choose to join PIJ's violent engagement in the future. In this way, the ongoing struggle and resistance that PIJ has been embroiled in for decades is not conceived of as a sequence of intense and sporadic acts or skirmishes, but as a severe, sustained, and constant engagement that should be continued not only to lead to the demise of the Israeli state, but also to honour and remember those who have lost their lives in pursuit of the same goal.

Viewing PIJ's digital presence in this way provides nuance into how the group operates and presents itself domestically and internationally. While it might appear more advantageous for the groups to champion specific social issues or welfare programs, the messaging of the necessity of struggle, which is further encouraged through honouring the legacy of those who have died as martyrs in pursuit of ending the Israeli state, is relatively straightforward but presents the deep commitment that PIJ members have had for decades. This does not require those considering joining to question their support for potential social projects PIJ could favour, but rather to directly support the collapse of the Israeli state and military occupation, and in doing so honouring those who fought for this goal throughout the history of the group. PIJ rhetorically argues through its cultural productions that by joining its struggle, there is honour, and that those who persist in pursuing this goal will continue the legacy of those who were previously part of the group.

This continuance of legacy and engagement in an active struggle with the Israeli state is significant throughout PIJ's videos and messaging. However, while a majority of its videos present the military prowess of the group, there is little presented about the 'day after'—what follows politically, socially, and economically *after* the military victory. Should their struggle prove effective, and one day the Israeli state falls, there is little mention about what should or could come next. This lack of a prefigurative vision and a focus on the past and present is reflective of PIJ's wider strategic approach to the conflict—the focused attention on the military, while disregarding the social service infrastructure and educational programs that are essential components of other armed groups' activities. This strategic vision is further reflected in the cultural products the group produces, and through these videos, PIJ can mobilise support by simultaneously harkening back to the past and showcasing in a positive light the victories of the present day.

Stephen Bryant, PhD Candidate, in the School of Public and International Affairs, at the University of Cincinnati. His research focuses on political behaviour, political violence, social movements, resistance, and the role of identities in mobilisation for, and defection from, violent movements. bryansh@mail.uc.edu

Michael Loadenthal, PhD, is a Professor of Research at the Centre for Cyber Strategy and Policy, in the School of Public and International Affairs, at The University of Cincinnati. His research focuses on political violence, social movements, extremism, security, and digital ecosystems. loadenml@ucmail.uc.edu

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A Preliminary Examination of the Prevalence and Correlates of Mass Casualty Terrorist Attacks

Daniel Milton*

Abstract: Thousands of terrorist attacks occur every year, but only a small fraction of them can be categorised as a mass-casualty terrorist (MCT) attack. Despite the fact that MCT attacks appear to be different from smaller-scale terrorist attacks (in terms of the implications it has for governments when it comes to prevention and response), both are lumped together in most analyses of terrorist attacks. This article discusses these differences and then proceeds to demonstrate how differences in the threshold used for MCT attacks lead to varied interpretations of its prevalence. The author then performs several exploratory analyses to show the correlates of MCT at both the country and group levels using the Global Terrorism Database, which contains information on terrorist events in over 100 countries from 1970-2020. The results regarding the circumstances under which MCT attacks matter are nuanced, with certain factors showing consistent results across both non-MCT and MCT attacks and others only mattering in one case or the other. Understanding the dynamics of MCT attacks is important for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners who must deal with this challenging problem.

Keywords: mass-casualty terrorist attacks, terrorism, terrorist groups, prevention, response

Corresponding author: Daniel Milton, Department of Political Science, Brigham Young University.
Email: daniel.milton@byu.edu

Introduction

In 1998, truck bombs were used in attacks against US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The September 11, 2001, attacks on the US featured the hijackings of four airplanes. In 2002, suicide bombers attacked a nightclub in Bali, Indonesia. Simultaneous backpack bombs exploded on commuter trains outside of Madrid, Spain in 2004. Coordinated suicide attacks were carried out on underground trains and a bus in London in 2005. Coordinated bombings and assaults were carried out in 2008 against a number of targets in Mumbai, India. A bombing and shooting in a city centre and political youth camp was perpetrated by a lone actor in Norway in 2011. A shopping mall was flooded with active shooters in Kenya in 2013. An explosive device hidden in a soda can was used to bring down a Metrojet flight over the Sinai Peninsula in 2015. Two truck bombing in 2017 killed hundreds in Mogadishu, Somalia. And in 2024, an armed assault and bombing targeted the Crocus City Hall in Moscow, Russia.

Each of these incidents represent a type of terrorist attack that is different from most of the tens of thousands of other terrorist attacks that have taken place over the past several decades: they have resulted in a large number of dead and injured victims as a direct result of the attack itself. These types of attacks are known as mass casualty terrorist/terrorism (MCT) attacks, and despite the fact that they may be what most people think of when they think of terrorism, they do not represent anything close to the majority of terrorist attacks. According to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), from 1970–2020, slightly more than 50 percent of terrorist attacks contained in the database did not kill a single individual.[1] Further, approximately 80 percent of incidents contained in the GTD resulted in no more than two deaths. In short, most terrorist attacks result in limited numbers of casualties. This stands in marked contrast to the terrorist attacks described in the preceding paragraph, each of which resulted in dozens—and in some cases hundreds—of deaths, not to mention the number wounded and the broader societal impacts that reverberated from these attacks.

Several key questions related to these specific types of terrorist attacks motivate this article. What are MCT attacks and how many have occurred over the past several decades? What do we know about the correlates of where these MCT attacks occur and which groups are likely to perpetrate them? This article aims to provide preliminary insight into these questions through an examination of data from the GTD. The overall approach in this article is descriptive and exploratory, rather than explanatory or causal.[2] It seeks to spark further debate and research about these attacks by providing an initial assessment of the prevalence and dynamics of MCT attacks. To be clear, the purpose of this article is to serve as a first take, not to provide a definitive explanation of their occurrence. This is not because the latter issue is unimportant; rather, the hope is that this study will act as a precursor to future examination of the causes and consequences of MCT attacks. Studying questions related to MCT attacks may yield additional insights into the nature of terrorism and how terrorist groups prioritise the execution of large-scale attacks. Additionally, due to the economic and psychological impact of MCT attacks, scholars researching terrorism may find it useful to include measures accounting for these types of attacks in their own studies as control variables. For practitioners and policymakers, MCT attacks can be disruptive at orders of magnitude higher than a small-scale attack. Thus, understanding more about the frequency and potential correlates of these attacks may assist in prevention and planning efforts. Moreover, in an environment in which states have limited resources to deal with terrorist organisations and individuals inspired by those organisations, being able to understand whether these attacks may occur and which types of organisations might carry out MCT attacks may be helpful for the prioritisation of scarce resources.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows. In the subsequent section, I first discuss the way in which scholars have approached questions related to the lethality of terrorist groups as

manifested through their attack. Of particular note, I argue that the concept of lethality is not the same as a specific focus on MCT attacks, and that studying the former to the exclusion of the latter can lead to unintended oversights by both scholars and policymakers. Then I discuss how I measure MCT attacks using data on terrorist attacks in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), while also showing how different fatality thresholds impact what the data show in terms of prevalence, temporal dynamics, and spatial spread. Following this discussion, I conduct two separate statistical analyses regarding MCT attacks, one at the country-level and the other at the group-level. These analyses (which are intended as a tentative first cut at the data), not only highlight correlates of MCT attacks, but also show how some of those correlates are similar and how some are different from non-MCT attacks. The article then concludes with a brief discussion of the implications of this analysis and directions for future research on MCT attacks.

The Lethality of Terrorist Organisations

Terrorism is a concept that has no single definition.[3] Achieving the impossible by providing a consensus definition is beyond the scope of this article. For the purposes of this article, I will rely on the definition utilised by the Global Terrorism Database, which is that terrorism is "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to achieve a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation."[4] Terrorism has long been a fixture of both international and domestic political life, in particular as various non-state actors have sought to fight against more established regimes in an effort to achieve their goals.[5] Key to the calculation of terrorist groups, and common to many of the definitions offered, is the ability to use violence strategically to further their varied agendas. Their use of violence is not random but rather is used strategically to achieve a variety of different ends.[6] In the words of one scholar, the use of violence generates fear and communicates intent, all with the goal of "enabling terrorists to manipulate the political process."[7]

Because violence is a critical part of what terrorists do and how they seek to achieve their goals, scholars have recently focused on examining organisational lethality to better understand the threat posed by these groups and how to combat them. There are many different strains of this research, but they can be broadly classified into two major camps. In one, research has demonstrated that certain characteristics of terrorist organisations correlate with increased lethality.[8] Among other findings, for example, the ideological and strategic orientation of terrorist organisations has shown that religious groups tend to be more lethal than secular organisations, in some measure due to their greater use of suicide bombings.[9] The other major category of research focuses on the lethality of certain tactics of terrorism, such as suicide bombing or lone offender terrorism.[10]

While this research on lethality has been useful and advanced our knowledge of terrorist organisations and their tactics, the particular approach that has been taken also may have hidden some important facets of how terrorist organisations use violence and the impact that it can have. For example, to capture the concept of lethality, many studies use either an aggregate count of casualties or calculate a statistic of the average number of deaths per attack or attack type. But aggregate counts of casualties may only tell part of the story. Consider a terrorist group which caused 100 casualties with one attack or 100 casualties with 100 attacks. Though the casualty counts are the same, there are likely important differences between these groups when it comes to intent, capability, and tolerance for violence. The use of average fatalities per attack, though better able to reflect the fact that some variation exists, by definition, still has the tendency to downplay so-called spectacular or outlying attacks, even though those attacks might have more economic or societal impact, or provide useful insights into terrorist organisations.

None of these previous focal points of the literature on lethality are inherently wrong. Rather, the use of a particular measurement or metric is contingent on the desired objective. I argue that, although MCT is related and builds on the literature on lethality, ultimately it should be considered a concept distinct from smaller terrorist attacks. Further, while potentially related to MCT attacks, the average number of fatalities caused by a terrorist group— or even the total number of fatalities caused by the group—does not capture the singularity and potential impact of these types of attacks. While MCT is currently underdeveloped as a topic of inquiry, I believe that focusing on it separately can provide useful insights into terrorist organisations as well as the potential counter-terrorism challenges posed by these special types of attacks. In other words, just as focusing on the varying lethality of suicide terrorism has yielded important insights regarding the conditions under which it is successful, as well as the ways in which practitioners and policymakers can better prevent and respond to terrorist organisations seeking to do harm, this article posits that a similar focus on MCT may prove equally useful.

Defining and Measuring Mass Casualty Terrorism

As noted above, there is no consensus on the definition of terrorism. As one might expect, this general definitional ambiguity has implications for identifying whether an attack is a mass casualty terrorist attack. The reality is, however, that if one is willing to accept the GTD definition of terrorism presented above, which this article does, then the main challenge related to identifying whether something is an MCT attack or not largely becomes a question of how to deal with the threshold of casualties past which something becomes an MCT attack (as opposed to a non MCT-attack). An MCT attack, then, would be defined as an attack involving the "actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to achieve a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation" in which the level of casualties exceeds a certain threshold.[11] Ideally, that last part of the definition could be replaced with an actual number. In other words, because the definition of MCT is based on numbers of casualties, the critical question has to do with the specific threshold that is required. Unfortunately, much as is the case with the definition of terrorism, there is no generally accepted standard for the requisite casualty level that separates an MCT attack from a non-MCT attack.[12] A variety of different thresholds have emerged from both scholarly literature and government reports. For example, one short research briefing focused on extremist attacks by individuals with a military background had a threshold of four or more casualties, defined as both dead and wounded.[13] The number four was certainly at the lower end of what seemed to be the definition of an MCT attack. In contrast to this relatively low standard, another article that conducted case studies of two specific MCT attacks (Mumbai, 2008 and Paris, 2015) offered a loose definition of 100 or "hundreds," and was certainly on the upper end of what constituted an MCT attack.[14] Although these two studies represent opposing ends of a spectrum, the author of this article was able to identify other studies that have used a variety of thresholds in-between, such as 10,[15] 25,[16] and 30.[17] In summary, it is impossible to look to the literature for a clear-cut answer to the question of what the appropriate threshold should be.

An added challenge is that there is no mathematical answer to this problem either. As opposed to the word "pair" (which means two), the actual threshold for MCT is more akin to the word "several," which means more than two. Unfortunately, how much more than two is quite arbitrary. One could argue that several means three or more, but it is not clear why that answer is any more accurate than six or more. This is not to say that ambiguous or difficult words cannot convey meaning. Indeed, some research in linguistics has shown that the use of the word "several" has important persuasive meaning beyond the equally ambiguous (at least on its face) word "few."[18] Such is the space in which the identifying the threshold of an MCT attack falls: any threshold feels arbitrary, yet there is likely some level of underlying meaning attached to the selection.

Despite any threshold being a matter of choice, there are indicators which would suggest the need for a higher level. First, the very term itself, *mass* casualty terrorism, uses a word that seems to denote a large number of casualties.[19] It would be hard to argue that *mass* refers to one, two, or even four casualties, although it is hard to know where to draw the line. Still, there is other research in the field of economics which suggests the existence of something known as "left digit bias," which suggests that consumers pay more attention to the left-most digits of a number as opposed to anything else.[20] Thus, something that costs $99 is viewed as significantly cheaper than something that is USD $100. Applying this idea to terrorism and the definition of an MCT attack, this line of logic might suggest a threshold of at least ten, although again it is hard to say exactly whether the best threshold should be ten, twenty, or something larger. Beyond that, however, the choice itself remains arbitrary.

If the choice of defining MCT is arbitrary, then how to proceed? As opposed to attempting to offer an authoritative statement on what the appropriate threshold for an MCT attack actually is, this article aims to provide clarity and transparency on the impact of choosing different thresholds, starting with ten fatalities per attack and ranging up to 100.[21] For scholars, the specific choice of threshold may be contingent on the nature of the research question motivating the project. For first responders and other practitioners, there may be a number of factors, ranging from emergency response training to potential prosecution of the perpetrator(s) of an MCT attack, which suggest the consideration and adoption of one threshold over another. For one, establishing a common understanding across different agencies, organisations, and states may be the first step to cooperation and collaboration on issues related to MCT attacks.

Recognising these challenges, and acknowledging that some level of ambiguity will always remain on this topic, the rest of this section aims to provide an empirically-informed view of MCT attacks across several different thresholds. The point of using several different thresholds is not to suggest that one is better than another or to try to fix a concrete standard for all research on the subject. Rather, the point is intended to illustrate to researchers and policymakers that choosing different thresholds has real consequences for understanding the prevalence and correlates of MCT. Like the definition of terrorism itself, MCT is a somewhat murky concept, with theory and policy offering some guidance, but no conclusion. As a result, the descriptive approach taken in this article should be seen as a first take that offers some insight, not ironclad conclusions.

With these caveats in mind, to create the different MCT variables, I rely on data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD).[22] The GTD is the largest open-source, publicly available database on terrorist attacks from around the world from 1970-2020. It includes over 200,000 individual events with event-level information on the location, timing, perpetrators, and impacts of attacks. Despite the dedicated effort of many scholars, coders, and staff members, the GTD is by no means a flawless product.[23] For example, because the GTD is based on collection of open-source data, especially media reporting, research has shown that there is an underreporting bias that may occur in countries with limited or no press freedoms.[24] Another challenge is that, given the fact that terrorist attacks are complicated events and there is no consensus, one challenge is determining (based on open sources) whether an event actually qualifies as terrorism or not. While these concerns are valid, there is some reason to believe that the focus of this study on MCT attacks may slightly mitigate them. Research has shown that the amount of media coverage of any given terrorist attack increases as the number of fatalities increases, or if the attack itself is unique, such as a suicide bombing.[25] In the case of MCT attacks, they are both unique and high fatality events, making them harder to miss. This means that there will likely be more information available about these incidents, which will hopefully reduce instances of missing or incomplete information. Another challenge with the GTD arose because,

due to a series of unfortunate events, the data for 1993 was lost, leaving the database without any attack records for that year. Fortunately, two scholars were able to collect the missing data, allowing this study to maintain a continuous time series.[26]

Despite the valid concerns regarding data, I still argue that the GTD represents an important tool for understanding the dynamics of terrorism, especially when it comes to MCT attacks. The GTD is an event-level dataset, meaning that each observation represents a single terrorist attack. For each of these attacks, GTD coders collected information on the date, location, and nature of the attack, including information about fatalities, the group responsible, and the method through which the attack was carried out. For each of these incidents, I focused on the location, date, group responsible, and number killed. Then, for each event, I determined whether an event was an MCT attack by checking to see whether the number of fatalities exceeded a certain threshold. Given the above discussion about the fact that there is no consensus threshold, I decided to capture and report that ambiguity by categorising the data across different thresholds, beginning at ten deaths per incident and redoing this check at twenty deaths, then 30, and so on, up to 100 total deaths in an attack. For context, it is important to note that the entire GTD dataset, as coded and utilised for this study, contains 209,793 incidents across time.[27] The results of changing the threshold for an MCT appear in Table 1.

Table 1: Mass Casualty Terrorist Attacks, By Different Thresholds

If Threshold Is…	# of MCT Attacks	% of GTD Total
10	10,825	5.2%
20	4,125	2.0%
30	2,191	1.0%
40	1,350	0.6%
50	890	0.4%
60	629	0.3%
70	474	0.2%
80	355	0.2%
90	299	0.1%
100	250	0.1%

The calculated number of MCT attacks varies quite drastically with even relatively small changes to the fatality threshold. Simply increasing the threshold from ten to twenty results in a more than 50 percent reduction in the number of events that would qualify as MCT attacks, with a fairly similar decrease in the relative number of events when the threshold increases from 20 to 30. Although subsequent increases to the threshold result in decreases in the number of attacks, the rate of decline slows quite a bit. The fact that small changes to the fatality threshold impact the data so much means that scholars and policymakers should be careful in overinterpreting the results of any analysis at a single threshold. This is true for the rest of this article as well. Still, even though caution is required due to how much the number of events can change due to a selected threshold, one of the takeaways from Table 1 is that, regardless of the threshold, MCT attacks are comparatively rarer than non-MCT attacks. This is especially true once the threshold for MCT attacks is at 30 or more individuals killed, at which point MCT attacks account for less than one percent of the total number of terrorist attacks in the GTD.[28]

Of course, to say that MCT attacks are rare does not diminish their significance in terms of economic, political, or security ramifications. When they do occur, the consequences can be quite far-reaching, impacting everything from security spending and civil liberties to individual psychological challenges over the short and long-term. And, although they occur comparatively less than terrorist attacks that do not kill as many people, these data suggest that they are certainly not an event that occurs only once in any given country's history. Unfortunately, even when the fatality threshold is higher, there have still been hundreds of MCT attacks over the past 40 years around the world. They appear to be a tragic part of the ecosystem of terrorism.

Picking up on this point, one element that may be worth considering when it comes to the occurrence of MCT attacks is the temporal aspect. That is to say, does this preliminary analysis suggest any trends with regard to time when it comes to the frequency of MCT attacks? Whether there has been an increase in these deadly attacks over time may also give an indication of whether there should be increasing concern among policymakers regarding the capability and willingness of terrorist organisations to conduct these types of attacks. In an effort to examine this question, Table 2 shows the number of MCT attacks that have occurred across different decades. To provide an easier-to-read table, only two thresholds (ten and 100 victims killed in each attack) are shown, as these two threshold levels represent the bookends of what the data show overall. That said, the caution noted above about the way that results can change from one fatality threshold to the next should be kept in mind.

Table 2: *Mass Casualty Terrorist Attacks, By Decade*

	MCT10	% of Total	MCT100	% of Total	Total Attacks
1970s	78	0.8%	3	0.03%	9,913
1980s	1,716	5.5%	41	0.13%	31,156
1990s	1,475	5.1%	41	0.14%	28,765
2000s	1,680	7.2%	44	0.19%	23,234
2010s	5,292	5.0%	104	0.10%	106,377

As shown in Table 2, the answer to the question of whether MCT attacks have been increasing over time is not straightforward. In fact, the preliminary analysis here suggests that there may be two distinct, but related, pieces to understanding the temporal aspect of MCT attacks. The first has to do with the absolute number of MCT attacks over time without making any comparison to non-MCT attacks. The second has to do with MCT attacks as a proportion of the total number of terrorist attacks. As it turns out, the data presented here suggest that MCT attacks may be increasing in terms of the absolute number of incidents, but also decreasing when compared to non-MCT attacks. To explore this a little further, consider the fact that when it comes to the absolute number of attacks over time, Table 2 shows that they have generally increased, although not in a linear fashion. In the 1970s, MCT attacks at the fatality threshold of ten numbered in the dozens, but then they increased in the 1980s, during which they numbered in the thousands. But, from the 1980s - 2000s, the absolute number of these incidents was relatively steady. It then increased again from the 2000s into the 2010s by almost 200 percent when measured using the 10-fatality threshold, and 136 percent using the 100-fatality threshold. Thus, there appear to have been two large jumps in the absolute number of MCT attacks. The first occurred from the 1970s into the 1980s. While a more complete examination into the reasons for these increases would be a great topic for future research, there are several preliminary possibilities. One is the introduction of new tactics, such as suicide bombing, which potentially come with

a higher casualty count. This explanation seems to be undercut by the fact that the number of suicide terrorist attacks during this period was quite low.[29] Another explanation that might be more compelling is that the groups which emerged in the 1980s tended to be motivated more by religious ideology and were less constrained in their use of violence.[30]

The second increase was seen from the 2000s into the 2010s. In this case, however, the increase seems to rise in tandem with the overall increase in terrorist activity during this time. One final potential explanation is that some sort of outbidding process may be taking place, whereby groups are competing to "one-up" each other in a bid for attention. Empirical evidence of outbidding has generally been mixed, although some research has suggested that focusing on the quality of violence over the quantity would be more productive.[31] If MCT attacks can be thought of as higher "quality" attacks, then testing outbidding using MCT attack data may be a fruitful line of inquiry.

However, one should be careful in examining MCT attacks in isolation, as it is important to take into account changes that have been occurring with terrorism overall before making any conclusive statements. This can be seen by looking at the rightmost column in Table 2, which shows the overall number of terrorist attacks (including non-MCT attacks) that occurred during the same time periods. Two things become apparent once trends in the total number of terrorist attacks are compared with trends related to MCT attacks. First, even though the absolute number of attacks fell from close to 31,000 in the 1980s to just over 23,000 in the 2000s, the fact that the number of MCT attacks remains constant during this time period actually represents a proportional increase. Again, although these findings are tentative and merit further investigation, suicide bombing may be a prominent factor in explaining this dynamic, as its employment by terrorist organizations rose during this decade.[32] But also important to consider is that there may be an impact in terms of the role of the September 11th, 2001, attacks, which might have functioned as an "attractive model for terrorism in the near future."[33]

The second point that this comparison brings out is that even though the 2010s showed a large increase in the number of MCT attacks (from 1,680 to 5,292), this increase is similar to the overall increase in non-MCT terrorist attacks during that time period as well (from 23,234 to 106,377). Preliminary speculation might suggest that internal conflicts in Libya, Iraq, Syria, and other parts of the world have driven a large increase in all types of political violence, including terrorism. This would be consistent with research which shows that terrorism is one of the many tactics employed by groups in internal conflicts.[34] Thus, at least in the 2010s, it may be the case that one factor driving the increase in MCT attacks is simply the increased amount of overall terrorist activity going on at that time. In fact, if MCT and non-MCT attacks are broken into yearly columns and placed side-by-side, a simple correlation coefficient between those two variables from 1970-2020 comes in at 0.9372. While correlation does not equal causation, the apparent statistical relationship between these two variables may be worth exploring in more depth in future work.

Further parsing out the MCT attack data provides several other interesting observations. As discussed above, suicide attacks seem to potentially be a prominent mechanism through which MCT attacks take place. Prominent examples of MCT attacks that involve a suicide element include, but are certainly not limited to, the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Ghandi by an LTTE suicide bomber in 1991, the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, the July 7, 2005, bombings in London, and the attack on an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester Arena in 2017.[35] Despite these examples, some initial examination of the data suggests that suicide terrorism is not the predominant method through which most MCT attacks occur. Over the entire course of the data series, the yearly proportion of MCT attacks that involve a suicide

component hovered around 18-22 percent, depending on the fatality threshold chosen for the attacks. While MCT attacks certainly can and do involve suicide bombings or armed assaults in which the perpetrators do not expect to live, it appears that they do not represent the majority of MCT attacks. Additional investigation of the tactics employed in MCT attacks, and whether these tactics differ significantly from non-MCT attacks, may provide useful data points for practitioners responsible for preventing and responding to these types of incidents.

Another suggestive finding when looking at MCT attacks involved whether they were generally directed against hard or soft targets. One argument in the literature is that higher fatality attacks are more likely to occur against soft targets because of lower security measures and a higher concentration of potential victims, although other contextual factors must be taken into account.[36] To see how this plays out with the MCT data here, I used information in the GTD to code each MCT attack as being against a hard or soft target.[37] Grouping each individual attack into one of these two categories based on the nature of the target, I then calculated the proportion of attacks that were hard or soft targets by the different MCT thresholds. Doing this showed that 52 percent of MCT attacks were found to be against hard targets when the fatality threshold was 10. However, when the threshold was changed to 100, the percentage of MCT attacks against hard targets dropped to around 45 percent. This change as the threshold increases is not necessarily surprising, especially since higher casualty counts imply that an attack was likely carried out in a place where more people congregate and are together, which is more likely a soft target than a hard one. However, even though there is some separation, the result of this preliminary examination is that MCT attacks seem to be split fairly evenly between hard and soft targets. Given the ease with which soft targets may be attacked, the fact that there does not appear to be much difference in terms of targeting when it comes to MCT attacks is intriguing, and is yet another topic on which additional research may yield additional insight into terrorists' targeting strategies.

The last potentially interesting finding discussed here has to do with the geographic distribution of MCT attacks. Does the MCT data suggest any sort of geographic clustering in terms of the countries where MCT attacks take place? To examine this further, Table 3 provides the top ten countries in terms of the number of MCT attacks that occurred within them from 1970-2020, as well as the total number of countries that experienced an MCT attack. For convenience and presentation, Table 3 only presents two thresholds: 10 and 100. One initial observation about Table 3 is that there are clearly many countries (119) that experience at least one MCT when the threshold for attacks is set at ten. Raising the threshold to 100 casualties results in 50 countries making the list, which is still a large number of countries that have experienced and responded to what can be a very challenging and tragic incident. Overall, it appears that the threat of MCT attacks is not wholly confined to a certain country or even a few countries.

Table 3: Top Ten Countries for Number of Mass Casualty Terrorist Attacks

Country (*n = 119*)	MCT10	Country (*n = 50*)	MCT100
Iraq	1,680	Iraq	38
Afghanistan	1,637	Nigeria	25
Nigeria	750	Syria	13
Syria	523	Nicaragua	11
Pakistan	483	Afghanistan	10
India	445	Sri Lanka	10
Sri Lanka	415	El Salvador	9
Peru	386	Ethiopia	9
El Salvador	323	Cameroon	7
Colombia	315	Burundi	6
		Pakistan	6
		Rwanda	6

Another observation (although tentative and preliminary) regarding Table 3 is that many of the countries at the top of the list of MCT attacks have also experienced sustained and intense periods of civil conflict at some point during the time series, including Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Sri Lanka, and Syria. As discussed above, research has shown that there is a strong relationship between terrorism and civil war.[38] If there is indeed a connection between internal conflict and MCT attacks, it would help explain what the descriptive breakdown of the data in Table 3 seems to indicate. The subsequent empirical analysis section offers a more robust empirical exploration of this potential connection.

Overall, this preliminary examination of the data related to MCT attacks has suggested that there are important nuances in the data and that changing the threshold of what is considered an MCT attack appears to have an impact on what we can learn from these attacks. First, whether the threshold is 10 or 100, MCT attacks are quite rare in comparison to non-MCT attacks (between 5.2 and 0.1 percent of attacks, respectively). Second, the absolute number of MCT attacks increased from the 1970s into the 1980s, levelled off, and then expected a nearly 215 percent increase from the 2000s to the 2010s when using the 10-fatality threshold, and a 136 percent increase when using the 100-fatality threshold.

Caution needs to be taken with this result, as the increase may have been driven by an increase in political violence more broadly, particularly as an outgrowth of civil conflicts. This fact will need to be taken into account in the exploratory empirical analysis later in the article. Third, although there does not appear to be a clear indication of MCT attacks occurring drastically more against hard or soft targets, the analysis seems to indicate that a relatively small proportion of MCT attacks (about 20 percent) take the form of any type of suicide operation. Fourth, contingent on the threshold, there is a fair amount of geographic spread in terms of the countries that have experienced MCT attacks at some point from 1970-2020. When the fatality threshold is set at 10, almost 120 countries have been the host to at least one MCT. Of course, these descriptive findings are only suggestive at this stage. There is still a large amount of nuance that exists when it comes to MCT attacks that cannot be captured by looking at the aggregate data. As has been noted several times in the preceding discussion, some of these points suggested by the data here need deeper and more robust examination. Encouraging more research on MCT attacks is one of the goals of this article, which cannot explore all these points with the detail they merit. Still, in the next section I perform some statistical analyses of the MCT data in an

effort to illuminate more of these differences and to gain some initial understanding of which factors appear to be correlated with this special category of terrorist attacks.

Which Country-Level Factors Are Related To Mass Casualty Attacks?

While the descriptive approach to examining data on MCT attacks provided some preliminary insights, in this section the intent is to conduct empirical analyses designed to help identify the country-level correlates of both MCT attacks across different thresholds and non-MCT attacks. To do this, I utilise the data on MCT attacks collected for this article and combine it with data on variables that have been identified to be related to terrorist attacks in previous studies. Thus, the rationale for including the different variables in the analyses here is theoretically informed, but no specific theory is being tested here.

To examine the correlates of MCT occurrence, I first created four different dependent variables using the data described above from the GTD. The unit of analysis for each of the dependent variables is the country-level, with an overall temporal range from 1970-2020. The first dependent variable is a count of non-MCT attacks that took place within a country in a given year. This variable is included in the subsequent analyses as a point of comparison to see if the correlates of MCT attacks differ much from non-MCT attacks. The other three dependent variables capture the number of events in a particular country that occurred at or above each of three different fatality thresholds for MCT attacks: 10, 50, 100.[39] For example, in 1995, the Oklahoma City bombing killed 168 people, and was the only terrorist attack that took place in the US that year with 10 or more fatalities. Thus, the value for the MCT count variables for the US in 1995 at the levels of 10, 50, and 100 would be one. If there had been an additional terrorist attack in the US in 1995 that had caused 11 fatalities, then the MCT count variable with a threshold of 10 would equal two, while the threshold variables for 50 and 100 fatalities would still remain at a value of one (due to the Oklahoma City Bombing).

I then included several independent variables in each of the models related to specific aspects of a country's political, economic, or security situation.[40] The sources for these variables are provided in the endnotes for each of the following descriptions. *Alliances* is a count variable to account for the number of military alliances each country has.[41] *Polity* is a measure that ranges from -10 to +10 of overall democratic or autocratic regime characteristics.[42] *PI Rights* is a measure of the respect for the physical security of citizens by a government and ranges from 0 to 8, with higher values suggesting more respect for those rights.[43] *Free Speech* is a measure of government limitations on press and speech in a society that has three categories: complete, some, or no censorship.[44] *Civil Liberties* is a measure of a government's treatment of the personal freedoms of citizens that ranges from 1 to 7, with lower numbers representing more freedom.[45] *GDP Per Cap* is a logged variable that provides the GDP per capita in a country in a given year.[46] *Military Exp* provides an estimate of the amount of military expenditures in a country as a portion of GDP.[47] *Population* is a logged variable that accounts for the size of a country measured in terms of its overall number of citizens.[48] *Civil War* is a binary measure that accounts for whether a country is experiencing some sort of internal conflict.[49]

Using these variables, I conducted an empirical analysis using a negative binomial regression on the data with standard errors clustered on the country. The negative binomial regression has been widely used by scholars researching terrorist attacks due to the fact that the dependent variable is a count variable that exhibits overdispersion, which occurs when the variance is much larger than the mean.[50] That is the case for the MCT attack variables across all thresholds.[51]

Figure 1 presents the results for four different models: Non-MCT attacks and MCT attacks with thresholds of 10, 50, and 100 fatalities. It is important to recall that these fatality thresholds are somewhat ambiguous and result in fairly substantial changes to the number of qualifying events. Thus, any of these individual results here should be seen as tentative, with more research needed to confirm the findings. Although the individual point estimates may be of interest in other settings, the main purpose here is to see how each of the threshold models compares and changes the significance, magnitude, and direction of the results.[52] Thus, comparing the dark circle (representing non-MCT attacks) to the other markers is the approach applied here.

Figure 1: Negative Binomial Coefficients for Different Models of Mass Casualty Terrorist Attacks (Country-Level)
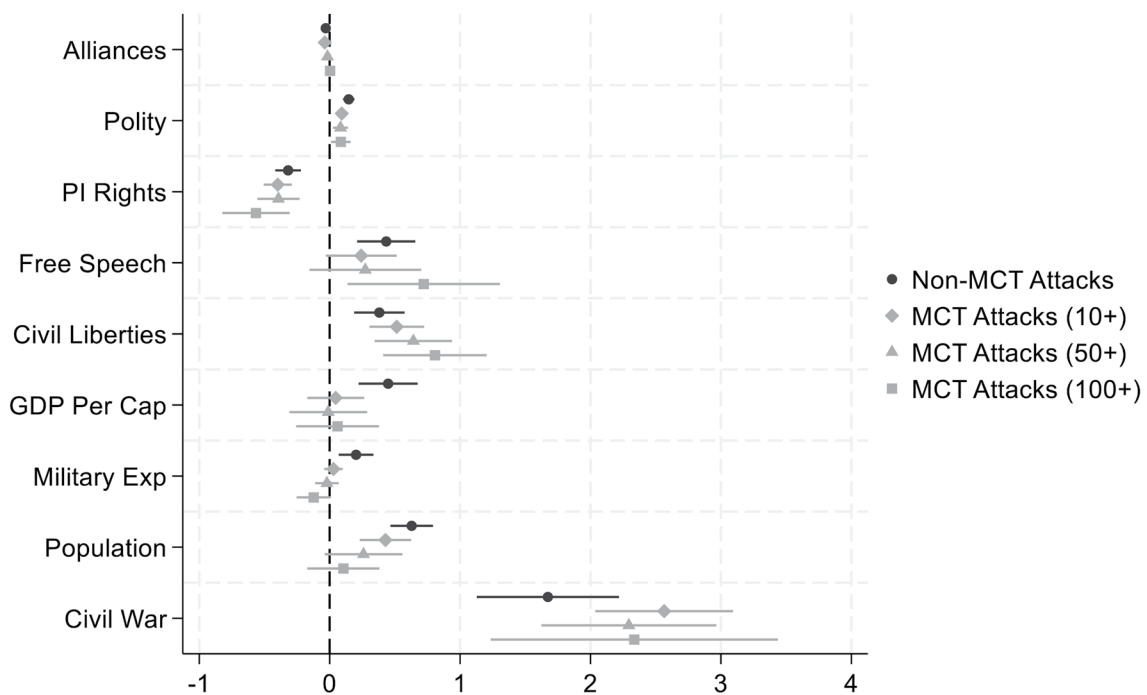
In doing so, there are a few key takeaways. As stated above, the main purpose of this analysis is not necessarily to show which factors matter more for MCT attacks as opposed to non-MCT attacks. Rather, the goal is to see if there is any empirical evidence that differences between MCT and non-MCT attacks exist and, if so, whether different fatality thresholds of the MCT attacks suggest differences in the variables related to said attacks. Given those objectives, the first interesting observation is that there appears to be—in the case of some variables—statistically significant differences between the non-MCT variables (which represent the vast majority of terrorist attacks) and the individual MCT variables. For example, in the case of the size of a country's population and its economic wealth, those variables are statistically significant predictors of non-MCT attacks, but not of MCT attacks. In the case of one variable, the amount of military spending in a country, the variable actually changes from having a positive impact on the occurrence of non-MCT attacks to a negative impact on MCT attacks with a threshold of over 100 fatalities, albeit just outside conventional levels of statistical significance (p-value = 0.065). In other words, there appear to be important statistical implications for researchers when it comes to distinguishing between terrorist attacks as a whole and MCT attacks. While not conclusive, it suggests that there may be differences in the underlying process and factors that influence these types of attacks, although additional research is needed on this subject.

The second interesting point suggested by these analyses is that the specific threshold used to empirically define MCT attacks appears to matter when it comes to the nature and strength of the results as well. Again, the variable accounting for population size is positive and statistically significant at the 10-fatality threshold, but not for either the 50 or 100 fatality thresholds. We see a similar comparative difference in the importance of the number of alliances a country has. When it comes to the level of freedom of speech in a country, it is statistically insignificant in models with the 10 and 50 fatality thresholds, but it is positive and statistically significant in models focused on non-MCT attacks or those with a 100-fatality threshold. In the case of a country's civil liberties, the impact of the variable appears to be more significant as the threshold increases. In short, the specific threshold selected for the MCT variable seems to influence the results of the analysis. If scholars are going to use MCT attacks either as a main focal point of analysis or even as a control variable in their studies, these results indicate that they will need to think carefully about which threshold they choose to represent MCT attacks.

Finally, it is important to note that there do not always appear to be differences between non-MCT attacks and MCT attacks across some independent variables. In other words, while some independent variables are only statistically significant when MCT attacks are used as the dependent variable, in some models an independent variable will have the same impact regardless of whether the dependent variable is MCT or non-MCT attacks. In the latter type of case, the results for some variables all seem to tell the same story, even though some minor differences may exist. For example, when it comes to the impact of regime type as measured by the polity score, each of the variables tells a fairly similar story in the case of both MCT and non-MCT attacks: a statistically significant, positive impact. The same appears to be true for a government's treatment of the physical security of its citizens, although there is a bit more variability in the result when the MCT threshold is 100 fatalities. In sum, the analysis reveals both consistency and differences across each of the models when it comes to the correlates of MCT and non-MCT attacks.[53] To reiterate, the point here is not to provide a conclusive examination of the country-level causes of MCT attacks. Rather, it is intended to be a first cut at the data to explore whether MCT attacks appear to be different from non-MCT attacks and how scholars might begin to think about these differences in terms of future studies. While tentative, the results here suggest that studying MCT attacks may be a worthwhile and fruitful avenue of inquiry.

Which Group-Level Factors Are Correlated With The Use Of Mass Casualty Terrorist Attacks?

In the previous section, the empirical analyses focused on conducting a preliminary analysis of the correlates of country-level data on the occurrence of MCT attacks. Studying country-level variations and relationships has a long history in terrorism studies, but another aspect that may also be useful to examine has to do with understanding the types of terrorist organisations that seem to be more prone to carrying out these types of attacks. In this section, the analyses combine the MCT data with group-level data created by other scholars on terrorist organisations to see if there are any initial insights the MCT data can reveal into the utilisation of MCT attacks by terrorist organisations, including whether there seem to be any patterns when it comes to the types of groups which engage in such attacks.

For the group-level analysis, I combined the MCT data collected for this article together with a select number of indicators from the BAAD2 dataset, which contains a variety of variables on the characteristics of insurgent organisations from 1998-2012.[54] *Control of Territory* is a binary measure which indicates whether a group is able to prevent or allow movement into,

out of, or within a geographic space.[55] *Size* is an ordinal measure with four values to indicate the size of the organisation, whether fewer than 100, 100-999, 1,000-1,999, or over 10,000.[56] *State Funding* is a binary measure (0 or 1), indicating whether the organisation has received some sort of state funding.[57] *Age* is a count measure that tracks how many years an organisation has existed, ranging 0-65.[58] Several variables, *Ethnic*, *Religious*, and *Leftist*, account for the ideological orientation of the group, with groups oriented towards the far right used as the reference category.[59] Finally, *Criminal Connectivity* is a variable used to account for the level of involvement and relationships the insurgent group has with criminal elements (by counting the number of alliances between them).[60]

Before discussing the results of the regression analysis, it is worthwhile to note that, regardless of which factors correlate with the number of MCT attacks carried out by insurgent groups, even a cursory perusal of the data shows that a wide range of groups carry out at least one MCT attack over the course of their lifetime, including groups of all ideologies, sizes, and geographic locations. This is not to suggest that any terrorist group can or will plan and execute MCT attacks. Indeed, the fact that many different groups in the BAAD2 dataset carry out MCT attacks may be in part because the BAAD2 dataset is composed of mostly capable and well-known groups, meaning that those of lesser capability might have already been filtered out. Still, there is a fairly large amount of diversity in the dataset. This would suggest caution in concluding that only certain types of groups can carry out MCT attacks. At least in terms of how the MCT data breaks down when merged with group data, it appears that such attacks are one tool in the toolkit of many different groups.

Having an initial understanding of which group-level variables seem to be indicative of the ability and desire to carry out these types of attacks is important. Similar to the analysis performed with the country-level data above, I conducted negative binomial regressions to examine if any relationships existed between the conduct of MCT attacks and various group-level characteristics. Figure 2 presents a graphical representation of the results of these analyses in the case of a group's non-MCT attacks along with a few selected thresholds (10, 50, and 100 fatalities) for the MCT attacks carried out by that particular group.[61]

Figure 2: *Negative Binomial Coefficients for Different Models of Mass Casualty Terrorist Attacks (Group-Level)*
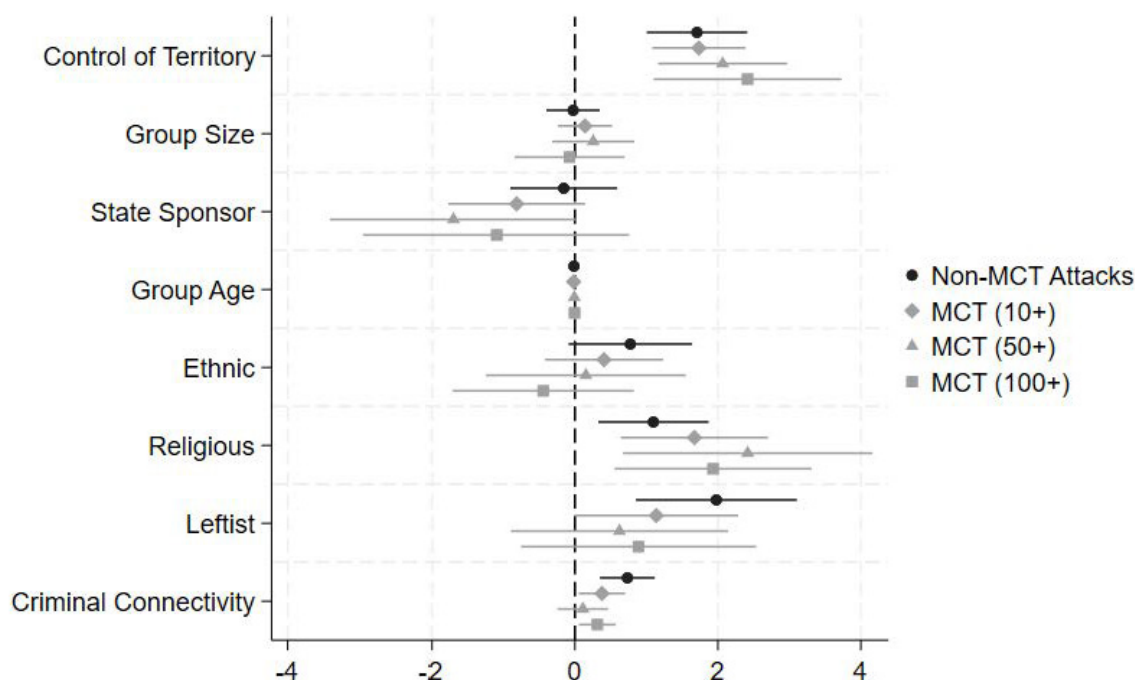
Overall, there appear to be fewer differences between the group-level variables and the occurrence of MCT attacks than was the case with the country-level analysis. Still, the results reveal a few interesting patterns that may be useful to examine in greater detail through future research. As was the case above, recall that the dark circle represents non-MCT attacks, which provides a baseline against which to compare the results for the individual MCT models. One initial finding that is interesting has to do with the factors where the statistical result is consistent across each of the models. This is especially true for two variables that have a positive impact on the use of both MCT and non-MCT attacks by groups: *Control of Territory* and *Religious*. Both of those variables are statistically significant and have a positive impact across all models, which suggests that these factors seem to be group-level drivers of a willingness and ability to engage in all types of terrorism. More specifically, these results seem to indicate that groups that control territory, or groups in which religion is a part of their ideological orientation, appear to be more likely to carry out terrorist attacks in general, including MCT attacks.

Another interesting finding is that some variables appear to matter for non-MCT attacks or MCT attacks with a low fatality threshold, but cease to be statistically significant once the threshold is increased. For example, this is the case for the *Leftist* variable, suggesting that there may be some measure of ideological variability when it comes to the dynamics of MCT attacks. Combined with the strong significance of the *Religious* variable, these are consistent with the literature that highlights the importance of ideology and ought to be a subject of future study and consideration. A slightly distinct pattern occurs with the *Criminal Connectivity* variable, which is significant for non-MCT attacks, as well as the 10 and 100-fatality thresholds. The inconsistent statistical significance of this variable is an interesting finding. Previous work has highlighted the importance of the crime-terror connection for increasing the capacity of terrorist groups.[62] Yet, at least as it applies to MCT attacks in this initial analysis, there does not appear to be a very strong connection between the ability to carry out MCT attacks and

connections to criminality.[63] If future research confirms this to be the case, it could potentially indicate that counter-terrorism practitioners seeking to prevent these types of attacks would need to focus their efforts on the terrorist groups themselves, not their criminal connections.

Finally, the above-described patterns do not describe the *State Sponsor* variable. In this case, the variable itself is insignificant for non-MCT attacks and for MCT attacks with a threshold of over 100 fatalities, but it is significant when the MCT threshold is between 10 or 70 fatalities. Moreover, it is significant in the negative direction, suggesting state sponsorship may reduce the involvement of a group in MCT attacks. Although there is no conclusive evidence regarding why this variable impacts the results the way it does, a few speculative explanations may help guide future inquiry. One explanation is the possibility that states view MCT attacks as dangerous business. If a group they are supporting carries out such an attack (potentially against another state), then the supportive state may find itself in the crosshairs of retaliation, as was the case for the Taliban after the September 11 attacks. If this explanation holds true, it would help explain why it appears that having a state sponsor reduces the number of MCT attacks that groups carry out. Of course, given the fact that the number of MCT events varies greatly by each threshold, these potential explanations for the statistical significance (or lack thereof) of specific variables ought to be viewed as starting points for further analysis, not the final word.

Conclusion

Any terrorist attack has the potential to cause real damage, create fear in the target population, and further the goals of the perpetrator. Yet, mass casualty terrorist (MCT) attacks, which cause large numbers of casualties and often become seared into the public consciousness by media coverage and governmental responses, seem to have an outsized impact on the communities and nations in which they occur. The larger and potentially more damaging impacts of MCT attacks are part of the reason I argue that they are a subject worthy of scholarly and policy attention, distinct from terrorist attacks in general. This article has sought to provide foundational conceptual and empirical insights, albeit in a descriptive and exploratory fashion, into MCT attacks. The overarching goal of this approach was to further the collective understanding of the terrorism studies community on this important subject and to encourage future research that helps the community to better understand why it occurs, what the impacts are, and how to prevent it. There are no final answers in this article, but instead it hopefully provides a pathway forward for pursuing such answers.

With the recognition that these results are sensitive to changes in the threshold of what is considered a MCT attack, several preliminary insights regarding the nature of MCT attacks emerge from the entire article. First, MCT attacks lack a clear and consistent definition, especially when it comes to the casualty threshold. Although this definitional issue is of academic concern, it also has practical implications in terms of planning and response. Second, the frequency with which MCT attacks have occurred from 1970-2020 depends entirely upon the selected threshold. There have either been thousands, hundreds, or dozens of these attacks each decade, contingent on the threshold. Third, MCT attacks do not appear to be increasing in frequency relative to the proportion of non-MCT attacks. That said, the absolute number of MCT attacks increased in the 2010s, though the total number of attacks increased as well. Fourth, although the correlation between MCT attacks and non-MCT attacks is high, the statistical analysis revealed that the correlates of both types of attacks do not always overlap, either at the country- or group-level. Thus, scholarship that seeks to explain these attacks or otherwise include them in statistical analyses needs to consider the issues raised in this article.

Beyond the implications for the scholarly study of terrorism and lethality, there are also practical reasons to seek a greater understanding of MCT attacks. When a terrorist attack results in either no or limited casualties, it will likely receive less media coverage.[64] Yet, large attacks are likely to draw more coverage, and more coverage may ultimately lead to greater fears regarding the future risk of terrorism, as well as the risk to loved ones.[65] Thus, MCT attacks can have a long-term psychological impact both on those immediately impacted and the broader community in which they take place. MCT attacks may also have greater economic implications than those of a less catastrophic attack. The 2004 backpack bombings on commuter trains in Madrid, Spain, resulted in costs to repair infrastructure, provide compensation and care for victims, account for lost wages, and support the long-term needs of the impacted people.[66] Additional research showed that the impact of attacks can last for some time, including when we take into account the tourism industry, and especially when the number of casualties rises.[67] In the aftermath of 2002 Bali bombings, for example, "foreign arrivals were down 30-40% . . . and hotel occupancy rates had dropped below 40%".[68]

MCT attacks also pose unique challenges for those preparing for them from a policy standpoint, as well as for the first responders who will be on the scene and need to provide care, investigative assistance, and other critical tasks in the immediate aftermath of an attack.[69] In terms of immediate issues, for example, the potentially large number of victims calls for experienced forensic analysis, which can be complicated by the possibility of continued risk to responders.[70] The obvious physical harm to a large number of victims can also pose difficulties for hospitals.[71] As noted above, MCT attacks can also have psychological impacts far beyond the event.[72] In the aftermath of the bombing of an Ariana Grande concert by a jihadist in Manchester, England, in 2017, one victim commented that "I struggled to leave the house alone for a few months after the attack, as I thought something may happen to me while I was alone."[73] These mental health challenges are not limited to the victims, and may even be felt by the first responders themselves, especially in situations involving many victims.[74]

Additionally, the results of the empirical analysis themselves may also provide some initial insights for practitioners and policymakers seeking to prepare for and prevent MCT attacks, even as additional research is needed to confirm such insights. More broadly speaking, the results suggest that countries experiencing internal conflict should expect a higher number of MCT attacks than countries not experiencing such conflicts. This finding is not necessarily surprising or novel, but it serves as a reminder that periods of volatility might be taken advantage of by terrorists. Perhaps more relevant is the finding that limitations on speech and civil liberties also seem to be a catalyst for higher numbers of MCT attacks. If these limits are being imposed (for whatever reason), then security and intelligence services may want to keep a wary eye on potential threats. At the level of the terrorist group, the results suggest that, on average, religious groups and groups that control territory commit a larger number of MCT attacks (in addition to committing more terrorism in general). Thus, if a state is engaged against a group with a religious ideology or one that possesses territory, it may want to be especially mindful of the possibility of larger-scale plots. Thus, cultivating intelligence to help prevent such plots, as well as preparing response capabilities if they do occur, ought to be a priority focus.

In sum, the study of MCT attacks is important for academics, policymakers, and practitioners. This study, although only a preliminary examination, has identified several future lines of inquiry related to MCT attacks that rely on both qualitative and quantitative approaches:

-   How do terrorist organisations use MCT attacks in the context of civil wars?
-   Does the use of an MCT attack reflect a sense of desperation on the part of a terrorist organisation or is it a sign of a strong organisation?

- How does the media cover MCT attacks? How does reporting on these events help/hinder the potential impacts?
- What types of state capabilities (ranging from law enforcement and intelligence to first responders and long-term care) are necessary to prevent and respond to MCT attacks?
- What does the decision-making process look like inside a terrorist group when considering MCT attacks? How do they balance competing demands and concerns related to the execution of these attacks?
- How does the use of MCT attacks impact other aspects of the operations of terrorist organisations?
- What impacts do MCT attacks on political processes and support for governments, if any?

Of course, these questions are only a small fraction of the potential avenues for research. I have tried to highlight several others at various points throughout the article. When combined with the questions listed above, which are based on the already-established literature as well as the continuing challenges that these attacks pose for practitioners, the hope is that they will be a good place to start.

Not many years after the September 11 attacks, one terrorism expert wrote that the idea of "terrorists want[ing] a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead" seemed to be yielding to a world in which terrorists were less constrained by norms against indiscriminate violence.[75] While the rate of MCT attacks has not necessarily risen, this article has shown that they are far from a tool of the past and seem to be a fixture of modern terrorism. Given this, continuing to study these unique and tragic events is critical to being able to understand how to prevent and respond to them more effectively.

Daniel J. Milton is a Visiting Professor of Political Science at Brigham Young University. His work focuses on the organisational behaviour of terrorist groups, counter-terrorism strategies, and related topics. He was previously a Professor at the George C. Marshall Center and the Director of Research at the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy.

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Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944," *International Interactions* 28, no. 3 (2002): 237-260, https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620213653; Thomas Plümper and Eric Neumayer, "The friend of my enemy is my enemy: International alliances and international terrorism," *European Journal of Political Research* 49, no. 1 (2010): 75-96, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2009.01885.x.

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44 Cingranelli et al., *The CIRI Human Rights Dataset*; Lasse S. Eskildsen and Christian Bjørnskov, "Does Freedom of Expression Cause Less Terrorism?" *Political Studies* 70, no. 1 (2022): 131-152, https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321720950223; Mark et al., *CIRIGHTS Data Project.*

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50 The way to test for overdispersion, which indicates that the negative binomial model is preferred over the Poisson model, is by looking at the alpha parameter. In the main models presented here for non-MCT attacks and all of the different fatality thresholds, the alpha parameter is statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level, which means that overdispersion is present and the negative binomial approach is the correct approach. Charlinda Santifort-Jordan and Todd Sandler, "An Empirical Analysis of Suicide Terrorism: A Global Analysis," *Southern Economic Journal* 80, no. 4 (2014): 990.

51 See Table 1A in the supplementary appendix for the specific mean and variance of the MCT attack

variables across different thresholds.

52 The traditional table of results for each of the models is available in the supplementary appendix (see Table 2A).

53 To test the robustness of these results, I conducted a few robustness checks. One set of checks tested whether the inclusion of different variables or the transformation of others impacted the general results presented here. These models were run with the inclusion of regional controls and year dummies to account for possible temporal impacts. Another set of checks tested whether the model specification impacted the results. Even though tests revealed that the negative binomial model was the preferred model choice over the Poisson, some might have preferred a simple OLS approach. Due to the fact that the dependent variable does not meet the assumptions required for OLS (i.e. it is not continuous or normally distributed), OLS does not seem an appropriate choice. Still, I ran the models using OLS and found little substantive variation from what is presented here. Second, there are certainly a large number of values of 'zero' for the dependent variable, especially as the fatality threshold increases. Some may argue that a modeling approach that takes these zeros into account is a better choice. Although I presented the results of the negative binomial model in the main article, I did run models using a zero-inflated negative binomial approach. Although the inflate portion of the model offers some additional nuance, the main results as it applies to the number of MCT attacks were consistent with the results in this section. The results for all of these robustness checks are available in the supplementary appendix.

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55 Luis de la Calle and Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, "How Armed Groups Fight: Territorial Control and Violent Tactics," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 10 (2015): 795–813, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1059103.

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59 Victor Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer, "The Nature of the Beast: Organizational Structures and the Lethality of Terrorist Attacks," *Journal of Politics* 70, no. 2 (2008): 437-449, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381608080419; Jochen O. Mierau, "The Activity and Lethality of Militant Groups: Ideology, Capacity, and Environment," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 8, no. 1 (2014): 23–37, https://hdl.handle.net/11370/b6aefc6d-e6ad-403d-b639-42ecf17d2617.

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61 As noted above, given that the purpose of these analyses is more about the overall results and the comparison of results across thresholds, the actual point estimates, in the form of traditional regression tables, are not included in the main body of the article. They are, however, available in Table 5A of the supplementary appendix.

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The Crime-Terrorism Nexus and Jihadism in Sweden: Explaining Connections, Recruitment Strategies, and Risks

Marco Nilsson*

Abstract: About half of the European foreign fighters who joined jihadist groups in Syria had a criminal record. In Sweden, as many as about two-thirds had been convicted of a crime, and several of them had a gang background. Previous research has suggested that such a background has often played a role in the radicalisation process. This study identifies six factors that explain why jihadism has held particular appeal for individuals with criminal backgrounds: absolving sins; providing a higher cause for crime and violence; gang members' lower threshold for using violence and quest for respect; overlapping ideas of masculinity in street culture and jihadism; jihadism more effectively satisfying a desire for excitement; and the prevalence of cognitive openings among gang members. The study also analyses different jihadist recruitment strategies aimed at youth involved in criminality, as well as the risk of jihadists joining gangs upon returning home from the conflict zone. These factors, strategies, and risks are illustrated with the help of interviews with former jihadists, a former jihadist recruiter, and individuals with friends and acquaintances in the Swedish Salafi-jihadist movement.

Keywords: crime-terrorism nexus, jihadism, Sweden, Salafism

* Corresponding author: Marco Nilsson, Political Science at Jönköping University, Sweden.
Email: marco.nilsson@ju.se

Introduction

Based on interviews with insiders and individuals connected to the Swedish Salafi-jihadist movement, this study identifies factors that help explain why jihadism has especially appealed to individuals with a criminal background. It also analyses various jihadist recruitment strategies targeting youth involved in criminality, as well as the risk of jihadists joining gangs upon returning from conflict zones.

About 300 Swedes travelled to Syria between 2012 and 2016 to join jihadist organisations, and about 150 of them returned to Sweden. An analysis of 83 identified returnees indicates that 30 have since then been convicted of a crime such as murder, assault, or a weapons offence.[1] Not only is the number of returnees who have become involved in crime high, but also the number of individuals with both jihadist and gang backgrounds seeking to escape criminality has increased. Their dual backgrounds have sometimes come as a surprise to social workers. Björn Berglund, who is operations manager for Exit, a Swedish organisation that helps individuals involved in extremism leave the milieu, explained that "I have been involved on at least five occasions where I have been told that you have been assigned to gang criminals, and then when you start working with the individual it turns out that they have fought in Syria as well."[2]

Early research into radicalisation sought to identify a common terrorist profile.[3] However, these efforts yielded only limited insights.[4] As a result, Perliger, Koehler-Derrick, and Pedahzur argue that disaggregation by focusing on different backgrounds and incentives offers greater potential for identifying specific profiles corresponding to different types of terrorists.[5] Recent research has increasingly theorised plural pathways into violent extremism.[6] Similarly, those who risk joining violent groups often have plural pathways into violence, extremism being only one of them. For instance, decisions about whether to join a gang or a jihadist group are frequently made in social spaces where members of both groups meet. Socio-economically marginalised areas, in particular, can function as "ecosystems" fostering various forms of violent activity.[7]

Indeed, while some research has explored formalised collaboration between criminals and terrorists, more recent perspectives focus instead on "similar social milieus from which criminals and terrorists draw their recruits."[8] In Sweden, 71 percent of the foreign fighters who left for Syria grew up in socio-economically marginalised areas.[9] Thus, both jihadist and gang recruiters have targeted the same group of troubled youth in these communities, as potential recruits are attracted to counter-cultural messages of redemption through power and violence.

Goyes and Sandberg argue in a study of Colombia that trajectories into paramilitary groups "are often similar to common trajectories into conventional crime."[10] It is also likely that the trajectories into gangs and jihadist groups can overlap to the extent that it is one's social contacts in the socio-economically marginalised areas that often have a significant effect in shaping one's direction. For example, Sageman emphasises that social bonds, including those formed prior to radicalisation, are crucial in the process of joining jihadist groups.[11] Socialisation often begins within peer groups of friends consisting of young men with criminal backgrounds who are unhappy with their lives in the West.[12]

The significance of peer groups during the radicalisation process of former criminals varies across categories of jihadists, depending on their backgrounds and incentives. Nesser argues that "misfits" are driven by both political grievances and personal problems that often involve criminality.[13] In contrast, "drifters", or what Bjørgo refers to as "followers", often join because of personal contacts and coincidences, often in peer groups of young men that may be criminal.[14] Peer groups, therefore, serve as a critical context for the radicalisation of drifters. Such social networks, including pre-existing criminal ones, facilitate the spread of new ideas, as messages

coming from trusted friends are more readily accepted. Moreover, the peer groups often promote a uniform worldview, reinforcing collective identity and ideological cohesion.

In Germany, two-thirds of those about whom the police had sufficient information had criminal records before travelling to Syria, and one-third had criminal convictions. In Belgium and in France, approximately half of the foreign fighters had prior criminal records.[15] Similarly, a study by Rostami et al. found that two-thirds of the 41 Swedish jihadists they investigated had previously been suspected of at least one crime.[16] Thus, from a historical perspective, jihadism has made a reverse class journey: while the majority of 9/11 attackers had studied at some university or college, most IS travellers were young men with criminal backgrounds and gang connections.

Although the crime-terrorism nexus—including the more specific links between criminality and jihadism—has been described in previous research,[17] the phenomenon is still under-researched. As Basra and Neumann argued, there is a knowledge gap regarding "the process of radicalization" within this nexus.[18] Understanding this process has become increasingly acute after the fall of IS, which has led to both contacts and competition for recruits between gangs and Salafi-jihadists, especially in Sweden.[19] Moreover, since crime and gang membership often serve as gateways into jihadist groups, the risk of jihadist recruitment has grown in recent years, with the rising number of Swedish gang members reaching 14,000 in 2023—up from 8,000 just two years earlier.[20]

Basra and Neumann examined the relevance of jihadists' criminal pasts, arguing that jihadism can offer redemption from past sins and a framework that legitimises crime. Prisons, they note, also provide an environment conducive to radicalisation and networking. Moreover, criminals often possess skills that are valuable to jihadist groups, such as familiarity with violence.[21] To shed more light on the radicalisation process within the crime-terror nexus, the current study identifies additional factors that help explain why jihadism has held particular appeal for individuals with criminal backgrounds. It also analyses different jihadist recruitment strategies targeting youth involved in criminality, as well as the risk of returning jihadists joining gangs after leaving the conflict zone. These factors, strategies, and risks are illustrated with the help of interviews with former jihadists, a former jihadist recruiter, and individuals with friends and acquaintances in the Swedish Salafi-jihadist movement.

Method

The interviews were conducted in Gothenburg, a former jihadist hub in Sweden, where up to 100 individuals left for jihad in Syria during the Syrian Civil War. The interviewees were located with the snowball method. When using such a non-probability sampling method, previous informants help recruit new ones, which makes it suitable for accessing hidden populations that are difficult to access. To avoid bias, as previous informants may help recruit individuals who have similar perceptions, the author established several independent starting points among his contacts. The interviews varied in length, ranging from one hour to shorter conversations conducted as part of ethnographic research on Swedish jihadists. In addition to questions about why jihadism has appealed to individuals with criminal backgrounds, the interviewees were asked about recruitment strategies. The interviews were conducted in mosques, private homes, and at cafes.

Seven individuals were interviewed for the study. Kareem (all names are pseudonyms) is a former jihadist recruiter who had contributed to the radicalisation of dozens of individuals

in Sweden, many of whom had criminal backgrounds. Mazen had returned from IS-controlled territory without any intention of going back. Bilal and Lukman, in contrast, were active IS fighters in Syria and were interviewed when they were briefly visiting Sweden. Ahmed belonged to an older generation of jihadists, having fought in Afghanistan and Bosnia. Malik and Jabir had not participated in jihad but had friends and acquaintances in the Swedish Salafi-jihadist environment and can therefore contribute to analysing why jihadism has appealed to individuals with criminal backgrounds. Both the active and the former jihadists described having had trouble with the authorities prior to their radicalisation. However, rather than focusing on their personal experiences, which jihadists are sometimes unwilling to focus on, all interviewees reflected on the topic in general terms and were treated as informants whose perceptions offer insights into the research question. The informants gave informed consent to be interviewed, and all data have been anonymised.

The interview data were analysed thematically, as the method is well-suited for highlighting different types of patterns that exist in the empirical material in relation to the research question. In accordance with Braun and Clarke, the analysis consisted of six steps: first, acquainting oneself with the data; second, generating a set of initial codes; third, searching for themes; fourth, evaluating the themes; fifth, defining and labelling the themes; and finally, compiling a report.[22] The number of informants was limited by the difficulty of accessing the Salafi-jihadist environment. However, the study aimed at data saturation—the point where new data no longer yields fresh insights or themes—not statistical generalisation. Informants with similar backgrounds, such as in this study, are more likely to express similar views, leading to quicker saturation.

Why does jihadism appeal to individuals with a criminal background?

The analysis identified six themes consisting of factors that explain why jihadism has held particular appeal for individuals with criminal backgrounds: absolving sins; providing a higher cause for crime and violence; gang members' lower threshold for using violence and quest for respect; overlapping ideas of masculinity in street culture and jihadism; jihadism more effectively satisfying a desire for excitement; and the prevalence of cognitive openings among gang members.

Absolving sins

Some scholars have argued that one reason individuals join jihadist groups is the belief that fighting can lead to the absolution of past sins.[23] Even gang members may experience moral qualms about the extreme violence they often use. As a Danish gang leader (interviewed by Touzari Greenwood) who became a jihadist explained, "Some people have died of my hands, and that is a big problem when I meet Allah ... It's not good enough just praying with all the shit I have done."[24]

Similarly, to contextualise his decision to travel to Syria, Lukman quoted the Quran (3:193): "Our Lord, so forgive us our sins and remove from us our misdeeds and cause us to die with the righteous." Like many other Swedish jihadists, Lukman had experienced trouble with the authorities and felt compelled to do something more meaningful with his life. However, although it is evident that some individuals with a criminal background seek repentance and seek atonement, the question remains: why would joining jihad be seen as a path to absolving sins? When I asked Lukman, he explained that fighting in the cause of God, "*fi sabil Allah*", is the "one of the best things you can do in Islam, and your past does not matter." Indeed, for him,

those "who have made *hijrah* [i.e., migration] to Dawlah [i.e., IS] are the best of the Muslims, the best of the believers." He also referred to the following hadith in Sahih Bukhari:

> *Allah's Apostle was asked, "What is the best deed?" He replied, "To believe in Allah and His Apostle. The questioner then asked, "What is the next [in goodness]?" He replied, "To participate in Jihad in Allah's cause."*[25]

Many Sunni Muslims regard Sahih Bukhari, along with Sahih Muslim, as the most authentic collection of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Accordingly, there is little dispute over the general merits of jihad (literally "struggle"), including its violent forms. What scholars do debate, however, is what actions truly constitute jihad and what should be considered *fitnah*, a term often understood as trial, discord or civil war.[26] Yet, young men seeking redemption from their sins often have limited religious knowledge and are therefore typically unaware of such theological distinctions and debates among scholars. As a result, the first interpretation they encounter is likely to leave the strongest impression. Ahmed, who had fought in Afghanistan and Bosnia, explained that it is often the outward appearance of jihadist recruiters, rather than their actual theological knowledge, that proves most persuasive:

> *Just because some people have the longest beards does not mean that they know much about Islam. But when you do not know about anything else, you can be convinced [by them]. When you later come into contact with other opinions, you dismiss them. What you first come into contact with is the most important influence.*

According to leaked IS documents, 70 percent of recruits reported having only a basic understanding of Islam upon their arrival in IS-controlled territories.[27] Kareem, a former IS recruiter, confirmed this pattern, explaining that his main target group consisted of young men looking for redemption and meaning, but with little knowledge of Islam. As a result, it was his outward appearance, rather than theological arguments, that often drew interest: "Then I come there… with a beard. That raises questions. That raises questions, that creates interest in the area, merely through my presence." Mazen, who had returned from IS, similarly argued that young men with troubled backgrounds would be less susceptible to jihadist recruitment if they had a stronger foundation in Islamic teachings:

> *If you, as a Muslim, are grounded in some form of traditional Islamic knowledge, you are in principle protected because you have role models that you look up to and who are going to say to you that what is going on there has faults, is not Islamic, and is instead diabolic.*

As Jensen and Larsen emphasised, it is religious emotions, rather than one's religious knowledge, that play a central role in the radicalisation process.[28] Hemmingsen even suggested that there has been a new trend in the radical environment called plebeian jihadism. It rejects formal education as a source of religious knowledge, linking this individualisation of authority to a narrative in which "adherents understand themselves as the chosen ones who receive direct divine guidance and have access to supernatural resources such as revelations through dreams and invisible soldiers."[29] In such an environment, where traditional formal knowledge is rejected, it becomes easy to believe that the more extreme the violence, the more effective it is in absolving one's past sins. This logic can create a dangerous circle of violence where the need to absolve sins increases if extreme violence itself creates doubts about its legitimacy. As Ahmed, who first fought in Afghanistan, explained: "There was too much fighting against wrong people, other Muslims, and that did not feel good. So I left for Bosnia and fought the Serbs."

Providing a higher cause for crime and violence

Jihadism can provide continuity with a criminal past and legitimise crime.[30] However, it can also provide a higher cause for violence. For those who have been involved in, for example, gang violence, this perceived higher cause can be perceived as beneficial in the process of absolving past sins. As Lukman said, "There is more benefit in fighting for Islam than for whatever you have done before. It is the fastest way to *Jannah* [i.e., Paradise]." Thus, the process of absolving sins may be perceived to require the use of violence in a new religious context. Indeed, extremist groups often exploit social polarisation, offering recruits a chance to engage in violence that feels meaningful and morally justified by positioning it as a fight against the "other." While gangs also use violence against other gangs, such as for control over the drug trade or retaliation for perceived injustices, such polarisation and violence lack divine sanction.

When a person who has previously used violence in a criminal context shifts to using violence for a higher cause, even ordinary crimes become seemingly legitimate, as victims are seen as *kufar* (unbelievers)—the "other" in a global struggle for dominance. Although jihadist groups do not expect all gang members to become jihadists, they provide religious and social justifications that can reduce moral concerns for criminals, intensifying and diversifying their criminality in an effort to create social unrest within society and maybe even to fund jihad.[31] As Lukman explained, "You owe no loyalty to *kufar* and their money is *halal* [i.e., allowed for you] to take."

The eleventh issue of the IS magazine *Rumiyah* even described robbery for the sake of jihad as a form of worship through which one seeks to draw closer to Allah.[32] Thus, as Basra and Neumann argued, IS conveyed the message that criminals do not need to change their behaviour, only their motivation.[33]

Although creating social unrest and even funding jihad may be viewed as beneficial by jihadist groups, the ultimate goal remains to turn gang members into committed jihadists. However, using violence is not always the first option for those leaving gangs. In fact, some have sought to leave gang life by adopting non-violent Salafism. Nevertheless, as Kareem explained, some of them have ended up on the battlefields of jihad:

> *That journey can go both ways. In fact, when I think of my old friends who were in a gang, many of them, when they left the gang, they became Salafists. Usually, it suits well. Some of them continued on the path and went on to jihadism and then travelled [to Syria] as well. And some lost faith. They joined gangs and then became religious, and then they lost faith. They stopped praying, they stopped, you know, going to the mosque, and they started smoking and stuff and went back to their old friends and old gang friends and stuff, and they lost their faith. Here comes some form of revival [...]. Those who joined the Islamist or Salafist group became cranky, started smoking and partying and stuff, and doing small robberies. And then they became religious again, but they went straight down to Syria, as soon as they became religious. Why? Because they wanted to protect themselves against going back to the old life. Because they are too weak to live in Sweden, and then they feel that the only way is that we do jihad. And then they all went down there [i.e., to Syria]. They were seven people or something like that.*

Thus, if a former gang member finds a higher meaning in religion, it can become coupled with jihadism to reduce the risk of relapsing into gang life. Such a strategy of leaving for the battlefield may initially be seen as a necessary step to create greater distance from sinful gang life. However, because jihadism involves the use of violence, which a gang member may have sought to leave behind when turning to religion, it must be legitimised by a higher divine cause to be acceptable.

Gang members' lower threshold for using violence and quest for respect

Fatal gun violence, primarily associated with gangs, began to increase dramatically in Sweden in the mid-2000s,[34] making gang members an increasingly tempting target group for recruitment into violent jihad. Similarly, involvement in jihadism, that is, what one perceives as religiously legitimate warfare, can be expected to be easier for gang members because of their previous experiences and dispositions. Basra and Neumann argued that criminals have psychological skills, such as familiarity with violence, that are advantageous for jihadist groups.[35] Indeed, gang members already have a low threshold for using violence, making the transition to fighting for a higher cause easier. As Bilal, a Swedish IS fighter, argued, "There is nothing special about killing *kufar*."

Moreover, both gang and jihadist environments use the same jargon that combines violence and brotherhood for the sake of defending one's territory. According to Kareem, "These environments are close to each other. Because these jihadists talk a lot about sacrifice, martyrdom and weapons and things like that, and in that environment there is a lot of talk about being brothers and shooting and defending your territory. So it's like the same talk."

Tutenges and Sandberg argued in a study of individuals involved in street life and crime in Oslo that there are four types of violence: respect-based violence, business violence, drunken violence, and family violence.[36] Of these, respect-based and business violence are also related to the jihadist use of violence. On the organisational level, one of the businesslike tools of IS's state-building project was the use of violence to secure money and other material resources.[37] However, on the social level, jihadists use violence mainly to be included in a peer group of "brothers" where respect for fellow warriors helps bind the group together. While individuals involved in street life and crime use violence to get respect mainly from those outside the group—potential victims of violence[38]—jihadists are more focused on respect from other members of the brotherhood. As Mazen explained, "You are respected for your fighting skills, what you can contribute to the brotherhood. You know, fighting the *kufar* and defending the *dawlah*. What the *kufar* think of you does not really matter."

Thus, being accustomed to using violence, while simultaneously constructing a brotherhood that seeks respect and defends its territory, can function as a form of priming for gang members who eventually opt for jihadism. Priming means that the processing of an initially encountered stimulus (the prime) influences a response to a subsequently encountered stimulus, as the brain is adapted to process certain kinds of information more easily after being exposed to something that is perceived as being related. Originally rooted in marketing research,[39] priming theory has since been expanded to explain why members of non-violent organisations join violent ones.[40] In the context of such behavioural radicalisation, the prime is initially created through socialisation into some related ideas and beliefs in the non-violent organisation. The prime can then be activated by framing, as recruiters suggest, for example, that these ideas are better realised through violence.

Similarly, being accustomed to using violence while constructing a brotherhood that seeks respect and defends its territory is a prime that can be activated by jihadist propaganda and recruiters that frame the jihadist activity as better realising these ideas, as respect comes from the brotherhood and not from the potential victims of violence. This increases the probability that one starts listening to those advocating other seemingly better solutions—creating a context where violence leads to "true" respect, brotherhood, and a seemingly more honourable defence of a territory than in the context of the drug trade. Thus, the lower threshold for using violence for some higher purpose can become an inadvertent prime that a jihadist group either strategically activates through framing or just benefits from.

Overlapping ideas of masculinity in street culture and jihadism

Although criminals often possess skills that suit jihadist organisations, such as proficiency with weapons and violence,[41] they may also have similar mindsets. For example, jihad and street culture contain overlapping ideals of masculinity, including toughness and readiness for violence,[42] which can be seen as essential components of hegemonic masculinity. Kimmel has explained engagement with violent extremism by arguing that being in a position of marginal masculinity can be experienced as emasculation, jeopardising one's social identity and making hegemonic masculinity appealing.[43] Hegemonic masculinity consists of practices that both legitimise men's dominant position in society and justify the subordination of the common male population and marginalised ways of being a man.

While gang violence can be viewed as an expression of hegemonic masculinity, jihadist groups construct heroic jihadist hypermasculinity—i.e., the exaggeration of male stereotypical behaviour such as violence and aggression[44]—as a potentially more meaningful form of hegemonic masculinity that involves violence for a higher cause. As Mazen, who had returned from IS, argued: "It is clear that you must be militant, always to be ready as a man. That is expected of a man… ready to defend the right cause." Thus, jihadism offers the exchange of gang members' hegemonic masculinity for heroic jihadist hypermasculinity. Such a seemingly more righteous form of hegemonic masculinity can be appealing to gang members searching for a deeper meaning.

However, as Ilan and Sandberg argued, embodied street habitus can also support continuities in attitudes and behaviours within different violent contexts.[45] Indeed, the way masculinity is expressed once in the conflict zone can vary depending on factors such as social context and the background of the jihadists. At times, it manifests in the intersection of street culture and jihad, as memories and social ties from one's previous life are carried into the battlefield.[46] For example, Mazen recalled positive memories of male socialization in Syria, describing how a group of young guys, who knew each other from before and came from the same part of the city, were on a male adventure and bonded over a shared experience: "People from Hisingen [an area in western Gothenburg] spent time with people from Hisingen, so it became a subculture of Hisingen and Syria, emigrating *muhajirun* soldiers." He also described how they had not completely changed the masculine norms of behaviour that they had previously developed in the streets of Gothenburg:

> *We arrived once at an installation. It was a house that the muhajirun had. And there was an Arab who was guarding the door. So, we were a couple of guys from Hisingen, street guys from Biskopsgården [a socio-economically vulnerable area in Hisingen]. And they did not want to let us in. That kind of nonchalance, that kind of street attitude, we just rolled over him. Just went in, almost ignored the guard. We belonged to the same group but did not take orders from him. It was funny, quite mischievous.*

Such narratives of merging milieus in the conflict zone—in which jihadists do not always need to leave their old friends, masculine behavioural patterns and social dynamics for male socialisation—can be highly appealing to young men searching for deeper meaning but still immersed in the ideals of street culture.

Jihadism more effectively satisfiyng the desire for excitement

Although there may be many reasons for becoming a criminal and even joining gangs, such as money, the desire for excitement can also be a strong motivational factor.[47] However, jihadism may satisfy that desire even more effectively. Indeed, scholars have long suspected that jihadism may function as a form of adventure.[48] As Hemmingsen argued, "Because jihadism is high-profiled and is perceived and received as a threat to security, it appears to hold the most potential for granting access to action and adventure."[49]

Few active jihadists would openly admit this. However, former jihadists, who have had time to reflect on their experiences and even become deradicalised, may arrive at such a conclusion. After a long discussion about why he had decided to travel to Afghanistan to become a jihadist, Ahmed acknowledged that it was not only about helping other Muslims or fulfilling a religious duty: "It was also about seeking an adventure." He also described how young men in particular may be drawn to jihad for the adventure it offers. In his youth, Ahmed could be described as a drifter who had trouble with the police and did not have anything meaningful to do in life. Especially for drifters, the prospect of jihadism may be appealing not only because it offers a sense of identity, but also because it offers something exciting to do.[50]

Sometimes, a willingness to embark on an adventure is part of a search for an identity and can thus also be seen as a component of the broader jihadist subculture often described as "jihadi cool."[51] Qvotrup Jensen et al. argued that coolness "pertains to a street cultural stylistic repertoire of displaying the potential for violence while being able to keep calm under pressure."[52] Mazen described this in terms of a heroic warrior identity, which may be even more appealing than the adventure offered by ordinary criminality: "It gives you the opportunity to be remembered for your deeds." Such jihadist narratives often echo the Homeric ethos—framing fighters as unique individuals gaining eternal honour and recognition.[53] However, as Mazen explained, the jihadist warrior identity is also grounded in the prospect of gaining freedom from the constraints of life in the suburbs:

> *Many of my friends who went down there and died there, as I knew them, they were not people who would play [an ordinary] life with a Volvo, a house, and a dog. They would not have kept an ordinary job [...] Some people are destined to raise a sword, and they yearn for an adventure—like a hunter. Why does he want to be out there to hunt? You know what I mean? The heroic deeds and the freedom of a warrior!*

However, jihadist organisations cannot always offer easy opportunities for jihad, particularly in foreign conflict zones. In Sweden, for instance, as travel to Syria became increasingly difficult, gangs had seemingly more to offer and grew more successful in recruiting young men seeking excitement.[54] Mazen argued that the excitement gangs can offer may not be as fulfilling as jihadism in a war zone, but the opportunities to use violence are now more readily accessible:

> *Gang culture is more popular among young people, that's what they see in the neighbourhood. It is cooler to be part of a gang because gangs have greater capacity for violence in civilian environments. They did not have that before.*

In 2024, however, an increasing number of Swedes travelled or attempted to travel to join jihadist organisations in Africa, including IS in Somalia. According to the Swedish National Centre for Terror Threat Assessment, this growing interest in such trips is expected to persist.[55] Some respondents said that travel to Somalia is more difficult than to Syria and that jihad in Somalia is not as appealing as jihad in Syria, which has greater symbolic resonance within the Salafi-jihadist movement. Mazen, however, argued that for those primarily seeking excitement in a warzone, Africa represents an alternative that will continue to be explored.

The prevalence of cognitive openings among gang members

Radicalisation often involves exposure to cognitive openings—experiences or events that make potential recruits question their previous beliefs about society and the use of violence.[56] These openings are also embedded in the everyday lives of many gang members. For example, experiences of racism can function as powerful cognitive openings. Samir (interviewed by Ismail), who eventually joined IS, described encountering such experiences already in school:

> *I do not really know, but I think they misunderstood me as a person and my skills, my potential. They completely misunderstood my potential. I had the potential to evolve in a positive way. Throughout my time in elementary school, their attitude towards me was totally humiliating. It was extremely racial. There was resistance all the way. It happened also to others, the pattern was that the Muslims in the class had to put up with the humiliation, they were seen as poorly developed.[57]*

The death of a family member is also a powerful catalyst for questioning one's beliefs.[58] According to the Norwegian police, 17.5 percent of the radical Islamists in Norway had lost one or both of their parents while growing up.[59] Kareem confirmed that this pattern is also common in Sweden: "The absence of fathers is common." He also explained that, in his recruitment efforts, he specifically targeted young people who had experienced such cognitive openings and sought to become their "father and imam."

Basra and Neumann argue that prisons can create cognitive openings that are readily exploited by recruiters.[60] However, it is also important to note that the general similarity of cognitive openings among criminals and jihadists increases the risk of radicalisation. Indeed, social and economic forces, as well as feelings of marginalisation, are some of the factors associated not only with radicalisation but also with a heightened risk of gang involvement,[61] thus functioning as common cognitive openings. Given that social contacts often shape one's trajectory,[62] it is not surprising that events and experiences that make one increasingly receptive to new ideas and behaviours that involve criminality often resemble those of jihadist recruits. Most importantly, since gang members often have similar cognitive openings, they are simply far more likely to join jihadist groups as compared to average youth, among whom such cognitive openings are not equally prevalent.

Jihadist recruitment strategies aimed at youth involved in criminality

Recruiters often employ strategies that especially target misfits who have grievances. They do so by framing events in the world, such as wars, as an existential threat to a transnational identity group they claim all Muslims belong to—the Ummah. The al-Qaeda recruitment manual, which has been distributed on several jihadist websites, elaborates in detail on many of the principles behind jihadist recruitment. It particularly encourages recruiters to "Use current events… (i.e., the siege of Gaza) to comment and explain the situation of Muslims."[63] Personal grievances, such as experiences of discrimination or lack of educational success, can then be attributed to the war on the Ummah, as Lukman argued: "There is resistance all the way. You cannot succeed because they hate Muslims. I mean the whole world…It is a war on Islam." Thus, jihad becomes a seemingly logical solution to solving one's personal grievances.

However, IS's strategy differed from that of al-Qaeda. While al-Qaeda had sought to polarise the world by creating a conflict between the Muslim world and the West, IS sought to create an elite group of true Muslims.[64] Their Ummah was thus limited to only IS supporters who are ready

to use extreme violence, which appealed especially to individuals with a criminal background who did not want to become "ordinary" peaceful Muslims.

Recruiters could also frame jihad as appealing to young men in the gang environment because they had led lifestyles involving several women. Indeed, one of the attractions of joining gangs has been access to women,[65] and in some cases this access is also relevant to understanding why young men are drawn to jihadist groups. At least, those potential recruits who have become accustomed to access to women must be convinced that it will continue. According to Al-Ali, "the promise of sexual access to women and girls has been central to ISIS's recruitment strategy and propaganda materials."[66] For example, in October 2014, IS's English-language publication *Dabiq* stated that captured Yezidi women and girls were given to jihadists as spoils of war. Mazen, who had returned from Syria, explained that IS's recruitment strategy sought to match the demand and supply of women, such that especially young men with troubled backgrounds could envision a new, comfortable future. "They were promised money, women and houses."

Jihad, however, entails a high risk of dying. Therefore, recruiters stressed that this access to women was expected to continue even in the afterlife. Kareem explained that the story of 72 Hoor al-'Ayn, who are often thought to be virgin maidens in Paradise with beautiful eyes, was a useful recruitment narrative when targeting these young men:

> For example, women in Paradise. Do you understand what I mean? Because they have a lot of girls, and they go out clubbing at bars and stuff— Hoor al-'Ayn. And then you talk a lot about it. So, this something that should be, in their heads, is linked to this desire, the desire for violence or the desire for sex. And then they become so interested and listen a lot. And I've tested it myself when I talk to them. When you sit and talk about why it is very important to pray five times a day and have a relationship with God, and things like that. I can be a good speaker and they may listen and not yawn, but it is not the case that they come afterwards and ask about prayers and how I become so and so.

These accounts highlight how the promise of sexual rewards both in this life and in the afterlife can be strategically mobilised to resonate with the desires of young men from the gang environment. This underscores how narratives that blend violence, masculinity, and sexuality may be more immediately engaging than conventional religious teachings focused on prayer or spiritual discipline. This also suggests that recruiters may prioritise emotionally charged and familiar frames to create psychological proximity between the recruits' current lifestyle and the imagined rewards of jihad, thus lowering the cognitive and moral barriers to radicalisation.

The risk of jihadists joining gangs upon returning home

When jihadists return home, there is a risk that gangs find returnees' experiences useful. Rafi Farouq, operations manager at the social centre Flamman in Malmö, Sweden, argued that "gang criminals are happy to recruit among people who have this capacity for violence and have been in these environments."[67] However, not all jihadists have the same experiences of using extreme violence, and even when they have such experiences, not all are keen to market themselves to gangs. Moreover, what happens upon returning from Syria depends not only on one's experiences in the conflict zone, but also on the reasons one had for joining the jihadist organisation.

Drifters who joined jihadist groups because of their prior social contacts are more likely to regret their involvement and become deradicalised, as their radicalisation was not based on grievances or a deep belief in jihadist ideology. However, some drifters have a gang background and have therefore fallen back into crime because of old social contacts. Malik explained: "Some grew up with the gangs before they left for Syria, so it is quite normal that they struggle with the temptations like drugs when they come back."

Misfits who joined the jihad because of grievances are more likely to remain radicalised, as those grievances likely persist. However, disappointment with the collapse of the utopian project in Syria can lead them to seek alternative forms of rebellion against society, such as joining gangs. Still, some of them have an innate resistance to gangs, as gangs lack a political cause. Thus, joining a gang is not inevitable, and if it does occur, it is likely to result in a dual identity such that one identifies with both milieus simultaneously. Kareem explained: "There is a mix between them. It's like they have their loyalty both to Islam—what's in their heads, Islam then—and also to the gang. So they are like between the gang and between the jihadists." Jabir also asked, "What is the difference? You can be killed by bombs from a plane or drugs from your local dealer. I am not saying that someone thinks that you will become *shaheed* [i.e., martyr] if you overdose, but it is still a struggle."

Accepting some overlap between the gang environment and the Salafi-jihadist environment is a strategic necessity, as completely losing members through deradicalisation would be a worse option from an organisational perspective. Therefore, as Kareem explained, "the new strategy now is to influence the gangs and try to make sure that they are loyal to their struggle." However, non-violent groups are seen as an even greater threat, as they do not permit dual identities. Kareem argued that returning jihadists sometimes end up in non-violent Salafist groups if they lose contact with other jihadists and become susceptible to new ideas: "It only happens when they are suddenly alone. He has no knowledge of Islam." This suggests that upholding the radical social context is important for Salafi-jihadist groups both for pulling individuals who have loyalties to gangs closer to them and for preventing deradicalisation when faced with competition from non-violent alternatives.

However, since individuals who identify both with the Salafi-jihadist and the gang environment have a weaker religious identity than the more full-fledged members, they need more socialisation into the Salafi-jihadist environment. This is more difficult today, as many activities have shifted online, while opportunities to spend time in the gang environment are more readily available.

Conclusion

The crime-terrorism nexus is volatile. As Basra and Neumann argue, "the adoption of the religious worldview of jihadism is no guarantee that criminal behaviour has stopped, while acting like a gangster does not preclude involvement in terrorism."[68] This makes studying various phenomena in the nexus difficult. One day, an individual may express himself and behave like a gangster, only to seem more religious the next day. Sometimes such changes even take place in the same sentence. Still, the need to better analyse fluid identities and the movement between the two environments is important for understanding the future of jihadism.

Decisions about whether to become a gang member or a jihadist are usually made in spaces where both gang members and jihadists meet, and socio-economically problematic areas can become "ecosystems" fostering different kinds of violent activities.[69] Understanding the factors

that explain why jihadism has especially appealed to individuals with a criminal background can shed more light on these ecosystems. Such studies are valuable, although they often make limited contributions to broader theorising about the plural pathways into violent extremism.[70] Much of the early research on the crime-terrorism nexus focused on organisational connections or on how terrorist groups resort to crime for income. Basra and Neumann, however, consider the concept useful for a different reason:

> *What we have observed in the case of jihadist recruits in Europe is not the convergence of criminals and terrorists as organisations but of their social networks, environments, or milieus. In other words: rather than being one or the other, criminal and terrorist groups have come to recruit from the same pool of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps that have consequences for how individuals radicalise and operate. This is what we call the new crime-terror nexus.[71]*

Moreover, an important component of this crime-terrorist nexus, which merits further study beyond a focus on the physical aspects of the social environment, is the identity dimension in these encounters where similar mindsets meet and identities are negotiated. We also need empirically tested causal explanations, moving beyond merely exemplifying.

Although the current study, focusing on the Swedish case, corroborated many of the arguments by Basra and Neumann about various reasons why jihadism can appeal to individuals with a criminal background,[72] it also put more emphasis on some variables, such as excitement, and added new variables, such as masculinity. It also analysed recruitment strategies targeting youth involved in criminality and the risk of jihadists joining gangs upon returning home. Moreover, it sought to shed light on the crime-terrorism nexus with the help of interview data. Although studies that are based on secondary data, such as that of Basra and Neumann,[73] can provide a broad overview of the crime-terrorism nexus with more cases, future studies should further test these ideas through interview studies in different contexts, which may uncover previously unexplored dimensions of the nexus.

Marco Nilsson is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Jönköping University, Sweden. His primary research interests include jihadism, radicalisation, and countering violent extremism.

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Introducing the Leadership for the Extreme and Dangerous for Innovative Results (LEADIR) Dataset

Gina S. Ligon, Michael K. Logan* and MacKenzie Harms

Abstract: The goal of this research note is to introduce the Leadership for the Extreme and Dangerous for Innovative Results (LEADIR) dataset. LEADIR is an open-source relational dataset containing information on 280 terrorist groups and 295 terrorist leaders active between 2008 and 2017. We first explain how LEADIR was developed and the historiometric method used to collect and code group and leadership information. Next, we discuss key variables at both the group and leader levels. Using descriptive statistics, we also examine these variables in the context of existing terrorism research. Finally, we elaborate on the strengths and limitations of LEADIR. In doing so, we describe the ways in which LEADIR can be used to build on terrorism research.

Keywords: terrorist leaders, terrorism, terrorist organisations, dataset construction, political violence

Corresponding author: Michael K. Logan, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, Kennesaw State University. Email: mlogan21@kennesaw.edu

Introduction

The goal of this research note is to introduce the Leadership for the Extreme and Dangerous for Innovative Results (LEADIR) dataset. LEADIR is an open-source relational dataset containing information on 280 terrorist groups and 295 terrorist leaders active between 2008 and 2017.[1] At the group level, LEADIR draws on industrial and organisational psychology, organisational theory, and criminology to examine the structure and processes of terrorist groups. At the leader level, LEADIR joins novel datasets such as the Rebel Organization Leaders (ROLE) database[2] and the Rebel Leaders in Civil War (RLCW) dataset,[3] in that it seeks to understand the background characteristics of violent ideological leaders and how those features influence group behaviour. Taken together, LEADIR offers an additional data source towards building a comprehensive understanding of the nature of terrorist groups and terrorist leaders.

The outline of this research note is as follows. First, we describe how LEADIR was developed, including the inclusion and exclusion criteria, coding procedures, and issues related to source credibility. Next, we provide background information and descriptive statistics for key group and leader-level variables. Finally, we discuss the strengths and limitations of LEADIR.

Building LEADIR

LEADIR contains group-level information on 280 terrorist groups and leader-level information on 295 terrorist leaders active between 2008 and 2017. We selected this ten-year timeframe for two key reasons. First, since LEADIR is a new data collection effort and includes several variables not found in existing datasets, it was important to select a time frame that was contemporary enough to collect information from a multitude of reliable sources. In other words, this date range ensured that sufficient information could be collected for each terrorist group. Second, as shown in more detail below, LEADIR is connected to the Global Terrorism Dataset (GTD). During the initial development of LEADIR, the GTD contained terrorist attack data only through 2017; consequently, 2017 was designated as the endpoint for the ten-year timeframe.[4] Further, in 2008, the GTD introduced new inclusion criteria, making 2008 an appropriate historical benchmark to ensure reliable attack-level data across a ten-year period.

Inclusion Criteria

The first step to reach the final sample of terrorist groups in LEADIR was to compile a list of active terrorist groups. To do so, we first relied on GTD. The GTD is an unclassified open-source database on domestic and international terrorist events from 1970 through 2020, maintained by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism.[5] Although the GTD is primarily an event-level database, it contains information on the name of the perpetrator group for each attack. More specifically, the "perpetrator group name" (i.e., gname) variable provides information on the name of the group carrying out an attack using a standardised list of group names established by GTD staff.[6] Using the perpetrator group name variable, we aggregated the attack cases to determine the population of active terrorist groups.[7] In total, 965 different perpetrator groups were associated with attacks between 2008 and 2017.[8]

Exclusion Criteria: Sustained Violence and Group Boundaries

In the next stage, we reduced the set of 965 perpetrator groups using two additional criteria. First, we removed all perpetrator groups that had less than five attacks attributed to them between 2008 and 2017. Specifically, a total of 640 groups had fewer than five attacks and were removed from the sample. We selected five attacks as the threshold for inclusion for both theoretical and practical reasons. First, committing five attacks during this ten-year period

displayed continuity, or a minimal commitment to violence, which is a core feature of organised criminal collectives.[9] Second, terrorist groups with five or more attacks were likely to have a sufficient amount of information written about them to assess their group and leadership characteristics.[10] After removing perpetrator groups with fewer than five attacks between 2008 and 2017, a total of 325 perpetrator groups remained.

Next, we excluded perpetrator groups that did not have identifiable group boundaries as indicated by the presence of a group name. The presence of a group name is important in criminal collectives as it functions both as a symbolic boundary and a mechanism through which members identify themselves as part of the group.[11] Of the 325 remaining perpetrator groups, we removed 45 group entries, most often referring to generic religious (e.g., Algerian Islamic Extremists) or political movements (e.g., Maoists). After removing perpetrator groups without a distinct, identifiable name, 280 terrorist groups remained. These 280 terrorist groups and the 295 terrorist leaders nested within these groups served as the final sample for LEADIR.

Historiometric Analysis

Organisational and leadership data were collected and coded using a historiometric approach. Historiometry is an organisational research method in which hypotheses about human or group behaviour are tested by applying quantitative analyses to narrative historical sources.[12] In simple terms, historiometric analysis "requires the acquisition, assessment, and coding of narrative historical sources in relation to the phenomena of interest."[13] Through a holistic exploration of the open-source information, historiometric analysis allows researchers to convert historical information into quantitative data that is appropriate for statistical analysis.[14] One key feature of historiometric analysis is that it relies on a context-driven interpretation of a text-based data source using highly trained raters. Given their familiarity with the phenomena of interest, raters are tasked with capturing estimates of variables from the story told by the text as opposed to the text itself.[15] In this sense, historiometry is a judgmental approach, which requires raters to have a functional understanding of the phenomena of interest and a shared mental model concerning the interpretation of the content.[16]

Historiometric analysis is particularly advantageous for studying terrorist groups and leaders since it was originally designed as a methodological tool to examine populations that are difficult to access and directly observe.[17] For example, historiometry has been used to examine destructive leadership,[18] leader assassination,[19] Machiavellianism,[20] and violent leaders.[21] Historiometric methods have also been utilised to compare the group processes and organisational features of violent ideological groups relative to violent non-ideological groups.[22] Since members of terrorist groups are difficult to access,[23] historiometry provides a suitable methodology for examining such topics.

Data Collection and Coding Procedure

The data were collected and assessed by five graduate student raters working in an interdisciplinary research lab over a fifteen-month period from October 2018 to December 2019.[24] Data were first collected for each terrorist group, followed by the terrorist leaders. Recognising that source credibility is a major limitation for open-source data collection,[25] LEADIR utilised two strategies to ensure the credibility of secondary sources. First, in line with best practices for historiometric analysis,[26] each rater underwent 40 hours of training in utilising open-source information prior to data collection. One goal of the training was to prevent mono-source and common method bias and orient raters toward reputable sources. Second, LEADIR utilised a three-tier source credibility system to help direct raters to the more "trusted" sources.[27] Tier 1 sources – the most credible sources – included academic publications and databases on terrorism (e.g., Mapping Militant Organization, South Asia

Terrorism Portal) and government sources (e.g., Department of Justice, United Nations). The next source credibility tier, Tier 2 sources – included media reports (e.g., *Wall Street Journal*, *Al Jazeera*, *New York Times*) and information from watchdog organisations (e.g., Council on Foreign Relations, Counter Extremist Project). Finally, the lowest source credibility tier – Tier 3 sources – consisted of information abstracted from blogs or extremist-affiliated websites. On average, just over one Tier-1 source and three Tier-2 sources were collected per terrorist group in LEADIR. Once identified, secondary information on individual terrorist leaders was more difficult to collect and code relative to information on the group. Nevertheless, for each terrorist leader in the dataset, there were an average of nearly one Tier-1 source and three Tier-2 sources.

Since LEADIR relied on multiple raters, we addressed inter-rater reliability in three ways. First, during the 40 hours of training described above, raters were instructed about theories underlying terrorist group behaviour. The training helped provide a baseline knowledge about terrorism (e.g., extremist ideologies, goals, and organisational structures) necessary to assess the data. Second, each rater also individually coded 20 terrorist groups and met to discuss their coding to ensure a shared mental model and reach a better understanding of the group characteristics. Interrater reliability was calculated for key constructs during this time. Cronbach's alpha score for each measure was greater than .80, suggesting adequate levels of interrater reliability.[28] The research team also debated any discrepant coding in the double-coded data to come to an agreement on the most accurate coding decision based on the available information. Third, during the entirety of the data collection and coding process, the principal investigator and project manager examined each rater's coding on a weekly basis to ensure the accuracy of the data.

Missing Data

Missing data were addressed in two ways. First, fixed-value imputation was used to replace missing information on variables for which substantive knowledge or subject expertise suggested a most likely or highly probable value. For instance, variables that are generally available in open sources (e.g., uniforms, drug trafficking) were coded as null if information could not be found. LaFree and colleagues showed that this method of estimating missing values did not significantly alter results using open-source data from the Profiles of Individual Radicalisation in the United States (PIRUS) dataset.[29] Second, variables that were not typically discussed in open sources (e.g., level of unit autonomy, level of membership expertise) were coded as missing, allowing researchers to utilise listwise deletion in subsequent analyses.

Group and Leader Level Variables

Tables 1 and 2 present the descriptive statistics for several of the key group and leader-level variables housed in LEADIR. One advantage of LEADIR is the use of Likert-type behaviourally anchored rating scales (BARS) with benchmark exemplars for what would be considered low, medium, and high for several measures of organisational structure (e.g., centralisation). Unlike dichotomous measures of group structure, Likert-type scales reflect the reality that the dimensions of terrorist group structure operate on a continuum as opposed to a dichotomy. The Caucasus Emirate, for example, is more centralised than the Animal Liberation Front but less centralised than Hezbollah. A dichotomous coding schema would force the researcher to categorise the Caucasus Emirate at one of the two extremes and miss the reality that they likely fall somewhere in the middle. At the same time, Likert-type scales do not constrain the variability of group structure, which provides the ability to identify a latent construct of terrorist group structure and increases the likelihood of identifying statistically significant findings.[30]

Figure 1: *Example Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scale for Organisational Centralisation*

1	2	3	4	5
There is no clear command structure; the group is anonymously cell-based.		Some command structure, but still ambiguous in terms of who is given commands/leader.	The structure of an organization is highly centralized and hierarchical with a clear chain of command.	
The Earth Liberation Front operates in autonomous cells with no central leadership		Caucasus Emirate has central leadership, but it is difficult to identify who has operational influence during periods in the group's history	ISIL has a hierarchical command structure featuring a central leader who sets the strategic objectives for the group	

Based on the descriptive statistics shown in Table 1, there are three conclusions to discuss.[31] First, nearly half of the group in LEADIR had either religious or ethnonationalist ideological motives, whereas only 10 percent had left-wing motives. The disproportionally high number of religious and ethno-nationalist groups is consistent with other terrorist group datasets[32] and theories about general patterns of terrorist group motives.[33] At the same time, Table 1 shows that the majority of terrorist groups fit into three of the six goal categories by Jones and Libicki.[34] More specifically, 17 percent of groups strived to establish an empire, 45 percent sought territorial control, and 25 percent wished to overthrow the current regime. The number of terrorist groups with goals of territorial control or regime change is consistent with Jones and Libicki's dataset.[35] LEADIR does, however, include a high number of groups with empire goals, which more than likely reflects the emergence of the Islamic State and its affiliates, as well as the expansion of al-Qaeda between 2008 and 2017.

Second, Table 1 shows that the majority of terrorist groups in LEADIR were relatively small (m = 1.35, SD = 1.26) and centralised (m = 3.25, SD = 1.25) but lacked departmentalisation (m = 2.60, SD = 1.16) and membership diversity/expertise (m = 2.20, SD = 1.10).[36] The average organisational size of the groups in LEADIR is relatively comparable to studies utilising BAAD.[37] Next, the finding that the majority of groups in LEADIR are centralised but lacking in departmentalisation is consistent with Kilberg's coding of the organisational structure of 246 terrorist groups. Specifically, Kilberg found that most terrorist groups were defined as having either an all-channel structure, defined by the presence of leadership but no functional differentiation or central command, or a hub-and-spoke structure characterised by the presence of leadership and functional differentiation but no central command.[38] In other words, consistent with Kilberg, most groups in LEADIR are organised somewhere in the middle between a centralised bureaucracy and fully decentralised cells. Finally, the lack of membership diversity/expertise in the groups in LEADIR corresponds with Windisch and colleagues, who found that few terrorist groups recruited members with specialised skills or training.[39] This finding also provides theoretical support to terrorism scholars arguing that "headhunting" or selective recruitment is a critical yet difficult task for extremist groups.[40]

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics for Key Group Level Measures*

Variable	Mean (SD)	Min	Max	Operational Definition
Ideology				
Religious	.49 (.50)	0	1	The terrorist group was motivated by a religious cause.
Ethnonationalist	.49 (50)	0	1	The terrorist group was motivated by an ethno-nationalist cause.
Left-Wing	.10 (.31)	0	1	The terrorist group was motivated by a left-wing cause.
Goals				
Empire	.17 (.38)	0	1	The terrorist group's primary goal was establishing an empire.
Territorial Control	.45 (.50)	0	1	The terrorist group's primary goal was territorial control.
Regime Change	.25 (.43)	0	1	The terrorist group's primary goal was overthrowing the current regime.
Group Characteristics				
Organizational Size	1.35 (1.26)	0	4	The estimated number of members in the terrorist group (0 = 0-99 or low confidence; 1 = 100-999; 2 = 1,000-4,999; 3 = 5,000-9,999; 4 = 10,000 or more).
Centralization	3.13 (1.25)	1	5	The degree to which the decision-making or command structure of the group was concentrated versus dispersed (1 = highly decentralized; 3 = balanced; 5 = highly centralized).
Departmentalization	2.60 (1.16)	1	5	The degree to which the group delineates tasks and labor to specific teams or cells within in the group (1 = no unit specialization; 3 = moderate unit specialization; 5 = maximum unit specialization).
Deep-Level Diversity	2.20 (1.10)	1	5	The degree to which a group's membership is diverse on deep-level characteristics such as educational background, wealth, or specialized skills (1 = no member expertise; 3 = moderate member expertise; 5 = maximum member expertise).
Services	.23 (.42)	0	1	The group provided services (e.g., medical) to their target community.
Group Processes				
Organizational Training	.28 (.45)	0	1	The group engaged in organizational training (e.g., leadership succession planning, internal memos, and financial reports).
Ideological Training	.25 (.43)	0	1	The group engaged in ideological training (e.g., religious camps; mandatory reading of ideological texts).
Combat Training	.53 (.50)	0	1	The group engaged in combat training.
Uniforms	.52 (.50)	0	1	Members of the group wore uniforms.
Child Soldiers	.28 (.45)	0	1	The group recruited and/or used child soldiers.
Fundraising				
State Sponsor	.20 (.40)	0	1	The group received aid from a state sponsor
Drug Trafficking	.14 (.35)	0	1	The group engaged in drug trafficking for fundraising.
Extortion	.45 (.50)	0	1	The group engaged in extortion for fundraising
Kidnapping	.38 (.49)	0	1	The group engaged in kidnapping for fundraising.

Third, Table 1 suggests that the majority of groups in LEADIR engaged in combat training (53 percent), wore uniforms (52 percent), and raised funds by extorting individuals and/or local businesses (45 percent), or kidnapping (38 percent). It is likely that a large number of terrorist groups engaged in combat training to both socialise members to violence and enhance their tactical and operational attack skills.[41] Drawing from insights on gang organisation and the use of insignia, it is plausible that terrorist groups utilise uniforms to help overcome "asymmetries

of information" between members and those outside the group.[42] Finally, the relatively high use of kidnapping or extortion as funding streams suggests that neither episodic crimes (e.g., kidnapping for ransom) nor institutional crimes (e.g., extortion) are clearly preferred by the groups in LEADIR.[43] At the same time, the large number of groups that use extortion to raise funds provides further support for the growing crime-terror continuum.[44]

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for several key leader-level variables. There are three findings worth discussing. First, the average estimated age at which individuals entered a leadership role was approximately 43 years old (SD = 12.79). As such, the average age of terrorist leaders is relatively similar to corporate team leaders,[45] small business owners,[46] and senior military leaders,[47] but less than most corporate chief executive officers[48] and political leaders.[49]

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics for Key Leader Level Measures*

Variable	Mean (SD)	Min	Max
Leader Age	42.47 (12.79)	20	85
Incarcerated	.37 (.48)	0	1
Founder	.43 (.50)	0	1
Strategic Influence	.45 (.50)	0	1
Operational Influence	.79 (.41)	0	1

Second, approximately 37 percent of terrorist leaders were incarcerated either prior to or during their time as leaders, while an estimated 43 percent of leaders helped found their group. The relatively high number of leaders with a criminal background is consistent with van Leeuwen and Weggeman's analysis of contemporary jihadist leaders and suggests that incarceration may have an important effect on extremists' rise to a leadership position.[50] The proportion of terrorist leaders who helped found their group is somewhat surprising, considering that forming a terrorist group is no small task and requires entrepreneurial and political skills to attract and induce individuals to commit violence.[51]

Finally, 45 percent of terrorist leaders were said to have strategic influence defined as having a credible degree of influence on the group's higher-order strategic goals (e.g., alliances). In contrast, 79 percent were rated as having operational influence or a credible degree of influence on the managerial functions of the organisation (e.g., fundraising, recruitment). We suspect that there are more leaders with operational as opposed to strategic influence since strategic goals are institutionalised as a group ages. In other words, second or third generation leaders primarily focus on day-to-day management since the strategic goals are formalised within the group.

Summary: Advantages and Limitations

The purpose of this research note was to introduce the LEADIR dataset – an open-source relational dataset containing information on 280 terrorist groups and 295 terrorist leaders active between 2008 and 2017. Before discussing the ways in which LEADIR can contribute to terrorism research, there are three main limitations to bear in mind. First, LEADIR relies on open-source information for collecting and coding group and leadership data. Although an increasing number of terrorism datasets are based on open-source data,[52] there is the potential

of reporting inaccurate, biased, or false information when using secondary data. Given the polarisation of terrorism, there is also the potential that government censorship of information may influence results.

Second, the LEADIR dataset includes terrorist groups with more than five attacks between 2008 and 2017. In turn, LEADIR does not include information on lone actors or social movements without identifiable group boundaries. As a result, LEADIR excluded many less durable and potentially less organised groups, and the generalisability of LEADIR is applicable to terrorist groups with patterns of sustained violence and who meet baseline criteria of an established group or organisation. Third, LEADIR is a cross-sectional dataset and is unable to examine how terrorist groups or leaders change over time.

Despite these limitations, there are at least five ways in which LEADIR can be leveraged to understand terrorist groups and the behaviour of terrorist leaders. First, LEADIR houses new group-level variables not found in existing datasets. For example, LEADIR includes measures of organisational centralisation, training, and the use of uniforms not found in other datasets. By collecting new variables, researchers can draw on LEADIR to address critical questions on the characteristics of terrorist groups and their relationship to violent (and nonviolent) outcomes. Second, LEADIR also incorporates group-level variables inspired by other terrorist group datasets.[53] As such, LEADIR provides the opportunity to replicate findings from previous studies and ultimately move toward a better understanding of terrorist groups.

Third, LEADIR is one of the first systematic data collection efforts on terrorist leaders as the unit of analysis.[54] Journalists, analysts, and citizen observers often comment on the quality or level of a terrorist leader, but until recently, there has been a dearth of research on the characteristics of terrorist leaders.[55] This does not discount research on the importance of leaders to terrorist group behaviour.[56] However, many studies focus on events surrounding terrorist leaders (e.g., leadership decapitation) – not the characteristics of leaders themselves. Admittedly, collecting information on terrorist leaders was much more difficult than gathering data on terrorist groups. Nevertheless, LEADIR contains several leader-level variables that should serve as a springboard to explore how terrorist leaders influence group outcomes.

Fourth, LEADIR was developed using historiometric analysis – an established method in organisational and leadership studies. Although researchers have often explored how to integrate theories from outside disciplines to study terrorism,[57] few scholars have examined how methods can do the same. Like many other datasets on terrorism and political violence[58], historiometry involves open-source, secondary data collection. However, historiometry is much more than just another open-source data collection technique, as it allows for the assessment of degrees of organisational and leadership characteristics via the use of BARS, which ultimately allows for a more nuanced analysis. Furthermore, given the robust use of historiometry in leadership studies and organisational science, researchers have put forth several best practices and procedures to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the data,[59] which were integrated into LEADIR. Finally, LEADIR is tied to the GTD, a terrorism event dataset. This linkage is important because it enhances the practical utility of LEADIR by providing researchers the capability to examine how group or leaders' characteristics influence violent outcomes. As Hou and colleagues note, "to be useful, a terrorist group data set must be tied to terrorism event data."[60]

In closing, LEADIR is another step toward building a comprehensive understanding of the group and leadership characteristics of modern-day terrorist groups. LEADIR is available to scholarly and practitioner communities by contacting the authors of this paper.[61]

Gina S. Ligon is the Jack and Stephanie Koraleski Professor of Collaboration Science at the University of Nebraska Omaha and the Director of the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, & Education Centre (NCITE). She received her Ph.D. in Industrial and Organisational Psychology and a Minor in Quantitative Psychology from the University of Oklahoma. Gina's research focuses on organisational structures and leadership in non-normative organisations (e.g., violent ideological).

Michael K. Logan is an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Kennesaw State University. He received his Ph.D. in Criminology and Criminal Justice from the University of Nebraska Omaha. Currently, Michael's research focuses on utilising a criminological approach to understand the decision-making processes of violent extremists.

Mackenzie Harms is a Research Fellow managing scientific research and review for the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, & Education Centre (NCITE) and co-leading the LEADIR research lab, conducting interdisciplinary research for government partners and the scientific community. She received her Ph.D. in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of Nebraska Omaha. Mckenzie's research focuses on the leadership and organisational characteristics of violent extremist organisations that contribute to their effectiveness and malevolent innovation.

Appendix A: LEADIR Sample (n=280)

Group Name	Goal	Ideology	Size
Abdullah Azzam Brigades	E	R	0
Abu Obaida bin Jarrah Brigade	TC	R	1
Abu Sayyaf Group	E	R, EN	1
Achik National Volunteer Council-B	TC	EN	1
Achik Songna An'pachakgipa Kotok	TC	EN	1
Adan-Abyan Province of the Islamic State	E	R	1
Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat	RC	R, EN	2
Ahlu-sunah Wal-jamea	TC	R	3
Ahrar al-Sham	E	R	4
Ajnad Misr	RC	R	1
Akhil Terai Mukti Morcha	TC	LW, EN	1
Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade	TC	R	1
Al-Ashtar Brigades	RC	R	0
Al-Islah Party	RC	R	0
Al-Mua'qi'oon Biddam Brigade	TC	R	0
Al-Naqshabandiya Army	SQ	EN	2
Al-Nasir Army (Syria)	RC	O	2
Al-Nusrah Front	E	R	3
Al-Qaida in Iraq	E	R	3
Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula	E	R	2
Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent	E	R	1
Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb	E	R	0
Al-Shabaab	E	R	3
Al-Sham Legion	RC	R	4
Aleppo Fatah Operations Room	RC	R	3
Algeria Province of the Islamic State	E	R	0
Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo	TC	EN	2
Allied Democratic Forces	RC	R	2
Ambazonia Defense Forces	TC	EN	1
Animal Liberation Front	PC	O	0
Ansar al-Din Front	RC	R	1
Ansar al-Dine (Mali)	TC	R	2
Ansar al-Islam	RC	R	1
Ansar al-Islam (Burkina Faso)	RC	R	1
Ansar al-Sharia (Libya)	TC	R	2
Ansar al-Sharia (Pakistan)	E	R	0
Ansar al-Sharia (Tunisia)	E	R	2
Ansar al-Sharia Operations Room	E	R	3
Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis	TC	R	2
Ansaru	E	R	2

Ansarullah Bangla Team	E	R	0
Anti-Balaka Militia	RC	R, EN	0
Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA)	TC	R	1
Arakan Army	TC	EN	2
Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army	TC	R, EN	2
Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq	TC	R, EN	2
Awami League	PC	LW	2
Azawad National Liberation Movement	TC	EN	3
Badr Brigades	TC	R, EN	4
Baloch Liberation Army	TC	EN	2
Baloch Liberation Front	TC	EN	0
Baloch Liberation Tigers	TC	EN	0
Baloch Republican Army	TC	EN	2
Baloch Republican Guards	TC	EN	0
Baloch Waja Liberation Army	TC	EN	0
Balochistan Liberation United Front	TC	EN	0
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	RC	EN	4
Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement	TC	R, EN	1
Barisan Revolusi Nasional	TC	LW, EN, R	2
Barqa Province of the Islamic State	E	R	0
Base Movement	RC	R	0
Basque Fatherland and Freedom	TC	EN	1
Benghazi Defense Brigades	RC	R	2
Bodu Bala Sena	RC	R, EN	1
Boko Haram	E	R	3
Caucasus Emirate	E	R	2
Caucasus Province of the Islamic State	E	R	2
Circle of Violators/Nucleus Lovers of Anomy	SR	O	0
Comite d'Action Viticole	PC	LW	0
Communist Party of India-Maoist	TC	LW	4
Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (Chand)	RC	LW	3
Communist Party of Nepal (People's War Group)	RC	LW	2
Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (Baidya)	TC	LW	1
Conspiracy Cells of Fire	SR	O	0
Coordination Committee	TC	EN	2
Coordination of Azawad Movements	TC	EN	0
Corsican National Liberation Front	TC	EN	1
Deccan Mujahideen	TC	R	0
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine	TC	LW, EN	0
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda	RC	EN	2
Democratic Front of the Central African People	RC	EN	0
Devrimci Halk Kurtulus Cephesi	SR	LW	0
Donetsk People's Republic	TC	EN	4

Earth Liberation Front	PC	O	0
Economic Freedom Fighters	SR	LW, EN	0
February 17th Martyrs Brigade	RC	R	2
Fetullah Terrorist Organization	RC	R	4
Fezzan Province of the Islamic State	E	R	1
Free Papua Movement	TC	EN	2
Free Syrian Army	RC	O	2
Garo National Liberation Army	TC	EN	0
Gorkha Janmukti Morcha	TC	EN	0
Gorkha Liberation Army	TC	EN	0
Group of Popular Fighters	SR	O	0
Hadramawt Province of the Islamic State	E	R	1
Haftar Militia	RC	O	4
Halqa-e-Mehsud	RC	R	2
Hamas	TC	R, EN	3
Haqqani Network	E	R	3
Hasam Movement	RC	R	1
Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham	E	R	4
Hezbollah	TC	R, EN	4
Hijaz Province of the Islamic State	E	R	0
Hizb-I-Islami	TC	R, EN	3
Hizbul al Islam	RC	R	1
Hizbul Mujahideen	TC	R, EN	2
Hmar People's Convention-Democracy	TC	EN	0
Houthi extremists	RC	R	4
Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council	TC	EN	0
Illuminating Paths of Solidarity	SR	O	0
Indian Mujahideen	E	R	0
Informal Anarchist Federation	SR	O	1
International Revolutionary Front	SR	O	0
Islamic Courts Union	TC	R	2
Islamic Front (Syria)	TC	R	4
Islamic State in Bangladesh	E	R	0
Islamic State in Egypt	E	R	0
Islamic State in the Greater Sahara	E	R	2
Islamic State of Iraq	TC	R	3
Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant	E	R	4
Jahba East Africa	E	R	0
Jaish al-Adl	TC	R, EN	0
Jaish al-Fatah (Syria)	TC	R	4
Jaish-e-Islam	TC	R, EN	1
Jaish-e-Mohammad	TC	R, EN	1
Jama'at Mujahideen Bangladesh	E	R	2

Jamaah Ansharut Daulah	E	R	0
Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin	E	R	2
Jamaat-e-Islami	RC	R	3
Jamaat-ul-Ahrar	RC	R	1
Jamat al-Tawhid wal-Qisas	E	R	0
Jamiat ul-Mujahedin	RC	R, EN	1
Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha	TC	EN	0
Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha - Goit	TC	EN	2
Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha- Jwala Singh	TC	EN	1
Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha- Rajan Mukti	TC	EN	2
Janjaweed	TC	EN	4
Jaysh al-Islam	E	R	4
Jharkhand Janmukti Parishad	RC	EN	0
Jund al-Aqsa	TC	R	2
Jund al-Khilafah	E	R	0
Jundallah (Pakistan)	PC	R, EN	1
Justice and Equality Movement	RC	R, EN	2
Kachin Independence Army	TC	EN	3
Kamtapur Liberation Organization	TC	EN	0
Kamwina Nsapu Militia	TC	EN	1
Kangleipak Communist Party	TC	EN	1
Karbi People's Liberation Tigers	TC	EN	0
Karen National Union	RC	EN	2
Kata'ib Hezbollah	TC	R, EN	4
Khalistan Liberation Force	TC	EN	1
Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State	E	R	2
Kuki National Front	TC	EN	1
Kurdistan Free Life Party	RC	EN	2
Kurdistan Freedom Hawks	TC	EN	0
Kurdistan Workers' Party	TC	LW,EN	3
Lashkar-e-Balochistan	TC	EN	0
Lashkar-e-Islam	TC	R	3
Lashkar-e-Islam (India)	TC	R, EN	0
Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	TC	R, EN	1
Lashkar-e-Taiba	E	R, EN	4
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam	TC	EN	2
Libya Revolutionaries Operations Room	RC	R	2
Libya Shield Force	TC	O	2
Liwa Ahrar al-Sunna	RC	R, EN	0
Lord's Resistance Army	RC	R, EN	1
Luhansk People's Republic	TC	EN	0
M23	RC	EN	1
Macina Liberation Front	TC	R, EN	1

Madhesh Rastra Janatantrik Revolutionary	RC	EN	0
Madhesi Mukti Tigers	TC	LW, EN	1
Mahaz Fedai Tahrik Islami Afghanistan	RC	R	0
Mai Mai Bakata Katanga Militia	TC	EN	1
Mai Mai Mazembe Militia	TC	EN	1
Mai Mai Simba Militia	TC	EN	1
Manipur Naga People's Army	TC	EN	0
Maute Group	TC	R, EN	1
Mayi Mayi	TC	EN	3
Militant Minority	SR	O	0
Military Council of the Tribal Revolutionaries	TC	R	2
Misrata Brigades	RC	R	2
Moro Islamic Liberation Front	TC	R, EN	3
Moro National Liberation Front	TC	R, EN	2
Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa	TC	R	2
Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta	PC	EN	1
Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance	TC	O	1
Movement of Niger People for Justice	PC	EN	2
Mozambique National Resistance Movement	SQ	R	2
Mujahedeen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem	TC	R, EN	1
Mujahideen Ansar	TC	R	1
Mujahidin Indonesia Timur	TC	R	0
Muslim Brotherhood	E	R	4
Najd Province of the Islamic State	E	R	2
National Democratic Alliance Army	TC	LW, EN	2
National Democratic Front of Bodoland	TC	EN	2
National Liberation Army of Colombia	RC	LW	2
National Liberation Front of Tripura	TC	EN	1
National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah	TC	LW, EN, R	2
National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang	TC	EN	2
Nduma Defense of Congo	TC	EN	1
New People's Army	RC	LW	2
Niger Delta Avengers	PC	EN	1
Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate	PC	EN	0
Nur-al-Din al-Zinki Movement	TC	R	2
Nyatura Militia	TC	EN	1
Oglaigh na hEireann	TC	EN	0
Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade	TC	R	0
Organization for Revolutionary Self-Defense	SR	O	0
Pagan Sect of the Mountain	SR	O	0
Palestinian Islamic Jihad	TC	R, EN	2
Paraguayan People's Army	RC	LW	0
Patriotic Ginbot 7 Movement for Unity and Democracy	TC	EN	0

Patriotic Resistance Front in Ituri	RC	EN	1
Peace at Home Council	RC	O	0
People's Committee against Police Atrocities	TC	LW	1
People's Liberation Army (India)	TC	EN	2
People's Liberation Front of India	RC	LW	0
People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak	TC	EN	1
People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak-Progressive	TC	EN	1
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine	TC	LW, EN	1
Popular Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic	TC	EN	0
Popular Liberation Army	RC	LW	1
Popular Resistance Brigade	RC	R	0
Popular Resistance Committees	TC	R, EN	1
Popular Resistance Movement (Egypt)	RC	EN	1
Raia Mutomboki Militia	SQ	EN	2
Ranbir/Ranvir Sena	SQ	O	1
Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh	RC	R, EN	4
Real Irish Republican Army	TC	R, EN	1
Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	RC	LW	3
Revolutionary Punishment Movement	E	R	0
Revolutionary Struggle	SR	O	0
Right Sector	SQ	O	2
Rubicon	SR	O	1
Runda Kumpulan Kecil	RC	R, EN	1
Samyukta Jatiya Mukti Morcha	PC	EN	0
Sanaa Province of the Islamic State	E	R	1
Seleka	RC	R, EN	3
Shamiya Front	RC	R	2
Shining Path (SL)	RC	LW	1
Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries	E	R	3
Shura Council of Mujahideen in Derna	TC	R	1
Shutdown G20: Take Hamburg Offline!	PC	O	0
Sinai Province of the Islamic State	E	R	2
Sindhudesh Liberation Army	TC	EN	0
Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army	TC	EN	0
Southern Front	RC	O	4
Southern Mobility Movement	TC	R	3
Students Islamic Movement of India	E	R	0
Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi	RC	EN	0
Sudan Liberation Movement	TC	EN	0
Sudan People's Liberation Movement - North	TC	EN	0
Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition	TC	EN	2
Ta'ang National Liberation Army	TC	EN	2

Taliban	RC	R	4
Tehrik al-Mojahedin	RC	R, EN	1
Tehrik e-Taliban Pakistan	RC	R	4
Tehrik-e-Khilafat	E	R, EN	0
Terai Army	TC	EN	0
The Defense Command of the French People and the Motherland	SQ	O	0
The Joint Revolutionary Council	RC	EN	0
The New Irish Republican Army	TC	EN	1
Tripoli Province of the Islamic State	E	R	3
Tripoli Revolutionaries Battalion	RC	EN	2
Tritiya Prastuti Committee	RC	LW	1
Turkestan Islamic Party	RC	R, EN	3
Ulster Volunteer Force	SQ	EN	1
United Baloch Army	TC	EN	0
United Democratic Liberation Army	RC	EN	0
United Democratic Madhesi Front	TC	EN	0
United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship	RC	LW	0
United Liberation Front of Assam	TC	LW, EN	2
United National Liberation Front	TC	LW, EN	2
United Revolutionary Front (India)	PC	O	0
United Self Defense Units of Colombia	SQ	O	0
Vishwa Hindu Parishad	SQ	R	4
Weichan Auka Mapu	SR	LW	0
Wild Individualities	SR	O	0
Zeliangrong United Front	TC	EN	1
Zero Tolerance	SR	O	0
Goals: (E: Empire; SR: Social Revolution: TC: Territorial Control; RC: Regime Change; SQ: Status Quo; PC: Policy Change) Ideology: (R: Religious; EN: Ethnonationalist; LW: Left-Wing; O: Other) Size: (0: 0-99; 1: 100-999; 2: 1,000-4,999; 3: 5,000-9,999; 4: 10,000+)			

Appendix B: LEADIR Sample (n=295)

Leader Name	Group Name	Leader Start	Leader End
Sangma, Reading T	A'chick Songma An'pachakgipa Kotok	-99	2017
Sangma, Netri T	A'chick Songma An'pachakgipa Kotok	-99	2016
al-Majid, Majid bin Muhammad	Abdullah Azzam Brigades	2012	2014
al-Qar'awi, Saleh	Abdullah Azzam Brigades	2009	2012
Kattala, Ahmed Abu	Abu Obaida bin Jarrah Brigade	-99	2014
Sahiron, Radulan	Abu Sayyaf Group	2006	2017
Marak, Bernard N	Achik National Volunteer Council - B	2011	2017
Ludhianvi, Maulana Muhammad Ahmed	Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat	2003	2017
Hasan, Sheikh Muhammad Shakir Ali	Ahlu-Sunnah Wal-Jamea	2015	2017
Hefow, Sheikh Mohamed Yusuf	Ahlu-Sunnah Wal-Jamea	2011	2013
Abboud, Hassan	Ahrar al-Sham	2011	2014
al-Sheikh, Sheikh Hashim	Ahrar al-Sham	2014	2017
al-Hamawi, Abu Yahya	Ahrar al-Sham	2015	2016
al-Omar, Ali	Ahrar al-Sham	2016	2017
Attiya, Hamam Mohamed	Ajnad Misr	2013	2015
Al-Masry, Eddin	Ajnad Misr	2015	-99
Goit, Jai Krishna	Akhil Terai Mukti Morcha	2008	2017
Ahmed, Qassim Ali	Al-Ashtar Brigades	2013	2017
al-Yadumi, Mohammed	Al-Islah Party	2007	2017
Belmokhtar, Mokhtar	Al-Mua'qi'oon Biddam Brigade	2012	2013
al-Duri, Izzat Ibrahim	Al-Naqshabandiya Army	2006	-99
Mansour, Muhammad	Al-Nasir Army (Syria)	2015	2017
al-Julani, Abu Mohammad	al-Nusrah Front	2011	2017
al-Masri, Abu Ayyub	Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI)	2006	2010
Al-Baghdadi, Abu Bakr	Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI)	2010	2013
al-Wuhayshi, Nasir	Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula	2009	2015
al-Raym, Qasim	Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula	2015	2017
Umar, Asim	Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent	2014	2017
Droukdel, Abdelmalek	Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	2004	2017
Godane, Ahmed Abdi	al-Shabaab	2008	2014
Omar, Ahmed	al-Shabaab	2014	2017
Saras, Mondher	Al-Sham Legion	2014	2017
Gouri, Abdelmalek	Algeria Province of the Islamic State	2014	2014
Karairi, Janvier Buingo	Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo	2006	2017
Baluku, Seka Musa	Allied Democratic Forces	2015	2017
Mukulu, Jamil	Allied Democratic Forces	1995	2015

Cho Lucas, Ayaba	Ambazonia Defense Forces	2017	2017
Kuah, Benedict	Ambazonia Defense Forces	2017	2017
al-Shami, Abu Abdullah	Ansar al-Din Front	2014	2017
ag Ghali, Iyad	Ansar al-Dine	2011	2017
Al-Shafii, Abdullah	Ansar al Islam	2003	2014
Ibrahim, Sheikh Abu Al	Ansar al Islam	2003	2012
Ahmad, Abu	Ansar al Islam	2011	2014
Dicko, Jafar	Ansar al-Islam (Burkina Faso)	2017	2017
Dicko, Malam Ibrahim	Ansar al-Islam (Burkina Faso)	2016	2017
al-Madani, Abu Khalid	Ansar al-Sharia (Libya)	2015	2017
al-Zahawi, Mohamed	Ansar al-Sharia (Libya)	2012	2015
Siddiqui, Abdul Kareem Saroosh	Ansar al-Sharia (Pakistan)	2017	2017
Hassine, Saifallah Ben	Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia	2011	2017
Kambar, Abubakar Adam	Ansaru	2012	2016
al-Barnawi, Khalid	Ansaru	2012	2016
Rahmani, Muhammad Jasimuddin	Ansarullah Bangla Team	2008	2013
Ngaissona, Patrice-Edouard	Anti-Balaka Militia	2013	2017
Muhammad, Ahmad Ould Sidi	Arab Movement of Azawad	2013	2017
Naing, Twan Mrat	Arakan Army	2009	2017
Jununi, Ataullah abu Ammar	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army	2013	2017
al-Khazali, Qais	Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq	2006	2017
Hasina, Sheikh	Awami League	1981	2017
Najem, Mohamed	Azawad National Liberation Movement	2011	2017
Ag Acherif, Bilal	Azawad National Liberation Movement	2011	2012
al-Amiri, Hadi	Badr Brigades	1983	2017
Marri, Hyrbyair	Baloch Liberation Army	2007	2017
Nazar, Dr. Allah	Baloch Liberation Front	2003	2017
Bugti, Brahamdagh	Baloch Republican Army	2006	2017
Kato, Ameril Umbra	Bangsmoro Islamic Freedom Movement	2010	2011
Tambako, Mohammad Ali	Bangsmoro Islamic Freedom Movement	2011	2014
Abubakar, Ismael	Bangsmoro Islamic Freedom Movement	2015	2017
Baso, Sapaeing	Barisan Revolusi Nasional	2016	2017
Suleiman, Dawood	Base Movement	-99	2017
Rubina, Garikoitz Aspiazu	Basque Fatherland and Freedom	2004	2011
al-Sharkasi, Mustafa	Benghazi Defense Brigades	2016	2017
Aththe Gnanasara, Galagoda	Bodu Bala Sena	-99	2016
Withanage, Dilanthe	Bodu Bala Sena	2012	2017
Yusuf, Mohammed	Boko Haram	2002	2009
Shekau, Abubakar	Boko Haram	2009	2017
Umarov, Doku	Caucasus Emirates	2007	2014
Kebekov, Aliaskhab	Caucasus Emirates	2014	2015
Suleimanov, Magomed	Caucasus Emirates	2015	2015
Asildarov, Rustam	Caucasus Province of the Islamic State	2015	2016

Rao, Muppala Lakshmana	Communist Party of India-Maoist	2004	2017
Chand, Netra Bikram	Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (Chand)	2014	2017
Baidya, Mohan	Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (Baidya)	2012	2017
Acherif, Bilal Ag	Coordination of Azawad Movements	2017	2017
Hawatmeh, Naif	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine	1969	2017
Mudacumura, Sylvestre	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda	2009	2017
Miskine, Abdoulaye	Democratic Front of the Central African People	2004	2017
Karatas, Dursun	Devrimici Halk Kurtulus Cephesi	1978	2008
Sari, Zerrin	Devrimci Halk Kurtulus Cephesi	2008	2017
Se, Seher Demir	Devrimci Halk Kurtulus Cephesi	2008	2017
Asglu, Musa	Devrimci Halk Kurtulus Cephesi	2008	2017
Zakharchenko, Alexander	Donetsk People's Republic	2014	2017
Malema, Julius	Economic Freedom Fighters	2013	2017
Kwalik, Kelly	Free Papua Movement	-99	2009
Tabuni, Goliath	Free Papua Movement	-99	2017
al-Asad, Riyad	Free Syrian Army	2011	2012
Idriss, Salim	Free Syrian Army	2012	2014
al-Noeimi, Abdel Ilah al-Bashir	Free Syrian Army	2014	2014
Berri, Ahmed	Free Syrian Army	2014	2014
al-Ahmed, Abdelkarim	Free Syrian Army	2014	2015
Sangma, Pakchara R.	Garo National Liberation Army	2010	2017
Gurung, Bimal	Gorkha Janmukti Morcha	2007	2017
Lama, Rajesh	Gorkha Liberation Army	-99	2017
Haftar, Khalifa	Haftar Militia	2014	2017
Mehsud, Khalid	Halqa-e-Mehsud	2013	2017
Meshaal, Khaled	Hamas	2004	2017
Haniya, Ismail	Hamas	2017	2017
Haqqani, Sirajuddin	Haqqani Network	2001	2017
Sweilim, Ahmed Muhammad	Hasam Movement	2016	2017
Dashisha, Muhammad	Hasam Movement	-99	2016
al-Julani, Abu Mohammad	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham	2017	2017
al-Shaykh, Hashim	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham	2017	2017
Nasrallah, Hassan	Hezbollah	1992	2017
Hekmatyar, Gulbuddin	Hizb-I-Islami	1976	2017
Arghandiwal, Abdul Hadi	Hizb-I-Islami	2008	2017
Abu Bakar, Omar Iman	Hizbul al Islam	2009	2009
Aweys, Hassan Dahir	Hizbul al Islam	2009	2013
Shah, Mohammed Yusef	Hizbul Mujahideen	1990	2017
Zosangbera, H	Hmar People's Convention-Democracy	-99	2017
Lalrupui	Hmar People's Convention-Democracy	-99	2017

al-Houthi, Abdul Malik	Houthi extremists (Ansar Allah)	2004	2017
Marwein, Bobby	Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council	2007	2017
Cheristerfield Thangkhiew	Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council	2007	2017
Bhatkal, Riyaz; Riyaz Ismail Shah-bandari	Indian Mujahideen	2005	-99
Eissa, Ahmad Abu	Islamic Front (Syria)	2012	2015
Sahraoui, Adnan Abu Walid	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara	2015	2017
al-Baghdadi, Abu Hamza	Islamic State of Iraq	2006	2010
al-Baghdadi, Abu Bakar	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant	2013	2017
Abdi Ali, Mohamed	Jahba East Africa	2013	2016
Farooqui, Salahuddin	Jaish ul-Adl	2012	2017
al-Muhaysini, Abdullah	Jaish al-Fatah	2015	2017
Azhar, Masood	Jaish-e-Mohammad	1999	2017
Abdullah, Mir Arkamul Karim	Jama'at Mujahideen Bangladesh	-99	2017
Abdurrahman, Aman	Jamaat Ansharut Daulah	2014	2017
Ghaly, Iyad Ag	Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin	2017	2017
Nizami, Motiur Rahman	Jamaat-E-Islami (Bangladesh)	2000	2016
Ahmed, Maqbul	Jamaat-E-Islami (Bangladesh)	2016	2017
Khorasani, Omar Khalid	Jamaat-ul-Ahrar	2014	2017
Salah, Mohammed	Jamiat ul-Mujahedin (JuM)	-99	-99
Goit, Jai Krishna	Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha - Goit	2004	2017
Goit, Jai Krishna	Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha	2004	2017
Singh, Jwala	Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha- Jwala Singh	2006	2017
Jha, Rajeev	Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha- Rajan Mukti	2008	2017
Hilal, Musa	Janjaweed	2003	2017
al-Buwaydhani, Essam	Jaysh al-Islam	2015	2017
Alloush, Zahran	Jaysh al-Islam	2013	2015
Lohra, Pappu	Jharkhand Janmukti Parishad	-99	2017
Kharwar, Upendra	Jharkhand Janmukti Parishad	-99	2017
al-Jazrawi, Abu Dhar	Jund al-Aqsa	2014	2016
al-Salam, Muhammad Yusuf Uth-man Abd	Jund al-Aqsa	2014	2014
Thelithi, Houssem	Jund al-Khilafah	-99	2017
Ibrahim, Khalil	Justice and Equality Movement	2001	2011
Ibrahim, Jibril	Justice and Equality Movement	2012	2017
Lanyaw Zawng Hra	Kachin Independence Army	2006	2017
Singh, Malkhan	Kamtapur Liberation Organization	-99	-99
Meetei, Laishram Ranjit	Kangleipak Communist Party	2016	2017
Engti, Angpang	Karbi People's Liberation Tigers	2011	2011
Hanse, Jing	Karbi People's Liberation Tigers	2011	2017
Saw Mutu Say Poe	Karen National Union	2012	2017

Jamal Jaafar Ibrahimi	Kata'ib Hezbollah	2007	2017
Mintoo, Harminder	Khalistan Liberation Force	2008	2017
Khan, Hafiz Saeed	Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State	2015	2016
Hasib, Sheikh Abdul	Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State	2016	2017
Ghaleb, Abu Saleed	Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State	2017	2017
Erhabi, Abu Saad	Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State	2017	2017
Kipgen, Thankboi	Kuki National Front	1996	-99
Vejin, Zilan	Kurdistan Free Life Party	-99	2017
Ahmadi, Abdul Rahman Haji	Kurdistan Free Life Party	2004	2017
Karayilan, Murat	Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)	1999	2014
Bayik, Cemil	Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)	2014	2017
Mengal, Javed	Lashkar-e-Balochistan	2009	2017
Bagh, Manghal	Lashkar-e-Islam	2007	2016
Ishaq, Malik	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	2002	2015
Saeed, Hafiz	Lashkar-e-Taiba	1990	2017
Prabhakaran, Velupollao	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam	1976	2009
Abusahmain, Nouri	Libya Revolutionaries Operation Room	2013	2013
Bin Hamid	Libya Shield Force	2012	2013
Kony, Joseph	Lord's Resistance Army	1987	2017
Plotnitsky, Igor Venediktovich	Luhansk People's Republic	2014	2017
Runiga, Jean-Marie	M23	2012	2013
Bisimwa, Bertrand	M23	2012	2013
Kouffa, Hamadou	Macina Liberation Front	2015	2017
Mahto, Ram Narayan	Madhesh Rastra Janatantrik Party- Revolutionary	-99	2009
Najibullah	Mahaz Fedai Tahrick Islami Afghanistan	2013	2017
John Francis Kashung	Manipur Naga People's Army	2013	2017
Maute, Omar	Maute Group	2012	2017
Maute, Abdullah	Maute Group	2012	2017
Mahorombsar, Owaydah	Maute Group	2017	2017
al-Shammari, Abdullah	Military Council of the Tribal Revolutionaries	-99	-99
Sulaiman, Sheik Raad Ali	Military Council of the Tribal Revolutionaries	-99	-99
Ebrahim, Murad	Moro Islamic Liberation Front	2003	2017
Nur Misuari	Moro National Liberation Front	1972	2017
Kheirou, Hamada Ould Mohamed	Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa	2011	2013
Sadio, Salif	Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance	-99	-99
Dieme, Magne	Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance	-99	-99
Alambo, Aghaly ag	Movement of Niger People for Justice	2007	2009

Dhlakama, Afonso	Mozambique National Resistance Movement	1979	2017
Hisham Al-Saedni	Mujahedeen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem	2008	2012
Bahadur, Hafiz Gul	Mujahideen Ansar	2007	2014
Santoso, Abu Wardah	Mujahidin Indonesia Timur	2010	2016
Kalora, Ali	Mujahidin Indonesia Timur	2016	2017
Mahdi Akef, Mohammed	Muslim Brotherhood	2004	2010
Badie, Mohammed	Muslim Brotherhood	2010	2013
Hsengla, Sao	National Democratic Alliance Army	-99	-99
Pae, San	National Democratic Alliance Army	-99	-99
Leun, Sai	National Democratic Alliance Army	1989	2017
Daimary, Ranjan	National Democratic Front of Bodoland	1994	2008
Sungthagra, B	National Democratic Front of Bodoland	2008	2017
Bautista, Nicolás Rodríguez	National Liberation Army of Colombia	1989	2017
Debbarma, Biswamohan	National Liberation Front of Tripura	2001	2017
Thuingaleng Muivah	National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah	1988	2017
Khaplang, S.S.	National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang	1988	2017
Konyak, Khango	National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang	2017	2017
Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka	Nduma Defense of Congo	2009	2017
Tiamzon, Benito	New People's Army	1987	2014
Silva, Adelberto	New People's Army	2014	2015
Padilla, Jaime	New People's Army	2015	2017
Agbalaja, Gen Aldo	Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate	-99	-99
Shahabuddin, Shaykh Tawfiq	Nur-al-Din al-Zinki Movement	2011	-99
Abu Sakhr, Luqman	Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade	2012	2015
Shalah, Ramadan	Palestinian Islamic Jihad	1995	2017
Villalba, Carmen	Paraguayan People's Army	2008	2017
Brítez, Oviedo	Paraguayan People's Army	2008	2017
Nega, Berhanu	Patriotic Ginbot 7 Movement for Unity and Democracy	2008	2017
Adirodo, Baudouin	Patriotic Resistance Front in Ituri	2005	2017
Matata, Banaloki	Patriotic Resistance Front in Ituri	2007	2010
Mahato, Manoj	Peoples Committee Against Police Atrocities	-99	2010
Chaoren, Irengbam	People's Liberation Army (India)	1989	2017
Gope, Dinesh	People's Liberation Front of India	2009	2017
Singh, Achamba	People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak	-99	-99
Subash, Longjam	People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak	2013	-99
Sa'adat, Ahmad	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine	2001	2017

Cervano, Victor Ramon Navarro	Popular Liberation Army (EPL)	2000	2015
al-Shashniya, Ayman	Popular Resistance Committees	2012	2017
Kokodiko, Masudi Alimasi	Raia Mutomboki Militia	-99	2017
Musumbu, Jean	Raia Mutomboki Militia	2005	2017
Dhanji Singh	Ranbir/Ranvir Sena	2012	2017
Singh, Brahmeshwar	Ranbir/Ranvir Sena	1994	2012
Bhagwat, Mohan	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh	2009	2017
Marulanda, Manuel	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	1966	2008
Cano, Alfonso	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	2008	2011
Jimenez, Timoleon	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	2011	2017
Maziotis, Nikos	Revolutionary Struggle	2012	2014
Yarosh, mytro	Right Sector	2013	2015
Tarasenko, Andriy	Right Sector	2016	2017
Kalaitzidis, Giorgos	Rubicon (Rouvikonas)	-99	2017
Ahsong, Rorhing	Runda Kumpulan Kecil	2002	-99
Djotodia, Michel	Seleka	2012	2013
Amr, Abu	Shamiya Front	2015	-99
Victor Quispe Palomino	Shining Path	1992	2017
Jorge Quispe Palomino	Shining Path	1992	2017
Tarcela Loya Vilchez	Shining Path	2001	2017
al-Zahawi, Mohamed	Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries	2014	2015
al-Salabi, Ismail Muhammad	Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries	2014	2017
al-Sharkasi, Mustafa	Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries	2014	2017
Derby, Salim	Shura Council of Mujahideen in Derna	2014	2015
al-Maqdisi, Abu Hamza	Sinai Province of the Islamic State	2014	2017
al-Masri, Abu Osama	Sinai Province of the Islamic State	2016	2017
Shafi Muhammad Burfat	Sindhudesh Liberation Army	2009	2017
al-Zoubi, Bashar	Southern Front	2014	2017
al-Nuba, Nasser	Southern Mobility Movement	2008	-99
Qureshi, Abdul Subhan	Students Islamic Movement of India	2008	-99
el-Nur, Abdel Wahed Mohamed	Sudan Liberation Movement	1992	2017
Minnawi, Minni	Sudan Liberation Movement	2010	2017
Agar, Malik	Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North	2011	2017
Machar, Riek	Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition	2013	2017
Bong, Tar Aik	Ta'ang National Liberation Army	2005	2017
Kyaw, Tar Bone	Ta'ang National Liberation Army	2005	2017
Omar; Mullah Muhammad	Taliban	1994	2013
Mansour, Mullah Akhtar	Taliban	2013	2016
Akhundzada, Mawlawi Hibatullah	Taliban	2016	2017
Sheikh Jamil-ur-Rehman	Tehrick al-Mojahedin	-99	2017
Mehsud, Baitullah	Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan	2007	2009

Mehsud, Hakimullah	Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan	2009	2013
Fazlullah, Mullah	Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan	2013	2017
Sahani, Kaushal	Terai Army	2007	2008
Yadav, Bhairab	Terai Army	2008	2009
Nisin, Logan Alexandre	The Defense Command of the French People and the Motherland	2017	2017
Kevin Braney	The New Irish Republican Army	2013	2017
Tajouri, Haithem	Tripoli Revolutionaries Battalion	2012	2017
Haq, Abdul; Memetiming Memeti	Turkestan Islamic Party	2003	2010
al-Turkistani, Abdul Shakoor	Turkestan Islamic Party	2010	2012
Mansour, Abdullah	Turkestan Islamic Party	2013	2014
Graham, John Bunter	Ulster Volunteer Force	1976	2012
Marri, Mehran	United Baloch Army	2011	2017
Gachhadar, Bijaya Kumar	United Democratic Madhesi Front	-99	2017
Tojirakran, Weng	United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship	2006	2010
Tawornset, Tida	United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship	2010	2014
Prompan, Jatuporn	United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship	2014	2017
Arabinda Rajkhowa	United Liberation Front of Assam	1979	2011
Buragohain, Bhimakanta	United Liberation Front of Assam	1979	2011
Barua, Paresh	United Liberation Front of Assam	1979	2017
Meghen, Rajkumar	United National Liberation Front	2003	2010
Togadia, Pravin	Vishwa Hindu Parishad	2003	2017
Kamei, Jenchui	Zeliangrong United Front	2015	2017

Endnotes

1 Appendix A contains the full sample of terrorist groups, while Appendix B contains the full sample of terrorist leaders.

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4 In 2008, data collection for the GTD changed from retrospective to prospective. To account for this change for individuals using LEADIR and the GTD, we selected 2008 as lower end of the 10-year data range for LEADIR.

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8 Before aggregating the attack cases, we excluded all attacks in which there was uncertainty about whether they qualified as an act of terrorism. We also excluded all cases where there was doubt regarding the perpetrator's involvement. In other words, we only aggregated attack cases that qualified as an act of terrorism and where there was clear evidence identifying the group(s) responsible for perpetrating the attack.

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31 Although we provide a host of group level variables in Table 1, we do not discuss each variable in this section. The goal of this section, and this research note more broadly, is to highlight important trends based on the data -- not showcase the entire dataset.

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36 Ratings use a Likert-type behaviorally anchored rating scale ranging from 1 (low on a construct) to 5 (high on a construct). Means and standard deviations are reflective to this measurement scale.

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42 Asymmetries of information occurs when one party has more or better information than the other party causing an imbalance and advantage for those with more knowledge. In gangs, the use of insignia or gang colors overcome asymmetries of information by communicating an individual's gang membership and identity. See Scott H. Decker and Barrik Van Winkle. *Life in the gang: Family, friends, and violence*. (Cambridge University Press, 1996); John Leverso and Ross L. Matsueda. "Gang organization and gang identity: An investigation of enduring gang membership." *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 35 (2019): 797-829.

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58 For review see, Chermak, Freilich, Greene-Colozzi, and Klein. "Open-Source Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice."

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61 LEADIR data collection ended as of February 2020.

Bibliography: Hezbollah

Judith Tinnes*

Abstract
This bibliography contains journal articles, book chapters, books, edited volumes, theses, grey literature, bibliographies and other resources on the Lebanese Shia Islamist political party and militant group Hezbollah. It focuses on recent publications (up to August 2025) and should not be considered as exhaustive. The literature has been retrieved by manually browsing more than 200 core and periphery sources in the field of Terrorism Studies. Additionally, full-text as well as reference retrieval systems have been employed to broaden the search.

Keywords: bibliography, resources, literature, Hezbollah, Lebanon, Islamism, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Iran

NB: All websites were last visited on 10.08.2025. For an inventory of previous bibliographies, see:
https://archive.org/details/terrorism-research-bibliographies-2

Corresponding author: Judith Tinnes, Terrorism Research Initiative, email: j.tinnes@gmx.de

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Judith Tinnes has a background in Information Science. Dr Tinnes works for the Leibniz Institute for Psychology (ZPID) in an open-access publishing programme for scholarly journals. Additionally, she serves as Information Resources Editor to 'Perspectives on Terrorism'. In her editorial role, she regularly compiles bibliographies and other resources for Terrorism Research and runs the execution monitoring project 'Counting Lives Lost' (CLL).

Book Review: Kumar Ramakrishna, *Jemaah Islamiyah, ISIS and Beyond: Tracking the Evolving Challenge of Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia (2001-2025)*

Reviewed by Joshua Sinai[*]

* Corresponding author: Joshua Sinai. Email: joshua.sinai@comcast.net

Kumar Ramakrishna, *Jemaah Islamiyah, ISIS and Beyond: Tracking the Evolving Challenge of Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia* (2001-2025) (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2025) 204 pp., US $78.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-9-8198-1271-4.

This well-written short book is filled with very insightful observations by a veteran academic expert about the evolution of the terrorist threat from around 2001 to the mid-2020s. The author serves as Professor of National Security Studies (among other positions) at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), in Singapore, and has written numerous books on terrorism in Southeast Asia. While this book primarily focuses on the characteristics of violent extremism in Southeast Asia by groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah, al-Qaeda, and most recently by ISIS (including the lone actors who follow them), one of the book's important contributions is the author's explanation of how the drivers of radicalisation into violent extremism have evolved globally over the years.

Unlike a 'conventional' explanation of radicalisation into violent extremism as a product of "political repression and acute socio-economic deprivation" (p. 11), the author points out that the radicalisation of many individuals into religiously extremist groups such as JI is a "desire for spiritual revival," to "atone for their 'sinful' lives," and the belief that "genuine Muslims must forcibly establish a pan-Southeast Asian Islamic state" by overthrowing secular regimes in their regions (p. 12). Another driver of religious fundamentalism, the author notes, is a "rigid maintenance of in-group/out-group boundaries and obsession with purity," which is "weaponized by ideologues to foster radicalization, leading to violent extremist actions" (p. 70). Finally, individuals who are susceptible to becoming extremists are what Carl Jung had termed as *concretists* who "prefer a fixed, uncomplicated way of understanding the world and are strongly solution-oriented," as opposed to those who are *intuitive* who are "open to new ideas and change, and problem-oriented" (p. 74). As a result, the author observes, there is a higher proportion of militant Islamic fundamentalists with backgrounds in the hard sciences and engineering than social scientists who tend to be more critical-minded (p. 76).

Concerning the growing challenge presented by right-wing militants (including white supremacist, Buddhist, and Hindu extremists), the author cites Julia Ebner's finding that they exhibit at least three out of five features: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, and strong state advocacy (p. 131). Central to the ideology of white supremacists is the Great Replacement narrative, which argues that whites in Western societies are being overtaken by non-white minorities. As an emerging trend, which also affects Singapore, he highlights the "phenomenon of non-whites buying into white supremacist 'far right' views" (p. 135), with several examples of their attacks cited to illustrate this phenomenon.

To effectively counter radicaliration into ideological extremism, especially by youth, the author points to Singapore's programme to promote "emotional, psychological, and intellectual resilience against violent extremism" that fosters "healthy norms of masculinity" and an appreciation for a "secular, cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic society" (p. 139).

Other terrorism-related issues are also discussed in the book, such as the phenomenon of extremists adopting ideologies that are "unstable or unclear" and are difficult to categorise (p. 173); the growing role of women in Islamist terrorism, with their radicalisation due to social discrimination, feeling "isolated and marginalized by a male-dominated conservative patriarchal society, and traumatic experiences such as being sexually exploited" (p. 172); and the increasing use in terrorist warfare of new technologies, such as weaponising AI-generated deepfake video clips in social media, and utilising 3D printed guns and unmanned automated vehicles.

As demonstrated by the author's insights, the book is a valuable guide to understanding how the global terrorist threat has evolved since 2001 and the measures required to mitigate this threat.

Dr Joshua Sinai is the Book Reviews Editor of *Perspectives on Terrorism*.

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