PT
PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

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# PT

PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

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HANDA CSTPV

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# 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.

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# Editorial



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# Words of Welcome

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to announce the release of Volume XVIII, Issue 1 (March 2024) 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); 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 18th 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, Michael Jensen and Elena Akers find significant disparities in international and domestic terrorism cases for three types of sentencing outcomes: length of incarceration; time spent on supervision upon release from prison; and the use of restrictive monitoring conditions. Next, Mauro Lubrano explains how insurrectionary anarchism shares parallels with the broader spectrum of anti-government extremism, including an inclination for conspiracy thinking and systematic targeting of politicians and/or governmental representatives. In the following article, Kathryn Lauren Roman Banda and Mahtab Shafiei examine intrastate wars that end in one-sided victories, and find that one-sided insurgent victories are linked to an increase in terrorist violence, while terrorism generally tends to decrease during the first year of the post-war period following incumbent victories. And in the final article of the March issue, Megan Kelly, Ann-Kathrin Rothermel and Lisa Sugiura critically assess the Incel Radicalisation Scale (IRS), and caution against legitimising misogynist incel narratives of victimhood and overlooking broader harms such as normalising misogynist violence, and male and white supremacism.

Our Research Notes section opens with Marcus Boyd and Timothy Leslie, who examine how socio-spatial embeddedness contributes to the emergence of sanctioned firms and terrorist attacks. And in the following Research Note, there is an update by Håvard Haugstvedt on his ongoing research on violent non-state actors' use of armed UAVs, highlighting key geographic and targeting trends.

Our Resources section begins an extensive bibliography on risk assessment of terrorism, compiled by our Information Resources Editor, Judith Tinnes. This is followed by our Associate Editor for Book Reviews Joshua Sinai's column, which provides brief capsule reviews of nine books on terrorism and counter-terrorism. This issue of the journal has been produced by the Editorial Team at ICCT with considerable assistance from Clarisa Nelu, for which we are very grateful.

Prof James Forest, Editor-in-Chief

PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Prosecuting Terror in the Homeland: An Empirical Assessment of Sentencing Disparities in United States Federal Terrorism Cases

Michael A. Jensen* and Elena Akers

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**Abstract:** Recent mass casualty attacks in the United States have renewed a long-standing debate over the need for novel legislation to effectively prosecute domestic terrorism. Those who advocate for a new terrorism law argue that deficiencies in the US legal code present challenges to prosecuting domestic extremists, leading to unwarranted sentencing disparities in international and domestic terrorism cases. Critics of the proposal for a domestic terrorism law counter that the US legal code is sufficiently flexible for the courts to punish domestic extremists to the same extent as their international counterparts. Neither side, however, has produced an empirical assessment to support their claims. In this article, we address this research gap by analysing data on 344 US federal terrorism cases that were initiated between 2014 and 2019. We find that significant disparities are endemic to US federal terrorism prosecutions for three types of sentencing outcomes: length of incarceration; time spent on supervision upon release from prison; and the use of restrictive monitoring conditions. International terrorism defendants are more likely than domestic extremists to receive severe penalties for all three sentencing decisions even when controlling for criminal severity. Sentencing disparities in US federal terrorism cases are especially large when domestic extremists are prosecuted using common criminal charges, like weapons violations. We conclude with a discussion of what these findings mean for promoting judicial fairness in US terrorism prosecutions.

**Keywords:** Domestic terrorism, international terrorism, terrorism laws, prosecuting terrorism, sentencing

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# Introduction

On his first day in office as President, Joe Biden instructed his national security team to provide recommendations for combating extremism in the United States, resulting in the first-ever national strategy for countering domestic terrorism.[1] When issuing his order, President Biden referred to domestic extremism as the "most urgent terrorism threat the United States faces."[2] The President's remarks reflect a belief held by many national security officials that domestic extremism is on the rise.[3] The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) illustrated this trend in their most recent joint report to Congress, noting that there has been a substantial expansion in the number of federal terrorism investigations, with nearly all of the increase being attributed to domestic terrorism inquiries.[4] Similarly, data show that more than 90 percent of the individuals who were charged in the United States between 2019 and 2022 for committing extremist crimes were connected to domestic extremist groups, such as white supremacist and nativist organisations, anti-government militias and the sovereign citizen movement, and fringe conspiracy theories.[5] All 22 of the mass casualty terrorist attacks committed in the United States from 2019 to 2022 were perpetrated by domestic extremists.[6]

While a host of legal statutes were passed after the September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks to prosecute international terrorism, the rise in domestic extremism has not led to a similar process of revising the US legal code.[7] US authorities continue to face obstacles to prosecuting domestic terrorism that are not present in cases involving foreign terrorist groups.[8] For instance, terrorism charges like 18 USC §2339A (Providing Material Support to Terrorists) and 18 USC §2339B (Providing Material Support to Designated Terrorist Organisations) carry stiff penalties and often result in prison sentences of twenty years or more.[9] However, because of the requirement that an offence has an international nexus, as in the case of §2339B, or the nature of the enumerated crimes that can trigger the charges, as in the case of §2339A, prosecutors often cannot use them in domestic terrorism cases.[10] Instead, federal authorities often have to charge domestic extremists with more typical crimes, such as weapons violations or making criminal threats. In some cases, the Department of Justice has even had to utilise statutes designed to undermine the Mafia to prosecute domestic extremists.[11]

The lack of punitive, federal statutes designed explicitly for domestic terrorism has led to intense debate among legal experts over the need for new legislation.[12] Those who advocate for a new domestic terrorism law claim that the lopsided use of terrorism statutes in international terrorism cases often results in unwarranted sentencing disparities.[13] Sinnar, for example, notes that "...the uneven coverage of federal terrorism law means that a severe federal sentencing enhancement disproportionately applies to cases with an international nexus."[14] Those who advocate for new terrorism legislation claim that legal revisions are necessary to promote judicial fairness, address sentencing disparities, and deter individuals from engaging in domestic extremism.[15] Opponents of a new domestic terrorism law argue that

the flexibility of the US Code allows the courts to punish domestic terrorists to a similar extent as their international counterparts.[16] They also warn that a domestic terrorism statute could be used to target political opponents, including historically underserved communities and peaceful political protesters.[17] While the debate over novel terrorism legislation often focuses on judicial fairness, neither side has provided an empirical analysis that explores the scale of sentencing disparities in US terrorism prosecutions.[18] It is currently not possible to say if significant sentencing gaps are common in terrorism cases, how large they are, or whether the legal code is to blame. The lack of an empirical baseline demonstrating how the use of different laws in terrorism prosecutions influences judicial outcomes has prevented both sides in the debate from engaging in a productive dialogue about how best to counter the rise in domestic terrorism without infringing on civil rights and liberties.

This article contributes to the debate by providing an empirical assessment of sentencing outcomes in 344 US federal terrorism prosecutions that were initiated between 2014 and 2019. We find that significant disparities are endemic to federal terrorism cases for three types of sentencing outcomes: incarceration length; time spent on post-incarceration supervision; and the use of restrictive monitoring conditions after release from federal prison. International terrorism defendants are significantly more likely to receive severe penalties on all three outcomes when compared to domestic extremists who commit similar crimes. Moreover, while some observers suggest that the current legal code is effective for prosecuting domestic extremism, we find that sentencing disparities are especially large when more common charges are used in cases of domestic terrorism.

These results suggest that new legislation may be necessary to address judicial inequities in US federal terrorism prosecutions. While some of the observed sentencing gaps in terrorism cases could be addressed by using existing hate crime statutes, significant obstacles exist to applying these charges to domestic terrorism cases. Absent changes in how judges perceive threats to public safety and how prosecutors make decisions, existing laws are unlikely to produce judicial fairness in US terrorism cases.

## The Current Legal Regime

Any debate about the need for a domestic terrorism statute must consider the efficacy of the current legal regime, which includes several laws for prosecuting individuals who provide support to terrorists. Originally enacted after the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing and later expanded after the 9/11 attacks, the material support charges codified in 18 USC §2339A-D have become important tools for prosecutors building cases against defendants accused of committing acts of international terrorism.[19] Material support laws significantly lower the bar for establishing a terrorism prosecution because they do not require that an individual participate in a specific crime or even know that a crime has occurred. For example, §2339B

requires only that an individual knowingly aid a group that has been designated as a foreign terrorist organisation by the US Secretary of State.[20] Aid can include financial help; sending weapons or fighters overseas; or providing lodging, transportation, or expertise to someone acting on a group's behalf in the US or abroad.[21] The statute's guidelines recommend a prison sentence of up to twenty years and they do not require that the defendant participate in a violent plot, making it an especially powerful tool for securing significant punishments in cases involving less serious criminal behaviours. Although the substantial prison sentences that accompany material support charges have been the subject of important debates about the ethical treatment of US defendants,[22] they have been effective in promoting specific deterrence. The recidivism rate for more ordinary types of crime in the United States is often greater than 50 percent,[23] but it is estimated at just 3 percent for individuals convicted of international terrorism.[24] In addition to their punitive effects, material support charges are commonly used in international terrorism prosecutions because the requisite elements of the offences are easy to prove, and convictions can result in reduced resources available to terrorist organisations.[25]

While §2339B and a companion statute that makes it a crime to receive military training from a terrorist organisation require that the offence in question have a nexus to international terrorism, the other material support charges codified in the US legal code do not.[26] For instance, §2339A only requires that the case involve a federal crime of terrorism, which is defined as an act "calculated to influence or affect the conduct of government by intimidation or coercion, or to retaliate against government conduct."[27] The predicate offence list attached to §2339A includes over 50 crimes, ranging from conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction to computer hacking to producing deadly viruses.[28] Similar rules apply to the use sentencing enhancements in terrorism cases, the most common of which is §3A1.4 (Terrorism). The enhancement, which is found in the US sentencing guidelines provided to the federal courts, can be used in any case that meets the legal definition of terrorism, and it sets the minimum sentencing guideline to 17.5 years in prison and assigns the defendant a criminal history score that is typically used for career offenders.[29]

While there is no *a priori* reason why §2339A and related terrorism enhancements cannot be used in domestic terrorism prosecutions, critics of the current legal regime have noted that the statutes are typically only applied to cases of international terrorism.[30] Mary McCord, a former Department of Justice prosecutor, attributes the non-use of §2339A in domestic extremism prosecutions to the fact that the most common form of terrorism in the US – plots involving the use of firearms against civilian targets – is not on the list of enumerated crimes that can trigger the charge.[31] This is also true of 18 USC §2332A (Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction) because firearms are not included among the destructive devices listed in section 921 of the legal code.[32] Prosecutors must look for alternatives when building cases against domestic extremists who plot attacks using firearms. These cases often result in the use of more typical charges, like 18 USC §922 and 18 USC §924, which make it a crime to possess an unregistered firearm, and for

convicted felons to own a gun of any kind. Charges like these do not reflect the defendants' terrorist intentions, and they can carry weaker penalties than terrorism laws. Indeed, non-terrorism charges typically have wide sentencing guideline ranges, and they usually reserve the harshest penalties for repeat offenders.[33]

Finally, the US code includes several statutes and sentencing enhancements for prosecuting hate crimes that can result in significant prison terms. While these statutes can be used in cases of domestic terrorism that involve the deliberate targeting of victims based on protected identity characteristics, hate crime charges and sentencing enhancements are systemically under-utilised in cases with a clear bias motivation.[34] Definitional ambiguity and the high *mens rea* requirements for establishing a hate crime prosecution mean that prosecutors typically favour charges that are easier to prove.[35] In all but the most obvious cases (i.e., those that result in mass fatalities), this type of prosecutorial decision-making carries over to domestic terrorism cases.[36] As we demonstrate below, hate crime charges have only been used in 5 percent of recent domestic terrorism prosecutions, and less than 9 percent of prosecutions that involved defendants with links to white supremacy.

## The Debate Over a New Domestic Terrorism Law

Following the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and the mass killing of Jewish worshippers at the Tree of Life Synagogue in 2018, legal observers began advocating for domestic terrorism legislation, noting that none of the neo-Nazi and white supremacist-affiliated individuals who participated in the deadly events were likely to be prosecuted as terrorists in federal court.[37] Renewed calls for a domestic terrorism law were made in the aftermath of the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol, in which thousands of demonstrators, including hundreds with links to extremist groups, battled with police and destroyed government property in an attempt to stop the peaceful transfer of presidential power.[38] Legal advocates again pointed to deficiencies in the US code that would make it difficult for prosecutors to try the Capitol rioters as domestic terrorists – an argument that was subsequently shown to be true.[39] Of the more than 1200 people who have been charged in connection with the Capitol attack, none have been prosecuted using material support charges, and only a handful have had a terrorism enhancement applied to their cases.[40] Even the rioters who were convicted of seditious conspiracy for orchestrating the attack on January 6 avoided being prosecuted as terrorists.[41]

The calls for a new terrorism law have coincided with an increase in domestic extremist activity in the US. For instance, the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) database, which tracks US criminal cases linked to extremism, shows that 57 percent of the extremist crimes committed in the United States between 2010 and 2016 were connected to domestic terrorism.[42] From 2017 to 2022, domestic extremist crimes rose to 91.7 percent of all

cases included in the data. In 2022, crimes linked to domestic terrorism made up 95.4 percent of the cases added to the PIRUS database.

Proponents of a domestic terrorism law argue that the legal code perpetuates racial and religious biases in the judicial system by reserving the harshest punishments for international terrorists, who tend to be non-White and non-Christian.[43] Given the uneven use of terrorism laws in federal prosecutions, legal advocates assume that unwarranted sentencing disparities are the norm in terrorism cases.[44] This extends to the use of capital punishment, as jurors are often instructed to treat premeditated acts of terrorism as an aggravating factor when deciding whether to sentence a defendant to death.[45]

Critics of the proposal for a new domestic terrorism law counter that the US code gives prosecutors the tools they need to hold domestic terrorists accountable for their crimes.[46] They often point to a diverse set of conspiracy charges and more ordinary criminal statutes to support their claim, noting that the laws are broad in applicability, are familiar to judges and juries, and do not require prosecutors to prove what is and is not terrorism.[47] Implicit in this line of argument is the assumption that these laws are sufficient for punishing domestic extremists to the same extent as international terrorists.

Critics also see a darker side to proposed domestic terrorism legislation. Following the Capitol riot, more than 150 civil rights organisations signed a letter to Congress opposing a domestic terrorism law, claiming that revisions to the legal code could allow law enforcement and prosecutors to unfairly target the Black Lives Matter movement and other peaceful political demonstrators.[48] Michael German, a former FBI agent and current researcher at the Brennan Centre for Justice, has similarly warned about the potential for a new terrorism law to be abused, arguing that federal prosecutors often make decisions that reflect their political biases rather than the need to ameliorate the greatest threats to public safety. German notes that as the highly lethal far-right movement was growing in the early 2000s, the FBI labelled environmental activists the number one domestic terrorism threat in the US. At the same time, federal prosecutors vigorously used the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act to prosecute property crimes related to the animal rights movement.[49] More recently, critics have pointed to the use of state-level domestic terrorism laws as evidence of how a federal law could be misused to silence political dissent. For example, prosecutors in Georgia are trying 23 non-violent demonstrators as domestic terrorists for their roles in protesting the construction of a police training facility outside of Atlanta.[50]

Both sides in the debate over a domestic terrorism law share concerns about the rising tide of extremism in the United States and the importance of protecting legal activism. However, they appear to be at an impasse about how best to achieve their common goals. One reason for the stalemate is that the debate is too often based on implicit assumptions about the legal outcomes

of terrorism cases.[51] Those on the side of passing a domestic terrorism law have not used sentencing data to demonstrate that disparities are typical in terrorism prosecutions, or that they are the product of the legal code. Without an empirical baseline that demonstrates judicial inequalities in the prosecution of terrorism, critics of the proposal for a domestic terrorism law quickly dismiss the idea and the problem it is intended to solve. For their part, opponents of the new legislation have not taken the opportunity to bolster their claims by demonstrating that ordinary laws are used to punish domestic terrorists to the same extent as their international counterparts. Critics assume, rather than demonstrate, that prosecutors exploit the flexibility of the legal code to charge domestic terrorists with crimes that carry penalties like those issued in international terrorism cases. For the debate to move forward, it needs to be based on a shared empirical understanding of the consequences of using different laws to prosecute people who engage in similar extremist crimes. The remainder of this article attempts to fill this gap by analysing the sentencing outcomes of more than 340 recent federal terrorism prosecutions.

## Data

The data used in this study come from the PIRUS project, which is a suite of de-identified, cross-sectional datasets on the radicalisation characteristics and social networks of US extremists.[52] The PIRUS datasets are coded using open sources and contain dozens of variables on a wide range of radicalisation characteristics and extremist events, including violent plots and attacks, extremist networks, and factors relevant to radicalisation processes, such as demographics, family characteristics, and personal histories. The datasets that make up the PIRUS portfolio include cases representing the far-right, far-left, Jihadist, and single-issue milieus.

For this article, we analysed federal terrorism prosecutions that were initiated between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2019.[53] We chose the end of 2019 as the cut-off for case inclusion to maximise the odds that the final data would include a set of federal terrorism cases for which sentencing decisions have been made. Including more recent years in the study could bias the data by excluding high-profile domestic terrorism cases that are still being adjudicated. These cases often involve the use of mass casualty violence, and they can take years to work their way through the federal court system.[54] They are also the cases that have the greatest potential to include the use of terrorism or hate crime charges, and to result in significant judicial punishments. Including more recent years in the data, therefore, could skew the sample of domestic terrorism cases towards less severe crimes and lead to overestimating sentencing disparities in federal terrorism prosecutions. We included all federal terrorism cases initiated during this period with two exceptions. First, narco-terrorism cases were not included because they do not satisfy the PIRUS inclusion requirement that crimes be primarily motivated by ideological goals. Second, individuals who travelled overseas to join foreign terrorist groups but did not commit additional crimes within the territorial boundaries of the US, were excluded from the study. Since international terrorism prosecutions typically involve the use of charges

that are not applicable to, or are rare in, domestic terrorism cases, examining sentencing disparities in federal terrorism cases requires comparing defendants who engaged in the same criminal behaviours. The act of travelling abroad to join a designated terrorist group does not have a domestic terrorism equivalent, making it impossible to compare the legal cases of foreign fighters to a cognate group of domestic terrorism defendants. Other types of material support were included in the data if the crimes are not unique to one type of terrorism prosecution. For instance, both international and domestic extremists have committed financial crimes to fund terrorist groups or pay for the materials needed to commit violent attacks. These types of material support cases were included in the data.

We classified cases as terrorism prosecutions if they resulted in federal criminal charges and met the PIRUS inclusion criteria, which require that the defendants were radicalised in the US and that there is clear evidence their criminal activities were the result of ideological motives, including the pursuit of political, economic, social, or religious goals. International terrorism prosecutions are cases where the defendants had links to, or were acting in support of, terrorist groups and movements whose bases of operation are located outside of the US.[55] Most of these groups appear on the Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTO) and Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) lists maintained by the US State Department and the Department of the Treasury. All international terrorism cases from this period are classified in PIRUS as Jihadist. Unlike international terrorism, the US government does not maintain a list of officially designated domestic extremist groups that we could use to help in the identification of domestic terrorism prosecutions.[56] Thus, to identify domestic terrorism cases, we reviewed all subjects in the PIRUS data to determine if they were acting on behalf of groups or movements that pursue broad political, social, economic, or religious goals and operate primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the US.[57] This resulted in the inclusion of 185 prosecutions that we classified as far-right, 22 that we coded as far-left, and nineteen that we categorised as single-issue. The final dataset includes 344 federal terrorism prosecutions – 226 domestic terrorism cases and 118 cases of international terrorism.[58]

We next added 25 variables to PIRUS that capture the courtroom and sentencing phases of terrorism cases. First, the legal statutes used in the prosecutions were coded, including the use of terrorism charges (e.g., §2339A, §2339B, §2339C, §2339D, §2332A, and §2332B). Second, cases were coded for several pre-sentence variables, such as where the cases were prosecuted, plea agreements, convictions by jury or bench trial, and whether some or all charges were dropped. Third, incarceration variables were added to the data, including the in/out decision (i.e., whether an individual was given a custodial sentence as opposed to probation), incarceration length, and whether prosecutors sought terrorism or other sentencing enhancements (e.g., §3A1.1, §3A1.2, and §3A1.4). Incarceration length and length of federal supervision were coded in months. Following the practice established by the US Sentencing Commission, defendants who were given life sentences were coded as receiving 470 months in federal prison.[59] Finally,

each case was coded for several post-incarceration variables, including length of federal supervision, access to rehabilitation services, and the use of restrictive supervision conditions, such as internet or GPS location monitoring, polygraph testing, and no-contact orders. These conditions are dichotomous measures in the data indicating whether they were present or absent.

The values for these variables were drawn from federal court documents, including indictments, plea agreements, sentencing memoranda, and judgments. To accurately compare these values for similar sets of international and domestic terrorism cases, we matched defendants using a typology of criminal behaviours and outcomes. For example, if two terrorism defendants—one international and one domestic—stockpiled weapons for future attacks, they were assigned to the same crime category, regardless of the actual charges they faced. As we noted above, this was done because international and domestic extremists are typically prosecuted using different legal statutes, making it impossible to compare similar terrorism cases by grouping them according to criminal charges.

Each case in the data was assigned to one of the following crime types: (1) successful attacks resulting in deaths; (2) successful attacks resulting in injuries only; (3) successful attacks resulting in property damage only; (4) violent attacks that were attempted but failed due to perpetrator error; (5) foiled violent plots in which the perpetrators successfully acquired weapons; (6) foiled violent plots in which the perpetrators failed to acquire weapons; (7) foiled violent plots in which the perpetrators identified targets but did not attempt to acquire weapons; (8) foiled non-violent plots to damage property; and (9) non-violent material support in the form of terrorist financing, making false statements, and illegally possessing weapons. We coded attacks as successful if the perpetrators deployed weapons against targets. Plots were coded as "foiled" if the defendants were interdicted by law enforcement while planning and preparing to commit attacks.

# Findings

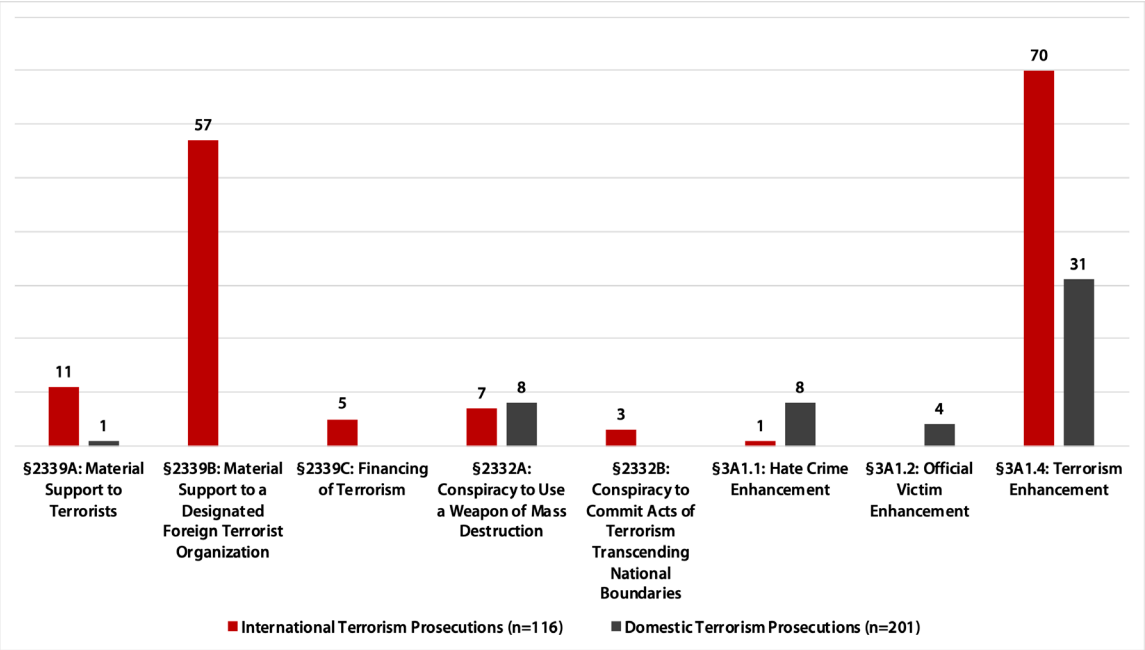
## *The Use of Terrorism Charges and Sentencing Enhancements*

For prosecutions initiated between 2014 and 2019, terrorism charges were disproportionately used in international terrorism cases (see Figure 1).[60] International terrorism defendants were the only subjects in the data who pleaded guilty to, or were convicted of, §2339B, which is limited to cases where the accused acted in support of a designated foreign terrorist organisation. Domestic extremists operating in the US often have links to terrorist groups abroad, such as European neo-Nazi organisations, but these entities do not appear on the FTO or SDGT lists.[61]

By comparison, most international terrorism prosecutions involved defendants who had links to, or were inspired by, groups on these lists, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

and al-Qaeda and its various affiliates. Approximately 50 percent of international terrorism defendants prosecuted during this period pleaded guilty to, or were convicted of, §2339B.

*Figure 1. Frequency of Terrorism Charges in Federal Prosecutions*




Somewhat more surprising, §2339A, which does not require that a crime have an international nexus, was rarely used during this period. The statute was used to prosecute 11 (9.5 percent) international terrorism defendants, six of whom were involved in the same criminal scheme to provide money, weapons, US military uniforms, and tactical gear to a friend who was fighting for ISIS in Syria.[62] The statute was only used to prosecute one (0.05 percent) domestic terrorism defendant who was involved in a plot with their significant other to attack an oil pipeline.[63]

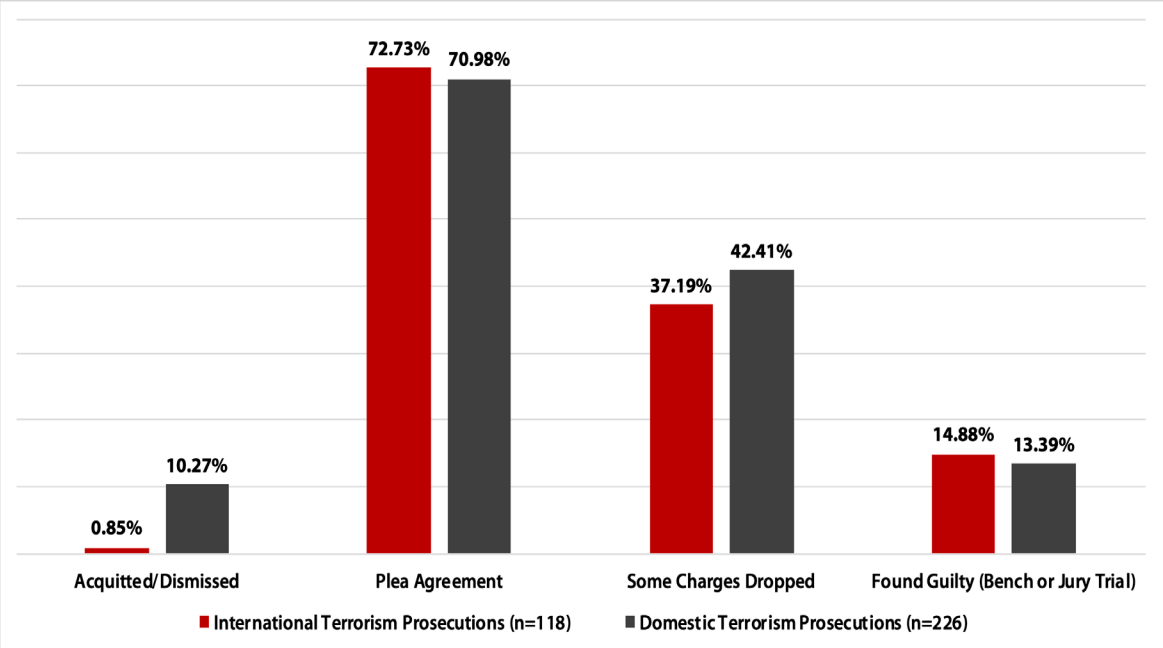
Conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction (§2332A), which is commonly included in discussions of terrorism offences, was also used sparingly during this period. The statute was used to prosecute fifteen terrorism defendants – eight domestic extremists and seven international terrorists. The defendants were involved in eleven unique plots, all of which involved attempts to acquire and use explosive devices. Only Ahmad Khan Rahimi, who committed several ISIS-inspired bombings in New York that injured more than 30 people, was successful in perpetrating attacks.[64] All told, 65 percent of international terrorism defendants pleaded guilty to, or were convicted of, one or more terrorism charges. However, only 4.5 percent of domestic terrorism defendants were prosecuted for committing terrorism offences. Instead, domestic extremists faced a wide array of charges that are not specific to crimes of terrorism. The most common of these were 18 USC §922 and 18 USC §924 (22 percent of cases), which involve the illegal use or possession of firearms, and 18 USC §875 (14.4 percent of cases), which makes it a crime to transmit threats across state lines. Conspiracy charges, which have been praised for their broad applicability to cases of domestic terrorism,[65] were only used to secure guilty pleas or convictions

in fifteen (7.5 percent) domestic terrorism prosecutions. Similarly, hate crime charges were only used in ten (5 percent) domestic terrorism prosecutions that resulted in guilty pleas or convictions.[66] Only eight (8.4 percent) defendants associated with white supremacist or neo-Nazi groups were prosecuted using hate crime charges. An analysis of the use of a terrorism sentencing enhancement under §3A1.4 reveals similar results. The enhancement, which does not require a transnational element to the crime, was requested far more often in international terrorism prosecutions. Prosecutors sought a sentencing enhancement under §3A1.4 in approximately 60 percent of international terrorism cases, but only requested similar penalties in 15.4 percent of domestic terrorism cases. Other sentencing enhancements, such as §3A1.1 (hate crime enhancement) and §3A1.2 (official victim enhancement), were seldom requested in either international or domestic terrorism prosecutions.

## *Case Disposition*

Notable disparities in the outcomes of US criminal cases often occur before any decisions about incarceration are made. The choice of prosecutors to negotiate plea agreements with some defendants but not others can contribute to inequities in the judicial system.[67] Similarly, the decision of juries to acquit some defendants while convicting others can be influenced by factors that are exogenous to the case, such as race and gender.[68] The cases we reviewed, however, generally did not display notable disparities in these areas (see Figure 2). Roughly the same percentage of domestic and international terrorism defendants were offered, and accepted, plea agreements. Both types of defendants typically had one or more of their charges dropped by prosecutors as part of plea deal negotiations. Similarly, defendants who opted for jury or bench trials were convicted at similar rates, regardless of whether they were being accused of domestic or international terrorism.

*Figure 2. Comparison of Case Outcomes*



The only part of the pre-sentence process that displayed significant differences between international and domestic terrorism cases was acquittals. Domestic terrorism defendants were more than 10 times as likely to be acquitted of their charges. Only one international terrorism defendant was acquitted during the six-year period we reviewed, while 23 domestic terrorism defendants were deemed not guilty or had their cases dismissed. This potentially points to a significant type of legal disparity in federal terrorism cases, but it is important to note that the acquittals of domestic extremists during this period were highly concentrated in just two events. All but four of the domestic extremists who received acquittals or dismissals were accused of crimes related to the 2014 armed standoff at the Bundy ranch in Bunkerville, Nevada, and the 2016 occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon. Both events involved rancher Cliven Bundy's family and their supporters in the anti-government movement confronting federal authorities over perceived government overreach.[69] Members of the Bundy family who were indicted for their roles in the ranch standoff walked free from a federal courthouse in 2018 after the judge in the case determined that the prosecution withheld evidence from the defence.[70] In the Oregon case, jurors decided that the government did not prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the occupation was the result of a criminal conspiracy to keep federal employees from doing their jobs.[71] When these cases are removed from consideration, the rate of acquittals in domestic terrorism prosecutions drops from 10.3 percent to 1.9 percent.

## *The In/Out Decision and Incarceration Length*

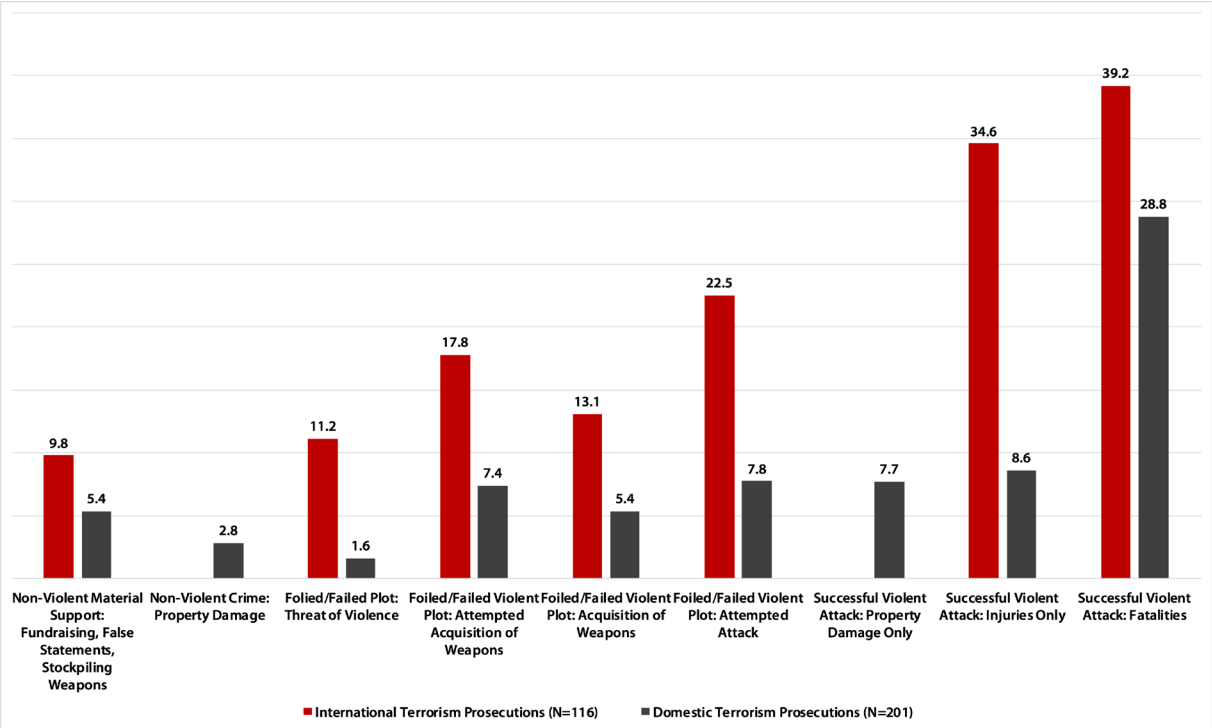
Research on the judicial outcomes of typical criminal cases commonly highlights the "in/out" decision – whether an individual is required to serve time in prison or is given a non-custodial sentence – as a potential area of inequities in the judicial system.[72] Indeed, when comparing defendants who committed similar crimes, studies show sentencing inequalities to be more common for the in/out decision than for incarceration length.[73] Two findings about the in/out decision in federal terrorism cases are worth noting. First, non-custodial sentences were uncommon (8.2 percent of all prosecutions) in the cases we reviewed, and they were only issued after guilty pleas. However, none of the defendants who received non-custodial sentences pleaded guilty to terrorism charges.

Second, significant inequalities were evident when comparing defendants who were given non-custodial sentences to defendants who were ordered to serve time in federal prison. Non-custodial sentences were given to domestic terrorism defendants at more than double the rate they were issued in international terrorism cases (12 percent vs 5 percent, respectively). Moreover, every international extremist who was given a non-custodial sentence pleaded guilty to a non-violent crime, such as making false statements to law enforcement about their support for foreign terrorist groups.[74] The international extremists who were prosecuted for plotting violent attacks were all sentenced to serve time in federal prison, regardless of how far they progressed in their criminal schemes. By comparison, 42.9 percent of the domestic terrorism

defendants who were given probation rather than time in prison threatened to commit violent attacks.[75] While none of these cases resulted in casualties, some plots were relatively mature, including two cases in which prosecutors alleged that the defendants had acquired weapons and selected targets for mass shootings.[76]

Significant disparities were also evident in how much time the defendants were sentenced to serve in federal prison. International terrorism defendants received average federal prison sentences that were more than double those given to domestic extremists (13.9 years vs 6.3 years, respectively). With that said, a potential limitation of comparing the aggregate average sentence lengths of the two populations is that it does not account for the role that criminal severity plays in driving sentencing decisions.[77] If international terrorism defendants are more often involved in violent crimes, then we might expect them to serve more time on average in federal prison. However, significant disparities were found in the prison sentences issued to international and domestic extremists even when controlling for crime severity (see Figure 3). International terrorism defendants were sentenced to serve more time in federal prison than domestic extremists for all crime types described above except for non-violent and violent attacks that resulted in property damage only – crimes and outcomes for which there were no international cases.

*Figure 3. Length of Incarceration in Years by Crime Severity*




Disparities in sentence length were especially large in cases involving subjects who plotted, but failed, to commit violent attacks. International terrorism defendants involved in these types of plots received average prison terms of 11.2 years, while domestic extremists who engaged in similar schemes were, on average, sentenced to just 1.6 years in prison. The uneven use of

terrorism laws appears to be a significant contributor to the lopsided prison sentences issued in these cases. For example, 64.1 percent of the international terrorism defendants who were involved in foiled or failed violent plots pleaded guilty to, or were convicted of, terrorism charges. These defendants received average prison sentences of 19 years. Domestic extremists who plotted similar attacks were most commonly (29.4 percent) prosecuted for making interstate threats and were sentenced to 2.7 years in prison on average.[78] Only 9.8 percent of domestic terrorism defendants who plotted foiled or failed attacks were prosecuted using terrorism charges.[79] Importantly, however, the sentencing gaps with international terrorism defendants were eliminated in these cases, with the average defendant receiving 19.7 years in prison.

Drastic disparities in the length of incarceration were also observed in cases involving defendants who committed attacks that resulted in casualties. In cases involving at least one victim injury but no deaths, international terrorism defendants were sentenced on average to 34.6 years in prison – a more than fourfold increase over their domestic extremist counterparts, who received average prison terms of 8.6 years. Even crimes that resulted in victim fatalities displayed notable sentencing disparities. International terrorism defendants who were accused of killing at least one person were ordered to spend approximately ten more years in prison on average than domestic extremists who committed similar attacks. Relatedly, life sentences were issued in 10 percent of international terrorism cases that involved violent plots but were only given to 5.7 percent of domestic terrorism defendants who were accused of similar crimes. The domestic terrorism defendants who were given life sentences all committed serious crimes that resulted in multiple people being killed or injured. However, nearly half (43 percent) of the international terrorism defendants who were ordered to spend the rest of their lives in prison committed crimes that did not result in any casualties. Again, the disproportionate use of terrorism laws in international terrorism prosecutions appears to have been a significant factor in causing these sentencing disparities. Five out of the six international terrorism defendants who committed attacks that resulted in victim injuries or fatalities were prosecuted using terrorism statutes, while none of the twenty domestic extremists who committed attacks that resulted in casualties were tried as terrorists in federal court.

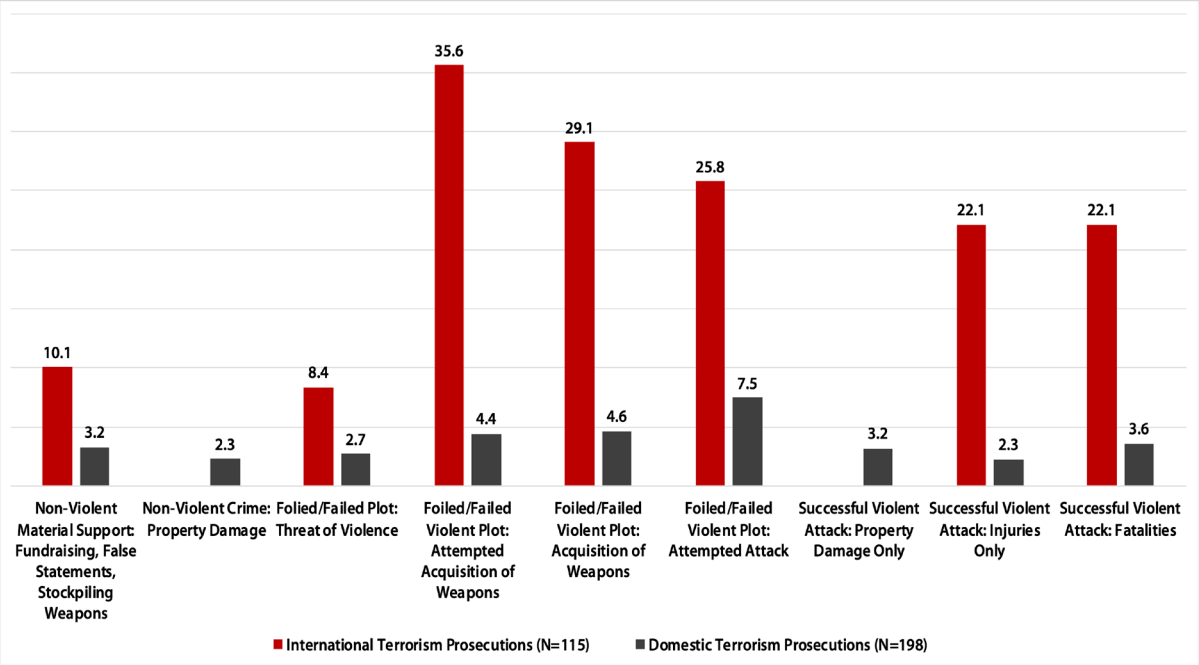
Sentencing enhancements under §3A1.4 also correlated with longer prison sentences. When prosecutors requested a terrorism sentencing enhancement, defendants were ordered to spend 13.8 years in federal prison on average. When they did not, defendants were sentenced to 6.9 years in prison on average. Prosecutors were nearly four times as likely to pursue a terrorism enhancement in international terrorism cases than they were in cases involving domestic extremists. When requested, sentencing enhancements were effective in producing more parity in prison sentences. For example, when prosecutors requested sentencing enhancements in terrorism cases involving foiled or failed violent plots, international terrorism defendants were sentenced to 17.7 years in prison on average, while domestic extremists were given average prison sentences of 15.1 years.[80]

## *Post-Incarceration Supervision*

Often overlooked in the literature on sentencing is inequalities that impact people after they leave prison.[81] There can be notable differences in the amount of time defendants are ordered to spend on post-incarceration supervision, as well as the conditions with which they must comply upon release. Our analysis shows that international terrorism defendants leaving federal prisons will spend far longer on supervision than their domestic terrorism counterparts. International extremists were given average post-incarceration supervisory terms of 19.3 years, while the average domestic terrorism defendant was put on federal supervision for 3.5 years after leaving prison.

A drastic disparity in post-incarceration supervision length was observed even after controlling for criminal severity (see Figure 4). International terrorism defendants were given post-incarceration probationary sentences that were 3.1 to 8.1 times longer than domestic extremists who engaged in the same criminal behaviours. For instance, international extremists who committed attacks that resulted in casualties were sentenced to spend 22.1 years on average on supervision upon release from prison. Domestic terrorism defendants who committed similar attacks received average post-incarceration supervisory terms of just 2.9 years. Moreover, nearly a quarter (23.5 percent) of all international terrorism defendants were ordered to spend the rest of their lives on supervision after leaving prison. Only two (1.01 percent) domestic terrorism defendants received the same penalty.

*Figure 4. Post-Incarceration Supervision Length in Years by Crime Severity*



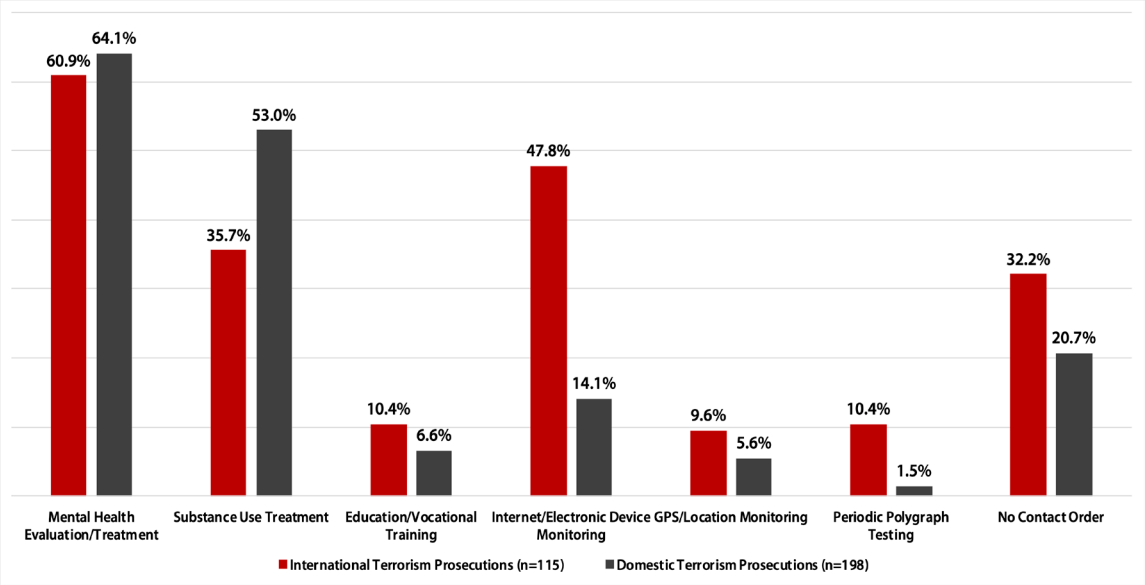

The unequal use of terrorism laws and sentencing enhancements in international terrorism cases again appears to be a contributing cause of these disparities. The average defendant who pleaded guilty to, or was convicted of, terrorism charges was sentenced to spend 26.3 years on

probation after leaving prison. Approximately 89 percent of these individuals were defendants accused of international terrorism. Overall, international terrorists who pleaded guilty to, or were convicted of, terrorism charges were ordered to spend 4.8 to 13.4 times longer on supervision after leaving prison than domestic terrorism defendants who engaged in similar crimes but were prosecuted using more typical criminal charges.

In addition to the amount of time a federal releasee spends on supervision, the conditions with which they are required to comply while on probation can be an important contributor to inequalities in judicial outcomes. Special conditions of supervision can involve the provision of rehabilitative services, but they can also include restrictive monitoring techniques that make it difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals to have contact with their family and friends, find and maintain employment, and form new pro-social relationships.[82] This includes location monitoring via GPS and the surveillance of electronic devices.

During the period under review, both cohorts of defendants received rehabilitative services at similar rates (see Figure 5). Domestic extremists were more often ordered to attend drug and/or alcohol treatment programmes due to their higher levels of substance use disorders.[83] However, international terrorism defendants were considerably more likely than domestic extremists to be ordered to comply with restrictive monitoring conditions. For example, while nearly half of all international terrorism defendants were barred from using the internet or were subjected to the monitoring of their electronic devices, only 14.1 percent of domestic extremists were given internet restrictions of any kind.

*Figure 5. Rates of Post-Incarceration Rehabilitative Services and Supervision Conditions*




International terrorism defendants were also more likely than their domestic terrorist counterparts to have their physical location monitored via GPS, to be required to sit for periodic polygraph examinations, and to receive no contact orders prohibiting them from associating

with co-defendants or members of extremist groups. More than 27 percent of the international terrorism defendants who received these conditions were ordered to comply with them for the rest of their lives. Only 2.9 percent of domestic extremists were give the same punishment. The majority (74.3 percent) of the domestic extremists who were issued restrictive conditions of release were ordered to comply with them for three years or less. Overall, 139 terrorism defendants (45.4 percent) were required to comply with one or more restrictive special conditions after leaving prison. Approximately 55 percent of these cases involved the use of terrorism charges and/or terrorism sentencing enhancements.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The above analysis demonstrates that sentencing disparities are pervasive among federal terrorism prosecutions. International terrorism defendants are subject to significantly harsher judicial penalties than domestic extremists, even when the two engage in the same criminal behaviours. The disproportionate use of terrorism laws in international terrorism cases appears to be a primary contributor to these sentencing inequalities. International extremists who are prosecuted using material support statutes or who are given terrorism sentencing enhancements receive considerably longer prison sentences and post-incarceration supervision terms than domestic extremists who are prosecuted using more typical criminal charges. They are also far more likely to be subjected to restrictive supervision conditions after release from federal prison. The results of this study provide preliminary empirical support for the claim that the uneven use of terrorism laws in federal prosecutions is a major obstacle to promoting judicial fairness in terrorism cases. Critics of the proposal to enact a new domestic terrorism law often point to the flexible nature of the US legal code as evidence that prosecutors and judges have the tools necessary to hold domestic extremists accountable for their crimes, but the data clearly show that the use of more typical criminal charges in terrorism cases results in comparatively lenient sentences. Defendants who were prosecuted using more typical charges, like weapons violations, were given significantly lighter penalties for every criminal severity type included in this study.

There are practical challenges to using non-terrorism charges to punish domestic extremists to the same extent as international terrorists. The upper bounds of the sentencing guidelines attached to these criminal statutes are often reserved for repeat offenders or other special cases. For example, significant penalties can accompany a conviction for 18 USC §922(g) (Felon in Possession of a Firearm). However, in order for a defendant convicted of §922(g) to receive a prison sentence in the range of the ones commonly issued in cases involving terrorism charges, they would need to be prosecuted under the Armed Career Criminal Act (ACCA), which requires three previous convictions for violent crimes or serious drug offences.[84] There is no such previous criminality requirement for a person convicted on terrorism charges to be given a severe sentence. Indeed, 61.1 percent of the international terrorists in our data who were given

prison sentences of fifteen years or more had no prior criminal record. While judges are free to deviate from sentencing guidelines, serious upward departures are rare in cases involving more typical criminal charges.[85] For example, approximately one third of the cases in the federal system that involve the use of §922(g) result in departures from sentencing guidelines, but more than 88 percent of these are downward departures below the guideline minimum.[86]

The more frequent use of hate crime laws could be effective in reducing sentencing disparities in terrorism cases. Our data show that defendants who pleaded guilty to, or were convicted of, hate crime offences were sentenced to 22.2 years in federal prison on average, which is comparable to the prison sentences issued to international extremists who were convicted on material support charges. However, hate crime charges in terrorism cases have been rare, and prosecutors appear unlikely to use them outside of cases that involve mass casualties or other extraordinary outcomes. Indeed, in our data, all twelve of the domestic terrorism cases that included hate crime charges involved attacks that resulted in victim fatalities. Five of the cases involved mass casualties. While federal hate crime laws have been routinely expanded since their initial adoption in 1968, only 15 percent of cases referred for prosecution as hate crimes each year result in the use of hate crime charges.[87] Thus, without a sudden and significant change in how prosecutors make decisions, it is unlikely that hate crime statutes will be used to level the sentencing gaps in US terrorism cases.

Critics of the proposal for a new domestic terrorism law could argue that more time is needed to determine if the January 6 Capitol attack, and the increased focus on domestic terrorism it has prompted, will compel judges to issue more equitable sentences in terrorism cases. Preliminary evidence, however, suggests that this is not the case. Domestic terrorism defendants have not been charged with material support crimes (e.g., §2339A) any more often in the last four years than they were in the preceding six.[88] No Capitol riot defendant has been charged with a terrorism crime of any kind, and less than 3 percent have had a terrorism sentencing enhancement under §3A1.4 requested in their cases.[89] Moreover, evidence from the January 6 cases suggests that the prosecution of domestic terrorism continues to result in comparatively lenient sentences.[90] For example, more than 150 people have been prosecuted for assaulting police officers on January 6. These cases have resulted in average federal prison sentences of under 4.5 years.[91] At the time of this writing, 67 percent of the January 6 defendants received prison sentences below the federal guidelines.[92]

In addition to the ethical concerns that arise from the unequal treatment of people who commit the same types of crimes, the use of different laws in terrorism cases has real consequences for deterring future acts of violence.[93] As we noted above, the recidivism rate among international terrorism defendants prosecuted on material support charges is vanishingly low, and this is in no small part due to the significant prison sentences that have been issued in their cases. However, recent instances of reoffending among domestic extremists suggest that the same

may not be true for individuals who are prosecuted using more typical criminal statutes.[94] Take the case of Brandon Russell, a Florida based neo-Nazi and former leader of Atomwaffen Division. In 2017, Russell was found to be stockpiling explosives in his garage, but rather than being prosecuted using terrorism laws – such as §2332A, which prohibits the possession or use of a weapon of mass destruction – he pleaded guilty to having an unregistered weapon and the improper storage of explosive materials.[95] Russell was sentenced to five years in federal prison, of which he only served three. In February 2023, Russell was back in federal custody when authorities discovered that he and an associate were planning a series of attacks on power substations in Baltimore, Maryland.[96] The uneven use of terrorism laws in federal prosecutions, and the sentencing disparities that result, also have a notable impact on how society perceives threats to public safety.[97] Ample research shows that the way violent acts and their perpetrators are labelled influences how people conceive of terrorism, who they describe as terrorists, and what measures they find acceptable to counter the threat.[98] Limiting the use of terrorism laws and harsh punishments to international terrorism cases reinforces societal perceptions of terrorism as something that is limited to Muslim populations and can only be deterred through swift legal penalties. In turn, these perceptions influence legal responses to terrorism, thus perpetuating a public opinion and prosecution cycle that produces unwarranted sentencing inequalities in terrorism cases.

The debate over proposed domestic terrorism legislation would be more constructive if both sides recognised the consequences of maintaining the status quo and sought to find solutions to the problem that also protects civil rights and liberties. This includes a more thorough discussion of the safeguards that would need to accompany a domestic terrorism law to ensure that it cannot be weaponised to target vulnerable populations and peaceful political protesters. Moreover, as McCord has argued, within the existing legal framework, more consideration needs to be given to amending the predicate offence list attached to §2339A to give prosecutors the power to use the charge in more domestic terrorism cases.[99] This includes granting prosecutors the legal authority to apply the statute to terrorism cases involving the acquisition, storage, and use of firearms. During the period we reviewed, the majority (56.1 percent) of the individuals who were prosecuted for plotting to commit, or committing, violent terrorist attacks planned to use, or used, firearms. However, only 25 percent of these cases resulted in the use of terrorism charges. Although the legal ownership of guns is a constitutionally protected activity in the US, their use in terrorist attacks is not. When paired with ideological motivations, the use of firearms in acts of violence should not be viewed differently than other types of terrorism that involve similarly destructive weapons. Perhaps most importantly, an amendment to §2339A would not require the creation of a designated domestic terrorist organisations list, which would be legally tenuous at best and operationally dangerous at worst.[100]

Recent federal terrorism cases clearly demonstrate that international terrorism defendants frequently experience judicial inequalities that far exceed those observed in more typical criminal cases.[101] Future research should consider if factors like race, ethnicity, religion, and

gender act as contributing causes of these disparities. Using data from a longer timeframe, future research should also examine how the outcomes of terrorism cases have been impacted by key events, like the September 11 attacks, the 2009 expansion of federal hate crime laws, and the 2005 Supreme Court decision that struct down the statute requiring judges to issue sentences within the federal guidelines. While additional research like this can provide a more complete picture of the causes of sentencing disparities in cases involving extremists, our analysis suggests that the current legal regime is a significant obstacle to promoting judicial fairness in the prosecution of terrorism.

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30 McCord, "It's Time for Congress to Make Domestic Terrorism a Federal Crime" and "Filling the Gap in Our Terrorism Statutes"; Sinnar, "Separate and Unequal"; Ware and Zolyniak, "Jan. 6 and Beyond."

31 McCord, "Lessons for Countering the Domestic Terrorism Threat."

32 18 USC §921(a)(4).

33 For instance, violations of weapons laws can result in minimum prison sentences of 1 to 15 years depending on the defendant's criminal history. See 18 USC § 924(e). Also see 18 USC § 875(c) and 18 USC § 1001(a).

34 Jeannine Bell, "Deciding When Hate is a Crime: The First Amendment, Police Detectives, and the Identification of Hate Crime," *Rutgers Race and the Law Review* 4 (2002): 33-76, https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/facpub/369; Neil Chakraborti and Jon Garland, *Hate Crime: Impact, Causes, and Responses* (New York: Sage Publications, 2009); Avlana Eisenberg, "Expressive Enforcement," *UCLA Law Review* 61 (2014): 860-921, https://ir.law.fsu.edu/articles/406; Bryan D. Byers, Kiesha Warren-Gordon, and James A. Jones, "Predictors of Hate Crime Prosecutions: An Analysis of Data From the National Prosecutors Survey and State-Level Bias Crime Laws," *Race and Justice* 2, no. 3 (2012): 203-219, https://doi.org/10.1177/2153368712446868; Karen Franklin, "Good Intentions: The Enforcement of Hate Crime

Penalty-Enhancement Statutes," *American Behavioral Scientist* 46, no. 1 (2002): 154-172, https://doi.org/10.1177/000276420204600101O; Valerie Jenness and Ryken Grattet, *Making Hate a Crime: From Social Movement to Law Enforcement* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004).

35 Jannine Bell, "Lack of Punishment Doesn't Fit the Crime: America's Tepid Response to Bias-Motivated Crime," in *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society*, ed. Austin Sarat (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2021); Beverly McPhail and Valerie Jenness, "To Charge or Not to Charge?-That is the Question: The Pursuit of Strategic Advantage in Prosecutional Decision-Making Surrounding Hate Crime," *Journal of Hate Studies* 4, no. 1 (2005): 89-119, https://doi.org/10.33972/jhs.34.

36 Shirin Sinnar, "Hate Crimes, Terrorism, and the Framing of White Supremacist Violence," *California Law Review* 110, no. 2 (2022): 489-565, https://www.californialawreview.org/print/hate-crimes-terrorism-and-the-framing-of-white-supremacist-violence.

37 Aaronson, "Terrorism's Double Standard"; McCord, "It's Time for Congress to Make Domestic Terrorism a Federal Crime."

38 Blazakis, "The Intangible Benefits of a Domestic Terrorism Statute"; Colin P. Clarke and Jason Blazakis, "Nothing less than new policies and a domestic terrorism law will help," *The Hill*, 6 June 2022, https://thehill.com/opinion/criminal-justice/3511476-nothing-less-than-new-policies-and-a-domestic-terrorism-law-will-help/; Ware and Zolyniak, "Jan. 6 and Beyond." On the links between the January 6th Capitol rioters and extremist groups, see Michael A. Jensen, "It Wasn't Just Proud Boys. Interconnected Extremists Converged on Jan. 6," *Washington Post*, 17 June 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/06/17/january-6-hearings-extremists-proud-boys/.

39 Scholars have debated whether the January 6, 2021, attack meets various academic and official definitions of terrorism. While most agree that the Capitol attack should be considered an act of terrorism, others have suggested that it is better described as a "riot" or "insurrection." What is important for the analyses presented in this article, however, is that the events of January 6 clearly meet the US government's legal definition of terrorism (see above), which only requires that an act be committed to influence or affect the conduct of government. Thus, the non-use of terrorism charges in the January 6 cases likely has more to do with the difficulty of using material support charges in prosecuting domestic terrorism than it does with whether the Capitol attack constitutes terrorism according to the US legal code. On the academic debate over whether the Capitol attack constitutes terrorism, see See Sara Rimer, "BU's Jessica Stern on Why January 6 Attack on Capitol Was an Act of Terrorism," *BU Today*, 15 January 2021, https://www.bu.edu/articles/2021/jessica-stern-on-why-january-6-attack-on-capitol-was-act-of-terrorism/; Laura Dugan and Daren Fisher, "Far-Right and Jihadi Terrorism Within the United States: From September 11th to January 6th," *Annual Review of Criminology* 6, no.1 (2023):131-153; Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "From 9/11 to 1/6: The War on Terror Supercharged the Far Right," *Foreign Affairs*, 24 August 2021, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-08-24/war-on-terror-911-jan6; David C. Rapoport, "The Capitol Attack and the 5th Terrorism Wave," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 33, no. 5(2021): 912-916, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2021.1932338; Arie Perliger, "Contextualising the Jan 6th Report: Contemporary Trends In Far-Right Violence in the US," *ICCT*, 2 January 2023, https://www.icct.nl/publication/contextualising-jan-6th-report-contemporary-trends-far-right-violence-us; Joana Cook and Tanya Mehra, "An Attack on the Capitol and Democracy: An Act of Terrorism?" *ICCT*, 11 January 2021, https://www.icct.nl/publication/attack-capitol-and-democracy-act-terrorism; and "Capitol Insurrection, Riot, or Domestic Terrorism?" an interview with Joe Young, https://www.american.edu/sis/big-world/44-capitol-insurrection-riot-or-domestic-terrorism.cfm. On January 6 meeting the U.S. legal definition of terrorism, see Lisa N. Sacco, "Domestic Terrorism and the Attack on the U.S. Capitol," *Congressional Research Service,* 13 January 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20210126202252/https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11573.

40 Gerstein, "Why DOJ is Avoiding Domestic Terrorism Sentences for Jan. 6 Defendants."

41 Alan Z. Rozenshtein, "Seditious Conspiracy is the Real Domestic Terrorism Statute," *Lawfare*, 7 April 2022, https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/seditious-conspiracy-real-domestic-terrorism-statute.

42 The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), "Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS)," https://www.start.umd.edu/data-tools/profiles-individual-radicalization-united-states-pirus.

43 McCord, "Lessons for Countering the Domestic Terrorism Threat"; Sinnar, "Separate and Unequal." On the ethnic and religious characteristics of international terrorism defendants, see Khaled Beydoun, "Lone Wolf Terrorism: Types, Stripes, and Double Standards," *Northwestern University Law Review* 112, no. 5 (2018): 1213-1243, https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/nulr/vol112/iss5/6; and Caroline Mala Corbin, "Terrorists Are Always Muslim but Never White: At the Intersection of Critical Race Theory and Propaganda," *Fordham Law Review* 86, no. 2 (2017): 455-485, https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/flr/vol86/iss2/5.

44 Sinnar, "Separate and Unequal"; Ware and Zolyniak, "Jan. 6 and Beyond."

45 Michael Molstad, "Our Inner Demons: Prosecuting Domestic Terrorism," *Boston College Law Review* 61, no. 1 (2020): 339-383, https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/bclr/vol61/iss1/8.

46 German, "Why New Laws Aren't Needed"; Rachael Hanna and Eric Halliday, "Discretion Without Oversight"; Jenkins, "Five Reasons to Be Wary of a New Domestic Terrorism Law."

47 German, "Why New Laws Aren't Needed."

48 "157 Civil Rights Organizations Oppose a New Domestic Terrorism Charge," *The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights*, 19 January 2021, https://civilrights.org/resource/135-civil-rights-organizations-oppose-a-new-domestic-terrorism-charge/.

49 Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, 18 USC § 43.

50 Jeff Martin and Jeff Amy, "23 Charged with Terrorism in Atlanta 'Cop City' Protest," *Associated Press*, 6 March 2023, https://apnews.com/article/atlanta-police-training-site-protest-fire-1ba4362c9337e27ecaf44283fc72fc56.

51 Empirical research on sentencing in US terrorism cases is extremely limited and tends to only focus on cases tied to one ideology rather than making comparisons across the ideological spectrum. Hodwitz, for example, includes sentence length in her research on terrorist recidivism but the data are limited to cases of international terrorism. Similarly, Gruenewald and colleagues examine sentencing decisions in US terrorism prosecutions but limit their analysis to cases of domestic terrorism. See Hodwitz, "The Terrorism Recidivism Study," and Jeff Gruenewald, Brent R. Klein, Brittany E. Hayes, William S. Parkin, and Taylor June, "Examining Disparities in Case Dispositions and Sentencing Outcomes for Domestic Violent Extremists in the United States," *Crime & Delinquency* (2022), https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287221109769.

52 START, "Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS)."

53 All cases were originally brought before the courts between 2014 and 2019, but they did not need to be completed during that timeframe to be included in the data. For instance, the prosecution of Patrick Crusius, a white supremacist who murdered 23 people at a Walmart store in 2019, is included in the data even though he was not sentenced in the case until July of 2023.

54 For example, Robert Bowers was charged on October 31, 2018, with 44 criminal counts after he killed 11 Jewish worshippers in an anti-Semitic attack at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A final sentencing outcome in the case was not reached until June of 2023—nearly five years after his initial arraignment. See, Marlene Lenthang and Brian Michael, "Pittsburgh Synagogue Gunman Found Guilty on all Federal Charges," *NBC News*, 16 June 2023, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting-ruling-verdict-jury-hate-crimes-robert-b-rcna89337.

55 Subjects did not have to be official members of foreign terrorist organizations to be classified in the data as international terrorism defendants. Individuals who were inspired by, or acting on behalf of, foreign terrorist groups were also coded as international terrorism defendants even if they had no known contact with foreign groups. This practice is consistent with the use of material support laws in

federal prosecutions, which do not require a defendant to have formal membership in a foreign terrorist organisation.

56 The US legal code does not provide lists, descriptions, or definitions of the extremist groups or ideologies that constitute domestic terrorism. According to the legal code, domestic terrorism is defined in terms of the tactical goals of those who commit the acts and can be broadly applied to any individual or group who seeks to affect the conduct of government through coercion or intimidation. See the note below for how we operationalised domestic terrorism in this study.

57 Subjects were coded as domestic terrorism defendants if they were formal or informal members of extremist groups or movements that originated or operate primarily within the territorial boundaries of the US. On the extremist far-right, this includes anti-government militias like the Oath Keepers and Boogaloo Movement, neo-fascist and white supremacist groups like Atomwaffen Division and the Patriot Front, xenophobic and nativist groups like the Proud Boys, and fringe conspiracy theories like QAnon. On the far-left, this includes environmental and animal rights groups like the Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front, the loose collective of anarchist extremists often referred to as ANTIFA, and individuals aligned with Black nationalist groups like the Black Hebrew Israelites. During the period under review, single-issue extremism was primarily concentrated around anti-abortion activity. Individuals without links to known extremist groups were classified as domestic terrorism defendants if they were acting to advance the ideologies or goals that are commonly expressed by extremist groups in the United States or if they were acting in direct response to domestic political issues, such as abortion, gun rights, the use of public lands, federal tax laws, domestic environmental concerns, national economic conditions, or the use of force by US law enforcement.

58 We reviewed 838 individuals for possible inclusion in the data. Of the 494 who were excluded from the study, 150 attempted to join foreign terrorist groups abroad and did not commit additional crimes in the United States. The remaining 344 cases that were excluded were made up of individuals who were killed while committing terrorist attacks or were prosecuted in state or local court.

59 United States Sentencing Commission, *Life Sentences in the Federal System* (Washington, DC: US Sentencing Commission, 2022).

60 The following discussion refers to the charges to which the defendants pleaded or were found guilty. Charges that were dropped before a guilty plea conviction were not included in these figures.

61 To date, the only far-right group to be designated a terrorist organisation by the US State Department is the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM). There have not been any federal terrorism prosecutions involving defendants with links to the RIM.

62 Robert Patrick, "Final St. Louis Woman Gets 4 Years in Prison," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 10 November 2020, https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/final-st-louis-defendant-in-terror-funding-case-gets-4-years-in-prison/article_1c42fff1-2cad-569f-af61-c82f24f61622.html.

63 This case is difficult to classify according to one ideology. The defendants were self-identified "anarchists" and were motivated in part by environmental concerns, but they also admired far-right mass killers, even going as far as corresponding with Dylann Roof, a white supremacist who murdered nine people in a historically black church in 2015, after Roof was sent to federal prison. See United States of America v. Elizabeth Lecron, 3:19-cr-0004 (2019).

64 Michael Wilson, "Bomber Sentenced to 2 Life Terms for Manhattan Attack," *New York Times*, 13 February 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/13/nyregion/bomber-chelsea-manhattan.html.

65 German, "Why New Laws Aren't Needed."

66 These cases all involved the use of 18 USC § 249 (Hate Crime Acts).

67 See, for example, Carlos Berdejó, "Criminalizing Race: Racial Disparities in Plea-Bargaining," *Boston College Law Review* 59, no. 4 (April 2018): 1187-1250, https://ssrn.com/abstract=3036726; Alexander Testa and Brian D. Johnson, "Paying the Trial Tax: Race, Guilty Pleas, and Disparity in Prosecution,"

*Criminal Justice Policy Review* 31, no. 4 (2020): 500-531, https://doi.org/10.1177/088740341983.

68 See Samuel Sommers, "Race and the Decision Making of Juries," *Legal and Criminological Psychology* 12, no. 2 (2007): 171-187, https://doi.org/10.1348/135532507X189687.

69 James R. Skillen, *This Land is My Land: Rebellion in the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

70 David Ferrara, "Appeals Court Upholds Dismissal of Cliven Bundy Case," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 6 August 2020, https://www.reviewjournal.com/crime/courts/appeals-court-upholds-dismissal-of-cliven-bundy-case-2089569/.

71 Courtney Sherwood and Kirk Johnson, "Bundy Brothers Acquitted in Takeover of Oregon Wildlife Refuge," *New York Times*, 27 October 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/28/us/bundy-brothers-acquitted-in-takeover-of-oregon-wildlife-refuge.html.

72 John Kramer and Darrell Steffensmeir, "Race and Imprisonment Decisions," *The Sociological Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1993): 357-376, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1993.tb00395.x; Cassia Spohn, *Thirty Years of Sentencing Reform: The Quest for a Racially Neutral Sentencing Process* (Washington, DC: Department of Justice, 2000).

73 Rhys Hester and Todd K. Hartman, "Conditional Race Disparities in Criminal Sentencing: A Test of the Liberation Hypothesis From a Non-Guidelines State," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 33, no. 1 (2017): 77-100, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-016-9283-z.

74 18 USC § 1001(a)(2).

75 During this period, three additional terrorism defendants—one international and two domestic—were deemed mentally unfit to stand trial.

76 Ryan Autullo, "Texas Man Plotting Mass Shooting Arrested on Weapons Charges," *Dayton Daily News*, 17 April 2017, https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/crime--law/fbi-austin-man-plotting-mass-shooting-arrested-weapons-charges/Js7cJF0eilpUKpmbc4wIeM/; Gary Craig, "Greece Man Who Expressed Support for New Zealand Mass Killings Admits to Lying to FBI," *Democrat & Chronicle*, 14 May 2019, https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2019/05/14/thomas-bolin-greece-ny-man-who-expressed-support-new-zealand-mass-killings-admits-to-lying-to-fbi/3665488002/.

77 Peter S. Lehmann, "Race, Ethnicity, Crime Type, and the Sentencing of Violent Felony Offenders," *Crime & Delinquency* 66, no. 6-7 (2020): 770-805, https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128720902699.

78 18 USC § 875(c).

79 All but one these cases involved the use of 18 USC § 2332A (Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction).

80 For these figures, we included requests for an enhancement under §3A1.4, as well as §3A1.1 (hate crime enhancement) and §3A1.2 (official victim enhancement).

81 For exceptions, see Tina L. Freiburger, and Carly M. Hilinski. "Probation Officers' Recommendations and Final Sentencing Outcomes" *Journal of Crime and Justice* 34, no. 1 (2011): 45-61, https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2011.554746; Michael Leiber, John Reitzel, and Kristin Mack, "Probation Officer Recommendations for Sentencing Relative to Judicial Practice: The Implications for African Americans," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 22, no. 3 (2011): 301-329, https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403410374230.

82 Matthew DeMichele, "Electronic Monitoring: It's a Tool, Not a Silver Bullet," *Criminology & Public Policy* 13, no. 3 (2014): 393-400, https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12089.

83 Approximately 39 percent of the domestic terrorism defendants in the data had documented substance use disorders. Only 19 percent of the international terrorism defendants who were prosecuted during this period had known substance use concerns.

84 According to the US Sentencing Commission, the average defendant convicted of a firearms offence under §922(g) and ACCA is sentenced to 186 months (15.5 years) in prison. The average Defendant who is convicted of §922(g) but who does not qualify to be charged under ACCA is sentenced to 59 months (4.92 years) of incarceration. United States Sentencing Commission, *Quick Facts—Felon in Possession of a Weapon* (Washington DC: U.S. Sentencing Commission, 2018).

85 United States Sentencing Commission, Office of the General Counsel, *Primer on Departures and Variances* (Washington, DC: US Sentencing Commission, 2023).

86 United States Sentencing Commission, *Quick Facts*.

87 Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, "Few Hate Crime Referrals Result in Prosecution," https://trac.syr.edu/tracreports/crim/569/.

88 According to the data, only three domestic terrorism defendants have been prosecuted using §2339A from 2020 through the first nine months of 2023. Considering that this period included an unprecedented expansion in the number of domestic terrorism prosecutions, it is safe to conclude that the statute has not been used at a greater rate in domestic terrorism cases in recent years.

89 According to our data, prosecutors have sought a sentencing enhancement under §3A1.4 in 30 Capitol riot cases. Most of these were cases with defendants who had links to known extremist groups, like the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys. Preliminary evidence suggests that the judges in most of these cases denied the prosecution's requests for the enhancement to be applied at sentencing.

90 "Notes: Responding to Domestic Terrorism: A Crisis of Legitimacy," *Harvard Law Review* 136, no. 7 (2023): 1914-1935, https://harvardlawreview.org/print/vol-136/responding-to-domestic-terrorism-a-crisis-of-legitimacy/

91 The statistics come from National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, "Capitol Insurrection Data Tool," https://www.start.umd.edu/capitol-insurrection.

92 Tom Jackman and Spencer Hsu, "Most Jan. 6 Defendants Get Time behind Bars, but less than U.S. Seeks" *Washington Post*, 5 January 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/01/05/january-6-riot-sentences/.

93 The extent to which legal punishments act as specific or general deterrents to future crime is a topic of considerable debate. Covering this literature is beyond the scope of this article, but it is important to acknowledge that there is lack of research that demonstrates the effects of sentencing decisions on general rates of terrorism or terrorist recidivism. For a review of the literature on sentencing and reoffending, see Daniel S. Nagin, Francis T. Cullen, and Cheryl Lero Jonson, "Imprisonment and Reoffending," *Crime and Justice* 38 (2009), https://doi.org/10.1086/599202.

94 For instance, preliminary analysis suggests that re-offending rates among domestic extremists may be as high as 50 percent. Michael A. Jensen, Patrick James, and Elizabeth Yates, "Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States—Desistance, Disengagement, and Deradicalization (PIRUS-D3)," *National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism*, July 2019, https://www.start.umd.edu/publication/profiles-individual-radicalization-united-states-desistance-disengagement-and.

95 Niraj Chokshi, "Neo-Nazi Leader in Florida Sentenced to 5 Years Over Homemade Explosives," *New York Times*, 10 January 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/10/us/brandon-russell-sentenced-neo-nazi.html.

96 Mike Wendling, "Brandon Russell: Leader of Neo-Nazi Atomwaffen Group Charged with Baltimore Power Grid Plot," *BBC*, 6 February 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-64493319.

97 Connor Huff and Joshua D. Kertzer, "How the Public Defines Terrorism," *American Journal of Political Science* 62, no. 1 (2018): 55-71, https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12329.

98 See, for example, Erin Kearns, Allison Betus, and Anthony Lemieux, "Why Do Some Terrorist Attacks

Receive More Media Attention Than Others?" *Justice Quarterly* (2019): 1–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2018.1524507; Kimberly A. Powell, "Framing Islam: An analysis of US media coverage of terrorism since 9/11," *Communication Studies* 62, no. 1 (2011): 90-112, https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2011.533599; Zachary S. Mitnik, Joshua D. Freilich, and Steven M. Chermak, "Post-9/11 Coverage of Terrorism in the New York Times," *Justice Quarterly* (2018): 1–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2018.1488985.

99 McCord, "Lessons for Countering the Domestic Terrorism Threat."

100 Catrina Doxsee, "Bad Idea: Domestic Terrorist Organization Designations," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 1 December 2020, https://defense360.csis.org/bad-idea-domestic-terrorist-organization-designations/.

101 For instance, a recent study using 22 years of federal sentencing data found that Black defendants receive average prison sentences that are 1.7 percent longer than White defendants. By comparison, the PIRUS data suggest that the average international terrorism defendant receives a prison sentence that is 220 percent longer than the average domestic extremist. See Bryan Holmes and Ben Feldmeyer, "The Only Thing Constant is Change: Temporal Analyses of Racial/Ethnic Sentencing Disparities," *American Journal of Criminal Justice* (2023), https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-023-09725-9.

PT PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Hidden in Plain Sight: Insurrectionary Anarchism in the Anti-Government Extremism Landscape

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**Abstract:** Anti-government extremism (AGE) stands as a significant contemporary manifestation of political violence. As such, recent scholarly publications have sought to provide novel conceptualisations and analyses of this phenomenon. Despite these valuable contributions, a prominent expression of anti-government extremism – insurrectionary anarchism – is largely absent from the scholarly debate. The aim of this article is thus to narrow this gap by providing a comprehensive exploration and overview of insurrectionary anarchism. To do so, this article builds on the definitions and frameworks elaborated in recent publications to demonstrate that insurrectionary anarchism can and should be included in the contemporary debate on anti-government extremism. Adopting a distinction between ideological and issue-driven anti-government extremism proposed in the literature, this analysis argues that, while insurrectionary anarchism's fundamental opposition to any hierarchical power structures remains its underlying rationale and justification, it essentially functions as a phenomenon driven by specific issues. As part of a lively and varied milieu, insurrectionary anarchist AGE shares parallels with the broader spectrum of anti-government extremism, including an inclination for conspiracy thinking and systematic targeting of politicians and/or governmental representatives. Although it diverges in scale and operational methods from other expressions of AGE, insurrectionary anarchism continues to represent a complex phenomenon that also holds the potential for escalation.

**Keywords:** Anti-government extremism, anti-state, insurrectionary anarchism, political violence, Informal Anarchist Federation, Conspiracy of the Cells of Fire, terrorism

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# Introduction

In recent years, anti-government extremism (AGE) has re-emerged as a major contemporary form of political violence, prompting scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to identify it as a substantial threat to "democracy, political processes, institutions, and elected politicians."[1] Consequently, a wealth of scholarly articles has recently attempted to enhance academic conversations and shed light on the complex and multifaceted nature of anti-government extremism. Among these, two Special Issues published in *Perspectives on Terrorism* stand out. The first issue was published in December 2022, with the second one becoming available a few months later, in March 2023.

Overall, the research articles featured in the Special Issues have made substantial contributions to the study of anti-government extremism, ranging from the role of conspiracy theories to the analysis of specific organisations and movements – such as Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, QAnon, or the German Reichsbürger[2] – and of the patterns of attacks and threats directed towards politicians. However, both issues primarily feature studies on right-wing AGE. Other expressions of anti-government extremism – such as left-wing or anarchist extremism – receive only passing mentions in the context of historical overviews or, occasionally, in endnotes. To their credit, the editors – Tore Bjørgo and Kurt Braddock – sought to cover a broader variety of anti-government movements to include studies not limited to the far-right. The intention envisioned the inclusion of historical and/or contemporary anarchist movements. Yet the call for papers did not result in "contributions of sufficient quality to address left-wing forms of anti-government extremism."[3] Hence, the overwhelming emphasis on right-wing extremism. Additionally, this focus comes with a limited geographical scope, primarily centred on a handful of countries, such as the United States of America, Australia, Germany, and Norway.

The absence of noteworthy contributions – or any contributions at all – on far-left and anarchist extremism in the Special Issues is symptomatic of a broader problem within the scholarly debate on terrorism and political violence: the dearth of meaningful engagement and research that could provide accurate portrayals and analyses of these forms of extremism. Drawing on the four forms of anti-government extremism and the conceptual discussions provided in the Special Issues, this article thus seeks to address the gap identified by the editors by providing an overview of contemporary anarchist anti-government extremism, thereby partially rectifying the lack of engagement with this issue. While its contributions do not do justice to the complexity, nuances, and importance of the topic, this analysis can stimulate a reinvigorated debate on left-wing and anarchist extremism in the terrorism and political violence literature.

The article will begin by critically examining the field and discussing the potential reasons underlying the lack of scholarly inquiry into anarchist violence. Thereafter, it will discuss anarchist anti-government extremism vis-à-vis the conceptual distinction between ideological

AGE and issue-driven AGE provided by Jackson in his contribution to the Special Issues.[4] Finally, the concluding section of the article will undertake an analysis of contemporary anarchist AGE using the two remaining forms identified in the Special Issues – namely conspiracy theories and attacks on politicians and/or governmental representatives.[5]

## Why Should We Care About Anarchist Extremism?

In his famous theory, David C. Rapoport argues that modern terrorism developed through four distinct waves over the last century and a half: the anarchist, the ethno-nationalist (or anti-colonial), the New Left, and the "religious" wave.[6] While scholars have speculated about a potential fifth wave, the decline of the previous waves does not imply the complete disappearance of the forms and expressions of violence associated with them.[7] In the context of anarchist violence, Ariel Koch is, therefore, correct when asserting that "the first (anarchist) wave is still relevant for Europe and North America and should be considered a potential threat."[8] However, the contemporary expression of this first wave – insurrectionary anarchism – received scant scholarly attention. As a few scholars have underscored, insurrectionary anarchism represents "a neglected topic," an "under-researched phenomenon," or an "under-researched milieu."[9] It is noteworthy that, while scholars have been reticent, practitioners and law enforcement agencies have diligently monitored the developments occurring within the anarchist universe. Notably, some of the documents and reports published by these entities – e.g., the yearly Europol Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT), or reports by the European Commission – represent some of the most compelling and comprehensive sources concerning anarchist extremism.[10] The question then arises: why has there been limited scholarly engagement with this subject? A few interrelated factors might provide an answer to this question.

First, a partial explanation can be found in "the event-driven nature of terrorism studies, with research interests influenced by dramatic developments in the terrorist threat and government's changing counterterrorism priorities" which inevitably leads to "the exclusion of other subjects no less deserving of attention."[11] Consequently, research on terrorism and political violence tends to focus on what constitutes – or what is perceived as – the most pressing security concern or threat. Whereas studies on al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other Jihadist organisations have dominated the post-9/11 era, the last few years have witnessed a surge in investigations of far-right extremism – as also reflected in the Special Issues. Therefore, the lack of robust scholarly engagement with anarchist extremism can be linked, in part, to a lower perception of the threat and risk associated with this phenomenon. This is not to say that anarchist violence is infrequent – quite the opposite. The lack of scholarly inquiry is then even more surprising "considering the contrast existing between the current poor number of studies on violent left-wing and anarchist extremism (…) and the quite high numbers of left-wing and anarchist attacks reported by Europol every year."[12] Rather than being an issue of *quantity*, there is a matter of *quality* when it comes to anarchist violence. Anarchists tend to prioritise

actions against property and infrastructure over lethal violence, even though their attacks do occasionally result in casualties.[13] The non-resort to lethal violence does not, however, make anarchists less destructive or less disruptive. In fact, anarchists do pose a serious security threat in several countries. For example, according to Europol, eighteen out of the 28 completed, foiled, or failed terrorist attacks recorded in the EU in 2022 were perpetrated by left-wing and anarchist individuals or groups.[14] These attacks have resulted in damage amounting to millions of euros.[15] Furthermore, in February 2023, the Italian intelligence service noted that insurrectionary anarchism poses the "most concrete and vital" threat to the country as far as clandestine political violence is concerned.[16] Similarly, anarchism still represents, along with ultranationalism, a leading and ongoing threat to the security and political stability of Greece, and a recurring concern in countries like Chile or Spain.[17] In other countries, instead, it poses a lower risk. For example, the UK considers the anarchist threat to be a low one.[18] Overall, the lower profile of anarchist violence might contribute to its lesser appeal as a topic for scholarly investigation.

Linked to this is the prevailing notion that anarchism is an inherently pacifist ideology. While it is undeniable that most anarchists embrace non-violent methods and pacifist ideals, it is equally indisputable that some adherents espouse violence as a legitimate means to achieve their goals.[19] After all, as the next section will discuss, the ideology of anarchism can be somewhat convoluted and, at times, incoherent.

Another potential explanation for the lack of scholarly engagement with anarchist extremism might reside in its geographical distribution. While the current resurgence of far-right politics is a global phenomenon, studies on far-right violence have mostly – albeit not exclusively – covered the Anglosphere along with some North European countries, a trend reflected in the geographical focus of the Special Issues. In contrast, contemporary anarchist extremism is more concentrated in Southern European nations such as Italy, Spain, and Greece, as well as countries like Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Indonesia, Syria, and Ukraine, where several anarchist foreign fighters have participated in the respective conflicts.[20] Therefore, one may argue that a language barrier is preventing scholars from Anglophone countries from investigating anarchist extremism. To their credit, several anarchist websites and blogs translate their posts into different languages thereby partially – and, arguably, inadvertently – resolving this challenge for researchers who are not proficient in those languages. Beyond the potential language barrier, investigating local expressions of anarchist violence undoubtedly requires an understanding of the political, social, historical, and cultural contexts in which they emerge. Doing so will inevitably require the field of terrorism and political studies to broaden its geographical scope and areas of inquiry beyond the topical far-right extremism or Jihadism.

Finally, a recent report suggests that the concepts and ideas associated with the far-left and anarchism align more closely with mainstream societal notions, such as anti-fascism, anti-

racism, and socioeconomic issues.[21] This convergence, coupled with the lower magnitude of anarchist violence discussed above, results in anarchist ideas evoking less astonishment and rejection than their far-right or Jihadist counterparts. Although it is undeniable that far-right politics and ideas are also gaining mainstream traction, potentially leading to the normalisation of extremist ideas, the comparatively "acceptable" nature of anarchist ideals – combined with the less lethal *modus operandi* – helps explain why this topic has received less scholarly attention.[22]

In summary, several factors contribute to relegating the topic of anarchist extremism to the periphery of academic inquiry. These factors include the field's inclination towards more striking forms of terrorism, misconceptions as to the very nature of anarchist extremism, a limited geographical scope, and the perception that anarchist ideas are "less radical." There are, of course, several scholars who have authored seminal works on different aspects of anarchism and anarchist extremism.[23] Yet, these efforts remain a minority, and the knowledge gap persists. As a recent report aptly summarised, there are no exact figures or fresh data about both attacks and attackers, there is no wide-range analysis on the use of the Internet and social media, and the drivers of anarchist radicalisation and extremism are poorly understood.[24] Similarly, anarchism has received little attention in approaches, programmes, and initiatives to prevent or counter violent extremism.[25] Finally, relatively little is known about anarchist foreign fighters' participation in conflict around the world.[26] Therefore, in alignment with the objective of the Special Issues on AGE, this article endeavours to "contribute to open a scholarly discussion on these issues and give us a better grasp on this slippery AGE concept and phenomenon."[27]

## The Four Forms: Placing Anarchism in the Anti-Government Landscape

In the introduction to the Special Issues, Bjørgo and Braddock outline four forms of anti-government extremism, with the first one pertaining to movements, networks, organisations, and individuals that reject the legitimacy of the government *in toto* refusing to submit to its authority. The second form refers to the propagation of conspiracy theories that undermine the legitimacy of governments, their institutions, policies, and political opponents. Then, the third form centres on issue-oriented demonstrations and opposition to specific policies, whereas the last involves violent attacks, plots, threats, and harassment targeting politicians and governmental representatives.[28] Since the first and third forms substantially align and overlap with Jackson's conceptual discussion in his contribution to the Special Issues, the ensuing analysis will commence with these two forms before addressing the second and fourth.

### *Ideological vs Issue-Driven Anti-Government Extremism*

Sam Jackson defines anti-government extremism as "instances of extremism that *primarily* or *consistently* focus on government as a source or cause of perceived crises, where that focus on government is central to the worldviews of the actors in question."[29] This definition is useful for

at least two reasons. First, as Jackson argues, it differentiates this form of extremism from other categories that, while focusing on the government, do not do so with a consistent or primary focus, or treat the government as a proxy for a broader target audience.[30] At the same time, this definition accommodates the possibility of AGE coexisting with other extremist ideologies and ideas – e.g., white supremacy, various conspiracy theories, or anti-technology extremism.[31]

Within this conceptualisation, Jackson identifies two sub-categories, namely ideological anti-government extremism, and issue-driven anti-government extremism. The latter primarily objects to a specific government's actions and/or priorities. A change in policies could, therefore, assuage the extremists and their demands for change. Conversely, ideological anti-government extremism remains rooted in the government's fundamental existence as an oppressive, tyrannical, and malevolent actor. It is important to stress that, as Jackson posits, this distinction between ideological and issue-driven AGE "might not be as clean as suggested here (…). Some individuals might be best understood as ideological AGE but at different times express a form of AGE that seems more issue-driven."[32]

Intuitively, one might assume that anarchism aligns closely with this definition. Yet, despite conceding that "it might be reasonable to say that anarchist extremism fits the definition of anti-government extremism," Jackson argues against this notion.[33] While acknowledging that "[a]t a very broad level, it is true that both right-wing anti-government extremists and anarchists oppose the state in important ways," he adds that "anarchist extremists often advocate for a radically inclusive form of governance, perhaps best understood as a non-hierarchical form of direct democracy." Opposed to that, "right-wing anti-government extremists instead typically argue in favour of excluding people from a political community or restricting participation in public life, often for racial, ethnic, or cultural reasons."[34] Therefore, Jackson argues for excluding anarchism from the AGE category noting that including it "blurs the category in unhelpful ways, and we can better understand and explain anarchism by treating it as a concept on its own rather than folding into a broader category alongside right-wing AGE."[35]

There are two problematic assumptions in this argument. First, it treats anarchism as a monolithic political theory, ideology, and philosophy. As the subsequent paragraphs will illustrate, anarchism is diverse and multifaceted.[36] With its different strands come different perspectives on governance. While acknowledging a degree of diversity within the anarchist universe by noting that anarchist extremists *often* "advocate for a radically inclusive form of governance," this portrayal fails to capture the complexity of anarchist tradition and theory. Additionally, promoting certain perspectives on governance does not necessarily diminish or weaken anarchists' anti-government stance. Advocating specific governance models does not imply support for a different form or practice of government. The idea that it is possible to achieve governance without government is not an innovative one and has been explored in various publications, including papers that drew inspiration from the anarchist tradition.[37]

This can be similarly applied to right-wing anti-government extremism, wherein proponents advance distinctive governance ideas rooted in racial, ethnic, or cultural considerations without detracting from their anti-government stance.

Similarly, one could also argue the reverse of Jackson's statement. Treating right-wing extremism as an independent concept – though often displaying, *inter alia*, anti-government sentiments – could potentially enhance the understanding of this milieu. However, as also noted in the introduction to the Special Issues, including anarchism in discussions about anti-government extremism would be beneficial for "comparative reasons as well as for ideological balance."[38] Even more so, since both anarchist and right-wing anti-government extremists share similar positions on various issues, such as opposition to COVID-19 restrictions and vaccines, as well as 5G and other emerging technologies.[39]

To his credit, Jackson stresses that his definition of anti-government extremism reflects his "interest in understanding the relatively more mainstream correlates of AGE in the United States" and that, therefore, it "might not be equally helpful for research in other contexts."[40] He then correctly argues that disagreements about a definition are not necessarily a problem as long as researchers agree on the core concept of anti-government extremism.[41] Yet, this is not a matter of conflicting characteristics; rather, it is about arguing that anarchism can be comprehended and analysed within Jackson's conceptual framework, provided certain misconceptions about anarchism are rectified. This naturally leads to the subsequent point of discussion: understanding anarchism and its place within the landscape of anti-government extremism.

## *What is Anarchism? What is Anarchist Anti-Government Extremism?*

As previously mentioned, anarchism is a complex and multifaceted ideology. The following quote – from an anarchist's document published online – eloquently captures this diversity within anarchism:

> *To call yourself an anarchist is to invite identification with an unpredictable array of associations, an ensemble which is unlikely to mean the same thing to any two people, including any two anarchists. (The most predictable is the least accurate: the bomb-thrower. But anarchists have thrown bombs, and some still do.)*[42]

This quote effectively highlights crucial aspects of contemporary anarchism, namely the diverse nature of anarchism and its contradictory stances on violence. Indeed, it suggests that there is ample room for disagreement among anarchists. The author goes on to note that anarchists are "at odds over work, industrialism, unionism, urbanism, science, sexual freedom, religion and much more which is more important, especially when taken together, than anything that unites

them."[43] In the words of Borum and Tilby, "the nuances are myriad and complex."[44] In fact, "[e]ver since anarchism was born in the nineteenth century as an ideology and a political and social movement, it has meant many different things, both to its supporters and to its opponents."[45] Anarchists "are notorious for disagreeing with each other"; a natural tendency towards dissent "for people whose fundamental principle is the rejection of authority."[46] Therefore, anarchism can be conceived as "a set of overlapping and sometimes competing traditions or aspects rather than a general theory or coherent ideology" and is also "characterized by the continual capacity to redefine and reconfigure itself."[47] According to Purkis and Bower, one of the main reasons behind the endurance of anarchism is "the fact that regardless of context it asks challenging questions about the nature of power."[48]

Yet, despite these differences, there are still essential characteristics that can be identified within anarchism. At its core, anarchism rejects the legitimacy of the state and authorities.[49] In other words, anarchists do not "oppose *who* is in power, but they generally oppose the notion that *anyone* is in power."[50] However, anarchists disagree on what constitutes the best approach or strategy to destroy the current existing structures and on the ways that the revolution should unfold.[51] In this regard, a major bone of contention lies in the legitimacy of the resort to violence. While many ascribe to non-violent resistance and pacifism, some anarchists justify violence against property and/or individuals.[52] This divergence has accompanied anarchism since its very inception. Already back in 1894, for example, as the world reacted with shock at the bombings and assassinations perpetrated by the anarchists, Errico Malatesta – a major proponent of the resort to violence – argued that while "the Anarchist Idea (…) is by its very nature opposed to violence," the employment of physical force was inevitable to fight the "legions of soldiers and police (…) ready to massacre and imprison anyone who will not meekly submit to the laws which a handful of privileged persons have made in their own interests."[53] These contrasting positions on the legitimacy of violence serve as a powerful reminder that anarchism is not a monolithic ideology and that various strands exist within it. Some examples include Green Anarchism, Anarcho-Primitivism, Anarcha-Feminism, Anarcho-Communism, Anarcho-Individualism, and Anarcho-Syndicalism. However, for the purpose of this discussion, this article will primarily focus on Insurrectionary Anarchism – a subset of anarchism that stands out for its commitment to violence and revolutionary insurrection. This strand of anarchism is often associated with violent actions against property, sabotage, bombings, and occasionally more serious forms of violence.[54] It is important to note that these strands can overlap and intersect – i.e., an insurrectionary anarchist can espouse anarcho-primitivist ideas or subscribe to anarcho-individualism. For the remaining discussion, the terms insurrectionary anarchism and anarchism will be used interchangeably unless otherwise specified.

Going back to Jackson's definition, this article contends that anarchism aligns with both ideological and issue-driven anti-government extremism. With respect to ideological AGE, the government is viewed as the root cause of all the conditions that allow for oppressive and

hierarchical relationships of power within society. These relationships are primarily maintained through violence, and – according to the more extremist interpretations of anarchism – it is with violence that they must be destroyed. The opposition to the government is not only expressed against its repressive institutions such as the police, prisons, the law, the armed forces etc. but also against those institutions that are "apparently benevolent – subsidised bodies and local councils, nationalised industries and public corporations, banks and insurance companies, schools and universities, press and broadcasting (…)."[55] As such, there can be rather broad interpretations of what constitutes government. However, anarchist AGE is also driven by specific issues. Anarchists mobilise around certain issues, such as COVID-19 restrictions,[56] the abolition of the prison system,[57] the environment,[58] the rise of far-right political parties and organisations,[59] and technological progress.[60]

Therefore, ideological anti-government extremism represents the *raison d'être* of anarchist anti-government extremism. So long as there will be governments, there will be anarchist anti-government extremism. At the same time, specific issues contribute to the fluctuation and mobilisation of anarchist AGE. For example, a wave of anarchist violence has recently swept Italy along with other countries, including Greece, Spain, Chile, Germany, and Argentina. The *casus belli* was provided by Alfredo Cospito, a prominent anarchist and militant of the Informal Anarchist Federation. Cospito – who has been imprisoned since 2012 – launched a hunger strike to protest the imposition of a particular prison regime system. Building upon their long-standing opposition to the criminal justice system as a constitutive part of their anti-government stance, anarchists launched a series of demonstrations and attacks against the Italian government both domestically and abroad in solidarity with Cospito.[61]

All in all, in maintaining that ideological AGE represents the *raison d'être* of anarchism whereas specific issues provide the necessary *casus belli* for mobilisation, Jackson's categorisation helps to make sense of anarchist anti-government extremism at a conceptual level while also highlighting how the two categories intertwine at the practical one. Before moving on to analysing the two remaining forms of anarchist AGE, it is necessary to provide a brief discussion on the main characteristics of anarchist anti-government violence and *modus operandi*. This will not only substantiate the above discussion but also provide context for the following sections.

## *Hallmarks of Insurrectionary Anarchism*

Generally speaking, a few hallmarks characterise anarchist extremism. First, its operational and organisational principles resemble leaderless resistance, emphasising decentralised actions without hierarchical leadership or a network of support.[62] Despite this lack of central organisation, informal leaders may emerge to provide general ideological guidance, specific and/or general targets of interest, or even technical information without assuming any formal role.[63] In addition to this leaderless nature, anarchists emphasise the recourse to direct actions as a means to achieve their goals.[64] Associated with the concept of "propaganda of the deed",

direct actions can be conceived as a series of practices of protest and resistance against societal structures, individuals, and/or positions of power;[65] "[t]hrough unmediated action, oppressed individuals and groups attempt to overturn or destroy that which subjects them."[66] Direct actions can range from non-violent tactics to more confrontational and, at times, violent ones.[67] Anarchists also organise into affinity groups. Emerging at the end of the 19th century in the Spanish anarchist movement, an affinity group "is an autonomous militant unit (…) who share a sense of the cause worth defending and of the types of actions they prefer to engage in."[68] In doing so, however, they do not act as a revolutionary vanguard, which would essentially be a form of hierarchical structure and command.[69] When the need arises, informal organisations can emerge as a means to coordinate affinity groups.[70] The informal organisation thus represents a form of coordination that "lacks the formality and authority which separate organisers and organised."[71] Communication between affinity groups within informal organisations is carried out primarily in an indirect way – that is, through direct actions and the related communiqués published on anarchist blogs and websites.[72] Any affinity group or individual can launch a campaign and explain its rationale through communiqués. Other affinity groups can then decide whether to join the campaign or not.[73] Usually, these campaigns develop along a two-level approach. This consists of a movementist approach – i.e., infiltration of public demonstration and promotion of more antagonistic forms of struggle – and a clandestine one, including covert direct actions.[74] It must be noted that, while anarchists popularised this organisational form, affinity groups have spread well beyond the boundaries of insurrectionary anarchism. Several activist groups have indeed adopted them without being necessarily infiltrated by anarchists or without promoting illegitimate forms of protests and activism.[75]

When it comes to the movementist approach, a prominent representative is Antifa, an anti-fascist "militant, non-hierarchical, geographically dispersed social movement comprised of local autonomous groups."[76] Antifa militants are often involved in street protests which may involve the targeted destruction of property, vandalism, and ransacking.[77] In doing so, they resort to *black blocs* tactics – militants wearing black clothing and masks to conceal their identities. Originating in the West German Autonomous Movement of the 1980s, this tactic has become a hallmark of anti-fascist and anarchist street fights and demonstrations across the globe,[78] in particular following the 1999 Battle of Seattle at the World Trade Organisation conference.[79] Other than preventing the identification of individual militants by the authorities or other opponents, black blocs are also used to de-arrest militants who are apprehended during street fighting by trying and overwhelming the police to remove their comrades from detention.[80] Thus, social movements – defined as "informal networks, based on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about conflictual issues, trough the frequent use of various forms of protest"[81] – represent a vibrant component of anti-government extremism, a fact also evidenced by some of the case studies discussed in the Special Issue (such as the article on the Reichsbürger). Yet, there is an important distinction to make here between activist movements that promote participation in normative political actions – such as lawful and/or non-violent

methods – and extremist movements that promote violence or a mixture of violent and non-violent strategies.[82] While many anarchists are involved in non-violent demonstrations or political actions, anarchist movements such as Antifa do promote the resort to violence, thus contributing to delegitimising their struggle.

When adopting the clandestine approach, instead, anarchist violence relies on a repertoire of tactics which includes arson, sabotage, assault, bombings, shootings, damage against property, and (less frequently) murder.[83] While anarchist violence rarely results in fatalities, some militants advocate for more extreme and nihilistic positions.[84] Additionally, operational capabilities are generally low – i.e., anarchists rarely resort to spectacular or complex *modi operandi.* The most sophisticated attacks are carried out using rudimentary improvised explosive devices or improvised incendiary devices.[85] Occasionally, certain cells might display a more sophisticated *modus operandi* – in particular, in the main hotbeds of Italy and Greece – but this remains the exception.[86] The most prominent of such clandestine organisations is the Informal Anarchist Federation – International Revolutionary Front (FAI-FRI, *Federazione Anarchica Informale – Fronte Rivoluzionario Internazionale*). Emerging in 2003 in Italy, the FAI has grown to become what is likely the world's largest anarchist network and the one that claims the highest number of attacks. In 2011, it underwent an internationalisation process with the establishment of the International Revolutionary Front. From then on, cells would usually sign with the acronym FAI-FRI. The FAI-FRI has claimed responsibility for attacks conducted in many countries, including Italy, Greece, Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Chile, Brazil, and Mexico.[87]

Another major anarchist organisation is the Conspiracy of Cells of Fire (CCF, *Συνωμοσία Πυρήνων της Φωτιάς* – sometimes also translated as Conspiracy of the Fire Nuclei). Established in 2008 in Greece, the CCF has been responsible for the 2010 series of parcel bombs sent to European political leaders and foreign embassies along with numerous other actions involving bombings and incendiary devices targeting government buildings and representatives as well as law enforcement and bans.[88] Some of these attacks have also resulted in casualties other than property damage. CCF supported the launch of the FAI-FRI and, in general, it is believed to have operational links with the Informal Anarchist Federation.[89]

While some anarchists do not use acronyms or claim responsibility for attacks, other groups include Rouvikonas (*Ρουβίκωνας*), the Nucleus of Opposition to the System (*Núcleo de Oposição ao Sistema*), the Sect of Revolutionaries (*Σέχτα των Επαναστατών*), the Organisation for Revolutionary Self-Defence (Οργανισμός Επαναστατικής Αυτοάμυνας), the International Revolutionary People's Guerrilla Forces, and the Antagonic Nuclei of the New Urban Guerrilla (*Núcleos Antagónicos de la Nueva Guerrilla Urbana*). This list is quite reductive and includes only major networks and organisations. Typically, smaller cells claim affiliation with a larger one – in particular, the FAI-FRI and CCF – when carrying out attacks.[90]

In summary, anarchism is a diverse ideology with differing perspectives on violence. Anarchists fundamentally reject hierarchical power structures and government authority while also mobilising around specific issues. Their operational principles involve leaderless resistance, direct actions, and affinity groups. While anarchist violence tends to avoid fatalities and is generally low-tech, it employs a range of tactics often coordinated by loose informal organisations. This multifaceted nature of anarchism is instrumental in understanding the two remaining expressions of AGE identified by Bjørgo and Braddock, namely the forms associated with conspiracy theories and attacks against politicians and government representatives.

## *Anarchism and Conspiracy Theories*

Overall, conspiracy theories have been positively associated with willingness to, or justifications for, the resort to violence.[91] In particular, they have risen to prominence in the narrative and ideologies of several right-wing extremist groups and individuals.[92] Similarly, conspiracy theories have also found a place within anarchist extremist circles, even though in a less pervasive and ubiquitous fashion when compared to far-right milieus.[93] Unlike certain highly structured and catchy conspiracy theories prevalent on the far right – e.g., the Great Replacement Theory, Eurabia, Zionist Occupation Government, or QAnon – anarchist conspiracy theories do often appear less organised, less coherent, and more open to the interpretation of the individual militants with some going as far as openly rejecting them. To some extent, this milieu tends to lean more towards conspiracy thinking, rather than fully articulated conspiracy theories. Nonetheless, such conspiracy thinking does provide powerful narrative devices that can contribute to guiding anarchist direct actions thereby increasing their impact.

Unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic offered fertile ground for conspiracy theories to flourish within the anarchist milieu. For example, Campion et al. showed how anarchist blogs attempted to establish a link between 5G technologies and the Coronavirus pandemic, suggesting that 5G weakened people's immune systems.[94] Additionally, the pandemic was also considered 'an opportunity to justify the introduction of 5G network' since "[f]ear is an ideal feeling to push us even further towards a world where human beings would be governed by 'intelligent objects' and by those who program them."[95] This narrative framed the pandemic response as a means of oppression against the subaltern classes.[96] Subalternity is here conceived in the Gramscian acceptation as the "intersectionality of the variations of race, class, gender, culture, religion, nationalism and colonialism functioning within an ensemble of socio-political and economic relations (…)" which denotes a condition in which "subaltern groups are subordinated to the power, will, influence, leadership, and direction of a dominant group or a 'single combination' of dominant groups."[97]

Related to the pandemic narrative, anti-vaccine sentiments also emerged. On the one hand, some militants questioned the COVID-19 vaccination campaign without resorting to conspiracy tropes.[98] On the other hand, however, others seemed quite comfortable in embracing them.

For example, according to an anonymous writer, it would be naïve to think that the worldwide vaccination programme is just a functional answer to the unforeseen spread of SARS-CoV-2.[99] They argue that so-called folkloric ideas about Bill Gates and population control are "certainly closer to the truth than the progressive illusion according to which techno-scientific development is not only neutral but even a factor of emancipation…"[100] In other words, the vaccination campaign is part and parcel of the elites' project of domination and modern totalitarianism:[101] "the programme to vaccinate billions of people (…) is born out of a similar convergence of powers that declared 'war on terror' to justify bombings. Bombs or vaccines, these are two moves stemming from the same command centres."[102] As discussed at the Fifth International Meeting Three Days Against Techno-Sciences held in Italy at the end of July 2023, vaccines are also associated with infertility, cancer, and genetic engineering.[103] Interestingly, some anarchists find it ironic that such considerations can be labelled as a conspiracy theory viewing it as part of the elites' own conspiracy to discredit the revolutionaries as enemies of collective health.[104]

Anarchist conspiracy theories extend beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and often tie into the broader narrative about the role of technology in society. In particular, some anarchists believe that emerging technologies are enabling the state and the elites to establish a *prison society*, wherein the subaltern classes are permanently enslaved.[105] These theories contend that nation-states cannot adapt to the new technological landscape without relinquishing their democratic pretences.[106] Consequently, "[t]he post-industrial nation-states are at risk, and are increasingly revealing their own developed and connected prison-society projects; the ascendant form of power relations backed by the multinational corporations."[107] Communication technologies, medicine, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence and other technologies are all contributing to this new form of totalitarianism.[108]

Actions stemming from these conspiracy theories include attacks on vaccination centres, telecommunications infrastructure, health institutes, research facilities, and technology-related companies. Anarchist extremists have carried out these attacks as a response to their beliefs about the implications of modern technologies and the perceived control exerted by the state and corporations.[109]

Summing up, conspiracy theories have become part of the narrative within anarchist extremist circles, influencing their direct actions and mobilisation strategies. These theories often focus on the role of technology, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While they are less articulated and coherent when compared to the conspiracy theories that are popular among far-right milieus, they nonetheless offer powerful narrative devices and contribute to shaping the anarchists' worldview and tactics.

## *Anarchism and Actions Against Politicians and/or Governmental Representatives*

Finally, anarchist anti-government extremism has historically manifested in the form of attacks and harassment against politicians and governmental representatives. The first wave of modern terrorism – the anarchist wave – saw numerous bombings in the 19th century. However, its main hallmark lay in the series of assassinations that targeted monarchs, heads of state, and heads of government.[110] This period, also referred to as the Golden Age of Assassination, witnessed the death of prominent figures such as Russian Czar Alexander II (1881), French President Carnot (1894), Spanish Premier Canovas (1897), Austrian Empress Elizabeth (1898), Italy's King Umberto I (1900), and US President McKinley (1901).[111] These high-profile assassinations undoubtedly marked a significant chapter in the history of anarchist violence.

While contemporary anarchist violence against politicians and governmental representatives may not reach the same level of intensity as the assassinations of the past, it remains a significant concern in many countries. The methods and targets have evolved, reflecting changes in society and the security landscape. Parcel bombs have been used to target political offices, as well as foreign embassies, politicians, and military bases. While the frequency of assassinations and the intensity of assaults are notably lower today, they still occur, particularly in Southern Europe and Latin America.[112] The historical context of the Golden Age of Assassination serves as a backdrop to the ongoing challenges posed by anarchist anti-government extremism. While the contemporary landscape may be less lethal, the persistence of attacks against politicians and government representatives underscores the enduring nature of anarchist movements and their continued impact on the political sphere. The subsequent paragraphs will now provide a few examples to epitomise the type of violence described here while also enriching and giving substance to the above claim.

Upon entering the stage of political violence in 2003, the Informal Anarchist Federation launched Operation Santa Claus with a series of parcel bombs targeting European Union representatives, senior officials, and institutions, including Romano Prodi who was serving as President of the EU Commission at the time.[113] Greek militants of the Conspiracy of Cells of Fire followed suit in 2010, similarly targeting EU leaders and embassies with parcel bombs.[114] Anarchist groups often direct their attacks at foreign embassies as also seen with the FAI's bombings of the Swiss and Chilean embassies in Rome which resulted in two employees being injured.[115] More recently, as the anarchist wave of solidarity with Alfredo Cospito propagated across the globe, Italian embassies, consulates, and diplomats were attacked in multiple countries, including Germany, Chile, Greece, and Argentina.[116] Similarly, Indonesia experienced an attack – undertaken in solidarity with Cospito – on a local parliament building in Bandung in April 2023.[117]

In addition to high-profile targets, lower-ranking figures also face anarchist aggression. In Greece, anarchist formations have repeatedly assaulted members of the neo-Nazi party Golden

Dawn. Some of these attacks resulted in injuries or death.[118] In Chile, instead, anarchists have broken into the homes of police officers to attack them, while the Brazilian Nucleus of Opposition to the System has doxed prominent military leaders and government officials as part of their campaign.[119]

Italy has also seen anarchists targeting judges and public prosecutors.[120] While these targets do not necessarily represent the government, *stricto sensu*, they are seen as part of the broader criminal justice system and thus implicated in the functioning of the government. As discussed above, anarchists have a rather broad understanding of what constitutes the government and, therefore, institutions like the criminal justice system are considered complicit in maintaining hierarchical power structures. Additionally, some attacks take on a symbolic rather than purely destructive nature. The Greek anarchist group Rouvikonas, for example, engages in paint-throwing attacks against government targets such as embassies or personal offices of ministers. These actions carry a strong symbolic message and seek to publicly demonstrate opposition to the government and its representatives.[121] While the actions of Rouvikonas tend to target governmental property rather than actual governmental representatives, the intended audience of such actions remains politicians and governments. For example, in 2019, Rouvikonas vandalised the private office of Education Minister Niki Kerameus after the government lifted a ban that prevented law enforcement officers from entering university campuses.[122] Therefore, violence against governmental property becomes a means to attempt to intimidate, coerce, or protest politicians and governmental representatives.

As mentioned previously, these anti-government direct actions against politicians and/or government representatives are no match when compared to the 19th century series of assassinations that decapitated several Western governments. One might speculate that both the lower propensity for bloodshed among contemporary anarchists and the state's more efficient means of control and repression have contributed to these qualitative differences in violence. However, this discussion – and the handful of examples that come with it – shows how anarchist anti-government extremism finds different expressions when it comes to attacks on politicians and/or government representatives. While a few of these actions still result in casualties or (more frequently) in property damage, their persistence is indicative of a lingering threat that anarchists pose to democratic institutions and politicians – a threat which, in line with the trends that characterised the second decade of the 20th century, could continue to escalate.[123]

In summary, contemporary anarchist anti-government extremism encompasses a diverse array of targets, including not only high-profile politicians but also individuals associated with law enforcement, the military, legal institutions, and even those aligned with perceived oppressive ideologies. This multifaceted targeting reflects the broader anarchist perspective that views various individuals and institutions as complicit in maintaining an oppressive system.

## Conclusion

As discussed throughout this article, anarchist anti-government extremism has not been relegated to the past. While its magnitude and *modus operandi* have changed over the decades, anarchist AGE still represents a dynamic and relevant phenomenon. The objective of this analysis was to provide an overview of anarchist anti-government extremism and, ideally, reverse the general trend when it comes to the lack of scholarly engagement with this topic. As initially noted, numerous dimensions within this phenomenon warrant more comprehensive exploration; this article, however, offers an introductory overview.

Using the framework and conceptual discussion provided in the Special Issues, this article argued that anarchism constitutes both a form of ideological and issue-driven anti-government extremism. As anarchists fundamentally consider them the root of all evil, they strive to abolish any hierarchical and oppressive relationships of power crystallised in the idea of state and government. However, in their praxis, anarchists tend to be more reactive rather than proactive and, therefore, their lines of intervention, or campaign, develop along different issues ranging from the environment to the rise of far-right parties and technological progress. Occasionally, conspiracy theories play a role in shaping their narrative of insurrectionary anarchists surrounding these issues. Having said that, anarchist conspiracy theories are usually less structured and less pervasive compared to those found in far-right groups, such as Reichsbürger or QAnon. Nonetheless, they can still exert considerable appeal among anarchist extremists and inform their direct actions.

Finally, anarchist AGE has also found a powerful expression through targeted attacks and harassment directed at politicians and government representatives. While contemporary instances might not parallel the Golden Age of Assassination witnessed in the 19th century, the trend persists, especially in regions like Southern Europe and Latin America. Notably, these attacks also encompass lower-ranking targets, including members of specific political parties, law enforcement officials, and judicial figures. These actions align with anarchists' broad perception of what constitutes an oppressive government, thus expanding their range of targets.

Overall, as evidenced throughout this article, insurrectionary anarchism represents a serious security issue in several countries. Anarchist attacks occasionally result in considerable financial and economic damage, disruption, and (more rarely) casualties. Now, when compared to the more striking and more lethal attacks perpetrated by far-right or Jihadist groups and individuals, it is perhaps natural to consider insurrectionary anarchists a lesser threat. After all, how can one compare massacres like the 2015 Paris attacks or the 2011 Norway attacks with the actions of the anarchists? Yet measuring the seriousness of a security threat entirely or largely on the scale of physical destruction and the number of victims of the attacks can be

misleading. For example, in 1972, the Provisional IRA launched hundreds of operations a month – Moloney argues that May 1972 alone saw around 1,200 Provisional IRA operations.[124] 1972 is also the year that recorded the highest number of victims during the Irish Troubles.[125] Twenty years later, on 10 April 1992, the PIRA bombed the Baltic Exchange in London in an attack that caused three deaths, ninety-one injured, and damage worth 800 million pounds – which was, McGladdery argues, worth the combined effect of 10,000 bombs in Northern Ireland.[126] When did, then, the Provisional IRA constitute a more serious threat? In 1972, when it reached the peak of its activity, or in 1992 when its actions had considerable economic and financial consequences? Arguably, these are two different forms of security threats or other ways to look at them. It goes without saying that the loss of even just one life is an irreparable tragedy, but the magnitude of a security threat is not necessarily linked to its lethality. Terrorism itself, as a phenomenon, rarely constitutes an existential threat, and yet it is often portrayed as such.[127] Furthermore, the above-mentioned Cospito affair shows that insurrectionary anarchism's potential for societal conflict and violence can thrive when polarising issues are at stake – in this case, the special prison regime system. Having said that, this article is not trying to suggest that insurrectionary anarchism should be securitised or that extraordinary measures should be implemented against it. If anything, the Cospito affair shows that the heavy hand of the Italian justice system contributed significantly to escalating the situation.[128] As always, a proportioned approach that does not overemphasise a military response and that adheres to democratic principles and the rule of law should be the cornerstone of every counterterrorism strategy.[129]

In conclusion, the article's contribution lies not only in highlighting the ongoing relevance of anarchist anti-government extremism but also in underscoring the need for rigorous academic examination of this phenomenon. By incorporating anarchism into the discourse on anti-government extremism, a more comprehensive understanding can emerge. Furthermore, the potential for comparative studies between different extremist ideologies, such as far-right and anarchist extremism, offers an avenue to explore intersections and overlaps on specific issues like COVID-19 responses. Additionally, delving deeper into contemporary anarchism's intricacies, including aspects like data scarcity and the presence of anarchist foreign fighters, holds promise for enriching our knowledge of this field.

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PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Violence After Victory? Civil Wars, One-Sided Wins, and Terrorism in the Post-Conflict Period

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**Abstract:** Our research juxtaposes terrorism with intrastate wars. We start from the assumption that terrorism is politically motivated and examine the persistence of these motivations following one-sided civil war victories. Using a difference-in-difference (DID) model and benchmark sensitivity analysis, we analyse over 70 terrorist groups active during civil wars from 1970-2014. We find that one-sided insurgent victories are both less frequent and less stable than one-sided incumbent wins. Post-conflict terrorism is purposeful in the sense that actors employ this form of violence to express dissatisfaction with war outcomes. In general, terrorism by pro-government actors drops off sharply in the post-conflict period; yet terrorism by anti-government actors tends to increase. This increase is particularly noteworthy following one-sided insurgent victories; the regime change inherent in such victories does little to quell the motivation for terrorist violence among ancillary nonstate actors in the post-war period.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, civil wars, difference-in-difference models, one-sided wins, post-conflict violence

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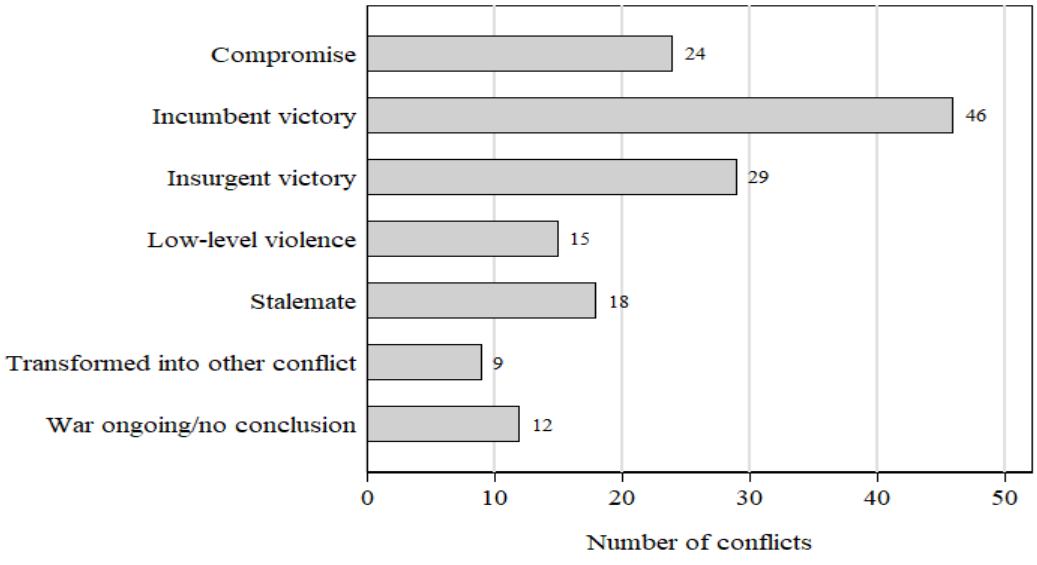
# Introduction

During the Intifada of 6 February 1984, the Amal Party and the Druze Progressive Socialist Party defeated the Lebanese military forces and took control of the capital of Lebanon. This ended the Fourth Lebanese Civil War. Despite this insurgent victory, fifteen terrorist attacks resulted in death or injury to hundreds of innocent civilians during the following year. Similar events took place in 2013. In the Central African Republic (CAR), Muslim Seleka rebels overthrew the incumbent regime and forcibly seized power. Again, in spite of – or because of – the insurgent win, there were at least seven new terrorist attacks by splinter groups of former Seleka rebels during the subsequent year. These two vignettes motivate our research. We pose questions such as, what is the effect of definitive, one-sided victories on post-war terrorism? Is post-war terrorism motivated by the war outcome and/or characteristics of the winning party? Under which circumstances do terrorists, who were active during the war, continue to employ similar violence during the post-conflict period?

In this study, we focus on terrorism during the transition out of intrastate war. Civil wars typically end in one-sided victories (Figure 1), yet these outcomes are comparatively neglected within the civil war literature.[1]

*Figure 1. Sample Population of Civil Wars Involving Terrorism Organised by Type of Ending 1970-2014*




Source: EDTG 1970-2014; UCDP/PRIO 1970-2014

In addition, authors posit that terrorism employed during wartime is both purposeful and, more importantly, linked to the central fighting.[2] In other words, militant actors pursue wartime terrorism to accomplish goals within the context of the central fighting. These two events – i.e., the primary conflict and acts of terrorism – are spatially and substantively related. These actors' objectives may include motivating the war effort, coercing civilians, cost-effectively displaying power, and incentivising concessions from the opposing party.[3] Thus, regardless of its success rate, wartime terrorist violence is purposeful. In addition, if we assume for the sake of argument that intra-war terrorism is motivated by political goals, are these goals at least partially fulfilled by a one-sided victory?

To answer this conundrum, we analyse over 70 terrorist groups active during civil wars from 1970-2014. We hypothesise that terrorist activity is closely related to the outcome of the war and the winning party. More specifically, when groups share orientations in common with the winning party, the need for terrorism declines. For instance, terrorism by pro-government groups should decrease following an incumbent victory. Likewise, we postulate that an insurgent victory should reduce the need for terrorism among anti-government actors. To test these conjectures, we employ a negative binomial difference-in-difference (DID) model with fixed effects and multivariate controls. We additionally perform a sensitivity analysis to solidify the robustness of our results. Ultimately, we find that terrorism by pro-government actors is intuitive. Moreover, pro-government actors represent a minority of terrorist groups more generally. Across both one-sided victories for either the incumbent or the insurgents, terrorist violence is primarily perpetrated by anti-government actors. When an insurgent wins, these victories tend to be highly unstable, and terrorism by nonstate actors increases overall. Our supplemental analysis demonstrates that even when one group of insurgents wins the war – and presumptively enacts a regime change – these events do little to placate the political goals of ancillary terrorist groups. As a result, we obtain the counter-intuitive finding that terrorism tends to increase following one-sided insurgent victories in civil wars.

# Literature Review

## *Defining Terrorist Actors*

In this study, we emphasise that *terrorism* is a violent tactic, not a precise type of actor. Chenoweth et al.[4] loosely define this tactic as the use of violence by non-state actors with the intent to instil fear beyond their immediate victims; this violence is aimed at a broader audience. We loosely adopt this definition; however, we underscore the variety of groups who employ this form of political violence. For instance, scholars may further subdivide groups using inclusive or exclusive definitions.[5] Inclusive definitions broadly consider any group engaging in terrorist tactics as a *terrorist group*. This perspective focuses on the method of violence; it makes few assumptions regarding the identity or goals of the groups who employ it. Additionally, this formulation typically incorporates subnational political organisations with organised command structures. Groups who target civilians with terror are ethically unique among violent political actors.[6] In contrast, exclusive definitions of terrorist groups are more narrow. *Terrorist groups* are explicitly non-territorial, while *guerillas* employ terrorist tactics with the goal of maintaining territory. Exclusive definitions also emphasise that a group must predominantly use terrorist tactics as opposed to peaceful activities, such as protests, or other forms of political violence, such as insurgencies, riot, and coup d'états.[7]

The notion that terrorism is a single tactic, rather than a defining characteristic, is taken up by other scholars such as Young and Shellman,[8] who explore this debate in greater detail. They argue that the landscape of dissident tactics is not homogenous; some groups specialise in a single tactic, such as terrorism, while others adopt a mix of tactics. This distinction is crucial for understanding the strategic choices and classifications of violent nonstate actors. In their study, Young and Shellman[9] dissect differences between groups, whom they define as terrorist organisations and insurgent groups, respectively, based on their targets and tactics. They posit that insurgent groups are primarily engaged in actions against state institutions, aiming for political change or control, while terrorist organisations are characterised by their targeting of societal elements, often using fear and violence to achieve their aims.[10]

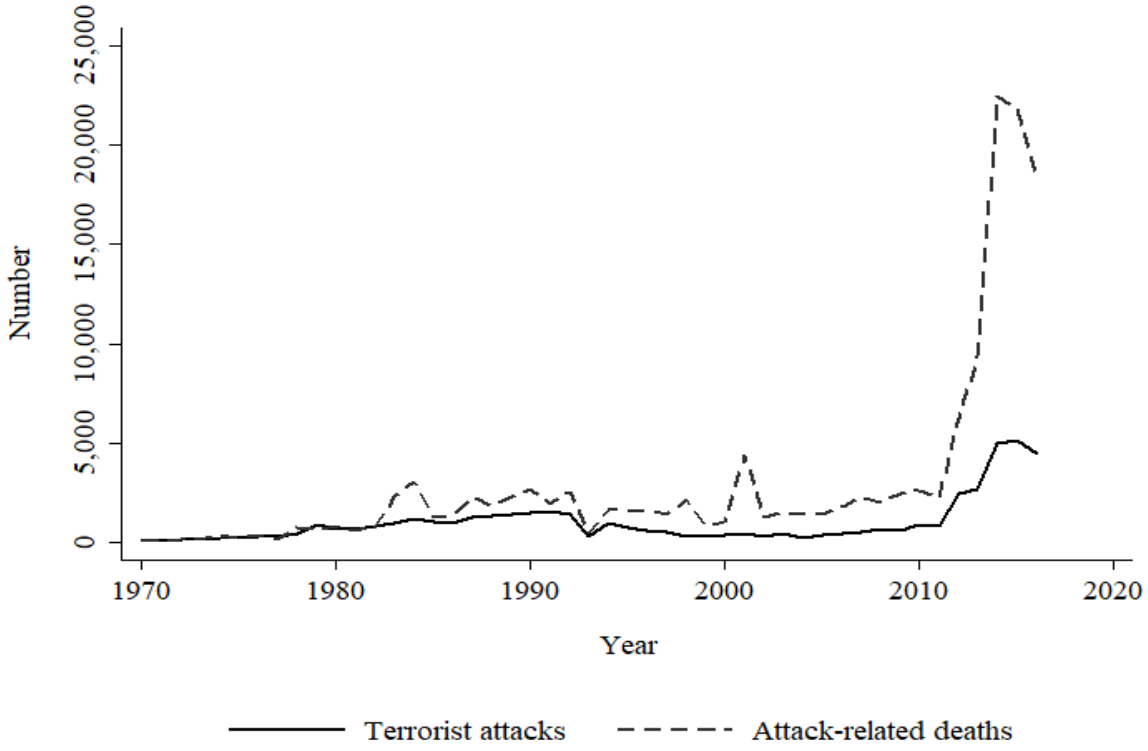
Our work bridges this diverse array of definitions and perspectives. We adopt an inclusive definition of terrorism in the sense we are primarily concerned with groups who employ

terrorism as a tactic; our definition includes both guerillas and insurgents, in the ways that these concepts have been previously defined.[11] More specifically, our loose formulation of terrorism as a tactic is consistent with the definition of political violence offered by Hou, Gaibulloev, and Sandler.[12] These scholars define a terrorist organisation as a "non-state entity comprising individuals who pursue political objectives by employing intimidation tactics against a specific audience or constituency, primarily through the use of violence or the threat thereof."[13] This definition emphasises the ideologies and goals of these groups, which are pivotal to the causal mechanisms that we wish to understand.

## *Juxtaposing Terrorism with Intrastate War*

Scholarship demonstrates that a majority of terrorist activity occurs *during* – rather than before or after – civil wars;* additionally, most extremist acts are linked to the primary fighting, rather than spatially or substantively outside the war.[14] During civil wars, terrorist groups engage in violence with the political goal of coercing people outside the sphere of their immediate victims. This form of political violence has increased dramatically over the last several decades (see Figure 2). Terrorist groups attack both belligerents and civilians because they want to impact a wider audience. However, it is less costly to attack civilians in comparison with government troops.[15] Terrorist actors harm civilians to maintain the appearance of strength while pursuing political and military goals with minimal resources.[16]

*Figure 2. Global Terrorist Attacks and Related Deaths 1970-2016*




During wartime, terrorists employ minimal resources to attack civilians and incentivise political concessions.[17] Terrorists view civilians in strategic ways. When violence takes the form of terrorism combined with racketeering, it permits actors to coerce civilian loyalties and

* Note: We adopt the UCDP-PRIO notion of civil wars defined as 1000 or more battle deaths within a one-year period (Davies, Pettersson, and Öberg 2022; Gleditsch et al. 2002).

obtain additional resources.[18] Extremist violence may simultaneously coerce and mobilise non-combatants. Superficially, terrorism may seem to be an effective method of accomplishing group goals during wartime; yet tests of this hypothesis have produced mixed results.[19] Terrorism may be coincident with fighting between the primary combatants to an intrastate conflict even though ancillary terrorist groups may operate separately from these entities. A case in point is the Syrian civil war. There were no fewer than seven terrorist groups acting simultaneously during that conflict.[20] Thus, to fully unpack the complex dynamics of actors who employed extremist violence during the post-war period, we start by differentiating terrorist groups.

To understand terrorist activity during civil war, we must unpack their unique – sometimes disparate – goals. Terrorists are utilitarian; they continually reassess their short and long-term objectives in response to social and political changes.[21] This means that the end of a large-scale intrastate war – particularly ending with a one-sided victory – will cause groups to reconsider their objectives. When civil wars end in a one-sided way, most notably following an insurgent win, groups must reevaluate where they stand in relation to the new regime. Groups will modify their behaviour depending on how closely the outcome of the civil war aligns with their long-term goals. Not only do extremist actors have relationships with the primary combatants, but multiple violent groups typically operate simultaneously within the same political boundaries. As a result, terrorist groups must manoeuvre to impact rival group calculations while simultaneously acquiring supporters.[22] Terrorist groups often leverage current social grievances to acquire members and adherents. As part of their campaigns to achieve popular backing, radical groups will prey upon marginalised populations, such as persecuted religious or ethnic minorities.[23] Yet the end of a civil war may change each of these socio-political areas. Some grievances dissipate while others expand; changing political dynamics uplift some groups while marginalising others. One-sided victories, especially wins by anti-government actors, may alter the very fabric of society. This means that groups must reassess their goals, activity, and membership following the large-scale political and social upheaval accompanying a one-sided war outcome.

Terrorists employ violence to accomplish short-term goals; however, these short-term objectives are intermediate to long-run political agendas. Groups' long-term agendas become especially salient when conflicts end; these pursuits may include regime change, social revolutions, empire-building, territory changes, policy changes, or maintenance of the status quo.[24] Scholars classify some of these goals as relatively *minimal*, which are attainable in the short or medium term; these objectives may include policy changes or increases in regional sovereignty, i.e., territorial changes.[25] Yet other goals are expansive, termed *maximal*; these achievements are expressly long-term and predicated on numerous intermediate milestones.[26] Examples of these objectives include social revolutions and empire creation. When groups pursue these massive political agendas during civil wars, they often prematurely foreclose the bargaining process.[27] Such expansive goals are both the most difficult to achieve and also least likely to be met with concessions from incumbent governments. Thus, it follows that groups with expansive goals are least likely to settle and most likely to fight until one side definitively wins. It also follows that groups with expansive political goals – such as regime changes, social revolutions, and empire creation – are most likely to retain grievances during civil war victories for the opposing side. To date, there is a dearth of quantitative literature that juxtaposes terrorist group behaviour before and after one-sided civil war endings; we do not fully understand how the ending itself impacts group goal achievement or the likelihood of future terrorism.

## *Terrorism in the Post-War Period*

The extant literature on post-conflict violence is almost exclusively devoted to conflicts that end in negotiated settlements or ceasefires.[28] For instance, during and after peace negotiations following the Angolan civil war, terrorist acts dramatically increased; scholars believe that non-state actors employed political terror to influence, or possibly curtail, the peace process.[29] Another case in point is the failed 2012 peace agreement between the Pakistani government and the Taliban. In this instance, the Taliban demanded increased concessions; they reinforced this demand with renewed violence after the initial peace agreement had been reached.[30] Despite the involvement of the US, its allies, and the United Nations, efforts to reduce attacks by the Taliban proved largely ineffective.[31] Historically, scholars defined this process as *spoiling*.[32]

Despite a limited number of projects that directly focus on terrorist acts following one-sided victories,[33] there are important generalisations to be gleaned from studies of post-war violence more generally. Scholars such as Subedi[34] frame post-war violence in terms of post-war state institutions that have an interest in solidifying their holding while simultaneously quelling insurgent violence. He contrasts this interest with those of the losing parties, who continue to harbour social, economic, and political grievances. The author notes that deeply-held grievances – typically tied to lack of employment, education, infrastructure, and social mobility, more generally – are exacerbated by the economic destruction of the war. Particularly for the losing parties, the conclusion of the war may not have ameliorated any of these grievances.[35] The destruction of physical infrastructure combined with the loss of former economic, political, and social institutions creates a vacuum in which both renewed and transformed violence foment.[36]

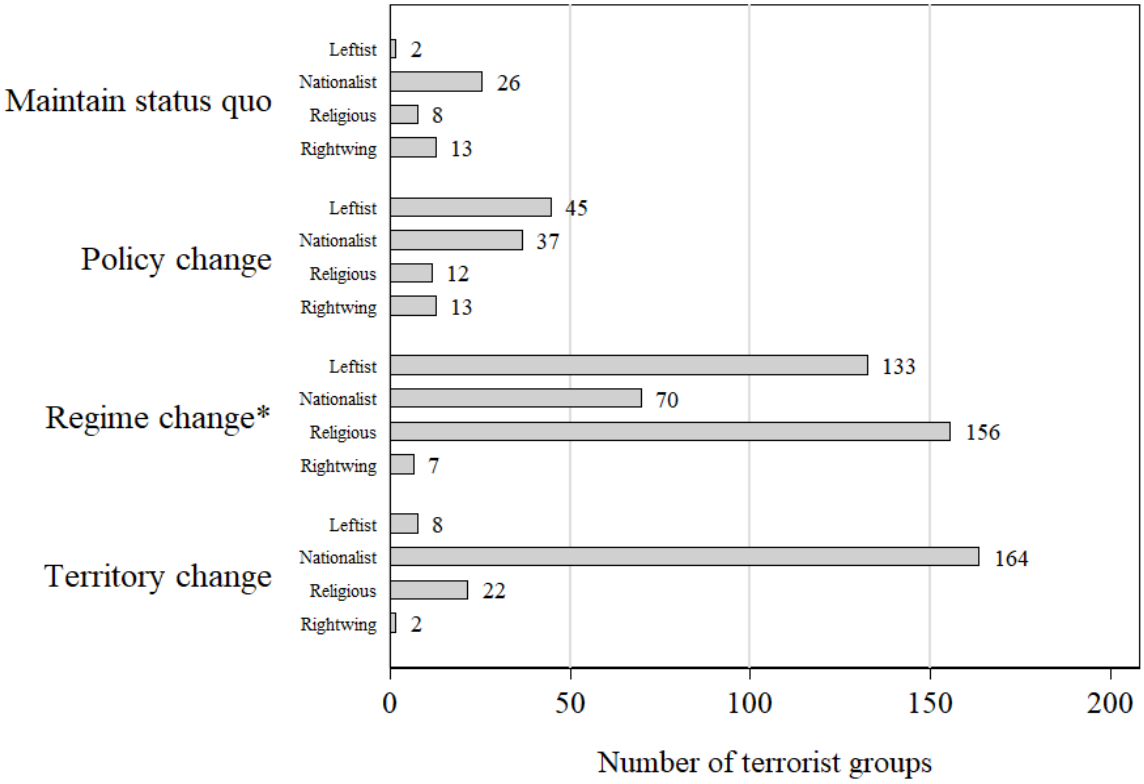
Wartime violence also creates inertia with respect to conflict resolution. On an individual level, authors note that the physical and psychological effects of war engender predispositions towards violent conflict resolution in the post-war period.[37] Previous studies posit that violence during wartime does not stop; it simply morphs into other types of criminal activities.[38] These activities may include petty theft, gang violence, or domestic violence, each of which is inversely related to the level of state and institutional fragility in the post-conflict period.[39] Finally, some scholars stress that influxes of former combatants and displaced persons from international borders can create new tensions, which further compound the difficulties that state actors face when combatting belligerents in the post-war period.[40]

Government institutions, including the presence of peacekeepers, are an important component of violence prevention within post-war societies. Researchers suggest that post-conflict violence often emerges from opportunity rather than motive.[41] Following the 2002 victory by the state in Sierra Leone, national leaders immediately turned to security provision as one of their primary objectives; the effectiveness of security forces and/or external policing is often critical to the prevalence – or relative absence – of violence following a conflict.[42] Intuitively, winners of the war seek to establish legitimacy and suppress insurgent violence; these intentions naturally oppose the defeated party or parties, whose instincts would be to prolong the fighting. As a result, scholars, argue that violence observed in the post-war period is at least partially related to the cumulative resources of the winning and losing sides.[43]

Yet, terrorism may not fit cleanly into our understanding of post-war violence. As we have previously observed, actors perpetrate political terror against civilians, which employs comparatively few resources. *Intra-war* terrorism is typically tied to the primary actors fighting within the conflict.[44] However, we have little knowledge of terrorists' motives in the post-war era, most notably when wars end in definitive victories for one side. We know that terrorists have heterogeneous ideologies and goals[45] (see Figure 3). However, we do not understand the

contribution of these traits to post-war violence. Moreover, we have little understanding of the way that one-sided civil war outcomes mediate these factors. For instance, when insurgents with a political goal of regime change defeat an incumbent during the civil war, does their use of terrorism increase or decrease? To date, conflict scholars have not analysed the transition from intra-war to post-conflict terrorism in systematic, quantitative ways. This is the purpose of the study presented in this research article.

*Figure 3. Population of Terrorist Groups Organised by Goals and Ideologies 1970-2014*




Source: EDTG 1970-2014; *Regime changes include revolutions and empires

# Theory

As Fortna observes, a majority of civil wars end in either a government victory or a ceasefire; settlement agreements and rebel victories are the least likely to occur.[46,†] See also Figure 1. Additionally, in the post-Cold War era, a rise in terrorism has increased the number of civil wars that end in definitive victories.[47] However, one-sided victories are relatively understudied despite their prevalence. Here, our focus is on these one-sided victories; we are particularly interested in one-sided victories for anti-government groups.

Within this project, we employ the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme – Peace Research Institute Oslo (UCDP-PRIO) definition of one-sided *victory*. These researchers define victory as, "One side is either defeated or eliminated or otherwise succumbs to the power of the other (e.g. through capitulation)."[48] They additionally describe how:

† This remark pertains to intrastate wars more generally; however, it is also true in our sample data over the study period (1970-2014).

> *A victory is considered to have occurred when a party to a conflict is considered to be defeated. With defeated the UCDP means that their military capability is destroyed to the point that it is seems unlikely that they could begin the fighting again. In this situation no other outcome can occur. A party that has been defeated can participate in a conflict again, if there is a new incompatibility or if there are new actors and goals of that party. A victory can occur both on the dyadic level as well as on the conflict level. The victorious party to the conflict does not have to provide concessions to the other side.*

Thus, by definition, one-sided victory necessarily implies that the military capabilities of the losing side have been sufficiently depleted and the winning side is not compelled to provide concessions to the losing party. These facts engender the post-war dynamics that we wish to understand.

First, we intuit that the winning side has political control over the government apparatus and the territory. We posit that this control creates disincentives towards future violence, primarily because the winning party has accomplished its goal(s). Terrorists are political actors. It follows more generally that if civil wars meet their goals – such as a regime change – then they will have fewer incentives (e.g., political grievances) for using political violence overall. Our goal is to ascertain whether a definitive victory – as a measure of political goal attainment – can be meaningful for wartime terrorists. Secondarily, the winning party has multiple disincentives towards future violence. Groups in this position seek legitimacy – in part, by maintaining peace. Additionally, winning groups desire loyalty from among nonviolent civilians. Both of these factors make winning groups less likely to continue political violence following a victory.

Additionally, we argue that a one-sided victory may represent a political gain for particular groups, regardless of whether the group in question is the primary actor within the conflict. For example, we postulate that anti-government terrorist groups benefit – directly or indirectly – from an insurgent victory that removes the incumbent from power. Under these circumstances, actors may perceive the war outcome in a positive light even if their individual objectives and/or ideologies are not perfectly synonymous with the actual winner, i.e., the primary insurgents. In other words, a right-wing terrorist group ultimately prefers to see another right-wing group in power, even if these groups are not perfectly aligned on the right-left political spectrum. These dynamics suggest the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 1. Groups aligned with the civil war winner will reduce terrorism in the post-war period.*

In a similar manner, conventional wisdom suggests that terrorists are politically motivated. It follows that they commit violence to express dissatisfaction with political outcomes. As a result, we posit that actors affiliated with the losing side of the civil war will be even further motivated to continue violence during the post-war era. This violence embodies their dissatisfaction with the outcome of the war itself. We propose the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 2. Groups aligned with the civil war loser will increase terrorism in the post-conflict period.*

Hypotheses 1 and 2 follow the conventional wisdom regarding civil war outcomes – winners decrease violence, while losers do the opposite. However, we acknowledge that political violence

is not always intuitive. Experts within the peacebuilding framework have long acknowledged that the end of the war has little bearing on the resources, institutions, and collective attitudes necessary to create a lasting peace.[49] Since post-conflict violence is prevalent in general, we must entertain similar hypotheses with respect to post-war terrorism. There are valid reasons to suggest that terrorist activity might increase following a one-sided victory, regardless of the winning side. For instance, a victorious entity may employ political violence to solidify an initial win and fend off competitor gains.[50] Scholars note that ISIS‡ insurgents acquired territories in Syria and Iraq but continued to use violence to maintain and solidify their holdings throughout 2013 and 2014.[51]

In addition, we concede that civil war violence is extremely complex. Intrastate wars typically contain many groups; these entities may or may not be the *primary insurgents* – as defined by UCDP-PRIO – within the conflict.[52] Adopting UCDP labelling conventions, we postulate that terrorist groups active during intrastate wars may support the state (Side A), the insurgents (Side B), or neither. (See Appendix Table A-1). Thus, we deliberately frame terrorist groups as distinct and heterogeneous from the actors who are typically perceived as the main contributors to civil war violence. We acknowledge that the central actors in an intrastate war – the state and the primary insurgents – may not even choose to perpetrate post-war terrorism. Post-conflict violence may be entirely composed of ancillary groups. With this realisation in mind, we argue that groups whose political goals are aligned with the winning or losing sides of the war will have similar incentives to increase or decrease violence, respectively. For instance, groups aligned with the winning side will decrease post-conflict terrorism, while groups aligned with the losing side will do the opposite.

The following analysis attempts to unpack these competing hypotheses. We posit that terrorism in the post-conflict period follows directly from groups' relationships to the winners and losers of conflict. More specifically, the degree of overlap between a group's identity – i.e., objectives and ideologies – with the conflict winner drives the violence that we observe. In exceptional cases, groups may employ terrorism to reinforce a win; yet we propose that this finding is relatively infrequent. More generally, we hypothesise that the prevalence of terrorist activity in the post-war period is indicative of the level of satisfaction with the war outcome.

# Research Methodology

## *Data and Research Design*

Our data represent a pooled, panel cross-section of the years 1970-2014. Our unit of analysis is the *terrorist group-conflict-year*, in which the conflict is defined by the incumbent state actor (Side A) and the major insurgent group (Side B). We draw terrorist data from the *Extended Data on Terrorist Groups* (EDTG) dataset.[53] Our data are comprised of 72 terrorist groups who were active during civil wars; we selected civil wars that concluded during the study period (1970-2014). We offer a list of these groups in Appendix Table A-1. Our interest primarily lies with the year immediately following the war. As a result, we merge terrorism data with the UCDP-PRIO Armed Conflict dataset[54] and drop panel years that occur after 1969 but before an ongoing conflict. The EDTG dataset contains information regarding multiple geographical bases for each terrorist group. We employ the primary territory identified in the EDTG dataset to merge in the civil war data, while effectively ignoring the information regarding secondary and tertiary bases, etc.§ Our dependent variable is the number of annual terrorist attacks during the first post-conflict year. We are not interested in intra-war terrorism per se; instead, we focus on the

‡ ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria; alternatively Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

§ This is a simplifying assumption; however, we argue that it does not bias our results. We leave the analysis of multiple terrorist bases per group for future research.

*change* in terrorism during the transition from wartime to a declared victory for one side. Our simplified difference-in-difference (DID) model[55] includes three time periods: the final intra-war year (-1), the year that the war ends (0), and the first year of the post-conflict period (1). We rationalise our choice of model for several reasons. First, scholars observe that terrorism is a time-varying parameter; it varies across the duration of civil conflicts.[56] By analysing only the final year of the conflict, we avoid the necessity to make smoothing assumptions regarding terrorism throughout the war. Second, rates of violence demonstrate clear anticipation effects, which are especially salient towards the end of the war.[57] Conflict duration, remaining resources, and expected outcomes contribute to these effects. Because actors are aware of impending conflict resolution, the year just prior to the end of the war provides the most accurate information about terrorists' reactions to the current political context.[58] We posit that our simplified, 3-period model is more appropriate for our data and research hypotheses than a more complex event history analysis. We leave this type of DID analysis for future research.

Our dependent variable is a count measure of terrorist attacks, which we acquire from the EDTG dataset. After testing for overdispersion, we determined that a negative binomial model represents the best fit for the dependent variable. We wish to analyse the credibility of a one-sided victory by insurgents on terrorism in the post-war period. To assess whether the ending of the war potentially impacts the number of attacks, we employ a DID model. The basic model equation is:

$$Y_{it} = e^{(\beta_0 + \beta_1 onset\_time_{it} + \beta_2 treatment_{it} + \beta_3 (onset\_time_{it} * treatment_{it}) + \beta_4 X + r_{it})} \quad (1)$$

where $X$ represents a vector of multivariate controls, $Y_{it}$ represents the dependent variable, i.e., the number of terrorist attacks, $r$ represents the model residuals, $i$ represents the terrorist group, and $t$ represents time, {-1, 0, 1}. To create the DID model, we first designate treatment and control groups. The treated group is terrorists active during wars that end in a one-sided insurgent victory. The DID measure is the multiplicative interaction effect between the treatment and the time in which the treatment is applied (*onset time* in Equation 1). We employ the DID formula within a negative binomial model for count data, which is consistent with current practice.[59] We cluster error terms in each panel according to the country of the terrorist group's primary base of operation.

## *Verification of Model Assumptions*

The DID model permits us to draw causal conclusions about the impact of one-sided victories if its foundational assumptions are met. The first assumption is that the model has the correct functional form; as previously stated, we employ the appropriate count model for use with over-dispersion. The second assumption requires that the error terms have expectation zero and are uncorrelated with the covariates; we test this assumption within the full model below. Finally, the third assumption requires the property of *as-if* randomisation in which units are assigned to treatment and control groups in a way that mimics the randomisation of a true *in vitro* experiment. Practitioners normally test this assumption by ensuring that the slope of the lines created by the treatment and control groups is parallel in the absence of the treatment condition. This is also known as the *parallel trends assumption*.¶

¶ The parallel trends assumption cannot be directly observed in the post-treatment time period. Thus, Equation 2 below represents the parallel slopes condition. The dependent variable is *Attacks.* The prime symbol to represents the unobserved (counterfactual) dependent variable, i.e. *Attacks^'*.. The superscripts represent times (0) and (1), respectively. Thus, the notation,, represents the unobserved counterfactual behaviour of the Treatment Group in the Absence of the Treatment (TGAT) at time period zero (0). To overcome the limitation of the unobserved counterfactual, scholars typically analyse the slopes of the treatment and control groups in the *pre*-treatment period as a method of verifying the parallel trends in the *post*-treatment period. The equality in Equation 2 permits us to create the DID indicator that we present in Equation

To create the DID model, we begin by testing the parallel trends assumption in the data in the absence of controls. This test takes the form of the simple negative binomial model that we present in Equation 4. We test for parallel trends over time periods (-1) and (0). In Equation 4, $\beta\_0$ represents the difference in intercepts generated by the assignment to the treatment (insurgent victory) versus control (incumbent victory) conditions. To create the slope coefficient, $\beta\_1$, we interact with the treatment condition with time. $Z$ is a vector of fixed effects.

$$Y_i = e^{(\beta_0 + \beta_1(onset\_time_i * treatment_i) + \beta_2 Z + r_i)} \quad (4)$$

Table 1, Model 1 demonstrates that the slope coefficient is significantly different from zero. However, when we include fixed effects for every year of the dataset (1970-2014), this significance disappears in Table 1, Model 2. Thus, the parallel trends assumption is not violated if we allow for the intercept term to vary according to year. This satisfies one pre-condition of the DID model; yet the problem of as-if randomisation is still outstanding. Recall that the assumption of as-if randomisation occurs when the conditions of a natural experiment may be plausibly likened to those of an in vitro experiment in which units are randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Here, this assumption is especially tenuous due to the presence of endogeneity, i.e., the war outcome is not entirely exogenous to the presence of terrorism.

*Table 1. Regression Model Test of Parallel Trends Assumption for Time Periods One and Two 1970-2014*

| | (1) Regression model | (2) Regression model + yearly fixed effects |
|---|---|---|
| Intercept (treatment) | 0.242 | -0.309 |
| | (0.133) | (0.245) |
| Slope coefficient (treatment*time) | 0.238* | 0.123 |
| | (0.0965) | (0.175) |
| Observations | 157 | 157 |
| *AIC* | 555.2 | 441.2 |
| *BIC* | 561.3 | 487.0 |

Dependent variable is logged the number of attacks; Error terms clustered by geographic base.
Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Scholars employ any number of adjustments to ensure that this assumption is valid. In this instance, a correction – such as the use of temporal lags – is not an option due to our experimental design. Instead, we employ two separate tools: (1) multivariate controls and (2) sensitivity analysis. We employ a variety of source matter to determine group orientation, which we operationalise as pro-government, anti-government, or neither (Appendix Table A-1). The scope of group goals is an ordinal composite measure defined in terms of increasing intensity

3. In other words, the difference between what we observe – the difference between treatment and control – substitutes for the counterfactual that remains unobserved (Equation 3).

$$E\left[Attacks'^{1}_{TGAT} - Attacks'^{0}_{TGAT}\right] = E\left[Attacks^{1}_{control} - Attacks^{0}_{control}\right] \quad (2)$$

$$DID = Attacks^{1}_{treated} - Attacks^{0}_{treated} - \left(Attacks'^{1}_{TGAT} - Attacks'^{0}_{TGAT}\right) =$$

$$Attacks^{1}_{treated} - Attacks^{0}_{treated} - \left(Attacks^{1}_{control} - Attacks^{0}_{control}\right) \quad (3)$$

as, (1) preservation of the status quo, (2) policy change, (3) territory change, (4) regime change/social revolution, or (5) empire formation. With the exception of the group orientation measure, we draw all controls from the EDTG dataset (see Appendix Table A-4); this includes individual group goals prior to aggregation. For complete variable definitions, please reference the EDTG codebook.[60] We log the population, battle death, elevation, and income measures due to heteroskedasticity; we standardise all non-binary variables; finally, we employ multiple imputations to fill in any missingness in the data.

In Appendix Table A-4, we separated all of the starting variables into treatment and control groups. We calculated averages for each variable during the final year of the intra-war period, then used a nonparametric comparison of means test (Kruskal-Wallis) to determine which variables are statistically different across the two groups (Appendix Table A-4). We initially included *all* of the variables that were significantly different across the treatment and control groups—i.e., the starred values in Appendix Table A-4, in the DID models (results not shown). Then we employed sequential t-tests to trim the models down to those displayed in Table 2 (below). Ultimately, our final model controls included (1) ethnic diversity, (2) total battle deaths, (3) a binary measure of war type (conflict scope), (5) religious diversity, (6) linguistic diversity, (7) ethnic diversity, and (8) yearly fixed effects (see Table 2; fixed effects are omitted for clarity). Graphical analysis of the residuals from the unimputed model demonstrates that errors are approximately evenly distributed around zero (results not shown).**

Despite our use of fixed effects and multivariable controls, endogeneity is still possible. This conclusion is intuitive because we assume that terrorist acts affect the progress of the war. Although we are interested in the effect of one-sided victories on terrorist attacks, we must address the fact that the war outcome is not fully exogenous (to terrorist attacks). In other words, one-sided victory (X) affects terrorist activity (Y) in the post-war period; yet, temporally, intra-war terrorist activity (Y) also affects the one-sided victory (X). We wish to partial out the potential causal effect of the war outcome from any lingering endogeneity in the DID model.†† Following Cinelli, Ferwerda, and Hazlett,[61] we employ a benchmark method that frames the potential bias in terms of the existing model coefficients. Keeping in mind that the other variables are standardised, we infer that the binary variable, *war for central control* (CW), has the greatest effect on the dependent variable (see results below; Table 2). We employ this variable as a benchmark insofar as we hypothesise that any remaining endogeneity in the model

** We computed the residuals by simply logging the dependent variable in Equation 1.

†† Ideally, we would prefer to instrumentalise the war outcome and avoid the simultaneity problem using two-stage least squares. For purposes of illustration, this problem may be represented as follows:

1. First stage least squares: $\boldsymbol{X_{predicted} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Instrument}$

Note: $\boldsymbol{X_{predicted}}$ is the predicted value of the endogenous variable (one-sided victory for incumbent versus insurgent)

2. Second stage least squares: $\boldsymbol{Y = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 X_{predicted} + \alpha_2 Covariate_{Vector} + error}$

3. Rewriting: $\boldsymbol{Y = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1(\beta_0 + \beta_1 Instrument) + \alpha_2 Covariate_{Vector} + error}$

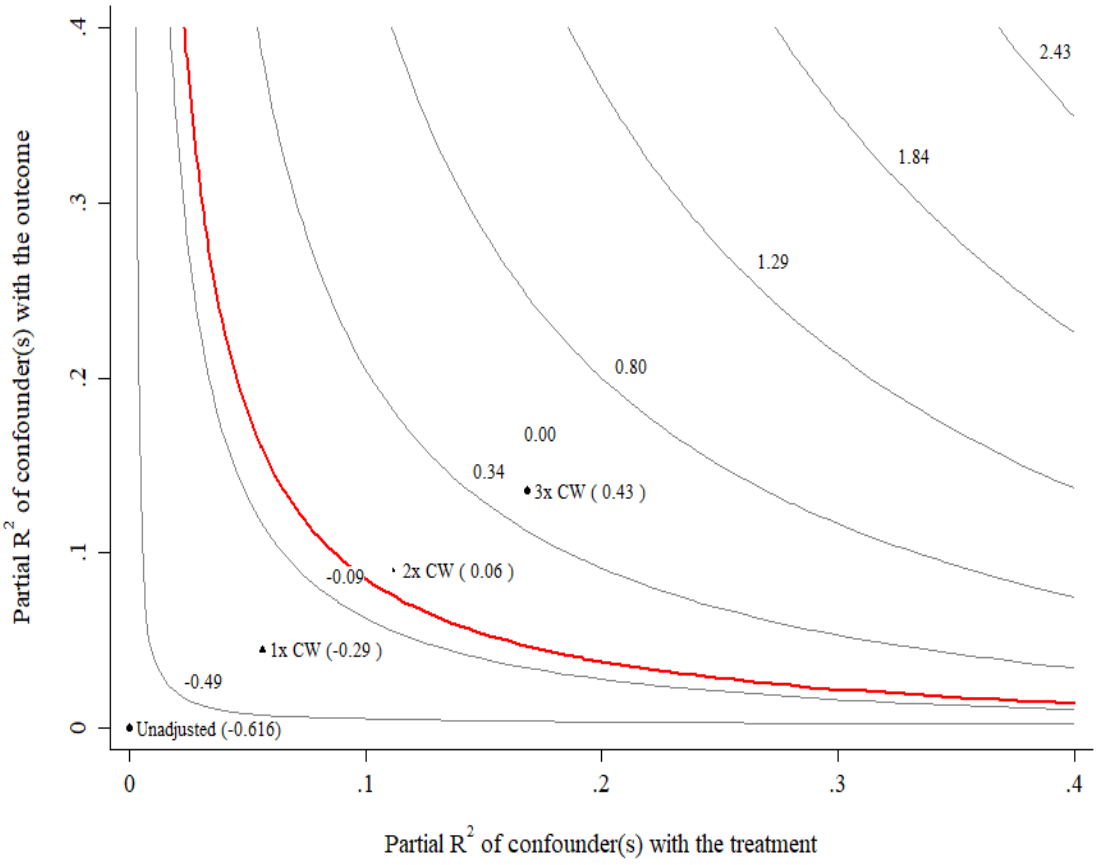
4. Combining first and second stage equations: $\boldsymbol{Y = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1\beta_0 + \alpha_1\beta_1 Instrument + \alpha_2 Covariate_{Vector} + error}$

In this instance, however, the task of finding an instrument with adequate power is nearly insurmountable. To address this problem, consider the first and second stages of the instrumental variable model above. In effect, the first stage model represents one or more variables that are used to approximate the endogenous variable (X); in the final equation, the instrumental variable(s) replaces this predictor. If a two-stage model is the correct functional form, omission of the instrumental variable(s) biases the second stage regression coefficients. This bias is consistent with the bias created by the use of an endogenous regressor in the DID model. Since we are aware of the simultaneity created by the use of the endogenous regressor, we wish to quantify the degree of bias, i.e., endogeneity, present in our DID models (Table 2). In other words, we operationalise the endogeneity in the war outcome as a form of omitted variable bias engendered by one or more omitted confounders (see proof above).

would be equal to or less than this effect. Consistent with Cinelli and Hazlett,[62] we quantify the bias in terms of the partial $R^2$ value created by the correlation of potential confounder(s) with the outcome (terrorist attacks) and the treatment (one-sided insurgent victory).

We employ the *sensmakr* package – designed by Cinelli and Hazlett[63] – to perform our sensitivity analysis. This tool is robust to multiple nonlinear confounders and multiple functional forms. We are interested in the level of endogeneity in the war outcome, that would be necessary to overturn the causal relationship between the type of one-sided victory and the number of terrorist attacks in the postwar period. This endogeneity is effectively proxied by analysing the partial $R^2$ values created by a hypothetical omitted variable.[64] We test the sensitivity of our results using the contour plot in Figure 4. The plotted points in the graphic represent the size of the potential confounder as a multiple of the largest covariate in the model, *central war* (CW). The contour lines represent the *coefficient size* of the confounder that would be necessary to overturn the statistical effect of the DID indicator. The red line represents the threshold point. We observe that a confounder would need to be *one-two times the size* of the largest variable effect in order to overturn our results. Recall that all of the continuous variables are standardised—i.e., a coefficient of two (similar to the coefficient for CW in Table 2) represents two standard deviations away from the average value. As a result, we can be fairly confident that our model results in Table 2 are robust to any possible endogeneity in the war outcome.

*Figure 4. Contour plot of DID model robustness to confounding benchmarked using*




*the control for the centrality of the war (CW)*

# Results and Discussion

Appendix Tables A-2 and A-3 contain descriptive statistics and a correlation matrix for each of the variables. Table 2 below presents our primary findings. The grey-shaded portion of the table represents the set-up for the DID model, while the variables in the lower half of the table represent controls. The columns represent (1) the full population, (2) the population of anti-government groups, and (3) the subpopulation of groups seeking regime changes, social revolutions, and/or creation of empires. Notice, however, that the effects of an insurgent victory (in contrast with a government win) are *positive* across the three models. This result means that, on average, terrorism increases more overall following a one-sided insurgent victory than a one-sided incumbent win. Our sensitivity analysis (above) ensures that we can be confident with this result.

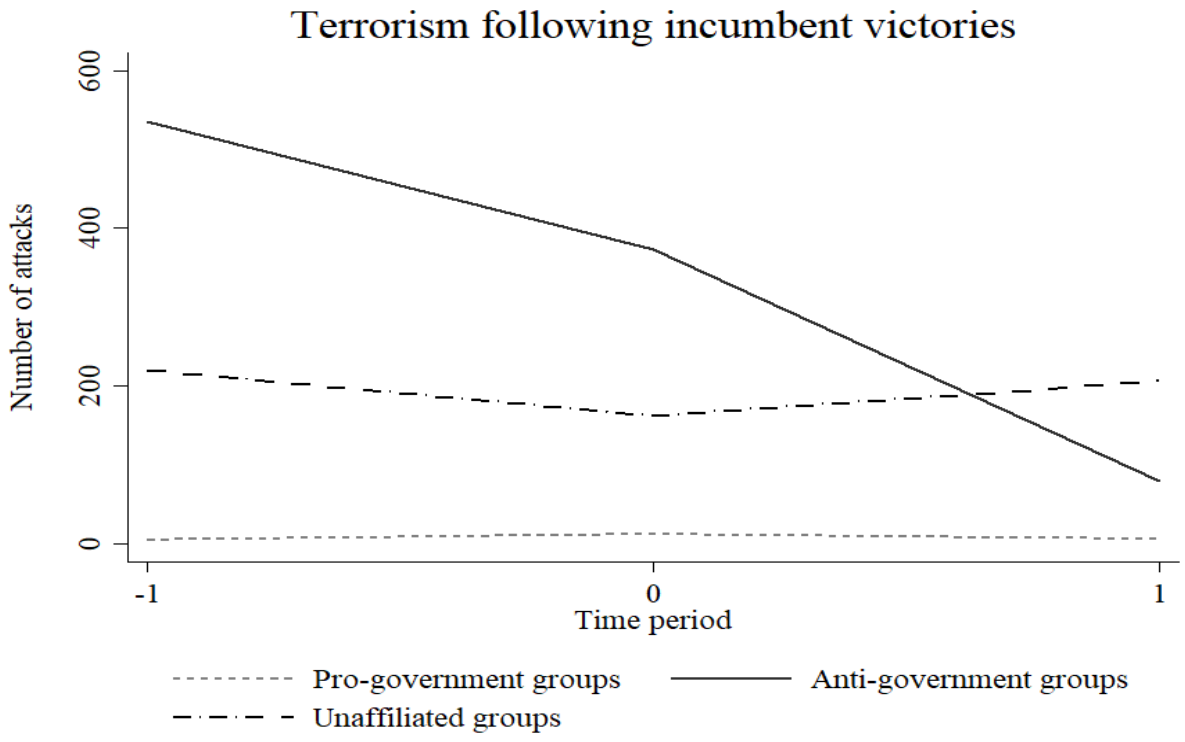
*Table 2. Negative Binomial Difference-in-Difference Model of the Effect of Insurgent Victories on Terrorist Attacks 1970-2014*

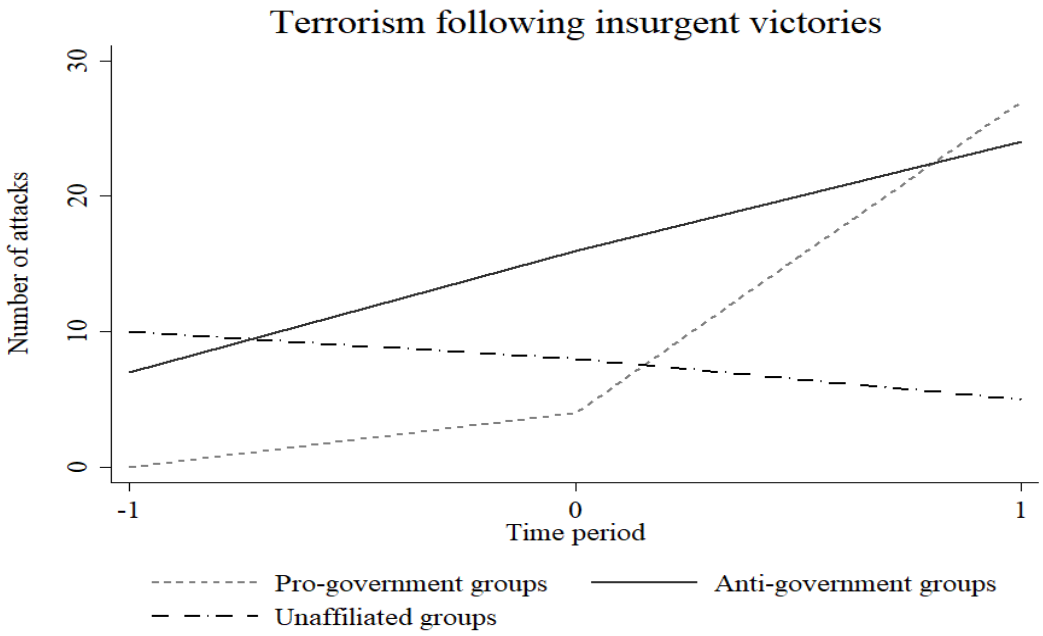
| | (1) Full population | (2) Subpopulation of anti-government groups | (3) Subpopulation of groups seeking regime changes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Rebel win (treatment) | -4.221*** | -2.438** | -3.423*** |
| | (1.245) | (1.028) | (1.085) |
| Time (onset) | -1.658*** | -2.078*** | -1.781*** |
| | (0.362) | (0.601) | (0.509) |
| Effect of war resolution (treatment*onset) | 1.487*** | 1.764** | 1.493** |
| | (0.556) | (0.773) | (0.589) |
| Battle deaths | -1.058** | -0.683 | -0.396 |
| | (0.471) | (0.417) | (0.457) |
| Ethnic diversity | 0.972** | 0.117 | 0.319 |
| | (0.377) | (0.535) | (0.635) |
| Linguistic diversity | -1.344*** | -0.437 | -1.059** |
| | (0.294) | (0.649) | (0.417) |
| Religious diversity | 0.294 | -0.159 | 0.0308 |
| | (0.298) | (0.318) | (0.368) |
| War for central control | 2.108*** | 1.515** | 2.342*** |
| | (0.523) | (0.588) | (0.676) |
| Constant | 2.917 | 2.600 | 3.333 |
| | (0.827) | (1.477) | (1.165) |
| Ln alpha | | | |
| Constant | 1.027 | 0.577 | 0.928 |
| | (0.196) | (0.281) | (0.254) |
| Observations | 224 | 111 | 144 |

Shaded portion: DID set-up; Fixed effects omitted for clarity; Standard errors in parentheses.
Source: EDTG 1970-2014
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

To further unpack this finding, consider the graphics in Figure 5 and Appendix Figure A-1. Figure 5 is a graphical representation of violence committed by each of the three types of groups during one-sided victories for the insurgents (treatment) and incumbents (control). Thus, the incumbent case only appears in Figure 2; the results in Appendix Table A-4 focus on the contrast between treatment and control groups; Appendix Table A-4 explicitly, and exclusively, highlights outcomes among treatment groups. Notably, however, the graphics displayed in Appendix Figure A-1 are consistent with Figure 5. This graphic reinforces results during the first post-conflict year insofar as initial trends tend to continue for several years then slowly die down. Overall, these graphics suggest several important conclusions. First, terrorist activity in general, and activity by anti-government groups in particular, is far more prevalent during civil wars that eventually end in incumbent victories. Pragmatically this makes sense because insurgents typically have less funding; terrorism is a relatively inexpensive tactic. Plus, anti-government groups have fewer incentives to maintain legitimacy by preserving the lives of civilians. The results in Figure 5 suggest that terrorism by pro-government groups is consistent with *Hypotheses 1 and 2*. Namely, terrorism by pro-government groups demonstrates a strong correlation with the winners and losers of the conflict. When the incumbent wins, terrorism by pro-government groups is low, which may be construed as satisfaction with the war outcome (*Hypotheses 1*). As we theorise, pro-government terrorist groups achieve their political goals; therefore, they have fewer incentives to continue political violence. This finding holds, regardless of whether groups are formally affiliated with the state – such as state-funded death squads or mercenaries – or independent from government payroll. In contrast, when the incumbent loses, political violence by pro-government groups increases. This is also consistent with the expression of dissatisfaction with the war outcome (*Hypothesis 2*).

*Figures 5a - 5b. Comparison of Terrorist Activity During One-Sided Insurgent and Incumbent Victories 1970 – 2014*






Although the activity of pro-government groups is fairly straightforward, terrorist violence by anti-government groups is completely counter-intuitive. Following one-sided insurgent victories, the war ending is correlated with a net positive increase in political violence by anti-government groups in the post-conflict period (Table 2, Model 2 and Figure 5). Superficially, this finding appears to negate *Hypothesis 1*. This observation is a conundrum that we wish to explain.‡‡ Namely, why does terrorism by anti-government groups increase when the primary government is overthrown? We propose several reasons for this counter-intuitive result. We posit that anti-government groups in power may *increase* terrorism to solidify their holdings. This occurs because insurgent victories may be inherently less stable than other types of civil war outcomes. In addition, we argue that political violence increases due to latent heterogeneities between anti-government actors. We underscore the fact that terrorism is politically motivated. Yet, in this instance, regime change and the assumption of power by a single anti-government group, are insufficient to meet the political goals of other actors.

Initially, we theorised that anti-government groups who favour regime changes should be at least partially satisfied by an incumbent defeat. Yet, this is not what we observe (Table 2, Model 3). Terrorism by groups with *goals* of regime change increases following an *actual* regime change, i.e., an incumbent defeat. Why does political violence increase despite the presence of superficially similar goals? To unpack this finding, we need to further disaggregate the data.
To understand an increase in terrorism following insurgent victories, we analysed a small subset of the data. We studied groups that engaged in terrorism despite purportedly supporting the primary insurgents and adopting regime-change goals. (Results not shown.) From this data, we make two primary observations. First, none of the terrorist activity in the post-war period is perpetrated by the primary insurgents within the conflict. Second, we observe clear discontinuities between *ideologies* of the terrorist groups and those of the insurgent victors. For example, the Democratic Front of the Central African People, a nationalist terrorist group and off-shoot of the Seleka, committed a total of seven terrorist acts in the Central African Republic during the ascendancy of the Seleka insurgents as a civil war victor. Additionally,

‡‡ The data in Figure 5 appear to negate *Hypothesis 2* with respect to anti-government groups; however, this information does not appear in Table 2 due to the assignment of treatment and control groups. We primarily focus our analysis on the treatment group, i.e., one-sided insurgent wins. We speculate that anti-government group behaviour following a one-sided incumbent victory reflects a lack of physical resources, rather than the degree of satisfaction with the war outcome. We leave a more thorough analysis of this outcome for future research.

numerous examples from the Lebanese civil wars illustrate that ideological (religious) differences across extremist political groups contributed to terrorism during multiple instances in which insurgents gained one-sided political victories. Each of these examples suggests that terrorism in the post-conflict period following an insurgent victory is not perpetrated by the primary insurgents. Rather, ancillary terrorist groups – who are not in power, and may possess strong ideological differences from the primary insurgent victors – commit terrorist violence, presumably to demonstrate dissatisfaction with the new regime. This finding lends nuanced support to *Hypothesis 1*.[§§] Namely, terrorist groups respond directly to the outcome of the war. They are goal-oriented and calculating. Groups will employ terrorism to protest the victories of actors whom they oppose for a variety of political and/or ideological reasons. This finding is particularly salient when incumbents win civil wars. When insurgents win, however, our findings are less intuitive. We see little evidence of terrorism by winning parties. Instead, we observe that, even when terrorist groups presumptively support the primary insurgents and desire regime changes, they may continue to use terrorist violence when they possess deeply held ideological differences from the insurgent winners.

Finally, we underscore that our findings, although illustrative, aggregate information into annual intervals. As scholars have previously noted, aggregation may often mask more nuanced trends and patterns. Aggregation may smooth out statistical findings;[65] in our case, it represents a more conservative summary of actual empirics. Thus, our study represents an initial foray into the question of one-sided victories and terrorism in the post-war period. Because our measurement of civil war endings is fairly imprecise – i.e., the year in which annual battle deaths drop below 1,000 – a more detailed analysis of monthly violence may add new insights to our preliminary observations. We save this formulation of the data for future research.

## Conclusion

In this study, we take a closer look at intrastate wars that end in one-sided victories and the effects of these victories on terrorism in the post-war period. Using a difference-in-difference (DID) negative binomial model with fixed effects and multiple controls, we find that one-sided insurgent victories are linked to an increase in terrorist violence. We contrast this finding with incumbent victories, in which terrorism generally tends to decrease during the first year of the post-war period. Using terrorists' goals and ideologies, we unpack the motivations that contribute to post-conflict terrorism, or its relative absence. In general, we observe that groups employ terrorism to express dissatisfaction with the outcome of the war. This result is particularly clear-cut with respect to pro-government groups. The behaviour of anti-government groups is more complex. Here, we observe that groups will employ terrorism – despite superficial similarities with the primary insurgents – when they possess deeply-held ideological differences from the winners of the war. We find little evidence that winners – neither incumbent, nor insurgent civil war victors – employ terrorism to solidify their conquests. Instead, terrorism continues to represent the voices of dissatisfied political actors whose goals remain unfulfilled, often in spite of changing political regimes.

§§ In a multivariate negative binomial model of post-war terrorism (time period 1 above), ideological differences are not significantly correlated with the dependent variable. (Results not shown.) Thus, our suppositions regarding ideological differences are tentative in nature. We postulate that the smaller sample size within a single time period may contribute to this outcome. We leave a more in-depth exploration of these findings for future research.

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# Appendix

*Table A-1. Terrorist Groups Active During Civil Wars 1970-2014*

| Group Name | Government Orientation (Pro/Anti/ Neither) | Group Goals | Civil War Side A | Civil War Side B |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave (Angola) | Anti | Territory Change | Angola | UNITA |
| National Union for the Total Independence of Angola | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Angola | UNITA |
| Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance | Pro | Status Quo | Argentina | Montoneros and ERP |
| Che Guevara Brigade | Anti | Policy Change | Argentina | Montoneros and ERP |
| Ejercito Revolucionaria del Pueblo (ERP) (Argentina) | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Argentina | Montoneros and ERP |
| Montoneros (Argentina) | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Argentina | Montoneros and ERP |
| OPR-33 | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Argentina | Montoneros and ERP |
| Khmer Rouge | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Cambodia | Khmer Rouge |
| Anti-Balaka | Pro | Status Quo | Central African Republic | Seleka |
| Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Central African Republic | Seleka |
| Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC) | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Central African Republic | Seleka |
| Popular Front for Recovery (FPR) | Neither | Territory Change | Central African Republic | Seleka |
| Counterrevolutionary Solidarity (SC) | Pro | Status Quo | Guatemala | Leftists |
| Guatemalan Labor Party (Guatemala) | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Guatemala | Leftists |
| Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Guatemala | Leftists |
| Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Guatemala | Leftists |
| Rebel Armed Forces (Guatemala) | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Guatemala | Leftists |
| Maoist Communist Center (MCC) | Anti | Territory Change | India | Naxalite Marxists |
| Vishwa Hindu Parishad | Neither | Policy Change | India | Naxalite Marxists |
| Free Aceh Movement (GAM) | Neither | Territory Change | Indonesia | FRETILIN |
| Free Papua Movement (OPM-Organisasi Papua Merdeka) | Neither | Territory Change | Indonesia | FRETILIN |
| Komando Jihad (Indonesian) | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Indonesia | FRETILIN |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fedayeen Khalq (People's Commandos) | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Iran | Anti-Khomeini Coalition |
| Movement of Islamic Action of Iraq | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Iran | Anti-Khomeini Coalition |
| Peykar | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Iran | Anti-Khomeini Coalition |
| Arab Liberation Front (ALF) | Pro | Territory Change | Iraq | KDP-Barzani |
| Revolutionary Organisation of Socialist Moslems | Neither | Territory Change | Iraq | KDP-Barzani |
| Abu Nidal Organisation (ANO) | Pro | Territory Change | Iraq | Kurds |
| Kurdish Democratic Party-Iraq (KDP) | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Iraq | Kurds |
| Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) | Neither | Territory Change | Iraq | Kurds |
| Amal | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Lebanon | Lahoud Faction |
| Asbat al-Ansar | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Lebanon | Lahoud Faction |
| Hezbollah | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Lebanon | Lahoud Faction |
| Islamic Unification Movement | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Lebanon | Lahoud Faction |
| Lebanese Liberation Front | Neither | Policy Change | Lebanon | Lahoud Faction |
| Lebanese National Resistance Front | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Lebanon | Lahoud Faction |
| Black Hand | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Lebanon | Shi'ites and Druzes |
| Front for the Liberation of Lebanon from Foreigners | Neither | Policy Change | Lebanon | Shi'ites and Druzes |
| Justice Commandos for the Armenian Genocide | Neither | Territory Change | Lebanon | Shi'ites and Druzes |
| Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Faction (LARF) | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Lebanon | Shi'ites and Druzes |
| Sons of the South | Neither | Policy Change | Lebanon | Shi'ites and Druzes |
| Revolutionary United Front (RUF) | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Liberia | LURD and MODEL |
| Al-Mua'qi'oon Biddam Brigade | Anti | Empire Change | Mali | Northern Opposition |
| Ansar al-Dine | Anti | Empire Change | Mali | Northern Opposition |
| Arab Movement of Azawad | Neither | Status Quo | Mali | Northern Opposition |
| Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA) | Neither | Territory Change | Mali | Northern Opposition |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy (CNRDR) | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Mali | Northern Opposition |
| Mozambique National Resistance Movement (MNR) | Anti | Status Quo | Mozambique | RENAMO |
| Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) | Anti | Territory Change | Pakistan | Baluchi Rebels |
| Hekmatyar (Hizb-I Islami Gulbuddin) | Neither | Empire Change | Pakistan | Baluchi Rebels |
| Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba (IJT) | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Pakistan | Baluchi Rebels |
| Shining Path | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Peru | Shining Path |
| Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Peru | Shining Path |
| Dagestani Shari'ah jamaat | Anti | Territory Change | Russia | Chechen Rebels |
| Red Guerrillas | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Russia | Chechen Rebels |
| Riyad us-Saliheyn Martyrs' Brigade | Anti | Territory Change | Russia | Chechen Rebels |
| New Revolutionary Alternative | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Russia | Chechnya |
| Ahlu-sunah Wal-jamea (Somalia) | Neither | Status Quo | Somalia | ICU |
| Al-Shabaab | Neither | Empire Change | Somalia | ICU |
| Hizbul al Islam | Neither | Empire Change | Somalia | ICU |
| Mujahideen Youth Movement | Neither | Empire Change | Somalia | ICU |
| Raskamboni Movement | Anti | Regime/Social Rev. | Somalia | ICU |
| Shabelle Valley militia | Pro | Status Quo | Somalia | ICU |
| Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) | Anti | Territory Change | Sri Lanka | LTTE |
| Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) | Pro | Regime/Social Rev. | Sri Lanka | LTTE |
| Devrimici Halk Kurtulus Cephesi (DHKP/C) | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Turkey | Kurds |
| Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) | Anti | Territory Change | Turkey | Kurds |
| People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan (ARGK) | Anti | Territory Change | Turkey | Kurds |
| Turkish Communist Party/Marxist (TKP-ML) | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Turkey | Kurds |
| Turkish Hizballah | Neither | Regime/Social Rev. | Turkey | Kurds |
| Turkish People's Liberation Front (TPLF)(THKP-C) | Neither | Regime/ Social Rev. | Turkey | Kurds |
| Ansar Allah | Anti | Status Quo | Yemen | Houthi Rebels |

*Table A-2. Descriptive Statistics*

| Variable | Obs.* | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of attacks (DV) | 224 | 7.589 | 35.732 | 0 | 381 |
| Battle deaths | 224 | 0 | 1 | -1.457 | 2.611 |
| Ethnic diversity | 221 | -.017 | 1.001 | -1.507 | 1.695 |
| Government orientation | 205 | .541 | .499 | 0 | 1 |
| Linguistic diversity | 224 | -.022 | .995 | -1.36 | 1.648 |
| Regime change goals | 224 | .643 | .48 | 0 | 1 |
| Religious diversity | 224 | -.004 | 1.004 | -1.417 | 1.669 |
| War for central control | 224 | .54 | .499 | 0 | 1 |

*Unimputed values

*Table A-3. Pairwise Correlations*

| Variables | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) | 1.000 | | | | | | | |
| (2) | 0.038 | 1.000 | | | | | | |
| (3) | 0.128 | 0.096 | 1.000 | | | | | |
| (4) | 0.162 | 0.000 | 0.048 | 1.000 | | | | |
| (5) | -0.075 | 0.109 | -0.225 | 0.542 | 1.000 | | | |
| (6) | 0.105 | 0.098 | 0.104 | -0.072 | -0.085 | 1.000 | | |
| (7) | -0.128 | 0.034 | -0.491 | -0.350 | 0.121 | 0.056 | 1.000 | |
| (8) | 0.151 | 0.183 | -0.131 | 0.012 | -0.150 | 0.284 | 0.290 | 1.000 |

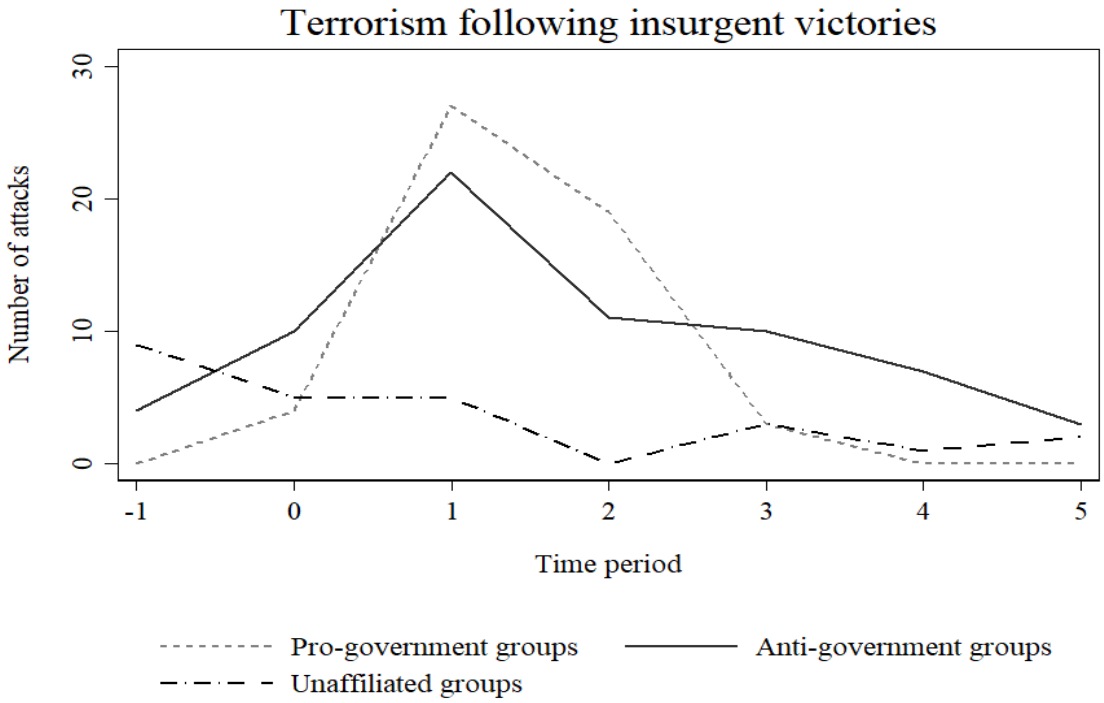
(1) Number of attacks (DV)
(2) Antigovernment orientation
(3) Battle deaths
(4) Ethnic diversity
(5) Linguistic diversity
(6) Regime change goals
(7) Religious diversity
(8) War for central control

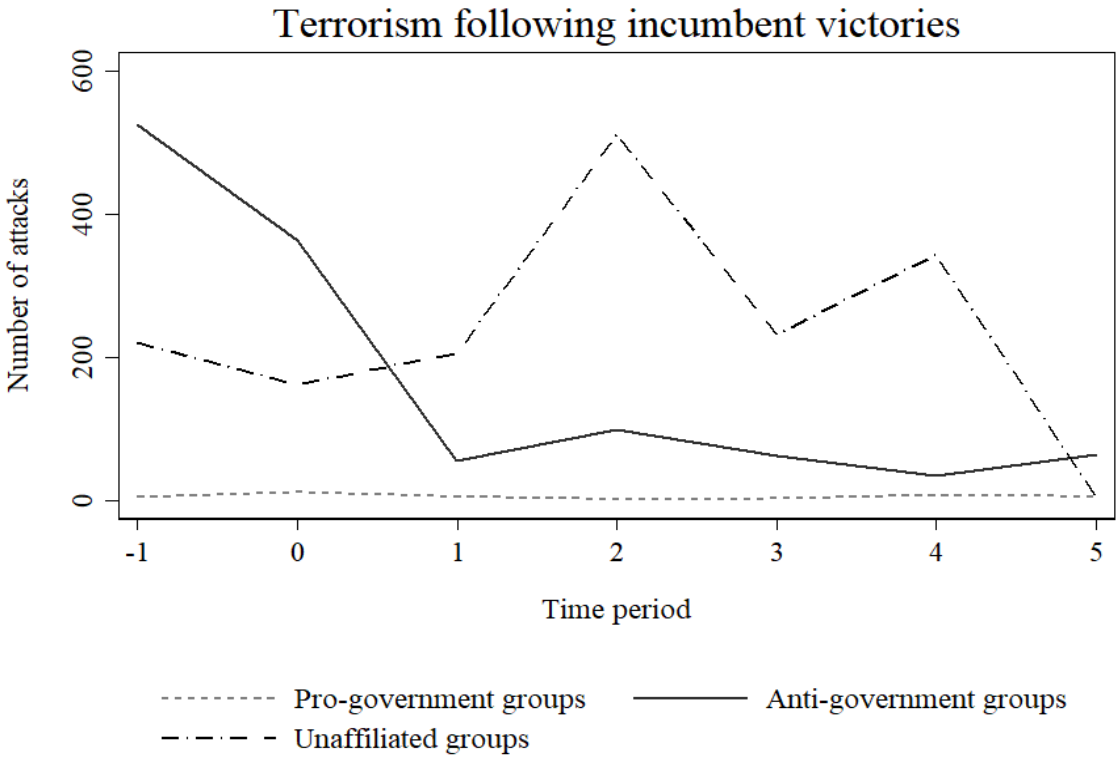
*Table A-4. Pre-Treatment Comparison of Treatment and Control Groups by Indicator 1970-2014*

| Variable name | Control group average | Treatment group average | Difference of means test* (p-value) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of attacks (dependent variable)† | 12.667 | 0.895 | 0.1774 |
| Anti-government orientation† | 0.564 | 0.368 | 0.0479* |
| Battle deaths | 0.24 | -0.831 | 0.0001*** |
| Conflict duration | 0.073 | -0.318 | 0.1324 |
| Democratic regime | 0.122 | -0.026 | 0.2471 |
| Elevation | -0.167 | 0.59 | 0.0001*** |
| Ethnic diversity | 0.163 | -0.797 | 0.0001*** |
| Government spending | 0.048 | -0.115 | 0.1578 |
| Income per capita | 0.119 | -0.131 | 0.3331 |
| Landlocked region | -0.13 | 0.094 | 0.0305* |
| Linguistic diversity | 0.083 | -0.352 | 0.0034** |
| Multiple terrorist bases† | 0.2 | 0.105 | 0.013* |
| Number of state sponsors | 5.231 | 2.178 | 0.6713 |
| Religious diversity | -0.365 | 1.411 | 0.0001*** |
| Population | 0.313 | -1.108 | 0.0001*** |
| Scope of goals | 0.006 | 0.177 | 0.0761 |
| Tropical climate | 0.09 | -0.519 | 0.0001*** |
| War for central control† | 0.517 | 1 | 0.0001*** |

*Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric difference of means test: $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$
†Not standardized
Source: UCDP/PRIO 1970-2014; EDTG 1970-2014

*Figure A-1a and A-1b. Five-year comparison of post-conflict terrorism 1970-2014*



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PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Victim, Violent, Vulnerable: A Feminist Response to the Incel Radicalisation Scale

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**Abstract:** Following several deadly attacks in recent years, misogynist incels have piqued academic interest. However, attempts by terrorism scholars to understand incels' radicalisation, ideology, and mental health raise concerns. In this article, we illustrate these concerns with the example of the Incel Radicalisation Scale (IRS), which relies on survey data and claims to help identify, measure, and prevent radicalisation among incels. First, drawing on a growing feminist knowledge base on incels and male supremacy, masculinity, and violence, we question the definition of core concepts (radicalisation, violence, misogyny) and incels in the IRS. Second, we criticise the methods used for sampling and concept validation, including reliance on incels' self-representation and the dismissal of their harmful online activity. Third, we assess what these shortcomings mean for the IRS' conclusions regarding the violent potential of incels, and the role of mental health and misogyny for male supremacist incel movements. We argue such conclusions are prone to legitimising misogynist incel narratives of victimhood, and overlooking broader harms such as normalising misogynist violence and male and white supremacism. We therefore caution against using the IRS and emphasise the importance of having a comprehensive picture of incel radicalisation. Future studies must be more rigorous about addressing the problematic effects resulting from research designs of uncritical epistemologies in male supremacist research.

**Keywords:** Misogyny, incels, radicalisation, victimhood, terrorism, feminist analysis, violence

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# Introduction

In recent years, several deadly attacks perpetrated by self-identified incels (involuntary celibates) have attracted media, public, and academic attention.[1] Incels are predominantly a subgroup of a growing (mostly) online network of misogynist websites and forums united around ideas of male supremacy, male entitlement, and anti-feminism, within the manosphere.[2] The manosphere is home to a variety of groups including Pick-Up Artists, Men's Rights Activists, Men Going Their Own Way, Redpillers, and Tradcons, united in the belief of zero-sum gender relations, where women's advancement and increased legal gender equality efforts, by feminist movements has resulted in the disruption of a supposed *natural* gender order granting women superfluous social, economic, political, and sexual power.[3] Drawing from the 1999 film *The Matrix,* manosphere groups often refer to the acceptance of this belief as taking the red pill.[4] Particular to incels is their belief in the blackpill,[5] a nihilistic and misogynist ideology in which the realisation of being an incel means accepting the immutability of having the lowest social and sexual status, often manifesting as hatred and justification for violence.[6] As scholars have highlighted, incels claim for themselves an "ultimate victimhood" where they position themselves as "subhuman" because of their lack of sexual or romantic interaction with women, attributed to their looks and feminism granting women more agency in choosing their romantic and sexual partners.[7] Incels' victimhood has been identified as a kind of "weaponised subordination," where incels position themselves as subordinate "failed" men in order to degrade and justify their misogyny towards women.[8]

While (feminist) scholars in gender studies, media and communications, and criminology have long taken an interest in the discourses and violence emanating from the "manosphere," recent attacks invoking the communities have also piqued interest from terrorism and security scholars.[9] Some of these newer works about incels have already raised concerns among feminist academics, including their potential to depoliticise and exceptionalise the misogynist and male supremacist structures underlying incel radicalisation and violence.[10] In particular, some current studies uncritically accept, and thereby platform, incel's narratives of victimhood and grievances.[11]

Some recent incel research has turned towards survey data to provide an empirical backdrop for the largely theoretical engagement by terrorism scholars so far. One article that stands out in this trend creates an Incel Radicalisation Scale (IRS), claiming to identify, measure, and help prevent radicalisation among incels.[12] However, as we show in this article, the nature of the data and the conclusions drawn from it raises both old and new concerns. Our perspective is based on our own research as scholars from political science, gender studies, and criminology, who have researched online male supremacist movements for the better part of ten years. Despite our different fields and focal points, we unite in a commitment to feminist theory and practice essential to understanding male supremacist movements, whose main identity

revolves around gender-based needs and grievances.[13] We therefore use the remainder of this article to caution against using the IRS by highlighting what we consider to be its three most impactful shortcomings, and outline their potentially harmful conclusions.

First, drawing on a growing feminist knowledge base on incels and male supremacy, masculinity, and violence, we argue there are issues with how core concepts (radicalisation, violence, misogyny, and incels) are defined. We show how these conceptualisations lack systemic engagement with incel discourses and the patriarchal power structures they are built on and perpetuate, emphasised in the existing literature on male and white supremacism. Second, we criticise the methods used for sampling and concept validation, including reliance on incels' self-representation and the dismissal of their online activity as "unreal." Third, we assess what these conceptual and methodological shortcomings mean for the conclusions drawn in regard to the IRS, the violent potential of incels, and the role of mental health and misogyny for male supremacist incel movements.

We draw on Kate Manne's conceptualisation of misogyny as not just manifested within the psychology and internal attitudes of individual men, rather, misogyny is embedded within social norms, expectations, and impacts upon women's lives, under a system of patriarchal oppression.[14] When women challenge the status quo, by not adhering to prescribed "feminine codes," and strive for or obtain "masculine-coded" achievements like authority, societal misogynistic structures dictate that women be put back in their place, through "subtly hostile, threatening, and punitive norm-enforcement mechanisms."[15] Misogyny, therefore, is not about merely hating women and enacting physical violence upon women (although the latter is the tragic and inevitable progression of misogyny), it also involves other seemingly less extreme ways of subjugating women, which can include discursive means, oppressing women, and validating and normalising violence against women.

We conclude that the IRS article is based on several conceptual choices, which make its argument prone to overlooking broader harms emanating from incel ideology, and how this is situated within wider societal structures normalising misogynist violence and male and white supremacism. We consider this to be particularly problematic due to the IRS's seemingly quantifiable and policy-oriented character, which might lead to these shortcomings applied within policies and practice. These conclusions extend beyond this article, and echo other critiques,[16] about how incel misogyny is often and increasingly minimised via the pathologising of a minority group of deviant individuals, whose pernicious attitudes toward women are attributed to their personality or mental illness. If the connection to structural misogyny and patriarchal systems of socialisation is disregarded, this ends up reinforcing assumptions of male supremacism – the belief in cisgender men's superiority and right to dominate and control others.[17] Furthermore, viewing mental health as a primary factor for participation in incel spaces implies that ill mental health causes misogyny, or participation and identification

in incel spaces, whilst also stigmatising mental health issues. To avoid these fallacies, we emphasise the importance of having a comprehensive understanding of incel radicalisation that does not take incel's claims to "wounded male victimhood" at face value.

## The Incel Radicalisation Scale

In 2022, the article "Predictors of Radical Intentions among Incels: A Survey of 54 Self-identified Incels" was published in the *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*. In the article, the authors set out to "explore the relationship between radicalisation, mental health and inceldom by directly asking incels about their experiences and attitudes."[18] This is presented as part of an innovative turn towards primary data on incels, advocated by several recent articles.[19] Aligned with these other works, the present article emphasises the potential of survey data to provide insights into "a potential mismatch between the mass public's widespread beliefs about Incels and Incels' own views of themselves as a group."[20] To implement this, the authors draw from survey data of 54 respondents, collected from individuals who reached out to the Incel Podcast, and "chose to connect with a Light Upon Light interventionist."[21] The survey asked questions about respondents' mental health, radical intentions, and ideology. Responses are set in the context of several scales: an Activism/Radicalism Intentions Scale (AIS/RIS), an Incel Ideology scale (II), and the Incel Radicalisation Scale (IRS), pointing to "high intercorrelations" between them.[22] Finally, the authors "predict" incel radicalisation by correlating the scores across the three scales and additional questions from the survey on so-called misconceptions about incels. They claim there is no correlation between radicalisation and incel ideology, suggesting that "an ideological commitment to the Black Pill ideas and to incels as a tight-knit community is not a useful predictor of illegal/violent intentions or radical attitudes."[23] Instead, the authors highlight the high prevalence of reported "mental health needs" among respondents as a worthwhile consideration for de-radicalisation measures. They further suggest that incels are less violent than is often assumed, with high scores of radical beliefs reserved to a "small minority" of respondents, "many of which reject violence."[24] They conclude that there is thus a mismatch with media reports' focus on incels as violent, and argue against "classifying incels as a terrorist group based on the action of a tiny minority among them."[25] They suggest that "The newly validated Incel Radicalisation Scale can be a useful measure for early detection of individuals vulnerable to radicalisation to violent incel action."[26]

These conclusions about violence, incel ideology, and radicalisation stand in contrast to findings from numerous works, involving not only analyses of online data (e.g. forums, videos, memes, etc.) but also direct interviews with self-identified current and former incels.[27] In the following sections, we outline how these conclusions are based on a particular, and in our view, problematically limited, understanding of key concepts and definitions of victimhood in incels' identity and ideology, the presented types of violence linked to or de-linked from extremism, and what constitutes vulnerability(ies) to radicalisation. These three aspects are at the centre of the

IRS article as captured in the three scales whose alignment works to prove its core argument. We, therefore, structure the rest of this response piece around them. By walking through their methodological, conceptual, and epistemological shortcomings in turn, we show that the article's core argument overlooks a variety of debates and insights from the existing literature on incels, masculinity, and violence (by feminist and non-feminist scholars). We conclude by linking these shortcomings to a broader trend in the reception of incels emerging among both preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) practitioners and certain academic circles, and advocate for a reconsideration of these tendencies by emphasising their detrimental effects on efforts to counter both radicalisation in incel spaces and broader misogynist and male supremacist worldviews.

## Victim: Incel Ideology and Identity

A central element of the article is the Incel Ideology scale, for which the authors asked twelve questions to their 54 incel respondents to measure their commitment to incel ideology.[28] We see several problems with how the article approaches incels (and their ideology), including methodological issues in terms of sampling and survey questions, a lack of engagement with broader knowledge bases on discrimination and victimhood, and literature on how incel ideology interlinks with misogyny.

### *Sampling*

First, the 54 individuals surveyed self-selected to participate in the study based on chosen interactions with a podcast about incels and P/CVE interventionists.[29] While the authors acknowledge in their limitations section that this might mean that those surveyed may not be representative of the larger incel network, this data is still ultimately used to draw conclusions that incels should not be considered a terrorist group, and only "a small minority of incels" are "radical."[30] However, the authors themselves note that many incels initially contacted the podcast "express[ed] gratitude to the show for featuring honest, nonjudgmental conversations with people like themselves."[31] This self-presentation stands somewhat at odds with the article's literature review, highlighting incels as a "reclusive population" distrustful and hesitant to outside intervention including "to seeking psychological treatment."[32] Incels who engage with the media are often disparaged on incel forums with their legitimacy as incels questioned, emphasising that they might not be accurately representative of the larger incel community nor pose the threat (or not) that the authors are trying to determine. Another issue with the authors' conceptualisation of incels is the disregard for the internal divisions rampant across many misogynist incel forums. As past research on incels has evidenced, incels are not a monolith historically nor presently.[33] In fact, within and across various incel forums today there is much disagreement about who can claim the incel label and whether it is dependent upon relationship status or an ideology.[34] More so, gatekeeping and controversies about the definition of incel based on race, class, geographical location, sexual histories and other hierarchies can be

understood as a regular, important and ongoing part of discussions in incel spaces.[35] However, within the IRS article's questions ["Do you consider yourself an Incel (yes/no)," whether they "believe in Black Pill," and what they believe qualifies someone to "claim they are an incel"], there is no acknowledgement of these nuances and contradictions.[36] Additionally, it is unclear if the blackpill was defined for survey participants. This is concerning because, like the definition of incel, within incel forums there is debate about the nuances of the blackpill, and mixed emotional responses to acceptance of the blackpill.[37] The twelve questions used to measure incel ideology were composed of questions about support for the blackpill, and about what it means to be an Incel.[38] Respondents were asked to rank the questions about believing the blackpill, and it being refreshing, comforting, objective etc. on a scale from (1) not at all to (5) very much.[39] The responses then form the scale along which the commitment to incel ideology is ranked. However, given the above-mentioned debates, these responses to a vague reference to the blackpill as well as to inceldom cannot be meaningfully interpreted as an ordinal scale, where multiple characteristics translate into increasing ideological convictions. In fact, there is no mention of specific incel forums or other spaces, making it difficult to understand how the individuals surveyed fit into the larger incelosphere.

## *Identity*

On page 1 of the IRS article, incels are defined as "an online subculture of primarily men who believe that they are prevented by the society from fulfilling their desire to have sex, date, or establish relationships with women."[40] The authors also identify that incels "tend to blame their disenfranchisement on *lookism*, or women's choice of sexual partners based solely on physical features" and the influence of "biological determinism" in incel forums.[41] While much of this definition mirrors other research on incels and their beliefs (i.e., the prevalence of biological determinism, blaming women, and lookism), it does fail to comprehensively engage with how these elements fit into a broader context, and in doing so reproduces incel definitions as factual without critically interrogating them. This neglects how the incel use of terms like "lookism" relates to a biologically deterministic worldview reliant on the naturalisation of sexist and dehumanising gender stereotypes. Notably, this worldview depends on cherry-picked readings of evolutionary psychology and biological theories, theories which scholars have highlighted are outdated, falsified, and sexist.[42] For example, philosopher Mari Ruti highlights that evolutionary psychology's "standard narrative" relies on "gender profiling," where gender stereotypes are naturalised and "validated" through methodologically suspect studies, that in turn promote "scientific sexism," harmful and dehumanising to men and particularly to women.[43]

The authors do not critically engage with these aspects, but instead seem to endorse incels' definition of "lookism" as correct, noting that, there is "some evidence that it does factor into day-to-day interactions rather than being a figment of Incel's imagination."[44] However, rather than just applying the term "lookism" as a phenomenon affecting men, this concept could be understood in the context of the "politics of desire," which acknowledges that racism,

heteronormativity, ableism and class "do extend into the sphere of romance and sex" and impact people of all genders.[45] This deeper engagement would serve not to give credence to incels' victimhood narrative, in which they alone are affected, but allow for a comprehensive understanding of the structures of sexual relations and their entanglements with broader societal hierarchies.

## *Ideology*

In line with this singular focus on victimisation of men reproducing incel narratives, the IRS conceptualisation of incels ignores the centrality of misogyny, which many other researchers on incels emphasise is a key component of incel ideology.[46] As Jilly Boyce Kay argues "inceldom depends upon a logic in which men are the victims of women's cruelty and shallowness" and that incels "rigorously polic[e]" victimhood along the lines of gender, as any sense that women might also face "sexual rejection and gendered cruelty threatens the basis of this claim."[47] Incel's sense of victimhood is at least partially grounded in an aggrieved male sexual entitlement, where they express anger and occasionally physical violence in response to their belief that they are denied access to women as sexual and romantic partners.[48] Misogyny then is deeply entangled in incels' entitlement to women's bodies and, therefore, their own sense of victimhood, which is rooted in that sexual entitlement. While the authors cite studies outlining misogyny as a central aspect of incel ideology and incel killer's hating, dehumanising, and feeling entitled to women in their literature review, misogyny and hate as core elements of incel ideology are absent from their operationalisation of incel ideology. We view this as a concerning omission as the authors of the IRS article seek to measure violence, and as other scholars including Caron Gentry and Kate Manne have highlighted, how misogyny is linked to violence. However, *misogynistic* violence is often overlooked or made apolitical.[49] The term misogyny in the article only appears in the results and findings of the survey in the response to the open-ended question: "What do you think is the biggest misconception about incels?"[50]

Here the authors create a Dispute Misogyny category for a section on the "perceived misconceptions about incels."[51] Responses to this open-ended question were coded as disputing misogyny if they mentioned misogyny, captured as "misogyny, bitterness towards women, hatred of women, objectification of women" as a "misconception."[52] Instead of misogyny, incel ideology stands to be largely defined through the blackpill defined in the article as "the idea that Incels cannot form sexual relationships with women because of inborn deficiencies (i.e., physical appearance, height, weight, and cognitive abilities) and their lack of social skills or status."[53] The authors also reference the incel belief that there is a social hierarchy in terms of attractiveness, whereby incels see themselves on the bottom of the hierarchy due to their claimed unattractiveness, but also other relational and societal concepts often mentioned by incels, such as hypergamy and misandry. However, while this hierarchical worldview of the blackpill as well as its underlying societal constructs have been deconstructed as essentially misogynistic and resulting from patriarchal structures by scholars, the authors do not relate

them to misogynist worldviews.[54] Here the ideological connection to structural misogyny and patriarchal systems of socialisation is neglected.[55]

### *Conclusion*

Given the above considerations, we are doubtful that the IRS is a valid measure of commitment to incel ideology. As we have outlined, it at best bears the potential to capture which aspects of the different existing interpretations of inceldom are particularly relevant to the sampled individuals. At worst, however, the scale represents a limited and superficial reproduction of a particular interpretation of incels as *male* and *victim* without engaging with underlying worldviews about broader gender relations of male superiority and misogyny (rather than individual experience) established as central to produce the self-identification as "male victims," which finds expression in the blackpill at the core of incel radicalisation.[56] Importantly, the reliance solely on survey data without engagement with the broader literature on incel ideology also disregards the possibility that the interpretation of inceldom conveyed by respondents reflects how incels might want to present themselves differently to researchers/outsiders than they do on forums. This disparity is not addressed because the authors explicitly do not engage with how incels perform their identity and victimhood online; at the same time, the wording of questions around *misconceptions* and *persecution* already assumes the sense of victimhood as central to the responses, yet does not inform the analysis. The lack of engagement with misogyny as a core element of incel ideology, nor a real grappling with incels' conception of their own victimhood, a victimhood intimately tied to misogyny as incels blame women for their plight, results in the authors reproducing this victimhood rather than interrogating it.

## Violent: Radical Intentions and Incel Violence

A main tenet of the article's argument is that "strong adherence to Incel ideology did not predict radical attitudes or radical intentions."[57] The article finds that the "Incel Ideology (II) scale was not correlated with the "Radical Intentions Scale," and that the majority of incels in this sample (83 percent) rejected radical attitudes and intentions."[58] The main argument made here is that incels are not as approving of violence as their reputation appears. While we agree that the common media depiction of incels as a homogeneous group of notorious and toxic killers is counterproductive at best and dangerous at worst,[59] we find several shortcomings in the article's engagement with incel violence noteworthy: its limited engagement with violence beyond mass murder, its flawed methodological operationalisation of sexual violence (rape), and its lack of engagement with the importance of violence for incels' online practices and identities proven by a variety of studies.[60]

### *Violence as a Concept*

First, the violence the article is concerned with seems to be mainly approached through incels' responses on their willingness to commit rape and/or political violence, and their admiration

of incel mass killers. Notably, the authors coded open-ended responses as "disputing violence" if they mentioned opposing incels connection with "murder, terrorism, threat, dangerous."[61] Beyond this, the survey itself only explicitly references violence in the question "I would continue to support a person or an organisation that fights for incels' political and legal rights even if they sometimes resort to violence." In this question it is again unclear what kind of violence is referenced, yet it seems to refer to terrorist *activist* violence. There are other types of (misogynist) violence, however, shown to be important in the context of male supremacist ideologies (and political violence more broadly), including interpersonal and domestic abuse, as well as misogynist online violence and sexual cyber harassment.[62] Yet, misogynist and interpersonal violence is often neglected from the scope of "terrorist" or "political" violence.[63] Misogynistic behaviour is about punishing women who act in ways subverting gendered expectations and violating patriarchal norms.[64] Inevitably, misogyny involves violence which manifests in various forms, from physical intimidation to sexual harassment, rape, and fatal violence. Specifically in the online realm, violent practices of misogynistic cyber harassment, ranging from active and passive verbal abuse through sexualised language and imagery to direct threats of physical violence often coupled with doxing, have been shown to result in the ostracising and silencing of women online.[65] The IRS article thus focuses on a narrow and inadequate conception of violence, overlooking the broader continuum of sexual and misogynist violence, which is routinely experienced both online and offline.[66]

## *Rape*

Violence is also considered with some brief mentions of rape. Specifically, respondents' "willingness to rape" was measured with the question "I would rape if I thought I would get away with it."[67] Previous studies show that few men in the general population will answer such questions affirmatively.[68] However, this changes when the question is altered to describe acts of sexual violence, omitting the word *rape*.[69] In manosphere communities, including incels, rape as a criminal offence is often contested and/or minimised, and the belief that most women lie about rape is an accepted common mythology, meaning that men might indeed condone or even commit rape but claim it to be consensual sex.[70] This is similar to how incels consider themselves as not misogynistic while engaging in misogynistic practices. For example, the authors find that "the majority of Incels (28 [participants], 52%) saw Incels as less violent/misogynistic than they are perceived. Only a small minority (3 [participants], 6%) believed Incels to be more dangerous than perceived."[71] While this self-assessment may be true for those surveyed, it is important to note that incels regularly talk about (and celebrate) rape and sexual violence on their forums.[72]

Even within the survey responses in the IRS article, there are references to violence and misogyny. Specifically, the authors created a "dispute innocuousness" category to capture some responses stating that the biggest misconception was that incels were harmless. Some of these responses included "People underestimate us, we will continue to kill until we get our

government assigned girlfriends" and "People underestimate us, they will regret it when the Incel revolution starts." While the authors do acknowledge that the "dispute innocuousness" category is concerning, they interpret these responses as appearing only among a radical few, stating the "more support for incel killers and willingness to rape, the more likely a participant was to say that Incels were more dangerous than the public perceives them."[73] This finding is, however, not theorised in a broader sense but rather positioned as a contrast to a larger group of respondents that "dispute" violence and misogyny.

## *Violence as Practice*

The study concludes that "the majority of Incels reject violence as a course of action for themselves and denounce violence of the three notorious Incel killers."[74] In the third scale (Radicalisation Scale - IRS), the authors find that,

> …the majority of participants (64%; 35 individuals) had an average score of 1 (not at all) on the IRS scale, indicating that they fully rejected Incel violence. Only nine individuals in our sample (17%) scored above 2.5, the scale's midpoint. In other words, the majority of Incels in this sample (83%) rejected radical attitudes and intentions.[75]

In their literature review, the authors claim that hateful content produced by a small subset is "consistent with existing research on incel online activity," citing two studies - Baele and colleagues, and Jaki and colleagues.[76] However, that is not what either study finds. In fact, Baele and colleagues found that, after the 2018 Toronto van attack, "messages explicitly endorsing or calling for violence remained extremely frequent, confirming the widespread support for violence produced by this worldview."[77] Meanwhile, Jaki and colleagues analysed hate speech rather than support for violence.[78] They found that although "about 10% of the users are responsible for the majority of the hate speech", that "about half of the users in our dataset posted hateful messages at one time or another."[79] These findings are further confirmed in other qualitative and quantitative analyses of incel spaces, showing an "overwhelming support among self-proclaimed incels for attacks and violence more generally" as well as a common practice of self-identified incels to commit other forms of violence such as doxing, image-based sexual abuse, harassment, and stalking.[80] This is not to say that these forms of violence are exclusive to incels, but that various forms of violence have arisen from and are encouraged in incel spaces. The authors of the IRS article fail to assess the differences between their survey results and the everyday reality of the forums. Even if it is indeed only a small subset of forum users producing the content (making their respondents merely observers of such content), the authors do not explain why individuals who claim they do not endorse violence continue to participate in spaces where support of violence is commonplace, and where there is often active denial of broader societal misogyny and (male) violence against women and girls.[81] In fact, posts perceived as being too "blue pilled" (anything viewed as counter to the blackpill, including advice like "work on your personality," or "don't be misogynist" as a way to stop being an incel) are often banned from misogynist incel forums or ostracised by other members of

these forums.[82] This shows how normalised both misogynist and violent statements are in incel discourse and online "culture," which does not, however, find entrance into the overall arguments the article makes about violence. Glossing over these broader perspectives on violence in the IRS article, the authors use their data to conclude that "given these parameters, there is little warrant for classifying Incels as a terrorist group based on the action of a tiny minority among them,"[83] which is particularly odd given that they compare incels with other radical groups, pointing out "only a tiny minority of those who held radical Jihadist ideas engaged in radical action."[84] However, even if we were to accept both the idea that violence can be measured sufficiently through the survey questions and the idea of a threshold of violent membership as an indicator of 'terrorist' ideology, it is unclear where the authors would set such a threshold. Methodologically speaking, while nine individuals is a small subset of the population, if this percentage was extrapolated to the membership of the largest incel forum alone, 17 percent of their membership is roughly 3,566 individuals.[85] This also does not do justice to the fact that even the small handful of incels who have committed mass murder over the last couple of years have taken many lives.[86]

## *Conclusion*

The difference between the survey results that indicate rejection of violence and the day-to-day activity of normalised violent misogynistic language and related practices of cyberharassment and abuse within incel forums (as well as some of the survey results that endorse violence), while potentially explainable through extreme differences in the definitions about what *rape*, *violence*, and *misogyny* entail, is not theorised, explained and, subsequently reconciled in the article. Thus, we find three important shortcomings with how the article engages with violent intentions: first, on a conceptual level, we find the reduction of violence to physical political violence in the incel context problematic since it disregards other types of misogynist violence significant in contexts of gender as well as online spaces, both of which are relevant to engagement with incels. Second, on a methodological level, we are sceptical of the measure of "rape willingness," which does not engage with the methodological and definitional problems that come with assessing these types of gender-based violence. Lastly, and related to the previous points about both violence and ideology, we contest the idea that incel perspectives of violence can be considered as objective measures. Understandings of incel ideology based on self-description to researchers should be coupled with an analysis of their online practices. Relying on self-description without analysing a group's practices is something that has not been applied to other extreme groups—for example, the Taliban say they support women, but this is not accepted as the absolute reality of this group.

In fact, the discrepancy between the assessments of the IRS article as well as other survey-based research and studies that engage with the online performance of inceldom, should not come as a surprise given that the very violence of their online and anonymously performed identity and ideology produces a need to justify and present themselves (vis-a-vis outsiders) as

continuously non-violent. As Andersen puts it:

> *Incels set up boundaries between themselves and violent actors by asserting they are participants in online spaces or groups unrelated to the incelosphere, and framing them as "actual" harmful others...Boundary work thus protects the purity of the online incel milieu from contamination by harmful others.*[87]

One could thus argue that rather than representing the actual purity of incels as portrayed by the authors, the study can serve as an example of the centrality of such purity/boundary work for incels' very identity.

## Vulnerable: Radicalisation and Mental Health

Much of the study's understanding of radicalisation, including the survey questions posed to measure it, is based on a particular understanding of radicalisation and (self-) assessed vulnerability to radicalise. We are concerned about the assumptions underlying both the conceptualisation and measurements in the article about how radicalisation is set in relation to activism, institutional mistrust, and mental health.

### *Activism*

There is a common tendency in the traditionally rather state-centric and policy-driven field of terrorism research to only consider direct acts of violence as problematic and relevant to the analysis and prevention of political violence.[88] In the article, instead of violence, the authors find that the "only significant predictor of Incel Ideology was Activist Intentions," which they interpret as meaning that "among participants in this study, a greater commitment to Incel ideology corresponded to a greater commitment to only legal/nonviolent action to advance Incels' interests."[89] This non-violent aspect of incel *activism* is considered mainly through a focus on support for and involvement with "organisations fighting for incels' political and legal rights, for example through demonstrations, petitions, flyers etc."[90] This perspective draws largely on a view of social movement activism as offline, in-person, and somewhat centralised in organisational units. This conception of *activist* inceldom implicitly repeats a common misunderstanding of social movement activism and its goals as at least somewhat peaceful and essentially liberating, implying that it is not harmful to others.[91]

In addition, none of these assumptions correspond to how most manosphere male supremacist groups—and incels in particular – organise. For example, while Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), have indeed occasionally combined their online activities in virtual communities with offline protests and advocacy work, this type of activism does not resonate with most incels (nor the blackpill ideology), who purports that efforts to work through existing political and social institutions are futile.[92] Rather, their online activities are more focused on providing alternative spaces for the exchange of their views, often based on violent discursive practices. Aside from the means of advocating for incels' rights, when looking at incel violence the article does not

specify how non-violent the political or legal rights that incels might want to advance can indeed be, given that much of their goals are explicitly promoting the oppression of women's rights.

## *Mobilisation*

The perspective on organisationally driven radicalisation, as well as successful radicalisation as equivalent to the usage of violence, is reflected in the previous comparison with Jihadist groups. However, far-right groups and their forms of recruitment and mobilisation may be a more appropriate comparison for incel spaces, given not only important overlaps in their misogynist ideology but also in their online practices, drawing extensively on pop-cultural references, dog whistles, and pseudoscientific evidence to construct an alternative view of the world.[93] Researchers have found important differences between Islamist and far-right online content, highlighting that "[o]rganisations like Islamic State use social media to recruit participants while the vast majority of far-right interactions take place on social media platforms, using aesthetics deeply influenced by internet youth cultures."[94] One aspect of these interactions that has received much attention in incel as well as far-right extremist spaces is a trend to engage in *trolling* or *shitposting*. Shitposting is the practice of posting deliberately provocative or off-topic comments to provoke others, distract from the main conversation, or to obscure the sincerity of the *shitposter*. Scholars note that such practices, along with the use of irony and trolling by far-right users often seek to mask true intentions, to spread and normalise hateful views (while rejecting accusations of bigotry), and spur recruitment.[95] In the IRS article, both the potential of shitposting to mask dangerous content as well as the difficulty this presents for researchers to assess incel online rhetoric is noted. They suggest that survey-based responses can help overcome this difficulty by presenting "self-reported violent intentions."[96]

However, while shitposting is indeed complex and multilayered, as a part of the online culture as well as means of mobilisation it has to be taken into account. As Witt puts it, "serious or not, the products of these discourses are very real."[97] Indeed, countering the assumption that only the uptake of direct means of violence is to be problematised, researchers have argued that even though the consumption of media does not lead to the majority of its viewers becoming radicalised into violence, the adoption of radical beliefs "may have other deleterious impacts, such as increasing support for authoritarian ideas, diminishing trust in public institutions, or decreasing support for prosocial public health efforts."[98] These aspects resonate much more with incels, one of whose central claims is that their forums create 'alternative spaces' to what they perceive as a malevolent mainstream of real-life events. Research has highlighted how these alternative spaces of the far-right are often used to reinterpret social events, to foster a discriminatory and non-democratic worldview and how their growth – and successful use of online and offline media – has led to a movement of such ideas into the mainstream.[99]

## *Mental Health*

Instead of taking the violent discourse and practices in incel forums into consideration as both the root cause and effect of radicalisation, the article advocates a strong emphasis on mental health and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in incel communities. The authors are careful not to claim a causal relationship between mental illness and participation in incel forums or violence.[100] However, in another (closely related) paper on the subject of incels, Moskalenko and colleagues[101] find that radical incels who embrace "violent manifestations of the incel subculture" are "qualitatively different from the non-radical majority," arguing that "radicalised incels are more likely to be on the neuro-divergent spectrum and more likely to have been bullied than non-radicalised incels."[102] This study supports Speckhard and colleagues' finding that in comparison to the general population, rates of ASD diagnoses and traits are significantly higher in incel communities.[103] As Gheorghe and Clement highlight, however, not only are these works promoting an ableist narrative, but in connecting incels' experiences of bullying, social exclusion, and difficulty forming relationships with autism, such individuals are then signposted to incel communities and to form an affinity with incel rhetoric, potentially fuelling the now established association between incels and autism.[104]

On a methodological note, it is worthwhile to note that these mental health struggles (anxiety and depression) and autism spectrum disorder diagnoses were all self-reported and not externally validated, and the article notes that almost half of survey respondents that reported mental health issues were self-diagnosed. While there are a variety of scales used in research on mental health that could have been used to validate these claims of mental health issues, none were used by the authors.[105] Further, bullying and persecution were not defined in the survey but left up to respondents to interpret. This is concerning given that the authors themselves acknowledge that,

> *...it is possible that the prevalence of mental health issues discussions on Incel forums creates a kind of "demand characteristic," normalising and even encouraging those who wish to belong to the Incel community to express mental health problems.*[106]

However, this limitation does not come into the analysis itself. This is problematic, as self-reporting of mental health issues or histories of bullying should not be necessarily taken at face value and in isolation, but instead analysed for how these incidents might interact with incel ideology, and victimhood and persecution as a key factor. Further, the authors do not interrogate whether or not the mental health issues explored are pre-existing, formed, or were worsened by participation in incel spaces. This is a big omission, especially considering how normalised suicide discourse is in incel spaces.[107]

In the IRS paper, this such-derived mental health struggles and incels' "history of bullying and/or persecution" is set in relation to their (supposed) rejection of violence from most incels according to the scale. Taking both of these findings together leads the authors to conclude that "there is little warrant for classifying Incels as a terrorist group based on the action of a tiny

minority among them."[108] Even if these numbers are an accurate representation, poor mental health or an ASD diagnosis does not justify or even mitigate the violence emanating from incel spaces nor membership in a hateful group. Misogyny and misogynistic motivated violence are not caused by mental illness, poor mental health, or autism, but rather the result of misogynist and patriarchal structures. Such assessments further risk stigmatising people with autism, mental illnesses, and poor mental health.[109] Similarly, this does not explain participation in a hateful forum. Straight cis-men, which is how most incels on misogynist incel forums identify, are not the most vulnerable population in regards to mental health, and many other vulnerable populations (take LGBTQ+ youth for example) suffering from mental health issues, including being at high risk for depression and suicide, are very unlikely to commit mass violence.[110]

Research on masculinity has indeed long found that experiences of bullying can result in a feeling of humiliation and emasculation, which has played a role in school shootings.[111] However, different from the IRS study, such studies typically highlight how this humiliation tends to be gendered as masculine and results from a male supremacist feeling of entitlement.[112] This entitlement is particularly strong in incel spaces, which are fuelled by aggrieved sexual entitlement, making them feel like that they have been "sexually excluded" and have a moral obligation to get their "sexual rights" back.[113] As Nicole Nguyen explains, in her exploration of the treatment of the 2015 Charleston Church massacre perpetrator,

> *Mental health often is used as an alibi to justify massacres waged by white shooters, eschewing more complex discussions about the primacy of white supremacy as an organising frame for violence while criminalising individuals with psychiatric disability labels.*[114]

The way in which mental health and ASD diagnoses are invoked in the IRS article, in part to establish that incels should not be classified as a terrorist group, combined with the lack of engagement in understanding how systemic misogyny and male supremacism fuels incel communities, but is also enacted beyond them, mirrors Nguyen's observation of the treatment of white supremacist shooters. The invocation of mental illness, ASD diagnoses, and poor mental health dismisses the political agency of white and male supremacist actors, and instead pathologises participation in violent action and/or extreme movements as resulting from an abject mental state. Platforming these incel convictions without engaging with their implications is based on an underlying tendency of *himpathy*—the undue sympathy for men who have done harm.[115] Because the authors fail to analyse the misogyny that shapes this movement, and put the emphasis instead on mental health, misogyny and male supremacy is at once made aberrant and excused.

## Conclusion

The article presents a distinction between activists, terrorists, and those suffering from depression and loneliness. Incels are presented as a vulnerable population, through a proximity to a (supposedly positive) activism, a misunderstanding of how their unorganised activism

can still lead to mobilisation, and through an emphasis on mental health issues and other vulnerabilities. All of these are not set into a causal relationship by the authors; yet their co-consideration in the context of any combination of these scales, as well as their portrayal as being somewhat indicative of individuals and groups' violence potential, are problematic, because they imply them as factors to assess risk of incel violence. These factors are not set in relation to a more systemic perspective on ideology, including the centrality of misogyny as a violent category or goal of advocacy in itself. Yet, it is precisely where we can see overlaps between the distinct categories, as their misogyny rather than their self-understanding as activists or suffering from mental illness, that their status has the potential to become violent. This lack of engagement with how ideology and worldviews interact with violence is also reflected in the lack of a broader understanding of online radicalisation and recruitment as established means of the far-right, which does not necessarily lead to individual lone actor violence for all those involved, but entails dangers of a broader societal anti-democratic mobilisation based on distrust of institutions and resulting justification of a diverse set of violence.

## Discussion: An Easy Fit? On "Unreal" Research and Real Victims

We see a variety of issues with how the authors of the IRS article treat incel radicalisation. While we have focused in particular on the problems of how the article conceptualises the core aspects of inceldom, violence and radicalisation, here we want to focus on the methodological and epistemological problems that accompany these shortcomings to outline why we consider them as particularly problematic when set in relation to their potential reception by policymakers.

First, as we have outlined in all three sections, there is a lack of reflection on how the methodological approach of surveying a particular sample of incels relates to the broader incel community. This is not only relevant considering the sampling method as outlined above. While survey and interview data can provide new insights on who and why people participate in these spaces, it is important to caveat and triangulate these insights with data from the forums themselves. However, the IRS article positions the data mined from surveys and interviews as *actual* and *real*: "The prevalence of trolling and 'shitposting' on Incel social media makes extrapolating from Incel online rhetoric to their *actual*[116] opinions and attitudes problematic and primary data on Incels (surveys or interviews) remain scarce."[117] In this way, the authors render online discourse analyses *unreal* and suspect, and therefore position them as less accurate. However, this underestimates how misogynist incels, who often seek to represent themselves as victims of women, feminism, and society, might choose to represent themselves in a way that emphasises their perceived victimhood with researchers.[118] Further, as the IRS article, and other researchers have noted, incels are hesitant with outsiders, be they researchers, mental health professionals, or P/CVE interventionists, and participating in such a survey may also be a method of trolling but also a reason that those who responded are not representative

overall. For example, an earlier survey with Light Upon Light (the same countering violent extremism initiative involved in the IRS paper) was met with extreme scepticism and paranoia in several misogynist incel forums, with posts warning members to leave the forum for other spaces to protect their identities or risk having their personal information leaked to security authorities.[119] These problematiques should be considered when interpreting the authors' conclusion that their findings indicate that "news stories about Incel killers do not adequately represent the larger Incel population, the majority of which reject violence."[120] Surveys or interviews are no more objective "real" representations than online discourses, and understanding of incel ideology based on these self-representations alone is concerning particularly when the difference between self-representation in surveys and interviews and online activity is not investigated.

Yet, this epistemological perspective is often adopted by policymakers and practitioners for three reasons: first, the understanding of good research as quantitative and/or quantifiable fits well with the incentive of policymakers to base their interventions on what is perceived as an objective measure, which the IRS article claims to provide.[121] Scholars have shown that the path-dependencies, as well as technocratic workings of policy-making cycles resonate with both the quantitative language and perspectives.[122] Second, a similar "easy fit" applies to a lack of engagement with systemic factors, including the complex interplay between practices and rhetoric, between online and offline, and between direct and indirect and structural violence. These types of interplay are hard to capture, complex to include, require much long-term planning and research, and the triangulation of data. More so, the required solutions to such problems are likely to expose a necessary shift in the systemic workings of the institutions of governance themselves (in our case P/CVE practitioners and policymakers, as well as security apparatuses in a variety of government systems), which require hard work, self-reflection, and significantly, the political will to change. Compared to this, the IRS scale presents a much easier approach to inceldom by focusing on the easier more direct manifestations and effects.

Third, as has been shown in previous works, the very basis of P/CVE interventions and some of the research on incels, are themselves implicated in the logics of male supremacy, which makes the above-mentioned reflection all the more necessary and all the harder.[123] Similarly, the authors of the IRS article fail to critically assess the role that victimhood plays among male supremacists and obscure this victimhood claim's foundations in male sexual entitlement and misogyny, and the harm that these movements perpetuate. While the IRS authors as well as a range of others publishing similar research, are hesitant to take incel's hateful discourse completely seriously, many of them seem to readily, and uncritically, accept other narratives that incels hope to forward, namely, incels' claim to victimhood. This readiness to accept male supremacist assumptions is not a particularity of the authors but is instead indicative of the broader embeddedness and uncritical replication of misogynist arguments in media and public discourses about incels so far.[124] The fact that – as opposed to other radical movements

– incels' narratives of victimhood and "non-violent"/"non-radical intentions" are taken to trump their expressions of violence is both problematic and revealing about how the analysis is unable or unwilling to tackle the underlying male supremacist worldviews of incels. Because the epistemological and methodological setting of the article is likely to resonate well and be easily integrated with policymaking practices and logic, we caution strongly against the usage of the IRS scale to assess the danger and violence emanating from incel spaces. Ultimately, the authors present their "newly validated" IRS to be a "useful measure for early detection of individuals vulnerable to radicalisation to violent Incel action."[125] However, as we have outlined, the methodology and validation of this scale is highly suspect. As we have shown, the framing of incels as simply "vulnerable" and "mostly peaceful" fails to recognise the less spectacular harms and violence (i.e., misogynistic, racist, and homophobic hate speech and cyberharassment, for example) that exist in misogynist incel spaces as fully "real."[126] All of these harms are then not recognised as political or representative of incels nor connected to broader structural male supremacy, but rather painted as a problem of "certain men."[127] Coupled with the emphasis on ASD diagnoses and a history of victimhood (through bullying) seems to explain away "radical incels," and therefore any group association with violence or misogyny, and likely further stigmatise those with mental illness as potentially violent. We strongly caution against this approach, because, as we have shown, it ends up depoliticising the misogyny and violent rhetoric that other studies have recognised as *widespread* in incel spaces, and which has motivated the violence emerging out of incel and other male supremacist spaces.[128] Moreover, it is precisely this rhetoric that has been shown to increase distrust in institutions and underlie a general democratic backsliding and general support for populist voices.[129]

## Conclusion

This article has provided a discussion and feminist critique of the methodological, conceptual, and epistemological underpinnings of the IRS article, a potentially influential publication into a broader trend to assess incels based on surveys without a more comprehensive understanding of societal power dynamics. We have concluded that at best, the article relativises and excuses the violent emanations from these spaces. At worst, this scale contributes to the mainstreaming of misogynist male supremacist discourses of victimhood and antifeminism, reproduces antifeminist stances within academia itself, as well as an outdated perspective on the role of social media and online mobilisation and radicalisation. The central claim of this type of research and policymaking on incels is that "listening to incels" can help to expose a hitherto hidden *mismatch* between public perception of incels and their self-description. However, as we have shown, the very problematising of this supposed mismatch is part of incel's identification as ultimate victimhood and is thus vital to their strategies to legitimise and perpetuate misogynist violence through their own position as victims.

More so, the mismatch between incel and media discourses is not as significant as it seems. Instead, feminist researchers have consistently shown that the underlying misogynist and male supremacist assumptions that undergird incel ideology are deeply embedded in both media and academic discourse. That the beliefs shared by incels are so easily published in media and research without problematising their misogynist roots and effects shows they are somewhat of an "easy fit" with sets of sexist beliefs, still deeply rooted in society and academia. Viewing the IRS article in this light, it can be identified as one incident of a broader tendency whereby the platforming of incel convictions contributes to the uncritical reproduction of misogynist male supremacist discourses of victimhood, which serve to cement antifeminist and misogynist belief sets within society and academia itself. In order to productively deal with decidedly antifeminist and misogynist movements, we argue that what is required instead is greater critical feminist awareness about how misogyny and male supremacy is not an individual characteristic of some men, which sometimes turn violent, but rather a systemic underpinning of most societies, which easily interlinks with other systems of oppression. We therefore want to close this piece with a call for researchers and policy practitioners to engage with a more comprehensive understanding of incel radicalisation that does not take incel's claims of so-called wounded male victimhood at face value, but instead integrates a systemic understanding of how male supremacy underlines and transcends incel radicalisation. Future analyses must be more careful about addressing the problematic effects resulting from research designs of uncritical epistemologies in male supremacist research. We recommend that practitioners and policymakers carefully consider the research that they choose to inform their recommendations, and critically reflect on the biases and interests that inform research, and their own positionality and practices.

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# Endnotes

1 We distinguish between individuals who historically and presently have identified with the involuntary celibate or incel label from self-identifying incels who engage and perpetuate male supremacist ideology and the misogynist incel movement. The focus of this article is on the latter group.

2 For a more comprehensive overview of the Manosphere's history, composition, and beliefs, we would point the reader to several texts including: Ann-Kathrin Rothermel, Megan Kelly, and Greta Jasser, "Of Victims, Mass Murder, and "Real Men": The Masculinities of the "Manosphere" In *Male Supremacism in the United States: From Patriarchal Traditionalism to Misogynist Incels and the Alt-Right*, ed. Emily K. Carian, Alex DiBranco and Chelsea Ebin, (London: Routledge, 2022), 117-141, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003164722; Debbie Ging. "Alphas, betas, and Incels: Theorizing the masculinities of the manosphere." *Men and Masculinities,* 22 no. 4 (2019): 638-57, https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17706401; Lisa Sugiura, *The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women*. (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2021); Rachel Schmitz and Emily Kazyak, "Masculinities in Cyberspace: An Analysis of Portrayals of Manhood in Men's Rights Activist Websites," *Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2016), https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci5020018.

3 Ging, "Alphas, betas and Incels"; Sugiura, *The Incel Rebellion*; Rothermel, Kelly, Jasser, "Of Victims, Mass Murder, and "Real Men"; Schmitz and Kazyak, "Masculinities in Cyberspace".

4 Ging, "Alphas, betas, and Incels".

5 Written as both "blackpill" and "Black Pill".

6 Megan Kelly, Alex DiBranco, and Julia DeCook, "Misogynist Incels and Male Supremacism" *New America* February 18, 2021. https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/misogynist-incels-and-male-supremacism/; Sugiura, *The Incel Rebellion.*

7 Ann-Kathrin Rothermel, "'The Other Side': Assessing the Polarization of Gender Knowledge Through a Feminist Analysis of the Affective-Discursive in Anti-Feminist Online Communities" *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society,* 27 no. 4 (Winter 2020), 718-741, https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxaa024; Angus Lindsay, "Swallowing the Black Pill: Involuntary Celibates' (incels) Anti-Feminism within Digital Society" *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy,* 11 no. 1, (2022): 210-224, https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.2138; Rothermel, Kelly, and Jasser "Of Victims, Mass Murder and 'Real Men'".

8 Michael Halpin, "Weaponized Subordination: How Incels Discredit Themselves to Degrade Women," *Gender and Society*, 36 no. 6 (2022): 813-837.

9 Ging, "Alphas, betas, and Incels" Alice E. Marwick and Rebecca Lewis, "Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online." *Data & Society.* (2017), https://datasociety.net/library/media-manipulation-and-disinfo-online/; Jack Bratich and Sarah Banet-Weiser, "From Pick-up Artists to Incels: Con (Fidence) Games, Networked Misogyny, and the Failure of Neoliberalism." *International Journal of Communication* 13, no. 25 (2019): 5003-5027, https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/102183/.

10 Julia DeCook and Megan Kelly, "Interrogating the "incel menace": assessing the threat of male supremacy in terrorism studies." *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, (2021): 706-726, https://10.1080/17539153.2021.2005099; Caron E. Gentry, "Misogynistic terrorism: it has always been here." *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15, no. 1 (2022): 209-24, https://doi.org10.1080/17539153.2022.2031131; Eviane Leidig, "Why Terrorism Studies Miss the Mark When It Comes to Incels," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*. August 31, 2021 https://www.icct.nl/publication/why-terrorism-studies-miss-mark-when-it-comes-incels; Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook, "Misogynist Incels and Male Supremacism".

11 M. Kelly, "The Mainstream Pill." *Political Research Associates*. July 1, 2021. http://www.politicalresearch.org/2021/07/01/mainstream-pill.

12 Sophia Moskalenko, Naama Kates, Juncal Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Mia Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions among Incels: A Survey of 54 Self-identified Incels," *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*, 1 no. 3 (2022), 1-21, https://doi.org/10.54501/jots.v1i3.57.

13 We understand that this commitment to feminist theory might seem "loaded" in the context of analysis of antifeminist movements and may even disqualify us in the eyes of some. Yet as we show in the remainder of the argument, such an anti-feminist stance to the analysis of antifeminist movements is likely to be less rather than more "objective." A similar argument would be to say a democratically leaning person was too biassed to analyse anti-democratic movements. (Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-99, https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066; Anita Lavorgna, and Lisa Sugiura, "Blurring Boundaries: Negotiating Researchers' Positionality and Identities in Digital Qualitative Research." *Italian Sociological Review,* 12, no 7s (2022): 709-727, https://doi.org/10.13136/isr.v12i7S.578.

14 Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny.* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), 78-79.

15 Ibid, 47.

16 Emily K. Carian, Alex DiBranco, and Megan Kelly. "Intervening in Problematic Research Approaches to Incel Violence." Men and Masculinities (2023). https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X231200825.

17 Emily K. Carian, Alex DiBranco, and Chelsea & Ebin. "Preface," C. In *Male Supremacism in the United States: From Patriarchal Traditionalism to Misogynist Incels and the Alt-Right*, edited by Emily K. Carian, Alex DiBranco and Chelsea Ebin, (London: Routledge, 2022), vii-xiv.

18 Moskalenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions," 2.

19 Jesse Morton, Alexander Ash, Ken Reidy, Namma Kates, Molly Ellenberg, and Anne Speckhard. "Asking Incels (Part 1): Assessing the Impacts of COVID-19 Quarantine and Coverage of the Canadian Terrorism Designation on Incel Isolation and Resentment," International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, January 21, 2021, https://www.icsve.org/asking-incels-part-1-assessing-the-impacts-of-covid-19-quarantine-and-coverage-of-the-canadian-terrorism-designation-on-incel-isolation-and-resentment/; Sophia Moskalenko, Juncal Fernández-Garayzábal González, Naama Kates, and Jesse Morton. "Incel Ideology, Radicalization and Mental Health: A Survey Study." *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare* 4 no. 3 (2022): 1–29, https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v4i3.3817; Anne Speckhard and Molly Ellenberg. "Self-Reported Psychiatric Disorder and Perceived Psychological Symptom Rates among Involuntary Celibates (Incels) and Their Perceptions of Mental Health Treatment." *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (2022), https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2022.2029933; Anne Speckhard, Molly Ellenberg, Jesse Morton, and Alexander Ash. "Involuntary Celibates' Experiences of and Grievance over Sexual Exclusion and the Potential Threat of Violence Among Those Active in an Online Incel Forum." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 14, no. 2 (2021): 89-121, https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.14.2.1910.

20 Moskalenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions," 2.

21 Ibid,14.; The "Incel Podcast" is hosted by one of the authors of the "Predictors of Radical Intentions" article. Light Upon Light is a Preventing and Countering Extremism (P/CVE) initiative, and has also been involved with several of the other articles that use survey data of incel forums (Morton, Ash, Reidy, Kates, Ellenberg, and Speckhard. "Asking Incels"; Moskalenko, Fernández-Garayzábal González, Kates, and Morton. "Incel Ideology, Radicalization and Mental Health"; Anne Speckhard, Molly Ellenberg, Jesse Morton, and Alexander Ash. "Involuntary Celibates' Experiences of and Grievance over Sexual Exclusion and the Potential Threat of Violence Among Those Active in an Online Incel Forum." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 14, no. 2 (2021): 89-121.

22 Moskalenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions," 11.

23 Ibid, 12.

24 Ibid, 11-13.

25 Ibid, 14.

26 Ibid, 14.

27 Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook, "Misogynist Incels and Male Supremacism"; Rothermel, Kelly, and Jasser, "Of Victims, Mass Murder, and "Real Men"; Sugiura, *"The Incel Rebellion".*

28 Moskalenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions," 9.

29 Notably, this podcast and this (P/CVE) programming initiative have both given uncritical sympathetic platforms to incels from the largest misogynist incel forum, including moderators and the (now former) administrator of the forum, for an overview see: Kelly "The Mainstream Pill."

30 Moskalenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions," 13.

31 Ibid, 6.

32 Ibid, 5-6.

33 DeCook and Kelly "Interrogating the 'incel menace'".

34 Meg Roser, Charlotte Chalker, and Tim Squirrell. "Spitting out the blackpill: Evaluating how incels present themselves in their own words on the incel wiki" *Institute for Strategic Dialogue.* January 30, 2023, https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/spitting-out-the-blackpill-evaluating-how-incels-present-themselves-in-their-own-words-on-the-incel-wiki/; There are a few online sites that allow men and women to join incel forums and identify as incels, however, these communities do not seem to engage as much with the "pill" ideology of more explicitly misogynist incel spaces that are most often the focus of current academic study and media reporting. Further some of these forums actively work to distance themselves from misogynist incel spaces by identifying as "involuntary celibates" instead of "incels" Jan Christoffer Andersen and Lisa Sugiura, "Interacting with online deviant subcultures: Gendered experiences of interviewing incels." In the *Routledge International Handbook of Online Deviance*. (forthcoming).

35 Emilia Lounela. and Shane Murphy. "Incel Violence and Victimhood: Negotiating Inceldom in Online Discussions of the Plymouth Shooting" *Terrorism and Political Violence.* (2023), https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2022.2157267; Jan Christoffer Andersen, J.C. "The Symbolic Boundary Work of Incels: Subcultural Negotiation of Meaning and Identity Online," *Deviant Behavior,* 44, no. 7 (2023): 1081-1101, https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2022.2142864.

36 Moskalenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions," 20.

37 DeCook and Kelly "Interrogating the 'incel menace'"; Angus Lindsay, "Swallowing the black pill".

38 Moskalenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions," 9.

39 The four questions that were asked about the black pill are as follows: "I believe in Black Pill; Black Pill is objective; Black Pill is refreshing; Black Pill is comforting" (p. 20). The other eight questions are about "what it means to be an incel," specifically "In order for someone to claim they are an incel they must be (a) male; (b) heterosexual; (c) over a certain age; (d) a virgin; (e) physically unattractive; (f) have never kissed another person; (g) Have not had sex in at least some time (e.g., 6 months); (h) Be an outcast of society (a "sufferer").

40 Moskalenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions," 1.

41 Ibid, 1.

42 Catherine, Baker, "Infrastructures of male supremacism: a mixed methods analysis of the incel wiki" (PhD diss., University of Loughborough, 2023) https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/thesis/Infrastructures_of_male_supremacism_a_mixed-methods_analysis_of_the_incel_wiki/21975863; Giordana Grossi, Suzanne Kelly, Alison Nash, and Gowri Parameswaran, "Challenging dangerous ideas: a multi-disciplinary critique of evolutionary psychology" Dialectical Anthropology 38, (2014): 281–85, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-014-9358-x; Mari Ruti*, The Age of Scientific Sexism: How Evolutionary Psychology Promotes Gender Profiling and Fans the Battle of the Sexes.* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Shawn P. Van Valkenburgh, "Digesting the Red Pill: Masculinity and Neoliberalism in the Manosphere"

*Men and Masculinities* 24, no 1. (2021): 84-103, https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18816118; Louis Bachaud and Sarah E. Johns "The use and misuse of evolutionary psychology in online manosphere communities: The case of female mating strategies" *Evolutionary Human Sciences* 5, no. e28 (2023): 1-15.

43 Ruti, *The Age of Scientific Sexism* 53, 149.

44 Moskalenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions," 1.

45 The article defines lookism as follows "Incels tend to blame their disenfranchisement on lookism, or women's choice of sexual partners based solely on physical features" (Moskalenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions," 1). While it is true that many incels would define lookism this way, it is not a concept that is exclusively relevant to incels. As Halpin defines it, "Lookism means that attractive people receive advantages, while unattractive people are the targets of prejudice...Incels think women are to blame for lookism and its consequences," thereby connecting the concept to an explicitly misogynistic and male-centric perspective. (Michael Halpin, "Incels are surprisingly diverse but united by hate," *The Conversation*, July 7, 2021 https://theconversation.com/Incels-are-surprisingly-diverse-but-united-by-hate-163414; Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century.* (London, Bloomsbury, 2021), 94.

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PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

RESEARCH NOTE

# Differentiating Terrorism and Sanctioned Finance: Regiment Stability and Economic Hierarchy

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**Abstract:** This Research Note delves into the intricate dynamics of how socio-spatial embeddedness contributes to the emergence of sanctioned firms and terrorist attacks. Leveraging datasets such as the Global Terrorism Database, the Terror Finance Database, the Social Fragility Matrix, and Polity IV, our study analyses the relationship between socio-spatial embeddedness within the regime stability. Our investigation reveals that countries experiencing more terrorist attacks tend to manifest fewer characteristics of national socio-spatial embeddedness. Specifically, they exhibit a lack of political regime stability, a higher likelihood of illiberal governance, and increased harmful stratification among social groups. Conversely, we find that sanctioned firms flourish in countries where government regimes are more stable and inclusive. Countries with a higher incidence of terrorist attacks demonstrate fewer traits associated with social cohesion and stability. In contrast, firms financing terrorist operations are more likely to be situated in countries characterised by stability and higher levels of social cohesion. Our findings align with the economic world-system paradigm, illustrating that sanctioned financial firms are more prevalent in core countries and less prevalent in the periphery

**Keywords:** Terrorism, sanctions, embeddedness, regime stability, world-system

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# Introduction

Spatial concentrations of violence and terrorism may be part of a larger pattern within the growth and decline of global systems.[1] Wallerstein's analysis of the birth of the modern world system in the 16th century showed Spain as the dominant world power, but as its power declined in the 17th century, Central Europe experienced growth. Such a shift in the world economy created new centres and left old ones behind.[2] World-systems theory is mainly silent on issues related to terrorism because it was developed with an expressed interest in development and underdevelopment. International terrorism has not been addressed by world society/polity scholars, who have extensively catalogued the expansion of Western models of culture, including rationalised actions and universal standards impeding cultural relativism.[3] While some world-systems scholars have theorised for decades that terrorism and world-systems have a causal relationship, attempts to establish a causal relationship between economic inequality and terrorism have been inconsistent.[4] In recent years, we have seen an increase in world-systems approaches to international terrorism. Still, the theoretical framework remains on the fringes of the discussion of global terrorism, terrorist financing, and the root causes of terrorism.[5]

We seek to examine how socio-spatial embeddedness may affect the location of terrorist attacks and sanctioned financial firms. For the purposes of this research note, a firm is defined as a business entity or non-profit organisation with a physical location that seeks to provide material support for terrorist activities, human rights violations, drug cartels, and/or other illicit practices that have been sanctioned by a government. This study uses fragility data with world-systems analysis and available data on sanctions and terrorist attacks to investigate to what effect spatial embeddedness may aid sanctioned firms and/or terrorist attacks as a proxy for violent extremism. We find that countries that are more likely to experience terrorist attacks are less likely to exhibit characteristics of spatial embeddedness—specifically, they lack political regime stability and are more likely to be illiberal. Conversely, sanctioned firms promulgate in countries where government regimes are stable and inclusive. Understanding these spatial dynamics underlies the understanding of effective strategies to counter violent extremism and promote a more secure global environment.

# Relevant Scholarship

## *Terrorism and Illicit Finance*

Terrorist attacks, which increase the cost of shipping and disrupt supply chains, foster instability and a corresponding increase in securitisation.[6] According to Hoffman, terrorism can be viewed in some instances as a reactionary response to ongoing efforts of international forces to seize power from individual states or localities.[7] States that deal with terrorism and conflict incur high costs that reduce productivity and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), resulting in an economic incentive to end conflicts.[8] After stability is restored, the redirection of security spending leads to macroeconomic stability in the form of rising tax revenue and poverty-reducing policies.

Overall, the instability that terrorism manufactures is remedied by ending conflict or displacing terrorism in other geographies.[9] Once this occurs, governments begin to rebuild. Restated, the destruction wrought by terrorism results in an opportunity for governments to creatively rebuild in a manner that not only fosters economic growth but also provides an avenue for implementing long-term security measures and social development programmes that can help prevent future occurrences of terrorism.[10] The presence and activities of coercive organisations provide rational explanations as to why a country like Iran would, on the one hand, utilise quasi-governmental organisations to acquire and distribute resources and development essential to the state, but then finance and offer operational support to organisations like Hezbollah. Iran's Qods Force has been sanctioned by multiple actors within the international community for its involvement in terrorist activities. The use of proxies in covert operations, as acknowledged by the Qods Force, has been a central element of Iran's foreign policy.[11] The Qods Force has been the significant force behind Hezbollah in Lebanon and various Shia militias in Iraq and other countries, with Brennan describing Iran as the "most active state sponsor of terrorism."[12] These activities serve multiple purposes for Iran including soft and hard influence in the region through the use of proxy groups, to deter outside intervention, and to attempt regime change. Understanding the complex interplay between geopolitical struggle and criminal financing sheds light on the intricate dynamics of global systems and the actors involved.

Organised criminal activity has benefited from the spread of industrialisation and economic liberalism.[13] Today, a sizeable portion of the global GDP is made up of a quasi-shadow economy of drug trafficking cartels, transnational criminal organisations, and terrorist groups.[14] Criminal activity accounts for between 15 and 20 percent of the world's GDP and nearly half of national income in periphery and semi periphery nations.[15] It is difficult to accurately determine the scope of operations and to separate an organisation's licit activities from their illicit ones, which makes it challenging to study the economic effects of illicit economic activity.[16] These linkages are growing partly as defensive measures, as Piazza found that terrorist groups involved in crime were half as likely to face demise as their non-criminally involved counterparts.[17] Understanding the intricate relationship between globalisation, organised crime, and the shadow economy is essential for developing effective strategies to combat illicit activities and promote a more transparent and equitable global economic system.

This interplay between licit and illicit activities in various contexts highlights the complexities of the global economic system and the blurred boundaries between legality and illegality in different regions and industries. International corporations occasionally blur the line between legal and illegal activity in the form of bribes and other activities that the West associates with organised crime due to the country-to-country differences in societal and cultural norms.[18] Local economies benefit from the production of illegal drugs, currency counterfeiting, and money laundering in peripheral urban areas.[19] For instance, many businesses in the Mexican town of Altar stock supplies for immigrants who try to enter the United States illegally.[20] The

provincial government of Fujian implicitly granted permission for extensive human smuggling and trafficking operations after they noticed the significant financial impact.[21] States may publicly claim to be fighting organised crime, but their decisions and willingness to crack down on these operations are often influenced by the financial benefits derived from illicit activities.[22]

## *Socio-spatial Embeddedness, Sanctioned Firms, and Terrorism*

The theories and findings related to embeddedness stem from Polanyi's development of analytic types of economic exchange in societies.[23] Central to the concept of embeddedness is that the location and organisation of a firm are "socially and historically constructed,"[24] meaning that location selection for a firm is embedded within the social and historical construction of that society such that how firms are organised and why can be determined based on the social structures observed into the broader society. Licit firms are known to benefit extensively from "relational proximity"—the clustering and colocation that is central to firm success and the development of social capital between firms.[25] Polanyi notes that cultural and social relations are embedded into the economic system, suggesting that the non-economic institutions within societies continue to play an important part in informing economic systems and, in turn, firm development, creation, and promulgation. The development and fostering of social and geographic ties are known to be vital.[26] And these ties are known to be relevant to terrorist groups given the need for secrecy and trust. Social and geographic ties aid in the establishment of networks based on trust and discretion.[27] Furthermore, the absence of strict enforcement or a bias towards socio-spatial embeddedness might facilitate the operations of illicit organisations.[28]

Sanctioned firms and terrorist organisations are entities made up of individuals. These groups, while dedicated to illegal activity, desire to achieve their goals in similar ways to licit and legal entities.[29] Given that they, like licit and legal entities, exist within a globalised market economy, they exploit available social and economic structures in similar ways.[30] Stys et al. showed that covert networks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are linked with overt networks directly and indirectly via third parties.[31] Further, they find that civilians living amid militarised conflict share the same "social support patterns" as demobilised and active combatants.[32] Hence, they conclude that covert and overt networks "are impossible to disentangle."[33] Similarly, Cheon found that lethal terrorist attacks have a negative impact on the longevity of a foreign subsidy's embeddedness, especially if the host nation has weak institutions.[34] However, if the foreign subsidy is staffed by local employees and has local investors, it greatly improves the subsidy's likelihood of withstanding a terrorist attack even in the face of weak governmental institutions. Overall, recent research suggests that in certain spaces, overt networks—such as legal and licit firms—must embed themselves in some fashion or another with covert networks.

What follows is our investigation of these theories. Based on previous research, we expect to find positive relationships between weak government institutions and terrorist attacks. But

when we see connections between attacks and/or sanctioned firms to institutional variables do we see relationships or trends across space? Is there an embeddedness to where sanctioned firms and/or terrorist attacks occur? If so, what trends exist? This work is meant to connect theories from economic geography and economic sociology with the study of terrorism and illicit finance. By focusing on spatial embeddedness, we hope to further our understanding of covert networks via indirect, but readily available, data and methods.

# Materials and Methods

## *Methods*

We focus on a set of logistic regressions to test multiple sets of hypotheses. This is done by independently considering whether terrorism and firms are affected by the effectiveness variables, and then separately the legitimacy variables. Next, we combine effectiveness, legitimacy, democracy, and consider world system and location variables. The twin dependent variables of financing and attacks are measured through a dichotomous measure of whether a terrorist attack happened, or a firm was sanctioned in a given year (1 = yes; 0 = no). The use of attacks to measure terror is a standard proxy, particularly in the investigation of spatial relationships.[35] We additionally utilise the Terror Finance (TerrorFi) Database of firms known to be sanctioned for illicit activities.[36] Our independent variables are presented in Table 1 and are predominantly based on the State Fragility metrics. We disambiguate the effectiveness and legitimacy variables, modelling them both separately and together. We additionally utilise a measure of democracy, dummy variables to differentiate semi-periphery and periphery countries from core countries. For our final model, we also include regional dummy variables.

*Table 1. Independent Variables*

| VARIABLE NAME | EXPLANATION[1] | SOURCE |
|---|---|---|
| SECURITY EFFECTIVENESS | A measure of general security and vulnerability to political violence | State Fragility Matrix (Marshall and Cole 2015) |
| SECURITY LEGITIMACY | A measure of state repression | |
| POLITICAL EFFECTIVENESS | Regime/governance stability | |
| POLITICAL LEGITIMACY | Regime/governance inclusion | |
| ECONOMIC EFFECTIVENESS | Gross Domestic Product per capita | |
| ECONOMIC LEGITIMACY | Share of export trade in manufactured goods | |
| SOCIAL EFFECTIVENESS | Human capital development | |
| SOCIAL LEGITIMACY | Human capital care | |
| DEMOCRACY | 11-point scale from authoritarian to democratic | State Fragility Matrix (Marshall and Cole 2015) and (Londregan and Poole 1996) |
| WORLD SYSTEM | Core, semi-periphery, periphery | Chase-Dunn et al. (2000) |

## *Data*

We use the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and the TerrorFi Database to derive our independent variables, both from the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START).[37] We use the GTD to derive when and where attacks have occurred. TerrorFi provides data on when a firm was placed on a sanctions list and where that firm was/is located. This modelling relies on the subsection of TerrorFi data based on the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) list. Firms on this list in the TerrorFi data are classified as state-backed businesses, non-state companies, threat financing, and narcotrafficking.

The bulk of our independent variables come from the State Fragility Matrix.[38] This dataset scores the 167 countries in the world with populations greater than 500,000 from the years 1995 to 2014 on effectiveness and legitimacy along the axes of security, economy, social, and politics. The State Fragility Matrix aims to quantify "state-society relations" across a wide range of validity and effectiveness. The measures that make up the matrix are created in response to critiques about the 'whole of society' approaches to governmental analysis.[39] We separately consider the effectiveness and legitimacy of each subtype to reflect on whether the difference in appearance or implementation is meaningful in terrorist acts or finance. Economic Effectiveness is defined as gross domestic product per capita.[40] Chase-Dunn constructed the basis for our world systems classifications, designating countries as periphery, semi-periphery, and core.[41] Social Effectiveness is based on the Human Development Index from the United Nations, and provides five-year estimates of the Gini Coefficient.[42] We use this information to identify the role of economic inequality in terrorism.

# Results

Table 2 shows our four regression models, presenting odds ratios for the relevant variables and indicating significance levels. In our first model, examining the effectiveness variables, attacks show a positive and significant correlation with security, political, and economic effectiveness, while being negatively correlated with social effectiveness. Notably, attacks tend to increase in countries with weaker political effectiveness. The positive relationship between attacks and security effectiveness is unsurprising, given the sensitivity of the security effectiveness variable to political violence. The positive relationship between attacks and security effectiveness is unsurprising, given the sensitivity of the security effectiveness variable to political violence. Further, firms and economic effectiveness exhibit a positive link, suggesting that locations with stronger GDP per capita make it easier to establish firms. The relationship between attacks and economic effectiveness shows a significant positive relationship, although the effect is minor. Finally, attacks and firms are negatively associated with social effectiveness, implying that the number of attacks and firms should increase as the Human Development Index (HDI) score rises.

*Table 2. Binary Logistic Regression Models*

| | EFFECTIVENESS ONLY | | LEGITIMACY ONLY | | EFFECTIVENESS + LEGITIMACY | | FULL MODEL | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Attacks* | *Firms* | *Attacks* | *Firms* | *Attacks* | *Firms* | *Attacks* | *Firms* |
| ***Security Effectiveness*** | 3.019** | 1.884** | | | 2.285** | 1.712** | 1.830** | 1.441** |
| ***Security Legitimacy*** | | | 2.595** | 1.74** | 1.829** | 1.323** | 2.146** | 1.746** |
| ***Political Effectiveness*** | 1.259** | 0.778** | | | 1.308** | 0.732** | 1.388** | 0.631** |
| ***Political Legitimacy*** | | | 1.128** | 0.932 | 1.165** | 0.872** | 1.11** | 0.859** |
| ***Economic Effectiveness*** | 1.104** | 1.331** | | | 0.944 | 1.257** | 1.148* | 1.659** |
| ***Economic Legitimacy*** | | | 0.834** | 0.945 | 0.889** | 0.924 | 1.049 | 1.095 |
| ***Social Effectiveness*** | 0.600** | 0.459** | | | 0.864 | 0.492** | 0.919 | 0.296** |
| ***Social Legitimacy*** | | | 0.750** | 0.618** | 0.745** | 0.861 | 0.775** | 0.859 |
| ***Democracy*** | | | | | | | 1.062** | 0.926** |
| ***Semi-periphery*** | | | | | | | 0.716 | 0.204** |
| ***Periphery*** | | | | | | | 0.27** | 0.199** |
| ***South Asia*** | | | | | | | 5.48** | 2.160** |
| ***Europe and Central Asia*** | | | | | | | 0.666* | 0.402** |
| ***Sub-Saharan Africa*** | | | | | | | 0.284** | 1.037 |
| ***Latin American and Caribbean*** | | | | | | | 0.402** | 0.00 |
| ***Oceania*** | | | | | | | 0.353** | 0.00 |
| ***East Asia*** | | | | | | | 0.376** | 0.576** |
| ***North America*** | | | | | | | 1.718 | 1.309 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| ***Chi-square*** | 23.964** | 52.571** | 41.002** | 23.843** | 17.683* | 51.103** | 13.886* | 34.90** |
| **Nagelkerke $R^2$** | 0.219 | 0.092 | 0.195 | 0.061 | 0.281 | 0.118 | 0.334 | 0.286 |

Values in parenthesis represent standard errors. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01

The second set of models—focusing on terrorism and sanctioned firms as a function of security, political, economic, and social legitimacy—reveals different linkages compared to the models on effectiveness. Security effectiveness, a measure of state repression, indicates that as repression levels increase, terrorist attacks are much more likely to occur. Similarly, increased repression is associated with a higher likelihood of sanctioned firms. Attacks also become more likely when a country's political legitimacy is weakened, particularly concerning the inclusion of minority populations in government. Exclusion of minority populations correlates with an increased likelihood of terrorist attacks. However, we do not observe a similar association with sanctioned firms. Economic legitimacy is negatively correlated with attacks, which suggests that as a country's exports decline, the likelihood of terrorism increases. In contrast, firms and attacks are significantly and negatively correlated with social legitimacy, measured by infant mortality. A decline in infant mortality is associated with an increase in both terrorist attacks and sanctioned firms.

Our third model incorporates all effectiveness and legitimacy variables, moderating the estimated impact of many relationships. This model fit improves considerably over considering each set of these metrics alone. The relationship between attacks, economic effectiveness, and social effectiveness becomes insignificant, consistent with previously reported findings that GDP per capita (economic effectiveness) is not a reliable predictor of terrorist attacks. Likewise,

HDI (social effectiveness) has no meaningful relationship with terrorist attacks. Economic legitimacy and social legitimacy are found to be insignificant predictors of sanctioned firms, contrasting with our earlier findings. When only considering the legitimacy variables, economic legitimacy was insignificant, but social legitimacy was significant. Overall, it appears the social and financial effectiveness and legitimacy variables are the most sensitive to the inclusion of additional variables. We find it notable that social and economic legitimacy are significant predictors of attacks, while social and monetary effectiveness are predictors of firms.

Our final model includes additional variables to control for democratic versus authoritarian tendencies in governance, position within the world system, and geographic region. When these variables are included with the legitimacy and effectiveness variables, economic effectiveness becomes a significant predictor of terrorist attacks, but economic legitimacy and social effectiveness drop out of the model. Social legitimacy maintains significance in the attack model. This suggests that when we control for regions, governance, and world-systems position, exports and HDI do not have a statistically significant relationship with terrorist attacks at this scale of analysis. Conversely, the social and economic legitimacy variables remain insignificant predictors of sanctioned firms. The democracy variable is significant for both models, but we observe basically no effect – terrorist attacks are ever so slightly more likely to occur in democratic leaning countries, while sanctioned firms are ever so slightly more likely to appear in countries that trend toward authoritarianism. The world-systems variables indicate a greater likelihood of attacks occurring in core countries, while there is no significant relationship in the semi-periphery and a repelling relationship in periphery countries. Sanctioned firms are more likely to appear in core countries than semi-periphery or periphery countries. Regionally, we held Middle East and North Africa as the control. Despite this, the most outstanding effects occur in South Asia, likely due to the number of terrorist attacks and sanctioned firms in Pakistan and Afghanistan. North America has no significant relationship, and all other regions have negative relationships for attacks.

## Conclusions

Terrorism may serve a purpose in the larger institutional order by "opening up a space" for alternate forms of government and regulation experimentation.[43] We find that while sanctioned firms serve as intervention opportunities within the larger structure of the world economy, illicit financing supports existing systems and contributes to bringing semi-peripheral countries closer to the global order. We additionally find evidence that supports claims that illicit financial firms will set up in core countries and use the same systems as licit financial entities. We find little evidence to support claims that terrorist attacks prefer specific spheres of the world system. We find that firms and attacks are more likely to occur in nations where security is fragile, and repression is systemic. In such locations, ties and embeddedness are critical as covert networks are intertwined with overt networks to operate effectively.[44] This pattern is particularly evident

in our final model. Sanctioned firms increase in locations where regimes are stable, and societies are more inclusive. The stability and inclusiveness increase the availability of embeddedness. Stabile regimes demonstrate that the existing network of political, social, and economic elites is in some form of equilibrium which fosters trust. However, these networks may increase opportunities for corruption and eventually lead to disagreements or factions. This, in turn, may explain why attacks increase when regimes are unstable and societies are less inclusive. Attacks, as a proxy for violent extremism, are negatively correlated with social cohesion. One potential explanation is that as the level of social cohesion decreases nationally, factions of elites foster subnational cohesion along economic, societal, and/or political cleavages. Some of these groups may be motivated by grievances or injustices, subsequently spurring violent extremist influence and increased attacks.

What is evident is that the countries where attacks and sanctioned firms co-locate are similar and diverge in important ways. We should expect to see extremist violence and organised criminality appear in all societies, but due to individual variance, the amount of embeddedness within a society is not constant. Consequently, social, political, and economic cohesion are variable. The political legitimacy variable could be seen as a proxy for socio-spatial embeddedness. This variable is negatively correlated with firms and positively correlated with attacks. This is telling because it suggests that in factionalised societies where embeddedness may be limited to constrained social groups (ethnic, economic, etc.), we observe more terrorist attacks. However, in countries where we observe more inclusive socio-spatial embeddedness, we increase the likelihood of sanctioned financial firms. Further investigation is necessary and warranted at the government and/or organisational level to identify whether these findings at the global level hold at local levels.

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PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

RESEARCH NOTE

# Still Aiming at the Harder Targets: An Update on Violent Non-State Actors' Use of Armed UAVs

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**Abstract:** Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), often referred to as drones, are integrated into the repertoire of both state and violent non-state actors (VNSAs). This Research Note updates the findings presented in a 2020 article published in Perspectives on Terrorism, and presents descriptive statistics on violent non-state actors' use of armed UAVs. This research has, through open sources, identified 1,122 incidents where VNSAs have used armed UAVs in attacks. The UAV attacks are recorded across the globe, from Mexico and Ecuador, through the Middle East and North Africa, to Myanmar. However, 91.3 percent of the attacks occurred in the Middle East and North Africa. The majority of UAV attacks are directed at hard targets, such as military targets. However, the Houthis in Yemen stand out as a VNSA more willing to attack civilian infrastructure, such as airports, energy infrastructure, and the commercial shipping industry, using UAVs as a strategic weapon. The showcasing of UAVs' potential in combat and conflict by state and non-state actors through media and social media is likely to influence actors who have yet to incorporate UAVs into their repertoire.

**Keywords:** UAV, drone, non-state actors, fourth-generation warfare, Islamic State, Houthi

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# Introduction

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are an integrated part of the modern military, and the ongoing war in Ukraine has shown how small UAVs are hard for air defences to intercept.[1] The earliest recording of a violent non-state actor (VNSA) using armed UAVs in an attack date back to 2006. At that time, Hezbollah launched three armed UAVs—allegedly carrying 40 to 50 kilograms of explosives—against Israel from southern Lebanon. All three UAVs were intercepted by Israeli F-16 fighter jets.[2] While it took eight years until the next recorded attack, when Hezbollah attacked the al-Nusra Front in 2014, VNSAs have now been using armed UAVs for nearly two decades.[3] Since the 2006 Hezbollah attack, UAVs have been integrated into the repertoire of ISIS, Hamas, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), various Iran-affiliated militias in Iraq and Syria, drug cartels in Mexico, and most notably the Houthis in Yemen, to name a few.[4] At the onset of 2024, UAVs are extensively used in several interconnected conflicts in the Middle East, between Israel, Hamas and Hezbollah, between the Houthis and an international coalition operating in the Red Sea, as well as between Russia and Ukraine.[5] And in January 2024, a UAV attack against a remote US military base in Jordan killed three US soldiers and injured more than 40 others; an Iranian-backed militia based in Iraq subsequently claimed responsibility for the attack.[6]

UAVs' potential in combat has been showcased by both nation-states and VNSAs. Notably, the war between Ukraine and Russia (following Russia's invasion of Ukraine) has shown how small UAVs are capable of supporting combatants with intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance.[7] It has also demonstrated the value of small commercial off-the-shelf UAVs and first-person view (FPV) UAVs in dropping grenades onto enemy combatants or merely flying directly into them to set off the destructive payload.[8]

This research note builds on the 2020 article published in Perspectives on Terrorism by Haugstvedt and Jacobsen, which explored the characteristics of non-state actors' use of weaponised UAVs in their operations, and whether VNSAs were using armed UAVs as a strategic weapon.[9] The 2020 research explored the notion of strategic bombing by VNSAs, specifically asking whether or not VNSAs choose targets discriminately, have a mass casualty focus, and prefer soft targets when using armed UAVs.[10] Target discrimination refers to whether attacks are carried out against specifically chosen targets. Soft targets are often defined as vulnerable targets that are difficult to protect and have a high likelihood of mass casualties in the event of a successful attack.[11] Mass casualty incidents are not defined through a fixed number of harmed individuals. Instead, the term is context-specific and refers to whether or not the incident overwhelms the local emergency and healthcare systems.[12] Specifically, this research note will present descriptive statistics on the distribution of UAV attacks across years, regions, various VNSAs, and types of targets (among other variables), and it will supplement and update the findings from the research published in 2020.

# Methodology

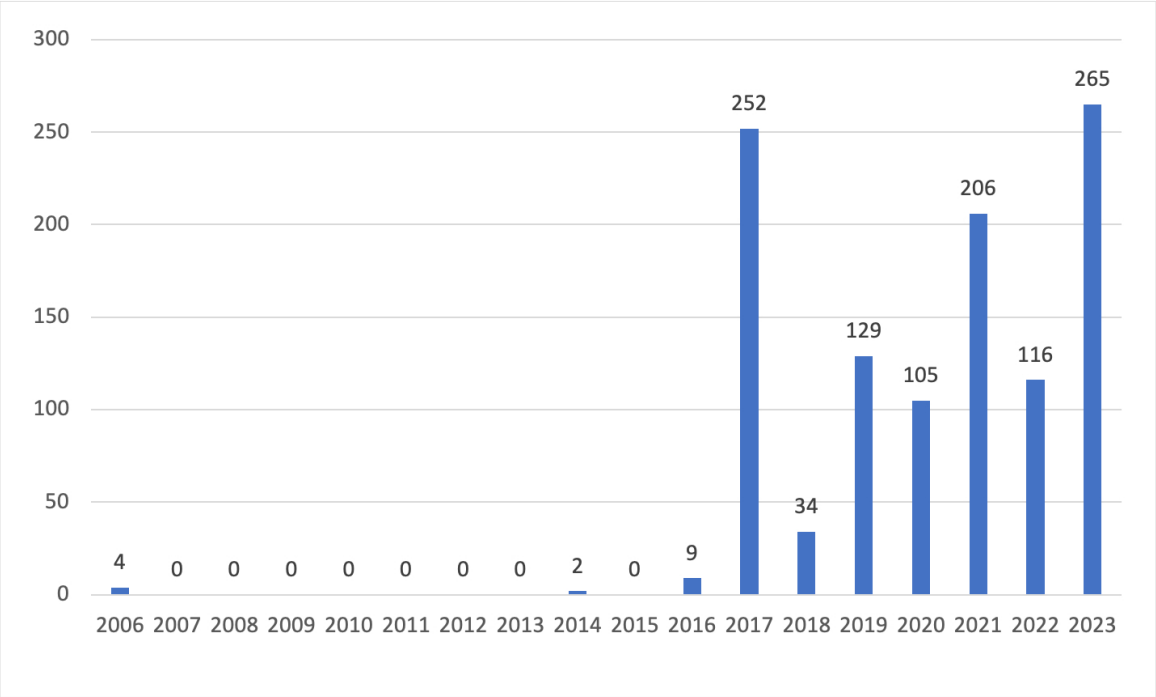
The dataset with records of VNSAs using UAVs in attacks spans from 2006 through 2023 and includes 1,122 incidents. The data collection of UAV attacks by VNSAs follows the same strategy as presented in the article published in 2020, which included: automatic Google alert search strings; a review of incidents reported in the Global Terrorism Database; the LiveUAMap; Bellingcat analyst Nick Waters' collection of ISIS UAV attacks; and a weekly search for articles, news reports, and research about non-state actors' use of UAVs.[13] The data is managed using MS Excel with the XL STAT package, and is analysed with descriptive statistics. Please also see the note on the last page about ethical considerations and data privacy.

# Results

## *Yearly Attacks*

Figure 1 shows that there is a substantial variation in a number of UAV attacks each year. Until 2023, 2017 was the year with the most recorded UAV attacks by VNSAs.

*Figure 1. Number of Attacks by Year*




The high number of attacks in 2017 is almost exclusively related to ISIS's defence of Mosul and Raqqa. In 2023, a high number of UAV attacks were located in Iraq, Syria, Israel, and Yemen, and VNSAs such as Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and various militias affiliated with Iran are responsible for the majority of attacks.

## *Geographic Locations*

The Middle East and North Africa are by far the regions in which most VNSA UAV attacks occur (see Figure 2). From 2006 through 2023, 91.3 percent of all such attacks happened in this region. Figure 3 highlights the countries where three or more UAV attacks by VNSAs are recorded. Iraq is, with 248 recorded incidents, the country with the highest number of UAV attacks by VNSAs. This is similar to the reporting in the 2020 article. However, Saudi Arabia has now surpassed Syria as the country with the second-highest number of such attacks.

These are followed by Yemen and Israel, similar to the findings in the 2020 research.[14] Additionally, as Figure 3 shows, there are 38 recorded UAV attacks located in the Red Sea. The attacks were recorded in the Red Sea if they were directed at a vessel in the Red Sea, or intercepted in the Red Sea while en route to a target in Israel, as was the case in many incidents in late 2023.

*Figure 2. Number of Attacks by Region*

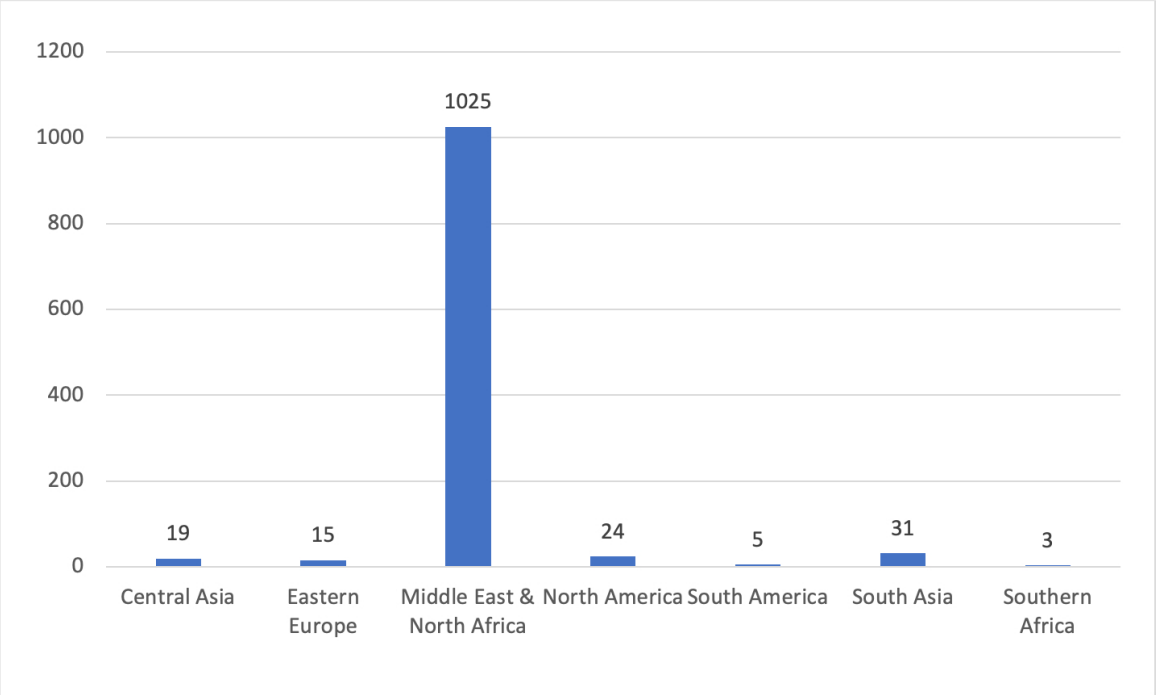
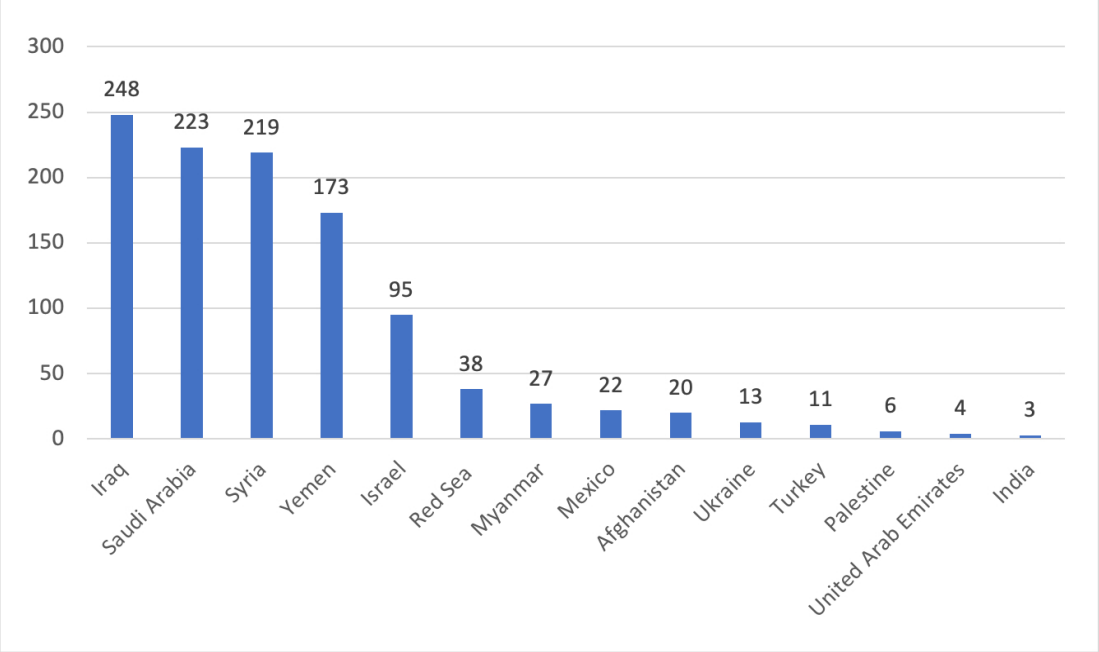



*Figure 3. Number of Attacks by Country*

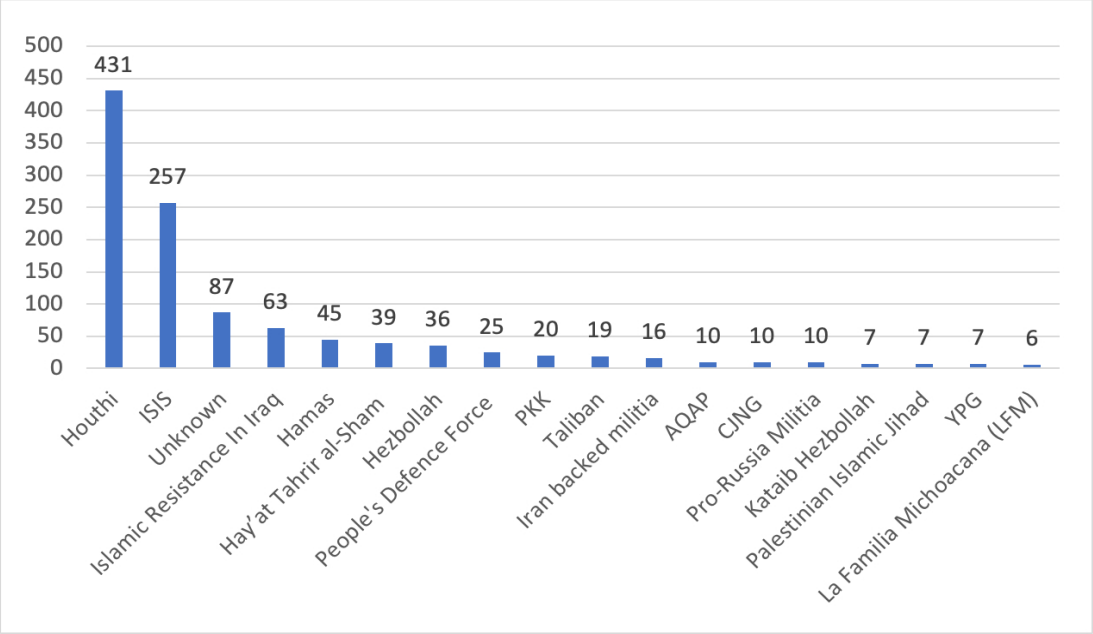



Two important countries to comment upon are Mexico and Myanmar. In Myanmar, the 27 recorded incidents primarily involve attacks conducted by the People's Defence Force (PDF) against the armed forces of the military junta, which in 2021 retook power in Myanmar.[15] In Mexico, 22 incidents are recorded. These are connected to conflicts between cartels, often involving Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG), or between cartels and the Mexican military/police. Official statements from Mexico report a substantially higher number of attacks from cartels.[16] However, the official statements do not provide details about the attacks. As such, the included incidents are incidents where factors such as date, location, and targets of attacks (among other variables) can be verified.

## Responsible VNSA

Figure 4 shows the number of UAV attacks by a VNSA responsible for five or more attacks. This limitation is set for visual reasons, as a substantial number of VNSAs are linked to only one or two such attacks. The most notable distinction from the 2020 research is the number of attacks by ISIS, which is stable, and the comparatively high number of attacks perpetrated by the Houthis in Yemen. Additionally, various VNSAs with ties to Iran are often reported on as "Iran-affiliated militia", or "Iran-supported militia". Combined, the VNSAs with ties to Iran are responsible for 53.9 percent of all UAV attacks by VNSAs. In this assessment, the following VNSAs are considered as having ties to Iran: Houthis, Hamas, Hezbollah, Kataib Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Islamic Resistance in Iraq, and the various Iran-backed militias in Iraq.

*Figure 4. Number of Attacks by Various VNSAs*

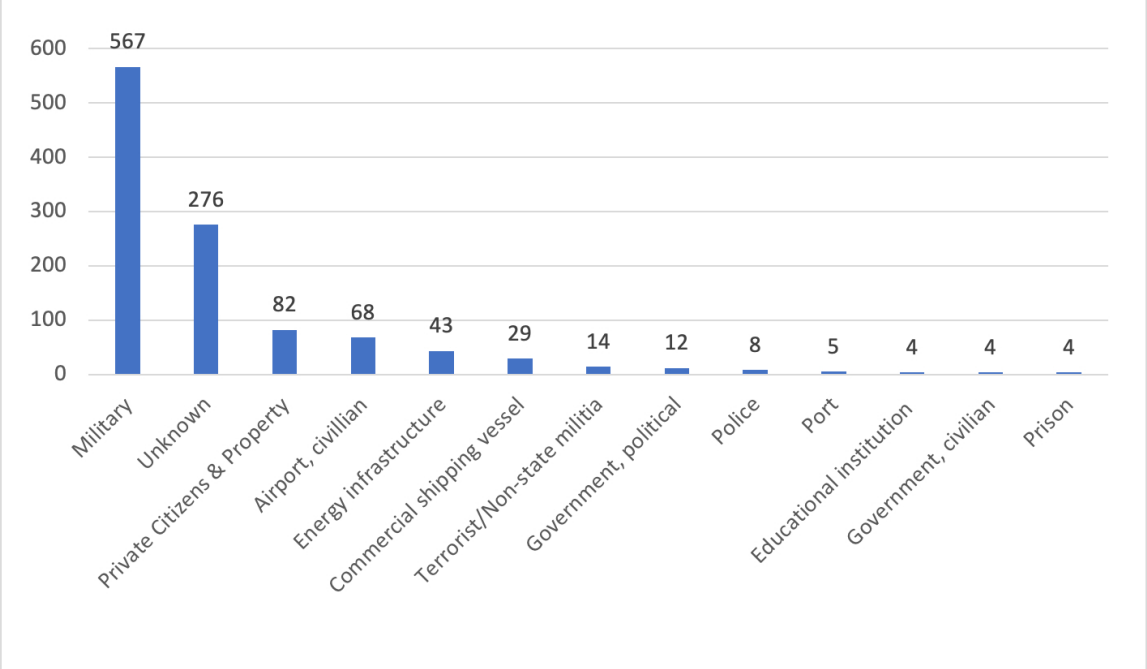



## Targets

UAV attacks by VNSAs are directed at military targets in 50.5 percent of the recorded incidents (see Figure 5). This is a decrease compared to the results in the 2020 article, where 57 percent of attacks were directed at military targets.[17] Compared to the findings in 2020, where 16.8 percent of the attacks had an unknown target, the entire data from 2006 to 2023 shows that 24.6 percent of the recorded attacks have unknown targets. The unknown target category occurs mainly in attacks where the UAV has been intercepted before it reaches its target.

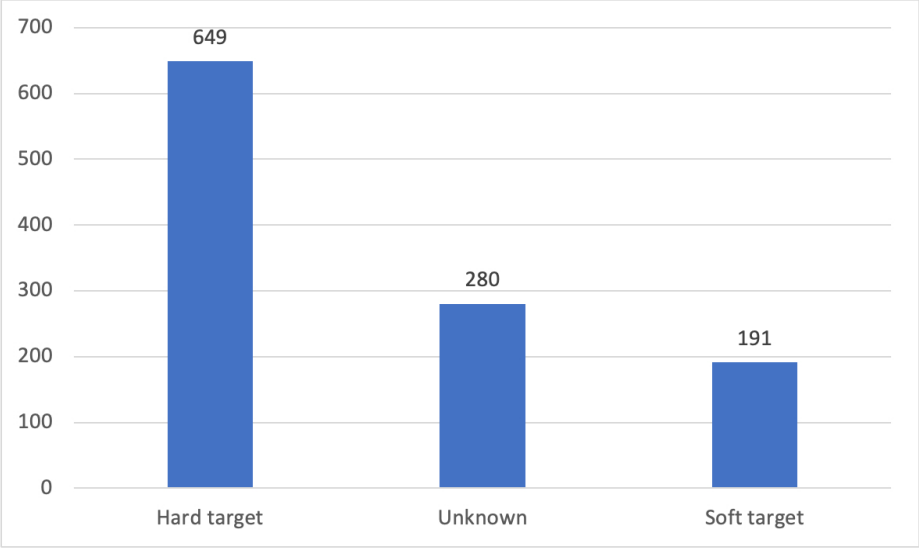
In terms of VNSAs using UAVs as a strategic weapon, bombing certain targets is likely to influence a policy change more than others, as they directly impact the lives of citizens in society. The Houthis stand out as a VNSA that, by choice or chance impacts such targets more than other VNSAs. The Houthis are responsible for 100 percent of the attacks against commercial shipping vessels, as well as 88.2 percent of the attacks against civilian airports. Additionally, the Houthis are responsible for the majority of attacks against energy infrastructure (such as oil refineries) and 28 percent of the attacks against private citizens and property.

*Figure 5. Number of Attacks by Target Category*




In the full dataset from 2006 to 2023, 57.8 percent of UAV attacks were directed at hard targets. This is a substantial decrease from the 71.4 percent hard targets reported in the 2020 article.[18] One explanation for this is the number of unknown targets as reported above, as well as the result of a critical evaluation of each incident. It is also a consequence of the challenge to determine the characteristics of the target and to assess whether it is a hard or soft target. As an example, a civilian airport is in most cases not a location protected with advanced counter-UAV (CUAV) capabilities, such as a military compound or naval vessel. However, a civilian airport is likely a more secure location than an open area marketplace, a town square, or a small residential building, where unprotected and unprepared civilians are likely to be gathered. Similarly, a commercial shipping vessel or oil refinery is likely not outfitted with CUAV capabilities but is also not occupied by unprepared civilians. Hence, a civilian target is, in many cases, categorised as a hard target.

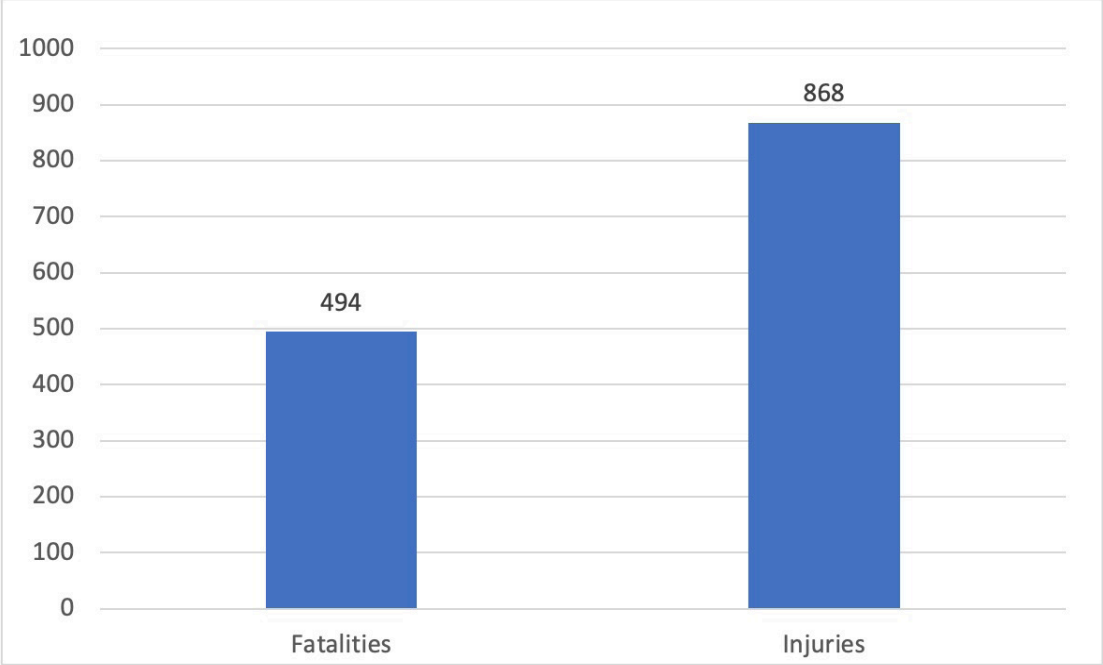
*Figure 6. Number of Attacks on Hard and Soft Targets*



## Fatalities and Injuries

As shown in Figure 7, UAV attacks by VNSAs have resulted in 494 fatalities and 868 injuries. The number of fatalities and injuries from the UAV attacks was available in respectively 623 and 619 incidents, with a mean of 0.79 fatalities and 1.4 injuries per attack. However, in many of the cases where UAVs are used, as are rockets or missiles. Hence, the number of harmed in such attacks must also be attributed to these weapons as well. Additionally, two cases contribute considerably to these high numbers. First, a Houthi UAV and missile attack on a Yemeni military compound in Marib, Yemen, on 20 January, 2020 killed 111 and wounded 30 soldiers.[19] Second, a UAV and missile attack on a military college in Homs, Syria, on 5 October, 2023 killed at least 89 and wounded over 300.[20] These two attacks skew the mean number of fatalities and injuries per attack, and this must be taken into account when reading the findings in this research note.

*Figure 7. Number of Fatalities and Injuries from UAV Attacks*

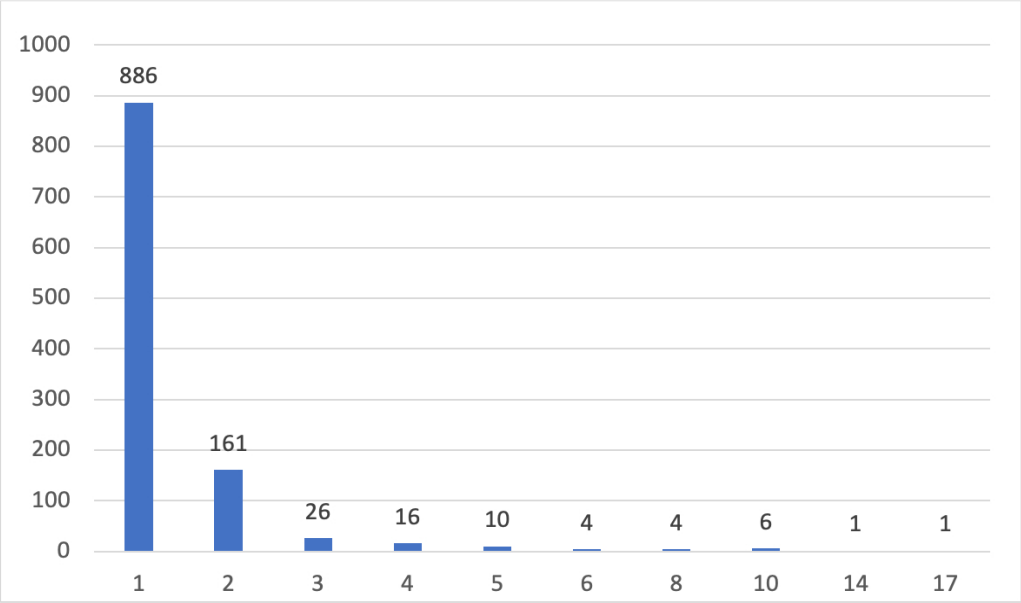



## Number of UAVs Used in an Attack

For each UAV attack included in the dataset, the involvement of one single UAV was recorded unless otherwise specified. If the phrasing of the incident report contained "UAVs" in the plural, without specifying the number in use, two UAVs were recorded. Where the specific number of UAVs used was reported, that number was recorded. In the majority of attacks (79.0 percent), VNSAs use one single UAV. However, as Figure 8 shows, two UAVs were used in 161 (14.3 percent) attacks, and three UAVs were used in 26 attacks (2.3 percent ). Additionally, two events stand out from the others. On 19 June 2021, the Houthis attacked a military base in Khamis Mushait, Saudi Arabia, using 17 armed UAVs.[21]

Later, on 16 December, 2023, the Houthis used 14 armed UAVs in an attack against commercial shipping vessels in the Red Sea.[22] All of the UAVs were reportedly intercepted and destroyed in the above cases.

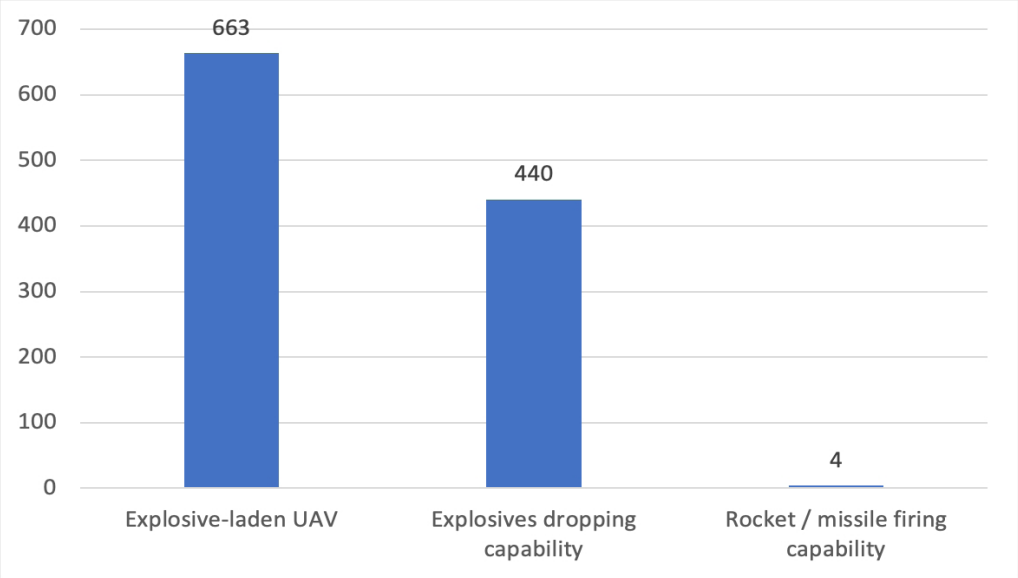
*Figure 8. Number of UAVs Used in an Attack*




## Results of Attacks

This variable in UAV attacks by VNSAs refers to whether a UAV was able to impact its target. This occurs either in the case of loitering munition UAVs, flying into the target, or in the case of quadcopter-style UAVs dropping explosives onto a target below. When it is not possible to determine whether a VNSA UAV attack impacted its target or not, the attack is coded as having an unknown result. The findings indicate that 50.8 percent were successful, while 37.3 percent were intercepted by air defences or other defensive means. Additionally, in 11.9 percent of the incidents, it was not possible to determine the result of the attack from the available data. The results from the complete data from 2006 to 2023 vary from the findings presented in the 2020 article, particularly regarding the number of UAVs being intercepted. In the 2020 research, only 21 percent of attacks were recorded as intercepted.[23]

*Figure 9. Number of Successful, Intercepted, and Unknown-Result Attacks*



## *Summary of Findings*

2023 is the year with the highest number of recorded UAV attacks by VNSAs. The Middle East and North Africa remain the region where the majority of such attacks have happened from 2006 to 2023, particularly in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. The records of attacks in Mexico and Myanmar broaden the geographical dimension of VNSAs' UAV attacks in the updated dataset. The Houthis in Yemen are responsible for 431 UAV attacks, surpassing ISIS (with 257 UAV attacks). The Houthis are also accountable for UAV attacks that may have a strategic effect, as they stand out as the only VNSA currently targeting commercial shipping vessels, civilian airports, and energy infrastructures.

Additionally, VNSAs with ties to Iran are responsible for 53.9 percent of all UAV attacks by VNSAs. Military facilities and personnel are most frequently targeted by VNSAs' UAVs, accounting for 50.5 percent of all such attacks. Hard targets in general, where unprepared civilians are less likely to be located, account for 57.8 percent of all targets. Further, of the 1,122 recorded UAV attacks, 50.8 percent successfully reached their target, while 37.3 percent were intercepted by air defences. It was not possible to determine the result of the UAV attack in 11.9 percent of the incidents. Lastly, when VNSAs conduct an attack using UAVs, they use a single UAV in 79.0 percent of the attacks. However, there are 161 attacks where at least two UAVs were employed, and 26 attacks where three UAVs were used. In two extreme outliers, the Houthis used 17 UAVs in one attack and 14 UAVs in another.

The findings from the analysis of the updated dataset reveal that the patterns identified in the 2020 article persist.[24] VNSAs still choose targets discriminately, and direct most of their UAV attacks against hard or hardened targets, such as military targets or hardened civilian targets. As previously noted, the Houthis have a broader targeting strategy and direct their armed UAVs against civilian targets as well. There is however a challenge to identify the characteristics of every target without actually being on the ground, and with at times limited data available. Additionally, with a few exceptions, VNSAs' UAV attacks do not cause mass casualties. VNSAs' target discrimination towards challenging targets substantiates the finding that VNSAs do not actively seek to create a mass casualty incident with their UAV attacks.

# Conclusion

This research has identified that VNSAs have been responsible for 1,122 UAV attacks from 2006 to 2023. VNSAs continue to use armed UAVs in attacks against primarily military targets, and primarily in the Middle East. As noted earlier, the prevalence of UAV attacks conducted by cartels in Mexico, and by forces fighting the military junta in Myanmar, produce a broader geographical distribution of UAV attacks than what was found in the 2020 article. Also, the Houthis are an outlier in two ways. First, they stand out as responsible for a high number of UAV attacks. Second, they also stand out regarding the type of targets of their UAV attacks. The Houthis are willing to direct their UAVs against civilians and essential targets for societal functioning, such as energy infrastructure and global trade. As such, the Houthis indicate through their actions that they use UAVs as a strategic weapon to influence policy among their nation-state counterparts. The use of armed UAVs by both nation-states and VNSAs and their showcasing of UAVs may facilitate the proliferation of UAVs by VNSAs beyond those who have already integrated UAVs into their repertoire.

## *Note on Ethical Considerations and Data Privacy*

All data used in this research have been procured through open sources, such as reports in newspaper articles, thematic reports, as well as briefs from research institutions, to name a few. The initial data collection did not include incidents from social media. However, the data protection office [Personvernombudet] at the University of Stavanger considered the information about incidents reported on Twitter/X as public information. Hence, after discussing the use of incidents found on social media with the data protection office, this data source was also included in the research. As the data used in this research are all from open and publicly available sources, focused on incident information, the research has not been submitted for ethical evaluation to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD).

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PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

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# Risk Assessment of Terrorism

Judith Tinnes*

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**Abstract:** This bibliography contains journal articles, book chapters, books, edited volumes, theses, grey literature, bibliographies and other resources on risk assessment of terrorism. It includes literature on evaluation of threats emanating from terrorist/extremist individuals, groups, and ideologies. The bibliography focuses on recent publications (up to January 2024) 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, terrorism, risk assessment, threat assessment, risk factors, warning behaviors, assessment tools

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*NB: All websites were last visited on 27.01.2024. For an inventory of previous bibliographies, see:* https://archive.org/details/terrorism-research-bibliographies

PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

BOOKSHELF

# Counter-Terrorism Bookshelf: Nine Books on Terrorism & Counter-Terrorism-Related Subjects

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**Abstract:** So many books are published on terrorism- and counter-terrorism-related subjects that it is difficult to catch up on a large backlog of monographs and volumes received for review. In order to deal with this backlog, this column consists of capsule reviews of nine books.

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Christine Andreeva, ***The Evolution of Information-Sharing in EU Counter-Terrorism: A Post-2015 Paradigm Shift?*** (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 258 pp., US $ 135.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-8039-2829-6.

As explained by the author, the book examines the impact of two paradigmatic changing junctures in the European Union's counter-terrorism campaign in the aftermath of two significant sets of al- Qaida/Islamic State terrorist attacks: Madrid (March 2004), London (July 2005), and the later ones in Paris (November 2015) and Brussels (March 2016). One transformative consequence was the "increased effectiveness of cross-border and inter-agency coordination… due to improved institutional design and legislative frameworks, leading to further policy integration" (p. 1). This excellently organised book's chapters include valuable tables, timelines of attacks, and summary references to EU CT-related documents. The author is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Security Studies, Metropolitan University Prague, Czech Republic.

Christian Kaunert, Alex MacKenzie, and Sarah Leonard, ***The European Union as a Global Counter-Terrorism Actor*** (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022), 192 pp., US $ 115.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-7825-4827-0.

This is an interesting account of the European Union's (EU) twin roles in counter-terrorism internally and globally. As the authors point out, the EU's role in countering terrorism evolved after al-Qaeda's 9/11 attacks, when several EU countries joined the US military's intervention in Afghanistan to remove the Taliban from power and decimate al-Qaeda. Two dimensions of EU counter-terrorism campaigns are examined: external and internal. The external dimension focuses on the EU's (or its member-states') involvement in countering terrorism in regions such as the Sahel region in Africa (e.g., Mali), the Middle East (especially Iraq and Syria), and Central Asia (e.g., Afghanistan). The internal dimension consists primarily of counter-terrorism security governance structures and legislation. In the conclusion, the authors posit questions for further research, such as to what extent EU's counter-terrorism measures succeeded in mitigating the threat by the Islamic State, the nature of the EU's cooperation with the US in counter-terrorism, the impact of counter-terrorism on the member-states' domestic civil liberties, and the impact of Brexit on the EU's overall counter-terrorism efforts. Christian Kaunert is a Professor at Dublin City University, Republic of Ireland and University of South Wales; Alex MacKenzie is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Liverpool, UK; and Sarah Léonard is the Jean Monnet Chair on Migration, Security and Intelligence in the European Union at the School of Law and Government, Dublin City University, Ireland.

Paul Burke, Doaa' Elnakhala, and Seumas Miller (Eds.), ***Global Jihadist Terrorism: Terrorist Groups, Zones of Armed Conflict and National Counter-Terrorism Strategies*** (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021), 352 pp., US $ 163.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-8003-7129-3.

This is a conceptually innovative edited handbook of jihadist terrorism by presenting three ways of analysing this subject. In the first, four significant jihadist terrorist groups are profiled (al-Qaida, Islamic State, Hamas, and Laskar-e-Taiba). This is followed by examining how these groups operate in four conflict zones (Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Palestine-Israel). Finally, the counter-terrorism campaigns by five targeted democratic governments are assessed (the United States, United Kingdom, France, Israel, and India). Although the volume lacks a concluding chapter to present the case studies' findings, it is a valuable reference handbook for authoritative information about these terrorist groups, their areas of operations, and the targeted governments' responses to their threats. Paul Burke is a Senior Researcher at the ERC Project on Counter-Terrorism Ethics, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands; Doaa' Elnakhala is a non-resident Research Manager at the Carnegie-Middle East Centre, Lebanon and a consultant at the Athletic Integrity Unit, Monaco; and Seumas Miller is a Professor of Philosophy at Charles Sturt University, Australia, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands and the Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, University of Oxford, UK.

Jerome Drevon, ***Institutionalizing Violence: Strategies of Jihad in Egypt*** (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022), 264 pp., US $ 80.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-1976-4369-3.

This is a highly detailed and authoritative account of the Sunni Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and Islamic Jihad – two leading jihadist terrorist groups that were active in Egypt beginning in the 1970s. The author points out that while the two jihadi groups shared the same militant ideology to overthrow the secular Egyptian state, their strategic objectives and tactics to achieve them diverged over time. The more violently militant Islamic Jihad, under the leadership of Ayman al-Zawahiri, was responsible for the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat, Egypt's late President, on October 6, 1981, and eventually joined Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda in the late 1990s. Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, on the other hand, turned away from violent militancy following the July 2003 coup that overthrew the Islamist President Mohamed Morsi, and eventually became a legitimate political party. This book is recommended as an important comparative case study on the two jihadi organisations and the factors driving the divergent paths that such organisations pursue to pursue their political and socio-religious objectives. The author is a Senior Analyst on jihad and conflict at the International Crisis Group (ICG).

Sajjan M. Gohel, ***Doctor, Teacher, Terrorist: The Life and Legacy of Al-Qaeda Leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri*** (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2024), 544 pp., US $ 39.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-1976-6536-7.

This is a detailed and well-written biography of the life, ideological writings, and terrorist activities of Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin-Laden's long-time deputy. He succeeded him as al-Qaida's leader following bin Laden's assassination by the US Navy Seals on May 2, 2011, in his hideout in Abbottabad, Pakistan. After 10 years as al-Qaida's leader, on July 31, 2022, Al-Zawahiri was subsequently assassinated by US Special Forces in his hideout in Kabul, Afghanistan. This is not a critical biography, as the author concludes that al-Zawahiri demonstrated "strategic patience" by "content[ing] to bide his time for the long-term survival of al-Qaeda and future jihadists" (p. 349), when one could argue that his ineffectual and bland leadership led to the organisation and its previously charismatic brand being overtaken by the Islamic State as the dominant global jihadi terrorist organisation and ideological leader. The author is the International Security Director at the Asia-Pacific Foundation, London, England.

Sara Kamali, ***Homegrown Hate: Why White Nationalists and Militant Islamists Are Waging War Against the United States*** (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022), 440 pp., US $ 29.95 [Hardcover], US $ 24.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-5203-6002-0.

This is an important, well-written and extensively researched comparative account of the threats presented to the United States by far-right white nationalists and militant Islamists. Especially noteworthy is the author's examination of their "striking parallels and marked differences" (p. 4). The white nationalists, the author points out, view America's "political landscape as currently in their favour, because they have been both tacitly and explicitly endorsed by President Donald Trump," while the militant Islamists "view themselves as directly opposed not only to the US government and all of the institutions constituting its bureaucracy but also, by extension, to their fellow Americans" (p. 4). In one parallel, the militant Islamists and the white nationalists share "a strong element of misogyny" while advocating male patriarchy over them (p. 4). In another parallel, both "identify intensely with a sense of their own victimhood…" (p. 5). To analyse these issues, the book is divided into four parts: who they are (with a valuable section on definitions and terminology), why they fight (in the US and against their American adversaries), what they want (a white ethno-state or an Islamist caliphate), and what can be done to address their respective threats. In conclusion, the author recommends "a holistic justice approach, one based on the principles of anti-oppression and empathy, in order to effectively secure the homeland for all Americans, irrespective of creed or colour" (p. 251). He also recommends a fair and balanced federal statute to criminalise domestic terrorism (p. 255). The author is the Founding Director of Kamali Consulting.

Seumas Miller, Adam Henschke, and Jonas Feltes (Eds), ***Counter-Terrorism: The Ethical Issues*** (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021), 224 pp., US $ 137.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-8003-7306-8.

As explained by the volume's editors, its contributors examine significant ethical issues in governments' counter-terrorism campaigns, with a particular focus on jihadist terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and their affiliates. These issues include how terrorism is defined, applying criminal statutes against suspected terrorists, targeted killings by governments against their terrorist adversaries, enhanced interrogation techniques against incarcerated terrorists, preventive detention, limiting freedom of expression of terrorist-related content on social media, waging psychological warfare against terrorist insurgents and their supporters, utilising bulk metadata collection on the Internet to gather intelligence on suspected terrorists, and how to respond to terrorists' potential use of weapons of mass destruction (p. 1). This reviewer wishes the editors had provided a concluding chapter to synthesise the contributors' findings, but the stand-alone chapters still provide an essential framework for understanding the ethical issues involved in governments' counter-terrorism campaigns against their terrorist adversaries. Seumas Miller is a Professor of Philosophy, Charles Sturt University, Australia, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands and the Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, University of Oxford, UK; Adam Henschke is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, University of Twente, the Netherlands; and Jonas Feltes is a PhD candidate in the Department of Values, Technology & Innovation at Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands.

Jeffrey D. Simon**, *The Bulldog Detective: William J. Flynn and America's First War Against the Mafia, Spies, and Terrorists*** (Lanham, MD: Prometheus Books, 2024), 288, pages, $29.95 Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-6338-8865-4.

This is a fascinating and dramatic account of Flynn, the director of the Bureau of Investigation (BI, forerunner of the FBI) in the late 1910s and 1920s. During this period, he led American law enforcement's fight against a spectrum of domestic national security threats. These included uncovering a German spy and saboteur ring in the US prior to the First World War, later dismantling a major Mafia organisation in Little Italy, New York, and investigating domestic anarchists. In a chapter entitled "Last Hurrah," the author discusses Flynn's involvement in the investigation of the Galleanist anarchist cell's alleged bombing of Wall Street on September 16, 1920, which killed 38 people and wounded more than 200 others. In a dramatic turn, Flynn was forced out of the BI in 1921, with his successor subsequently replaced in 1924 by J. Edgar Hoover, who was 29 years old at the time. Interestingly, the identity of the Wall Street bombing's perpetrators remained unknown, although the author speculates that it was likely Mario Buda, a militant Galleanist (p. 165). The author has published several important books about terrorism and is a former RAND analyst who has also taught at UCLA.

Silke Zoller, ***To Deter and Punish: Global Collaboration Against Terrorism in the 1970s*** (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2021), 360 pp., US $ 145.00 [Hardcover], US $ 35.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-2311-9547-8.

In this important and innovative account, the author focuses on a formative period in the Cold War from 1968 to 1984, when primarily the United States and Western governments (including Israel) began to implement counter-terrorism campaigns against their international terrorist adversaries. What is unique about this period, the author explains, is that counter-terrorism was primarily "based on diplomatic and state-on-state collaboration…" (p. 7). As an international history, the author "traces state officials' approaches in various countries to issues of political violence and terrorism within international relations. It highlights mid-level bureaucrats who conducted negotiations in international organisations and oftentimes shaped the policy results" (p. 7). In what this reviewer considers an overly partisan approach, the author refers to Western policy-makers as advocating "Global North positions on terrorism and political violence" (p. 7) against the Global South, in which terrorism was considered a criminal activity. This approach, the author argues, "downplays revolutionary, postcolonial, leftist, and similar views, views that threaten the global status quo and the predominance of Global North countries…" in the international system (p. 245). Moreover, the author does not define the difference between terrorism and other forms of political violence. Despite such criticisms, this is a valuable case study for shedding light on an essential formative period in the modern history of the nature of primarily Western governments' counter-terrorism campaigns, which have significantly evolved in their response measures since then. The author is an assistant professor of History at Kennesaw State University, Georgia.

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