

## Criminology's third war

### Special issue on terrorism and responses to terrorism

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Politicians in the United States have invoked the term “war” to develop national support for an all-out attack on criminal behavior on at least three separate occasions since World War II: the wars on crime, drugs, and terrorism. In each case, the word has been used as a metaphor to underscore the conviction that society is involved in a pitched battle and that there is no room for acquiescence or compromise. The implications of the war metaphor or a detailed examination of criminology's role in these three campaigns is beyond the scope of this short introduction. However, I argue that several important similarities can be found across the three major crime-related political wars of the past century and that there is at least one important difference: Academic criminology was far more engaged in the wars on crime and drugs than it has been in the war on terrorism.

#### **Wars on Crime, Drugs, and Terrorism**

Each of the three wars can be linked directly to presidential politics. Given the United States president's constitutional responsibility to serve as “commander in chief,” the president is the elected official who is most likely to invoke the war metaphor and be taken seriously. The phrase “war on crime” was actually already in U.S. politics by the early 1930s when Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover sponsored a comic strip of the same name that was syndicated in newspapers across the country (Ruth and Reitz, 2003). But it was Arizona Senator and Presidential Nominee Barry Goldwater who elevated the war-on-crime metaphor to national prominence by making it a key issue in the 1964 presidential election. Goldwater lost the election but forced President-Elect Lyndon Johnson to take the issue seriously. In the fall of 1964, Johnson tried to counter Goldwater's focus on the microlevel dynamics of crime fighting by arguing that crime was rooted in broad, macrolevel social problems and that warring on poverty really constituted warring on crime (Flamm, 2005). But a year later, Johnson dropped the indirect link to poverty and instead declared a new and direct concern with the victims of crime: “I will not be satisfied until every woman and child in this Nation can walk any street,

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enjoy any park, drive on any highway, and live in any community at any time of the day or night without fear of being harmed” (Flamm, 2005: 51). When Richard Nixon campaigned during the run-up to the election of 1968, he moved the war on crime even more directly to center stage in presidential politics. At the time of his State of the Union Address in 1970, Nixon declared that “If there is one area where the word ‘war’ is appropriate, it is in the fight against crime” (Huq and Muller, 2008: 218).

Although the U.S. war on drugs can be traced as far back as the 1880s when the United States pressed for a treaty with China that included an absolute prohibition on the shipment of opium between the two countries (Eddy, 2003), the modern war on drugs is usually traced to 1971 when President Richard Nixon declared an all-out offensive on drugs—which he referred to as “America’s public enemy number one” (2003: 1). In 1973, the Drug Enforcement Assistance Administration (DEA) was created and charged with enforcing federal drug laws. In 1978, the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act was amended to allow for asset forfeiture—which has since been widely used in the war on drugs.

The war on drugs received a major boost with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. He responded to perceived drug-related problems by declaring: “The American people want their government to get tough and go on the offensive” (Walker, 1992: 26) and promising that police would attack the drug problem “with more ferocity than ever before” (Donziger, 1996: 115). In 1983, the Drug Abuse Resistance Education Program (DARE) was founded in Los Angeles and spread quickly to schools across the country. In 1985, First Lady Nancy Reagan launched the widely publicized Just Say No (to drugs) campaign, promoting it through television and radio, popular magazines, bumper stickers, and t-shirts. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 created the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to lead the war on drugs, and William Bennett was appointed as its first director.

In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed into law the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which called for mandatory prison sentences of 20 years to life for some drug offenders and the death penalty for those who committed murder in pursuit of illegal drug sales. Since the early 1970s, the United States has spent vast sums of money combating drug use and abuse and has created a far-flung bureaucracy to administer these programs. In addition to agencies like the DEA and ONDCP that were created directly to combat drugs, a host of other agencies—including the departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Justice, Homeland Security (DHS), State, Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Education—received major budget increases for programs tasked with the control of drugs and the treatment or punishment of drug offenders. Robinson and Scherlen (2007: 42) estimated that in FY 2005, total federal spending on the drug war amounted to \$12.2 billion, with the largest amounts going to HHS, the Department of Justice, and DHS.

Fewer than 10 days after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, President George W. Bush declared war on “terrorism with a global reach” and promised that the war would end only with the eradication of evil (Andreani, 2004: 31). In October 2001, the United States passed the USA Patriot Act, which provides a variety of legal tools to fight terrorism at

home and abroad. The war on terrorism rapidly took concrete policy form in the campaign to topple the Taliban in Afghanistan. The invasion was preceded by an ultimatum to the Taliban to hand over terrorists and was at least implicitly sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council. After early successes in the Afghan campaign, the Bush administration introduced the doctrine of “preventive war,” which suggests that the United States had the right to resort to force to fight terrorists and their supporters at home and abroad, and strongly pushed the idea that Iraq was the next step in the global war on terrorism (Andreani, 2004). President Bush clearly identified his presidency with the war on terrorism and emphasized this connection in his ultimately successful election over Democratic opponent John Kerry.

Despite obvious differences, there are several important similarities between all three of these declared wars on different types of criminal behavior (Caulkins, Kleiman, and Reuter, 2003; LaFree and Dugan, 2004). First, in all three cases, law enforcement is a necessary but not a sufficient solution. Although this argument has probably been the most controversial for the war on terrorism (LaFree and Hendrickson, 2007), it seems fair to conclude that most commentators now imagine at least some role for law enforcement in preventing terrorism and responding to terrorist attacks. Second, in all three cases, much evidence suggests that taking a tough stand and attacking the problem aggressively does not always produce desired results. Third, in the case of terrorism and drugs and to some extent crime, the problem has domestic and transnational aspects. Fourth, in the case of terrorism and drugs and to some extent crime, the problem cuts across various levels of government, agencies, disciplines, and the public and private sectors in complex ways. And finally, in all three areas, the war metaphor has produced substantial and to some extent unanticipated policy difficulties. Thus, Flamm (2005) claimed that, because President Johnson promoted the war-model idea of total victory against crime, he set himself up for certain failure. As former Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach explained, “You are meant to win wars, and the War on Crime was in a sense an unwinnable war.” Similar arguments have been voiced in terms of the war metaphor applied to drugs (Robinson and Scherlen, 2007) and terrorism (LaFree and Hendrickson, 2007).

However, ordinary street crime, drug distribution and use, and terrorism are also distinct in important ways, including the scope of violations (crimes and drug violations are common, but terrorism is relatively rare); the motivations of participants (terrorists often perceive themselves as altruists; common criminals and drug distributors rarely do); and organizational structure (most common crimes are committed with little organized structure, whereas drug distribution networks and terrorist groups vary greatly in organizational complexity). From a research standpoint, a major difference between these three types of crime is the differential involvement of academic criminology.

Although criminology has been involved front and center in the war on crime and drugs, thus far, its connection to the war on terrorism has been modest. It is true that criminologists have been making important contributions to the research literature on terrorism and responses to terrorism for many years. Two past presidents of the American Society of Criminology, Nicholas Kittrie (1978) and Austin Turk (1982, 1984), explicitly built terrorism into their research on

political crime in the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, it is clear that the criminological study of terrorism has lagged far behind many other specialized branches of criminology. For example, in a review for this introduction, I identified only four articles dealing directly with terrorism, responses to terrorism, and homeland security in *Criminology* from 1963 to the present (Dugan, LaFree, and Piquero, 2005; LaFree, Dugan, and Korte, 2009; Smith and Damphousse, 1996, 1998) and only one article in *Law & Society Review* from 1966 to the present (Thatcher, 2005). Note that all four of the *Criminology* articles are by authors that have contributed to this issue of *Criminology & Public Policy*.

However, the relatively small number of criminologists active in terrorism research has begun to change in recent years. After the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 and especially after the September 11, 2001 attacks, major federal funding became available for criminologists to embark on large-scale empirical work on the study of terrorism. After these events, funding through the National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism, terrorism research solicitations by the National Institute of Justice and the Bureau of Justice Administration, and eventually the creation of the DHS opened the door for an expanded portfolio of criminological research on terrorism. More recently, terrorism research solicitations by the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Justice, and the Bureau of Justice Administration along with the creation of the DHS Centers of Excellence Program have strengthened support for social science studies of terrorism and responses to terrorism. The Minerva program (Washington Post, 2008), which is funded by the Department of Defense, promises to increase levels of support. Moreover, spurred by brutal attacks such as the Madrid and London bombings, funding of social science research on terrorism and responses to terrorism has also expanded greatly in Europe (Eder and Senn, 2008). To underscore the growing effect of these developments, note that all five articles on terrorism published in *Criminology* and the *Law & Society Review* identified above have publication dates after 1995.

It is of course the hope of the editors and contributors to this issue that the research reported here will increase attention paid to terrorism and responses to terrorism by the criminological research community. The five articles included can be divided into the two traditional subdivisions of criminology, with three articles on the etiology of terrorism (LaFree, Yang, and Crenshaw; Kelly and Damphousse; Freilich, Chermak, and Caspi) and two articles on the criminal justice processing of terrorism (Legault and Hendrickson; Useem and Clayton). All of the articles are grounded in empirical data and rely extensively on criminological theories and methods to make their arguments.

## **Current Contributions**

### *The Etiology of Terrorism*

LaFree, Yang, and Crenshaw (2009, this issue) examine the attack patterns of 53 foreign terrorist groups that have been identified by the U.S. State Department and other government sources as posing a special threat to the United States. Using newly available data on nearly 17,000 terrorist attacks from the Global Terrorism Database from 1970 to 2004, the authors

find that slightly more than 3% of attacks by these designated anti-U.S. groups were actually directed at the United States. Moreover, more than 99% of attacks targeting the United States did not occur on U.S. soil but were aimed at U.S. targets in other countries (e.g., embassies and multinational corporations). LaFree et al. also find that more than 90% of non-U.S. attacks were domestic (i.e., nationals from one country attacking targets of the same nationality in the same country). The researchers apply group-based trajectory methods for the analysis—a methodology which, up to this point, has been used mostly in criminology.

The LaFree et al. (2009) results underscore the importance of proximity for terrorist targeting by these foreign groups. These terrorists, like more ordinary criminals, mainly chose targets close to their operational base. Given that most attacks by groups identified as threats by the U.S. government are in fact aimed at non-U.S. domestic targets, the authors conclude that the United States should pursue efforts to strengthen the capacity of local governments to combat terrorism and to communicate to other governments the understanding that groups that are anti-United States are primarily a threat to the countries in which they are located.

Smith and Damphousse (2009, this issue) use open-source data on 173 terrorist perpetrated or planned incidents (55 international and 118 environmental) to contrast the lifespan and strategies of a U.S. eco-terrorist group with other types of terrorist groups operating in the United States. Like the article by LaFree et al. (2009), Smith and Damphousse introduce a methodology to the study of terrorism that has not been widely used in the past; they focus on examining the lifespan of terrorist groups by measuring all major terrorist attacks attributed to the group and they analyze the criminal and noncriminal precursor behavior associated with each known attack. Their findings suggest that there are important differences in the temporal patterns of terrorist groups operating in the United States. Most notably, environmental terrorist groups engage in a relatively short planning cycle compared with right-wing and international terrorists. These conclusions suggest caution in interpreting the article by LaFree et al., which is limited to foreign terrorist organizations.

Smith and Damphousse (2009) provide a detailed examination of the Family, a unique environmentally oriented terrorist group operating during a relatively long period of time. This group provides an interesting contrast to other environmental groups that have been charged with terrorism-related crimes in the United States. Despite important organizational differences between the Family and other environmental groups using terrorist tactics, Smith and Damphousse find that the underlying patterns of preparatory conduct for environmental groups are strikingly similar. The authors conclude that law-enforcement agencies investigating environmental groups have relatively little time to observe and infiltrate the individual cells and that, compared with other terrorist groups, environmental extremists thus far have engaged in attacks that are less deadly.

Like LaFree et al. (2009) and Smith and Damphousse (2009), Freilich, Caspi, and Chermak (2009, this issue) rely on unclassified, open-source data. The authors examine the evolution of four domestic far-right racist groups: the Aryan Nations, National Alliance, Public Enemy Number 1 (PEN1), and the Oklahoma Constitutional Militia (OCM). The authors compare

the changes that occurred in these groups and find that they were influenced by contextual and organizational variables. The first three groups experienced growth and longevity because they (1) had able leadership that set forth a clear ideological message and goals, (2) undertook concrete actions to further their ideology and goals and had the finances necessary for this, (3) took advantage of political opportunities, and (4) were internally cohesive. Conversely, OCM's leader displayed poor judgment and the group did not set forth a coherent message, conduct successful actions, or take advantage of opportunities. Three groups declined because of organizational instability and responses by law-enforcement and non-state actors (e.g., watch groups). PEN1, on the other hand, has thus far avoided organizational instability and continues to grow despite periodic internal debates about its mission.

The article by Freilich et al. (2009) suggests that law-enforcement policymakers should consider how critical incidents affect a group and account for organizational variables that denote the group's strength. Moreover, policymakers must engage in dynamic analyses of terrorist groups because contextual and organizational features of groups are constantly changing. Although law-enforcement (and watch-group) responses can reduce or even eliminate violent groups, authorities must be conscious of possible backlash effects. By focusing on all criminal activities—not just those that can be classified as terrorist—researchers and policymakers can provide more sophisticated theoretical explanations for group differences and help law enforcement establish priorities for responding to and preventing future terrorist activities.

### *Terrorism and Criminal Justice Issues*

The final two articles in the volume deal more directly with responses of the legal system to terrorism. Legault and Hendrickson (2009, this issue) provide one of the first individual-level studies of terrorists and more common criminals by comparing firearm offending characteristics for 336 offenders convicted of terrorism-related charges from the American Terrorism Study with 923 federal felons convicted by the United States Sentencing Commission. The authors point out that, although previous research describes firearm use by terrorists in the United States as relatively common, there have been few systematic studies of how firearm use varies between terrorists and ordinary criminals. Legault and Hendrickson find that, compared with other felons, offenders charged with terrorism-related offenses were more likely to participate in firearm crimes. The authors recommend that official efforts to monitor weapon sales—such as the Brady Act—continue to include those named on the terrorist watch list and that those named on the list should be subject to additional law-enforcement scrutiny when attempting to purchase firearms. These efforts should be coordinated by federal law-enforcement agencies and should effectively use existing antiterrorism mechanisms to either block purchases or garner intelligence on terrorists attempting to obtain firearms.

Useem and Clayton (2009, this issue) examine 27 medium- and high-security prisons for men in 10 state departments of corrections and 1 municipal jail system during the 2006 to 2009 calendar years. The authors interviewed a total of 210 prison officials in central offices of correctional systems or in separate prison facilities and 270 inmates in prison facilities. In

two cases—the municipal jail system and a state prison system—interviews were limited to prison officials.

Useem and Clayton (2009) focus on jihadi-based radicalization within prisons. Their central finding is that the occurrence of radicalization in U.S. prisons has been low and the probability for radicalization in the future is modest. The reasons for predicting a modest probability of this type of prison radicalization are fourfold: (1) order and stability in U.S. prisons have been achieved during the prison buildup period throughout the past four decades; (2) prison officials have successfully implemented efforts to counter the importation of radicalism; (3) correctional leadership has infused antiradicalization into their agencies; and (4) inmates' low levels of education decrease the appeals of jihad-style terrorism. The prison environment permits a great deal of information to be collected on the actual and planned activities of inmates after they are released. This requires attentive observation of staff, collection of information from inmates, and efforts at different levels of correctional agencies to assemble, collate, and assess information—much of it likely to be false but some of which will be vital.

### **Policy Essays**

In response to the five articles in this issue, we include eight policy essays. These essays are extremely diverse and provide thoughtful arguments about the complexity of the challenges that face policymakers in this arena. Although Banks (2009, this issue) endorses the chief conclusion of the LaFree et al. (2009) article that greater international cooperation might be the best counterterrorist strategy, he points out barriers to successful implementation of this policy and stresses that it should not occur at the expense of less domestic vigilance. Major barriers to international cooperation on counterterrorism include the absence of internationally recognized definitions of terrorism, the problem of terrorist threats faced by each country being mostly idiosyncratic, the enormous variation in counterterrorist resources of individual nations, and the wariness other countries have regarding real or perceived threats to their sovereignty implied by bilateral or international counterterrorist strategies. Banks' essay underscores the fundamental policy dilemma posed by attacks with a small likelihood of occurrence but with the potential for a catastrophic effect.

Weinberg and Eubank (2009, this issue) address similar themes by raising the question of whether the relatively limited number of terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland justifies the government's enormous outpouring of human and material resources and restrictions on civil liberties. These authors highlight a fundamental problem in evaluating terrorism policies that also applies to crime policy more generally: Effective policies tend to undercut their rationale for existing. The use of metal detectors in response to aerial hijackings in the United States provides an example. Research (e.g., Dugan et al., 2005) generally supports the conclusion that metal detectors greatly reduced aerial hijackings in the United States. However, an observer assessing the small number of aerial hijackings after the implementation of the extremely costly metal detector program might ask why we would engage in such a costly program to stop a behavior that is so uncommon. In other words, to address the concerns raised by Banks and by

Weinberg and Eubank, we must not only ask how common attacks by foreign terrorist groups have been, but also how common they would have been had governments not taken action to counter them.

Wigle (2009, this issue) provides an extremely thoughtful examination of an operations-research approach to countering crime and terrorism. Wigle, chief of the Worldwide Incidents Team at the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), notes that Smith and Damphousse's (2009) research demonstrates that empirical studies using open-source data and relatively few cases can nonetheless provide extremely useful information for policymakers. Wigle points out that such research could be strengthened by providing researchers with greater access to larger, higher quality databases and by increasingly using automated empirical data-collection and analytic methods. Wigle also provides a more general warning about the validity of open-source data that applies to several articles in this issue: Journalists looking for stories will often bypass frequently occurring crimes to concentrate on atypical but newsworthy events.

Wigle (2009) offers the most detailed suggestions for systematically improving the quality of terrorism data. For example, he provides specific suggestions for studying groups that frequently change names, sometimes align with other groups, and sometimes disperse altogether only to emerge again with different personnel. Like several other policy essay authors, Wigle raises the issue of how to protect civil liberties and privacy while collecting useful data on terrorists and terrorist groups. Here, he suggests that having policies formulated in advance and making sure analysts are fully informed of these policies and their implications are the most effective strategies.

Wigle argues that law-enforcement and counterterrorism policymakers must recognize the value of social science terrorism data and do more to make data collection a requirement. He sees operations research as a viable way to increase capabilities and to optimize the detection and prevention of terrorism, and he encourages academics to work within the existing domestic intelligence network and especially to partner with public safety agencies, joint terrorism task forces, state fusion centers, and regional intelligence centers.

Policy essays by Berlet (2009, this issue) and Blazak (2009, this issue) deal with radicalization and extremism in the United States, but from very different perspectives. Berlet's central concern is that law enforcement and policymakers in the United States often fail to distinguish radical ideas from behaviors, and he notes that little empirical evidence exists of a strong link between radical thoughts and violent acts. But Berlet sees hope in the fact that the Homegrown Terrorism and Violent Radicalization Prevention Act of 2007 (H.R.1955 and S.1959) was blocked by a coalition of civil liberties groups spanning the political spectrum.

Compared with Berlet (2009), Blazak (2009) concentrates more directly on the danger of hate crimes and particularly on the role that U.S. prisons play in generating right-wing extremism. Although the research article by Useem and Clayton (2009) does not find strong evidence for jihad-style radicalization in U.S. prisons, Blazak argues that there is much more cause for

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1. The details of this law can be found at [govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-1955](http://govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-1955).



alarm in terms of racist prison gangs, especially from individuals incarcerated under state hate-crime laws and federal civil rights laws. Berlet and Blazak—like nearly all the contributors to this issue—point out that thus far there is little empirical data and analysis on terrorism, including radicalization and political extremism in the United States.

Austin, (2009, this issue), Greene (2009, this issue), and Forst (2009, this issue) provide thoughtful, and in many ways complementary, appraisals of the connections between domestic terrorism in the United States, prisons, and firearms. Similar to Blazak (2009), Austin considers the prevalence and threat of prisoner radicalization. After reading the Useem and Clayton (2009) research findings and policy discussion, however, Austin questions the need for and success of continued or increased law-enforcement efforts to prevent terrorist threats. He asks whether the more logical policy issue posed by Useem and Clayton's research is why there has not been another attack since 9/11. He encourages us not to assume that radicalization in prisons is a serious problem when the reported evidence contradicts such a notion; rather, Austin proposes that we ask ourselves why terrorists have attacked the United States with such low frequency.

The final two essays (Greene, 2009; Forst, 2009) directly discuss Legault and Hendrickson (2009). For Greene, the strength of the Legault and Hendrickson article is that it emphasizes important differences between criminal and terrorist motivations and the implications of these differences for access to and use of handguns. Greene reminds us that critical differences exist between distinct types of terrorism and some of these differences may have serious implications for firearm policies and their effectiveness. For example, compared with international terrorists, homegrown terrorists likely respond much more directly to gun control laws and domestic police intelligence. But Greene cautions that gun control laws by themselves are not likely to be effective in stopping terrorism without more complete communication and information sharing between local and state government officials and those at the federal level.

This emphasis on the need for better communication among local, state, and federal officials echoes the earlier discussion by Wigle (2009). Throughout the past decade, Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs) have been organized as major vehicles for improving communication linkages across the various levels of government. But as Greene (2009) points out, the JTTFs have thus far struggled with conflicting missions and organizational cultures and a general lack of trust among federal, state, and local law-enforcement agencies. Greene also warns against an overreliance on rational choice models for explaining terrorism, concluding that behavioral and values-based ideas about crime might ultimately be more useful for both prevention and interdiction.

Compared with Greene (2009), Forst (2009) provides a much more critical view of the utility of comparing firearm use by terrorists and common criminals and, more generally, for the contribution of criminological research to terrorism policies. Forst claims that federal sentencing data are unrepresentative of firearm cases because they include many white-collar offenses, such as mail fraud, embezzlement, and drug trafficking. Forst points out that the heterogeneity of terrorism, the sometimes idiosyncratic behavior of terrorists, and the lack of reliable data create major barriers to researchers. That said, Forst is somewhat more optimistic

about adapting crime-prevention models to terrorism. Compared with Greene, Forst sees more promise for routine activities theory and mentions game theory as potentially useful. Whereas Austin (2009) focuses on the financial costs of terrorism and the United States' responses to terrorism, Forst argues that criminologists could play a useful role in developing models of the social costs associated with terrorism.

Following the policy essays, we conclude this issue with a thoughtful essay by Jessica Stern (2009, this issue), an international expert on terrorism. In particular, Stern provides useful suggestions for building on the research of LaFree, Yang, and Crenshaw (2009), Useem and Clayton (2009), and Legault and Hendrickson (2009). More generally, Stern emphasizes the need for better empirical data in the study of terrorism and for developing more robust partnerships between law enforcement, intelligence personnel, and academic researchers. She also stresses the need to remain flexible and open in an ever-changing threat environment and suggests that academic specialists could play an important role here.

## Conclusions

The wars on crime and drugs have been around long enough to justify asking ourselves whether academic criminology has had any significant effect on policy in these two areas. When we think of policy with regard to crime, we most often think of the ability of research to reduce the behavior in question. And in this sense, the track record of academic research in criminology has not been encouraging. Certainly, the explosive growth in violent crime that plagued the United States through the early 1990s—especially its poorer central-city areas—has considerably abated. Murder rates in the United States in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century are now similar to rates in the mid-1960s—before the crime boom began (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008). However, many might suggest that giving academic criminology credit for these declines is reminiscent of the Mark Twain (1889) character who claimed credit for a solar eclipse. The success of academic criminology in reducing drug use in the United States is likely to be an even tougher argument to make. In fact, it is difficult these days to find any researcher who seriously claims that the war on drugs has been a success from a crime-prevention standpoint (inter alia, see MacCoun and Reuter, 2001).

However, another way of judging the effect of academic criminology on the wars on crime and drugs is to evaluate its success in providing objective data, evaluation, and assessment in areas that are often highly contentious. And here the past achievements of criminology are more easily recognized. For example, criminological research in the United States has played a major role by identifying and describing the nature of crime and drug use and evaluating policies and programs aimed at combating them. Much of the most important criminological research in this arena has produced negative findings. Thus, despite much common sense to the contrary, criminological research has not supported strong and consistent connections between unemployment and crime (Blumstein and Wallman, 2006). Similarly, despite the immense popularity of the DARE anti-drug program with police, school administrators, and the general public, research (e.g., Robinson and Scherlen, 2007) demonstrated that it was not

only ineffective but sometimes counterproductive. In fact, an underappreciated yet extremely important role of criminological research is to provide hard evidence that few magic bullets exist in the realm of crime-control policy.

There is a troubling irony in the relative lack of empirically based criminological research on terrorism, because compared with crime and drug use, terrorism represents a type of criminal behavior for which effective policy is especially dependent on hard data and objective analysis. As a result of the lack of systematic empirical research, an area that is in need of clear-eyed, dispassionate facts is especially susceptible to half truths and myths. Policymakers have long recognized the value to democratic institutions of a free press to serve as an informed critic for observing public policy and objectively reporting on its causes and consequences to an informed public. As “slow journalists,” the role of criminologists in promoting sound policies for the nation’s efforts to respond to terrorism may be no less critical. To some extent at least, criminology has served this watch-dog function during the wars on crime and drugs. The role that criminological research will play in understanding terrorism and responses to terrorism remains to be seen. But certainly the type of systematic, empirically driven research represented by the articles in this volume is an important move in this direction.

And finally, we must be careful not to overstate the similarities between the three types of crime. Ordinary criminals have victims; drug dealers have willing customers; and terrorists have not only victims but also audiences of supporters and would-be supporters. Compared with ordinary crime and drug crime, terrorism is far less common and is affected by much more than single extraordinary events like the September 11 attacks. Ordinary crime is to a large extent local; drug trafficking and terrorism are more likely to cross national borders. But while drug trafficking and terrorism can involve crossing national borders, the scope of border crossing is far greater for drug crimes than terrorism. And given the poor record of border security in stopping drug trafficking, the probability of success of border control for stopping the much less common problem of terrorism is correspondingly diminished. Ordinary crime needs little financing to flourish; drug crimes and terrorism rely on financing. But the direction of money flows for drug dealing and terrorism run in opposite directions: Drug king pins need to launder money produced by their retail operations; terrorism organizations need to raise money and safely transfer it to their operatives. Given these underlying differences, there is clearly no single set of lessons learned from the wars on crime and drugs that can universally be applied to the war on terrorism.

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# Trajectories of terrorism

## Attack patterns of foreign groups that have targeted the United States, 1970–2004

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### Research Summary

*Although researchers began to assemble open-source terrorism event databases in the late 1960s, until recently most of these databases excluded domestic attacks. This exclusion is particularly misleading for the United States because, although the United States is often perceived to be the central target of transnational terrorism, the domestic attacks of foreign groups targeting the United States are often ignored. We began this article with 53 foreign terrorist groups that have been identified by U.S. State Department and other government sources as posing a special threat to the United States. Using newly available data from the Global Terrorism Database composed of both domestic and transnational terrorist attacks, we examined 16,916 attacks attributed to these groups between 1970 and 2004. We found that just 3% of attacks by these designated anti-U.S. groups were actually directed at the United States. Moreover, 99% of attacks targeting the United States did not occur on U.S. soil but were aimed at U.S. targets in other countries (e.g., embassies or multilateral corporations). We also found that more than 90% of the non-U.S. attacks were domestic (i.e., nationals from one country attacking targets of the same nationality in the same country). We used group-based trajectory analysis to examine the different developmental trajectories of U.S. target and non-U.S. target terrorist strikes and concluded that four trajectories best capture attack patterns for both. These trajectories outline three terrorist*

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*waves—which occurred in the 1970s, 1980s, and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century—as well as a trajectory that does not exhibit wave-like characteristics but instead is characterized by irregular and infrequent attacks.*

### **Policy Implications**

*Our results underscore the importance of proximity for terrorist targeting. Terrorists, like ordinary criminals, are likely to choose targets close to their operational base. However, when attacks occur further from the terrorists' home bases, they are more deadly. Approximately half of the terrorist organizations studied here exhibited wave-like boom and bust attack trajectories. Given that most attacks by groups identified as threats by the U.S. government are in fact aimed at non-U.S. domestic targets, the United States should pursue efforts to strengthen the capacity of local governments to combat terrorism and to communicate to them our understanding that groups that are anti-United States are also a threat to local governments. In framing counterterrorism policies, the United States should put threats into perspective by acknowledging that we are the exception and local governments are the rule. Terrorism is not just about us.*

### **Keywords**

*global terrorism database, terrorism targets, terrorism trends, terrorist groups, anti-U.S. attacks, trajectory analysis, terrorism waves*

Compared with most types of criminal violence, terrorism poses special data-collection challenges. To begin, the term “terrorism” yields varying definitions that are often loaded with political and emotional implications. Even different branches of the U.S. government have adopted unique definitions of terrorism (cf. Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1997; U.S. Department of State, 2001). Although government departments in some countries collect official data on terrorism (e.g., the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center [NCTC]), data collected by governments are suspicious either because they are influenced by political considerations or because many fear that they might be so influenced. Moreover, although vast amounts of detailed official data on common crimes are routinely produced by the various branches of the criminal justice system in most countries, this rarely is the case for terrorism. For example, most offenders suspected of terrorism against the United States are not legally processed for terrorism but rather for other related offenses, such as weapons violations and money laundering (Smith, Damphousse, Jackson, and Sellers, 2002). In addition, much primary data are collected by intelligence agents (e.g., informants and communications intercepts) and are not available to researchers working in an unclassified environment.

In response to these data challenges, researchers have long relied on open-source unclassified terrorism event databases. Terrorism event databases generally use electronic and print media to collect detailed information on the characteristics of terrorist attacks. LaFree and Dugan (2007)



described eight of these event databases, which provide varying coverage extending to 1968. Analyses based on these open-source event databases have provided important insights into a wide range of terrorism-related empirical questions, which include trends in terrorism over time (LaFree and Dugan, 2009), the deterrent effect of new antiterrorism policies (Dugan, LaFree, and Piquero, 2005; LaFree, Dugan, and Korte, 2009), and the economic effect of terrorist attacks (Greenbaum, Dugan, and LaFree, 2007; Richardson, Gordon, and Moore, 2005).

However, an important limitation of most open-source databases is that they include only transnational events—those that involve a national or a group of nationals from one country attacking targets in another country or attacking foreign targets in their home country. This limitation is potentially critical because sources that compared domestic and transnational terrorist attacks (Asal and Rethemeyer, 2007; LaFree and Dugan, 2007; Neumayer and Plumper, 2008; Schmid, 2004) concluded that the former outnumber the latter by as much as seven to one. Moreover, as Falkenrath (2001: 164) pointed out, dividing bureaucratic responsibility and legal authority according to a domestic-international distinction is “an artifact of a simpler, less globally interconnected era.” Some groups such as al Qaeda have global operations that cut across domestic and international lines. Others (e.g., the Abu Nidal Organization and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party) operate in multiple countries and, hence, might simultaneously be engaged in acts of both domestic and transnational terrorism. In short, excluding domestic terrorist attacks may impede a more sophisticated understanding of terrorism and ultimately weaken counterterrorism efforts.

The fact that most unclassified terrorism databases have excluded domestic terrorist attacks has special relevance for the United States because the United States has long been perceived as the target of an inordinate number of terrorist attacks. Thus, the U.S. State Department has claimed that one third of all terrorist attacks worldwide are directed at the United States (Crenshaw, 2006). Neumayer and Plumper (2008) also argued that, when it comes to transnational terrorism, most victims of foreign attacks are U.S. citizens. However, because previous estimates have been based only on transnational terrorist attacks, they do not take into account the possibility that most terrorist attacks are local. Thus, in one of the few analyses of both domestic and transnational terrorist attacks from around the world, LaFree and Dugan (2009) found that the United States was not the number one target of terrorist groups from 1970 to 2004, but instead ranked 19<sup>th</sup> among all countries in terms of total attacks.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, we include both domestic and transnational terrorist events in an examination of the attack patterns of a select number of foreign nonstate organizations identified by the Department of State as posing the greatest threat to U.S. citizens. This strategy was motivated in large part by the overwhelming public and policy preoccupation with the questions of “why

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1. The 18 countries with more terrorist attacks than the United States during this period were (in order): Colombia, Peru, El Salvador, India, Northern Ireland (treated here as a country), Spain, Turkey, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Chile, Guatemala, Israel (excluding the Palestine territories), Nicaragua, Lebanon, Algeria, South Africa, and Italy. The United States ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in total fatalities, including the above list minus Chile, Israel, South Africa, and Italy.

do they hate us” in the wake of the 9/11 attacks (Crenshaw, 2001; Hoge and Rose, 2001). This frequently asked question led us to focus on foreign groups that target or have targeted the United States to put al Qaeda and the 9/11 attacks in perspective. In addition, most quantitative analysis of terrorism to this point has used terrorist attacks as the unit of analysis, often in relation to country-level data on economic, political, and social indicators (e.g., Dugan, LaFree, and Piquero, 2005; Li, 2005). We noted an almost complete absence of analyses of the groups themselves and their targeting patterns. Thus, we link attacks to the specific groups that the U.S. government itself deemed most threatening to U.S. interests. This investigation is an appropriate point of departure for better understanding al Qaeda and for developing a group-level analysis of terrorism.<sup>2</sup>

Based on newly available data on 16,916 terrorist incidents between 1970 and 2004, we compared the attacks of 53 foreign terrorist groups against the United States with those they perpetrated against other countries. We also used trajectory analysis to identify trends in attack patterns among the different groups. The results reveal that most attacks—even from these groups that are considered to be specifically anti-United States—have not been directed at the United States. Moreover, the relatively small proportion of attacks on the United States from these groups is overwhelmingly accounted for by attacks that happened not on U.S. soil, but against U.S. targets located in other countries (e.g., embassies and corporations). Non-U.S. attacks by these designated anti-U.S. groups have also been overwhelmingly domestic: More than 90% of all attacks analyzed here were perpetrated by offenders against local targets within their own countries. We also found that terrorist attacks directed against the United States and those directed against non-U.S. targets since 1970 can be divided into four main trajectories. Although overlap exists in the structures of these trajectories and in the specific groups they contain, important differences are indicated. In the next section, we describe open-source terrorism event databases in more detail before turning to the specific policy questions that guided our analyses.

### **Terrorism Event Databases**

Beginning in the late 1960s, a growing number of government and private entities began collecting open-source data on terrorist attacks. Among the most extensive and influential of these databases to date have been: (1) RAND-The Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT),<sup>3</sup> (2) International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events (ITERATE), (3) the U.S. State Department, and (4) the Global Terrorism Database (GTD).<sup>4</sup> In general, all

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2. An additional practical consideration that influenced our choice of methodological strategy is that linking attacks to specific groups is a labor-intensive process and is much more manageable for the subset of groups that routinely target the United States than for all extant terrorist groups.
  3. MIPT is a nonprofit organization established after the bombing of Oklahoma City's Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995.
  4. This list is by no means exhaustive. For example, a large data-collection effort on terrorism and other types of criminal and political violence is currently under way at Sam Houston State University (Hale, 2006).

of these databases have relied on some combination of unclassified print and electronic media. In 1972, the RAND Corporation, which is a nonprofit policy research institution, began collecting annual information on transnational terrorist attacks until 1997 (LaFree, Dugan, and Cragin, in press). After the 9/11 attacks, RAND collaborated with MIPT to resume collecting terrorist attack data—this time both transnational and domestic—beginning in 1998. The RAND-MIPT joint data collection ended in March 2008.<sup>5</sup>

The ITERATE data, which were originally collected by Mickolus (1982), have probably been the most widely used archival source of terrorism data in terms of empirical research (Enders and Sandler, 2006). ITERATE contains quantitatively coded data on international terrorist incidents as well as qualitative descriptions of each incident. The quantitative data are arranged into four information files: (1) type of terrorist attack (i.e., location, name of group taking responsibility, and number of deaths and injuries), (2) fate of the terrorist individuals or groups claiming responsibility, (3) hostage events, and (4) skyjackings.

In 1982, the U.S. State Department began publishing an annual report (later called *Patterns of global terrorism*) on transnational terrorism, which described incidents occurring in 1980 (U.S. Department of State, 2001). The report reviewed transnational terrorist attacks by year, date, region, and group and provided background information on terrorist organizations, U.S. terrorism policy, and progress on counterterrorism. When the report issued on April 30, 2004, mistakenly concluded that “worldwide terrorism had dropped by 45 percent between 2001 and 2003,” it unleashed a flood of criticism from lawmakers. As results of this criticism, (1) the name of the report was changed to *Country reports on terrorism*, (2) the statistical data and chronology of “significant” international terrorist events were dropped, and (3) Congress mandated that terrorism statistics were henceforth to be compiled by the newly created National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). In recent years, the NCTC has made terrorist attack data available to the public on an official Web site ([wits.nctc.gov](http://wits.nctc.gov)).

Currently, the only open-source worldwide terrorist event database collecting both transnational and domestic terrorism data for an extended period of time is the GTD—which was used in our analysis. Because the GTD is described in detail elsewhere (LaFree and Dugan, 2007), we only review some of its important characteristics here. The original platform for the GTD was the Pinkerton Global Intelligence Services (PGIS) database. From 1970 to 1997, the PGIS trained researchers to identify and record terrorism incidents from wire services (including Reuters and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service), U.S. State Department reports, other U.S. and foreign government reporting, U.S. and foreign newspapers (including the *New York Times*, *British Financial Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, and *Wall Street Journal*), and information provided by PGIS offices around the world. In more recent years, PGIS researchers have increasingly relied on the Internet.

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5. At the time this article was being prepared, RAND was still collecting terrorism event data but was no longer making it available on a public Web site.

The PGIS defined terrorism as an event involving “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation.” Based on the coding rules originally developed in 1970, the people responsible for collecting the PGIS data excluded criminal acts that seemed to be devoid of any political or ideological motivation and acts resulting from open combat between opposing armed forces (both regular and irregular). Data collectors also excluded actions taken by governments in the legitimate exercise of their authority, even when such actions were denounced by domestic and foreign critics as acts of “state terrorism.” However, they included violent acts that were not officially sanctioned by government, even in cases in which many observers believed that the government was openly tolerating the violent actions.

In December 2005, a team at the University of Maryland completed creating electronic files of PGIS data, which consisted of more than 67,000 events that occurred around the world from 1970 to 1997 (LaFree and Dugan, 2007).<sup>6</sup> We refer to the resulting database—constructed on the original PGIS platform—as the GTD. In April 2006, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) received funding from the Human Factors Division of the Department of Homeland Security to extend the GTD beyond 1997. The new GTD data collection captures information on more than 120 variables and stores the original open-source texts on which each case is based. The START Consortium released an updated, synthesized version of the complete GTD through 2007 in June 2009 ([start.umd.edu/data/gtd/](http://start.umd.edu/data/gtd/)).<sup>7</sup> However, at the time this article was being prepared, the most recent data had ended in 2004.

### **Selection of Anti-U.S. Groups**

To identify foreign non-state actors that have posed a serious threat to U.S. citizens since 1970 (the first year for which GTD were available), we relied on three main sources. First, we examined the foreign groups identified by the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Diplomatic Security annual publication, *Significant incidents of political violence against Americans* (which later became simply, *Political violence against Americans*).<sup>8</sup> Second, we supplemented and validated these records with a list of terrorist groups compiled by the Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs (2001). And finally, based on a literature review, we updated this list by adding six foreign groups that came to prominence after the 9/11 attacks (al Qaeda in the

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6. Most of the 1993 data in the GTD were lost by the original collectors (LaFree and Dugan, 2007). For this report, we re-collected 1993 data for the 53 groups. For 1993 transnational attacks, we systematically compared the new data collection with RAND-MIPT and ITERATE data. However, because the GTD is the only unclassified event database that included domestic terrorist attacks in 1993, no obvious comparison source is available for 1993 domestic data. For these reasons, we subject the results for 1993 to additional scrutiny throughout the analysis.

7. START will continue to provide updated versions of the GTD to researchers through its Web site ([start.umd.edu/data/gtd/](http://start.umd.edu/data/gtd/)).

8. Particularly useful was the 1997 report, which contains a summary account of “Lethal attacks versus Americans, 1968–1997.”

Arabian Peninsula, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Jemaah Islamiya, Lashkar-e Taiba, Lashkar I Jhangvi, and the Taliban).

We next combined splinter groups in the analysis but separated several successor groups. Thus, we included the Anti-Imperialist International Brigade as part of the Japanese Red Army because it was their Middle Eastern branch when they left Japan. Similarly, we collapsed al Faran, Harakut-ul Ansar, and Harkat-ul Mujahidin into a single organization because they simply went through several name changes. The Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) is an umbrella organization that brought together five groups in 1980: the Central American Workers' Revolutionary Party (PRTC), the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), the Farabundo Marti Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), the Armed Forces of National Resistance, and the Communist Party of the Armed Forces of Liberation. But because the ERP and the PRTC for the most part continued to operate independently of the FMLN, we included them as separate groups in our analyses.

And finally, we deleted four groups that either did not claim responsibility for any attacks in our data (Action for National Liberation, Islamic Revolutionary Council of Pakistan, and Islamic Movement of Change of Saudi Arabia)<sup>9</sup> or used generic group names that cannot be reliably linked to a specific group (e.g., Islamic Jihad of Turkey, because Islamic Jihad was associated with many Islamic groups). Taken together, these processes produced a total of 53 foreign organizations considered by the U.S. government to pose serious security threats to the United States.

In Table 1, we show all the groups included in the analysis, along with the country or countries that served as their home base, their years of activity, and whether they claimed or were strongly implicated in any attacks against the United States during the analysis period.<sup>10</sup> Because terrorist attacks in Israel and the Palestine territories were often spatially and politically linked and boundaries have been fiercely disputed, we combined them here as a single "country."

Table 1 shows that, of the 53 groups included, we classified only one group (al Qaeda) as truly international (defined here as having major operations in more than three countries). In addition, one group (Black September Organization) had known operations in three countries—Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel/Palestine. Four other groups (the Abu Nidal Organization, al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya, the Eritrean Liberation Front, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine [PFLP]) had operations in two countries. All other groups in the analysis operated mostly in a single country. The countries with the largest number of terrorist groups were Israel/Palestine with five groups, and Colombia, the Philippines, and Pakistan, with four groups.

9. Although widely recognized as posing a serious threat to the United States, five groups (al Faran/Harkat-ul Mujahidin and Lashkar-e Taiba of Pakistan, al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, Ansar al-Islam of Iraq, and the Palestine Liberation Front) had no recorded attacks on the United States (or U.S. targets in other countries) from 1970 to 2004. We therefore excluded these groups from the analysis of U.S. attacks but kept them in the analysis of non-U.S. attacks.

10. Many attacks in open-source databases on terrorism are never attributed to a specific group. In the GTD, only 1,363 (53.1%) of 2,564 total attacks targeting the United States from 1970 to 2004 were not attributed to a specific terrorist organization.

TABLE 1

## Fifty-three terrorist groups identified as anti-U.S., 1970–2004

| Name of Group                                                            | Years of Country of Origin        | U.S. Activities (in GTD) | Attacks? |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| Abu Nidal Organization (ANO)                                             | Iraq, Israel/ Palestine           | 1976–1998                | Yes      |
| Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)                                                   | Philippines                       | 1993–2004                | Yes      |
| al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya (IG)                                             | Egypt, Afghanistan                | 1991–1998                | Yes      |
| al Faran/Harkat-ul Mujahidin (HuM)                                       | Pakistan                          | 1995–2004                | No       |
| al Qaeda                                                                 | International                     | 1998–2004                | Yes      |
| al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)                                 | Saudi Arabia                      | 2004                     | Yes      |
| al Qaeda in Mesopotamia                                                  | Iraq                              | 2004                     | No       |
| Ansar al-Islam                                                           | Iraq                              | 2002–2003                | No       |
| Black September Organization                                             | Jordan, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine | 1971–1974                | Yes      |
| Central American Revolutionary Workers Party (PRTC)                      | El Salvador                       | 1979                     | Yes      |
| Dev Sol                                                                  | Turkey                            | 1979–1996                | Yes      |
| Ejercito Revolucionaria del Pueblo (ERP)                                 | Argentina                         | 1970–1980                | Yes      |
| Eritrean Liberation Front                                                | Eritrea, Ethiopia                 | 1970–1992                | Yes      |
| Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN)                         | El Salvador                       | 1978–1994                | Yes      |
| Hizballah                                                                | Lebanon                           | 1981–2004                | Yes      |
| Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)                                     | Uzbekistan                        | 2000–2004                | Yes      |
| Jaish-e-Mohammad                                                         | Pakistan                          | 2000–2003                | Yes      |
| Japanese Red Army (JRA)                                                  | Japan                             | 1972–1988                | Yes      |
| 'emaah Islamiya (JI)                                                     | Indonesia                         | 2002–2004                | Yes      |
| Lashkar-e-Taiba                                                          | Pakistan                          | 1999–2004                | No       |
| Lashkar I Jhangvi                                                        | Pakistan                          | 1996–2004                | No       |
| Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Faction (LARF)                              | Lebanon                           | 1981–1985                | Yes      |
| Lebanese Socialist Revolutionary Organization                            | Lebanon                           | 1973–1974                | Yes      |
| M-19 (Movement of April 19)                                              | Colombia                          | 1976–1997                | Yes      |
| Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front (FPMR)                                  | Chile                             | 1984–1997                | Yes      |
| Marxist-Leninist Armed Propaganda Unit                                   | Turkey                            | 1977–1980                | Yes      |
| Montoneros                                                               | Argentina                         | 1970–1991                | Yes      |
| Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)                                     | Philippines                       | 1986–2004                | Yes      |
| Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)                                    | Philippines                       | 1975–2001                | Yes      |
| Mujahideen-I-Khalq (MK)                                                  | Iran                              | 1972–2001                | Yes      |
| National Liberation Army of Colombia (ELN)                               | Colombia                          | 1972–2001                | Yes      |
| Nestor Paz Zamora Commission (CNPZ)                                      | Bolivia                           | 1990                     | Yes      |
| New People's Army (NPA)                                                  | Philippines                       | 1970–2004                | Yes      |
| November 17 Revolutionary Organization (N17RO)                           | Greece                            | 1976–2001                | Yes      |
| Palestine Liberation Front (PLF)                                         | Israel/Palestine                  | 1979–2004                | No       |
| Patriotic Morazanista Front (FPM)                                        | Honduras                          | 1988–1995                | Yes      |
| People's Liberation Forces (FPL)                                         | El Salvador                       | 1977–1979                | Yes      |
| Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)                     | Israel/ Palestine, Syria          | 1970–2004                | Yes      |
| Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, General Command (PFLP-GC) | Israel/ Palestine                 | 1970–2003                | Yes      |
| Popular Liberation Army (EPL)                                            | Colombia                          | 1976–2003                | Yes      |
| Popular Revolutionary Vanguard (VPR)                                     | Brazil                            | 1970–1976                | Yes      |
| Rebel Armed Forces of Guatemala (FAR)                                    | Guatemala                         | 1970–1989                | Yes      |
| Red Army Faction (RAF)                                                   | West Germany                      | 1977–1993                | Yes      |

|                                                                                         |             |           |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----|
| Red Army for the Liberation of Catalonia                                                | Spain       | 1987      | Yes |
| Red Brigades                                                                            | Italy       | 1974–1982 | Yes |
| Red Brigades Fighting Communist Party (BR-PCC)<br>and Fighting Communist Union (BR-UCC) | Italy       | 1983–2003 | Yes |
| Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)                                           | Colombia    | 1975–2004 | Yes |
| Revolutionary People's Struggle (ELA)                                                   | Greece      | 1976–1995 | Yes |
| Shining Path (SL)                                                                       | Peru        | 1978–2004 | Yes |
| Taliban                                                                                 | Afghanistan | 2001–2004 | Yes |
| Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA)                                               | Peru        | 1984–1997 | Yes |
| Tupamaros                                                                               | Uruguay     | 1970–1971 | Yes |
| Turkish People's Liberation Army                                                        | Turkey      | 1970–1980 | Yes |

Notes. We used 1982 as the last year of the Red Brigades based on Caselli and della Porta's analysis (1991). Any attacks claimed by the Red Brigades after 1982 were attributed to the splinter groups, BR-PCC, and BR-UCC. Similarly, it is generally agreed that the Black September Organization was no longer active after 1974 (Jones and Libicki, 2008). Based on case-specific information, we attributed attacks claimed by the Black September Organization after 1974 to the Abu Nidal Organization.

To gauge the years of activity of the groups in Table 1, we examined the span of years between their earliest and most recent attacks recorded in the GTD. Table 1 shows considerable variation across the groups in terms of number of years of operation measured in this way.<sup>11</sup> Only two groups had continuous attacks from 1970 to 2004: the New People's Army of the Philippines and the PFLP. Three additional groups had continued attacks for 30 years—the National Liberation Army (ELN) of Colombia, the Mujahideen-I-Khalq of Iran, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) of Colombia. We next used the GTD to address a series of policy-driven questions about the attack patterns of these anti-U.S. groups against both U.S. and non-U.S. targets from 1970 to 2004.

### *Has the Number of Anti-U.S. Attacks and Fatalities Increased Over Time?*

It seems that no comprehensive analyses of long-term trends in terrorist attacks have been published that include domestic incidents. Figure 1 shows total attacks and total fatal attacks against U.S. targets attributed to the groups that are the subject of this study. Total attacks were of course far more common than fatal attacks: Fatal attacks ( $n = 111$ ) represent 19.5% of all attacks shown. Total attacks against the United States by these groups were considerably higher in the 1970s and 1980s and declined in the 1990s—a likely consequence of the decline of Marxist-Leninist-oriented terrorist groups after the collapse of the Soviet Union and developments in the Middle East after the first Gulf War. After reaching a high point of 38 attacks in 1974, total attacks against the United States declined to a low of 5 attacks in 1980. They then increased steeply before reaching the series high point of 41 attacks in 1990 and then again

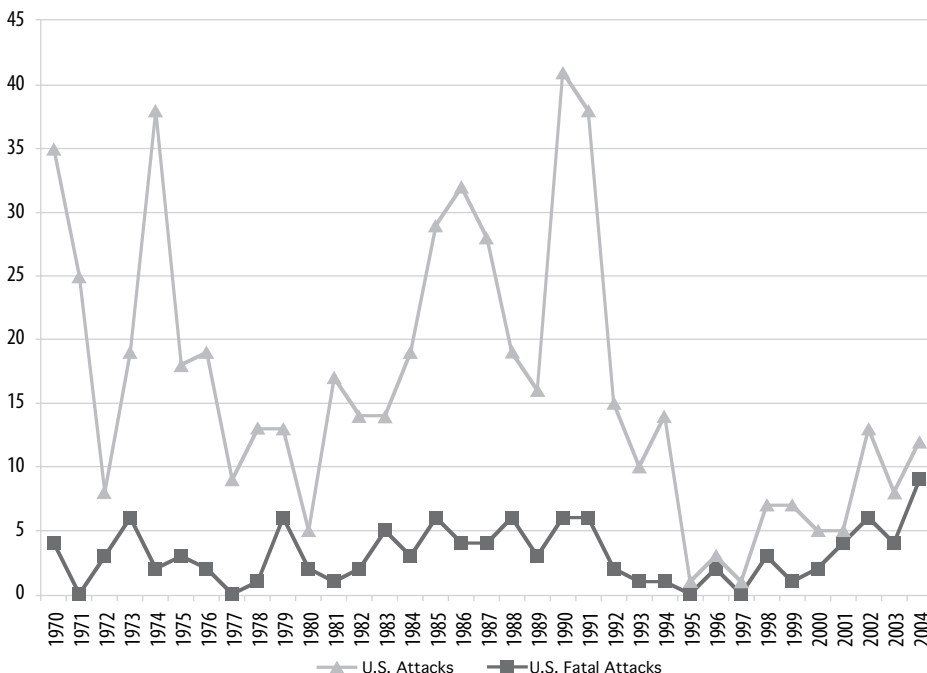
11. Because we analyzed the actual attacks of these groups, it is possible that some groups whose last known attack was before 2004 might nevertheless be implicated in later attacks. However, Table 1 shows that the last known attacks of only two groups (Jaish-e-Mohammad and the PFLP-General Command [PFLP-GC]) happened during the last 3 years of the data set—the last known attack of both of these groups was 2003.

declined steeply. From 1998 to the end of the series, attacks on U.S. targets increased somewhat but remained far below the totals found for much of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>12</sup>

As with total attacks, total fatal attacks against the United States during this period were relatively high in the 1970s and 1980s and then declined throughout the 1990s. However, the major difference in the two trend lines is that fatal attacks against the United States increased

**FIGURE 1**

**Total and fatal attacks against U.S. targets of 53 anti-U.S. terrorist groups, 1970–2004**



strongly in the late 1990s and reached their highest level (i.e., 9 attacks) in the last year of the series. Apart from the peak in 2004, 6 fatal attacks against the United States occurred in the following 7 years in the series (1973, 1979, 1985, 1988, 1990, 1991, and 2002).

In response to the question that motivated this section, total terrorist attacks against the United States from these groups actually declined since 1990. In fact, they were at a 35-year low just before the 9/11 attacks. The 2 years in the series with the fewest anti-U.S. attacks were

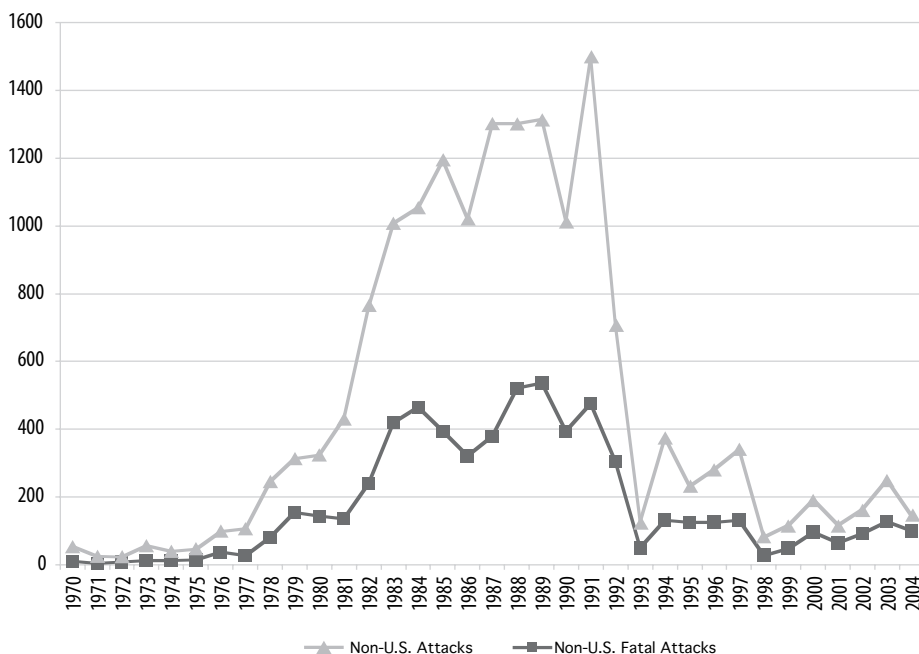
12. We should reiterate here that we had to re-collect 1993 data for this project because it was missing from the original PGIS database. If we accept the assumption that open-source information erodes over time, the likely effect of delayed data collection is the identification of fewer true cases. In fact, Figure 1 does show a decline in total attacks from 1992 to 1993—although it is far less than the decline from 1991 to 1992 and the decline from 1994 to 1995. Nevertheless, it is important to remember this missing data issue in interpreting this article's findings.



1995 and 1997. Similarly, fatal attacks were generally more common in the 1970s and 1980s and reached a series low in the decade before 9/11. However, fatal attacks directed at the United States increased since the end of the 1990s. Although low in absolute terms, they reached their peak during 2004, which is the last year included in the analysis. But as we shall observe below, most of these fatal attacks involved U.S. citizen targets in other countries.

**FIGURE 2**

**Total and fatal attacks against non-U.S. targets for  
53 anti-U.S. terrorist groups, 1970–2004**



*Have the Number of Non-U.S. Attacks by Designated Anti-U.S. Groups Increased Over Time?*

In Figure 2, we present the same analysis for total and fatal attacks on non-U.S. targets by the same groups. The most obvious difference between Figures 1 and 2 is the magnitude of the scales. In all, 41 attacks on the United States occurred in the peak year of 1990. By contrast, 1,499 attacks occurred on non-U.S. targets during the peak year of 1991. Similarly, only 9 fatal attacks were launched against the United States in the peak year of 2004 compared with a total of 536 fatal attacks against non-U.S. targets in the peak year of 1989. Thus, groups perceived to be dangerous to the United States are in fact much more so to other governments.

Non-U.S. trends for total and fatal attacks look like a classic boom-and-bust cycle with long and fairly steady increases that reached a peak in 1991 for total attacks and in 1989 for fatal attacks, and then trailed off significantly until the end of the series. As the U.S. trends also indicate, both total non-U.S. attacks and fatal attacks increased in the late 1990s, but this increase was much less pronounced for the non-U.S. attacks than it was for the U.S. attacks.

The clear answer to the question animating this section is that total attacks and total fatal attacks against non-U.S. targets reached a peak in the early 1990s and, since then, have remained far less. The total attacks increased slightly in the last few years spanned by the data, but the total number of attacks in 2004 was still lower than it was from 1994 to 1997. Despite the obvious difference in magnitude of U.S. and non-U.S. attacks, the trend lines are correlated ( $r = .45, p < .01$  for the full series; the correlation increases to  $r = .78, p < .0001$  if we limit the analysis to the years 1980–2004).

### *To What Extent Do Purportedly Anti-U.S. Groups Strike Non-U.S. Targets?*

Because no previous database could compare domestic and transnational terrorist attacks over several decades, we were especially interested in the proportion of attacks by these purportedly anti-U.S. groups that were actually directed against U.S. targets. Table 2 compares total attacks and total fatalities against U.S. and against non-U.S. targets. From 1970 to 2004, only 3.4% of all attacks of these nominally anti-U.S. groups were directed against the United States. Moreover, recall that we were including not only attacks by nonindigenous actors based outside the country, but also attacks on U.S. targets located in other countries. According to Table 2, of the 570 total anti-U.S. attacks, only 5 attacks (less than 1%) occurred on U.S. soil. These events included 1 attack by the FMLN on August 18, 1983, against the Washington, DC Navy Yard (i.e., Navy Regional Data Automation Center) with small explosives as well as the 4 attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, by al Qaeda.<sup>13</sup> Major targets of anti-U.S. attacks in other countries included U.S. businesses ( $n = 233$ ), U.S. diplomats and embassies ( $n = 106$ ), and the U.S. military ( $n = 96$ ).<sup>14</sup> The rest of the attacks were widely scattered in terms of target selection and included U.S. educational institutions, journalists, nongovernmental organizations, and tourists.

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13. The 1993 World Trade Center bombing was not included in the analysis because the perpetrators of the event were not affiliated with any of the 53 terrorist groups identified by this study at the time when the attack occurred.

14. The GTD excludes attacks related to open combat between opposing armed forces, both regular and irregular. However, the GTD includes attacks against the military if the military is serving as an internationally recognized peacekeeping force, if the attack is against military forces on leave away from their area of operation (as in the attack on the U.S.S. Cole), or if the attacks are against military forces who are in their place of residence (LaFree and Dugan, 2007).

TABLE 2

**Total number of attacks and fatalities for U.S. and non-U.S. targets, 1970–2004**

| Attack Type                        | Number of Attacks (percentage) | Fatalities (percentage) |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>U.S. Attacks</i>                |                                |                         |
| U.S. homeland                      | 5 (0.03%)                      | 3,007 (7.15%)           |
| Non-U.S. homeland                  | 565 (3.34%)                    | 936 (2.23%)             |
| Subtotal                           | 570 (3.37%)                    | 3,943 (9.38%)           |
| <i>Non-U.S. Attacks</i>            |                                |                         |
| Transnational                      | 1,121 (6.63%)                  | 2,791 (76.64%)          |
| Target and group country the same  | 42 (0.25%)                     | 48 (0.11%)              |
| Target and group country different | 1,090 (6.44%)                  | 2,743 (6.52%)           |
| Domestic                           | 15,225 (90.00%)                | 35,322 (84.00%)         |
| Subtotal                           | 16,346 (96.63%)                | 38,113 (90.62%)         |
| <i>Total</i>                       | 16,916 (100%)                  | 42,056 (100%)           |

Table 2 shows that the proportion of terrorist fatalities suffered by the United States was almost three times as high as the proportion of total attacks against the United States—although the total proportion of fatalities was still only 9.4%. Moreover, a large proportion of these anti-U.S. fatalities ( $n = 3,007$  or 76.3%) were accounted for by a single event: the 9/11 attacks.<sup>15</sup> Other especially lethal anti-U.S. attacks by the groups analyzed here included the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, on August 7, 1998, which killed 224 and injured an estimated 4,000 people; the bombing of the U.S. marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, on October 23, 1983, which killed 239 U.S. citizens; and the attack on a Trans World Airlines Boeing 707 aircraft by the PFLP-GC in 1974 that resulted in 88 deaths.

In short, to a remarkable extent, these data indicate that, during a 35-year period, attacks by foreign groups identified as dangerous to the United States especially were not aimed at the U.S. homeland or even at U.S. targets in other countries but at non-U.S. targets. Attacks by these groups on the United States were exceptional.

#### *To What Extent Do Designated Anti-U.S. Groups Strike Transnational Targets?*

The bottom part of Table 2 divides the non-U.S. attacks into transnational and domestic categories. As mentioned, any attacks by al Qaeda were classified as transnational here. For all other groups, a transnational attack was one that occurred outside the boundaries of the countries of origin or against targets of a different nationality within the group's home country. Based on this

15. Interestingly, disagreement still exists about how many fatalities actually resulted from the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers. Three main sources of this disagreement are as follows. First, all estimates for fatalities are from both towers because it has proven impossible to separate fatalities for the two towers. Second, because of the long-term health-related effects of the attack, it is unclear how many post-9/11 deaths can be attributed to the original attack. And finally, a fluctuating number of individuals connected to the attacks are still missing and cannot be absolutely confirmed as fatalities of the attack. The estimate used here errs on the side of assuming that those still listed as missing were in fact fatalities.

classification, 90% of attacks and 84% of fatalities in the database were classified as domestic attacks. Of the transnational attacks, 4.9% were committed by al Qaeda and another 34.6% by the five groups that had either two or three countries of origin.

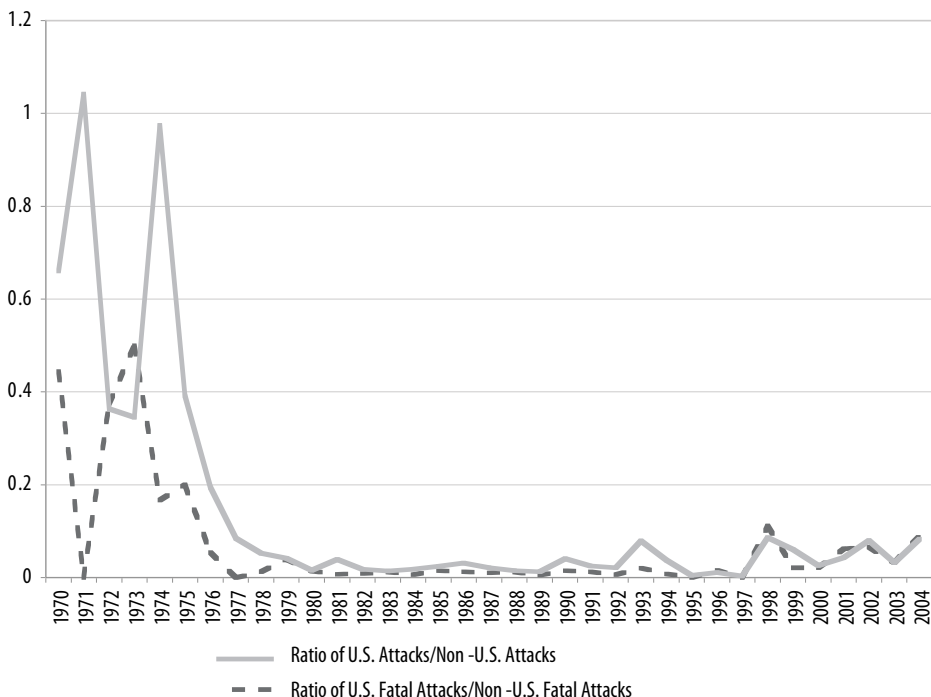
We should also point out that the classification of transnational terrorism in Table 2 counted as transnational attacks those occurring outside the group’s home even if the targets were from the same country as the terrorist group. For example, if a Pakistani citizen attacked the Pakistani embassy in Germany, it is counted here as a transnational attack. Just 3.7% of the transnational attacks in Table 2 involved attacks by nationals from one country against targets connected to their home country that were located abroad. In short, most non-U.S. attacks by the anti-U.S. terrorist groups in question were against domestic targets at home. This finding underscores the fact that most terrorism—like most crime—is a local matter.

*Is The Ratio of U.S. to Non-U.S. Attacks and Fatalities Changing Over Time?*

We next explored the extent to which anti-U.S. groups changed their selection of targets over time. In Figure 3, we plotted the ratio of U.S. and non-U.S. attacks and fatal attacks from 1970 to 2004. In general, the ratios of attacks and fatal attacks against the U.S. to non-U.S. attacks by these terrorist groups were much higher in the 1970s than in subsequent decades, which

**FIGURE 3**

**Ratio of U.S. and non-U.S. total and fatal attacks, 1970–2004**



might explain why many of them were originally considered as “anti-U.S.” groups. In fact, for one year in the analysis (i.e., 1971), the absolute number of attacks against the United States actually exceeded the number of non-U.S. attacks. The top three groups attacking the United States and U.S. targets abroad from 1970 to 1979, ranked by number of attacks, were the Shining Path of Peru (43 attacks), the Montoneros of Argentina (38 attacks), and the Turkish People’s Liberation Army (37 attacks).

Although the ratio of U.S. to non-U.S. attacks never exceeded 20% after the 1970s, small peaks occurred in 1993 (7.9%),<sup>16</sup> 1998 (8.6%), and 2004 (8.3%). The ratio of U.S. to non-U.S. fatal attacks generally followed a similar pattern, with a far higher percentage of U.S. fatal attacks occurring in the early 1970s than in subsequent decades. A much lower peak occurred in 1998 when the ratio of U.S. to non-U.S. fatal attacks was just over 11%. In sum, the ratio of U.S. to non-U.S. attacks and fatal attacks changed over time and in a way that some might find surprising. In general, the designated anti-U.S. groups attacked a much higher proportion of U.S. targets in the 1970s than in subsequent decades.

#### *Do U.S. Attacks by Anti-U.S. Groups Fit into Clear Trajectories Over Time?*

Rapoport (1992: 1064) argued that, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, terrorist attacks can be divided into four “political turning points,” or waves (cf. Sedgwick, 2007). In a recent update of this work, Rapoport (2004: 47) defined a terrorist wave as “a cycle of activity in a given time period—a cycle characterized by expansion and contraction phases.” Following Rapoport, we asked whether the attacks of these 53 terrorist groups since 1970 could also be divided into distinct temporal patterns. For this part of the analysis, we relied on a statistical methodology called group-based trajectory analysis (GBTA), which is described in the next section.

**Group-based trajectory analysis.** We used GBTA to distinguish the attack patterns of the groups included in the analysis. GBTA was originally designed to illustrate the developmental patterns of individual criminal offending (Nagin, 1999, 2005; Nagin and Land, 1993). Recently, GBTA has been applied to the study of crime distribution across geographic locations (Weisburd, Bushway, Lum, and Yang, 2004) and trends in terrorist activities and crime across countries and groups (Dugan, LaFree, and Miller, 2007; LaFree, Morris, and Dugan, in press; Piquero and Piquero, 2006). The primary assumption of GBTA is that trends in offending rates over time can be approximated with a set number of trajectories characterized by polynomial growth curves (Nagin and Tremblay, 1999; Nagin, Pagani, Tremblay, and Vitaro, 2003). Specifically, GBTA is designed to identify latent groups of cases with similar developmental paths (Bushway, Piquero, Broidy, Cauffman, and Mazerolle, 2001; Nagin, 2005; Weisburd et al., 2004). Thus, the results from GBTA illustrate the latent growth curves of a set number of trajectories.

The correct number of trajectories in a specific analysis is determined by prior theories, empirical criteria (e.g., the Bayesian Information Criteria [BIC]), and posterior probabilities.

16. Again, we should regard the results for 1993 with caution, given the missing data problems described previously. But interestingly, despite our concern about undercounting terrorist attacks for 1993, in this case it still emerged as a peak year for attacks.

While modeling the developmental pathways, GBTA allows individual cases to follow different trajectories based on the values of observations (Bushway et al., 2001). The fact that GBTA can capture developmental changes in a dynamic, longitudinal framework makes it attractive for examining long-term trends. GBTA can also be used to estimate the proportion (i.e., posterior probability) of a given population that follows a particular trajectory. These posterior probabilities provide an assessment of the extent to which the models correctly classify individual cases into group trajectories.

The following equation represents a basic version of GBTA that is a polynomial function modeling dependent measures over time (Nagin et al., 2003):

$$y_{it}^j = \beta_o^j + \beta_1^j \text{time}_u + \beta_2^j \text{time}_u^2 + \varepsilon$$

where  $y_{it}^j$  is the level of the dependent variable for individual  $i$  at time  $t$  given the membership in group  $j$ , and the shape of each group is determined by the parameters  $\beta_o^j$ ,  $\beta_1^j$ , and  $\beta_2^j$ .

Trajectory results can be evaluated using BIC to determine the optimal number of trajectories in an analysis:  $\text{BIC} = \log(L) - 0.5 * \log(n) * (k)$ , where  $L$  is the value of the model's maximized likelihood estimates,  $n$  is the sample size, and  $k$  is the number of parameters estimated in a given model. Because more complex models will generally improve the fit of a given analysis, BIC encourages a parsimonious solution by penalizing models that increase the number of trajectories unless they substantially improve model fit. In addition to BIC, trajectory analysis requires that researchers also consider posterior probabilities of trajectory assignments, odds of correct classification, estimated group probabilities, and whether meaningful groups are revealed (Nagin, 2005).

**Trajectory results.** We conducted separate GBTA on U.S.-related and non-U.S.-related attacks for the 53 anti-U.S. terrorist groups included in our study. Figure 4 shows the best-fitting GBTA model for attacks on the United States.<sup>17</sup> The model resulted in four separate trajectories with distinct pathways. Perhaps the most striking feature of Figure 4 is that three trajectories form separate and sequential "waves." Trajectory 1, which is referred to here as the "1970s boom," included about 22.4% of the terrorist groups in the analysis, reached a peak in 1974, and almost entirely disappeared by 1980. Trajectory 2, which we call the "1980s boom," included 29.3% of the terrorist organizations in the analysis, began to increase rapidly in the early 1980s, reached a peak in 1990, and largely disappeared by 1995. And finally, Trajectory 3, which is referred to as the "21<sup>st</sup>-century boom," included only about 4.3% of the terrorist organizations in our analysis, began to accelerate rapidly in the late 1990s, and was still in-

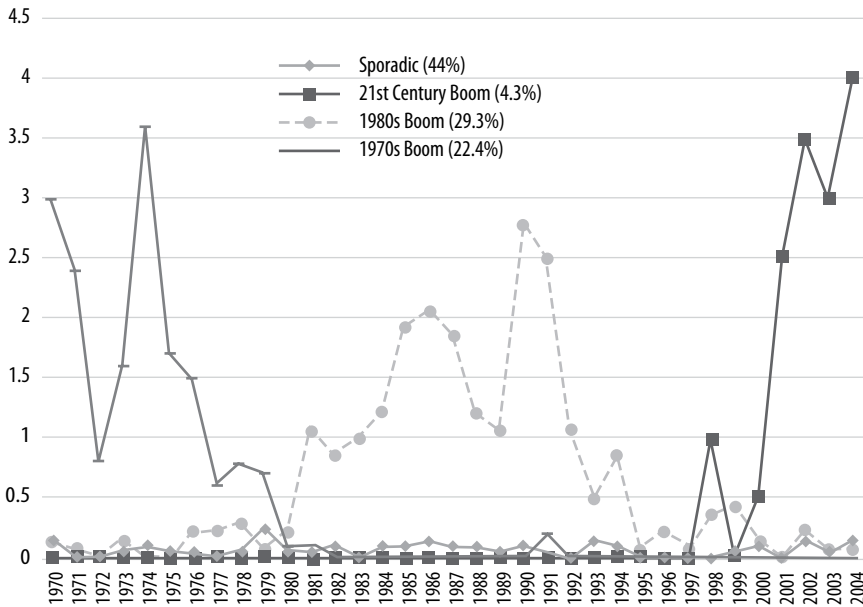
17. The minimum average within-group posterior probability in the model is .96, and the lowest value of the odds of correction classification (OCC) is 26.58. Nagin (2005) suggested that when average posterior probability is higher than .7 and OCC values are higher than 5, the group assignment represents a high level of accuracy. Judging by these standards, the four-group model performed satisfactorily in classifying the anti-U.S. groups into separate trajectories.

creasing rapidly at the end of the analysis period in 2004. We refer to the fourth trajectory in Figure 4 as “sporadic” because all of the groups included in this trajectory practiced sporadic and infrequent attacks against the United States.

In Table 3, we present the characteristics of these four trajectories. Despite the sporadic trajectory including nearly half of the terrorist organizations in the analysis (44%), it accounted for less than 10% of all U.S. attacks. However, when the groups in the sporadic trajectory did attack, 47.9% of their attacks included at least one fatality—which is higher than any other trajectory group except for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century boom.

**FIGURE 4**

**Total and fatal attacks against U.S. targets of 53 anti-U.S. terrorist groups, 1970–2004**



**TABLE 3**

**Characteristics of anti-U.S. terrorist trajectories**

| Trajectory Group                      | Attacks (%) | Fatalities (%) | Attacks with Fatalities (%) | Fatal Attacks (%) |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Sporadic (44%)                        | 48 (8.4%)   | 158 (4.0%)     | 23 (20.7%)                  | 47.92%            |
| 1970s boom (22.4%)                    | 171 (30%)   | 59 (1.5%)      | 22 (19.8%)                  | 12.87%            |
| 1980s boom (29.3%)                    | 322 (56.5%) | 410 (10.4%)    | 48 (43.2%)                  | 14.91%            |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> -century boom (4.3%) | 29 (5.1%)   | 3,316 (84.1%)  | 18 (16.2%)                  | 62.07%            |
| Total                                 | 570 (100%)  | 3,943 (100%)   | 111 (100%)                  |                   |

Together, the 1970s and 1980s boom trajectories accounted for about half of all terrorist groups in the U.S. analysis, but nearly 87% of all anti-U.S. attacks in the analysis. Despite this, these attack patterns were far less likely to include fatalities or fatal attacks than either the sporadic or the 21<sup>st</sup>-century boom trajectories. Only about 13% to 15% of attacks by the groups summarized in the 1970s and 1980s boom trajectories resulted in fatalities. By contrast, 62.1% of attacks in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century boom trajectory and 47.9% of the attacks in the sporadic trajectory included at least one fatality.

In Table 4, we list the terrorist groups that comprise each of the four anti-U.S. trajectories. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century boom trajectory was composed of only two groups: al Qaeda and the Taliban. It is worth recalling that our analysis ends in 2004—before al Qaeda in Mesopotamia and its successors in Iraq staged any attacks against U.S. targets.

**T A B L E 4**

**Terrorist groups by trajectory assignments (U.S. targets)**

| Trajectory Group                                     | Group                                                                                             |                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Sporadic group ( <i>n</i> = 21)                      | Abu Nidal Organization (ANO)                                                                      |                                          |
|                                                      | Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)                                                                            |                                          |
|                                                      | al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya (IG)                                                                      |                                          |
|                                                      | al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)                                                          |                                          |
|                                                      | Central American Revolutionary Workers Party (PRTC)                                               |                                          |
|                                                      | Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)                                                              |                                          |
|                                                      | Jaish-e-Mohammad                                                                                  |                                          |
|                                                      | Japanese Red Army (JRA)                                                                           |                                          |
|                                                      | Jemaah Islamiya (JI)                                                                              |                                          |
|                                                      | Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Faction (LARF)                                                       |                                          |
|                                                      | Lebanese Socialist Revolutionary Organization                                                     |                                          |
|                                                      | Marxist-Leninist Armed Propaganda Unit                                                            |                                          |
|                                                      | Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)                                                              |                                          |
|                                                      | Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)                                                             |                                          |
|                                                      | Nestor Paz Zamora Commission (CNPZ)                                                               |                                          |
|                                                      | Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Gen Cmd (PFLP-GC)                                  |                                          |
|                                                      | Popular Liberation Army (EPL)                                                                     |                                          |
|                                                      | Popular Revolutionary Vanguard (VPR)                                                              |                                          |
|                                                      | Rebel Armed Forces of Guatemala (FAR)                                                             |                                          |
|                                                      | Red Army for the Liberation of Catalonia                                                          |                                          |
|                                                      | Red Brigades Fighting Communist Party (BR-PCC) and Red Brigades Fighting Communist Union (BR-UCC) |                                          |
|                                                      | 1970s boom ( <i>n</i> = 10)                                                                       | Black September Organization             |
|                                                      |                                                                                                   | Ejercito Revolucionaria del Pueblo (ERP) |
|                                                      |                                                                                                   | Eritrean Liberation Front                |
|                                                      |                                                                                                   | Montoneros                               |
|                                                      |                                                                                                   | Mujahideen-I-Khalq (MK)                  |
| People's Liberation Forces (FPL)                     |                                                                                                   |                                          |
| Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) |                                                                                                   |                                          |
| Red Brigades                                         |                                                                                                   |                                          |
| Tupamaros                                            |                                                                                                   |                                          |



|                                            |                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 1980s boom ( $n = 14$ )                    | Turkish People's Liberation Army                 |
|                                            | Dev Sol                                          |
|                                            | Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) |
|                                            | Hizballah                                        |
|                                            | M-19 (Movement of April 19)                      |
|                                            | Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front (FPMR)          |
|                                            | National Liberation Army of Colombia (ELN)       |
|                                            | New People's Army (NPA)                          |
|                                            | November 17 Revolutionary Organization (N17RO)   |
|                                            | Patriotic Morazanista Front (FPM)                |
|                                            | Red Army Faction (RAF)                           |
|                                            | Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)    |
|                                            | Revolutionary People's Struggle (ELA)            |
|                                            | Shining Path (SL)                                |
| Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA)  |                                                  |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> -century boom ( $n = 2$ ) | al Qaeda                                         |
|                                            | Taliban                                          |

Notes. al Faran/Harkat-ul Mujahidin (HuM), al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, Ansar al-Islam, Lashkar I Jhangvi, Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), and Lashkar-e-Taiba had no U.S. attacks during the study period. Thus, only 47 groups were included in the U.S. analysis.

### *Do Non-U.S. Attacks by Anti-U.S. Groups Fit into Clear Trajectories Over Time?*

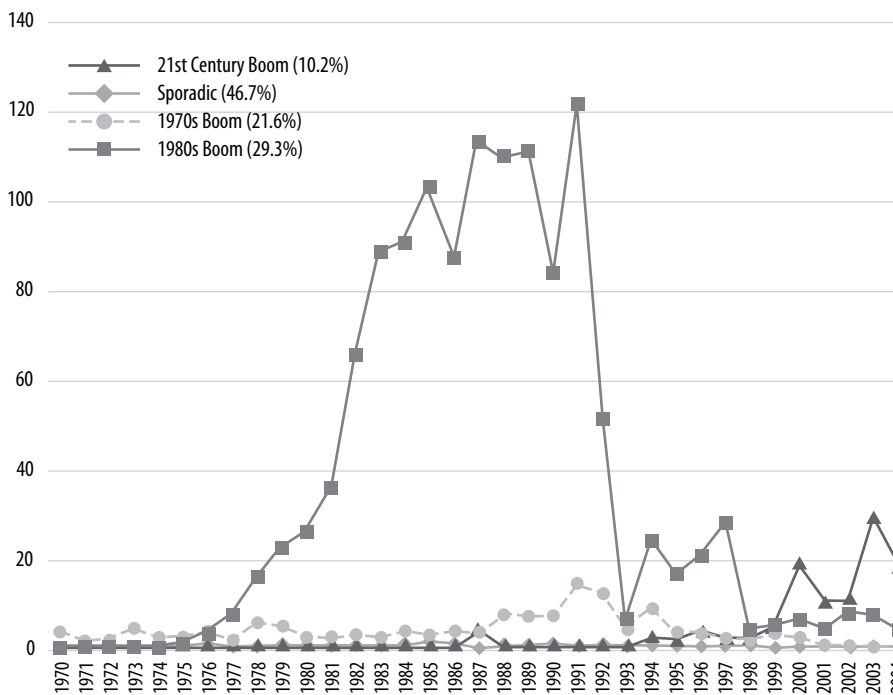
We next performed the same analysis for attacks against non-U.S. targets (both domestic and transnational). The trajectory results are shown in Figure 5. As with the U.S. analysis, we found the most robust results for a four-trajectory solution. Similarly, we found that about half of the groups fit into a sporadic, low-frequency trajectory. Likewise, we found some evidence for a 1970s onset group and, to a lesser extent, some evidence of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century boom trajectory. Compared with the 1970s boom for the United States, the 1970s onset trajectory for the non-U.S. attacks included about as many terrorist groups. By contrast, compared with the 21<sup>st</sup>-century boom trajectory for the United States, the 21<sup>st</sup>-century boom trajectory for the non-U.S. attacks included about three times more terrorist groups.

The most striking difference between U.S. and non-U.S. attacks was the huge importance of the 1980s boom trajectory for the latter. Although it included only 11 terrorist groups in the analysis, from the late 1970s until the early 1990s, it was responsible for most terrorist attacks by these groups against non-U.S. targets. Thus, whereas the 1970s onset trajectory reached a smaller peak in 1978 and a higher peak in 1991, it was totally overshadowed by the rise of the 1980s boom trajectory. Similarly, whereas the 21<sup>st</sup>-century boom trajectory showed some increases after the mid-1990s, these increases were dwarfed by the 1980s boom trajectory.

In Table 5, we present the characteristics of the non-U.S. attack trajectories. Based on the preceding discussion, it is unsurprising that the most striking feature of Table 5 is the dominance of the 1980s boom trajectory. Although this group included 20% of the total terrorist groups in the analysis, it accounted for 85.2% of total non-U.S. attacks and 84.3% of non-U.S. fatalities. This pattern is in strong contrast to that exhibited by the sporadic trajectory, which accounted for 47% of the total groups but less than 3% of total attacks and fatalities.

**FIGURE 5**

**Trajectories of non-U.S. attacks by 53 anti-U.S. terrorist groups, 1970–2004**



**TABLE 5**

**Characteristics of attacks against non-U.S. targets**

| Trajectory Group                       | Attacks (%)    | Fatalities (%) | Attacks with Fatalities (%) | Fatal Attacks (%) |
|----------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Sporadic (46.7%)                       | 409 (2.5%)     | 1,055 (2.8%)   | 187 (3.0%)                  | 45.72%            |
| 1970s onset (21.6%)                    | 1,475 (9.0%)   | 2,485 (6.5%)   | 530 (8.4%)                  | 35.93%            |
| 1980s boom (21.6%)                     | 13,926 (85.2%) | 32,133 (84.3%) | 5,310 (83.8%)               | 38.13%            |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> -century boom (10.2%) | 536 (3.3%)     | 2,440 (6.4%)   | 309 (4.9%)                  | 57.65%            |
| Total                                  | 16,346         | 38,113         | 6,336                       |                   |

In Table 6, we list all the individual groups for each of the four non-U.S. attack trajectories. What we observe in this preliminary analysis is a heterogeneous picture. No clear ideological or regional differentiations are present across the board, which might indicate that patterns of group behavior cannot be predicted by ideology. It is also interesting to note that the 1980s seem to be more dangerous for non-U.S. targets of terrorism than for U.S. targets, despite the prominence of anti-U.S. terrorism in Lebanon.

TABLE 6

**Terrorist groups by trajectory assignments (non-U.S. targets)**

| <b>Trajectory Group</b>               | <b>Group</b>                                                                         |                                                |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Sporadic ( <i>n</i> = 24)             | Abu Nidal Organization (ANO)                                                         |                                                |
|                                       | al Faran/Harkat-ul Mujahidin (HuM)                                                   |                                                |
|                                       | al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)                                             |                                                |
|                                       | al Qaeda in Mesopotamia                                                              |                                                |
|                                       | Ansar al-Islam                                                                       |                                                |
|                                       | Eritrean Liberation Front                                                            |                                                |
|                                       | Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)                                                 |                                                |
|                                       | Jaish-e-Mohammad                                                                     |                                                |
|                                       | Japanese Red Army (JRA)                                                              |                                                |
|                                       | Jemaah Islamiya (JI)                                                                 |                                                |
|                                       | Lashkar I Jhangvi                                                                    |                                                |
|                                       | Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Faction (LARF)                                          |                                                |
|                                       | Lebanese Socialist Revolutionary Organization                                        |                                                |
|                                       | Marxist-Leninist Armed Propaganda Unit                                               |                                                |
|                                       | Nestor Paz Zamora Commission (CNPZ)                                                  |                                                |
|                                       | Palestine Liberation Front (PLF)                                                     |                                                |
|                                       | Patriotic Morazanista Front (FPM)                                                    |                                                |
|                                       | Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)                                 |                                                |
|                                       | Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Gen Cmd (PFLP-GC)                     |                                                |
|                                       | Popular Revolutionary Vanguard (VPR)                                                 |                                                |
|                                       | Rebel Armed Forces of Guatemala (FAR)                                                |                                                |
|                                       | Red Army Faction (RAF)                                                               |                                                |
|                                       | Red Brigades Fighting Communist Party (BR-PCC) and Fighting Communist Union (BR-UCC) |                                                |
|                                       | Turkish People's Liberation Army                                                     |                                                |
|                                       | 1970s onset ( <i>n</i> = 11)                                                         | Black September Organization                   |
|                                       |                                                                                      | Dev Sol                                        |
|                                       |                                                                                      | Ejercito Revolucionaria del Pueblo (ERP)       |
|                                       |                                                                                      | Hizballah                                      |
|                                       |                                                                                      | Montoneros                                     |
|                                       |                                                                                      | Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)          |
|                                       |                                                                                      | Mujahideen-I-Khalq (MK)                        |
|                                       |                                                                                      | November 17 Revolutionary Organization (N17RO) |
|                                       |                                                                                      | Popular Liberation Army (EPL)                  |
| Revolutionary People's Struggle (ELA) |                                                                                      |                                                |
| Tupamaros (Uruguay)                   |                                                                                      |                                                |
| 1980s boom ( <i>n</i> = 11)           | al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya (IG)                                                         |                                                |
|                                       | Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN)                                     |                                                |
|                                       | M-19 (Movement of April 19)                                                          |                                                |
|                                       | Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front (FPMR)                                              |                                                |
|                                       | National Liberation Army of Colombia (ELN)                                           |                                                |
|                                       | New People's Army (NPA)                                                              |                                                |
|                                       | People's Liberation Forces (FPL)                                                     |                                                |
|                                       | Red Brigades                                                                         |                                                |
|                                       | Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)                                        |                                                |
| Shining Path (SL)                     |                                                                                      |                                                |

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 21 <sup>st</sup> -century boom ( <i>n</i> = 5) | Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA)<br>Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)<br>al Qaeda<br>Lashkar-e Taiba<br>Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)<br>Taliban |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Notes. The Central American Revolutionary Workers Party (PRTC) and Red Army for the Liberation of Catalonia had no non-U.S. attacks during the study period. Thus, only 51 groups were included in the non-U.S. analysis.

*How Closely Related Are the U.S. and Non-U.S. Attack Trajectories?*

Because the trajectory analysis for both the U.S. and non-U.S. attacks yielded four trajectories and these trajectories to some extent resembled each other, we were able to examine the extent to which the groups included in the four trajectories for both analyses were the same. In Table 7, we compared the classification of the terrorist groups into one of the four trajectories for the U.S. and non-U.S. analysis. According to Table 7, both groups in the U.S. 21<sup>st</sup>-century boom trajectory were also in the non-U.S. 21<sup>st</sup>-century boom trajectory. But in addition, the non-U.S. 21<sup>st</sup>-century boom trajectory included the Abu Sayyaf Group, Lashkar-e Taiba, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

**T A B L E 7**

**A comparison of U.S. and non-U.S. terrorist group trajectories**

| Non-U.S. Trajectory            | U.S. Trajectory   |                |                  |                                | Total     |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|
|                                | Sporadic Group    | 1970s Boom     | 1980s Boom       | 21 <sup>st</sup> -Century Boom |           |
| Sporadic group                 | <b>13 (72.2%)</b> | 3 (30%)        | 2 (14.3%)        | 0 (0%)                         | 18        |
| 1970s boom                     | 2 (11.1%)         | <b>5 (50%)</b> | 4 (28.6%)        | 0 (0%)                         | 11        |
| 1980s boom                     | 1 (5.6%)          | 2 (20%)        | <b>8 (57.1%)</b> | 0 (0%)                         | 11        |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> -century boom | 2 (11.1%)         | 0 (0%)         | 0 (0%)           | <b>2 (100%)</b>                | 4         |
| Total                          | 18 (100%)         | 10 (100%)      | 14 (100%)        | 2 (100%)                       | 44 (100%) |

Notes. Only 44 of the 53 terrorist groups attacked both U.S. and non-U.S. targets from 1970–2004.

Next, 72.2% of the groups in the U.S. sporadic trajectory were also in the non-U.S. sporadic trajectory. The five groups that were sporadic for U.S. attacks but not for non-U.S. attacks were the Abu Sayyaf Group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Moro National Liberation Front in the Philippines, al-Gama’at al-Islamiyya in Egypt, and the Central American Revolutionary Workers Party in El Salvador. Again, thus far at least, these five groups were much more active in directing attacks against non-U.S. than U.S. targets.

More than half of the groups in the U.S. 1980s boom trajectory were also in the non-U.S. 1980s boom trajectory. Interestingly, all but one of these groups (i.e., the New People’s Army in the Philippines [NPA]) were Latin-American revolutionary organizations: FMLN in El Salvador;

Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front in Chile; Shining Path of Peru; ELN, M-19, Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) in Peru; and FARC in Colombia. And although not Latin American, the NPA was a leftist group.

The six U.S. groups that were not in the non-U.S. 1980s boom trajectory were Dev Sol, Hizballah, the November 17 Revolutionary Organization, the Red Army Faction, the Patriotic Morazanista Front, and the Revolutionary People's Struggle Group. Two of these (the Red Army Faction and Patriotic Morazanista Front) were in the sporadic non-U.S. trajectory; the rest were in the 1970s onset non-U.S. trajectory (Dev Sol, Hizballah, the Revolutionary People's Struggle Group, and the November 17 Revolutionary Organization).

The trajectory that included the smallest percentage of group overlap for the U.S. and non-U.S. attacks was the 1970s trajectory—only 50% of the 10 groups in this U.S. trajectory were also in the non-U.S. 1970s onset trajectory. As with the 1980s trajectory, three were Latin-American revolutionary groups: two Argentine organizations (Montoneros and ERP) and the Tupamaros of Uruguay. For the non-U.S. trajectories, the other five groups from the U.S. 1970s onset trajectory were instead in the sporadic trajectory (the Eritrean Liberation Front, the PFLP, and the Turkish People's Liberation Army) and the 1980s boom trajectory (the People's Liberation Forces and the Red Brigades).

In the 1970s, most of the groups that posed a more consistent threat to the United States than to other countries had Middle-East or African origins: two Palestinian groups (Black September and PFLP), the Iranian Mujahideen-I-Khalq, the Eritrean National Liberation Front, and the Turkish People's Liberation Army. Added to these were the People's Liberation Forces in El Salvador and the Red Brigades in Italy. The groups in the 1970s onset trajectory for non-U.S., but not the 1970s U.S. boom trajectory, included another Turkish group, Dev Sol, the Hizballah in Lebanon, the November 17 group in Greece, the Moro National Liberation Front in the Philippines, the Revolutionary People's Struggle in Greece, and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) of Colombia. Interestingly, by the 1980s, November 17, Hizballah, and Dev Sol switched trajectories from the non-U.S. to the U.S. boom; this finding probably indicates a strategic shift that remains to be explored.

Two other groups are also in the 1970s U.S. boom trajectory: the Red Army Faction in Germany and another Greek group called the Revolutionary People's Struggle. By the same token, two groups were in the American boom trajectory in the 1970s but moved to the non-U.S. boom in the 1980s: the Red Brigades of Italy and the People's Liberation Forces in El Salvador. Groups also in the 1980s boom for non-U.S. but not U.S. include the Egyptian Islamist group al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya, the Red Brigades in Italy, and the MRTA in Peru.

In short, the attack patterns of these groups against the U.S. and non-U.S. targets had considerable similarities over the 35 years spanned by the data. For both, we found four distinct trajectories—three sequential waves and a fourth trajectory made up of groups that attack sporadically or are short lived. For both the U.S. and non-U.S. attacks, the sporadic trajectory accounted for nearly half the groups in the analysis. However, a substantial difference exists

between the U.S. and the non-U.S. trajectories for the 1980s boom trajectory: Whereas the 1980s boom trajectory is responsible for more than 85% of all non-U.S. attacks, it accounts for slightly more than 56% of all U.S. attacks.

In general, the groups that comprised each of the four trajectories in the U.S. and non-U.S. attack trajectories were similar. Overall, 28 of the 44 groups (63.6%) classified in a particular trajectory for the United States were found in the comparable trajectory for non-U.S. targets. Based on the classifications for U.S. trajectories, the correspondence is perfect for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century boom groups, 72.2% for the sporadic trajectory, and 57.1% for the 1980s trajectory. The least group overlap occurred in the 1970s trajectory (50%). The groups that figured in both U.S. and non-U.S. trajectories included several Latin-American revolutionary organizations. The Moro National Liberation Front in the Philippines was in the 1970s onset trajectory for non-U.S. attacks but not for U.S. attacks. Groups in the 1970s boom trajectory for the U.S. but not for the non-U.S. targets were several Middle Eastern and African groups: Eritrean Liberation Front, FPL in El Salvador, Red Brigades in Italy, PFLP (Israel/Palestine, Syria), and Turkish People's Liberation Army. Although explaining the specific targeting strategies of these groups is beyond the scope of this article, we can suppose that regional politics played a role in the groups' targeting selections over time.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Based on a newly available event database composed of domestic as well as transnational terrorist attacks, we examined the anti-U.S. and non-U.S. attack patterns by organizations identified by the U.S. Department of State and subsequently the NCTC as particularly dangerous for the United States. The results show that, between 1970 and 2004, more than 96% of more than 16,000 terrorist attacks were in fact directed at non-U.S. targets. Not only did groups considered to be threatening rarely attack the United States (and almost never on U.S. soil), but more than 90% of these groups' non-U.S. attacks were domestic. Most groups operated primarily at home against local targets. Additional analysis could ask whether these findings also hold for groups that have not generally attacked U.S. interests since 1970 (for example, the Irish Republican Army, Basque Fatherland and Liberty, or the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; for work on this topic, see Dugan, Miller, LaFree, and Cragin, 2008).

Despite non-U.S. attacks outnumbering U.S. attacks by nearly 30 to 1, the attack trajectories for U.S. and non-U.S. attacks show considerable similarity. In both cases, we found that four trajectories best explain the attack patterns from 1970 to 2004. We identified three "waves" of terrorist attacks with relatively sharp ascents and declines, and a fourth and largest trajectory of groups that struck for only a short period of time or infrequently. One interpretation of these results is that the activities of approximately half of the groups analyzed do not fit neatly into clear terrorism waves.

Our findings point to several critical policy implications. First, they underscore the importance of proximity to terrorist targeting. Even though the groups identified here might have

ample interest in striking the United States, actually doing so is not an easy task. Anti-U.S. objectives are not sufficient. As Clarke and Newman (2006: 139) put it, "Proximity to the target is the most important target characteristic to terrorists." Mounting an attack against the United States from primary bases outside the United States is extremely challenging. Clarke and Newman (2006: 154) concluded: "Terrorists are constrained by geography. Like criminals, they will choose targets that are close to their operational base."

Foreign attackers typically face an environment in which they have an imperfect understanding of local language, culture, and daily life. This impediment may explain why recent research (i.e., Smith et al., 2002) documented that international terrorist attacks against the United States have a much longer planning period than attacks by domestic groups. To overcome cultural and linguistic obstacles, foreign attackers will probably be more likely than domestic attackers to rely on immigrant Diaspora communities within the target country. Similar reasoning leads Clarke and Newman (2006: 143) to conclude that "externally based terrorists will mount their attacks from locations that are as close as possible to the target." In other words, foreign terrorist groups need locals. Thus, a recent report by the U.S. Department of State (2008) stressed the importance of local recruits to al Qaeda, especially in the West. More generally, the results underscore both the atypicality and the lethal ingenuity of the 9/11 attacks. Al Qaeda was able to engineer 9/11 without using locals but instead relied on specially trained and highly qualified foreign operatives. The ability to commandeer such assets undoubtedly is rare.

Second, compared with the percentage of total attacks on U.S. targets, the total percentage of fatalities suffered by U.S. targets is nearly twice as high. This finding suggests that, when foreign terrorists do succeed in striking outside their domestic base of operations, they aim to cause large numbers of casualties. As Clarke and Newman (2006) observed, in situations where terrorists have but one opportunity to carry out an attack, they will seek to cause as much damage as they possibly can. We could thus expect such attacks to be carefully planned over a long period of time. They will not be easily repeated.

Third, the attack trajectories of approximately half of the terrorist groups included in the analyses exhibit wave-like boom-and-bust cycles. This finding supports earlier research (e.g., Midlarsky, Crenshaw, and Yoshida, 1980; Rapoport, 2004; Sedgwick, 2007), suggesting that the decision to resort to terrorism is to some extent contagious. Once an upward trajectory begins, it tends to follow an accelerating path for several years. The cycle hypothesis also underscores the need to improve our understanding of the processes that end a cycle of terrorist group attacks (cf. Cronin, 2008; Jones and Libicki, 2008; LaFree and Miller, 2008). But it is also equally important to emphasize that nearly half of the groups we examined do not fit this pattern. They were responsible for infrequent or sporadic attacks.

Last, the fact that total attacks by this set of designated anti-U.S. organizations is so lopsidedly against non-U.S. targets is consistent with the proposition that the decision of anti-U.S. terrorist groups to attack the United States is often strategic. As Crenshaw (2001) suggested, the United States may become a preferred target if domestic challengers cannot succeed at home unless the scope of the conflict is expanded beyond local boundaries. Crenshaw pointed out

that the United States is a useful target for pragmatic as well as ideological reasons: Attacks on U.S. citizens are highly visible and both acts of terrorism and the U.S. response may well arouse popular emotions in an audience of importance to the terrorist organization. Beyond these considerations, attacks on U.S. targets can be useful for directly influencing U.S. policies—such as compelling the United States to withdraw from a military commitment that supports a local government. The bombing of the marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983 is a prominent example. Crenshaw also argued that terrorism directed at the United States may be a mechanism for drawing the United States into a local conflict, perhaps to pressure the government to make reforms or to undermine its legitimacy.

Regardless of the strategic intent behind attacks on the United States or the virulence of anti-U.S. ideology, our results show that most terrorist attacks by foreign groups deemed dangerous to national security by the U.S. government are in fact directed at non-U.S. targets. Local governments suffer the most. U.S. decision makers might be well advised to avoid parochialism and keep in mind that even the most seriously threatening groups direct most of their activities elsewhere. This conclusion suggests that international cooperation—not unilateral policies—might be the best counterterrorist strategy.

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# Patterns of precursor behaviors in the life span of a U.S. environmental terrorist group

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## **Research Summary**

*This article discusses the paucity of data available for assessing the “life span” of a terrorist group. It introduces a new methodology that allows researchers to examine when terrorist groups perform their preincident activities. The findings suggest that differences exist in the temporal patterns of terrorist groups: environmental terrorist groups engage in a relatively short planning cycle compared with right-wing and international terrorists. The article concludes by examining a case study on “the Family,” which is a unique environmental terrorist group that conducted activities over a relatively long period of time. This group provides an interesting contrast to other environmental terrorists. Despite significant organizational differences, their patterns of preparatory conduct were highly similar.*

## **Policy Implications**

*The findings suggest that (1) temporal and spatial data about preincident terrorist activity can be collected from unclassified and open sources and (2) law-enforcement agencies that are investigating environmental groups have relatively little time to observe and infiltrate their individual cells (compared with right-wing and international terrorists). Finally, the data suggest that environmental terrorists—at least so far—have engaged in attacks that are less deadly than the comparison groups.*

## **Keywords**

*environmental terrorism, extremism, terrorism, eco-terrorism, preincident patterns*

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Although the “life cycle” of terrorist groups has been the focus of considerable recent scholarly interest (see Sageman, 2004; Smith and Picarelli, 2008; and Cronin, 2006), in particular, for a review of some of this work), this type of research remains in its infancy. There have been some estimates regarding the average life span of terrorist groups (e.g., Rapoport, 1992), but most of these estimates have been based on case studies rather than on empirical data using reliable sampling techniques. A variety of methodological obstacles are probably responsible for the lack of reliable information about the life span of these groups. Terrorist groups frequently change names for specific occasions, coalesce with other groups and then disperse again, and even disband only to emerge again with different personnel. This amoeba-like quality not only makes the study of terrorist groups challenging, but it also increases the probability that estimates regarding terrorist groups’ life courses will be limited to specific examples or, worse yet, are completely unreliable. Like the article by Freilich, Caspi, and Chermak (2009, this issue), this article explores some of these methodological issues and suggests how these problems can be overcome.

In addition, we examine variables affecting terrorist groups’ life spans. Recruitment, training, governmental response, and a host of other societal and economic issues may significantly affect whether a terrorist group remains intact over time. Although many of these factors are not easily measured, one of our goals was to identify research questions that may encourage scholars to examine the temporal patterns of terrorist activity in greater detail through the creation of empirically verified data. Finally, we selected one terrorist organization, a group of environmental extremists known as “the Family,” to serve as a case study for this analysis. The group was chosen because of its unique characteristics and the methodological opportunities it presents regarding terrorist groups’ planning cycles.

### **Problems with Studying the Life Span of Terrorist Groups**

Rapoport (1992) and LaFree and Dugan (2008) estimated that the life span of the average terrorist group was remarkably short—usually 1 year or less. Efforts to validate these assessments, however, must confront at least three problems.

First, terrorist groups occasionally change their names prior to committing a specific act of terrorism. The May 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Organization (M19CO) led by Marilyn Buck in the early 1980s is a classic example of this technique. On January 28, 1983, the group used the name “Revolutionary Fighting Group” to claim credit for damage in the bombing of the federal building on Staten Island, New York. In three subsequent bombings in 1983, they used the name “Armed Resistance Unit” when they sent communiqués to the media.<sup>1</sup> The National War College, the Washington Navy Yard, and the U.S. Capital Building were all bombing victims of the Armed Resistance Unit. In 1984, they again changed their name, this time to the “Red Guerrilla Resistance.” Three more targets were hit that year: the Israeli Aircraft Industries

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1. In the terrorism literature, “communiqués” refer to communications from terrorist groups describing their motivation for the terrorist act.

Building in New York City, the Washington Navy Yard Officers' Club, and the South African Consulate in New York were all bombed before the spree ended with the arrests of some of the group's members in November (see Smith, 1994, for additional details). It was not until their indictment in 1988 that the public learned that all three groups were actually one and the same. M19CO was formed in 1979 and—during its 7-year life span—was responsible for several notorious crimes, including the escapes of leftist terror group leaders JoAnne Chesimard and William Morales.

Second, some terrorist groups may have been decimated by arrest only to rise again with new personnel and, sometimes, a different name. In 1987 and 1988, for example, David Foreman and a small band of his Earth First adherents vandalized power lines in northern Arizona and ski lifts at a resort in Flagstaff. Two years after his 1989 indictment, Foreman renounced his ties to the Earth First movement that he had created, claiming it had become tied to left extremism in the group's California wing (Smith, 1994).<sup>2</sup> The movement reemerged the following year with the name Earth Liberation Front. Although some might claim that Earth Liberation Front is a separate and distinctly different group than the Earth First movement, the origins of the latter can be traced to the former, which creates a considerable problem for scholars trying to document the life span of this extremist group.

Third, some group members affiliate with several groups over time, which makes it difficult to identify a stable membership base within a terrorist group from which to trace the group's life course. Within the extreme right, a good example is the Order. While maintaining some affiliation with the Covenant, Sword, and Arm of the Lord (CSA), many members drifted from the CSA to the newly formed Order. Additional Order members emerged from the Aryan Nations and some participants in the Order (particularly those indicted for seditious conspiracy in the aftermath of the Order's demise) maintained primary membership in the CSA and Aryan Nations and only loosely affiliated themselves with the Order (Hamm, 2007; Smith, 1994).

Leftist terrorists in the United States may provide an even better example of this problem. Marilyn Buck is a good example. She was the leader of M19CO, had been a member of the Weather Underground and the Black Liberation Army, and she had ties to the Black Panthers and the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional—which is a violent Puerto Rican independence group. Sometimes her affiliation with these groups led them to coalesce for specific incidents (such as they did for the 1981 Nyack, New York, armored truck robbery), only to dissipate once the attack was completed. Such behaviors were so confusing to law-enforcement authorities that U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director William Webster testified before Congress after the Nyack robbery that, “there is no known coalescing of an ideological synthesis among (domestic terrorist) groups, nor do we have any sense that they have become effective” (*Hearings on FBI Oversight before the Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism of the Committee on the Judiciary*, 1982).

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2. Mike Roselle, who was a leader in the California wing of Earth First, referred to Foreman as an “unrepentant right-wing thug” when he heard of Foreman's resignation (Sidener, 1990).

### **Factors Affecting the Life Span of American Terrorist Groups**

Despite these problems, we have learned a great deal about the factors that affect the longevity of terrorist groups. Several important works examining this issue have been published in recent years, most of which have focused on the desistance of terrorist groups. Most notable are works by Crenshaw (1991) and Cronin (2006). Crenshaw's 1991 piece on "how terrorism declines" and her subsequent identification of variables and situations potentially linked to the demise of terrorist groups in a special report by the U.S. Institute of Peace (1999) provided a framework from which much of the research on this subject has evolved. In the 1999 report, Crenshaw suggested that both internal and external factors could effectuate a group's desistance from terrorism: (1) success in meeting group goals, (2) partial success by raising public awareness about issues the group considered important, (3) failure in funding or recruitment resulting in organizational breakdown, (4) loss of support from broader constituents, and (5) identification of alternatives to political violence as a means of conflict resolution.

Second, Cronin's (2006) review of the literature on how terrorism ends constitutes an excellent summary of the current status of research on the subject and provides a model for analyzing desistance from terrorism. Drawing from the conclusions of previous work (see, for example, Crenshaw, 1995; Rapoport, 2004; Ross and Gurr, 1989; Silke, 2004; Sprinzak, 1995), Cronin (2006) contended that the demise of most terrorist groups results from one or more of the following factors: (1) removal of group leadership, (2) unsuccessful transition to the next generation of militants, (3) success, (4) transition to legitimate political means, (5) loss of popular support, (6) repression, and (7) a shift from either terrorism to criminality or full insurgency. She cited numerous examples of international and U.S. domestic groups whose ends were caused by these factors.

Here in the United States, some of these factors have been more relevant than others (Smith, Damphousse, and Roberts, 2006). Although factors affecting desistance from terrorism lack empirical validation, many have manifested themselves in case studies of U.S. terrorist groups. Furthermore, in-depth mining of court records and open-source materials in the United States allows us to assess how some of these factors identified by Crenshaw (1995) and Cronin (2006) have influenced U.S. terrorists. In particular, the following contingencies seem to be crucially important to the life span of U.S. terrorist groups during the last few decades: (1) whether the group continues to recruit after going underground, (2) the quality of the group's security measures and training, (3) whether the group's ideological foundation remains germane, and (4) how the polity responds to the group's activities. Each of these contingencies is discussed in the following subsections.



### *Recruitment*<sup>3</sup>

From the time an extremist group commits to acts of terrorism, it is faced with the ultimate dilemma: Does it continue to recruit to enlarge its membership and thereby run the risk of infiltration by the authorities or does it cease recruiting and hope that its communiqués and terrorist acts will attract converts to the movement—despite not having direct contact with members of the organization? Some leaders of terrorist groups have apparently given this dilemma a great deal of thought. The leadership of the United Freedom Front, which was a leftist terrorist group during the 1970s and 1980s, chose not to recruit because of its fear of infiltration. With only eight members, the group engaged in more than 30 bank robberies and bombings in its anticapitalist and antiwar violence spree from 1975 to 1984, earning itself the distinction of being the United States' most prolific domestic terrorist group. In contrast, some right-wing groups like the Order and the Arizona Patriots continued to recruit after beginning to engage in terrorism. The Order's demise resulted from the defection of a peripheral member, whereas the Arizona Patriots' downfall was from heavy law-enforcement infiltration (Hamm, 2007; Martinez, 1988; Smith, 1994). In contrast to the United Freedom Front, neither of these groups lasted more than 18 months. Solving this dilemma is so essential to group survival that many extremist groups in the United States began experimenting with alternative sustainability strategies in the early 1990s.<sup>4</sup>

### *Security Measures*

U.S. terrorist groups that sustained themselves for any length of time invariably had fairly sophisticated techniques for internal communication. The United Freedom Front, for example, perfected the use of "mail drops," the meeting "sets," and the extensive use of safe houses, thereby sustaining itself for a decade. The Family, which is an environmental group to be discussed at length later in this article, had a central core membership known as the "Book Club." The Book Club provided an opportunity for members to receive instruction in secure communication through computer technology. This training resulted in the members using "draft" e-mail messaging and encryption technology to communicate safely with each other. Were it not for the arrest and cooperation with law enforcement by one of its members, the Family's arson spree might have continued beyond the 6 years it existed. Other terrorists who remained active for several years (such as Eric Rudolph and Ted Kaczynski) precluded such communication problems by avoiding contact with others and employing "lone wolf" tactics (Arnold, 1997; Vollers, 2006). More careless individuals and groups have succumbed to early interdiction. Many of the militia groups of the late 1990s, such as the Mountaineer Militia, readily found that loose lips do indeed sink ships.

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3. This is essentially synonymous with Cronin's (2006) notion of "failure to transition to the next generation."

4. The use of "uncoordinated violence" approaches such as "leaderless resistance," the use of "hit lists" on Internet postings by environmental and antiabortion extremist groups, and the use of "fatwahs" by Islamic extremists are examples of alternative strategies.

### *Ideological Relevance*

When the “cause” that motivates the terrorist group disappears, the group has two options. Some groups have turned their attention to a new cause. When Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese Army in April 1975 and U.S. forces withdrew from the country, for example, West German terrorist groups like the Red Army Faction began to take up the cause of the Palestinians (Hoffman, 2006). According to one of the founders of the group Movement 2 June, “Since Vietnam is finished, people should get involved with Palestine” (Baumann, 1979: 60). The availability of a suitable alternative cause may extend the life span of a terrorist group.

It may be more common, however, for terrorist groups simply to fade away because their cause is no longer relevant. Extreme leftist terrorist groups in the United States found this to be the case on several occasions. The Weather Underground, for example, based its existence on opposition to the Vietnam War and, when the war ended, left its members as rebels without a cause. Advances during the civil rights movement also left groups like the Black Liberation Army with less reason to continue the fight (Hoffman, 2006). Regarding the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional and Macheteros organizations, the Puerto Rican plebiscites in 1993 and 1998 revealed little support for the independence movement on the island. Decimated by arrests and with little popular support, the two organizations faded in the mid 1990s (Smith, 1994).

### *Governmental Intervention*

Yet more often than not, previous research using government data has suggested that most terrorist groups in the United States have eventually succumbed to governmental interdiction. That said, Cronin (2006) has been skeptical about using such data to support this thesis because of the issue of self-selection (or sample selection bias). If researchers rely on data provided by a government, there is a potential for attending only to cases in which the government was successful. A review of approximately 325 terrorism acts officially labeled by the FBI between 1980 and 2005 indicates that most events were eventually resolved by arrest. Although government intervention has involved arrest and prosecution for most group members, the relationship between the demise of particular terrorist groups and the government’s response is actually more complex.

Law-enforcement and prosecutorial focus on terrorism has fluctuated over time and the number of persons investigated and indicted under federal terrorism investigations has varied accordingly (Damphousse and Shields, 2007). For example, renewed interest in prosecuting terrorists in the early 1980s led to the creation and expansion of the FBI’s terrorism taskforce strategy, implementation of the William French Smith Attorney General’s Guidelines in 1983, and elevation of terrorism investigations to “priority one.”<sup>5</sup> These actions resulted in one of the most productive eras of FBI counterterrorism efforts in years. From 1985 to 1988, federal prosecutions decimated remaining left-wing terrorist groups and suppressed a growing right-wing white supremacy/Christian identity/antitax movement (Damphousse and Smith, 2004;

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5. This designation is no longer used by the FBI.

Smith and Damphousse, 1996). Similarly, passage of the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act resulted in significant increases in prosecutions and convictions for providing material support to international terrorist groups, particularly following the 9/11 attacks (Smith and Damphousse, 1998). Other less known government strategies to persuade potential terrorist groups to desist from terrorist behavior have produced similar results without prosecution. For example, in the aftermath of the siege at Ruby Ridge and the Oklahoma City bombing, the FBI embarked on a highly successful Militia Outreach Program intended to decrease tensions between federal law-enforcement agencies and the burgeoning militia movement.<sup>6</sup>

### *Two Temporal Approaches: Life Spans and Precursor Behaviors*

The behaviors of terrorists can be temporally examined in many ways. Some have argued that international terrorism demonstrates a cyclical nature, with well-defined peaks and valleys (Enders and Sandler, 2004), whereas others have contended that a broader look at international terrorism reveals the existence of waves of terror lasting as long as several decades (Rapoport, 2004). Although important for strategic planning, law-enforcement officials have found that such modeling provides little help in determining when and how to intervene in threats presented by specific groups. Consequently, much law-enforcement training in the United States currently focuses on the identification of preincident indicators drawn from case studies.

To compensate for some of these problems, we used two different approaches to examine the temporal patterns of U.S. terrorists for a series of projects funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ; Smith, Cothren, Roberts, and Damphousse, 2008; Smith, Damphousse, and Roberts, 2006). The first approach attempted to measure the life span of U.S. terrorist groups by temporally recording all terrorist incidents attributed to the groups. Although this approach does not reveal the length of time from initial radicalization to first terrorist incident, it does provide a reliable indicator of the length of time a group was involved in *terrorist* activities. The second approach involved recording the known precursor behaviors associated with each terrorist *incident*. Some of these behaviors were criminal and others were not.

In this article, we elected to use these approaches to examine a single terrorist group in the United States—the environmental group known as the Family (or the Book Club). The Family is unique among environmental terrorists. Unlike most Animal Liberation Front and Earth Liberation Front “direct actions,” whose operatives acted alone and outside the realm of a known organizational structure, the Family consisted of a fairly large “cell” of at least 20 members. Furthermore, they committed numerous acts of arsons and “ecotage” over a 6-year period from 1995 through 2001.<sup>7</sup> Both the length of the conspiracy and the deviation from traditional environmental extremism make the Family a fascinating comparison with other terrorist groups.

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6. This was described to the author by one FBI supervisory agent as the “take your militia leader to lunch program.”

7. The term “ecotage” refers to ecological sabotage.

## Data and Method

The current analysis of the Family's activities is extracted from a combination of several much larger projects funded by the NIJ and the Department of Homeland Security (Smith et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2006). In 2003, the NIJ began funding a series of projects to examine the precursor activities of terrorist groups in the United States. Results from this pilot project were extremely promising. Subsequent funding was provided to collect additional data on international and environmental terrorists, hereafter referred to as the Geospatial Analysis of Terrorist Activities (GATA) project. A third project involved the collection of geospatial, temporal, demographic, and legal data regarding terrorism incidents (or prevented incidents) that had been the focus of federal scrutiny over a period of three decades.

Most of the incidents chosen for these analyses were selected from the American Terrorism Study database, which is a Department of Homeland Security and Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism-funded project that collects data on people indicted as a result of an FBI terrorism investigation, as defined by the attorney general guidelines for FBI terrorism and counterintelligence investigations.<sup>8</sup> Although reference will be made to data from the other projects, the methodology used in the GATA project—which focused on environmental groups and includes the Family case data—will be described here. More detailed information on the data collection involved in these projects is available in the NIJ final technical reports for the first two of these projects (Smith et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2006).

For the GATA project, an initial sample of 54 court cases was selected from the American Terrorism Study. These cases were augmented by 29 additional case studies identified by a panel of subject matter experts.<sup>9</sup> Of the 83 court cases and case studies, 20 were deemed not have sufficient information available, so we were left with 63 cases from which to collect data. Of these 63 cases, 5 were combined for a final total of 58 “case studies.”<sup>10</sup> The data set included more than 400 variables related to the addresses or locations of the incidents, terrorists' homes, antecedent behaviors, telephone calls, and group meetings. It also included temporal data (i.e., dates and sequence of these behaviors), relationships among group members, and demographic and legal variables.

Information on each of the 58 cases was extracted from several sources: (1) federal criminal court case records (e.g., indictments, FBI affidavits, transcripts); (2) newspapers, books, and print media; and (3) other open sources, including Internet searches and other publicly available

8. Domestic cases consist of indictments resulting from investigation under the Attorney General Guidelines on General Crimes, Racketeering Enterprises, and Domestic Security/Terrorism Investigations and subsequent editions (Office of the Attorney General, 1983, 1989, 2002). International terrorists consist of people indicted in federal courts as a result of investigation under the Attorney General Guidelines for FBI Foreign Intelligence Collection and Foreign Counterintelligence Investigations.
9. The panel of experts included Ron Arnold (environmental extremism), Kelly Damphousse (domestic terrorism), Jackson Cothren (database management and structure), Bill Dyson (international and environmental terrorism), and Jonathan White (Islamic terrorism).
10. Case studies may have been of a terrorist group, a specific court case, or a single terrorism incident. The primary unit of analysis was “incidents” or “prevented incidents.” Some case studies contained information on multiple incidents.

documents. The data were compiled by the Institute for Intelligence Studies at Mercyhurst College and were formatted into an Oracle database for analysis by the Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies at the University of Arkansas. The case studies contained information on 173 perpetrated or planned incidents (55 international and 118 environmental). Time constraints and lack of sufficient information resulted in us only being able to collect complete data on 136 of these incidents for the spatial analysis.

We are focusing only on the *temporal* data. Unfortunately, of the two data sets (spatial and temporal), the temporal data are much more difficult to obtain and verify. For the temporal analysis, identification of both an incident date and dates of preparatory behaviors are required for analysis and 39 incidents contained sufficient temporal data for analysis. Temporal analysis was limited, therefore, to these 10 international and 29 environmental incidents. Of the 29 environmental incidents, the Family was responsible for 21. Known temporal patterns depict an attenuated version of real events in each of these cases so we may never know all the meetings and preparations involved in a specific incident. Consequently, our findings must be discussed with caution. That said, if we assume that the volume of “missing” precursor terrorist group behaviors is random across types of groups, then comparisons between group types is possible (Little and Rubin, 1987).

## Results

We discuss the Family’s activities in three subsections. First, we provide a brief history of the group, a timeline of its major direct actions, and general comments regarding the events that led to its longevity and eventual desistance. In the second subsection, we describe the preparatory behaviors for each of the incidents and compare them with known behavior patterns of non-environmental terrorist groups and other environmental terrorist groups. The third subsection is a summary of the influence of each of the four major issues affecting longevity (i.e., recruitment, quality of security measures, ideological relevance, and government intervention).

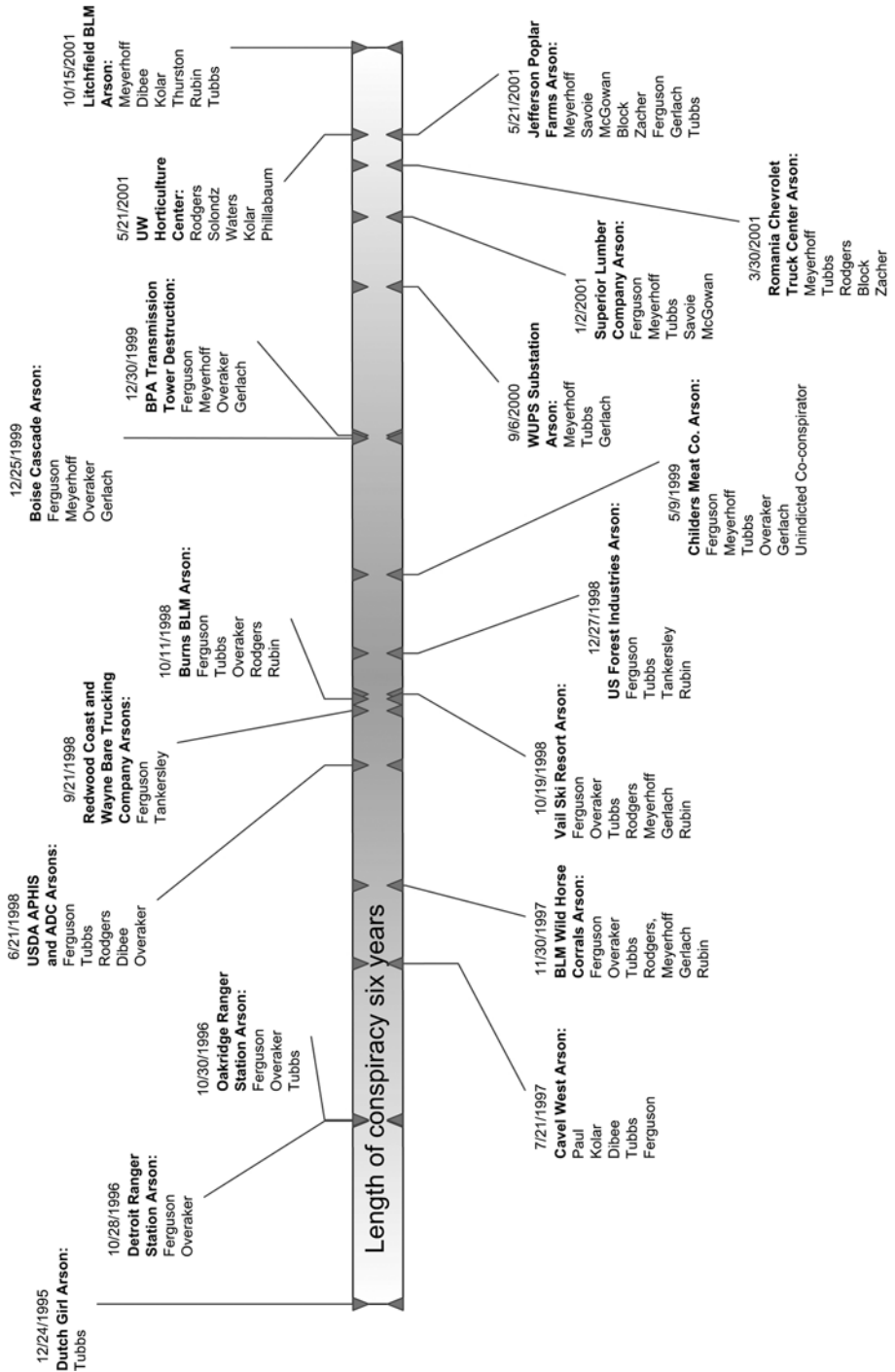
### *Evolution and Desistance*

The Family emerged in 1995 from an eclectic group of environmental activists with fairly diverse backgrounds but a singular commitment to environmental extremism. Some members were “hippies,” others leftists and anarchists, and some—like Jacob Ferguson, who eventually became the FBI’s primary informant—had extensive criminal backgrounds. Mostly middle class and young, the group’s anarchist-hippie attitude toward life was reflective of late-1960s leftist extremism. Almost all of the 20 or so members of the group lived in the Pacific Northwest and became acquainted through the anarchist-environmental movement in and around Eugene, Oregon. In addition, many lived in (or were frequent visitors to) a semipermanent environmental protest site in the Willamette Valley called “Fort Warner” (Grigoriadis, 2006).

Federal prosecutors eventually connected members of the group to 21 “ecotage” and arson attacks from December 1995 through October 2001 (Indictments and U.S. Government’s

FIGURE 1

"The Family" incident timeline



Sentencing Memorandum, 2007). As of July 2008, 16 members had been convicted of these crimes and 4 remained fugitives.<sup>11</sup> Kevin Tubbs committed the Family's first terrorist act in December 1995 when he placed timed incendiary devices on three trucks at the Dutch Girl Dairy in Eugene, Oregon, then spray painted "A.L.F." and "Go Vegan" on other trucks. Nine months later, two additional participants (Jacob Ferguson and his then-girlfriend, Josephine Overaker) attempted to burn the Detroit Ranger Station at Detroit, Oregon; they also spray-painted the facility and trucks with different graffiti, attributing the act to the "Earth Liberation Front."

Thus began the series of attacks that stretched into the next decade. A timeline of their terrorist acts is provided in Figure 1. The figure shows the 6-year life course of the Family's conspiracy, the dates of each attack, and the members who were known to be involved in each attack. The attacks began with the Christmas Eve Dutch Girl arson in 1995 by Tubbs and ended with the Litchfield Bureau of Land Management Horse Corrals arson in 2001. Note that, even though as many as 20 people were members of the Family during this period, no attack was perpetrated by more than 8 members.

Ferguson (a semiskilled criminal with a drug habit), Overaker (his adoring, environmentalist girlfriend), and Tubbs (a college-educated animal rights radical with degrees in philosophy and fine arts) formed the core participants in the formative years of the organization (Grigoriadis, 2006). During this time, they became acquainted with William Rodgers, who eventually became the group leader once it had expanded to include 20 or more members. By early 1997, three additional people were added to the list of active participants in the group. Tubbs and Ferguson conducted reconnaissance on a score of fur farms and Bureau of Land Management facilities before deciding on a horse processing plant in Redmond, Oregon, as the next target. Then they recruited Jonathan Paul (a well-known animal rights activist), Jennifer Kolar (Paul's girlfriend who was working on her Ph.D. at the University of Colorado), and Joseph Dibee (a Microsoft Internet security tester; Freeman, 2007; Grigoriadis, 2006; U.S. Government Sentencing Memorandum, 2007). They burned the Cavel West meat processing facility to the ground in July 1997, which resulted in approximately \$1 million in damages—their most destructive arson to date.

The 14-month period from November 1997 through December 1998 was an important period for the group. Their successes led them to recruit five more members. In addition to William Rodgers (aka Avalon), who eventually assumed the leading role in the organization, the group added Kendall Tankersley (Ferguson's then girlfriend and receptionist at a Planned Parenthood clinic), Gregory Meyerhof (a radical anarchist who eventually called for violent action against persons, not just facilities), Rebecca Rubin (reportedly a Canadian animal researcher who studied cranes), and Chelsea Dawn Gerlach (who began her transformation to radical environmentalism after meeting William Rodgers in 1993 at the age of 16 years; Abraham, 2006; Grigoriadis, 2006; U.S. Government Sentencing Memorandum, 2007).<sup>12</sup> Gerlach, who had

11. The four fugitives are Josephine "Sunshine" Overaker, Rebecca Rubin, Joseph Dibee, and Justin Solondz.

12. Chelsea Dawn Gerlach is also known as Sarah Kendall Harvey.

been romantically involved with Meyerhof while they were in high school in Eugene, Oregon, later became romantically involved with Darren Thurston (a late addition to the group). Gerlach and Thurston often sold drugs as their major source of income (U.S. Government Sentencing Memorandum, 2007: 92–93). These individuals were all highly committed to environmental activism and were selected for participation in specific acts after members of the group became acquainted with them at environmental meetings.

In 1998, Rodgers and Dibee formed a plan to train core group members through what came to be known as “Book Club” meetings. Five of these meetings were held in different locations around the country. The first meeting included the core group of nine members, though Jacob Ferguson, the founding member of the group and its most prolific arsonist, was not among the attendees. The meetings included training on lock-picking, computer security, target reconnaissance, and bomb making (*Petition to Enter Plea of Guilty for Kendall Tankersley*, 2006). At one of these meetings, Jennifer Kolar (who had become a software designer for AOL) shared “her extensive expertise in computers by providing encryption diskettes and instructing in their use, so the group could communicate secretly” (U.S. Government’s Sentencing Memorandum, 2007: 123). As many as 16 of the members attended at least one of the Book Club meetings.

In 1998 and 1999, the group committed at least nine major attacks, including the arson at a Vail ski resort as it was under construction. This concentration of acts is evident in Figure 1. The Vail attack was their most destructive attack and one that launched their cause into the national limelight. Directed personally by William Rodgers, the Vail fire damage was estimated at nearly \$25,000,000. Yet during 2000, the group was inactive and some of the members became disillusioned, believing that their tactics were not having the desired effects. The ski resort at Vail, for example, was covered by insurance and was rebuilt in an even more grandiose fashion than before. In fact, all of the facilities they firebombed were rebuilt within a matter of months (Grigoriadis, 2006).

In 2001, the group ended their dormancy, but it was also the year of their undoing. To show support for Jeffrey Luers—an environmental activist accused of burning three sport utility vehicles—Bill Rodgers and four others burned 35 sport utility vehicles at a Chevrolet dealership in Eugene, Oregon, the night before Luers’s March 31 trial was set to begin. In addition to being a member of a radical punk rock band, a heavy drug user, and a womanizer, Ferguson’s reputation as an outspoken environmental activist led many protesters to wrongly assume that he had been involved. The public linking of Ferguson’s name to the attack sent shockwaves through the Family. Considerable dissension had developed within the group, including disagreements about the success of their actions and problems with Rodgers’ abusive sexual behavior, and the group committed its last direct action on October 15, 2001—even as members had begun to scatter across the country.

In the years that followed, Ferguson became addicted to heroin, Rodgers moved to Arizona, and others in the group returned to their earlier lives as activists instead of arsonists. Some, however, increasingly turned to crime and violence. Darren Thurston and Chelsea Gerlach, for example, became heavily involved in drug trafficking, bought an arsenal of weapons, and even



provided explosives training for Zapatista guerrillas from Mexico (U.S. Government Sentencing Memorandum, 2007).<sup>13</sup>

After the immediate effects of the 9/11 attacks had subsided, the FBI's renewed interest in domestic terrorism brought increased focus on the Family's arsons, and Ferguson became the center of attention.<sup>14</sup> Fearing a life behind bars, he agreed to become a government informant. In addition to providing federal prosecutors with details about his involvement in the arsons, Ferguson was flown around the country, wired for sound, and set up to meet with the now-scattered members of the group. Over time, he obtained incriminating statements from many of them.<sup>15</sup>

In December 2005, 6 of the members, including Rodgers, were arrested for crimes affiliated with the Family (Egan, 2005). When he was arrested in Arizona, Rodgers was found not only with incriminating evidence about the Family's activities, but also with child pornography on his computer. He eventually hanged himself in his jail cell in December 2005. The following month, 11 members of the Family were indicted in federal court in Eugene, Oregon (Janofsky, 2006). After their indictments, the defendants turned on each other. Because many of the members had been romantically involved with other members in the group, jealousy and conflict over sexual issues became fodder for both defense attorneys and prosecutors alike.

Four members of the group went underground and remain fugitive: Justin Solondz (Briana Waters' former boyfriend), Josephine Overaker (Ferguson's first girlfriend in the group), Rebecca Rubin (believed to be in Canada), and Joseph Dibee (who had allegedly planned to assassinate Jonathan Paul; Government's Sentencing Memorandum, 2007: 79). Other than those still fugitive, all defendants except one pleaded guilty to one or more of the charges against them. Only Briana Waters (a violin teacher from Olympia, Washington, who served as a lookout during the arson at the University of Washington Center for Urban Horticulture) went to trial. She was convicted and sentenced on June 20, 2008, to 6 years in the federal penitentiary and was ordered to pay \$6 million in restitution to the University of Washington (Bartley and Carter, 2008).

### *Incident Planning and Preparation*

Our second method of examining temporal issues involved using each incident as the unit of analysis. This method may be a useful tool for law enforcement because routinized patterns of conduct can be identified for specific groups. Although this approach is still new, some patterns of behavior have been identified (see Smith et al., 2006, 2008, for an overview of initial NIJ projects using this approach). Figure 2 shows a summary of these temporal patterns in precursor behaviors for the terrorists in our data set divided by terrorism motivation (i.e., international, environmental, right wing, and left wing). Antecedent conduct that could not be linked di-

13. Thurston, a Canadian with an extensive criminal record, remains a fugitive and is believed to be in Canada.

14. Known as Operation Backfire, the 10-year investigation eventually had successes in 2004 and 2005.

15. Despite having a leading role in the organization, Ferguson received 2 years of probation and no restitution requirements for his activities (Associated Press, 2008).

rectly to a particular incident was excluded from the analysis. We collected more than 1,300 temporal measurements across all groups. In general, this method of examining the temporal sequencing of the terrorists' planning and preparation processes indicates that environmental terrorists engage in a shorter preparatory cycle than any other groups that committed acts of terrorism in the United States.

**FIGURE 2**

| Category (Incidents)     | 3 + years | 1-3 years | 6-12 months | 1-6 months | 21-30 days | 11-20 days | 6-10 days | 2-5 days | Day before | Incident day | Total acts |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|----------|------------|--------------|------------|
| Left wing (45)           | 100%      | 97%       | 65%         | 49%        | 16%        | 13%        | 11%       | 8%       | 3%         | 1%           | 153        |
| Right wing (40)          | 100%      | 96%       | 76%         | 60%        | 32%        | 25%        | 17%       | 15%      | 7%         | 5%           | 285        |
| International (13)       | 100%      | 97%       | 87%         | 77%        | 50%        | 43%        | 25%       | 22%      | 6%         | 5%           | 380        |
| Single issue, other (11) | 100%      | 100%      | 100%        | 100%       | 62%        | 48%        | 48%       | 32%      | 8%         | 4%           | 26         |
| Environmental (38)       | 100%      | 100%      | 100%        | 97%        | 88%        | 85%        | 63%       | 54%      | 33%        | 16%          | 118        |
| All categories (147)     | 100%      | 97%       | 82%         | 70%        | 44%        | 38%        | 26%       | 22%      | 10%        | 6%           | 962        |

The information in the figure shows the percent of precursor activities that took place at distinct time periods before the terrorist attack. For example, several of the international, left-wing, and right-wing terrorist groups took longer than a year to complete preparations for an incident: 75% of their behaviors took place prior to 10 days before the incident and most of their preparations occurred between 11 days and 6 months prior to the terrorist act. However, most (88%) preparations for environmental acts of terrorism occurred within 30 days of the incident. Of the 38 environmental incidents that we examined for which temporal data were available, more than 30% occurred either the day of the incident or the day prior. Compared with left-wing (3%), right-wing (7%), international (6%), and other single-issue terrorists (8%), the data suggest that environmental terrorists seem to be much more spontaneous than other types of terrorists.

Part of the reason environmental terrorists seem to have such a short planning cycle may be their tactics and the crimes they commit. Infamous for using uncoordinated violence, both the Animal Liberation Front and the Earth Liberation Front are known for “direct actions” committed by “lone wolves” (or the “elves”). Most of their crimes require little preparation. That said, because the Family represents such a departure from the uncoordinated violence (lone wolf) model by involving a fairly large number of persons in a vast conspiracy, we initially suspected that its patterns of preparatory conduct would reflect a longer planning and preparatory cycle than other environmental incidents. But this does not seem to be the case.

We conducted a separate analysis of the Family's preparatory activity for each of its serial attacks. When we compared the confirmed preparatory behaviors in Family incidents with those of other environmental terrorists, we observed a similarly short preparatory cycle. In Figure 3, we present the temporal sequence of each preparatory act for 19 of the 21 incidents committed

by the Family.<sup>16</sup> The data show that only 2 incidents (i.e., Cavel West and Litchfield) included preparatory activity more than 30 days before the attack. Instead, the majority of the precursor activities (60%) took place within 2 days of the attacks. This temporal pattern is similar to that exhibited by other environmental terrorists in our sample, suggesting that the length of attack planning by environmental terrorist groups seems to be independent of organizational structure and size.

However, that unlike environmental attacks that were committed by non-Family terrorists, members of the Family engaged in significant Internet research on potential targets as much as 3 to 4 months in advance of target selection. For example, Jacob Ferguson reportedly conducted reconnaissance on more than 20 fur farms and Bureau of Land Management facilities in the Northwest (Grigoriadis, 2006). Others had similar in-depth knowledge of potential environmental targets in the region because of their extensive earlier participation in the environmental movement. Most members of the Family were not novices: They were already knowledgeable about environmental issues, the corporations and facilities to be targeted, and basic monkey-wrenching tactics. Because these behaviors were not target specific, they were not included in our analysis of preparatory behaviors.

The type of weapon used (usually an incendiary device, sometimes with a timer, sometimes without) did not require the theft of explosive materials or a bomb-making laboratory. In fact, preparation of the typical “vegan jello” involved a 5-gallon bucket filled with gasoline and diesel fuel and a road flare or gas-soaked sponge to ignite the mixture. More complicated versions included a delay timer made from an alarm clock attached to a battery and light filament that heated up and ignited matches or some other source to ignite the explosive material (Government’s Sentencing Memorandum, 2007: 2–18). Because of the ease with which these devices could be made and the volatility and difficulty of storing them, the collection of ingredients and their actual construction usually occurred shortly before the attack. For these reasons, most attacks committed by the Family had a relatively short preparatory cycle. The easily accessible ingredients used and the difficulty of investigating arsons likewise might have contributed to the overall longevity of the group.

### *Discussion*

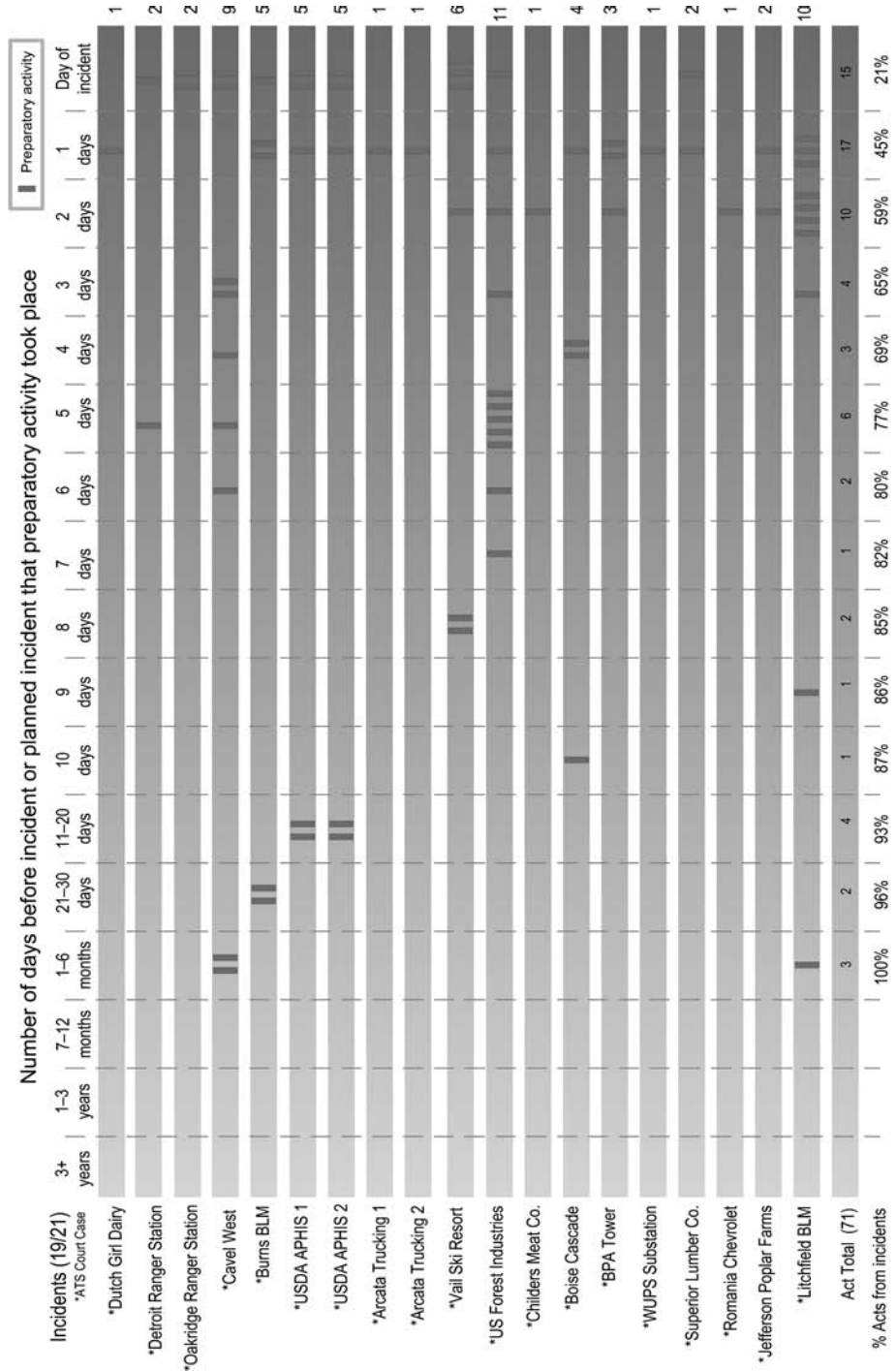
Each of the four predictors of longevity—recruitment, quality of security measures, ideological relevance, and government intervention—played a role in the life span of the Family. The group committed more than a score of terrorist-related arsons for 6 years and then survived another 4 years before being indicted and convicted. Despite its 4-year hiatus, its initial 6-year run is fairly remarkable among U.S. terrorist groups. Although some others have had similar success (e.g., the United Freedom Front and the M19CO in particular), the Family must be considered one of the more successful terrorist groups in terms of longevity. It is also noteworthy that all

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16. Temporal measurements were not available for the other 2 incidents.

FIGURE 3

Temporal distribution of pre-incident activities of "the Family"



\* Temporal data on two of the incidents could not be found.

of these groups were leftist in orientation.<sup>17</sup> Demographically, these groups were much better educated than members of other groups and included street-smart criminals with lower class backgrounds (Corley, Smith, and Damphousse, 2005; Smith and Damphousse, 2008; Smith and Morgan, 1994). Whether this combination caused their longevity is debatable, but the correlation is unquestionable.

Recruitment within the Family was unique. Most terrorist groups in the United States that chose to continue adding members after becoming active in terrorism quickly found themselves infiltrated by law-enforcement authorities or informants that brought the organization to an abrupt end (Smith, 1994). Those who added new members after they had started using terrorist methods (e.g., the Order) inducted people with little or no experience in violent extremism. The Family was an exception to this pattern. New members continued to be recruited for specific terrorist attacks and allowed to participate in Book Club meetings on into the final year of the group's terror spree in 2001. However, the Family added personnel with established histories of active participation in direct action in other venues. Most additions to the Family were seasoned environmental extremists who had been arrested numerous times at demonstrations. They were known by Family members to be "true believers" in the cause.

Perhaps because of the educational backgrounds of many members, training in operations and security was exceptional within the group. The Book Club meetings provided training not only in operational tactics but also in secure communications. In addition to Jennifer Kolar's expertise in communications software and the use of encryption techniques, Darren Thurston (who was also the primary publicist for the Animal Liberation Front during this time) taught the group "how to use 'dead drops' (anonymous e-mail accounts with unsent messages stored in the draft folder) for communicating secret messages" (U.S. Government Sentencing Memorandum, 2007: 134).

Tactically, the group wisely committed crimes (primarily arson) that are difficult to investigate. Although not the primary reason for the group's eventual demise, the repeated use of similar timers on the incendiary devices eventually aided prosecutors in linking some of the crimes together. William Rodgers' belief that investigators had connected his timing devices to some of his writings led him to post instructions on how to manufacture these devices on the Web. He reasoned that this posting would allow him to claim that others had simply picked up his techniques from the Web and that they were being used by numerous "elves." Federal investigators did not believe that story.

Although the Family's commitment to environmentalism cannot be questioned, many members eventually began to question the relevance of their tactics. As Grigoriadis (2006: 13)

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17. Although the FBI lists environmental terror in the "single issue" category, many subtle characteristics of these groups suggest links to leftism. In addition to David Foreman's assessment, they most resemble leftist groups from the 1970s and 1980s demographically; the Animal Liberation Front clearly incorporates the internationally recognized symbol for anarchism in its logo; both the Animal Liberation Front and the Earth Liberation Front refer to their terrorist behaviors as "direct actions," an interesting descriptive reminiscent of the leftist Baader-Meinhof spin-off group in France that called itself "Directe Action"; and many of the Family members were also affiliated with the anarchist movement in Eugene, Oregon.

noted, “every single place they burned down had been rebuilt—even Vail, which was insured for the entire damage—was up and running in a manner of months and was expanded in exactly the ways environmentalists had been protesting. Even some of the hardcore members, including Kevin Tubbs (the Dog), began to see their biggest action as a dismal failure.” Others, however, like Daniel McGowan, never lamented the failure of these actions, claiming instead “the victory is in the . . . publicity” (U.S. Government Sentencing Memorandum, 2007: 107). Despite McGowan’s optimistic outlook, the Family was wracked by ideological discontent in its later years. In addition, many members simply did not like each other; discussions of altered communiqés, sexual infidelity, and abusive relationships came to consume much of the time at Book Club meetings.

Ultimately, fear about, and actual commitment of, government resources to investigate the string of Family arsons led to their demise. When Jacob Ferguson’s name was incorrectly linked to the arson of SUVs at the Romania Chevrolet Truck dealership March 2001, members of the Family feared the worst. Within a few months, the group disbanded. Although some members continued to affiliate with one another by providing financial assistance, false identification papers, and the like, the group ended its series of attacks after the October 2001 Bureau of Land Management horse corral arson.

Although the fear of arrest halted its activities, the Family was actually somewhat premature in believing that the government had marshaled its vast resources against them. FBI resources were committed primarily to preempting *international* terrorism after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The number of FBI joint terrorism task forces more than doubled and the number of federal agents assigned to counterterrorism increased dramatically (White, 2009). Once the international threat was assessed and contained, however, these resources were again free to combat domestic terrorism—and environmental terrorism was at the top of the list (Jarboe, 2002). Jacob Ferguson—the hard-rocking, drug-addicted musician and prolific anarchist arsonist—became the target of investigative pressure. By 2004, he had cracked and, under the threat of a lifetime in prison, agreed to cooperate fully in the investigation.

Although Jacob Ferguson had been involved in more acts of terrorism attributed to the Family than anyone else, he received the most lenient sentence for his crimes—2 years probation. Since Attorney General William French Smith issued new guidelines in 1983, FBI investigations on terrorism have concentrated on “beheading” terrorist organizations. Despite Ferguson’s longstanding and fervent participation, he was not recognized as the leader of the operation. Others—like William Rodgers, Joseph Dibee, Stan Meyerhof, Kevin Tubbs, Jonathan Paul, and Darren Thurston—were observed as more important figures in the environmental movement whose convictions were more likely to have a deterrent effect on people contemplating violence. Rodgers committed suicide while in jail awaiting trial and Dibee remains a fugitive. Of the remaining defendants, Meyerhof and Tubbs were sentenced to 13 years in prison and the other defendants were sentenced to 5 to 9 years. Compared with other people convicted through FBI terrorism investigations, these sentences are relatively light. How these prosecutions and

failures to capture Dibee, Overaker, and other Family members will affect people considering environmental extremism remains to be determined.

## Conclusions

As part of three NIJ projects, temporal and spatial data were collected on 325 terrorism incidents in the United States from 1980 to 2004. Approximately three fourths of these incidents were designated “official” acts of terrorism in FBI annual reports. More than 3,000 spatial measurements and 1,300 temporal measurements were collected during the course of these projects, allowing comparisons between various groups regarding their planning behaviors and the spatial distribution of these acts. The Family perpetrated 21 of these officially designated acts of U.S. terrorism and provides an opportunity to examine issues involving both their longevity and their preparatory processes.

We examined many factors that have affected U.S. terrorist groups in the past to determine whether they influenced the longevity or demise of this particular environmental group. In general, we found that three of the four factors we examined—recruitment practices, security measures, and ideological relevance—contributed positively to the group’s ability to survive as long as it did. In particular, limiting recruitment to those immersed in the violent fringes of the environmental movement—most of whom already demonstrate a willingness to engage in illegal “direct actions”—combined with some fairly sophisticated and secure means of communication, seem to be important contributors to the group’s survival. However, like most groups who have engaged in terrorism in the United States, the government eventually was able to intervene successfully.

Finally, the Family is unique among environmental groups in that it involved a fairly large conspiracy, exhibiting organizational behaviors unlike most other environmental cases investigated by the FBI. Nevertheless, the group’s temporal behavior patterns are similar to other environmental terrorism groups. They had relatively short planning cycles per incident, which suggests that the type of incident committed (e.g., improvised incendiary bombings) is a more important predictor of the length of the preparatory process than is organizational structure. This finding is of course not conclusive, but it suggests that more research on this subject could be useful—for theoretical development as well as for informing practical intervention guidelines.

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# Critical events in the life trajectories of domestic extremist white supremacist groups

## A case study analysis of four violent organizations

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### **Research Summary**

*This study examines the evolution of four domestic far-right racist organizations: Aryan Nations, National Alliance, Public Enemy Number 1 (PEN1), and Oklahoma Constitutional Militia (OCM). Information about the groups was compiled through open-source documents, including scholarly, government, watch-group, and media accounts. We compared the changes that occurred in these organizations and found that they were influenced by contextual and organizational variables. We focused primarily on the rise of the groups. Three organizations experienced growth and longevity because they (1) had able leadership that set forth a clear ideological message and goals, (2) undertook concrete actions to advance their ideology and goals as well as had the finances necessary for this, (3) took advantage of political opportunities, and (4) were internally cohesive. Conversely,*

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*the OCM's leader displayed poor judgment, and the group did not set forth a coherent message, conduct successful actions, or take advantage of opportunities. The OCM neither grew nor amounted to an important extremist organization. We also examined the fall of the organizations. Three groups declined because of organizational instability and/or responses by law enforcement and nonstate actors, such as watch groups. PENI—despite periodic internal debates about its mission—has avoided organizational instability and continues to grow.*

### **Policy Implications**

*Law-enforcement analysts must consider how critical incidents affect a group and account for organizational level variables that denote the group's strength. Understanding these organizations is like hitting a moving target. Analysts must engage in dynamic analyses because changes in the factors outlined above may cause a group to increase or decrease in strength and potential to commit violent acts. Although law-enforcement (and watch-group) responses can eliminate violent groups, authorities must be conscious of possible backlash effects. Law enforcement should use harsh responses only as a last resort. Simultaneous with police and watch-group actions, the government should reassure noncriminal movement members that their rights will be protected and encourage them to join the political process. Anti-extremist strategies should challenge the groups' ideologies and stress that violence will not be tolerated. Strategies that prevent the crimes these groups commit (e.g., situational crime prevention) could disrupt the groups, preempt harsh police responses, and thus avoid possible backlash effects. Finally, the authorities should focus on all criminal activities—including terrorist strikes and nonviolent and nonideological crimes—these organizations commit. This strategy could expand our theoretical explanations for group differences and help law enforcement establish priorities for responding to and preventing future terrorist activities.*

### **Keywords**

*domestic terrorism, far-right extremism, political violence, racist organizations*

This study examines the evolution of four racist far-right domestic organizations:<sup>1</sup> Aryan Nations, National Alliance, Public Enemy Number 1 (PEN1), and Oklahoma Constitutional Militia (OCM). Although all the groups are racist and antigovernment, they differ in their beliefs, religions, and criminal activities. We focus primarily on the rise of the groups. Three organizations grew significantly, whereas OCM did not and was viewed as a fringe group by most movement members. OCM serves as an ideal comparison group for documenting factors critical to the rise of racist extremist organizations. We also examine the fall of the organizations. Three groups declined, but PEN1 has not and continues to grow. PEN1 serves as a comparison group for documenting factors critical to the fall of far-right racist groups. These differences matter because they reveal different threat levels necessary for terrorism or violent crime, as well as suggest different law-enforcement policies when confronting these groups (Duffy and Brantley, 1998).

It is important to investigate such groups because, although international terrorist groups like Al Qaeda threaten public safety, the far right also poses a serious threat. Freilich, Chermak, and Simone's (in press; see also Riley, Treverton, Wilson, and Davis, 2005) survey of state police agencies (in which 37 states, or 74%, returned surveys) found that more responding states reported the presence of far-right militia (92%), neo-Nazi (89%), and racist skinheads (89%) in their jurisdictions than Islamic Jihadi extremists (65%). Other studies indicate that domestic attacks outnumber international attacks in the United States by 7 to 1 (LaFree, Dugan, Fogg, and Scott, 2006), and that the far right represents a danger to domestic security (Chermak, 2002; Freilich, Pichardo-Almanzar, and Rivera, 1999; Hewitt, 2003).

Freilich and Chermak's (2008; see also Chermak, Freilich, and Shemtob, in press; Gruenewald et al., in press) ongoing U.S. Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) study has identified more than 4,300 criminal events, which include more than 275 homicide incidents committed by far rightists since 1990. This study is unique because, unlike most research that focuses on a narrow range of "terrorist" incidents, the ECDB examines any crime committed by at least one far rightist. The ECDB tracks violent and nonviolent, as well as ideological and nonideological,

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1. Defining the domestic far right is not easy because no universally accepted definition exists and prior research has not sufficiently addressed this issue. Drawing from our systematic review of studies (Gruenewald, Freilich, and Chermak, in press) published on far-right extremism in general and its association with political crimes in particular—including important works that offer typologies, definitions, and descriptions (see, e.g., Barkun, 1990; Berlet and Lyons, 2000; Coates, 1987; Duffy and Brantley, 1998; Durham, 2003; Kaplan, 1993, 1996; Mullins, 1988; Smith, 1994; Sprinzak, 1998; see also Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, 1997; Weinberg, 1993)—we rely on the following description. The domestic far right is composed of individuals or groups that subscribe to aspects of these ideals: They are fiercely nationalistic (as opposed to universal and international in orientation), antiglobal, suspicious of centralized federal authority, reverent of individual liberty (especially their right to own guns and be free of taxes), believe in conspiracy theories that involve a grave threat to national sovereignty and/or personal liberty, believe that one's personal and/or national "way of life" is under attack and is either already lost or that the threat is imminent (sometimes such beliefs are amorphous and vague, but for some the threat is from a specific ethnic, racial, or religious group), and believe in the need to be prepared for an attack by participating in paramilitary preparations and training and survivalism. It is important to note that mainstream conservative movements and the mainstream Christian right are not included.

crimes. For example, both an antigovernment bombing committed by a militia group and a profit-motivated drug sale committed by neo-Nazi skinheads would be included in the database. The homicide incidents in the ECDB (ideologically motivated and nonideologically motivated) claimed more than 530 fatalities (and more than 360 fatalities when excluding the Oklahoma City bombing). More than 250 additional individuals (excluding the Oklahoma City bombing) were injured during these events. Far rightists killed more than 47 law-enforcement and private security personnel in the line of duty in more than 35 incidents. At least 22 far rightists were killed by law-enforcement personnel since 1990 (Freilich and Chermak, 2008).

We first discuss our selection of groups for analysis and comparison, the data we used to examine the groups, and our comparative case study method. Next, we examine the origins of the four organizations as well as the critical events that influenced their evolutions. Our discussion section uses the organizational, social movement, and terrorism literatures to place our findings in theoretical and empirical context. We conclude with a discussion of the policy implications of our findings.

### **Selection of Groups, Data, and Method**

We used Berlet and Vysotsky's (2006) typology that divides far-right organizations into three categories: religious, political, and youth cultural. One group was selected to represent each category (Aryan Nations, National Alliance, and PEN1) to assess different perspectives on the events of interest (Creswell, 2007; Snow and Trom, 2002). These groups are not a representative sample, but we were interested in uncovering factors related to groups becoming long lasting and successful. We therefore selected groups that lasted more than 20 years and at one point were either the leading racist group in the country or had one of the largest memberships in its category. We selected a fourth group (OCM) that was unsuccessful, small in number, and lasted only 1 year to serve as a "comparison" group. Ideally, we would have selected three unsuccessful groups (one in each category), but we limited ourselves due to space constraints. We also examined the decline of the groups. Three of the organizations declined, but because PEN1 has continued to grow, it serves as the comparison group for determining factors critical to the fall of far-right groups. We focused on only far-right racist groups. Future research should consider whether our findings apply to other ideological groups, such as far leftists or single-issue extremists (e.g., anti-abortion or animal- or environmental-rights extremists). We describe the four groups we selected below.

#### *Groups Selected*

Religious white supremacist groups endorse a spiritual belief system and require their members and supporters to practice the religion (Berlet and Vysotsky, 2006). These groups use religion to justify their racist ideology and are led by leaders with religious titles (Barkun, 1990, 1997). Such organizations construct the world into good (whites) versus evil (nonwhites and Jews) and believe that an apocalyptic war is inevitable. We selected the Aryan Nations to represent the

religious category because it has existed for more than 20 years and it was the preeminent racist group in the mid-to-late 1980s (Balch, 2006; Wakin, 2004). Although leaders of the Aryan Nations ran for political office, the group emphasized religion (Berlet and Vysotsky, 2006) and its leader, Butler, was a Christian Identity pastor. The group's religious interpretations promote violence against Jews, minorities, and the government (Hoffman, 1995).

Political white supremacist groups endorse neo-Nazi ideology and favor an authoritarian government. These groups espouse "traditional values"; categorize individuals into "in groups" and "out groups" based on race, religion, or citizenship; and delegitimize the out group. Political groups seek to overthrow the government (Berlet and Vysotsky, 2006) and they spread their message by distributing literature and organizing rallies (Berbrier, 2000; Blazak, 2001; Futrell, Simi, and Gottschalk, 2006). We chose the National Alliance to represent the political category because it was the leading neo-Nazi organization in the 1990s and it has existed for more than three decades (Gardell, 2003; Michael, 2003b). The group seeks to replace the government with a national socialist regime. Although William Pierce, the group's founder, emphasized spirituality through his creation of Cosmotheism, belief in it was not required (Gardell, 2003). The National Alliance stresses Aryan superiority from an evolutionary standpoint. The group claims that Jews prevent Aryans from achieving their evolutionary destiny by promoting non-white immigration and multicultural policies (Whitsel, 1995).

Youth-cultural white supremacist groups stress subcultural affiliations that include listening to hate rock and black metal music, wearing a certain style of clothes, and displaying Nazi and white supremacist symbols. It also entails adopting a racist ideology and some members possess a willingness to use violence (Berlet and Vysotsky, 2006). Youth are exposed to this subculture through friends, hate rock concerts, and Internet sites (Blazak, 2001; Futrell et al., 2006; Hamm, 1993; Moore, 1993). The ideals and social norms are reinforced by older members. We selected PEN1 to represent the youth subculture category because it has existed for more than 20 years and is one of the largest skinhead groups currently operating in the United States (Simi, Smith, and Reeser, 2008). We therefore also use this group as a "control" group to compare with the three organizations that declined.

We selected a fourth group that never experienced growth to serve as a "control" group to compare with the groups that grew. We needed to find a group that—although unsuccessful—attracted the attention of open sources. We selected OCM because it lasted only 1 year, consisted of four members, and was unsuccessful in its criminal plans. However, the threat posed by the organization was large. The arrest and trial of the group's members attracted attention and we uncovered significant open-source materials on it. This group is also categorized as a religious organization because its members practiced Christian Identity. The organization was apocalyptic and believed that a Jewish cabal was conspiring to take over the United States and establish a new world order. The group's religious objectives guided their decision to commit violence through bombing certain government, Jewish, homosexual, and abortion targets.

### *Data and Method*

We researched the four groups using 22 search engines (Lexis-Nexis; Proquest; Yahoo; Google; Copernic; News Library; Infotrac; Google Scholar; Amazon; Google U.S. Government; Federation of American Scientists; Google Video; Center for the Study of Intelligence; Surf Wax; Dogpile; Mamma; Librarians' Internet Index; Scirus; All the Web; Google News; Google Blog; and Homeland Security Digital Library) and we reviewed terrorism databases (e.g., the American Terrorism Study, the U.S. Extremist Crime Database Study, and the Global Terrorism Database), official sources (e.g., Federal Bureau of Investigation reports and congressional testimonies), and watch-group reports (e.g., Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center) to uncover detailed information on them. The information came from a variety of sources and increased the likelihood that there was no systematic bias operating either for or against the groups (Freilich and Pridemore, 2006, 2007). The resulting information comprised media accounts, government documents, court records, videos, blogs, books, watch-group reports, movement-produced materials, and scholarly accounts.

We used this information to complete case studies on each group, highlighting their ideology, structure, leadership, and membership. We were interested in how the groups changed over time, especially the critical incidents that affected their size and strength. We drafted a timeline of these factors and expanded the comparative historical research method to make comparisons across the organizations (Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth, 1992; see also Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007). We explain our method in more detail in the Discussion section. We first examine the evolution of the four groups.

### **Group Case Studies**

#### *Religious Group: The Rise and Fall of the Aryan Nations*

The Aryan Nations was founded by Richard Girnt Butler in 1978 (Balch, 2006; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, 1997). Butler was an aeronautical engineer from California and a U.S. Air Force veteran (Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, 1997). He became racially conscious as a result of his parents (Ezekiel, 1995) and he embraced white superiority after observing the caste system during World War II while being stationed in India (Aho, 1990; Ezekiel, 1995; Wakin, 2004). In the 1960s, Butler met Wesley Swift, a Christian Identity pastor (Balch, 2006). Butler commented that meeting Swift "was the total turning point in my life.... He had the answers I was trying to find" (Aho, 1990: 68). After Swift's death, Butler took over his church. In 1973, Butler purchased 20 acres near Hayden Lake, Idaho, and created his own Identity church. In 1978, after a few failed endeavors, Butler created the Aryan Nations to serve as his church's political arm (Balch, 2006).

The Aryan Nations grew quickly and, by the early-to-mid-1980s, was the preeminent white supremacist organization. The organization grew because its unchallenged leader set forth a clear ideological message, committed actions to further the ideology, took advantage of political openings, and kept the group unified. It was a religious group that espoused the theology



of Christian Identity: Aryans are the true chosen people, Jews are imposters—the offspring of the devil’s union with Eve—and nonwhites are subhuman (Barkun, 1997). The Aryan Nations justified violence against the government and nonwhites. Importantly, it offered an action plan, the “10% solution,” which refers to their goal of establishing a white-only homeland in the five states of the Northwest. Butler claimed that the 10% solution could be achieved by recruiting supporters in Idaho (and then Washington, Oregon, Montana, and Wyoming) to gain power (Balch, 2006).

The Aryan Nations undertook concrete actions to spread its message and achieve its goals. In July 1980, the group established the annual Aryan World Congresses (AWC) at its compound with the goal of attracting white separatists to move to the Northwest. The congresses focused on perceived injustices by affirmative action and multiculturalism to the white working class (Balch, 2006). Attendance grew from 200 AWC attendees in 1982 to 500 attendees in 1983 (Balch, 2006). AWC catapulted the Aryan Nations into a highly respected organization in the movement and helped recruit members (Moore, 1993). The group actively recruited from various segments of the racist far right (Aho, 1990; Balch, 2006; Dobratz and Shanks-Miele, 1997; Moore, 1993; Seymour, 1991; Smith, 1994), struggling farmers (Aho, 1990), and the incarcerated (Moore, 1993; Ridgeway, 1995; Smith, 1994).

The Aryan Nations took advantage of political opportunities such as the June 1983 killing of Gordon Kahl, a noted Christian Identity tax protestor. Kahl killed two law-enforcement agents who tried to arrest him. After months as a fugitive, he was surrounded by the authorities and became engaged in a shootout that killed a third officer and resulted in Kahl’s own death. Many far rightists saw Kahl as a martyr and his death angered white racialists and radicalized elements of the Aryan Nations (Corcoran, 1990). The Aryan Nations capitalized on this and the largest AWC (i.e., 500 attendees) took place 1 month after Kahl’s death in 1983. During this AWC, Robert Jay Mathews formed a group called “The Order” (also known as Brüder Schweigen—Silent Brotherhood) that consisted of members of the Aryan Nations and National Alliance (Flynn and Gerhardt, 1990; Hamm, 2007a; Martinez and Gunthier, 1999). Mathews formed the group to foment a revolution and obtain funds for various racist organizations (Balch, 2006; Gardell, 2003; Ridgeway, 1995). Government documents suggest that Mathews was encouraged to form The Order by Butler, as well as by the leading racists Louis Beam, Robert Miles, and Jim Ellison (Smith, personal communication, July 2008). The Order launched a crime spree consisting of a counterfeiting operation at the Aryan Nations compound, murder, and armored car robberies. These crimes garnered millions of dollars but the group was short lived: Mathews was killed in 1984 in a shootout with federal authorities and his followers were arrested (Dobratz and Shanks-Miele, 1997; Flynn and Gerhardt, 1990; Hamm, 2007a; Martinez and Gunthier, 1999; Schlatter, 2006). Law enforcement viewed The Order as an Aryan Nations spin off, which led to increased attention from government agents and resulted in Butler’s prosecution for conspiring to overthrow the U.S. government (Balch, 2006).

Although the Aryan Nations rose to the top of the white supremacist movement in the 1980s, it declined during the late 1980s and 1990s because of internal dissension and actions taken against it by law enforcement and watch groups. First, although the AWC played a part in the group's rise, it eventually undermined the organization. The cohesion of the Aryan Nations unraveled when skinheads and neo-Nazis began to attend congresses in the late 1980s. The skinheads and neo-Nazis were young, male, and partial to alcohol, drugs, and violence. They brought an unpredictability that made many residents of the compound uncomfortable and their presence also increased law-enforcement interest in the group (Balch, 2006). The initial core of families that lived on Butler's compound moved away, causing disorganization within the group. The emphasis on Nazism drove away nonresident Christian Identity adherents. Less than half of the Identity faithful who attended the 1987 AWC also attended the 1988 congress (Seymour, 1991). The instability was exacerbated by the Aryan Nations being a poor organization that received income from membership dues and some merchandising, never collected more than \$100,000 in a year, and could not provide compensation for most staff positions (Balch, 2006). Consequently, Butler's inner circle changed frequently, which undermined the group's stability.

Another critical factor was the attention the Aryan Nations received from law enforcement because of the group's crimes and conflicts with the police (Balch, 2006), which caused suspicion and mistrust among members (Seymour, 1991). Subsequent terrorist and criminal activities by those associated with the Aryan Nations (i.e., The Order II and The Aryan Republican Army) only increased law enforcement's interest in the group and consequently the paranoia among its members. Indeed, the Aryan Nations experienced difficulty drawing people to their annual congresses because Butler's compound was thought to be infiltrated by government agents as well as by hidden microphones and cameras (Balch, 2006; Gardell, 2003). The Aryan Nations limped through the 1990s with even fewer members and smaller annual congresses (Balch, 2006). The final blow came in 1998 when Victoria Keenan and her son were assaulted and shot at by Aryan Nation guards when their car backfired while they drove on a road near the group's compound. This incident led to a lawsuit brought by the Southern Poverty Law Center on behalf of the Keenans that resulted in a \$6.3 million judgment against Butler and the Aryan Nations that bankrupted the group. Butler was forced to sell the 20-acre compound to help satisfy the judgment (Michael, 2003b). The civil suit also introduced greater dissension within the organization.

Though Butler continued to organize the AWC (on available camp grounds) and to run the Aryan Nations from a small home in Idaho purchased for him by wealthy sympathizers, attendance continued to fall (Balch, 2006). In August 2001, Butler appointed Harold Ray Redfeairn as the new leader of the Aryan Nations. Redfeairn, along with August Kreis III (former propaganda minister), attempted to lead the group away from Butler and Butler expelled them. Redfeairn subsequently returned to Butler's Aryan Nations. Kreis, however, led the Aryan Nations chapter in Lexington, South Carolina (Cable News Network, 2005). After Redfeairn

died in 2003 and Butler died in 2004, two competing Aryan Nations emerged. One is led by August Kreis (now located in Florida), and a second is led by Jonathan Williams in Alabama. Both organizations remain small, and each claims to be the true continuation of the Aryan Nations (Schlatter, 2006).<sup>2</sup>

*Political Group: The Rise and Fall of the National Alliance*

William Luther Pierce III founded the National Alliance in 1974 in Washington, DC. Pierce had been a physics professor at Oregon State University from 1962 to 1965 (Whitsel, 1995), when he became alarmed by increasing immigration and civil rights advances that he saw as Jewish-created problems (Gardell, 2003; Michael, 2003a). He read books about Aryan genetic superiority (Griffin 2001; Whitsel, 1995) and joined the John Birch Society, though he left because of its unwillingness to embrace anti-Semitism (Whitsel, 1995). Pierce moved to Washington, DC, in 1966 and became the editor of George Rockwell's American Nazi Party's publication, *National Socialist World* (Gardell, 2003; Michael, 2003a; Smith, 1994; Whitsel, 1995). Pierce left the organization in 1970 (Michael, 2003a) and joined Willis Carto's National Youth Alliance but soon left because of personality conflicts (Whitsel, 1995). Pierce created the National Alliance in 1974 (Michael 2003a; Whitsel, 1995).

The National Alliance did not grow until the 1990s. The group rose because Pierce—who was a strong leader—set forth a coherent ideology, committed acts to extend that ideology, took advantage of political opportunities, and kept the group unified. Pierce was a prolific writer and was known as an ideologue within the movement (Griffin, 2001; Michael, 2003a; Whitsel, 1995). He set forth his group's neo-Nazi political views in many venues, but his most meaningful statement was a widely circulated novel. In 1978, Pierce self-published *The Turner diaries*, which was a novel authored under the pseudonym Andrew McDonald (Michael, 2003b). *The Turner diaries* involves a protagonist, Earl Turner, who launched a violent white revolution against the U.S. government. This revolution resulted in a race war in North America and the extermination of nonwhites. Pierce chose fiction to present his views because he thought it would reach a wider audience and have a bigger impact than a dry political pamphlet (Griffin, 2001).

Importantly, the influence of the novel grew over time. Each time the perpetrators of serious acts of violence were linked to the novel, Pierce's ideological message and action plan received extensive media coverage (Smith, 1994). This increased the National Alliance's popularity and influence. The British newspaper, the *Guardian*, reported that approximately 500,000 copies of *The Turner diaries* had been sold and that sales were strongly boosted as a result of the 1995 Oklahoma bombing (Sutherland, 2000). Indeed, Timothy McVeigh was a big fan of *The Turner diaries* and was carrying passages in his car when driving away from the scene of that bombing

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2. However, these two Aryan Nations differ. Williams's Aryan Nations is more attached to the Christian Identity faith. Kreiss's organization is less religious and openly praises Islamic terrorists and Osama bin Laden. Williams disagrees with this viewpoint and commented that whereas, "I sympathize with Arabs, yes, sympathize because their lands have been stolen by Jews... we have nothing for them [Arabs]. The simple fact is that they aren't white" (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2006).

(Cable News Network, 1997). Mathews used Pierce's novel as a blueprint for the actions of The Order during the 1980s (Whitsel, 1995). Similarly, Pierce's novel influenced David Copeland's (the "London Nail-bomber") bombing spree in 1999 (Michael, 2003a).

The popularity of *The Turner diaries* increased awareness of Pierce's other ideological writings. In the essay "Who rules America," Pierce asserted that the Jews use their control of the mass media to promote individualism and prevent whites from pursuing their interests (Michael, 2003b; Natvan, 2004). According to Pierce, the first step in the revolution was to reeducate white U.S. citizens (Michael, 2003a). He therefore took concrete action and created his own publishing company, National Vanguard Books, in 1987. This company expanded from selling books and tabloids to selling cassettes and videos and was vital to the rise of the National Alliance because it promulgated the group's message and raised its exposure within the white supremacist movement. Significantly, the company generated income that allowed the group to undertake additional activities (Anti-Defamation League, 2005b).<sup>3</sup> It influenced Pierce's decision to purchase record production companies, such as Resistance Records in the 1990s. The National Alliance used these companies to disseminate its message to, and increase its membership from, skinhead and neo-Nazi youth (Anti-Defamation League, 2005a; Notable Names Database, 2008; Prejudice Institute, 2005). The record companies helped the group generate a yearly income of \$1 million or more (Anti-Defamation League, 2000).

The National Alliance also took advantage of political opportunities. The decline of the Aryan Nations—then the leading racist group—in the late 1980s provided an opening for Pierce in the 1990s. Like other far-right groups, the National Alliance also profited from the Waco and Ruby Ridge incidents, fears over government heavy handedness, and concerns about gun rights throughout the 1990s (Wright, 2007). Finally, the last critical factor in the group's rise was its strong internal cohesion. According to the indictment against Miles, Butler, and Beam for seditious conspiracy, before he was killed, Mathews met with Pierce and gave him \$50,000 (Smith, personal communication, July 2008). Shortly afterward in 1985, Pierce purchased 346 acres in Hillsboro, West Virginia, for \$95,000 cash (Griffin, 2001; Hamm, 1993; Whitsel, 1995). Pierce used the land to create a communal home for members (Whitsel, 1995). Although the National Alliance did not recruit many whites to move to Hillsboro, it provided a place for the group's staff to live and work. The compound enabled the National Alliance to remain stable and to develop its businesses while keeping costs low, which created a profitable organization. Pierce's leadership kept the group unified. Pierce surrounded himself with intelligent people and, based on his experience with Rockwell's American Nazi Party, he avoided hiring uneducated skinheads. Instead Pierce hired educated professionals (Griffin, 2001). He strictly enforced the rules of the organization and made sure there were no factions within the group. Under Pierce's leadership, the National Alliance was a well-funded, stable organization that grew from a few members in the 1970s to 2,500 members from at least 30 states in 2000 (Anti-Defamation League, 2005b; Building Democracy, 2002; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2002).

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3. Initially, the group had little money and Pierce relied on his wife's income (Griffin, 2001).

Pierce's death and subsequent internal strife caused the fall of the National Alliance. After Pierce's death, Erich "The Aryan Barbarian" Gliebe became chairman of the national organization (Baysinger 2006; Michael, 2003b) and chief executive officer of Resistance Records (Prejudice Institute, 2005). Soon after, conflict developed among Gliebe and others over financial and other matters (Baysinger, 2006; Jabpage, 2003). Gliebe fired Billy Roper, deputy membership coordinator (Michael, 2003b; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2003), who went on to create a new group: White Revolution. In 2005, Kevin Alfred Strom, another leading member, resigned in order to found a group called National Vanguard (Newsgroups, 2006). Strom was soon arrested and pled guilty to a non-movement-related child pornography crime (Freilich and Chermak, 2008). In June 2006, Gliebe resigned and appointed Shaun Walker to succeed him (Anti-Defamation League, 2005c). But Walker's reign was short lived because he was convicted of civil rights violations and was sentenced to 87 months in prison (Freilich and Chermak, 2008). Gliebe returned to lead the National Alliance.

Actions by the Southern Poverty Law Center (a watch group) and law enforcement added to the National Alliance's troubles. Shortly after Pierce's death, the watch group published tapes of a secret meeting in which Pierce referred to other white supremacist groups as "freaks," "weaklings," and "human morons" (Rab, 2006). As word spread throughout the movement, skinheads and neo-Nazis—which compose the largest segment of Resistance Records' customer base—began to boycott the National Alliance and its record production company. During this time, the National Alliance became a poor organization with only a handful of staffers and less than 300 dues-paying members (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2006).

### *Youth Culture Group: The Rise of PEN1*

PEN1 grew out of the punk rock scene in Long Beach and Huntington Beach in Southern California during the 1980s. Youth were attracted by the music, drugs, alcohol, fashion, and the beliefs and symbols of neo-Nazism (e.g., swastikas). By the mid 1980s, one group of young whites evolved into a gang, "Rudimentary PEN1," which was named after a punk band. Other than the name, the band had no link to the gang. PEN1 was also formed to protect white youths from minority gangs in neighborhoods that were changing demographically (Simi et al., 2008). Many of PEN1's initial members had time, money, and a desire to emulate the skinheads from England (Anti-Defamation League, 2007; Edds, 2008; Good, 2007; Moxley, 2007). Two influential leaders emerged: Brody Davis, who wanted PEN1 to be a white supremacist organization that rejected drug use and nonideological crimes; and Donald Reed "Popeye" Mazza, who although he was an ideological racist, favored committing profit-motivated crimes such as drug trafficking. Mazza won control of PEN1 and charted its course (Anti-Defamation League, 2007; Moxley, 2007).

PEN1 has grown into one of the largest skinhead groups in the country (Anti-Defamation League, 2007; Edds, 2008; Good, 2007; Moxley, 2007; Simi et al., 2008). PEN1's rise can be attributed to its clear goals, able leadership, ongoing criminal activities, internal cohesion, and political opportunism. First, PEN1's consistent white supremacist belief system and focus on

nonideological profit-motivated crimes distinguishes it from other white gangs. (Other gangs are either nonracist and are profit motivated or they only focus on extending white supremacist ideology.) PEN1 has not wavered from its path despite periodic debates during the last 20 years about whether it should focus only on profit-seeking crimes or solely advance white supremacist ideology (Simi et al., 2008). In short, PEN1 has remained a racist gang and, although it commits ideological hate crimes (Freilich and Chermak, 2008), it is primarily engaged in profit-motivated crimes (Freilich and Chermak, 2008; Simi et al., 2008). Relatedly, PEN1 has remained a centralized organization and, as discussed below, this is one reason the Aryan Brotherhood prison gang chose to work with it.

PEN1 also took advantage of political opportunities. During PEN1's early years, the Aryan Brotherhood—the leading white neo-Nazi prison gang—was identified as a prison gang by prison authorities and was isolated in special housing units throughout the system. This isolation forced the Aryan Brotherhood to cooperate with the Nazi Low Riders, which is another white racist gang. Because the Nazi Low Riders were not yet labeled a prison gang, they were placed in the general prison population and were able to conduct criminal business both inside and outside the prison system. However, during the 1990s, the Nazi Low Riders also were identified as a prison gang and were thus isolated in special housing units. During this time, an increasing number of PEN1 members entered the prison system after being convicted of various crimes (e.g., drug trafficking, identity theft, and murder). Because PEN1 was not labeled a prison gang by prison authorities, they filled the void left by the Nazi Low Riders. The Aryan Brotherhood also selected PEN1 to assist with its criminal operations because PEN1 “traditionally maintained a small and relatively cohesive leadership” (Simi et al., 2008: 762). The relationship between PEN1 and the Aryan Brotherhood strengthened when PEN1's leader, Donald Mazza, and second-in-command, Dominic Rizzo, were made Aryan Brotherhood “associates” (Anti-Defamation League, 2007; Edds, 2008; Good, 2007; Moxley, 2007; Simi et al., 2008).

These developments enhanced PEN1's clout within the prison system. The group increased its criminal operations, which meant more PEN1 members entering the prison system (Anti-Defamation League, 2001, 2007; Edds, 2008; Good, 2007; Moxley, 2007; Simi et al., 2008). As PEN1's criminal enterprises expanded beyond drug trafficking to auto theft, burglary, property crime, and identity theft, so did its membership base and geographic range, which in turn provided more potential recruits. Recruiting within the prison system became easier and the group has expanded its criminal enterprises by collaborating with other groups, including those with Latino members. Because of PEN1's reputation and growing size, many white inmates joined PEN1 to acquire protection from other ethnic and criminal gangs within the prison system. By 2002, PEN1's membership reached approximately 200 known members. By 2005, the estimate had grown to 400 and some law-enforcement and prison officials believed that the true number might be double that. In 2004, the California Department of Justice reported that PEN1 is “one of the most powerful and fastest-growing gangs inside and outside prison” (Associated Press 2006: 2; see also Anti-Defamation League, 2007; Edds, 2008; Freilich and Chermak, 2008; Good, 2007; Moxley, 2007; Simi et al., 2008).

*Control Group: The Fall of the OCM (Universal Church of God)*

Willie Ray Lampley formed the OCM in 1994. Unlike the groups discussed above—which at times had hundreds or thousands of members—the OCM consisted of only four people: Willie Lampley, his wife Cecilia, Larry Wayne Crow, and John Dare (J.D.) Baird (Ferguson, 1995; Fink, 1995; Pitcavage, 2001; Swindell, 1995). Lampley was a follower of Christian Identity who created a church in 1975 called the Universal Church of God and referred to himself as “Prophet of the Most High” of the church (de Armond, 1996). In the 1980s and early 1990s, he published a magazine and wrote letters to politicians, such as the governors of California and Idaho, warning them that their state was noncompliant with God’s law and threatening violence if they did not change course (Anti-Defamation League, 1995).

A significant amount of open-source information is available about the arrest and conviction of the members of the OCM. The organization’s four members were racist and strongly opposed to the federal government. The two key figures—Lampley (the group’s primary actor) and Crow—met and became partners because of their shared religious viewpoints. They attended militia gatherings together, shared racist literature, discussed ideology, and publicized their views through newsletters and the Internet. The OCM lasted for approximately 1 year and had a birth and a death, but no significant rise. The group was negatively affected by Lampley’s lack of leadership ability and criminal sophistication, a convoluted ideological message, and law-enforcement tactics taken in response to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

Lampley had poor organizational leadership skills: He was not a shrewd manager and he was unable to attract a wide following or engage leaders of other groups. Most extremists who came in contact with Lampley shunned him. John Parsons, who was the leader of a national militia umbrella organization called the Tri-States Militia (as well as an FBI informant) said, “I thought Lampley was a complete nut case, and everyone else looked at him the same way.” Other militia members stated that he “spooked even the militia” (Foster, 1996: 2). Lampley also lacked criminal sophistication. In the months after the Oklahoma City bombing, Lampley visited various militia and white supremacist organizations to discuss his bombing plans and to seek support, but instead he was rebuffed (Swindell, 1996). Lampley ignored the fact that law-enforcement officials were interested in militias (especially those that used the Internet to disseminate hateful ideology and recruit new members) after the Oklahoma City bombing (see Sageman, 2008, on the importance of the Internet to the recruitment and radicalization processes). He attempted to harness the Internet’s power by posting messages designed to spread his racist rhetoric and recruit individuals to his plot.

Relatedly, the ideological messages set forth by Lampley were unclear and did not attract supporters. For example, in one Internet message illustrative of his worldview, he emphasized that war was necessary to purge the government out of “his America.”<sup>4</sup> He claimed that he was one of God’s prophets sent to warn others of the impending war and to take the necessary steps

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4. See [albionmonitor.com/12-3-95/lamplaypost.html](http://albionmonitor.com/12-3-95/lamplaypost.html).

to ensure victory. In convoluted reference to Christian Identity teachings, Lampley argued that America is the “land of Ephraim”—essentially, white America—and that Yahweh, the Elohim God of Israel, do not want to go to war but existing sources of evil ensure that war is inevitable. Lampley’s lack of discretion and chosen means of disseminating his unclear message made him visible to law enforcement.

Concurrent with Lampley’s unwise actions, law enforcement increased the amount of attention and resources devoted to right-wing extremist organizations, especially militias (Chermak, 2002). As a result of this increased attention, Lampley, his wife Cecilia, Baird, and Crow were arrested in November 1995 for conspiracy to manufacture and possess a destructive device. Richard Schrum, an undercover informant who volunteered to work for the FBI after the Oklahoma City bombing, had infiltrated Lampley’s militia and secretly recorded conversations (Fink, 1995; Swindell, 1996). Lampley and the others planned on using ammonium nitrate fertilizer bombs to blow up offices of the Anti-Defamation League and Southern Poverty Law Center, abortion clinics, civil rights offices, welfare offices, and gay bars. Law-enforcement officers seized numerous guns and three semiautomatic weapons when making the arrests. It is possible that prior to the Oklahoma City bombing, Lampley and the OCM might have gone unnoticed but, in the months after McVeigh’s actions, law enforcement was paying closer attention and Lampley’s behavior made the group visible to investigators.

## **Comparison and Discussion**

Organizational theorists argue that it is difficult to identify the causes of group growth after it has occurred (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Whetten, 1987). To address this issue, we extended the comparative historical research method (Steinmo et al., 1992; see also Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007). We isolated factors that seem to account for each group’s rise, growth, and decline. We ensured that factors found to be responsible for a group’s rise occurred before the group rose or before the rise accelerated. Similarly, factors responsible for the decline occurred before the decline began or before the decline increased. We listed the factors for each group and then compared the four organizations. We first focus on the rise of the groups.

### *Growth of Groups*

The Aryan Nations, National Alliance, and PEN1 were unique because they achieved considerable growth. Most terrorist and extremist groups do not grow, cannot sustain growth, and exist for less than 1 year (Jones and Libicki, 2008; LaFree and Dugan, in press; Rapoport, 1992). We recently examined all white supremacist organizations that the Southern Poverty Law Center’s annual hate report listed as existing in the United States since 1990. Less than 5% of the 6,000 listed groups existed for at least 3 years (Freilich and Chermak, 2008). It is important to uncover the factors that fuel organizational growth.

Our analysis documented four factors that were critical to the rise of the Aryan Nations, National Alliance, and PEN1 but were not found in our examination of the OCM (the comparison group). The organization (1) was led by a strong leader with a clear ideological agenda,



(2) pursued activities to expand its goals and had the necessary finances, (3) strategically took advantage of political opportunities, and (4) was cohesive. Although we discuss these critical factors separately, they interact. We outline them sequentially, however, as a heuristic device.

*Leadership and ideology.* A strong leader is determined, committed, provides an ideology that justifies certain beliefs or actions, and provides direction on how to achieve the group’s goals (Richardson, 2006; Stern, 2003). All three successful organizations were led by strong leaders who set forth clear ideologies or goals, whereas the unsuccessful OCM leader’s ideological writings were “convoluted.” Table 1 illustrates this.

**T A B L E 1**

**Leadership and ideology**

|                                                                                                | <b>Aryan Nations</b>                                                                                           | <b>National Alliance</b>                                                                                                                                               | <b>PEN1</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>OCM</b>                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Critical factor responsible for group's growth or continued growth and when it occurred</i> | Butler set forth clear ideological message: Christian Identity theology as well as the 10% action plan in 1978 | Pierce set forth a clear ideological message: Pierce's neo-Nazi message received increased attention throughout the 1980s (because of high profile crimes it inspired) | PEN1 has a small cohesive leadership and clear goals: Endorses white supremacist beliefs and focuses on profit crimes (while also engaging in hate crimes) throughout the 1990s and the new millennium<br>Rose in late 1990s and especially 2000+ | Lampley was perceived as a "nut"<br>Ideology was "convoluted," and Lampley's writing (in the 1980s and early 1990s) consisted of rants and threats |
| <i>When group began to rise or continued to rise</i>                                           | Rose in the early and mid 1980s                                                                                | Rose throughout the 1990s                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Never rose                                                                                                                                         |

Notes. PEN1 = Public Enemy Number 1. OCM = Oklahoma Constitutional Militia.

The Aryan Nations was Butler’s brainchild and Pierce was the sole founder of the National Alliance. PEN1 did not find its focus until Mazza took control and currently its leadership is small and cohesive. Butler formed the Aryan Nations in 1978 and promulgated Christian Identity claims that whites are locked in an apocalyptic cosmic battle with the devil (Jews) and subhuman nonwhites. More practically, Butler offered the 10% solution that called for the establishment of a white-only homeland in the Pacific Northwest. The Aryan Nations began to grow and attendance at its AWC increased in the early and mid 1980s (Goodrick-Clark, 2002; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2004). Pierce was a strong leader who consistently provided explanations, justifications, and direction. He advocated revolution, a white-only homeland, and he sought to institute a national socialist government. Pierce’s message received increased attention throughout the 1980s owing to crimes it inspired. The National Alliance began to grow in the 1990s.

PEN1 embraced white supremacy and parroted the famous statement, “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children,” which was coined by David Lane (member of The Order). Although PEN1 did not primarily pursue ideological goals, its members

committed violent hate crimes (Freilich and Chermak, 2008). Importantly, the group’s mission has consistently focused on profit-motivated crimes since its inception. The group’s growth accelerated after 2000. Conversely, although Lampley embraced Christian Identity, his ideological utterances were usually incomprehensible. Most of Lampley’s writings were rants and threats against politicians. The OCM never grew but instead remained a four-person group.

**T A B L E 2**

**Concrete actions and financial stability**

|                                                                                                | <b>Aryan Nations</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>National Alliance</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>PEN1</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>OCM</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Critical factor responsible for group’s growth or continued growth and when it occurred</i> | Although the group was never wealthy, it had resources to host AWC to spread group’s ideology and recruit members (first congress in 1980)<br>Community of families lived on compound (1980s)—further 10% plan<br>Order—associated with group—committed crimes in early 1980s | Ideology publicized in multiple venues (Turner diaries, pamphlets, talks, radio shows)—received increasing attention during the 1980s because of crimes it inspired<br>Group’s book and record companies generated more than \$1 million in income. These companies also allowed group to bypass “Jewish dominated media” | Founded to protect white youth in changing areas (in late 1980s and early 1990s)<br>Hate crimes and especially profit crimes increased in 1990s<br>Allied with AB in prison to protect white inmates and pursue crimes inside prison (late 1990s and the new millennium) | Lampley was shunned by others and his group’s terrorist plots were foiled<br><br>Other than Lampley’s failed recruitment efforts in person and via the Internet, the group did not undertake concrete actions |
| <i>When group began to rise or continued to rise</i>                                           | Rose in the early and mid 1980s                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Rose throughout the 1990s                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Rose in late 1990s and especially 2000+                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Never rose                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

Notes. AWC = Aryan World Congress. AB = Aryan Brotherhood. PEN1 = Public Enemy Number 1. OCM = Oklahoma Constitutional Militia.

These findings are consistent with the social movement and terrorism literatures. Resource mobilization theory places a heavy premium on leadership skills in determining which movements or groups succeed (Zald and McCarthy, 1987). Stern (2003) concluded that terrorist leaders are fundamental to group success because they decide and justify the message and tactics, provide a sense of identity and purpose, and empower marginal followers (see also Hamm, 1993, 2002; Hewitt, 2003; Jurgensmeyer, 2000; Ruggiero, 2005; Smith, 1994). Relatedly, current social movement scholarship criticizes earlier approaches that refused to take the ideology of far-right groups seriously and dismissed their beliefs as irrational or unreasoned. Our finding that a clear ideological message is important for an organization’s growth indicates that dismissing such views as irrational is unhelpful (Aho, 1990; Berlet and Lyons, 2000; Bruce, 1988; Freilich, 2003; Hixson, 1992). We expand on this point in the policy implications section.

*Concrete actions and financial stability.* All three successful groups conducted concrete activities to expand their goals and ideologies and had the finances necessary to undertake these steps. This approach is illustrated in Table 2.

Some white supremacists—like Robert Mathews and members of The Order—believed most movement members were long on rhetoric but short on action (Gardell, 2003; Schlatter, 2006). An active group reflects seriousness and commitment. The Aryan Nations organized its first annual congress in 1980 to unite the fractious white supremacist movement. Some Aryan Nations members moved to the compound to live (thereby extending the group's 10% plan). A cohesive community was living at the compound in the mid 1980s. The Aryan Nations seemed to be committed to the cause, as individuals associated with it perpetrated serious crimes to spread their ideology (e.g., The Order in the early 1980s). The Aryan Nations took steps to attract young members (Moore, 1993) and recruited members in prison. Again, the group rose in the mid-to-late 1980s.

The National Alliance demonstrated activity largely through organizational achievements. Pierce published his message in books, tabloids, newsletters; created a publishing company; purchased record companies; hosted a weekly radio program; and spoke at white supremacist gatherings both in the United States and abroad. The National Alliance organized protests and rallies. Although Pierce had little respect for young skinheads, he recruited youth by purchasing Resistance Records and other companies. Pierce increased these activities in the 1980s and throughout the 1990s. Again, the group's ideology and activities received increased attention as a result of the publicized crimes it inspired. These activities were fundamental to its growth and made it the premier white supremacist organization of the 1990s.

Since its creation in the late 1980s, PEN1 has pursued illicit profits and committed murder and other crimes to advance its objectives. Initially, it protected white youth in demographically changing areas and focused on profit crimes throughout the 1990s. As more of its members were arrested, greater numbers of PEN1 members entered California prisons in the 1990s. Thus, PEN1 has been active behind bars, especially since 2000. Prisons offer an ideal environment for recruitment because protection can be offered in exchange for support. In contrast, Lampley and the OCM were unable to undertake any successful activities: Both their recruitment efforts and terrorist plots failed because of poor leadership, messaging, and recruiting skills.

The three successful groups' activities and growths were made possible because they had sufficient funds to conduct these activities. The more money the organization possesses, the more capable it is. Before Pierce's death, the National Alliance was earning more than \$1 million per year. Although the Aryan Nations was not as financially successful, it earned enough in the 1980s to organize annual congresses. PEN1 may be more profitable than the other organizations, but the money has typically been used for criminal schemes and personal income.

These findings are congruent with prior research. Ruggiero (2005) stated that members of the Red Brigades engaged in activities to distinguish themselves and to thereby achieve greater status (see also Friedman and McAdam, 1992; Hamm, 2007a; Sageman, 2008). Relatedly, the Aryan

Nations and PEN1’s recruitment efforts inside prisons mirror the activities of other extremist groups. The Black Liberation Army recruited inside prisons in the 1960s (Smith, 1994) and Al Qaeda might currently be recruiting members inside U.S. prisons (Hamm, 2007b). Finally, our finding that financially strong organizations were more active (which then aided their growth) is consistent with earlier studies. Stern (2003) found that finances are a necessary ingredient for a terrorist group’s success: “Where there is money for Islamist causes but not communist ones, Islamist terrorist organizations will rise and communist ones will fail” (2003: 142; see also Dobrtatz and Shanks-Meile, 1997; Giraldo and Trinkunas, 2007; Hamm, 1993, 2002; Hewitt, 2003; Horgan, 2004; Horgan and Taylor, 1999; Jones and Libicki, 2008; Ruggiero, 1995; Sageman, 2008; Smith, 1994; Sprinzak, 1998; Zald and McCarthy, 1987).

**T A B L E 3**

**Political opportunities**

|                                                                                                | <b>Aryan Nations</b>                                                                            | <b>National Alliance</b>                                                                                                             | <b>PEN1</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>OCM</b>                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Critical factor responsible for group’s growth or continued growth and when it occurred</i> | Capitalized on anger about government heavy handedness, such as the death of Gordon Kahl (1983) | Capitalized on the decline of the Aryan Nations (late 1980s) and concerns about government abuses (e.g., Ruby Ridge 1992; Waco 1993) | Formed to protect whites in changing areas. Entered prison in growing numbers in late 1990s and 2000+<br>Capitalized on the AB and NLR being labeled prison gangs and isolated. This led to AB and PEN1 cooperation | Unable to take advantage of possible political openings<br>Lampley was shunned by others in the movement because he was viewed as crazy |
| <i>When group began to rise or continued to rise</i>                                           | Rose in early and mid 1980s                                                                     | Rose throughout 1990s                                                                                                                | Rose in late 1990s and especially 2000+                                                                                                                                                                             | Never rose                                                                                                                              |

Notes. AB = Aryan Brotherhood. PEN1 = Public Enemy Number 1. NLR = Nazi Low Riders. OCM = Oklahoma Constitutional Militia.

**Political openings and opportunities.** A third factor common to the successful groups was that they took advantage of political opportunities. Table 3 documents savvy decisions the organizations made to take advantage of these openings.

Butler exploited the “martyrdom” of Gordon Kahl and Robert Mathews to benefit the growth of the Aryan Nations. Pierce—like many far-right groups—exploited Ruby Ridge and Waco in the 1990s (Wright, 2007) and took advantage of the decline of the Aryan Nations. *The Turner diaries* and his other writings brought high-profile publicity to the National Alliance. PEN1 also took advantage of political opportunities. It formed in the late 1980s to protect white youth in neighborhoods that were changing demographically. PEN1 has recently grown because of its alliance with the Aryan Brotherhood inside prisons. This collaboration occurred because PEN1 took advantage of the opening provided by prison authorities who classified the Brotherhood and the Nazi Low Riders as prison gangs and isolated them from the general

population. However, because of Lampley’s poor leadership qualities, the OCM could not take advantage of any political openings. Rather, Lampley made efforts to recruit others and tap into the national patriot network, but he was shunned because he was viewed as “nuts.” Lampley could not take advantage of the Internet to recruit either, because he posted convoluted writings that were unlikely to appeal to potential followers.

These findings are consistent with prior research. Whetten’s (1987) review of literature on organizations’ life cycles found that growth is critical for survival and is typically a by-product of other strategies. Some strategies are initiated by the organization, but often the group takes advantage of external events or chance happenings. McAdam’s (1982) political process model in the social movement literature similarly found that changed power relations (such as that which occurred with PEN1 inside of California’s prisons) create opportunities that groups can take advantage of. McAdam also noted that opportunities are related to “cognitive liberation,” which is the creation of beliefs that “the current situation is unjust” (p. 19). Both the Aryan Nations and the National Alliance took advantage of alleged government heavy handedness to expand their groups. Furthermore, the recent decline of the National Alliance created opportunities for the growth of similar groups, such as the National Socialist Movement.

**T A B L E 4**

**Internal cohesion**

|                                                                                                | <b>Aryan Nations</b>                                                                                                                                       | <b>National Alliance</b>                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>PEN1</b>                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>OCM</b>                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Critical factor responsible for group’s growth or continued growth and when it occurred</i> | Butler was unrivaled leader, and the group had no factions or internal disputes<br><br>A united community lived at the group compound (early to mid-1980s) | Pierce was unrivaled leader who avoided internal strife by shunning “unruly” types and hiring professional types for senior positions<br><br>Senior management lived in the group’s compound (1980s and 1990s) | Despite periodic debates about the group’s mission (i.e., racist ideology v. routine crimes), Mazza and the group’s centralized leadership has so far successfully bridged these divides | Lampley made unwise decisions<br><br>Group was small—four people—but was undone by trusting a police informer—cohesion undermined |
| When group began to rise or continued to rise                                                  | Rose in early and mid 1980s                                                                                                                                | Rose in 1990s                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Rose in late 1990s and especially 2004+                                                                                                                                                  | Never rose                                                                                                                        |

Notes. PEN1 = Public Enemy Number 1. OCM = Oklahoma Constitutional Militia.

**Internal cohesion.** The final factor common to the rise of the successful groups is that they grew when they were cohesive and factions were kept to a minimum. This was again partially attributed to strong leadership exercised by Butler, Pierce, and Mazza, as observed in Table 4.

Butler initially surrounded himself with a stable inner core that followed his rules. Although this support ultimately changed, for many years, Butler was an unchallenged leader and the

group was unified. Pierce created a stable group and he surrounded himself with intelligent and capable people. He purposefully did not recruit unruly skinheads or other hotheads to key positions. Pierce enforced the rules and the National Alliance had no factions while he ruled. Although Mazza is imprisoned, he has managed to maintain a stable gang that is respected among white supremacist gangs—both within and outside of the California prison system. Although the group has periodic internal debates about its mission, its leadership remains small and cohesive (Simi et al., 2008). Furthermore, the group has been consistent in its activities and goals throughout the past two decades, which is precisely why the Aryan Brotherhood reached out to them.

Previous research found that cohesion is fundamental to group survival. Jamieson (1990) concluded that the Italian Red Brigades terrorist group survived as long as it did because it avoided infiltration and internal discord because most members followed the organization's rules (see also Horschem, 1989, 1991; Ruggiero, 2005; Sprinzak, 1998). Jones and Libicki's (2008: 40) recent RAND study that investigated 268 terrorist groups worldwide to determine why they ended found that "a terrorist group often has to become large to win. The inability to grow, conversely, is a harbinger of defeat. Splintering (or absorption into other groups) is a bane of small groups." Indeed, both the Aryan Nations and the National Alliance were created out of factional splits: Before Butler formed the Aryan Nations, he took over Swift's church; Pierce created the National Alliance after a conflict with Willis Carto (Hamm, 2007a; Hewitt, 2003; Smith, 1994; Sprinzak, 1998).

### *Fall (Decline)*

Although our main focus was on the factors responsible for group growth, we also investigated their decline. In this analysis, we treated PEN1 as our comparison group because it is the only organization examined that is still growing. The demise of a group seems to be a culmination of two broad factors that likely interact and encompass many circumstances: organizational instability and responses by government and nongovernment agencies. We discuss both points.

**Organizational instability.** All the groups except PEN1 experienced internal instability before their decline began. Table 5 illustrates this point. Instability is related to loss of leadership, loss of cohesive inner core, and loss of funds. Initially, Butler was surrounded by a close-knit group that shared common values. However, when he organized the AWC, this introduced a more militant element to the compound that did not share the same values as the inner core. Many members of the stable initial group then left. The skinhead presence also brought additional law-enforcement attention to the Aryan Nations, which increased dissension within the group. Eventually, Butler (who was older and in poor health) could not enforce the rules. Furthermore, the Aryan Nations could not afford to pay its staff and key personnel came and went, which destabilized the group even more. Butler was recognized as a failed leader and infighting began. Members left, created splinter organizations, or tried to take control of the

Aryan Nations. Currently, the Aryan Nations is split between two groups that claim to be the true descendent of Butler’s organization and both have few members.

The National Alliance also suffered from organizational instability, but it happened in a different sequence. Pierce maintained a cohesive inner core until his death. Gliebe (Pierce’s replacement) was not as capable as Pierce, and he could not earn the group’s respect. Within a short period, infighting occurred and members left, created splinter groups, or tried to remove Gliebe. Business suffered and resulted in more staff leaving the organization. Today, the National Alliance is a shadow of its former self with just a few hundred members.

**T A B L E 5**

**Organizational instability**

|                                                                                                     | <b>Aryan Nations</b>                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>National Alliance</b>                                                      | <b>PEN1</b>                                                                                                                                         | <b>OCM</b>                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Critical factors responsible for group’s decline or continued decline and year each occurred</i> | Neo-Nazis began showing up at AWC—led to Christian Identity adherents leaving (late 1980s)<br><br>AWC attracted unruly skin-heads and core families left (late 1980s)<br><br>Heavy turnover of key personnel | Pierce death— led to splintering of the group and power struggles (2002–2003) | Small cohesive leadership<br><br>Despite periodic debates over the last two decades, it has consistently embraced profit crimes and white supremacy | Trusted an informant— led to the group’s demise (1994) |
| <i>When group began to decline or continued to decline</i>                                          | Late 1980s and 1990s; shell of a group by late 1990s; split in 2004 after Butler’s death                                                                                                                     | Group split in 2002–2003                                                      | Group has not declined and is still rising                                                                                                          | Members arrested in 1995                               |

Notes. AWC = Aryan World Congress. PEN1 = Public Enemy Number 1. OCM = Oklahoma Constitutional Militia.

The OCM never had a strong leader or funds. It was able to maintain some stability because it consisted of only four people who shared the same values. Lampley did not need much money to achieve his goals, but he was not a sophisticated leader. He embarked on his plan soon after the Oklahoma City bombing, at which time militias were being heavily scrutinized by law enforcement. Lampley was indiscreet in discussing his plans. The group’s cohesion was effectively undermined by their trusting of a law-enforcement informant, which led to a quick end to the OCM. Conversely, PEN1 has remained unified with a small cohesive leadership. Indeed, as mentioned previously, this is one reason it is attractive to the Aryan Brotherhood. Furthermore, PEN1 has consistently embraced both white supremacy and profit crimes for more than 20 years and thus far has managed to avoid crippling internal disputes.

The results from previous organizational and terrorism studies are consistent with our findings. Scholars explaining the decline of organizations have concluded: “Declining organizations

are characterized by a wide range of dysfunctional organizational processes. These outcomes of decline erode organizational effectiveness and undermine member satisfaction and commitment” (Whetten, 1987: 345). Similarly, losing the support of one’s base is associated with a terrorist group’s decline (Chermak, 2002; Crothers, 2003; Dugan, Huang, LaFree, and McCauley, 2008; Hewitt, 2003; McAdam, 1999; Ross and Gurr, 1989; Sageman, 2008).

*Responses to group (by government and nongovernment agencies).* A group’s descent also may be encouraged by outside forces, which include the government and nonstate actors. All the groups engaged in (or attempted to engage in) serious acts of violence and each of them provoked a response. Table 6 makes this point. The Aryan Nations benefited from the violent crimes committed by groups like The Order. These crimes raised the Aryan Nations’ status and helped recruit new members. But it drew the attention of law enforcement, which arrested most members of the criminal groups that supported the Aryan Nations. Law enforcement also focused on the Aryan Nations. This attention affected attendance at the AWC and created paranoia within the group as to who was a true member and who was an undercover agent—which contributed to the instability of the group. In addition, the \$6.3 million civil lawsuit won by the Southern Poverty Law Center on behalf of the Keenans bankrupted Butler and the Aryan Nations. The Aryan Nations was already struggling financially and organizationally, yet major splits occurred after the lawsuit. Although the National Alliance’s undoing is primarily attributable to itself, recall that the Southern Poverty Law Center published tapes from a secret meeting in which Pierce insulted other white supremacists. The tapes angered many in the movement and resulted in a boycott of Resistance Records, which reduced the sales and profitability of the organization. Law enforcement also kept the National Alliance destabilized. In 2006 after Gliebe appointed Shaun Walker as the group’s new chairman, law enforcement arrested Walker for previous civil rights violations and he was convicted. Kevin Strom, who was another key leader, was arrested for nonmovement crimes. The constant change of leadership added to the instability of the organization. Similarly, successful law-enforcement tactics led to the complete end of the OCM: All four members of the organization were identified by law enforcement.

However, PEN1’s frequent interactions with the law have not hampered their growth; instead, it seems that prison actually has helped the group grow. As already discussed, PEN1 shrewdly took advantage of the opportunities inside prison—protecting white inmates, collaborating with the Brotherhood to commit profit crimes, and expanding.

Previous studies have found that responses by both state and nonstate actors contribute to the decline of terrorist or extremist groups. Jones and Libicki’s (2008) study that examined 268 terrorist groups worldwide found that 40% of organizations ended because local law-enforcement and intelligence agencies arrested or eliminated key members. Smith (1994: 91; see also Hamm, 1993) concluded that skinhead groups declined in the United States in the 1980s because of a “double barreled blast of aggressive federal criminal prosecutions and private civil rights attorneys,” and Hamm (2007a) reached similar conclusions about the demise of



the Arizona Patriots (see also Crothers, 2003; Hewitt, 2003; Horschem, 1991; Kaplan, 1996; McAdam, 1999; Ruggiero, 2005). Such responses, although contributing to declines in these groups, also may have had unintended consequences and created backlash effects. These concerns are addressed in the next section.

T A B L E 6

## Responses to groups

|                                                                                                     | Aryan Nations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | National Alliance                                                                                                                                                           | PEN1                                                                                                                                                                 | OCM                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Critical factors responsible for groups' decline or continued decline and year each occurred</i> | Law-enforcement infiltration increased suspicion and paranoia among group's members<br>Arrested members of The Order and other "below ground" groups inspired by Aryan Nations<br>Southern Poverty Law Center civil suit crippled Aryan Nations (2000) | Southern Poverty Law Center publicized tapes of Pierce mocking others in the movement—led to boycott of NA companies (2002)<br>Arrests of key figures (e.g., Walker, Strom) | Despite imprisonment of its leadership, it has thrived both inside and outside prison<br>Political opportunities inside prison seem to transcend enforcement efforts | Successful law-enforcement tactics led to arrest of group with help from a police informant (1995) |
| <i>When group began to decline or continued to decline</i>                                          | Late 1980s and 1990s; shell of a group by late 1990s; split in 2004 after Butler's death                                                                                                                                                               | Split in 2002–2003                                                                                                                                                          | Group has not declined and is still rising                                                                                                                           | Members arrested in 1995                                                                           |

Notes. PEN1 = Public Enemy Number 1. OCM = Oklahoma Constitutional Militia.

### Policy Implications and Conclusion

Our findings have many policy implications. The rise and fall of white supremacist organizations are linked to critical events and organizational variables that enhance or disrupt groups. These findings suggest the importance of law-enforcement intelligence and analysis. Understanding these organizations is like hitting a moving target and analysts must engage in dynamic analyses (Freilich et al., in press; Sageman, 2008; Smith, 1994). Changes in the factors outlined above may cause a group to increase or decrease in strength and potential to commit violent acts. For example, the militia movement was affected dramatically by the Oklahoma City bombing, which forced many individuals to leave the movement, others to join, and some to go underground or to seek other extremist organizations for fear of government infiltration (Chermak, 2002). Paying attention to such changes will allow law enforcement to (1) assess a group's threat level more accurately as it changes; (2) differentiate between truly dangerous groups and less dangerous groups, as well as immediate versus potential future threats; and (3) develop policies that best address these threats (Chermak et al., in press; Duffy and Brantley, 1998; McGarrell, Freilich, and Chermak, 2007).

It seems obvious that successful law-enforcement operations can eliminate a group or individuals that have engaged in crimes (e.g., Kahl, who murdered three police agents, and Matthews, who was the leader of The Order, were killed during separate firefights with law enforcement; remaining members of The Order and the OCM were tracked down and arrested by the authorities). This thought seems to bolster deterrence and incapacitation views that call for harsh responses to extremist groups. Many watch groups call for firm government actions against extremist organizations (Chermak, 2002; Freilich, 2003). However, our findings also demonstrate that some responses may have unintended consequences. Perceived harsh government and police actions may lead to consciousness raising (Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, 1997; McAdam, 1982) that outrages the wider movement and causes a backlash. Other extremist groups and the movement at large may grow and individuals and groups may become even more radicalized and turn to violence. For example, the Aryan Nations capitalized on the killings of Kahl and Matthews by law enforcement and the organization's popularity increased. In addition, Matthews partially created The Order because of anger over Kahl's death. The National Alliance, the militia movement, and other far-right groups grew in response to government excesses at Waco and Ruby Ridge. Importantly, recent research also suggests that harsh government responses to terrorism often have no deterrent effect and sometimes lead to a backlash (Kaplan, 1996; Jones and Libicki, 2008; LaFree, Dugan, and Korte, in press; McCauley, 2006; Pridemore and Freilich, 2007; Sageman, 2008; Silke, 2008).

Authorities must strike a balance between a carefully calibrated campaign that eliminates dangerous groups and which stresses that violence will not be tolerated on the one hand, and responses that avoid outraging and possibly increasing crime from the larger movement on the other hand. Several options must be considered. First, law enforcement should use deadly or harsh responses only as a last resort. Again, severe government actions at Waco and Ruby Ridge had a backlash effect. Conversely, the Anti-Defamation League (2003; see also Wright, 2007) explained that nuanced and patient responses by law enforcement that allow militia extremists to save face can yield peaceful resolutions, such as the Republic of Texas standoff in 1997.

Second, the government should consider supplementing harsh law-enforcement actions against violent groups with "outreach" programs to nonviolent wings of the movement. These strategies should encourage members of the movement to forsake illegal behaviors in favor of participation in the political system or other legal activities. Jones and Libicki's (2008) study found that 43% of 268 terrorist groups worldwide ended because of a transition to the political process. Significantly, FBI agents charged with monitoring domestic extremists have made similar arguments. Agents Duffy and Brantley (1998) created a typology of four categories of far-right militia groups that range from noncriminal entities to organizations, that conduct serious crimes (e.g., homicide, bombings). These authors urged local police to open a dialogue with leaders from the two nonviolent categories "so that the two sides can voice their concerns and discuss relevant issues in a non-confrontational way" (p. 2).

These strategies should be used today, especially when law enforcement is involved in a crackdown. What makes this initiative difficult is that the ideology of far-right racist groups is explicitly antigovernment and calls for violence against nonwhites, Jews, and the government. However, outreach policies could extend law-enforcement efforts to build bridges in immigrant communities that are suspicious of the government (Freilich and Chermak, in press). Newman and Clarke (2008) recently identified steps that police agencies can take to reduce tension with migrant communities that have come under suspicion because a few terrorists—such as the 9/11 hijackers—used them to fit in. These steps include assigning community police agents to work solely with migrant communities, taking advantage of ethnic media outlets to communicate with the larger community, and clearly publicizing the police agency's mission and policies. Similar strategies could be taken with “moderate” members of racist groups and other far rightists. In addition to following Duffy and Brantley's (1998) suggestion of initiating dialogue with nonviolent groups, agencies can assign officers to appear on far-right media outlets (many racist groups make use of short-wave radio shows and the Internet). Such campaigns could explain the government response and note that it is directed only at those who commit crimes. Authorities could reassure noncriminal members of the movement that their rights will be protected and encourage them to focus on lawful activities while stressing that violence will not be tolerated.

Although we recognize that some hard-core terrorists have no interest in pursuing change through legitimate processes, it is also true that most extremist individuals and groups do not engage in violence or terrorism themselves. Furthermore, some “terrorists” are reluctant participants and are not strongly committed to an extremist ideology. McGarrell et al. (2007) discussed how most of the individuals linked to a series of bombings and detained terrorists (nearly 70%) were not ideologically committed. We also recognize that the goals of racist, far-right groups are beyond the pale to most. But our study shows that the ideology of these groups plays a role in their growth. Effective antiextremist strategies should challenge the ideology of racist groups and refute their points (Berlet and Lyons, 2000; Freilich, 2003). Part of the reason that civil lawsuits against these organizations brought by watch groups have been successful is that they focus on violent actions by committed movement members. Successful judgments handicap the organizations financially and send a message that violent tactics will not be tolerated. Consistent with our earlier discussion, it is important that watch groups avoid taking actions that harshly target the nonviolent wing of the movement. Like crime-control authorities, watch groups need to balance necessary responses to illegal acts against severe actions that outrage the larger movement and create backlash effects. It is important that future research on deterrent and backlash effects also examines the role of nonstate actors, such as watch groups, the media, and others (Pridemore and Freilich, 2007). Finally, backlash effects are usually found when a government takes action *after* a crime or terrorist act has been committed. Strategies that prevent the crimes these groups commit to raise funds and advance their objectives (e.g., by using situational crime prevention; Clarke and Newman, 2006; Freilich and Newman, in

press; Hamm, 2007a; Jones and Libicki, 2008; Newman and Clarke, 2008) may preempt the harsh police responses to these crimes and thus avoid possible backlash effects.

Our analysis of PEN1 raises challenges for both terrorism scholarship and government responses to such groups. PEN1 adheres to an extremist ideology, but its primary concern is its continued existence as a gang that focuses on profit crimes. Law enforcement should be wary of PEN1 transitioning from nonideological routine crimes to a full-fledged ideological criminal organization (Simi et al., 2008). It is important for authorities to remember that many terrorist groups commit a wide range of criminal activities to fund and prepare for significant terrorist activities (Hamm, 2007a; Smith, Dampousse, and Roberts, 2006). Finally, terrorism scholarship has struggled with defining terrorism (Freilich et al., in press; Schmid and Jongman, 1988). However, it may be valuable to focus on all criminal and terrorist activities of such groups and to compare the characteristics of organizations that commit terrorists acts with groups that do not, as well as with groups that commit only nonideological crimes or ideological crimes that are *not* terrorism (e.g., tax refusal; Freilich and Chermak, 2008). This could expand our theoretical explanations for group differences and help law enforcement establish priorities for responding to and preventing future terrorist activities.

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# Weapon choice and American political violence

## A comparison of terrorists and other felons in federal custody

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### **Research Summary**

*The criminal use of firearms presents a unique challenge to policymakers and is the subject of scientific study in fields such as criminology, public health, sociology, and law. Previous research has described firearm use by terrorists in the United States as uniformly common; however, little systematic attention has been focused on this phenomenon. Although valuable, progress in this area has been hampered by the absence of reliable quantitative information. Using data from the American Terrorism Study and the U.S. Sentencing Commission, we examine the firearm-offending characteristics of 923 federal felons and 336 terrorists.*

### **Policy Implications**

*Findings indicate that many systematic differences exist between terrorists and other types of federal felons and that terrorists are more likely than other felons to be convicted of firearm-related crimes. We recommend that official efforts to monitor weapons sales—such as the Brady Act—continue to include those named on the terrorist watch list and that those named on the list be subject to additional law-enforcement scrutiny when attempting to purchase firearms. These efforts should be coordinated by federal law-enforcement agencies to facilitate the effective use of existing antiterrorism mechanisms in both blocking purchases and garnering intelligence on terrorists attempting to obtain firearms.*

### **Keywords**

*terrorism, firearms, sentencing, weapons, felons*

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In recent years, terrorism has generated fear, mistrust, and procedural changes in the U.S. criminal justice system.<sup>1</sup> Many of these changes have led to policy debates that are neither informed by empirical evidence nor based on well-founded and tested assumptions. A promising criminological approach for examining terrorism is the situational crime-prevention perspective. The examination of terrorists' behavior from this point of view allows criminologists to offer policymakers relevant and timely empirical observations that could identify crimes and other routine activities upon which law-enforcement efforts could be focused. The ultimate objective of such policies is preventing potential terrorists from carrying out attacks. Additionally, although scholars have pointed out several criminal activities in which terrorists are known to participate, there have been few quantitative analyses detailing similarities and differences that may exist between terrorists and other types of felons at an individual level. In short, there is a demand for research that informs theory and substantive understanding of the types of crimes committed by terrorists and possible prevention mechanisms.

One of the recent policy debates regarding the terrorism-crime nexus is focused on firearms. For example, news reports have recently raised alarm that terrorist suspects may obtain firearms legally (Lichtblau, 2005) and have publicized government efforts to integrate firearm purchase regulations with antiterrorism efforts (Luo, 2007) through existing firearms background checks (Krouse, 2005). At least one bill being considered by Congress aims to ban firearm purchases by those who may be linked to terrorist activities.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly important because little is known about the characteristics of individual terrorists and how these characteristics may affect access to firearms. For instance, some have speculated that terrorists may lack a pronounced criminal history (e.g., Sageman, 2006) and that this would expose them to less law-enforcement scrutiny when entering the United States (Meissner, 2004). If true, then a lack of significant criminal history upon entry to the United States would increase terrorists' access to firearms while in the United States.

Criminological research methodologies, findings, and associated policy recommendations can provide a practical template with which some terrorists' activities may be studied (Hamm and Van de Voorde, 2005; LaFree and Dugan, 2004; LaFree and Hendrickson, 2008).<sup>3</sup> For

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1. Terrorism in this study is defined as participation in alleged criminal activities that warrant counterterrorism investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and lead to federal indictment. For introductions to the vigorous debate regarding a functional definition of what types of behavior do and do not constitute terrorism, see Hoffman (2006) and Schmid and Jongman (1988).
  2. Senate Bill 1237—the Denying Firearms and Explosives to Dangerous Terrorists Act of 2007—is currently under consideration and was drawn from a Department of Justice recommendation to provide the Attorney General with the discretion to deny firearm transfers to those who may intend to use the firearms for terrorist purposes as well as revoke federal firearm licenses. This includes a provision for the Attorney General to keep secret the reasons for denial or revocation if she or he considers those reasons to be important to national security (U.S. Congress, 2007; U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).
  3. We do not imply that terrorists are essentially criminals, nor do we imply that they are not. This debate is beyond the scope of this article. We simply wish to note that criminological research, and the more general literature on deviance, is useful to shed light on activities that are defined as terrorism.

instance, the use of firearms by American “street” criminals has been well documented and a similar examination of firearm involvement among terrorists may explain their patterns of use, common methods of obtaining firearms, motivations for use, preference for types of firearms, and the instrumentality of firearms in causing harm. For instance, the finding that many firearms used by criminals were originally stolen from legal gun owners has led to some local laws requiring secure storage of privately owned guns as well as requirements to report stolen guns to the police (c.f. Wintemute, 1999). Additionally, controlled market access and supply-side restrictions, such as the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, are designed to reduce access by former felons and other restricted classes at the point of retail sale, thus intending to reduce criminal firearm violence at U.S. state and federal levels (Cook and Braga, 2001; Cook, Ludwig, Venkatesh, and Braga, 2007; Cook, Molliconi, and Cole, 1995). A similar understanding of terrorist participation in firearm crime may yield similar, policy-relevant recommendations.

Aside from public debate and the potential to improve fundamental scientific understanding of terrorism, there is at least one compelling reason for addressing the terrorism-firearm dynamic: Most research on terrorism has focused on terrorist groups or incidents, not on individuals who have participated in terrorism; therefore, little research has examined terrorist weapon choice or any individual-level characteristic of terrorists. Answers to many substantive questions are often speculative at best. For this reason, we compiled individual-level data on terrorists that can be directly compared with individuals who are not terrorists—namely, federal felons—offering a new perspective and filling an important gap in this area of research.

## **Literature Review**

Policy-relevant research on counterterrorism using advanced statistical methods is insufficient in the social science literature. For example, in a recent Campbell Collaboration systematic review, Lum, Kennedy, and Sherley (2006) examined 6,041 peer-reviewed publications and found only 7 that used statistical tests sufficiently robust for effective evaluation of counterterrorism policies. Furthermore, although a great deal is known about criminals who use firearms, little empirically based knowledge is available regarding terrorism and crime or terrorist use of firearms in the United States. To address some of these shortcomings, it is useful to discuss the studies that have used quantitative methodologies to explore the intersection of crime and terrorism, as well as past research that has informed our understanding of firearm crime.

### *Terrorism and Crime*

Most recently, Dugan, LaFree, and Piquero (2005) used data from the Federal Aviation Administration and the RAND Corporation to examine 828 airline hijackings that occurred before 1986. They found that an increase in the perceived costs of hijacking as a result of metal detectors and increased law enforcement at passenger checkpoints was effective in reducing nonterrorist hijacking but that terrorist hijackings were largely unaffected, which led to the conclusion that

the rational choice perspective might be in need of continued refinement and that the level of motivation, goals, and perception of risk differs between terrorist and nonterrorist hijackers. The work of Dugan and colleagues echoes previous research examining the effects of policy interventions on terrorism such as airport security increases, international conventions, and national counterterrorism policies addressing international terrorist activities, which was recently summarized by Enders and Sandler (2006). Enders and Sandler used a number of economic techniques, including intervention analyses (i.e., Box-Jenkins models) and game theoretical models, to examine terrorism from a traditional rational choice perspective.

Although quantitative methods have not been applied to data about *individuals* who participate in terrorist activities, qualitative criminological work addressing individual characteristics of terrorists is available. Working primarily from court transcripts supplemented with personal interviews, Hamm (2005, 2007) outlined the process of terrorist group formation, commission of attacks, and group dissolution and the role of individuals in these processes using routine activities and social learning perspectives. Hamm (2005) argued that the daily lives of terrorists, including their day-to-day interactions, create opportunities to commit attacks to occur and expose terrorists to law enforcement. Likewise, crimes supporting terrorist group goals are made possible by terrorist organizations exploiting the everyday routine activities of their victims. Thus, Hamm (2005) argued that patterns of firearm use by terrorists can be understood by using the routine activities framework. Indeed, Hamm explained the ultra-right-wing Aryan Republican Army's success in bank robberies largely by invoking Cohen's notion of "capable guardians" such as bank security measures or police surveillance, and also that the ability of the ARA to engage in bank robbery was greatly facilitated by their use of all types of firearms (Hamm, 2002, 2007).<sup>4</sup> In his description of the Aryan Republican Army's (ARA) activities, Hamm recounted the following behaviors leading up to a bank robbery:

Much like al-Qaeda in the East Africa Embassy attacks and late in the 9/11 plot, the ARA devoted considerable attention to reconnaissance. Langan and Guthrie would spend weeks casing banks, taking into account every moment in the taken-for-granted order of daily life around their targets. They would fully occupy these urban spaces by entering the banks in disguise, walking the streets and sidewalks, entering area stores and eateries, and then driving escape routes over and over again. These spaces were then videotaped and then studied for the small often unnoticed practices of routine security. . . . Langan called off more than a dozen robberies due to things such as changes in bank security, shifting police patrol patterns and the unexpected presence of construction crews near the banks (Hamm, 2007: 176).

Hamm also wrote that firearms were intrinsic to the actual act of bank robbery: "At nine-thirty A.M. March 29, Stedeford pulled the LeSabre into the bank's parking lot. Pete carried a Taurus

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4. Routine activities comprise only part of Hamm's argument; he also observed that there is a pronounced social learning component to terrorist behavior.



9-millimeter pistol, Guthrie had an Astra .45-caliber handgun. Kevin packed his .45 caliber Glock and Scott toted an HK-91 assault rifle inside his guitar case. Langan, Guthrie, and McCarthy got out, dressed as construction workers with bulletproof vests and camouflage masks. . . . Drawing their guns they entered the bank shouting. . . ." (Hamm, 2002: 208).

### *Felons and Firearms*

An understanding of the character and nature of criminals who use firearms is usually derived from surveys of incarcerated felons who used firearms in the past or are serving a sentence for firearm crimes as part of their most recent conviction; usually, but not always, these surveys focus on state prisoners (Scalia, 2000; Wright and Rossi, 1994). An additional data source is self-report surveys from arrestees and delinquents (Bjerregaard and Lizotte, 1995; Decker, Pennell, and Caldwell, 1997; Lizotte and Sheppard, 2001). These studies reveal patterns of illegal gun use and details about where criminals obtain guns, criminals' preferences for certain types of firearms, reasons for carrying or using firearms, and in some cases, demographic details and criminal history.

Criminals tend to obtain firearms through illegal means. For instance, most state and federal inmates report that they either obtained their last gun through illegal sources (33% and 39.2%, respectively) or "borrowed" it from a friend or family member (39.6% and 35.4%, respectively) (Scalia, 2000; Wolf Harlow, 2001). A minority of criminals purchase firearms: Approximately 22% of federal inmates bought their firearms at retail outlets, pawnshops, flea markets, and gun shows, and approximately 14% of state inmates purchased their guns legally.

The types of firearms that tend to be reported by both state and federal inmates are similar. Of those who report carrying a gun during their most recent offense, 83% of state inmates and 87% of federal inmates reported carrying a handgun (Wolf Harlow, 2001). This finding agrees with similar studies and demonstrates that most criminals prefer small, easily concealed weapons for criminal activities.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note, however, that firearm *possession* charges are much more common in federal courts than *use* charges, and more than 70% of the illegal firearm possession charges between 1992 and 1998 included no other substantive charge (Scalia, 2000).

Federal and state firearm offenders differ somewhat in their criminal histories and other personal characteristics. For instance, approximately 22% of state firearms offenders in 1997 had no previous known criminal sentences compared with only 9.5% of federal prisoners (Wolf Harlow, 2001). State and federal firearm offenders also differ slightly by race. About 18% of both black and white inmates in federal facilities used firearms (Wolf Harlow, 2001). In state prisons, however, where firearm crimes are more common, firearm criminals tend to be nonwhite (Wolf Harlow, 2001; Wright and Rossi, 1994).

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5. Significantly fewer inmates reported carrying more lethal types of firearms, such as rifles (7% state and 9% federal) and shotguns (13% state and 14% federal).

Among criminals who carry firearms, the most often self-reported reason for doing so is self-protection (Bjerregaard and Lizotte, 1995; Decker et al., 1997; Lizotte and Sheppard, 2001; Wolf Harlow, 2001; Wright and Rossi, 1994). When inmates who used a gun in the commission of a crime were asked for information on the extent of their firearm use, they often reported that they brandished the weapon to “scare someone” or to “get away” (Wolf Harlow, 2001: 11). These findings indicate that a complex set of relationships motivates firearm offending and that theoretical explanations for firearm use have important implications for enforcement policy (Hamm, 2007).

### *Terrorists, Criminals, and Situational Crime Prevention*

The routine activities perspective provides a framework with which to make sense of the situations in which crimes occur during activities involved in everyday life (Felson, 1994). In this case, terrorism is the crime of interest. Implicit in the routine activities perspective is the means to develop policies, strategies, and tactics that take advantage of these common habits of criminals to develop plans for situational crime prevention (Felson, 1994).

Clarke and Newman (2006) used this perspective to develop a situational terrorism prevention model that relies on weapon choice as one of the four pillars of terrorist opportunity.<sup>6</sup> They identified expected attributes of weapons that terrorists would prefer: “multipurpose, undetectable, removable, destructive, enjoyable, reliable, obtainable, uncomplicated, and safe” (2006: 108). Guns possess each of these attributes. Also—although they may lack some of the shock value of explosives—their availability, lethality, relative safety, and ease of use seem to have historically made guns popular among terrorists.<sup>7</sup> For instance, according to data available in the Global Terrorism Database version 1.1, approximately 41% of terrorist incidents between 1970 and 1997 in which weapon type could be determined were perpetrated with firearms (authors’ calculation of GTD1.1 data; LaFree and Dugan, 2008).

Accounts of terrorist activity suggest that terrorists differ from other types of criminals in several key respects. First, a core, perhaps defining, activity of terrorism is the commission of violent purposive criminal acts of a political nature (Schmid and Jongman, 1988). In contrast, criminal acts are widely recognized to be committed in a haphazard fashion generally lacking in foresight (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Second, patterns of terrorist offending seem different from those of “street” criminals. Terrorists engage in acts of terrorism, such as kidnapping, assassinations, mass attacks, and so on, as well as a variety of organizational maintenance crimes, such as identity fraud, bank robbery, and racketeering (Hamm, 2007). In contrast, felons tend to be less involved in rare crimes like assassination, kidnapping, and mass murder, and they tend to be less involved in group offending—at least during later stages of the life

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6. The four pillars of terrorist opportunity are targets, weapons, tools, and facilitating conditions (Clarke and Newman, 2006: 9).

7. Although bombs are certain to make U.S. headlines, mass shootings—such as those that have occurred in high schools and universities in the United States—have garnered immense public attention and reaction.

course (Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein, 2007). Thus, one might hypothesize that terrorists have qualitatively different motivations as well as engage in different patterns of behavior than other types of felons.

These differences seem to influence patterns of firearm offending. As distinct from terrorists, criminals are likely to recognize firearms as a secondary tool that allows for easier commission of crime, escape to be possible, and victim compliance to be greater, which reduces the chance that victims will be hurt (Wright and Rossi, 1994: 128). In such cases, criminals who want to commit a crime with a firearm but are unable to obtain one often report that they would forgo the gun and still perpetrate the original criminal act (Wright and Rossi, 1994).<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, terrorist crime seems more strongly linked to firearm involvement. The research in this area is primarily anecdotal, but it is voluminous, so we illustrate just a few examples. Post, Sprinzak, and Denny (2003) outlined the role of motivations and values in 35 interviews with incarcerated Middle Eastern terrorists. They noted that psychological constructions of value and meaning were intimately associated with armed attacks that were often carried out using commonly available Kalashnikovs and pistols. The results of their interviews generally indicated that terrorists were in favor of armed attacks on Israel and endorsed the use of firearms against their perceived oppressors. More importantly, strikes—with and without firearms—provided a sense of empowerment, mastery, and fulfillment that was otherwise lacking in the daily lives of Post and colleagues' research subjects. Regarding offense patterns, Hamm (2007) wrote that firearms played a prominent role in bank, armored car, and interpersonal robberies committed by white supremacist terrorists in the 1980s and 1990s and were an integral part of planning acts of violence against the federal government in several instances (Hamm, 2002, 2005). Research on Irish political assassinations indicates that nearly 81% of political murders were committed with a firearm as opposed to only 24% of nonpolitical murders (Lyons and Harbinson, 1986). In short, some anecdotal evidence suggests that terrorists may be more likely than other types of criminals to be involved with firearm offending because of motivational differences and patterns of offending.

### *The Importance of Access to Firearm Markets*

Firearms are a prominent part of U.S. trade. Estimates indicate that between 190 and 290 million firearms are privately owned in the United States, with four to six million being added every year (Legault, 2008). Generally speaking, firearms are not easily homemade and must be obtained from manufacturers through primary or secondary markets (Cook et al., 1995).

Access to firearms is an important issue for theory and policy. Aside from the aforementioned motivational and behavioral differences between terrorists and other felons, there is a possibility

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8. When asked what they would do if they could not obtain a handgun to commit a crime, 37% of state inmates reported that they would go unarmed, 24% stated that they would carry a knife or club, and 40% said that they would carry a long gun that had been sawed off to make it concealable (Wright and Rossi, 1994: 217).

that firearms are more available to terrorists because they might have overall greater access to U.S. firearm markets. Firearms may be obtained in primary legal, secondary legal, and secondary illegal firearm markets (Cook et al., 1995). Primary markets are federally licensed firearm dealers that are usually retail points of sale. The noteworthy difference between primary and other markets is that primary markets require a firearms purchaser to produce identification, to require the seller to record the details of the sale for review by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (BATFE), and to require a background check through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) before the firearm can be transferred to the purchaser (Gun Control Act of 1968, 2006). These markets require actions that result in the purchaser being exposed to federal law-enforcement authorities at some point in the sale. Secondary firearm markets have no such requirements regardless of the type of transaction, and they include both legal sales by private parties and sales or trade through illegal sources (Cook et al., 1995). Obtaining firearms through illegal sources may expose terrorists to law-enforcement scrutiny. If terrorists have less serious criminal histories than other felons, as some have speculated (Meissner, 2004; Sageman, 2006), then terrorists would have a greater opportunity to obtain firearms legally through primary markets and have greater access to secondary markets.

### *Conceptual Model*

The literature suggests that two paths might influence terrorists' use of firearms. First, the situational crime-prevention perspective would predict that, *ceteris paribus*, a restriction on the ability of terrorists to access primary and secondary markets would reduce firearm offending by denying access to weapons. Second, previous literature indicates that terrorists are motivated to obtain firearms and to engage differentially in crimes that involve guns. Our conceptual model appears below. The model assumes several control variables that are discussed later.

Because so little is known regarding individual-level terrorist behavior, we must first test some speculative assumptions on which these arguments lie and then test the more complex relationships. Therefore, we hypothesized four relationships. First, we hypothesized that terrorists have a less extensive formal criminal history than nonterrorist felons. Second, we expected that, because of motivational and behavioral differences, terrorists will participate in a variety of firearm crimes. Third, we hypothesized that participating in terrorism will have a particularly strong effect on charges for use and possession. Finally, based on the situational crime-prevention perspective advocated by Felson (1994) and by Clarke and Newman (2006), we hypothesized that criminal history mediates the relationship between terrorism and firearm crime through differential access to firearms markets.

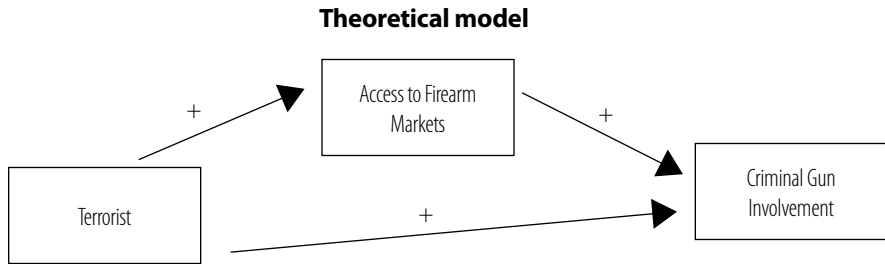
*H<sub>1</sub>: Terrorists will have a less extensive criminal history than other felons.*

*H<sub>2</sub>: Terrorists will participate more than other felons in all forms of firearm crime.*

*H<sub>3</sub>: Relative to other felons, terrorists will have a greater prevalence of firearm use and possession.*

*H<sub>4</sub>: Criminal history will mediate the relationship between terrorists and firearm crime.*

FIGURE 1



### Data

This analysis is a comparative examination of 1,259 male felons prosecuted in the federal court system between 1987 and 2002. These data are derived from two sources. The first source, the American Terrorism Study (ATS), is a database detailing the characteristics of people charged as a result of terrorism investigations by the FBI (Smith and Damphousse, 2006, 2007). In this study, terrorism is defined by inclusion in this data set and does not necessarily equate to involvement in an act of terrorism. The offender could have been charged with any number of offenses resulting from his involvement in terrorist activities—just as other felons could have been charged with any number of crimes resulting from similar actions that did not involve terrorist activities. Therefore, it is involvement in terrorist activities as determined by a resulting investigation by the FBI that defines terrorism in this study. The second data source used in this study is the official records of male felons from the U.S. Sentencing Commission (USSC) data. We discuss each data source in turn.

#### *American Terrorism Study*

The ATS is a study of the characteristics, behavior patterns, and tactics of U.S. terrorist groups using abstracted courtroom records (although we use the individual-level offender files from these data). The ATS was compiled by Smith and Damphousse (2002) in conjunction with the FBI's Terrorist Research and Analytic Center and the U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime. The data are derived from publicly available indictments of individuals who have been identified and investigated by the FBI for potential involvement in terrorism-related offending between 1978 and 2002. Initially in the form of court records, the relevant variables were abstracted into a machine-readable format by Smith and Damphousse (2002) and were made available to the research community. The ATS microdata include variables measuring individual demographic status, membership in a terrorist group, the content and breadth of formal legal charges and case disposition, and the outcome and location of prosecution. A wide variety of crimes is represented in the ATS including conspiracy, weapons offending, fraud, and others. For the purposes of this analysis, individuals in the ATS are considered "terrorists" and are hereafter referred to using this term.

### *U.S. Sentencing Commission*

The USSC data are collected under the auspices of the USSC and are used to monitor compliance with federal sentencing guidelines (USSC, 1987–2002). The USSC data contain official information on individuals processed in the federal court system under the 1984 U.S. Sentencing Guidelines. These individual-level data measure offender characteristics such as demographic status, crime of conviction, criminal history score, and amount of harm caused. The USSC nonterrorist felons were selected randomly from a concatenated file created by the authors containing all 631,869 individuals sentenced in the federal court system between 1987 and 2002 (U.S. Sentencing Commission, 1987–2002). Similar to the ATS, the USSC data contain offenders charged with a wide variety of federal crimes. Individuals from the USSC file are referred to in this analysis as “felons” or “nonterrorist felons.” The USSC file is included to provide a group of individuals to compare against terrorists from the ATS data.

### *Analytic File*

Because the analyses were intended to make a direct comparison between ATS terrorists and USSC felons, only years where data were available in both data sets were included and the data were limited to felons only: All 374 felony cases from the ATS individual-level file from 1987 to 2002 were included in the data and a random selection of 1,125 felony cases was drawn from the 1987–2002 USSC data.<sup>9</sup> To create the analysis file, the ATS and USSC cases were combined and variable coding was standardized across both data sets.

To obtain a focused comparison, we applied several restrictions to both the ATS and the USSC data. Namely, we limited the data to male terrorists charged in the United States and convicted of a felony during years common to both data sets. These limitations yielded a total of 336 males charged with terrorism-related offenses between 1987 and 2002 from the ATS and 923 comparable cases from the USSC.<sup>10</sup> The analytic file was created using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Corporation, Chicago, IL). The final analysis file contained a total of 1,259 male felons processed between 1987 and 2002.

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9. The *n* randomly selected from the USSC was determined by our desire for the USSC cases to outnumber the ATS cases by about three to one to increase statistical power while not overwhelming the number of ATS cases. Three times 374 is 1,122 and we rounded this to the nearest five to arrive at our final USSC *n* of 1,225.

10. Female cases were removed from the final data set during the initial stages of development when it was determined that the small number of females (relative to males) in both data sets introduced instability into the statistical analysis and that no relationship existed between gender and any of the outcome variables. This is common to studies of gun violence (Lizotte and Sheppard, 2001). The lack of female cases in the ATS is particularly acute with only 38 female indictees in the data.

## Methods<sup>11</sup>

To establish baseline relationships among our variables and between the two groups (terrorists and felons), we first performed bivariate tests of independence and correlation coefficients. The next method for describing differences in terrorists and felons involved estimating a series of logistic regressions on the pooled data. Using this method allows a comprehensive depiction of the outcomes while other relevant variables are held constant. Logistic regression allows the interpretation of resulting coefficients as odds statements and does not assume a linear functional form (Aldrich and Nelson, 1984). Furthermore, we can determine the odds of firearm crime involvement based on each independent variable using this method (Long, 1997). Another advantage of logistic regression, aside from its desirable properties when estimating limited dependent variables, is the ease with which one may interpret the outcomes of the equations.<sup>12</sup> Finally, we can test for differences between the subsets of primary firearm crime (use and possession) to determine whether observed differences in the coefficients of these equations occur by chance or whether they indicate a difference in behavior (Cohen, 1983).<sup>13</sup>

We conducted two additional analyses. First, logistic models were estimated with data weighted to correct for the oversampling of terrorists. Finally, to take additional steps to remove extra causal factors from the model disturbance, we estimated conditional fixed-effects logistic regression equations, fixing the courtroom effects of the 96 federal court districts. This portion of the analysis represents an effort to address any unobserved variation in courtroom culture and prosecutorial discretion. These analytic techniques and results are presented in Appendix A.

### *The Variables*

**Firearm charges.** Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables. The primary dependent concept measured in this analysis is illegal use and possession of firearms as measured by criminal firearm charges. We used four dichotomous measures to capture the illegal use and possession of firearms: (1) *charged with any firearm offense*, (2) *charged with any firearm crime as a primary offense*, (3) *charged with firearm use as a primary offense*, and (4) *firearm possession as a primary offense*. We coded all four measures 1 for charged with the firearm offense in question and 0 for not charged. Approximately 18.5% of the entire sample was charged with a firearm offense, followed by 15.8% being charged with a primary firearm offense.<sup>14</sup> Fewer than 2% (1.7) were

11. SPSS Version 12.0 was used for bivariate analysis and STATA Version 9.1 (StataCorp, College Station, TX) was used to estimate multivariate models.

12. When the coefficients of a logistic regression are exponentiated and transformed through a simple formula, we may interpret the result as a percent change in odds of the dependent variable for a one-unit change on the independent variable while holding all other variables constant. The transformation formula used here is as follows: percent change in the odds ratio =  $(e^{\beta} - 1) * 100$ .

13. In this case, the t test is distributed as where a z score of 1.65 is  $p < .05$ . The formula for calculating the z scores is as follows:

$$z = \frac{\theta_1 - \theta_2}{\sqrt{SE\theta_1^2 + SE\theta_2^2}}$$

(see also Paternoster, Brame, Mazerolle, and Piquero, 1998).

14. These measures are similar to measures of federal prisoners' self-reports of gun use, which further supports our confidence in the validity of these data (Wolf Harlow, 2001).

accused of firearm use and 7% were implicated in firearm possession.

Because the data were abstracted from the ATS and USSC statutory codes, these variables are crude indicators only and cannot distinguish between firearm types (e.g., whether pistols or long guns) and are not sensitive to bullet caliber, manufacturer, or style of firearm. Nevertheless, we assume that the use of official court records is a valid measure of criminal offending. Previous research on firearm use by offenders has shown a high degree of reliability between prosecutorial charging behavior and actual firearm-related offending (Lizotte and Zatz, 1986; Loftin and McDowall, 1981). In other words, if an individual is charged with more serious crimes and a firearm is involved, then firearm charges also are included. Furthermore, the strict definitions of firearm-use crimes at the federal level require specific alleged actions on the part of the defendant and do not include the mere possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony (Scalia, 2000), which lends yet more confidence to this particular measure. In both the ATS and the USSC, firearm involvement was defined by official courtroom action and any measurement error would be more likely caused by stochastic processes rather than by data definitional issues. In other words, we assumed that being charged with a firearm crime indicates involvement with firearms and that an absence of firearm charges indicates no firearm involvement.

**Terrorism status.** The main independent variable in this analysis is whether the defendant was a terrorist. This item was coded 1 or 0 depending on the data source from which the individual was drawn. Defendants from the ATS data were coded 1, and those from the USSC data were coded 0. The ATS data contain individuals formally indicted in a court of law as part of the FBI's counterterrorism program (Smith and Damphousse, 2006). The formal indictment provides high confidence that individuals from that source were in fact involved in terrorist activity. The USSC data are a record of individuals charged in the federal court system who were not involved in terrorism. The combined data include 336 (26.7%) individuals identified by the FBI as terrorists and 923 (73.3%) nonterrorists from the USSC sentencing data.

**Criminal activity.** The next three items represent individuals' degrees of criminal activity using three variables. First, we included a measure of the defendants' federal criminal history score. Ranging from 0 to 6 (with 6 being the most severe), the average federal criminal history score is 2.3 in this sample.<sup>15</sup> The second indicator of seriousness of criminality is the number of months sentenced to prison. Although the authors recognize that sentencing under the federal system remains highly structured by the federal guidelines (U.S. Sentencing Commission, 2006),

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15. The criteria for these scores are outlined in the USSC's Federal Sentencing Guidelines Manual (U.S. Sentencing Commission, 2007). However, we could not dichotomize criminal history into previous felony indictment or no previous felony indictment. Determining whether the offender was previously convicted of a felony is not possible because of the complex coding of the criminal history score. The criminal history score is calculated by using a multistage process that evaluates prior offenses by sentence length, whether the offenders were adjudicated as adults or juveniles, release dates from custody, whether offenses were committed while under sentence for another criminal offense, time since last offense, escape status, and the nature of previous offenses. By evaluating each of these characteristics, the USSC sums the total points and then uses these points to assign a criminal history category score.



**T A B L E 1**

**Coding of variables, means, and standard deviations for all variables**

| Variable                | Coding of Variable                                                                                                                 | Unweighted |         | Weighted |         | N     |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------|----------|---------|-------|
|                         |                                                                                                                                    | Mean       | SD      | Mean     | SD      |       |
| <i>Dependent</i>        |                                                                                                                                    |            |         |          |         |       |
| Any firearm offense     | Did any of the defendant's convictions involve a firearm? (1 = yes, 0 = no)                                                        | .186       | .389    | .105     | .307    | 1,259 |
| Firearm primary offense | Did the defendant's primary offense of conviction involve a firearm? (1 = yes, 0 = no)                                             | .089       | .284    | .085     | .279    | 1,162 |
| Firearm use             | Did the defendant's primary offense of conviction involve using a firearm? (1 = yes, 0 = no)                                       | .017       | .130    | .011     | .104    | 1,162 |
| Firearm possession      | Did the defendant's primary offense of conviction involve firearm possession? (1 = yes, 0 = no)                                    | .071       | .258    | .074     | .262    | 1,162 |
| <i>Independent</i>      |                                                                                                                                    |            |         |          |         |       |
| Terrorist               | Defendant identified as a terrorist and included in the ATS (1 = yes, 0 = no)                                                      | .267       | .443    | .001     | .025    | 1,259 |
| Criminal history        | Defendant's federal criminal history category; measures the frequency and seriousness of offender's criminal history (range = 0–6) | 2.279      | 1.688   | 2.425    | 1.726   | 971   |
| Months sentenced        | Prison sentence (in months)                                                                                                        | 67.022     | 105.886 | 58.825   | 100.245 | 1,134 |
| Leadership role         | Defendant had a leadership or otherwise aggravating role in the primary offense of conviction (1 = yes, 0 = no)                    | .121       | .327    | .086     | .280    | 1,210 |
| Citizen                 | Defendant is a U.S. citizen (1 = yes, 0 = no)                                                                                      | .661       | .474    | .700     | .459    | 1,111 |
| Black                   | Defendant is of African-American race/ethnicity (1 = yes, 0 = no)                                                                  | .242       | .428    | .287     | .453    | 1,223 |
| Latino                  | Defendant is of Hispanic race/ethnicity (1 = yes, 0 = no)                                                                          | .276       | .447    | .337     | .473    | 1,223 |
| White                   | Defendant is of Caucasian race/ethnicity (1 = yes, 0 = no)                                                                         | .460       | .499    | .353     | .478    | 1,223 |
| Other                   | Defendant is of other race/ethnicity                                                                                               | .021       | .144    | .022     | .147    | 1,223 |
| Age                     | Defendant's age at conviction (in years)                                                                                           | 35.310     | 10.789  | 34.677   | 10.434  | 1,172 |
| Number of counts        | Defendant's number of counts                                                                                                       |            |         |          |         |       |
|                         |                                                                                                                                    | 3.692      | 10.722  | 1.551    | 2.376   | 1,188 |

Notes. SD = standard deviation. ATS = American Terrorism Study. Weighted terror variable value = .0006672.

the number of months sentenced to prison is a potent indicator of the severity of defendants' most recent crimes as well as their criminal history (Tonry, 1996). When used in conjunction with other criminal history variables in multivariate models, this indicator more precisely measures the severity of the current offense. The average number of months sentenced was 67. Our third measure of criminal severity is whether the offender had a leading or aggravating role in his primary offense of conviction. Research on terrorism (Sageman, 2004) suggested that some individuals who play a central role in terrorist organizations may be more likely to engage in a greater amount of offending. Similarly, we expected that nonterrorist criminals who were in leading or aggravating roles during primary offenses would commit more severe crimes. Nearly 12% of offenders in the combined ATS-USSC data set were in a leadership or otherwise aggravating role.

**Control variables.** Our indicator of citizenship is an important control variable. Recent literature noted that some terrorists are drawn from immigrant communities (Rapoport, 2001) and prior work on firearm offending suggests that firearm offending may be lower among immigrant offenders (Wolf Harlow, 2001). Thus, we included citizenship to improve the focus on our comparisons and to account for mid-level sociodemographic contextual variables. Citizenship was measured using a dichotomous variable. Approximately 66% of the total sample were U.S. citizens.

To control for possible confounding variables associated with demographic characteristics and to compare felons versus terrorists in their firearms involvement, we also included age and race variables. Age was defined as the defendant's age at conviction and the average age of the offenders in the combined ATS-USSC data was 35.3 years. Ethnicity was captured using four dichotomous variables. Approximately 24.2% of all USSC-ATS felons were African American, 27.6% were Latino, 46% were white, and only 2% were listed as "other".

Finally, we included a measure of the number of charges levied against the defendant to control for a possible higher level of aggressive prosecutions against terrorists. It is entirely probable that prosecutors view terrorism as a form of heinous crime and therefore simply "throw the book" at terrorists. Accordingly, we included the total number of criminal counts to control for the possible confounding effect of differential case handling. The average number of criminal counts against defendants in this sample was approximately 3.7.

## **Results**

### ***Bivariate***

The results from Table 2 indicate that terrorists and felons are distinct in several important ways. The bivariate results paint a picture of the U.S. terrorist as being more heavily firearm involved, older, usually white, and having a less extensive offending history than other felons. In this regard, the percentage differentials are large: A total of 40% of terrorists were charged with a gun-related crime, compared with 10.5% of felons. On average, terrorists were 37 years of age and federal felons were 34. Fully 76.5% of terrorists were white, while 35.3% of felons

were white. Finally, terrorists had an average criminal history score nearly a point less than nonterrorists (1.45 v. 2.42).

**T A B L E 2**

**Contingency tables comparing terrorists with felons**

| Variable                      | Felons<br>(n = 923) | Terrorists<br>(n = 336) | p     |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Any firearm offense (%)       | 10.5                | 40.8                    | <.001 |
| Firearm primary offense (%)   | 8.5                 | 9.8                     | NS    |
| Firearm use (%)               | 1.08                | 3.3                     | .022  |
| Firearm possession (%)        | 7.4                 | 6.5                     | NS    |
| Criminal history score (mean) | 2.4                 | 1.5                     | <.001 |
| Months sentenced (mean)       | 58.8                | 100.2                   | <.001 |
| Leadership role (%)           | 8.6                 | 21.4                    | <.001 |
| Citizen (%)                   | 70.0                | 56.3                    | <.001 |
| African American (%)          | 28.8                | 11.3                    | <.001 |
| White (%)                     | 35.3                | 76.5                    | <.001 |
| Latino (%)                    | 33.7                | 10.3                    | <.001 |
| Other (%)                     | 2.2                 | 1.9                     | NS    |
| Age (mean)                    | 34.7                | 37.1                    | .001  |
| Number of counts (mean)       | 1.6                 | 9.3                     | <.001 |

Notes. NS = not significant. Results are unweighted. Independent sample t-tests and chi-square tests of independence calculated, respectively.

Results from the correlation matrix in Table 3 are consistent with Table 2 and suggest some important consistencies between the data sets. Our measure of terrorism was positively correlated with firearm crime ( $r = .344$ ), age ( $r = .099$ ), and being white ( $r = .363$ ). Similar to the contingency tables, the correlations show that terrorists are associated with lower criminal history scores ( $-.206$ ). Both of these results, then, provide initial support for our first and second hypotheses—that terrorists have less of a criminal history and participate in more firearm crime than other felons. They also suggest that prosecutorial behavior might have an important effect: Terrorists are charged with about eight times the number of offenses as other felons.

Other results from the correlation tables are consistent with previous studies and suggest important race and citizenship dynamics. For example, Latinos were less likely to be involved with firearms, as evidenced by their negative and significant correlations with all four measures of firearm violations.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, we found that U.S. citizenship was related to a higher likelihood of all types of firearm charges. The data also indicate that African Americans had a longer formal criminal record ( $r = .170$ ) and that being African American was associated with longer sentence lengths ( $r = .162$ ).

16. This finding is consistent with previous examinations of federal firearm offenders (Scalia, 2000; Wolf Harlow, 2001).

T A B L E 3

**Correlation matrix—All cases (Pearson's *r*, 1987–2002)**

| Variables                        | Any firearm crime | Primary crime firearm | Primary crime firearm use | Primary crime firearm possession | Terrorist | Criminal history | Months sentenced | Leadership role | Citizen | Black  | Latino | Other  | White | Age  | Number of counts |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|-------|------|------------------|
| Any firearm crime                | 1                 |                       |                           |                                  |           |                  |                  |                 |         |        |        |        |       |      |                  |
| Primary crime firearm            | .237*             | 1                     |                           |                                  |           |                  |                  |                 |         |        |        |        |       |      |                  |
| Primary crime firearm use        | .152*             | .424*                 | 1                         |                                  |           |                  |                  |                 |         |        |        |        |       |      |                  |
| Primary crime firearm possession | .185*             | .889*                 | -.037                     | 1                                |           |                  |                  |                 |         |        |        |        |       |      |                  |
| Terrorist                        | .344*             | .021                  | .076*                     | -.015                            | 1         |                  |                  |                 |         |        |        |        |       |      |                  |
| Criminal history                 | -.038             | .144*                 | -.019                     | .163*                            | -.206*    | 1                |                  |                 |         |        |        |        |       |      |                  |
| Months sentenced                 | .145*             | -.019                 | .014                      | -.028                            | .156*     | .174*            | 1                |                 |         |        |        |        |       |      |                  |
| Leadership role                  | .133*             | -.014                 | -.023                     | -.000                            | .176*     | -.042            | .183*            | 1               |         |        |        |        |       |      |                  |
| Citizen                          | .048              | .205*                 | .092*                     | .180*                            | -.131*    | -.044            | .053             | .041            | 1       |        |        |        |       |      |                  |
| Black                            | -.046             | .077*                 | .003                      | .083*                            | -.179*    | .170*            | .162*            | -.087*          | .214*   | 1      |        |        |       |      |                  |
| Latino                           | -.264*            | -.134*                | -.069*                    | -.114*                           | -.230*    | .069*            | -.068*           | -.092*          | -.405*  | -.349* | 1      |        |       |      |                  |
| Other                            | .046              | .002                  | -.019                     | .012                             | -.010     | .002             | .001             | .015            | -.028   | -.083* | -.091* | 1      |       |      |                  |
| White                            | .263*             | .055                  | .064*                     | .028                             | .363*     | -.216*           | -.078*           | .152*           | .187*   | -.522* | -.571* | -.136* | 1     |      |                  |
| Age                              | .015              | -.013                 | -.058                     | .015                             | .099*     | -.094*           | .004             | .162*           | .112*   | -.220* | -.085* | -.011  | .269* | 1    |                  |
| Number of counts                 | .263*             | -.047                 | -.009                     | -.047                            | .333*     | -.062            | .245*            | .088*           | -.179*  | -.033  | -.130* | .032   | .136* | .038 | 1                |

Notes. *n* = 846.  
\**p* < .05.

*Multivariate*

Table 4 presents the results of the logistic regression equations estimating the effects of each of the independent variables on each of the four firearm crime variables. The findings from this analysis provide additional support for three of the four hypotheses. In seven of the eight models, being a terrorist significantly increased the odds of being charged with firearm offenses. The first column details the simple odds ratios for all cases with any firearm, without including a measure of criminal history. In this equation, being in the terrorist group increased the odds of being indicted with any firearm offense by more than fourfold. Being Latino reduced the odds of being indicted with any firearm crime by 90%. Finally, being a U.S. citizen more than doubled the odds of being indicted for a firearm crime.

Estimates in the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth columns included a control for criminal history to test our fourth hypothesis. In each of these cases, the idea that criminal history mediates the relationship between terrorist and firearm offenses was supported by the considerable increase in parameter estimates for terrorists' participation in any firearm crime for all four outcome models. Controlling for the effect of the criminal history variable reveals the full extent of terrorist participation in firearm crime. For instance, when criminal history is included in the model, there is an almost ninefold increase in the odds of terrorists being charged with any firearm crime compared with nonterrorists. This is much higher than the fourfold difference observed in the equation that did not include criminal history to mediate the relationship and illustrates the suppression effect of criminal history on terrorists' participation in firearm crime: Those few terrorists with extensive criminal histories, then, were charged with firearm crimes more often than other felons, but the effect was more pronounced when controlling for variation in criminal history. This finding stands in stark contrast to previous research on felons that identified extensive criminal history as being a predictor of current gun involvement.

The fourth column reports the equation for firearm charges as a primary offense. In this case, terrorists had approximately six times higher odds of having a gun charge as a primary offense than did other criminals. In addition, criminal history became a significant predictor, increasing the odds of a primary firearm offense by approximately 57%, and the effect of citizenship intensified to approximately a tenfold increase in odds. Finally, the severity of crime (measured by the number of months sentenced) changed direction compared with the first model, reducing the odds of being charged with a primary firearm offense by 0.6% per month sentenced.

The sixth column presents the results for gun use as a primary crime. This is the largest disparity between terrorists and other criminals with a more-than-20-fold increase in the odds of being charged with firearm use for members of the terrorist group. We note here that the terrorist variable and age are the only variables in the equation that explain variation in the firearm use variable and the strong finding could be an artifact because only approximately 1% of all the cases in the data involved firearm use as a primary offense.

Finally, the last column details the equation for firearm possession as a primary offense. In this case, being in the terrorist group increased the odds of being charged with firearm pos-

**T A B L E 4**

**Logistic models (1987–2002)**

| Variable                              | Exp β Any Firearm (SE) |                    | Exp β Primary Firearm (SE) |                     | Exp β Firearm Use <sup>a</sup> (SE) |                      | Exp β Firearm Possession (SE) |                    |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Terrorist                             | 4.783**<br>(1.101)     | 8.876**<br>(2.490) | 2.395**<br>(.673)          | 6.335**<br>(2.168)  | 7.341**<br>(4.150)                  | 20.087**<br>(19.589) | 1.607<br>(.494)               | 4.046**<br>(1.428) |
| Criminal history                      | —                      | 1.062<br>(.078)    | —                          | 1.571**<br>(.122)   | —                                   | 1.247<br>(.334)      | —                             | 1.583**<br>(.115)  |
| Months sentenced                      | 1.002**<br>(.000)      | 1.001*<br>(.000)   | .998*<br>(.002)            | .994*<br>(.002)     | 1.000<br>(.003)                     | .999<br>(.007)       | .997<br>(.002)                | .994**<br>(.002)   |
| Leadership role                       | 1.179<br>(.323)        | .794<br>(.269)     | .600<br>(.237)             | .460*<br>(.211)     | .266<br>(.280)                      | .255<br>(.292)       | .762<br>(.319)                | .550<br>(.265)     |
| Citizen                               | 2.566**<br>(.723)      | 2.243**<br>(.788)  | 12.060**<br>(7.415)        | 10.363**<br>(7.174) | —                                   | —                    | 9.258**<br>(5.807)            | 9.072**<br>(6.614) |
| Black                                 | .594*<br>(.149)        | .651<br>(.175)     | 1.319<br>(.367)            | 1.089<br>(.334)     | .692<br>(.415)                      | .248<br>(.309)       | 1.559<br>(.473)               | 1.319<br>(.423)    |
| Latino                                | .097**<br>(.043)       | .060**<br>(.033)   | .468*<br>(.193)            | .449*<br>(.202)     | —                                   | —                    | .650<br>(.277)                | .599<br>(.286)     |
| Other                                 | 1.882<br>(1.029)       | 2.072<br>(1.400)   | 1.513<br>(1.264)           | 1.358<br>(1.326)    | —                                   | —                    | 1.874<br>(1.621)              | 1.739<br>(1.712)   |
| Age                                   | .975**<br>(.009)       | .979**<br>(.010)   | .987<br>(.010)             | .994<br>(.011)      | .951**<br>(.016)                    | .949**<br>(.021)     | .997<br>(.010)                | 1.004<br>(.012)    |
| Number of counts                      | 1.016<br>(.018)        | 1.039<br>(.029)    | .960<br>(.033)             | .992<br>(.027)      | 1.003<br>(.045)                     | 1.072**<br>(.034)    | .942<br>(.052)                | .969<br>(.047)     |
| * <i>p</i> < .10<br>** <i>p</i> < .05 | <i>n</i> = 953         | <i>n</i> = 847     | <i>n</i> = 952             | <i>n</i> = 846      | <i>n</i> = 558                      | <i>n</i> = 512       | <i>n</i> = 952                | <i>n</i> = 846     |
| G <sup>2</sup> test (sig.)            | 110.22<br>(<.001)      | 115.56<br>(<.000)  | 37.22<br>(<.000)           | 63.77<br>(<.000)    | 32.06<br>(<.000)                    | 54.77<br>(<.000)     | 34.71<br>(<.000)              | 68.45<br>(<.000)   |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>                 | .193                   | .242               | .106                       | .171                | .129                                | .260                 | .085                          | .152               |

Notes. SE = standard error.

<sup>a</sup> Other race, Latino, and citizen not included as constant.

session as a primary offense about fourfold over the nonterrorist group. Next, we compared the terrorist coefficients in the firearm use and possession equations as subsets of the primary firearm variable. Although initial inspections supported the conclusion that firearm use was more common than possession among terrorists as compared with criminals, we found that this difference was not statistically significant when examined with a cross coefficient test and that it does not support the third hypothesis that terrorists will show a large difference between firearm use and possession compared with other felons.<sup>17</sup> Criminal history also exhibited strong

17. Calculating the cross coefficient test for these equations produces *z* = .0843 with *p* = .466, which fails to reject the null hypothesis that the coefficients are different in the population.

effects on firearm possession: Each increase in criminal history score produced a 60% increase in the odds of firearm possession. Months sentenced decreased the odds of firearm possession by approximately 6% for each additional month, and U.S. citizenship increased the odds of firearm possession by more than eightfold.

Finally, we estimated these equations with the weighted data and used conditional fixed-effects models of the data to control for the oversample of terrorists and for the effects of courtroom actors, respectively. The results of these additional models did not differ substantively from the models already reported. Complete details about these methods and results are reported in Appendix A.

### *Summary of Findings*

Three of the four hypotheses are supported by these results. Overall, and perhaps unsurprisingly, firearm charges were positively related to criminal offending, with criminal history being positively and significantly related to primary firearm crime and being charged with possession of a firearm as a primary offense. Terrorists, the main variable of interest, displayed strong positive effects in each of the equations, a pattern that supports the hypothesis that terrorists participate in more firearm crime than other felons. Nonetheless, the odds of being charged with firearm use (as opposed to possession) for terrorists were not significantly different than nonterrorist felons, a finding that fails to support the third hypothesis. The relatively small number of firearm-use cases and consequent lack of variation and power for this dependent variable could be driving this result. Finally, the fourth hypothesis—a mediated relationship between terrorists and firearm crime because of criminal history differences—is supported by the suppression effect noted in each of the models presented.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

These findings concur with previous research using the ATS suggesting that individual terrorists are frequently charged with firearm offenses (Hamm, 2007). They are also consistent with research that found that terrorists are more likely to use firearms for assassinations than are nonterrorists (Lyons and Harbinson, 1986) and with research from terrorist-incident databases indicating that firearm-based attacks are the second most common type of recorded occurrence (Jackson and Frelinger, 2007; LaFree, Dugan, Fogg, and Scott, 2006).

Although this consistency with previous literature provides additional confidence in the findings, there are limitations to the analyses. First, we lack information regarding the specific type of firearm used, firearm preference, and circumstances conditioning weapon type use. Perhaps more importantly, direct measures of weapon use in terrorist attacks versus supporting crimes are absent; unfortunately, these data do not yet exist. It will be important to collect new data to address the specific details and motivations of terrorists at an individual level.

Second, both the ATS and the USSC data are drawn primarily from federal prosecutions and do not include cases tried in state courts. Although current indications suggest that the

bulk of terrorism-related cases are tried in federal courts, some states may contribute to this total as well (cf. Simone, Freilich, and Chermak, 2008). Although we expect that this will not fundamentally undermine the findings of this study, it is important to understand that not all cases tried and punished in federal courts result from a violation of federal firearm statutes. Federally sponsored firearm violence-reduction strategies such as Operation Ceasefire and Exile try defendants in federal courts who would traditionally have been tried in state criminal courts. This limitation is not particularly threatening, however, because it serves only to make a rejection of the null hypothesis more difficult. That is, if additional firearm felons were in the sample that were not in the terrorist group, then it would be more difficult to find that being involved in terrorist activities increases the odds of participating in firearm-related crime. In short, this potential for systematic error in the data serves only to increase the difficulty in supporting our hypotheses. In any case, the unique nature of these data and the opportunity to compare terrorists and other types of felons quantitatively at the individual level far outweighs these shortcomings.

Future research should attempt to shed light on the dynamics of weapon choice among individual terrorists. In particular, additional research examining the interplay between terrorism and type of firearm would be very informative. Prior research has suggested that felons are primarily interested in easily concealed handguns (Wolf Harlow, 2001; Wright and Rossi, 1994), but terrorists may be more interested in offensive weapons such as shotguns and semi-automatic rifles. Understanding weapon choice is vital to understanding the routine criminal activities of terrorists in the United States. Previous work (Hamm, 2002, 2007) suggested that terrorists may differ from felons in their involvement with explosives, which are not the common weapons of ordinary criminals. This suggests that researchers or policymakers interested in better understanding terrorism may want to study terrorist weapon choice and preference—just as others have studied criminal weapon choice and use in the past to inform criminal justice policy (e.g., Cook et al., 1995; Lizotte, Krohn, Howell, Tobin, and Howard, 2000; Lizotte, Tesoriero, Thornberry, and Krohn, 1994).

Terrorist group type may be an important variable as well. Hoffman (2006) argued that left-wing violence is distinguishable from right-wing violence by the left's use of innovative tactics and specific targets. Based on these findings, one would expect right-wing groups to be more apt to possess and use firearms than left-wing groups. Accordingly, future research on firearm involvement should explicitly examine differential patterns of firearm use between types of terrorist groups.

Finally, these findings support at least one specific recommendation for policy. Because terrorists tend to have less extensive criminal histories, they might find it easier to obtain firearms legally through available primary market retail sources and to pass Brady background checks—both of which suggest that policymakers should continue to include the Violent Gang and Terrorist Organization File (VGOTF) as part of the Brady NICS criteria. More importantly, however, procedural changes regarding how that information is communicated to federal and



state law-enforcement agencies should be improved in light of the proclivity of terrorists in this sample of federal felons to participate in firearm crimes, a lack of coordination on this subject between state and federal agencies, and a history of allowing these purchases to be completed (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2005).

Current federal restrictions on firearm purchases forbid the sale or transfer of firearms to people who are indicted or convicted of felonies, fugitives from justice, addicted to or use controlled substances, adjudicated as mentally defective, identified as illegal aliens, discharged from the armed forces under dishonorable conditions, recognized as previous citizens who have renounced U.S. citizenship, subject to a court protective order restraining contact with an intimate partner, or convicted of a misdemeanor or domestic violence (The Gun Control Act of 1968, 2006). Currently, no provisions are in place to prevent individuals named in the VGOTF from purchasing weapons unless they are otherwise ineligible (Krouse, 2005). Furthermore, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2005: 21) reported that federal law-enforcement and counterterrorism authorities have “not routinely monitored states’ handling of NICS transactions involving terrorist records in the VGOTF.” We recommend that this integration of the VGOTF with NICS checks be continued with additional FBI counterterrorism oversight and coordination and that a provision to prevent firearm sales to individuals listed in the VGOTF (with proper oversight) be enacted. For instance, the Denying Firearms and Explosives to Dangerous Terrorists Act of 2007 (S. 1237) currently proposes to deny people named on the VGOTF list the right to possess a firearm and allows for remedy through the discretion of the attorney general (U.S. Congress, 2007). This bill also allows the attorney general to withhold information regarding the denial of a firearm purchase if the information is considered to be a matter of national security—although we are not sure how this might be germane to domestic terrorism and it would justifiably draw the ire of civil rights groups as well as gun rights activists. The ability to deny the right to purchase a gun based on VGOTF membership may be necessary considering that, during the 5 months of the U.S. Government Accountability Office study, the NICS recorded approximately 650 hits on terrorist lists, of which only 44 were valid. Of the 44 valid alerts, 35 were ultimately allowed to proceed for lack of cause for denial, 6 transactions were denied, 1 was not resolved, and 2 were listed as “unknown status” (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2005). Considering the evidence presented here, it is probably more prudent to impose greater law-enforcement oversight and involvement rather than to try to impose and enforce additional purchasing restrictions.

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## Appendix A

### *Oversample Weights*

One obstacle to making direct comparisons between the ATS and the USSC data is the gross oversample, and hence overrepresentation, of terrorists in the data. The data include 923 felons randomly sampled from a total of 511,466 cases processed under the federal system.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, all available terrorists from the same time period—336—were included in the data. Terrorism prosecutions are rare, which presents a degree of methodological difficulty in modeling terrorist behavior.<sup>19</sup> To compare the two data sets, weights were calculated to compensate for the discrepancy in the relative sizes of the groups.<sup>20</sup> Both weighted and unweighted descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1.

Failure to include such weights can lead to biased parameter estimates (Wang, Yu, and Lin, 1997). Inclusion of weights, however, can have unwanted effects on inferential statistics by inflating standard errors, which increases the likelihood of error. As a result, Winship and Radbill (1994) recommended not including oversample weights when the parameter estimates between weighted and unweighted models are the same. Therefore, all statistical tests and analyses were performed on both the weighted and unweighted data. No substantive differences were found in the interpretation of findings or in the standard errors. This being the case, we elected to present and interpret the unweighted results (Winship and Radbill, 1994) and we do not report weighted equations here.<sup>21</sup> To allow for the possibility that the standard errors might be inflated, all models are estimated using Huber-White robust standard errors. In sum, we chose to include the more conservative, smaller parameter estimates *and* the more conservative robust standard errors.

### *The Conditional Fixed-Effects Logistic Model*

The data used for this analysis are official courtroom statistics. Accordingly, individual outcomes in these contexts are influenced by a host of factors inherent in the local courtroom context. These factors are the local informal legal cultures; social dynamics among judges, defense attorneys,

18. Although the original population of the USSC is 631,869, this is the number of males in the USSC population and is the population  $N$  used to calculate the weighting scheme for the final data set used in the analysis.

19. The authors note that, in 2002, there were approximately 370 U.S. federal homicide convictions (Maguire and Pastore, 2004) but only 38 prosecutions of terrorists (authors' calculations—not shown). These data suggest a ratio of 1 terrorist prosecuted to every 9.73 homicides. In short, terrorism cases in the federal system are far rarer than even the infrequent crime of homicide.

20. Simple probability weights were calculated and used as oversample weights. The weight calculations were performed by determining the sampling proportion of the terrorist group, using this number to determine the expected number of terrorist cases in a simple random sample, dividing the expected proportion by the actual  $n$ , subtracting this number from the actual sample size, and dividing the expected size by the actual sample size.

21. All parameter estimates were in the same direction; however, the weighted results were of a greater magnitude. We chose to report the more conservative estimates here. Although not reported, the weighted results are available upon request.

and prosecutors; and attitudes of courtroom actors toward the perceived harm of criminal acts (Eisenstein, Flemming, and Nardulli, 1999).

To account for these potential courtroom-level effects, we estimated conditional fixed-effects logistic regression models, which allow for the user to hold constant unobserved, stable variation (Greene, 2003; Wooldridge, 2002) in groups, such as geographic areas, in this case 96 federal court districts. The unconditional logistic fixed-effects model has often been cited as an appropriate model for the study of logistically distributed dependent variables across time in panel data (Greene, 2003; Wooldridge, 2002). However, these models usually rely on a series of dichotomous variables representing each of the concepts under investigation, thus introducing the possibility of incidental parameter bias (Allison and Waterman, 2002). Conditional models, however, allow for the examination of case control and matched data while fixing and separating higher-level effects from all of the individual-level effects in the model; these models do not include the additional parameter estimates in the final model.

In the case of the conditional fixed-effect model, each fixed-effect term is conditioned on the constant term of the logit estimator, in this case, it allows us to control for unobserved variation in the 96 federal court districts that may be caused by variation in district policies or variation in courtroom behavior without the disadvantages inherent in adding 95 additional variables to the equation. The conditional logistic fixed-effects model is well suited for the inherent structure of the analytic data, but it is not without shortcomings. First, because the constant term is used to compute the fixed effects, it is lost to the model. As the constant term is not of particular substantive interest in our analysis, this has no negative effect on our findings. Second, the conditional fixed-effects model must drop all cases that do not vary within a grouping (Greene, 2003; Wooldridge, 2002). In this case, any federal district that had no terrorism cases was dropped from the analysis due to lack of within-group variation, which resulted in the loss of a large portion of the individual cases in the data to hold constant the unobserved variation in districts and in the complete loss of the firearm use equations.

The outcome of the conditional fixed-effects logit model is reported in Table A1. Because of lack of cases and variation between districts, the firearm-use equation failed to estimate. We would like to note, however, that in the three equations with sufficient data, the parameter estimates were not substantively different than those in the equations reported in Table 4. This model and modeling technique may prove more useful as more individual-level data become available with large sample sizes. In this case, it adds to our analysis by providing an additional control—beyond the number of counts for each case—for the possibility that systematic variations in courtroom behavior in federal courts are the cause of the observed relationship between terrorists and firearm charges.



**T A B L E A 1**

**Conditional fixed-effects logistic models, grouped by district (1987–2002)<sup>a</sup>**

| Variable              | Exp $\beta$ Any Firearm (SE) |                    | Exp $\beta$ Primary Firearm (SE) |                    | Exp $\beta$ Firearm Possession (SE) |                     |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Terrorist             | 6.130**<br>(.472)            | 10.294**<br>(.544) | 3.708**<br>(.626)                | 16.113**<br>(.734) | 2.614*<br>(.563)                    | 10.469**<br>(.566)  |
| Criminal history      | —                            | 1.061<br>(.086)    | —                                | 1.515**<br>(.095)  | —                                   | 1.555**<br>(.089)   |
| Months sentenced      | 1.001<br>(.001)              | 1.001<br>(.001)    | .998<br>(.002)                   | .994<br>(.003)     | .997**<br>(.002)                    | .993**<br>(.002)    |
| Leadership role       | 1.305<br>(.341)              | .940<br>(.429)     | .673<br>(.316)                   | .375**<br>(.425)   | .772<br>(.387)                      | .371*<br>(.582)     |
| Citizen               | 3.305**<br>(.556)            | 4.418**<br>(.593)  | 11.680**<br>(.756)               | 10.234**<br>(.818) | 10.360**<br>(.749)                  | 9.812**<br>(.765)   |
| Black                 | .829<br>(.313)               | .807<br>(.355)     | 2.775**<br>(.475)                | 1.940<br>(.480)    | 2.737**<br>(.468)                   | 2.253<br>(.513)     |
| Latino                | .171**<br>(.496)             | .185**<br>(.624)   | .970<br>(.568)                   | 1.001<br>(.585)    | 1.174<br>(.585)                     | 1.281<br>(.615)     |
| Other                 | 3.010<br>(.727)              | 3.575<br>(.977)    | 4.063<br>(1.031)                 | 9.812<br>(1.585)   | 5.281<br>(1.173)                    | 26.995**<br>(1.514) |
| Age                   | .974**<br>(.010)             | .983<br>(.011)     | .992<br>(.014)                   | 1.003<br>(.014)    | .999<br>(.013)                      | 1.010<br>(.014)     |
| Number of counts      | 1.023<br>(.025)              | 1.036<br>(.031)    | .960<br>(.062)                   | .970<br>(.053)     | .968<br>(.051)                      | .977<br>(.047)      |
| * $p < .10$           |                              |                    |                                  |                    |                                     |                     |
| ** $p < .05$          | $n = 736$                    | $n = 643$          | $n = 575$                        | $n = 509$          | $n = 549$                           | $n = 492$           |
| G <sup>2</sup> test   | 99.86                        | 72.53              | 36.03                            | 111.04             | 41.74                               | 84.78               |
| (sig.)                | (<.001)                      | (<.001)            | (<.001)                          | (<.001)            | (<.001)                             | (<.001)             |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> | .215                         | .237               | .147                             | .253               | .125                                | .237                |

Notes. SE = standard error.

<sup>a</sup>Effects grouped by district of prosecution.



# Radicalization of U.S. prisoners

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## **Research Summary**

*Concern has been expressed that prisoner radicalization poses a high probability threat to the safety of the United States. Although the threat of terrorist acts planned in prison is known to be above zero because of a nearly executed terrorist plot hatched in a state prison, the central finding of this research is that the actual probability is modest. The reasons for a modest probability are fourfold: Order and stability in U.S. prisons were achieved during the buildup period, prison officials successfully implemented efforts to counter the "importation" of radicalism, correctional leadership infused antiradicalization into their agencies, and inmates' low levels of education decreased the appeals of terrorism.*

## **Policy Implications**

*The prison environment permits a great deal of information to be collected on the activities and, more difficult to detect, planned activities of inmates after they are released. This environment requires the attentive observation of staff, collection of information from inmates, and efforts at different levels of a correctional agency to assemble, collate, and assess information; much of it is likely to be false and some will be vital.*

## **Keywords**

*prisons, radicalization, terrorism*

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The radicalization of prisoners is one of the most discussed yet least studied aspects of the domestic terrorism threat. Insufficient empirical work notwithstanding, some analysts have argued that radicalized prisoners pose an imminent threat to the U.S. and European homelands. For example, testifying before the U.S. Senate, Michael Waller (2003:13) stated that radical Islamist groups: “dominate Muslim prison recruitment in the U.S. and seek to create a radicalized cadre of felons who will support their anti-American efforts. Estimates place the number of Muslim prison recruits at between 15–20% of the prison population.” However, Waller did not explain the basis of his estimate. Even if the true proportion was only one tenth as large, or even a fiftieth, a small percentage of a large number is sizeable: In 2007, 725,000 inmates were released from federal and state prisons (West and Sabol, 2008).

Similarly, a 17-person blue-ribbon task force—assembled by researchers from Georgetown University and the University of Virginia Medical School—issued a report based on testimony of law-enforcement, homeland security, and corrections experts. The task force noted, “Prisons have long been places where extremist ideology and calls to violence could find a willing ear, and conditions are often conducive to radicalization” (Cilluffo and Saathoff, 2006: i). The researchers conceded “there is insufficient information about prisoner radicalization to quantify the threat” of Islamic terrorism in prison. Nevertheless, they concluded that, because Islamic terrorists feed on the bitterness and alienation that is currently ubiquitous in American prisons, the United States “is at risk of facing the sort of homegrown terrorism currently plaguing other countries” (Cilluffo and Saathoff, 2006: i and iv).

Cuthbertson (2004: 15) concluded that prisons are ideal places for recruitment into Islamic terrorist organizations. Just as prisons are “schools for crime,” in which petty offenders “graduate” into more serious criminal careers, so too prisons have become “universities” for advanced training in terrorism. With regard to Britain, RAND researchers predicted that “contemporary violent Jihadists can and will seek out new recruits in the prison environment” (2004: 49).

There is at least one dissenting voice to the prison-as-breeding-ground argument. Motivated by reports of radicalizing inmates in European prisons, Klein (2007) assessed whether a similar process was occurring in U.S. prisons. Between late 2003 and 2005, he contacted his extensive network of corrections and law-enforcement officials, who, he believed, would be in a position to monitor prisoner radicalization. From their reports, Klein concluded that, although prison gangs were heavily involved in criminal activity, there is no evidence whatsoever of prisoner involvement in radical groups. In sum, claims have been advanced that the radicalization of prison inmates poses a serious threat to U.S. security, but there is no empirical research that supports this idea.

## Research Design

Prisoner radicalization could have multiple sources, from reactionary hatred of the modern world, to mental illness, to involvement in any one of the dozens of antigovernment militia movements in the United States. We focus on jihad-based radicalization because it might be the greatest potential threat. The most recent National Intelligence Estimate, which was prepared

by the National Intelligence Council (2007: 7), predicted that non-Muslim terrorist groups are likely to carry out attacks during the next several years, but that this “violence is likely to be on a small scale.” In addition, one of the two researchers is African American, which we expected might facilitate interviewing inmates with a jihad orientation but impede interviewing far-right extremists, such as neo-Nazis and skinheads. A focus on Islamic radicalization seems prudent, even if other threats need to be monitored (and explained) simultaneously.

Our research project is based on interviews in 10 state corrections departments and 1 municipal jail system during the 2006–2009 calendar years. We visited 27 medium- and high-security prisons for men. In each jurisdiction (with 2 exceptions), we interviewed prison officials in the central office, prison officials in each prison facility, and inmates in each prison facility. The two exceptions—the municipal jail system and a state prison system—did not involve interviews of inmates due to resource limitations and administrative reluctance. Overall, we interviewed 210 prison officials and 270 inmates.

We were unable to obtain entirely random samples of inmates at each facility. We relied on prison officials in each facility to help recruit inmate volunteers for our interviews, asking them to do so without regard to the inmates’ backgrounds—a recruitment strategy that might suppress evidence of radicalization. Radicalized inmates might have declined to be interviewed and inmates with information about radicalization might have been unwilling to say so in our interviews. Although these caveats are important, we made efforts to increase the chances of detecting radicalization. First, we assured inmates that the information they provided would remain confidential.<sup>1</sup> In addition, we did not ask inmates about their own behavior, only other inmates’ behavior.

Second, 61% of the inmate interviewees were African American, 21% were white, and 9% were Hispanic or Latino. This sample overrepresents African Americans (43% among the U.S. state prison population) and underrepresents whites (37%) and Hispanics (19%; Pastore and Maguire, 2003: Table 6.0001.2002).<sup>2</sup> Although this demographic oversampling might have introduced bias into our sample, such bias should have increased the probability of detecting jihad-based radicalization (while decreasing the likelihood of uncovering other forms of radicalization, such as right-wing militia groups).

Third, we interviewed a broad range of corrections officials (i.e., intelligence officers, executive leadership in agency headquarters, senior officers in facilities, line correctional officers, counselors, and religious ministers). They appeared open to sharing their information and assessments of inmate radicalization—even if unfavorable to their institutions. The two sets of

1. A consent form read to inmates included the statement, “To help us protect your privacy, we have obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health. With this Certificate, the researchers cannot be forced to disclose information that may identify you, even by a court subpoena, in any federal, state, or local, civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceedings. The researchers will use the Certificate to resist any demands for information that would identify you.”
2. Most Muslim inmates in prison are African American; the rate was found to be 87% in one state (Ammar, Weaver, and Saxon, 2004: 419).

interviews (i.e., inmates and staff) converged on the key empirical issues, giving us confidence that inmate self-selection or self-editing did not distort the findings. Given these procedures (i.e., we were unable to obtain lists of inmates from which to sample), we were unable to calculate a precise response rate. However, correctional staff at each institution posted sign-up sheets for interviews in each block and provided these lists to us when we entered the institutions. Approximately 80% of inmates who signed up participated in our study. Those who refused had various reasons for not participating, ranging from conflicts with work schedules to disinterest. The response rates for the administrators and staff were 100% and, in addition, we obtained a 100% response rate from all wardens and chief security threat officers. We randomly asked to speak with line staff and were accommodated in all instances.

Most importantly, the purpose of this research was *not* to discover actively mobilized, radicalized inmates poised to engage in terrorism after release. If such groups exist, they are highly unlikely to reveal their presence to us or to anyone else. Rather, our purpose was to gauge the social climate that prison inmates are in and to determine whether prisons are fertile grounds for radicalization into a jihad-type terrorist movement.

### **Researching Radicalization**

We define inmate radicalization as an ideology that endorses the use of violence calculated to spread fear, disrupt the social order, and achieve political goals external to the prison environment. We excluded from this definition intramural forms of radicalization, such as support for prison riots. Likewise, we also excluded ideologies supporting inmate gang violence and interpersonal violence.

Moreover, radicalization is not a by-product of self-interest because it often entails self-sacrifice for a broader vision of how the world should be.<sup>3</sup> There may be short-term rewards, such as the satisfaction of striking out against one's enemy. In general, however, radicalization entails seeking to damage the nation-state even at high levels of personal risk. As we use it here, radicalization goes beyond self-interest to reach the logical converse of patriotism, which is a willingness to sacrifice personal benefits out of love of one's country.

Too many unknowns surround this issue to determine the precise risk that prisons serve as an engine of radicalization. We do know that there is *a* risk, which is demonstrated by a California case study we develop below, in which radicalization led to an acted on terrorist plot (although it was eventually thwarted). The precise risk cannot be determined, but we can nevertheless assess the systemwide "barometric pressure" for radicalization—whether the chances for radicalization are high or low. We conclude that the pressure is moderate and falling. The central evidence for this conclusion is the *consistency in responses* across inmates and correctional staff to questions about the presence of radicalization among prisoners.

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3. Indeed, McCauley and Moskaleiko (2008: 416) observed that radicalization "demand[s] sacrifice in defense of the ingroup."

*Inmate Interviews*

The empirical results do not support our expectation of finding pockets of inmate radicalization, as suggested by past literature. We discuss our findings in three subsections, beginning with attitudes toward the Iraq War.

*Iraq War.* Sageman has reported that the Iraq War has “captured all the sense of moral outrage in Muslims all over the world. In all my talks with Muslims, Iraq is monopolizing the theme of any conversation about Islam and the West” (Sageman, 2007: 2, 2008: 91). We asked each inmate about his view of the Iraq War. Most individuals expressed opposition to the United States’ entry into the war but for reasons far less galvanizing than those expressed by Sageman’s interviewees. Their most common explanation was that the United States entered the war for “oil” (e.g., “The only reason we are over there is for the oil”). Most prisoners expressed their awareness of the failed search for weapons of mass destruction after the invasion and knew that weapons of mass destruction were used to justify the invasion. If a useful distinction exists between moral outrage and cynicism associated with policy disagreement, then most interviewed inmates were in the latter camp. One such inmate commented, “No one gets worked up over Iraq. Just against it.” Also in contrast to Sageman’s respondents, the alleged abuses at Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prisons hold little meaning for U.S. prisoners. This finding contradicts the notion that U.S. inmates might be expected to identify with the plight of “fellow” inmates: There was little or no sense of identification or fellowship.

A significant minority expressed support for the war, generally not in terms of the ideals behind the war, but either because they had friends or relatives serving in the military or because they would take satisfaction (at least compared with life in prison) in the opportunity to “fight.” One inmate said he would eagerly go to Iraq to “kick butt.” Another category of inmates had no interest whatsoever in public affairs. One inmate who followed politics closely described most other inmates as apolitical: “They don’t follow politics much. They want to play checkers, dominoes, run around the yard. They don’t care as long as they get fed.” Another inmate said, “We don’t discuss Iraq. . . . Inmates are focused on prison life. Everyone wants to go home.”

In sum, the salience of Iraq to inmates seems to be far below the level that Sageman (2007) noted for his terrorist respondents. In general, inmates were critical of the U.S. war, but they did not describe it as an invasion of their homeland, like Sageman’s sample did. A minority of inmates even expressed support for the war effort or voiced regret for having committed crimes that placed them in prison rather than having joined the military. Still others did not care one way or another.

*War on terrorism.* We asked each inmate about the U.S. “war on terrorism,” probing in particular whether they perceived the West as pursuing a war against Islam. Again, expressions of cynicism (rather than outrage) dominated. For example, one inmate stated that he thought the war on terror was “wrong and has not gotten us anywhere.” He added, “Don’t get me wrong. Bin Laden is no leader to me. . . . He’s a murderer.” Another inmate responded to a question about the war on terrorism: “I am a Muslim. We should not be bombing Iraq. For

Caucasians, the war on terrorism is justified. For Muslims, it's not justified. If we pulled out of Iraq, would they shoot *us*? No way." Another inmate stated, "Terrorists are cowards killing innocent people."

There were exceptions. With great intensity, one inmate declared, "The U.S. government is the biggest terrorist cell there is." Although this comment is suggestive of an authentic radicalization, he expanded on this point in a manner that indicated otherwise. He explained that state troopers "have declared a war on every citizen." He then went into some detail about various plots hatched by state troopers to persecute him and other law-abiding citizens. In both language and posture, he seemed highly unstable, in dangerous ways.

In addition, we queried staff and long-term inmates about the reactions in the prison blocks on the day of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Uniformly, both inmates and staff stated that inmates were subdued, shocked, and saddened by the attacks. One inmate explained, "We felt like everyone else in America." Several inmates saw 9/11 as an attack on their homeland. One inmate stated emphatically, "those people [in the attacked sites] didn't do nothing to nobody. That was just wrong." A small minority of inmates stated felt the government "knew" about 9/11 in advance, that the government itself was behind the attack, or both.

**Patriotism.** Our interviews suggest that inmates, as a whole, are patriotic, or perhaps more precisely "individually disloyal patriots"—that is, they do not recognize themselves as bound by the laws of society (as a result of having committed serious crimes) but, by the same token, they do not delight in the damage to the country. Although willing to exploit opportunities for crime that society provides, they do not perceive U.S. society to be the enemy. One inmate said, "Even though we're criminals, we see ourselves as Americans." He "couldn't turn against this country."

Some inmates reported that they would view it as their *duty* to report a terrorist cell to prison authorities. This sentiment, however, was moderated by a (perhaps) stronger antipathy toward "snitches." Regardless of the balance between these two sentiments, most inmates perceived prison to be a hostile environment for the formation of a radical cell. According to an inmate in a maximum-security prison, "If someone comes in slanting toward terrorism, we will know before the officers. This is our house, and we were all born Americans." Another inmate concurred that, if a group of inmates were planning terrorism, "it would definitely get out. There is no need for terror. Go kill my family?"<sup>4</sup>

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4. These findings are consistent with one of the few studies of contemporary political attitudes of inmates, although the study's sample is small and limited to one state. Just prior to 9/11, Jeff Manza and Christopher Uggen (2006) conducted 33 semistructured interviews of prisoners, parolees, and probationers in Minnesota. They reported, "Even if they disagreed with particular punishment they received...none of our respondents expressed extreme views about eliminating or fundamentally transforming the system. In fact, a number highlighted instead the new knowledge they had gained in prison about just how bad other criminals are" (2006: 144, emphasis in original). More generally, the authors found that their interviewees "embraced their responsibilities as citizens" (2006: 163).



### *Deprivation*

Neil Smelser (2007) argued that the underlying basis of terrorism is a “shared sense of dispossession and suffering.” Some view the purpose of prison to be the imposition of dispossession and some level of suffering. In this regard, the crucial question is whether these purposefully imposed deprivations fall below a legitimate level, as perceived by inmates. In our interviews, complaints about prison life were numerous. They included crowded conditions, poor food and meager portions, the absence of rehabilitative programs, inadequate recreational opportunities, correctional officers who treat inmates without courtesy and respect (“not as men”), endless tedium, excessively long sentences, and corrupt parole boards that concoct excuses not to release inmates. One inmate asserted that forcing two men in a cell designed for one is unconstitutional and imposed a humiliating lack of privacy; he also complained that authorities forced Muslim and Christian inmates to share cells. However, most inmates did not claim that conditions of confinement fell below reasonable standards, or that the correctional staff as a whole was capricious or mean spirited. They did not seem to seethe with anger and hatred.

For example, in one prison, prison officials had just implemented a policy of prohibiting inmates from draping makeshift curtains on cell windows. Prison officials explained the rationale to inmates, that the blocking of light made it more difficult to achieve an accurate inmate count. Some inmates still described the new policy as “stupid” and arbitrarily punitive. The criticisms, however, fell far short of suggesting serious mistreatment. In an interview in the same prison, we asked the question, “If there was one thing you could change in this prison, other than your own release, what would it be?” One inmate responded, “a better law library and a more forgiving parole board.” Another inmate said, “Visitors are treated poorly. Treat them with respect.” In a medium-security prison in the same state, an inmate stated, “They [correctional officers] treat everyone fairly. If you do something stupid, you’re out of here [transferred to a less pleasant, higher security facility].”

In sum, the essence of prison is the domination of some people over others and abuses are inevitable. A studied blindness to the problems and challenges of corrections must be avoided. Nevertheless, we agree with Marquart’s (2007: 8) assessment that, “America’s prisons are not ‘killing fields’ or places of abject violence, disarray, and horror.” Most inmates we interviewed expressed similar views.

### *Prison Staff Interview*

We also interviewed senior executives in all the agencies studied, asking them about inmate radicalization in their agencies. The responses were uniformly in the negative: There is little or no radicalization. For example, a director of a correctional agency holding 15,000 inmates—most of whom are from a major urban center—reported that the risk of radicalization was of great concern to him, but he had observed “no signs of this whatsoever, thus far.” His response is especially credible because he is a seasoned correctional administrator (having served as a director in another agency) and was willing to discuss other serious challenges with candor.

In another major prison, we asked the security threat group officer whether radicalization was present in his facility. His response was “not here, not here.” In yet another high-security facility, a security officer said, “We’ve been looking and looking. Nothing, so far.” In a press interview, an Imam who had worked for many years in a major state agency explained, “[Inmates] don’t care about Osama bin Laden. They have their own beefs that have nothing to do with shariah, the Taliban, or Wahhabism, and everything to do with slavery, segregation, and the history of U.S. racism” (Zoll, 2005: 1). These observations are a good representation of the interviews conducted in each agency studied. In sum, then, a central finding is that the level of radicalization of U.S. inmates seems to be low or, at least, unobserved by both prison officials and inmates.

### **Explaining Radicalization**

We argue that four factors have produced this low level of radicalization: (1) the increase of order in prisons, (2) the creation of a boundary between prison and potentially radicalizing communities, (3) the efforts by agency leadership to infuse their agency with an antiradicalization mission, and (4) the educational profile of inmates compared with the educational profile of terrorist within the United States and abroad.

#### *Creation of Order: State Failure versus State Success*

We defined radicalization to exclude intramural forms of violence such as prison riots and inmate interpersonal violence. Nevertheless, we anticipated a statistical association between radicalization and these forms of violence, because they share a common cause.

First, prison riots are associated with high rates of interpersonal violence—slashings, stabbings, and murders. This relationship exists because both individual and collective violence originate from state disorganization or (at the extreme) near-state failure (DiIulio, 1987; Useem and Kimball, 1989). As prisons lose their capacity to govern, inmates are more likely to turn to violence. Radicalization, as well, could be a product of state failure and, conversely, success in governance could explain the absence of radicalization.

Relevant here is Goldstone’s (2002: 14) observation that, although poverty as such does not generate terrorism, it is related:

Al-Qaeda is like gangs in U.S. inner cities or social protest movements throughout the world. It is not poverty *per se* that gives birth to terrorists (or gangs or protest). Rather, poverty provides a situation in which there is fairly low competition by other occupations when leaders who seek to mobilize supporters against perceived injustices, and who offer attractive short-term rewards, come to recruit.

One need only substitute “prison environment” for poverty to highlight the influence prison breakdown can have on inmate radicalization.<sup>5</sup> In conditions of prison breakdown, radicalized groups have few competitors for the loyalty of prison inmates. In addition, radicalized inmates can blend more easily into the day-to-day disorder of the situation under conditions of breakdown. Without stability, it is more difficult to detect unusual signals (Hollywood, Snyder, McKay, and Boon, 2004). The very definition of deviance will become uncertain and murky. If almost anything goes, what is one more deviant activity? Finally, correctional staff will be apprehensive of rocking the boat if the boat could realistically explode into individual or collective violence. In that case, breakdown feeds on itself.

Our data are consistent with the position that the low level of inmate radicalization (as observed above) was associated with a decline in individual and collective violence in prisons. That is, the relative absence of radicalization and a low level of individual and collective violence seem to have a common cause in the state’s success in maintaining order.

*Prisons as zones of safety.* According to a wide set of measures, U.S. prisons have become safer and more orderly during the last two decades. For example, more than 90 prison riots were reported in 1972. By 2005, prison riots had become rare, almost to the point of disappearing (Useem and Piehl, 2008: 94). The inmate homicide rate fell from 54 deaths per 100,000 inmates in 1980 to 4 deaths per 100,000 inmates in 2003 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008a). Staff killed by inmates decreased from 9 in 1982 to 2 in 1999, and 0 in 2000 and 2001. In line with his earlier quoted comment, Marquart (2007: 7) pointed out that the U.S. prison homicide rate is now lower than that for the general population. This lower prison homicide rate exists *before* adjusting for demographics, not to mention criminality. When standardized by age, race, and gender to match the state prison population, the 2002 general population homicide rate was 35 per 100,000, which is almost nine times the rate in state prisons (Mumola, 2005: 11). These statistical trends, and their link to low levels of radicalization, were reflected in the qualitative data collected for the current study. Three case studies, one of a specific prison and two others of correctional agencies, illustrate these trends.

*Case Study One: State Correctional Institution at Graterford, Pennsylvania.* Thirty miles from Philadelphia, Graterford has long been considered one of the toughest, most dangerous maximum-security prisons in the country. Built in 1929, the prison now houses approximately 3,500 inmates. Its original architectural style—fortress-like exterior walls and little space for recreation and other inmate activities, with each cellblock housing 450 inmates—has been superseded by smaller, more manageable designs. In the last decade, the prison has become safer and in the firm control of prison authorities. Two events served as catalysts for change.

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5. In a preliminary analysis of the Global Terrorism Database, LaFree, Dugan, and Fahey (2008) found a strong positive association between terrorism and state failure, at least for the period 1978 through 1997. Haney (2006: 218–220) argued, consistent with Goldstone’s point, that prison gang membership is primarily a product of prisons’ lack of meaningful involvement.

In 1989, a major riot occurred at State Correctional Institution Camp Hill, which is a maximum-security facility about 100 miles to the west of Graterford. This 2-day siege left 16 of the prison's 31 buildings in ruins; 100 people were injured, including 5 hostages. The Camp Hill riot was a major impetus for agency-wide reform. At Graterford, however, a second event—initiated by the state rather than inmates—brought full reform.

In October 1995, the Department of Corrections placed Graterford in a “state of emergency,” which “essentially suspend[ed] all administrative directives and policies of the Department of Corrections” (Beard, as quoted in Rueter, 1998: 6). A combined force of 650 state police and correctional officers from other prisons conducted a surprise search of the facility that lasted 72 hours. They searched for contraband and evidence that illegal activities were being conducted at the prison. Nine staff, including two high-ranking supervisors, were transferred or forced to resign for alleged corruption or lax management. The state's governor authorized the surprise search, later explaining, “The first thing we need to do is control the prisons, and we weren't in control of that one” (Purdy, 1995: A1). The department's commissioner characterized the facility as plagued by violence and corruption and said that the main purpose of the raid was to weed out employees who permitted inmates to use drug or who dealt drugs themselves (Goldwyn, 1995).

A new set of policies was implemented, with at least one change directly related to the Camp Hill riot. The state's riot investigation revealed that some of the riot leaders were inmates who served as religious leaders. Inmates had been allowed to conduct religious services on their own and, according to the department's deputy commissioner, this practice had empowered the main leader of the services to take a leadership role in the riot (Rueter, 1998). After the state of emergency, a new policy was implemented at Graterford that permitted only outside religious leaders to conduct religious services. In addition, two officers were required to be present at each service.

Other changes tightened security and created order. For example, street clothes were prohibited and replaced with prison-issued uniforms. Inmates had been able to move through the prison relatively freely, but the new policy required them to have a pass on which the origin and destination for each trip was written. Metal detectors were placed in hallways and other strategic locations, as were security cameras. One inmate said of the latter, “You can't do nothing no more. They'll get you on those cameras.” Finally, prison authorities began to file “outside” (i.e., criminal) charges in cases of serious assault. Previously, the only punishment was “administrative” (i.e., time in administrative segregation). A long-term inmate stated, “30 years ago, you have a fight in the blocks, you have 30 days. Then back to population. Now it is outside cases. And everyone wants to go home, so you lose that.” Finally, the prison implemented a “tips hotline,” whereby an inmate could give information to staff without risk of exposure. The inmates had only to use a standard phone in the block, thus giving the appearance of making outside calls. Staff and inmates agreed that a great deal of information is provided to staff this way.

No evidence of the pre-1995 “lack of control” and environment of violence was apparent in interviews conducted by our research team. One long-time Graterford inmate said, “Things are a lot different now than they were before 1995. It’s a lot safer now. Calmer.” In his view, this new state of calm and order was a mixed blessing. Before 1995, if two inmates had a grudge, they would fight it out and correctional officers would stand to the side. Now “they swoop down on you.” He complained that a “man now can’t settle his own affairs.” Another Graterford inmate stated, “Thirteen years ago, a lot of drugs, stabbings, rape. Guards were on the take. That’s now all changed. Much more safe. Guards now have to meet a higher standard.”

A supervising sergeant explained that under an earlier regime, correctional officers remained in their offices at the front of the housing blocks. Now, they are required to pass through the block, talk to inmates, collect information, and generally maintain order. An inmate affirmed, “Guards now take control. [Before 1995,] sergeants and correctional officers never walked down the tiers. Guards didn’t want you to bring your problems. Deal with it yourself. It’s not that way now.” When we asked an inmate whether treatment by correctional officers was fair, he responded: “It’s fair here. Open language. More communication between staff and inmates. More rehabilitation here than Huntington [another Pennsylvania prison].” Even though the general environment had improved, many, perhaps most, of the inmates described the food as poor in quality and variety. One inmate said it was “not fit to feed a dog.” Another described the menu: “hotdog, hamburger, and hotdog.”

When Graterford staff and inmates were asked about radicalization at their facility, they uniformly said that it did not seem to be occurring. One senior staff member made explicit the connection between order and absence of radicalization: “Before 1995, we probably wouldn’t have known if inmates were radicalized, or if we did, what to do about it. Now we are much more confident about what we know.”

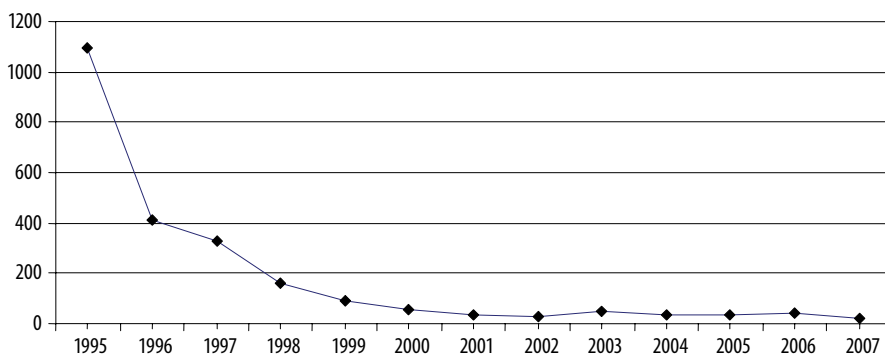
*Case Study Two: New York City Department of Correction.* In 1986 and 1990, the New York City Department of Correction experienced major riots and remained violent and disorderly through the first half of the 1990s. Yet, starting in 1995 and continuing through 2008, inmate violence dropped by 95% and worries of riots went from widespread to nearly nonexistent (Horn, 2008b; Useem and Goldstone, 2002). In 1995, there were 1,093 “slashings and stabbings”—the best indicator of inmate against inmate violence—yet in 2007, there were only 19.<sup>6</sup> Many other performance indicators moved in the same period in the same direction. For example, as inmates and staff began to feel safer, there was a 50% decrease in sick leave by correctional officers during the 1995–2008 period (Horn, 2008b: 40).

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6. Slashings and stabbings are assaults using a contraband weapon with the potential to create serious injury (Horn, 2008a). A portion of the decrease in the number of slashings and stabbings can be accounted for by a decrease in the inmate population, from 18,900 in 1995 to 14,000 in 2007. Still, the ratio of slashings and stabbings to inmates decreased from 57.9 per 1,000 inmates in 1995 to 1.4 in 2007.

FIGURE 1

## Inmate-on-inmate violence (i.e., stabbings and slashings), 1995–2007



Note. This figure is based on data from Horn (2008b).

The center of the effort to restore order was a management program called the Total Efficiency Accountability Management System (TEAMS). Once a month, TEAMS assembles the commissioner, his senior staff, heads of civilian and uniformed units, and facility managers to examine events and trends in their facilities. To support the forum, the TEAMS staff collects and verifies data on facility performance. The data play a central role in the TEAMS meetings. Facility managers must be able to account for trends in their facilities, especially any spikes or troughs. Managers unable to account for those trends or correct problems once identified are likely to be replaced. More than 600 indicators are tracked, not only on violence but also on other aspects of prison operations: the cleanliness of showers and toilets, the number of inmates attending religious services, the contraband finds, the time inmates wait in medical clinics, and the staff overtime (Horn, 2008b). Even mundane—but for inmates galling—problems are taken seriously. For example, to improve the cleanliness of showers, the department adopted the city's standard for health clubs, set up a system to inspect every shower, purchased steam cleaners, trained staff and inmates in cleaning, and held facilities accountable for the results (Horn, 2008b: 43). By quickly and consistently identifying inmate complaints and clamping down on prisoner violence, the safety of inmates and officers greatly improved.

The restoration and maintenance of order permit much greater vigilance of issues other than violence, including the potential radicalization of inmates. A deputy superintendent of one facility on Riker's Island described, in impressive detail, the security threat groups in his facility. He stated, however, that no radical groups existed or were in formation. The most senior members of the agency supported this judgment and were willing to generalize it to the agency as a whole.

*Case Study Three: Texas Department of Criminal Justice.* If rapid growth destabilizes and creates opportunities for radicalization, then Texas corrections should be rife with inmate radicalism. Between 1980 and 2006, the number of inmates in Texas nearly quadrupled from 45,000 to 172,000. Other conditions also suggest instability. Two major federal court orders disrupted the social order behind bars. A 1980 decision (*Ruiz v. Estelle*) changed “almost every aspect of Texas prison operations” (Crouch and Marquart, 1990: 109). This included dismantling the “building tenders” system, in which inmates had assisted prison officials in maintaining order. Also, a 1977 federal court ordered the end to racial segregation of inmates (*Lamar v. Coffield*, 1977).

Furthermore, the deprivations experienced by Texas inmates seem to be significantly greater than those in the other states we studied. For example, prisoners are required to work but are not paid. (Several inmates referred to this as “slave labor.”) Male inmates are required to wear short hair. Inmates are allowed only one call every 90 days, for no longer than 5 minutes. The state’s legislature made it a felony to provide an inmate with a cell phone (McVicker, 2004).

The agency is especially punitive toward gang members. If an inmate is identified as being a member of 1 of 12 “security threat groups” (gangs), then he is placed in administrative segregation—even without having committed a violation of prison rules. Under administrative segregation, an inmate is confined to his cell for 23 hours a day and is allowed out only for showers and limited recreation. He is not permitted to have contact visits, to participate in academic or vocational programs, or to work. One inmate commented, “Ad seg is really hard. No TVs, no radios.” The inmate also loses “good time,” in effect lengthening his sentence. To secure release from administrative segregation, the gang member must renounce his membership and complete an antigang debriefing program.

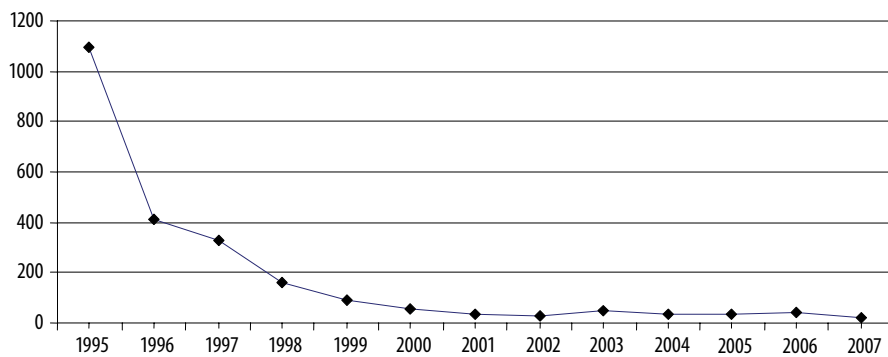
Texas inmates seem somewhat more favorable to the food they are served than inmates in other states. One inmate, for example, stated that the food is “at least edible and sometimes good.” Others, however, complained about the small portions.

Despite the pressures of an expanding inmate population and deprivations associated with imprisonment, Texas prisons have not experienced a sustained increase in violence. As the state’s prisons grew in the 1990s, there was a reduction in the rate of inmate-on-inmate assaults.<sup>7</sup> Figure 2 shows that, from 1990 to the end of the decade, inmate-on-inmate violence fell by more than 50%. We do not have comparable data on rates of violence after 1999 (a more restrictive definition of “violence” began to be used in 2000), but the extant data show a stable level of violence from 2001 to 2005. Our interviews with staff and inmates provide indications that the rate of violence has remained low. One inmate commented, “It’s a lot safer now. A guy can do his time.”

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7. In the 1990s, the Texas prison system grew more rapidly than any other prison system in the country, accounting for one out of every five prisoners added to the U.S. correctional population (Schiraldi and Ziedenberg, 2003).

FIGURE 2

**Inmate assaults, Texas Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation**

Note. This figure is based on data from Trulson and Marquart (in press; 2002).

Accompanying this low level of disorder is a low level of radicalization. One inmate said, “There is no radicalization here. Radicalization is not tolerated [by inmates].” Another inmate responded: “Don’t think it’s happening here. No signs at all. I’ve been here 4 years, 9 months.” Another inmate reported that radicalization is not possible, because “there are no secrets in this institution.” An Islamic inmate likewise said, “Islam is a religion of peace. Not one inmate [is radicalized]. Not happening here.”

Interviews with central office and prison staff indicate that the threat of prisoner radicalization is taken seriously. Imams are screened rigidly through a central location. Volunteer Imams are not allowed in facilities without supervision and Arabic is not allowed to be spoken during services. All prayer books are screened closely. The Imams work closely with prison officials in identifying any potential security threats. Similar to other systems we visited, Muslim inmates expressed modest levels of patriotism, and they did not complain they were treated differently than other prisoners.

Finally, our observations are corroborated by Klein (2007: 93), who reported that corrections officials in Texas exercise a “choke hold” on information coming into and out of prison. Visitors and mail are monitored tightly, especially when the visitor or correspondent is a “person of interest.” The sources of all inmate money are examined carefully. To summarize, the evidence indicates that prison officials have been successful in creating order and safety, despite the strains of escalating inmate numbers. An unforeseen by-product of the effort to create order behind bars has been a reduction in the risk of radicalization.



*Permeability of Boundaries*

A key debate in the study of prisons pits “deprivation” theory against “importation” theory. According to deprivation theory, the fact of imprisonment—the harsh reality of being kept behind bars for years on end—damages inmates’ sense of well-being and personhood. To manage these injuries, inmates create their own distinct, self-protective cultures (Cloward et al., 1960; Sykes, 1958). According to importation theory, offenders do not construct their lives from scratch as they enter the prison gates. They bring with them the norms, values, and behavior patterns of their previous communities and world around them (Irwin, 1980). These “imported” features of social life are the main determinants of inmate culture. This debate intensified when researchers began to apply multivariate statistical models to the problem. Perhaps not surprisingly, variables from both theories explained variations in prisoner adaptation but the importation model seems to be more successful at explaining variations in violence (Cao, Shao, and Van Dine, 1997; Harer and Steffensmeier, 2006; Hochstetler and DeLisi, 2005; Lahm, 2008).

We agree with the multivariate approach (i.e., both sets of variables may matter) and introduce two additional points. Prison officials could attempt to counter the importation of radicalism. Prisons might, but need not be, passive receptacles of external influence. Further, much will depend on the presence of disruptive or otherwise antisystem values in the external culture. Not coincidentally, the heyday of the deprivation model was during the 1950s and the early 1960s, when countercultural values were rare in non-prison U.S. society—there was little to “import.” The importation model gained an intellectual following with the subsequent rise of a counterculture, militant social protest, and street gangs.

We expected, then, that Islamic inmates would be more disposed to radicalization if the Muslim community outside of prisons perceived its treatment as unfair and if radical values existed in that community. In fact, this does not seem to be the case in the Muslim community outside prisons, although with some (possibly) worrisome pockets. Two studies, in particular, speak to this issue.

*Attitudes and social standing of the U.S. Islamic Community.* An estimated 2.3 to 3 million Muslims live in the United States (Logan and Deane, 2003; Pew Research Center, 2007: 3), which represents too small a population to show up in significant numbers in standard surveys.<sup>8</sup> In 2007, the Pew Research Center conducted 55,000 telephone-screening interviews nationwide to obtain a sample of 1,050 Muslims. Respondents in this representative sample were asked a wide range of questions about their lives in U.S. and Islamic extremism. With regard to the former, the overall story is surprisingly positive. For the most part, Muslim Americans are solidly middle class. Forty-one percent have household incomes of \$50,000 or more, compared with

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8. In a study of Islamic inmates in Ohio prisons, Ammar et al. (2004) found that most Islamic inmates (70%) converted to Islam while in prison; the remaining 30% were identified as Islamic before entering prison. With a sample limited to one state, the authors cautioned against generalizing these findings to U.S. inmates as a whole. Nevertheless, their findings seem sufficiently robust to suggest that, with the one third of inmates having prior identification with Islam in the United States, there would be a significant importation of Islamic values from the community to prisons.

44% non-Muslim Americans (Pew Research Center, 2007: 18). (This is in sharp contrast to Muslim populations in Great Britain, France, Germany, and Spain, which are much less affluent compared with the general populations of those countries [Pew Research Center, 2007].) Muslim Americans are slightly less likely than other Americans to report overall satisfaction with their personal financial situation (42% “excellent” or “good” versus 49% for the general public; Pew Research Center, 2007: 19).

Overall, Muslim Americans view U.S. society favorably. Most Muslim Americans (72%) reported that their communities are excellent or good places to live, compared with 82% for the general public. A slightly higher percent of Muslim Americans (38%) expressed satisfaction with the state of the nation compared with the general public (32%). Furthermore, 71% of Muslim Americans agreed that people can get ahead in the United States if they work hard, compared with 64% of the general public (Pew Research Center, 2007: 2).

Although Muslim Americans expressed generally positive views of their own lives and U.S. society, some still reported favorable views of at least some forms of terrorism. Eight percent of Muslim Americans responded that suicide bombings against civilian targets are “often” (1%) or “sometimes” (7%) justified in the defense of Islam (Pew Research Center, 2007: 53).<sup>9</sup> This result might indicate a substantial pocket of proterrorist sentiment within the U.S. Muslim community: At 1% of 3 million Muslims, this population constitutes 30,000 Muslims who support suicide bombing. The Pew researchers, however, did not report comparable responses from the non-Islamic public to provide a sense of perspective. Fortunately for our purposes, in the same year as the Pew survey, the University of Maryland’s Program on International Public Attitudes posed a similar (although not identical) question to a sample of U.S. citizens.<sup>10</sup> Twenty-four percent of U.S. citizens saw attacks on civilians as at least sometimes justified, 5% often, and 19% as sometimes (Kull, 2007: 10). Apparently, then, U.S. Muslims reject attacks on civilians more frequently than does the general public.

*Aggregate radicalization: Europe versus the United States.* Sageman (2008: 106–107) stated without qualification, “there are no sleeper cells in the United States.” Of course, with any clandestine activity, one cannot be certain about what does not exist, as new evidence could emerge at any time.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Sageman was certainly correct to point out that, since 9/11, the level of jihad-based terrorism in the United States has been far below that experienced in Europe. Sageman attributed the U.S. comparative advantage to several factors. First, the U.S. government has performed well in deterring terrorists from entering the country through its

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9. The text of the question was: “Some people think that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets are justified to defend Islam from its enemies. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that this kind of violence is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?”

10. The text of the question was: “Some people think that bombing and other types of attacks intentionally aimed at civilians are sometimes justified while others think that this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that such attacks are... justified?”

11. John MacGaffin (2005: 92), who is a senior member of the U.S. intelligence community, said “the FBI must acquire significant human source penetration of al-Qaeda’s U.S.-based apparatus, if one exists. It has none.”

airport security operations. Second, since 9/11, U.S. citizens have become alert to suspicious behavior and willing to report it; they now present an aggressively unsympathetic environment for terrorists. Third, national borders in Europe are more open (i.e., travelers are not required to show a passport while traveling among European Union countries) than those in the United States. Finally, consistent with the Pew findings:

American Muslims have adopted the American Creed, which makes them less susceptible to the terrorist message... For the United States, pursuing policies of political, social, and economic inclusion rather than exclusion has paid an enormous dividend (Sageman, 2008: 108).

The absence of domestic terrorism outside of prison seems likely to preclude its occurrence within prison. For radicalization to take place, prisoners must reach further to foreign lands and cultures to find groups with which to identify.

*Case Study: Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, Lucasville.* A major riot at the Lucasville, Ohio facility in 1993 (with 10 dead in 11 days) divides the state's correctional history. A state legislative committee's investigation described the prerior prison as a "loosely run and operated organization lacking the necessary attention to detail one would expect from a maximum-security facility" (Ohio Civil Service Employees Association, 1993: 17). An increasing inmate population required two inmates in cells designed for one, and a federal court ordered the racial integration of cells in 1992. Ohio had the second lowest officer-inmate ratio among the 50 state correctional agencies, with some states having two to three times as many staff. Internally, the warden lacked confidence in his administrative staff and middle managers and they, in turn, distrusted him. The riot began when the warden could not deal effectively with a controversy concerning the tuberculosis testing of Muslim inmates who claimed that the test violated their religion (Goldstone and Useem, 1999).

Major reforms followed the riot, creating a more proactive and controlling prison regime. Imams and other religious leaders began to be centrally screened before being admitted to a prison. Prior to the riot, Muslim prisoners could lead their own services without being monitored. The state's ratio of inmates to staff was reduced from 9 to 1 in 1993 to 5 to 1 in 2008. Other reforms coming out of the riot were the housing of maximum-security inmates in single cells; the Strategic Threat Group (i.e., gang) office became larger, more proactive, and sophisticated; and mail and telephone calls began to be more closely monitored and recorded (Wilkinson and Stickrath, 1997).

A senior administrator told us, "Terrorists could have recruited prisoners before Lucasville. But not after." He went on to support this statement by describing the agency's tight controls. Our own interviews of Lucasville inmates support this contention. One Islamic inmate, for example, said, "No way you're going to have radical groups in this prison for more than 5 minutes, without them knowing it." We asked inmates about the existence of "political and religious groups in this prison." Most inmates offered a long list, which included named gangs.

No inmate mentioned radical groups, even when probed. When we introduced the idea that radical groups might exist, inmates scoffed at the suggestion. The prison staff were generally more reflective in their answers but did not differ from the inmates in their assessments of prison radicalization. Regarding mail censorship, one inmate complained that incoming magazines were tightly censored: “*Easy Rider* magazine, not allowed. No biker girls allowed, or nudity. Nothing political, period.”

### *Education and Radicalization*

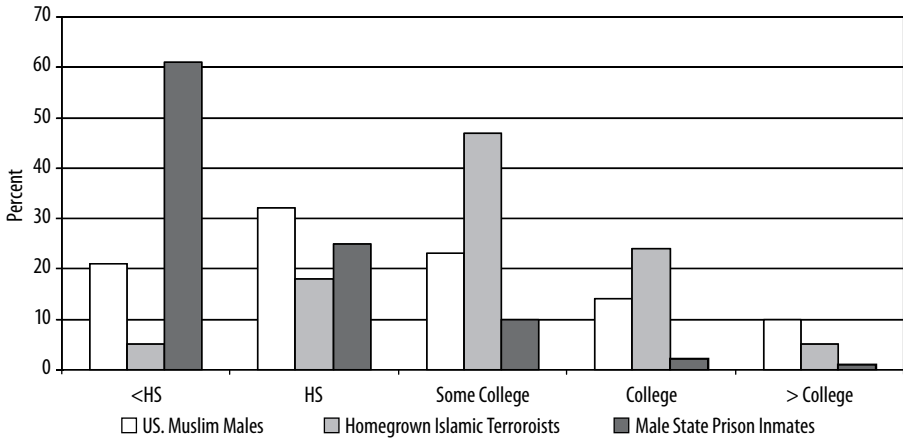
We argued above that radicalization is the opposite of self-interest. That is, radicals are motivated not by immediate self-interest but by broader political goals. One implication of this claim is that we should anticipate a *positive* correlation between education and radicalization. Education leads people to be informed and concerned, even fervently concerned, with the issues of the day. Krueger (2007) argued that, just as educated people, on average, are more likely to vote than the less educated, so too terrorists can be anticipated to be, on average, more likely to be educated than the populations from which they are drawn. A growing body of literature on international terrorism—and more recently on U.S. domestic terrorism—supports this hypothesized positive association between education and terrorism.

Sageman (2008: 58) collected data on 172 individual international terrorists and found that most terrorists (62%) had attended college. This figure contrasts with the 10% college attendance rate of the general population in the terrorists’ home communities. In separate studies, Berrebi (2007) and Benmelech and Berrebi (2007) found that, on average, Palestinian suicide bombers who attacked an Israeli target in Israel were more educated than the general Palestinian population. Although the earlier study found a much stronger effect (55% of suicide bombers had or were perusing higher education) than the later study (18% with university study), the differences are in the size of the effect of education on terrorism, not its direction. Finally, Pape (2005) examined a database profiling 462 suicide terrorists who struck between 1980 and 2003. He found that suicide attackers were not, on average, poor, uneducated, or “social losers.” Quite the opposite: Most suicide attackers, relative to their communities, were well educated and had favorable economic futures. The attackers strongly identified with the fate of the nation, and saw “themselves as sacrificing their lives for the nation’s good” (p. 23).

Krueger (2008) provided the first empirical analysis of the educational backgrounds of U.S. domestic jihad terrorists. He sought to identify all homegrown Islamic terrorists in the United States, beginning with the participants in the first World Trade Center attack in 1993. He located 63 such terrorists. (This excluded the 9/11 attackers, because they were from foreign soil.) Krueger compared the educational attainment of the 63 terrorists, using data collected from an array of sources, with the educational attainment of the U.S. Muslim population, using the above noted Pew data. Figure 3 reproduces Krueger’s results and data on the educational attainment of male state prison inmates. Because all 63 terrorists were men and we interviewed only in male prisons, we did not include women.

FIGURE 3

**Educational attainment for U.S. Muslim males, homegrown Islamic terrorists, and male state prison inmates**



Notes. Measurements are of state male inmates' education prior to incarceration. The data do not reflect additional in-prison education. This figure is based on data from the Pew Research Center, calculated by Krueger (2008) for U.S. Muslim males; Krueger (2008) for homegrown Islamic inmates; and Bureau of Justice Statistics (2004) for male state prison inmates.

Krueger's sample of 63 U.S. jihad terrorists is grouped in the middle categories of the educational continuum, primarily in the "some college" and "college" categories (jointly, 71% of the sample). They are less represented in the high-school, below high-school, and postcollege categories. In short, they tend to be well but not highly educated. In contrast, the U.S. Muslim males have, on average, lower levels of educational attainment. They are, however, overrepresented in the above college category, at least compared with terrorists. The educational attainment of male state inmates is decidedly below both terrorists and the U.S. Muslim population: 3% of male prison inmates have college degrees or more education. They are concentrated in the lowest categories of the educational continuum.

In sum, the educational backgrounds of male inmates help to explain the finding of low levels of jihad radicalization in prisons. Both foreign and domestic terrorists tend to have relatively high levels of education. In contrast, inmates tend to have low levels of education. However, although prison inmates are unlikely to participate in the political process (either through legitimate means or violence), the correlation between education and terrorism is modest in strength. We should anticipate exceptions to the pattern that terrorists come from advantaged backgrounds. Moreover, terrorist organizations are adroit at using individuals who do not fit standard profiles—an argument against racial profiling and discounting the possibility of prisoner radicalization (Harcourt, 2006; Posner, 2005).

*Institutional Leadership and Infusion of Mission*

A central theme of this article is that the challenge from below and control from above co-evolve, that is, change over time in response to one another. This theme is illustrated by the central responsibility of agency leadership to define the mission of the agency and (in the language of Selznick, 1957) to infuse this *sense of mission* or *distinctive competence* throughout the organization. The past quarter century of prison growth has made the multiple goals of corrections (e.g., punishment and preparation of inmates for reentry) increasingly difficult to achieve simultaneously. Under these strains and pressures, has antiterrorism been infused into the daily practice of prison officials?

The answer to this question would be straightforward if prisons were producing radicalized inmates who, after release, engaged in terrorist strikes. Even a single prison-based strike would “change everything,” as did the shock of 9/11. This event has not happened yet (although we discuss a near exception below) and, therefore, one problem facing correctional leadership is to communicate the need for antiterrorist efforts. Line staff—those who interact most with inmates—must be motivated to listen for and observe signs of radicalization, and they must report rather than ignore suspicions. Leadership must engender motivation, so that line officers feel commitment, even pride, in looking for signs of radicalization. False leads will be far more numerous than real ones.

How successful has correctional leadership been in sustaining a high level of staff vigilance? Our interviews with staff were only modestly reassuring. Most line staff expressed an awareness of the radicalization issue. Of course, like any other citizens, they are attentive to the possibility of homegrown terrorism, and they are especially concerned with their own facility. When we asked staff what they would do if they observed signs of radicalization, they almost uniformly responded that they would report it to their superiors. Although no staff member disagreed that inmate radicalization might be a problem in their facility, most said that this specific threat was a low priority for them. One correctional officer, for example, reported that she “thought about this from time to time, but not more than that.” Executive leadership could more effectively communicate the priority of detecting and preventing radicalization. In addition, new mechanisms are needed to address the underlying problems that give rise to radicalization. We consider five case studies. The first demonstrates the need for caution in downplaying the threat of radicalization and identifies limitations of radicalization. The other four case studies describe various efforts to counter radicalization.

*Case Study One: Foiled terrorist plot.* In 1997, Kevin James, an inmate in the California State Prison at Sacramento for a gang-related armed robbery, formed Jam’iyyat Ul-Ilam Is-Saheeh (“JIS” or the Authentic Assembly of God; Harris, 2006).<sup>12</sup> The immediate purpose of this “movement,” as James later called the group, was to “offer a complete understanding of the Islamic culture, Fiqh, Hadith, politics, and spirituality without any interference” (James, 2002).

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12. Hamm (2007) wrote a detailed analysis of the JIS incident. We draw on this excellent work but differ in our interpretation of the incident.

The movement's long-term goal was to help "reestablish the Islamic Khalifate...throughout the Muslim world" (James, 2007). As he later admitted in a plea agreement with federal prosecutors, James instructed members of his group that it was their duty to violently attack "infidels," or enemies of Islam (*U.S. v. James*, 2007a). These enemies included members of the Nation of Islam, U.S. Muslims who are followers of Warith D. Muhammad, Muslims who "trash the four schools of Islamic law," Muslim supporters of the "infidel state of Iran," Muslims who believe it is permissible to join or support the U.S. Army, Muslims who work for government institutions "that are blatantly in opposition to the laws and religions of Islam," as well as Jewish and non-Jewish supporters of Israel (James, 2007). These attacks were intended to "defend and propagate traditional Islam in its purity.... [They would] teach the importance of staying within the bound of Shariah" (James, 2007).

James recruited fellow inmate Levar Washington into JIS. In November 2004, Washington was paroled. James had instructed Washington "to recruit five individuals without felony convictions and train them in covert operations," as well as to acquire firearms (*U.S. v. James*, 2005). Washington was to stay in contact with James. At a local mosque, Washington recruited Gregory Patterson and Hammad Samana, each of whom had no criminal record. This group of three conducted surveillance and drew up plans to attack military recruitment offices, the Israeli Consulate, and synagogues in the Los Angeles area. According to Washington's plea agreement, "The object of the attacks was to kill as many people as possible who were present at the locations" (*U.S. v. James*, 2007b).

To fund these attacks, Washington, Patterson, and Samana robbed a dozen gas stations. Numbers on a cell phone dropped during one of the holdups guided local police to the apartment where Washington and Patterson lived. There they found a computer with documents detailing the full conspiracy (DeYoung, 2007; U.S. Department of Justice, 2008). Federal prosecutions followed, including charges against James who was still in a state prison. Three of the four pled guilty; Samana was found mentally incompetent to stand trial (NEFA Foundation, 2008).

The JIS plot is the only known "plot directed against U.S. targets to have been planned and executed within the United States and potentially executable by a predominantly American radical Islamic...cell" (Cozzens and Conway, 2006: 5). It also was nearly executed. Nevertheless, caution should be used in drawing broader implications from the case for several reasons. James did hatch and direct the criminal conspiracy from prison and he recruited one of the three conspirators there. However, had James not been in prison, evidence suggests that he would have followed the same path toward attaining the Caliphate.

James was a prolific writer. His foundational statement for JIS is more than 100 pages long (mostly in single-spaced type, with some portions handwritten in English or in Arabic). The writing is dense and scholarly, or at least pseudo-scholarly. If bad prison conditions or the humiliation of the prison experience had moved James toward radicalization, then it is reasonable to expect that he would have said so in this document. Yet he did not. That James's manifesto did not dwell on prison conditions suggests other reasons for his radicalization. Moreover, as

Hamm (2007: 40) pointed out, James's father was a member of the Black Panther Party, which likely contributed to his radicalization.

Moreover, James argued that desired radicalization is achieved by being exposed to the "true" teaching of Islam (which is only available in Arabic)—not by bringing attention to poor prison conditions or discrimination.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, James (2002) explained that learning Arabic is an "obligation" for two reasons. First, he felt that Arabic "represents unity and brotherhood. It is the language that bonds all Muslims together as one nation." Additionally, knowing Arabic allows Muslims to "know the true actions or responsibilities connected with the meritorious acts of Jihad." He believed that books translated into English by "pseudo Muslims" are distributed by the "Kuffaar penal system for fear of radicalizing the faithful and keep[ing] them subservient to their hypocritical ideals."

Second, drawing any general lesson from the JIS incident is ill advised because the incident involved the behavior of a small number of people—only two of whom had been radicalized while in prison. According to one report, as many as 13 other inmates were affiliated with JIS in the period immediately leading up to and just after the gas station robberies (Ross, 2005). Any sort of generalization about prisoner radicalization—beyond that it can happen—is risky.

Third, according to the Los Angeles Police Department Deputy Chief of Counterterrorism Mark Leap, JIS was "below the radar screen when it comes to prison intelligence. Prison intelligence was focused on violent groups such as the Aryan Brotherhood or the Black Guerilla Family or the Mexican Mafia. Those groups that create havoc and commit violence inside the prison walls" (quoted in Harris, 2006). An empirical question is whether the radar screen has changed. We know it has in other jurisdictions, partially in response to the JIS incident.

Finally, if James and Washington were motivated toward terrorism by intolerable prison conditions, then their actions put them at risk to suffer more of the same. Washington was sentenced to 12 to 22 years in federal prison. James, who had been eligible for parole as early as January 2006, was sentenced to 16 years (Goffard, 2009; Murr, 2007a). Commitment to broader ideals, not self-interest in avoiding unpleasant prison conditions, seems to have actuated this terrorist plot. To summarize, the JIS case illuminates Juergensmeyer's (2008) point that religious ideas can play an important role, not so much in generating social conflicts, but in transforming them. When social conflicts are "religionized," activists may see themselves as engaged in a struggle between good and evil, a divine conflict in which violence is justified. Religion may provide personal rewards—in the form of redemption, religious merit, and the expectation of heavenly pleasures—to participants who may otherwise see collective action as bringing only social benefits. The question—why should I participate?—is answered: Jihad religious beliefs led James and his collaborators toward domestic terrorism.

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13. James seems to have undertaken a serious effort to understand orthodox Islamist thought. For example, his sources include writings from a Web site dedicated to advancing "Islamic knowledge strictly according to the Quran and Sunnah" ([abdurrahman.org/index.html](http://abdurrahman.org/index.html)).



*Case Study Two: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.* In direct response to the JIS conspiracy, the Pennsylvania Secretary of Corrections created an intelligence committee to develop, share, analyze, and collate any information regarding prisoner radicalization. Additionally, the committee was tasked with working with the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Joint Terrorist Task Force. This committee later recommended that a permanent unit be formed to perform this function. The Field Intelligence Unit was created and assigned to the Office of Professional Responsibility. The office reports directly to the secretary and has arrest power and responsibility to investigate allegations of inmate abuse as well as criminal investigations of staff involving corruption, theft of department property, and inmate fraternization.

This case study is an example of an agency adapting to the flow of events and centralizing tasks when needed. First, it recognized that outreach to external law-enforcement agencies requires a central point of contact. Second, it did not separate detection of inmate radicalization from normal operations, but rather it relied on the routine channels of communication and flow of information. Third, it created a dedicated core group of dependable, trained, and motivated individuals to investigate radicalization, and it gave them the support from above needed to investigate potential problems.

*Case Study Three: New York State Department of Correctional Services.* The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, hit the New York State Department of Correctional Services (NYSDOCS) hard—staff and inmates alike. More than two thirds of its 63,000 inmates are from New York City or surrounding counties. Most staff and many inmates knew, or knew people who knew, victims or residents who witnessed the collapse of the twin towers and the deaths of thousands. Thus, one might anticipate that New York inmates would be less prone to radicalization than inmates in other states because of their links to the victims of the 9/11 attack. However, perhaps also because of New York City's influence, the state prison population has a high concentration of Islamic inmates, which is estimated to be about 16%.<sup>14</sup> In addition, for those inmates predisposed toward radicalization, the "success" of the terrorist attack could demonstrate the vulnerability of the country to future terrorist attacks. Regardless of the exact balance of these forces, the agency's leadership moved quickly after 9/11 to counter any threat of inmate radicalization.

The agency added to its "normal" organizational commitments the development of an organized system to monitor the threat of inmate radicalization and to share intelligence information with other law-enforcement agencies. Centralization and decentralization of operations existed where appropriate. At the department-centralized level, two types of information are collated and analyzed. *Operational intelligence* comprises data on unusual incidents, disruptive inmates, gangs, inmate grievances, and other indicators of impaired operations of facilities. *Criminal intelligence* includes data on criminal cases that may be of value to external law-enforcement agencies. The department assigns investigators to meet with other agencies and work jointly through regional intelligence centers (or fusion centers) to enhance interagency

14. More precisely, 12.3% are Islamic and 3.9% are Nation of Islam.

information sharing. The cooperative relations can readily be mobilized to meet concerns of radicalization since 9/11.

Prisons have distinctive cultures that, although varying over time and space, must be understood before evaluating the credibility and meaning of information, especially counterterrorism intelligence. Leads on national intelligence are often ambiguous. The net must be wide and fragments of information have to be assembled to form a coherent picture (Posner, 2007: 106–107). In addition, the goal of counterterrorism intelligence is to prevent crimes that have not yet occurred, which makes the trail of evidence all the more difficult to follow. To assess national security information—that is, to distinguish the credible from the noncredible—requires a deep knowledge of the facilities, staff culture, inmate culture, and routine procedures. This knowledge is concentrated in the central office (i.e., the commissioner and deputy commissioners).

At the facility-decentralized level, the agency developed a strong commitment to the active involvement of senior management in day-to-day operations. The institutional culture is for superintendents, deputy superintendents, and other senior staff to frequently interact with inmates to learn their concerns and intentions. The data collected by management and line staff are forwarded to the central office through the chain of command. In addition, the central office staff makes themselves available to managers at the facility level. Personnel at all levels are trained to forward significant information to the central office for analysis to establish a single point of contact for the entire system.

*Case Study Four: Nebraska Department of Corrections.* The Nebraska Department of Corrections stands in sharp contrast with NYSDOCS, not only in terms of the size of its inmate population (Nebraska has 4,500 inmates) but also because it has relatively few Islamic inmates (estimated to be less than 10% of the total inmate population). Still, the agency takes the threat of inmate radicalization seriously, especially from radicalized Imams. Only two Imams live in the state, one in Lincoln and the other in Omaha. Therefore, the religious needs of Islamic inmates are met through volunteers.

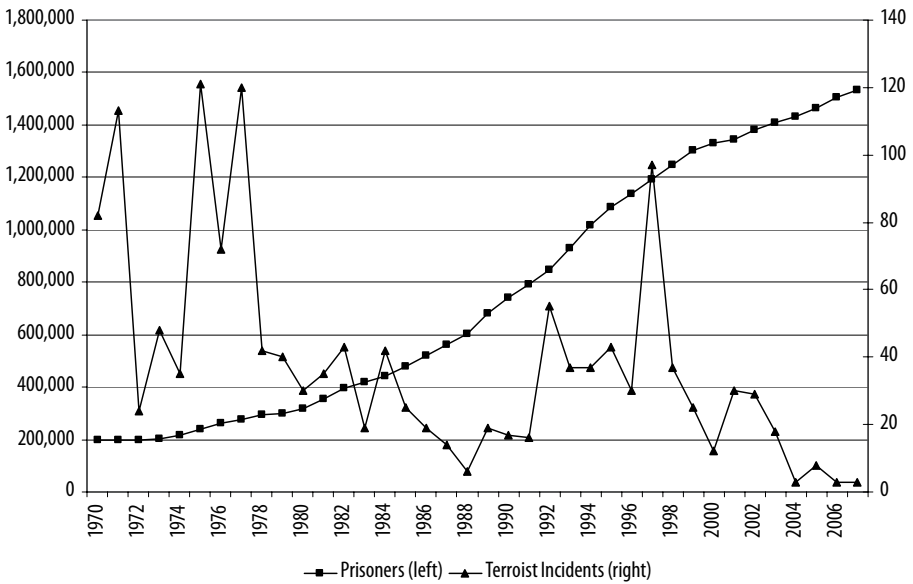
Each prison in the system has a religious coordinator who has the task of approving all religious volunteers. The central office encourages the coordinators to become involved in their local communities, to help recruit volunteers, and to vet them through social networks. The volunteers are subject to criminal background and reference checks, undergo a pat search before and after visitation, and may bring in one book containing the tenets of their faith and one additional religious book for instructional purposes. In addition, all materials are searched upon entering and exiting the institution, no materials may be left with an inmate during a visit, and no material may be given to the clergy visitor by the inmate for removal from the facility without approval by the warden or his designee. In our interviews of prison inmates in two Nebraska prisons, we detected no signs of inmate radicalization.

*Case Study Five: Indiana Department of Corrections.* As quoted above, Goldstone argued that terrorism occurs when competition by other occupations is weak. That radicalization may be best avoided by strengthening the occupation prospects of inmates is a main motivation for

the Indiana Department of Corrections' efforts to assist inmates in their transition from prison to community. These efforts are part of a broader "reentry" movement within corrections which, in recent years, has begun to move from rhetoric to actual programming. Correctional agencies are making a major investment in reentry, as is the federal government. In 2007, Congress authorized \$300 million in grant programs to help successful reentry. Indiana's efforts include a faith-based transition center and a reentry unit that provides inmates with free movement in an attempt to create a culture that mimics civilian society. Increasingly cast off is the position that, if offenders choose to commit crimes, then let them suffer. There are too many of them, and they can now do harm on a much larger scale.

**FIGURE 4**

**U.S. federal and state inmates and incidents of terrorism occurring in the United States, 1970–2007**



Note. This figure is based on data from Pastore and Maguire (2003) and START (2009).

### *Cross-National Data*

As a final check on the overall analysis, consider the relationship between the number of terrorism incidents worldwide, the number of incidents occurring within the United States, and the growth of the U.S. prison population from 1970 to 2007. In this nearly four-decade period, there were more than 85,000 terrorist incidents (Global Terrorism Database, 2009). Of these incidents, 1,347 occurred on U.S. soil—a world ranking of 20 in the raw frequency of terrorist events. Yet the United States, with 4.5% of the world's population, has 23.4% of the world's correctional population (Walmsley, 2008). If prisoners are a major source of terrorist activity, we should expect to see more U.S.-based terrorism compared with its incidence in other countries. Moreover, there appears to be no association between terrorism occurring in the United States and the number of U.S. prisoners. For example, from 1992 to 2007, there was a tenfold decline in the number of terrorist incidents inside the United States (with the exception of 1997) despite the addition of 700,000 prison inmates.

### **Conclusion**

Prisons serve as a catchment area for society's most dangerous, and often most troubled, individuals. In 2004, 670,000 of the 1,270,000 state prisoners had committed violent crimes (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008b). Prison inmates have higher rates of mental disorders compared with the general population; those inmates with mental health problems, compared with those without, are more likely to have a current or past violent offense and to be injured in a fight since admission to prison (James and Glaze, 2006: 7 and 10). These facts seem to be ignored (or at least not taken into account adequately) by those who claim that prisons are "breeding grounds" for terrorism. The offending population itself is worrisome, whatever setting they inhabit.

The simple fact that an offender, after release, becomes involved in terrorist activity does not sufficiently demonstrate that the prison experience caused his radicalization. It is not obvious, for example, that—had the initial two JIS conspirators been on the streets rather than behind bars—they would not have engaged in terrorist activity. Prisoners may be radicalized despite—rather than because of—prison life. If prisons were a cause of jihad radicalization, even a weak cause, then the country would be rife with terrorists.

A principle finding of this study is that correctional institutions have responded with urgency to the threat of radicalization. When we arrived in central offices and facilities, we did not surprise anyone by raising the issue of prisoner radicalization. They were already sensitive to the issue. Correctional leadership has fashioned, staffed, and energized the effort to defeat radicalization. Several areas of concern, however, remain. We discuss four of them.

One area of concern is the sustainability of the effort over time. The claim that prisons will generate scores of terrorists spilling out on to the streets of our cities—the position described at the opening of this paper—seems to be false, or at least overstated. This false positive, however, could morph into a false negative far too easily: Prisons are never the breeding ground for radicalization, even in small numbers. Nothing in this work sustains this latter statement.

Thus, corrections should maintain a high level of vigilance, which is increasingly difficult the further away in time we are from exemplars of the threat.

Second, a surprising finding emerging from our inmate interviews is the presence of inmate solidarity *against* jihadist radicalization. As a consequence of this solidarity, radicalized inmates would have a difficult time finding clusters of inmates who they could trust. At a minimum, they would be inhibited by the fact that information on efforts to radicalize other inmates could be transmitted to correctional authorities. Yet inmate solidarity against radicalization comes from somewhere. In part, it reflects inmate loyalty to the country. Although inmates may be self-interested as evidenced by the crimes that put them in prison, they remain loyal to the country to the extent that they do not seek to damage the country at high personal risk (e.g., death).

Third, another source of inmate solidarity against jihadist terrorism is prison order and safety. U.S. prisons have made significant strides during the last two decades in achieving legitimate order. A pleasant unintended consequence of increased order has been that prisoners seem less susceptible to the appeals of radicalization. Correctional institutions should continue to advance a successful effort to build legitimate order behind bars. The challenge may be all the greater to the extent to which fiscal pressures impinge on operations.

Fourth, alarms about prisoner radicalization have been sounded most loudly by analysts within the intelligence community, such as Cilluffo and Saathoff (2006). In our view, this group of analysts fails to give the social organization of prisons their due in inhibiting radicalization and misreads the aims, values, and attitudes of inmates. Consequently, it overstates the magnitude of threat. However, these analysts also point to an area where their expertise may provide valuable insights and where the present research did not explore deeply or systematically: the sharing of information between corrections and other law-enforcement and intelligence agencies. Extensive efforts have been made along these lines, some of which we reported above. However, Cilluffo and Saathoff argued that we need much more, and much better, information pooling across agencies.

We ask our prisons to do a lot. Yet we cannot expect them to solve the problems of poverty and social disarray that all too often plague our communities. Prisons can be “breeding grounds” for radicalization and, ultimately, terrorism. The low level of radicalization observed in this study may provide some comfort, but it should not lead to complacency.

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# Smart counterterrorism

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**T**his essay considers the policy implications of the article by LaFree, Yang, and Crenshaw (2009, this issue). It considers and then defends the investment made by the United States in homeland security. It then assesses post-September 11 reforms aimed at enhancing the United States' international cooperation in combating terrorism.

It is not startling news to learn from the article by LaFree et al. (2009) that international cooperation may be the best counterterrorism strategy. Thoughtful strategists have advocated global approaches to countering terrorism for a long time. It turns out, however, that such international cooperation is more easily advocated than accomplished. The second part of this essay offers comments on some obstacles to international cooperation in countering terrorism, from the U.S. perspective.

Beyond recommending international cooperation, the article (LaFree et al., 2009) provides sobering documentation that terrorism is overwhelmingly likely to occur outside the borders of the United States. The authors' data also confirm worrisome assumptions that many of us have about terrorists that in some ways run counter to their statistical evidence that the United States is seldom a terrorist target—that terrorist attacks are unpredictable and that attacks targeting the United States are far more lethal than other attacks. Nearly half of the attacks examined fell outside the waves found by the authors, and attacks on U.S. targets caused nearly twice as many deaths as attacks on other targets. The authors conclude that their data support the proposition that attacks by anti-U.S. groups are often strategic—that their attacks are connected to larger conflicts and political objectives. If the raw data suggest that the United States should worry less about domestic terrorist attacks and more about cooperating internationally to combat terrorism, then what are the policy implications of these additional, troubling findings?

### **Managing Unpredictability, Uncertainties, and Lethality**

The starkest message of LaFree et al. (2009) is that we overinvest in domestic preparedness for terrorism, at the expense of better international counterterrorism results. To be sure, the creation and funding of our federal homeland security bureaucracy has been staggeringly expensive, and

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the post-September 11 drumbeat for better preparedness made healthy budget increases for homeland security and attendant state and local grants a sure bet every year. Critics have charged that the heavy investment in airline security, for example, is a misguided example of fighting the last war. Officials respond by saying that intelligence points toward continuing interest by terrorists in attacks on airplanes. At the same time, our federal system contributes to an often wasteful redundancy of federal, state, and local preparedness plans and spending.

Yet there are reasons to take careful stock before rolling back the homeland counterterrorism apparatus. First, LaFree et al.'s (2009) data show that approximately half of the recorded incidents fell outside the attack waves documented in their study. Unpredictability has long been a hallmark of terrorism. Indeed, the fear and dread inspired by unannounced terrorist attacks is a central objective of the terrorists. In addition, 21<sup>st</sup>-century terrorism has demonstrated a level of resources, ingenuity, and preparedness that far outstrips the capabilities of the terrorist organizations of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Consider the September 11 attacks.

Although the documented cases suggest that terrorists strike targets close to home and that anti-American hostility is not sufficient to propel the terrorists to strike U.S. targets far from home, the September 11 attacks are significant and horrific enough exceptions to capture our collective attention. In retrospect, we learned that we should not have been so surprised by the September 11 attacks. Al Qaeda had advocated using airplanes as weapons in the past. Our borders remained mostly porous and capable of manipulation by terrorists' intent on finding a way to remain undetected for a while in the United States. Those hijackers were not deterred by language, culture, or border restrictions and they did not require local supporters to pull off their attacks.

The risks of being wrong in predicting that terrorism will not strike the United States domestically are significant. Consider the anthrax attacks of October 2001. As few as four or five mailed letters temporarily shut down parts of Congress, the Supreme Court, and other government offices as well as scattered postal operations. The response and recovery costs exceeded several billion dollars. If—instead of an apparent lone, disturbed, individual sending out tainted letters—a determined terrorist network had planned a sustained wave of anthrax dispersal in the United States, the results could have been catastrophic. If a communicable agent, such as smallpox, had been weaponized, widespread panic and catastrophic harm would have been even more likely.

There have been follow-up attempts and nascent terrorist conspiracies inside the United States since September 11, 2001. The recent convictions of those who conspired to topple the Sears Tower in Chicago and those who attempted to attack Fort Dix in New Jersey are emblematic. Although the longer planning horizon and likely reliance on local accomplices may complicate and render less likely terrorist attacks on targets in the United States, the data also suggest that the attacks that are mounted are designed to cause heavy casualties.

Nor is it necessarily the case that the challenges to mounting successful devastating terrorist attacks in the United States are sufficient deterrents. Putting September 11 aside, some experts believe that a catastrophic terrorist attack could be carried out by al Qaeda or other anti-U.S.

terrorists in the United States—with or without local support. The details on how terrorists might acquire or develop nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and how they might use them have received considerable attention since the September 11 attacks. To select just one example, terrorists find biological weapons attractive because they are relatively easy to conceal during manufacture and transport, and they can potentially be used anonymously, which makes it next to impossible for authorities to identify the perpetrator.

For example, terrorists could acquire the smallpox virus, grow it by gene splicing, and extract modest quantities in liquid form. Depending on the strain of smallpox, roughly 30% of those who contract the disease would die. Aerosolized smallpox, which is a communicable agent, could be dispersed in large, enclosed places of public assembly, such as mass transit centers, airports, convention centers, and sports arenas. Hundreds or even thousands of individuals could be infected by an invisible mist at each location, and all of them would be carriers of the disease. The perpetrators would presumably have been vaccinated, and they could escape undetected. Symptoms would not begin to appear for several days and, meanwhile, those exposed would go about their lives, travel to other cities and countries, and spread the disease. With a large dissemination of the agent, our public health response system could be brought to its knees, and our overall capacity to contain the disease and ensuing panic would be severely tested. Worse yet, terrorists intent on causing maximum panic, disruption, and casualties could repeat the attack scenario in other cities and thereby spread terror even more.

Furthermore, in situations in which nonstate terrorists require local support to carry out attacks against the United States, that support may be available. A recent study of homegrown terrorists found that radicalized terrorists who spent a long time in the United States or United Kingdom were hard for authorities to detect. These terrorists joined militant movements and used their familiarity with the societies they targeted (Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, 2009).

One great frustration of counterterrorism policymaking is its great costs. To successfully counter a few hundred terrorists, we employ hundreds of thousands of military, intelligence, law-enforcement, and security personnel, with annual costs in the billions of dollars. All of those personnel could potentially be involved in attempting to interdict or, if an attack occurs, to apprehend the terrorist perpetrators of a catastrophic attack. Interdiction could include border surveillance and controls, intelligence gathering at home and abroad, regulation of precursor materials, and information sharing among federal, state, and local officials, between government and the private sector, and between the United States and foreign governments. If interdiction fails, law-enforcement personnel would be attempting to apprehend the terrorists as criminals, intelligence agencies would be trying to locate the perpetrators and their supporters, and countless public health officials, first responders, and likely even military personnel would be involved in responding to the emergency. The likely longer planning horizon of foreign-mounted domestic attacks puts a premium on intelligence gathering and preventive law enforcement; these two aspects of homeland security preparedness have been augmented considerably in this decade.

Conventional techniques of cost-benefit analysis confront a variety of obstacles in attempting to identify optimal investment in security precautions. Economists wring their hands in the

face of a very small likelihood of a catastrophic occurrence. Lacking a solid cost-benefit ratio or even a practically valuable risk assessment, prominent economists generally say that, because we cannot assess the probability of terrorist attacks and because catastrophic terrorist attacks are feasible, we should increase our efforts at detection and prevention.

Arguably, it makes good policy sense for the United States to prepare, train, and conduct exercises in anticipation of catastrophic terrorism. In the case of bioterrorism, the Department of Homeland Security and others have undertaken preparedness seriously, although our public health system and its predominantly state and local infrastructure is not adequate to meet the challenge of such an attack at this time.

### **Implementing International Cooperation to Combat Terrorism**

LaFree et al. (2009) question the utility of our nation's continuous shaping of counterterrorism policies focusing on our sovereign borders. For a long time in the United States, there has been domestic and international counterterrorism. It was clear well before September 11 that U.S. laws and policies that divide responsibility for countering terrorism along a domestic-international axis is inefficient at best and counterproductive at worst. To be sure, our policymakers have reformed many of our laws, institutions, and bureaucracies in ways designed to pay less attention to U.S. sovereign boundaries in assigning responsibility for counterterrorism programs. Our law-enforcement bureaucracy, the Department of Justice and its Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), have expanded international responsibilities and authorities to go along with their turf. The intelligence agencies—including the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, and FBI—likewise have new authorities and protocols for international activities, although in many instances laws still constrain the agencies when the target of surveillance is reasonably believed to be inside the United States.

Despite the undeniable good policy sense favoring international cooperation in combating terrorism, several problems complicate such policy implementation. To begin, states cannot agree completely on the threshold question: What is terrorism? Some states assert that terrorist acts can be justified in some circumstances, such as when people fight political oppression. A 2005 effort at the United Nations (U.N.) General Assembly to approve a resolution denouncing terrorism fell apart when nations (including the United States) could not agree on definitional language. Although efforts toward achieving an international consensus on a definition of terrorism are ongoing, most experts agree that international policies to combat terrorism should proceed unabated, focusing on the terrorist acts rather than on their motivation. Second, combating terrorism is not a one-size-fits-all undertaking. States may face internal or external threats, both, or neither. Their threats may differ significantly in dimension, source, and attack methods and targets. Cooperation must necessarily, then, be adaptable to each nation's particular terrorism-related context. Third, the capabilities of states to combat terrorism range widely, from little or none, to sophisticated and experienced. Weaker states may not be capable of strengthening their institutions or providing resources to counter terrorism effectively. Similarly, weaker states are vulnerable to international organized crime. Those networks may exploit weaker states in

furtherance of their aims. Finally, some states believe they risk some loss of sovereignty if they relinquish to the United States or an international organization the authority to allow foreign intelligence services or even foreign military personnel on their territory.

Notwithstanding the formidable obstacles, terrorism experts now understand that U.S. counterterrorism policy should be based on international cooperation in several areas. Consider the lessons learned from efforts at sanctioning Libya. Through Muammar al-Qaddafi's seizure of power in Libya in 1969 and its support for terrorist groups, Libya earned a designation in 1979 by the State Department as a state sponsor of terrorism. U.S. sanctions followed the designation, including restrictions on trade and travel to Libya. After Libyan agents bombed a Berlin night club frequented by U.S. soldiers in 1986, the United States attacked Libyan targets associated with supporting terrorism. Nonetheless, Libyan agents in 1989 were responsible for terrorist bombings of Pan Am flight 103 and France's UTA flight 772, which killed hundreds of people. After Libya refused to turn over the bombing suspects in 1992, the U.N. Security Council imposed an embargo on arms sales and air travel to Libya and limited the number of diplomats Libya could send abroad. The next year, more U.N. sanctions prohibited sales of equipment for Libyan oil and gas industries and froze Libyan assets abroad.

Lifting of the sanctions was clearly tied to Libya turning over the bombing suspects for trial. In 1999, Libya met the U.N. demands and the sanctions were later lifted in 2006, after Libya compensated the relatives of the victims of Pan Am flight 103. At about the same time, Libya renounced its support for terrorism and gave up its effort to acquire weapons of mass destruction. After these steps were taken and Libya agreed to allow inspectors to check for illicit weapons, Libya was removed from the State Department list of state sponsors of terrorism in 2006. Unilateral U.S. sanctions failed to change Libyan behavior, but the broadly supported U.N. sanctions were effective, eventually. Of course, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the United States responses to the September 11 attacks also might have influenced Libyan reforms.

In the area of secure transportation, the United States has cooperated with other nations to establish watch lists, travel guidelines and restrictions, cargo security checks, and passenger security checks. Beyond its No Fly List, the Department of Homeland Security now has an electronic system for travel authorization that requires nationals or citizens of Visa-Waiver-Program countries who plan to travel to the United States to obtain travel authorization before boarding a plane or cruise ship. The Transportation Security Administration has worked to improve cargo security through inspections, background checks of cargo employees, and reliance on a "known shipper" list of reliable shippers. The No Fly List remains a work in progress, although it generates fewer false positives than in the past.

Apart from border infiltration, potential terrorists remain in the United States by overstaying legally obtained visas and by using fraudulent travel documents. Visa overstays were involved in two of the 1993 World Trade Center bombers and four of the September 11 hijackers. Although a biometric tracking system was proposed, it has been limited so far to tracking at entry only. Passports issued by the United States now include radio frequency identification chips that can store biometric data, and the United States requires that nations that participate in the Visa

Waiver Program issue their passports with the capacity to store some biometric data. Cooperation in this setting imposes significant demands on other nations, including financial costs and the development of technology. Moreover, like the watch lists, the new screening technology raises privacy concerns and stumbles when high false-positive rates force government officials to withdraw the technologies from use while researching improvements.

Another area in which international cooperation has increased significantly since September 11 is intelligence sharing. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) coordinates 16 U.S. intelligence agencies through the monitoring and supervision of 30 on-line databases. The NCTC provides alerts, advisories, and assessments that are shared with foreign nations' intelligence services and analysts. The success of international cooperation in this sphere is, of course, dependent on the willingness and commitment of other nations to take advantage of the NCTC and to integrate its data into their own resources. To date, the sharing of NCTC resources has been limited to its databases. Going forward, information sharing could be made more effective internationally if liaison personnel between agencies and nations were assigned to the NCTC and the other nations' intelligence-sharing agencies.

The use of public diplomacy, which includes organizing and disseminating information and positive messages in support of diplomatic objectives (such as countering terrorism), could have significant potential as the United States turns away from the "Global War on Terror" and toward the employment of "soft power," winning hearts and minds, and engaging in postconflict reconstruction. From the U.S. vantage point, public diplomacy can help repair impressions of the United States abroad. From a global perspective, public diplomacy can reduce the attractiveness of terrorism to potential supporters and operatives. Early in the Obama administration, the State Department is working toward further implementation of a Bush administration initiative: the Civilian Response Corps (CRC). The CRC would include civilian experts prepared to be rapidly deployed to the scene of a crisis, coordinate support for foreign leaders and citizens, stabilize and rebuild the community, and if possible, prevent additional conflict. A larger group of standby members of the CRC would be trained for future deployments.

## Conclusion

LaFree et al. (2009) have contributed significantly to our knowledge of terrorism. The implications of their findings strengthen a growing trend toward greater international cooperation by the United States in combating terrorism. The small number of attacks against the United States, however, does not mean that our government should curtail its homeland security preparedness or redirect its investments to international programs. The small chance of catastrophic harm posed by a weapons-of-mass-destruction attack on our soil justifies our continuing heavy investment in interdiction and response.



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## Data daze

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Almost from the beginning of what Walter Laqueur labeled the “age of terrorism” in the late 1960s, professional work on the subject has been the target of serious criticisms. These critiques have included—but have hardly been limited to—complaints that the term “terrorism” has never been adequately defined by investigators. Work on the subject is alleged to exhibit a pro-state bias. Government agencies often provide funding to support the work they believe will accomplish their own aims. State agencies that stage terrorist attacks on their own citizens or the citizens of other states tend to be played down, often for *raisons d’etat*. One major criticism of the terrorism literature is that the problem itself has been overblown. Reacting to the former Bush administration’s “war on terrorism,” John Mueller wrote: “In almost all years fewer than ten Americans die worldwide at the hands of international terrorists.... An average of ninety people is killed each year by lightning in the United States.... About 100 Americans die per year from accidents caused by deer and the same number from peanut allergies” (Mueller, 2006: 199–200).

The LaFree, Yang, and Crenshaw (2009, this issue) article belongs to the “overblown” genre. It makes use of a new or relatively new database to reach certain conclusions about the terrorist threat to the United States and its various installations around the world. We intend to make a few comments about the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and the conclusions drawn from its analysis.

The overall conclusion—and certainly the judgment likely to capture the most attention—is that the terrorist threat to the United States has been vastly exaggerated, as Mueller (2006) suggested. The reasoning behind this judgment is as follows. Before the GTD, virtually all collections of terrorist attacks that began to be compiled in the late 1960s (e.g., ITERATE and Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism [MIPT], until 2002) were based on international or transnational events. The new GTD collection, however, not only incorporates events involving situations in which the perpetrators and targets are of different national backgrounds, but also (and crucially) it includes domestic terrorist campaigns. For example, terrorist attacks carried

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out by insurgents in Chechnya against Russian targets or by the recently defeated Tamil Tigers against Sri Lankan targets are included in the GTD, even though their struggles have little to do with the United States. The GTD database is then likely to prove exceptionally helpful in providing researchers with important understandings of the status of terrorist violence in different parts of the world. Are terrorist attacks contagious, for example? If so, what, if anything, can be done to contain the contagion? Why are certain countries (e.g., Colombia) or regions (e.g., South Asia) in different parts of the world more susceptible to terrorism than others?

LaFree, Yang, and Crenshaw's (2009) analysis is based on 16,916 fatal terrorist events and other terrorist threats carried out between 1970 and 2004. In all, 53 groups identified by the State Department and now the National Counterterrorism Center as posing a serious threat to the United States are subject to close investigation. The results seem unambiguous. The United States, as it turns out, was not the "number one" target of terrorist attacks in this period. Rather, it ranked 19<sup>th</sup> among countries targeted by terrorist groups throughout the world. Despite the vast amount of attention given to the "war on terrorism" by the U.S. media, research institutes, and most of all by the federal government, the severity of the threat seems to have been vastly exaggerated. Illustratively, Crenshaw recently observed that the magnitude of change in the structure of government institutions after the 9/11 attacks was comparable with structural changes implemented at the beginning of the Cold War (i.e., 1946–1950). At that time, the United States was challenged by the Soviet Union with its vast military power (which included a nuclear arsenal) and threats to Western Europe. This time, the threat comes from small bands of religious fanatics organized in a network format with infinitely fewer resources than the U.S.S.R. had under Stalin's ruthless leadership.

Does the analysis of the GTD data suggest that all or most changes in direction after 9/11 were unnecessary, akin to misperceptions or "optical illusions" brought on in turn by threats issued by Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and other religious fanatics and then augmented by the mass media?

One way of dealing with the problem of the gap between perception—the United States is confronted by a lethal threat—and reality—the United States ranks 19<sup>th</sup> based on GTD data—is to call attention to the issue of magnitude. For some years, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation has regarded Earth First and other radical environmental groups to be the most serious domestic terrorist threats facing the country. This judgment is based on the frequency with which such groups have staged attacks. To date, however, these attacks on ski lodges, Hummer dealerships, and housing projects in environmentally threatened areas have failed to produce any fatalities. In other words, a high frequency of terrorist attacks is not the equivalent of severity. Simply counting the number of attacks or threatened attacks is not a good indicator of the magnitude of a terrorist campaign.

A second way of addressing the GTD findings and the widespread view that the United States is under serious terrorist threat is to point out a logical problem with the analysis: If you add thousands of domestic terrorist attacks committed by groups in various parts of the world between 1970 and 2004, it should not come as a surprise that the United States sinks in the

rankings. It is no doubt true, but true by definition. More than anything else, we may be dealing with a kind of circular line of reasoning. That is, if you compile lists of terrorist attacks carried out by groups active in, for example, Pakistan, Spain, Italy, Turkey, and India throughout the decades, it should not come as a surprise that the threat to the United States would not seem especially serious.

A third consideration is the bureaucratic bias built into the U.S. State Department's identification of 53 terrorist groups threatening U.S. security. Few government agencies have an incentive to have the scope of their missions reduced and their budgets cut. As a result, there seems to be a natural tendency to overstate and exaggerate. Take the case of the Italian Red Brigades (BR), a group that killed slightly fewer than 100 people throughout the course of its career (1970–1984). The BR was essentially a domestic revolutionary group that hoped to topple the Italian state by striking at its so-called “heart.” It had limited international interests that mostly involved the Palestinians. Toward the end of its career, the BR kidnapped U.S. General James Dozier in 1981 and managed to assassinate Leamon Hunt in 1984, the head of U.S. peace-keeping forces in the Sinai who was vacationing in Rome. But these attacks had little to do with the BR's original mission.

Having said this, it is hard to escape the trite conclusion that the world is what you perceive it to be. Here, as in other quantitative studies of terrorism, the world is defined by the database. Acknowledging that all other data sets contain flaws, the question is what attracts researchers to the GTD? First it is “new”; researchers have not yet worked through the GTD and discovered flaws and dissatisfactions as they have with ITERATE or MIPT. Thus, the GTD is attractive because it promises new insights. Yet the GTD is not new. It is a database established in 1968 by the Pinkerton Global Intelligence Service and collected continuously in two sets into 2007. So the data are the product of an organization motivated by reasons other than academic or public policy concerns. The consequences of such motivations will be shown shortly.

It is a large data set with approximately 69,000 observations. ITERATE, which is the next largest openly available set, has approximately 16,000 observations, all of an international character. So the GTD is a seemingly better data set than ITERATE or MIPT (now housed at the RAND Corporation) because it contains more observations. More observations implies a more complete description of the world and a more complete perception of the world. The more complete the description of the world, the better the understanding of the world. Size alone implies more completeness.

The number also seems to get around a growing complaint of all “open-source” data. These data are drawn from media sources; but open sources are infrequent in nondemocratic countries. Hence, all open-source data are inherently biased toward democratic countries with reasonably free media and, as a consequence, the world is “biased” in whatever way toward democratic countries. This bias will affect how terrorism is understood.

So, what is the problem? In the first instance, the definition used by the Pinkerton Global Intelligence Service includes “threats” of some terrorist activity.<sup>1</sup> Observations are both threats and events. The question then becomes: What is the effect of each; do governments respond differently to threats than to events? This is a good question that is grounded in both social science research and public policy. The second instance is the claim that the data set contains domestic, international, and transnational events. Yet a reading of the code books supplied through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, as well as descriptions at START, show that in neither the GTD1 nor GTD2 data sets is either variable found. Consequently, the two factors that make GTD1 and GTD2 attractive are not in the data set. The researcher cannot distinguish one type of event from another; each event is taken as the same. For the purposes of social science research and the development of good public policy, one would want to make such distinctions. It may be that governments would respond differently to different categories of the variable that divides observations into four categories: domestic threat, domestic event, international threat, and international event. But, without examining each event’s description, a formidable task, creating categories cannot be done.

What the researcher is left with are some manipulations designed to detect such distinctions but reduce the number of observations. LaFree et al. (2009) include approximately 16,000 fatal attacks. A recently reviewed paper relies only on attacks targeting military personnel. The underlying reasoning runs afoul of the “open-source” criticism. These events are used because terrorist attacks directed at military operations and those that are fatal are the most visible. But news of such events is likely to be suppressed by nondemocratic governments. Consequently, the observations are affected by the very attribute that makes GTD attractive: reported events most commonly found in media are free from government interference and more likely to be from democratic countries. Notice that the GTD is composed of nearly 30 years of data, which date back to 1968. The number of countries that support unrestrained media reporting was vastly fewer in the 1970s than in the 1990s–2000s, so the democratic bias is inherent in the data. Modern communications—such as the Web, e-mail, and Twitter—only enhance this bias.

Finally, the number of observations may present its own problem. It is well known that the statistical significance of any parameter is a function of the number of observations. As the number of observations increases, the likelihood of a statistically significant finding also increases, though not directly. A technique to get around the overwhelming finding that the most common number of terrorist events in any one country is zero during the last 40 years is to pool the entire data set, treating it as panel data and using techniques suitable for pool cross-sectional analysis. The choice of which tool (negatively inflated binomial regression, for

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1. In LaFree and Dugan (2007), the data now reside at the ICPSR, and the code books can be obtained from [icpsr.umich.edu/cocoon/ICPSR/STUDY/22541.xml](http://icpsr.umich.edu/cocoon/ICPSR/STUDY/22541.xml) and [icpsr.umich.edu/cocoon/ICPSR/STUDY/22600.xml](http://icpsr.umich.edu/cocoon/ICPSR/STUDY/22600.xml). Each codebook cautions against merging GTD1 and GTD2. GTD 3.0 resides at the University of Maryland and now includes approximately 80,000 observations. The codebook, which includes methodological considerations, can be found at [start.umd.edu/gtd/](http://start.umd.edu/gtd/).

example) is driven by the type of the data, a count, and appropriateness to the question asked. Yet, the statistical significance of the results is a function of the number of observations. A data set of this magnitude, relative to a smaller and certainly less complete data set, raises the risk of false positives. Only careful attention to this problem will avoid this risk.

Each data set has its peculiarities; each set attracts complaints, objections, and suggestions for improvement. All data sets should be used critically and the GTD is no exception, as LaFree et al. (2009) note in the opening pages of their article. In an ideal world, the GTD1 and GDT2 would contain two critical variables: threat-event and domestic-international. Groups would be easily attached to each type—assuming of course some connection can be drawn between the incident and a group—and analysis would proceed more easily. But, the world perceived through the GTD may be different from that perceived through other data sets. Perhaps a replication of these analyses using other data would be helpful.

### Conclusions

As with so much other research work on terrorism, this analysis based on the GTD involves a mixture of both methodological issues and political concerns. Of course, the latter are dependent on the former. If the United States is rarely the target of terrorist attack according to this research, then why does the government execute an enormous outpouring of human and material resources aimed at preventing them? Bureaucratic inertia? And if the terrorist threat to the United States is exaggerated, then the need to impose restrictions on civil liberties and hold “enemy combatants” without trial seems unnecessary.

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# A systemic approach to precursor behaviors

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### Operations Research

It is said that operations research was a decisive factor contributing to the U.S. victory in World War II. General Carl Spaatz expressed his appreciation for operations analysts during the war and, describing them as essential, prophetically stated, “We all hope that no similar national crisis will arise in the future.... If that time ever comes we shall call upon you again as we called on you before” (McArthur, 1990: 324). General Doolittle also expressed his appreciation for operations analysts, saying they made “substantial contributions toward the success of the Eighth Air Force” (McArthur, 1990: 324). The point of operations research during the war was to help the nation optimize its limited resources to fight a war efficiently against Germany on one front and Japan on another.

With the current economic crisis, many U.S. public-safety agencies are facing budget shortfalls, hiring freezes, equipment shortages, and in some departments, layoffs. The demands on these agencies, however, have increased in the areas of gang violence, drug trafficking, and increased theft, all of which are common during an economic downturn, as well as additional responsibilities involved in homeland security. Analogous to World War II, tribal, state, and local (TSL) police departments find themselves fighting on multiple fronts with limited resources.

For those less familiar with the science, “Operations research is a scientific approach to problem solving for executive decision making which requires the formulation of mathematical, economic, and statistical models for decision and control problems to deal with situations arising out of risk and uncertainty” (Panneerselvam, 2006: 1). Operations research using mathematics, economics, and statistics was the special forces of industrial engineering in its heyday during World War II, but it has since waned as an art form. Recalling the prophetic words of General Spaatz, the restoration of the art is in the best interest of the nation during this historic time. Public-safety executives could leverage operations research and its methods

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The findings and recommendations in this essay are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of The Johns Hopkins University or the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the National Counterterrorism Center, or the U.S. government. Direct correspondence to John Wigle, Division of Public Safety Leadership, The Johns Hopkins University, School of Education, Baltimore, MD 21218 (e-mail: john.wigle@jhu.edu).

to optimally deploy their dwindling and limited resources against the assortment of criminal activity threatening public safety, particularly in terms of countering terrorism in the homeland. TSL agencies are best positioned to track criminal events and suspicious activities and to observe their communities. Their operations could be adjusted to collect data and apply the art form to improve outcomes. Evidence suggests that strategic meaning can be derived from terrorism data (Krueger, 2009), and the Smith and Damphousse (2009, this issue) research indicates that tactical meaning can be derived about the pattern of precursor behaviors using open sources, including law-enforcement and court data.

An operations-research approach to countering crime and terrorism will necessarily involve the application of mathematics, statistics, and scientific methods to social science and police data, but it is not Compstat, and it is more than just filtering and sorting data (Hollywood, Strom, and Pope, 2009).<sup>1</sup> Operations research is more in depth. It would develop models for detection and prevention of terrorism and provide insights into hidden criminal processes that can lead investigations in better directions.

### **A Systemic Approach**

If public-safety executives decide to take this approach, a criminal intelligence cell would be the focus of any transition to an operations-research model. Optionally, an operations-analysis cell could be created within an existing intelligence center. In addition to performing intelligence analysis, such a cell would identify precursors and recommend business processes and data-collection improvements based on empirical conclusions. To perform these functions, the cell would need to use a variety of data and expertise to produce meaningful precursors that inform and apprise its customers and public-safety executives of impending problems, and to optimize business practices that improve outcomes.

The collection of large amounts of data is beyond the fiscal reach of most TSL departments, so how is it possible for an agency—particularly a small one—to set up a criminal intelligence cell or to transition an existing one as resources dwindle or dry up? To get started, it requires an executive champion who understands the issues behind organizational change management and the potential return on investment from using an operations-research approach.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the champion must be willing to work with other agencies to pool resources, identify technologies that can conserve human capital, and build a common understanding that technology will be fundamental to success.

Finally, once the intelligence cell is running, a champion must have the political clout necessary to encourage adjustments in interagency processes that improve outcomes. The combination of executive leadership, pooling of resources, operations research, and infusing

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1. Compstat is a police management improvement process in which weekly data are submitted to a statistical unit to determine crime trends and patterns.

2. This can be hard to measure, but it might be observable in Compstat data.

the right kind of technology will provide the critical mass needed to build an effective criminal intelligence cell.

To reach such an objective, a cash-strapped agency might turn to an existing regional intelligence center, a state fusion center, or a Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF). Such centers provide a more efficient and effective arrangement to pool resources than would be required to build a new intelligence unit. The two remaining pieces, technology and operations research, are a little more elusive and outside the normal comfort zone of public-safety leadership. But in my opinion, it is absolutely essential to get these elements right if the intelligence cell is going to succeed. These pieces might be found combined in some software applications, but I have found that such software has a narrow focus and solves specific problems, or accuracy is problematic (Hollywood et al., 2007). With that in mind, in most cases, an interdisciplinary team with operations research and social science experience—using a suite of software tools to collect, organize, analyze, and present data—will most likely achieve the combination required for success.

Alternatively, an agency could turn to local university criminology and computer science departments for assistance. The fusion of police professionals and graduate students solving difficult problems could be an effective operation. The university would bring the social science, interdisciplinary, and technology skills to the table, and the agency would provide the professional rigor and experience. Finally, the blending of a regional intelligence or state fusion center with university resources might yield the greatest impact of all these options. Providing the requisite security clearances to knowledgeable university scholars is a small cost to pay in the long run, and I think most academics would delight in having access to the large data sets that they are otherwise precluded from accessing.

### **Development of Attack Precursors**

Smith and Damphousse (2009, this issue) demonstrate how an empirical study can identify meaningful precursors through difficult terrain where information is scarce or incomplete. Solid intelligence on tactical indications and warnings—attack precursors—from a systemic collection process are needed to alert local law-enforcement agencies to the presence of terrorist and criminal activity. An empirical analysis of terrorism data could yield useful and valid indications and warnings as well as direct intelligence gathering that would provide public safety agencies with the tools they need to detect and prevent terrorism. Such analysis, however, is in a formative stage and will, out of necessity, require an iterative development process in the collection and study of data associated with the attack planning cycle, cell organization, and recruitment activities, Smith and Damphousse suggest.

Determining the best types of data to collect and drive intelligence activities is essential. Software engineers use an iterative development technique—called spiral or agile development—to rapidly build features into software applications. Similarly, social scientists could use operations-research techniques in an iterative process during a period of just 1 or 2 years to collect data, study it for correlations, and then evaluate it against known outcomes to identify which factors

are the most reliable and useful. The identified factors could then be published in a journal like this one to encourage additional testing to determine whether they hold true using other data sets. As a result, major factors for indications and warnings could be discovered cost effectively and passed to a plethora of small TSL departments. Distribution to the numerous TSL agencies would create a large network to detect and prevent a variety of terrorist groups. More specialized indicators for specific groups in areas at higher risk could also be developed under an iterative process with a special focus group of interested departments. The constant fine tuning of intelligence gathering and collection efforts during this start-up period, although initially expensive, should conserve limited resources in the long term while refining the science needed to yield useful indications and warnings as rapidly as possible.

One challenge to studying terrorism and its practical application to law enforcement is that terrorist groups operate across jurisdictional boundaries, and without a regional and systemic data-collection effort, premeditated attacks spread out over time and distance could appear unrelated to a particular public-safety agency.<sup>3</sup> Using the iterative process I described earlier at a regional or state center may be critical to identifying such activity. An operations-research approach would catalyze the development of detection networks and key data to notice groups who operate over large areas. The best practices of each JTTF, regional, or fusion center could then be leveraged with other centers to improve the systemic monitoring and to alert local communities to potential problems.

To gain insight into your enemies' intentions, you have to know what they have done and their modus operandi (Sun, 1910). Some organizations are focused on the present and view historical data as holding limited value. The past can provide meaningful insights into predicting future behavior, Smith and Damphousse (2009) illustrate. These insights can yield indicators that intelligence cells can train themselves to observe and warn agencies of the presence of attack precursors. Predicting behavior and looking for attack precursors is the essence of indications and warnings. Therefore, it is important that intelligence cells develop a historical set of ground-truth data on which to verify newly discovered factors and indicators. These data sets should contain known and highly accurate cases as well as generally collected data of suitable quality to test newly discovered factors adequately against ground truth.

Key to developing attack precursors is using technology to automate the collection of significant data points.<sup>4</sup> Automation of statistical models—like Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI) to identify relationships or Markov chains (Rabiner, 1989) to identify hidden behavior—reveals other factors worthy of additional examination by analysts.<sup>5</sup> LSI is an information-retrieval technology used to detect relationships between unstructured documents that are hard for humans to observe naturally (Deerwester et al., 1989). It is not possible to read everything and

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3. Although crime tends to be localized, my discussion focuses on the following question: What if the terrorist pattern is not localized?
  4. Not necessarily limited to software but to the concepts that make the software work better.
  5. More than just facial recognition for alias resolution.

you cannot remember everything you read, so it is virtually impossible to identify relationships between all documents you have read (Cogle, 2001). LSI can automate those connections to save analysts the time of reading, remembering, and putting it together, and it can allow them to focus on the substance of the connections made. Rutgers University has developed a High Order form of Naive Bayes (HONB; Ganiz, Lytkin, and Pottenger, 2009) framework that, when applied to unstructured data, can spot latent correlations that are sometimes two or three times removed between correlated pairs. The utility of such technology for terrorism precursor data could be fascinating and useful in the rapid discovery of correlations that might otherwise go unnoticed. LSI and HONB may also reveal meaning within problematic data sets, such as suspicious activity reports, the utility of which is hotly contested. With appropriate technologies, the application of operations-research principles, mathematical and statistical models, and empirically led research, TSL departments could establish detection networks rivaling the best in the profession.

### **Data Collection Strategies**

Smith and Damphousse (2009) note the scarcity of terrorism data available for research. Given the small amount of data they found and used in their study (i.e., 962 data points, as observed in their charts), they illustrate that even small amounts of data can yield meaningful information that can be leveraged for detecting and preventing terrorism. Their findings provide insight into how business processes might need adjustment to handle certain threats. Other academics support the collection of larger data sets. In the academic letter found in the *2006 NCTC Report on Terrorist Incidents*, Princeton professor Alan Krueger argued that the collection of these data is a “quintessential public good,” whereas in 2007 Stanford professor David Laitin encouraged the government to promote collecting data to a national account headed by appropriately credentialed statisticians.

The central limit theorem of statistics, in my opinion, necessitates collecting a range of data on various kinds of political violence and a variety of data on groups of the same genre. If additional detailed information about other ecoterrorist groups had been made available to Smith and Damphousse for their research, I believe they would have found more factors. The central limit theorem would have successfully exposed those additional factors useful to indications and warnings. Their finding that ecoterrorists have a short planning cycle is probably a factor with a strong correlation, but what about factors with weaker correlations hiding beneath the surface? To uncover more subtle factors, analysts will require (1) larger data sets than are currently available for research, (2) data of generally high quality, and (3) thorough and automated empirical methods. Until these criteria are met, we will not know the answer to this question. Some of the unknown subtle factors might present a practical and effective indication and warning that public-safety administrators can train their departments to observe. So how can an intelligence cell address these three criteria? If I had to prioritize the first two criteria, I would put quality as number one and quantity as number two. I placed quality first because poor-quality data can complicate the discovery of even key factors and, if poor enough, can

mislead or invalidate research. Automated processes and technology can assist with quantity, but only proper human oversight with the smart use of assistive algorithms and statistical models will bolster data quality. The remaining criterion is the use of an operations-research approach and social science techniques to achieve robust study results.

Data presented over temporal and geospatial plots are probably the most useful and informative venues for terrorism data. Smith and Damphousse (2009) suggest that temporal and spatial data about preincident terrorist activity can be collected from unclassified and open sources. Examination of the National Counterterrorism Center's Worldwide Incidents Tracking System (WITS), the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)<sup>6</sup> Global Terrorism Database, and Smith and Damphousse reveals that open-source collection of discrete information can yield useful time-series and geospatial data. WITS data are, however, limited to kinetic events and it is unknown whether data on threats, reported suspicious activities, and other ancillary events gathered from an open source hold any meaning or utility. The Smith and Damphousse research does point to the conclusion that, if gathered from an open source, other ancillary events would hold meaning and could be leveraged by public-safety executives. So I recommend that effort be directed at gathering discrete date, time, and location characteristics of any data collected.

Police reports, news, Internet blogs and Web sites, court records, and other open sources might provide a wealth of geospatial and time-series data that could be analyzed for correlated factors to provide indications and warnings on attack planning and preparations. There are, however, limitations to its use. Having manned the front desk at a police station, I have always been amazed that journalists trolling for stories are rarely interested in the frequent stabbings that spill over from a nearby major city, but a single shooting generates numerous phone calls. This problem is not new and unique to the press, and underreported criminal activity has been the subject of many papers, so I will not discuss it here. Despite my personal observations, I speculate that bias introduced through open-source coverage might not present a challenge to discrete data points, as they will either be present or absent. Ultimately, an empirical assessment will determine whether the factors needed for indications and warnings are affected by reporting rates in the press and other open sources. If it is determined that press coverage does not have an effect on the effectiveness of discrete data, then open sources can become a safe and cost-effective data pool for harvesting intelligence. Given the costs of other collection channels, such as confidential informants and undercover officers, the reliability of open sources is worthy of substantial research funding. If the most important data variables can be reliably plucked from open sources, then the long-term cost savings to law-enforcement agencies would provide a generous nationwide return on the investment.

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6. START is a U.S. Department of Homeland Security academic center of excellence headquartered at the University of Maryland.

For those data variables that cannot be reliably measured using open sources, then the iterative-study model I described earlier could be used to explore increasingly expensive or hazardous options to determine the most cost-effective arrangement. It is imperative that the results and lessons learned from these more expensive and hazardous options are shared among the regional intelligence centers to conserve resources for the best interests of officer safety and the nation. I caution that data collected from these channels might be closely held (or classified) because they could reveal sources and methods, thus precluding a rigorous academic review of correlations and thereby increasing the likelihood of public-safety departments turning their attention to poor indicators or spending additional funds to determine accuracy and reliability. Reducing the security access requirements of data reduces overall costs and increases the discovery rate of relevant factors. Given the volume of intelligence reports that either avoid or misuse quantitative analysis (Scheuer, 2007), it is probably better for academics and statisticians than intelligence analysts to examine (or at least review) longitudinal trends and patterns in data sets. When possible, terrorism data should be made available at the unclassified level to allow academics, scholars, and private institutions to explore the data for correlations. The public has an equally invested interest in maintaining order in society and in reducing the risk of terrorism, and it should not be denied the opportunity to evaluate the data for itself. Besides, what if the public does discover a cure for terrorism? How would that harm national security?

Additionally, police data, crime reports, dispatch records, suspicious-activity reports, and other primary sources of law-enforcement records will enrich open sources further and, within security protocols, will be made available to criminal intelligence cells. As new significant data points are correlated and discovered in large data sets, these primary sources of reporting can be altered to include such data if it is practical for the information to be collected in the reporting process. Such adjustments to the operating practices would constitute the hallmark of operations research; they would strengthen data collection and potentially provide a redundant data-collection channel for comparison with open sources. Such comparisons could determine reliability and completeness of open sources and police data.

The proper use of statistical data should be integral to any analytic report produced by a criminal intelligence cell, and the methodology used to collect and code the data for enumeration should at the very least be documented and repeatable. Data collected from the various channels should be synthesized into helpful bundles and related to one another as practically as possible. Data can be lumped into two basic formats: structured and unstructured. For structured data, intelligence cells should write data dictionaries and other standards so translation and loading of data into a main database can be repeated and understood by other regional intelligence centers that have information-sharing arrangements. Unstructured text should be included in the data dictionary to describe the origin of the text and its purpose.

Developing a practical methodology and a replicable and reliable collection practice is more difficult than one may think. For example, it can be expensive, usually in labor costs, to collect data and to code it into a useful baseline for time-series and geospatial comparisons. As such, many analysts opt for the less expensive and practical I-know-it-when-I-see-it approach, which

I encounter most frequently. The problem, of course, is the reliability of the results. Having a data-interchange standard common among all the regional intelligence centers throughout the country would reduce the use of undocumented and improvised approaches.<sup>7</sup> Such documentation is also critical to the technology processes of the intelligence cell. If each regional center gathered, sorted, and analyzed data from across the country, it would not only be duplicative but also cost prohibitive. Sharing data among intelligence centers would allow the central limit theorem of statistics to assist statisticians with identifying factors, improving quality, and bolstering methodological practices while reducing overall costs to public-safety agencies.

### **Use of Factors to Support Public Safety**

Smith and Damphousse (2009) conclude from their findings that law-enforcement agencies that are investigating eco-terrorist groups have relatively little time to observe and infiltrate individual cells. The data shown in their research certainly support this conclusion, and it should be examined more thoroughly to determine whether it could be operationalized to suppress eco-terrorist cells effectively. Conversely, international, right-wing, and left-wing terrorist cells have longer planning cycles. Such longer planning cycles reinforce the challenge I mentioned earlier that groups operating over time and distance may seem to be unrelated if data about them are collected by disparate agencies. Understanding these factors will allow business processes and data-collection requirements to observe terrorist groups as they emerge and plan attacks.

Smith and Damphousse (2009) also suggest that environmental terrorists so far have engaged in attacks that are less deadly than the comparison groups. They offer no data to support their finding, but an examination of the WITS data does support this conclusion (see Table 1). Eco-terrorists have the lowest fatality-to-attack and victim-to-attack ratios of any genre of terrorists in the WITS database.

Identified trends and patterns should be captured in a knowledge-management process, or at the very least placed into the department's operational procedures, so future officials will have the benefit (Walker, 2005) of knowing how quickly they must act and how deadly the planned attack may be. How the various genres of terrorist groups share common factors is just as essential as understanding how they differ from each other. Public-safety executives can use this information to tailor responses and investigations of specific kinds of terrorist cells. Those smaller departments with limited resources can deploy intelligence collection on those factors that are most common to all genres of terrorist groups. Conversely, larger departments that may be able to afford to do so can collect data on specific factors addressing specific risks in their region.

Ideally, the systemic collection of data on a large scale, followed by statistical analysis of factors and correlations, would alert law-enforcement officials to the presence of attack-planning operations. The data would provide a rough profile of the cell and where the cell is in the attack-

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7. As well as in Canada, if permissible.



planning process. Such foundational work—even if imperfect—can be delivered to detectives to begin their investigation.

**T A B L E 1**

**Attack ratios from WITS data, by group genre**

| <b>Group Genre</b>                  | <b>Fatality-Attack Ratio</b> | <b>Victim-Attack Ratio</b> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Christian Extremist                 | 14 to 1                      | 25 to 1                    |
| Environmental/Anti-Globalization    | 0 to 1                       | 1 to 1                     |
| Hindu Extremist                     | 1 to 1                       | 10 to 1                    |
| Islamic Extremist (Shia)            | 3 to 1                       | 11 to 1                    |
| Islamic Extremist (Sunni)           | 3 to 1                       | 9 to 1                     |
| Islamic Extremist (Unknown)         | 3 to 1                       | 17 to 1                    |
| Jewish Extremist                    | 1 to 1                       | 3 to 1                     |
| Neo-Nazi/Fascists/White Supremacist | 1 to 1                       | 3 to 1                     |

Notes. WITS = Worldwide Incidents Tracking System. Retrieved May 30, 2009 from [wits.nctc.gov](http://wits.nctc.gov).

A potentially rich source of data precursors would be suspicious-activity reports. There are opposing views on the value of such reports, and many feel the data are too unstructured to use. The belief is that any valuable data that might be hiding in such reports are too cumbersome and costly to sift out, whereas others feel that reporting standards could be implemented to increase their utility. And still others would simply claim there is no utility in any reported data regardless of their structure, format, or developed standards. Some anecdotal evidence suggests that suspicious-activity reports do have meaning (Hollywood et al., 2009) and may be useful to TSL agencies for precursor detection. Generally, regional intelligence cells would be faced with a variety of agencies submitting suspicious-activity reports in various formats, making the data unapproachable. The FBI has addressed this issue with its eGuardian effort (FBI, 2008), but it is unclear how many TSL agencies participate and whether the FBI has made any efforts to automate correlation of the reports submitted. Technologies, like LSI and HONB that were mentioned earlier, could be employed with this untapped data set to provide a quick triage of its utility. This area is definitely worthy of additional investigation, and deploying the right technologies with this data set could soon end the debate.

### **A Method for Controlling Group Variables in Studies**

Smith and Damphousse (2009) observe that terrorist groups frequently change their names for specific actions, occasionally coalesce with other groups and then disperse again, and even disband only to emerge again with different personnel. I could not agree more with this statement. Some members leave groups for various reasons (e.g., they are too militant or not militant enough). Groups are problematic in practice because membership is clandestine and informal, and these dynamics have troubled academic study for years. Smith and Damphousse identify three factors that complicate the study of terrorist groups' life cycles: (1) name changes, (2) ar-

rests or interventions, and (3) loose network affiliations. Managing these dynamics is essential to make reasonable comparisons. More factors are probably involved in group dynamics than those cited by Smith and Damphousse, and I propose the following flexible method to manage terrorist groups more accurately as they morph and evolve over time.

I recommend that groups be defined as organizations under specific leaders or structures with a fixed cause or purpose. Because personalities seem to have a large effect on the character of a terrorist group, the control of group “X” by leader “A” will vary in behavior from the same group run by leader “B.”<sup>8</sup> For more sophisticated terrorist groups that have multiple leaders structured in a particular fashion, it might be the structure itself that holds greater weight than leaders. Likewise, the character of group “X” with structure “F” will vary in behavior from the same group with structure “G.” The point of this factor is to capture the idiosyncrasy of the organization. The next factor is the cause or purpose of the organization, which is usually emblazoned in the name of the group. Group names that are used to deceive or frustrate legal processes and do not involve a seed change in purpose or cause are more appropriately identified as aliases. Thus, if group “X” changes its name to “Y” signaling a new direction, then it should be identified as a “new” group, separate and apart from the old group. Otherwise, “Y” would simply be an alias of “X.” The issue of knowing who the groups really are—especially those that use an alias to hide their real identity—can never be overcome, except after the information comes to light. At such a time, group data can be recoded to make it more accurate, which is addressed later in this article.

Affiliations and networks of organizations can be handled in the following fashion. A group that is the controlling organization is identified as such and the levels of hierarchy are defined. Other groups could then be attributed with the level of relationship to the controlling group. If no single group has a truly controlling relationship to the others, then the groups involved in the network are probably of the same group genre. Fellow travelers working together without some real controlling party could simply be labeled unaffiliated or given a special category of affiliation denoting loose affiliation.

Some other factors to track include nationality, group genre, emergence date, and relationship between group genres. Additional factors can be added to the structure schema described below but are probably impractical to use with a shorthand notation. Here is a possible shorthand notation format for group variables in social science data. Group “X” with leader “A” could be coded as  $X_A$ , and future leadership could be coded as  $X_B$ ,  $X_C$ , and so on, which indicates the same group with slightly variant characteristics. Groups using an alias could be coded as  $X_A-Y$  and  $X_A-Z$ .

Here is a possible shorthand notation schema for affiliations between group variables. If group “X” (say under leader “A”) is the controlling group and group “Y” (say under leader “B”) is closely affiliated with  $X_A$ , then  $Y_B$  could be notated as  $Y_B [X_A-1]$  with the numeral 1 indicating

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8. I use the word “seem” because it is my intuition and not empirical.

(for example) the highest level of affiliation. If  $Y_B$  is not so closely affiliated, then a coding of  $Y_B [X_A-2]$  might be appropriate. The controlling group would always be identified as  $[X_A-0]$  if needed for any reason; otherwise, it could be left out. For loosely affiliated groups without a controlling group, the group genre could be  $[Leftist-1]$ .

To define a perpetrator group in a structured data format for an electronic data set, I would recommend additional pieces of information. Here is how it might look:

```
Perpetrator Group record: {
  Primary key: unique number (1 to 65534);
  Predecessor: number (foreign key);
  Group genre: number (foreign key);
  Nationality: number (ISO-3166 code);9
  Name: text string;
  Leadership: text string;
  Affiliation: number (foreign key | zero | highest value );
  Affiliation level: number;
  Alias: binary (yes or no);
  Canonical group: number (zero | foreign key);
  Emergence: date (null | date);
}
```

The structure above describes a record for a perpetrator group with a unique number for  $2^{16}$  (65,536) groups. If needed, a 32-bit value could be used to provide more than 4 billion possible groups. I would recommend reserving the value 0 and the highest value (65,535). Each record would have a predecessor foreign key, a group genre foreign key, a nationality code, a group name in text, a leadership label in text, an affiliation that is the primary key of another group (called a foreign key), its affiliation level associated with an identified lead group, an alias indicator field, a true group name's foreign key if an alias, and finally, the emergence date field. The affiliation field can hold the value 0 to mean no affiliation, or it can hold the highest value to mean that it has a loose affiliation with the group genre identified in the record. If an unknown affiliation is needed, then the second highest value or the numeral 1 should be reserved for this purpose. Records with the alias flagged "yes" would indicate that the group name field contains a pseudonym and not the true name, and the canonical group field would indicate which group record to consult for the group's true name. Groups later identified as an alias of another group can be recoded easily by setting the alias flag to "yes" and placing the real group's foreign key in the canonical group field. The remaining fields can be left untouched. It might be important to leave the data untouched because it may be possible for a group to behave differently under its alias than it does under its true name. Such a question would be

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9. The International Standards Organization publishes Standard 3166, which lists all the countries as well as the digraphs and trigraphs.

interesting to study and it requires a coding practice like the one described here. And finally, the emergence date would record when the group name first appeared on the world stage and would assist in temporal analysis of perpetrator groups, or at least their names. Here is how a group genre record might look:

```
Perpetrator Genre record: {
  Primary key: unique number (1 to 255);
  Genre label: text string;
  Affiliation: number (zero | foreign key | highest value);
  Affiliation level: number;
}
```

The notation above describes a data set record for a group genre with a unique number for  $2^8$  (256) genres. I recommend reserving the value 0 and the highest numeric value. Each record would have a genre label in text, an affiliation field that is the primary key of another group genre, and an affiliation level. The primary key from this record would be used as the number in the group genre field of a perpetrator record. An affiliation field might be helpful in the event that researchers need a hierarchy for group genres in addition to affiliations between perpetrator groups. A value of 0 would be used to describe no affiliation and the highest value would be used to describe an unknown affiliation.

Here is how the shorthand might work for the examples found in the Smith and Damp-housse (2009) article. The Marilyn Buck group could be identified as  $M19CO_{Buck}$ . On its January 28, 1983 attack, it would be coded as  $M19CO_{Buck}-RFG$  and the three subsequent attacks as  $M19CO_{Buck}-ARU$ . Then after 1984, the coding could be written as  $M19CO_{Buck}-RGR$ . In the next example, the Earth First<sub>Foreman</sub> notation would evolve into  $ELF_{Autonomous}$  or possibly Earth First<sub>Unknown</sub>- $ELF$  after Foreman's indictment depending on whether it can be shown that the ELF is really Earth First under a new unidentified leader. I do not believe that to be the case, so I would be inclined to use the  $ELF_{Anonymous}$  notation. And as the last example,  $CSA_{Ellison}$ , The Order<sub>Mathews</sub> and Aryan Nations<sub>Butler</sub> could be coded with an affiliation as  $CSA_{Ellison}[White\ Supremists-1]$ , The Order<sub>Mathews</sub>[White Supremists-1], and Aryan Nations<sub>Butler</sub>[White Supremists-1].

Using the structured schema for electronic data sets, fields could be selected in combinations of leadership, group names, emergence dates, and affiliations by computer and be used to control group variables for a variety of hypothesis testing. It is also flexible for handling additional perpetrator factors that researchers might want to study or control. This schema, although imperfect, should provide researchers with a start for testing data sets and learning whether this approach is workable. Here is how a perpetrator group is structured in an electronic data set:

```
Perpetrator Group record: {
  Primary key: 1234;
  Predecessor: 4567; (Weather Underground Organization)
  Group genre: 9876; (Left Wing)
  Nationality: 840; (USA)
```

Name: May 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Organization;  
Leadership: Marilyn Buck;  
Affiliation: zero; (none)  
Affiliation level: zero; (none)  
Alias: no;  
Canonical group: zero;  
Emergence: October 20, 1981; (or use 1978)  
}

### **Final Observation**

The collection of social science data to study terrorism necessarily involves the collection of data on terrorist events, organizations, and individual terrorists. Data collected from past actions, groups, and actors are by their nature limited by civil liberty and privacy concerns because the actions, groups, and actors in question have usually been determined to be terrorist. When the data are enumerated, analyzed, and correlated for factors, additional privacy and civil liberty matters usually are not raised. Only once a search for those factors is applied to a data set of unknown events, groups, or actors is a civil liberty or privacy issue raised. Thus, to get ahead of this challenge, intelligence cells must formulate civil liberty and privacy policies from the onset of transition or the start of operations. Having the policy formulated ahead of time will ensure that analysts and officers are fully informed of the implications of their search and of how to handle the data appropriately without encroaching on ethical and legal requirements. I defer to lawyers and more expert opinions for further discussion on the subject.

### **Conclusion**

Terrorism metrics are just beginning to emerge, and more work is needed to develop indicators that have an important effect. The academic, law-enforcement, and counterterrorism communities must recognize the value of such data, make it a collection requirement, and finally, develop the capability to interpret the data. Using the latest technology and mathematical models, operations research is a viable option in developing capabilities that optimize terrorism detection and prevention.

Robust data sets and systemic collection practices could yield greater results than Smith and Damphousse (2009) achieved and lead to more efficient police operations to combat crime and terrorism. Although collecting even larger data sets would pose a challenge to any criminal intelligence cell, technology can free analysts of time-consuming collection, organization, triage, and some analytic tasks. Working within the existing frameworks of the domestic intelligence network, public-safety agencies could partner with JTTFs, state fusion centers, regional intelligence centers, and local universities to reduce resource demands while achieving improved outcomes.

Data standards and documented practices will assist intelligence centers with sharing data and bolster the methodology used to collect and code the data. Using an iterative development cycle, social scientists and statisticians should be able to make significant gains in identifying factors and discrete data important to observe, detect, and prevent terrorism. Infusing technology with robust, high-quality data sets is essential to identifying significant factors and reducing labor costs long term. As important data points and factors are identified, these information needs can be infused into the business process of participating agencies to improve domain awareness. And finally, the effect on U.S. citizens' civil liberties and privacy must be addressed before a search for factors is undertaken to guard those principles that make us a great nation in this world.

The tactic of terrorism is as old as history itself, and it cannot be defeated in the same manner as a standing army of uniformed actors. As such, meaningful terrorism metrics will always be collected and reported regularly to evaluate the threat and manage the risk to society. The proper collection and public availability of official data will lead to the speedy discovery of correlations and necessary debate about their relationships. Determining which factors are needed to measure the current state of the risk of terrorism is the final destination of the operations-research approach. Currently, the collection of terrorism data is slowly maturing, but work remains to be done to reach that ultimate goal.

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## Violence and public policy

### The right lessons

**Chip Berlet**

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Most U.S. citizens learned of the existence of an armed right-wing underground in the United States on April 19, 1995, when the Oklahoma City federal building was bombed. In a similar way, most U.S. citizens learned of the rise of Islamic political jihad on September 11, 2001, when coordinated terror attacks brought down the World Trade Center twin towers in New York City and damaged the Pentagon in Washington, DC. How are these two acts related, and what does this mean for public policy?

Federal law-enforcement policymakers started their learning curve when Gordon Kahl, a leader in the right-wing antigovernment Posse Comitatus movement, gunned down two federal marshals in North Dakota after a botched attempt to detain him in 1983. The law-enforcement response was swift. Tracked down to a rural home where he was hiding, Kahl died during a shootout when a flammable liquid was poured down the chimney and ignited, thus avoiding the burden of an actual trial.

Since that incident in 1983, public policy regarding appropriate law-enforcement response to acts or potential acts of political violence has oscillated between hardliners and pragmatists. The basic hardline position warns that being “soft” on “radicals” and “extremists” will increase disrespect for law enforcement and the government itself, leading to more attacks. Pragmatists suggest that aggressive techniques coupled with impatience to end confrontations often results in needless injuries and deaths and the creation of martyrs in whose name future acts of violence will be committed.

Throughout the 1980s, a series of lethal acts of violence and terrorism were perpetrated by right-wing ideologues. Pragmatists in 1985 crafted a peaceful resolution of a standoff at the compound of the right-wing paramilitary group Covenant, Sword, and Arm of the Lord (Stern, 2003a). Hardline responses led to raids, confrontations, and a 1988 federal conspiracy trial that collapsed when jurors rejected the claims of dubious federal witnesses (Berlet and Lyons, 2000).

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Hardline responses also led to two disastrous confrontations with survivalists. One was in 1992 involving the Weaver family at their remote mountain home at Ruby Ridge in Idaho. The other was in 1993 with the Branch Davidian religious sect at their compound on the outskirts of Waco, Texas. Both confrontations involved people who believed conspiracy theories warning of impending government tyranny with a religious apocalyptic frame foreseeing a rapidly approaching confrontation between good (and godly) heroic resisters and a corrupt and venal (perhaps satanic) government apparatus.

During the Branch Davidian standoff, several scholars contacted the Justice Department and other federal agencies in an attempt to suggest that their aggressive law-enforcement tactics were not only counterproductive, but also potentially lethal (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995; Wessinger, 1999).<sup>1</sup> This tragically prophetic social science analysis rode a decade-long wave of academic interest in theories of social movement mobilization and action, prophetic millenarian groups, and religious belief.<sup>2</sup> Hamm (2004) has studied the relationship of these tendencies to domestic terrorism, whereas Juergensmeyer (2000), Stern (2003a), and others have focused on both domestic and overseas tendencies, including militant political jihad (Berlet, 2005a, 2005b).

Religion scholar Ammerman (1993) observed that law enforcement “should have understood that new or dissident religious groups are often ‘millennialist’ or ‘apocalyptic.’ That is, they foresee the imminent end of the world as we know it and the emergence of a new world, usually with themselves in leadership roles.” A chastened federal bureaucracy solicited advice from several scholars and developed a new game plan for handling potentially dangerous interactions with militant groups suspected of criminal activity or a potential for violence (Ammerman, 1993; Stone, 1993).

Several analysts who studied the political right during this period anticipated a new round of right-wing violence. Fearing an attack on their clinics, Planned Parenthood’s research staff hosted a small strategy meeting in New York City in late 1994. A few weeks later, antiabortion activist John C. Salvi III went on a killing spree (Berlet and Lyons, 2000: 297–299). This and other incidents and increasingly shrill calls on the right for antigovernment resistance prompted a meeting of watchdog groups and researchers in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>3</sup> Fearing more violence, Ken Stern of the American Jewish Committee volunteered to summarize the concerns in a report

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1. The author contacted a Justice Department official and provided this person with the names of scholars of apocalyptic belief.
  2. Authors discussing the role of apocalyptic belief in mobilizing social movement activism include Dick Anthony, Kathleen Blee, Paul S. Boyer, Brenda Brasher, Norman Cohn, Betty Dobratz, Frances Fitzgerald, Robert C. Fuller, Mark S. Hamm, Susan Harding, Mark Juergensmeyer, Patrick Mingos, Stephen D. O’Leary, Susan J. Palmer, Thomas Robbins, Stephanie Shanks-Meile, Jessica Stern, Kathleen Stewart, Charles B. Strozier, Damian Thompson, and Catherine Wessinger.
  3. The author attended the meeting and made a presentation on right-wing populism and apocalyptic belief.

presented to federal authorities just a few weeks before the federal building in Oklahoma City was destroyed by a terrorist bombing in April 1995 (Stern, 1996).<sup>4</sup>

The Oklahoma City bombing was a clandestine operation by a cell of neo-Nazis (Hamm, 1997, 2002). The Salvi attacks were the act of a “lone wolf.” Neither event provided the opportunity for the federal government to apply the new, less aggressive procedures suggested by the scholarly pragmatists. Two later incidents demonstrated the effectiveness of the new policies: the standoff involving the Montana Freeman, which ran from March to June in 1996, and the standoff involving the McLaren faction of the Republic of Texas in May 1997.

The evolving policy advice concerning confrontations was summarized as follows in 2003 by the Anti-Defamation League:

- Take written and verbal threats seriously. Authorities who receive letters, phone messages, or e-mails from people expressing, even implicitly, a willingness to kill (or to die) over an issue concerning their property or residence should take such communications seriously.
- Avoid precipitous action. If law enforcement suspects that the potential exists for a violent or threatening confrontation, then actions that might unwittingly effect such a confrontation should be avoided. Probably the most provocative such action is the sudden and unexpected appearance of a law-enforcement officer on the property of an extremist (indeed, such appearances caused the deaths of law-enforcement officers at Ruby Ridge and Waco).
- Make accurate threat assessments. If a possible confrontational situation develops, then law enforcement should pause to assess what sort of threats, if any, are posed.
- Use friends, relatives, and go-betweens. Sometimes it is even possible to use other extremists for this purpose.
- Allow people to save face. In standoff situations, authorities should look for ways to allow extremists to “save face” and rationalize ways to surrender. During a standoff, an extremist may not wish to die but may find it difficult or impossible simply to give up.
- Make patience a virtue. If a standoff situation exists, then authorities should always consider the virtues of simply “waiting people out” rather than trying to end the situation quickly with tactical action. Whenever possible, negotiation and patience, such as that demonstrated at the successfully resolved Montana Freeman standoff in 1996, should be exercised. Time is rarely more precious than lives.

These policies not only save lives but also reduce the likelihood of future acts of violence. As Stern (2003b) explained, among the most often proposed “root causes” of terrorism are “poverty, lack of education, abrogation of human rights, the perception that the enemy is weak-willed.” Yet based on her research, Stern (2003b) reported that the “variable that came up most frequently was...perceived humiliation. Humiliation emerged at every level of the

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4. Stern (1996) incorporated much of the information contained in the original private report. The author was contacted after the bombing by a Justice Department official seeking information on balancing the threat of more violence with civil liberties concerns.

terrorist groups I studied—leaders and followers.” Hardline approaches to confrontations can sow the seeds for future acts of terrorism (Garfinkel, 2003).

### **The U.S. Ultra Right and Militant Islam**

After 9/11, some on the ultra right in the United States praised the attacks by militant Islamic terrorists, and a troubling relationship continues to percolate (Michael, 2006). The public policy issues, however, revolve around using an analysis of the acts of violence committed by the ultra right in the United States to predict potential terrorism by Muslims living in the United States.

In 2008, two influential experts on terrorism, Sageman and Hoffman, became embroiled in a heated and public dispute. At issue was the source of future acts of domestic terrorism by Islamic militants, such as those carried out on 9/11. Hoffman argued that such attacks most likely will be generated by the international al Qaeda network. Sageman contended that the most likely source will be homegrown terrorism plots planned by Muslims living in the United States (Hoffman, 2008; Sageman, 2008a). Both Hoffman (2008) and Sageman (2008a, 2008b), however, created their analytical models based in part on seriously flawed research on violence and terrorist acts perpetrated by people associated with domestic right-wing social movements during the 1980s and 1990s. This poses a greater problem for Sageman’s policy prescriptions because he predicted that violence would emerge from within the United States.

In his book *Leaderless jihad*, Sageman (2008b: 145) argued that surviving “leaderless social movements” requires “a constant stream of new violent actions to hold the interest of potential newcomers to the movement, create the impression of visible progress toward a goal, and give potential recruits a vicarious experience before they take the initiative to engage in their own terrorist activities.” This claim by Sageman (2008b) took the work of antiterrorism policy analyst Garfinkel and changed a basic premise. Garfinkel (2003) was referring to a narrowly defined terrorist underground cell structure. In Sageman’s erroneous analysis, anyone joining a street-level affinity group or collectivity could be considered prone to violence and a potential terrorist.

Sageman’s (2008b) analysis echoed Cold War countersubversive conspiracy theories that demonized liberals and socialists as “fellow travelers” on a slippery slope toward communism and armed revolution (Heale, 1990; Kovel, 1994; Theoharis, 1978). This frame was then used by government agencies to justify widespread surveillance and infiltration of domestic groups, primarily on the political left (Cunningham, 2004; Donner, 1980).

Sageman’s (2004) first book, *Understanding terror networks*, was an excellent study with a pioneering use of data from field research. Much of the innovative research attributed to Sageman’s (2008b) *Leaderless jihad* by public policy experts, however, originated in the work of other authors, as Hoffman (2008) noted in his scathing review. In terms of social movements, groundbreaking studies include Tibi (2002), Juergensmeyer (2000), Stern (2003a), and Wiktorowicz (2004, 2005).

In his review of *Leaderless jihad*, sociologist Jeff Goodwin (2009) noted that the controversy but found much merit in the book and gave an overall positive review. Goodwin, who is a leading

scholar of social movement theory, nonetheless expressed concern that Sageman (2008b) might have overpredicted the potential for “organized violence” among Muslims in the United States: “Does every Muslim student group—or angry social circle within such groups—conclude that violence or terrorism is their best hope?” asked Goodwin. “How many angry youth have the wherewithal to carry out terrorist acts, even if they reach this conclusion?” Goodwin (2009: 209) added his fear that “certain authorities will use Sageman’s model” of radicalization to portray a “potential national-security threat” behind every association or social circle of Muslim youth. That is already happening. Policies and procedures are being formulated based on inaccurate summaries of right-wing violence and hyperbolized fears of Muslim subversion that go far beyond anything suggested by Sageman. We are facing a series of interrelated policy problems, including the following (Berlet, 2008):

- Failure to distinguish radical ideologies adequately from violent methodologies.
- Flawed and sometimes woefully inaccurate information about right-wing violence in the United States.
- Misreading of the concept of “leaderless resistance.”
- Misapplication of contemporary social movement theories.
- Superficial analysis of the role of religion in political struggles and violence.
- Pointless polarization of debate into two camps when numerous other valid analytical interpretations are available.

Sageman (2008a, 2008b) and Hoffman (2008) have much to offer, but the policy debate about models of anti-terrorist threat analysis needs to be broadened to include a much larger pool of scholars with competing ideas.

### **Framing Appropriate Targets**

Himmelstein (1998: 7) argued that the term “extremism” is at best a characterization that “tells us nothing substantive about the people it labels” and that, at worst, the term “paints a false picture.” The term “extremist” is often used by those in the political center to demonize dissidents on the political left and right. As a label, the term extremism is elastic enough to cover everything from nuns committing civil disobedience to neo-Nazis gunning down their enemies. More precise language and more distinctions are needed.

Law-enforcement agencies are using the term extremism in a way that blurs the distinction between ideologies and methodologies, which suggests that radical ideas inevitably produce violent acts when no such direct causal relationship exists. Furthermore, as Levin (2001) observed, “For a variety of reasons, including legal ones” the leaders of some militant radical groups today “appear as content to inspire violence as their predecessors were to orchestrate it.”

The First Amendment protects the free flow of ideas—even those that we find reprehensible. The proper role for law enforcement is to pursue crime, not police the boundaries of “radical” dissent. There is a clear government role for officials and politicians who are not directly involved in criminal investigations to decry dualism, scapegoating, demonization, and conspiracism—the tools of fear (Berlet, 2009). And those of us who promote human rights and civil society also

must play a role; we need to use precise language that exposes the dynamics of societal oppression. We should not ask law-enforcement agencies to step into this sphere of civil society unless criminal intent or action is evident. Law enforcement needs to be concerned with individuals and organizations that use intimidation or violence against a targeted group or individual based on their perceived identity. It is methodology—not ideology—that matters.

The traumatic shocks of the Oklahoma City bombing and the attacks on 9/11 created an unusual dynamic regarding legislative oversight of government policies related to political violence and terrorism. According to Haider-Markel and O'Brien (1997: 551), when “anti-paramilitary laws arise out of a perception of the threat posed by armed far-right groups, conservative Republicans, faced with a constituency that supports some issues raised by paramilitary groups, appear to try to limit the scope of anti-paramilitary laws.” On the other side of the political aisle, when liberal elites and elected democratic politicians fear the threat of violence more than the threat to civil liberties, they tend to retreat from normal oversight functions, allowing more repressive actions by the federal government (Keller, 1989). Prior to 9/11, civil libertarians were pushing for an end to “sacrificing civil liberties in the name of national security” (Dempsey and Cole, 1999). After 9/11, fear of more terror attacks by Islamic militants led many conservatives to support even more repressive measures. At the same time, many liberal and democratic elites were also scurrying away from challenging repressive measures. This dynamic is now shifting.

The Homegrown Terrorism and Violent Radicalization Prevention Act (H.R. 1955 and S. 1959) introduced in 2007 was blocked by a coalition of civil liberties groups that spanned the political spectrum.<sup>5</sup> The act proposed a National Commission on the Prevention of Violent Radicalization and Ideologically Based Violence that would have moved scholarly research out of the realm of peer review, academic ethical guidelines, and competitive grant applications into “Centers of Excellence” wrapped in unnecessary layers of bureaucracy and facing political pressure to produce findings in line with the ideological needs of elected officials.

The successful effort to block the bill highlighted a broad coalition of civil liberties groups that included not only the American Civil Liberties Union, but also the libertarian Cato Institute, the conservative Free Congress Foundation, and right-wing anti-tax activist Grover Norquist. On the left were groups including the National Lawyers Guild, the Center for Constitutional Rights, the Bill of Rights Defense Committee, and the Defending Dissent Foundation.

The coalition then turned to challenge the discussion of antiterrorism policies at the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, chaired by Joe Lieberman (I-CT). The hearings have not provided an even-handed inspection of various antiterrorism approaches but have featured hardliners and ideologues, leading to protests from civil libertarian, Muslim, and Arab groups (Berlet, 2008).<sup>6</sup> Since then, coalition members have criticized as seriously flawed a federal report on *Right-wing extremism: Current economic and political*

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5. The details of this law can be found at [govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-1955](http://govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-1955).

6. The author participates in the coalition that blocked the legislation, criticized the Lieberman hearings, and continues to push for reforms.

*climate fueling resurgence in radicalization and recruitment* and the Virginia Fusion Center 2009 terrorism threat assessment.

At the same time, professionals in law enforcement continue to produce research, analysis, training materials, and public handbooks that adopt the patient and pragmatic approach and respect the civil liberties and civil rights of potential suspects. For example the second edition of Fuller's (in press) college textbook, *Criminal justice: Mainstream and crosscurrents*, contains a crisp and provocative discussion of the tough issues faced by law enforcement dealing with terrorist threats in an increasingly diverse society. The accessible public guide by Licata (2009), a retired Air Force Colonel, teaches people how to keep their "eyes and ears open for terrorist threats...without using race or religion" as indicators; their program's slogan is "Protecting America with Pride, Not Prejudice."

## Conclusions

Law-enforcement personnel put their lives on the line every day. They deserve to be deployed into dangerous situations using techniques based on evidence-based research that minimize risk and loss of life rather than hardline, ideologically driven, aggressive use of force that maximizes headlines and institutional reputation. Policies shaped by hyperbolic countersubversive panics and political opportunism should not be allowed to triumph over policies based on the most reliable recent social science and carefully weighed tactical field experience.

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## The prison hate machine

**Randy Blazak**

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**O**n June 7, 1998, the body of James Byrd was chained to the back of a truck in Jasper, Texas. Byrd, who was black, had been beaten and stripped naked. His body was then dragged along a dirt road, which caused Byrd's right arm and head to be severed. The three perpetrators had recently been released from prison where they had become indoctrinated into the tenants of white supremacy through a racist prison group called Aryan Circle (Anti-Defamation League, 2002). Byrd's murder cast a spotlight on the violence of hate crimes but not on the influence of racist prison groups. Stories of crimes and extremist activities by those who become radicalized in the U.S. prison system are becoming increasingly common.

What is the true threat posed by adherents of racist and right-wing ideologies? The assessment of the real threat by right-wing extremists in the United States changed dramatically on April 19, 1995. The truck bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building by Timothy McVeigh took 168 lives and injured more than 800 people. It was quickly revealed that McVeigh had drifted through the radical militia movement and was a devotee of the racist novel, *The Turner diaries*, written by National Alliance leader William Pierce. The bombing put domestic antigovernment groups—especially those with links to neo-Nazi ideologies—on the top of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) antiterrorism efforts and led Congress to attempt the passage of the Comprehensive Antiterrorism Act of 1995. The act failed to pass but the crackdown on such groups by federal, state, and local law enforcement effectively crippled the militia movement (Anti-Defamation League, 2005).

The events of September 11, 2001, shifted public attention away from the threat of domestic terrorism and criminal actions by right-wing groups. However, large and small groups connected to various right-wing ideologies have continued to perpetrate various acts of terrorism and organized criminality. These groups have changed dramatically from the usual cast of characters that law enforcement and civil rights groups concerned themselves with in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among the growing threats are racist groups that originate in the U.S. penal system.

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### **Hate Crimes versus Hate Groups and Extremist Organizations**

There is an understandable tendency to conflate the occurrence of hate crimes, the presence of hate groups like the National Alliance, and the criminal activities of extreme right-wing groups like the Aryan Republican Army. Hate crimes represent a considerable and consistent problem in the United States. The numbers themselves seem small. According to the most recent data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Report, there were only 7,624 reported hate incidents in 2007 compared with 16,929 murders and 445,125 robberies (FBI, 2008). Yet, for several reasons, there is a significant underreporting of hate crimes to police. A 2005 study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics titled *Hate crimes reported by victims and police* found actual numbers of hate crimes occurring each year to be more than 15 times higher than the number reported, which puts the annual average closer to 191,000 hate crimes (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2005).

Both numbers are significant because hate crimes are a form of terrorism. Despite the claim that "all crimes are hate crimes," bias-motivated criminality is qualitatively different. Unlike financial and interpersonal crimes, hate crimes are meant to send messages to larger communities. Usually, the victims are randomly selected and often misidentified. For example, many victims of the 481 anti-Islamic hate crimes reported in 2001 (most of which occurred after the 9/11 attacks) were not Muslim. Many were Sikhs, Latinos, and others that appeared to be Middle Eastern.

The goal of hate crimes is to terrorize larger communities to effectuate a specific political goal. The burning of a cross in a black family's yard or the beating of a Hispanic man by racist skinheads is designed to create waves of fear in those specific communities. Research shows that hate crimes tend to be more violent than other violent crimes, often involving the mutilation of the victim (as in the James Byrd murder). The result is heightened anxiety among other potential targets (Iganski, 2001). This "greater harm" to the community has facilitated public support for hate-crime laws that enhance penalties for bias-motivated criminality.

The amount of participation by hate groups in the commission of hate crimes is largely unknown. High-profile cases focus attention on the criminality of group members. For example, the 1999 Los Angeles shooting spree by Buford Furrow, Jr.—which left three Jewish children injured and one Filipino postal worker dead—was linked to his membership in the Aryan Nations. However, the more typical form of hate crime is not likely to be committed by a formal hate group member. According to the FBI, the most common type of offense is the racially motivated destruction of property, including vandalism (FBI, 2008). Someone who spray paints a racial slur on a person's car is committing a small act of terrorism (although not one orchestrated by a larger hate group).

One study found the terrorist activity of hate groups to be relatively minimal. Levin and McDevitt examined the records of the Boston Police in the early 1990s and found that 5% of hate crimes involved members of organized hate groups (Levin and McDevitt, 1995). However, Boston might not be the typical city with regard to hate activity, and hate crimes in Little Rock or Birmingham might be more likely to be committed by members of hate groups, which are more common in southern states. There is also the inability to assess the true nature of hate

groups' influence on hate criminals who may not be formal members of any established group: Those who associate with hate groups do not typically carry membership cards.

The actual definitions of "hate groups" and "extremist organizations" are also imprecise sciences. There is a high consensus on the status of groups like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and National Alliance, but less consensus that the Nation of Islam qualifies as a hate group. Criteria have been established based on a survey of law enforcement and monitoring groups. A group can be regarded as a hate group if it meets the following four conditions (Blazak, 2009):

1. The group is a collection of people who hold a common disdain for one or more large categorizations of people
2. The group is a named entity
3. The group desires the oppression of one or more large categorizations of people based on historical circumstances
4. The group must act on its collective disdain of other groups

These criteria allow for the inclusion of various bias-motivated groups (e.g., the New Black Panthers) and the exclusion of other groups that have been linked to oppressive ideologies, such as the Catholic Church. It bears repeating that involvement in a hate group is not equitable with the commission of hate crimes or any criminal behavior. Hate group membership itself is protected under the First Amendment, as are most hate-group members' activities. Some acts might equate to symbolic terrorism, like wearing a swastika armband, but they are protected free-speech acts.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has experienced a significant decline in the more traditional right-wing extremist groups. Although monitoring groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center have alleged an increase in hate groups, the claim is easily challenged. The 2009 Southern Poverty Law Center *Year in hate* report announced a 54% increase in hate groups since 2000 (and a total of 926 groups; Holthouse, 2009). However, some of this increase includes Klan groups who had split into smaller groups, groups that had fewer than three members (e.g., the American National Socialist Workers Party in Oregon), and black nationalist groups (e.g., Black Lawyers for Justice). And we cannot link the rise of the hate group count to an actual increase in the number of people engaging in right-wing extremism.

The 2000s ushered in the decline of the stalwarts of the white supremacist movement. The 2002 death of William Pierce led to internal dissension in his National Alliance. Richard Butler's death in 2004 caused a splintering of the Aryan Nations. The arrest of several high-ranking members of the Hammerskin Nation disrupted the racist skinhead movement. Several civil cases—including the 2008 case against the Imperial Klans of America—have hampered the activities of the KKK. Militia groups declined after heightened attention in the 1990s and were replaced by traditional "patriot" groups like the John Birch Society. The only group to increase in activity has been a relatively small Nazi group, the National Socialist Movement.

Claims that the election of Barack Obama and the failing economy would fuel extremist activity have been made by civil rights groups and the Department of Homeland Security—without much corroborating evidence. On April 15, 2009, Homeland Security officers warned

law-enforcement personnel to expect an increase in right-wing extremism linked to hatred of the new president and the rising unemployment rate (Sullivan, 2009).

Although the far right has been in increasing disarray, one area of growth has been racist prison gangs. Those incarcerated under various state hate crime laws and federal civil rights laws have become increasingly organized. Additionally, white offenders unaffiliated with racist groups before incarceration become indoctrinated in far-right ideologies that stay with them after release. The release of committed hate mongers back into the community might be the greatest threat from the far-right extremist counterculture.

### **Today's White Inmate Is Tomorrow's Racist Terrorist**

A bumper sticker reads, "Today's prisoner is tomorrow's neighbor." Approximately 95% of the 2.2 million U.S. citizens currently in state and federal prisons will be released at some point (Hughes and Wilson, 2005). That translates into more than 650,000 inmates released back into communities each year (Harrison and Beck, 2005). Although minorities are disproportionately represented in incarcerated populations, prison officials estimate that 10% of the prison population is involved in racist white prison gangs (Anti-Defamation League, 2001). That translates into roughly 220,000 members of groups—groups like Public Enemy Number 1 (PEN1), Nazi Low Riders, Aryan Brotherhood, Aryan Circle, Insane Peckerwood Society (IPS), and European Kindred with 65,000 members—being released each year.

Some of those who have become involved in racist prison groups have done so out of a need for protection in a population that is less than 40% white (The Sentencing Project, 2009). Others have been incarcerated because they had been convicted of acts considered to be hate crimes or civil rights violations. Many serve their sentences and, during parole, leave the world of hate and crime. Others' reentry is marked by either a return to racist criminal subcultures or the first engagement with the racist subculture outside of prison. Those who recently transition out of prison blend into the increasing number of U.S. citizens with incarceration histories.

One racist prison organization that has become a significant criminal presence outside of correctional facilities is PEN1. The California group has become heavily involved in criminal rackets, including identity theft and methamphetamine trafficking. In December 2006, more than 300 federal and state law-enforcement officers throughout California raided PEN1 hang-outs, arresting 67 members of the white supremacist group. Included in the crimes listed in their warrants was a hit list of state prosecutors and police officers. Nearly all of those arrested had become members of PEN1 in prison (Anti-Defamation League, 2007).

### **The Rise of Racist Prison Groups**

The rise of racist prison groups has its roots in the 1960s civil rights reforms. Desegregation of prisons resulted in the formation of racist inmate groups, most notably the Aryan Brotherhood in California's San Quentin Prison, which emerged from racist biker gangs (Anti-Defamation League, 2002). Racist prison groups actively recruited white inmates who were then expected to follow the groups' radical racist agendas after release. Wesley Dillinger, leader of the East

Coast Aryan Brotherhood, said, “Prisons can be used as a training facility and should be” (Moser, 2002: 10).

With the growth of “war-on-crime” strategies like mandatory minimum sentences and “three strikes and you’re out” laws, the U.S. prison population exploded. Between 1974 and 2001, the number of U.S. citizens held in prisons more than quadrupled (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003). This included the urban minority population that got swept up in an attempt to reduce “street crime” in addition to white offenders incarcerated through the new color-blind sentencing guidelines. Although minorities had preexisting street gangs inside prison to connect with—like 18<sup>th</sup> Street, the Bloods, and the Gangster Disciples—many white convicts had no such group for protection. The lone exception was the Aryan Brotherhood in California which, by the year 2000, was estimated to have 15,000 members (Lyman and Potter, 2006). White-power inmate groups, like European Kindred, grew rapidly in the 1990s along with the U.S. prison population.

Now, most men’s state and federal prisons, as well as many county jails, have racist white prison groups. Some, like the Nazi Low Riders (NLR), are recognized by the Bureau of Prisons as “security threat groups”; others, like Odinist Groves, pass as religious groups, and still others are informal cliques of white inmates who embrace racist iconography as a bonding symbology. A new white inmate, recognizing that he is now a racial minority in a world of well-established (and violent) black and Hispanic gangs, may rationally approach racist prison groups for protection. After a ritualistic initiation, which typically involves a mandated act of violence against another inmate, the new member is given a tattoo (often a swastika or Nazi SS bolts) and is indoctrinated into the racist ideology.

An addition to the new prison recruits are hate criminals who enter prison with a certain amount of experience. Those who are convicted of state hate crimes, federal civil rights violations, or any act that can be viewed as extending the white supremacist movement are viewed as heroes by many organized racists. For example, members of the Order, a racist gang that robbed banks and armored cars and murdered a Jewish radio host in the 1980s, have achieved celebrity status in prison. These stories have been celebrated on the “Free the Order” Web site, and their names are well known. Until his death in 2007, Order member David Lane operated a popular blog and a publishing house (14 Words Press). Other hate criminals are listed as “Aryan Prisoners of War” (APOWs) or “political prisoners” for waging battle against the supposed Jewish-controlled society. Their names are listed on Web sites, like Celtic Reign and Nationalist.org, and racists are encouraged to correspond with them. In 2002, the Oregon-based skinhead group Volksfront raised money to buy a television for Ken Mieskie. Mieskie was the ringleader of a group of skinheads who brutally beat an African student to death with baseball bats in 1988. He remains in an Oregon prison. Many of these Web sites publish letters from hate-affected inmates, including members of the Order, which gives them an audience outside of prison.

Except for those who receive death penalty sentences, life without parole, or who die in prison, all incarcerated offenders will eventually be released back into the community. This includes offenders who are convicted of hate crimes, are listed as APOWs, are members of racist prison gangs, and are influenced by racist ideology inside correctional facilities. Several programs are available to assist gang members with their transition back into the community after release from prison, such as the Going Home Program in Oregon, but no programs are available for inmates involved in racist prison groups.

Convicted hate criminals and those who become “hate affected” in prison experience a similar support network. Inside correctional facilities, racist gangs offer protection, brotherhood, and emotional support to white inmates who are likely to perceive a threat because of their new minority status. Additionally, hate offenders receive support and encouragement from the white supremacist community outside the prison. Many hate Web sites have run APOW mailing lists that encourage followers to write racist inmates and provide them with resources for their release, such as jobs, residences, and even wives. This strategy translates into an expectation that the inmate will maintain engagement with this support network after release.

The case of Kyle Brewster is instructive. Brewster, along with Ken Mieskie and a third skinhead, were convicted of the brutal 1988 beating death of Mulugeta Seraw in Portland, Oregon. In 2002, Brewster was paroled under the condition that he not associate with known gangs, including skinhead groups. In 2006, Brewster’s MySpace Web site featured pictures of him with members of Volksfront, a violent skinhead group. Volksfront supported Brewster while he was in prison, including conducting a letter-writing campaign on his behalf. Having violated his parole, Brewster was returned to prison. He again violated his parole in 2006 by assaulting a black prison guard. He remained in custody until he completed his sentence in 2008.

### **Policy Implications**

The issue of prison-generated hate offenders generates two primary responses regarding research and policy. Criminologists and other academics must assess the nature of the problem itself. Little is known about the sociology of racist prison gangs. Research areas should focus on the following issues:

1. The nature of recruitment inside prisons
2. The presence of racist prison gangs inside juvenile correctional facilities
3. The activity of white groups that are not counted as security threat groups, including racist religious groups
4. The demographics of hate groups, including the percentage of members who are hate criminals or hate group affiliated before entering prison populations
5. The support racist group members and APOWs receive from the white supremacist community
6. The relationship between racist groups and other inmate groups, including religious groups and gangs
7. Factors that allow inmates to leave racist prison groups while incarcerated



8. The recidivism rates of racist prison group members and the types of criminality they engage in
9. The participation of racist offenders with organized right-wing extremists after release
10. The effectiveness of postrelease transition programs in reducing the recidivism of racist offenders

These issues also require policy responses from lawmakers and correctional officials. The following areas clearly require policy actions:

1. The creation of resources that allow inmates to resist recruitment into racist prison gangs, including protection from assault, extortion, and harassment from minority inmates
2. The development of an active threat assessment of racist prison groups that communicate with extremists in the general population
3. The setting of stringent conditions of probation and parole that restrict offenders' associations with extremist groups
4. The development of postrelease programs that help offenders adjust to living and working in a diverse society

It is possible that more than a thousand members of racist prison groups are being released back into the community each week, with no established strategy to respond to their increasing presence in the criminal landscape. Police are often the first to confront the criminal threat of racist groups like PEN1, IPS, and NLR, who mix terroristic activity with traditional gang offenses. These groups feed into biker gangs, radical political groups, and older hate groups to pave the way for future events like those in Jasper, Texas, and Oklahoma City.

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# Prisons and fear of terrorism

**James Austin**

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The article by Useem and Clayton (2009, this issue) addresses two major themes that dominate our thinking on terrorism. First, we assume that all terrorists are sophisticated, extremely dangerous, and (unless killed or incarcerated) capable of inflicting mass destruction. The second is that they exist in such large numbers that we must allocate large amounts of our military and criminal justice resources to identify, kill, or contain terrorists before they act. Useem and Clayton examine the more narrow fear that our massive prison system may be becoming a “breeding ground” for future terrorists and what (if anything) should be done about it before it is too late.

By definition, terrorism is a political act. Students of criminology and labeling theory learn early that for, an act to be defined as criminal, one (usually the state) must successfully apply the label to the act (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951). The sheer act of killing someone does not constitute it as a crime. Depending on who does it and under what circumstances, the very act could alternatively be viewed as heroic or as a brutal murder. The differential use of the label also applies to the murder of large numbers of people. When people resist invasion and occupation by a foreign and more powerful state by conducting acts of violence, they become labeled as terrorists. Often, these so-called terrorists—especially the leaders of terrorist groups—have no prior criminal behavior that predates their involvement in terrorism.

To date, there are no examples of a person who was sentenced to a U.S. prison who later became a terrorist and then inflicted mass destruction on fellow U.S. citizens. But could it happen? At first, I was somewhat surprised that the editors of this journal were considering a publication that examines this question in detail. One would think that, with all the pressing issues surrounding the United States’ growing 1.7 million prisoner population, this topic would be among the lowest of priorities for criminologists to study and debate. But the politics of fear that have been successfully linked to September 11, 2001, seem to trump a rational assessment of the potential danger we face from terrorism emanating from the nation’s prison system.

More significantly, at the time of this writing, this concern has been amplified by recent political events. President Obama promised on the campaign trail to close the notorious Guan-

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tanamo Bay Prison which, according to our government houses more than 240 of the world's most feared terrorists. Now there are concerns that it would be dangerous to transfer them to federal maximum-security prisons on U.S. soil.<sup>1</sup> One primary concern raised by Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Robert Mueller is that such a move would expose the bulging U.S. prison population to radicalization by these 240 people who would be contained in super-max single cells:

The concerns we have about individuals who may support terrorism being in the United States run from concerns about providing financing [to] radicalizing others as well as the potential for individuals undertaking attacks in the United States. All of those are relevant concerns.<sup>2</sup>

As is common practice with our government, the FBI chief would not list any specific individuals that reflect these concerns. And never mind the uncomfortable fact that this has not yet happened even with the presence of more than 300 such terrorists already in the custody of the Bureau of Prisons. But to further fuel our fears, the Department of Defense recently reported that 5% of the nearly 600 people released from Gitmo have become involved once again in terrorist activities or “are suspected of being involved.” Compared with the U.S. prison recidivism rate, the Gitmo rate is pretty good. On a more serious note, though, we (criminologists or the public) cannot verify these data. But they certainly provide a useful image of fear to convince the public that—absent Gitmo—terrorism would be breaking out all over the United States.

Finally, two of our leading academic institutions (the George Washington University [GWU] and the University of Virginia [Virginia] with the help of Department of Justice and Homeland Security funds) have published a detailed report ominously titled *Out of the shadows: Getting ahead of prisoner radicalism*, which raises the same fears. GWU's Homeland Security Policy Institute and Virginia's Critical Incident Analysis Group believe that our U.S. prison population could easily become a breeding ground for future terrorists unless we take action now (Cilluffo and Saathoff, 2006). The evidence provided to support their conclusion is five cases of which only three are examples of U.S.-born prisoners who were radicalized by Islamic teachings while they were incarcerated in U.S. prisons. Like Director Mueller, the authors said there are many more, but as always these cases cannot be shared with the public because of “... the sensitive nature of on-going investigations...” (Cilluffo and Saathoff, 2006: iii). Despite

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1. The current budget request from the Department of Justice suggests that it would cost anywhere from \$50 to \$80 million as requested by the Department of Justice to effect such a transfer (that is \$207,000–\$330,000 per transferred prisoner). Those familiar with the business of transferring prisoners know that the costs are more likely to be zero. The United States already has a considerable infrastructure designed to move known and suspected terrorists from one place to another for detention and torture. In fact, a recent editorial by Harvard Law Professor Jack Goldsmith pointed out that an even larger but unspecified number of detainees is located at the Bagram U.S. Air Force Base in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the United States continues to transfer suspects to other countries as part of its rendition program for purposes of using interrogation methods that are not legal in the United States (Goldsmith, 2009).

2. See [msnbc.msn.com/id/30846430/#](http://msnbc.msn.com/id/30846430/#).

the small sample, these intelligence experts confidently recommended that the following steps be taken to preempt a terrorist attack by U.S. prisoners:

Congress should establish a Commission to investigate this issue in depth. An objective risk assessment is urgently needed in order to better understand the nature of the threat and to formulate and calibrate proactive prevention and response efforts accordingly. Enhanced information would enable officials to address this issue now, rather than forcing them to manage a crisis later (Cilluffo and Saathoff, 2006: v).

### **How Dangerous and Competent Are They?**

One of the three incidents cited by Cilluffo and Saathoff (2006) is the Kevin James case. A closer analysis of James illustrates well how he and his band of three other converts were incapable of being effective terrorists. James was serving a lengthy prison term in California and became a converted Muslim. He and a fellow convert (Levar Washington) then formed a group called the Jam'yyat Al-Islam Al-Saheeh (JIS), which translates from Arabic as "The Association of True Islam." The U.S. Department of Justice now claims that the two-person JIS team was dedicated to terrorist acts against U.S. military bases, synagogues, and Israeli government facilities. While incarcerated, the two drafted a document referred to as "Blue Print 2005," which listed the "do's and don'ts" for their group.

1. Learn Arabic
2. Acquire a steady job that does not interfere with learning Arabic
3. Acquire two weapons (pistols) with silencers
4. Appoint a member (from the five) to find contacts for explosives or to learn bomb making. We will need bombs that can be activated from a distance
5. And "In order to fulfill these task [sic] you must become legitimate. Acquire identification, drivers license, work/school, keep regular contact with your parole agent, attempt to remove your tattoos and monitor your look. Your dress code must not bring attention... casual dress so as not to arouse 'extremist suspicion.' We have work to do."<sup>3</sup>

Washington was later released from prison. He then recruited two other men who were subsequently arrested by law enforcement after committing a series of gas station robberies. A search of their apartment found the blue print and other materials, such as a press release to be aired once they had committed their acts of violence. Apparently they had badly strayed from the blue print and returned to what they knew better: common stickups of gas stations. These men clearly do not fit the stereotypical image of terrorists as sophisticated and dangerous.

The second example is Jeff Fort. I met many of Fort's associates who were incarcerated at Stateville and Joliet prisons where I worked from 1970 to 1974. At that time, Fort was a leader of the Chicago street gang originally called the Blackstone Rangers. Fort had a lengthy juvenile

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3. See [nefaoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S.\\_v.\\_James\\_PleaAgreement.pdf](http://nefaoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v._James_PleaAgreement.pdf).

and adult criminal record. He and his associates were no more than gang bangers who knew how to steal, intimidate, assault, and murder rival gang members. Fort and his gang were not formally educated and had fewer technical skills that would make him a threat to anyone beyond those in the south-side neighborhoods of Chicago—which the Rangers controlled.

Throughout the years, Fort and others transformed the Rangers into the Black P. Stone Nation. In the late 1960s, the gang was able to obtain federal funds from the now defunct Office of Economic Opportunity. These funds led to accusations of fraud and misuse and ultimately to Fort's federal conviction and 5-year sentence. While incarcerated, Fort converted to Islam and, when he was released in 1976, he changed his gang's name to El Rukn. The gang continued their drug dealing and Fort was again sentenced to federal prison for drug trafficking. While in the Bureau of Prison, his plot to receive \$2.5 million from Libya to commit unspecified acts of terrorism was taped during telephone conversations. Fort and his group of would be terrorists never got the money and, if they had, I suspect they would have spent it on activities they were skilled at—drug dealing and assaulting and killing rival drug dealers.<sup>4</sup>

My point is that, although James and Fort were threats to public safety, they never could inflict the kind of damage and mass destruction suggested by our national law-enforcement leaders, domestic terrorism experts, and university-based think tanks. Their criminality predated their romantic association with Islam and terrorism, and they lacked the necessary skills to become effective terrorists.

### **The Disproportionate Costs and Benefits of the War on Terror**

I would be remiss not to remind readers of the costs and benefits of the war on terror. This war parallels our other wars on crime and drugs. For example, the United States is spending approximately \$215 billion a year for the criminal justice system, of which almost \$70 billion is spent on corrections.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, the total economic loss to victims of “street crime” in 2003, as reported by the U.S. Department of Justice through its victimization survey, was an estimated \$15.4 billion (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003).

Similar to the disproportionate costs versus benefits of our wars on crime and drugs, the costs of the war on terror can only be viewed as excessive. Fewer than 3,000 people were killed in the 9/11 Twin Towers and Pentagon attacks.<sup>6</sup> Economic losses have been estimated at \$27.2 billion. Included here were the destruction of private and public assets (\$16.2 billion) and another \$11 billion in rescue, cleanup, and related costs (Looney, 2002).<sup>7</sup>

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4. For a summary of Jeff Fort's career and associated activities, see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff\\_Fort](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff_Fort).

5. See [ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/tables/exptyptab.htm](http://ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/tables/exptyptab.htm).

6. It is noteworthy that approximately 100,000 people die each year from infections acquired while in a hospital (Connolly and Yourish, 2009).

7. These are not necessarily “losses” because many companies and individuals profited from the disaster by being awarded government cleanup and construction contracts and replacing lost jobs that occurred only in Manhattan.

In reaction to this attack, the United States launched two wars against Afghanistan and Iraq that have cost thus far more than \$800 billion with another \$76 billion requested in 2009 and no end in sight.<sup>8</sup> More than 4,200 American troops have been killed and another 31,000 have been seriously wounded. Iraq has had 9,000 police and soldiers killed. An estimated 55,000 insurgents have been killed. The number of Iraqi civilians killed ranges from 100,000 to 600,000 and another 2.5 million Iraqis have been displaced.<sup>9</sup> At what point do these mounting costs “break even” with the costs of the attacks on 9/11?

### **The Larger False-Positive Hypothesis**

This leads me to the specific policy recommendations of Useem and Clayton (2009). Again let us remind ourselves that the number of actual cases in which terrorist acts have been led by released U.S. prisoners who were radicalized while incarcerated is zero. The only remaining question is whether there is any credible reason to believe that this number will change. Useem and Clayton observe that the prospect of scores of terrorists being created by our prison system is unlikely. Indeed, one major reason for this is that Muslim and other religious groups in prisons—as well as the overall pro-American values of most prisoners—serve to reduce the likelihood of such cells developing. Existing intelligence and self-regulating prisoner control systems—coupled with the general lack of competence to become an effective terrorist cell—make the whole issue mute and unworthy of serious inquiry. So in this regard the article should be useful by helping remove this topic from further investigation by scholars at our universities.

But there is one issue that needs additional scrutiny that was not raised by the authors. This is the much larger false positive of why there have not been any terrorist attacks since 2001 when everyone predicted there would be. It defies common sense that the absence of any post-9/11 attacks is solely because of the greater use of military and law-enforcement assets. The relative ease with which a few dedicated suicide bombers could enter and simultaneously detonate explosives in some of our major railroad stations or shopping malls—as is performed on almost a daily basis in Iraq and elsewhere—strongly suggests that such cells do not exist in the United States. Investigating this hypothesis would be a far better use of criminological assets.

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8. See [nationalpriorities.org/costofwar\\_home](http://nationalpriorities.org/costofwar_home).

9. See [zfacts.com/p/466.html](http://zfacts.com/p/466.html).

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# “Weapon choice and American political violence”

## Some policy options

**Jack R. Greene**

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Legault and Hendrickson’s (2009, this issue) research is timely and complicated. It is timely in that terrorism internationally continues to consume a large portion of emotional and financial energy, and it is complicated because terrorism is many different things often aggregated under one rather elastic heading—terrorism—which makes its specification, classification, and treatment complex.

Legault and Hendrickson’s (2009) central argument is that firearm violence differs between those we label criminals and those we label terrorists, but rational choice and situational crime-prevention perspectives and analyses might prove useful for understanding both groups and interdicting such behavior. In respect to weapon sales, Legault and Hendrickson argue that more oversight of legal transactions might be necessary to address terrorist acquisition of such weapons, including greater scrutiny of those who are on terrorism “watch lists.” This is the case because those who could be labeled terrorists may have little prior contact with the criminal justice system and would go unnoticed in the legal gun market. Moreover, as Legault and Hendrickson demonstrate, terrorists are more likely to use firearms than are federal felons, who possess weapons for many reasons, including self-protection and to threaten victims; thus, their detection has real implications for firearm violence.

Legault and Hendrickson’s (2009) research highlights the differences between federal felons and terrorists, most especially in connection with gaining access to firearms and the use of firearms in the commission of criminal or terrorism acts. These differences are somewhat obvious—that is, criminals use weapons instrumentally to induce compliance from victims, whereas terrorists use weapons for their instrumental and expressive value, namely to terrorize. Nevertheless, important and often subtle differences between these two groups suggest the need for policy choices that address the substantive differences between criminal and terrorist motivations as well as their differential access to and use of handguns.

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Legault and Hendrickson's (2009) analysis might be most useful in clarifying the need to distinguish "terrorism types" to tailor current and new legislation as well as law-enforcement efforts to address differences among terrorist groups. However, to do this, we must look more closely at differences in "terrorism," as well as the role that rational choice theories of crime could play in describing these phenomena. I agree with Legault and Hendrickson that it is an advantage to be more scrupulous about the legal and the illegal gun markets and how handguns could find their way into the hands of terrorists. At the same time, it seems that the application of such oversight needs to address the question of "which terrorists?"

### **Which Terrorists?**

Like criminals, considerable variation is found among terrorists, acts of terrorism, and motivations for terrorism (Forst, 2009). Simple constructions like domestic versus international terrorists, religious versus political terrorists, "green" or eco-terrorists versus cyber-terrorists, and the like suggest that we must be careful not to oversimplify what is meant by terrorists and terrorism. Each has its own connotation and behind each connotation is its own sense of motivation and human behavior. Consequently, how we label terrorism has implications for what policies we think might be successful in dissuading or otherwise preventing different forms of terrorism.

I suppose the fundamental distinction between domestic and international terrorists and terrorism might be the most direct way to think about firearm policy options that could reduce the capability of these persons to use lethal violence for political ends. Domestic terrorism has perhaps been most evident in the actions of hate and supremacy groups, as well as in some activities of what are generally called militias, whereas international terrorism is most associated with several sporadic incidents spread throughout U.S. history and, most recently, the first bombing of the World Trade Center followed by the tragedies of September 11, 2001.

Homegrown terrorism might respond more directly to gun control laws already in existence, coupled with more vigorous domestic police intelligence. Many of those involved in hate and supremacy groups, as well as those associated with more radicalized militias, have previously come to the attention of the police. Their role in the gun market is more likely in obtaining illegal weapons, explosive materials, and the like, although many of these groups are likely to have access to rifles and other long guns. Generally, their tactics seem to be focused on individuals (sometimes randomly), places of worship (such as churches with black congregations, Jewish temples, or Arabic mosques), and representations of government, especially those of the federal government.

Increasing local police knowledge and surveillance of domestic terrorism groups—concurrent with monitoring group member behavior as opposed to gun purchases—is likely the most direct route available for police prevention and interdiction. Current local and national strategies to monitor gun markets and access to explosive materials can obviously be strengthened, but those are the target weapons and munitions that should be under federal, state, and local scrutiny. What is often needed in these arrangements is a better line of communication and information sharing between those at the state and local levels of government and those at the federal level.

This is true for understanding and monitoring international terrorism groups as well, although it is less likely to be a local police function, at least initially.

Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs) organized during the past 8 to 10 years are one way of improving these communication linkages, although these efforts have struggled largely because of conflicting missions, organizational cultures, and a lack of trust between federal agencies and state and local police (Office of the Inspector General, 2005). Increasing communications and information sharing within the context of the JTTFs and other task force arrangements is of the highest priority. It should be remembered that failures in information sharing between federal police agencies accounted for the largest lapse of intelligence leading up to the tragedies of September 11, 2001 (The 9/11 Commission, 2004). Strengthening intelligence and information-sharing capacities across police agencies should be a national priority and, despite the rhetoric of existing leadership, must be made actionable and accountable. The dirty little secret is that federal agencies are often in competition with one another, do not share information sufficiently, and are loosely connected to their state and local counterparts by choice because of institutional jealousies, conflict in institutional missions and institutional cultures emphasizing control, independence of action, and secrecy.

At the end of the day, it will be local information systematically fed to analysts that reveals behavior patterns. Linking sources of information with analytics and then making the derived intelligence available to all who might take action remains elusive in the "fight against terrorism." Local police have not been well prepared to collect information on terrorism, and it should not be assumed (as it is) that police information across a wide spectrum of behaviors is a ready source of information on terrorism (Carter, 2004). Such an approach would be like drinking water from a fire hose: You will be very wet, and your thirst may remain. The development of shared information protocols and shared meaning about actions thought to be connected to terrorism will also be necessary to implement locally.

### **The Limits of Rational Choice**

Much situational crime-prevention thinking is rooted in rational choice theories of human behavior (Clarke and Newman, 2005; Cornish and Clarke, 1986). Simply put, these models emphasize a calculus people make to maximize intended value whether through criminal or legitimate means. For crime, the pain-gain calculus is said to be enhanced when motivated offenders are confronted by capable guardians who protect available targets from victimization (Felson, 1998). Target hardening, the use of increased lighting or surveillance, and otherwise "marking" places with symbols that "someone is watching" are strategies meant to increase the risk of detection and apprehension while decreasing the ease of criminal activity.

For economically motivated street crimes such as burglary, car theft, vandalism, and some forms of robbery, the rational choice perspective has had some success. However, the use of rational choice methods has important limits, even for economic crimes, and most especially when more personal crime and terrorism are raised, although such models have been advanced as contributing to the prevention of terrorism (Clarke and Newman, 2006).

Such “economic-centric” models of decision making and choice may work for some types of criminal activity but certainly not for all. Ideas associated with behavioral- or sensory-driven criminal behaviors may be powerful explanations and predictors of certain types of criminal and terrorist behavior. Moreover, given that terrorism is often associated with ideological extremism, it follows that behavioral and values-based ideas about crime may be more useful to understanding and perhaps preventing or interdicting these actions.

By moving away from purely “rational” models of decision making, criminology—like the field of economics—has much to learn about what Keynes suggested were “animal spirits”: the range of impulses, emotions, misconceptions, and values that intimately drive economics more than rational decision making and choice do (Akerlof and Shiller, 2009). Witness our current international financial crisis, which was caused in large measure by beliefs that the housing market was infallible, rising ever steadily without interruption and the subsequent and very consequential loss of confidence in financial instruments and institutions that have followed.

Behavioral economics challenges the underlying rationality of classic economic theory by stressing that most decisions are constrained by what Simon (1976) called bounded rationality. Behavioral economics demonstrates that, given information shortages and the asymmetry of information in the marketplace (among other things), people often will use approximations or rules of thumb in making choices (Gladwell, 2005). Moreover, how problems are presented to those who make decisions also has considerable influence on the actions taken. Such “framing” is said to restrict a thorough analysis of economic choices. Last, according to behavioral economics, markets themselves are often inefficient in that their behavior may be contradictory to what is viewed as being rational. For example, the world pumps trillions of dollars into global banking systems; yet the fear of undisclosed losses and eroding trust within the financial markets cause markets to continue to decline. On its face, such behavior seems irrational; yet its rationality is based on fear and mistrust rather than on strict economic calculus. Such behavioral anomalies are easily discovered in crime as well and are more likely deeply associated with acts of terrorism, especially international terrorism. Moreover, crime is not only the result of an economic calculus, but it also has a seductive edge according to Katz (1990).

Katz’s (1990) treatment of murder as “righteous slaughter” can be most aptly associated with acts of terrorism. Here, he concluded that such homicides are most often the result of a sense of humiliation that the perpetrator can resolve only through extreme violence. Such humiliation is internalized such that the victim is viewed as the tormentor whose death displays ritual, partly to punish the offender and partly to return “dignity” to the oppressed; that is, the murderer. Katz (1990: 18) also suggested that another characteristic of homicide is “in its character as a self-righteous act undertaken within the form of defending communal values.” The intimate and personal nature of such crime (murder), coupled with a sense of righteous indignation and the need for dignity to be reasserted, has important implications for acts of terrorism—especially those associated with religious, cultural, or political extremism.

Rather than a rational choice model to guide understanding and action about such value-laden behaviors as religious and cultural terrorism, the use of symbolic interactionism and

social identity theories, as outlined by Arena and Arrigo (2006), might be more fruitful and could actually fill in gaps where rational choice is found wanting. Here, the focus should be on providing police and security personnel with a better understanding of the "social psychological, as well as cultural, political, and religious dynamics that lead to terrorist violence" (p. 248) and to improve our understanding of who joins such extremist groups. Such information is useful in developing short- and long-term efforts to address terrorism (Forst, 2009) because it shapes police understanding of terrorism and terrorists' motivations, and it provides important contextual information that could be acted on locally.

Criminal and terrorist acts motivated by intense personal values and a sense of indignity would likely be unaltered by conventional policing methods. Just as the police have generally been ineffective in dealing with intimate homicide, their ability to prevent or interdict terrorism—which is inspired by ethnic or religious fanaticism—is equally problematic.

Paying closer attention to what might be termed the precursors to such incidents, as is the case in spousal assault, might be a point of entry for policing. Here, community engagement, not just surveillance and intelligence, could prove to be useful tools in addressing perhaps the most complex aspects of terrorism: the underlying sense of marginality that often accompanies such behavior. Importantly, local police have the greatest capacity for such engagement but, in engaging the community, they must be careful not to become the agent provocateur of the federal government.

### **Fusion Centers and Integrating Local Knowledge with Federal Responses**

One primary problem in preventing or interdicting terrorism is that all terrorism ultimately is local in its implications, in its consequences, and as the site of activities that immediately precede terrorism events—but the genesis of terrorism may be more distant. Although the planning for such events may occur elsewhere, local contexts are the settings in which terrorism actually happens.

Although the federal government has an important role in these matters, local police have on-the-ground knowledge of both suspicious and nonsuspicious behavior. Connecting the two—federal roles and local police knowledge—has proven to be challenging, to say the least. One emerging yet struggling model for such integration is in the implementation of fusion centers throughout the United States, the purpose of which is to draw information from many local sources within a state or region and then to sift and mine that information to produce usable intelligence for dealing with potential terrorism.

Fusion centers are state and regional intelligence centers that pool information across jurisdictions and share analyzed information across law-enforcement agencies at all levels of government, but especially serving as a link between states and the federal government. Fusion centers were conceived as mechanisms to link state and local knowledge about current and emerging trends that threaten the security of local jurisdictions. The range of interested parties in fusion center analysis spans the public and private sectors, from law enforcement to private security to other government agencies, such as public health, medical and fire-first

responders, and infrastructure (telecommunications, transportation, finance, and banking) oversight. Information sharing is the pivotal aspect of the fusion center concept, yet the most difficult to achieve. Fusion center information exchange and sharing among local, state, regional, federal, and private partners requires many structures, cultures, and protocols to merge. This has been a difficult integration (Congressional Research Service, 2008).

Although many recommendations surround the development of fusion centers, perhaps those that have the largest import are associated with the ability of these entities to collect, analyze, and share information. Getting beyond the structural, cultural, and power-centric attributes of police agencies—whether they are at the local, state, or federal levels—is a major issue that needs to be confronted squarely if local information such as legal and illegal gun trade is to be useful locally and federally. Moreover, governance of these analytic centers, the establishment of appropriate oversight, and sensitivity to issues of governmental overreach and violations of civil liberties also need more development and refinement in the fusion center concept.

### **Equally Important Policy Considerations**

Threats to national security through acts of terrorism in the United States (whether domestically or internationally inspired) have resulted in challenges to the rule of law and human rights, generally through the expansion of government authority like the Patriot Acts and their state and local progeny. Those on the far left assert that democratic governments must resist the overreach of state capacities if democratic governance is to survive, whereas those on the far right argue that, absent strong and highly proactive government interventions, democratic regimes are equally likely to fail largely because of their inability to protect their populace.

The collection of information about crime has its own problems, which include issues of underreporting, shifts in definitions (especially between the public and the police), political suppression of crime information, and difficulties in separating victimization from the formal reporting of crime. Such problems also confound the collection of information on what constitutes suspicious behavior other than terrorism. Public moral panic, racism, negative attitudes toward ethnic groups such as Arabic people, and a general inability to specify what constitutes suspicious terrorism activity all confound government agencies in their pursuit of terrorism intelligence. The excesses of this process have been documented and remain a concern (Congressional Research Service, 2008).

### **Concluding Remarks**

In some ways, the era of terrorism is overwhelming, from both a research and a public policy perspective. How researchers define and analyze differing forms, motivations for, strategies in, and consequences of terrorism produces a constellation of ideas ranging from macroeconomics to individual psychopathy. Although rational choice theories might be useful for describing some aspects of terrorism, theories that focus on the nature of expressive acts are equally important and provide important contextual information for the police. Integrating such a wide array of intellectual and research perspectives is indeed daunting but necessary. Approaches to

reducing firearm violence will likely take different forms given the range and variations potentially associated with terrorism. What is argued here is that, central to any processes adopted for addressing terrorism (e.g., gun tracking systems, task forces, fusion centers), is the genuine sharing of information across police agencies—something that currently must move beyond the rhetorical to a pragmatic reality.

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# Criminologists and terrorism

## Finding firearms under lampposts

**Brian Forst**

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Ask informed people about terrorist attacks on U.S. soil and they are likely to identify two as the most significant: al Qaeda's 2001 attack on New York and Washington, which killed about 3,000 people, and Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, which killed 168 people. In the al Qaeda attack, the terrorists used box cutters and large commercial jets with filled fuel tanks. In the Oklahoma City attack, the weapon was an ammonium nitrate bomb. Ask informed U.S. citizens how terrorists kill our military personnel and other citizens in the Middle East and they are likely to identify suicide car bombings and roadside IEDs (i.e., improvised explosive devices) as the two primary weapons of choice. Guns do not play a prominent role in the answers to either of these basic questions about the weapons used by terrorists against U.S. citizens throughout the past several decades.<sup>11</sup>

Ask criminologists about the weapon choice of terrorists in the United States and they might say, "Let's look at the data," which ordinarily is a good idea. One of the most extensive data sets available is the one collected under the American Terrorism Study (ATS), documenting cases and case outcomes of more than 300 terrorists prosecuted in federal courts since 1980 (Smith and Damphousse, 2002). Analysis of this data set tells a story quite different from that expressed by our hypothetical sample of informed people: Firearms turn up as systematically associated with cases of terrorism—they are more likely to be used by terrorists than by other federal felons (Legault and Hendrickson, 2009, this issue).

Now, a database of federal cases can serve many purposes; for example, it can help answer questions on the effects of various charging and plea bargaining practices on conviction and

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1. LaFree's (in press) 2009 analysis of more than 80,000 terrorist attacks worldwide, based on open source information about terrorist attacks from 1970 through 2007 reported in the START project's Global Terrorism Database (GTD), suggests that firearms are more commonly used against non-U.S. targets but that explosives are nonetheless the leading weapon of choice of terrorists worldwide, running at a rate 21% higher than for firearms. The United States was targeted in just 1.6% of the terrorist attacks in the GTD.

sentencing outcomes, and other matters of federal prosecution policy. Comparisons of the ATS federal case data with data on the prosecution of similar cases in state and local courts could help establish improved policies for coordinating federal and local law-enforcement and prosecution resources toward a more effective and coherent counterterrorism strategy.

But analyses of these data can yield misleading results on other aspects of terrorism, including questions about weapons used by terrorists. The terrorist cases in the ATS data are more likely to involve firearm use because other federal cases are rich in white-collar offenses such as mail fraud and embezzlement and in drug trafficking cases—crimes that typically do not involve the use of guns. The 19 suicide terrorists of al Qaeda are not in the data set for obvious reasons, and the McVeigh case gets no greater weight than hundreds of much less serious terrorist cases. Many other U.S. citizens have been killed by terrorists over the years, mostly by suicide bombers. To use the ATS data to provide a basis for drawing inferences about terrorists' choices of weapons to kill U.S. citizens because the data are available—when we know that about 99% of terrorism victims were in fact killed by weapons other than firearms—is reminiscent of the old story of the guy looking for his keys under the lamppost rather than in the dark place where he dropped them because “the light is better over here.”

It makes perfectly good sense to restrict the sale or possession of firearms to illegal aliens and people with known terrorist connections or intentions, especially if they have violated laws. No empirical justification is needed, really. But if we want to be taken seriously in public policy forums and debates, we must exercise caution and good judgment in determining whether available data are suitable for producing meaningful inferences and for drawing useful implications for policy on issues as important as terrorism.

### **Barriers to the Empirical Analysis of Terrorism**

The study by Legault and Hendrickson (2009) is emblematic of the difficulty in learning about terrorism using empirical approaches that have proven useful in learning about other crimes. To a much greater degree than for street crime, terrorism defies statistical analysis, for several reasons. First, although terrorism cases may share the property of having a political motive,<sup>22</sup> they are in a pot that contains a heterogeneous stew of cases that vary by type of extremism (e.g., Islamic, Christian fundamentalist, environmental, anti-globalization), connection to a larger network, extent of planning, weapon choice, and other distinguishing factors. These subcategories of terrorism are as diverse as the major crime categories are different from one another.

Terrorism is difficult to analyze empirically for a second reason: Terrorists, to a greater degree than other criminals, tend to operate in unpredictable ways, aiming to create fear and turmoil, and relying on surprise to achieve both. When terrorist screening protocols used in the months after the 9/11 attack ignored women as suicide bombers, terrorists responded by enlisting women to participate in suicide bombings. To the extent that terrorists operate

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2. We say “may” because some acts that many authorities classify as terrorism, such as genocide and hate killings, have a dubious political motive.

intentionally outside of predictable patterns to exploit elements of fear and uncertainty, such patterns are less likely to show up in the data. In the case of terrorism, it may well be that the only thing we have to predict...is unpredictability itself.

Terrorism is more difficult to analyze than other crimes for a third reason: We simply do not have enough reliable data on cases of each major type of terrorism to provide a basis for statistical inference along lines that parallel the analysis of conventional criminal justice data. That there have been too few terrorist cases on U.S. soil to permit empirical analysis is a blessing for those of us who care first and foremost about the well-being of our children and grandchildren, but it is a curse for empiricists interested in understanding terrorism.

### **Prospects for Criminological Contributions to Our Understanding of Terrorism**

So much for what criminologists cannot say about terrorism. Let us turn now to brighter prospects for criminologists to contribute to our understanding of terrorism, toward the development of sound policies for preventing it, and for responding to it when our efforts at prevention fail.

#### *Adapting Crime Prevention Models to Terrorism*

One major area where we can contribute to the conversation on terrorism is in the reshaping of models for crime prevention that are applicable to terrorism. Several crime-prevention models have clear relevance to the prevention of terrorism (For more on these models, see Forst, 2009; LaFree and Dugan, 2004.).

The routine activities theory (or opportunity theory) gives us one such model: Opportunities for terrorism and other predatory crimes can exist only when there are willing offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of adequate guardianship to protect the targets from the offenders (Cohen and Felson, 1979). If any one of these three components is not present or is unmet in a particular situation, there will be no opportunity for terrorism. This theory has particular relevance for the development of common sense situational controls in determining how to allocate guardianship resources toward the prevention of crime—even in the absence of valid empirical estimates. On the willing offenders side, it has implications for a focus on the surveillance of extremists and the targeting of individuals and groups known to have ties with terrorists. Routine activities theory should offer insights as well into the development of a system of weights to assign to the allocation of scarce target hardening and protective resources to accessible targets in order to maximize the effectiveness of these resources (Clarke and Newman, 2006). The theory suggests, moreover, that fear-reduction strategies might be useful in making terrorist targets less attractive. Lynch (in press), for one, urges closer scrutiny of the relationship between opportunity reduction and the fear of terrorism; specifically, that we should focus on opportunity-reduction strategies as they pertain to fear rather than terrorism, which is a less feasible course of inquiry.

After the 9/11 attack, the United States has been more diligent in tracking willing offenders, hardening targets, and creating guardianship. It may be no coincidence that several

years have passed without a serious attack. Still, the mix seems to be driven by factors that are often more political than rational, and criminologists may be able to bring these problems to light and pave the way for more efficient allocations using the routine activities framework for organizing the inquiry.

Another model, which can be used in conjunction with the routine activities theory, is provided by the theory of games: the idea of a mixed strategy (Enders and Sandler, 2006; Luce and Raiffa, 1989). From the guardian's perspective, the terrorist will have the most difficulty anticipating the likelihood of detection and capture if security agents and surveillance instruments are allocated randomly across the array of vulnerable targets in proportion to the value the terrorist attaches to each prospective target, taking into account the cost to the terrorist of attacking each target. This randomized strategy will apply to personnel and other movable resources, ensuring that they are optimally allocated, rather than to fixed protective resources, such as barricades and other target-hardening capital resources, which should also be allocated in proportion to the net value of the target, but in a fixed rather than a random manner. Randomized and other strategies for preventing terrorist attacks can be assessed under a variety of scenarios by applying simulation gaming models. Gaming models have proven useful in developing military strategies for dealing with both conventional combat operations and with insurgency and other forms of unconventional warfare (Myerson, 1997). They could prove useful as well for assessing alternative preventive approaches to protecting any prospective target against threats posed by terrorism.

### *Estimating the Social Costs of Terrorism and Counterterrorism Policy*

A second major area in which criminologists can contribute to the development of effective counterterrorism policies is the estimation of social costs associated with critical aspects of terrorism—such as fear—and the assessment of fundamental trade-offs in terrorism policy. Criminologists have found that fear of crime can impose costs on society that exceed those of crime itself, manifested as reduced quality of life, wasteful expenditures on resources and measures that do little to prevent crime, stress-related illnesses and health costs, and related social costs (Cohen, 2000; Warr, 2000). Because the shock and damage associated with a successful act of terrorism are generally much greater than for a typical street crime, the level of fear and associated social costs are generally much larger as well.

Estimates of the social costs of alternative counterterrorism policies can be useful also to find better balances in the determination of trade-offs between security and constitutional rights to liberty and privacy. A prime example is the assessment of profiling and screening systems that aim to balance the social costs of false negatives (failures to detect real terrorists) and false positives (imposing delays and other intrusions on innocent people screened, and alienating them in the process; Forst, 2004). These costs are elusive, but we might begin the process of assessing them by imputing values that are implicit in policies that are clearly shaped by politics rather than by sound analysis.

## Conclusion

Many of us—especially the statisticians, criminologists, and policy wonks in our ranks—take special pleasure in the sound analysis of reliable crime data that produces results that cut across the grain of popular misconception and lead to more effective and just policies. In the case of terrorism, the image of nerds winning battles over terrorists adds charm to the inquiry. And as private citizens interested in protecting national security without intruding excessively on rights to liberty and privacy, we have a stake in ensuring that public policies are effective and efficient, informed by reliable empirical evidence, and provide valid links between the evidence and policy. We take no pleasure, either professionally or personally, in standing by while anticrime and counterterrorism policies are imposed based on pork-barrel politics rather than valid analysis.

Criminologists have weighed in frequently with evidence about crime and interventions that advances the discussion of public policies and leads to improvement. Research on community policing, intermediate sanctions, and reentry from prison programs serve as prominent examples. This will be more difficult to accomplish for terrorism, but empirical evidence can and should inform counterterrorism policy nonetheless. An abundance of opportunities remain for criminologists to make a difference in shaping more effective and just counterterrorism policies by making good use of data that are reliable and relevant. When the evidence is insufficient, we do the best we can with theory, indirect evidence, and common sense.

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# Strengths and limits of criminological research on terrorism

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“Every age has its own kind of war,” Clausewitz (1976/1832–1834) prognosticated in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Given the vastly superior firepower of the United States and its allies, the most significant threats of the foreseeable future will likely involve attacks against “soft” targets, which include terrorist strikes against civilians. And yet, unlike the war on drugs and the war on crime, there have been few empirical studies to date regarding what causes terrorism and “what works” in regard to counterterrorism policies.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have not had sufficient access to terrorists to administer questionnaires to random samples. As a result, most studies have relied on data collected by governments. These data, too, are problematic for reasons outlined in Gary LaFree’s introduction to this volume (LaFree, 2009, this issue).

This special issue includes five articles that take methodologies traditionally used to study common crime and apply them to the study of terrorism. In his introduction, LaFree (2009) summarizes the theoretical contributions of the articles. I will comment here on the three articles that seem most relevant to policy, as well as suggest some future areas of research.

LaFree, Yang, and Crenshaw (2009, this issue) use newly available data to examine targeting patterns of a set of foreign terrorist groups designated by the U.S. government as posing a particular threat to the United States. These authors found that the groups chose targets close to their operational base. Approximately 97% of the incidents perpetrated by the groups were against non-U.S. targets—despite the groups’ purported opposition to the U.S. government. Even when the authors limited their analysis to attacks on U.S. interests, 99% of the attacks occurred abroad, close to the terrorists’ home. Proximity matters, the authors conclude.

But why does proximity matter? Is it because terrorist groups categorized as anti-United States find it too difficult to bring operatives to the enemy? Are they electing, instead, to target the “near enemy” rather than the “far enemy” (the opposite of the approach Zawahiri articulated)?

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1. In using these terms, which are commonly applied, I do not mean to equate any of these efforts with war. Please see Gary LaFree’s introduction (2009, this issue) for a discussion of the politics associated with the word “war.”

If so, is there any evidence that this tendency to target U.S. interests abroad has increased since new security measures were put into place after the attacks on September 11, 2001?

Several prominent supporters of al Qaeda have begun denouncing the group, in part because of al Qaeda's killing of many citizens in Muslim-majority states (Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2008). It would seem that one way around this problem of "proximity matters" would be to recruit U.S. operatives to serve in logistics roles. Zawahiri has been actively targeting U.S. citizens in recruitment drives.

One possible alternative explanation is that the groups actually have more important local grievances than their alleged grievance against the United States. We do not know how or why these groups were put into the category of 53 groups that oppose the U.S. government. (For more on this, see Weinberg and Eubank, 2009, this issue.) Could it be, at least for some groups, that their stated anti-U.S. stance is more of a fundraising or marketing ploy than an actual description of the groups' most important goals? If that were the case, then perhaps we should not be surprised that these purportedly anti-U.S. groups have chosen to focus on cheaper, more local attacks. Follow-up studies might consider questions such as these.

The one overarching theme in the multiple narratives articulated by the global Salafi terrorist movement is humiliation and the idea that the United States is leading a crusade to dominate and, ultimately, destroy the global Muslim community. It stands to reason that the movement would seek out pockets in U.S. society most vulnerable to anomie. An obvious place to look would be in U.S. prisons. This makes Bert Useem and Obie Clayton's (2009, this issue) assessment of radicalization in U.S. prisons particularly timely and important.

The radicalization of prisoners has been a concern of many national governments. The Jordanian government found that the Palestinian cleric Abu Muhammad al-Maqqisi was so successful at radicalizing prisoners—including Zaraqawi, founder of the group that became al Qaeda in Iraq—that they put him under house arrest rather than leave him in prison.<sup>2</sup> Zaraqawi, who was imprisoned in Jordan for petty crime, is also alleged to have radicalized others in prison. The Saudi government's formation of their deradicalization program was partially inspired by concerns about prison radicalization, not only of inmates, but also of guards (Saudi officials, personal communication, April 2009). Many European governments have voiced similar concerns.

President Obama's commitment to close down the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay by early 2010 will result in some detainees being held in U.S. prisons or in prisons abroad. The question of prison radicalization has become particularly important—not only for the security of civilians but also for the security of other prisoners—so we need to understand the dynamics of radicalization in U.S. and foreign prisons (if it exists). Useem and Clayton's (2009) study represents the first major attempt to assess the level of Islamist radicalization in U.S. prisons and they found no evidence of its occurrence.

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2. These data were gathered through author interviews with Jordanian intelligence officials. Zaraqawi himself is alleged to have recruited terrorists while incarcerated in Jordan's prisons.



In contrast to James Austin (2009, this issue), I was surprised that Useem and Clayton (2009) found no Islamist radicalization. As Randy Blazak (2009, this volume) explains, white supremacist gangs emerging from prison are the biggest area of growth for violent white supremacist groups. He concludes that the release of committed hate-mongers back into the community is the single greatest threat from the far-right extremist counterculture. Indeed, one of the right-wing groups discussed in this volume, Public Enemy Number 1 (otherwise known as PEN1), was largely created in prison.

Muslim immigrants to the United States are significantly better assimilated into U.S. society than are Muslim immigrants to Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, or the United Kingdom—all of which are countries that have experienced jihad terrorism. Muslim-American immigrants are better educated, wealthier, and more likely to vote in U.S. elections than are U.S. citizens taken as a whole.<sup>3</sup> A more analogous group to Muslim immigrants to Europe is African Americans. African-American youth are significantly more likely to spend time in prison than whites or Muslim immigrants. According to James Gilligan's research (2003), violent offenders describe humiliation, or the feeling of having been "disseed," as a significant motivating factor in their involvement in violence. Interestingly, violent white supremacists have also emphasized their feeling of humiliation in discussions with me (Stern, 2003).

Useem and Clayton (2009) were not allowed to ask inmates about their own views. They were only allowed to ask inmates about the views of others. Nor were they allowed to conduct a random sample. They could speak only to volunteers. The main drawback of Useem and Clayton's (2009) study—a drawback that the authors could not avoid, given strictures imposed by the Institutional Review Board—is that prisoners who know about radicalization, or have been radicalized themselves, would be unlikely to volunteer to speak about the subject. This applies equally to surveys of any general population on issues related to radical views: Terrorists are unlikely to participate in population surveys. When scholars specifically target radicals or terrorists, they are guilty of selecting on the dependent variable. Both are threats to validity. Given these limitations, it makes sense to combine what we can learn from case studies of individual radicals, as well as controls, with sample data of the kind attempted here. Future studies should also include systematic polling of Imams.

More broadly, we need to find a way to balance the need to protect human subjects with the need to study radicalization. Human-subject protection rules, which were designed to protect individuals participating in potentially dangerous medical experiments, may need to be revised slightly if we hope to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of radicalization.

A related dilemma for research and policy is discussed in Legault and Hendrickson (2009, this issue). The authors make the important observation that terrorists, at least in their sample, have less pronounced criminal histories than other felons. For this reason, they are more likely to pass Brady background checks and could find it easier to obtain firearms legally, through

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3. See [yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=9668](http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=9668).

primary retail sources. Currently, there are no restrictions on an individual's access to guns for those named on the Violent Gang/Terrorist Organization File. Here again, we need to balance the civil liberties of those who aim to acquire firearms or participate in violent groups with the rights of their potential victims.

All the studies contained in this issue rely on inadequate data sets. The reason is that better data are not available or are too difficult or expensive for scholars to collect. The most solid idea for moving forward is presented by John Wigle (2009, this issue). Wigle proposes the formation of interdisciplinary teams composed of law-enforcement and intelligence personnel working together with computer scientists, criminologists, and other scholars with the goal of improving present data collection and analysis.

The security environment U.S. citizens face today is shifting rapidly. Unlike alliances among national governments, sub-state groups are constantly merging, splintering, and collaborating with competitor groups for some missions but not others, which greatly complicates intelligence requirements. The groups change their names without changing their goals or their personnel; or conversely, they acquire new missions, using many of the same operatives. We also need a much better understanding of how our policies are received in areas where terrorists recruit. One possible solution would be to create a reserve intelligence force composed of academics and other experts from the private sector that can be scaled up, and scaled back, as needed. The goal would be not only to improve data, as John Wigle (2009) proposes, but also to improve intelligence more broadly on all issues related to terrorism and counterterrorism, including public diplomacy. For example, had the Pentagon been informed by a group of academics that the sexual humiliation of detainees in Iraq or Afghanistan would likely be used by terrorists to mobilize recruits, that knowledge could have discouraged tolerance of those behaviors.

Today, we need experts in the Middle East and South Asia who speak languages such as Pashto, Urdu, and Arabic. We are about to need a lot more expertise on rehabilitation in prisons, as we will be relying on Saudi Arabia to reintegrate not only Saudi detainees released from Guantanamo but also Yemeni detainees. In the coming years, we are likely to find ourselves suddenly needing other kinds of area and technical specialists to help analyze new threats emerging from different parts of the world, which we cannot yet predict. We need to have a way to bring specialists in rapidly, and to send them back to the private sector as soon as their expertise is no longer needed. Perhaps this issue—which demonstrates both the strengths of criminological research on terrorism and the areas where data need to be improved—can be a first step.

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