International Journal of Peace Studies, Volume 25, Number 2, Winter 2020

Exploring the Typologies of Terrorism in the United States: Using Cluster Analysis to Group Terrorists Based on Their Individual Characteristics

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Abstract

In this study two-step cluster analysis was used in an exploratory effort to try and determine what the primary typologies of terrorism are in the United States based on the profiles of individual terrorist who operated in the United States from 1948 – 2016. From this, it was discovered that terrorists in the United States can be classified into two overarching typologies. The first one can most appropriately be called political extremism and the second typology may be titled religious extremism. These findings suggest that terrorists have varying characteristics in accordance with which typology they are classified by. Moreover, this study also found that terrorists share some common characteristics that make them unique among other types of social deviants.

Introduction

There is no doubt that terrorism has become one of the most well-publicized issues of our time. However, despite its continual occupation in the headlines of news-outlets all across the western world, most notably since the events of September 11th, 2001, terrorism is in no way a new addition to the human experience. Indeed, its existence can be traced all the way back to the advent of the written word – and most likely, much longer than that. In its long and fairly well-documented history, the sheer vastness in the manner in which it has manifested itself into the public sphere has changed substantially. Terrorism is a phenomenon constructed from mixed and often conflicting political and ideological perspectives. This makes attempts to try and holistically interpret and classify its true nature a highly elusive undertaking. Starting with Hebrew Zealots, who opposed the Roman Empire's occupation of Palestine, terrorism sweeps across the historical time-line to the Jacobin's *Reign of Terror* in revolutionary France, the anarchists struggle against Czarist Russia, the Algerian revolutionaries rise against French colonialism, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) opposition to British rule, and most recently, the international threat of Islamic extremism displayed most prominently by groups like Al-Qaeda (AQ) and the Islamic State (IS). In viewing terrorism across history, the phenomenon may best be described as a means by which a small group of extremists, with political persuasions from both the right and left and with ideologies ranging from Marxism to religious extremism, can carry out insurrections against their enemies (Laqueur & Wall, 2018).

In considering the multiple social, psychological, and political factors that drives people to become terrorists, the main purpose of the current study is to advance the research literature by better defining the different typologies of terrorism that exist based on the characteristics of the individuals who engage in terrorism. To this end, the current study uses the data mining technique of two-step cluster analysis to explore what the primary typologies of terrorism are in

the United States based on the profiles of individual terrorist who operated in the United States from 1948 – 2016.

The Current Study

To date, many research efforts attempting to categorize terrorism into typologies have been made primarily through the use of two methods. The first is to use case studies that focus on a small sample of terrorists to try classify them based on a thick, rich description of the phenomenon. However, this approach has a limited capacity for replication or for transferring conclusions into more generalized explanations (Chenoweth & Lowham, 2007). The second is to aggregate terrorists into large samples and to categorize them based on overarching themes. The drawback to this approach is that it can be overly broad and often fails to capture contextual qualities and peculiarities among cases (Chenoweth & Lowham, 2007).

In this current research project I hope to strike a balance between these two methods by following up on a recommendation made in Chenoweth and Lowham (2007) to use the unique capacity of cluster analysis in order to take an expansive view of terrorism over multiple time periods while preserving the comprehensive qualities that can get easily lost in other types of large-scale evaluations. Moreover, the current study differs from most other attempts at categorizing terrorism because I redirected the level of analysis away from the group-level and towards the individual terrorists themselves. To this end, I used the profiles of individual extremists, who operated in the United States during the years 1948 – 2016, in order to classify them across three different dimensions: demographics, personal history, and recruitment-radicalization processes. By classifying cases in this manner, it is my intention to delve deeper into the multiplicity of factors that surround terrorism so that clear distinctions can be made into its typologies at the most intimate level. It is my hope that in grouping forms of terrorism based on individual terrorists' characteristics, policymakers will gain a more comprehensive picture of how terrorists are both alike and different from one another, and that these insights will help to guide them towards constructing counterterrorism policies that are able to adapt to the multiple versions of terrorism that have and continue to exist in the United States.

Criteria Used to Define an Individual as a Terrorist

Before moving on to a review of the literature that helped to shape the direction of this research project, it is important to note what criteria was used in this study to define a person as a terrorist. Since all the data used in this study was acquired through the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) dataset, I adopted the same criteria established by the dataset developers. Therefore, in this study, individuals were considered terrorists if they had espoused Islamist, far right, far left, or single issue ideologies, radicalized within the United States to the point of committing ideologically motivated illegal violent or non-violent acts, joining a designated terrorist organization, or associating with an extremist organization whose leader(s) has/have been indicted of an ideologically motivated violent offense (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), 2018.

Theoretical Discussion

Terrorist Attacks in the United States

Although media outlets often try to portray the United States as being the primary focus of transnational terrorism, researchers examining the trajectory of the problem have determined that it is much less of a threat than what is often portrayed by the media (Laqueur & Wall, 2018). With regard to the total number of the terrorist attacks directed against the U.S., incidents spiked in the 1970s and 1980s and then declined during the 1990s (LaFree, Yang, & Crenshaw, 2009). Although terrorist attacks against the United States did show an increase in the early 1990s, these trends did not reach the same heights as seen in the 1970s or 1980s. In fact, attacks against U.S. targets were actually at a 35-year low just before 9/11 (LaFree et al., 2009). Moreover, among the terrorist attacks that have been conducted against U.S. targets, only a fraction of them actually took place on U.S. soil – with most of the assaults striking at American targets in other countries (LaFree et al., 2009).

Despite the relatively small number of completed attacks against American targets since 9/11, U.S. authorities have intercepted a large number of plots by jihadist terrorists before they were ever fully carried out. Among these plots, most of them never went beyond the preparation phase, and of the ones that did, very few accomplished the full amount of damage that was intended. To help put this in perspective, the New American Foundation found that from 2005 – 2015, 94 U.S. citizens were killed by jihadist terrorists, which is a small portion when compared to the number of people killed in such events as mass shooting during this same time period (Laqueur & Wall, 2018). Laqueur and Wall (2018) identify two essential reasons why only 94 people died from jihadist terrorism during this time period. The first reason is the United State's ability to integrate and assimilate its Muslim population into the mainstream culture. The second reason is the security reforms that were implemented by the U.S. government in the aftermath of 9/11.

With the expansion of such things as the internet and social media, many jihadist terrorist attacks that have occurred in the United States have been conducted by individuals who were guided, directed, or inspired by foreign elements such as the Islamic State (Asongu, Orim, & Nting (2019); Laqueur &Wall, 2018; Zeman, Břeň, & Urban, 2017). This can be seen in such attacks as the Garland Texas shooting in May 2015, the San Bernardino shooting in December 2015, and the Pulse nightclub shooting in June 2016 (Laqueur & Wall, 2018). It is also important to keep in mind that many of these shooters were born or grew up in the United States and were radicalized while living in the U.S. (Laqueur & Wall, 2018).

Besides jihadist terrorism, the other substantial terror threat that the United States currently faces comes from right-wing extremists (Becker, 2014). Although other forms of terrorist ideologies such as left-wing extremism and radical environmentalists do exist in the U.S., in terms of actual incidents of violence, these forms of extremism are currently not as prevalent as right-wing violence (Laqueur & Wall, 2018). Individuals fitting into the right-wing mode of terrorism can be categorized as Christian extremists, white-supremacists, anti-government groups, and militia groups. Their violence tends to be directed at members of minority groups such as Jews, Muslims, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. A few examples of these kinds of attacks include: the Oklahoma City bombing, Charleston church

shooting, and the 2009 attack against the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. The emerging threat that right-wing extremism poses to the United States by alt-right and anti-government groups is demonstrated by the fact that, in 2017, thirteen terrorist incidents took place in the United States. Of these attacks, only two can be attributed to jihadist terrorist; the rest came from the extreme right (Laqueur & Wall, 2018). It is also important to keep in mind that terrorist attacks committed by right-wing extremists may be underrepresented in the U.S. since such acts are not always labeled as terrorist events by the U.S. legal system due to hate-crime laws. Still, such attacks often maintain the traditional characteristics of terrorist incidents in most respects.

Terrorists' Demographics

Concerning the demographic information of individual terrorists, it is almost universally accepted by scholars that acts of terrorism are predominantly committed by young males (Chermak & Gruenwald, 2015; Sageman, 2008; Russell & Miller, 1977). Traditionally, researchers have identified perpetrators of terror as being unmarried (Berrebi, 2007; Chermak & Gruenwald, 2015). However, to the contrary, Sageman (2008) determined that the vast majority of jihadist terrorists are married and have children. Most researchers have found that terrorists are generally well educated, and come from middle to upper-class backgrounds (Berrebi, 2007; Chermak & Gruenwald, 2015; Krueger & Maleckova, 2003; Sageman, 2008). Such commonalities among the demographic characteristics of terrorists are understandable when considering the nature of terrorism from psychological, sociological and organizational perspectives. It is no secret that young males are more prone to experiencing feelings of anger towards their society and to act out violently when compared to young females or older individuals (Hegghammer, 2006).

Moreover, terrorist recruiters tend to focus their attention on drawing young people to their cause because, in many cases, the young have not lived long enough to establish a strong sense of identity, and are therefore more likely to be attracted to an organization that offers them an opportunity to develop a strong sense of self-worth. From the standpoint of the organization, young individuals are less likely to be spies and can be more easily molded into the roles required by the organization (Hegghammer, 2006). The fact that terrorists are often intelligent, well-placed individuals is not really all that surprising when one considers that terrorist organizations, like other organizations, acknowledge the value that education and the attainment of specific skill sets has in predicting an individual's ability to plan and carry out complex operations (Benmelech & Berrebi, 2007; Hegghammer, 2006; Krueger & Malecova, 2003; Laqueur & Wall, 2018).

Terrorists' Personal History

The factors in a person's life that compels them to become a terrorist are a chain of highly complex motivators that are interwoven into people's psychological and social development. In terms of psychological factors, researchers have generally determined that very few terrorists can be classified as being mentally disturbed, at least in the traditional sense of having officially recognized mental health diagnoses (Becker, 2014; Laqueur & Wall, 2018). However, several researchers have determined that lone wolf terrorists have a higher probability of having mental health diagnoses than group-based terrorists (Corner & Gill, 2015; Hewitt, 2003). For example, Corner and Gill (2015) concluded that the rate of mental illness for lone wolf terrorists was

31.9% compared with 3.4% for group-based terrorists among the individuals in their study's sample. One possible explanation for this finding is that individuals with mental illnesses are more likely to be rejected by terrorist recruiters because recruiters believe that these individuals' mental states make them unfit to join their organization. Despite this rejection, such people often maintain their fervent devotion to the terrorist cause, and therefore, decide to carry out attacks on their own without any assistance from the organization they once tried to join (Jones, 2017).

In terms of sociological factors, most people become terrorists due to their devotion to a radical cause; although, the exact degree of their devotion varies from person to person. Still, an intense devotion to a particular radical cause is not, by itself, a sufficient explanation as to why an individual decides to become a terrorist since many people are intensely aligned with all sorts of radical causes who never resort to terrorism. Three other common factors that help prime people to become terrorists are personal grievances, personal relationships, and thrill and status seeking motivations. For instance, some people join terrorist organizations due to wanting to take revenge against their government because of a personal injury (personal grievance), some join because a person they care about (e.g., friend, relative, romantic partner) is a member of the group and recruits them (personal relationship), and some join in search of excitement, status, or money (thrill and status seeking motivations) (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011). Laqueur and Wall (2018) note that historically speaking, the one main commonality that helps to designate whether a person becomes a terrorist is if they have a family member or friend already involved in the cause. Another major commonality identified by the other was that terrorists often reflect the best and brightest of their society when accounting for their education levels and the fact that most come from middle to upper-class family backgrounds. However, despite these advantages, they find themselves feeling extremely isolated and alienated from the society in which they live.

Terrorists' Recruitment-Radicalization Processes

Although at first glance, the recruitment and radicalization processes that turn people into terrorists may seem indistinguishable from one another, and indeed, the two concepts often coincide with each other, recruitment and radicalization are actually two separate things. Recruitment refers to the specific process through which un-initiated individuals are courted and assessed for their potential value to a terrorist organization by individuals who are already established members of that organization. Radicalization is the process that occurs when an individual's belief system is modified in order to align it with the doctrine of the terrorist organization (Jones, 2017).

Recruitment. To understand terrorist recruitment, it is helpful to consider that, just like other kinds of organizations, terrorist organizations have specific criteria regarding the types of individuals they want to recruit. As such, for the purposes of resource allocation and cost-saving measures, terrorist organizations seek to focus their recruiting efforts on the type of individuals they predict will be the most productive members of their organization (Hunter, Shortland, Cryane, & Ligon, 2017). There is evidence that terrorist organizations look for people with certain personality traits as well. For example, an al-Qaida manual known as the *Manchester Manual* outlines 14 different qualities desirable in potential recruits including (e.g., intelligence, maturity, truthfulness, the ability to observe, and the ability to conceal oneself) (Hegghammer, 2006). To this end, terrorist organizations do not seek to recruit just anyone, but instead pre-screen potential recruits to verify that they have the proper personality traits and knowledge

regarding the organization's cause, ideology, and history. Likewise, Terrorist recruiters use a variety of methods to try and quantifying that individuals are competent in the special skills required to carry out combat operations (e.g., weapons, tactics, bomb-making) and for daily activities (e.g., computer engineering, and social media skills) (Hegghammer, 2006). This idea is expanded even further by the understanding that individuals are recruited to hold multiple and changing roles within a terrorist organization. Which means that the process of recruitment and selection fluctuates based on the role or roles the prospective recruit will hold in the organization (Horgan, Shortland, Abbasciano, & Walsh, 2016; Hunter et al., 2017).

Although it seems that terrorist recruiters use many of the same techniques and standards when initiating people to their organization that legitimate organizations do when searching for new employees, it is quite apparent that the factors that drive a person to become a terrorist are substantially different from those that compel people to apply for traditional occupations such as a banker, firefighter, or nurse. On many levels, being a terrorist is not a particularly enviable way for one to live their life. Terrorism, by its very nature, does not allow its adherents to live a conventional lifestyle that most people desire and are afforded. Not to mention, people engaged in terrorism have to live most of their lives in hiding from authorities, are often subjugated to lengthy prison terms, and have a very high probability of being killed at an early age.

Currently, the hypotheses explaining why people become terrorists are divided into push and pull factors. Push factors have to do with the social, economic, and political forces which cause people to see society as unjust and discriminatory, and that fosters their aspirations to take violent action against those they believe have wronged them and what they stand for. Pull factors have to do with the innate human desires to want to belong to a higher cause, to seek out adventures, and to do something worthwhile with one's life (Jones, 2017). In this way, the process of terrorist recruitment is often encompassed within the grand narrative that portrays society as being terminally flawed (push factors) and the individual terrorist as having a moral duty to go on a heroic quest to right the wrongs imposed on them and their people by the unjust powers that be (pull factors). Such a narrative is especially appealing to young recruits because it offers them the opportunity to shed their old identity for a new emboldened one (Choudry, 2007; Pfundmair, Aßmann, Kiver, Penzkofer, Scheuermeyer, Sust, & Schmidt, 2019). An identity that induces complete loyalty to the terrorist organization because it is empowered by the level of devotion that recruits have to the sacred values inscribed in the terrorist ideology (Atran, 2010).

Radicalization. The process through which an individual is radicalized can happen gradually with a tipping point culminating in their final transition or may be achieved within a short period of time. In terms of terrorism, radicalization is the progression from feeling sympathy towards a terrorist cause to the direct Matusitz, 2020). involvement in such activities (Neumann, 2013). Generally, radicalization can happen in one of two ways: top-down or bottom-up. Top-down occurs when new recruits are gradually radicalized through a structuralized recruiting and training process. An example of a top-down approach would be when recruits attend a terrorist training camp where they undergo extensive training in military tactics, are indoctrinated in the ideology of the group and begin to form personal bonds with other members of the group (Hegghammer, 2006). Bottom-up refers to situations where individuals first self-radicalize and then intentionally seek out a recruiter with the intentions of joining the terrorist organization (Hegghammer, 2006). This process of self-radicalization is becoming more and more prevalent today through the widespread use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp by terrorist groups (Edwards & Gribbon, 2013). By using social media

in this way, terrorist organizations are now able to connect with potential recruits all over the world without having to meet with them face-to-face (Toevs, 2020). Through the use of such technologies as encryption software and the dark web, extremists are now able to create virtual environments where they can freely and covertly spread ideas that are unacceptable in open-society, to people all across the globe with little fear of being intercepted by government forces (Neumann, 2012).

Terrorist Typologies

As discussed in the introduction, terrorism exists in many different forms in terms of ideological motivations, organizational structure, tactics and overall objectives. At its most basic level, terrorism should not be viewed as a single ideological perspective adopted by a particular type of organization, but rather as a method of operation assumed by a variety of organizations to advance their specific causes forward (Kis-Katos, Liebert & Schulze, 2012; Laqueur, 2003; Mullins & Thurman, 2011). Given these distinctions, it is essential to classify terrorists into different typologies in order to find out what characteristics are transferable across different time periods and locations and which ones are unique to the specific context in which they exist. However, due to its ever-evolving nature, terrorism is notoriously difficult to classify. Take for example that back in 1988, when the classification of terrorist organizations was just starting to develop in the empirical literature, Schmid and Jongman identified as many as 31 different typologies of terrorism.

Generally, most large-scale assessments have tended to focus their level of analysis at the group-level and classify terrorist organizations primarily based on their origin or ideological motivations – such as far-right, Marxist, nationalists, single issue (e.g., anti-abortionist and environmentalists), and religious extremists (Chenoweth & Lowham, 2007; Chermak & Greuenewald, 2015; National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism [START], 2018; Piazza, 2009). Another popular method for classifying terrorism is to make divisions based on historical movements (e.g., anarchism, anti-colonialism, left-wing radicalism, and religious terrorism) (Rapoport, 2001). While such classification methods are advantageous for their sharp, clear distinctions, they also tend to exclude the intricate details that help to explain how different version of terrorism both match and differ from one another (Chenoweth & Lowham, 2007). To help prevent these intricate details from being lost, it seems appropriate to shift the level of analysis away from the group and towards the individual level when attempting to divide terrorism into typologies. However, attempts to classify terrorists into typologies according to individual characteristics of its practitioner is largely absent from the research literature. This is a gap in the research that this current study hopes to start rectifying.

Research Questions

In this exploratory study the following three research questions were asked:

Q 1: How many primary typologies of terrorism exist in the United States based on the profiles of individual terrorist who operated in the United States from 1948 – 2016?

Q 2: In what ways are terrorists from different typologies similar to one another?

Q 3: In what ways are terrorists from different typologies similar to one another?

Methodology

Data

The current study is based on data obtained from the (PIRUS) dataset, which is a publically available dataset operated by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland. It provides individual-level information on the backgrounds, attributes, and radicalization processes for over 1,800 violent and non-violent extremists who operated in the United States from 1948 – 2016 (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), 2018).

Analysis

In order to classify individual extremists into terrorist typologies, I utilized the Statistical Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to conduct a two-step cluster analysis. Cluster analysis is an exploratory data mining technique used to discover naturally occurring groups within complex datasets so that data may be retrieved, understood, and evaluated in a quick and easy manner. (Everitt, Landau, Leese, & Stahl, 2011). Cluster analysis works towards dividing cases according to their similarity on one or more dimensions, and thus, produces groups where the objects within the group are more similar to each other than to those in other groups (Kaufman and Rousseeuw, 1990). Two-step cluster analysis, was chosen for this study because the algorithm that it employees has several features not possible with traditional clustering techniques. More specifically, I chose this clustering technique based on three main features. One, by constructing a cluster features (CF) tree that summarizes all records, two-step clustering is uniquely compatible with large datasets such as the one used in this study. Second, by using a log-likelihood measure, it assumes all variables to be independent and places a normal distribution on continuous variables and a multinomial distribution on categorical variables, thus, making it capable of handling both types of variables simultaneously. Third, by comparing the values of a model-choice criterion across different clustering solutions, the procedure automatically determines the optimal number of clusters ("TwoStep Cluster Analysis," n.d.). 18 separate variables were entered into the analysis based on three different dimensions of the terrorist profile: demographics, personal factors, and recruitment-radicalization processes. The demographics dimension looks at the identifying characteristics of individuals such as religion, age, marital status, etc. The personal factors dimension may be defined as key factors in an individual's history that can act as predictors of their future behavior such as mental illness, criminal history, drug use and military history. The recruitment-radicalization processes dimension considers the manner in which an individual was recruited and the process by which they were radicalized into becoming a terrorist. This is measured through such factors as their ideology, beliefs, and the length of their radicalization process. Table 1 displays each of the 18 variables in accordance with the three dimensions with which they are aligned.

Table 1
18 Variables Used in the Cluster Analysis in Accordance with Their Profile Dimension

Demographics	Personal Factors	Recruitment-Radicalization Processes
Religious Background	Previous Criminal Activity	Terrorist Ideology
Ethnicity	Alcohol/Drug abuse	Radical Beliefs
Time in the U.S.	Military History	Radicalization Duration
Age	Mental Illness	Radical Behaviors
Marital Status		Media Radicalization
Number of Children		
Level of Education		
Social Stratum		
Employment Status		

Results

Using the study's criterion, the two-step cluster analysis compared values across different clustering solutions to determine that the optimum number of clusters for this dataset is two. This means that each case was reported to fit into one of two clusters, with 48.1% (41 cases) fitting into the first group and 51.9% (38 cases) fitting into the second group. This finding indicates that

Table 2
Two-Step Cluster Analysis Results

Variables	Cluster 1 (51.9% = 41 Cases)	Cluster 2 (48.1% = 38 Cases)
Religious Background	Unspecified Christianity (29.3%)	Sunni Islam (42.1%)
Time in the U.S.	(379.37 Months)	(215.29 Months)
Ethnicity	White (68.3%)	Middle Eastern/North African (39.5%)
Terror Ideology	Far-Right (34.1%)	Islamic (92.1%)
Age	33.27 yrs. old	25.26 yrs. old
Radical Beliefs	Deep commitment to radical ideological beliefs (70.7%)	Shared many of the same beliefs of radical ideology (28.9%)
Previous Criminal Activity	None (46.3%)	None (89.5%)
Social Stratum	Middle-Class (46.3%)	Middle-Class (84.2%)
Marital Status	Married (48.8%)	Single (65.8%)
Radicalization Duration	Long (53.7%)	Medium (57.9%)
Number of Children	None (31.7%)	None (73.7%)
Radical Behaviors	Active participant in operations intended to cause casualties (61%)	Active participant in operations intended to cause casualties (42.1%)
Alcohol/Drug Abuse	None (65.9%)	None (86.8%)
Employment Status	Employed (46.3%)	Employed (65.8%)
Media Radicalization	None (39%)	None (50%)

Military History	None (75.6%)	None (92.1%)
Level of Education	Some College (36.6%)	High school diploma (31.6%)
Mental Illness	None (73.2%)	None (78.9%)

there are mainly two overarching typologies of terrorism based on the profile characteristics of individual terrorists. Table 2 presents each of the 18 variables entered into the analysis along with its most frequent value for the cases in that cluster. The variables are shown in rank order, ranging from the variable with the most predictive power (religious background) at the top to the variable with the least predictive power (psychological history) at the bottom.

The following sections describe in detail how cases were categorized based on similarities and differences among each of the variables. The reader will note that the divisions made in how the variables are presented are based on which profile dimension they represent.

Demographics

With regard to religious background, the majority of cases in cluster 1 fell into one of several different Christian denominations, with a good portion being Jewish or new religion (Scientology, Satanic, New Age, etc.) while the majority of cases in cluster 2 were classified into one of several types of Islamic denominations. With regard to ethnicity, a vast majority of terrorists in cluster 1 were white while the majority of terrorists in cluster 2 were identified as being Middle Eastern/North African. It is notable that ethnicity within cluster 2 was more diversified than that of cluster 1, with a large number of cases being identified as being Asian and a smaller number identified as Black or White. Concerning time spent in the U.S., terrorists in cluster 1 tended to live in the U.S. for a longer period of time before public exposure than those in cluster 2 (379.37 months versus 215.29 months). With regard to age, terrorists in cluster 1 tended to be older than those in cluster 2 (33.27 yrs. versus 25.26 yrs.). In terms of marital status, the majority of cases in cluster 1 were married, with the next largest portion being single. In cluster 2, the majority of cases were shown to be single with next largest portion being married. In terms of their number of children, the majority of cases in both clusters 1 and 2 had no children, although, a large number of cases in cluster 1 did have at least one child. With concern to their level of education, the majority of cases in both clusters 1 and 2 tended to have at least some college or vocational training, although, the cases in cluster 2 were slightly more likely to have advance degrees. Concerning what social stratum they came from, cases in cluster 1 tended to be in the low to middle-class stratum while a large majority of cases in cluster 2 were in the middle-class stratum. In terms employment status, the majority of cases in both clusters 1 and 2 were found to be employed; however, a good portion of cases in cluster 1 were unemployed while almost all cases in cluster 2 were employed.

Personal History

Concerning their previous criminal activity, the majority of cases in both clusters 1 and 2 had no previous criminal activity prior to radicalization, although, a fair portion of individuals in cluster 1 did have a history of both violent and non-violent crime, while very few individuals in cluster 2 had any previous history of criminality. With concern to their alcohol/drug abuse history, the majority of cases in both clusters 1 and 2 had no history of abuse, although, a fair amount of cases in cluster 1 did have a history of abuse. Regarding their military history, very few

individuals in both clusters 1 and 2 had history in the military. Likewise, this was the case for their history of mental illness.

Recruitment-Radicalization Processes

With concern to terrorist ideology, a slight majority of individuals in cluster 1 were radicalized into far-right movements; however, cases were distributed proportionally with a good number of individuals radicalized into radical-Islamic, far-left, and single-issue ideologies. However, this was not the case for cluster 2 where almost all of the cases were radicalized into a radical-Islamic ideology. In terms of the amount if radicalization that was evident in the individual's belief system, the majority of people in cluster 1 had a deep commitment to their radical ideological beliefs. The majority of people in cluster 2 were slightly less committed in terms of how their personal beliefs reflected the radical ideology they professed. Concerning the duration of their radicalization process, the majority of cases in cluster 1 were radicalized over a long period of time with a good number of cases radicalized over a medium period of time. The majority of cases in cluster 2 were radicalized for a medium period of time with good portion radicalized over short and long time spans. In regards to radical behaviors, the majority of cases in both clusters 1 and 2 actively participated in terrorist plots in which they intended to bring about the death of others in a direct manner, while a smaller proportion of cases played roles in terror plots that would not make them directly responsible for causing the death of others. Regarding the role that the media played in their radicalization process, the media played no role in the radical process for a slight majority of cases in both clusters 1 and 2 and did play at least some role for a good portion of cases in both clusters.

Discussion

The two cluster solution regarding the number terrorist typologies present in the data was an unexpected finding. Given the long time span that the dataset covered, the amount of diversity within the individual profiles, and the number of different variables entered into the model, I fully believed that the number of clusters found in the data would be greater than two. However, after careful inspection of the data, I've reached the conclusion that the results reveal many sharp distinctions between variables that would most likely have been mitigated if the cases would have been divided into more than two clusters. Therefore, I am in agreement with the findings that a two cluster solution is the best answer for the dataset, and is in accordance with what past researchers have said about the differences in the typologies of terrorism.

The cleavages made between the variables of each group reveal that, broadly speaking, there are two distinct terrorist typologies that exist in the United States. Individuals in cluster 1 can most appropriately be classified as being older, white, mainly associate with a denomination of Christianity, who have lived in the U.S. for a long period of time, and whose extremist ideology is mainly driven by nationalistic and political factors. Individuals in cluster 2 tended to be younger, of Middle-Eastern or North African descent, lived in the U.S. for a shorter period of time than those in cluster 1, and had an extremist ideology which can most appropriately be classified as being religiously motivated. These typologies draw a line between what has been described as being the traditional politically motivated version of terrorism and religious extremism or what has also been called the *new face of terrorism* (Hoffman, 1998; Laqueur & Wall, 2018; Rapoport, 2001).

Those who fit into the politically motivated version of terrorism use violence as a revolutionary means to bring about clearly defined changes to the current political order. Whether their political ideology is from the far-right (e.g., anti-government and white supremacists), far-left (Marxist-Leninists), or based on a single issue (e.g., anti-abortionist and environmentalists), these individuals seem best described as being spurred on by political issues. Currently, in the United States, this type of terrorist is best represented by the far-right in such forms as anti-government militias and white nationalists. However, in the past, this typology has been represented by far-left groups such as the Weather Underground.

Those individuals who may be described as being religious extremists misuse and abuse religious doctrine in order to attract recruits from all over the globe towards a universal cause that transcends language, culture, and political ideology. This mode of terrorism does not intend to re-order an existing secular political order so that it can be brought into alignment with what they perceive to be a justified political structure, but rather, they deny any type of secular political order to be justified. To them, the only law that has any validity is the law of God (Hoffman, 1998; Laqueur & Wall, 2018; Rapoport, 2001). Therefore, the focus of such terrorists is not on the political structure but rather on the individual person. Their primary mission is to have all humanity embrace the only true ideology and those who refuse to do so should be eliminated, or at least, relegated to second or third-class citizenship for their unbelief (Hoffman, 1998; Laqueur & Wall, 2018; Rapoport, 2001).

Before proceeding forward, it is worth pausing for a moment in order to fully clarify four essential aspects of these typologies. First, the religious extremist typology does not consist exclusively of radical jihadists. Historically speaking the Zealots of ancient Judea, the Shiite Assassins in Persia during the Crusades, the Thuggee cult of India, and the Aum Shinrikyo cult, which orchestrated sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway system in 1995, all fit into this classification of terrorism as well (Laqueur & Wall, 2018). However, it is clearly evident that radical jihadism is the most dominant version of religious extremism that currently exists in the United States and other parts of the world, with very little competition on the horizon threatening to upstage its reign.

Second, the characteristics of these typologies is not in any way mutually-exclusive to one another, but instead exist between typologies within a proportional scale. Although it is true that *religious extremism* is the primary motive of radical jihadists, this is an oversimplification of the problem. Radical jihadist movements also have a powerful presence in the political sphere. For example, during the Islamic State's (IS) brief territorial rule over failed-states such as Iraq and Afghanistan, it engaged in such overtly political operations as reformulating laws according to sharia, implementing a system for taxation , debating health care policy, and implementing a new court system (Laqueur & Wall, 2018). Moreover, in many cases, there is a strong religious influence among politically motivated terrorists. Far-right terrorist groups in the United States have had an historical connection with Christianity. The Ku Klux Klan, anti-government militias, anti-Semitic groups, and white nationalists are just a few examples of terrorists who misuse elements of Christian doctrine to help justify their extremist views.

Third, the two typologies are not entirely homogenous. That is to say, the two typologies created in the cluster analysis represent the most prominent distinctions that can be made between the variables at the aggregate level, but the individuals within each cluster still contain many micro-level differences when compared to other members of that group. For instance, the cases within cluster 1 could be further sub-divided into right-wing, left-wing, and single-issue extremists. Moreover, even though the ideology for the vast majority of cases in cluster 2 can be

classified as being part of the radical jihadist movement, this movement is far from uniform. For example, there was considerable differences of opinion among the top leadership of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda over such issues as how to treat non-Sunni Muslims and what constitutes religious orthodoxy, which eventually caused a schism between the two groups and has even led to them fighting one another within the various Middle-Eastern conflicts that have emerged in the post-Arab Spring world (Laqueur & Wall, 2018).

Fourth, there are many characteristics that terrorists in both typologies have in common. For instance, many terrorists in both groups tended to have a strong commitment to radical ideological beliefs, had no previous history of criminal activity, came from middle-class or a higher social stratum, had some history of employment, had no history of drug or alcohol abuse, had no history of military service, had no history of mental illness, and had a high school diploma – with many having some college experience. Such findings are in keeping with what other researchers have also determined about the common characteristics of terrorists – the most significant being that they are often highly intelligent individuals, from middle to upper-class backgrounds, not suffering from clinical mental illness (Berrebi, 2007; Chermak & Gruenwald, 2015; Krueger & Maleckova, 2003; Laqueur & Wall, 2018; Sageman, 2008). This of course is not a surprising conclusion given that terrorist operations are often very complex undertakings requiring a great deal of preparation, strategic and tactical planning, technical knowledge, and resourcefulness to effectively execute (Benmelech & Berrebi, 2007; Krueger & Malecova, 2003).

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is that it focused exclusively on a sample of terrorists within in a single country, the United States. Because modern terrorist movements are certainly not confined to any one country, but instead, exist globally, it is reasonable to assume that the social environmental characteristics of any single county have a unique and significant impact on the manner in which terrorists exist in that country. As such, the results from this study are not directly applicable to terrorism in countries outside the United States. Even so, the study's findings are in alignment with what other researchers have said about the sharp distinctions between political and religious terrorists when commenting on terrorism outside of the United States (Hoffman, 1998; Laqueur & Wall, 2018; Piazza, 2009; Rapoport, 2001). Still, I suggest a great deal of caution be used with regard to generalizing these results to populations outside of the United States.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study based its classification of terrorists on three dimensions: demographics, personal history, and recruitment-radicalization processes. However, this is only one of many methods that can be used to classify terrorism. Researchers in the future will do well to consider using cluster analysis to group terrorism into typologies using other established criteria. For instance, Chenoweth and Lowham (2007) suggest using cluster analysis to develop typologies based on the methods and tactics that terrorists use when carrying out their attacks. In this way a more comprehensive picture of the varieties of terrorism can be established. In the future, researchers should also explore how the behaviour of individual terrorists differ from one another when their typology is factored in. One possible avenue for researchers to explore is to look at how

typologies impact the degree of formal involvement with a terrorist organization that is necessary before an individual attempts to carry out a terrorist attack. For example, the terrorists in one typology may be more likely to attempt to carry out an attack with little formal involvement or may be willing to act as lone wolves, while terrorists in another typology may not attempt an attack until formal connections within an organization have been established. Another possibility is to explore the extent to which typology is able to predict the severity of an attack that an individual is willing to engage in. These are only a few suggestions among a vast array of possibilities that I encourage other researchers to explore further.

Conclusion

In this study two-step cluster analysis was used in an exploratory effort to determine what the primary typologies of terrorism are in the United States. The study's findings suggest that the United States faces two overarching types of terrorism. The first one can most appropriately be classified as political extremism, which currently, is mainly represented by right-wing extremists, but has historically involved individuals all across the political spectrum. The second typology may be classified as religious extremism, which by in large, are composed of radical jihadist, although this is certainly not the only type of religious extremism connected to terrorism. This study also concluded that there are many commonalities among terrorists regardless of what cluster they fit into. Most notably, terrorists seem to be reasonably intelligent individuals, from middle to upper class backgrounds, who do not have a history of mental illness, criminal activity, or drug and alcohol abuse. These findings suggest that terrorists carry with them unique features that policymakers should be aware of when shaping counterterrorism policies. Moreover, policymakers should be aware that terrorists share some common characteristics that differentiate them from other types of deviant actors, which suggest that the motivations behind their actions are distinctive from other types of social deviants.

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