

Terrorism and Political Violence



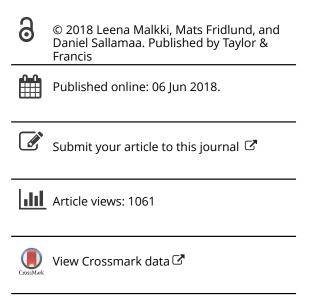
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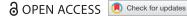
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Terrorism and Political Violence in the Nordic Countries

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ABSTRACT

The introductory article to the special issue discusses terrorism and political violence in the Nordic countries and reviews the state of academic research on the topic. Even though the Nordic countries appear to have suffered from lower levels of terrorism and political violence than many other Western states, they have been less void and peripheral with regard to such phenomena than common wisdom and academic scholarship would suggest. While some notable acts of violence like the July 2011 attacks in Norway have been covered in research literature to a certain degree, other phenomena such as far-right violence in Sweden have attracted less attention. The article discusses the ways in which the analysis of Nordic countries could contribute to the field of research and how articles included in the special issue address existing gaps in literature.

KEYWORDS

Nordic countries; terrorism; political violence

In the early 1990s, inhabitants of the Stockholm area were stuck with fear and concern. One person after the other was shot in the murky streets, and most of them had an immigrant background. Authorities suspected that the shootings, which resulted in one death and ten people injured, were for the most part committed by the same person. The incidents conjured much attention and sparked a heated debate on immigration and xenophobia, while the police were in turn fiercely criticised for failing to catch the perpetrator. Finally, some ten months after the incident, the assailant John Ausonius was apprehended during a bank robbery. It emerged that Ausonius had been motivated by a strong loathing of immigrants, communists, and social democrats. The rationale of his shootings was to drive immigrants out of Sweden.

A book that detailed Ausonius's story became a bestseller in Sweden. Within terrorism studies, however, one is hard-pressed to find even the most trivial of mentions pertaining to these shootings—even in the recently blooming literature on lone actor terrorism in the West. Only one of these shootings is listed in the Global Terrorism Database (without information on the perpetrator) and none of them appear in the TWEED database that covers terrorist attacks in a number of European countries during 1950-2004.

Ausonius's attacks serve as a striking example of a broader trend in terrorism studies. Little attention has traditionally been paid to events in the Nordic countries. Although this is in part understandable as the region has witnessed relatively low levels of political violence during recent decades, it is also in part due to the fact that the value of studying these countries has not been entirely understood by the discipline.

In this special issue, we seek to demonstrate that the Nordic countries have been less void and peripheral with regard to terrorism and political violence than common wisdom and academic scholarship would suggest. We claim that the scholarly value of political violence in the Nordic countries has been undervalued and explain in this introduction why this is the case. The articles included in this special issue address several underresearched and less known aspects of terrorism and political violence in the Nordic countries.

The Nordic countries in terrorism literature

The Nordic countries can hardly be characterized as having formed a focus area of terrorism studies. This claim can be safely maintained even though there are no studies that would systematically analyze the field of research in terms of geographical focus. During the last 20 years, 21 articles focusing on the Nordic countries have been published by the key academic journals of the field. A cursory look at the publication data for other countries suggests that this is not a particularly high figure, even though there are admittedly many countries that have received even less attention.

In order to form a more systematic view of how the Nordic countries have been discussed in the field of research, we went through all peer-reviewed articles published by Terrorism and Political Violence, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, and Critical Studies on Terrorism since 1997. While the articles published by these journals represent but a part of the overall research on terrorism and political violence, we argue that these journals function as key loci of an otherwise dispersed and unorganised field of study. They are the most obvious publication platforms for articles that aim to contribute towards the study of terrorism. They are, furthermore, the publications that researchers of terrorism in all likelihood follow most closely, especially with respect to topics beyond one's immediate field of specialization. If an article on a given issue is published by these journals, it likely has a considerable impact on the topic's recognition within the field of research.

Of the 21 articles mentioned above,³ most have been published quite recently. Figure 1 shows the number of articles published by year. Before 2011, only three articles that

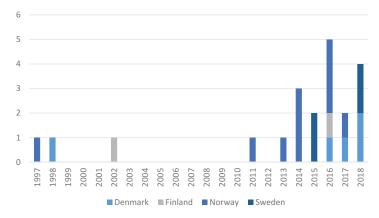


Figure 1. Articles with focus on the Nordic countries.

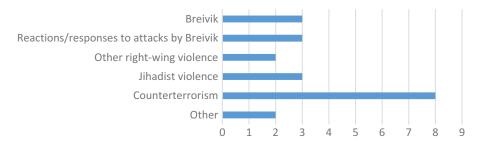


Figure 2. Articles with focus on the Nordic countries by topic.

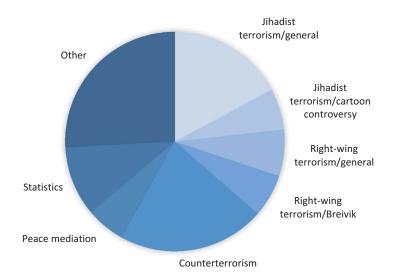


Figure 3. All mentions of the Nordic countries by topic.

primarily focused on developments in the Nordic region were published. Although the numbers are too small to warrant definitive conclusions, the results do suggest that the Nordic countries' visibility within these journals is increasing.

Figure 2 illustrates the divergence of articles according to the main topic. Three articles primarily focus on Anders Breivik and the attacks he committed in Oslo and Utøya on July 22, 2011. An additional three articles focus on the reactions and responses to these attacks in Norway, while three articles focus on jihadi terrorism and two on other forms of far-right violence. Eight articles analyse various issues related to counterterrorism. In terms of the countries discussed, almost half (10) focus on Norway. Five deal with Denmark, four with Sweden, and two with Finland.

On top of the articles that focus on the Nordic region, there are over 250 other articles in which one or several of the countries are mentioned. Our database includes altogether 379 entries (if an article mentioned more than one Nordic country, we created a separate entry for each country). Sweden, Denmark, and Norway are all mentioned equally often (each slightly over 100 times) while Finland is referred to less frequently (in 44 articles) and Iceland hardly ever (5 times). In terms of a temporal pattern, these brief mentions have also become more frequent over time although the increase in attention started around 2007, thus a few years earlier than with Nordic-focused articles.

An overwhelming majority of the mentions are very brief and rather insubstantial, and the range of different contexts wide. In terms of topics, the mentions roughly diverge into the following categories (see Figure 3):

In terms of jihadist terrorism, the Nordic countries are mostly mentioned in passing, as a brief reference to a person's background or travel routes, for example. Several pre-empted attack plots are also mentioned, especially with respect to Denmark and Sweden. These are also the two Nordic countries that have been brought up most often with regard to this topic. Very few articles discuss the development of jihadist networks and the activities of jihadists in the Nordic countries to any great degree. The single most common type of reference to the Nordic countries is a mention of the issues and activities related to the Danish cartoon controversy. These account for around one-fifth of all mentions pertaining to Denmark.

In terms of far-right violence, references to the attacks committed by Anders Breivik dominate the field. Unsurprisingly, they are also the one single incident most often mentioned by the journals. Other cases of far-right violence are also debated, but the number of these mentions is, even as a whole, about the same as that of those referring to Breivik's attacks. References to this particular incident explain a significant part of the attention directed towards Norway. They constitute about one-fourth of all mentions pertaining to the country.

It is in the context of counterterrorism, however, that the Nordic countries most typically come up. To give a few examples, the countries have been mentioned in articles that discuss international counterterrorism operations and the development of international agreements. In some cases, the point that is being made is that even the liberal Nordic countries, which have traditionally had a low terrorism threat level, have adopted more restrictive counterterrorism laws and measures. Nordic policies aiming to prevent violent extremism—exit/deradicalisation programmes in particular—are mentioned at times, but perhaps less often than their international reputation and recognition would lead one to believe. The long traditions of crisis management and peace mediation are visible in the articles as well, especially with respect to the role of Norway in the Sri Lanka peace negotiations and the work of Finnish peace mediator Martti Ahtisaari in various contexts.

Finally, the Nordic countries are included in a number of quantitative studies. Sometimes they are also mentioned as part of statistical information drawn from other sources. Almost invariably, these countries are not mentioned in the conclusion part of the study. In addition to the aforementioned themes, the names of the Nordic countries pop up randomly in relation to a large number of varying topics (constituting about one-fourth of all mentions in our dataset).

Table 1. The number of terrorist attacks/attack plots in the Nordic countries as listed by terrorism

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Global Terrorism Database (1970–2016)	41	18	4	18	118
TWEED Database (1950–2004, several Western European countries)	6	0	0	3	9
Chronology of jihadi plots and attacks (launched/planned) (1994–2017) ^a	5/13	1/0	0/0	0/2	3/1
RTV dataset on right-wing terrorism and violence, 1990–2015	19	8	0	25	89

^aThe data is drawn from the Appendix 3 of the following article: Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen, and Emilie Oftedal, "Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect," Perspectives on Terrorism 10, no. 6 (2016). The information for the year 2017 is based on preliminary data received as personal correspondence from Petter Nesser in December 2017.

Terrorism statistics and the Nordic countries

The rather marginal role of the Nordic countries in terrorism literature is not surprising when viewed against statistics on terrorist attacks. The number of attacks listed in databases is invariably low. This reaffirms the image of the Nordic countries as peaceful societies that have little to offer for a researcher of terrorism.

Table 1 lists the information that various databases include on the Nordic countries. The temporal scope and inclusion criteria is different for each database, so the numbers are not comparable.

The attacks in the Nordic countries were on average also rather minor. According to the Global Terrorism Database, 89% of the attacks did not result in deaths. This is a significantly higher percentage than the average of all attacks included in the database. In total, the Nordic attacks resulted in 110 fatalities and 182 injured. It is important to note that 77 of the fatalities and 75 of the injuries resulted from the 2011 attacks in Norway. A total of 22 attacks have claimed lives and more than half of them (12) have taken place in Sweden.

What these databases consistently point towards is that although all Nordic countries have experienced a relatively small number of violent attacks, some Nordic countries have witnessed more than others. Sweden has seen the greatest number of attacks in total and also when adjusted to the size of the population. Denmark comes in as second, while the number of documented attacks for Norway and Finland is almost equally low, especially if the 2011 attacks are excluded from the count. Iceland has witnessed hardly any attacks that would have fit the inclusion criteria of the databases.

In terms of perpetrators, the databases convey an impression of a highly fragmented situation. There is no single actor that would stand out as having committed particularly many attacks. Most actors have not carried out more than a few attacks. Information on the perpetrators is also highly incomplete—in two-thirds of all Nordic attacks included in the Global Terrorism Database, the perpetrator is recorded as unknown. This is a higher share than the average for the database. The number of cases with an unknown perpetrator is particularly high for the early 1990s and the years 2015-2016. While the perpetrators of most of these attacks are indeed unknown, the target selection suggests that they may have been motivated by anti-immigration views: a majority of them attacked reception centers or leftwing parties.

While the GTD's overall image of a relatively low number of attacks perpetrated by a wide variety of actors finds support in research literature, it is also clear that the database does not include all attacks in the Nordic countries that meet the inclusion criteria. Putting together a database like the GTD is a huge undertaking, and it will never be perfect. Missing attacks and



incomplete or incorrect information are a more general challenge to the GTD and other databases. It is impossible to say whether there is more or less data lacking on the Nordic countries than on, for example, Western European countries on average. However, there are issues that have certainly not assisted data production. Incidents in the Nordic countries are usually covered by the media in the local language only, the press has at least occasionally had a tendency of downplaying such events, and domestically-produced, publicly available chronologies and statistics on incidents of political violence in the Nordic countries have been few.

Under-researched aspects of terrorism, political violence, and the Nordic countries

At the beginning of this introduction, we argued that there is more to terrorism, political violence, and the Nordic countries than research literature thus far would suggest. Having reviewed key journals and databases, we will now elaborate why this is the case.

There exists, first of all, a curious discrepancy between the topics of study and attack statistics. This is especially the case with Sweden. As the RTV database compiled by Jacob Aaland Ravndal, for example, suggests, Sweden has experienced more far-right violence than any other Nordic country. Yet our analysis of peer-reviewed articles demonstrates that far-right violence in Sweden has hardly been discussed by terrorism journals. This is all the more curious as the number of deadly far-right attacks in Sweden is the highest per capita in Western Europe. 4 Swedish activists have also traditionally played an important role in the transnational far-right networks. This lack of attention is most likely at least a partial result of a more general trend in terrorism studies to de-prioritize the study of far-right violence and, at times, at least implicitly consider it as not quite terrorism since the attacks, even if unmistakably political in nature, often do not directly target the state.

This special issue contributes towards filling such a gap. Jacob Aasland Ravndal's article examines the post-Cold War evolution of far-right terrorism and militancy in the Nordic countries with particular attention to the factors that might underlie Sweden's prominence as a setting for such violence. Ravndal's work first traces certain general patterns pertaining to post-Cold War far-right militancy and terrorism in the Nordic countries and consequently presents a summary of the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish cases by drawing upon information from the RTV dataset. The study then moves on to identify those factors that may have influenced the widespread nature of far-right terrorism and violence in Sweden. Ravndal's work adopts social movement theory as a framework to investigating the Swedish case and applies in particular the concepts of political opportunities, organizational resources, and frame analysis to establishing the particularities that may have rendered Sweden a more opportune setting for far-right violence than its neighbours.

Mattias Gardell's article examines the series of murders and murder attempts that the white supremacist Peter Mangs carried out in Sweden's Malmö during 2003-2010. In addition to the aforementioned case of John Ausonius, this series of "lone actor" attacks has also remained off the radar in terrorism studies. Mangs, who aimed to incite a race war, targeted 12 victims of a mainly immigrant background and managed to kill three. Gardell constructs a detailed exposé of the series of attacks while also looking at Mangs' personal history and the sources of inspiration for his deeds. The article similarly charts the philosophical underpinnings of the ideology that Mangs constructed and looks at how Swedish authorities and the media reacted to the attacks—and how such reactions in part helped the assailant to elude capture for a number of years. Among the primary source material included in Gardell's work are interviews conducted with the assailant and his father, as well as material retrieved from Mangs' personal computer.

To provide a further example of less examined questions, attacks committed by animal rights activists in the Nordic countries have also remained unexplored by the discipline of terrorism studies. Animal rights activism in general has not figured among the most studied topics of the field, most likely due to the same kind of considerations that have contributed to the lack of attention towards far-right violence. Most famous are perhaps the acts committed in the United Kingdom, where activism of this sort has achieved its most radical manifestations. However, what appears to have eluded attention almost entirely is that Finland, too, witnessed several dozens of such attacks in the late 1990s and early 2000s—attacks that were, furthermore, perpetrated in the name of the Animal Liberation Front (in Finland) and included several arsons as well as operations during which hundreds of foxes were released from fur farms.6

Furthermore, the generally low level of political violence in the Nordic countries renders them an interesting topic of research. Namely, the countries have been subject to the same transnationally diffused ideas, models, ideologies, and inspirations as many other states. These ideas and models have found their adherents in the Nordic countries as well, yet they have not invariably led to significant violent manifestations. The New Left wave of terrorism is a good example of this. As a study by Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca demonstrates, all the Nordic countries were among those Western European states where the intensity of revolutionary terrorism was the lowest.⁷ Studying more peripheral countries during waves of terrorism would help to develop a theoretical understanding of the dynamics that underlie such manifestations, as well as of the processes and factors that may provide resilience to political violence.8

In order to understand the processes that lead to the adoption of terrorism as a tactic, a much too often ignored avenue of research has been to look at cases where a network or a movement has decided to adopt an alternative course of action. Jussi Jalonen's article contributes towards such discussion by investigating how and why members of the Finnish Jäger Movement engaged in and refrained from the use of terrorist tactics during the early 20th century. The Jäger Movement, a clandestine organization of young Finns who received military training in imperial Germany, was established in late 1914 to facilitate Finland's secession from the Russian empire yet ultimately came to perform a key role in the Finnish Civil War of 1918.

Jalonen establishes the historical background to his topic of study by looking into Finland's deteriorating legal status as part of Russia and also describes the political violence that preceded the Jäger Movement's establishment. The article then provides a brief exposé of the movement's birth and evolution before examining how the jägers came to contemplate violent reprisals against informants and other parties collaborating with the Russians—and how such contemplations failed to develop into a full-blown campaign of terror in 1917. The author furthermore investigates the jägers' engagement in terror tactics during the Finnish Civil War and the involvement of some members in far-right extremism during the 1930s. The study evaluates the significance of internal and external factors to conditioning the jägers' take on terrorism while also briefly discussing how the more radical tendencies among members of the movement began to wither after a failed uprising in 1932.

Jalonen's article bears testimony to the fact that even though the Nordic countries have witnessed relatively few cases of political violence during recent decades, the picture changes considerably when one goes further back into history. While the ideas and inspirations that led to the New Left wave of terrorism did not result in significant manifestations of violence in the region, the same cannot be said of the Anarchist wave. The article by Richard Bach Jensen deals with this era. Jensen analyzes the most famous act of terrorism in the Nordic countries during those years—the 1904 assassination of Finland's governor general Nikolay Bobrikov—from the viewpoint of how the act was labelled in public discussion. Bobrikov, the highest representative of Russian state power in the Grand Duchy of Finland, was fatally wounded by the Senate clerk Eugen Schauman in the most high-profile case of Finnish political violence to date.

Jensen first situates the affair in the general context of the Anarchist wave of terrorism and briefly discusses why, after two decades of relative peace, such violence began to proliferate again in early 20th-century Russia. The study then gauges contemporary perceptions of Schauman's deed by looking into how foreign newspapers discussed the killing of Bobrikov. Jensen furthermore evaluates whether the killing was a result of Finnish or Russian traditions of political violence while additionally employing the affair as a window into investigating how the terms "terrorism" and "anarchism" were used in early 20th-century Western public debate.

The current religious wave of terrorism has also manifested itself very clearly in the Nordic countries. People residing in the region have formed an integral part of transnational jihadist networks. An important point to notice here is that the number of attacks in a given country alone cannot be convincingly treated as the sole indication of that region's relevance to inherently transnational phenomena. This is clearly evident in the case of the Nordic countries where the priority of many jihadist actors has often been to support ongoing struggles elsewhere rather than attack their country of residence—although, as the chronology of attacks maintained by Petter Nesser demonstrates, the Nordic countries have also increasingly become a target of jihadist terrorist attacks during the last ten years. The value of studying more peripheral areas of transnational phenomena has been demonstrated well by a recent article by Brynjar Lia and Petter Nesser with regard to the development and manifestations of jihadism in Norway.

This means that the Nordic countries are increasingly dealing with the same kind of questions that pertain to the prevention of violent radicalisation and the countering of terrorist activities as Western European countries with decades of experience concerning a significant level of threat from terrorism. This, as well as the success of these countries in preventing violent extremism during earlier decades, makes them a worthwhile topic of study also from a counterterrorism perspective. The relevance of the Nordic countries is furthermore highlighted by the recent wave of mobilisation into Syria and Iraq. The number of people that have left from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland is rather significant when adjusted to these countries' overall population and the size of their Muslim population in particular.

Still, the challenges of today are not entirely novel to the Nordic countries. This emerges from Teemu Tammikko's article which compares the threat perceptions pertaining to Finland-based foreign fighter returnees from the 1930s Spanish Civil War with those concerning the returnees from the present-day conflict in Syria and Iraq. Tammikko's article furthermore evaluates the official responses to the two waves of returnees. While the Finnish Security Intelligence Service (Supo) has estimated the figure of Finland-based

foreign fighters in the Middle East to hover at around 80, a total of 86 Finns of a primarily leftist inclination also partook in the Spanish Civil War. Tammikko reconstructs the state's perception of the threat posed by foreign fighter returnees and its response to the situation by investigating Supo's archival material from the 1930s as well as publicly-available government material and parliamentary debates from the 21st century. The work situates its findings within the wider socio-political context of Finland while additionally looking into the international factors that conditioned and continue to condition the Finnish response to foreign fighter returnees.

Finally, the Nordic countries would merit much more attention in studies that look at terrorism as a social construct. Most research on the meaning and use of the term in public debate focus on a small number of countries, the United States and United Kingdom in particular. While the connotations attached to the term may be widely shared internationally, the way in which the term is used varies from one context to the other. There is evidence suggesting that the term has been used more conservatively in the Nordic countries than in those contexts that have been most comprehensively studied.

One study pointing towards such a direction is Leena Malkki's and Daniel Sallamaa's article within the present volume. Malkki and Sallamaa investigate Finnish public discussion on domestic acts of ideologically-motivated violence between 1991 and 2015. In particular, their study focuses on how the word "terrorism" has and has not been used to characterize violent incidents in Finland while also looking at the background factors that have influenced such a choice of terminology.

Malkki and Sallamaa demonstrate that Finnish public discussion has primarily avoided characterizing acts of ideologically-motivated violence in the country as terrorism. Certain exceptions to this rule can be found, however, such as a series of incidents perpetrated by animal rights activists in the 1990s. The authors also contextualize their findings, and effectively demonstrate that factors such as the perpetrators' suspected international connections, Finnish traditions of crisis management, and the assailants' backgrounds have influenced the decision to call and not call acts of violence in Finland terrorism. Most importantly, the choice of terminology has been driven by interpretations of what needs to be done to prevent potential future attacks.

This special issue traces its origins to the international conference "From Schauman to Breivik: Terrorism, Political Violence and the Nordic Countries" that was held in Helsinki on June 16-17, 2014. The authors wish to thank the participants of that conference for inspiring discussions. The conference was one manifestation of increasingly vibrant cooperation between researchers studying political violence in the Nordic countries.

We wish that this special issue will increase knowledge of and interest in research on terrorism, political violence, and the Nordic countries. Just as importantly, we hope that the articles in this volume will inspire scholars in the field to explore new avenues of research—among them analyzing transnational networks beyond their key nodes, looking not just for the causes of political violence but also the processes that foster resilience to it, and further exploring the social construction of terrorism and its variations in different political, historical, and social contexts.



Notes on contributors

Leena Malkki is a historian and political scientist specialised in terrorism and political violence in western countries. Her fields of interest include disengagement from terrorist campaigns, radicalization and counterradicalisation in the European context, history of terrorism, Finnish policies on countering violent extremism and terrorism, school shootings, lone actor terrorism and leaderless resistance. She is University Lecturer in European Studies at the University of Helsinki and Visiting Researcher at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs, Leiden University, Campus the Hague.

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Daniel Sallamaa is a doctoral student of political history at the University of Helsinki's Faculty of Social Sciences. His dissertation investigates extraparliamentary far-right extremism in post-Cold War Finland. Sallamaa's research interests also include, among others, public discussion on terrorism, the historical manifestations of political violence in Finland, and the cultural output of extremist movements. He has previously published on political violence and extraparliamentary dissent in early 20th century Finland.

Notes

- Gellert Tamas, Lasermannen: En berättelse om Sverige (Ordfront Förlag, 2003).
- The articles were identified by using the search function in the Taylor & Francis Online website. The search terms that were used were the names of the journals (Terrorism and Political Violence, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, and Critical Studies on Terrorism) and several keywords (Sweden/ Swedish, Norway/Norwegian, Finland/Finnish, Denmark/Danish/Dane, Iceland/Icelandic, Nordic and Scandinavian). There were some articles that included the word Nordic or Scandinavian but none of the other search terms, so the results for these two terms are excluded from the discussion here. The time range was limited to January 1, 1997-December 31, 2017. The search also returned articles that have so far been published only online, under the section latest articles, and not yet in print form. These too were included in the analysis and listed under the year 2018. The website was last consulted in mid-December 2017. Only peer-reviewed articles were included (and research notes, book reviews, introductions to special issues, etc. were excluded) and if the search term appeared only in the references, the article was excluded.
- In order to be considered as mainly focused on the Nordic countries, any of the aforementioned search terms had to be included either in the title or the abstract of the article. Additionally, the Nordic reference could not be only anecdotal (e.g., just mentioning the Oslo and Utøya attacks but actually focusing on other issues).
- 4. Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Explaining Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: Grievances, Opportunities and Polarisation," European Journal of Political Research (Forthcoming).
- 5. Rachel Monaghan, "Not Quite Terrorism: Animal Rights Extremism in the United Kingdom," Studies in Conflict and Terrorism 36, no. 11 (2013): 933-51.
- 6. See, e.g., Pirita Juppi, "Keitä me olemme? Mitä me haluamme?" Eläinoikeusliike määrittelykamppailun, marginalisoinnin ja moraalisen paniikin kohteena suomalaisessa sanomalehdistössä (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylä University Printing House, 2004).



- 7. Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, "Revolutionary Dreams and Terrorist Violence in the Developed World," Journal of Peace Research 46, no. 5 (2009): 687-06.
- 8. These questions are currently being explored with respect to Finland in a project "Finland and Theories of Political Violence," directed by Leena Malkki.
- 9. Petter Nesser, "Toward an Increasingly Heterogeneous Threat: A Chronology of Jihadist Terrorism in Europe 2008-2013," Studies in Conflict and Terrorism 37, no. 5 (2014) and the Appendix 3 in Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen, and Emilie Oftedal, "Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect," Perspectives on Terrorism 10, no. 6 (2016).
- 10. Brynjar Lia and Petter Nesser, "Jihadism in Norway: A Typology of Militant Networks in a Peripheral European Country," Perspectives on Terrorism 10, no. 6 (2016): 3-24.