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The Social Media Decision: Why Some Terrorist Organizations Choose to Build and Utilize a Social Media Presence and Others Do Not

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The Social Media Decision: Why Some Terrorist Organizations Choose to Build and Utilize a
Social Media Presence and Others Do Not

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
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Justin Robert Kinney
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Dedication

To my Mom and Dad, thank you for all of your love and support. You have always been there for me and encouraged me to aim high, to reach for the stars. You taught me to work hard, to stand up for what's important in life, to chase my dreams, and to believe in myself. I wouldn't be half the man I am today without you.

To Rebecca, my sister, who always gave me the emotional support and confidence in me that only a sibling can give. I'm so proud of you and feel so blessed to have had you as my sister and best friend throughout my life.

And above all, to God be all glory. There's nothing I could accomplish without Him.

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Thank you to my friends. Your faith in me and reassurance along the way was very needed and much appreciated. I have grown tremendously these last several years and I have you to thank. There are too many to name individually, but you have become my community and like family. You all keep me grounded and upbeat when I get stressed, with your support, humor, and perspective and for that, I will always be grateful.

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Abstract

Traditionally, radicalization was accomplished through isolation from society, in a small, personal, hands-on setting. But today, some groups have embraced social media platforms to reach and radicalize new supporters and recruits. This modern tool is an opportunity to reach more individuals in a manner that is less costly, easier, and less time-consuming. This has opened the process, allowing for both "direct recruiting", targeting selected individuals, and "indirect recruiting", loading material online and allowing it to spread to cause a form of self-radicalization in those who encounter it. This would seem beneficial for all rebel groups. If you successfully recruit even a few fighters or supporters through a low-cost process, it would be worthwhile to take advantage of that. Yet, we don't see this occurring at the rate one would expect from such a low-cost, high-benefit approach. Certain groups—such as the Islamic State—have built an online presence and embraced social media, but others choose not to, or maintain a low presence. This presents a puzzle: which group actors choose to create and use social media as a radicalization and recruitment tool and which do not? What factors or characteristics determine this decision?

This research project investigates the usage of social media as a strategic tactic by terrorist groups. We see certain groups embrace the tactic, to varying degrees, and others do not. So what types of groups choose to utilize this tool? Is there some component or trait of groups that can explain and/or predict the choice to create a social media presence? And if they have a presence, is there some component(s) that explains and predicts their level of social media activity? I propose several factors play important roles in this decision: ideological identity, recruitment opportunities through alliance networks, and competition or outbidding behavior spurred by the existence of rival groups.

Testable hypotheses are derived from these factors and are tested on a dataset of 25 organizations from 2006 to 2016, then through three case studies on individual groups. The analysis reveals statistically significant support for all three variables and their relationship to social media engagement.

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General Introduction

For decades, terrorist organizations have been forced to adapt, to be flexible as they adjust to new counter-terrorism methods, new tactics, and new technologies around the world. In particular, we've seen these groups evolve and grow, adopting and utilizing new technologies that allow them to continue to survive despite the increase in states' abilities to combat them as well. Since modern terrorism first emerged onto the scene with a handful of anarchist groups in the late 19th century, we've seen these organizations adjust to the rise of truly globalized media, the invention of radio and television satellites, and the emergence of upstart, non-mainstream media outlets. Some have even adopted their own media enterprises, from rogue radio stations to television channels. One of these recent additions to the pantheon of terrorist group adaptations has been the advent of the Internet and, in particular, the emergence of online social media platforms.

Prior to the advent of social media, traditional radicalization and recruitment was generally accomplished through some measure of isolation from normal society (defined as low connectivity to the non-radicals in society) and accomplished in a very personal, hands-on setting. Frequently, they would even remove recruits from the broader public entirely to complete that process, preventing their access to moderating beliefs and individuals in their lives. They sought to sever the connection to the wider, less radical society, so needed to separate any potential recruits from outside influences. But social media offers such organizations a new technological means to reach out, to locate, to radicalize, and ultimately to bring in new supporters, both locally and from afar. This modern tool is an opportunity to reach more individuals, allowing for both direct and indirect recruitment. It's cheap, viewed as easy, and less time-consuming, all appealing features to groups traditionally seen as weak relative to the state.

Yet it doesn't have the same isolating effect because of the distance between recruit and recruiter, between recruit and organization; individuals are able to radicalize and be recruited halfway around the world, without true removal from their surrounding moderate society. But we've seen many groups adapt, finding ways to still accomplish the radicalization, but without needing to physically isolate and doing so in a low-cost, timeless, and simple manner.

Yet, even though this online tactic seems to hold value for all rebel groups due to those appealing aspects, even if it only reaches a handful of people or successfully radicalizes a minute percentage of those contacted, the world hasn't observed this phenomenon of social media adoption at nearly the rate one would expect from such a low-cost, high-benefit approach. There appears to be little downside as it doesn't prevent groups from continuing to engage in traditional radicalization alongside it, yet provides a new means to accomplish their goal. If a process is low-budget, but broadens your pool of support and potential recruits even a little bit, one would expect to see groups all scrambling to adopt this new method and embrace it. However, instead we observe that only certain groups choose to build and cultivate their social media presence, while others have elected to eschew its usage entirely or simply maintain a very low presence.

This research project seeks to explore this puzzle in detail and investigate the adoption of social media technology as a strategic tactic by terrorist organizations. I seek explanatory factors at the group level and their respective mechanisms for this decision-making process that all such organizations go through. What types of groups choose to adopt and utilize this tool? Is there some component or trait of groups that can be used to explain and/or predict whether they will choose to create a presence on social media? And further, what explains the extent to which they choose to embrace it?

A better understanding of these questions contributes to both terrorism studies and political science literature along multiple dimensions. Previous literature on the topic has primarily focused on a few anecdotal examinations of individual organizations—such as the Islamic State (ISIS), but there is a significant gap in our broader knowledge surrounding the type of groups that utilize social media, why and how they choose to adopt it as a technology, and what factors contribute to that ultimate decision. By building on the body of literature on terrorist group psychology, technology adoption research, and radicalization studies, this deeper grasp of the social media decision-making process will help political scientists and policymakers predict which groups will seek to embrace these tactics, why they move into the online space, to what extent they will construct a presence and utilize it, and ultimately it will allow for states and other groups—even international institutions to develop specific, detailed national security plans designed to counter those moves.

Social Media Concerns

In addition, it should be noted that the implications of social media manipulation go beyond that of usage by extremist organizations. In today's increasingly-online and globalized world, there are many real concerns arising in society about how social media is used. From privacy intrusions and leaks, to hacking, to the dis-informational spread of so-called 'fake news', to electoral manipulation, all of these potential uses for social media have been popular topics for discussion of late, particularly given some of the recent allegations surrounding American electoral processes.

The use of online media for political purposes has been around virtually since the day such platforms were first introduced. A survey by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) showed 14

percent of American adults claim social media is their 'most important' news source now. While that number may not seem particularly high offhand, that is a large proportion of the civilian population, with roughly 1 in 7 adults paying more attention to social media news feeds than traditional news sources. And while I don't mean to downplay the accusations of bias often launched at the more mainstream sources as well, a perceived problem likely driving much of this shift toward social media news, this means the potential impact of 'fake news' or conspiracy theories influencing positions or attitudes, causing misperception, is extensive and growing, with studies demonstrating this across a variety of academic literatures. With so many people receiving their news on social media, it has become increasingly a place where people go for everything from news stories to opinions and is capable of shaping opinions; in this sphere, there is substantial room for people or groups to come in and utilize the technology to twist ideas, influence people, shape opinions, and even radicalize those beliefs.

Ultimately, we are learning this powerful media tool can be exploited to manipulate perceptions present in the general population and connect people who share extreme beliefs from afar. It can even be used to perpetuate a sort of virtual isolation, where increasing amounts of information are drawn from the site and less from more mainstream, moderate sources. This cycle of diminished mainstream media trust combined with the rise of social media as news source permits groups to contact vulnerable individuals (or allow them to contact the group), push and twist ideas further and further from the mainstream, encourage and support their radicalizing ideologies, and even recruit them into the fold.

Further, this risk of radicalization into terrorism is only one risk the social media revolution poses, if we—as a society—are not careful with its usage. Bessi and Ferrara (2016) discovered that as much as one-fifth of the social media conversation surrounding the 2016

Presidential election may have been driven by bot-created content and not real humans, which could negatively affect democratic discussions, public opinion, and possibly even alter votes and impact election results. This also leads into another big fear surrounding manipulation of social media, the ability for foreign states to 'hack' elections. During the 2016 election cycle, it has been alleged that a Russian 'farm' created hundreds of fake profiles that were impersonating Americans, which they used to plan rallies and drum up distrust toward candidates and politics in general, which provides strong potential to influence opinion and potentially votes.

It is clear social media has the innate ability for achieving and assisting in a lot of good, but like a lot of things, there exists inherent risk in its spread and usage. From foreign powers seeking to influence policies to the spread of fake news to extremist groups trying to radicalize fighters and levels of support, social media presents concerns that must be addressed and potentially confronted because the platforms are here to stay. This research project will not only help us understand how terrorist organizations are choosing to utilize social media, but can inform and clarify the platform's usage in other areas as well. We already know the technology is widely embraced and we've seen both benefits and risks manifest. But by complementing this previous knowledge of its usage through focusing on unique factors that go into the social media decision-making process by extremist groups, we can also extrapolate findings to how foreign states may choose to use it, and how even private corporations, media entities, and interest groups enter public cyberspace.

In the following chapter, I detail previous literature that exists on terrorism, traditional radicalization and recruitment, as well as online platform usage and technology adoption by extremist organizations. Existing research on the topic has been largely limited to case studies on individual organizations or methodologies on social media, but there remain gaps in the literature

when it comes to the causal factors and mechanisms that go into the choice to engage on public-facing social media in the first place. This project seeks to solve that puzzle and fill in those gaps in order to provide a stronger understanding of what types of terrorist organizations elect to make the move online and why they do so.

Out of those gaps, I develop a theory of multiple explanatory factors, which I argue play a role in this decision-making process: ideological identity, alliance networks, and rivalries. An exploration of those factors then generates several hypotheses for testing regarding their relationship to an organization's engagement on Twitter. In order to test those hypotheses, I utilize a mixed methods approach, combining a quantitative, statistical analysis with a series of qualitative case studies. Using that quantitative approach first, I examine the relationship between the causally-identified variables and social media usage and find statistically significant support and positive relationships for all three of those factors. Finally, I utilize the results from this to act as a springboard to launch into three case study organizations—pulled from the dataset—for more in-depth, qualitative analysis. This deeper investigation into three groups also finds support for the theoretically-identified causal variables, while providing a richer story, fleshing out the mechanism for each of the variables, and constructing a more nuanced understanding of the process. These findings provide key information about why groups choose to build public social media presences and use those profiles to radicalize and recruit people to their cause, which will help counter-terrorism analysts find new ways to counteract their efforts.

Chapter One: Literature

Introduction

In this chapter, I review several relevant topics in previous literature. I start with a little history and some of the research that's been done on terrorism itself, as well as its connection to civil wars and rebel organizations, in order to demonstrate its overall position within political science literature and provide a better understanding of who these groups are that engage in terror tactics. From there, I move into traditional radicalization and recruitment. This question of how groups have managed to convert people to their particularly-violent way of thinking is a puzzle and understanding how this has been achieved in the pre-social media era should help frame the new online tactic in a similar way. In other words, seeing what worked previously will allow for a better grasp of how groups are seeking to simulate their more traditional efforts, but in an online space.

From there, I move to review previous literature published on social media itself, the phenomena of social networking and technology adoption, and finally focus on how terrorist groups have been utilizing the public aspect of social media up to this point. By examining the various aspects of social media and how it has been used and embraced—both by extremist groups and non-radical ones, this will lay a groundwork for the theoretical model proposed in the following chapter about what drives the decisions to adopt these new technological platforms as recruiting and radicalization tools. But before identifying the causal processes, it's important to understand who these groups are, how they fit into broader international relations, how they've responded in the past to new technologies, and how they appear to be responding today to social media, at least on the surface.

Terrorism

History and Context

Broadly speaking, terrorist tactics by non-state actors have existed since ancient times with the first century political rebels, the Sicarii, fighting against Roman rule in Judea (D'Alessio & Stolzenberg, 1990), and the eleventh century Hashshashin—or Nizari Ismaili—assassins (Pichtel, 2011) who operated across Persia. We even saw precursor terror groups thrive in southern Asia, such as the Indian Thuggees, that showed elements of what we think of today as terrorist activity. However, the word 'terrorism' didn't arise into language until the late eighteenth century during the French 'Reign of Terror' when its usage was official government policy by the Jacobins, designed to silence political dissent among their opponents (Linton, 2006).

Obviously, the term has shifted over the centuries since the Jacobins—eventually to describe non-state groups, as we define it today—but generally speaking, modern terrorist organizations have existed since the end of the 19th century when anarchist groups reigned supreme among extremists. The Narodnaya Volya, a revolutionary group that sought to destabilize the Russian Empire and noted for assassinating Tsar Alexander II, was one of the first (Hoffman, 2006), but since that point, terrorism has been used as a tool by groups across the world, from Ireland to Colombia to the Middle East to Japan, across six continents and thousands of organizations, spanning many different ideologies and goals. Terror tactics have been adopted by nationalist groups, anti-colonial organizations, communist proponents, and most recently, religious extremists. And they've been recognized for their flexibility, their adoption of new innovations and tactics as counter-terrorism groups fought back, and their adaptability in the face of a modernizing world. Vehicle attacks, plane hijackings, private radio and television

broadcasts, even chemical weaponry, and now social media platforms have all emerged as new technological advances adopted by extremist groups for a variety of purposes in the last century.

Most research of terrorism has historically been focused on understanding incidents and circumstances, with less directed toward radicalization efforts. In fact, terrorism studies literature is frequently situated within the context of civil wars. Civil war literature is more extensive than terrorism literature, giving it a larger base of research and knowledge of rebellion on which to draw. Terrorism has been around—in some fashion—for centuries and 'modern terrorism' since the late 19th century, but its appeal for research is relatively new. We did see some academic research on terrorism going back to the 1970s (Crenshaw, 2014), but we didn't truly observe much interest from political scientists or policy makers until the 9/11 terrorist attack on United States soil. This massive attack within the borders of a Western superpower, the hegemon, intensified academic efforts on the topic (Sageman, 2014).

However, the more salient reason these literature sets are often grouped together is because the phenomena tend to be observed in similar situations, sometimes even simultaneously with the same organization. Geo-referenced data has demonstrated terrorism and civil war share a high degree of overlap (Findley & Young, 2012) before, during, or after civil conflict. Similar causal factors correlate with each, including minority discrimination, political openness in society, globalization on an economic level (Ghatak, 2016; 2018), certain types of repression (Piazza, 2017), and ethnic exclusion from political power (Choi & Piazza, 2014). Economic development, in particular, appears to have a curvilinear relationship with domestic terrorism (Ghatak & Gold, 2015). And the usage of terror tactics by rebels within the context of an ongoing civil war has been shown repeatedly.

The reason for this emphasis is that while most public knowledge and attention focuses trans-nationally, a large proportion of terrorism actually takes place domestically by extremists in enduring civil war, with groups making strategic choices regarding both opponents and constituents. These choices take into account the character of governments (democratic or autocratic) and costs of violence among constituents (Stanton, 2013). Jeremy Weinstein's book, Inside Rebellion (2006), places this choice in the scope of a resource argument; when groups have higher wealth, they are more apt to engage in indiscriminate violence, but when they can't draw on available resources, they engage in violence more selectively. But this lack of regard for civilians has ties to the fractious nature of the organization, as groups more fragmented ethnically or driven by material goals also show high levels of abuse toward civilians (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2006). With little regard for the populace, violent extremists are more likely to embrace tactics that target civilians or attack indiscriminately without care for protecting the innocent. These decisions impact the broader conflict as well. Fortna (2015) demonstrated terrorism tactics by rebel organizations correlate with longer length of war, but went on to note that route made rebel groups less likely to achieve desired political objectives. However, evidence of lack of success is mixed, depending how you define success. Most studies focus on concessions, but other literature shows a greater number of terror attacks within civil war actually raises the chance of being invited to the negotiation table (Thomas, 2014), which could be seen as a win for groups aiming to achieve legitimization.

Further, some literature argues terror tactics as part of ongoing civil war is not infrequent and the two tactics—terror and more discriminate rebel attacks—are opposite ends of the same phenomena spectrum, with causal factors that determine which tactical route an organization chooses being support base size and strength of the host state (Ghatak, 2018). As states gain in

strength, non-state actors are less capable of competing head-to-head with formal armies because terrorist organizations, by nature, are weak. This leads them to strategically select tactics that target infrastructure, civilians, or non-active duty fighters—terrorism. In other words, when a group is unable to attack the military, they go after non-combatants through terror. However, as states weaken, their military power diminishes, and extremist groups are more likely to engage in civil war tactics, battling the military head-on because they are more capable of doing so. Their group strength is closer to even-par with the state, so that's where they focus their efforts and engage in rebel tactics. Thus, when faced with a rebel organization in one's country, simply increasing overall state strength may not be the optimal solution as this may lead the group to change tactics toward terrorism and away from insurgent or guerrilla warfare (Ghatak & Prins, 2016). Grievances must be considered as the relationship between discrimination and terrorism is different depending on the strength of the state.

Reviewing the overlap and potential connections between terrorist organizations and civil war is important in understanding group motivations, which will tie into decision-making processes later. By knowing where they frequently fall in previous literature establishes a base for where and why they choose to engage in certain technologies, as well as how they manage to connect with possible recruits and sympathizers. Now there are many aspects of the phenomenon of terrorism that have garnered research interest over the years, but one of the most perplexing— especially to the average citizen—is that concept of radicalization and recruitment. The question about why an individual chooses to leave their normal lives and joins a terrorist organization is one that has driven a lot of unknowns and spurred a lot of research. What factors cause someone to develop radical beliefs in the first place? How do they develop to move toward violence? How do groups manage to convince someone to give up everything they know, often leave behind

friends and family, and join an ideological movement that commits acts of violence on oft-innocent civilians? Many researchers have sought to explain this and in the following section, I examine several of the previous efforts on this front.

Traditional Methods

Previous Models

The psychology and sociology of terrorism is of particular curiosity to researchers, especially why individuals radicalize and how groups encourage such extreme ideas in people and convince them to join the organization. Understanding what causes someone to develop such radical beliefs and/or join at extremist organization dedicated to violent action becomes important in examining tactics groups use to exploit those mechanisms. Because of this, radicalization—the process of causing someone to adopt an extreme position resulting in action—and recruitment have become major issues of research in terrorism studies and international relations. Behaviorists have sought to examine and understand the minds of terrorists (Borum, 2004; Crenshaw, 1986), but the pathways individuals take to extremism aren't always linear (Horgan, 2008) and in fact, it's simply not possible to find a 'one size fits all' conceptualization (Borum, 2011). Certain markers are noted in literature to explain why specific people or groups seem more prone to radicalized beliefs—unemployment, drug use, etc.—but this has proven difficult as terror is not "the product of a single decision, but the end result of a dialectical process that gradually pushes an individual toward a commitment to violence over time" (McCormick, 2003, p. 492).

Some researchers have even sought to build a conceptualized model of the psychological stages of radicalization via traditional means, to explain how someone moves from a non-radical

position to one fully radicalized and committing acts of violence. By understanding the psychology of individual movement through the process, we can start to recognize how groups try to exploit those pathways, particularly as they attempt to apply traditional tactics to the new online space of social media. Gurr (1970) was one of the first to tackle this, though his model applied broadly to all "rebels", not just terrorists. Still, he focused on the concept of relative deprivation, the discrepancy between what a person feels they deserve and what they actually have…that is, the difference between "value expectations and value capabilities." No matter the type of deprivation, as the scope and intensity of this discrepancy grow, Gurr contends this creates frustration among people, which leads to aggressive feelings and behavior, and ultimately turns into violence (Gurr, 1970). Beyond Gurr's work, Borum (2003) went on to build a four-step radicalization model. An individual starts in the Grievance stage, where the person first perceives that something isn't right, moves through Injustice—claiming that grievance isn't fair, Target Attribution—blaming someone else for that perceived injustice, and ultimately to Devaluation, or dehumanization of the person being blamed. This can even reach a point where the individual believes the 'other' is evil. A couple years after Borum, Moghaddam (2005) offered a competing model. He conceptualized the process as "stairs" leading to radicalization, with each stage building on the previous, from noticing injustice all the way to the point they remove inhibitions against aggression and violence. His staircase, he argued, had the benefit of visualizing the shrinking pool of members present at each level. And several other researchers have tried their hand at similar modeling (Precht, 2007; Silber & Blatt, 2007).

At the individual level, these models attempt to explain how and why a person moves from being an average civilian to a radicalized terrorist who is willing to not only die for their belief system, but also to kill others for it. And as we apply these theories to the organization

side, we see groups trying to exploit these stages and find ways to move sympathizers through them efficiently and rapidly. The introduction of social media has somewhat changed the way they do this, but the underlying concepts of traditional radicalization have been pursued and perfected for decades and should still exist, to some extent in the new technological online space. In the following section, I examine those traditional methodologies that groups used to employ these models.

Traditional Radicalization & Recruitment

However you choose to model the process, though, polling data have demonstrated the existence of significant numbers of people in the general population that hold extreme beliefs—defined broadly—but few of those people actually radicalize to the point of violently acting on their beliefs (Pew Research Center, 2006). McCauley (2006) further conceptualized this as a pyramid, similar to Moghaddam's staircase, with the base made up of some sympathetic idea, but higher tiers being associated with deeper radicalization, but also lesser numbers. So groups need to find ways to instigate that movement up the pyramid, which creates a larger in-group for the organization, consisting of more supporters or members. A variety of mechanisms have been noted to explain radicalization from personal victimization to slippery slope to "jujitsu politics"—or provocation leading to an attack from an out-group) (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008), but traditionally speaking, this has been done in person through a hands-on process. Bloom (2016) suggests this is a cycle, alternating between expertise and labor, different strategies and messaging for different times in the cycle. This allows them to target and attract a variety of recruits. Individuals are frequently targeted directly because the organization feels they are susceptible to manipulation. This idea of reaching out to and engaging with vulnerable

populations—that is, individuals whose personal or communal situation does not allow them to protect their interests—as a means of recruitment is not uncommon in a variety of criminal organization. These populations would include underage children, economically or educationally disadvantaged, the disabled, or anyone in a lower tier of a hierarchy. We've seen this tactic used to recruit members for gangs, transnational organized crime, and even religious cults. The targeting of designated vulnerable populations provides groups with easier recruiting, as they can manipulate the individual's situation to their benefit.

One of the most common factors for individuals who do radicalize in a traditional manner has been their relationships with close friends, their larger social group in their community, and others they know who also hold radical beliefs (Genkin & Gutfraind, 2011). In other words, radicalization traditionally occurs through having close connections and relationships to people with an extreme ideology. Individuals are recruited by personal connections to other terrorists, building on already-established levels of trust. By exploiting connections, it builds self-identity in recruits and gives them a place to belong. This mechanistic pathway is known as the 'power of love' (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008) and has been examined extensively (Sageman, 2004). It provides stability and structure (Kruglanski, 2014). It's been shown that possessing numerous and strong ties to non-radical members of the broader community prevents the radicalization process, and separation from a more-moderate society plays a role in cultivating and recruiting radical adherents to any violent cause. High, prolonged isolation from a society composed of non-radical—or anti-radical beliefs, combined with high levels of "clustering", or tightly-knit radical cells with many in-group connections, appears to result in a stronger likelihood of radicalization to violence (Genkin & Gutfraind, 2011). This means, in layman's terms, that people are influenced by who they're around. The more extremist allies they are in friendship or

community with, and the fewer ties they have to moderates in their overall community, the more

likely an individual is to undergo the radicalization process and ultimately commit an act of

violence.

This personal component has been identified as a crucial aspect of traditional extremist

radicalization—along with motivation and ideology (Kruglanski, et al., 2014). Sites where other

radicals operate is important in the radicalization process (Genkin & Gutfraind, 2011). The

process of networking within a small group of socio-political like-minded individuals cultivates

more radical members. It allows individuals to interact with others who are also going through—

or already completed—the same process of radicalism (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010). Much like

small combat units of soldiers build powerful, personal loyalty to one another—trusting each

other, relying on groupmates for one's life—this extreme isolation from society and normal

social interactions, combined with any perceived—real or manufactured—out-group threat, can

generate intense cohesion and intimacy (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Such loyalty between

members demands in-group agreement on issues, ideologies, values, and goals, which creates an

environment where violence against perceived external threats can be justified (McCauley &

Moskalenko, 2008). By isolating members from outside, alternative, competing ideologies and

moral stances, "groupthink" absorbs recruits into a collective organizational consciousness where

a sense of right versus wrong, combatant versus non-combatant, and other radicalization aspects

can become blurred (Post, 2008). In this intense period of isolation, they then get exposed to

heavy indoctrination and construct a sense of "us versus them" (Post, 2008). Further, the

experience of being socially isolated can actually prompt the process of radicalization in

individuals who may previously be vulnerable, already harbor extreme views, or view society as

discriminatory toward their beliefs or community (Mitts, 2019). Other studies demonstrate in-

group loyalty and out-group hostility is not only common in radical groups, but serves to dehumanize outsiders and legitimize violent tactics (Mandel, 2009). Small, isolated groups represent a traditional, more direct means of radicalization that identifies and targets capable, committed recruits to bring to the organization.

All of this plays into modeling behavior and social learning theory. Albert Bandura (1977) argued most of our human behavior is first learned through observation of others and then modeled after those we observe. So traditional radicalization methods were built around this idea of removing recruits from potentially influential out-group ideas and behaviors and isolating them around people with extreme ideas. This exposure desensitizes people, especially young adults or children, to violence, building a psychological relationship in their minds between the holy religious duty of jihad, and acts of violence.

Beyond ideological radicalization, the next step groups must guide individuals through is the commission of a violent act, or direct involvement in terrorism. This is recruitment. There's a lot of research on how individuals gain radical beliefs from a psychological perspective (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Bandura, 1998, Moghaddam, 2005). But studies on taking already developed beliefs and helping them find each other or bringing them into a group of others with similar views to engage in violence is less common. A large component of recruitment, traditionally speaking, relies on building and exploiting social networks—the offline kind—where current members already possess personal ties to new recruits (delle Porta, 1988). Some of the most common steps are the creation of a micro-community around potential recruits to construct a societal dynamic, cutting the recruit off from more moderate or mainstream influences in society, and shifting the back-and-forth dialogue between recruit and recruiter to more private communication platforms (Berger, 2015a). Because of the "weapon of the weak"

label, these isolation tactics are necessary, whether pursuing traditional or online recruitment, because as politically "open" concepts—less repression, more political opportunity, more freedoms—are increased in the wider society, recruitment successes diminish, even though it doesn't necessarily affect more hardcore members (Faria & Arce, 2006). So groups seek innovative ways to counter those ideals in the broader community through isolating steps. This mitigates the effect of the spread of those open ideas on possible recruits.

Further, it has been shown that, at least in specific cases of Islamist extremism, an emphasis on pan-Islamic nationalism integrated into the political sphere helps facilitate more top-down recruiting efforts (Hegghammer, 2006). By this, I mean that the rhetoric used in politics about moral responsibilities to support oppressed Muslims elsewhere gets manipulated to raise a higher level of support for radical groups that can pose as resistance movements. Groups will often solicit support or recruits by exploiting this common Islamic value of helping their religious kin and this can take the form of a more organized effort. By utilizing a pre-existing religious mandate and combining it into the political sphere, extremist organizations have been able to exploit those ties as part of their larger radicalization and/or recruitment efforts.

But as we've seen the rise in social media, the questions emerge. Do these common, traditional efforts ultimately translate to the new online technology? Are groups trying to simulate these same ideas and mechanisms in a virtual space rather than through in-person interactions? Traditional radicalization and recruitment haven't disappeared, but the introduction of a new innovation introduces both new advantages and new risks. In the following section, I examine existing literature on the purpose of social media, its effects on social networking, technology adoption tendencies and what we do know about terrorist organizations using social media.

Online Platform Literature

Introduction

The rise of social media as a connective tool has fundamentally changed the way people communicate with one another. In this section, I discuss a brief history and purpose of the innovative tool, strategies for utilizing it, types of recruiting in which it can engage, and the rise of networking communities. This will provide a baseline for understanding the technology by looking at its influence on society, both as a whole, but also for organizations seeking to harness its power. Where and how did the social media era begin, what was it initially intended for, and what kind of impact do we observe it having on people and groups? In particular, it has been utilized in a variety of ways in the political sphere to spread messaging, ideologies, and awareness about campaigns.

After establishing that, I discuss the decision-making procedure that groups—whether extremist or not—undergo as they sort through the question of whether or not to adopt a new technology. While social media is quite new, with Twitter only having existed a little over a decade, but plenty of other inventions have come along over the years that required similar decisions. The choice to accept new technology as a tool for achieving goals is strategic, not automatic, and a complicated one and researchers have sought to explain and model this process. I explore previously constructed models for this process of accepting and using new innovations, then take a brief look at what we observe about how and why terrorist organizations adopt such technologies.

Finally, I explore the things we already know about how terrorist organizations utilize public-facing social media platforms and the impact it appears to have on the radicalization and recruitment process. Tech-savvy terrorism is a relatively new phenomenon, but the literature

surrounding its embrace is growing and researchers have examined the role social media plays and the changes within organizations that this new tool has potentially caused—both positive changes and risks it induces. By building a base of our current knowledge on the subject, this project can fill some of the gaps in the literature, namely dealing with the factors that lead to the decision to use social media and why certain groups seem more apt to utilize its abilities than others.

Social Media Purpose & Strategy

Social media has shifted over the years as computerized programs became more advanced and varied, but the underlying concept has remained the same. Social media is defined as computer technologies or applications that are interactive, facilitating the creation or sharing of ideas and information through some sort of online community or network. Over time, its capabilities have expanded from simply text—like message boards—to include graphical ideas and information in the form of photos and videos. The advent of basic online social media probably goes back further than the average person realizes, with the introduction of Talkomatic in 1973 at the University of Illinois, a chat room application on which local users (on the university's PLATO system) could interact. Later, Internet relay chats (IRCs) emerged in the late 1980s and the first site someone today might recognize as social media was created in 1997, called Six Degrees. With Six Degrees, users could create profiles, with photos, and expand their social networks through sending and posting messages. And since that point, we've seen all kinds of social media outlets emerge, from Facebook to Skype to Flickr. But one that stands out today for its overall penetration into the market, popularity for spreading political ideologies, and ability to connect globally is Twitter.

Twitter, which was launched in July 2006, was once described by co-founder Evan Williams as "a social utility…but…more of an information network," (Lapowsky, 2013). From its founding, its public-facing aspect was intended to communicate bursts of information to followers and connections. Its ability to communicate rapidly, fluidly, and more widely than other platforms, has led to immense popularity worldwide, the level of which is unprecedented. It currently boasts over 330 million active monthly users (Statistica, 2018), with over 6,000 tweets sent around the world every second (Internet Live Stats, 2018), and has been cited as invaluable in everything from election campaigns, fundraising plans, news reports, and even played a role in the 2011 Arab Spring revolts across the Middle East and North Africa. And it's particularly invaded the political sphere; a recent study (Twiplomacy, 2018) found that 97% of all United Nations members states had official government Twitter accounts (the only exceptions being Laos, Mauritania, Nicaragua, North Korea, Swaziland, and Turkmenistan), making it the most popular social network among government leaders.

We've seen this popularity extend to intergovernmental organizations, diplomatic missions, and individual government departments as well. Further, social media allows for organizations to reach and contact a broader target pool to include foreign sympathizers, ex-patriots, and the like that may not be experiencing any local troubles. In fact, news entities have even begun to treat public social media posts as equivalent to public opinion (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2015). Roughly two-thirds of the American population uses some sort of social media entity—Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. (Metaxas & Mustafaraj, 2012), so groups often seek to use those same platforms to reach people, whether for propaganda efforts, information, manipulation, organization, or otherwise.

When the online social media revolution arose, it offered unique engagement abilities for extremists, especially with the platform's strong political/social influence on society (Thompson, 2011). By operating as a virtual propaganda tool, it radically changed how groups can reach and recruit people for support and membership, communication speed and cost of recruiting, offers a wider target audience for their ideology, and more anonymity. By building a social media presence, that allows for the creation of online communities built around the generation and sharing of content and ideas (Vorvoreanu, Kisselburgh, & Spafford, 2010). And we've observed these online tools become increasingly popular in this manner (Thompson, 2011; Rothenberger, 2012; Theohary & Rollins, 2011); less costly and time-consuming, groups have chosen to invest resources into the usage of these platforms as part of a recruiting campaign. The decentralized nature of the Internet matches well with the fractured hierarchy of many terrorist groups (Theohary & Rollins, 2011).

Social media strategy is frequently built around creating a community that shares some nominally innocent ideas, but extremist content gets slowly introduced over time (Torok, 2010). Then, they move to isolate potential recruits by shifting to private communications, recommending the recruit blocks other influences online (Berger, 2015a). While traditional methods of radicalization are still capable of finding and producing successful recruits (Gerwehr & Daly, 2006), social media platforms offer extremist groups the opportunity to recruit more sympathizers both locally and, most notably, abroad, increasing their pool of potential recruits and supporters. Online social media platforms permit organizations to draw from around the world, crossing national and state borders with ease (Torok, 2010). This is a fairly low-cost method to contact more people, organize, and communicate quickly; there is essentially a measurable, additive value to building a platform and utilizing it.

It doesn't prevent direct targeting/identification of easy recruits—it may make that easier as well—but notably, it presents the opportunity for more indirect recruiting. Literature often makes the distinction between "top-down" recruitment and "bottom-up" recruitment (Hegghammer, 2006). Top-down recruiting involves groups targeting specific people, whereas bottom-up recruitment is when recruits seek out the group. Posting materials and having social media platforms allows for both, but the potential for bottom-up recruitment rises significantly as it makes it much easier for "self-radicalized" individuals to find and contact organizations. Groups can put their message and supporting literature online to explain grievances and ideology, allow it to spread, and anyone can seek out—or stumble across—it to "self-radicalize" with little or no direct contact or effort by the group. Online platforms present a new means for groups to accomplish recruiting and radicalization goals, and many groups have begun to utilize it as a tactic and it's shown to already be key in recruiting abroad (Gates & Podder, 2015; Weimann, 2016). While there are a handful of countries that ban various social media platforms, such as China's censorship of Facebook and Twitter (MacKinnon, 2011; Bamman, O'Connor, & Smith, 2012), social media allows for the emergence of cross-border connection to nation-states around the world at levels that far outstrip the capabilities of traditional methods.

Through the usage of online platforms, groups are able to engage in radicalization practices that simulate the sense of personal connection—even between physically distant individuals—that is so critical to traditional radicalization and convincing recruits to engage in violence. Usage of photographs and videos, near-instant communication, and virtual isolation helps build relationships. Terrorist radicalization is a process that "gradually pushes an individual toward a commitment to violence over time" (McCormick, 2003, p. 492), which means having ties—both strong independently, but also numerous in number—over a period of time in which

they can be isolated from moderate society in some manner can cultivate radicalization to a violent end. Social media may allow them to replicate that in-person, in-group environment in an online space, still providing for the potential of isolation—a virtual, ideological isolation along with encouraging societal isolation rather than a strictly physical one—while creating bonds that build loyalty and in-group kinship. This constructs a micro-community, or network, to sever ties with more moderate influences and helps push the recruit down the path toward violence (Berger, 2015a).

Social Networking & Movements

As social media users begin to connect, this leads to networking behavior. For any sort of rigid society structure, extremist ideas and opinions almost universally bubble to the surface. Social mobility can lessen the problem of extremism, but some is always observed (Martins, 2008) and the idea of social networking has allowed individuals with extremist ideas to connect with one another in ways they have never before.

Utilizing Internet-based social media platforms or programs in order to connect with others is a process known as social networking and it can be used for a variety of purposes from personal to business. People use it to 'stay in touch with family and friends that have been scattered, companies use it to advertise and build brands, and politicians use it to drum up support for campaigns. But at the core of a lot of these platforms is a movement driven by the youth. We already know these networking sites are popular forms of communication among adolescents, teenagers, and young adults who frequently use them as an extension for their offline networks (Subrahmanyam, et al., 2008), but the overlap between online and offline connections isn't perfect, indicating that even for those who use it primarily to reconnect with previously-established relationships, there are other uses at play here too. In addition to that

socialization element, other factors also contribute to participation in networking behavior on social media, including entertainment, information-gathering, and self-status seeking (Park, Kee, and Valenzuela, 2009).

We recognize that individuals with similar views find each other, encourage each other, and begin to network, a social movement can begin to form over what's called a 'collective identity' (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). This shared sense of belonging to some sort of group plays a big role in defining personal identity, confirming one's beliefs as valid and not unique, and strengthening those characteristics as legitimate elements of self that don't need to be suppressed or altered. These beliefs become a part of one's personal identity, confirming (in their own minds, anyway) that they are in the right, that they are morally justified; further, higher levels of narcissism—idealized self-image—have been correlated with social media activity (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). Sometimes, these movements built around shared grievances; other times, they may be more abstract and constructed of simply common ideas about how things should, or should not, be done. These movements become more and more complex networks, linked by some underlying force of relationship, cause, or shared ideas; connections can be either direct—like the pre-existing relationships discussed above—or indirect, when two or more individuals share common beliefs, activities, or resources, but have never interacted with one another in person (Diani, 2003). And as these movements grow, the distinction between the collective and the individual becomes blurred (Larana, 2009). In political science, social movement theory suggests that it is the context or climate that favors and provides political opportunity for movements to grow and act (Meyer, 2004). The way that social networks become social movements is through opportunity, dimensions within the political system that allow people—or encourage them—to participate (Tarrow, 1998). And further, the rise in globalization, or an

increasingly-united world—and ultimately social media—has increased the ability for movements to form because it raises that level of connectivity between people who no longer have to be physically near one another to create community, but instead can be in geographically distant regions.

Terrorist groups fall into this category and can, in some ways, be viewed as social movements grounded in either perceived grievances that are shared by a collective group of people, or in shared ideas and beliefs that construct into a collective group identity. From there, confirmation and validation of those beliefs can radicalize the ideas further and ultimately lead to mobilization of some kind. By allowing those with particularly radical thoughts—those well outside the norm—to find others with similar ideas, the potential for more and more fringe ideas to become movements should be higher as well. And while the grand majority of social movements probably vanish and disintegrate long before anyone is able to even truly observe or notice them (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2009), the movements that do survive and grow into something influential—and perhaps, dangerous, in the case of terrorism—are aided by media platforms that provide such easy affirmation and connectivity.

Technology Adoption

Before examining the adoption and usage of social media by extremist groups, it is first important to note the progression of technological advancement, in general. To start, while technology is capable of *diffusion*, the more passive spread between individuals and groups, this project focuses on its more active counterpart, the *adoption* decision a group makes—usually at the leadership level—to receive and utilize a new technology, in this case online social media platforms (Cragin, et al., 2007). The understanding of why individuals and groups choose to adopt various new innovations has driven a lot of recent research projects in several literature

fields. At the individual level, literature has shown a 'life-cycle' of sorts, exploring behavior relative to the phase of life one is in. That is, that most technological adoption occurs in the earlier stages, or first half of life, but after that point, it becomes more productive to spend time working with what you know rather than adopt something new (Swanson, Kopecky, & Tucker, 2019). Rather than the traditional interpretation of elders with slowing mental capabilities, they demonstrate a rational decision-making process that takes into account the time it takes to learn a new technology versus continuing to excel with the older technology you currently utilize. However, how does this adoption life-cycle apply to groups or organizations that seek to last and don't have a relatively-set lifespan?

The adoption of technology by groups, extremist or not, is a complex phenomenon driven by several factors, from cognitive to emotional to social context (Straub, 2017). And it is a decision made under the condition of uncertainty about the outcome; the adoption of new tactics or technology always comes with risks (Cragin, et al., 2007). But adoption is not always an automatic decision. We've seen groups eschew certain types of technology that they associate with their enemies, such as how the Taliban bans television because of religious reasons and its Western origin. Other times, the reaction to new innovations in technology are driven by economic reasons or its relation to the group/nation's legitimacy (Coşgel, Miceli, & Rubin, 2012) One of the more prevalent relationships that exists is between adoption and social networks (the non-Internet kind). Networks driven by similar religious ideologies do show a higher level of adoption, but the key driver here appears to be relationships, whether familial or friendship (Bandiera & Rasul, 2006). And as a new technology becomes more publicly utilized and available, this drives an even stronger relationship between adoption and influence through social connections (Kulviwat, Bruner, & Al-Shuridah, 2009).

Within communications literature, some theorists have sought to explore and construct models to describe how people accept and utilize new technologies. One of the most studied and widely used is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), focuses on ideas of usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989). In other words, if a technology is perceived as being simple to use and believed to "enhance his or her…performance", it will be adopted. Many studies over the years have sought to provide empirical evidence of this model (Szajna, 1994; Segars & Grover, 1993), and we've even seen research expand the theory. TAM itself has gone through a few iterations, such as TAM 2 (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Further, Venkatesh, et al. (2003) came up with the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), in an attempt to combine TAM with other competing models and Liao, Palvia, and Chen (2009) have also suggested their own unifying theory of the 'life cycle' of how new innovations become adopted, the Technology Continuance Theory (TCT), focusing more heavily on attitude variables in addition to usefulness. Other determinants have been suggested as significant, including social influence and ability to access, as well. And in more recent years, Okafor, Nico, and Azman (2016) showed that some online technologies—in particular, multimedia—might be immune to the effect of perceived ease of use, at least in certain areas. The willingness of people or groups to learn a new technology might also be playing a factor.

And when it comes to terrorist organizations, they show much the same behavior; the adoption and acquisition of technology is clearly a strategic choice. Some scholars have dismissed the desire for new technological innovation among terrorist organizations because of their frequent preference for simple weapons, firearms and explosives (Clutterbuck, 1993), but this is an overly simplistic view. Groups must constantly look to adapt as counter-terrorism efforts are ubiquitous and fierce, and even among ones that use a small array of weapon, or

tactic, types, innovation and adaptation is evident. In certain regions, we've observed groups innovate in direct response to intense methods of counter-tactics (Cragin, et al., 2007). In order to stay ahead of the government, opposing groups, or rival non-state actors, groups often must seek new methods, tactics, and weapons in order to stay relevant. Groups may be unable to adopt a technology, for one reason or another, but in those cases where the technology is available to them, it comes down to a strategic decision or willingness. A combination of human resources, connection to technological sources, leadership structural support, and the necessary environment to allow for adjustment will make groups most likely to adopt and stick with new technology (Jackson, 2001). Almost by definition, non-state groups are more flexible and capable of adaption to changing environments more than their more bureaucratic, hierarchical state counterparts (Arquilla, Ronfeldt, & Zanini, 1999). We've seen groups embrace other technologies, from printing pamphlets and magazines to running rogue radio stations. In particular, as information and material becomes cheaper and easier to produce and access, it is likely we will see groups move into new weapon technologies like chemical or even biological weapons, transforming the concept of warfare by growing the power of the non-state actor (Shubik, 1997). Terrorist groups have been observed decentralizing into webs more than hierarchies, which allows them to operate more fluidly and efficiently (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 2001).

Social Media Usage by Terrorists

Social media, as one of these new innovations or technologies in the modern world, has revolutionized much of the way the world communicates and many organizations and campaigns—extremist or not—have sought to utilize these platforms as a tool. Having an outward-facing social media presence is almost a requirement now in the West for anyone

running for office and businesses. Even states have constructed social media profiles; authoritarian regimes often target online campaigns toward their own populations for manipulation and spin (Bradshaw & Howard, 2017). Proficiency in social media tactic can be seen among many terrorist groups; Shining Path, a Cold War-era group in Peru that has seen a resurgence lately, occasionally communicates via social media and LTTE, a nationalist group in Sri Lanka until 2009, once had a fairly large social media presence, among others (Rothenberger, 2012). However, this prolificacy has been particularly notable for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS/Daesh), which has been widely recognized for its recruiting prowess online (Engel, 2015; Alarid, 2016, Bodine-Baron et al., 2016), often following its recruits all the way from first contact to violent act (Berger, 2015b). By utilizing a "carrot and stick" approach, disseminating images of graphic violence but also positive campaigns showing the organization as safe and attractive, these groups seek to manipulate individuals into becoming recruits (Berger & Morgan, 2015). Social media further provides an opportunity to target and engage younger recruits, which we've seen groups like ISIS embrace; their recruits are very diverse, but also younger than previous terrorism suspects, with the average age of an American ISIS-supporter being found to be only 26 years old (Schmitt, 2015). Finally, literature has suggested that social media usage may accelerate the overall radicalization and recruitment process (HSI, 2009), which would provide value to any group that elects to utilize it. Usage of the Internet to promote radicalization provides virtual social connections that create a virtual community for individuals seeking kinship and belonging. As long as they manage to facilitate ties with high levels of trust, such platforms can serve as forums for this psychological movement (Genkin & Gutfraind, 2011).

The very idea of a tech-savvy terrorist was almost unthinkable a few decades ago, but one that ultimately became inevitable as the world grew increasingly digital and globalized. Terrorist

groups are adopting and sharing technology more successfully today than ever before (Cragin, et al., 2007). The global reach, the power of imagery, and ease of usage makes it useful for building and encouraging extremism, but without some of the physical "signatures" that made it easy for counter-terrorist experts to track radicals. Hackers and hacker teams have been recruited by groups for propaganda exploits, turning videos for groups like ISIS into entertainment, drawing inspiration from movies and videos games, such as *Call of Duty*. And we've seen an effort from groups to execute combination-style attacks—both physical terrorist activities and hacking (Carlin, 2018). Extremists have even targeted individuals with these particular online skills for recruitment, using them for 'hacktivism' efforts, radicalization, propaganda, and even attacks. In more recent years, one of those new technological innovations that has emerged and presented an opportunity to groups is online social media. It presents unique strategic engagement abilities for extremists and the world has observed some groups move to embrace the platform as a means to reach new people as potential sources of support—material, financial, or otherwise, a larger pool of recruits, a new means to initiate the radicalization process, as well as a new avenue to spread their ideology and air grievances to a larger audience.

We already know that the embrace of this new tool (Thompson, 2011) has led to other changes too; social media adoption has identifiable results. One of the more obvious is that, due to a heightened ability to reach foreign recruits, combined with the difficulty and cost of transporting them to physically join the rest of the organization, some groups have been encouraging attacks where a foreign recruit never leaves their home state, yet still radicalizes without any—or with minimal—in-person contact (Spaaij, 2010). This raises questions as to the purpose in engaging and radicalizing people abroad. Is this due to a more global, cross-border ideology with less-local grievances? It seems clear—at least for most situations—that it isn't

about local policy change. There may be an occasional provocation attack, like September 11th,

or one to coerce a government to enact some policy or take some action, but most of these

attacks don't appear to have direct demands on those foreign governments or states. Yet, this type

of attack, with homegrown extremists, has increased across the West (Hamm & Spaaij, 2015;

Spaaij, 2010; 2012, Teich, 2013). While not every country has seen the same exact rise, the

United States has had the most attacks and the overall number of targeted countries has risen

since the 1990s (Teich, 2013). Casualties from this type of attack have also been on the rise

recently (Teich, 2013). Still, these attacks are far removed from the grievances experienced in

the immediate locale of the group's home base.

These literature-identified results are not just beneficial for the group, however, as it also

leads to the risk of creating recruits that are less connected to the group and, in essence, to the

cause. Recruitment patterns show local recruits exhibit different profiles than foreign fighters,

both regionally and from 'Western' members (Gates and Podder, 2015). Foreign fighters are less

motivated by personal history of grievances and more by "universal" ideological issues, while

local fighters generally have a much more direct connection to those grievances (Gates and

Podder, 2015). Further, the recruitment of foreign members raises the potential for internal

conflict between local members and those from abroad; while broad ideological agreement might

exist, those from other regions don't share the same concerns with local conflict (Gates &

Podder, 2015). While the tactic is still fairly low-cost overall, this potential risk for internal

dissent raises the potential costs of choosing to use social media recruiting. Of course, groups

know and understand the costs and benefits of recruiting with online tools. Still, some have made

the conscious decision to pursue this tactic while others have not. Not all groups have chosen to

do so—and some have elected to engage with the platform to a much further extent than others.

However, the majority of previous literature on the subject has focused on these end results of social media—both the benefits and the risks, the ways it currently impacts groups and surrounding society, or the tactical efforts currently being employed. But there is a gap on the front end of the adoption process, where the initial decision to go online has been under-researched. This project explores the factors that lead up to that decision and helps us understand the characteristics of a group which can be used to predict the types of organizations who will choose to construct a public social media presence and which prefer to stick with traditional methods.

Conclusion

The previous review of literature establishes the historical usage of terrorism, the traditional view and approach to radicalization and recruitment, and its place in research literature. By situating it alongside civil war literature, we can see a more clear picture of motivation, but more importantly, we can see how conclusions derived from this project may be applicable to rebel organizations as well. Next, I walked through individual radicalization models and recruitment methods to show what we know about how groups have engaged with this aspect of organizational growth in the pre-social media. This lays groundwork for how groups have adjusted their methods to include a move into the online space. From there, I shifted into a discussion of what we currently know about social media and its growing level of influence in the political sphere. Starting with its initial purpose, I then explored previous literature on strategies of use to how terrorist organizations have—to this point—been utilizing it. By showing what we already know about the existence of terrorist organizations on social media platforms, we can situate this project within a gap in the literature. Previously, we have seen a focus on

specific case studies—namely ISIS, tactics, and potential consequences of the move online but there exists minimal information on the factors that drive the decision-making process up front. We know a reasonable amount about the actual presence, online methods, and the end results of the tactics, but very little about why and what factors are driving them to choose to embrace social media. It is here that this project fills in the gap, exploring causal factors for that strategic choice.

Chapter Two: Theory

The Puzzle

In Chapter One, we saw that most research on the topic of terrorist organizational usage of social media has focused on the end result or the online methods themselves, leaving a hole in the literature when it comes to understanding the causal mechanisms that lead to that decision to utilize them in the first place. This project seeks to advance our knowledge of that gap and explore factors that inform that decision. Moving forward, in this chapter, I develop and build a theory to examine and explain multiple, causal, group-level variables that impact the group's decision-making process to construct an online social media presence and then to utilize it. From this theoretical exploration will grow several hypotheses about the relationship between variables that are tested later in future chapters.

One of the most prevalent and troubling developments in the field of terrorism studies is the emergence of social media as a popular tool for recruitment and radicalization. While these communications platforms are frequently hailed for their connective ability—their speed, reach, and ease of use—they also have, like a lot of positively-intended inventions, been utilized for negative purposes as well. Nuclear power was used to create weapons of mass destruction. TNT (trinitrotoluene) was created to be used as a yellow clothing dye before being used as an explosive. The loudspeaker debuted by playing popular Christmas carols, but was used for widespread propaganda campaigns across Nazi Germany. Sarin gas was an insecticide designed to fight poverty and starvation before it was used as a nerve agent. Google Earth was a satellite map to grant perspective and access to far-flung places, but occasionally gets used by criminals to scope out their targets for burglaries or violence (most infamously, the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks). And now social media, invented to connect people, to globalize the world in ways we'd

never before seen, is being used to network those with extremist ideas as well, leading to more distant radicalization, legitimization of radical beliefs, and recruitment into organizations, and this has resulted in a lot of controversy. However, this also leads to a complicated puzzle. Despite the obvious benefits of these platforms to terrorist and other extremist groups (as well as non-extremist, more 'normal' organizations), we don't observe all groups choose to utilize social media and even among those who do, there is wide variation in the extent to which they've embraced this.

When we look at terrorist organizations, or any sort of organization, whether radical or mainstream group, we can observe similarities in their methods for reaching and communicating with people. This could be corresponding with their current followers, any potential followers and recruits, or simply the broader public at large to communicate a message. All groups ultimately want to find low-cost ways to spread their messaging, convince people of the value in believing in and ultimately acting upon their ideology, or find or bring in new supporters or recruits. We see them utilize speeches, mail out fliers, hold events, put up posters and many more tactics designed to accomplish this goal of increasing ideological support or membership. But in more recent times, building an open social media presence would appear to be a practical and useful way to do it. It's cheap, easy, and can reach a lot of people quickly. We've seen this tactic embraced in a number of industries, as businesses, interest groups, politicians running campaigns, and community organizations all have embraced Twitter and other platforms in this manner. Using social media is an exceptional way to reach and connect with people. This is particularly true when your target audience is young people, who use such platforms at a higher rate than other generations, often preferring them to traditional news sources or communication channels, like television or radio.

Terrorist organizations have that same incentive as non-extremist groups as well, but arguably with even more at stake given their almost-definitional position at the fringes of society with extremist ideas and beliefs to which the average person does not adhere. They can't rely on mainstream media organizations to spread their messages in the way they want. The value in finding and connecting with people in other areas, in providing a landing spot for sympathizers, and in finding ways to express your beliefs in your own words, unfiltered by mainstream media or third-party sources, is potentially immense for groups that live on the ideological outskirts of modern society. Granted, such extremists often find themselves at odds with the platforms themselves and the people who run the platforms, which may seek to shut down and block violent groups, or ones that spread messages encouraging violence, but the simple ability of merely setting up new accounts faster than the platform can shut them down still makes it a decision that adds value to the group. And if an organization is lucky enough to find themselves in a weird cloud of political correctness, the platform might just elect to allow the group to exist on the website, much like Twitter does with the violent, but pro-Palestinian, extremist group HAMAS.

So given that incentive, the extremely low-cost of creating a public Twitter profile—zero, as long as you have Internet access, its penetration in the social media market—particularly amongst young people, and the simplicity of using it would all suggest that terrorist organizations should embrace the usage of such new media platforms. Further, its anonymity factor is strong as well, particularly on Twitter. You don't need to use your own name and, other than the handful of "verified" accounts, there's no real effort to identify the owners of any particular account. All you need is an email address, which can be obtained for free from a number of providers across the Internet. Given all of this, one would expect groups and

extremists to not only build profiles on such platforms to create a simple presence, but to try to utilize said profiles to their fullest extent to reach the maximum amount of people. That does not mean they will all be proficient in their usage, especially not right away, but the low cost means it is still logical that groups would seek to benefit from the tactic as much as they can, all while attempting to strengthen and hone their proficiency with the platform over time. Even if the tactic only results in recruiting a few extra fighters, a little extra support from an ex-pat community in another area, or just convinces a handful of people to believe in your ideology, why wouldn't a group want to embrace such a low-cost process? You don't need a particularly high success rate for the method to provide a net positive value to the group. It seems rational that all terrorist organizations would benefit from such a move into the modern social media Internet sphere, so we should see them seek to adopt this new technology.

However, this technology adoption phenomenon simply doesn't appear to be happening at the rate one would typically expect, given that cost-benefit analysis. It's true that the world has observed some terrorist groups dive in head-first to use social media platforms in pursuit of their organizational goals, but many such groups have either elected to leave their accounts fairly dormant and not effectively utilize the platform profiles they've set up, or they've not even bothered to create a public presence on social media at all. So there is a difference observed in both simple presence on social media, but also its overall usage. While there are groups like the Islamic State that have embraced this tactic to a large extent, others have eschewed its usage completely, and many groups ultimately fall on a spectrum between those two poles as well. This poses a puzzle for terrorism studies literature, research, and policymakers.

Why would some organizations elect to create a social media presence and others have not? Further, why would some of these groups choose to utilize that presence extensively, while

others do so only minimally or not at all, despite having created a platform? Are there certain causal drivers that can be used by researchers to examine, explore, and explain this discrepancy between what behavior one expects to see and what the world has observed taking place?

Through this project, I propose that yes, these drivers do exist and they exist along three primary dimensions: ideological identity, recruitment and support opportunity, and competition. Each of these factors plays a role in explaining social media usage. Ideological identity is a form of connection and kinship that spans further and across borders, a belief system that can engender support from afar without needing to personally experience grievance. Next, social media will be utilized when there is a direct and promising opportunity to reach new pools of potential support and recruits via more formalized connections to similar organizations or extremist groups of individuals. And finally, competition explains at how a shrinking local pool—split among multiple groups that battle each other for support—forces organizations to seek out new avenues elsewhere simply to continue to adequately compete. As the rival takes away resources locally, groups need to seek out opportunities elsewhere. Therefore, ideological kinship—especially that across borders, new opportunities generated through ally endorsement, and competition behavior all play roles in the decision-making process to build and use social media presences.

Identity

Connective ideological identities—especially those that demonstrate cross-border kinship qualities—may explain why groups would elect to build and use social media profiles, to reach potential sympathizers, recruits, or supporters. Ideology is one of the most common traits that previous research has studied in terrorist organizations. The way people conceive of their

personal being is often thought to be heavily influenced—if not largely determined—by their surrounding social environment (Harre, 1984). Psychological associations and membership in groups can often affect one's personal identity and self-concept (Breakwell, 1992), which means that group ideology can have a profound impact on the way members within that group perceive themselves, their relationships with others, as well as how they view outsiders. And further, it's been demonstrated in research that the way individuals view in-group versus out-group categorization can depersonalize the concept of the self, which in turn, affects the way the overall group chooses to behave (Turner, 2010). Identity is developed and cultivated in an individual's early years, forming gradually throughout their childhood and adolescence, even into young adulthood, in part through the way people relate to one another. This could be parents, siblings, extended family members, or it could be one's social architecture of close friends, acquaintances, and other members of a group to which they belong. And the influence of the relationship between personal identity and group ultimately swings both directions as well.

Terrorist groups, almost by definition, exhibit weakness relative to the state in which they reside and hold extremist views, an ideological identity well outside the mainstream ideas and beliefs of the general population. Whether a group is more politically focused—either extreme right- or left-wing, ethnically-motivated, nationalist, religious, social, or some other ideological bent can help people to understand a group's motivations and actions. Since the advent of "modern terrorism" in the late 1800s, we have seen groups across the ideological spectrum, representing all kinds of beliefs. But more recently, the world has observed a dramatic rise in the formation of ideologically-religious groups in the last thirty years, since the Iranian revolution converted that country into an Islamic republic (Hoffman, 1998-99). During the 1970s and 1980s, often considered to be the peak era for terrorist group formation, the ideologies of

terrorist organizations were often communist with backing by the USSR, but we also saw a hodgepodge of varying agendas exist: nationalist, left- and right-wing revolutionaries, and religious (Pedahzur, Eubank, & Weinberg, 2010). But this more heterogenous mix has homogenized a fair amount in the most recent few decades to become much more religious in nature, leading us into and through what David Rapoport (2004) calls the Religious Wave of Terror, the fourth wave he identifies in the history of modern terrorism. Many of these groups from previous eras died out, particularly as the Soviet Union fell and many of the groups it supported also diminished, but a few—the PLO, primarily—persisted to varying degrees and crossed into this final wave as well.

As one example, Botha and Abdile (2016) presented research on the African group, al-Shabaab, that showed over 50% of their recruits joined the organization for religious reasons, despite there officially being several ethnic and nationalist motivations driving the group as well. And religious terrorism has seen a wider, more indiscriminate scope of violence too (Hoffman, 1998), more than other ideologies. Religion is an identity that gets at a very intrinsic piece of a person's heart. For many, it's something very near and dear to them, more so than many other forms of identity. This may be, in part, due to the "eternal" nature of religion having an afterlife, so it affects much more than current living situation or location. But the most notable factor of religiously-motivated terrorism, at least for this theory, is that religion is an ideology highly capable of crossing political and national borders. Even when groups may strategically select the most extreme aspects of a mainstream religious belief system, or adhere to a particularly extremist interpretation of a more mainstream faith's scriptures, a believer in one faith in a particular corner of the world can connect and identify theologically with a believer on the other side of the globe, despite sharing no other identity characteristics, no ethnic similarities, nor any

history or relationship to specific, observable grievances. While it can be assumed that all terrorist groups possess, by nature or definition, extremist ideologies, religious belief plays a strong role in a person's identity and life, yet it maintains flexibility and malleability to different circumstances; it is generally not considered innately linked or inherent to an individual, ethnic or location. That is, you generally do not need to personally experience any condition or grievance, live in any specific locale, or share a similar historical background in order to connect with identical—or highly similar—religious beliefs. Historically, religious groups always receive the largest percentage of donations to charity (Charity Navigator, 2018). Many Christian charities advertise being able to help religious brethren abroad, from Samaritan's Purse helping persecuted Christians worldwide (www.samaritanspurse.org) to Open Doors advertising helping your "family" in North Korea (www.opendoorsusa.org). In Islam, the concept of giving alms or charity to fellow Muslims is enshrined into their religious obligations through the *zakat* (Benthall, 1997). And there is evidence that religious ties can spark more than just nominal relationships as well, as these ideological institutions have even helped establish trade networks abroad in certain circles (Ratanapruck, 2007). We do see correlations between certain ethnicities and locales to religion, but there are very few faiths where the former is required in order to possess the latter. While acknowledging that almost any ideology does technically possess this raw capacity for crossing borders, this malleable and trans-national aspect is not nearly as strong for ideologies of other non-religious forms. For example, ethnic ideologies and identities are more strongly tied to a shared background or common grievances, while nationalist ideologies frequently rely on specific knowledge of a region, common interest in independence, or a local grievance.

We've seen connective faiths spurt in growth in widely divergent areas culturally. Christianity, for example, has seen remarkable growth of late across the world on multiple continents and in many diverse countries, in Africa (McClendon, 2017; Jenkins, 2011), China (Aikman, 2006), and Latin America (Freston, 2008), despite those regions being miles apart physically, varied ethnically, and widely divergent culturally. While homebound religious groups still experience local grievances that foreign sympathizers or believers simply aren't a part of, by constructing their identity and the group's ideology around a faith that can be shared with those in other regions, this builds a connection between faith adherents no matter the location. And extremist groups may logically attempt to exploit that in-group connection and emphasize or incorporate a religious ideology in order to reach wider pools of recruits beyond borders. Creating a kinship with foreigners in other parts of the world can help spark people into support situations or even recruit potential fighters. By opening doors to other parts of the world through religion, this allows people to view grievances of their brethren as their own; they identify with these individuals across the world and can begin to feel that grievance too, even if it's only emotionally felt from afar. Especially if they have a difficult time assimilating in their current location, that lack of a sense of belonging can lead them to find community elsewhere and appropriate grievances of religious kin as their own. We've observed this occur in many locales, from Africa to Europe, but one example from the United States is the disproportionately high rate of individuals from Minnesota leaving to join groups like al-Shabaab in Somalia (House Homeland Security Committee Report, 2011), but also ISIS in Syria (Ibrahim, 2017)

Finally, as touched on previously, other types of groups whose identity is rooted heavily in understanding and experiencing local grievances—secular nationalists seeking to secede from their state or targeted ethnic discrimination, for example—are less likely to generate that same

level of appeal abroad. And even if they do generate sympathy from, say, an ex-pat community of shared kinsmen who simply live in another state, the connection is still unlikely to be as strong due to the lack of grasp of local history and local issues, concrete issues that the ideology has been focused around. When an ideology is rooted in local grievances or discrimination more so than an ideological focus on something more inward—like religious identity—it's more challenging to convince people who don't share those local grievances of the validity of your goals and tactics, and especially to radicalize them in support. You might draw sympathizers due to shared ethnic or nationalist qualities, but moving them from sympathy to a tolerance for—or support of—violence toward that end is a whole other level. But finding connections with others who share a religious ideology that encompasses global goals, harbors theological arguments for violence, etcetera, can promote kinship in ways that locally-specific concerns simply do not.

Social media platforms permit these types of connections across borders and abroad. By taking advantage of a potential religious kinship that already exists—or might exist—organizations are able to manipulate people and engender shared grievances even in populations that are not personally experiencing the grievance themselves. By constructing a group identity surrounding religious identity, people are more likely to identify with religious brothers and sisters elsewhere and appropriate their grievances, persecution, and other problems as their own, particularly if they are already in a vulnerable situation due to lack of assimilation, more mild forms of persecution, discrimination, or something similar. This allows for radicalization, pushing individuals toward more and more extreme feelings and the more a group can encourage self-isolation from their immediate society and draw them into the online community of fellow believers on social media, they can draw their beliefs further and further from the mainstream and into the extreme. Groups therefore who are able to claim any religious component for their

organizational ideology should be more likely to utilize Twitter, and other social media platforms, to reach these people, further their radicalization by transferring grievance feelings, and potentially even recruit them into the group.

Alliance Networks

Ideological identity also closely ties to another characteristic that can help to classify organizations, the size of the its network of alliances. Sometimes, groups who are fighting for similar goals in different localities or even regions of the world will construct a relationship with one another, which potentially opens up many opportunities for each side. This can be chances for recruiting new members and finding more various types of support, material or otherwise. The size, shape, and dynamics of the networks they create have been shown to affect the survivability and success of the organizations involved (Sageman, 2004), so there is incentive to build these networks, and terror networks of the last couple decades have helped groups act more fluidly and adapt to changing environments more effectively (Sageman, 2008). In fact, many groups have even sought to disaggregate from strict, fully-autonomous hierarchies and moved into more decentralized webs or networks (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 2001). Whether multiple separate groups pledging allegiance to one another, groups sharing resources and arms training, or—like today's iteration of al-Qaeda, for example, which differs greatly from the al-Qaeda of the early 2000s—designed into pockets of franchised, semi-autonomous units that operate more bottom-up, according to a set of principles, but without strong central command (Gunaratna, 2002), this concept of networking has become a way to spread ideology and cover more territory with recruits and support systems. Some groups have chosen to pursue this networked organizational practice extensively and constructed large, elaborate spiderwebs of alliances and

allegiances, while other groups have elected to just focus locally within their own organization and not build those wider networks.

While ideology can be viewed as a more informal relationship between groups, the cross-border connection that groups utilize to attract sympathy, support, and recruits also applies to formal associations and alliance networks. While much recent research on terrorist groups assumes groups operate in isolation, this is not always the case as organizations often appear interested in forming networks by building "official" relationships with other groups, whether that takes the form of verbally pledging allegiance, sharing resources, or engaging in mutual training. Groups don't necessarily exist in mere isolation; they form links to others, either those situated locally or those similar ideologically from afar. These linkages outside the primary organization may often—though don't always—span national or state boundaries as well (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 2001). And there remains strong incentive for groups like this to work together, even if they have different long-term goals to pursue, in obtaining new skills, capabilities, or knowledge, which can result in clustering around central, hub-organizations (Bacon, 2018). Terror is traditionally argued to be a weapon of the weak, so building these relationships serves to strengthen weak organizations in some manner. Through crafting formal alliances with one another, it opens up opportunities to reach more people, more avenues of support, more resources, and builds up the organization. This are all provided opportunities that can be exploited to maximum effect through social media, once an alliance has first opened up that door.

Groups like Hezbollah and Al-Shabaab have constructed massive and sweeping financial networks to raise funds, much like a transnational crime syndicate, with high levels of trust and often kinship relationships holding them together (Leuprecht & Walther, 2018). Alliances with

other outside groups may create or amplify the desire to reach out to these new allied-partners and their base of supporters. This increases opportunities for recruitment and other forms of support by opening up access to a new pool of potential supporters, the members and sympathizers of the ally. When they lack direct channels to external support through allies—unlike the connection a group has with their own supporters—it is rational that they would seek to lean on less direct avenues of communication like social media accounts and posts to reach those individuals. Having alliances with outside organizations solidifies the belief a group can connect with people elsewhere as well, which builds confidence and can spur the action of reaching out to them. In other words, the argument for the connection between alliance networking and social media presence/activity is about access and opportunity; by building these external networks, organizations are able to increase their overall access to new pools of supporters. Ultimately, alliances are about making available new lines of connection, which social media can then be used to access.

  While this argument focuses on radical and violent organizations, we actually see this behavior manifest itself among non-extremist groups as well. Think of what happens during election cycles here in the United States. Young, inexperienced candidates and campaigns—those that do not yet possess wide networks of supporters that they can use to raise funds—will often reach out to the more established candidates who have spent years building databases of supporters, or simply the more well-known candidates. They're looking for some measure of support through an official, public statement of endorsement. When former President Barack Obama offers his endorsement of a young 'nobody' candidate, someone that the average American hasn't even heard of in some regional or district battle for office, that gives the new up-and-coming candidate a much wider pool of supporters to draw on and contact for pledges. It

raises their profile, solidifies their legitimacy in the eyes of the public, and allows them to expand their fundraising for support. It tells Obama's supporters that this new player shares their ideas, their preferences, and thus, may deserve their support as well. Without that "alliance" with Obama, the candidate would simply lack the resources and ability to reach certain individuals, but with his endorsement, they are able to tap into his vast connections and influence to increase their support pool for monetary support, as well as their recruiting pool for volunteers. And when this happens between two groups or candidates that are both still campaigning for office, both sides can potentially benefit by being able to reach each other's supporters more readily.

Alliances can be seen as an effort at recruiting support, in and of themselves. This means that groups that show an interest in alliances may also have an interest in expanding their pools in other ways too and social media is a great, more-informal way to do that. Alliances create a similar cross-border appeal, much like the ideological relationship. Thus, it makes sense groups which show interest in cultivating formal relationships to outsiders and other organizations would also be interested in utilizing social media platforms to cultivate informal relationships with supporters they can't reach without the Internet-based method. Both tactical decisions serve similar purposes, to reach those in other areas to strengthen your own ranks, whether through adding members, resources, monetary funding, training, notoriety, or spreading ideology.

Now, this does raise a question about the direction of the relationship between these two variables. It's clear that both alliances and social media are similar, each about building new connections, but does an alliance cause the group to use more social media to reach those new supporters? Or does social media drive more alliances because they're able to reach more potential allies through the platform? And admittedly, it is rational to assume there may be a little bit of both mechanisms taking place here. Especially once platforms are established, the

connective ability to provide both possible supporters and allies could certainly emerge. However, the former argument still makes the most sense for the initial direction. The causal direction should favor the formal connection (alliances) leading to the informal (social media) because a formal relationship contains built-in connections and pools of support, whereas social media provides a lower potential for connective opportunities due to its uncertain nature. Creating a social media platform and posting on it is no guarantee that anyone will follow or connect with you, raising the level of uncertainty with that mechanism and favoring the alternative explanation of alliances leading to an increase in social media. Further, the diffusion of innovation theory explains that technology spreads faster when previously-established relationships already exist (Rogers, 1962), which also supports this directional arrow.

Rivalries

Along a similar line of argument, but at the other end of the 'connection spectrum' from alliances, are rivalry relationships, a factor that drives a lot of competition between the various rivals over resources, territory, and support. In both cases—alliance and rivalry—the question is about opportunity and finding new clusters of supporters and/or recruits; allies provide opportunity to communicate with new pools of potential support, while rivals force groups to seek out those pools themselves. Most analysis of terrorist groups that look at intergroup interactions—the few that actually don't assume groups operate in isolation—have focused on the cooperative element (Asal, Ackerman, & Rethemeyer, 2012). But having rivalries, even violent ones, have also been shown to positively correlate with terrorist group longevity (Phillips, 2015). In other words, having a rival actually suggest that a group will survive longer than one that operates in isolation. There are multiple reasons posited for this. Having a rival

inspires innovation and incentive for groups to work harder to build and strengthen themselves, in order to better compete. This is a reaction to competition, a phenomenon familiar to many in other areas of literature and research as well. When you're forced to compete in order to simply survive, you work harder to ultimately perform better when pitted against your competitor. And when competing locally with other groups or organizations for resources, terrorist organizations see their pool of potential recruits and resources shrink because the total of what is available is spread out across multiple groups now instead of being monopolized by the only extremists in town. They run the risk of losing recruits, of losing material support locally. This means the group may need to look elsewhere to keep up a similar level of support.

Further, when faced with competition locally from other extremist organizations, it has been shown previously in the literature that terrorist groups frequently will engage in what's called outbidding behavior as a way to stand out to the people in comparison to their rival (Kydd & Walter, 2006). Outbidding is one of the five identified primary strategies of costly terrorism signaling. This strategic behavior is designed for the purpose of communicating to the general public things like a deeper internal resolve or strength capability, or to gain more recognition and notoriety among the civilian population and potential supporters. One such possibility when faced with an extremist competitor is to moderate your views or belief system to try to capture the middle ideological segment of society, something we do see occur with political candidates in elections in democracies (Gruber, 2012), a concept demonstrated through the median voter theorem. However, some research shows this specific behavior toward moderation may actually inhibit progress toward a group's overall goals (Tezcür, 2011), because it communicates a lack of dedication and seriousness for one's radical beliefs. And for terrorist organizations, moderation is even less useful because once a group has a reputation as a particularly extremist organization,

especially if they've already engaged in violent activity, moving back toward the mainstream runs the risk of losing the respect of your current supporters and engendering suspicion among anyone you're hoping to reach now. And it normally doesn't end up capturing as much of the moderates as they'd hope, because that reputation precedes them. Especially in these cases, moderation as a means to gain support simply isn't possible for radical groups because it can demonstrate less resolve and/or capability, so instead they commit to their extremism through outbidding and moving further from mainstream ideas.

However, in doing so, these organizations in competition move further from the mean ideological position of their area's more moderate population. They up resolve and demonstrate dedication toward their supporters, but it can cost them even further among the moderates in broader society or even among other fringe believers who might have been supporters otherwise, but dislike the move outward—or who agree ideologically, but don't support the violent behavior. This means that, as a group is pushed to move outward ideologically, it will also likely need to explore and find novel, innovative ways to generate that same level of support, finances, and recruits they would have garnered in the absence of competition by an outside organization or rival. In other words, in addition to a shrinking pool of resources, competition among these groups drives an extremist ideological push and a need for outside support in order to compensate for what is being lost through the presence of a local area, or ideological, rival.

There may be multiple avenues for generating that additional support for groups, but one such action that is seen as easy and low-cost is moving online into social media communities. Social media allows for precisely that by expanding the potential pool of resources—material, human, or otherwise—outside the local vicinity. This expands to other areas of the home country, other parts of the world, and new populations, which can give a group a leg-up in

dealing with a rival. And it manages to accomplish this without adding much to the overall cost that the group puts into the tactic. Social media is a relatively low-cost, low-effort method to find and generate support and recruits in more disparate regions they would have struggled to reach otherwise. And regardless of whether one's rival also engages in social media recruiting, it makes sense the organization would have incentive to do so on their own. In fact, if the rival group is, in fact, using social media, that may force your hand even further into the medium simply to keep up. Thus, groups in competition with a rival (or even more than one rival) should prove more likely to choose to pursue some form of social media strategies to reach more people, whether they're seeking monetary or material support, or new recruits for membership. The more rivals that exist, the more a tactic like creating and utilizing a social media presence would prove beneficial to them and provide external value to an organization struggling with diminishing or fractured resources within their local area or community. Therefore, as the number of non-state rivalries for organizations increases, the amount of inter-group competition and risk of losing local support increases, and the incentive to embrace social media platforms, both for organizational legitimization and for finding new pools of support, also rises, creating a clear deterministic causal direction for this particular decision-making mechanism.

This means both allies and rivals—each a form of interaction with another organization, yet with opposite purposes—produce similar outcomes for social media engagement, yet for different reasons. In the first case above, allies naturally produce new opportunities for the organization through endorsement and permitting access to their supporters and sympathizers, but in the latter situation, rivalries increase competition for local resources and support, which force the organization into needing to uncover, and/or create, those opportunities on their own. This means that we see a sort of curvilinear association when it comes to forming relationships

with other groups. At both ends of the spectrum, we see terrorist groups more likely to engage on social media to either take advantage of, or create, new connections, but in the middle—when the organization lacks both formal allies and rivals—there is no endorsement providing built-in access to new support pools, but there also exists less need to seek them out on your own. In other words, while both positive ally relationships and negative rival ones produce similar social media engagement results, the mechanisms and reasons driving those behaviors differ.

In summary, three things are addressed in this theoretical framework — ideological identity, opportunity through alliance networks, and competition through rivalry— that together can lead to terrorist organizations choosing to engage on social media. Terrorist organizations that possess a religious ideology with cross-border appeal are likely to want to cultivate those connections. And similarly, by building formalized alliances with outside organizations, that opens more opportunities for reaching new pools of support and recruits. I also expect groups that have non-state rivals to exhibit competitive behavior and feel the need to find new avenues of support to make up for the divided local pool they share with their competitor. Three primary hypotheses follow from the theoretical framework discussed above.

H1: Religious terrorist groups, compared to secular groups, will be more likely to create and utilize social media platforms as tools for recruitment and radicalization.

H2: Terrorist groups with larger alliance networks to outside organizations, compared to groups with small—or no—networks, will be more likely to build and utilize social media platforms as a tool for recruitment and radicalization.

H3: Terrorist groups with more rivals/non-state opponents, as opposed to those with few—or no—rivals, will be more likely to build and utilize social media platforms as a recruitment and radicalization tool.

In this chapter, I have examined three crucial theoretical variables that I use to explain why certain extremist groups choose to embrace social media platforms, cultivating their presence and utilizing its tools, and other groups choose not to do so. This fills a gap in the extant literature about the causes that drive the initial choice to embrace social media; by focusing on the mechanisms that lead up to the move online, I am exploring the pre-decision variables whereas previous research has mostly focused on post-decision effects and the methods utilized while already on social media. I argue that the decision-making process upfront is a strategic, rational choice when organizations are able to use their ideology's appeal abroad to attract support and recruits, want to explore new opportunities and pools of support through formal allies that act as endorsements and create new ties, and are competing for resources with a local rival.

In the next chapter, I discuss those three primary hypotheses, the group selection methodology, and the various operational measures for each of the dependent and independent variables. Then, in Chapter Four, I quantitatively test them through a regression analysis to evaluate the influence of these identified variables on a dataset of 25 terrorist organizations over the period between 2006 and 2016.

Chapter Three: Research Design

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I posited three variables theoretically as causally-related to social media engagement, backed up by existing literature and research, for predicting social media presence and usage, and detailed specific mechanisms for how they operate. The identified variables are: ideological identity—specifically religious ideologies, opportunity through alliance networking, and rivalry-induced competition. Ideological identity works through the cross-border, international appeal of certain ideologies—less tied to specific grievances—connecting people in far-flung places that can be contacted, radicalized, and recruited into an organization through online social media. Alliance networking opens up opportunities to connect to your allies supporters/sympathizers, giving the organization a new pool of potential recruits and supporters that they can use social media to reach. And rivalries shrink the pool of local resources—material and human, inducing competitive behavior in organizations and raising the incentive to find outside sources for that lost resource of support, and one such method to do so is through the utilization of social media. Out of that theoretical chapter emerged multiple, specific hypotheses about the relationship between these three causal, independent variables and the dependent variables, measured by using the Twitter platform. So the next step in the project is to empirically test these variables to determine whether or not the theoretical models put forward in Chapter Two actually hold up in a real-world environment, with real extremist organizations. This hypothesis testing ultimately takes shape on two fronts, a quantitative methodology followed by one qualitative approach. First, the quantitative analysis on the data was performed, for which data was collected and placed into a new dataset of twenty-five terrorist organizations. The methods of group selection and data collection are explained below.

Group Selection

To test the hypotheses posited in Chapter Two, the first step involves data collection on terrorist groups. The meaning of the word 'terrorism' today has proven difficult to define, by political scientists and policymakers alike, as no universally accepted standard truly exists in literature. Many have attempted to create one, but it has been a struggle to settle on one definition. Each attempt generally sees considerable overlap with guerrilla groups, insurgency, and/or paramilitary militias. Still, Bruce Hoffman posited one of the most widely utilized definitions and the closest thing we have to being universal, so this is what will be utilized here. According to Hoffman (2006), terrorism is "the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change." I chose this definition because it is both necessarily broad to make sure to encompass as many groups as possible while also being definitive and specific enough to be meaningful. And while it is known states and governments can—and have—engaged in the same type of activities typically classified as terrorism, for the purposes of this project, only groups labeled "non-state" are included in my analysis. This is due to governments and non-state organizations necessarily have different resources, capabilities, and aims, making their avenues and techniques for recruitment distinct from one another. So to avoid conflating two completely unique recruiting tools, state actors who directly engage in similarly violent activities will be excluded.

For the purposes of this project, I am defining a terrorist organization as any distinct non-state group that utilizes violence—or the threat of violence—in strategic pursuit of a political, religious, or social aim. In a perfect world, this dataset would include all terrorist organizations across the globe, over the entire time period since Twitter went online for public usage, which would encompass over six hundred groups. However, due to data limitations with gathering

social media usage of many groups and the nature of social media itself—with many accounts being shut down shortly after creation, a true large-N dataset was impossible to collect at this point (though may, indeed, be grounds for a larger research project in the future). This is unfortunately, a limitation of the research. Instead, an analysis of fewer groups was used for basic regression analysis and to serve as a launching point to select particular groups for more in-depth analyses. In other words, this initial examination demonstrates the overall concept and purpose of the project while serving to support the underlying theory.

In order to accomplish this step, twenty-five groups were selected for this analysis. I wanted to maximize the relevancy and applicability of the project in today's world for policymakers, counter-terrorism experts, and political scientists who may seek to use any conclusions of this research to take action. So it was decided that the best way to explore the groups that have carried the most impact for the world under the social media era would be to examine groups according to how deadly they have been—how many people they have killed, at least over the lifespan of Twitter's existence. By focusing on group lethality, any conclusions that emerge would be applicable toward groups that are causing the most cost to overall human life. So by utilizing data on attacks from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), first sorted by group and then tallied into total deadly casualty counts, groups were ranked in terms of their overall lethality—the total number of deaths for which they are responsible, over the time period for evaluation, 2006-2016. This is the time span for which data exist since Twitter was first released as a public platform. By evaluating the top 25 most lethal terrorist groups since the initial advent of Twitter, this project can focus on examining the most impactful and relevant organizations in this new social media-present world. This means that any results and better understanding

gleaned from this project should prove particularly useful to counter-terrorism analysts and policymakers, leading to policies that are effective at reducing overall terror casualties.

A full description of the dataset will be included in the next chapter, but this sample of the 25 most lethal terrorist groups includes a solid mix of both religious and secular organizations, as well as includes group numbers, rivalries, and other relevant information too. The groups included in the dataset range from the globally prominent Islamic State (ISIS, ISIL, etc.) at the top to the lesser-known Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), a militant group that fights for liberation in Darfur and Kurdufan, Sudan. This dataset will allow me to adequately test the hypotheses established in Chapter Two. Because these groups were gleaned from the GTD, there were a few groups included in their dataset that had to be omitted from this initial regression dataset because they didn't fit this project's definition of a terrorist organization. These omitted groups included two proto-states that don't meet our definition for a terrorist organization because, despite their occasional tactics and formally unrecognized status, they operate more as state than non-state entities (Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics); militia coalitions and loose affiliations that don't meet the criteria for being a distinct terrorist group (Houthis, Free Syrian Army, Fulani extremists, Anti-Balaka militia, etc.); and groups that only existed for a small fraction of the utilized time-frame in which Twitter was active, making them largely irrelevant to the dependent variable (LTTE, Islamic Front in Syria, Ansar al-din). After these groups have been analyzed as a full dataset, those data will serve to inform the selection of three groups for more in-depth, detailed case studies to explore the causal stories and mechanisms driving the social media decisions.

Dependent Variables

While social media now encompasses many different platforms and a wide variety of forms and styles, this project examines Twitter specifically, one of the most popular sites in this genre, as a proxy for all social media. Twitter is a unique platform designed for online news sharing, social networking, and communication and it's one that has been utilized extensively by organizations—radical and non-radical—around the world. It's obvious that plenty of other social networking sites get play by terrorist organizations, from Facebook to YouTube to Tumblr to Reddit, all potentially serving different functions for the organization, but it's the public-facing Twitter feeds that I believe serves as the best way to examine overall usage. While groups do diversify their online portfolio, Twitter's public feed—something you don't even need an account to access, its ubiquitousness, its speed of communication, ease of use, and other features make it a tempting method of reaching people and it serves as a much more public face for groups than many other media platforms. It's also easier to track usage because even private accounts—ones with blocked feeds—still have their basic profile and presence visible to the public.

This project examines two aspects of terrorist organizations on social media, both their presence and their activity. While there is obviously a relationship between the two, presence and activity still measure slightly different things and capture unique elements of a group's communication goals. By building a mere social media presence, an organization provides a landing spot for individuals obtained through indirect recruiting, anyone curious about the organization, and it also provides a sense of legitimacy. Fair or not, having even a basic presence on the Internet gives a group an authority and influence because they are seen as "real" in the eyes of the public and potential recruits and social media platforms are simple, cheap ways to garner that validity for them. So many groups have embraced Twitter and it's already proved its

effectiveness in many cases, with the Islamic State famously leading the way, but plenty of

others enjoying its benefits as well. By building or creating accounts, profiles, and garnering

followers, these organizations are able to accomplish something and induce interest merely

through existing.

However, some groups go further than this, electing to not merely exist online for the

sake of legitimacy, but to cultivate that presence and utilize the site in a more active capacity.

They send tweets, interact with followers, rivals, potential recruits, news organizations, and other

accounts. This level of activity shows a dedication to the platform and to the method of social

media usage that mere presence—a low-cost, low-effort endeavor—does not. By electing to not

only maintain a presence, but to also actively use the site shows a commitment to online

propaganda, recruitment, and radicalization efforts. They are not just "keeping with the times"

and creating the website for legitimacy, but they actually hope to accomplish something through

their embrace of the new media as well. Because of these two different aspects to social media

engagement, this project collected data on and approached each component separately, to

determine whether the independent variables have any relationship to both creating a presence on

Twitter, but also actively participating on the platform. This is reflected in the tested hypotheses

by breaking each of the three primary ones from the end of the last chapter into two segments,

one hypothesis testing presence and a second one testing activity.

For Twitter presence, two distinct variables are used. The first variable is a simple count

of number of accounts on Twitter, by group, that could be identified during this time period. This

is difficult to tackle, but data were taken from a variety of sources, news articles, reports, peer-

reviewed research, and occasionally a simple search on Twitter as well. This number represents a

rough snapshot in time, as a collapsed time variable, where all accounts over the entire period are

combined into a single number. However, because Twitter sometimes shuts down accounts before they can be logged and reported somewhere else, this variable should not—and truly, can not—be treated as 100% precise. Because of that, and because a couple groups showed account totals that numbered much higher than the rest, causing potential for skewing the data, a second variable was created for social media presence that is ordinal. This variable ranks groups on a scale from 0 to 5. If no accounts could be found, they would be coded as a '0' and if a group had only one or two accounts on Twitter, that is coded as a '1' to demonstrate a very simple presence. This usually meant there was a single account to represent the entire organization or one of their primary leaders also possessed an account. From there, two to five accounts would show a commitment to the platform, but likely only for a few leaders within the organization, so is coded as a '2'. This also could represent an organization with more than one wing, with an account for each branch. Next, five to fifty accounts demonstrates more proliferation of the platform beyond the immediate leadership and into the general membership and is coded as a '3'. Any groups that have over fifty accounts demonstrates an extreme commitment to having a social media presence for a larger proportion of their membership and has been divided into two levels, with between fifty and one hundred accounts coded as a '4', and anything over 100 accounts showing a full embrace of the platform and coded as a '5'.

For Twitter activity, a subjective, ordinal variable is used due to the difficulty in capturing tweets over time as well as the unknown—and inaccessible—number of deleted tweets and accounts. This variable will be based around observable activity on Twitter itself (if possible, depending on the group), as well as past reports, news articles, and other sources that discuss group activity online. A list of all additional sources can be found in the Appendix. While this prevents the project from utilizing activity as a true longitudinal variable, at least at this time, this

will create an educated and evidence-based estimate in places where the exact measurements are simply impossible to collect at this point. The amount of activity will then be ranked on a scale of 0 to 3. In this scale, '0' will indicate no activity at all, which will mostly be reserved for groups with no presence on the platform, but might also represent a group that created an account, yet never utilized it. A score of '1' is used to indicate low levels of activity on Twitter and often long periods of time between tweets—a few days to weeks at a time, virtually no engagement with other accounts beyond the possible occasional response, and/or very few 'media' postings (imagery, video, and/or links to websites) with a focus on pure text posts. A '2' indicates a moderate level that showed consistent Tweeting activity and engagement with other accounts but not necessarily daily or even weekly, and a '3' will indicate high levels of activity with daily tweets, across multiple accounts, repeated engagement with other accounts on the site—both sympathetic and opposing, a commitment to different types of imagery/video in their messaging, etc. Because many of the accounts we are dealing with have long since been deleted/banned by Twitter itself, it is impossible to get precise numbers for these categories for many organizations—as has been previously explained—so in these cases, I am relying on reports about activity from other sources (Appendix).

Independent Variables

To measure the identified critical drivers of social media presence and usage, three primary independent variables were examined for their relationship to the organization's Twitter platform, as well as their Twitter activity. These variables are: group ideology, alliance network size, and number of rivalries. These three particular variables were selected to represent the

previously theoretically-identified causal drivers of identity, opportunity through connection, and competition.

Identity is operationalized through group ideology. An organizational identity is particularly important to a group because it provides justification for their existence and weighs heavily into their ability to reach people and recruit new members. This is frequently depicted in terrorism studies literature, in political science, and in the media as 'ideology'. While ideology almost certainly oversimplifies the entirety of an organization's full motivation and belief system, it provides a good starting point for understanding how a group portrays itself to the world and how others outside view them. And to a counter-terrorism analyst, understanding a group's ideology helps you to grasp how both the leaders and fighters view themselves and to predict an organization's future actions based on those self-identities. So while ideology is likely not comprehensive in comprising the entire identity—private and public—of the members inside an organization, it provides a useful place to start by representing their public identity. This variable is taken and broken down from a variety of sources, including the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), but it primarily comes from the Big, Allied, and Dangerous (BAAD) dataset through the START program at the University of Maryland (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2015). The BAAD dataset contains data on hundreds of terrorist and rebel organizations and sorts them based on ideology. Other sources can be found in Appendix. Because the theoretical causal story predicts a connection between religious identity/ideology and social media usage, there will be two variables utilized to evaluate this causal driver. The first variable is simply a measurement of whether the ideology has any religious component at all, whether fully or simply a partial component. Any group with a religious orientation to their ideology is coded as a '1' and any organization with no religious component at all is coded as a '0'. The second variable provides

more nuance to account for any differences between those partial-religious ideologies and fully-religious ideologies. Groups categorized as Religious are coded as '2', Partial Religious as a '1', and Not Religious as a '0'.

For the second independent variable, opportunity through connection, this project tackles it by operationalizing the variable as alliance network size, to represent the causal driver. Alliances are a formalized version of connections and open up groups to new opportunities— from new regions to which they previously lacked access, to new pools of support and recruits. Through these connections, they can recruit people, funds, materials, and other forms of support. Formally for this project, an alliance is defined as groups that work together in one way or anything, in some sort of collaborative relationship in which both sides believe they are benefitting. The number of alliances a group has, as a count variable, comprises its alliance network size. Most of these data are drawn from the Asal-Rethemeyer alliance dataset, part of the BAAD dataset through START (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2015). However, this dataset ends in 2012 (for some variables, it ends in 2005), so groups have been updated to include any obvious changes to these numbers in the years since the data ended. This would include any newly-formed groups that were created since the dataset concluded or any major alterations to the group's overall alliance network. As one example, in recent years, a couple terrorist organizations have pledged their allegiance to the Islamic State in a formal alliance setting, but due to the newness of the pledge, they would not have been counted in the original dataset, so this would require updating to include the new alliance. These updated numbers have been gathered from a variety of open-source, publicly-available materials, including news articles, secondary source materials, etcetera (See the Appendix).

Finally, as a means to represent competition, this project operationalizes this variable as the number of rivalries a terrorist organization possesses. For this project, rivalries are defined as groups that compete against, attempt to equal or outdo each other, or dispute each other's superiority. Rivalries are a different form of connection than alliances, at the other end of the spectrum, but unlike allies which provide opportunities, having a rival drives competitive behavior between the two groups, whether competing for material resources, territory, recruits, or anything else. And, as the theory explains, having competition increases both the need and desire to seek out new sources of support and resources in order to adequately compete. This is a count variable, looking at the specific number of rivals that the group has had. This data was formed out of the Asal-Rethemeyer dataset part of BAAD, but like alliances, it has been updated to include any new groups or major changes to their number out of open-source material. For example, ISIS is coded in BAAD as only having one rival, but clearly has created several more opponents and rivals out of rebel/terrorist groups in the years since that dataset ended, so their number has been updated to include those new rivalries. See the Appendix for a list of these sources.

In addition, three different constant variables have been included in each of the various models to test the explanatory variables: organizational age, organizational size, and territorial control. There were some groups not included in the initial BAAD dataset, so information on these organizations was collected separately from various online sources. The appendix lists these sources. However, an entry was able to be gathered for every one of the twenty-five groups in the dataset, so no data was missing or had to be dropped because of these controls.

The first control is organizational age, included to make sure that social media is not influenced by groups going through an online phase after having been established and using

traditional radicalization and recruitment methods for a certain length of time. Having been

established for a long period of time might trigger more creativity in methodologies or online

media usage may simply be a phase that groups go through at a certain point in their history, so I

want to ensure there is no age component impacting the results. This variable is a simple count of

the number of years a group has existed from its founding until 2018 (or in a couple rare cases,

until the group was disbanded/defeated). This was taken from the BAAD dataset (Asal &

Rethemeyer, 2015), with a couple organizations needing to be sourced from other materials

(Appendix).

The second control is organizational size, to control for whether the foray into social

media is influenced by how large a group gets. As groups grow larger, they have more members

within the organization who may become interested in creating social media accounts and

utilizing them for group purposes and they have more people they can spare for different tactics,

so I want to ensure that organizational size isn't influencing the results. This control is

operationalized as a numerical code, from '0' to '3' with intervals. I have chosen to utilize the

same data and interval measurements for this coding that the BAAD dataset (Asal &

Rethemeyer, 2015) chose to use. Here, a '0' means the group's size lies between 0-100 members,

or we have very low confidence in the assessment of their size. A '1' means they have between

100 and 1,000 members. A '2' indicates an overall size between 1,000 and 10,000. And finally, a

'3' means their membership is 10,000 or greater.

Finally, I controlled for whether or not a group controls any territory, using data from the

BAAD dataset (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2015). This is a basic binary, categorical variable, with '1'

used to indicate that the organization does/did hold territory during this time period and a '0' to

mean that they do/did not. This variable is being used to control for any potential influence that

having a stable location over which they rule has on their embrace of this online tactic. A stable

location could also provide stable Internet access, which might influence their ability and desire

to build an Internet presence on social media, so it is important to control for this possibility.

In summary, in this chapter, I detailed the group selection process to prepare for the

upcoming quantitative analysis, based on organizations' overall lethality during the time period

of 2006 to 2016. I also described the various dependent and independent variables that are being

utilized in the project, as well as their operationalization for measurement and how they are

coded in the final dataset. This sets up the next chapter, where I describe the dataset in more

detail and discuss the basic statistics for each of the key variables in turn. Then, I discuss the

quantitative results and findings from the regression analysis for each of the variable models.

Finally, using the dataset, I explain the selection methods for choosing the three case studies that

will be examined qualitatively in more detail in later chapters.

Chapter Four: 25 Case Analysis

Introduction

As detailed in the research design in the previous chapter, the first step toward understanding this puzzle is a quantitative analysis of extremist groups from around the world. This allows for an understanding of the relationship between key, causally-identified independent variables and terrorist groups on social media and the dataset served as informative for selecting three groups for further, in-depth exploration. Moving forward, this chapter will detail that statistical analysis utilizing a dataset of the twenty-five most lethal terrorist organizations in the world. The group selection was explained in detail in Chapter Three, but the dataset is comprised of the most deadly terrorist groups over the Twitter-era period from 2006 to 2016. This analysis was performed with an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS)-regression method and generated several results, which will be explored in the following sections. For each of the three causal variables, a separate analysis was run with the control variables and reported below. A summary of the various descriptive statistics for the key variables, as well as the controls, used in the models can be examined in Table 1 below. While this is a quantitative analysis of only twenty-five cases, none of them had to be dropped for any of the models.

Table 1: Summary Statistics of Variables

variable	N	mean	sd	min	max
twipres1	25	1.72	1.45831	0	5
twitact	25	1.32	.9882645	0	3
ideology	25	.8	.8164966	0	2
partrelg	25	.56	.5066228	0	1
netwsize	25	5.96	7.435725	0	36
rivals	25	1.6	2.061553	0	9

Of particular note and before looking at the final dataset results, one particular aspect about the initial Twitter presence variable collected for this project emerged through the first round of descriptive statistics and should be mentioned. As suspected, the initial variable for Twitter presence showed significant skew in the data, with a skewness of slightly over 2.61. This variable was simply a count of the number of accounts owned and operated by the terrorist organization. This is likely due to the Islamic State and Lashkar-e-Taiba having a much higher number of Twitter accounts than the rest of the organizations in the dataset. Because the sample size is only 25 groups, these two organizations had an outsized effect on the variable, causing the skew. So the second presence variable created, which rated organizations on a scale of 0 to 5 based on that number of groups, corrects for this issue and lowers the skewness statistic down below that acceptable level. Because of its more accurate representation, this secondary variable (seen in Table 1 as 'twipres1') was utilized throughout the project for further analysis and statistics.

There are three variables being tested for their relationship to social media presence/usage. The results from each will solidify a baseline understanding of how they factor into the overall decision-making process and will provide clarification on the usefulness for prediction by counter-terrorism analysts when new extremist organizations emerge. The first theoretical-identified variable is ideological identity. Identities that have an international appeal, with some sort of attractive quality that crosses borders and has less of a tie to local grievances or concerns should show more social media engagement because of these connections abroad. It was hypothesized that religious groups—which show more of that foreign appeal—will have a stronger correlation with both social media presence on Twitter, as well as usage of the platform.

The second key variable is the size of a group's alliance network. Theoretically, it was argued last chapter that having more formal connections to other groups—or allies—provides more opportunities for terrorist organizations to connect to potential supporters and sympathizers in other regions. An alliance provides at least an implied endorsement of each other, which opens the door to new potential pools to reach through social media for recruits and other forms of support. Because of this, it was hypothesized that as one's network of alliances grows, the more social media engagement groups will have, both in terms of their overall presence online and in the extent to which they utilize the platforms.

The final causal variable tested is rivalry. It was argued in Chapter Two that rivals for resources—human or material—drives competitive behavior between groups and shrinks the available pool of recruits and resources in a local area. This drives groups to radicalize further as a form of outbidding behavior and also pushes them to find new avenues further away to maintain their capabilities and continue to survive and thrive. One such avenue is through using social media to connect with possible sympathizers in more remote regions in order to compensate for what is being lost through the rivalry competition. Because of that, it was hypothesized that groups with more rivalries would also show more social media engagement.

After a brief description of the data, the next few sections will detail the results from the quantitative analysis on these three key variables and their relationship to social media.

Dataset Description

Before moving into the results of the quantitative analysis, first I want to examine some of the basic statistics and description of the dataset. The dataset is comprised of twenty-five terrorist organizations from around the globe, from the Middle East (Pakistan, Afghanistan,

Iraq), to Africa (Somalia, Uganda, Sudan, Nigeria, Rwanda, Chad, Congo), to Asia (India, Philippines), to South America (Colombia). But more groups hail from Africa than any other continent, headlined by some bigger names, like al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, but also includes the less well-known Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Janjaweed, from Sudan and Chad. Also, the grand majority of groups operate in the Eastern hemisphere with only FARC in the West.

Some of these groups included are nationalist movements, others are religious extremists, others are built around political ideologies. As one might expect given that we are in the middle of the so-called religious wave of terror, fourteen of the twenty-five groups have at least some religious component to their ideological belief system, while eleven are secular organizations fighting for nationalist, political, or ethnic motivations. Of note, I couldn't find a single group in the dataset with a religious component that had no social media engagement at all, but we do still find variation on this variable in the extent of the engagement online and in the amount of religiosity to their ideological makeup (partial or full).

In terms of the control variables, the organizations in the dataset range in age from the relatively young al-Nusrah Front at only seven-years-old to two groups that have hit the half century mark (New People's Army in the Philippines, and FARC in Columbia). The average length of existence in the dataset is 24.88 years, with a median of twenty-three years and a standard deviation of 12.28 years. We also see that virtually all of the groups predate the Twitter era, with only three that are thirteen-years-old or younger, which means that they have existed both with and without the possibility of social media recruitment and radicalization as a tactical choice.

Further, of the twenty-five groups included in the data, sixteen have used land control during this era—that is, holding territory as a tactic and not simply operating as guerrillas—while nine have not. And ten of the groups are quite large, with over 10,000 members. Eleven of them are between 1,000 and 10,000 in membership. And four groups are on the small side, having fewer than 1,000 fighters in their ranks.

The next few sections will detail the quantitative analysis results, as well as further descriptions of the key variables being examined.

Findings - Ideology

The first causal variable to be examined for the project is religious ideology and its correlation with twitter presence. Because of its cross-border applicability, a religious component to a group's belief system should theoretically provide greater opportunities to connect with sympathizers, possible recruits, and other forms of support in more far-flung parts of the world. Because of this, I expected to find a rise in the number of Twitter accounts, as well as increased activity on the platforms for groups that showed religious elements to their ideology. And, as noted in the previous chapter, this model is controlled for the age of the organization, the size of the organization, and whether or not the group uses territorial control as an operational tactic.

For ideology, the dataset was comprised of eleven different organizations with no religious component to their ideology, eight that had a partially religious ideology, and six whose ideology was fully religious in nature. Thus, roughly 44% of the groups show no systematic religious aspect to their belief system, while 56% are at least partially religious and have some sort of religious component, while 24% are fully religious, in nature. When evaluated in the models, the two different variables for ideology that I created and utilized showed no distinction;

it didn't appear to matter whether I treated religious ideology as a simple binary variable or if I separated the variable into three categories: non, partial, and full religious ideologies. Because the results didn't change either way, for the following analysis, I utilized the variable with separated coding for different levels of religiosity in their identity.

First, I utilized a cross tabulation to aggregate and visualize the distribution of data points between ideology and the social media dependent variables. This contingency table can be seen below in Table 2. By looking at this, one can clearly see a trend forming from the data. When examining those groups with no religious aspect to their belief system, over half of the organizations also show zero Twitter presence at all on the platform, with another third only having created one or two accounts. And all of the non-religious organizations in the dataset created five or fewer accounts. However, this starts to shift in the next category with partially religious beliefs, and when you look at the final category, groups with full religious ideologies, all have at least two accounts and over two-thirds have more than five. This supports the hypothesis from Chapter Two that religious identity—and by extension, the argument that an ideology with cross-border appeal—is associated with constructing a presence on social media.

Table 2: Crosstab of Twitter Presence by Ideology

Twitter Presence	Religious Ideology			Total
	None	**Partial**	**Full**	
None	6	0	0	6
	54.5%	0.0%	0.0%	
One or Two	4	1	0	5
	36.4%	12.5%	0.0%	
Two to Five	1	6	2	9
	9.1%	75.0%	33.3%	
Five to Fifty	0	0	2	2
	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	
Fifty to 100	0	0	1	1
	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	
100 or More	0	1	1	2
	0.0%	12.5%	16.7%	
Total	11	8	6	**25**

Pearson $\chi^2 = 27.284$, Pr $= 0.002$***

After examining the contingency table, I ran a regression analysis model, with the control characteristics included. In the social media presence model, I observed a correlation with a coefficient of 1.61 and p-value below 0.001 (Table 3). This demonstrates a positive relationship between the two tested variables, the same as was observed in the contingency table above; as we move from non-religious ideologies to partially religious and ultimately, to fully religious ideologies, there is a clear rise in the size of a group's online presence on Twitter's platform as more accounts are created. Because of the small-N in the dataset, we look at the value for adjusted R-squared and see that roughly 56.7% of the variance in the dependent variable, social media presence, can be explained by this particular model. The effect of this relationship is depicted in Figure 1, where having a religious ideology showed a positive, statistically significant effect on the extent of organizational presence on Twitter. However, none of the control variables included in the model show any statistical significance.

Table 3: Ideology

Variables	Social Media Presence	Adjusted R-Squared	Social Media Activity	Adjusted R-Squared
		0.5666		0.4614
Religious Ideology	1.612*** (0.292)		0.992*** (0.221)	
Organization Age	0.029 (0.019)		0.020 (0.014)	
Territorial Control	-0.037 (0.426)		0.182 (0.321)	
Organization Size	-0.392 (0.284)		-0.161 (0.215)	

Standard errors in parentheses
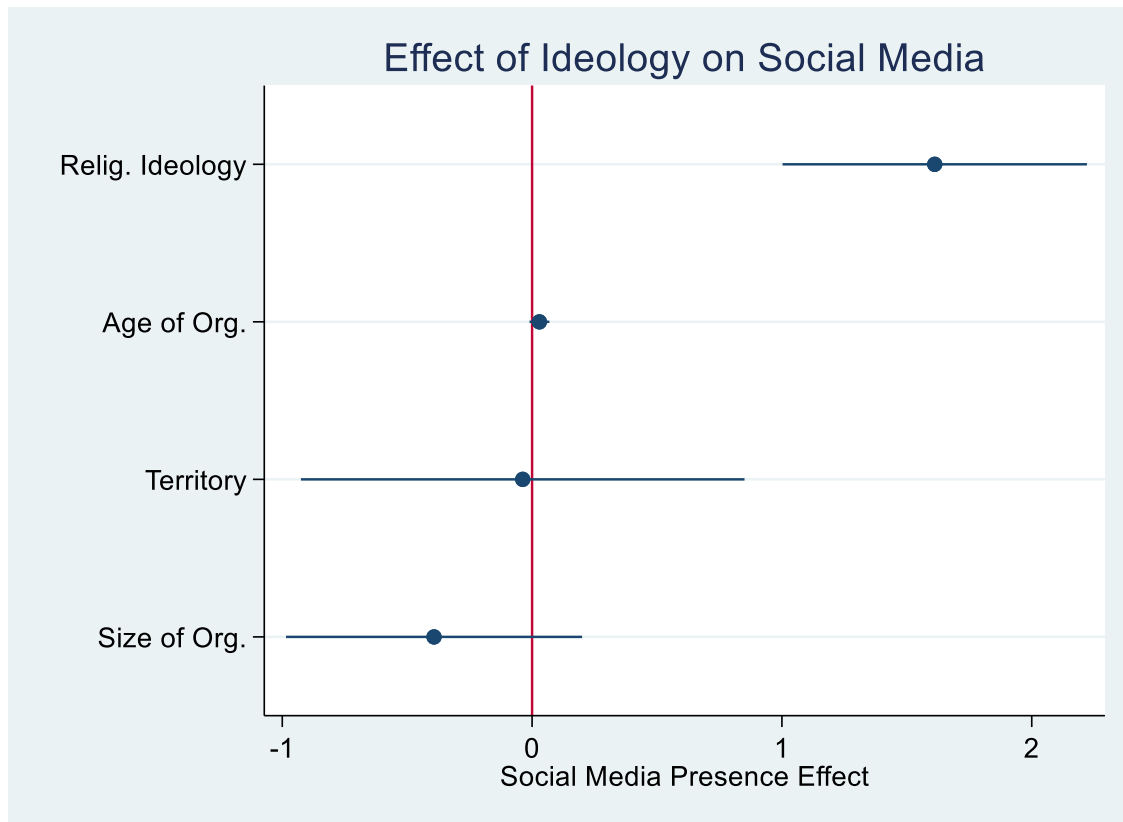*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

Figure 1: Effect of Ideology on Social Media Presence

Further, when we examine overall Twitter activity for groups, not just presence, we see a similar relationship with religious ideology. The cross tabulation is in Table 4. In this contingency table, we can visualize a trend emerging. As organizational ideology becomes more religious, activity on the social media platform also increases. Over fifty-percent of groups that show no religious component to their ideology also show zero Twitter activity, and another quarter show low activity on the platform, but by the time ideology becomes fully religious in nature, every group shows at least moderate activity on Twitter. This provides evidence for the hypothesis in Chapter Two that religious belief systems are associated with the extent to which groups engage on social media, with more tweets and more interactions with other accounts.

The Twitter activity variable shows a mean of 1.32 and a median of 1, which tells us that the average terrorist organization shows a 'weak', low level of activity on social media, even though the previous variable demonstrated the average group does have an account. Much like was initially expected, we also find a positive correlation in the quantitative regression analysis, with statistical significance at the 99% confidence level. The data shows a positive correlation between religious ideological identity and how much groups utilize social media platforms, also significant at the 99% confidence level. In this case, we see a coefficient of 0.992, with a P-value below 0.001 (Table 3). For the same reasons as above, we looked at the model's adjusted R-squared value, finding this activity model accounts for roughly 46.1% of the variance in the dependent variable. Thus, we ultimately find statistical support for both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 1b. We find that religious ideology does appear to predict both social media presence and social media usage. Groups with a religious component to their ideology—and the more religious the ideology becomes—are more likely to create a social media platform on Twitter and they are also more likely to utilize that platform. See Figure 2 to observe this effect.

Table 4: Crosstab of Twitter Activity by Ideology

Twitter Activity	Religious Ideology			Total
	None	Partial	Full	
None	6 54.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	6
Weak	3 27.3%	5 62.5%	0 0.0%	8
Moderate	2 18.2%	2 25.0%	4 66.7%	8
Strong	0 0.0%	1 12.5%	2 33.3%	3
Total	11	8	6	25

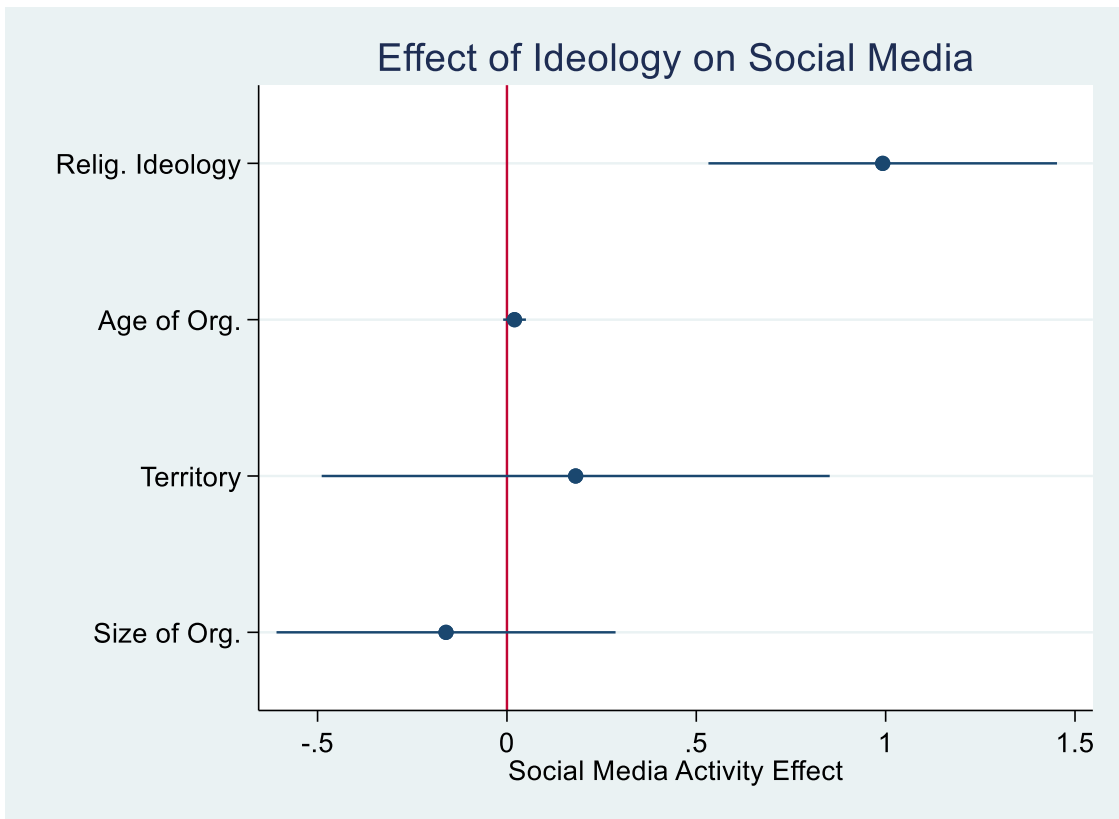Pearson χ^2 = 18.588, Pr = 0.005***

Figure 2: Effect of Ideology on Social Media Activity

Findings - Alliances

The second variable examined quantitatively is the size of an organization's alliance network, measured as a count of the number of allies the group has. The same Twitter presence and activity variables from the first causal model were also used here. The alliance network size argument was about providing greater opportunities for reaching people through formal connections to supportive groups, or allies. Thus, we expect to find a positive relationship between the number of alliances a group has and both their presence and activity on Twitter.

In terms of basic statistics for this variable, alliance network size, the data show an average of 5.96 alliances, with a standard deviation of 7.44. This means that the average terrorist organization has roughly six allies in their overall network. (However, if one was to remove al-Qaeda from the dataset, given its abnormally large network size of 36, the relative sizes of the other two become even more pronounced and deviated from the mean. In this case, the mean size drops to 4.7 alliances, with a standard deviation of only 4.1). Groups range from having zero allies (Janjaweed) to al-Qaeda at 36 alliances.

First, I utilized a crosstab to examine the data and visualize any trends. Because there isn't a value for every possible alliance number (e.g. there were no groups with nine allies), the data were sorted into groups (0-2 allies, 3-5 allies, 6-9 allies, and 10+ allies). Organized into a contingency table like this, a clear trend emerges. Among groups with two or fewer allies in their network, over sixty-percent showed zero Twitter presence and another thirty-percent had only one or two accounts on the platform. As we move toward more allies, Twitter presence also grows. Groups with at least three allies all had at least one or two accounts. Groups with between six and nine allies had at least three accounts and once you reach those with ten or more, sixty-percent had at least fifty Twitter accounts. This crosstab can be viewed in Table 5.

Table 5: Cross Tabulation of Twitter Presence by Alliance Network Size

Twit. Presence	Alliance Network Size				
	0-2	**3-5**	**6-9**	**10+**	**Total**
None	6 60.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	6
One or Two	3 30.0%	2 40.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	5
Three to Five	1 10.0%	3 60.0%	3 60.0%	2 40.0%	9
Five to Fifty	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 40.0%	0 0.0%	2
Fifty to 100	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 20.0%	1
100 or more	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 40.0%	2
Total	10	5	5	5	25

Pearson $\chi^2 = 87.917$, Pr $= 0.011$**

When run in the first model with the Twitter presence variable and the control variables, we observe there to be a statistically significant, positive correlation between alliance size and Twitter presence, with a P-value of 0.001, making it significant at the 99% confidence level (Table 6). None of the constants (organizational age, organizational size, or territorial control) showed any statistical significance here in this model. See Figure 3 to see this effect. This provides support for Hypothesis 2 and leads us to reject the null hypothesis of there being no relationship. Groups with more alliances to other organizations are more likely to construct Twitter profiles on social media. Further, with an adjusted R-squared value of 0.398, this means that roughly 39.8% of the variance in social media presence can be explained through this particular model.

Table 6: Network Alliance Size

Variables	Social Media Presence	Adjusted R-Squared 0.3980	Social Media Activity	Adjusted R-Squared 0.4364
Alliance Network	0.127*** (0.032)		0.089*** (0.021)	
Organization Age	-0.021 (0.019)		-0.011 (0.012)	
Territorial Control	0.359 (0.489)		0.413 (0.321)	
Organization Size	-0.378 (0.335)		-0.165 (0.212)	

Standard errors in parentheses
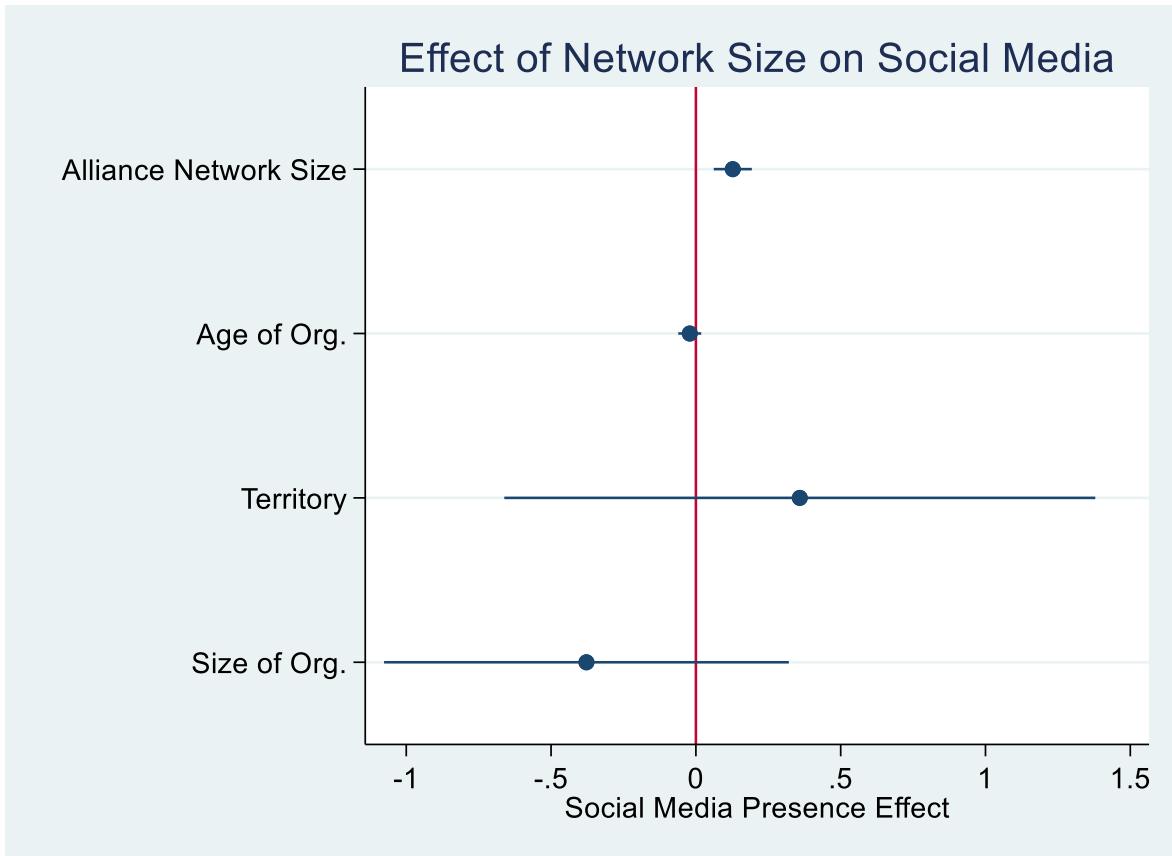*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 3: Effect of Alliance Network Size on Social Media Presence

In order to examine social media activity, I created another contingency table to observe any relationships emerging from the dataset. When visualized in this manner, another trend appeared. For organizations with two or fewer allies, sixty-percent had no activity at all on the platform and the rest showed only low engagement. As you move across the table, activity increases. For groups with between three and nine allies, all showed low or moderate activity, and by the time you reach those with ten or more alliances, sixty-percent demonstrate high levels of activity, with many tweets and interactions with other accounts. This crosstab is in Table 7.

Further, when run in the second model, with Twitter activity, we also find a statistically significant relationship with the size of an alliance network. Here, we see a coefficient of 0.089 and a P-value less than 0.001 (See Table 6), making it significant at the 99.9% confidence level. With an adjusted R-squared of 0.436, this model accounts for roughly 43.6% of the variance in Twitter activity. Figure 4 shows this effect. This provides evidence for Hypothesis 2b, causing us to reject the null hypothesis of no relationship. Groups with a larger network of alliances are more likely to utilize their social media profiles through active tweeting and engagement.

Table 7: Crosstab of Twitter Activity by Alliance Network Size

Twit. Activity	Alliance Network Size				
	0-2	3-5	6-9	10+	Total
None	6	0	0	0	6
	60.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
Weak	4	2	2	0	8
	40.0%	40.0%	40.0%	0.0%	
Moderate	0	3	3	2	8
	0.0%	60.0%	60.0%	40.0%	
Strong	0	0	0	3	3
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	60.0%	
Total	10	5	5	5	25

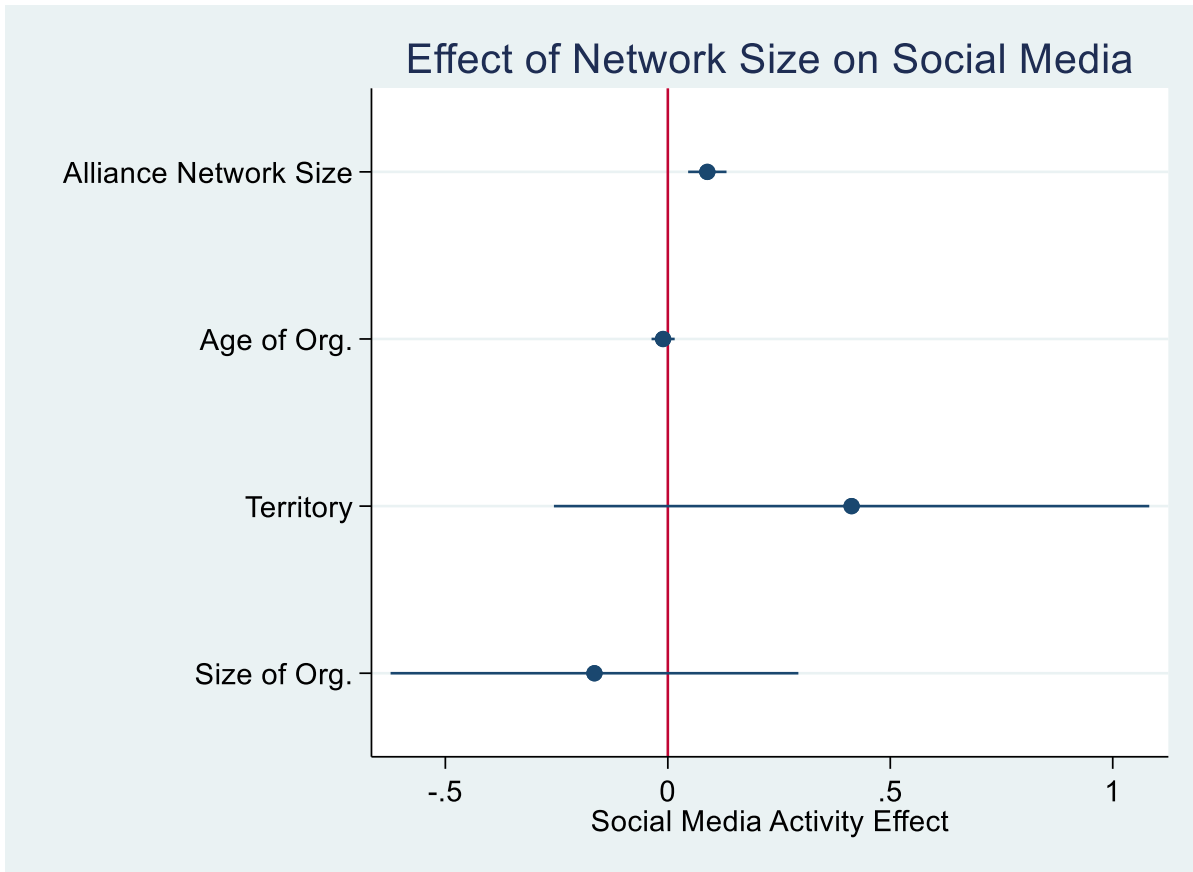Pearson χ^2 = 55.382, Pr = 0.020**

Figure 4: Effect of Alliance Network Size on Social Media Activity

Findings - Rivalries

The final causal variable examined quantitatively in this research project was rivalry, measured as a count of the number of non-state rivals a terrorist group has. Like both of the previous two causal variables, the same Twitter presence and Twitter activity variables were used (Table 1 provides a summary of those statistics if you need a reminder). The rivalry argument is about competition between groups over a shared pool of support and/or resources, including possible recruits. This should theoretically drive groups to seek out alternative sources of those assets, including social media tactics for recruiting and radicalizing.

The basic statistics from the dataset on rivalries reveals a mean number of 1.6 rivals, with a standard deviation of 2.06. This means that the average terrorist organization has one or two non-state rivals they compete with, either for resources, recruits, or other means of support, in some capacity. The number of rivals ranges from zero (multiple) to a high of nine (the Islamic State).

Before running the final model with rivalry, I again created a crosstab to visualize any potential trends. Like the alliance variable, there were possibilities in this variable that didn't have any datapoints (e.g. No groups had either four or six rivals), so the variable was combined into categories (0-1, 2-4 rivals, and 5+ rivals). When viewing the data like this, a relationship seems to appear between the number of rivalries an organization has and how large their social media presence is. For groups with one rival or none at all, 28.6% created no Twitter accounts and another 21.4 % only had one or two accounts. For those organizations with two to four rivalries, only 22.2% had no Twitter presence, and by the time you reach groups with five or more rivals, all groups had at least fifty accounts on the platform. However, the trend here is less obvious than the previous two variables because the data on rivalries is bottom-heavy. Fourteen

of the twenty-five groups had 0-1 rivals, while only two had five or more. Since the observation

in this manner is less clear, a regression analysis is more necessary. This table can be viewed in

Table 8.

When run in the model against the Twitter presence variable, we again find the expected

positive relationship between the number of rivals and the size of a group's Twitter presence. The

coefficient was 0.395, with a P-value of 0.01. Because significance was determined to be below

0.01 (not equal to), that means this correlation is not quite statistically significant at the 99%

confidence level, but does show significance at the 95% confidence level (Table 9). This lower

confidence level makes sense given the less clear contingency table observation, but we do still

see the effect and find evidence for the hypothesis that more rivals means an increase in

organizational presence on Twitter. See Figure 5 for a depiction of this effect.

Table 8: Crosstab of Twitter Presence by Rivalry

Twitter Presence	Rivals			Total
	0-1	2-4	5+	
0	4 28.6%	2 22.2%	0 0.0%	6
1	3 21.4%	2 22.2%	0 0.0%	5
2	5 35.7%	4 44.4%	0 0.0%	9
3	1 7.1%	1 11.1%	0 0.0%	2
4	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 50.0%	1
5	1 7.1%	0 0.0%	1 50.0%	2
Total	14	9	2	25

Pearson χ^2 = 43.000, Pr = 0.014**

Table 9: Rivalries

Variables	Social Media Presence	Adjusted R-Squared 0.2187	Social Media Activity	Adjusted R-Squared 0.1867
Rivalry	0.395** (0.140)		0.249** (0.097)	
Organization Age	-0.017 (0.022)		-0.008 (0.015)	
Territorial Control	0.440 (0.556)		0.475 (0.385)	
Organization Size	-0.648 (0.408)		-0.324 (0.282)	

Standard errors in parentheses
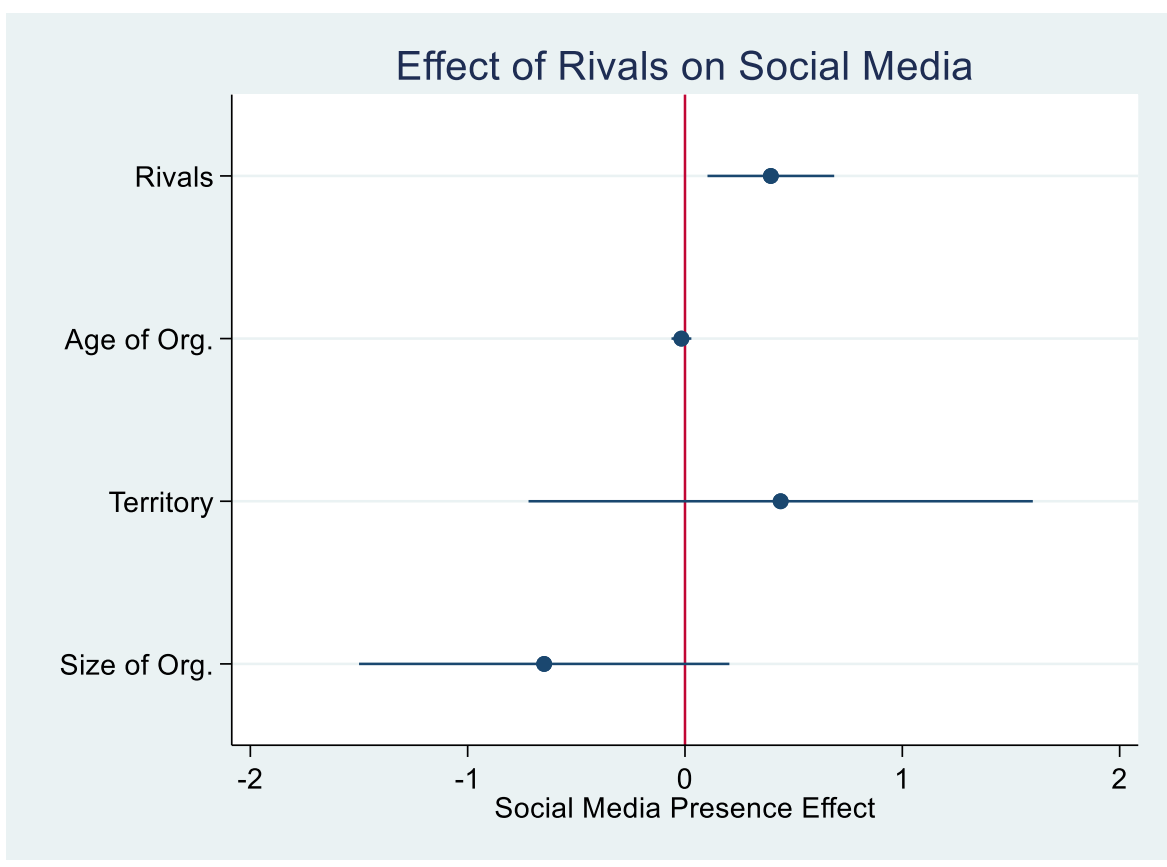*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 5: Effect of Rivalry on Social Media Presence

Of the variables, however, this one shows the lowest adjusted R-squared, at only 0.219, meaning that only 21.9% of the variance in Twitter presence can be explained by this model. This is much lower in comparison with the other two causal variables in their respective models, further suggesting that the number of rivalries an organization has cultivated is the weakest of the three causal variables being examined, explaining a lower percentage of that variance.

A similar situation arises when running a model with Twitter activity and rivalries. I again created a crosstab of activity on the platform broken down by number of rivalries to visualize the data (Table 10). And at first blush, a trend appears to take shape; however with a p-value of 0.126, this is not statistically significant until you lower the confidence interval below 90%. Still, among groups with zero or one rival, 28.6% showed no Twitter activity at all and another 42.9% had only weak activity on the platform. Thus, over 70% of these groups had no or low engagement on the platform, with only sporadic tweets. With organizations that have two to four rivals, 55.6% showed moderate social media activity, and for groups with five or more rivals, both showed strong levels of Twitter activity. However, like above, because there are only two groups that fall into that final category, the trend here is less obvious and it is not statistically significant, so the regression analysis is more important in evaluating the relationship.

Table 10: Crosstab of Twitter Activity by Rivalries

	Rivals			
Twitter Activity	**0-1**	**2-4**	**5+**	**Totals**
None	4	2	0	6
	28.6%	22.2%	0%	
Weak	6	2	0	8
	42.9%	22.2%	0.0%	
Moderate	3	5	0	8
	21.4%	55.6%	0.0%	
Strong	1	0	2	3
	7.1%	0.0%	100.0%	
Total	14	9	2	**25**

Pearson χ^2 = 21.354, Pr = 0.126

In the model, we do find a statistically significant relationship between rivalries and Twitter activity, with a coefficient of 0.249. However, a slightly higher P-value of 0.018 makes it not significant at the 99% confidence level either, but it does show significance at the 95% confidence level (see back to Table 9 for these results). This is still significant, obviously, but it does need to be noted this variable doesn't achieve that 99% level. Here, we also see a lower adjusted R-squared of only 0.187, meaning only 18.7% of the variance in Twitter activity can be explained by this particular model. Figure 6 shows this effect. Still, despite lower significance levels and less explanation of dependent variable variance, we still find evidential support for both Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 3b, rejecting the null hypotheses of no relationship. We find groups with more rivals do, in fact, also have higher levels of social media presence and usage.
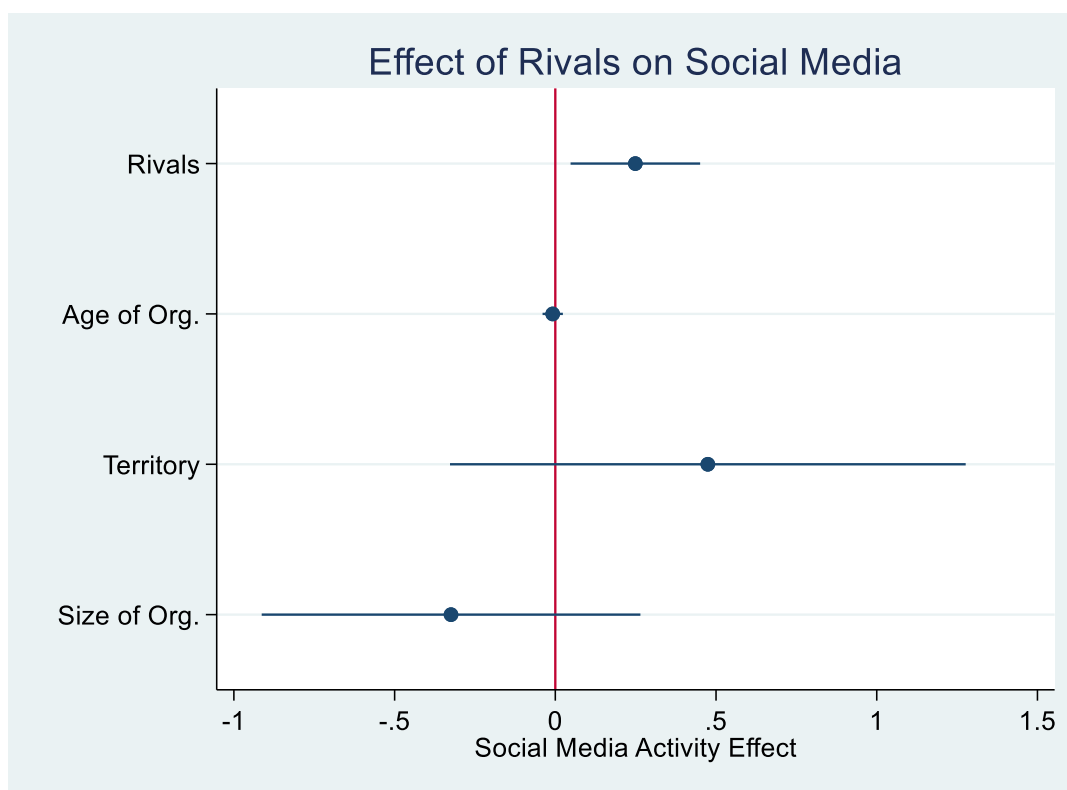

Figure 6: Effect of Rivalry on Social Media Activity

Conclusion & Case Study Selection

The results from the statistical analysis were all positive and significant, finding evidence for all of the theory-driven hypotheses I examined. We find a significant correlation to social media engagement for religious ideology (99% confidence level in both models), alliance network size (99% confidence level in both), and rivalries (95% confidence level in both). Religious ideology, driven by its appeal outside a group's local area, increases the desire for connectivity to supporters, sympathizers, and potential recruits elsewhere, making social media an attractive tactic to reach and communicate with these people. Both the desire to create a platform for legitimization and the usage of the platform for radicalization, recruitment, and messaging are positively related to whether or not a group's ideological belief system contains a religious component.

As for alliance network size, we see that as the number of allies an organization rises, so does their likelihood to engage on social media. This provides support for the theory surrounding opportunity. Allies are a form of tacit endorsement and when a group formally allies with another, they are telling their supporters—either explicitly or implicitly—that the other group is worthy of support too. This opens up new opportunities for groups to engage with these new supporters and this drives a desire to both build and use social media platforms. By doing so, they gain access to a whole new pool of people who may provide a rich supply of recruits or other forms of support for their cause.

Finally, we observe statistically that as the number of a group's rivals increases, so too does their likelihood to move onto social media platforms. While only reaching a less significant confidence level and a smaller explanation of variation, these results still support the mechanistic theory surrounding competition. As groups compete with one other over some pool of resources,

human or material, that pool necessarily shrinks somewhat and drives the group to find new sources of support to make up for what they're losing through the rivalry. Social media is a cheap, easy method to connect with people outside their local area and either gain the upper hand on a rival or simply keep up with them for continued survival.

All of these together, in conclusion, seem to support the theoretical model from Chapter Two. The decision to move online and adopt social media as a new technological tool for radicalization and recruitment is a complex one, driven by multiple factors, but these three key variables help to elucidate some of that complexity and explain the process of making that choice. A connective ideological appeal not tied down to local concerns, new opportunity through alliances, and the drive of rivalry competition all push groups toward the desire—or in some cases, the need—to embrace a new innovation that will provide them with supporters that can then by radicalized (if necessary) and recruited into formally joining the organization or providing some other means of support from afar. Further, these relationships hold true even when controlled for the size of the group, whether or not a group controls territory, and how long the group has existed. We can conclude that each of these three variables plays an important role in the decision-making process and could be used by counter-terrorism analysts or policymakers to predict whether newly-emerging organizations are likely to see value in conducting operations through social media platforms.

However, the support we find for the hypotheses about these variables does not provide much of context behind the correlations. I find statistical support for the relationship and can infer the causal mechanism from the literature-driven theory, but in order to construct a better understanding of the story behind the relationships, it is important to take a deeper look. The quantitative results from this chapter provide a baseline for understanding the connections

between these variables, but moving forward, and using the quantitative results as a launching point, I wanted to find three organizations that showed promise as interesting, relevant, and useful case studies to examine in further detail and to flesh out the mechanisms driving their relationships into a richer story. Also, because religion was the most significant variable in these quantitative models, it was going to be important to choose groups that differed along that variable. I also sought to select groups that were both relevant in a modern context for potential counter-terrorism policymaking and applicable for study in a political science context.

The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) is the most well-known organization for their extensive usage of social media for radicalization and recruitment, but because of that infamy, I feel they have been somewhat over-analyzed in previous literature, both in academia and in a wide variety of news sources. Because of that, I have chosen to avoid them and examine other groups that have had less thought and analysis extended toward their decision to engage in social media (or not) and to what extent. The first group selected for deeper examination is an organization that perhaps is not as well-known in West circles, but is actually highly deadly and proficient with social media in Central Asia. In fact, as the only terrorist organization in the world that can really match ISIS in terms of their social media presence and come close to matching in lethality, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) in Pakistan makes perfect sense as a primary selection. More than almost any other group, they have embraced this new technology in both presence and activity online and understanding why this organization has done so could prove very useful for political science researchers and policymakers.

As a comparison to LeT, the second group chosen for more in-depth evaluation was selected using a Most-Similar design model (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). This method of case selection has been widely used in a variety of political science research, from health policy

abroad (Roman-Urrestarazu, et al., 2018) to European Union states' military operations (Haesebrouck, 2017), to rebel insurgencies (Wickham-Crowley, 1993). In this note, the second organization examined is the Taliban, of Afghanistan. The comparison between LeT and the Taliban should prove to be enlightening due to their many independent variable similarities. The organizations have been active for similar lengths of time in a very similar part of the world—in the country right next door—and show similarly sized alliance networks. Further, both of their ideologies fall within the Sunni branch of Islam, so they show religious kinship as well. However, their ideologies are not monolithic and there actually is some variation within them due to ethnic and regionalism concerns, a potentially-important note that will be examined in more detail in the following chapter. Any distinctions between the two on this variable, or others (notably they also differ on the rivalry variable), should prove useful in exploring the differences in the extent to which they've embraced social media, as the Taliban has dozens fewer accounts and less overall Twitter activity.

Finally, because we are in a religious wave of terrorism, it was also going to be important to choose a significant non-religious, secular organization for comparison, where the primary distinguishing characteristic is specifically a very different, ideologically-based dependent variable. Again using a Most-Similar design model (Przeworski & Teune, 1970), but this time focusing on differences on the ideology variable, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) was selected; its ideological makeup is notably not religious at all, certainly not Islamist like the other two, but is far-left Marxist nationalist. They show many similarities to the Taliban, in particular. They have only a couple true rivals and a similar time history, as well as a decently sized alliance network. FARC is one of the most Twitter-active nonreligious organizations in the world, so evaluating what drives that decision to pursue the tactic, despite not following the

observed correlation between religion and social media in the quantitative models. Understanding what makes them different from other secular organizations may prove enlightening and useful with future policy implications.

This chapter provided statistical support for the existence of relationships between the key causal variables. Through this analysis, I can conclude that the three theoretically-identified variables play roles in the decision-making process, but this doesn't provide information into how they influence that process, nor does it elucidate the nuances in the relationships. The next two chapters seek to fill in those areas through examination of three specific organizations. These groups are studied in more detail in order to flesh out the richer story behind those correlations.

Chapter Five: Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Taliban

Introduction

In Chapter Four, the data was examined quantitatively through cross tabulation and regression analysis and statistical support was found for the relationships between each of the three independent variables and social media engagement. Religious identity and alliance network size were both significant at the 99% confidence level and rivalry was significant at the 95% confidence level. This suggests that all three variables are related to why terrorist organizations make the strategic choice to engage in social media.

The next two chapters will contain the discussion about three case studies that were chosen for further, qualitative study to examine these three variables in more depth. The first two selected are both Islamist religious groups (although, as we'll see, their ideologies are not identical). Due to many of their similarities that were explained in the previous chapter—same region, same ideological branch, similar ages, etc., I decided it was best to discuss these two in conjunction with one another. As we'll see, the two organizations' attributes particularly stand out when juxtaposed next to one another, which allows any differences in their causal stories to be highlighted. Thus, in this chapter, we will be discussing Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Taliban together, as we explore how they fit into the overall theoretical model presented back in Chapter Two. In the following chapter, the third organization, the FARC, will be explored in more detail; the secular organization's story is more unique—both in this project and in the world of extremist organizations today—so works best to be examined alone. But here, with LeT and the Taliban, I will start with a brief overview of each group's history, as well as how they have approached Radicalization and Recruitment in the past. This background sets the stage for understanding who they are, their importance and impact within their region, and where the organization has

been prior to the social media revolution, providing a basis to ground the group before we move into their more recent decision-making regarding the potential move online to Twitter. Then, I will move into a look at their social media numbers on Twitter, and then evaluate each group along the dimensions of the three theoretically identified causal variables.

Lashkar-e-Taiba: Intro & History

One of the most prolific users of social media in the terrorist world is a group many in the West have not even heard of, much less know details about. But in fact, this organization is one of the most active and extreme Islamist terrorist groups in all of South Asia. With a name that translates to 'Army of the Good' or 'Army of the Righteous', this group operates mainly from Pakistan. Most attacks and activities have the expressed goal of ceasing Indian control of the Himalayan state of Jammu and Kashmir and increasing overall Islamism—a politically-focused element of Islam—within the region.

This group, known as Lashkar-e-Taiba (though you may see spelling variations), was founded in 1990 with partial funding coming from Osama bin Laden of al-Qaeda. Started by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) grew out of a small missionary organization that had formed a handful of years prior, with a stated goal to promote an interpretation of Islam that shares similarities to the Wahhabi movement prevalent in Saudi Arabia. A military branch of this organization eventually developed alongside the missionary component and became LeT. It emerged into public consciousness as a violent group with an ambush of Indian Air Force members in 1990. From there, LeT conducted further attacks on Indian military over the next several years, but it wasn't until 1996 that they truly gained infamy for a massacre of minority Hindus in the area, killing sixteen. Originally, this group focused on organizing training camps

for volunteer fighters in the ongoing conflict in the Kashmir region, but even in recent years, we've observed LeT conduct aspects of humanitarian work across Pakistan, including operating schools, blood banks, and an ambulance service. This commitment to more constructive and benevolent activities has contributed to building a wide support network, from which they garner contributions and donations across not only Pakistan, but the entire Middle East, with one of their largest benefactors being Saudi Arabia. Further, they also bring in extensive private donations from individuals in Gulf States, South Asian nations, and even some European countries.

Much of their financial pot comes from donations, but they also generate revenue through quasi-legitimate businesses. They run agricultural and fish farms, operate schools for which they charge tuition, and sell various goods in markets. LeT also collects an *ushr*, a type of religious land tax common in this part of the world and certain Muslim communities elsewhere. It requires any individuals who make their money from the land—such as farmers—donate a portion of either their crops or income to charity. And while sometimes, this is given by individuals with full knowledge of its use in extremist groups, frequently this is collected without the donor knowing where their money was truly going. The transfer chain for the donation is purposely kept hidden or obscured in some way. One example took place back in 2005. There was a devastating earthquake of 7.6 magnitude in Kashmir and many expatriate communities across Europe—particularly Great Britain—collected funds for relief efforts. Because Lashkar-e-Taiba became involved in relief operations, a large chunk of that money ended up funneling through their organization. And it's thought more than half of the funds collected abroad ended up in the coffers of LeT rather than going toward relief efforts.

Despite their relative lack of notoriety in the West, LeT has a roster numbering in the several thousands, with fighters from Pakistan and Afghanistan making up the majority of the list. LeT is banned in Pakistan, as a result of pressure from the United States in the immediate months post September 11th, 2001. However, despite its formal illegality, there have been accusations thrown around of informal ties between the organization and official Pakistani intelligence services. Pakistan denies this, but accusations persist. In addition to being banned there, LeT was designated as a terrorist organization by both the U.S. State Department and the United Nations and remains on these lists to this day.

The Taliban: Intro & History

The second group examined is one the average Westerner is probably a lot more familiar with, but is quite close geographically to Lashkar-e-Taiba. Just across the Pakistani border into the Central Asian state of Afghanistan, a fundamentalist political movement with roots in the mujahideen fighters from the Soviet occupation first arose formally in the mid-1990s. Persistent and flexible, it has survived through multiple unique iterations over the decades since and still operates as an insurgency today. This is the Taliban (sometimes Taleban) or formally the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

When the Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan back in 1979, local tribal fighters—known as mujahideen—fought back against the larger, secular Soviet forces. A part of the global Cold War, this conflict between the superpower of the USSR and the local Afghan resistance spiraled into a massive civil war, and the world took sides. To counter the Soviet incursion, Pakistan collaborated with Saudi Arabia to drum up support for Afghan resistance fighters. Even the United States gave support to certain factions as part of the larger policy of communist

containment. And this resistance—backed by foreign support—ultimately succeeded, with the USSR withdrawing military troops in 1989. The Soviet-backed communist government lasted a bit longer, but ultimately, the city of Kabul fell as well in 1992. But this removal of occupying forces didn't end the fighting. Rather, it created a power vacuum and a violent struggle for control erupted, which engaged militia groups, power-hungry tribal warlords, and regional powers such as Pakistan, Iran, and Uzbekistan.

The Taliban were one such group, emerging in 1994. As one of the stronger militia organizations, they swept across central and southern provinces, based out of Kandahar. They conquered, united, or assimilated competing groups as they gained power. Led by Mohammed Omar until his death in 2013, the Taliban initially held a high level of support among the Afghan people who had grown tired of incessant fighting between the warlords and high levels of corruption that ran rampant among them. This support was particularly high among tribes of the Pashtun people, who thought this Taliban movement might lead to their ethnic group becoming more dominant nationally. And while they saw their share of struggles for a while, they managed to gain military support from Pakistan and financial support from Saudi Arabia and by September of 1996, the Taliban had risen in power and actually took control of the nation's government. From there, they consolidated power and managed to either negotiate with or wrest power from remaining warlords. For five or six years, the Taliban operated as the main governing body in Afghanistan, wielding power over about three-quarters of the territory and enforcing their strict brand of Islamic law. This was enough to achieve formal recognition as legitimate rulers of Afghanistan by three regional countries for a period of time: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Ultimately, they fell in 2001 when the United States invaded, following the September 11th attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. Americans were hunting al-Qaeda members that U.S. intelligence services believed Afghanistan to be harboring. In particular, the Americans believed the Taliban-led Afghan government was sheltering Osama bin Laden, the main perpetrator of the attacks. Afghanistan under Taliban rule had a reputation as a safe haven for Islamist militants and extremists. The group was soon removed from power by US forces with NATO backing. Since being ousted in that American invasion, the organization struggled for a few years, but regrouped as an insurgency movement. While their position and power level changed, today they fight against the more Western government that was installed after their fall.

Comprised mostly of individual fighters or supporters from the Pashtun ethnic group, the Taliban is largely made up of students. In fact, their name is the Pashto word for "students." While there were many competing extremists with roots in the occupation resistance, this group grew out of a specific movement of religious, Islamic students disappointed with how Islamic law had been—or rather, had not been—installed across Afghanistan when the communist government fell. They believed a large portion of the suffering among the Afghan people was due to lax adherence to the moral code of Islam. In other words, they argued that schools, even religious institutions, were not doing their duty in teaching strict Islamic law and the people were hurting because of that.

Despite a few countries formally recognizing the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, the grand majority of the world's opinion on the group was negative, particularly toward their restrictive social practices. Their views on gender are harsh and divisive, with women excluded from public life, banning them from becoming educated and having jobs. And these restrictions were enforced through brutal punishment, public beatings, floggings, and other

abuse. They further imposed and enforced a particularly strict brand of justice through a harsh interpretation of sharia law. This included banning television, drinking alcohol, listening to and creating music, and most forms of art. They required women to be completely covered—head-to-toe—in a *chadri*, a form of full-length burqa, and would jail men they deemed had cropped their beards too short.

Despite removal from power after 9/11, the Taliban still exists and operates in Afghanistan today, but in the form of an insurgency movement, fighting both US forces and the current Afghan government through guerrilla warfare. It is in this form the Taliban has existed during the entire social media era. They still maintain support from local tribes and other groups and as of July 2016, the Taliban still controlled roughly 20% of the country and remain particularly strong in the province of Helmand. So all of this means that, though they are far from the peak of their strength, the Taliban is still alive, active, and fighting. And in fact, despite their loss of power, they have been steadily gaining in strength again and are likely at their strongest level since their fall at the hands of the United States military.

Traditional Radicalization & Recruitment

Before moving into understanding any online radicalization and recruitment methods, it is important to know how they've handled these tasks before, in the pre-social media era. This can identify some of the mechanisms they may hope to simulate through Twitter, as well as the 'why' behind some of their previous tactics, which may be able to be applied in this online space as well. With both the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba having operated in neighboring states for many years—LeT for nineteen, the Taliban for twenty-five—they each have well-established recruitment and radicalization patterns they developed and leaned on prior to the social media

revolution. And while, as we'll explore shortly, the two groups diverged in the Twitter-era with their usage of the online platform, both of these groups show a similar history in their traditional tactics to recruit potential members and to radicalize them.

Starting with Lashkar-e-Taiba, a large portion of their initial recruitment tactics was about exploiting pre-existing tensions and grievances in the region. Particularly, the relationship between Pakistan and India—and further the relationship between Hindus and Muslims—played a major role in convincing people to join and to fight. The religious rivalry was so strong that LeT convinced many Indian Muslims to join and commit attacks in their name in other, most disparate regions of India against Hindus. Religiously, new recruits join because they feel an obligation to help fellow Muslim adherents (Rotella, 2013). Because of this pre-existing religious ideological connection, LeT recruits heavily in the Punjab and Kashmir regions and operates by spreading anti-Indian propaganda and religious ideology through madrassas—Islamic religious schools—and mosques, but it is not just religious entities in which they operate. In fact, it was shown in a recent study that LeT's fighters possess a higher level of *secular* education than average Pakistani men (Rassler, et al., 2013), so non-religious educational institutions also are targeted. This is done through in-person connections, friendships, and familial ties to current members of the extremist organization (Tankel, 2011). A large part of Lashkar-e-Taiba's recruitment efforts were being funneled through shell-like entities, schools and charity centers that serve as front organizations for LeT. A 2008 report by the United States State Department on international religious freedom claimed that Jamaat ud-Dawah (JuD), believed to be a front of the group, runs schools that operate specifically to handle "teaching and recruitment" for LeT (International Religious Freedom Report, 2008). This claim has been repeated in multiple other reports over the years. LeT further exploits problems in current Pakistani society by constructing

an image for themselves as being anti-corruption. This works well there because Pakistan is noted for having an epidemic of corruption throughout the government at virtually all levels (Rotella, 2013), so by portraying themselves as the pure, clean, incorruptible alternative to the status quo, that scores points among the civilian population in comparison.

Just across the border into Afghanistan, the Taliban also utilizes madrassas, or religious schools, for similar purposes; while they are, on the whole, less educated than their Pakistani counterpart, many of their fighters were educated in Saudi-financed madrassas that teach a particularly strict interpretation of Islam. Like LeT, utilizing existing networks and entities like religious institutions plays a big role in how they find and contact possible recruits and support networks. They use religious schools and mosques to find people, facilitate recruitment, and ultimately convince recruits to join the organization through appeals to ideology and worldview (Landinfo, 2017). The Taliban, in particular, also makes their case by citing the poor economic conditions in Afghanistan, with many fighters joining out of poverty and lack of opportunity. This gives two fronts for appealing to recruits; some join out of frustration and hopelessness at the low standard of living, while others see jihad as a religious duty drilled into them by hardline religious extremists in madrassas. Finally, the Taliban also taps into public discontent with the current ruling government. Either due to corruption, inefficiency, foreign influence (namely by the United States on the democratic Afghan government), or lack of representation for the Pashtun tribes—typically their strongest supporters, the Taliban has exploited concerns and fueled grievances that drive recruitment and radicalization. But like LeT, the grand majority of these connections are made personally, through pre-established connections and relationships, whether familial or via friendships.

Outside of this in-person connection in the community, LeT reaches a more widespread audience through other technologies as well. This will be explored in more detail in the next section, but it should be mentioned LeT has multiple publications in print (e.g. Al-Dawa, a journal that is published monthly) and has constructed a website and a virtual magazine as well. So they are no stranger to embracing technological advances to reach a broader civilian populace and spread ideology that way. Likewise, the Taliban has showed an interest in investing time and effort into other technologies as well; at varying times, they have used pamphlets, DVDs, radio, and online blog sites to spread their messages and recruit for their cause. And their overall media network for propaganda is seen as fairly extensive and varied. But again, this will be explored further in another section.

One important thing both groups have in common in their radicalization/recruitment efforts is that both the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba are able to operate—either presently or in the recent past—at least partially in the open within their respective countries. This speaks to their overall strength and physical capabilities, but also to their ability to connect with people and relatively high levels of support in the regions in which they operate. Lashkar-e-Taiba openly provides many social services, thrives in the marketplace, schools, and mosques, and has a widespread level of support across many countries. The Taliban, likewise, was able to operate openly, but this was mostly a past ability for them. At one point, they were so strong that they were the *de facto* governing body of the entire country. Despite the lack of recognition by the grand majority of the world, this gave them almost free range to recruit and radicalize in the open within Afghanistan. They even engaged on university campuses with their propaganda across Afghanistan (Giustozzi, 2012). Today, the Taliban exists as a rebel group, an insurgency partially forced back underground, but even with these new limitations, they still hold a fair

amount of public influence in certain regions of the country. This openness allows both groups the ability to utilize different mechanisms than they would if they were totally—or even mostly—in secret.

Finally, there is one major avenue that separates Lashkar-e-Taiba from the Taliban in their traditional recruiting and radicalization that must be discussed: their international efforts. While international support is not explicitly a part of this theory, the extent to which groups show interest in connections or support abroad in traditional recruiting speaks, in part, to the possible exportability of their appeal to other locations. And almost from the beginning, LeT had a fairly strong foreign influence and support. They set up various fundraising groups, front organizations, and recruitment offices in other countries, including Nepal, Bangladesh, and the Maldives. They even set up shop in other states across the Gulf region and there is evidence to suggest they may have quasi-offices in other parts of the world, from Europe to Australia to the United States and Canada (Meyer, 2007). In contrast, the Taliban has frequently struggled to gain international support. That's not to say they receive none; it's been widely alleged that Pakistan, across the border, has provided support and funding many times in the past. Russia admitted to cooperating with the Taliban recently in fighting the common enemy of the Islamic State (IB Times, 2015). But for reasons that will be explained when we examine the ideology of the Taliban, their appeal among the general population, even within their own country, is fairly limited, especially to those from Pashtun ethnic tribes. Their leadership hierarchy is closely tied to one ethnic group and their ideology is viewed as too extreme for the majority of other Afghan citizens. While not technically an ethnically pure organization, over 80 percent of top leadership is from one province (Jones, 2018) and that doesn't generate much excitement from people in other areas that might otherwise view the Taliban more favorably. Further, their poor treatment

of civilians during their rule of the country also has contributed to poor relationships with the people. All of this means that traditional recruitment and radicalization opportunities over the years have been limited in scope. But this departure between the two groups when it comes to traditional recruitment is almost entirely on the international front; domestically, they show a lot of similarities with how they've handled off-line radicalization and recruitment efforts.

Twitter Adoption

Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Taliban were chosen because, despite many of their similarities, they show variation along the x-axis in the ideological identity variable. On the surface, they may appear to be quite similar because they are both twigs off the same Islamist branch of extremism, but as will be detailed in the following section, there are actually some very key differences in their identities that affect its cross-border appeal. Because of that variation, it is hypothesized that their ideological differences will result in movement in their social media engagement, variation along the dependent variables.

In total, the Taliban was observed to own and operate roughly five accounts on Twitter over the time period for this project, 2006-2016, with three "main" ones. The first is an official account for the group (@alemarahweb), which mostly is simply utilized to post links to various official organizational statements, reports about attacks, and news releases, but little else. For example, their first English tweet in 2011—since deleted and the account suspended by Twitter—reported an attack on police, saying "Enemy attacked in Khak-e-Safid, 6 dead" (Boone, 2011). Sometimes these reports are even false; one such tweet claimed "Mujahideen bring down US helicopter in Kunar", which the international coalition forces disputed, responding back that the "reports of a shoot-down are false" (Keyes, 2011). But it still serves the Taliban narrative.

The others are from two of the Taliban's leaders or spokesmen (@ABalkhi and Zabihullah Mujahid), who are a bit more combative with their accounts, getting into heated exchanges with followers, reporters, or government entities. When the International Security and Assistance Forces tweeted out a question about how long the Taliban would continue to put "innocent Afghans in harm's way", Balkhi responded and challenged the ISAF, accusing them of razing villages and markets, claiming (in textspeak, given the 140-character limit at the time) "…u hve bn pttng thm n 'harm's way' fr da pst 10 yrs…" (Fox, 2011). And using these accounts, the Taliban likes to pump out a stream of insults and attacks on their enemies as a dehumanization tactic, often referring to the government forces in tweets as "puppets" or "minions", while international forces are referred to as "invaders" or "terrorists" (Bernatis, 2014; MEMRI, 2011). Generally speaking, when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, they avoided most forms of modern technology, even banning it among their followers. This included everything from television to music players. However, since losing power, they have relaxed this rule and, to an extent, embraced a few areas of technology. Twitter is one of these pieces of technology they've started to accept, but their Twitter activity rate over this time period was only moderate, showing some engagement to other accounts, but by no means was their activity daily or even weekly at times. All of that said, however, one aspect that they have embraced Twitter for, a tactic which makes them fairly unique among extremist groups, is exchanging regular tweets with the United States military accounts. Most of this engagement is propaganda designed to emphasize the United States as invaders and to exaggerate their victories on the battlefield. This semi-habitual interchange is done to demonstrate strength toward their current members and boost morale among them, more so than anything.

By contrast, Lashkar-e-Taiba has fully embraced this online medium with thousands of accounts, putting them in rarefied air among extremist organizations. The Islamic State gets all the headlines for their prolific handling of Twitter and social media, and rightfully so, but LeT is the one other group in the dataset whose presence on the platform can challenge the numbers that ISIS puts out. In particular, their most active profiles are that of their founder Hafiz Muhammad Saeed (@HafizSaeedJUD, in one iteration) and one of its military and political front organizations, Jamaat-ud Dawa (@JUD_Official). While they didn't leap into the Twitter pool right away when the medium was first introduced to the public, they have fully embraced this social media movement since joining the platform in 2010, with one faction of the organization even holding workshops on the topic to teach and train young people in its operation (Negi, 2017). They build accounts by the thousands and tweet very openly and freely, spreading their ideological messaging and encouraging people—particularly the youth—to rise up and fight or support them. They believe social media "has the political aim of taking up…narratives…Twitter allows us to give our own official statements. The main purpose is to preach our message" (Shackle, 2013). In their own words, tweeted near the end of 2014 in response to a fresh round of Twitter suspensions, "Truth can never be suspended…" (TNN, 2014). They view smart phones and social media as weapons that can be used by the group to communicate, connect with, and incite people (Negi, 2017). They also show a high level of activity on the platform, one of the three most active organizations in the dataset on Twitter (alongside the previously mentioned Islamic State and al-Qaeda). These accounts are not just placeholders for legitimacy, like some groups appear to desire, but Lashkar-e-Taiba actively uses them, sending out many tweets from official group accounts and individual leader accounts—as well as using other platforms—and encouraging their membership at many levels to do the same.

Both of these extremist organizations clearly place value on possessing social media accounts and creating an online social media presence, but that is where the similarities cease when it comes to these online platforms. There are notable large-scale differences in both presence and activity between the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba. In the upcoming sections, we will examine a few causal variables that should help explain these differences.

Ideology

Ideological identity was examined as one of the primary causal factors that would explain both the presence and usage of social media. And in the initial quantitative analysis, a positive, statistically-significant correlation was found between religious ideology and social media, both presence and usage. Theoretically, this relationship was explored, deducing that it is the cross-border nature of religion, its ability to find appeal in a wide variety of locations and group, that drives social media usage because it is another form of identity connection to people elsewhere. In other words, because religion is an ideology that can be exported without necessarily needing to emphasize local economic or discriminatory grievances, it's easier and more fruitful to engage on social media as part of a broader radicalization and recruitment campaign. So how does that relationship play out in the stories of these two groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan, both branches off the larger Islamic tree of extremism? While both are a lot of ideological similarities between the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba, there are a couple key identity differences that affect that cross-border appeal of their ideologies that may be resulting in differing levels of social media engagement.

First, let's examine and acknowledge the many similarities between the two extremist organizations on this front. Both of these groups are ideologically of the same tree. Both show

heavy religious overtones to their belief system, specifically in the Islamist branch. In fact, both groups are considered to be a part of the Sunni denomination and the Salafi reform movement (which, notably, developed as a response to Western imperialism), though as I'll talk about in a minute, the Taliban has deviated from this original belief system somewhat. As Islamic fundamentalists, both groups find themselves—to varying degrees—utilizing the Quran to create a legal, political, and societal system and emphasizing the importance of what is called sharia law. Sharia law is an Islamic religious law tradition derived from some of the Quranic scriptures, as well as certain hadiths—the records of the words and actions of Muhammad, as well as things of which he approved. The Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba both ultimately seek to implement these religious laws across their lands and establish a fully Islamic state, or caliphate, free from foreign powers and other influences (Qazi, 2010), in Afghanistan and Pakistan, respectively. Both groups are viewed as fundamentalists and strict adherents to the Quranic law, with particularly austere interpretations of the faith.

In terms of the relationship of any actual religious element to their activity, the Taliban has argued in one of their propaganda videos that jihad—literally struggling or striving, but frequently used to reference a holy war against any non-believers or enemies of Islam—is a "divine obligation", directly tying some of their violent actions to religious adherence. And they generate support by pushing the idea that failure to support others in jihad may be considered a sin against their god. And the reward for fulfilling this obligation is often great, particularly during holy months, such as Ramadan. As one example of this ideological push, in 2017 a spokesman for the Taliban, Mujahid, tweeted "Out fight is Jihad & obligatory worship, reward for every obligatory act of worship is multiplied x70 in #Ramadan (Roggio, 2017). And LeT makes similar such arguments, though in their case, it's often referenced with more political

overtones of ousting foreigners from any regions they view as "Muslim lands." To them, this mostly means India and Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, but would also include countries from Spain to Ethiopia to Hungary. And they have reportedly been present and/or involved in a handful of foreign conflicts as well that are viewed as threatening to local Muslim populations, including Chechnya, Kosovo, and Bosnia. Here, the political component of their Islamism is more fully on display than with the Taliban, but in both cases, religious arguments for violence are frequently emphasized.

Further, while their specific locations are different—mildly so, given that the two states are neighboring, so exist in a similar region of the world—both of these radical organizations are very focused on transforming their homeland into a Muslim land, comprised of and run by adherents to Islam. They have used Twitter to argue this claim to their land as well, demanding India leaves Kashmir and issuing threats; in one series of tweets after an attack in Pampore, one propagandist threatened "Leave Kashmir only solution if you want to stop the deaths of your young captains" and later "…save your coward army from Kashmiri mujahideen Lashkar-e-Taiba" (Swami, 2016). Another anti-India tweet thread accused their neighbors of using "water terrorism" through natural flooding, claiming "India has used water to attack Pakistan…must be taken to the UN security council" (IndiaToday.in, 2014). The Taliban once formally announced its goals were to impose order, enforce sharia law, and ultimately to defend the Islamic character of Afghanistan, whereas LeT openly seeks to oust the Hindu Indians from the regions of Jammu and Kashmir to establish Muslim rule across Pakistan. But this commitment to Islamic rule doesn't end within their states' respective borders, for either organization. LeT has outlined a much broader agenda that ultimately includes unifying all of the Muslim majority states across the region, restore Islamic rule in India, and even once vowed to plant the "flag of Islam [in]

Washington, Tel Aviv, and New Delhi." (Tankel, 2011). With these far-reaching, worldwide goals, LeT is advocating for the common belief among such groups that the global Muslim community, the *ummah*, is supreme and should be hailed above any sort of non-Muslim, secular, or democratic state entity. And in comparison, the Taliban, particularly in more recent years, has pushed for a more pan-Islamic unity across the Middle East as well. They don't appear to possess quite the same global goals as LeT, but one of their leaders, Mullah Omar, has emphasized the creation of a unified Islamist alliance of groups to oust the foreigners (Western powers, that is).

With these religious ideologies and the similarities you see between the groups, it makes sense that each would maintain a social media presence and be, at least, mildly active on their social media accounts. Having a presence provides a legitimacy to their organization and, as touched upon in the theoretical argument, religious identity is an ideology that is particularly suited to connecting people across national and state borders. And with each group having at least some connection to the broader Islamist extremist movements, possessing an online social media presence allows for them to exploit that multi-national advantage. However, it is in their ideological differences that we see the explanation for why such similar groups actually utilize those accounts to such widely different degrees, particularly when looking at the unique elements of the Taliban's belief structure. This divergence in the independent variable of ideological identity is affecting the variation in the dependent variable of social media engagement.

One of Lashkar-e-Taiba's main battlegrounds is in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, noted for being one of the most disputed regions in the world, with both Pakistan and India firmly arguing claims to it, and even China has been known to engage in the area. Thus, by definition, their stated goals of liberating this region from the Hindu population necessitates border-crossing and, in fact, we have seen the group seek to mobilize Muslims in other parts of India for their

cause, in addition to their normal activities in Pakistan. Calls for *Ghazwa-e-Hind*, a prophecy dealing with the Muslim conquest of India, frequents their Twitter feeds. Before one of their founders, Hafiz Saeed, was temporarily banned from Twitter, one of his tweets claimed this prophecy was "…inevitable, Kashmir will be freed" (Jha, 2014). Another tweet engaged directly with Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, exhorting him to treat Indian Muslims better: "Instead of instigating Hindus in Pakistan, @narendramodi should focus on fulfilling rights of Muslims in India…" (India TV, 2014)

This *de facto* transnational ideology differs somewhat from the Taliban's more localized belief system. But the real difference in ideology comes when one examines the unusual aspects of the Taliban's ideology. While it's absolutely true that the Taliban falls within the broader movement of Islamist extremists and, like LeT, lie beneath the heading of Sunni ideology, the Taliban possess certain unique elements that they have interwoven into their belief system that you don't find among other Islamist organizations. They are not considered to be traditional Islamist, like those held by so many groups, from the Mujahedeen fighters of the 1980s to al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other extremist organizations that exist today. They do have a lot of the same fundamental religious beliefs, adherence to a particularly-strict interpretation of the Quran like other groups on the Salafi branch, and desire to establish a religious caliphate under sharia law, but they have also woven in some external beliefs systems native to the region to create a bit of a mixed ideology. In particular, there are two elements that make them more unique and also have caused their movement to lack some of the wider appeal to a more global audience.

First is something called Deobandi, or Deobandism. This is technically a movement still within the broad bounds of Islam and is considered by many to be an austere revivalist movement within Sunni Islam. It is a very fundamentalist, conservative, orthodox interpretation

that mainly teaches its followers to imitate the life that Mohammad led and holds some harsh anti-colonial leanings. In fact, it was developed in a city in India originally in opposition to the British rulers there. Its followers felt the English were having too much influence on the local populations and corrupting their faith, so sought to return back to the basics.. It is also viewed as a very scholastic tradition, with a lot of emphasis on learning and teaching, more so than is typically seen. Because of its commitment to imitating Mohammad, this particular fundamentalist tradition is sometimes respected by other forms of Islam; however, Deobandi is not widely practiced outside of Pakistan and Afghanistan (aside from a handful of small communities in India and in the United Kingdom).

The other element of Taliban ideology that has especially resulted in some division from the rest of the global Islamist radical movement is the infusion of something called the Pashtunwali. Roughly translated, this means "the code of life" or "the way of the Pashtuns." (Banting, 2003). The Pashtunwali is a sort of unwritten, informal ethical code or lifestyle that is practiced specifically by the people of the Pashtun ethnic tribes, which are frequently considered to be the ethnic Afghans. In many ways, it acts a lot like the basic law and government in the less urban areas. While today it has diminished a small amount in usage, it is still widely seen among the rural tribal areas of Afghanistan and, to a lesser extent, Pakistan. You also see these Pashtunwali codes practiced among some members of the Pashtun diaspora abroad. These codes of behavior provide people with guidance and both individual and community/societal conduct (Banting, 2003), and are frequently equated to how the "ideal Pashtun" should act. While this is far from fully inclusive, some of the major principles that form the basic understanding of Pashtunwali include: hospitality, forgiveness or protection, loyalty, faith, righteousness, honor, country, pride and courage, bravery, justice, and protection of women. As an example of what I

mean, there are two in particular that will resonate because, even if you don't realize it, these have had an impact recently in the war between Western forces and the terrorists of the Taliban and their existence even made it into a major Hollywood blockbuster.

These are the principles of Melmastia, or hospitality, and Nanawatai, frequently translated as forgiveness, asylum, or protection. The latter specifically references the idea of protecting someone against his enemies, even if the person is running from the law or is an enemy who has been vanquished and seeking surrender or sanctuary. Both of these principles came into play during the United States war in Afghanistan over one U.S. Navy SEAL, Marcus Luttrell. His team had been ambushed by Taliban fighters and was the sole survivor. Badly injured, Luttrell was on the run and aided by members of a Pashtun tribe who took him into their village and fended off attacks by the Taliban until Luttrell was able to be rescued for U.S. forces. This "code" of the tribe overwhelmed the idea that this soldier was actively fighting in their country and they offered the wounded man protection. This was such a sensational story that Hollywood turned it into a movie, *Lone Survivor*, but it was something so entrenched in the hearts and minds of the Pashtun people, not out of religious duty or strategic interests, but a regionally-specific ethical code of this particular ethnicity of people in Afghanistan.

And in many ways, these codes have been intertwined with the Deobandi revivalist beliefs and the austere Salafi Sunni beliefs to comprise a unique identity that only the Taliban truly possesses. There is no other well-known organization to which you could draw a comparison on this level. And it is this particular inclusion that makes the Taliban's ideology so difficult to export to people or groups outside their local area. While their tweets do engage in some of the common language of militant Islamism, they also embrace a lot of "traditional Pashtun folklore" in their online social media (Drissel, 2014), and the codes of the Pashtun

people are strictly Pashtun. This is further reflected in the leadership hierarchy of the radical organization being overwhelmingly Pashtun. Even other Islamist groups across the Middle East and South Asia have struggled to accept the Taliban into their broader movement and many groups, particularly the Islamic State have viewed this Afghani organization as apostate, as enemies to their goals of a caliphate. Because of this unique ideology, it is still logical that the Taliban would maintain a presence on social media for the legitimacy and ability to spread their messaging that it provides, but it is also very rational that they don't see much benefit in using it as extensively like Lashkar-e-Taiba does. While some alliances do exist in the region—which will be discussed shortly—these connections are largely strategic and not ideological.

Their particular brand of messaging and ideas simply hold no real appeal beyond their borders and they even struggle to spread it beyond the specific tribes of the Pashtun people to other parts of Afghanistan itself. I hypothesized that ideology matters to social media engagement based largely on the ability of the ideas to appeal beyond borders, and the quantitative analysis backed up that claim by looking at religious ideology's relationship to social media. And in examining the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba in detail as case studies, we find further backing for those hypotheses. In the quantitative analysis, I used religion, specifically, as a case of ideology that is capable of uniting people beyond local borders, but with these two organizations, I find there is nuance within this variable; the group whose ideology shows more appeal abroad also engages much more on social media, while the group whose ideology is very localized and unique to specific area ethnic groups—even though it is religious, in nature—only engages to a small extent. Spending the time and effort to cultivate a very active presence on Twitter simply isn't worth it when the ideology you're pushing doesn't—and likely never will—resonate with individuals outside of your immediate area. You need the presence for the more

strategic allies and the broader connection to other Islamist extremists, as well as any local benefits your actual members may provide, but there's little benefit in utilizing that presence extensively for recruiting or radicalizing people outside the Pashtun tribes and similar local groups. Therefore, when it comes to the question of whether or not ideological identity matters to one's social media engagement, we do find support for the previously-identified theoretical model.

Alliance Networks

The second causal factor examined in detail for these two religious groups is their alliance network, or the number of non-state organizations to which they have created some type of formal relationship. This relationship can serve a variety of purposes, from generating material and membership support to training to sharing resources. And theoretically speaking, a larger alliance network should predict more social media engagement because it opens up more opportunities for reaching new pools of people for recruiting and support. This is one variable where it would appear that the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba are very similar, meaning this particular variable might not play a major role in explaining their differences in social media usage, but a deeper exploration of the topic is still warranted as there are a few quirks in their alliances that may reveal more.

While both show similar network sizes, Lashkar-e-Taiba technically has a slightly smaller web of alliances, with only twelve formal relationships established with other organizations. On the other side, the Taliban has fourteen such alliances in their overall network. In comparison to the rest of the dataset, both of these organizations are on the high end for this variable. As discussed in Chapter Three, in the quantitative analysis, the average network size of

the overall small-N dataset is only 5.96 alliances, with a standard deviation of roughly 7.44. Thus, LeT is slightly under one standard deviation from the mean, while the Taliban is slightly over one standard deviation away. This means that both of these organizations have an abnormally high number of formal alliances when compared to other groups at their level of lethality. By being on the larger end of the alliance size variable, we should expect both groups to demonstrate higher levels of social media engagement. However, the difference between the two groups in this count variable is fairly small. So where the identity variable revealed some potentially impactful differences affecting the amount and way the Taliban and LeT utilize social media, this is one variable where we may find less impact, at least between these specific cases.

It would be easy to just stop there, to assume that in this case, this variable simply holds no correlative or causal impact. However, it is when we look closer that we realize that not every alliance is created the same and there might be other reasons why this similar alliance network size doesn't appear to have correlate with similar social media practices. Before going too far, it should be noted that these two groups have actually allied with each other over the years as well, so the joint alliance is counted among each other's number. As one example, after September 11th, 2001, Lashkar-e-Taiba is known to have provided safe haven to members of the Taliban when they fled the country and sought asylum in Pakistan. LeT also has extensive connections to the greater militant Islamist community al-Qaeda, providing training to their militants and conspiring with al-Qaeda on attacks in foreign nations. But even outside the local area, LeT has networked connections with Islamist organizations in other parts of the world, including Central and South Asia, with examples being the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Jama'Atul Mujahideen Bangladesh. They've also been involved in many conflicts in more disparate regions where Muslims were viewed as being under attack, from Bosnia to Kosovo. This network that

they have constructed is extensive and runs throughout Pakistan and India, but also with branches or allies in other nations, including Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, the United Kingdom, the Philippines, Egypt, Germany, and others. They frequently will tweet about events in other nations, offering support to those on the ground that they can reach through their kinship and alliances; one such example was during the university protests in New Delhi, Hafiz Saeed tweeted "We request our Pakistani Brothers to trend #SupportJNU for our pro-Pakistani JNUites brothers #PakStandWithJNU" (India Today, 2016). Most of these alliances have been ideological connections within the broader Islamist network, with formal webs connecting any area in which LeT feels that fellow Muslims are threatened, even if those alliances don't provide much personal interest value. This wide connection around the region and other parts of the world provides LeT with many opportunities to find new pools of recruits or sources of support outside their local area along ideological lines.

Meanwhile, a common thread among the Taliban's alliances has been that they are routinely tenuous. One of the strongest alliances in their history has been with al-Qaeda. Reportedly, Osama bin Laden may have helped finance them and one of bin Laden's sons married the daughter of Omar, the leader and founder of the Taliban. And further, many al-Qaeda fighters fought for the Taliban under the orders of bin Laden and the al-Qaeda leader was sheltered in Afghanistan post 9/11 when the United States was hunting him. In conjunction with their connections to extremist Islam, one would assume this is a fairly stable alliance. However, this isn't the case…in fact, the relationship between the two has been downright icy. They didn't particularly get along prior to 9/11 and in the subsequent years, they have been in on-and-off talks to completely sever ties with each other for good. In July 2012, one senior Taliban official claimed "Our people consider al-Qaeda to be a plague that was sent down to us by the

heavens…that al-Qaeda are actually the spies of America. Originally, the Taliban were naive and ignorant of politics and welcomes al-Qaeda into their homes. But al-Qaeda abused our hospitality." (New Statesman, 2012)

This type of challenging and shaky relationship is notably not uncommon for the Taliban either. One of the organizations that is closest to the Taliban in terms of their unique interpretation of Islam, as well as their reliance on the Pashtun ethnicity for support is a group in the neighboring country called Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP (Shane, 2009). They share a common enemy in the coalition forces present in Afghanistan and it's believed that they have cooperated or coordinated on attacks and to maintain control over territory along their borders, and many leaders of the Afghan Taliban have been given shelter in Pakistan over the years. Yet even this relationship, with its important ideological tie-in has been on very shaky ground over the years. One Afghan Taliban spokesman once claimed about TTP, "We don't like to be involved with them, as we have rejected all affiliation with Pakistani Taliban fighters…We have sympathy for them as Muslims, but beside that, there is nothing else between us." Now, it's important to note that this thread of struggling alliances is hardly universal; they have several alliances with smaller groups where there is no (apparent) tension. And this relative alliance trouble might just be a small footnote in comparison to other major causal variables predicting social media usage, but when viewed alongside LeT's alliances, their ties to other non-state actors appear to be weaker, especially with the larger organizations.

With this variable, I had hypothesized that larger alliance networks would matter to social media engagement because of an increased opportunity to connect to, and recruit from, supporters of your allies. A formal alliance tells sympathizers that they can trust you, that your beliefs and ideas are acceptable and softens their attitude toward you, making them better targets

with which to engage on social media for further radicalization and recruitment. In the original quantitative analysis from Chapter Three, I found support for these hypotheses, both for social media presence and usage. And in examining these two groups in more detail, we continue to find support for this theoretical model, as both organizations demonstrate an interest in creating a social media presence for building legitimacy; however, we notice that alliance quality also matters, and there are still distinctions even though their networks are of similar quantity. While LeT's alliances connect them to the broader Islamist network of extremists, the Taliban's alliance frequently shows signs of being tenuous. This lower strength of connection appears that it might mitigate the expected larger social media presence and usage because weak alliances likely don't project the same levels of opportunity for recruitment and support that a stronger alliance might. This helps to explain the difference between the two group's social media engagement, despite their very similar alliance numbers; the quantity of alliances matters, but so does quality.

Rivalries

Finally, the previous quantitative analysis revealed support for the hypotheses that having rivalries would drive competition behavior and increase social media engagement. To reiterate the definition from a previous chapter, a rival is defined as any other non-state group that competes with the organization for resources, support, or recruits. And theoretically, a higher number of rivalries should result in stronger competitive behavior, driving groups to explore new options and tactics—like cultivating a social media presence—in order to better compete for the shrinking pool of resources that having a rival creates. For these two particular groups, however, we do not see the relationship expected between these two variables—nor the relationship

demonstrated in the analysis of the full dataset, so it is important to examine and understand why that is.

To start, Lashkar-e-Taiba's unusual number may be driving this unusual result in this case. While the average number of rivals for groups in the dataset is 1.60 organizations, to date, LeT has zero known rivals against which they would be expected to compete. Neither the BAAD dataset, nor any outside online research into the literature has revealed a single true rival. This isn't to indicate that they have perfect relationships with every group that exists out there, however; they have certainly had their squabbles here and there, even with the Taliban itself. But simply having disagreements with other organizations does not mean that their strained relationship has resulted in a real rivalry of competition for a shared pool, either of resources or recruits.

First, as we saw in the quantitative analysis, it should be noted that even having zero rivals puts it within a single standard deviation (2.06) of the mean for the dataset. This is likely due to the fact that a full 40% of groups in the data (10 out of 25) possess no true rivals and mostly, the very idea of having rivals is reserved for those groups near the very top of the lethality ranking. In fact, outside of the top six most lethal extremist organizations, the highest number of rivals is only three, and only two groups see a number even this high, the Communist Party of India - Maoist (CPI-M) and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). This suggest that rivalries may be a so-called elite problem; that is, only the groups that are strong enough, capable enough, and famous enough to cause serious damage will be likely to attract potential rivals for competition. This is due to a couple reasons. Being strong and powerful makes you may capable of luring materials and recruits from further away, meaning you're more likely to draw that support away from another group, causing higher tensions. This

idea of projection of power may simply be at play here, driving a top-heavy rivalry ranking. To put it in more mainstream, Western terms, college athletics operates in a similar fashion. Only the best-of-the-best teams—the "bluebloods"—are capable of truly nationwide recruiting. The Duke basketball's and Alabama football's of the world can irritate teams and support bases across the country by stealing recruits and fans from other teams' own backyards and they do it on the strength of their program and the strength of their name. The further down the charts you go, the more difficult it is for teams to recruit outside their local area because of name recognition and lack of historical success and the less power they have to draw support and to create true rivals. Yes, being "neighbor" schools in a region create an additional element of rivalry for the school or two in your immediate vicinity, but having star power (both of your players and your leaders, or coaches), multiple championship titles, and a general history of sustained success can create and fuel rivalries and hatred all over. In much the same way, while LeT may be regionally powerful, their name simply doesn't carry the same weight or recognition, fairly or not, that a more well-known group like the Islamic State or al-Qaeda might.

All of that said, the Taliban doesn't have an extensive number of rivals either, with only three identified. This places the organization at just barely over the average for the dataset and well within a single standard deviation from the mean. So let's examine who these three rivals are and why they might be considered as such. Their rivals are noted as Hizb-i-Islami, the Afghan Northern Alliance, and the more recent Islamic State (ISIS). The first two are mostly strategic rivals. Hizb-i-Islamic is an anti-Communist, Islamist organization that largely draws its membership from the exact same Pashtun people group as the Taliban and ultimately seeks to unite all the various tribes of Afghanistan into one unified state. Because they draw from the same pool of recruits and have a slightly different overall goal—whereas the Taliban is more

focused on tribal factions—the two groups have butted heads many times over the years. By competing for support and recruits, they have built themselves into a local rival against the more famous Taliban, but it's important to note that this rivalry is simply due to proximity.

The second group, the Afghan Northern Alliance was a military organization that fought, like a rebel group, against the Taliban-ruled government when the Taliban controlled the country twenty years ago and by the time the United States invaded after 9/11, the Northern Alliance controlled about half of the country. In fact, the United States (and other countries, including Russia, India, Iran, and Turkey) have all allied with this group at various times to help fight against the Taliban. However, it should be noted that this rivalry doesn't really exist anymore, as the formal Northern Alliance was dissolved when the Taliban government was overthrown, with many of their members joining other small groups or the Karzai administration that took over as the new ruling entity. So while there are still small factions that exist today, mainly to counter any potential return or resurgence of the Taliban, they don't really have the same power or influence that they once did and it would be tough to consider them a true rival anymore. In fact, if we only look at the time frame of 2006-2016, it wouldn't be difficult to leave them off the rivalry list entirely. It is true that today, there is a reformation movement called the National Front of Afghanistan that is basically considered a reconstitution of the Northern Alliance and has many of the same members, and their goal has been to oppose peace talks with the Taliban, but they simply don't have the same strength, capabilities, or name recognition that the previous iteration possessed.

Finally, their third rival is the most recent as they have faced off with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS over the last several years. Unlike the other two which focused on differing ideas of how to run the country of Afghanistan, this rivalry is less about strategy and

more about the particulars of their ideology. Specifically, the Islamic State has showed a distinct hostility toward the Taliban and has dedicated pages and pages of their various publications, including their main magazine *Dabiq* (now *Rumiyah),* toward refuting the ideology of the Taliban, whom they feel has fallen away from 'true Islam' and is apostate to the faith. Mostly, this is due to the Taliban's connection to the ethnic Pashtunwali codes of the local tribes and their nationalistic base of support. Further, where the Taliban is mostly concerned with setting up an ideological state in the country, one that the Islamic State dislikes already, ISIS has larger, more specific goals of a regional—and ultimately global—caliphate. Because the Taliban has tied their identity so closely to a single, narrow ethnic group and mixed in some of the local tribal codes of conduct, the Islamic State considers the Taliban to be impure, not true believers in Islam, and therefore, enemies of the extreme Islamist movement. These hard feelings are not just one way either; the Taliban strongly dislikes the Islamic State as well. Even today, they frequently tweet about ISIS as being the "filthy arm of the enemies of Islam", akin to Mossad and the CIA (@Alvizier), essentially arguing that their brand of Islamist ideology is apostate as well. They even went so far as to utilize the term Daesh to refer to ISIS (@Alvizier), which is seen as derogatory by the organization. And this isn't just an intellectual debate of ideology between them, taking place in the hearts and minds of the leaders and support systems. This "disagreement" has actually led to fierce on-the-ground fighting between the two groups in recent years, with many battles and hundreds of militants attacked killed across territory in northern Afghanistan. The Islamic State has an entire branch of their organization which has set up shop in this region, building a strong foothold in lands that the Taliban sees as theirs to control and influence. This also means that, in addition to the ideological divide, the Islamic

State is now competing for shared pools of resources and recruits in those regions as well. And both groups have been the initiators in these battles, so the enmity appears fairly mutual.

So when we look at these three rivals of the Taliban, we see one that is largely in name-only at this point, one small regional rival for recruits, and then the more recent battles with ISIS over ideological differences. So while it's true that, according to the quantitative regression analysis, the larger number of rivalries predicted a higher level of social media usage, we don't see this occurring with these two cases. This discrepancy is largely due to the other causal factors most likely, particularly the Taliban's unique and ethnic-heavy ideology that makes it difficult to create appeal outside of their local area. The higher number of rivals may actually help to explain why the Taliban even acts as much as they do on social media; without these competitors, it's probable they'd be even less present and less active on the sites.

Conclusion

Looking over these causal variables for these two organizations, there are several conclusions that emerge to demonstrate how both of these groups fit into the theory. First and foremost, the ideological divide appears to be driving a lot of the social media differences. Even among two religious organizations, the differences between the two identities is one of widespread appeal. While one has been able to export its identity to a wider, trans-national audience and connect to a wider network of similar ideology, the other has uniquely enmeshed their identity into local tribal customs and codes. Even though both groups have ideologies that technically fall into the same branch of the extreme Islamist tree, the differences that do exist affect their ability to draw support from other areas. The argument for ideology as causal in explaining social media presence and activity relies heavily on an ideological ability to cross-

borders and find believers, supporters, or sympathizers in other locations. This is why religious

beliefs and motivations should, theoretically, drive more social media usage because religion is a

belief system that does not heavily rely on local grievances or require ties to any specific country

in order to connect. So it makes sense that within religious ideology, you should see differences

in broader applicability also drive differences in Twitter usage as well. And while Lashkar-e-

Taiba has constructed an ideology with ties to the global extreme Islamist brand, building

ideological alliances, reaching out to support networks elsewhere, etcetera, the Taliban has

chosen a different tack. The Taliban has taken a lot of similar aspects of Islamist radicalism and

they've said a lot of the 'right' things regarding seeking pan-Islamic unity across the Middle East,

but at the end of the day, they struggle to gain widespread acceptance by other groups due to

their unique branding. The Pashtunwali codes, so specific to the people group of the ethnic

Afghans, has rendered them apostate in the eyes of many potential supporters and potential

allies. Their adherence to local customs and codes of conduct has nullified much—if not, all—of

the cross-border appeal and applicability that their baseline religious ideology would have

provided.

But this leads into the difficulty with alliances. While the initial quantitative analysis

from Chapter Three revealed evidence of a correlation between the number of alliances an

extremist organization has and their social media usage, a more in-depth look into LeT and the

Taliban reveals there may be an even deeper level of analysis here. Both groups show very

similar alliance numbers overall, but whereas Lashkar-e-Taiba has managed to exploit those ties

to connect to the larger Islamist radicalism network and take interest in other regions, the

Taliban's alliances appear fraught with tensions, challenging and not particularly strong. The

previous example of how even some of their strongest alliances like with al-Qaeda have gaping

holes, insults being slung back and forth, and bad feelings on both sides. So while on the surface, the Taliban should demonstrate equivalent—or even more—social media usage than LeT based on their ally numbers according to the theoretical argument, it appears that the strength of those alliances needs to be considered in more depth. Weaker connections to other groups simply don't result in the same opportunities for accessing new recruiting pools or potential supporters that a stronger alliance is likely to provide. The theory suggests that having alliances is really an argument about opportunity and that connection still appears to be true. But the alliance variable's relationship to opening up those opportunities is more complicated that initially thought, as breaking down those ally numbers by their strength may reveal more about the precise mechanisms of opportunity.

The final conclusion to be drawn from examining these two groups is two-fold. First, rivalry may just be a problem of the rich. Not 'rich' in terms of their strength when compared to the state—terrorism as a tactic is still viewed as a weapon of the weak—but rich in comparison to other groups. You simply don't see large rivalry numbers outside of the top few most lethal groups in the world. Notoriety, effectiveness, and relative strength may be driving this, much like the strongest and most famous sports teams also draw the most haters—the Yankees, Duke, Alabama, the Lakers, etc. The less deadly groups don't attract competitors at the same rate, making the argument for social media usage a moot point for your average group. This is likely due to a couple factors. Name recognition surely drives envy and hate, but there's also an important strength argument here because the further a group can project their power, the more backyards they are likely to cross into, which may upset other groups and create competitive battles for resources, recruits, and support. In other words, the stronger the group, the more likely they are to find themselves in different areas, competing over resources with other groups. The

rivalry argument as a causal variable boils down to competition driving the search for new tactics and new pools of support in order to compensate for the diminishing returns in their current area, so in simple terms, being strong raises competition chances and you simply don't see groups outside that top tier generating lots of rivals. The second aspect of this conclusion is that quality of rivalry matters. In much the same way that strength of alliance appears to play a role, the type of rivalry you have also seems to matter. While Lashkar-e-Taiba simply hasn't had to deal with any significant competition by rival groups, we do see this play out to some extent in the example of the Taliban. While they are coded as having three rivals, one of those is basically in name only at this point and a second is just a small regional rival that doesn't pose much of an existential threat. The only rivalry that might be affecting competition is their third one, a recent competition with the Islamic State. And ironically, a large component of this rivalry is being driven by ideological differences.

All of these brings us back to the exportability of one's ideology mattering. While all three of the examined causal variables demonstrated statistical significance in the small-N dataset, when examining these two individual cases, it appears that an ideology's global appeal may have the strongest impact on social media usage, making it the most explanatory of the examined causal variables. Because while 'religion' was used as a way to measure cross-border, transnational appeal because it doesn't normally require a person to be based in any one location in order to be a believing adherent, it's really that attractiveness of one's ideology to other regions that theory claims is driving presence on social media platforms. So even within religion, if one from brings connections and appeal to a wide region and one is uniquely linked to local tribes and area-based codes of conduct, that variation helps explain why groups join and build social media platforms and the extent to which they utilize those platforms. And it is this variable that,

at least in these two similar organizations, has the greatest influence on predicting the embrace of such online tactics. Alliance strength also appears to have an impact, though there may be an endogeneity concern here, as ideological similarities frequently affect the strength of connection between groups. And rivalries may still play a role as well, but only for those organizations strong enough or well-known enough to have the problem of rival competition.

Looking back on these two neighboring cases of the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba, I examined two different types of religious terrorist groups in detail. And we saw nuance in all three causally-identified variables that ultimately enriched the understanding of the mechanisms in the story of their impact. But in the following chapter, I go further and explore the FARC as a third case study, with a wide variation on ideology from the other two. This organization is an extremist group from Columbia that embraces a political belief system in the left-wing/Marxist wing of ideology, without any sort of religious component. As one of the more social media-active secular organizations in the world today, I plan to explore what makes them different, despite their lack of a religious ideology. What other variables come into play in this specific case? Is there even further nuance to the causal argument that needs to be explored?

Chapter Six: FARC

Introduction

As noted back at the end of Chapter Four, in order to fully examine the theoretically-identified causal variables, it is necessary to explore one more type of terrorist organization from the dataset. Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Taliban provide excellent case studies for research, but despite their ideological distinctions, both groups are, at their core, religiously-motivated. Even with their disagreements, and in particular the Taliban's embrace of local tribal codes of conduct, it is clear that their religious, and specifically Islamist, belief systems are at the core of who they are. Because of that and in order to fully examine the identity variable discussed in the theory chapter, it is important to examine a completely non-religious organization, one that derives its belief system and ultimate goals from some secular aim.

The organization that was selected for this purpose is the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia, otherwise known as FARC. As an extreme left-wing, Marxist group that has been—until very recently—quite active and deadly in South America, their ideological construct has no religious component, yet they still operate a low- to moderate-level of Twitter presence and activity. This means that, at least partially, FARC challenges the theoretical argument surrounding ideology. Therefore, this chapter will qualitatively attempt to explore and explain the mechanisms that have driven this organization to operate online as they do and how their causal decision-making process differs from religious entities. To do so, I will first detail a short history of the organization and their radicalization/recruitment practices, which will ground the group and provide an important backdrop for where this organization has been—ideologically and methodologically—before we examine their current, social media-age practices. This will then be followed by an analysis of their operation along the three causal variables to explain how

they fit into the overall puzzle and demonstrate their mechanistic processes that have led to their social media decision.

FARC: History

While the two previous groups examined share an ideological component common among terrorist organizations today, a religious belief system, it is first important to note that other types of groups have existed—even during the modern, fourth, religious wave of terror—that don't adhere to that specific kind of belief system. Deep in the Colombian jungle and spread out along the base of the Andes mountains, a rebel guerrilla movement has been battling since the mid-1960s, fighting—until quite recently—in the ongoing armed conflict throughout the South American country. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army, or FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia in their native Spanish), was an active participant in the so-called Colombian Conflict, an asymmetric war between the government and various crime syndicates, paramilitary outfits, and militants, which ran for several decades. FARC is one of the few fully secular organizations practicing terror in the modern world, during this religious wave of terror. Having formed during the global Cold War period, the FARC was a Marxist-Leninist movement that sought to overthrow the Colombian government and instill their own governing body, but it was also involved in a massive illegal drug trade business that spanned continents, kidnappings for ransom, illicit mining, extortion, and terror tactics. These activities provided funding support for the organization, but the group was also faced with accusations of violating human rights by their own national government, foreign governments, and even international organizations like the United Nations and Human Rights Watch.

The FARC was formed out of a small coalition of farmers who armed themselves as they felt they'd been disenfranchised, arguing the newly-installed Colombian government was stealing land from the poor and giving it to the wealthy. While they didn't associate themselves with the Soviet Union or Cuba directly, they emulated some of those countries' ideas and claimed to fight for and represent the peasantry against the rule of the powerful and wealthy within Colombia and adopted a strong Marxist-Leninist ideology. While they never seemed to concern themselves much with the typical left-wing belief in large government, they historically focused on the promotion of social welfare and fighting societal inequality. In those early years of the FARC, the organization was committed to that ideology, with a stated focus on the redistribution of the country's wealth and opposing multinational corporations. However over time, that commitment to those initial ideological goals wavered and ultimately diminished in favor of cartel-like behavior. By their later years, the organization had simply shifted goals, becoming more focused on territorial control and economic pursuits, more akin to a transnational criminal organization (TCO) or drug cartel than a pure rebel, terrorist group. They still practiced terrorism tactics, but their motivations had changed. In particular, the FARC moved into the drug trade, especially the production and sale of cocaine both within and outside the country. And at least in terms of sheer wealth—traditionally seen as a form of organizational power—this was a successful move, with the FARC peaking as the wealthiest non-Islamic terrorist group in the world, and 3rd overall with a revenue of roughly $600 million per year in total (Forbes, 2014), falling in line only behind the terror powerhouses of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and HAMAS.

While the organization formally disbanded in 2017 and signed a ceasefire, voluntarily disarming its fighters by handing over their weaponry to United Nations officials and peacekeepers, thousands of dissidents within the group still hold fast to FARC's mission. They

refused to comply with the agreement and still continue illegal activities to this day (Casey &

Escobar, 2018). Officially, the FARC organization has since become a legal political party called

the Common Alternative Revolutionary Force (also abbreviated as FARC, in Spanish,

intentionally done to emphasize that this is not a new, distinct group, but a continuation of their

previous efforts), but because so many former members are still actively fighting against

government forces and engaging in the drug trafficking, it's difficult to suggest this terrorist

organization is actually eliminated. It may no longer exist formally, but in practice, there are still

many active members adhering to their previous goals. Still, however, the peace deal they signed

with the government guaranteed the organization ten seats in the Colombian Congress through

the year 2026, seats for which it promises no other parties in the country would be allowed to

compete (Romero, 2016). And in the immediate aftermath, the effects of this deal were felt

across the country, with 2017 being the least deadly in Colombia since the 1970s (Faiola, 2016).

So even with dissidents, one could still claim this agreement was a success, at least temporarily.

It remains to be seen if the government will manage to control and adequately govern the

previously FARC-owned areas or if it will fall into disorder again, leading to the re-rise of the

FARC or another similar group.

Up until their official retirement and disarmament in 2017, the FARC was the oldest

insurgent organization on either American continent, having lasted and thrived for over fifty

years. It was also considered to be the largest, with as many as 18,000 members at its peak in

1999 (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2015), though its membership had suffered hits in the

last decade. One of the aspects of the organization that contributed to its unique longevity and

strength was its strict hierarchy, structured much the same way traditional militaries are, with

ranks and distinct units. This heavily-structured construction gave the group a sense of stability

and legitimacy in the eyes of the public and the fact that it drew many members from the rural peasantry allowed it to argue it was fighting on behalf of the people, which kept civilian support at a maintainable level. It also found a way, unlike most traditional terrorist organizations across the region, to inject itself into the country's official economy, making itself instrumental to the overall maintenance of Colombia's financial society. Without its extensive trade routes and cocaine sales, the state's economy might have collapsed, or at least struggled greatly.

All of that said, despite repeated claims of being pro-peasant and the source of much of their membership, however, the actual relationship between FARC and the local communities in which it largely operated varied wildly and wasn't particularly standard across Colombia. Peasant ties did provide a sort of organic link that went back generations and allowed FARC to rule in a quasi-governmental role in certain areas, providing social services and keeping the peace where the national government was unable or unwilling to step in. And many fighters ultimately came out of rural peasant classes. But in other regions, especially ones with large indigenous populations, those ties with the general public were noticeably absent, replaced by a sense of distrust from the people. In many cases, they felt like they'd been caught in the crossfire of a war between a dangerously violent rebel group and the equally violent Colombian military forces, so were much less supportive of either side.

Traditional Radicalization & Recruitment

Traditional radicalization and recruitment within the FARC organization was multi-faceted. In its earliest years, they relied heavily on their perception as a group fighting for the people, especially in neglected rural communities where FARC operated sort of as a protector for the people from the state's military on the heels of a violent decade of civil war. By publicly

arguing for and emphasizing things like better medical care and education for the poor, land reform, and nationalization of certain businesses, they gathered fighters and support quickly. This was true even on the political front where they actually won many government seats throughout the 1980s. And as they grew in strength, they also grew in wealth, which attracted more and more of the poor Colombian population who felt disenfranchised by the rest of society. This success and ideology made radicalization and recruitment easy, as they enjoyed a high level of bottom-up recruitment, where individuals develop ideology largely on their own, then seek out the already-existing group.

However, as FARC grew in wealth, their participation in the illegal drug trade and their overall level of violence also rose. And this new spike in violent activities began to turn people off, and their rich vein of support started to dry up. And in fact, at once point in the 1990s, over 13 million people across Colombia participated in country-wide protests against the continued existence of guerrilla groups like the FARC in their nation. This shift against them in public sentiment meant that FARC was gradually forced to find and to rely on other avenues to gain support and to increase radicalization and recruitment. So we saw their recruiting change form and targets.

One way they sought to accomplish this was through shifting their targets for membership toward younger and younger recruits. The usage of child soldiers is considered a war crime under international law, but in the FARC, it was observed that youth recruitment rose dramatically in later years, to the point where nearly 50% of all fighters in the group had joined the organization prior to reaching the age of 18 (Springer, 2012). Because of this focus, this means that a large chunk of FARC recruitment (and, in fact, general rebel group recruitment in Colombia across several different groups) during this time period is almost certainly forcible,

meaning they operate through a variation of top-down radicalization. This is when a group utilizes an organized campaign to reach out and find members—sometimes through force—rather than wait for individuals to reach out to them. These children are sometimes coerced into joining the organization at the business end of a gun or simply out of fear for their life or their family's. Others are in a vulnerable life situation, poor or orphaned with no other option, a socioeconomic condition that could be used to manipulate them into joining, and still more join the group for protection, money, or simple sustenance. Finally, at this age, ideological manipulation is common as well; it's not difficult to convince young people that you're doing the "right thing" as they're still trying to find their own identity and grasping at anything that allows them to belong. There are actually some similarities between this recruitment method for extremist groups and the ones utilized in domestic gangs and religious cults.

When child soldiers are brought into a violent organization like this, whether by gunpoint, coerced with the promise of money or jobs in a poor economy, or voluntary as protection, they are generally then worked through the radicalization process through a couple different mechanisms. Because they're so young, they typically don't have any real political grievance, nor are they exhibiting status/thrill-seeking, both mechanisms you often find in adult radicalization. Rather, young typically go through either the "Power of Love", joining to be with or protect a loved one, or more likely for forced recruits, the "Slippery Slope." In the Slippery Slope mechanism, recruits who have newly joined may not be fully radicalized yet, so are gradually moved through escalating levels of violence until they are so far down the slope that it's difficult to pinpoint precisely when they became a radical. Their extremism was merely conditioned into them over a slow period of hands-on initiation, moving them from mild actions (i.e. acting as a lookout) to harder, more violent activity. While FARC formally denies that any

of their recruits were forced, this mechanism of radicalization was not uncommon for either

scenario, but required a delicate touch. FARC would traditionally accomplish this through in a

hands-on, personal setting where they could ease these young recruits through the process with

caution.

      For adult recruits of FARC, there were some similarities in their recruitment to that of

child soldiers. Reports of forcible recruitment of indigenous people, or other marginalized

communities, was prevalent through their lifespan. But it went further than that too. As

previously mentioned, FARC leaned heavily on their claimed commitment to fighting for the

"oppressed" people, to establish "social justice" across the country. This, along with the promise

of income, brought in many fighters voluntarily who sought a better life and felt discriminated

against—or simply ignored—by the ruling government. They were promised meaning, power,

money, and even excitement. Several of radicalization mechanisms were common in

usage…Political Grievance, Thrill-seeking, etc. Once there, however, FARC put all newly

recruited guerrillas through a system of training, designed to break them down and build them

back up into soldiers, not that unlike what you see in traditional military units through boot camp

activities. This doesn't necessarily instill radical beliefs in and of itself, but it builds a high level

of in-group loyalty and cohesion among its members, as it provides a common ground that all of

them have suffered through and can relate to.

      FARC has also been noted, traditionally, for its recruitment of women, to the point that it

is believed that up to a third of their fighters are female. In these cases, radicalization and

recruitment was often even easier. By promising Colombian women the opportunity to fight

against injustice, they offer the chance at a better life than they can get in everyday society. In

much of South America, women still experience much discrimination and, especially in poverty-

ridden areas, this often forces them into less savory lifestyles of prostitution and gang activity.

Joining local rebel groups like FARC is a way to escape that lifestyle and FARC itself makes a

point of claiming that the status of women is equal to men and they are treated equally, placed in

the same units, allowed to participate in all military operations. This is very appealing to many

from low-income locales who see that gender-based discrimination at particularly high levels, so

convincing them of the honor of their identity is not as big of a step as one might expect.

All of these methods have been used by FARC to spur traditional radicalization and to

recruit new supporters and members into the organization. And they saw a fair amount of success

using these methods, with their numbers peaking into the five digits at times. Still, when new

technological advances such as social media moved into their arena, the group attempted to shift

with the times and entered this online space. Social media presented some challenges, however,

to their traditional methods. As much of their previous recruitment relied on local grievances—

whether for persecuted minorities or marginalized women—or on coercion at gunpoint, to fully

embrace social media and potentially connect with non-local communities would require novel

approaches. The next few sections will go into more detail on this, as well as on the causal

factors that drove their decision to join the online platforms, but only use them minimally.

Twitter Adoption

While there are a few secular terrorist organizations without religious ideologies—whole

or partial—that have completely eschewed the usage of Twitter, not even bothering to create a

basic profile or presence on the site, the FARC was chosen for this project in part because it

appears to have been straddling the line between wanting a presence and creating accountings,

but not choosing to engage in much activity on those social media profiles until 2012. They

occupy a middle-ground position, believing there exists some value in possessing accounts, but only moderate value in its usage, having only begun using the platform in its later years, as it weakened.

In total, the FARC was observed to own and operate roughly five accounts on Twitter over the course of the time period 2006-2016, with their two primary ones being an official account for the overall organization (@FARC_COLOMBIA) and one specifically for its leader Rodrigo Lodoño, known as Timochenko (@TimoFARC). Since embracing its new identity post-truce and shifting into a legal political party in Columbia, several other accounts have cropped up as well very recently. With these accounts, they frequently seek to provide alternative news to what the government reports, attempt to depict themselves as humanitarians in comparison to the government forces, and pitch themselves as justice-seekers on the side of the people. In particular, they like to emphasize their connection to the people, and emphasize their resolve to continue the fight on behalf of the citizens: "In the fight we are and in the fight we will continue" (@FARC_COLUMBIA).

However, the FARC didn't even elect to enter the Twitter game until the very end of 2011 and into 2012, near the end of their reign of violence, as a much-weakened organization in their final years. Their leader Timochenko first created and built his Twitter profile, listing his location as "Mountains of Colombia," in September of that year. This appears to be largely due to power loss and membership decline. In 2012, they suffered a great loss of a significant portion of their ranks due to an increased initiative that had been enacted to combat them by the Columbian government. Over 5,000 guerrilla fighters across the FARC and ELN were lost during this time period, as well as the destruction of over 1,400 cocaine laboratories and a 90% loss in illegal aircraft missions (Volckhausen, 2013). This initiative was also supported heavily

by the United States, an ally of the government and a nation that has seen a large portion of its illegal cocaine supply coming from these Columbian groups. This new push caused a drastic cutback on the group's ability to operate and many members were arrested. So it appears to be a rational conclusion that they were at a low point; they were likely feeling desperate and weak, so in the hopes of re-bolstering their organization, they finally turned to an online platform tactic that they had eschewed prior to this point. Having lost a large number of its fighters due to arrest and other circumstances, the group needed more support, more members, and their traditional recruiting methods were not keeping up with the overall need, so they hoped that a new, more-modern tactic would be the solution to their losses. That said, even though it ultimately takes place outside of my evaluated time period, it should be noted that the group laid down their arms only four years after entering Twitter, after thriving for nearly fifty years prior, so that last-ditch effort appears to have failed.

In terms of activity, their usage scored a '2' on this project's Twitter Activity scale, indicating Moderate usage, but it should be noted that this is pulled up by an increase in activity over the last couple years, while the early years were entirely devoid of any activity and even any presence. While it is difficult (likely impossible) to gather precise numbers for tweets from those years due to deleted posts and some of Twitter's crackdown on extremists, it is the general consensus of experts that the FARC's involvement in the platform was present, but unremarkable. Primarily, the group used their accounts for a few main purposes. First and probably foremost, the platform was used to spread ideology, to post messages about their plans to liberate the nation from its elitist oppression and return the power to the people. For ideological propaganda, Twitter—and a few other platforms—all proved cheap and easy to deploy. But messaging wasn't the only thing they utilized it for in those last few years.

Interestingly, they also used it to provide information about hostages they held, updates about their health, and details of the release of those individuals on multiple occasions (Uribe, 2012).

FARC has also invested, it should be mentioned, in other forms of communication technology as well over the years, most notably their own radio stations. These clandestine stations have been used traditionally for years to spread its messaging—largely political indoctrination and to boost the morale of fighters—throughout the rural parts of the country. It's believed that the FARC had at least one radio station in every single area of Colombia with several dating back decades (Uribe, 2012). This demonstrates that the FARC is not averse to adopting forms of new technology into their methods, if they feel it is helpful to their mission.

Ideology

The first hypotheses argued that a religious ideology would predict higher social media usage and the quantitative analysis from Chapter Three showed a statistically significant relationship between ideology and social media engagement. However, the FARC is not religious in their ideology—meaning one would expect little to no engagement online, but we have seen the organization create accounts and use them to some extent. In fact, they are one of the most active secular organizations on the platform. So what is it about the ideology here that makes them different here?

The ideology of FARC is not a common one today for terrorist organizations, but it was much more prevalent when the group was founded in the 1960s. They were created in 1964 with the stated intention to overthrow the National Front, a bipartisan political alternation system. Essentially, at the time, the two main political parties in Colombia—the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party—had agreed to rotate power and share the bureaucracy every four years.

These two parties have been dominant forces in Colombian politics at various times. The Liberal Party was originally more of a classically liberal party, but had shifted leftward toward socialism during the 1940s, embracing more social-democratic ideas. The Conservative Party, by contrast, espoused economic liberalism, social conservatism, somewhat akin to Christian democratic tradition.

While this agreement to share power in this manner did help end the decade of intense political violence in Colombia—a bloody ten-year civil war known as La Violencia—this adopted solution didn't resolve the various economic, political, and social problems throughout the country, so civilian dissatisfaction remained and began to grow as the people became impatient. Further, as the people become increasingly frustrated with the ineffectiveness of this rotating government set-up, one particular new political ideology begins to emerge and fester in the general population. This new set of ideas is more well known in a different part of the world, but it takes root here in Colombia as well. This ideology, communism, especially grabs the hearts and minds of emerging guerrilla groups, from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to the National Liberation Army (ELN) to the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) to the 19th of April Movement (M-19).

Especially in those early years, the FARC was largely composed of coordinating peasant self-defense groups and some militant communists. The commitment to pure-Marxism was strong and they were popular among the rural locals who saw the FARC as a revolutionary fighting for them, a Robin-Hood-esque organization dedicated to taking back lands from the wealthy elite and helping the poor. This commitment to being a "People's Army" provided them with a sense of legitimacy and justification for their actions, believing their guerrilla violence to be the only way, the last resort in their goal to combat the government. It gave them a "heroic"

purpose that worked well for recruitment and public support, but also morale. Terrorist groups rarely cast themselves as "terrorists"; the term is viewed as derogatory, so these organizations prefer to refer to themselves as something else. Whether revolutionaries, freedom fighters, martyrs, or another label, the ability to think of oneself as, and claim the public mantle, of hero for the people helps a group legitimize actions that would otherwise be considered heinous. It's not murder when it's against a villain.

Over time, however, this commitment to their communist, left-wing ideology has wavered as the opportunity to embrace the illegal drug trade as a means of raising funds for the operation of their organization. The leaders became less and less steadfast in their dedication to that original ideology as the movement progressed, but this lapse did not carry over into the more poor, rural supporters who maintained the Marxist belief system. This led to a bit of a chasm between members within the organization, as leadership focused more on the money that could be gleaned from working the drug trade in Colombia's economic system, while the rural FARC members remained dedicated to the left-wing beliefs that helped the group gain popularity in the first place. And in fact, we did see their support in rural communities decline due to this decision; by the time an amnesty peace deal rolled around in late 2016, rural Colombians were more likely to vote 'no' on the agreement than urban citizens.

There are several unique elements to the FARC ideology that set it apart from other terrorist organizations and help to explain its decisions surrounding the creation and usage of social media accounts; its roots in a specific once-global ideology, its shift over decades of power, and its connection to the local (and rural) communities. These factors make the FARC stand out in comparison to a lot of group today, especially many of the other extremist organizations near the top of the lethality rankings, and likely led them to eschew social media

tools for a very long time in favor of pursuing a more traditional, local recruitment and support path.

First, the FARC ideology is particularly rare in the world today for such terrorist groups, but there was a time when it was considered fairly common. During the New Left Wave of terror, which kicked off during the 1960s, a whole host of organizations around the globe possessed similar ideologies. A combination of international events spurred this movement, namely the Vietnam War which stirred encouragement among radicals that the technology and weaponry of a superpower could be beaten—or at least, held at bay—by a weaker, but more resolute ideological movement. Watching Vietcong guerrillas battle the American behemoth provided psychological backing for traditionally weak movements to feel emboldened. And with Soviet support, many groups arose and flourished temporarily. It was during this period the FARC emerged, a pure-communist-oriented organization willing to fight to the death for their ideas. And for a while, connections to other groups of common ideology was paramount, as the Soviet Union played a heavy role in supporting organizations around the world and there was, to an extent, connective sentiments between virtually all groups with similar beliefs. And the FARC utilized this leftist fraternity as well, sending troops for extensive training in Vietnam and the Soviet Union. They didn't rely as much on financial backing as some New Left-era groups, but over the years, we saw them interact favorably with multiple socialist governments, from the Soviet Union to Cuba to Venezuela. Even within their own country, there were several other communist organizations they would work with to accomplish broader goals.

However, as the Soviet Union slid and ultimately fell and the rest of the New Left wave-era radical organizations faded away during the 1980s, there were fewer and fewer outside groups for the FARC and its ideological brethren to reach out to and connect. And today, the

number of violent, extremist Marxist-Leninist groups that still exist number in the single digits in the Western Hemisphere and the global numbers diminished immensely as well. This means that while they did have connections with sympathizers and supporters early on in their existence, they had gotten used to not having that and operating largely solo, ideologically, by the time Twitter and the main thrust of the social media revolution arrived on the scene. Without many communist kin, and with the lack of major state players on that political front for financial backing, the FARC found a way to thrive on their own without need for reaching support or recruits front other locales. We also know that in those first few years after the Soviet Union fell, the FARC began to collaborate with other nationalist groups that had somewhat different ideologies, but were in similar position within their respective nations. This included the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) and the Provisional Irish Republican Army (pIRA), two rebel organizations in Europe. We even saw a short-lived cross-border alliance form between the FARC and al-Qaeda, a Middle Eastern religious group. This implies that the leaders in FARC initially saw a benefit in having such connections and when they lost the communist giant of the Soviet Union, they felt they needed something and couldn't exist purely on their own. However, these relationships ultimately faded away they further we move from the fall of the USSR and as FARC moved deeper into the drug trade.

On that note, this leads into the second reason the organization likely never truly embraced using social media until a last-ditch effort in 2013. Possibly in part because of their need to adjust to the demise of their ideological kin around the world, the FARC was forced to find another means of support to continue their existence. Due to local and national factors which made it particularly easy and profitable, the organization shifted away from left-wing beliefs and into a more economically-driven motivation. The majority of its funding—which, at its peak,

was nearly $300 million in United States currency per year—came from the illegal drug trade, specifically cocaine. This re-focusing as an economic cartel of sorts came during the 1990s, right after the downfall of the USSR. Prior to this, the FARC was not particularly involved in the growing or trafficking of drugs through Colombia during or prior to the 1980s, when they weren't alone ideologically. Because of the timing of this shift coinciding with the end of the Soviet Union, we can infer the loss of that connection, in part, spurred their decision to largely abandon the political ideology aspect and focus on trafficking. Further, FARC's decision was aided by the propitious fall of two of the main drug cartels in Colombia in the 1990s, Medellin and Cali, which allowed FARC to gain control of some of the coca-growing regions across the Amazon. As they moved into this arena, FARC helped Colombia become the world's largest producer of coca (cocaine) in the 1990s and today, Colombia alone accounts for roughly 43% of the entire global production of the drug. FARC managed to rebound from the fall of the USSR and collapse of the leftist terrorist wave by changing their goals and activity to become more of a cartel than a pure rebel organization, using the funds from the sale and trafficking of cocaine to fund their other violent activities. By doing so, however, their ideological reason for connecting to outside organizations for recruits and support vanished, which meant ideological motivations for utilizing social media also went up in smoke. This cartel behavior shift alone would not enough of an explanation, as many other groups around the world—namely ISIS—have engaged in black market fundraising or illegal drug trade, while still embracing social media. However these groups maintain ideological ties to other groups, significant cross-border aspirations, and draw a hefty portion of funds from other sources as well, so their illegal fundraising methods— black market oil or ancient relic sales, for example—likely have less of an impact on their social media decision. Thus, in conjunction with the FARC's loss of ideological kin, the extent to which

their fundraising methods changed almost overnight likely contributes to the explanation more

here than it would in an organization with a different type of ideology.

Finally, FARC's ideology was heavily rooted in local grievances of the poorer peasantry

of Colombia. Specifically, they were formed out of local farmers who were upset at being left

out of the new, rotating government structure. And tweets that come from FARC leadership

(translated from Spanish) catered to that ideological concept, frequently attacking the

government as an "oligarchy" and claiming they "raise and insist on a different solution"

(@TimoFARC). FARC likes to further play on that class system, pitching themselves as fighting

on the side of the poor, claiming "the Colombian people speak for us" (@FARC_COLOMBIA).

They liken the government to criminals themselves, tweeting "the criminal tradition of all

oligarchies" (@TimoFARC), as a way to align themselves with the more rural, peasant classes

and appeal to those populations. So their initial formation was due, almost entirely, to something

in their local Colombia government that troubled them. The fact that Marxist-Leninism became

the ruling ideology of the emerging organization was not coincidence, but it was, in part,

incidental as the initial members were mostly focused on their exclusion from the government

and disliked how the country appeared to be taking money from the poor to benefit the wealthy.

By being so heavily built around a grievance that almost requires one to be residing in an

aggrieved region of Colombia, it becomes difficult for the organization to truly sell their

ideological appeal to outsiders, especially abroad. While they did benefit somewhat from

expatriate Colombians in other parts of the world, much like other extremist organizations such

as the Irish Republican Army, the grand majority of their support and membership was driven by

locals, particularly the poor and rural communities. And because these are the people they

targeted for support and recruiting, the need for the utilization of social media to reach them is

minimized. People in other regions, even expatriate communities, are not likely to relate to the

grievances of local populations in Colombia because they are not under the authority of the

governing body to which the FARC objects. And they aren't experiencing the arguably

problematic power and wealth inequality in the country. In particular, if they were able to leave

the country to become an ex-patriot ethnic or national kin of the people of FARC, they are not

likely to have come from the poverty-stricken, rural communities that comprise the make-up of

FARC's main supporter/recruitment pool. And even locally, the poor, rural communities of

Colombia are less likely to have social media accounts due to the cost of Internet, so while some

organizations use social media to communicate and organize in their immediate locale, the

FARC doesn't even have much need for that. And even though FARC ultimately lost a lot of

support among these rural areas due to what was viewed as abandoning ideological principles,

All of these reasons add up to an extremist ideological makeup that is just not particularly

compatible with the typical reasons for building and creating social media. We have seen FARC

create a small number of accounts, but they simply didn't use it extensively for the grand

majority of this time period, only entering the scene in the last few years as the group was

weakened and in peace talks. They scored a '2'—or moderate—on my Twitter Activity scale. If

you recall from Chapter Three, this level indicates groups that engage in some activity on the

platform, but undergo gaps of days to weeks between posts. This implies that they saw

justification for having a profile or two—likely the legitimization that an online presence

provides, as "real" organizations in everyday society all have accounts—but that they don't view

the tactic as particularly useful day-to-day. Their roots in an extremist ideology that is minimally

present on the world stage today, their shift away from pure ideology into money-making cartel-

like behavior in the drug trade, and their origins in local, poor communities of rural Colombia all

combine to explain the mechanics of the relationship between their unique brand of ideology today and their decisions surrounding the creation and usage rate of social media.

Alliance Networks

Alliance network size, the theory argues, should cause a group to exploit the new opportunities presented and use social media more extensively to reach out to new potential supporters of their allies. Quantitatively, we did find some evidence for these hypotheses back in Chapter Three. When it comes to the FARC, the organization has shown mild interest in building formalized relationships with outside organizations at times. As previously mentioned, during their earlier years, they would occasionally send soldiers to the Soviet Union and to Vietnam for training purposes. During the 1970s and 1980s, Cuba provided various levels of funding to the organization, which included weapons, training, and money. And in the early 2000s, Venezuela and Hugo Chavez supplied the FARC with millions in money, and traded oil and weaponry with them. But when the Soviet Union collapsed, that particular relationship vanished along with the USSR and we saw the FARC's relationship to allies change. And while a few state governments remained—namely Cuba and Venezuela again—there were few non-state groups with similar ideologies for them to communicate and work with. However, this setback didn't result in the organization eschewing outside alliances with other extremist groups. In fact, we saw them broaden their horizons and reach out to nationalist organizations, from the ETA in Spain and pIRA in Ireland. The ETA, or Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, is a Spanish separatist organization in the Basque territories. While they did share some similar beliefs in revolutionary socialism with the FARC, primarily this armed group engaged in paramilitary operations to promote Basque culture and hoped to gain independence for their region from Spain and France. The pIRA (Provisional

Irish Republican Army) was one of several successors to the original IRA, like the ETA, had a few socialist ideas that provided common group for their relationship with the FARC, but mainly they fought in Ireland to end British rule, reunify the Irish nation, and liberate their people.

As previously discussed, these types of relationships built by the FARC organization didn't last particularly long, as they shifted their mindset and goals toward cartel-like drug trade behavior, lessening the need for outside support. By embracing a financial outlook at an organization, they lessened the need for a large alliance network to outside entities, states, or groups, and in the process, they moved toward being increasingly self-sufficient in their later years of existence.

They also maintained admittedly mixed relationships with local organizations. Sometimes allies, sometimes rivals, the would utilize each other for various aims. In particular, this included the National Liberation Army of Columbia (ELN), and to a lesser extent, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), both other Marxist-Leninist groups in Columbia, BACRIM (Bandas Criminales) which is a criminal organization that traffics in a variety of illegal money-making activities, and Shining Path, a Peruvian guerrilla group that has often draw comparisons with the Columbian organization (BAAD). And while many of the foreign relationships have faded (though it should be mentioned that both Castro and Chavez played roles in facilitating peace talks between the FARC and the Columbian government in the last decade), these more local relationships have persisted—at least to some extent—with Shining Path, in particular, having been in contact with the FARC in the drug trade as recently as 2015. Each of these allied groups in the region have served purposes for the FARC organization at various times. And when it suits the organization, FARC will discuss other groups as being on the same side; in one tweet from 2012, the leader of the group, Timochenko, sent out a tweet that specifically

mentioned that both "the FARC and the ELN" had been threatened with "prison or the grave" (@TimoFARC), placing them on the same side of the broader conflict with the Columbian government. Of note, this type of economic relationship for illegal trading purposes is a different kind of alliance than one typically envisions between these extremist groups; this is more akin to cartel behavior, or business behavior.

Looking at this history of alliances of the FARC, they scored a network size of six in the dataset, indicating they have held six allied relationships in the time period of 2006-2016. This lands them right on the average, with the median score of the 25-group dataset being 5.96 alliances during this period. This indicates that while they did see value in building and maintaining some alliances, they didn't place a particularly high value on cultivating them and constructing a massive network of allied organizations. They showed a moderate level of attention to network-building, but never invested in creating a particularly large web of friends. This fits well with the explanation of their only-mild interest in social media building as well. They recognize the value in having such connections to outside forces, organizations, individuals, and other possible support pools, but also heavily value self-sufficiency. Alliance building opens up new potential avenues for support, but when a group doesn't create that network, there is less incentive to construct social media platforms to reach those supporters as well. The group doesn't require outside support due to internal factors that allow them to thrive on their own money-making tactics and local recruitment models, so they require smaller networks of allies, which leads to less incentive to build a presence online to reach those new pools of support.

Still, however, they do observe some value in creating a minimum level of these variables. They built a small network of allies in the region and globally. They do have a small

social media presence. It provides legitimacy to connect with a globalizing world, whether via formal alliances or informal ties through Internet media. Particularly for an organization that runs an international business of sorts, as the FARC group did with their drug trafficking empire, having ties to others, both locally and in more removed regions, establishes them as genuine players in a broader worldly community. Yet, much like their low to moderate ties to allies, the FARC organization apparently saw low-moderate value in extending that online reach and cultivating extensive relationships with others through an active social media presence.

Without strong and widespread formal ties, the need for indirect communication via social networking over the Internet was also diminished. Formal allies opened up new pools for recruits and support that an organization like FARC could utilize to build their empire of terror, but with only a few true allies—and even fewer that lasted very long—those pools of potential supporters and recruits were less likely to be there for milking and exploiting. A moderate to low level of alliance networking also creates a lower level of need and a lower level of opportunity for a very Columbian-centric organization to extend their recruiting efforts beyond the immediate locale to reach others through Twitter. In other words, alliance networking connections open up channels that a group can use for support and a low number of those channels also generates less need for groups to try to exploit those channels. In the language of opportunity arguments, the FARC only generated a small to moderate number of formal opportunities to access the recruiting and support pools of other organizations, so it makes little sense for them to massively over-utilize an informal tool of opportunity that, in part, is designed to help them reach, communicate with, and solicit various forms of support from those specific pools that allied organizations draw from. Here, we find support for the hypotheses and for the

broader alliance theory about opportunities. A low-moderate size of their alliance network drives a low-moderate presence and activity on social media networks.

Rivalries

When it comes to the number of rivals that the FARC has, the proposed theoretical model here argues the more rivalries, the more one should engage on social media because competition behavior is driving them to seek out new methods of finding recruits/support to compensate for what they're losing through competition. And in the quantitative chapter, we found evidence for these hypotheses, both on presence and usage of social media.

In this particular case, social media usage for FARC is moderate and their rival number is actually above both the mean and median, albeit not by a lot. For this particular causal variable and the time period evaluated, FARC had only two groups that could feasibly be considered rivals, or other non-state organizations in open competition with each other for resources, support, recruits, or other assets. This included the occasional ally but often enemy, the aforementioned ELN, and another group they often sparred with violently, the United Self Defense Forces of Columbia (AUC) (BAAD). During the Columbian Armed Conflict, a low-intensity Cold War conflict that began in the 1960s and continues to this day, a lot of various non-state groups battled each other, as well as the official state government of the country, to increase their influence across Columbia. This violence between non-state entities continued throughout the conflict, which each claiming their own motivations and goals, but virtually all contributing to the hundreds of thousands of casualties and millions of displaced individuals across the country as a direct result of the fighting. The FARC was one of these violent groups, claiming to fight for the rights of the poor, but two opposing groups—one far-left guerrilla in the

ELN and one far-right paramilitary organization in the AUC—stood out as chief non-state rivals to FARC's desire for power and influence in the region.

Like FARC, the ELN has recently been looking to secure a deal with the government to lay down arms in exchange for being able to form a political party, but over their decades of existence as the second-largest rebel group in the country, they have been responsible for various kidnappings and armed attacks on many, including the massacre of civilians on multiple occasions. And like FARC, they too operated with an ideology steeped in Marxism-Leninism and liberation theology. In fact, ideologically-speaking, both groups show extreme left-wing and nationalistic similarity. This made them candidates for an alliance with FARC, which they did exploit on a handful of occasions, running joint missions and cooperating on many operations. However, these close similarities also led to hostilities, particularly in certain areas. And while the two groups are technically allied, in practice those cooperative actions are rare

One such area is Arauca, a department (a territory similar to a state or province) in the north of the country along the border with Venezuela, where we've seen repeated skirmishes between FARC and the ELN. While the reasons differ slightly depending on location, a common theme is FARC attempting to take over local ELN income sources and territory near the Venezuelan border, which angered the smaller rebel organization. ELN, in response, has attacked and killed several militants from their larger brethren (BBC, 2006). This led FARC to publicly accuse the ELN of "attacks we only expected from the enemy" on their webpage—the existence of which is another piece of evidence that FARC sees some value in the legitimization an Internet presence provides—and invited members of the other organization to defect and join with them "for the good of the revolution." This fighting between two groups that share locales, share ideology, and thus, may share a similar recruiting pool of support, drove a lot of struggles

over the years. And in fact, it is this similarity that would seem to predict a higher level of social media usage than is observed by FARC.

However, one possible explanation for why this particular rivalry doesn't seem to have driven a larger usage of social media is that, despite being similar ideologically, there was not as much overlap in recruiting as one might think. FARC mostly was comprised of peasant self-defense groups and some militant communist ideologues, but the ELN mainly targeted the intellectual crowd for their recruits. They found support among student groups and teachers, particularly at the university level. So while their ideologies would suggest an overlap that might drive competition behavior of the type that would lead to online media tactics, we didn't observe this playing out in the real world. They competed with one another for territory and resources, but much less so for supporters and potential recruits.

The other major rival that the FARC dealt with during this time period is the AUC, the United Self-Defense Forces of Columbia. This was a right-wing paramilitary organization with its roots in individuals and small drug enterprises wanting to directly combat the FARC and the ELN, sometimes even to avenge deaths at the hands of the organizations. But in the late 1990s, it became a distinct group by merging several local militias and developed a reputation for horrific attacks and murders designed to instill fear. The utilized torture, massacres, assassinations, kidnappings, and other human rights abuses against who they saw as rival guerrillas or sympathizers. They even engaged in spoiling behavior, an identified terrorist behavior whose purpose is to 'spoil' peace talks between the government and more moderate radicals. As the AUC increased in violence, they also worked in the illegal drug trade for funding, which put themselves into direct competition with the FARC and other similar groups across Columbia.

However, this rival too is unique, for a couple reasons. First, and probably primarily, they were eliminated very early on during the social media years. In fact, formally they demobilized in 2006, right as Twitter was coming online. It is true that many successors and a handful of small cells claiming to be survivors of the AUC persisted past this date, but even most of them were wiped out by 2008. So they simply didn't exist much during this time period, despite technically being rivals. However, even if they had existed longer, it is unlikely that this particular rival of FARC would have resulted in social media engagement beyond what FARC was already doing. This is because they operated under wildly divergent ideologies and motivations. FARC, as previously discussed was quite left-wing, constructed around the ideas of Marx and Lenin, and even when they shifted gears into more economically-driven goals, their rural supporters still adhered to the communist ideas that had been built into the founding of the organization. Meanwhile, the AUC landed at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum as a right-wing group. There was unlikely to have been much overlap in terms of recruit or support pools from a strict ideological sentiment. And because they were founded with the express purpose of combating some of these other groups, like FARC and the ELN, there likely weren't too many groups of people that both rivals were truly competing over. Again, while competition for resources and territory existed, there would have been little need for competitive behavior to manifest in recruiting tactics.

Thus, while the FARC does possess (nominally) two rivals, it does not appear that this variable drives much of their social media decision. While the overall dataset regression suggests a correlation between number of rivals and social media presence/usage, this case study would suggest it isn't quite that simple. In fact, there are certain details of this particular variable that means there is more going on here than a simple count of rivalries would suggest. While both of

these rivals raised overall competition for influence in the region, there appear to be enough differences in their ideology or their recruiting targets that their existence simply didn't result in the expected competitive behavior predicted by the theory. We did not find explicit support for the hypotheses, as currently written, but rather the FARC built a richer, more nuanced story than they suggested. By strengthening what it means to truly be a rival, this only strengthens the theory regarding rivalry-driven competition over recruits. When recruits and local supporters are not at stake—but only material resources and local power—you don't see that competition driving social media usage; it's only when human capital is at risk of being lost to competition that this online recruitment tool is significantly impacted.

Conclusion

As we examine the causal variables for this organization, there are a few conclusions that emerge from the data to explain where the FARC fits into the broader theory. When rivalry is combined with the alliance network size and group ideological factors, it is clear that the FARC saw Twitter merely as a means to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the public—and international community, but didn't value it much beyond that for finding or developing support, or communicating with and radicalizing potential recruits. This conclusion holds at least until their last few years of existence, possibly when they believed themselves to be severely weakened and were in talks with the government. There was value at that point in cultivating support among the moderates for votes when they emerged as a new political party. And in fact, since disbanding formally, the newly-formed party has created a Twitter presence and has been quite active on it as well. Prior to those final years, they didn't see a need to reach out to these people through the medium, for ideological reasons, for competitive reasons, or for connecting with new allies. In

their eyes, there was value inherent in having accounts and engaging in small to moderate usage, but this, by and large, didn't translate to needing to be particularly active.

The first variable of ideology demonstrates that while religious ideology may make it easier to find cross-border connections, there have been ideological connections in the past along other, political lines that may have driven more social media usage had Twitter existed forty years ago. But communist-Marxist philosophy simply doesn't generate the same appeal globally as it once did for extremists, so there's less need for social media accounts to reach others. The theory suggests that it is this cross-border applicability that drives the social media decision and the FARC fits neatly into that argument. While the theory goes on to purport that religion is the most able to appeal across state/ethnic/national borders, it certainly doesn't insist that other ideologies can't do the same. And it appears that the ideology of FARC may have once held a similar flexibility around the globe that simply doesn't exist anymore today. It's difficult to know for sure what level of Twitter usage that appeal during the Cold War era would have produced, had the technology existed, but it is likely that you would've seen, at minimum, some engagement on the platform because there was more inter-state ideological kinship. So the FARC ultimately does support the theoretical argument and the two ideology hypotheses, but emphasizes the caveat that, even if religion has the best chance of being exported to other areas, that type of ideology is not the only possibility. Any other ideology that also doesn't rely heavily on local grievances or ties to a specific state should also see similar results, which further enriches the understanding we have about the types of ideologies that can generate that appeal abroad.

When it comes to the second variable, the FARC fits neatly into the theoretical model and provides support for the hypotheses that claim a positive relationship between alliances and

social media engagement. They showed mild to moderate interest in constructing formalized relationships with outside groups and they also showed a similar level of interest in embracing social media. Their relationships abroad mostly predated the social media era, and many of their local alliances were mixed. Further, a solid portion of their local relationships appear to have been built around their economic trade ties for their illegal drug trade more than their shared ideologies. This is more cartel-esque behavior, so the primary conclusion we can take from this variable is that these alliances should hold only mild impact on constructing social media platforms, which is precisely what we observe out of the FARC.

The final conclusion that emerges from this case study is about rivalry. We saw in the previous chapter that rivals may be a problem that only the powerful organizations even have to deal with, but we also observe here that the type of rivalry may matter as well. Not all rivalries are constructed equally. An ideological rivalry that recruits from different populations won't hold the same competitive nature as a situation when multiple groups are trying to access the same recruiting pools. And likewise, a rivalry over material resources when the competing organizations espouse divergent ideologies also likely won't see the same competitive behavior. Thus, while this particular case doesn't directly provide strong support for the original hypotheses, it appears the FARC simply adds nuance to the broader theoretical model regarding the quality of rivalry, specifically surrounding the concept of shared recruiting pools. If groups are trying to reach different people groups, different classes, different ideologies, social media recruiting simply isn't as necessary and you're not likely to see rivalries impacting that decision as much. There is still the aspect of needing to gather material resources elsewhere, so some level of social media may help accomplish that, but lacking that competitive adversary would certainly dampen the necessity of constructing those online profiles.

Together, the three variables examined help enrich a bigger, more complete picture of social media decision-making. Ideology is really driven by the exportability and attractiveness of your belief system to other regions, a factor that can vary somewhat throughout time, but requires a less concrete tie to local concerns. Alliances need to open up recruiting and support opportunities to a strong impact; economic trade ties are less impactful. But there does still appear to be a relationship between constructing formal relationships and utilizing social media to exploit the opportunities that those relationships open up. And finally, rivalry is a variable not just about the quantity of rivals, but also the quality and type. The competitive behavior of outbidding and seeking new avenues for support only matters if the rivals are negatively impacting recruiting. In all, we see a complex image of social media decision-making, one primarily driven by ideological connections abroad, but with impacts coming from multiple, nuanced variables as well.

Final Conclusion

The Puzzle

Modern terrorism is a phenomenon that has been with the world since the late 1800s and in that time has shown remarkable resiliency and ability to adapt to change. From new technological innovations to tectonic shifts in international relations and structure to new counter-terrorism efforts, terrorism has evolved to adjust to it all. And one of those most recent changes to the global landscape is the addition of social media. Invented as a way for people to connect to one another, its breakthrough onto the scene has spurred globalization. And we've seen a wide variety of groups and individuals turn to this online invention as a way to grow businesses, stay in touch with friends, spread messaging about political campaigns, sell products, and much more. Because of its immense power, it only makes sense that extremist organizations would also seek to harness its influence and power. Building Twitter profiles would provide a means to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the public, both locally and globally, and utilizing those profiles through frequent posts and interactions with other accounts builds community, connects to vulnerable individuals, spurs radicalization, and potentially brings new members into the fold

But when we didn't observe the phenomenon occurring among extremist groups at the level one would expect given its extremely low-cost, easy-to-use nature, that raised some questions about why. This presented a puzzle and I sought to answer those questions. In this dissertation, I developed a theory connecting social media engagement—namely through Twitter—to three different causal variables: ideological identity, opportunity through alliances, and rivalry-based competition. In doing so, I advanced causal mechanisms for each in order to explore and explain how each was tied to a group's strategic choice to create social media presences and to further utilize those platforms once profiles had been created.

Ideological identity is something very intrinsic to an organization's motivation for its actions and the connective ability of that identity is what frequently drives the search for support, new recruits, and sympathizers. Theoretically, I argued that the greater appeal an identity has abroad and the less connected it is to local, concrete grievances, the more likely an organization is to seek out social media tactics to reach and connect with people in other areas. Religious ideology in particular, I pointed out in the theory chapter and backed up with previous literature, is a form of identity that is usually more easily exportable, so I hypothesized that the more religiously-motivated a group's ideology, the more social media engagement that group would embrace.

Alliance networks are a type of formalized connection that opens up opportunities to people who may be potential supporters and/or recruits. By creating direct ties to other organizations, there are implicit endorsements made that supporters and sympathizers of one group can trust the allied organization. This creates new connective links to new pools of potential recruits—often in other locations—that groups will want to seek to tap into and I hypothesized that the larger a group's alliance network, the more engaged they will be on social media. In other words, allies generate opportunity that can be accessed through engagement on social media platforms.

Rivalries are a different causal mechanism, but exist on the opposite end of the spectrum of organizational connections; here I examined competition behavior. When two groups are competing with one another for local resources, support, and recruits, this creates a competitive drive. And as the local pool for those things shrinks and gets divided between the organizational rivals, there is an incentive for groups to find new avenues to generate that support and find new members to radicalize and bring into the fold. In other words, competition forces groups to need

to find new methods of recruitment and I hypothesized that as a group's number of rivals increase, they would seek to engage on social media more to try to seek out new pools for raising that support.

Key Empirical Findings

I put the above theoretical arguments to the test in chapters four through six of my dissertation. In Chapter Four, my study on the social media engagement using a database of twenty-five terrorist organizations from 2006 to 2016 showed strong levels of support for all three of my causal variables, on both presence and usage dimensions. Religious ideology, the size of an alliance network, and the number of group rivals all show positive correlations with groups deciding to build social media platforms for their organization. From these results, three groups were chosen to examine in further detail as case studies. Based on the results from the previous analysis and their information gathered into the dataset, Pakistani Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Afghani Taliban, and FARC out of Columbia were selected for this next step of the project.

Several conclusions could be drawn from these case studies. First, ideological identity appears to be the strongest of the three identified key variables and even among religious organizations, that idea of widespread appeal being the driver here is strong. The ability to export your ideology to a trans-national audience do affect a group's capabilities when it comes to drawing support from other regions. Groups that possess that aspect to their ideology—particularly religious, but even within faiths—show much more interest in building connections through social media and it makes sense that what is driving that is the ideology's perceived level of attractiveness to possible supporters outside the local area. We also see that, while religion appears to make it easier to appeal across borders, especially in today's world, it must be noted

that there may be other ideologies that can generate similar levels of attractiveness abroad. Looking for religious aspects to a belief system can act as a good shortcut, ultimately one needs to deduce if that ideology—religious or secular—has the ability to appeal remotely or if there is something about it that is uniquely tied to the local community and area.

Secondly, the size of one's alliance network also shows a relationship with social media engagement, but while quantity still shows a correlation, it is likely the underlying quality of those alliances that plays the bigger role. We observed Lashkar-e-Taiba, with much stronger connections to the broader Islamist network of extremists, engaging on social media to a much greater extent than the Taliban, who has had trouble building relationships with other groups due to some unique elements to their belief systems and many of their alliances have been fraught with difficulties. The strength of alliances also appears to be connected to having shared ideologies more so than, say, economic ties or strategic ones, so there may be some overlap in this with the previous identity variable.

Finally, the rivalry variable did demonstrate support for the theory but, as noted in Chapter Five, this may be impacted because of its status as a sort of 'problem of the rich'. In other words, having a large number of rivalries is very rare and only the largest, most lethal groups have more than a few that might drive competition. The strength and name-recognition allows for further power projection and causes more interactions between organizations, which can spark more conflict and competition, but smaller, less powerful organizations simply are less likely to have many rivals to compete against. I further noted that the type of rivalry matters; this is important in supporting the radicalization and recruitment piece of the theoretical argument. Rivalries over material resources when the groups claim different ideologies doesn't appear to generate the same competitive behavior. In other words, it is mainly when groups are trying to

attract people, not just raise new materials, that you see competitive behavior emerging and social media engagement on the rise.

All three of these variables, however, do appear to play a part in driving the strategic decision-making process that groups undergo when choosing whether or not a move to embrace a social media campaign is worth the effort. And understanding the way these factors play into that decision holds some policy implications for counter-terrorism analysts as well.

Implications

From these research results, we can infer a few things with real-world consequences for understanding terrorist organizations and for countering them. First, this research demonstrates that groups do see value in utilizing social media to manipulate vulnerable people and to connect with sympathizers, for recruitment and radicalization efforts. The move online is not without thought; it is clearly a strategic choice dependent on other factors both inside and outside their organization to achieve their goals. Not that counter-terrorism efforts have been doing so, but this research shows that we can't simply ignore this online space as a means for radicalization. Efforts need to be proactive in battling extremist methods through social media because we know this is an active choice on their part. Further, as it is a strategic decision, this also suggests that groups who do decide to move some of their efforts online are also likely to dedicate resources to this. We've seen reports that ISIS once was trying to recruit individuals with degrees in communications and social media expertise; it is likely we will see other groups start to move in this direction as well.

Secondly, the manipulation and influential abilities of social media are strong. In this research project, we only see the group side of the argument—not the individual results—but it is

clear that, at least, the perception of effectiveness in this capacity is high. Whether social media is being used to shift public opinion for an election, ideas on a particularly salient political issue, or spread extremist propaganda and impact young people in that manner, these platforms need to be understood for what they are. They are immensely useful connective tools, but they carry risks that need to be taken seriously as well. As a society, we need to be cautious with their power and protect those in society who are most vulnerable—the youth, the jobless, the marginalized, etc.—because it is not just local groups or individuals that may be seeking to exploit their vulnerability, but the globalizing world and extensive reach of social media means there are worldwide threats on the platforms. Creating support networks and encouraging strong familial units for these individuals has always been important in building a strong society, but the consequences are growing and it is even more vital now.

Thirdly, ideology matters. A lot of times, people in the media or in the public citizenry treat all terrorism the same. Nationalist, racial supremacist, religious terrorist, lone wolf, etc. And in some ways, maybe there are similarities. But when it comes to the way they utilize the new online space of social media, there are definite differences, depending largely on just how much appeal that ideology can generate across borders and in further-away locales. If an ideology is too directly tied to a local or personal grievance, that belief system can't be exported as neatly or as thoroughly and those terrorists are not likely to move into the online space. But when a group feels it can reach people in other areas with their belief system, they are much more likely to engage on Twitter and other forms of social media. In these cases, it becomes all the more important for counter-terrorism agencies and groups to fight to counter those belief systems in their local or state communities, as well as providing alternative beliefs online as well. In a few anecdotal cases locally in the Middle East, we've seen individuals go into terror-ridden

communities offering a more moderate interpretation of Islamist beliefs see a small level of success. Thus, people like this also should be more involved online, more pro-active in offering a non-violent way of viewing those religious beliefs on social media. And counter-terrorism agencies who fight these organizations need to understand that you can't bomb away an ideology. But you can fight an ideology with another ideology, and as these groups seek to spread their messaging through social media, specific counter-ideologies could be very effective.

Finally, we can use these results to predict the type of groups that are most likely to move online and use these platforms. Groups with cross-border appeal, as discussed above, but also groups that engage in a lot of networking through formal avenues and alliances, and groups that face rivals and competitors locally for resources and supporters. This allows counter-terrorist experts to focus their efforts; as new groups inevitably emerge around the world, we can use these results to predict which groups are likely to build social media profiles and campaigns and which ones are more likely to eschew its usage and keep its radicalization and recruitment efforts more localized. As we look to commit resources in the global 'War on Terror', utilizing projects like this can impact how we choose to devote our efforts in a way that is efficient and effective.

Future Research

Going forward, there are a couple avenues for future research that deserve to be explored further. Primarily, I would like to continue to expand the dataset to include more extremist organizations and to also construct a dynamic component to explore the embrace of social media by groups over time. This will permit for any adjustments to the theory based on whether groups embraced the tactic slowly or jumped in with two feet, or to note if there were significant events that impacted the decision-making at any particular time. This ability to track social media usage

over time will become more useful the longer the technology exists. There are also a lot of extremist organizations in the world, many of which did not make it into this dataset, so to improve applicability, a larger set of data would be very useful. Because of the sheer number and availability of data, this simply wasn't viable on this project, but with more time, this should be possible. Ideally, I would also like to develop the dataset further to incorporate organizations with radical, extremist beliefs that have not recently crossed the line into committing much violence—such as white nationalist groups in the West, former terrorist groups like the IRA that focus more on vandalism today, or even religious cults who hold views well outside the mainstream, but mostly keep to themselves. This would increase the applicability of this model and its findings to all sorts of groups, to include gangs, cartels, cults, and transnational criminal organizations that frequently don't get the label of terrorist, but may still be operating online in similar fashions. Finally, to truly grow the dataset with social media numbers would require access to logs of countless deleted accounts, which would mean getting permission from Twitter itself and likely a level of government security clearance considering the potential national security implications. Access to these logs would also allow for more accurate measurements for groups currently included in the dataset; while the numbers are very educated guesses and compiled from trustworthy sources, ultimately they are still just estimates. A future, and perhaps ongoing, project will focus in these areas.

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Appendix

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Vita

Justin Kinney was born in Durham, NC, to his parents, Robert and Kim Kinney. He is the older of two children, with a younger sister, Rebecca. He attended Cannon School until 2002 and then continued to Northwest Cabarrus High School in Concord, NC until 2006. After graduation, he headed to Duke University where he obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in May 2010 in Psychology, with a focus on Personalities. From there, he moved north to Washington D.C. where he earned a Master of Science from George Washington University in December 2012 in Forensic Science – Crime Scene Investigation. After working in the nation's capital for a couple years, Kinney moved to Knoxville, TN and enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of Tennessee in 2014. Here, he obtained a Ph.D. in Political Science with concentrations in International Relations and Comparative Politics in August 2019.

In addition to academic pursuits, Kinney has written and published two mystery/suspense novels, *Precipice* and *Splintered State* with plans for several more, and currently hosts a weekly podcast on international politics and political theory, *Nutshell Politics*. Kinney's future plans are to work and teach as a professor at a university or to pursue a non-academic route in government, but mostly he hopes to continue to grow as a person and never stop learning.