

**Introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy, and Practice*: terrorism and political violence**

Readers unfamiliar with issues related to terrorism and political violence may be surprised to find that empirical research on these topics began nearly 50 years ago. In its early years, this research was performed by relatively few scholars in political science and sociology. Research from other fields was largely non-existent, and of the studies that do exist from those other fields, few have stood the test of time as seminal works in terrorism studies. Given this, one could be forgiven for assuming that academic interest in terrorism – particularly from researchers other than political scientists and sociologists – is a wholly contemporary phenomenon.

In the years since the September 11 attacks, however, research on terrorism has been produced at a seemingly exponential rate. To be sure, political scientists and sociologists remain stalwart figures in the study of terrorism, but researchers from other fields have also joined the fray. Psychologists have explored how individuals come to adopt ideologies that advocate the use of violence against civilians (e.g. Horgan, 2014). Communication researchers have investigated how strategic messaging supports the use of terrorism and efforts to counter violent extremism (e.g. Braddock, 2015; Braddock and Horgan, 2016; Glazzard, 2017). Anthropologists have demonstrated how ethnographic methods can contribute to our understanding of terrorism (e.g. Sluka, 2009). Even economists have gotten involved, producing models that inform policymaking regarding transnational terrorism (Enders and Sandler, 2002). These examples represent only a small fraction of the studies from the variety of disciplines that are now engaged in systematic research on terrorism.

Included in the growing group of social scientists engaging in research on terrorism are criminologists. Criminal justice scholars at the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism have been at the center of the study of terrorism for the last decade, engaging in research on a wide variety of issues, including (but not limited to) violent incidents against military targets (Parkin *et al.*, 2016), charismatic leadership in terrorist groups (Hofmann (featured in this issue), 2005), criminal case processing of terrorists (Johnson, 2012), and the role of identity in the development of terrorists (Simi *et al.*, 2013). The John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York (CUNY) has also produced a substantial amount of research on terrorism and political violence. Researchers at John Jay have explored the effects of terrorist events on willingness to cooperate with security forces (LaFree and Adamczyk, 2017), hate groups (Adamczyk *et al.*, 2014), and how criminal networks operate in areas rife with political violence (Arias, 2010). Other research at the nexus of criminology and terrorism has been performed independent of official affiliation with criminal justice-based departments. Altier *et al.* (2014) utilized criminological theory to explore the reasons why individuals abandon their terrorist activities. Silke (2001) analyzed papers published in criminology journals to evaluate the trajectory of terrorism studies in the early 2000s. Mythen and Walklate (2006) advocated for a criminological perspective in approaching the study of terrorism after the September 11 attacks. As this small sample of studies illustrates, criminology has clearly had an impact on the empirical study of terrorism, particularly since the year 2000.

The addition of criminologists to the pool of researchers performing research on terrorism has been crucial for several reasons. First, criminological theories can teach us much about the performance of and desistance from terrorism, as well as how we should approach the treatment of terrorist prisoners. Some researchers have performed work to this effect, as strain theory (e.g. Agnew, 2010), anomie theory (e.g. Blazak, 2001), differential association theory (e.g. Armstrong and Matusitz, 2013), and other theoretical perspectives have already made

Kurt Braddock is a Lecturer at the Department of Communication Arts & Sciences, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, USA.

significant contributions to the literature on radicalization and terrorism. Second, although terrorism is often treated as a “special” kind of offense, there is little evidence to suggest that its performance is different from the kinds of crime that are more typically explored by criminologists. Of course, terrorism may be considered different from more common forms of crime because it is statistically and socially abnormal, but the social and psychological processes that underpin its performance are often no different than the processes that relate to other forms of criminal behavior. If terrorism is stripped of its visceral tenor, it becomes possible to address it impartially; criminological approaches are well suited to this endeavor.

Given criminology’s place in the study of terrorism, it is critical for uninitiated criminologists to become familiar with research that addresses this pressing concern. This special issue of the *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy, and Practice* stands as one collection of such research. Still, this volume should not be considered a comprehensive anthology of criminological approaches to the study of terrorism. The sheer range of issues to which criminological perspectives might be applied renders the creation of such a volume impossible. Instead, this special issue should be considered a representative sample of scholarship related to terrorism and political violence.

I would be remiss if I failed to note that extant criminology-based work on terrorism has covered quite a bit of ground. To avoid redundancies with past work, this special issue does not include research that closely replicates any work that has already been performed. In this way, this issue contains innovative research that moves the study of terrorism forward. At the same time, there is considerable room for future criminology research to address other issues related to terrorism. To gain a complete understanding of how criminological theories, frameworks, and perspectives can be brought to bear on the study of terrorism, it is important for criminologists to continue to engage in research on violent radicalization, counter-radicalization, the conditions that promote the use of terrorism, and the effective treatment of terrorist prisoners. The studies represented in this special issue provide some suggestions about how future criminologists can engage in these lines of research.

## Articles

A special issue on how criminology can inform the study of terrorism could reasonably take one of several different forms. For instance, a terrorism-focused issue of a criminology journal could feature articles related only to the punishment of terrorists, criminological approaches to dissuading terrorism, socio-structural elements that contribute to the performance of terrorism, or any number of other issues. However, it was decided that to best capture the plethora ways in which criminological approaches can inform issues surrounding the performance of terrorism, it would be unwise to limit the included papers such that they focus exclusively on one characteristic of the terrorism phenomenon. As a result, the papers included in this special issue address a variety of issues and were produced by scholars from a variety of disciplines. In choosing papers in this manner, this issue is designed to provide readers with a wide range of relevant scholarship on terrorism and political violence.

In the first article, Vanja Lujic, Jan Willem van Prooijen, and Frank Weerman expand upon the long-studied connection between terrorism and more common forms of criminal activity. There exist several studies on the nexus between terrorism and crime, many of which have focused on how terrorist organizations often transform into criminal enterprises or partner with organized criminal organizations to achieve strategic goals (e.g. Clarke and Lee, 2008; Hutchinson and O'Malley, 2007; Makarenko, 2004). These studies have done much to advance our understanding of how terrorist and criminal entities organize and coordinate their operations. However, there is a smaller group of studies that explore how criminal activity at the individual level may influence an individual’s trajectory toward terrorism (see, e.g., Basra and Neumann, 2016). The first article in this issue builds on this second group of studies. More specifically, Lujic, van Prooijen, and Weerman use classic theories of criminology (i.e. strain theory, anomie theory) to explore the likelihood that certain factors can push an individual toward terrorism. Readers familiar with terrorism studies will recognize the authors’ analyses as couched in the “root causes” perspective.

Similar to the first article, the second article of this issue draws from theories and perspectives that will be familiar to regular readers of the *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy, and Practice*.

In this paper, Marissa Mandala and Joshua Freilich utilize environmental criminological and situational crime prevention (SCP) frameworks to explore how the characteristics of assassination events affect the likelihood and degree of such events' success. Of course, researchers have used theories related to environmental criminology (i.e. routine activity theory, rational choice theory, and crime pattern theory) to explore the likelihood of a criminal event in certain conditions (e.g. Brantingham and Brantingham, 2013; Clarke, 2013; Clarke and Cornish, 1985; Cohen and Felson, 1979). However, these perspectives have not been extensively used to study terrorist events. There is also a marked lack of scholarly work within criminology that focuses on political assassinations. By using environmental criminology and SCP to explore the efficacy of terroristic assassinations (and by extension, the efficacy of measures intended to prevent assassinations), Mandala and Freilich bring key criminological perspectives to bear on a previously neglected area of research.

Third, Matthew Valasik and Matthew Phillips draw from the extensive literature on street gangs to investigate one of the most notorious terrorist groups in recent memory – the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Using a qualitative case study methodology, Valasik and Phillips outline ISIS's organizational structure, membership, criminal activity (including violent activity), use of technology, and strategic objectives. In doing so, they compare the organizations to more commonly studied street gangs. Although the authors concede that a qualitative approach to evaluating ISIS through the lens of street gangs represents only an initial step toward developing policy geared toward defeating the group, it is a critical one. Research on the relationship between street gang activity and terrorist activity has shown that counter-terrorist policy can benefit from comparisons like the one featured in this article (see Decker and Pyrooz, 2015a, b). Through this case study analysis, Valasik and Phillips contribute to a growing understanding of how approaches for thwarting street gang activity can be used to combat groups like ISIS.

There is a long history of academic research on organizational leadership in several contexts, including criminal contexts. However, research on issues related to terrorist leadership – particularly regarding the relationship between terrorist groups' leaders and followers – is somewhat sparse. In the fourth article of the special issue, David Hofmann reviews past research on leadership to provide critical methodological and conceptual recommendations for the future study of terrorist leadership. This article does not represent a comprehensive account of all research on leadership (either within terrorist organizations or more generally), but instead stands as a healthy criticism of established work on terrorist leadership. Hofmann contends that by raising issues related to the study of terrorist leadership, researchers can gain a better understanding of the role these leaders play in key processes that sustain terrorist organizations (e.g. radicalization, recruitment).

In the fifth article of the special issue, John Morrison explores the phenomenon of “splitting” in terrorist organizations. Like Hofmann's work in the previous article, Morrison provides a critical analysis of extant literature on the topic of terrorist organizational fragmentation. Through his analysis, Morrison asserts that an understanding of organizational splitting provides us with a more nuanced grasp of the factors that contribute to the persistence of some terrorist organizations. Also similar to Hofmann's article, Morrison's article stands as a call for future research within criminology and beyond to explore the factors that contribute to organizational fragmentation. By testing the hypotheses presented in Morrison's article, future researchers can begin to isolate the factors and phenomena that prompt terrorist organizational splitting. As such, this article has the potential to inform effective strategies for causing terrorist organizational dissolution.

In the final article of the special issue, we turn to the future of terrorism legislation. In this article, Sara De Vido argues for the creation and execution of a UN Convention on International Terrorism. In doing so, De Vido contends that one of the most persistent issues plaguing terrorism research – establishing a consensus definition for terrorism itself – can be circumvented by identifying common elements of existing definitions. Furthermore, De Vido argues for the creation of an “annex” that contains a listing of the organizations that can be mutually agreed upon as terrorist in kind. Unique to this special issue, De Vido's article provides readers with a glimpse into the conceptual debates that continue to rage within terrorism studies, as well as potential resolutions for those debates.

Taken together, these articles (deliberately) cover quite a bit of ground. With the first three, we have research that provides direct evidence as to how criminological perspectives can be used in the study of terrorism. In the latter three, the authors have provided more targeted analyses of contemporary issues within terrorism studies. I believe that it is important to provide readers of the *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy, and Practice* with both kinds of articles. In doing so, this special issue offers a comprehensive account of not only how criminologists have already studied terrorism, but also how criminologists can engage with issues related to terrorism in the future.

As I noted in the first section of this editorial, no one issue of a journal can cover all topics related to criminology and terrorism. There exists a wealth of extant research that would complement the issues covered here. As such, I would recommend that the interested reader seek out several volumes that can provide additional information that relates to the work presented in this issue. These volumes include:

- *The Handbook of the Criminology of Terrorism*, Gary LaFree and Joshua D. Freilich (Eds), Wiley-Blackwell (2016).
- *Criminology Theory and Terrorism: New Applications and Approaches*, Joshua D. Freilich and Gary LaFree (Eds), Routledge (2017).
- *The Palgrave Handbook of Criminology and War*, Ross McGarry and Sandra Walklate (Eds), Palgrave-Macmillan (2016).
- *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: Criminological Perspectives*, Mathieu Leflem (Ed.), Emerald (2004).

Thank you for your interest in the study of terrorism from a criminological perspective. I hope that the collection of articles presented here will provide you with the impression that the multidisciplinary study of terrorism is well served by the inclusion of criminological perspectives. The continued inclusion of criminologists among those attempting to solve the riddle of terrorism will only benefit its empirical study.

## References

- Adamczyk, A., Gruenewald, J., Chermak, S.M. and Freilich, J.D. (2014), "The relationship between hate groups and far-right ideological violence", *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, Vol. 30 No. 3, pp. 310-22.
- Agnew, R. (2010), "A general strain theory of terrorism", *Theoretical Criminology*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 131-53.
- Altier, M.B., Thoroughgood, C. and Horgan, J. (2014), "Turning away from terrorism: lessons from psychology, sociology, and criminology", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 51 No. 5, pp. 647-61.
- Arias, E.D. (2010), "Understanding criminal networks, political order, and politics in Latin America and the Caribbean", in Clunan, A.L. and Trinkunas, H.A. (Eds), *Ungoverned spaces: Alternatives to state authority in an era of softened sovereignty*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, pp. 115-35.
- Armstrong, T. and Matusitz, J. (2013), "Hezbollah as a group phenomenon: differential association theory", *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 475-84.
- Basra, R. and Neumann, P.R. (2016), "Criminal pasts, terrorist futures: European jihadists and the new crime-terror nexus", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 10 No. 6, pp. 25-40.
- Blazak, R. (2001), "White boys to terrorist men: target recruitment of Nazi skinheads", *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 44 No. 6, pp. 982-1000.
- Braddock, K. (2015), "The utility of narratives for promoting radicalization: the case of the Animal Liberation Front", *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 38-59.
- Braddock, K. and Horgan, J. (2016), "Towards a guide for constructing and disseminating counternarratives to reduce support for terrorism", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 39 No. 5, pp. 381-404.
- Brantingham, P.J. and Brantingham, P.L. (2013), "Crime pattern theory", in Wortley, R. and Mazzerole, L. (Eds), *Environmental Criminology and Crime Analysis*, Willan Publishing, Cullompton, pp. 78-93.
- Clarke, R. (2013), "Situational crime prevention", in Wortley, R. and Mazzerole, L. (Eds), *Environmental Criminology and Crime Analysis*, Willan Publishing, Cullompton, pp. 178-94.

- Clarke, R. and Lee, S. (2008), "The PIRA, D-company, and the crime-terror nexus", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 376-95.
- Clarke, R.V. and Cornish, D.B. (1985), "Modeling offenders' decisions: a framework for research and policy", *Crime and Justice*, Vol. 6, pp. 147-85.
- Cohen, L.E. and Felson, M. (1979), "Social change and crime rate trends: a routine activities approach", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 44 No. 4, pp. 588-608.
- Decker, S.H. and Pyrooz, D.C. (2015a), " 'I'm down for a jihad': how 100 years of gang research can inform the study of terrorism, radicalization, and extremism", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 104-12.
- Decker, S.H. and Pyrooz, D.C. (2015b), "Street gangs, terrorists, drug smugglers, and organized crime: what's the difference?", in Decker, S.H. and Pyrooz, D.C. (Eds), *The Handbook of Gangs*, Wiley-Blackwell, New York, NY, pp. 294-308.
- Enders, W. and Sandler, T. (2002), "Patterns of transnational terrorism, 1970-1990: alternative time-series estimates", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 46 No. 2, pp. 145-65.
- Glazzard, A. (2017), "Losing the plot: narrative, counter-narrative and violent extremism", ICCT Research Paper, available at: <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ICCT-Glazzard-Losing-the-Plot-May-2017.pdf>
- Horgan, J. (2014), *The Psychology of Terrorism*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Hutchinson, S. and O'Malley, P. (2007), "A crime-terror nexus? Thinking on some of the links between terrorism and criminality", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 30 No. 12, pp. 1095-107.
- Johnson, B.D. (2012), "Cross-classified multilevel models: an application to the criminal case processing of indicted terrorists", *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 163-89.
- LaFree, G. and Adamczyk, A. (2017), "The impact of the Boston marathon bombings on public willingness to cooperate with police", *Justice Quarterly*, Vol. 34 No. 3, pp. 459-90.
- Makarenko, T. (2004), "The crime-terror continuum: tracing the interplay between transnational organized crime and terrorism", *Global Crime*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 129-45.
- Mythen, G. and Walklate, S. (2006), "Criminology and terrorism: which thesis? Risk society or governmentality?", *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 46 No. 3, pp. 379-98.
- Parkin, W.S., Freilich, J.D., Chermak, S.M. and Gruenewald, J. (2016), "Criminal justice & military deaths at the hands of extremists (background report)", available at: [www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START\\_CriminalJusticeMilitaryDeathsbyExtremists\\_BackgroundReport\\_Nov2016.pdf](http://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_CriminalJusticeMilitaryDeathsbyExtremists_BackgroundReport_Nov2016.pdf) (accessed June 28, 2017).
- Silke, A. (2001), "The devil you know: continuing problems with research on terrorism", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 1-14.
- Simi, P., Bubolz, B. and Hardman, A. (2013), "Military experience, identity discrepancies, and far right terrorism: an exploratory analysis", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 36 No. 8, pp. 654-71.
- Sluka, J.A. (2009), "The contribution of anthropology to critical terrorism studies", in Jackson, R., Smythe, M.B. and Gunning, J. (Eds), *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, Routledge, New York, NY, pp. 138-55.

## Further reading

- Hoffman, D.C. (2015), "Quantifying and qualifying charisma: a theoretical framework for measuring the presence of charismatic authority in terrorist groups", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 38 No. 9, pp. 710-33.