

SOURCES OF STRAIN EXPERIENCED BY HOMEGROWN JIHADIST TERRORISTS

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ABSTRACT

The United States is not immune to the threat of homegrown jihadist terrorism. The issue demands more attention with each successful attack. Identifying individuals before they radicalize and commit acts of violence is a significant challenge. This study advances that effort by analyzing strain among homegrown jihadist terrorists. Although it is widely assumed that the lives of homegrown jihadist terrorists are uniquely different, the results show otherwise. The most common pressures and stresses experienced by terrorists are very much the same as other Americans and Muslim Americans. Clarifying these misconceptions will help eliminate biases and guide counterterrorism strategy towards evidence based solutions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Patriot's Day is always one of the most exciting events on the Boston calendar. Every spring the city welcomes hopes of warmer weather and celebrates the running of one of the world's most iconic road races, the Boston Marathon. Unfortunately, April 15th 2013 would not be one of these days. As thousands gathered for the festivities, a pair of brothers from Cambridge, Massachusetts made final preparations to inflict horror across the greater Boston community and nation.

They blended in easily among the thousands of spectators congregating at the marathon's Boylston Street finish line. There was nothing uniquely identifiable about Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev as they made their way towards two predetermined locations with confidence. Surveillance footage would later show each brother carrying a small backpack. They contained homemade bombs built from common household pressure cookers. After a brief telephone conversation, each placed their packs on the ground, one in front of a restaurant, the other a popular athletic store. At 2:50 pm, 27-year-old Tamerlan pressed a remote detonator setting off the first explosion. Twelve seconds later, younger brother Dzhokhar activated a second bomb about 200 meters away. Ultimately three people were killed and more than 250 injured as the devastation was broadcast live on national television. The brothers simply walked away from the scene of the crime, initiating a desperate multi-day search.

Seventeen years prior an attack took place in Atlanta's Centennial Park, host to the Summer Olympic Games. Perhaps acting as a blueprint for the Tsarnaev brothers, a man carrying a green army rucksack wandered through downtown unnoticed. In a park designed to entertain thousands of visitors for one of the largest Games in modern history, the man methodically selected an inconspicuous park bench, sat, and casually placed a military ALICE pack beneath. Just after one in the morning on July 27, 1996, Eric Rudolph's homemade dynamite pipe bomb detonated killing Alice Hawthorne and wounding over one hundred others. For more than five years Rudolph evaded authorities while continuing to terrorize the country, targeting clinics and bars in Atlanta, Georgia and Birmingham, Alabama.

The similarities between two of the nation's most infamous acts of domestic terrorism are extraordinarily shocking. But perhaps even more alarming is the implication that the United States security apparatus is no more likely to prevent homegrown attacks today than it was nearly twenty years ago. Recent data confirms that terrorism is becoming even more difficult to identify and deter now than in previous years. From May 2009 to December 2012, American citizens and legal permanent residents of the United States attempted 42 homegrown terrorist plots. This is twice the amount of incidents reported during the seven years prior between September 2001 and April 2009 (Bjelopera, 2013). This trend is exceptionally concerning, and even more so considering the successes of The Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and their ability to recruit and radicalize individuals from all walks of life. While counterterrorism dominates national security and experts debate the implications of these developments, others must continue to explore what motives these attacks.

Coincidence is a logical conclusion to reach since the Tsarnaevs and Rudolph seemingly shared little in common. A general consensus among investigators and terrorism experts was that

Rudolph was a “lone wolf” politicized radical fueled by his hatred of homosexuality and abortion rights. The Tsarnaev brothers on the other hand were religiously motivated, inspired by Islamic cleric Anwar al-Alwaki sermons, and acting in response to flawed foreign policy, specifically US military action in Iraq and Afghanistan. But what if additional explanations exist below the surface of political and religious radicalization? Perhaps these narratives are becoming a bit too convenient for law enforcement and terrorism professionals to rationalize these shocking attacks? Does the generality conceal a more complicated reality? When asked by media to explain what might have encouraged their radicalism, Ruslan Tsarni (uncle to the Tsarnaev brothers) confidently claimed, “Being losers. Hatred to those who were able to settle themselves. These are the only reasons I can imagine. Anything else, anything to do with religion, with Islam, that’s a fraud. It’s a fake.” Interestingly, Tsarni’s observations may contain more validity than what might be initially assumed. It is possible as their uncle suggests, the brothers were attempting to compensate for social failures. Or maybe it was a perverted effort to belong to a greater group or movement. Could Rudolph have been trying to hold his targets accountable for his own personal struggles? As homegrown jihadist terrorism continues to threaten our nation, alternative explanations like these must be considered.

Numerous theories postulate how individuals become involved in criminal activity. Beginning with Emile Durkheim’s earliest sociological theories of deviancy, and advancements in more traditional works like Edwin Sutherland’s Theory of Differential Association (1947) and Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1977), all provide valued substance and insight into criminal outlooks. However, research explaining what drives terrorists to express themselves in such an indiscriminately violent manner remains widely debated. The current study uses Robert

Agnew's General Strain Theory (1992) as a potential answer to this question, and seeks to compare sources of strain experienced by homegrown jihadist terrorists.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

a. Terrorism Research

Researchers continue to take an active and aggressive role in studying terrorism. However, this level of interest is relatively new and not consistent with the field's 40 year history. It was only in response to the September 11 attacks that more than 200 governmental organizations were either introduced or restructured (Cronin, 2015) to accommodate the increase in analysis. The academic community followed suit and as a result, an explosion of terrorism related literature was published post 9/11 (Silke, 2004).

Early research focused on conceptualization of terrorism, causation of terrorism, and terrorist actor rationality. This helped established a substantial theoretical foundation for future research in the field. Advances in technology and the availability of statistical data compiled in programs like the Study of Terrorism and the Response to Terrorism (START), the RAND Corporation, and the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) have enhanced the ability to perform empirical analysis (Sandler, 2014). Tragically, the importance of these developments in terrorism academia was not recognized until after major attacks struck at home on American soil. Now, vast amounts of scholarly literature are published every year with thousands of books, articles, reports and PhD dissertations focusing on the issue (Jackson, 2009).

Regrettably, this surge of research has resulted in much less preventative success and policy clarity than what might be expected. A tendency to isolate terrorism from similar fields of

research (Stampnitzky, 2014), and failures to recognize established theoretical causes and resolutions (Silke, 2004; Ranstorp, 2006) have contributed to significant misconceptions. As a result, it is difficult for researchers to agree on a definitive understanding of the challenges facing the discipline. However, current terrorism scholarship is in prime position to establish productive research practices and generate innovative inquiry (Jackson, 2012).

This optimism is contingent upon two key factors: clarifying operational definitions within the study, and prioritizing research that responds to specific gaps in the literature. Increasing commitments to theoretically and empirically demanding research will not only benefit the broader terrorism community in the long run by targeting immerging inadequacies, but it will also open doors for potential sub-fields of research to emerge (Jackson, 2009). The present study shares a steadfast commitment to these priorities in hopes of significantly enhancing understandings for what motivates homegrown jihadist terrorism.

b. Recruitment and Radicalization

Recruitment and radicalization are two predominant themes in terrorism research. They are highly reliant on complex interactions of personal and social influences. “Internal mechanisms alone are not sufficient for radicalization” (Kleinman, 2012, p. 278). In fact, radicalization is often a result of recruitment efforts of friends or family, and remains one of the most effective methods for terrorist groups to expand the reach and influence of its radical ideology (Hughbank & Ferrandino, 2012). Armed with this understanding, successful terrorist organizations seek opportunities to attract a variety of individuals through diverse social situations. Many variables, including environmental conditions, community factors, strain, and social and learned behaviors can influence target recruits’ emotional vulnerability, and therefore impact if and how they might be approached for recruitment.

This is generally consistent with criminologist Travis Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory which explains how tendencies for deviant behavior can be a direct reflection of an individual's engagement, or lack thereof, in four critical areas: attachment, commitment, involvement, and idea. For instance, a juvenile living in a community that is sympathetic to an extremist organization's cause, who recognizes no commitment to the broader well-being of society, and who is not engaged socially or does not subscribe to the importance of social bonds with law-abiding citizens, is less likely to challenge the recruitment efforts of a terrorist organization (Hughbank & Ferrandino, 2012). Social processes like those explained by Hirschi's theory help determine how individual choices develop in relation to the environmental factors around them. Accordingly, effective recruitment networks exploit the social and environmental conditions and susceptible personalities to meet their organizational goals.

Other theories suggest that many behaviors, including extremely violent ones, are learned and a product of imitation (e.g. Akers, 1985; Bandura, 1978). Some interpret deviancy as a reaction to unfavorable circumstances such as political, religious, or economic oppression (e.g. Victoroff, 2005). Still others see radicalization as a social movement where recruitment is facilitated through the development of networks and the exchange of information (e.g. Sageman, 2008). Perhaps each of these theories possesses at least some level of validity. Yet how extremist tendencies mature and the impact of individuality, personal characteristic, and various social dynamics remains unclear.

c. Motivations

Before 9/11, United States experts on terrorism were unable to convince government leadership that a group like Al Qaeda could be motivated to attack America in such a calculated and indiscriminately violent manner in order to achieve precise strategic objectives. Assumptions

that Islamic radicals were on blind ideological quests and out to conquer the entire world were widely accepted. President George W. Bush himself reiterated that Al Qaeda's goal was "remaking the world, and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere (Bush, 2001)." In hindsight, it appears that some within the Bush administration catastrophically underestimated Al Qaeda's capabilities. They repeatedly discounted Osama bin Laden's overt warnings and misdiagnosed the terrorist organization's primary motives.

In a comprehensive analysis of statements made by bin Laden over a decade long period, Payne (2008) exposes a recurring theme and highlights several key arguments that became defined focal points for radical Islamists' contention with the Western world. Interference in Muslim territories by the United States and other Western nations was a topic that appeared in more than 70 percent of the material examined. A perceived United States reliance on convenient Middle East oil and impositions of democratic values on Arab states has long been viewed in the eyes of some Muslims to be exceedingly aggressive. Continued military cooperation in Saudi Arabia is often considered a form of occupation. These disputes with United States foreign policies fueled bin Laden's desire to impose demands on the West. More significantly, bin Laden used these circumstances to rationalize jihad, which calls for the protection of the faith by any and all means necessary while simultaneously exporting its religious obligation to billions of Muslims around the planet (Scheuer, 2005). As Payne (2008) summarizes, "the idea of imposing sharia on Cleveland, forcing Queen Elizabeth to wear a burka, and letting George Bush have multiple wives is as ridiculous to them as it is to us." Rather more appropriately however, some jihadists are more immediately concerned with the perceived abuses in American foreign policy directed towards Muslims and use these conflicts not only as motivation, but also as justification to conduct acts of terrorism.

Additional research indicates these aggravations are relevant domestically as well. Using coercive violence as an instrument to correct, dissuade, or delegitimize unfavorable government action is a fundamental characteristic of terrorism and a strategy that is employed even within our own borders. The Animal Liberation Front, Aryan Nation, Black Liberation Army, and Earth Liberation Front are groups that have all used terrorism as a strategy to influence government policy and coerce the public. Indiscriminate violence as a domestic terrorism strategy provides multiple potential benefits. It delegitimizes governments that appear unable to protect its own citizens while promoting the organizations political agenda (Hinkkainen, 2013). Jihadists subscribe to this same approach by pursuing ‘Political Islam,’ where participants use terrorism as a tool to implement what they interpret to be pure Islamic values and traditions (Denoeux, 2002). While authorities seem hesitant to generalize terrorists based on motivational factors alone, the characteristics shared between many international and domestic actors seem to carry noteworthy similarities.

Other scholarship suggests that terrorism may be encouraged by certain psychological and social factors. Desires to resolve religious and ideological convictions (Hoffer, 1951), achieve notoriety or infamy (Vaisman-Tzachor, 2007; Lankford, 2013), seek social approval or acceptance within a group (Sageman, 2008), respond to social isolation (McDermott, 2005; Sageman, 2004), or to retaliate and pursue vengeance (Ratnesar, 2006) may all be factors that drive an individual to pursue acts of terrorism. Extreme violence or participation in terrorist activity could be the offender's attempt to account for any number of these aggravations. Additionally, there is a significant difference in motives among varying levels of participants. For example, the social and psychological factors that motivate a foot soldier or lone actor are often not the same factors that influence members of leadership (e.g. Vaisman-Tzachor, 2007;

Stern, 2003). These findings are critical in the development of profiles that may help identify the predisposed, in turn focusing counterterrorism resources towards more appropriate points of weakness.

d. Profiles

A fundamental element of counterterrorism strategy is being able to identify the overwhelming minority of potential actors within a much larger population of non-actors. Experts have traditionally relied upon the construction of profiles to accomplish this. Profiles distinguish sets of physical, psychological, and social characteristics, and behavioral patterns consistent within a target group. Typically, the more determinates or factors measured, the more accurate the profile becomes (Vaisman-Tzachor, 2007). Likewise, profiles for terrorists can be developed from the same variables that may help identify the prospect of the individual's extremist predispositions. Officials use these models to maximize counterterrorism efforts by focusing resources on areas of high susceptibility to radicalization and terrorist activity. Identifying personalities that are more disposed to commit acts of terror increases the ability to prevent them (Rae, 2012; Siggins, 2002).

Demographics are the most accessible characteristic to document and organize, and therefore make up the bulk of data amassed in terrorism databases. An individual's race, ethnicity, gender, and age are all data points that can be easily identified and archived. Once these statistics are collected they can be quickly referenced for analytic processes. Often the data are grouped and arranged based on historical precedent or frequency in which they appear in previously documented cases. Almost all profile analyses include variables for nationality, ethnicity, and religious affiliation because statistically these factors are among the most measured. Furthermore, expatriation and immigration statuses are common among offenders

(McDermott, 2005). Age and gender are also highly factored characteristics being that a large number of offenders are adolescent males (Gill et al., 2014; Silke, 1999). These descriptive observations are critical in building a framework for exposing commonalities among offenders.

Social and psychological measures also contribute to the construction of criminal profiles. Previous scholarship suggests common circumstances among terrorists include social marginality (e.g. McDermott, 2005; Sageman, 2004), struggles with socially normative behavior (e.g. Meloy, 2000; Vaisman-Tzachor, 2007), financial distress or poor socio-economic status (e.g. McDermott, 2005), experiences of sexual trauma (e.g. Rae, 2012), and narcissistic tendencies, paranoia, or psychopathy (e.g. Kushner, 1996; Rosenberger, 2003; Salib, 2003). However, the reliability of these observations is often challenged and not characteristic of all terrorists.

In a comprehensive analysis on individual terrorists, Marc Sageman (2008), a psychiatrist and one of the nation's leading experts in terrorism research, identified inconsistencies among commonly accepted social and psychological profiles. His assessment suggests these characteristics hold little explanatory value and many widely accepted suppositions are actually misconceptions. For example, Sageman notes many of the terrorists he examined came from middle class socioeconomic backgrounds rather than from adverse poverty. Very few exhibited social dysfunction advertised by common profile sets. Prior criminal records were rare, personality disorders and narcissism infrequent, and mental instability or psychosis was virtually nonexistent. Most interestingly, Sageman concluded it is not social marginalization that caused individuals to become predisposed to terrorism, but rather a collective social process shared by a group of similar thinkers that facilitated their radicalization.

These conflicting viewpoints highlight significant concerns in the processes of terrorist profiling. Many of the individuals studied had unlike social, psychological, political, and ideological experiences. The categories from which these profiles are constructed are far from exclusive and result in considerable overlap with other characteristics (Vaisman-Tzachor, 2007). This creates conditions for multi-category inclusion. Organizational affiliation, focus, and priorities are rarely static conditions but are fluid and evolve over time, much like economic and psychological statuses. While some studies conclude that available data and analysis simply do not support the ability to consistently identify individuals as candidates for violent extremism, arguments for profiling and the opportunity to focus resources and preventive measures remain. As with most other areas of terrorism scholarship, additional research is necessary in order to increase understanding.

e. General Strain Theory

Criminal researchers have historically recognized strain for its strong explanatory value for crime. At the most fundamental level, strain theories propose that stress and failure can be the starting point for an individual's departure from normative behavior. According to some of criminology's most notable theorists, strain is often a byproduct of inequality in social class and consequently can be associated with individual disappointments and failures (Agnew, 1992, 2001, 2002; Durkheim, 1951; Merton, 1968). Criminal activity is one method to alleviate the conflict caused by these social strains.

Robert Agnew's (1992) General Strain Theory (GST) is the authority on associations between strain and crime. Agnew was the first to champion strain as more than a lower-class problem and identified several sources of crime provoking stress. Goal achievement failure, removal of positive stimuli, and the presence of negative influences were three conditions that

expanded GST's scope to all social classes. Additionally, the more strain someone experiences, the more likely they are to turn to crime. Severity is equally linked (Agnew, 2006). There are many reasons why this may be the case. Strain has been shown to stimulate undesirable feelings of fear, failure, anger, and humiliation. The pressure caused by these emotions encourages a response for which crime becomes a vehicle. It can be seen as a way to address unfavorable circumstances, exact revenge, or escape reality. Agnew (2001) also identified numerous stress-inducing life events like divorce, death of a family member, or loss of a job that increase strain and therefore contributes to participation in criminal activity.

Previous research shows mixed support for GST. In one study, Agnew and White (1992) focused on the relationship between strain and delinquency in minors and found that negative life events were associated with an increased risk of criminal offending. Another study found that strain had a significant effect on property crimes and violence (Paternoster & Mazerolle, 1994). However, not all scholarship is quick to fully endorse GST. Some studies found that the relationship between strain, negative emotions, and crime is much more complicated, especially when gender is considered (e.g. Drapela, 2006). Additionally, studies often fail to explain why some participants chose legal coping mechanisms while others turn to criminal offending. All things considered, many complex factors affect the amount of strain an individual experiences during a lifetime as well as how they choose to confront and cope with their problems. Regrettably, even with all of the contributions of researchers like Agnew, the full relationship between these experiences and deviant behavior is yet to be fully understood.

f. Important Clarifications on Strain

We are fortunate that the vast majority of people who go through significant strain do not turn to criminal activity. The ability to alleviate stress and cope effectively is essential in

preventing them from that end (Agnew, 2006). However, there are both legal and illegal coping methods. Crime becomes a prospect when strain is not properly addressed. For example, someone might see theft as a solution to economic hardship rather than simply finding a legal source of income. Illicit drug use is another common criminal activity that is used to cope with strain because it can help minimize or temporarily avoid the issue all together (Agnew, 2006). There are many reasons why an individual would lack appropriate coping skills including few resources, poor problem-solving skills, and even inadequate social outlets. Participants in crime could be surrounded by other criminals or live in areas where crime is prosecuted infrequently. They might not have access to or appreciate the importance of healthy diet and exercise, two effective methods for managing with stress. Therefore, crime becomes more likely as fewer opportunities to cope are made available.

One difficulty with using strain as an explanation for crime is its extraordinary subjectivity. Not all people experience or even construct strain equally (Wheaton, 1990). There is a clear difference between events that most people would characterize as stressful, and events that only few find problematic. Some people might see life changing events as cause for celebration rather than a demoralizing source of stress. Divorce and job change are applicable examples. Interestingly, subjective strains seem to be more strongly related to criminal activity than objective ones (Agnew & Froggio, 2007). Furthermore, strain has a demonstrated ability to influence individuals through anticipation and empathy. Not only can personal strain become a pathway to crime, but second hand (or vicarious) strain may contribute as well. Previous research indicates a significant correlation between exposure to community violence and traumatic news and an increased risk of criminal offending (Eitle & Turner, 2002). Important clarifications like

these help confirm strain's complexity in relation to crime, and contribute to developing a more broad range of theoretical applications.

g. Links between Strain and Terrorism

Academic research linking strain and terrorism is not difficult to find. In fact, many studies claim that terrorism is often fueled by personal injustices (Hoffman, 2006; Piazza, 2006; Silke, 2004; Victoroff, 2005). This is consistent with the relationship between strain and other more traditional crimes that have been the focus of strain related research for decades. As previously established, injustices produce negative emotions that lead to strain, and their plight is no mystery. Terrorists are uninterested in keeping sufferings secret, and are regularly outspoken on topics they feel justify corrective action. This includes a broad range of themes such as poverty, unwelcomed globalization/modernization, military occupation, economic deterioration and unemployment, political or religious oppression, and territorial disagreements. Even the adopted names of terrorist groups reflect their conflicts (Hoffman, 2006). The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLF), Revolutionary People's Liberation Party (DHKP), and Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LET) (Translates to "Army of the Righteous) all follow this theme. Therefore, education, health, and economic development and prosperity are key components to counterterrorism strategy. This seems to indicate that government officials and policy experts clearly recognize the relationship between strain and terrorism as well.

Most research on strain and terrorism focuses on individual case studies. Quantitative research on the potential relationship is far less prevalent. Even so, there are a few studies that provide mixed or weak results. For example, Azam and Thelen (2008) and Burgoon (2006) both provide convincing evidence for the positive impact of education and income on terrorism. However, Krueger and Maleckova (2003) suggest that poor and less educated Palestinians are

not more likely to participate in terrorist activity. Many other researchers agree that the link between poverty, a considerable source of strain, and terrorism are not strongly related (Newman, 2006; Maleckova, 2005; Piazza, 2006; Sageman, 2008; Victoroff, 2005).

Agnew (2010) clarifies that the reason for this weak association is a fundamental problem with the academic explanations of strain and not the conceptual relationship between strain and terrorism itself. He claims that current strain related research on terrorism suffers from three critical issues: failure to fully explain the core characteristics of strains leading to terrorism, failure to fully explain why strain increases the likelihood of terrorism, and failure to rationalize why only an extremely small number of the total population that is exposed to strain participates in terrorism. First, most research only focuses on one or a few sources of strain (e.g. military occupation, material deprivation), and fails to account for additional sources, or for the duration and severity of the strain. Second, these studies simply attempt to end emotional discomfort or social stress and do not dutifully explain the intricacies involved in the relationship between strain and terrorism. Finally, no current strain explanations exist that rationalize why some individuals exposed to strain go on to participate in terrorism. In hopes of resolving these central issues, Agnew developed a General Strain Theory of Terrorism.

h. General Strain Theory of Terrorism

A General Strain Theory of Terrorism assumes the fundamentals established by previous GST research. There are some important clarifications however, including the need to account for additional characteristics of strain that apply to the vast majority of terrorists. According to Agnew (2010), terrorism is a more probable result of strains experienced by a ‘collective group.’ More specifically, strains that are frequent, of long duration, have a reasonable expectation to remain, and apply to a large majority (i.e. religious, ethnic, or political) contribute to terrorism.

Prolonged conflict, widespread death and violence, genocide, mass imprisonment, and threats to livelihood or identity are communal and fall into this category. When these strains are not directly applicable, they can remain significant through perception or association to the group to which it applies. In other words, terrorists who do not suffer these types of strains may become motivated by identifying with a group that does, or by simply perceiving that they are subjected to the same experiences (Agnew & Froggio, 2007; Post, 2007). Other noteworthy characteristic of strain includes the perception of biased infliction of unfavorable circumstances by a more powerful entity (i.e. government, military, civilian population) (Agnew, 2010). The problem with these characteristics is that they are all strongly connected and must be considered in totality rather than individually. This is where most previous research falls short.

Another important distinction of Agnew's General Strain Theory of Terrorism is its focus on *why* strain increases the likelihood of terrorism. As noted, strains contribute to the formation of negative emotions. These emotions create pressure for some type of reaction. They also lower inhibitions, impact legal coping mechanisms, reduce social control, and encourage collective responses (Agnew, 2010). For example, an individual who displays negative emotions consistent with prolonged experiences of strain will demonstrate decreased impulse control. Subsequently, they will think less often of the consequences of their actions and may resort to revenge as a corrective measure. This person may also have a diminished ability to cope with their emotions because of the severity of the strains they suffer. Terrorism can be perceived as an appropriate response to prolonged violence or extensive poverty. In the mind of the offender, terrorism is an effective coping strategy (Smelser, 2007; Victoroff, 2005).

There are many factors involved in the subjective response to strain. Fortunately, not all individuals who experience these strains turn to terrorism. Most people rely on a variety of

positive resources to cope including financial or political capital, medical care, military protection, information, and networks of social support. Furthermore, some individuals or groups enjoy items of value (e.g. wealth, reputation) and are not willing to jeopardize these assets by pursuing illegal activities (Agnew, 2010). However, not everyone is fortunate enough to have these resources. In fact, many of these same resources, or lack thereof, can also strongly encourage terrorism. Previous research suggests that simply being cognitively inflexible (Victoroff, 2005) or socially marginalized (Agnew, 2010) makes an individual particularly sensitive to strain and more attracted to risky aggressive behaviors. This might include young unmarried males, immigrants, and the unemployed to name a few.

If Agnew is correct that strain significantly increases the likelihood that a person engages in terrorist behavior, the average terrorist should have experienced more strain in his or her life than the average law-abiding citizen. This study will test that basic premise by comparing homegrown jihadist terrorists against two different control groups: Americans in general, and American Muslims. The formal hypotheses are as follows: (1) homegrown jihadist terrorists will be significantly different and will experience significantly more strain than the average American, and (2) homegrown jihadist terrorists will be significantly different and will experience significantly more strain than the average American Muslim.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Most research on the biographical experiences of terrorists uses qualitative methodologies, but this study will quantify the sources of strain experienced by homegrown jihadists terrorists, and then compare that to the strain experienced by the average American and average American Muslim.

a. Data

The foundation of the data is the Congressional Research Service (CRS) report (2013) cataloguing post-9/11 homegrown jihadist terrorism. The list of subjects identified in the CRS report provided a sufficient sample size and was used with no additions in order to avoid any potential selection bias by the author. According to the report, 63 homegrown jihadist terrorist plots occurred between September 2001 and December 2012, resulting in the indictment of 153 individuals. Among the indicted, all of those (1) who were American citizens or legal permanent residents, (2) who radicalized to perform Islamic inspired Jihad, (3) who perpetrated and/or planned terrorist attacks, and (4) whose lives and backgrounds were extensively covered in open source documents were identified as subjects. One hundred forty four met these four criteria for inclusion. The remaining nine were omitted for minimal involvement in the aforementioned terrorist plots and subsequent investigations (i.e. making false statements, perjury, obstruction, acquittal).

Summaries of each terrorist plot were included in the 2013 CRS report; however, additional research was conducted to gather biographical information on each individual offender. The author systematically examined media reports (currently available and archived), court documents (e.g. affidavits, indictments, criminal complaints, and judgments), academic literature, unclassified intelligence summaries, and character witness statements to develop a comprehensive but replicable data set.

First, the birth names and name variants of all subjects were searched in active Google (<https://google.com>), Google News archives (<https://news.google.com/newspapers>), and Archive.org (<https://archive.org>) browsers. These searches primarily led to news reports and magazine articles from which the author recorded demographic characteristics, upbringing, lifestyle, family dynamics, criminal history, mental and physical health, social standing, financial stability, and other relevant information. Most notable to the research questions were circumstances likely to have caused exceptional strain or stress on the subject (e.g. bankruptcy, abuse, etc., to be detailed more later). Additional searches of all subjects were conducted through the exploration of available academic literature. Online research libraries were used to find peer reviewed scholarly journals, periodicals, and books that could provide additional information on the study's population. Finally, court case documents for each plot and the terrorists subsequently indicted in each event were accessed from The Investigative Project on Terrorism's research center (<http://www.investigativeproject.org>). The court documents provided insight to the circumstances surrounding the investigations, evidence, and criminal charges. Furthermore, terrorist plot names or attack descriptions were also searched for, in order to access information on subjects whose background information proved difficult to locate from the process described above.

The result was a dataset of demographic characteristics and life experiences for each member of the sample. These variables (age, country of birth, ethnicity, marital status, education, employment, criminal history, mental health, substance abuse, and religion) were used to build a biographical profile from which comparisons could be made to two major populations: American and Muslim American adults. Corresponding biographical data were collected for both control groups, with the United States Census Bureau (www.census.gov) as the source for the bulk of the material. The Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (www.samhsa.gov), Pew Research Center's 2011 Muslim American Survey (<http://www.people-press.org>), the "Muslim Americans: A National Portrait" Gallup Poll (www.themosqueinmorgantown.com), "State of American Muslim Youth: Research & Recommendations" (<http://www.ispu.org>), and "Religion in Prisons (2012)" (www.pewforum.org) also provided valuable demographic information and rates of marriage, employment, education, criminal history, and religion for both populations.

All life experiences reasonably assumed to be stressful or traumatic to the participating individual were noted. For clarity and consistency's sake, eight key variables were identified as being a possible source of the subject's distress: spousal history problems, employment status problems, personal tragedy, social deficiencies, financial struggles, abuse, criminal history, and psychological health problems. Below is a list of the most common potentially stressful or traumatic circumstances discovered through the research, with additional details for each circumstance.

Spousal History Problems: unable to find desirable partner, experienced divorce, and spousal departure

Employment Status Problems: unemployed, underemployed, or even involuntarily self-employed

Personal Tragedy: recent deaths of friend or family member, sickness, serious injury, war and conflict

Social Marginalization: isolation, awkwardness, limited friends, discrimination, and introversion

Financial Struggles: bankruptcies, gambling problems, severely low income, and homelessness

Abuse: physical, verbal, sexual, drug and alcohol

Criminal History: significant arrest record, gang participation, violence, and prison time

Mental Illness: depression, suicidal, schizophrenic, and other medicated mental illness

Each subject's religious exposure was documented, which provided an additional population group within the study that was directly comparable. All but five of the overall sample of subjects ($n = 144$) self-identified as Muslims; however, not all were raised in traditional Muslim families or households. The remaining ($n = 44$) were exposed to Islam later in life and converted prior to their crime. This information was gleaned using the same research methods and sources described above.

In the rare event where records could not be located on an individual or event, existing databases (Global Terrorism Database, National Counterterrorism Center, New America's Homegrown Extremism) were consulted. This data were then reinvestigated and added if confirmed. The author refrained from initially referencing these databases to avoid duplication and subjectivity, and only used the information contained when absolutely necessary. Cases of insufficient data were noted; however, it is important to emphasize the difference between insufficient information and negative findings. In most cases the research process described

above was able to confirm or deny if a particular description fit a subject. However, in some instances no information was available and therefore recorded as unreported.

b. Limitations

All data analyzed were compiled from currently accessible and archived sources that were available at the time of collection. The opportunity for valuable information to be underreported or completely neglected is concerning. For example, some subjects continue pursuing post-trial motions, or share legal cases with other defendants who have yet to reach trial. It is likely that relevant information remains sealed, or under non-disclosure agreements until the entire due process is complete. Data collection was unavoidably influenced by these nuances and the amount of information available subsequently varied on a case-by-case basis. Verifying accuracy was also problematic. Much of the material collected can be corroborated from multiple sources; however, some originates from single outlets or even from conflicting reports. When there was conflicting information, the most reliable source assumed precedence (i.e., court documents took precedence over initial news reporting).

Additionally, it is possible some individuals that should have been included on the list of subjects were inadvertently left out. Criminal accomplices that were never discovered or prosecuted during terrorism investigations are a near certainty. This means that the CRS's list of post-9/11 homegrown jihadist terrorists may not be a perfect representation of the population of homegrown jihadist terrorists during the study's time period. Finally, much of the information collected may be fluid and evolve over time. What might have been previously identified as applicable to the subject is not always an accurate reflection of the circumstances at the time of their crimes. For instance, social influences and substance abuse are not always constant characteristics in an individual's life, but rather continuously changing. Furthermore, what one

person might interpret to be addictive or aggressive behaviors, to others may be acceptable or appropriate. In these situations, information was recorded according to what was most recently available and what was supported from the most objective source.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

From September 2001 to December 2012 there were 63 cases of homegrown jihadist terrorism that occurred in the United States. 144 offenders were identified from these events for inclusion in the current study. Biographical information for the offenders and two comparable population groups is detailed below (Table 1).

Almost all of the homegrown jihadist terrorists were male ($n = 139$), representing approximately 97% of the study's subjects. Only five were female. The ages ranged from 17 to 62, with a mean of 27.5 years. More than 92% were between the ages of 18 and 40. Close to half (51.4%) were born in the United States ($n = 74$) and considered natural born citizens. The remaining were illegal residents ($n = 10$), naturalized citizens ($n = 35$), legal permanent residents ($n = 18$), refugees ($n = 3$), or those whose citizenship status was unknown ($n = 4$). Ethnicity was widely distributed with South Asian being the most prevalent ($n = 34$). Arab ($n = 31$), Black ($n = 17$), Hispanic/Latino ($n = 7$), Caucasian ($n = 13$) were also represented, while many ($n = 42$) were of various other or unknown ethnicities.

By comparison, the average age of the American population is much older at 37.2 years. According to 2010 US Census Bureau estimates, 87.1% of the American population was born in the United States. 63.7% of this population was ethnically Caucasian, 16.3% Hispanic/Latino, 12.2% Black, and less than one percent Arab and South Asian (Table 2). Muslim Americans on the other hand were unique. According to 2011 figures, 59% of the Muslim American population

was between 18 and 39 years of age. A large majority of this demographic was born outside the United States (63.0%), and was far more ethnically diverse than the American counterpart. Caucasians (30.0%) represented the largest percentage of this population group, Arab (26.0%), Black (23.0%), South Asian (16.0%), and Hispanic/Latino (6.0%) (Table 3).

Table 1 – Biographical Data for Homegrown Jihadist Terrorists

Variables		Male (n = 139)	Female (n = 5)	Total (N = 144)
Age	< 18	1 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.7%)
	18-29	97 (69.8%)	1 (40.0%)	98 (68.1%)
	30-39	33 (23.7%)	2 (20.0%)	35 (24.3%)
	40 <	8 (5.8%)	2 (40.0%)	10 (6.9%)
Country of Birth	United States	71 (51.1%)	3 (60.0%)	74 (51.4%)
	Other	68 (48.9%)	2 (40.0%)	70 (48.6%)
Ethnicity	Arab	31 (22.3%)	0 (0.0%)	31 (21.5%)
	South Asian	34 (24.5%)	0 (0.0%)	34 (23.6%)
	African American	17 (12.2%)	0 (0.0%)	17 (11.8%)
	Hispanic/Latino	7 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (4.9%)
	Caucasian	11 (7.9%)	2 (40.0%)	13 (9.0%)
	Other	38 (27.3%)	3 (60.0%)	41 (28.5%)
	Unknown	1 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.0%)
Citizenship Status	Illegal	10 (7.2%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (6.9%)
	Natural Born	71 (51.0%)	3 (60.0%)	74 (51.4%)
	Naturalized	33 (23.7%)	2 (40.0%)	35 (24.3%)
	Legal Permanent Resident	18 (12.9%)	0 (0.0%)	18 (12.5%)
	Refugee	3 (2.2%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.8%)
	Other/Unknown	4 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (2.8%)

Biographical information was collected on additional variables including marital status, education, employment, criminal history, mental health, substance abuse, and religion. This revealed a large percentage (38.2%) of the homegrown jihadist terrorist population was characterized as being single ($n = 55$). 37.5% of the group was married ($n = 54$), 9.7% were divorced ($n = 14$), and the remaining could not be determined ($n = 21$). Corresponding data was found for both Americans and Muslim Americans. 27.1% of the average American population was single, 54.4% married, and 18.5% divorced, whereas 39.0% of the average Muslim American was single, 55.0% married, and 6.0% divorced (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 2 – Biographical Data for Homegrown Jihadist Terrorists and Average Americans

Variables		Homegrown Jihadist Terrorist ($N=144$)	Average Americans
Age (Average)		27.5	37.2
Country of Birth	United States	51.4%	87.1%
	Other	48.6%	12.9%
Ethnicity	Arab	21.5%	<1.0%
	South Asian	23.6%	<1.0%
	African American	11.8%	12.2%
	Hispanic/Latino	4.9%	16.3%
	Caucasian	9.0%	63.7%

Sources: US Census Bureau (2010), US Census Bureau (2010), US Census Bureau (2011)

Table 3 – Biographical Data for Homegrown Jihadist Terrorists and Average Muslim Americans

Variables		Homegrown Jihadist Terrorist (N=144)	Average Muslim Americans
Age	Ages 18 - 39	92.4%	59.0%
	Not 18 - 39	7.6%	41.0%
Country of Birth	United States	51.4%	37.0%
	Other	48.6%	63.0%
Ethnicity	Arab	21.5%	26.0%
	South Asian	23.6%	16.0%
	African American	11.8%	23.0%
	Hispanic/Latino	4.9%	6.0%
	Caucasian	9.0%	30.0%

Sources: Pew Research Center (2011)

For average Americans ages 25 and older, 15.5% had less than a high school education, 30.1% were only high school graduates, and 54.4% possessed some college education or higher. Of the homegrown jihadist terrorists in this age category ($n = 85$), 11.1% had less than a high school education, 19.4% were high school graduates only, and 50.7% possessed some college education or higher. Approximately 14.0% of the average Muslim American population had less than a high school education, 40.0% were high school graduates only, and 45.0% possessed some college education or higher. Nearly 65% of the study's offenders ($n = 93$) were employed on at least a part-time basis. This compares to 59% for both American and Muslim American populations. Startlingly, 29% of Muslim Americans and approximately 20% of Americans were unemployed or underemployed (employed part-time but prefer full-time employment) (Tables 4 and 5).

Statistics on religious preference of criminals could not be found, so other data was used to compare populations. 8.6% of Americans are either in jail or are convicted felons. These same percentages for the Muslim American population were not available; however, some estimates claim Muslims make up 9% of the overall prison population in the United States while accounting for only 0.8% of the national population (Pew Research Center, 2012). Prior criminal participation was similarly high for the study's homegrown jihadist terrorists. Nearly a quarter (24.3%) of the study's subjects were former criminal offenders ($n = 35$) (Tables 4 and 5).

Drug and alcohol abuse and mental illness rates are also difficult to quantify because these issues often go unreported. According to the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, approximately 17.8% of the average American population is inflicted with some type of mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder. However, only 3.9% of the population suffers from serious mental illness, which is categorized as any disorder that substantially interferes with major life activities. Because of the stigmatic and misunderstood relationship between Islam and the mental health community, it is likely that figures for Muslim American mental illness are also severely underestimated. Best approximations place 15.7% of the Muslim American population as suffering from a mental illness. At least 22.9% of the homegrown jihadist terrorist offender subjects had confirmed mental health issues ($n = 33$). Substance abuse statistics show similar prevalence. 15.7% of the study's offenders had problems with drugs or alcohol abuse ($n = 23$). Only 12.5% reportedly avoided all drug and alcohol participation ($n = 18$), leaving over 70% of the population's involvement unknown. A 2009 National Gallup Poll indicates that Muslim Americans struggle significantly with drug and alcohol abuse. It reports that 14% of the population has issues with binge drinking and as high as 25% drug use. Prevalence among

average Americans is also widely disputed and very difficult to quantify, but estimates for Substance Use Disorder range from 7% to as high as 25% (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4 – Potential Sources of Strain for Homegrown Jihadist Terrorists and Average Americans

Variables		Homegrown Jihadist Terrorist (<i>n</i> = 144)	Average Americans
Marital Status	Single	38.2%	27.1%
	Married	37.5%	54.4%
	Divorced	9.7%	18.5%
Education	< High School	11.1%	15.5%
	High School Grad	19.4%	30.1%
	Some College +	50.7%	54.4%
		NOTE: Adults Aged 25+ (<i>n</i> = 85)	NOTE: Adults Aged 25+
Employment	Employed (part + full)	64.6%	59.0%
	Student	11.8%	
	Unemployed	16.7%	20.0%*
	Unreported	6.9%	*Underemployment
Criminal History	Yes	24.3%	8.6%
	Unreported	75.7%	
Mental Illness	Yes	22.9%	17.8%
	Unreported	77.1%	3.9%
Substance Abuse	Yes	15.7%	7.1% - 25%
	Unreported	71.5%	

Sources: US Census Bureau (2003), US Census Bureau (2009), Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2011), Pew Research Center (2011), Shannon et al (2011), Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (2015)

Table 5 - Potential Sources of Strain for Homegrown Jihadist Terrorists and Average Muslim Americans

Variables		Homegrown Jihadist Terrorist (n = 144)	Average Muslim Americans
Marital Status	Single	38.2%	39.0%
	Married	37.5%	55.0%
	Divorced	9.7%	6.0%
Education	< High School	11.1%	14.0%
	High School Grad	19.4%	40.0%
	Some College +	50.7%	45.0%
Employment	Employed (part + full)	64.6%	59.0%
	Student	11.8%	
	Unemployed	16.7%	29.0%*
	Unreported	6.9%	*Underemployment
Criminal History	Yes	24.3%	Muslims make up 9.0% of prison population compared to 0.8% of total US population
	Unreported	75.7%	
Religion	Born Muslim	66.0%	80.0%
	Converted	30.6%	20.0%
Mental Illness	Yes	22.9%	15.7%
	Unreported	77.1%	
Substance Abuse	Yes	15.7%	14.0%*
	Unreported	71.5%	25.0% ^o
			*Binge Drinking ^o Drug Use

Sources: Gallup (2009), Pew Research Center (2011), Pew Research Center (2012), The Family & Youth Institute, and Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (2015)

Other relevant strain data for homegrown jihadist terrorist offenders include recent personal tragedy, social deficiencies, and religious upbringing. For example, 38.6% of the current study's jihadists experienced a significant tragic event prior to their participation in terrorism ($n = 56$). The experiences of the remaining are unclear. Additionally, friends and family members characterized 22.9% of the group as socially isolated ($n = 33$), 42.4% as well adjusted ($n = 61$), and the remaining could not be determined ($n = 50$). Perhaps this could be an explanation for why a large majority of the offenders (75.7%) had co-conspirators ($n = 109$). Lastly, 66% of the homegrown jihadist terrorists appeared to be raised in traditional Islamic families ($n = 95$). Conversely, more than 30% were not and clearly converted to Islam later in life ($n = 44$). The significance of these statistics will be considered later (Table 6).

Table 6 – Additional Potential Sources of Strain for Homegrown Jihadist Terrorists

Variables		Male (<i>n</i> = 139)	Female (<i>n</i> = 5)	Total (<i>n</i> = 144)
Plot Participants	Acted Alone	35 (25.2%)	0 (0.0%)	35 (24.3%)
	Co-Conspirators	104 (74.8%)	5 (100%)	109 (75.7%)
Recent Tragedy	Yes	54 (38.8%)	2 (40.0%)	56 (38.9%)
	Unclear	85 (61.2%)	3 (60.0%)	88 (61.1%)
Social Marginalization	Yes	32 (23.0%)	1 (20.0%)	33 (22.9%)
	No	61 (43.9%)	0 (0.0%)	61 (42.4%)
	Unclear	46 (33.1%)	4 (80.0%)	50 (34.7%)
Religion	Muslim	93 (66.9%)	2 (40.0%)	95 (66.0%)
	Converted Muslim	41 (29.5%)	3 (60.0%)	44 (30.6%)
	Other	5 (3.6%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (3.5%)

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

a. Discussion

Based on these results, it appears that homegrown jihadist terrorists in the United States from 2001-2012 were most likely to be non-Caucasian males between the ages of 18 and 29. Almost exactly half of the 144 homegrown jihadist terrorists were born in the United States. By comparison, this is a much lower percentage than the overall proportion of Americans (87.1%), but still higher than the proportion of Muslim Americans (37%) (Tables 2 and 3). Immigration trends could partially explain this finding. Many of the study's subjects were second-generation immigrants whose parents recently settled in the United States. Immigrants typically go through a lengthy process to gain citizenship; however, their children born in the United States would be considered citizens by birth. This was the case for many of the study's offenders. Of course, on a per capita basis, the likelihood of any member of any racial or ethnic group becoming a terrorist is extremely small. However, this study's findings suggest that Muslim Americans who immigrate to this country may actually be less likely to become homegrown jihadists than their U.S. born children. If that is the case, it raises questions about whether there is something during these children's experience growing up in the United States that leads to their eventually following this jihadist path.

Homegrown jihadist terrorists were generally well educated. Only a small percentage did not graduate high school (11.1%) and more than half attended some form of post-secondary education, including universities, technical colleges, or vocational schools. Many were academically exceptional beyond their peers. Ali al-Tamimi for example received a PhD in Computational Biology from George Washington University. He was a founding member of an Islamic center and worked as a software architect for a high-tech Washington D.C. computer firm. Other jihadists held advanced degrees in psychology, business administration, computer science, and risk management. Average rates of education for the study's offenders were consistent with average Americans and Muslim Americans over the age of 25.

Understandably, academic success positively contributed to better employment opportunities. Homegrown jihadist terrorist were actually employed at a slightly higher rate than their American and Muslim American counterparts. Engineers, doctors, pharmacists, teachers, religious scholars, and experts in science and technology were all occupations represented among the group. It seems reasonable to infer that strong academic and career achievement would lead to economic success as well. This was the case for most of the well-educated offenders within this study. Even some of the jihadists who had not yet reached academic or professional achievement came from very affluent and financially well-positioned families. Faisal Shahzad, who unsuccessfully tried to car bomb New York's Times Square, grew up privileged in an upper-class family of a Pakistani diplomat. Financial advantage like Shahzad's was not uncommon among other offenders. This study's data and these supporting examples corroborate previous research claiming that terrorists are often educated and come from middle class socioeconomic backgrounds rather than adverse poverty. The idea that

terrorists collectively suffer from poor education or a lack thereof, and come from destitute backgrounds would be a clear misrepresentation of the subjects analyzed for the current study.

Previous research shows personal relationships impact criminal behavior (Capaldi et al., 2008; Macmillan, 2001; Paat & Hope, 2015; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Schroeder et al., 2010; Umberson, 1992; Wisdom, 1989). For example, researchers have long studied the parallels between social marginalization and criminal offending (Chen, 2009; Elliott, 1998; Hirschi, 1969; Johnson et al., 2015; Putnam, 2000; Theimann, 2016; Wooditch et al., 2014). Overall, the effects of social marginalization appear complex: sometimes people with few friends are at higher risk for bad behavior, while other times social groups such as gangs that commit crimes seem to have a socially negative effect on pressuring and encouraging others to commit crimes as well. While we see these associations play out in neighborhoods all across America, one extreme or another does not necessarily characterize the experiences of homegrown jihadist terrorists. There was no indication that the majority of offenders analyzed for the current study suffered from negative social experiences: in fact, this study found that more jihadists did not appear socially isolated (42.4%) than those who did appear socially isolated (22.9%). However, there were also some remaining cases where the evidence was unclear (34.7%). While some subjects certainly found it difficult to culturally adapt, make friends, or find suitable significant others, many others seemed to thrive in large social networks. They often had many close friends and family, were actively involved in school or religious associations, played sports, and volunteered. These findings do not support previous scholarship suggesting terrorists almost always suffer from social marginality. In fact, approximately twice as many homegrown jihadist terrorists fit a successful social profile than those who failed to integrate or were anti-social.

For example, Omar Hammami, who became an extremely influential commander, propagandist, and recruiter for Al-Shabaab, was so well thought of by his high school friends that he was voted class president. Similarly, before being convicted of providing material support to Al-Qaeda, Terek Mehanna was described by people who knew him best as a positive role model to the community. Hammami, Mehanna, and many others like them were far from socially marginalized. If anything they were socially exceptional, accepted, and even admired within their communities. For these individuals, social interaction seemed to have no impact on discouraging their participation in homegrown jihadist terrorism. Rather, in some cases it seems to have even encouraged it.

Some of these homegrown jihadist terrorists were clearly radicalized by people within their social group. Others seemed to recognize an opportunity to join a larger organization or movement that otherwise would not have been easily accessible. This may explain why more than 75 percent of this study's subjects were not lone actors but rather operated with co-conspirators.

On the other hand, for some individuals, participation in terrorism could also have been inspired by dramatic social changes in the offender's personal life, like a sudden divorce or relocation away from family and friends, or a desire for more social relationships. Results of the study show that homegrown jihadist terrorists were married much less often than both average Americans and Muslim Americans. Inability to find a suitable partner, start a family, or make friends through traditional means could certainly be interpreted as socially damaging. Mohammad Hassan Khalid, the study's youngest offender, found it difficult to relate with others his age, had very few friends, and was described by many as anti-social and vulnerably isolated. High school peers often bullied him. Yet as a 15 year old Khalid was very active online. He must

have felt supported and valued while engaging in social interactions online that others did not provide in his face-to-face relationships. Khalid soon connected with several Islamic scholars who recognized his gifted intellect and manipulated him for their benefit. Khalid was radicalized by this online social group and eventually arrested for providing material support to a terrorist organization.

Fort Hood shooter Nidal Malik Hasan is an excellent case study because he presented many of the characteristics representative of some other homegrown jihadist terrorists in this study. Born in the United States to Palestinian immigrants, Hasan grew up in Northern Virginia in a traditional Muslim household. He was the oldest of three boys, all of whom were academically and professionally successful. After graduating with honors from Virginia Tech in biochemistry, Hasan enlisted in the United States Army as a commissioned officer. Medical school and a residency in psychiatry at Walter Reed Army Medical Hospital followed. He had a stable job and lived frugally so employment and economic welfare were never in question. Hasan's only difference from the majority of other jihadists was his preference to be introverted and socially withdrawn. He had very few close friends and found it difficult to find a suitable Muslim wife. His faith seemed to isolate him from other members of the military community and made it more difficult to participate in social activities. What is concerning with Hasan's story is that his circumstances are unremarkable. The challenges he faced were no different than those of millions of other average American and Muslim American adults. It could be argued that Hasan presented other indicators of religious radicalism, but absent these lawful beliefs, he was productively adjusted to American society and seemed otherwise relatively normal. Identifying homegrown jihadist before they conduct acts of domestic terrorism based on demographic and social characteristics seems to be a challenging enterprise.

Not all data challenged the hypothesis that homegrown jihadist terrorist have different experiences with strain than Americans and Muslim Americans. Rates of substance abuse, recent tragic events, and mental illness were especially concerning among the study's subjects. However, perhaps most alarming was prior criminal offending. According to a study on the growth of American prison systems, 19.8 million people have served time or are currently imprisoned, and/or have been convicted of a felony (Shannon et al; 2011). This represents approximately 8.6 percent of the American population. By comparison, Muslim Americans account for 9 percent of prison populations while representing less than one percent of the total United States population (Table 5). Furthermore, the homegrown jihadist terrorists analyzed for the study seem to be incarcerated at much higher rates. Nearly one full quarter of subjects had documented criminal histories before becoming involved in terrorism. A list of their crimes includes murder, violent assault, armed robbery, illegal firearms and drug related offenses, and extensive gang involvement.

Beyond increasing the probability of further offending, these criminal convictions have additional collateral consequences. For several jihadists, prison provided their initial exposure to radical Islamic ideology. As an example, this was the case for Kevin James, who began following a radical Islamic group known as Jam'iyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheed (the Assembly of Authentic Islam) or JIS while serving a 10-year prison term for robbery. Not only was James a supporter of this ideological cause, but he also began actively recruiting other inmates to JIS and would later be convicted for plotting with them to bomb military bases and synagogues in Los Angeles. The external source of Kevin James' exposure to radical Islam was not unique among jihadist peers. Over 30% of the study's subjects were not raised as traditional Muslims but converted to Islam as adults (Table 6). Perhaps these converts were attracted by an inclusive

social dynamic. Or maybe they believed religion would bring order and stability to troubled lives. Regardless of what motivated their conversion, Islam provided something for all of these jihadists and for many it was simply justification.

The prevalence of documented mental illness among Muslim Americans (15.7%) is actually lower than the rate for Americans overall (17.8%), but rates were even higher among homegrown jihadist terrorists (22.9%). In other words, nearly one out of every four analyzed for this study suffered from conditions like depression, schizophrenia, psychosis, anxiety, PTSD, and/or were suicidal. Many were diagnosed, medicated, and sought professional counseling, but still others refused treatment and assistance. Unfortunately, Muslims in general often appear hesitant to seek psychiatric help because of cultural stereotypes and stigmas of shame and disgrace associated with mental illness (Ciftci et al., 2012). They are especially sensitive to these labels because sickness in general can be viewed as a test of faith or punishment from God (Rassoll, 2000). This detail is specifically relevant to the current research because jihad, a compulsory religious duty, provides an opportunity for atonement and reward. Therefore, it is plausible that someone who feels wayward or challenged by God will attempt to rationalize violent jihad in exchange for the expected religious benefit. Of course this reasoning can equally apply to other sources of strain as well.

Suffering from a recent tragedy or crisis was another recurring theme among the study's subjects. Losing a family member, divorce, illness, being fired from a job, or imprisonment were all common situations among the group. In many cases these events seemed to be the tipping point for jihadists, causing them to cross a threshold leading them towards criminality. Most Americans will experience trauma at some point in life, however the personal significance of the incident and capacity to cope depends largely on the individual. One concern with tragedy, or

any type of strain for that matter, is that they can create a complicated cycle where the inability to successfully cope can open the door to additional forms of adversity like criminal activity.

Stress and strain can also increase vulnerability to patterns of addiction (Sinha, 2001). This could help explain why homegrown jihadist terrorists used drugs and alcohol as often as the average American, even though both are strongly discouraged in Islamic culture. Substance abuse provided one way to cope tragedy or mental illness for some subjects. This certainly appears to be the case for James Elshafay, who was dealt a particularly harsh set of circumstances. Elshafay grew up in a broken home, was sexually abused by a male relative, and suffered from schizophrenia. He dropped out of high school, had trouble keeping jobs, and even spent time in a psychiatric ward. As a consequence he turned to drugs and alcohol. He later unsuccessfully plotted to blow up a New York subway station, along with a Pakistani American named Shahawar Matin Siraj. Other individuals in this study also turned to drugs and alcohol as a social pursuit or sold them for financial benefit. While these activities are not exceptional experiences for many Americans, they are fundamentally inconsistent with what is expected for religiously devout Muslims. This might lead one to conclude that homegrown jihadist terrorists were less often motivated by religious conviction, but rather saw terrorism as an appropriate response to the various strain and conflict in their lives.

b. Conclusion

Contrary to popular opinion, the present study established that homegrown jihadist terrorists were demographically and socially relatively similar to other populations. Additionally, the offenders were equally or more educated and more often employed than average Americans and Muslim Americans. Overall however, the study's findings suggest key differences in experiences with certain types of strain. While homegrown jihadist terrorists fell closely within

range of current substance abuse rates, they were *more* likely to suffer from mental illness, have a criminal record, and be unmarried. Though not a likely source of strain, many were also recent converts to Islam. These findings deliver some insight into the types, frequency, and disadvantages of their experiences with strain, but it falls far short of providing a complete picture.

The results of this study are almost certainly an imperfect representation of the subtleties and complexities of homegrown jihadist terrorists experiences with strain, because there was no way to measure severity or duration at an individual level. We do know that many sources of strain are closely interconnected and compound upon each other to magnify consequences (Agnew, 1992; Agnew, 2001, Agnew, 2006). Nearly every one of the study's subjects experienced multiple strains, whether just a few or a combination of them all. Many even appeared to go through a progression from modest stress to more severe in nature. Future research should further explore this relationship and attempt to address the following questions: 1) Does the perceived severity of strain accelerate an individual's progression towards radical criminal behavior? 2) Does terrorism offending become more extreme relative to the difficulty of strain? 3) What is the link between certain sources of strain and specific terrorist activity, and are any particular types of strain more likely to produce terrorism than others? Clarifying these questions would provide valued insight towards a more complete understanding of homegrown jihadist terrorism.

Not only are current race-based and religion-based profiling models inaccurate, but they also contribute to overextended resources and ineffective strategies to prevent terrorism. For example, immigration restrictions for travelers from Muslim countries would likely accomplish nothing in terms of averting homegrown jihadist terrorism, because there is no evidence to

suggest a pattern of this study's offenders recently immigrating to the United States before they committed acts of terror. Rather, prejudiced immigration policies based on race or religion may actually create more strains for Muslim Americans already in the United States, and their children, because these policies suggest that all Muslims represent a potential threat. This could make it more difficult for peaceful Muslim Americans to excel in school, make new friends, get good jobs, and successfully integrate into American society in other important ways. Travel bans that specifically target Muslims could also have the unintended consequences of increasing other types of strains, such as making it more difficult to visit or be visited by foreign family members. Overall, the results illustrate many complex pathways involved in individual radicalization. Focusing exclusively on ideological indicators, as many existing counterterrorism strategies do, is likely to fail because religion is rarely the only motivator. Perhaps reevaluating existing approaches towards criminal rehabilitation, immigration, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and employment programs would be a worthwhile exercise in deterring disenfranchised citizens from turning to radical extremes.

Future research should explore whether or not the current study's findings are representative of other terrorist populations, both at home and abroad. For example, do eco-terrorists, supremacist groups, and state-sponsored organizations share the same experiences with strain as homegrown jihadist terrorists? Do this study's findings apply to terrorist groups in other countries? What additional strains do these groups experience and how can they be confronted? Studying the differences in how other governments view these threats would also be interesting. Are there similar stereotypical misconceptions about terrorists from Europe or Africa, and how do they impact prevention efforts? Providing policymakers with empirical answer to these questions is imperative. Not only will it help eliminate biases and flawed assumptions about

what we think we know about homegrown jihadist terrorism, but it will guide future counterterrorism strategy towards evidence based solutions, rather than simply trying to manage a continual problem.

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