

POLS 429: International Terrorism

Lecture 33 (04.20.2020): Lone-Wolf Terrorism

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Overview

- 1 Quick review
- 2 Introduction
- 3 Lone-Wolf Terrorism Research
- 4 Extra Material

Review

WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- CBRN Terrorism: definitions, cases (US, Japan, Syria).
- Why use or obtain CBRN: costly signal, organizational prestige, apocalyptic ideology.
- What factors create incentives to pursue CBRN: state sponsorship and religion (no data support).
- Support: global integration, network and alliances, experience with political violence.
- Why not? Lack of interest, difficulty to obtain material and assemble weapon.

Questions??

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

DEFINITIONS

- An individual terror operative who has no direct ties to a formal organization, and is difficult to detect.
- A more narrow definition (Spaaij 2010):
 - ① Operate individually.
 - ② Lack any type of connection to other groups or networks.
 - ③ Prepares and executes the attack by him/herself.
- The main point of contention: no connections to other groups.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

FAMOUS INCIDENTS

► LoneWolfUS

<i>Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Time Span</i>	<i>Fatalities/ Injuries</i>
Theodore Kaczynski	United States	1978–1996	3/23
David Copeland	United Kingdom	April 17–30, 1999	3/129
Anders Behring Breivik	Norway	2011	69/60
Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel	France	2016	86/434
Alexandre Bissonnette	Canada	2017	6/19

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

BACKGROUND

- Early lone-wolves: criminals of the 1930s.
- "Lone-Wolf" and right-wing extremists.
- 1983: the "leaderless resistance" (Beam) emphasizing the need to operate in 'one-man' cells to counter the most powerful government in the world.
- Tom Metzger, leader of the *White Aryan Resistance* inspired a series of hate crimes.
- Since 9.11: lone operatives and the global jihad ideology.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

BACKGROUND

- A trend of attacks: Fort Hood army base (2009) - 13 dead.
- Exeter, England (2008): an individual who converted to Islam tried to blow up a restaurant.
- Growing online propaganda and a call for offensive like the "leaderless resistance".
- Instant analysis following attacks (the Boston marathon, attacks in France, Germany and England).
- In most cases → lone-wolf label is misplaced: investigations reveal that perpetrators had support to groups.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

INTRODUCTION

- Research → strategic logic, threat perceptions, narratives that promote lone-wolves actions, and individual case studies.
- What makes lone-wolf so unique and dangerous?
 - ① Hard to detect.
 - ② No organizational restrictions: may discourage creative actions or delays.
 - ③ Response is not subjected to repressive action.
 - ④ Solves the **collective action problem**: how to motivate and mobilize multiple members for action and reduce 'free riders'.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

Gill et al. (2014)

- Focus: the behavioral and demographic aspects of perpetrators.
- Conceptualize 3 'groupings' of lone-wolf operatives:
- **(1) Individual terrorists:** operate autonomously and independent of a group.
- **(2) Individuals with command and control links:** trained/ supported by a group; executes autonomously.
- **(3) Isolated dyads:** pairs who plan, prepare and execute an attack outside of a group setting.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

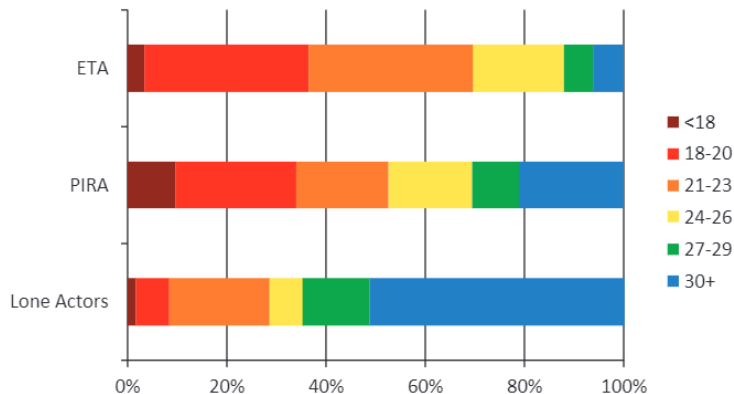
Gill et al. (2014)

- Categories of factors:
 - ① Demographic: age, gender, occupation, family status.
 - ② Antecedent behavior: daily routine and social interactions.
 - ③ Event-specific: methods, target.
 - ④ Post-event behavior: credit claiming, arrest details.
- **Data:** 119 individuals who engaged or planned to engage in lone-wolf terrorism in the US or Europe (after 1990).

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

Gill et al. (2014)

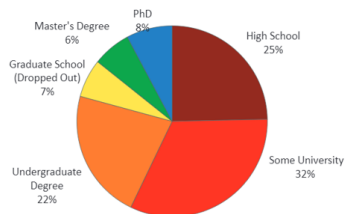
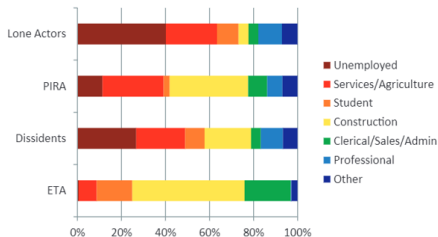
AGE



Lone-Wolf Terrorism

Gill et al. (2014)

EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION



Lone-Wolf Terrorism

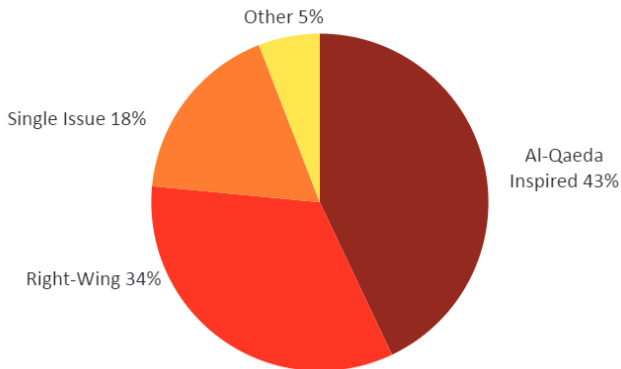
Gill et al. (2014)

- **Gender:** overwhelming majority are male (96%).
- Female attackers: Choudhry attacked Labour Party MP as a revenge for the events in Iraq (2010); Shannon was associated with multiple attacks on Abortion clinics in the 1990s.
- **Illegal activities:** many with previous criminal record.
- Offenses vary: minor (tax frauds) to severe (robbery, blackmail, drug possession, firearms offenses).
- Unique to lone-wolf: groups prefer recruits without past criminal records.
- Over 60% served time in jail → faster radicalization process.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

Gill et al. (2014)

IDEOLOGY



Lone-Wolf Terrorism

Gill et al. (2014)

- **Awareness of intentions:** perpetrators openly talk of their radical worldview, and intent to engage in violence.
- Over 60% of cases: family and/or close friends were aware intentions.
- **Economic situation:** many perpetrators recently lost their job.
- Chronically unemployed, (about a quarter had financial problems).
- **Stress:** no clear factors among most perpetrators.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

Gill et al. (2014)

- **Network:** participate in (legal) political contention .
- Access to radicalizing material and propaganda.
- Friends or family are members in a wider network of violent criminal or political movement.
- Network contacts are aware of the intended attack: lone-wolf operatives tried to recruit others.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

Gill et al. (2014)

- **Attack preparation:** self-trained and obtained manuals of preparing explosives.
- Receive help in training and preparation from close associates.
- **Targets:** civilians or government-related targets.
- Less targeting of religious centers and military targets.
- **Weapons:** wide variation. [▶ WeaponFBI](#)

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

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Bottom Line: No clear Lone-Wolf profile!!

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

Phillips (2017)

- Structural/organizational approach to understand terror groups and lone-wolves.
- Who is more lethal?

Why terror groups are more lethal?

- (1) Internal dynamics and the need to ensure survival: incentives for regular and constant attacks.
- Group attacks are riskier.
- Example: suicide terrorism

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

Phillips (2017)

Why terror groups are more lethal?

- (2) Access to resources: a logistical network (production of weapons, transportation services, safe houses).
- Translate into public concerns → groups appear as more of a threat than individuals.
- Why lone-wolves associate themselves with groups → enhance the fear factor.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

Phillips (2017)

- Main structural factor: state capacity.
- Developed CT capabilities complicate terror groups' operations.
- Law enforcement tools: policing, informants and surveillance, are less effective in disrupting lone-wolf terrorism.
- As a result → lone-wolfs are **more lethal** in states with higher CT capacity.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

Phillips (2017)

- Measure lethality: the number of fatalities in a terror attack (1970-2010).
- Findings: overall, groups are more deadly (lethal).
- US sample only (a state with robust CT capabilities): on average, lethality is higher for lone-wolf attacks.
- Lone-wolf attacks in the US: almost 1.5 times more fatalities than group attacks.
- Policy implications: emphasize the threat of lone-wolf instead of transnational attacks by groups.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

THE THREAT

- The main challenge for research: definitions.
 - ① Who is a lone-wolf?
 - ② How to characterize links with groups or networks in these definition?
 - ③ What role does ideology play? (right-wing or religion).
- Critical for research and policymaking:
- Definition → data collected → empirical analysis → implications.

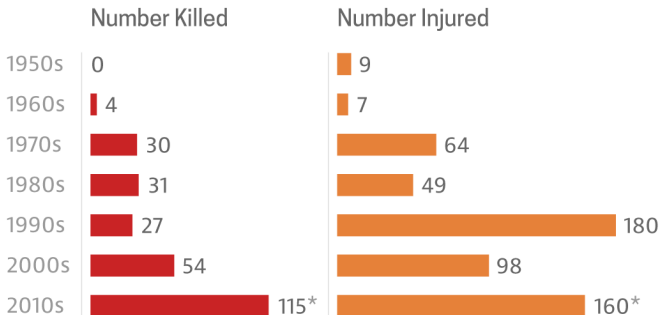
Recommended readings

More studies on Lone-wolf Terrorism:

- 1 Spaaij, Ramon. "The enigma of lone wolf terrorism: An assessment." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 33, no. 9 (2010): 854-870.
- 2 Byman, Daniel. "How to Hunt a Lone Wolf: Countering Terrorists Who Act on Their Own." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 96 (2017): 96-106.
- 3 Perry, Simon, Badi Hasisi, and Gali Perry. "Who is the lone terrorist? A study of vehicle-borne attackers in Israel and the West Bank." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 41, no. 11 (2018): 899-913.

US Lone-Wolf Terrorism

Lone Wolf Attacks



*Includes Orlando and Dallas attacks

source: The American Lone Wolf Terrorism Database, by Ramon Spaaij and Mark Hamm

The database includes all known American lone wolf attacks; historic incidents are added as they're identified. FRONTLINE analyzed a subset of Hamm and Spaaij's database — leaving out attacks that never came to fruition, or were hoaxes.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism: Weapons

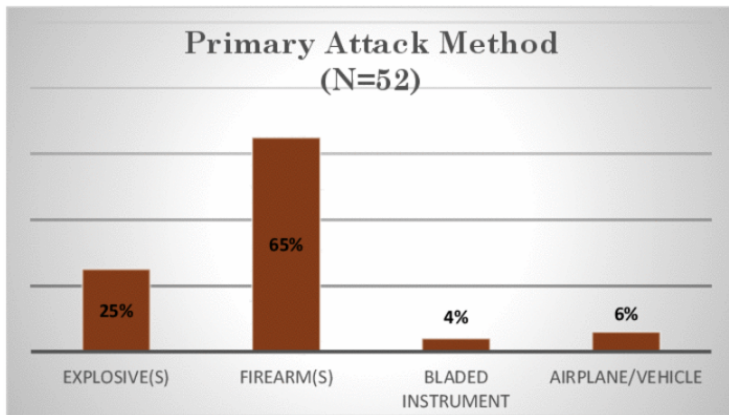


Figure: "Lone Offender Terrorism Report" - FBI (November 2019)