

TERRORIST BEHAVIOUR - BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL

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Abstract: *The paper captures some of the trends in terrorist behaviour based on an analysis of demographic, historical, psychological and political factors. Rational choice theory also shows that this behavioural tendency is nothing more than an adaptation to, or a rejection of, governmental policy changes. The causes of terrorism are complex and multi-dimensional, including social, political, economic, cultural and psychological aspects. One of the most common causes of terrorism is discrimination, i.e. perceived oppression or discrimination against an ethnic, religious or cultural group; and political conflict (terrorism can be used as a means to influence political decisions). Sociologically, even criminologically, terrorism cannot be reduced to the form of insanity or mental disorder, as it is essentially a political act with political aims. It can also be pointed out that some terrorists may suffer from psychiatric problems or behavioural disorders, but the causes of terrorism go much deeper, such as social frustration, moral indignation, the desire to change an unjust situation or to achieve a specific political goal.*

Keywords: terrorism, security, counterterrorism, psychology of terrorism.

1. Introduction

Terrorism has undoubtedly existed throughout the ages, predating the advent of recorded history [1].

While human nature remains unchanged, three interrelated factors have significantly transformed the nature and scope of threats:

1. The increasing interconnectedness of trade, travel, and information exchange on a global scale has accentuated economic inequalities, ideological rivalries, and facilitated acts of aggression.
2. The emergence of religious fundamentalism has arisen as a challenger to the democratic and secular economic progress associated with modernity.
3. The privatization of weapons of mass destruction has enabled small groups or even individuals to possess the capability for large-scale acts of terrorism [2].

It would be fitting for the academic fields of psychology and psychiatry to apply their intellectual expertise to the political challenge of terrorism, which involves aberrant human behaviour. Political psychological theory suggests that the better a target group understands the roots of the terrorist mindset, the better that group can develop policies to effectively manage risk [3].

Although there is a clear necessity for such comprehension, numerous theoretical and practical obstacles have hindered, and possibly derailed, the objective scientific examination of terrorism within the field of psychology. Counter-terrorism tactics have been formulated without the advantage of factual knowledge regarding the roots of terrorist behaviour, often relying on theoretical assumptions presented as

certainties. Conducting research on the psychology of terrorists could serve as an essential initial stride towards harnessing the full potential of modern political psychology, enabling us to comprehend the foundations of terrorist aggression and devise an effective counter-terrorism strategy.

Schmid (1983) conducted a comprehensive review of 109 academic definitions of terrorism, highlighting the considerable lack of consensus among experts in the field. This lack of consensus is understandable given the multifaceted nature of terrorist behaviour and the wide array of motivations that are expressed or assumed. Nevertheless, contemporary definitions commonly share two fundamental elements. Firstly, terrorism involves aggressive acts perpetrated against non-combatants. Secondly, the central aim of terrorist actions is not the direct attainment of a political objective, but rather the exertion of influence over a target audience to modify their behaviour in a way that serves the interests of the terrorist group.

The classification of terrorism is a multifaceted and debated topic, as various factors contribute to the characterization of different actors. Scholars have proposed seven variables - causes, environment, goals, strategy, means, organization, and participation - that can be applied to distinguish between revolutionary and sub-revolutionary terrorism. In a helpful categorization by Post (2004), substate political terrorism is divided into five types: (1) social revolutionary terrorism, (2) right-wing terrorism, (3) nationalist-separatist terrorism, (4) religious extremist terrorism, and (5) single-issue terrorism (e.g., animal rights). Each type is associated with distinct socio-psychological dynamics.

It is paramount to recognize that typologies of terrorism serve as analytical tools rather than inflexible frameworks with mutually exclusive categories. They provide valuable

insights for comprehending the phenomenon but should not be perceived as absolute or definitive. For instance, state terrorism, exemplified by the gassing of Iraqi civilians in Halabja, undeniably meets the criteria of state-sponsored violence. However, the line of demarcation between state and sub-state terrorism can become blurred in instances involving pro-government paramilitary death squads, as observed in contexts such as South Africa or Colombia. These situations highlight the complexity and fluidity of categorizing terrorism, necessitating careful examination and contextual understanding to avoid oversimplification [4].

Another challenge in studying the psychology of terrorism is that terrorist organizations often have a hierarchical structure, where distinct roles exist at each level. Different individuals with varied predispositions are attracted to each position in this hierarchy, likely driven by diverse psychological factors. It can be postulated, for instance, that some leaders are motivated by idealism or self-perceived altruism, while others are fuelled by messianic delusions, ethnic or religious animosity, or entrepreneurial ambitions. Upon examination, the distinct psychological attributes of convicted terrorist leaders, such as Shoko Asahara, Abu Nidal, and Nelson Mandela, become apparent. Each of these individuals exhibits unique psychological characteristics that differentiate them from one another. While there may be some overlapping roles depending on the group and its scale, it is crucial to acknowledge the substantial variations in temperaments among individuals fulfilling different roles within a terrorist organization. Therefore, any empirical study seeking to understand "terrorist psychology" would risk misleading conclusions if it does not analyze its findings with a consideration of stratification based on levels and roles.

In conclusion, demographic studies

conducted during the 1960s and 1970s shed light on the typical profile of a terrorist during that era. The findings indicated that the prototypical terrorist was a young, unmarried, well-educated male in his mid-20s, originating from a middle-class background. A comprehensive study in 1976, which examined eighteen groups, further revealed that the average age of members fell between 23.2 and 31.3 years. Moreover, it was observed that a majority of identified or convicted terrorists came from middle- or upper-middle-class backgrounds and had received a university education. These findings were consistent with a contemporary study that analyzed 48 members of Euzkadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) [5].

Handler conducted an investigation into the relationship between political orientation and socioeconomic factors by analyzing data gathered from Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) interviews with right-wing and left-wing terrorists operating in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. According to Handler's findings, a significantly higher proportion of female individuals were identified among left-wing terrorists compared to right-wing terrorists (46.2% versus 11.2%). Moreover, left-wing terrorists were more likely to have obtained a college degree compared to their right-wing counterparts (67.6% versus 19.0%). On the other hand, right-wing terrorists were more prevalent among individuals engaged in "blue-collar" [6] occupations (74.8% versus 24.3% for left-wing terrorists). Interestingly, a notable observation is that both left-wing and right-wing terrorists commonly exhibited lower or middle income levels, despite having higher levels of education.

The analysis conducted by Weinberg and Eubank (1987) on 451 Italian female terrorists revealed a notable trend: a significant number of these individuals were in their twenties and employed as teachers or in white-collar professions. Additionally, a controlled study conducted

by Ferracuti found no significant differences in the family backgrounds of Italian Red Brigade terrorists compared to politically active individuals. These findings shed light on the demographic and occupational characteristics of female terrorists in Italy and suggest that family background may not be a distinguishing factor between terrorists and politically engaged individuals in this context [7].

The dynamics shifted in the 1980s when American terrorist groups became relatively quiet, European revolutionary anarchist-Marxist groups faced significant decline, and radical Islamic terrorists gained global prominence. During this period, the typical Palestinian terrorist was typically between seventeen to twenty-three years old, originating from a large family with a disadvantaged background and limited education.

However, the landscape of terrorism underwent further transformations. In the late 1990s and early 21st century, Middle Eastern terrorists displayed a wider demographic spectrum, encompassing individuals such as students, professionals, married men in their late 40s, and young individuals. A notable example is seen in the 9/11 attacks, where the group of pilots included individuals like Mohammad Atta, a middle-aged urbanite from a middle-class background, and Ziad Jarrah, who came from a wealthy family, attended Christian schools, and had interests in discos and beer.

Another noteworthy progression in the realm of terrorism is the inclusion of women as suicide bombers. This development can be attributed, in part, to the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade [8], which is affiliated with Yasser Arafat's Fatah [9] movement. As the first secular group to advocate for Palestinian independence, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade actively involves women in their cause, enabling them to play an active role in their pursuit of objectives [10].

The survey conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) [11] and the findings from other studies challenge the commonly held theories that associate political violence, such as terrorism, with poverty and low education levels. Surprisingly, the survey revealed that support for terrorism against Israeli civilians was more prevalent among professionals and individuals with a high school education, contradicting the assumption that poverty and lack of education fuel such attitudes. Similarly, studies on Muslim terrorists and Hezbollah fighters found that a significant number had received some university education or attended secondary school, suggesting a more nuanced relationship between political violence and socioeconomic factors. These findings indicate that the dynamics underlying political violence are complex and cannot be solely attributed to poverty or education levels. Further research is needed to better understand the multifaceted nature of these connections and identify other influential factors shaping attitudes towards political violence.

Theories argue that poverty and lack of education can limit access to resources and economic opportunities, which can lead to frustration and disregard for the existing social and political system. Thus, individuals from these vulnerable groups may be more easily recruited by groups to provide them with opportunities to make a living. However, it is important to note that these are not the sole and definitive causes of terrorism and that there are several other factors, such as politics, religion, racism and discrimination, which can contribute to the perpetuation of terrorism. Also, not all individuals from vulnerable groups will participate in terrorist actions.

Psychological data on terrorists are limited, although some projects have attempted to identify typical psychosocial characteristics of terrorists in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, one study reported five traits of

skyjackers, including a violent father, deeply religious mother, sexual shyness, protective behaviour towards younger sisters, and poor social outcomes. Another study identified nine characteristics of right-wing terrorists, such as ambivalence toward authority, emotional detachment, and adherence to violent subculture norms. However, these studies were based on unstructured interviews and lacked validated psychological controls or instruments. The largest study conducted under the West German Ministry of the Interior involved semi-structured interviews with left-wing terrorists and right-wing extremists. Overall, the available psychological data on terrorists remain scarce, and there is a lack of consensus or common background traits identified across studies [12].

The existing body of research on terrorists has yielded valuable insights into various demographic, life history, and psychological factors frequently observed among them. A particular study, for instance, revealed shared experiences among left-wing terrorists, including parental loss, significant parental conflicts, and a history of delinquency or court convictions during adolescence. Furthermore, the study identified two discernible patterns of personality traits: one characterized by extroversion, stimulus-seeking behaviour, and dependency, and another marked by hostility, suspicion, and defensiveness. Nonetheless, it is crucial to exercise caution when interpreting these findings.

The German study, in particular, challenges some psychological theories of terrorism by recognizing the diverse psychological profiles among terrorists. The conclusions drawn in these studies were primarily based on subjective assessments, and different psychologists involved in the German study arrived at varying interpretations. Without the use of validated behavioural measures and a control group, it is not possible to

definitively conclude that the identified characteristics effectively distinguish terrorists from non-terrorists. Therefore, while these studies offer valuable insights, further research incorporating rigorous methodologies is necessary to deepen our understanding of the psychological aspects of terrorism.

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, there has been a heightened interest in comprehending the psychology behind Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. However, it is noteworthy that there is a lack of published literature exploring psychological studies specifically conducted on Muslim extremists. To address this gap, Merari and his colleagues embarked on a study aiming to administer standardized psychological tests, including assessments of cognitive function, to captured individuals associated with Hezbollah, Amal, and pro-Syrian secular fighters in Lebanon during the late 1980s [13].

The existing research on the psychology of Muslim extremists is limited. The data collected by Merari and his colleagues, who conducted psychological tests on captured Hezbollah, Amal, and pro-Syrian secular fighters, is inaccessible for academic review or replication due to its classification by the Israeli Defense Forces. Post, Sprinzak, and Denny conducted semi-structured interviews with incarcerated Middle Eastern extremists, including Islamic religious terrorists and layperson terrorists. These interviews revealed that many extremists had high school educations and came from supportive families. Peer influence played a significant role in their decision to join terrorist groups, and being in prison strengthened their commitment to the group. While anger and hatred were common among the extremists, there was little interest in acquiring weapons of mass destruction. However, the study has limitations, including a lack of detailed information on subject selection, interview circumstances, and methods used.

Demographic data, formal psychological measures, and control groups were not included. Therefore, further research incorporating direct psychological screening and comprehensive methodologies is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological factors influencing Muslim extremists [14].

Psychiatrist Marc Sageman conducted a comprehensive analysis utilizing publicly available data on 172 individuals whom he identified as members of the “global Salafi mujahideen”, a group of Muslims involved in terrorist activities against the “distant enemy” in support of a new Islamic world order. Sageman's analysis encompassed expatriate leaders from various organizations, including the Egyptian Islamic Group (EIG) [15], Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), Jemaah Islamiyah [16], Moro Islamic Liberation Front [17], Algerian Salafistepour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) [18], and al-Qaeda [19]. However, it is essential to recognize the potential biases in Sageman's sample, as it mainly excludes those engaged in local jihadist movements such as Chechens, Kashmiris, Afghans, and Palestinians. Furthermore, the sample predominantly comprises leaders, thereby skewing the representation of transnational terrorism.

Within Sageman's analysis, a limited amount of childhood data was available for 61 cases, with only four cases indicating a history of conduct disorder (involving the Egyptian Islamic Group, members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Jemaah Islamiyah, Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Algerian Salafistepour la Prédication et le Combat, and al-Qaeda) and only one case (Habib Zacarias Moussaoui) suggesting childhood trauma. Sageman's findings shed light on the childhood and personality characteristics of the individuals under scrutiny. Among the 69 cases with available childhood personality descriptors, loners were less prevalent compared to individuals who were not considered “left-behind

children”. Furthermore, most of the personality descriptors were either neutral or positive in nature. Additionally, approximately 25% of the group had a history of minor offenses.

Through a careful examination of detailed biographies of ten cases, Sageman observed that, except for potential traits identified in Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of al-Qaeda, there was no conclusive evidence of pathological narcissism or a consistent pattern of paranoid personality disorder within this particular subgroup.

However, it is important to consider the limitations of Sageman's work. The sample size is small, making it challenging to draw definitive conclusions. The sample itself is also atypical and uncontrolled, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, Sageman acknowledges that he lacked a formal method to directly confirm these indirect psychiatric characteristics, adding further caution to the interpretation of his results [20].

UN relief worker Nasra Hassan conducted unstructured interviews with approximately 250 members of Hamas or Islamic Jihad in Gaza between 1996 and 1999, providing valuable data outside the scope of academic research. In her report, Hassan discloses that the age range of suicide bombers varied from eighteen to thirty-eight years old, with over half of them being refugees. This insight sheds light on the demographic characteristics of individuals involved in such acts of violence during the specified time period. It is noteworthy that many of these individuals hailed from middle-class backgrounds, and two were sons of millionaires. Interestingly, none of the interviewees were reported as being depressed, although many claimed to have experienced beatings or torture at the hands of Israeli forces.

However, it is important to note that Hassan's report lacks specific details regarding the precise number of terrorist subjects interviewed and the breakdown of individuals

who were intended suicide bombers, failed suicide bombers, or trainers within the subject population. Furthermore, the report does not provide comprehensive demographic, socioeconomic, or psychological data proportions for further analysis. These limitations restrict the extent to which meaningful conclusions can be drawn from the gathered information [21].

In Barber's extensive study on psychological factors potentially linked to Islamic political violence, data from the Palestinian Family Study was utilized. The study involved 6,923 ninth graders in the West Bank and Gaza. Aggression and mood were assessed using the Child Behavior Checklist, while “family values” were measured through a question regarding the importance placed on marriage and having a family. Participation in the 1987-1993 intifada was determined based on a single yes/no question related to various activities against the Israeli occupation. Respondents who answered yes to this question displayed higher levels of depression, aggression, and family values. However, the study's limitation lies in the lack of differentiation between violent and nonviolent political participation, which compromises the ability to draw conclusive findings regarding the predictive value of psychological factors for Islamic insurgent aggression.

Psychological studies of Muslim extremists have been aimed at assessing the motives and behaviour of these individuals with a view to developing and preventing terrorism. The results of these studies are diverse and depend on the methodology used. In conclusion, some studies have found that Muslim extremists may have psychological profiles similar to other individuals who participate in violent actions, such as individuals with personality disorders or whose negative emotions are not adequately controlled. Other studies have identified factors such as socio-economic frustration, feelings of

discrimination and disillusionment with government, as well as personal factors such as physical or emotional abuse, as possible causes of radicalisation. However, it is important to note that there is no single psychological profile of Muslim extremists, and that radicalisation can be influenced by a number of factors, including social and political context, personal and family experiences and access to extremist information. Also, not all Muslims are vulnerable to radicalisation or terrorism.

Terrorist behaviour can be analyzed through two broad approaches: top-down and bottom-up. The top-down approach emphasizes external factors such as political, social, economic, or evolutionary circumstances that contribute to terrorism. This perspective recognizes that larger contextual factors play a significant role in shaping individuals' decisions to engage in terrorist activities.

On the other hand, the bottom-up approach focuses on the individual and group characteristics that drive individuals towards terrorism. This approach examines personal motivations, ideologies, psychological factors, and social dynamics within specific groups or communities.

It's important to note that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive and can be integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of terrorism. For instance, rational choice theory and relative deprivation/oppression theory combine elements from both approaches. Rational choice theory considers how individuals weigh the costs and benefits of engaging in terrorism, taking into account both the circumstances they face and their individual motivations. Relative deprivation/oppression theory acknowledges that feelings of injustice or marginalization can contribute to an individual's decision to resort to violence as a means of redressing grievances.

By considering both top-down and bottom-up perspectives, researchers and analysts

can gain a more nuanced understanding of terrorism, recognizing the complex interplay between external factors and individual/group characteristics in shaping terrorist behaviour.

The notion that terrorists must be mentally insane or psychotic is a misconception. In the field of modern Western psychiatry, adult behavioural disorders are categorized into Axis I and Axis II. Axis I includes major clinical illnesses like schizophrenia or major depression, while Axis II encompasses personality disorders such as antisocial personality disorder. It is important to distinguish that psychosis, which involves a loss of reality testing, is primarily associated with Axis I disorders and is not typically present in Axis II disorders like antisocial personality disorder.

The term "mental disorder" [22] can have different connotations in behavioural science and legal contexts, often implying psychosis but subject to jurisdictional variation. A person who is psychotic or "crazy" is mentally disturbed to the extent that they cannot differentiate between right and wrong. In contrast, a sociopath understands right from wrong but chooses to act wrongly for selfish reasons without experiencing guilt or remorse.

Although there is limited research on Axis I clinical disorders among terrorists, existing uncontrolled empirical psychological studies conducted on left-wing German militants, members of the Algerian FLN [23], members of the PIRA [24], and Hezbollah have shown that terrorists generally do not exhibit Axis I or Axis II psychological disorders. Wilfred Rasch, a German psychiatrist, found no evidence of mental illness among eleven suspected terrorists, including members of the Baader-Meinhof group, and a Federal Police study of forty other wanted individuals as terrorists also revealed no signs of mental illness [25].

Additionally, Post, Sprinzak, and Denny's

research in 2003 [26], which examined twenty-one secular terrorists and fourteen radical Islamic terrorists from the Middle East, found no Axis I disorders in their psychiatric evaluations.

It is crucial to acknowledge that these conclusions are based on limited studies and uncontrolled methodologies. Further comprehensive research, including psychiatric examinations with validated measures and control groups, is needed to better understand the psychological profiles and disorders, if any, among terrorists.

According to criminologist Franco Ferracuti's assertion over two decades ago, which has found subsequent support in various reports, it is noteworthy that while certain terrorist groups may be led by individuals with mental disorders, and while specific terrorist acts could be attributed to individuals who exhibit clear signs of mental illness, the majority of terrorists do not meet the psychiatric criteria for insanity. This observation emphasizes the significance of distinguishing between mental health issues and the motivations, ideologies, and strategic calculations that underlie terrorist behaviour.

Instead, much of the literature that examines the presence of clinical mental disorders in terrorists focuses on discussing personality traits such as remorselessness, psychopathy, or sociopathy. These studies shed light on the psychological characteristics that may contribute to the engagement in terrorism, highlighting the significance of understanding the interplay between individual personality traits and extremist ideologies in shaping terrorist behaviour [27]. Terrorists, like psychopaths, are ruthless "outcasts" and "outcasts" who adhere to an abnormal pattern of values that is not in accord with that of the rest of society and that there is a "close identity of this fundamental characteristic in both the psychopath and the terrorist." Terrorists were sociopaths who acted antisocially because of "superego gaps," i.e., gaps in self-monitoring; he supports his

conclusion partly because of tattoos found on a terrorist [28].

The claim that terrorism is predominantly antisocial behaviour lacks empirical evidence and oversimplifies the complex nature of terrorism. While some terrorists may exhibit antisocial tendencies, it is important to consider the broader context and motivations behind their actions.

Evidence suggests that terrorists often view themselves as heroic freedom fighters or defenders of their group's interests. It is important to recognize that nationalist-separatist terrorists are not solely driven by antisocial motivations but may also perceive their actions as contributing to social welfare. While terrorism is commonly associated with acts of violence and destruction, nationalist-separatist terrorists often view themselves as fighting for the rights, autonomy, and well-being of their own communities or ethnic groups.

These individuals may believe that their actions are necessary to bring attention to perceived injustices, achieve self-determination, or address social, economic, or political grievances. They may see themselves as freedom fighters or defenders of their cultural or national identity. In their perspective, their acts of violence are a means to bring about social change and secure better conditions for their communities.

This highlights the complex nature of terrorism and the diverse motivations that drive individuals to engage in such acts. While the means they employ may be considered unacceptable and morally wrong by many, it is important to understand that their underlying motivations can stem from a desire for social welfare and the betterment of their communities. Moreover, there are instances where the actions of terrorists, even if they fail or result in their own death, can benefit their relatives and social group. This indicates a prosocial aspect to their behaviour, as they collaborate based on shared social values and beliefs.

The concept of altruistic suicide, as observed in religiously motivated terrorists, further supports the notion of prosociality among certain terrorists. They may believe they are acting selflessly in the service of their religious or ideological cause.

However, it is important to acknowledge that some terrorists may exploit the moral cover of group affiliation to mask their aggressive and remorseless impulses. Further research is needed to better understand the personality traits and motivations of both antisocial and prosocial terrorists.

In summary, while there may be cases of sociopathy among terrorists, it is not accurate to categorize all terrorists as inherently antisocial. Many terrorists believe they are serving society and are judged by their group to be acting in its best interests. Further exploration is needed to understand the correlation between sociopathy and terrorism, as well as to examine the varying personality traits exhibited by antisocial and prosocial terrorists. Additional research should aim to investigate these aspects in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between personality traits and engagement in terrorist activities.

Rational choice theory is applied to the study of terrorism by approaching this phenomenon as an economic behaviour, in which terrorist actors assess the costs and benefits of different options before making a decision. In this context, the decision to participate in terrorist acts can be understood as the result of a rational assessment of the costs and benefits of the advantages involved [29].

This theory suggests that terrorist actors assume the risks and costs of terrorist acts in exchange for rewards such as ideological satisfaction, media attention or influence over political decisions [30]. Rational choice theory can also explain why some terrorist groups adopt certain strategies, such as recruiting new members or using

modern technologies, by weighing the costs and benefits of these options [31].

The observation that the majority of terrorists do not meet the diagnostic criteria for major mental illnesses or sociopathy raises important questions regarding the rationality of their actions. This prompts an examination of the explanatory capacity of rational choice theory, which proposes that terrorist actions arise from a deliberate, rational, and strategic decision made as the optimal means to accomplish a socio-political objective. It is essential to differentiate rational or strategic choice theory from other psychological theories that aim to elucidate the factors influencing individuals' inclination towards certain types or styles of behaviour, such as engagement in terrorism. By delving into the rationality behind terrorist decision-making, researchers can gain insights into the underlying motivations and calculations that shape these acts of violence.

Rational or strategic choice theory, derived from economics, posits that terrorist actions are the result of a conscious, rational, and calculated decision made by individuals who perceive it as the optimal strategy for achieving their sociopolitical goals. This theory focuses on the notion that individuals weigh the potential costs and benefits of their actions and choose terrorism as a means to advance their objectives.

On the other hand, various psychological theories delve into the underlying psychological factors that contribute to an individual's inclination towards terrorism. These theories explore aspects such as personal beliefs, ideologies, socialization processes, psychological needs, group dynamics, and individual vulnerabilities that may shape an individual's decision to engage in terrorist activities. They aim to provide insights into the internal psychological mechanisms and influences that drive individuals towards violent extremism.

While rational choice theory emphasizes the conscious decision-making process and the calculation of costs and benefits, other psychological theories consider a broader range of factors that influence an individual's propensity for terrorism. These theories delve into the cognitive, emotional, social, and ideological dimensions that can shape an individual's worldview and behavioural choices.

By distinguishing rational or strategic choice theory from other psychological theories, we can better understand the interplay between individual decision-making processes, contextual factors, and psychological influences that contribute to the phenomenon of terrorism. This differentiation allows for a more comprehensive examination of the multifaceted nature of terrorist behaviour and the motivations behind it.

Rational choice theory, rooted in economics, operates under the assumption that individuals are rational actors who make calculated decisions based on their own self-interests. When applied to the study of terrorism, this theory seeks to explain how changes in policy, which shape the rules of engagement between terrorists and governments, can predictably influence behaviour.

Unlike other psychological theories that focus on understanding the underlying psychological factors driving individuals towards terrorism, rational choice theory takes the behavioural tendency towards terrorism as a given and explores how policy changes can impact the decision-making process.

This theory considers both the macro-level political context and the micro-level individual responses to policy measures. It recognizes that policies enacted by governments can alter the incentives and constraints faced by potential terrorists, affecting their calculations of the costs and benefits associated with engaging in terrorist activities.

By combining top-down and bottom-up approaches, rational choice theory acknowledges the importance of broader political and social structures while also accounting for individual agency and decision-making. It recognizes that policy changes can shape the strategic calculations made by terrorists and potentially deter or influence their behaviour.

In this way, rational choice theory offers a framework that integrates the impact of policy decisions with the individual choices made by terrorists, providing insights into the dynamics of the "game" played between terrorists and governments. By understanding how changes in policy can influence behaviour, policymakers can develop strategies to counteract terrorism more effectively [32].

Game theory focuses on analysing the strategic behaviour of individuals and groups in interactive situations. Regarding the behaviour of terrorists, game theory can be used to analyse how they interact with authorities and society. Studies that have used game theory to analyse the behaviour of terrorists have produced several interesting results. For example, some researchers have shown how game theory can explain how terrorists choose to use certain violent or non-violent tactics depending on their political goals and potential costs and benefits. Other researchers have used game theory to analyse the relationship between terrorists and public authorities, as well as interactions with civil society. However, it is important to note that game theory cannot fully explain terrorist behaviour and that other perspectives, such as social and psychological analysis, are also needed to understand the terrorist phenomenon.

Game theory [33] has emerged as a valuable tool for analyzing and predicting political behaviour, encompassing the actions of both terrorists and targeted governments. This theoretical framework operates under the assumption of

rationality, positing that individuals and entities make strategic decisions based on their perceived self-interest. Empirical experiments, such as the well-known prisoner's dilemma game, have provided support for the applicability of game theory in understanding decision-making processes in political contexts. By applying game theory to the study of terrorism, researchers can gain insights into the strategic calculations, interactions, and dynamics that underlie the actions of both terrorist groups and the governments they target. Has been widely used to analyze and predict political behaviour, including the actions of terrorists and targeted governments. It operates on the assumption of rationality and has been supported by empirical experiments such as the prisoner's dilemma game. Game theory has several strengths in understanding the behaviour of terrorists and governments: it considers the interdependent nature of their interactions, uncovers strategic implications based on assumptions about the other side's thinking, incorporates the impact of threats and promises, maximizes goals within constraints, predicts outcomes in negotiations, and accounts for the influence of uncertainty and incomplete information. These factors contribute to a quantitative understanding of the dynamics and decision-making processes in political

conflicts.

Psychological and social analyses of terrorist behaviour have provided a variety of conclusions. From a psychological perspective, some researchers have shown that terrorists may have personality traits such as aggression, impulsivity, self-distrust, anxiety and social isolation. Other researchers have identified some mental health problems such as depression, paranoid experiences. From a social perspective, researchers have identified a number of factors that contribute to terrorist behaviour, such as social frustration, marginalisation, discrimination, influence of extremist groups, distrust of political institutions and social justice. Socio-economic factors such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, limited access to education and resources can also be contributing factors to terrorist behaviour. The findings of these studies suggest that there is no single cause of terrorist behaviour and that several factors interact to create a context conducive to terrorist actions.

In conclusion, terrorism cannot be reduced to the form of insanity or mental disorder because it is essentially a political act with political aims. It can also be pointed out that some terrorists may suffer from psychiatric problems or behavioural disorders, but this problem cannot be considered as the sole cause of terrorism.

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- [15] Islamic Jihad in Egypt is an Egyptian Islamist group active since the late 1970s. It is under international embargo imposed by the United Nations, being affiliated with al-Qaeda. It is also banned by several governments, including that of the Russian Federation. Since 1991, it has been led by Ayman al-Zawahiri. The main goal of the organization is to overthrow the government of Egypt and replace it with an Islamic state. It later broadened its range of targets to include attacks against US and Israeli interests in Egypt and abroad. In June 2001, Al Qaeda and Islamic Jihad in Egypt, which had been associated for many years, merged to form „Qaeda al-Jihad."
- [16] Jemaah Islamiyah is a Southeast Asian Islamist militant group based in Indonesia, which is established in Indonesia.
- [17] The Moro Islamic Liberation Front is a group based in Mindanao that seeks to create an independent Muslim nation in the southern Philippines. The group has a presence in the Bangsamoro region of Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, Palawan, Basilan and other neighboring islands.

- [18] The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, or GSPC, is an Islamist terrorist organization of jihadist ideology split in 1919 from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) during the final years of the Algerian civil war. The organization is included on the official list of terrorist organizations in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- [19] Al-Qaeda is a pan-Islamist militant organization led by Salafi jihadists who perceive themselves as the vanguard spearheading a global Islamist revolution aimed at uniting the Muslim world under a supranational Islamic state, commonly referred to as the Caliphate. The group primarily consists of Arab members but also includes individuals from other ethnic backgrounds. Al-Qaeda has carried out numerous attacks targeting both civilian and military objectives in various nations, notably including the 1998 United States embassy bombings, the September 11, 2001 attacks, and the 2002 Bali bombings. It has received official recognition as a terrorist group from prominent entities such as The United Nations Security Council, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union, as well as numerous countries worldwide.
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