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Lone Wolves as a Product of Extremist Islamist Groups

Osamělí vlci jako produkt extremistických islamistických skupin

Bachelor's thesis

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Hereby I declare that the submitted bachelor's thesis is a product of my own work with use of listed literature and sources.

20th April 2022 in Olomouc

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Introduction

In the 21st century, the threat of terrorism became an everyday aspect of our lives almost everywhere around the globe more than ever before. Sources of terrorism reach as far as 1st century to its pre-modern era. Some argue that the first terrorists in history were Sicarii, the fraction of Zealotry movement, who through the first terrorist acts fought against the Roman occupation and rule of Judea Province. Through pre-modern era there were multiple groups utilizing the tactics of terror. However, the term terrorism is first used in connection with the period that followed the French Revolution of 1789. The Reign of Terror gave origin to word terrorism and was used in connection with state terror. The terrorism as we know it makes first appearance during the by Rapoport so called first wave of terrorism in the 19th century. Since then, various styles and ideologies of terrorism were dominant. Currently we live in era, in which the religious terrorism emerged above other types. The terrorism itself began globalizing in the 80s and 90s. As for the globalization, the events of 9/11 date the end of old era of terrorism and were introduction to a new era of mass globalization and warfare waged by terrorist groups against their enemies in pursuit of their goals. If it was possible to divide this era into two parts, it should be era of Global War on Terror, where nations all around the world led crusade against terrorist organizations, and era of post-Arab Spring, which is not connected only to fight against oppression, but also to fight with infamous organizations such as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (further ISIS) and Al-Nusra front. These two decades gave birth to globalization of terrorism, new types of warfare, new threats, and new fears.

Along with massive globalization of terrorism returned one type of attacker, that has been long known in history and which has been making massive comeback in last two decades – “lone wolf”. While in the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century the “lone wolf” or “leaderless” terrorism was domain of anarchist entities (Jensen 2014), the dominant ideology connected to “lone wolves” nowadays is jihadist terrorism. Through the 20th century, the presence of “lone wolves” was minor compared to activities of terrorist cells. Furthermore, the “lone wolves” were more common and connected to far-right, far-left or ethnicity ideologies. “Lone wolves” as actors of religiously inspired terrorism began appearing in the 90s’. Responsibility for sudden rise of numbers can be connected to establishment of Al-Qaeda in 1988, which with its actions made conditions for creation of Islamist “lone wolves”. The “golden age” of Islamist “lone wolves” began with 21st century. The number of attacks perpetrated by Islamist “lone wolves” multiplied by hundreds of percent, thus making the “lone wolves” a serious threat to state security.

The topic of “lone wolf” terrorism attracted many scholars, in the last decade, who have been trying to explain their goals, motivation, behavior, or history. This was mainly caused by the 9/11, Global War on Terror and finally the ISIS terrorist campaign in the Western and Central Europe. The latter mentioned has caused so called “boom” in need to research “lone wolf” terrorism and topics connected with it.

Apart from explaining history and goals, scholars are proposing new ways of explaining motivations hidden behind “lone wolves” acts. One of newer models of behavior is the “Bathtub” model proposed by Boaz Ganor. Research done by B. Ganor is focusing on a system of motivations influencing the independent attacker to perpetrate an attack. In his work, he describes three main groups of problem sources: ideological, personal, psychological. These three groups contain motivations such as religion, family, mental disorder, politics and others. B. Ganor makes the argument that these motivation sources are filling up the bathtub where the “execution threshold” is located (Ganor, 2021). Furthermore, some scholars such as Khaled A. Beydoun have proposed typology and double standards in case of lone wolves. He introduces types such as Lone Soldiers, who act most of the times act alone, but hold the terrorist organization responsible for the attack. Further he introduces Lone Vanguard, Loners, Lone Followers and Lone Wolf Killers as new categorizations of attackers (Beydoun, 2018).

Following thesis will focus on topic of Islamist (or jihadist) “lone wolves” from perspective of their creation. Research of this topic is convenient for multiple reasons. First, it is of great importance to be able to trace the process of “lone wolf” in making. Multiple explanations for the process exist, such as by Mark Hamm and Ramon Spaaj (Hamm&Spaaj, 2015), but in case of Islamist “lone wolves” it might be nearly too inconvenient to force one explanation on multiple types of ideologies. For example, there is observable difference among the Western and Central European Islamist “lone wolves”, which comes from their origin and will be furthermore elaborated in the text.

Second, the gap caused by the lack of information has an impact on policy making of governments. Even with sophisticated information gained by governmental intelligence services, the policy utilized to counter the “lone wolves” and to break the causal mechanism is created by governments in cooperation with chosen experts. The point is, if this gap is not at least partially filled and the public is unable to work with more precise data, the evolution in policy connected to this problem will be slow, thus unable to keep the pace with evolution of terrorism and “lone wolves”.

Third, the “lone wolves” went from an independent inspired person (Jensen, 2014) to special kind of “weapon” used by large terrorist groups, which realized their potential in two previous decades. And at last, it might help the scholars to specify and modernize the wide definition of “lone wolf”, which currently consists of multiple explanations and approaches.

The thesis utilizes a method of process tracing, which is most suitable for this research. Process tracing is a qualitative method utilizing empirical trace and simple testing of evidence (Mazák 2017). These tests are based on criteria of necessity and sufficiency. Due to the fact that we already know independent variable X (ISIS becoming international) and dependent variable Y (creation of “lone wolf”), the variant used for this thesis is Theory-building process tracing. Aim of the theory building variant is to build a theoretical explanation from empirical evidence. The observed facts help us identify the mechanisms and then construct the theory for the case(s) (Punton, 2015). All of this allows for efficient method of constructing the causal mechanism and explaining it

When talking about process tracing it is also important to note that research questions and mainly hypotheses operate differently. This particular thesis works with following research question: *How does the causal mechanism behind creation of Islamist “lone wolf” look?* The single goal of this thesis is to propose a causal mechanism of Islamist “lone wolves”, which begins with the terrorist organization becoming international and ends with creation of “lone wolf”. Although the question aims only at creating the causal mechanism, the thesis itself will provide detailed explanations of each part of the causal mechanism. This is important for understanding of the case. As it will be explained further, there are differences in causal mechanisms even among the Western and Central European Islamist “lone wolves”. Due to this, the neglect of appropriate explanation would mean incompleteness of research.

As for the hypotheses, a specific approach must be utilized. Since the thesis deals with the theory-building, we cannot set the hypotheses as usual (Punton, 2015). Rather than that we set them for testing, which confirms or eliminates the hypotheses or others. Following are examples of hypotheses sources with which the thesis operates: *Establishment of organization’s propaganda channels, personal factors (such as criminal records, family background, country of origin etc.), contact with propaganda, escalation of radical behavior* and others that will be further mentioned. Evidence provided by these sources will help test hypotheses via one of four basic tests that are utilized for this method: Straw in the Wind Test, Hoop Test, Smoking Gun Test, and Doubly Decisive Test. Hypotheses will be further introduced in the following chapter.

Every research, including this, has factors which will affect and limit the study area. First, the thesis will focus only on Western and Central Europe. It is given mainly by the availability of data and public resources connected to this problem. In other parts of the world, difficulty of tracing data to build up an attacker's profile could lead to serious obstruction in work, thus causing corrupted research. Due to this, Western and Central Europe EU countries provide perfect location to achieve best results in given goals. Furthermore, working with smaller geographical area lowers the risk of results being vague. Aim of the process tracing is to provide the qualitative results for one or small number of cases, thus when working with multiple of them, by narrowing the case selection one can achieve clear results. Second, the thesis focuses on the timeline from 2011 to 2020. This period limitation is given by need to choose the terrorist organization, which's activity can be empirically observable. The best subject to comply with criteria of observation is ISIS, which had the highest activity in Western Europe (EUROPOL 2014,2015,...,2021) and became globalized in the mentioned period. It is also important that the majority of "lone wolves" were somehow motivated by this organization. Due to this, the period of 2011-2020 was chosen.

However, there are factors that are, unlike the aforementioned, actively limiting the results of work. One of the major problems is connected to the collection of data. Due to the current laws and nature of the topic, much information is kept out of public reach or is limited to the absolute minimum. Thus, it is more than probable that the estimated total of "lone wolves" attacks will have a significant chance of being inaccurate. Despite this fact, the total number will not pose the threat of research corruption. More to this problem will be elaborated in the following parts. The true limitation connected to data collection comes from the crucial part of building up an attacker's profile. Profiles must be created by collecting available data. This means, that instead of opening the profile file, one must collect the data from various media sources. This combines multiple obstacles. First, since the research regards whole Western and Central Europe, the language misinterpretation comes into play. Second, more perilous obstacle is the data itself. Media provide various information, thus adding fake reports and data to the right ones. This leads to the need of selecting and matching data from various sources. More to the collection of data will be also described further.

The literature and sources, with which the thesis works, provide coverage for both the theoretical explanations and data coverage. The literature regarding theoretical explanations, such as by Gabriel Rubin (Rubin, 2018) or Khaled A. Beydoun (Beydoun, 2018), is quite new. Some may consider the texts as less verified by other researchers. Although, the works are not

as verified as the older ones, the terrorism is permanently evolving field, thus keeping up to date is important. After careful consideration of literature, the decision to use some of the more recent works offers better understanding. Understandably, some texts can be biased by authors opinion, which cannot be prevented.

However, when considering the sources, the risk of mistake has to be taken. Europol's Te-Sats offer the official and undoubtful evidence, which cover cases and organization. Nevertheless, the information published is limited by member states and what they hand over to Europol. Unfortunately, the risk of member states covering up some data cannot be eliminated by simply changing the source, thus the risk of missing information is outweighed by scarcity of sources. In addition, for the purpose of profile building, the media sources are utilized. There, the risk of obtaining falls information is significant. Thus, claiming information from multiple media outlets and comparing it is the efficient method to partially eliminate the risk.

Work is divided into three main parts. First, the methodology, where the methods, boundaries, selection and theoretical framework is introduced. Second, the description of theorized causal mechanism, evidence and theory. Final part is interpretation of evidence and findings, followed by the proposed causal mechanism.

1. Methodology

Method of process tracing comes with various questions and decisions. Will the research work with a single case or multiple of them? Are we seeking an explanation of the result of causal mechanism, its beginning, or causal mechanism itself? These are some of the questions that must be answered before proceeding to other stages of research. As it was already mentioned, the thesis operates with following research question: *How does the causal mechanism behind creation of Islamist “lone wolf” look?* To achieve an answer for this question, the thesis has to work with the correct form of process tracing. Furthermore, case selection plays a major role in provision of empirical evidence and construction of hypotheses. Following pages are dedicated to explanation of used methodology.

1.1. Who is the “lone wolf”?

This thesis aims at uncovering the causal mechanism behind creation of “lone wolves”. First task after deciding for process tracing was to choose the correct variant. Before choosing the variant, it was important to clarify terminology which will be used in research. For the majority of concepts, such as radicalization or propaganda, precise explanation exists. Unfortunately, “lone wolves” as a concept lack unified terminology. Nevertheless, Matthew Feldman wrote an article focusing on identification of a nearly 150-year tradition of lone wolf terrorism and its heuristic definition (Feldman, 2013). Feldman introduces multiple definitions used by various actors of international relations, which he in combination with other characteristics of present-day “lone wolf” terrorism uses to construct the definition. He defines it as following: Self-directed political or religious violence undertaken through the “terrorist attack cycle” by individuals – typically perceived by its adherents to be an act of asymmetrical, propagandistic warfare – which derives from a variable amount of external influence and context (notably now online), rather than external command and control (Feldman, 2013). Such definition containing characteristics allows for better understanding of “lone wolves”, thus the definition will be defining the concept in this thesis. Furthermore, the definition itself mentions one of the work’s hypotheses sources: asymmetrical, propagandistic warfare.

1.2. Use of process tracing

Method of process tracing is in recent years growing in popularity among scholars of Political Science and International Relations. Its focus is aimed towards the causality of case studies. There are three types of process tracing: Theory-testing, which is used when we want to test theories, theory-building, which's goal is to construct the theory, and finally explaining-outcome process tracing, which is used to create full explanation why Y happened (Punton & Welle, 2015).

When it comes to the method itself, the first step of constructing the research was the decision which variant of process tracing should be used. The topic and aim itself allows for two possibilities: a) using the variant of theory-building or b) explaining-outcome method. Both of them would be able to answer the research question, however both of them are limited by their characteristics. The theory-building process tracing method aims at developing theory that is generalizable to other interventions or situations (Punton & Welle, 2015). In context of this thesis, it means that greater number of various cases can be analyzed, however the greater number allows for slightly wider explanations, which sacrifices the smaller details of causal mechanism. On the other hand, the explaining-outcome process tracing method aims at precise description of causal mechanism from X to Y. However, such case study has multiple limitations. First, the causal mechanism would be focusing only on one particular case, meaning that any universality would be eliminated. Second, for such study the source of detailed information and data is needed. If we put it into the context of the thesis, by choosing such a variant we would eliminate the goal of the research itself.

The decision between theory-building and explaining-outcome method is affected and supported by multiple factors and arguments, some of them mentioned further. The explaining-outcome method is case-centric, thus the results it provides are only relevant to case that is being investigated (Punton & Welle, 2015). Furthermore, such results cannot be applied to other situations. This goes against the goal of the thesis to create a "framework" which could be applied to more than one situation. It is the possibility of universality within the case area that makes the theory-building method a perfect solution.

1.3. Setting boundaries

As mentioned in introduction, the thesis is focusing on case of Islamist “lone wolves” in Western Europe. Some of the limitations such as time period and geographical framework were briefly mentioned. These limits were not chosen out of thin air but are rather based on data published by The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (further Europol).

The decision behind the pick of period 2011-2020 was based on multiple arguments provided by statistics and 2010s events. From 2011 to 2020 there were eight confirmed terrorist attacks perpetrated by terrorist cells and 60 “lone wolves” completed attacks (TESAT, 2012, 2013, ...,2021) on soil of EU member states. First mention of ISIS activity from Europol comes from 2014 EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Report (further Te-Sat) regarding the year 2013. However, in 2011 and 2012 ISIS was already actively establishing its network internationally. Before July 2011, the operational domain of back then Islamic State of Iraq (further ISI) was Iraq. In 2010 Abu Bakr al Baghdadi became the leader of ISI after the extermination of Abu Omar al Baghdadi and Abu Ayyub al Masri (Glenn *et al.*, 2019). The ISI began its international campaign when in July 2011 A. B. al Baghdadi sends operatives to Syria (Glenn *et al.*, 2019). These events are followed by the “Breaking the Walls” campaign, which takes place between July 2012 and July 2013. The official call to arms by ISIS falls on 22nd September 2014 as a reaction to the anti-ISIS coalition. Nevertheless, Europol statistics clearly show the growth of criminal activities connected to jihadist terrorism since 2011 (TESAT, 2015).

In addition to the above mentioned it should be stated that Europol works only with data provided by governments. Due to this fact an attempt to acquire real numbers connected to Islamist “lone wolves” has been made. Embassies of Great Britain, France, Germany, Netherlands were contacted with requests to provide possible help with settling the numbers. Requests were never answered.

Another boundary chosen on the basis of statistics is the region with which the research will operate. For such a delicate topic as “lone wolves” it is important to focus on small region and fraction. For example, for far-right “lone wolves” we will choose the United States of America in contrast to far-left attackers who are more common in Latin America or Asia. To demonstrate this as an example of research, Smith and Gruenewald are focusing on “lone wolves” or “loners” who are operating on United States’ soil (Smith & Gruenewald *et al.*, 2015). For the Islamist “lone wolves” the thesis operates with the Western and Central European EU members.

On the soil of these countries, 56 out of 60 attacks took place, with the majority in Western Europe (please see *Chart 1*). Other four attacks happened in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Italy. Regarding this fact, the Western and Central Europe provide a perfect geographical frame for research.

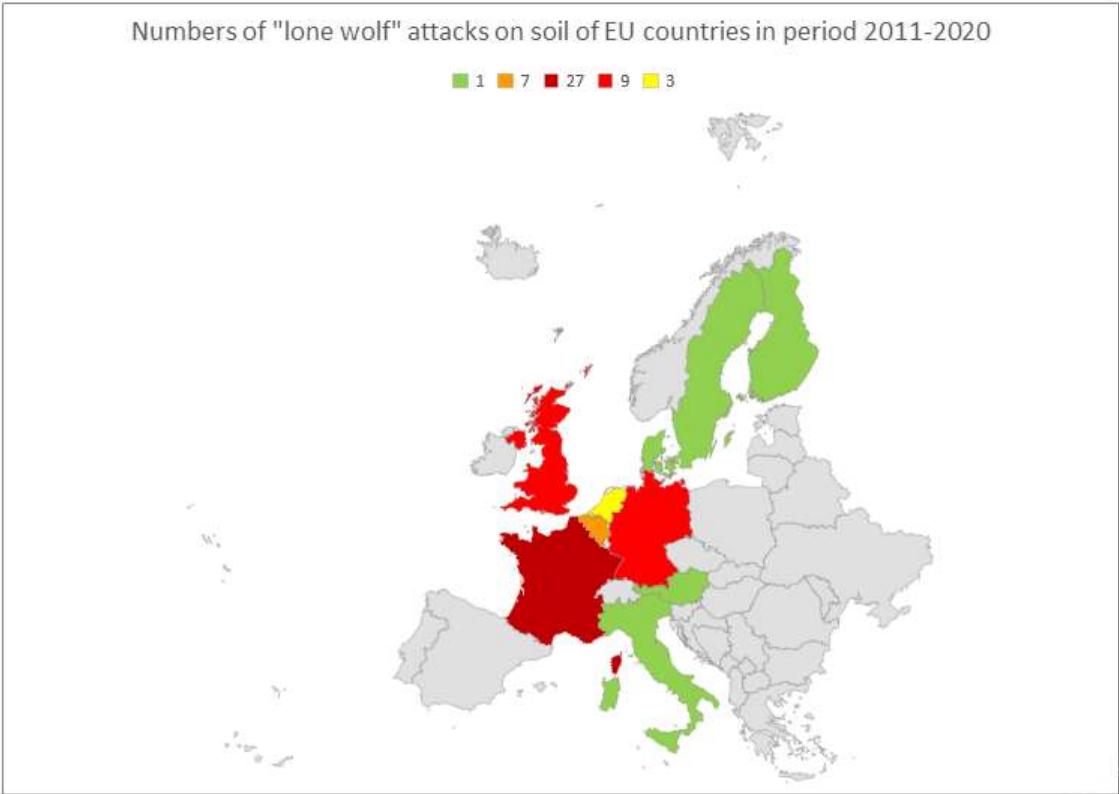


Chart 1: Visualization of the "lone wolf" attacks in period 2011-2020 according to Europol's Te-Sats numbers

1.4. Selecting the cases

When the boundaries for research were set, one should focus on representative cases. Since, as it was mentioned above, research utilizes theory-building process tracing method, it is possible to use a greater number of cases. However, cases must complain with the following criteria. First, they must be labeled as jihadist terrorism by Europol. This narrows our selection to 60 cases. Furthermore, the geographical boundaries have to be taken into consideration. This narrows the possible case selection to 56 cases for Western and Central Europe EU members

(TESAT, 2012, 2013, ...,2021). Second, attention should be paid for the time frame 2011-2020. Not all the cases are connected to the ISIS source, thus eliminating cases from years 2011-2013. Although we eliminated the cases such as Mohammed Merah, Michel Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale, the results of research can be compared to them. This leaves the number of cases at 52. Third and last, the case must have coverage sufficient enough to extract evidence and be empirically observable.

Considering all the criteria mentioned above, the 24 cases have been picked. While this might be seen as a massive number of cases for qualitative research, process tracing walks the line between qualitative and quantitative methods (Mazák, 2015). This is due to the existence of three categories among cases itself: Homegrown/long-term (10+ years) residency status, immigrant/asylum seeker, and anomalies (this term is used due to the uniqueness of such cases and inability to affiliate them to one of the causal mechanisms). These categories were created during the research, when differences among these groups began showing in the empirical evidence. Such a step was necessary for maintaining logical order of process tracing. If mixed, the evidence from each category is in contrary with others. This means that for example strong evidence characteristic for homegrown “lone wolf” would be affected by lack of such evidence for immigrant or anomaly, thus changing the status of evidence. Cases are divided in following order: for homegrown/long-term residency and immigrant/asylum seeker its 10 cases for each and remaining five are dedicated to anomalies. For overview, the list of cases consisting of date, location, name, and status, is included in the appendix.

1.5. Collecting the evidence and hypothesized causal mechanism

First step of successful theory-building process tracing is collecting enough empirical evidence for each observable manifestation of each part of the mechanism (Punton & Welle, 2015). Thesis works with two primary sources of empirical evidence. The evidence regarding the “lone wolves” is collected from various credible news sources. While this might not be the ideal way for collecting the evidence about the attacker, it is the only public source providing information about the attacker. Evidence which is of more collective and broader character, such as propagandistic activity of ISIS is collected from official reports and databases. Finally, to support both the evidence and claims works of experts are used.

Next step is operationalizing the evidence. Included in this step is the necessity to work out what each part of the mechanism will look like in practice. Since the prime aim of the thesis

is proposing mechanism behind creation of Islamist “lone wolves” in Western and Central Europe, the parts of the mechanism should be abstract enough to allow generalization for other cases (in other words, if the research is successful, it should be possible to apply the mechanism on the other 35 Europol mentioned cases, which were excluded).

When all the empirical evidence is gathered, it is beneficial to create a draft of possible causal mechanism. Not only does it introduce a more readable vision of the goal, but (and this is important) it helps to specify the hypotheses which should or must be asked and parts of the mechanism. After gathering evidence, it was thus possible to create such a draft. As it is visible (please see the *Chart 2*) first two parts (“ISIS becomes international” and “organization strengthens propaganda channels”) are more of abstract character as well as from Radicalization onwards. Then we have parts with specific character: “Contact with propaganda”, “Failure to integrate/Failure to gain asylum” and “Contact with propaganda/previous experience”. These are specific for Homegrown/long-term residency status or immigrants/asylum seekers. Finally, there is one very specific part, “Personal factors”, which’s character is more of specific, but due to the existence of pattern evidence, it can have major impact on causal mechanism and some of the terms connected to it can be “smoking gun”. Closer description is provided in the second chapter.

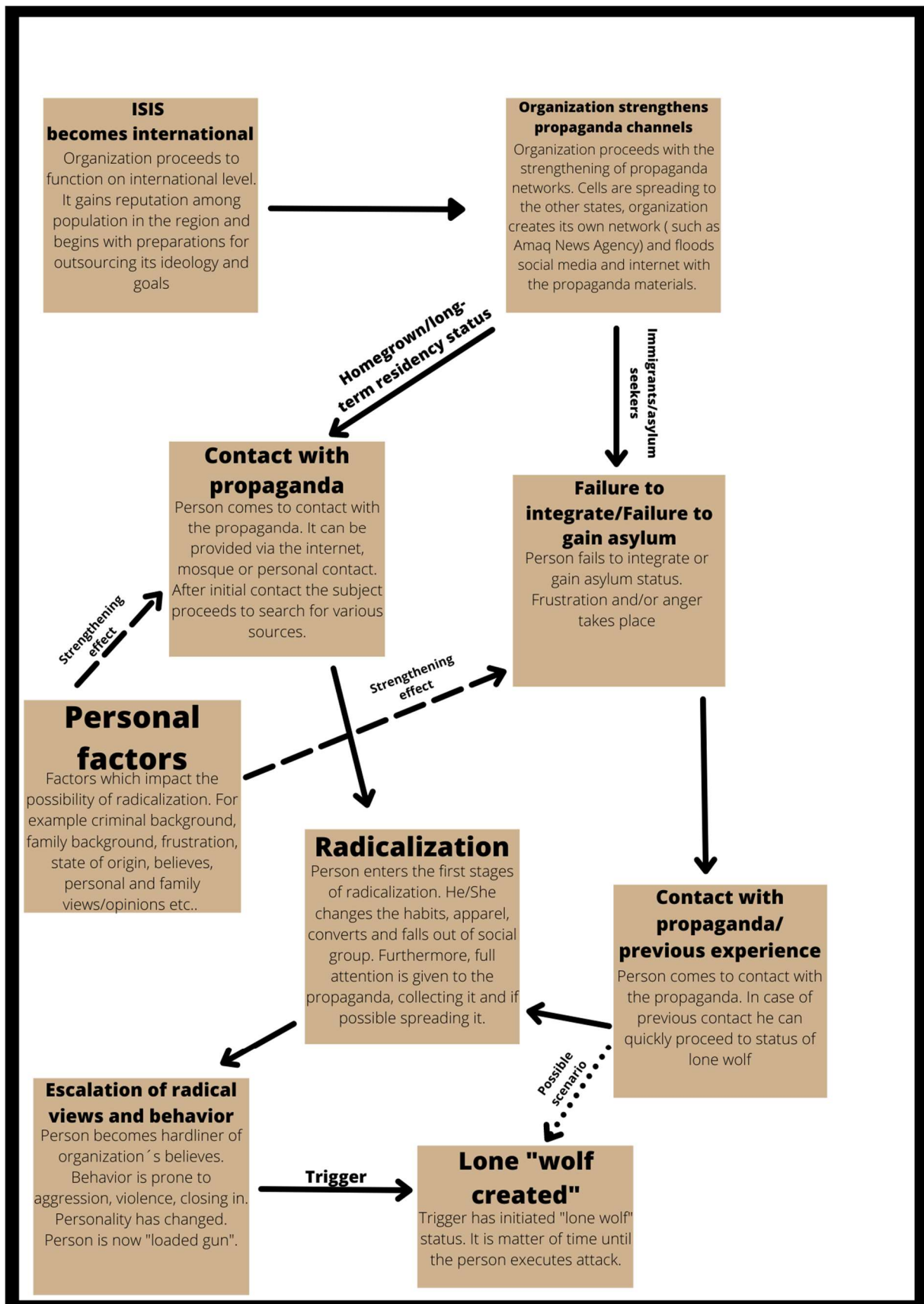


Chart 2: Draft of possible causal mechanism based on collected evidence

1.6. Hypotheses

As a result of hypothesized causal mechanism based on evidence collected it is possible to set hypotheses for theory-building process tracing (Punton & Welle, 2015). However, rather than testing whole possible mechanism, it is necessary to divide it into smaller parts This thesis will aim to test following:

H1: Initial contact with propaganda/propagandist is necessary for starting the process of creation of “lone wolf”.

H2: Criminal background is a strengthening factor of possibly developing “lone wolf”

H3: In case of immigrants and asylum seekers the typical radicalization behavior is not a necessary part of the process.

H4: Personal contact of possible homegrown “lone wolf” with radical propagandist ensures the radicalization.

H5: Failure of integration by immigrant or failure of asylum seeker to obtain asylum followed by contact with propaganda or being exposed to it in the past is the reason behind the “lone wolves” coming from this group.

These are some of the possible, more abstract hypotheses. However, it is possible to test nearly everything from simple claims of *H1* to very specific claims such as the ones regarding the personal background. More possible hypotheses can be asked to specify the causal mechanism, but only to the point where it does not cross the line to deducing the mechanism behind one specific case or scenario.

1.7. Testing the hypotheses

Hypotheses serve as building blocks for building the causal mechanism. Their relevance is tested via empirical evidence and four basic tests: Straw in the Wind Test, Hoop Test, Smoking Gun Test, and Doubly Decisive Test.

To distinguish what test will be used for hypotheses, the questions of necessity and sufficiency will be used. Is the presence of empirical evidence necessary to establish causation? Is the presence of empirical evidence sufficient to establish causation? Based on answering these, the researcher is choosing the test which will be connected to empirical evidence. The

evidence is based upon specification of hypotheses, for which background knowledge is fundamental. Furthermore, the researcher should be careful while selecting the test due to assumptions and interpretations (Collier, 2011). For further explanation of tests, please see *Table 1*.

		SUFFICIENT FOR AFFIRMING CAUSAL INFERENCE	
		No	Yes
NECESSARY FOR AFFIRMING CAUSAL INFERENCE	No	1. Straw-in-the-Wind	3. Smoking-Gun
		a. Passing: Affirms relevance of hypothesis, but does not confirm it.	a. Passing: Confirms hypothesis.
		b. Failing: Hypothesis is not eliminated, but is slightly weakened.	b. Failing: Hypothesis is not eliminated, but is somewhat weakened.
		c. Implications for rival hypotheses: Passing <i>slightly</i> weakens them. Failing <i>slightly</i> strengthens them.	c. Implications for rival hypotheses: Passing <i>substantially</i> weakens them. Failing <i>somewhat</i> strengthens them.
	Yes	2. Hoop	4. Doubly Decisive
		a. Passing: Affirms relevance of hypothesis, but does not confirm it.	a. Passing: Confirms hypothesis and eliminates others.
b. Failing: Eliminates hypothesis.		b. Failing: Eliminates hypothesis.	
	c. Implications for rival hypotheses: Passing <i>somewhat</i> weakens them. Failing <i>somewhat</i> strengthens them.	c. Implications for rival hypotheses: Passing <i>eliminates</i> them. Failing <i>substantially</i> strengthens them.	

Source: Adapted from Bennett (2010, 210), who builds on categories formulated by Van Evera (1997, 31–32).

Table 1: Overview of PT tests and their outcomes. Source: (Collier, 2011)

In addition to four tests, there are two concepts which are used in connection to empirical evidence. First, the theoretical uniqueness. If the evidence is theoretically unique, it means that it could not be created by any other means than by the discussed causal mechanism, thus finding such evidence is sufficient condition for proving the causal mechanism or its part. Second, the theoretical certainty, which is equivalent to necessary condition. Absence of such evidence eliminates the discussed causal mechanism (Mazák, 2015).

2. Theory & Evidence

2.1. Becoming international

Only the most “successful” terrorist organization can become truly international and survive for longer period. Regarding the longevity Brian J. Phillips revisits the famous wisdom that 90 percent of terrorist groups last less than a year. In his analysis of terrorist organizations lifespan, he uses eight largest global data sets of terrorist group longevity. By this he successfully covers years 1968-2013. The percentage terrorist groups that do not survive their first was spread from 25-74%, with average about 50% in every data set (Phillips, 2017). Terrorist organization can cease to exist for multiple reason: lack of finance, losing the relevance, dividing into fractions, achieving goals, being eliminated and many more.

However, the major challenge for terrorist group is to successfully obtain the international impact, while at the same time surviving for long time. To achieve this, organization must be constantly evolving and adapting, such as Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and Al-Qaeda. For others like ISIS, achieving international status meant achieving its prime, which was then followed by downfall. Fall of menace in the form of ISIS was caused by its own brutality and recklessness, which led to the creation of the anti-ISIS coalition.

Before analyzing the propaganda channels, which are an essential part of the ability to survive, become international and to produce “lone wolves”, it is desirable to explain the background of ISIS becoming international and its downfall, which as it will be explained later caused rise of numbers of “lone wolves” attacks. On 15th October 2006 al Masri announced the establishment of ISI (Islamic State of Iraq), with Abu Omar al Baghdadi in lead (Glenn *et al.*, 2019). In 2007 ISI is driven out of Baghdad to Diyala, Slahideen, and Mosul due to “The New Way Forward” or in other words deployment of massive numbers U. S. Next year, the numbers of ISI are drastically low. In early 2008 out of 15 000 members 2 400 have been killed and 8 800 captured. The 2009 nine became a turning point for ISIS due to the targeting of Sunni leaders by Iraqi Prime Minister Mailiki, which caused the growing support from Sunni tribal areas. In the same time ISIS is claiming deadly suicide attacks in Baghdad (Glenn *et al.*, 2019).

In April 2010 Abu Bakr al Baghdadi became leader of ISI due to the death of his predecessor. Following this, al Baghdadi sent his operatives to Syria in July 2011. Exactly one year later ISI launches ambitious campaign “Breaking the Walls” and frees significant number of jihadists in span of twelve months (Glenn *et al.*, 2019). This can be seen as the first major

operation with propagandistic value. On 11th April 2013 the ISIS was established. By this time ISIS is established and already operating internationally, including its propaganda channels. First “lone wolf” connected to ISIS already attacked on 24th May 2014 at Brussels, seven months before the first attack of ISIS members. His name was Mehddi Nemmuouche, he was born in France and radicalized in prison, and he has just returned from Syria (BBC News, 2014).

2.2. Propaganda channels

During the period of 2011-2020, ISIS was waging propaganda on such a professional level it is described as asymmetric propaganda warfare. Propaganda channels used by ISIS are divided into two groups. Centralized media, which belong to ISIS and are under their lead. There we can find media centers such as Al-Hayat Media, Mu’assassat al-Furqan and A’maq News Agency (which played specific role for propaganda), Al-Bayan online radio, and Dabiq, al-Naba, Rumiya, Dar al-Islam, Istok and others (EUROPOL, 2017). Opposed to this are decentralized media, which are used to spread propaganda, communicate, or even as a virtual training camp and Massive Open Online Course provider (EUROPOL, 2017). This group includes social media such as Telegram, Twitter etc., file sharing sites with encryption and Western media.

In both centralized and decentralized media ISIS was attempting to build an image of well-established organization, with a tendency to show itself as a caliphate or legitimate state. Propaganda was conveying clear in-group/out-group dichotomy. Two key messages were the benefits for Muslims of living under the caliphate, including a strong emphasis on group solidarity and emotional bonds among Muslims: and extreme brutality, including mass executions, towards enemies as a deterrent. (EUROPOL, 2015). ISIS used rhetoric of victorious Islam until 2016, when due to the pressure from their opponents, they had to shift the rhetoric towards calls for retaliation for alleged attacks on Islam (EUROPOL, 2017). This shift was followed by a crisis of ideological position in 2018, with slowly decreasing potency and elimination of ISIS itself, with final blow in form takedown of networks in November 2019 by Telegram. Europol reports that takedown of Telegram networks caused major disruption for ISIS members, and they were struggling to recreate them throughout the year 2020 (EUROPOL, 2021).

The “lone wolves” became one of the priority target groups of ISIS. In 2014, leadership of ISIS repeatedly called upon Muslims in Western countries, to perpetrate indiscriminate

terrorist attacks against any target that they could reach (EUROPOL, 2015). To be exact, on 22nd September 2014 Abu Muhammad al Adnani, back then spokesman of ISIS endorses terrorist attacks against citizens countries involved in anti-ISIS coalition in his message.

Although ISIS had a wide variety of own propaganda outlets at its disposal, for “lone wolves” only a few of these centralized outlets proved crucial. A’maq News Agency, which was established in the second half of 2014, played a special role as an independent media outlet for ISIS. In connection to “lone wolves” they praised their attacks and referred to them as heroes. In a few cases, A’maq News Agency obtained videos of perpetrators pledging allegiance to ISIS and published them after the attacks were carried out (EUROPOL, 2017). However, the credibility of the agency was damaged by them claiming the responsibility for attacks without links to ISIS. Another ISIS owned outlet, al-Hayat Media Centre, was specializing in multi-language propaganda. Under them, magazines such as Dabiq in English, Dar al-Islam in French, Konstantiniyye in Turkish and Istok in Russian were published, however in 2016 the concept was abandoned and replaced by Rumiya (EUROPOL, 2017). Specifically for lone wolves, Rumiya introduced series of articles under the title “Just Terror Tactics” (EUROPOL, 2017).

The actual propaganda affecting the potential individuals, from whom some of them became “lone wolves” was the one of the decentralized kinds. The most repetitive occurrence in most of the cases is the presence of communication through social media. As Asma Shakir Khawaja and Asma Hussain Khan claim in their article aimed towards the media strategy of ISIS: “ISIS is using social media outlets as an essential tool to promote its “brand awareness”.” (Khawaja & Khan, 2016).

Among most common social media used for communication one can find Telegram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook. In the case of Twitter ISIS went as far as releasing its own Twitter app called Fajr al-Bashaer, which was used to follow progress and activities of ISIS. Since its launch in the April 2014 to the June 2014, from 5 000 to 10 000 people downloaded the app (Khawaja & Khan, 2016). To maximize the possible spread beyond closed circles of ISIS, supporters on Telegram were organizing coordinated campaigns with the goal to flood social media such as Twitter or Facebook within minutes after release of new propaganda (EUROPOL, 2017). To support such a tactic, supporters utilized hashtags. Europol states that hashtags unrelated to terrorism, such as political rallies or sports matches, in languages of regions of interest, including Europe and other Western countries, but also hashtags used by ISIS opponents in the Middle East, were used (EUROPOL, 2017).

Another source unknowingly aiding ISIS's propaganda are western media. Following the Nice attack on 14th July 2016, ISIS claimed responsibility after two days. It is suspected ISIS leadership was unaware of the attack or this delay was a propaganda strategy with the aim to achieve maximum media coverage (EUROPOL, 2017). Unknowingly, the media became a tool of propaganda and could have inspired possible "lone wolves".

Furthermore, the content spread on social media was created and tailored to exploit the vulnerable groups. Group, which was targeted by ISIS in great numbers, was youth. Therefore, propaganda aimed for indoctrination of ideas into the minds of youth and ensure the new militants and spread its area of influence (Khawaja & Khan, 2016). For the youth audience the ISIS distributed videos and photos in which they tried to mimic video games and movies (EUROPOL, 2016). The communicated message in such materials is full of violence and war between good and evil (Khawaja & Khan, 2016). In all of its propaganda ISIS poses as the only harbinger of truth, justice and moral superiority. Propaganda aimed at possible members was covering social, ethnic and other problems the future members could have been experiencing (EUROPOL, 2015, 2016, ...,2021; Khawaja & Khan, 2016; Gerstel, 2016).

In addition to this, ISIS created their own communication lexicon. To eliminate the Islam's rigorous prohibition of killing fellow Muslims unless it is ratified by a court, ISIS declared Shi'is, Alawites, opposing Sunnis and other Muslim sects as the enemies of their umma (EUROPOL, 2016). Therefore, they eliminated the boundaries for "lone wolves" in their attacks and made it possible and attractive for them to carry out indiscriminate attacks. As it was already mentioned above, to support and inspire possible perpetrators ISIS was publishing propaganda materials directly aimed at possible "lone wolves". Furthermore, to support the activity of followers in enemy states, the ISIS shifted rhetoric from "all good Muslims must join our struggle at Middle East directly to uphold their religious duty" to "all good Muslims must join our struggle at Middle East directly or perpetrate attacks and battle enemy on their soil to uphold their religious duty".

Such effective and targeted propaganda allowed for creation of "lone wolves" in foreign countries. By waging such asymmetric, propaganda warfare ISIS was able to radicalize hundreds (or even thousands) of followers. In Western and Central Europe, we witnessed only 55 out of 60 "lone wolves" attacks connected to ISIS. This is significantly lower than other parts of the world. However, in the period 2013-2020 this region witnessed hundreds of arrests connected to the spread of propaganda or activity in support of ISIS. Many of these arrested people were getting ready to perpetrate attacks. (EUROPOL 2014, 2015,...,2021).

2.3. Homegrowns and long-term residents

While in past the Islamist terrorism was mainly connected to attackers, who were born and grew up in another state or were recent immigrants, in Western and Eastern Europe society witnessed the birth of new quite unexpected and lurking danger. One of the definitions according to Wilner and Doboulz can be described as “autonomously organized radicalized Westerners with little direct assistance from transitional networks, usually organized within the home or host country, and targets fellow nationals” (Wilner & Dobouloz, 2010). While even for “lone wolves” it is possible to agree with help from the outside, the characterizing homegrown as radicalized Westerners is at fault. Homegrown radicals are in other words people who were the second-generation immigrants and were born and raised in the country against which’s society they now stand or original nationals who lived in the country for generations and got somehow radicalized. Long-term residents are in most cases almost the same. They have spent most of their lives in the country, most probably since their early childhood. Both of these groups quickly became the subject of internal security in Europe. (Renart, 2017).

In order to understand Islamist homegrown and long-term resident “lone wolves”, it is important to define who is “lone wolf”. First, the word “homegrown” can be mistakenly perceived in the sense, that such a person has never met a radicalizing factor outside of their country of residence. The fact is, that when distinguishing homegrown or long-term residency terrorist/“lone wolf” from foreign fighter terrorist or returnee, the grey zone exists. Some of the homegrown “lone wolves” met their radicalizing factor on their travels (Renard 2017). GLOBSEC research from 2018 states that out of 197 individuals connected to terrorism in Europe 144 (73%) of them spent 50% of their lives in the EU, out of which 101 (51%) were born in EU member state, while at the same time 141 (72%) of them possessed citizenship in EU countries (Rekawek et al., 2018). At the same year the average age of attackers was 26 (EUROPOL, 2019). By far the youngest recorded homegrown attacker was a 15-year-old girl from Hanover, Germany. Majority of homegrown Islamist “lone wolves” come from Arabic families practicing Islam. However, we can still observe cases where individuals do not have the ethnic or religious history

Long-term residents tend to be of similar age, but their ethnicity is of non-European origin and their families practice Islam religion. Other traits of homegrown and long-term residents will be described in personal factors.

2.3.1. Contact with propaganda

In case of homegrown and long-term residents the following part of the mechanism is initial contact with propaganda. Knowing the source of first contact which can under appropriate circumstances lead to radicalization can tell us more about Islamist “lone wolves” and the mechanism itself. While observing the evidence, five following ways of contact with propaganda are described by media sources regarding the cases: prison, centralized propaganda, personal contact, and mosque.

First mentioned possible way, prisons, contributes to four cases making it by far the second most common way of chosen sample. Khalid Masood (Adrian Russel Elms) (Anderson, 2017), Chérif Chekkat (Willsher, 2018) and Mehdi Nemmouche (BBC, 2014) came into initial contact with propagandist work in prison. The problem of Islamist radicalism in Europe was mainly observable in Western Europe. As Gabriel Rubin mentions in his work, to many convicts the Islam followed by the Islamist radicalism might be appealing for multiple reasons. An inmate: becomes a member of a group, which grants him protection; is given religious exceptions by facility; finds religion appealing and it helps him escape the reality of prison life (Rubin, 2018). Furthermore, some of them can relate to the international jihadist struggle. Thus, the Islamist headhunters look for inmates who have no prior knowledge of Islam or have some prior knowledge of Islam and are in need of physical protection (Rubin, 2018).

Centralized propaganda has been found as a possible “first contact” in cases of Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel (Willsher, 2016) and Sudes Mamoor Faraz Amman (Lucraft, 2018). In the first case, the propaganda served as a clear fascination and initialization of the process. However, S. M. F. Amman was sentenced for more than 3 years for dissemination of Islamist propaganda and gathering information with potential use for terrorist attack. Nevertheless, it is most probable that both of them were indoctrinated by centralized propaganda strategy.

Personal connection with members was initiator of four cases: Usman Khan, who was already charged with terrorism offences before (Townsend & Iqbal, 2019), Khazmat Azimov (Le Monde, 2018), Khuram Shazad Butt (Cruickshank & Robertson, 2017), and Yassin Salhi (Rubin, 2015). Except Khazmat Azimov and Yassin Salhi, the perpetrators were long term radicals. K. S. Butt was a longtime member of al-Muhajiroun and under the investigation of MI5 and U. Khan, who spent his teenage years in Pakistan, was previously part of the Al-Qaeda plot. On the other hand, Y. Salhi was possibly radicalized by Frédéric Jean Salvi, an ex-convict

who himself converted and radicalized in prison (Rubin, 2015). Personal connection with radicals is the most represented way of initial contact in the sample.

The case of Kujtim Fejzulai, who perpetrated the 2nd November 2020 attack in Vienna, is more complicated. We cannot say if his initial contact was connected to any kind of propaganda or personal connection. Although we do not know the exact answer, the possible lead exists. K. Fejzulain attended the local mosque which was observed by Austrian intelligence service as a suspect of promulgating extremism. If he was attending this mosque before the age of 18, when he tried to travel to Syria, the mosque could have been the place of initial contact.

To summarize above mentioned for homegrowns and long-term residents the initial way of possible “first contact” was (ranked from the most to least repeated) prison, personal contact, centralized propaganda, and mosque. Regarding the counts, prison and personal contact might be the most effective strategies for initial propaganda contact by ISIS.

2.4. Immigrants and asylum seekers

The Arab Spring, civil wars in Libya and Syria, and the reign of ISIS created a massive migration wave during the last decade. Among migrants who were escaping from war-torn regions were not only those who were truly endangered by war, but also those who migrated to abuse the migration policy and, what was lurking danger, returnees, who are considered far more lethal than other jihadists (EUROPOL, 2016) and possible “lone wolves”.

In 2015 the average number of asylum applicants to EU from Middle East and North Africa was 100 000 per month. At the same time the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, France, Spain and Sweden have national threat levels at high. During 2015 there were 15 “lone wolves” (EUROPOL, 2016) attacks out of which at least two were caused by immigrants. The common danger in case of immigrants and asylum seekers from region of Middle East and North Africa is inability to accomplish background checks.

As it will be described later, many of the Islamist “lone wolves” who were immigrants or asylum seekers got radicalized on soil of EU. Such phenomena can have various explanations mostly connected to personal life. The ISIS specifically raised efforts in 2016 to gain followers from lines of vulnerable people (EUROPOL, 2017). This tactic targeted both homegrowns and immigrants. However, since 2016 it was possible to observe the shift in status of attackers and out of 37 attackers, 20 were immigrants or asylum seekers.

Cases of immigrants and asylum seekers are mostly “blurred” by insufficient information. We know mostly what they were doing while staying in Europe, but before and beyond that knowledge of their connections and activities prior to life on EU soil is mostly limited.

2.4.1. Failure to integrate or gain asylum

In all of the sample cases traces of problems with integration or gaining asylum have been found. While causes shall be discussed further in the chapter, the description of such failures, most possibly leading to becoming “lone wolf” will be discussed separately, due to the fact that homegrown and immigrants can share personal factors and traits.

Case of Ayoub El Khazzani clearly showed the threat of returnees and integration failure. A. El Khazani immigrated to Spain in 2007 from Morocco. Here he worked and was twice convicted of drug smuggling. He was noticed by intelligence services for visiting and connection to radical mosques (Bitttermann & Jones, 2018). Furthermore, he was suspected for traveling to Syria. While intelligence services were not able to prove this (Bitttermann & Jones, 2018), El. Khazani pledged guilty to such an act. In the courtroom he described his travels to Syria and claimed to be a noble fighter (Seelow, 2016). It is possible to conclude that El Khazani had problems with criminal activity and integration since his arrival to Europe.

Another perpetrator, Tarek Belgacem, was Tunisian national who claimed to be an asylum-seeker from Iraq or Syria (Lichfield, 2016). He was trying to abuse the system and lived illegally in France and requested asylum in multiple countries. When faced with deportation he disappeared and created another identity. T. Belgacem had also a criminal past and spent month in jail in 2015. French authorities confirmed that Belgacem carried an ISIS banner and found a note in which he pledged allegiance to the organization. Based on Evidence authorities closed his case as a “lone wolf” attack (Deutsche Welle, 2016).

In 2015, 17-year-old Afghani Riaz Khan Ahmadzai, immigrated to Germany as an unaccompanied child refugee (Hack, 2016). Year later he carried out an ax attack as revenge for his fallen friend. Evidence pointed towards connections to ISIS and the case was marked as a “lone wolf” attack (BBC, 2016b). It is believed that he has decided to commit such an act when he learned that his friend was killed back home in Afghanistan (BBC, 2016b).

A 27-year-old Syrian refugee Mohammad Daleel was a failed asylum seeker. He immigrated illegally through Bulgaria to Germany, where he tried to gain permanent asylum status (Al Jazeera, 2016). After failing twice and attempting suicide, he went on to carry out suicide attack in the name of the ISIS. He was believed to be manipulative and unstable (BBC, 2016a). Similar case to Mohammad Daleel is Jawed Sultani, who was also denied permanent asylum in Germany (Mallén, 2018). He later perpetrated attack in Amsterdam and was believed to have terrorist motive (Cullen et al., 2018).

Rachid Redouane was also a failed asylum seeker and accomplice to Khuram Shazad Butt and Youssef Zaghba on 3rd June 2017 attack in London. He was of Moroccan-Libyan descent, who lived in Dublin and Married British woman. It is possible that he came into contact with radicals in Dublin, where one of the Muslim imams warned authorities about possible activity of ISIS and Al-Qaeda (The Irish Times, 2017).

Khairi Saadallah was 17 when he immigrated to the United Kingdom in 2012. While applying for asylum during the interview it was found out that he fought for the Islamist militant group Ansar al-Sharia in the Libyan revolution. Furthermore, he claimed no participation in fighting or other activities of the group. Years before his attack, he was in prison multiple times for various crimes. Later he began to show symptoms of radicalization. For the attack that killed three he was sentenced for lifetime (De Simone & Sandford, 2021).

Young Pakistani immigrant Ali Hassan came to France in search of a better life. In France he lived with other working-class immigrants, mainly from North Africa, Sahel region and Pakistan. When Charlie Hebdo published caricatures of Muhammad, A. Hassan was offended by such depiction. Following this he was watching videos by Tahreek-e Labbaik Party's leader Khadim Hussain Rizvi. It is also possible that he was inspired by the previous attack on Charlie Hebbdo. On 25th September 2020 he went to the previous location of redaction, unaware it moved, and injured two people. Back home he was praised as hero for his actions (Gannon, 2020)

One of the more shocking attacks was the beheading of Samuel Paty by Abdoullakh Abouyedovich Anzorov, the immigrant of Chechen descent. S. Paty was beheaded by A. A. Anzorov because he showed the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad during a class aimed at freedom of speech. Before the attack there were complaints coming from parents of pupils, including the father of the attacker. Furthermore, the half-sister of the attacker joined ISIS in

Syria in 2014. The possibility of connections to ISIS is high in the case of A. A. Anzorov (BBC, 2020).

Last of the sample cases, Brahim Aouissaoui from Tunisia, who reached Italy on the 20th September 2020 and arrived in France on the 9th October 2020, just 20 days before his attack. B. Aouissaoui had no papers except for a Red Cross document he acquired in Germany and was not in the databases of any intelligence services. Back home in Tunisia he had occasional stages of violent behavior and use of drugs and alcohol. According to relatives, he showed symptoms of radicalization before leaving for Europe (Burke & Tondo, 2020). Further connections remain unknown.

2.4.2. Contact with propaganda or previous experience

According to the previous subchapter, multiple scenarios are possible. First, two returnees, who perpetrated attacks, were radicalized in common way. One of them was radicalized on EU soil of EU, whilst the other already came radicalized to Europe. Second possible scenario, the more interesting, was failure to gain asylum which was sought after by three perpetrators. In all three cases, the pattern is observable. After being declined by officials, they quickly radicalized and perpetrated attacks. It could be assumed that this was to achieve revenge. Another four perpetrators radicalized also in Europe. Two of them perpetrated “original” attacks as Islamist “lone wolves” and two took inspiration in previous attacks connected to ISIS. Case of Aouissaoui remains unexplained to the public.

Nevertheless, in most of the cases personal connections and decentralized propaganda are suspected to be initiators of radical behavior.

2.5. Personal factors

B. Ganor introduces “lone wolves” typology of motives in his work aimed where he introduces “The Bathtub” model (Ganor, 2021). The motives are divided into three main groups: ideological, personal, psychological. While ideological group is divided to nationalistic, religious, and political motives, which according to above mentioned evidence carry the supporting role, personal and psychological are much more vital. According to B. Ganor under the personal motives are economic, interpersonal, and family motives. For

psychological the mental disorder, death wish, and honor predisposition, which is shared with personal factor.

By observing the evidence, the most relevant factors are the following: family background, criminal activity and psychological factors. These factors are present in most of the cases. There is little to no Islamist “lone wolves” who have no factor standing behind them. This could mean that personal factors play the role necessary condition for the causal mechanism to work. If this was true, then such factors play the role of justification of actions for the “lone wolf”. In relation to “lone wolves” decision makings B. Ganor mentions the following formula: $TA = (M+T) > I$. This means Terror Attack = (Motivation + Triggers) > Inhibitions (Ganor, 2021). This formula concludes that the sum of motivation and triggers has to be bigger than the inhibitions opposed to them. In case of this research the correctly aimed ISIS propaganda has to be more appealing than other solutions.

Most represented factor is criminal activity. Out of 60 attacks in the period 2011-2020 around 90% of “lone wolves” had previous criminal records. Out of 20 mentioned “lone wolves” 12 of them were convicted for criminal activity before their attacks. Does that mean that prisons are efficient recruitment grounds? “Overcrowding, understaffing and the high turnover of personnel and prisoners” are factors impacting jihadism in prisons. When prisons are overcrowded, guards are unable to supervise the inmates properly. This is reinforced by the understaffing and high turnover, which blocks the guards from familiarizing with the prisoners and surroundings thus making it harder for them to notice the radicals (Rubin, 2018). In prisons, psychological factors work alongside the prison conditions. The “quest for significance” means that some of the prisoners radicalize due to the loss of significance in their lives and radicalization helps them to become a more significant person (Rubin, 2018). Such prisoners can also hold aversion against the state and feel wronged by it. Alienation and disaffection forces inmates to join the prison gangs. With overcrowding, these problems get even worse (Rubin, 2018). As it was already mentioned above, amidst the chaos of prison, religion, such as Islam, gives the prisoners multiple benefits (special regime, protection, etc.). This can be the case of Khalid Masood who converted and radicalized in prison (Anderson, 2017).

Family background tends to be problematic in families which are more religiously based or come from the region, where such extreme ways can be promoted with pride. A. Hassan is the perfect example of this. A. Hassan came from the Kotli Qazi village, which is located deep in a rural area of Punjab province in Pakistan. In 2020 Global Terrorism Index report, the Pakistan ranked as the seventh most impacted country by terrorism (GTD, 2020). In the district

of Kotli Qazi the Tehreek-e Labbaik party operates. Their sole purpose and agenda is upholding blasphemy laws and calling for death penalty against those who offend Islam (Gannon, 2020). Furthermore, A. Hassan's father championed the actions of his son, thus making the family support clear. Shuja Nawaz, security analyst and fellow at the Washington-based Atlantic Council, gave following statement for AP News regarding the migration of youth from countries like Pakistan into Europe, which brings two factors into collision: "First, the conditions in the home countries, like Pakistan, that increasingly are becoming more Islamized and anti-Western through the influence of mullahs and populist governments, while their education systems crumble. Second, in the Western countries, where migrants end up legally or illegally, there is a Ghettoization of Muslim immigrants who turn to religion as a defense mechanism and rallying point." (Gannon, 2020). A. Hassan was not the only Pakistani to perpetrate the "lone wolf" act. In 2017, K. S. Butt perpetrated the attack in London, but was radicalized in Pakistan (Cruickshank & Robertson, 2017).

Descent and family pose dangerous precedent when it comes to "lone wolves". Regarding the sample cases, Pakistanis came into direct contact with radicals or were formed by Islamist surroundings. In some cases, even the descent might be enough to motivate the "lone wolves". In such case, the "honor predisposition" can be observed. This was demonstrated in case of A. A. Anzorov, whose parents were from Chechnya (BBC, 2020). Concluding facts, descent and family background can spark the radicalization of potential "lone wolf" or push him into perpetrating attack.

Last group, psychological factors, is a wide range of outer and inner influences. These factors were exploited by ISIS propaganda. Young Muslims around the globe can suffer from not being able to find their identity (mainly second generation immigrants) which might lead them straight to the arms of Islamist organization. ISIS was aware of this fact and decided to directly recruit vulnerable people via social media (EUROPOL, 2017) by fulfilling their desires to be part of "something bigger than one's self" (Khawaja & Khan, 2016). As S. Nawaz makes clear, Ghettoization turns the young inside (Gannon, 2020). Due to this some young immigrants find themselves ostracized and gain mental problems. Mental disorders and illnesses can play a supportive role for creation of "lone wolf" but to prove their presence is many times impossible in case of "lone wolves".

2.6. Radicalization

According to Oxford dictionary radicalization is defined as the action or process of making somebody more extreme or radical in their opinions on political, social or religious issues (Oxford, 2022). However, definition more suitable for the Islamist “lone wolves” and what is generally meant by such term is the individual or group process of growing commitment to engage in acts of political terrorism (Muro, 2016). Basic understanding of this process is described by Diego Muro as “a process of change, a personal and political transformation from one condition to another” (Muro, 2016). The process begins with ideological engagement and is ended by the “catalyst event” and violent extremism or terrorism.

Another model, “the Four-Stage Model” focuses on mindset of possible terrorist or “lone wolf”. This shows more of the psychological process behind the radicalization. The escalating ladder consists of the following stages: Grievance (It’s not right), Injustice (It’s not fair), Target Attribution (It’s your fault) and distancing/devaluation (You’re evil). Aim of the model is to introduce the process behind the ideological radicalization. This model explains the mental development of R. K. Ahmadzai. After learning that his friend was killed by allied actions in Afghanistan (BBC, 2016b), he went through the quick process of ideological adoption and blamed the Western society for the death. Nevertheless, this model does not forecast when the individual will use the violence (Muro, 2016). Ahmadzai was a specific perpetrator due to the fact that the event, which forced escalation of ideological mindset in him, was at the same time according to process model the “catalyst event” or a trigger.

As a perfect textbook example of quiet radicalization and indoctrination one should observe the case of Y. Salhi. According to people who knew Y. Salhi was a soft-spoken and reserved man. In 2004 he met with F. J. Salvi, whose nickname was “Grand Ali” (Rubin, 2015). It is believed that this was the point of above-mentioned ideological engagement. Prior to this Salhi was described by Amar Remimi, who taught Arabic to Y. Salhi in his youth, that as adolescent he was not interested in Islam (Rubin, 2015). Nevertheless, due to the connection with F. J. Salvi, Y. Salhi was placed on security services list as a potential security threat from 2006-2008 (Rubin, 2015). First worrying event came, when Y. Salhi criticized the preaching imam and ordered him to stop. It is known that Y. Salhi and F. J. Salvi were in close contact. Furthermore, F. J. Salvi was active internationally and thus the Interpol issued an arrest warrant on him (Rubin, 2015).

In contrast to Y. Salhi, Islamist “lone wolves” such as K. S. Butt or U. Khan, underwent far “louder” radicalization. This suggests that the radicalization process differs individually and, in some cases, standard signs such as change of appearance, style, social circle etc. are not present.

2.6.1. Trigger

To cross the line from radicalized individual to individual being able to perpetrate violent terrorist “catalyst even” (Muro, 2016) or trigger (Ganor, 2021). These can for example psychological phenomena such as trauma and imitation (Ganor, 2021), or outer influences such as major terrorist attacks and call to arms by ISIS. The latter is represented in *Chart 3*. There, the visualization of attacks perpetrated by “lone wolves” and terrorist cells shows important data. In 2015 there was a clear spike in the count of “lone wolves”. Four major events, that can in theory serve as a trigger, took place that year. First, two major terrorist attacks happened in France: Charlie Hebdo shooting in January and Bataclan shooting in November. The Charlie Hebdo was the second bigger attack since the London bombings of 2005 (first being Mohammed Merah), thus granting it enough media coverage to motivate radicalized or radicalizing individuals. This attack also became an inspiration for Ali Hassan who on 25th September 2020 perpetrated a “lone wolf” attack at the same place and for the same reason (Gannon, 2020). For both attacks, the triggering event were caricatures of Prophet Muhammad.

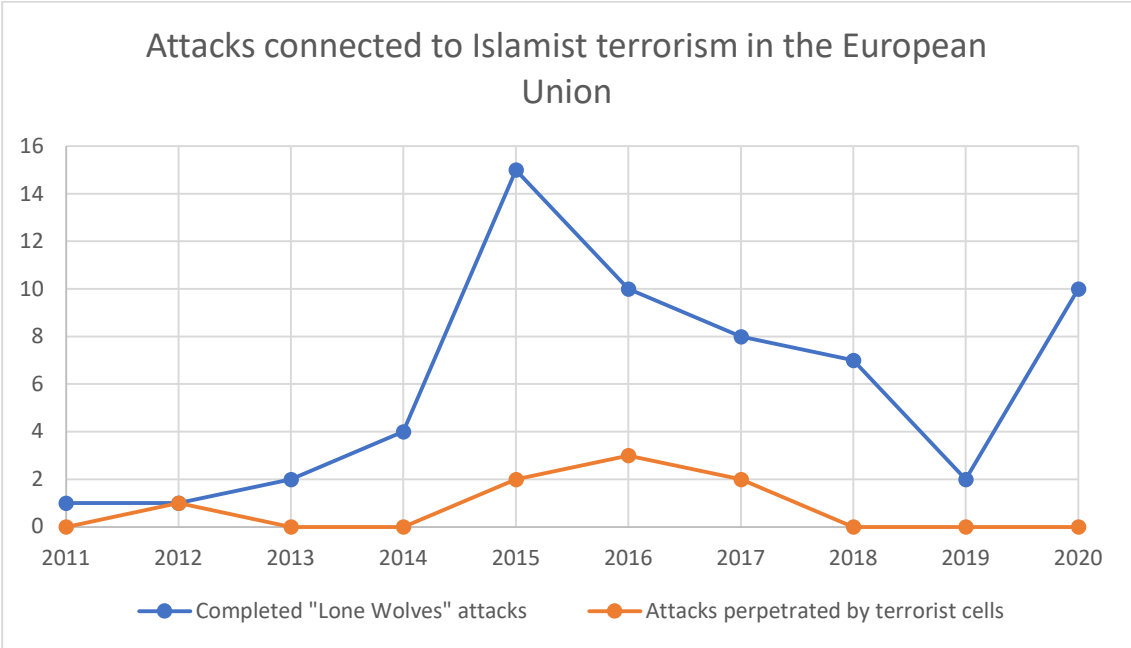


Chart 3: Visualization of attacks perpetrated in the European Union between 2011-2020

Second, 2015 marks the beginning of a counter-offensive against ISIS, in which coalition partners were using frequent airstrikes. Many of those unfortunately caused collateral damage. Participation of Western states in this counter-offensive and collateral damage became triggers for potential “lone wolves”. On 6th December 2015 a man was arrested at the London Underground station. According to witness he screamed “this is for Syria” (EUROPOL, 2016). This attack took place three weeks after Bataclan shooting, which was supposed to be retaliation for French airstrikes against ISIS in Syria and Iraq (EUROPOL, 2016). Riaz Khan Ahmadzai, the Afghani immigrant, met his triggering event in the faith of his fallen friend. When R. K. Ahmadzai learned that his friend was killed in Afghanistan, he underwent “the Four-Stage Model” and became radicalized (BBC, 2016b).

Last event is the call to perpetrate attacks by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani (EUROPOL, 2016). Since then, ISIS has been encouraging its supporters in Europe to carry out attacks. This “call to arms” was frequently repeated and transformed. First, the call was interpreted as a religious duty (EUROPOL, 2016). One year later, the opportunity of perpetrating the terrorist attack in the West was even more preferred by ISIS. According to A. M al-Adnani attacks perpetrated in the West would have great impact and would terrorize the enemy (EUROPOL, 2017).

In 2016 to 2019 the decline in numbers of “lone wolves” happened. However, in 2020 the number of attacks peaked to two thirds of the cases that took place in 2015 and exactly the same count as in 2016. Decline of numbers was consistent with ISIS losing the war in Iraq and Syria. The peak of 2020 can be viewed as the last gasp of breath for ISIS in Europe. Such sudden peak was probably triggered by assassination of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on 27th October 2019 and defeat with following dissolution of main ISIS core to smaller operating groups.

Summarized, triggers are the final step in creation of “lone wolf” and after crossing this line there is no point of return. It is only matter of time before the individual carries out the terrorist act.

2.7. Anomalies

Multiple cases of Islamist “lone wolves” connected to ISIS in EU member states go outside the standard profile. During selection of cases, five of them stood out for their unique

characteristics. They were caused by minors, out of which one was a girl, a Belgium Army veteran, an individual suffering from severe mental illness and a Ph.D. student.

A Frenchman, named Nacer B., drove a vehicle into the crowd of people. While the investigators believe this was a “copycat” incident (Lichfield, 2014) what is interesting is the history of the attacker. While the act itself had every aspect of “lone wolf”, the local prosecutor declared the attack as a “non-terrorist act by a confused man”. Reason for such an argument was that in the last 13 years Nacer B. made 157 visits to psychiatric units (Lichfield, 2014). Furthermore, Marie-Christine Tarrare, the city prosecutor, said that while motivations of Nacer B. are hardly coherent and Vague, he became “very agitated” at home after watching television program, about the plight of children in Chechnya. (Breedon & Cowell, 2014). According to D. Muro self-radicalisation is rare and mental pathologies and radicalization do not go hand in hand (Muro, 2016). While the latter is caused by careful approach of recruiters, the first is rare due to the fact that even people who radicalize on the internet need help from distant recruiters (Muro, 2016). However, Nacer B. was possibly radicalized or more suitably said made the decision to attack, due to his severe mental problems.

Another unique case was the attack that took place on 26th February 2016. The attack was perpetrated by 15-year-old girl of German and Moroccan descend named Safia S., who at the age of seven appeared in a video with the German Islamist preacher Pierre Vogel (Dearden, 2017). Safia S. traveled to Istanbul, where she met members of ISIS (EUROPOL, 2017) which was possibly the moment when she finished her radicalization. Prior to this, she praised the Paris attacks (Dearden, 2017). Safia S. became only woman who became Islamist “lone wolf” in the states of EU. Although, the ISIS ideology, same as other jihadist groups, exempts women from the obligation of fighting, it does not explicitly prohibits them from engaging in fighting or carrying out attacks. Nevertheless, women participating in such activities were/are not granted same titles as men and work cells consisted only out of women, which might be linked to the obligation of gender segregation (EUROPOL, 2017).

Far less explained is the case of the next minor, the boy of Turkish-Kurdish origins, who perpetrated an attack at Franco-Hebraic institute in Marseille (Hall, 2016). Due to the low age of the attacker, a heavy information embargo surrounds the case. Despite this what is known is that he perpetrated an attack in the name of ISIS (Hall, 2016). According to Europol, the boy arrived in France in 2010. The attack was designated by Europol as jihadist terrorism (EUROPOL, 2017).

Hicham Diop, a 43-year-old Belgian army veteran, perpetrated a knife attack against police officers in Brussels (EUROPOL, 2017). He served in the army until 2009, was one-time professional boxer and stood as candidate in local elections for an Islamist Party (EURACTIV, 2016). H. Diop was known to authorities for being in contact with jihadists who went to fight in Syria (EURACTIV, 2016). Not only H. Diop is above age average, but his previous jobs could suggest that he will not incline to such extreme ways.

Another perpetrator with uncommon occupation is 40-year-old Algerian Farid Ikken, who was awarded journalist and PhD. student of communication in France. As a journalist he worked in Sweden and Algeria (Associated Press, 2017). According to his surroundings he never showed any signs of radicalization. Furthermore, F. Ikken was described as “someone who believed a lot in democratic ideals, the expression of free thinking, in journalism” (Associated Press, 2017). While attacking the police officers in front of Notre Dame Cathedral. Only link between him and ISIS was video allegiance found in his student residence (Willsher, 2017). Further information remains unknown.

These are some of more or totally unique cases of Islamist “lone wolves” in Europe. While some of them, such as Safia S., follow the typical route of radicalization, others are examples of least probable ways or very specific conditions, thus making them truly one-of-a-kind cases.

3. Results

Concluding above mentioned evidence and data, the research comes to following answers in case of research questions:

H1: Initial contact with propaganda/propagandist is necessary for starting the process of creation of “lone wolf”.

Initial contact with some kind of propaganda or propagandist is a necessary part of causal mechanism leading to creation of “lone wolf”. The hypothesis passed the Doubly decisive test, meaning in each case the individual came into contact with propaganda which initiated the process. However, if we further specify the type of propaganda as centralized, we get a more detailed answer. Multiple cases have shown no prior contact with centralized propaganda. Combining two approaches to questioning propaganda, the following answer was achieved: Initial contact with propaganda is necessary condition for starting the process of creation of “lone wolf”, but the presence of decentralized propaganda is sufficient enough for initiating the process.

H2: Criminal background is a strengthening factor of possibly developing “lone wolf”.

According to evidence and statistics, criminal background truly strengthens the possibility of creation of “lone wolf”. In EU member countries, most notably France, radical jihadism was spreading at massive numbers. The prison conditions and prison lifestyle enable and support radicalization inside (Rubin, 2018). Then some of the most radicalized hard-liners like K. Masood or F. J. Salvi, who in fact converted to Islam in prison, proceed to carry out activity in support of various terrorist cells or in form of “lone wolf” attack. The approach to personal factors will be explained further

H3: In case of immigrants and asylum seekers the typical radicalization behavior is not a necessary part of the process.

Immigrants and asylum seekers have been proved to be different from homegrown and long-term resident “lone wolves” by hypothesis 5. However, even with some differences, all of them follow a similar pattern of radicalization. Thus, according to the Straw-in-the-Wind test which it failed, the hypothesis remains weakened. We cannot fully eliminate this idea due to the low count of exceptions present. However, the numbers and evidence are lacking for confirmation.

H4: Personal contact of possible homegrown “lone wolf” with radical propagandist ensures the radicalization.

While this hypothesis might not be considered vital for constructing the causal mechanism, it is supportive for explaining one of its parts. Individuals, who came into direct contact with ISIS members or recruiters. This hypothesis passed the Smoking-Gun test. When possible “lone wolf” meets with the propagandist, the individual is: a) at the stage of ideological engagement which is being supported by the personal contact or b) in late phases of radicalization consolidating his mindset, views and preparing to actively join the fight.

H5: Failure of integration by immigrant or failure of asylum seeker to obtain asylum followed by contact with propaganda or being exposed to it in the past is the reason behind the “lone wolves” coming from this group.

This hypothesis passed the smoking gun test. Unlike homegrown and long-term residents who became Islamist “lone wolves”, immigrants and mainly asylum seekers tend to be more impulsive towards some things. They either were already radicalized back home or tend to radicalize at a faster pace. What is interesting finding is the fact that when asylum seekers are not granted the stay and are faced with deportation, they radicalize impulsively. Three out of four failed asylum seekers described above were acting impulsively after being declined the asylum. In their cases, the radicalization was quick and there was no need for a second triggering event. Immigrants and asylum seekers also tend to have previous experience with the radical movements.

3.1. Proposed causal mechanism

Based on the results of hypotheses testing and evidence gathered, the following causal mechanism answering the research question is being proposed (please see *Chart 4*). Between X (ISIS becomes international) and Y (“Lone wolf” created), three subsequent blocs are described. First bloc is “Propaganda spreads” is theoretical certainty. It is the condition needed for survival of organization and also for creating the “lone wolf”. With insufficient spread of propaganda, the chance of gaining assets in the form of “lone wolf” will decline. Furthermore, the propaganda has to be aimed at the right target group to have effect. Dividing the first and second bloc is a necessary condition in the form of personal factors. If personal factors, such as criminal past, family background etc. are not present, then the effectiveness of propaganda

declines. In the *Chart 4* the “Present personal factors” can be viewed as hole in the wall, letting the propagandist message inside.

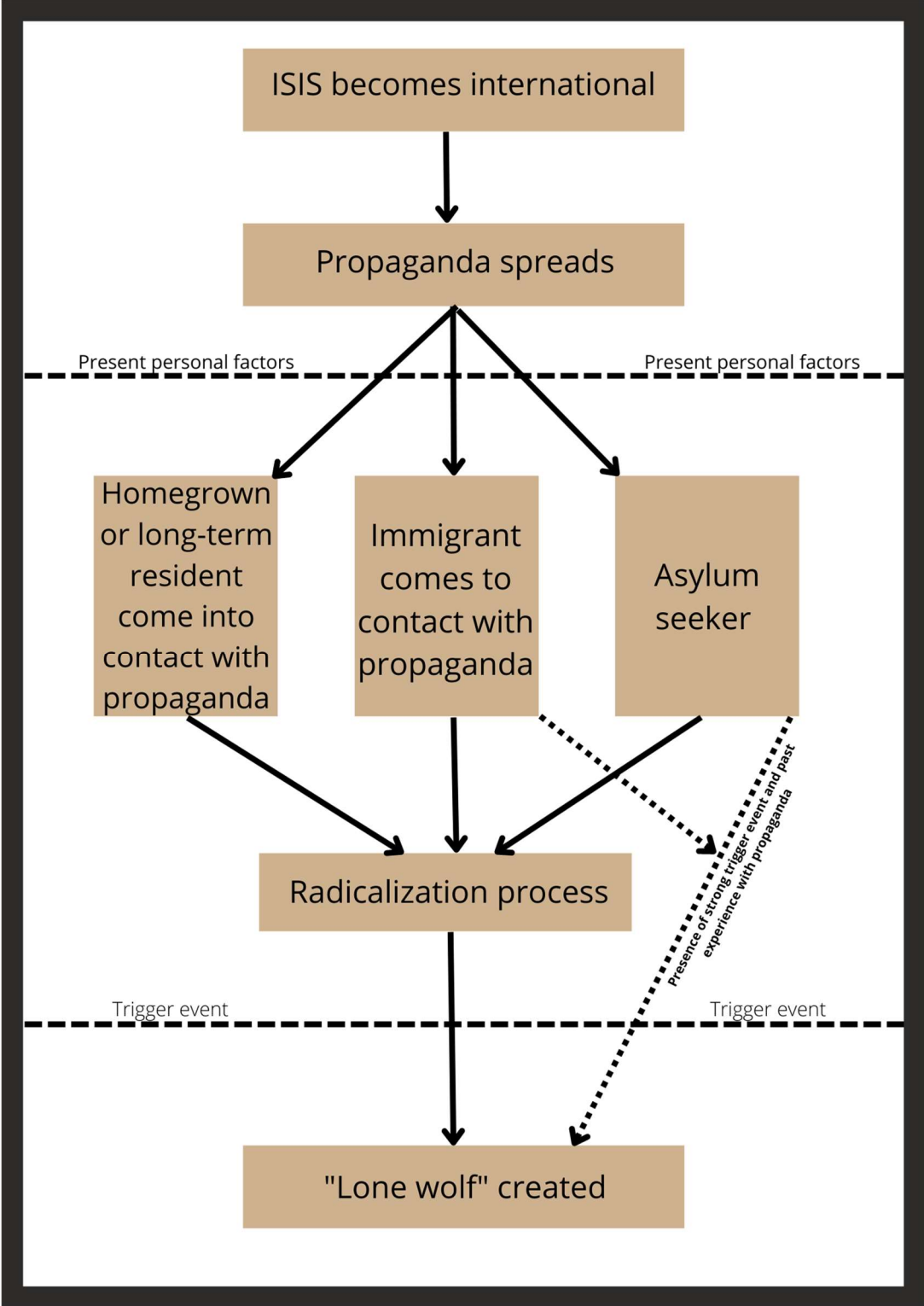


Chart 4: Proposed causal mechanism

Second bloc is differentiation among three types of cases. First, we have homegrown or long-term residents who came into contact with propaganda. Second group are immigrants and third are asylum seekers. In the case of immigrants and asylum seekers two possible ways of causal mechanism are observed. The way of the common radicalization process, marked by full arrow, and more unique way of skipping the standard route and directly aiming for creation of “lone wolf”. However, to skip this process, two conditions have to be present: a) strong trigger event and b) previous experience with propaganda. Such “shortcut” was not represented or found in the case of homegrown or long-term residents.

Third and last bloc is “radicalization process”. There the individual is consolidating his views and begins to be indoctrinated by organization, in this case ISIS. When an individual reaches a sufficient degree of radicalization, it is only a matter of time until the trigger event takes place and allows for finishing the process (Ganor, 2021) and thus the “lone wolf” is created.

Conclusion

The goal of the thesis was to construct the causal mechanism between ISIS and “lone wolves” on the soil of the EU and provide explanation for phenomena connected to it. Not only the causal mechanism was successfully constructed and described, but furthermore the importance of personal factors was made clear along with uncovering the impulsiveness and possible shortcut connected to immigrants and asylum seekers.

While this was achieved, the research itself has boundaries. Probably the most prominent boundary is individuality of modus operandi used by Islamist organizations. Even if a significant number of traits remains shared, there will always be differences. Furthermore, every organization favors different approach to waging terrorism. Thus, the causal mechanism remains applicable only for one concrete followed observation. Same is applicable for Islamist “lone wolfs” who will share some traits too, but their modus operandi and causal mechanism can differ according to region. Further limitations, such as data collecting, have to be taken into account, since the case files are not available. Due to this, the possibility of human error cannot be eliminated.

Since the data collection is limited to public sources, the research can be missing (and most probably is) missing some piece that was not found while collecting the evidence or have not been published by authorities. For further research into this topic, the availability of trustful data will be necessary. Other than that, the research offers future possibility of comparison of “lone wolves” of other terrorist ideologies, for example far right or ethno-nationalist.

The thesis itself is built on two topics which are in the field of International Relations being mainly used and researched since last decade. Although the method of process tracing was introduced to political science not so long ago, the literature connected to it and explaining the use of process tracing and method itself is more than sufficient. On the other hand, literature regarding the “lone wolves”, their definition etc. is often full of disagreements. This was demonstrated while trying to define “lone wolf”. According to some definitions, sample cases which are part of the work would not be designated as “lone wolves”.

In summary, the topic of “lone wolves” will possibly remain in the EU, however in other connections than to ISIS. The main message that should be stressed is that there is no efficient way to trace possible “lone wolves” in real-time effectively enough to be able to prevent any future attacks. Even with knowledge gathered from the cases and modern technologies, the perpetrators will most likely be one step ahead.

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Appendix

List of cases

Homegrown and long-term residency status		
Date	Location	Name (status)
24. 5. 2014	Brussels, Belgium	Mehddi Nemmouche (homegrown)
26. 6. 2015	Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, France	Yassin Salhi (homegrown)
14. 7. 2016	Nice, France	Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel (long-term residency)
22. 3. 2017	London, United Kingdom	Khalid Masood (homegrown)
3. 6. 2017	London, United Kingdom	Khuram Shazad Butt (homegrown)
12. 5. 2018	Paris, France	Khamzat Azimov (born in Chechnya, lived in France since childhood and gained citizenship)
11. 12. 2018	Strasbourg, France	Chérif Chekatt (homegrown)
29. 11. 2019	London, United Kingdom	Usman Khan (homegrown)
2. 2. 2020	London, United Kingdom	Sudesh Mamoor Faraz Amman (homegrown)
2. 11. 2020	Vienna, Austria	Kujtim Fejzulai (homegrown)

Immigrants and asylum seekers		
Date	Location	Name (status)
21. 8. 2015	Oignies, France	Ayoub El Khazzani (immigrant)
7. 1. 2016	Paris, France	Tarek Belgacem (immigrant)
18. 7. 2016	Würzburg, Germany	Riaz Khan Ahmadzai (immigrant)
24. 7. 2016	Ansbach, Germany	Mohamad Daleel (asylum seeker)
3. 6. 2017	London, United Kingdom	Rachid Redouane (asylum seeker)
31. 8. 2018	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Jawed Sultani (asylum seeker)
20. 6. 2020	Reading, United Kingdom	Khairi Saadallah (immigrant)
25. 9. 2020	Paris, France	Ali Hassan (immigrant)
16. 10. 2020	Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, France	Abdoullakh Anzorov (immigrant)
29. 10. 2020	Nice, France	Brahim Aouissaoui (immigrant)

Anomalies		
Date	Location	Name (status)
21. 12. 2014	Dijon, France	Nacer B. (French citizen)
11. 1. 2016	Marseille, France	Boy of Turkish-Kurdish origins (immigrant)
26. . 2016	Hanover, Germany	Safia S. (German citizen)
5. 10. 2016	Brussels, Belgium	Hicham Diop (Belgian citizen)
6. 6. 2017	Paris, France	Farid Ikken (Foreign student. Born in Algeria)

Abstract/Abstrakt

Abstract

In the last decade, Europe faced the threat in form of “lone wolf” Islamist terrorism. The aim of the thesis is to construct the causal mechanism between the terrorist organization becoming international, in this case ISIS, and the creation of “lone wolf”. Furthermore, the thesis should offer explanations of parts of the causal mechanism and introduction of the “lone wolf” phenomenon.

To achieve this, the work operates with a method of process tracing, more precisely the theory-building variant. Gathering of empirical evidence was done via official security reports and through obtaining information from media outlets, out of which profiles of “lone wolves” were built.

The result of the thesis is proposed causal mechanism and better understanding of differences among “lone wolves”.

Key words: Lone wolf, ISIS, process tracing, terrorism, Europe

Abstrakt

V minulém desetiletí Evropa čelila hrozbě v podobě islamistického terorismu a s ním spojenými osamělými vlky. Cílem práce je sestrojít kauzální mechanismus spojující moment, kdy se stane teroristická organizace mezinárodní, v případě práce ISIS, až po vznik osamělého vlka. Dále by práce měla také nabídnout vysvětlení jednotlivých částí kauzálního mechanismu a blíže představit fenomén osamělých vlků.

K docílení stanovených bodů práce využívá metody process tracing, přesněji theory-building process tracing. Sběr empirických důkazů probíhal za využití oficiálních bezpečnostních zpráv a skrze data uvedená médii, která sloužila k sestavení profilů osamělých vlků.

Výsledky práce jsou navrhovaný kauzální mechanismus a lepší porozumění rozdílům mezi samotnými osamělými vlky.

Klíčová slova: Lone wolf, ISIS, process tracing, terorismus, Evropa