The Effects of State-Level Discourse on Terrorist Recruitment

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Abstract

Existing work on terrorist recruitment marginalizes the role of strategic choice on the part of non-state militant organizations, particularly how state discourse and policies affect how such organizations decide to recruit. I address this gap in the literature by developing a theory that explains variation in recruitment appeals used by the same organization cross-nationally. Centrally, I argue that state discourses surrounding who is and is not a terrorist influence what recruitment strategies work best in which contexts. In states where certain groups are Othered and alienated through such discourses, terrorists will recruit based on appeals to ingroup solidarity and belonging. In states where such alienation is less extensive or absent, terrorists will find recruitment based on identity more difficult and instead target career fighters or individuals with specialized skills. I demonstrate the plausibility of my theory through a comparison of Islamic State propaganda in France and Germany.

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1 Introduction

On January 28, 2017, pro-Islamic State social media accounts exploded. Two days prior, U.S. President Donald Trump had announced a ban on refugee admissions from seven Muslim majority countries, and IS supporters hailed the policy shift. The ban "clearly revealed the truth and harsh reality behind the American government's hatred toward Muslims," one user on Telegram wrote. Others referred to the ban as "blessed", predicting that the policy would push more U.S. Muslims toward the Islamic State.[1]

IS's response to this change in U.S. counterterrorism policy highlights two important but hitherto understudied features of terrorist recruitment. First, recruitment does not occur in a vacuum: though often viewed as an interaction between recruiters and potential members, the process of recruitment occurs within a broader societal context shaped by state discourse and behavior. Second, militant organizations pay attention to these discourses and behaviors and rationally consider how they affect recruitment prospects. By not examining the role of the state in terrorist recruitment, scholars and policymakers ignore a large piece of the strategic puzzle determining how organizations develop strategies and target their recruitment efforts.

This paper represents a step toward addressing this gap in our understanding of how militant organizations recruit abroad in spaces dominated by antagonistic state actors and the discourses they promulgate. I focus here on militant organizations deemed "terrorist", both legally and colloquially. As noted by Agamben (2005) and demonstrated empirically by Huff & Kertzer (2018), "terrorism" as a category is constructed as a qualitatively different form of violence, one viewed as particularly abhorrent and mandating a particularly quick and forceful response. As such, there is much at stake in even an informal "terrorist" designation—and the view of terrorism as incomprehensible and alien to accepted norms of political protest and resistance means that the process of calling someone or something "terrorist" invokes core ideas about state and societal identity. Terrorism is thus a ripe category for consideration of how state discourse shapes the strategic choices of nonstate militant organizations—and a relevant one given recent spikes in foreign recruitment efforts in the global North.

I argue that terrorists seeking foreign members target populations othered by state discourses surrounding who is and is not predisposed toward engaging in terrorism. A "discourse" is a relatively stable set of statements that assign a particular meaning or interpretation to a political phenomenon (Holland 2013, 3, 15). In the case of extreme

[1] "Jihadist groups hail Trump's travel ban as a victory". *The Washington Post*, `https://wapo.st/2TwawiW`; "Isis hails Donald Trump's Muslim immigration restrictions as a 'blessed ban'". *The Independent*, `https://ind.pn/2WFm7ya`.

violence viewed as incompatible with established understandings of political behavior, the "terrorist" designation becomes an adjudication of a state's identity—and what ideologies and groups are seen to challenge that identity. In states where certain populations are perceived to represent such a challenge and alienated accordingly, militant organizations claiming to represent these populations will recruit based on appeals to ingroup solidarity and belonging. Where such alienation occurs to a lesser extent, organizations will find recruitment based on appeals to identity more difficult and instead target other populations of interest—namely, specialists and career fighters seeking opportunities to use their skills irrespective of a particular cause, ideology, or conflict.

I demonstrate the plausibility of my argument in a theory-generating exercise using Islamic State propaganda from different recruitment environments: France and Germany. In France, longstanding alarmist discourses surrounding North African immigrants, as well as fundamental conceptualizations of French identity as secular, combine to produce an environment where "terrorism" and "Muslim" are seen as inextricably connected. By contrast, the German experience with Nazism means that challenges to state identity come not only from populations viewed as not stereotypically German, but also from internal sources elevating white nationalism and German superiority. "Terrorism" in Germany is thus a more multifaceted category, which I contend has consequences for how militant organizations recruit in the country.

Analyzing propaganda across France and Germany therefore facilitates comparison of strategies by the same organization under variegated state discourses, while also disaggregating the often black-boxed category of terrorist propaganda directed at the West broadly. In so doing, I highlight a new avenue for research on terrorist recruitment, one that considers recruitment as a tripartite interaction between individual, organization, and state. Individual motivations for participation in terrorism cannot be considered absent the context in which individuals understand their membership in various social and political identity groups—and organizational efforts cannot be separated from the state actions that enable and constrain them.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, I review existing approaches to studying terrorist recruitment, demonstrating the absence of the state in such theories as a significant oversight. I then more fully develop the idea of state discourses surrounding terrorism, drawing on constructivist approaches to language and critical understandings of "terrorism" as a tool of identity production. I highlight an alienation mechanism linking state discourses to recruitment strategies used by rational militant organizations, and I derive hypotheses about when and where we should observe various populations being targeted for recruitment. Finally, I describe my data sources, present my analysis, and

discuss avenues for further research on this topic.

2 Bringing State Discourse Back In

Assuming militant organizations operate rationally, we would expect them to consider state actions as potential impediments—or unintentional boons—to recruitment efforts. Yet the state remains conspicuously absent from most theories of where and why terrorists recruit. Continued marginalization of the state in studies of recruitment paints an incomplete picture of the strategic landscape and minimizes the degree to which scholars can explain variation in recruitment across time and space.

Two approaches to studying recruitment dominate the literature. The first focuses on the supply side of the equation, alternatively called radicalization: what motivates someone to engage in political violence? Work on radicalization is extensive and underscores a wide array of factors that might drive an individual toward terrorism, from personal alienation to larger grievances to social network ties (Sageman 2004; King & Taylor 2011; Borum 2011; Moghaddam 2005; Khosrokhavar 2017; Horgan 2008).

In contrast, we know relatively little about the demand side of recruitment. Part of this is due to data issues: recruiters operate clandestinely, and as much recruitment activity remains unobservable, there is doubt about the extent to which recruiters actively target individuals as opposed to waiting to be approached (Hunter *et al.* 2017; Sageman 2016; Norris 2019).[2] What work we do have suggests that both ideological and material factors influence recruitment strategies. Weinstein (2007), for example, argues that organizations with access to resources can offer material incentives to potential members and thus recruit from a wider pool, whereas resource-poor organizations must recruit based upon ideological devotion (see also Gates 2002). Still, much of this work focuses on organizations recruiting in-theater rather than transnational organizations recruiting more widely, leaving room to extend existing theoretical logics to more complicated scenarios.

I adopt the generally agreed-upon view in the literature that recruitment is a strategic choice necessary for organizational survival: without effort on the part of existing members to recruit new ones, an organization will eventually vanish (Faria & Arce 2012). Recruitment is complicated, however, by limited resources—a militant organization cannot possibly target every person who could potentially become a member—and the possibility of infiltration (Hegghammer 2012). Thus, organizations face two interrelated decisions: whom to recruit and how to go about recruiting them.

All else equal, we might assume militant organizations would prefer to recruit local

[2]For an exception, see Hegghammer (2012).

individuals with genuine commitments to their cause. Such individuals' loyalty is less dependent on fluctuating material resources (Weinstein 2007), and their status as locals decreases travel costs and makes them more likely to share militants' concerns than individuals further afield. In cases where local individuals are unwilling to join, militants might engage in provocation strategies aimed at drumming up popular support (Kydd & Walter 2006) or engage in outright coercion or forced conscription. Relevant concerns here are the sheer need for bodies on the front lines and symbolic shows of strength that demonstrate to state actors that they are losing support vis-à-vis the militant organization. Bloom (2017) posits that balancing these concerns creates a terrorist "recruitment cycle", in which organizations recruit for symbolic value when doing relatively well in battlefield confrontations and for labor when losing ground.

For some militant organizations, the needs for both labor and symbolism extend beyond the conflict theater. Recruiting internationally may be more costly: resources must be expended to understand foreign contexts, people must be devoted to monitoring internet traffic in those contexts, propaganda materials may need to be translated into other languages, and local networks for funneling foreign fighters to the conflict theater must be established. Still, the benefits of recruiting internationally may outweigh these costs if local labor is scarce, if specialized skillsets are not available locally, or if there is particular symbolic value in attracting foreign recruits.[3]

Two questions emerge from this discussion. The first—why recruit internationally—is frequently exogenized in the literature, limiting the degree to which we can assess the strategic motivations driving both this choice and the particular recruitment appeals used. The second is whether recruitment strategies by the same militant organization vary cross-nationally. For example, do organizations craft general messages for the entire "West", or do they target their appeals more precisely?[4] Existing work often treats foreign recruitment as a homogenous black box, wherein appeals are developed for a single international audience. Yet foreign contexts differ, both demographically with respect to an organization's target population and in terms of how appealing militancy is to members of that target population and other populations who might be interested in joining. If organizations have the resources, considering this variation in context makes strategic sense—and thanks to social media and the wider internet, this particular cost of recruitment is much lower than it used to be.

Understanding how militant organizations recruit, then, requires attention to both

[3]The Islamic State (IS), for example, bases its identity in part on representing a global community of Muslims. Perpetuating this identity thus requires attracting recruits from a broad swath of that global community.

[4]See Daly & Gerwehr (2006) on net vs. funnel recruitment strategies.

local needs and characteristics of international contexts, if in fact recruitment efforts are targeted internationally. Most notably, the international context introduces additional factors complicating the typically theorized dyadic interaction between organization and potential recruit. I argue that there is at least a third actor (or constellation of actors): the state, and particularly advanced democratic states with considerable resources to put toward making the organization's life more difficult. State security forces may constrain how militants are able to recruit on the ground; state intelligence services may target recruiters and inhibit their ability to operate; state policies may steer individuals away through counternarratives and deradicalization efforts; state leaders may drive individuals toward militant organizations with inflammatory rhetoric. All of these actions affect the strategic environment in which militant organizations attempt to recruit, changing the calculus about which appeals are likely to work and for whom.

A sizable literature exists on state counterterrorism efforts, particularly those by Western states attempting to combat transnational extremist Islamist organizations. In foundational work, Enders & Sandler (1993) evaluate six counterterrorism policies, ranging from airport security to embassy fortification, and their effects on terrorist attack patterns. More recent work extends this general approach (see e.g. Bueno de Mesquita 2007; Kydd 2011), taking attacks as the outcome of interest. Studies of the effects of counterterrorism policies on recruitment have focused on grievances born of airstrikes and other displays of force abroad (Rosendorff & Sandler 2004; Fattah & Fierke 2009; Shah 2018), finding mixed support for a "blowback" thesis wherein uses of force against militants create local civilian casualties and general instability, paradoxically leading to greater sympathies for the militants and bolstering recruitment. Blowback research, however, tends to focus singularly on effects on recruitment in the country where military action is occurring, as opposed to recruitment of locals in the country carrying out the military action itself.

States have a number of tools at their disposal to directly address concerns about local recruitment. Community-based programs under the umbrella of "countering violent extremism" (CVE) work through local leaders and institutions to intervene with at-risk youth and encourage deradicalization. Both academic and practitioner evaluations of the effects of CVE programs are rare, however, due to the newness of such programs in many areas and the impossibility of observing the counterfactual scenario of local recruitment patterns had such programs not been implemented (Mastroe & Szmania 2016). Suggestive evidence from the United Kingdom's Prevent initiative is not promising, indicating heightened suspicion within Muslim communities and new grievances due to profiling (Blackwood *et al.* 2016).

Alternatively or concurrently, states also engage in strategic communications aimed at countering terrorist propaganda narratives and crafting interpretations of the terrorist threat. Approaches here range from simply attempting to correct misinformation to disseminating alternative narratives casting the state in a positive light to direct efforts to discredit propaganda (Briggs & Feve 2013; Schmid 2014). In the aftermath of major attacks, leaders regularly construct narratives both to make sense of the violence and to present policies as appropriate responses (Nacos *et al.* 2011; Hodges 2011; Holland 2013; Hutchison 2010; Polonska-Kimunguyi & Gillespie 2008). Yet we lack theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence with which to understand how militant organizations respond to these narratives—and, moreover, what effects these narratives might have on recruitment, an outcome that states presumably would like to mitigate. This paper presents a corrective by directly theorizing the effects of state discourse on militant recruitment.

3 Theory

Taken together, strategic counterterrorism communications and narratives about particular terrorist threats constitute a larger discursive context, one which presents a dominant interpretation of what terrorism is and whence it comes. Leaving this discourse out of theories of terrorist recruitment limits our ability to contextualize and explain empirical variation in recruitment efforts by the same organization across time and space. By bringing discourse back in, I argue, we can make sense of how organizations strategically select recruitment strategies and shed light on why certain populations may make more attractive targets for recruitment than others.

Yet policies do not emerge independent of larger contexts, many of which predate particular attacks to which policies might respond. After all, events do not narrate themselves (Krebs 2015, 35), and the meanings which they are assigned are influenced by preconceptions about the identities and motivations of the actors involved. By focusing singularly on counterterrorism policies, we miss the ways in which state actors shape the national discourse on terrorism beyond any single attack or attacker. State actors take the lead in deciding which militant organizations constitute threats in the first place and which get called "terrorist"—again, a qualitatively different form of violence demanding a particularly harsh response. By playing a significant role in determining who is considered a terrorist—and who has the potential to become one—state actors may inadvertently make recruitment of some populations *easier* rather than harder.

As mentioned, a discourse is a relatively stable set of statements that assign a

particular meaning or interpretation to a political phenomenon (Holland 2013, 3,15). I contend that discourses have both *agentic* and *non-agentic* components. On the one hand, state actors strategically deploy rhetoric about terrorism to construct certain actors as threats. The U.S. is notorious for leaving ally Saudi Arabia off of its State Sponsors of Terrorism list while including adversary Iran, despite both countries' provision of financial and material resources to militant organizations. The Erdogan government in Turkey uses "terrorist" to label political rivals and justify crackdowns on civil liberties; the Xi government in China applies the "terrorist" classifier as cover for mass internment of the Uighur minority; the Nicaraguan government and many others call journalists "terrorists" when they are critical of state policies.[5] Dixit (2016) refers to such choices as part of a larger process of "terroristization", in which something becomes categorized as a terrorism issue irrespective of its alignment with objective legal definitions. These agentic choices feed into overarching discourses states construct about terrorist threats, highlighting for domestic and international audiences which actors are deemed worthy of the disproportionate and overwhelming response that the "terrorist" designation demands and justifying subsequent policy choices.

Yet there are also deeper ideas about "terrorism" as a category of violence at work here. Academics, policymakers, and the media, even in their attempts to divest "terrorism" of its political baggage by applying strict definitions, cannot fully separate the term from how it is colloquially and unconsciously comprehended (Moore 2015; Raphael 2009). Ideas about terrorism are longstanding, embedded, and influence perceptions of political violence in what Edward Said (1988) describes as the "unthinking" usage of the term—such that stepping outside of the biases and assumptions tangled up with "terrorism" requires a feat of sociopolitical gymnastics. Ideas about terrorism are in some cases so deeply institutionalized as to result in an almost instinctual invocation, enabling an individual to assume that "terrorist" means "Islamist extremist" before that assumption is specified or clarified *without it occurring that that is in fact an assumption rather than a universal understanding*.

I argue that these subconscious, non-agentic associations are the product of long-term processes of identity construction in a state, which are institutionalized and reproduced over time. In the modern era, "terrorism" has become a carte blanche classifier for groups or organizations that threaten a state's ontological security. Distinct from the physical security of a state's territory, ontological security references a state's sense of self, which

[5] "Turkey officially designates Gulen religious group as terrorists." *Reuters*, `https://reut.rs/2I0TNDf`; "U.N. Panel Confronts China Over Reports That It Holds a Million Uighurs in Camps." *The New York Times*, `https://nyti.ms/2OzFrrP`; "In Nicaragua, 2 Prominent Journalists Face Charges Of Terrorism In Attack On Press." *NPR*, `https://n.pr/2RJyHsE`

must be relatively stable in order to provide guidance for policymakers in interacting with others and responding to external phenomena (Mitzen 2006). Challenges to that identity unsettle political elites' conceptualizations of what the state is and what role it is expected to play in the international community. In other words, they constitute existential threats in the eyes of state actors by challenging the notion that those particular actors should retain power. There is no room for negotiation, appeasement, or even conventional battlefield defeat with the sources of these threats: to preserve the position of those in power, such groups or organizations must be removed from the board.

In contemporary politics, "terrorism" serves as the designation under which such removal can be condoned. Changing international norms surrounding the use of force mean that sending armies into battle or cracking down at home often comes with both formal and informal censures, and new legal regimes complicate indiscriminate or clumsy deployments (Finnemore 2003). Complete eradication of an enemy, in most cases, is normatively prohibited. Yet "terrorism" is different. It has not always been so: for much of the 20th century, terrorism was associated with national liberation—and before that, with the actions of tyrannical regimes dating back to Robespierrean France. However, the 1972 hostage-taking at the Munich Olympics by Palestinian organization Black September put non-state belligerents on the map as an *international* threat, one perceived as targeting the international order rather than an oppressive colonial state or authoritarian regime (Stampnitzky 2013; Crenshaw 1972). The subsequent shift in perspective, helped along by the rise of television media and soon-to-come Iranian Revolution as a rejection of Western hegemonic meddling, re-cast "terrorism" as a classifier not for freedom fighters far afield, but for nebulous, existential threats to the status quo—which, in turn, necessitate and justify a qualitatively different type of response.

The understanding that the "terror" category as permissive of otherwise proscribed behavior is therefore near-universal among states. What varies cross-nationally is the particular source of threat to be put in the "terrorism" box. That variation, I argue, depends upon how political elites conceive of their own identities as the legitimate government of a state. Altogether, then, "terrorism", as understood and applied by state actors, refers to political violence challenging the legitimacy of those in power—violence seen as threatening precisely because it cuts to the core of a particular group's legitimacy and its right to govern or rule.

All of which is to say: how state actors talk about terrorism is closely related to their own identities and how they conceive of a state's identity more broadly. That state discourses surrounding terrorism are often heavily rooted in defining sources of threats in terms of identity is therefore not surprising. By insinuating that "terrorism"—a

qualitatively different form of violence demanding an exceptional response—springs from a particular identity group, state actors participate in a particularly extreme process of othering, alienating a group in order to reinforce their own legitimacy. This is at once an agentic choice, in that state actors may consciously choose to demonize a group to shore up domestic public support, and a non-agentic one, enabled by the institutionalization of the idea of the state as being *for* a certain type of group and not others.[6] Similarly, state actors may make an agentic choice to *not* associate terrorism with a particular group, which is again undergirded by institutionalized notions of a more diverse polity. Regardless, state discourses surrounding terrorism can play a significant role in alienating certain groups, which can provide a ripe opportunity for militant organizations claiming to represent those groups.

3.1 Effects on Recruitment

In responding to state discourse surrounding terrorism, recruiters face a dilemma. Recruitment is a costly action: even in the age of the internet, which reduces the costs of *disseminating* recruitment materials, time and effort are still required to produce them. Accordingly, militant organizations must decide on the most efficient use of resources to craft recruitment materials likely to have the maximum impact. This necessitates consideration of which populations are most reasonable to target—a combination of what an organization needs and who is most likely to join.

The alienation mechanism derived from state discourse drives this consideration. In contexts where there is a clear ingroup/outgroup division, with the state casting certain populations as fundamentally Other and incapable of integrating into the dominant society, alienated groups are rational targets for militant organizations claiming to represent those groups. By re-situating an alienated identification as valid and supported, militant organizations can reframe these identifications as positives and, by extension, provide a context in which their expression is celebrated. Moreover, militant organizations can position themselves as avenues through which to defend alienated identifications, again assigning value and meaning to a marginalized group.

- H_1: In contexts where state discourse surrounding terrorism constructs ingroup/outgroup divides as starker, militant organizations will be more likely to employ recruitment appeals based on identity.

[6] See Straus (2015) on the concept of founding narratives, which are ideological frameworks crafted by political leaders at critical junctures to highlight who is part of the polity and, by extension, who are the rightful powerholders. Founding narratives then have downstream implications for politics (in Straus' case, for political violence and genocide), many of which were never intended by the narratives' original creators.

Of course, recruiting from a group one claims to represent may simply be a universally rational course of action. Yet the salience of an identification for an ingroup member is not a given. In a context wherein society is not as sharply divided into "us" and "them" and alienation is weaker, militant organizations will have a harder time recruiting new members on the basis of identity appeals. This is not to say that no one will join due to shared identity, but such individuals are likely to be those for whom an identification is already extremely salient and who express it in a way slightly out of sync with established norms. In such contexts, recruiting based on identity appeals alone is no longer rational, and so militant recruiters will instead target other populations for whom identity is more incidental—namely, those with specialized skills useful to a militant organization, such as engineers, scientists, career criminals, or veterans of other armed conflicts.

- H_2: In contexts where state discourse surrounding terrorism constructs ingroup/outgroup divides as less important, militant organizations will be more likely to employ recruitment appeals based on skills.

4 Research Design

To demonstrate the plausibility of my theory, I undertake a paired comparison of Islamic State (IS) propaganda in France and Germany. I focus on the French and German cases because of their disparate state-level discourses surrounding terrorism despite sharing other macro-level characteristics: while both countries are major European democracies facing similar contemporary threats from constellations of domestic and international militant organizations, they promulgate quite different discourses regarding what terrorism is and whence it comes. If my theory is correct, we should observe variation in how militant organizations respond to these discourses in crafting their recruitment appeals.

Direct links between state actor rhetoric and recruitment strategies are rarely as blatant as in the aforementioned case of the IS response to the Trump administration's travel ban, and so the associations I am able to show are suggestive, not causal. Still, even suggestive evidence raises important questions for future research. Most importantly, it emphasizes the importance of cross-national analysis in studies of terrorist recruitment: continuing to assume universal strategies by militant organizations simply does not accord with the empirical record.

4.1 Case Selection

Shortly after an attacker drove a truck through a crowd gathered for Bastille Day celebrations in Nice, France in July 2016, French prime minister Manuel Valls went on television to discuss what had happened. The attack, he said, "was probably linked to radical Islam in one way or another", despite French police having not yet established the perpetrator's identity or motive at the time of the interview.[7] French president François Hollande echoed Valls' comments, declaring hours after the attack that "all of France is being menaced by fundamentalist Islamist terrorism".[8]

A few months later, Germany suffered a similar truck ramming incident at a Christmas market in Berlin. Rather than responding with divisive language that othered a minority group, however, the German government emphasized a narrative of "strength and calm", or *heroische Gelassenheit* (heroic calmness).[9] Like Hollande, German chancellor Angela Merkel was quick to call the attack terrorism, but her statement in the aftermath focused on the importance of unity and Germany's refugee admissions program, in stark contrast to Hollande's focus on direct threats to France as a whole.[10]

The variegated responses to otherwise similar attacks typify French and German state discourses surrounding terrorism: whereas German discourses stress the diversity of the German polity and minimize associations of terrorism with any one group, French discourses construct clear us vs. them distinctions that Other the country's Muslim populations. The comparison of France and Germany thus constitutes a most likely case, such that my theory should help explain variation across these two cases, even in a suggestive way, if it is to hold water more generally.

The French state discourse identifying terrorism with Muslims while simultaneously constructing Muslims as Other cuts to the core principles of French identity. The French concept of laïcité, born out of struggles between French republicans and the Catholic church in early 20th-century France, enshrines secularism into French law via the 1905 *pacte laïque*, fashioning the French state as the sole protector of the French people and religious identification as serving only to divide the polity (Baubérot 2004). Laïcité—and the subsequent construction of identification with France as the primary indicator of one's Frenchness—continues to pervade contemporary French culture. Former president Jacques Chirac created a federal commission in 2003 to review continued commitment

[7] "Manuel Valls: le terroriste 'sans doute lié à l'islamisme radical'". *Le Monde*, `https://bit.ly/2a5XfLU`

[8] Hollande's statement is often rendered in English as *Islamic* terrorism, but this is a mistranslation of "islamiste", which means "Islamist". See `https://bit.ly/2Obt5Hs` for the full text of the speech in French. All translations of French and German in this paper are my own.

[9] See e.g. "Our Strength" (in English), *Der Spiegel*, `https://bit.ly/2ufwqfw`

[10] "Angela Merkel on Berlin attack: 'We must assume it was terrorism'". *The Independent*, `https://ind.pn/2OuzxIB`

to secularism as a component of French identity,[11] and the concept has been hotly debated (and deployed) in relation to France's contentious law banning variations of *hijab* (Scott 2007). On paper, France's anti-terrorism laws allow for warrantless house raids regardless of one's religious affiliation; in practice, regular raids in the predominantly Muslim *banlieues* reinforce a culture of fear surrounding Muslims, one only exacerbated by state-level discourses continuing to associate Muslims with crime and terrorism (Foley 2013).

In such a context, it is unsurprising that Muslims feel alienated by French society and that some turn to alternative sources of community and belonging. The number of French Muslims known to have joined IS, both in raw numbers and as a proportion of the total French Muslim population, is higher than in any other European country save Russia (Barrett 2017).[12] French scholars of radicalization have documented extensively the role that alienation has played in driving those French Muslims who have joined organizations such as IS, highlighting narratives of "negative celebrity" and opportunities to fight on behalf of a beleaguered community (Khosrokhavar 2017; Roy 2017; Atran 2016). Given this, France would seem to present a ripe opportunity for IS recruitment based on appeals to shared identity and opportunities to belong to the larger global Muslim community IS purports to represent.

In contrast, the German state discourse surrounding terrorism is more complicated. The German experience with Nazism continues to color what attitudes toward tolerance and diversity are acceptable at the national level, due to both domestic and international pressures. To this day, the Holocaust remains the default example in the Western lexicon for "genocide" and Hitler the proverbial picture in the dictionary next to the definition of "evil". Notwithstanding the plethora of other 20th-century atrocities and strongmen in the Western (and non-Western) canon, the Nazi regime functions as the benchmark against which other horrific events and actors are measured. The continued relevance of Nazi imagery in international discourse reinforces the need for the German state to disavow not only Nazi and white nationalist ideologies, but also anything short of broad social inclusivity, in order to retain its position as a member of the international community.

Compounding contemporary concern about inclusivity is the resurgence in far-right, anti-immigrant violence, perhaps best encapsulated in the actions of the National Socialist Underground (NSU) in the early 2000s. Committing at least 10 murders and three bombings targeting immigrants over a decade, the NSU was not confronted by German

[11] "Rapport au President de la Republique", Stasi Commission, December 11, 2003: `https://bit.ly/2LbeMRC`

[12] Prior to the fall of the caliphate, IS counted about 3,400 Russian nationals among its cadres. Germany, the European country with the highest number of foreign fighters after France, has produced about 1,000 foreign fighters.

law enforcement until 2011, when links between the organization's activities were first established. Whatever the reasons for the length of time it took to make these connections (Graef 2018),[13] the NSU captured national attention in 2011 and reawakened concerns about right-wing extremism, which had taken a back burner to left-wing extremism as a national security threat for much of the Cold War. Recent anti-immigrant acts of violence committed by Revolution Chemnitz, the Freital Group, and the Oldschool Society have explicitly engendered references to NSU "terrorism" by federal prosecutors, media outlets, and political elites.[14]

That this association exists alongside that of IS and Islamist extremist violence more generally means that discussions of terrorism in Germany are more multifaceted than in France, limiting the othering and alienation of any single population. We would therefore expect organizations like IS to rely less heavily on appeals to identity as a recruitment strategy in the German context, as such appeals would be less effective in a country that at least pays lip service to tolerance.[15] Instead, we should observe more varied strategic rhetoric on the part of IS, including appeals to utilize specialized skillsets or to join the fight without reference to identity.

4.2 Data

To examine the validity of these predictions, I examine Islamic State propaganda published in French and German. Non-English IS propaganda has received minimal scholarly attention, including in non-English-language scholarship.[16] Yet IS has invested substantial resources in not only translating its flagship magazine, *Dabiq* (later rebranded as *Rumiyah*),[17] from English to numerous other languages, but also in single-language publications such as *Konstatiniyye* (Turkish) and *Istok* (Russian). This suggests that IS recognizes the utility of targeting its appeals in different recruitment environments—and, moreover, functions as evidence of its ability to do so should it so desire.

My French-language corpus consists of 10 issues of *Dar al-Islam*, a magazine similar

[13] "10 Murders, 3 Nazis, and Germany's Moment of Reckoning." *Foreign Policy*, `https://bit.ly/2HzJkxN`

[14] See, for example, "Revolution Chemnitz: Why a German neo-Nazi group was charged with terrorism." *Deutsche Welle*, `https://bit.ly/2SIloOi`; "Rechter Terror in Sachsen: Die Grenzen zur Mitte verschwimmen." *Der Tagesspiegel*, `https://bit.ly/2N1isGv`; "German police arrest six on suspicion of belonging to far-right terror group." *The Guardian*, `https://bit.ly/2NZvY14`

[15] Shifting public opinion and electoral dynamics in Germany have led to increased anti-immigrant rhetoric on the national political sphere and new restrictions on refugee admissions. See e.g. "Germany's Angela Merkel Agrees to Limits on Accepting Refugees." *The New York Times*, `https://nyti.ms/2zaX3TU`

[16] For exceptions, see Sparks (2018), Ohl (2017), and Ascone & Longhi (2017).

[17] IS published *Dabiq* from July 2014 to July 2016, at which point it was renamed *Rumiyah* after IS lost control of the Syrian town of Dabiq, prophesied to be the site of the final clash between Muslims and the "crusaders" (broadly interpreted as the West; "Rumiyah" means "Rome" in Arabic).

to IS's more widely distributed *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* but published solely in French (rather than published first in English and then translated into other languages) and released between December 2014 and August 2016. I compare these magazines with the first nine issues of IS's *Rumiyah* magazine published in German, released between September 2016 and May 2017. Altogether, I analyze over 240,000 words of non-English IS propaganda, which represents a significant and to my knowledge unmatched empirical contribution to examining IS media cross-nationally.

As with all terrorism data, mine have limitations. German *Rumiyah* issues are translations, rather than original pieces of propaganda produced in German, and so could be reasonably criticized as not targeting potential German recruits specifically. Still, the comparison of French- and German-language sources allows me to investigate how recruitment appeals vary in countries with similar socioeconomic and political characteristics yet diverging discourses surrounding terrorism. Moreover, even the German "translation" of *Rumiyah* includes several unique graphics and articles not present in the English version, as I show below. Using French and German further facilitates pinpointing recruitment environments in a way that English would not, given its status as a global lingua franca. While there are numerous ways in which this research strategy continues to lack precision—potential recruits in Austria and parts of Switzerland and Belgium likely read the German edition of *Rumiyah*, and French is also widely spoken throughout North and Sub-Saharan Africa—the relatively small geographic area in which German is a native language, along with the prevalence of Arabic in major recruitment environments in North Africa (which would be the native language of most IS media officers), supports the intuition that the French- and German-language recruiting areas are primarily France and Germany.

5 Preliminary Results and Discussion

As an initial look at the data, I fit separate structural topic models for the French and German corpora (Roberts *et al.* 2014). STMs inductively identify clusters of words, or "topics", discussed in a document. Unlike supervised text classification methods, STMs require no assumptions on the part of the researcher about what words are likely to occur together or how certain subjects are likely to be described. Accordingly, they allow for a quick first look at broad trends in a large corpus without having to read every word.

Topics derived from both the French and German corpora are presented in Tables 1 and 2.[18] There are no *a priori* assumptions in unsupervised text classification as to the

[18]As topic models are iterative, results will vary slightly if the same model is estimated multiple times.

French Corpus

Topic 1 allah, if, father, infidel, soldier, muhammad, combat	**Topic 2** message, allah, religion, verse, state, whose, good
Topic 3 prophet, muslim, combat, return, woman, because, thus	**Topic 4** all, like, son, says, those, then
Topic 5 has, islam, allah, against, after	

Table 1: Topics from an unsupervised model, French corpus. The analysis was conducted in French but translated here for ease of intelligibility. Despite running multiple models and choosing the one that produced topics with the highest exclusivity, there is still a decent amount of overlap.

German Corpus

Topic 1 that, muslim, religion, sent, truth, people	**Topic 2** soldiers, city, do, like, men, women, crusader, due to
Topic 3 islam, caliphate, kufr, muhammad, adversary, know, taught	**Topic 4** allah, was, son, said
Topic 5 jihad, tradition, islamic, mujahideen, killed, defectors, father	

Table 2: Topics from an unsupervised model, German corpus. The analysis was conducted in German but translated here for ease of intelligibility. While the German topic model appeared to generate more distinct topics than the French model, the German topics feature more religious language than the French topics, contrary to expectations.

To correct for differences in results arising from different starting values of the model parameter, I use the `selectModel` function to estimate models for two expectation-maximization algorithm steps and evaluate the 20% of models with the highest likelihood of being the "true" model for semantic coherence and

appropriate number of topics; I use five because models with more than five topics started to become nonsensical.

As it stands, topics appear to neither differ significantly across the corpora nor within corpora. Words one might logically associate with IS propaganda—"Allah", "religion", "Muslim", "combat"—appear commonly in both the French and German texts with little immediately apparent differentiation in how they are used. If anything, the German texts include more specific religious language, such as *kufr* (*kafir*, or infidel), *Abtrünnigen* (defectors), and *Kreuzzügler* (crusaders), than the French texts, where references are vaguer, e.g. to *versets* (verses) and *messages* (messages). Based on this analysis alone, we could not conclude that the French and German corpora even include meaningfully different appeals, much less in the direction predicted by the theory.

There are a number of reasons to take this general analysis with a grain of salt, however. First, unsupervised learning relies heavily on the models chosen, the number of topics, and a researcher's own interpretations of what those topics mean. Absent additional context from close reading of the texts themselves, it is not clear how, for example, propagandists are deploying terms like "tradition". Second, all topic models are highly sensitive to assumptions involved in pre-processing the texts. Such pre-processing typically involves removing a list of "stopwords", or common words that do not add meaning (e.g. "the" and "a" in English). Tools for processing texts in other languages are less well-developed and include a number of odd choices: for example, the German stopword list includes *würden* but not *wurden*, which depending on context may be different tenses of the same verb (*werden*, to become). The French stopword list includes some conjunctions (e.g. *et*, and) but not others (e.g. *si*, if, although also sometimes so). Removing these words from the analysis changes the composition of the topics, again showcasing the sensitivity of these models to small changes.

Engaging in the sort of close reading required for coding appeals by hand trades speed for the greater comprehension of the human brain; as such, I present an extremely preliminary and incomplete analysis here. As a reminder, I expect more exclusionary state discourses surrounding terrorism in the French case to be correlated with more frequent usage of recruitment appeals based on shared identity among Muslims. Likewise, I expect less exclusionary discourses in Germany to be correlated with more frequent usage of appeals to potential recruits with specialized skills.[19]

Three primary takeaways emerge from close reading of *Dar al-Islam* and the German

exclusivity of topics.

[19]For now, I ask the reader to accept my interpretations of French and German terrorism discourses, which are of course subject to contestation. I measure these more directly in other work based on elite interviews and more extensive archival research.

edition of *Rumiyah*. First, each magazine is clearly targeted toward a specific recruitment environment (France and Germany, respectively), supporting the intuition that treating foreign recruitment in the West as a homogenous collection of appeals ignores significant variation. The second issue of *Dar al-Islam*, entitled "Qu'Allah maudisse la France" ("May Allah Curse France"), features a detailed history of French involvement in Muslim countries since the Crusades that does not feature in its English-language propaganda publications, identifying the cause of the First Crusade as "propagande" (propaganda) disseminated by French Pope Urban II. The magazine overall devotes significant space to discussing and degrading the targets of attacks in France specifically, such as referring to *Charlie Hebdo* writers as "les mécréants impurs et pervers" (impure and perverse infidels).

The German edition of *Rumiyah*, despite being mostly a translation of a magazine produced in English, includes content with no analogues in the English edition. Each issue begins with a list of recently distributed propaganda videos in German and features numerous graphics missing from English-language versions of the magazine. (For an archetypical example, see Figure 1.) While much of the content remains the same across various translations of *Rumiyah*, that IS media officers took the time to create specific content for certain countries indicates an acknowledgment of the utility of more targeted recruitment strategies.

Second, both *Dar al-Islam* and *Rumiyah* are overwhelmingly religious publications. In the introduction to the first issue of *Dar al-Islam*, IS propagandists state their aim in no uncertain terms: "It is for this reason that this magazine is called Dar al-Islam, to remind you of the benefit of living under the law of Allah, among believers."[20] Issue 3, entitled "La destruction des idoles" ("The Destruction of Idols"), includes an extensive theological discussion justifying IS's demolishing of cultural sites across Iraq and Syria. *Rumiyah* is similarly religious: its first two issues include an extensive multi-part essay entitled "Die Religion des Islam [*sic*] und die Gemeinschaft der Muslime" ("The Religion of Islam and the Community of Muslims"), and long-winded discussions of obligations to undertake the *haj* also feature prominently. All of this constitutes near-constant invocation of a larger Muslim identity.

At first glance, this seems to run counter to H_2, which predicts fewer religious appeals in propaganda targeted at Germany. Yet it is important to note that IS, as a fundamentalist religious organization, should be expected to trade in primarily religious discourse. Moreover, even a cursory comparison of *Dar al-Islam* and *Rumiyah* reveals that they have different aims. *Dar al-Islam* acts as a primer on the Islamic State, with each issue serving as a discrete, themed package introducing readers to a component of IS doctrine or

[20] "C'est pour cela que ce magazine se nomme Dâr al-Isâm, pour ce rappeler cet immense bienfait qu'est celui de vivre sous la loi d'Allâh, au milieu des croyants." *Dar al-Islam* translates roughly as "land of Islam".

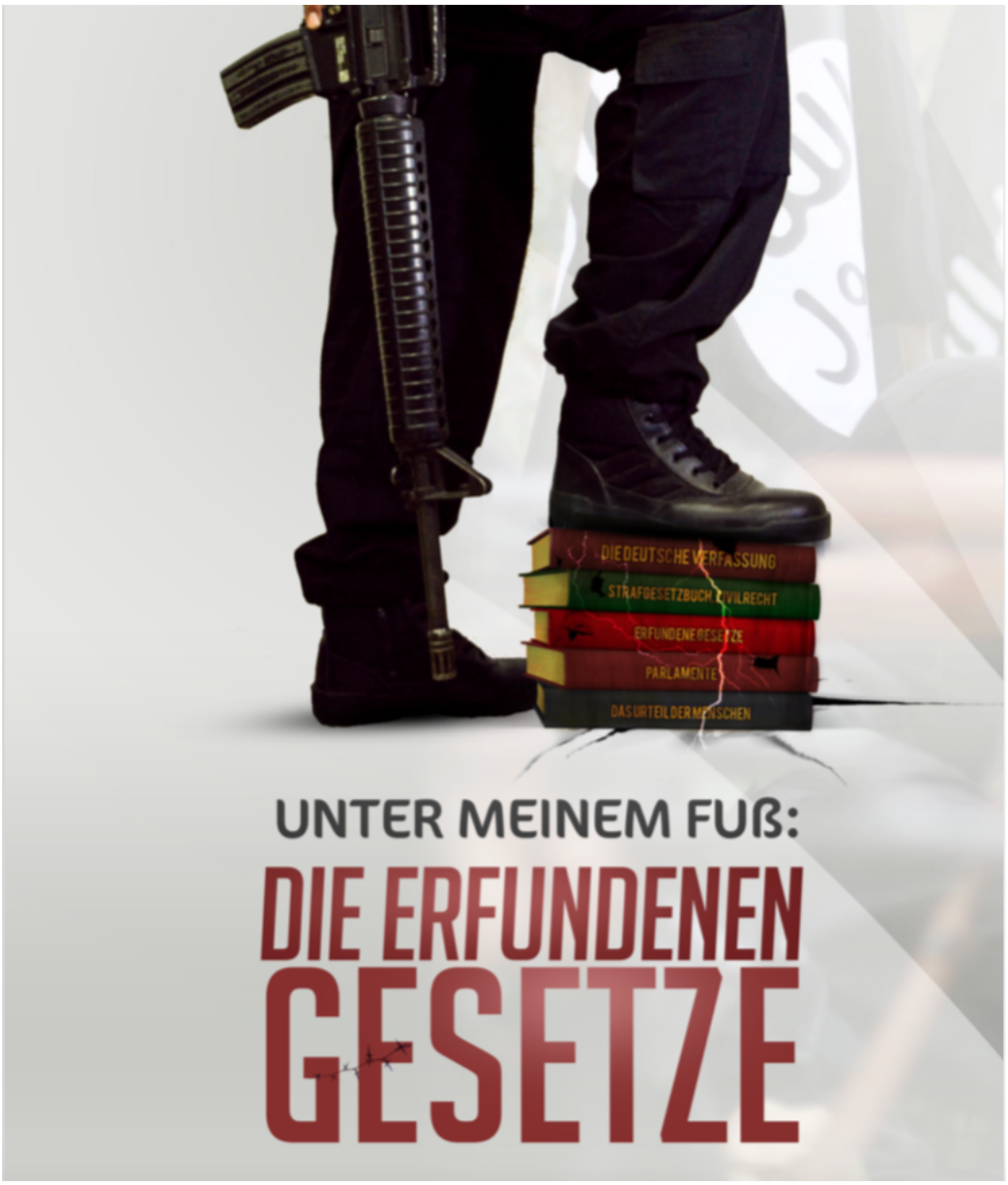

Figure 1: Graphic from the second issue of *Rumiyah*'s German edition, published October 4, 2016. There is no comparable graphic in the English-language version of *Rumiyah*. The large text translates as "Under my foot: The invented laws", with various German legal documents underneath the boot (such as the *Verfassung*, or constitution, and the *Strafgesetzbuch*, or criminal code), as well as more general descriptions of laws (e.g. *der Urteil der Menschen*, the judgment of men), suggesting that the graphic could have been easily adapted to fit other national contexts had IS media officers wished to do so.

governance. It is much more explicitly oriented toward recruitment, with glossy spreads depicting sunlit photos of daily life in the caliphate and regular reminders of the inability of Western states to counter IS's power. *Rumiyah*, meanwhile, is more focused on lengthy

doctrinal debates and recountings of militants' actions in various combat theaters around the world.

One possible inference is that *Dar al-Islam* and *Rumiyah* are targeting different audiences, and not solely in terms of nationality: *Dar al-Islam* targets the larger community of French Muslims, while *Rumiyah* targets German (and other) sympathizers who are already broadly amenable to IS doctrine and methods. There is some degree of selection present in any propaganda scenario: individuals who seek out extremist propaganda are likely already systematically different from the general population, and so even recruitment strategies that cast a wide net are only reaching a certain fraction of a potential audience. Still, that these publications have different aims suggests that IS expects individuals consuming propaganda to vary systematically across contexts. The contexts in which IS has chosen to create country-specific publications—Turkey and Russia being the others besides France—are potentially rich pools of recruits, leading to different recruitment strategies than in places such as Germany. Whether this variation exists primarily along identity-based lines will require further research—but some difference does indeed appear to exist and to have affected IS recruitment strategies.

A final takeaway is that IS is hyper-aware of Western discourse surrounding the organization and frequently attempts to co-opt it for recruitment purposes. Beginning in its third issue, *Dar al-Islam* includes a column entitled "Dans les mots de l'ennemi" ("In the Words of the Enemy"), featuring detailed breakdowns of pronouncements by Western politicians and analysts as evidence of IS's success at spreading fear and establishing a strong caliphate. (See Figure 2 for an example.) Similar content is less present in *Rumiyah*, although this may be a product of that magazine's different objectives. Still, the attention paid in IS propaganda to Western discourse underscores the need for studies of how militant organizations respond to state rhetoric in crafting propaganda and recruitment strategies. The decision of how to recruit is not made in a vacuum: organizations are both constrained and enabled by the discourses promulgated by state actors, and thus recruitment strategies must be treated as responsive and iterative in order to be properly understood.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that past examinations of terrorist recruitment that conceive of the phenomenon as a dyadic interaction between organization and potential recruit miss the important role played by state actors. State discourse shapes the environment in which both recruits and recruiters operate, casting certain groups as inextricably

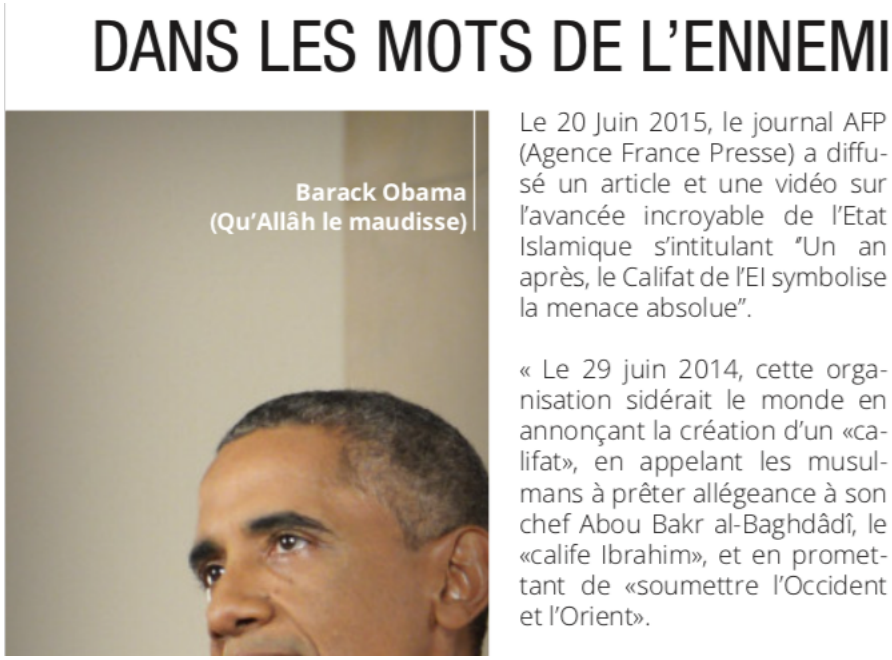

Figure 2: An excerpt from IS's "Dans les mots de l'ennemi" ("In the Words of the Enemy") column. The article discusses the "incredible advance" and "absolute menace" of IS, as described in *Agence France-Presse* in June 2015, and continues on to discuss this reporting as clear evidence of the strength of IS and the incompetence of Western states in combating it.

related to terrorism and thus creating opportunities for organizations to target alienated populations. Organizations, in turn, can co-opt state rhetoric and use it to paint themselves as viable alternatives for those seeking a sense of community or a chance to protect a persecuted population.

Although the evidence I have presented here is preliminary, it indicates that the Islamic State, at least, both targets its recruitment strategies differentially across national contexts and responds to state discourse in crafting recruitment appeals. While I am unable to show direct evidence that IS is capitalizing directly on the alienation of Muslim populations by states, it remains plausible that the organization is assessing the different characteristics of pools of potential recruits and adjusting its strategies accordingly.

All of this suggests two avenues for further research. First, it is possible that recruitment appeals vary cross-nationally not in terms of identity-based content, as I have theorized here, but rather on a scale from more general identity-based content to more specific. *Dar al-Islam*, IS's French-only magazine, exhibits much more basic discussions of the organization's doctrine than the in-depth theological essays present in *Rumiyah*, perhaps because alienation of the French population means the potential pool of recruits

in France is wider and not limited to ideological diehards. Testing this proposition requires comparison of *Dar al-Islam* not to *Rumiyah*, but rather to another country-specific IS publication such as *Konstatinyye* (in Turkey) or *Istok* in Russia.

Second, demonstrating direct responsiveness on the part of militant organizations to state discourses requires more systematic data on those discourses than broad generalizations about state-level attitudes toward terrorism. Elite interviews to be conducted this summer will help flesh out assessment of discourses surrounding terrorism. Time series analysis of major speeches by Western leaders or narratives deployed following attacks—and whether or not the content of IS publications changes accordingly—presents another potential method for demonstrating a linkage between recruitment strategies and state discourse.

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