

**Violent Versus Non-Violent Actors:
An Empirical Study of Different Types of Extremism**

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Abstract

It is notoriously difficult to distinguish between those who simply espouse radical beliefs and those who are prepared to commit acts of extremist-related violence. This poses a problem for those responsible for counter terrorism (CT) needing to discriminate between the two. The present study adopted an empirical approach to compare violent and non-violent extremists. In-depth case studies on 40 extremist individuals were developed and analyzed for key themes, sub-themes and underlying variables. Violent extremists (VEs) and non-violent extremists (NVEs) were compared to understand where similarities and differences lie. Identified were a number of variables that distinguish between VEs and NVEs; this has implications for CT in terms of prevent, pursue and intervention. Results can, for example, assist those responsible for CT and law enforcement to focus on variables that distinguish between violent and non-violent extremists in order to identify those who are most high risk (i.e. likely to actively facilitate and/ or commit acts of extreme violence) and focus their efforts on these, rather than on those who are not. Results can also inform CT practitioners and policy-makers on the development of tailored interventions for different types of extremist individuals and groups.

Key words: Extremism, counter-terrorism, violence, non-violence, risk assessment.

The scale and number of terrorist attacks worldwide since 9/11 has raised awareness that large numbers of people across the world hold extreme opinions, and a subset of these are prepared to commit acts of violence in the name of their beliefs. In reality, whilst many express extremist views, and may support the use of violence to achieve aims and objectives, very few of these actively facilitate or commit acts of extreme violence (Atran, 2010): This creates a problem for law enforcement and counter terrorism (CT) practitioners who need to discriminate between the two. Each year, the Security Services in the UK and the US review thousands of preliminary inquiries into potential cases of terrorism; with most involving a short-term, basic level of investigation: Furthermore, due mainly to limited resources, only a small proportion will be opened as full investigations (Stewart & Burton, 2009). With substantial numbers of people on terrorist 'watch lists', the challenge for law enforcement and CT practitioners is to conduct risk assessments in order to identify real threats (Borum, 2015) and to train agents to be confident enough to do so (Gibbs, 2009). However, it is difficult to distinguish between those who hold and espouse radical beliefs and those who are prepared to go further and commit acts of extremist-related violence².

² In the current paper, the term 'radicalized' means that an individual may hold and/or express extremist viewpoints, but not necessarily act on these views. 'Radicalisation' is the process whereby these views are established and developed. Different individuals may be at different stages of the radicalisation process and as a result be more or less extreme in their views. 'Extremists' are individuals who have been radicalized. For the current research, the working definition of 'extremist' (which informed the inclusion/ exclusion criteria for cases to be analyzed for analysis), was 'Offenders who support ideas and goals that are far outside the mainstream attitudes of UK society regarding specific issues (such as politics or religion). To be included in this research, individuals had to be convicted of a criminal offence where there was evidence that the offence was in some way motivated by extremist beliefs.' In order to distinguish between violent and non-violent extremists, a definition of violence was also needed. Violence was defined as: (i) any act which constitutes, or (ii) any potential act which, if carried out would constitute, the offence of murder, attempted murder, manslaughter,

This topic has attracted interest from researchers from a range of disciplines, and has resulted in a mass of literature in this area. However, a key problem with this is that “Though a variety of risk assessment technologies are available for a range of populations and types of violent behavior, a robust empirical foundation does not yet exist for understanding the risk of terrorism or involvement in violent extremist activity” (Borum, 2015, p.63). Risk assessments need to define the outcomes that are of concern, especially with regard to extremism and terrorism (Borum, 2015). For example, some of those responsible for CT or Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) are concerned about expressions of support for terrorism and how this can perpetuate and facilitate violence, whilst others may need to focus only on those who are likely to conduct acts of violence. Gaps in the literature mean that practitioners are faced with a difficult dilemma, whereby they are required to assess the degree of risk posed by an individual, or group of individuals who are known to hold extremist beliefs and attitudes, without a robust understanding of the similarities and differences between violent and non-violent extremists.

The present study does not examine how people become radicalized; instead it focuses on how, when and why individuals choose different extremist-related violent or non-violent actions. At the start of the current study, an initial review of the literature identified only two books (Cole & Cole, 2009; Merari, 2010) and a handful

culpable homicide, assault, and/or real injury. To be included in the sample and categorized as violent, individuals must have been convicted of a violent action or on the basis that a perceived threat of action existed. That is, as well as individuals who had actually conducted acts of (extremist-related) violence, individuals who had not conducted an act of violence, but were arrested prior to such and convicted on the basis that there was sufficient evidence to suggest that they would have conducted the act if they had not been disrupted, were also included. Finally, we use the term ‘terrorist’ to refer to extremists who attempt to evoke terror to via violence. The definition of terrorism used here was ‘a crime that endangers another individual or violence with broader intent to intimidate, influence or change policy or opinion’ (Gibbs, 2009). See Method section for a further explanation of how cases were selected for the current study.

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of empirical research articles/ reports in this area (e.g. Altunbas & Thornton, 2011; Bartlett & Miller, 2012; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2014; Mumford, et al., 2008; Speckhard, 2007; Tosini, 2010). Moreover, a Home Office review of the literature on Islamist extremism in the UK found no studies that examine why those ‘at risk’ choose *not* to become involved in violent extremism, and that, in general, robust evidence for factors underlying extremism is weak (Home Office, 2011a). Whilst more recent studies have taken an empirical approach (e.g. Corner & Gill, 2015; Gill, Horgan & Deckert, 2014; Smith, Damphousse & Roberts, 2006; Horgan, Shortland, Abbasciano, & Walsh, 2016; Perliger, Koehler-Derrick, & Pedahzur, 2016)³, a thorough review published in 2017 noted that empirical evidence regarding violent extremism and how to counter it is ‘nascent’ (Schomerus, El Taraboulsi-McCarthy & Sandhar, 2017), and (Horgan, 2017, p. 199 stated that . “psychological research on terrorist behavior is conspicuously underdeveloped”

Understanding violent extremism: Approaches, theories and models

Several theories, models and frameworks have been developed to describe processes underlying radicalization and extremism (e.g. see Borum, 2003; Moghaddam, 2005; McCauley, 2006; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). These approaches tend to assume that individuals are driven by some kind of grievance; however, McCauley and Moskalenko (2014) proposed that (a) the majority of people with radical views and ideas will never take part in extremist-related violence; but also that (b) some join radical groups without ever being radicalized (i.e. radical opinion is not necessary for radical action). Moreover, whilst the pathway to

³ Quantitative analyses of terrorism tend to focus on incidents rather than those responsible for attacks (Chermak & Gruenewald, 2015), and most databases do not include the level of details examined in the current study.

radicalization is often inferred as key to terrorism; radicalization is actually only one of various pathways into violent extremism. Others agree that radicalization does not necessarily equate to violent action (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Borum, 2011a; Borum, 2011b; Mandel, 2010; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2014; Rahimullah, Larmer, & Abdalla, 2013; Schomerus, El Taraboulsi-McCarthy & Sadnhar, 2017). What is generally agreed is that due to 'protective' factors, some individuals will be more or less vulnerable to 'push' and 'pull' factors (de Ruiter & Nicholls, 2011; Horgan, 2008); which might help explain differences between violent extremists (VEs) and non-violent extremists (NVEs).

Empirical studies of violent versus non-violent extremism

Altunbas and Thornton (2011) compared the characteristics of 'homegrown' Islamic terrorists in the UK to a representative sample of 1363 UK Muslims and found that Muslims with higher educational levels were somewhat more likely to participate in terrorist activities. Other predictors of involvement in terrorism included employment status, UK citizenship and ethnic origin. Another empirical comparison of VEs, NVES and a control group comprising a representative cross section of young Muslims was conducted by Bartlett and Miller (2012). Similarities and differences were found for a number of factors, such as: (a) Social and personal characteristics; (b) Religion and ideology; (c) Violence, war and Jihad; (d) Journey to violence; and (e) Terrorism and radicalization in the community. Ultimately, Bartlett and Miller's (2012) comparative work identified some distinguishable features between violent and non-violent extremists. However, it also identified shared features between those with no extremist beliefs and those who were VEs and

NVEs, illustrating the complexity of the challenge faced by law enforcement and CT practitioners.

Kruglanski et al. (2017) suggested that violent extremism should be treated as a specific type of extremism. Other recent studies focus on behavioral differences regarding extremists with a similar ideological perspective, distinguishing between 'actions and words' (or 'belief and force') and suggesting that we should examine the roles and functions extremists perform and discriminate different types of extremists accordingly (Gill, Horgan & Deckert, 2014; Gruenewald, Chermak & Freilich, 2013; Horgan, 2014; Horgan, Shortland, Abbasciano & Walsh, 2016; Perliger, Koehler-Derrick & Pedahzur, 2016; Schomerus, El Taraboulsi-McCarthy & Sadnhar, 2017; Silke, 2014). For example, Simcox and Dyer (2013) identified 5 types of US Al-Qaeda (AQ) members: active participants, aspirants, facilitators, trained aspirants and ideologues. Each vary in terms of how operationally active they are which has important implications for risk assessment. Moreover, Gherabeyya (2016) distinguished between 'symbolic' and 'material' (i.e. physical) violence, the former referring to fear and hatred of 'the other', that leads to the latter. Horgan (2014) stated that varying levels of 'dangerousness' was of clear relevance to CT practitioners, but so far this has been relatively unexplored in the literature.

In 2010, Singh, Serper, Reinharth and Fazel (2010) identified more than 120 risk assessment tools for clinical and/or professional judgment. Tools that might be relevant in terms of extremism, include the Multi-Level Guidelines (MLG: Cook, 2014; Cook, Hart, & Kropp, 2013), the Violent Extremism Risk Assessment (VERA-2: Pressman, 2009; Pressman & Flockton, 2014), the Extremist Risk Guidelines (ERG-22+: Lloyd & Dean, 2015), and, specifically for lone actors, the Terrorist

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Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18: Meloy & Gill, 2014). The MLG comprises 20 risk factors with four nested domains (Individual, Individual-Group, Group, and Group-Societal), the VERA-2 31 factors, and the ERG 22+ (22 factors are identified but it is acknowledged that more may be added). The ERG is in prisons in England and Wales whilst the VERA is used in Australia. Both are developed from the literature on terrorism and are therefore unsurprisingly similar in terms of the factors they propose, except that the VERA includes six protective factors as well as risk factors. There is considerable overlap regarding these and the MLG, despite the fact that the MLG (i) was designed for the assessment and management of group-based violence only, not specifically for extremism, and (ii) does not include protective factors. For example, a content evaluation of three risk assessment tools found eight overlapping content areas between the MLG and VERA-2 (Cook et al., 2015).

The present study

More evidence is required regarding how individuals with extremist views may vary in terms the risk they pose and to inform those responsible for countering terrorism and extremism. CONTEST is the UK Home Office CT strategy that aims “to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence” (Home Office, 2011b, p. 3). The strategy is organized around four work streams (the ‘4 Ps’): Pursue - to stop terrorist attacks; Prevent - to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism; Protect - to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack; and Prepare - to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack. The present project relates mainly to the Pursue and Prevent elements of CONTEST, by aiming to determine and explore similarities and

differences between those with extremist views who conduct acts of violence and those who do not. Detailed, in-depth case studies⁴ on 40 extremist individuals were developed and analyzed to identify key themes, sub-themes and underlying variables. VEs and NVEs were then compared to understand where similarities and differences lie.

This study addresses a difficult problem which scholars have yet to resolve, namely: Why are some people with extreme views prepared to commit acts of violence whilst others, with seemingly similar views, are not? The aim was to further our understanding of how to distinguish between and detect high and low risk extremists, that can be applied by those responsible for pursue, prevention and intervention, as well as for risk assessment purposes.

Method

Categorizing violent and non-violent extremists

There are various definitions of ‘radicalization’ within the literature, with most proposing a process whereby a person’s beliefs become increasingly extreme. For example: “Radicalization is defined as the process by which people come to support terrorism and extremism and, in some cases, to then participate in terrorist activity” (Home Office, 2011b, p. 108). As already noted, radicalization is often implied as an essential step necessary for violent extremism, but this is not necessarily the case (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Borum, 2011a; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2014). Regarding ‘extremism’, the UK Government defines this as the: “... vocal or active opposition to

⁴ Each case study referred to one individual only, and included a mix of group extremists (i.e. those operating as part of a group) and lone actor extremists (those who have planned, or have been planning, the execution of a plot alone and planning to execute the plot alone).

fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs” (HMG, 2015, p. 9).

However, within the literature there is a lack of clear definition or consensus regarding extremism: Many studies fail to define what is meant by the term, and tend to be vague regarding whether the ‘extremism’ refers to a person’s opinions, actions, or both.

The main issue regarding different definitions of extremism and radicalization is that some studies use either or both terms, sometimes to refer only to extremist thought processes, sometimes to infer that action (mainly violence) is an inevitable outcome of increasingly extremist viewpoints; whilst others do not clearly or overtly distinguish between extremist viewpoints and violent action. The present project distinguishes between violent and non-violent extremism. Those referred to here as ‘extremists’ are known to hold attitudes and beliefs that do not fit with mainstream opinion regarding political and/or ideological issues⁵. Data was gathered on individuals that were identified as being ‘extremists’, and had been convicted of a criminal offence (violent or non-violent) where there was evidence that this was in some way motivated by extremism.

In terms of categorizing individuals as VE or NVE, violence was defined as any act which constituted, or any potential act which, if carried out would constitute, murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, culpable homicide, assault, and/or real injury to another, and/ or cause serious and significant structural damage⁶.

⁵ We acknowledge here that it is difficult and somewhat contentious to define extremists from this standpoint, but this research is focused on supporting CT practitioners and therefore needed to take a pragmatic approach to the definition used.

⁶ It is important to note that by including the words ‘any potential act’, the definition of violence was extended to include serious threat of action, as well as action itself. As such, to be included as a

Moreover, those who had knowingly conducted non-violent behaviors that would facilitate violence conducted by others were categorized as VEs. As such, the sample comprises extremists convicted of non-violent behaviors (e.g. sending racist hate mail), and those convicted of acts of violence intended to cause human and/or structural damage (e.g. providing explosives, conducting a terrorist attack).

Case Study Research

A number of detailed case studies were developed and substantial data generated in order to identify similarities and differences between VEs and NVEs. A multi-method approach was applied, with Case Study Research (CSR) used as a starting point to generate and analyze rich and detailed information about different types of extremists. CSR is a method commonly used in qualitative research and has been demonstrated as a rigorous approach in its own right (Hartley, 2004; Stake, 2005, as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006). CSR is an investigative method that can explain, describe, illustrate and enlighten understanding regarding contemporary phenomena and theoretical principles (Yin, 2003). CSR is appropriate when the subject of interest is broadly defined (Yin, 2003), allowing an examination of complex social concepts, in depth and in their real-world context (Flyvbjerg, 2006). It involves detailed investigation via the collection and analysis of evidence that can be quantitative, qualitative or both, from multiple sources and via various methods (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). The goal is to identify patterns, determine meanings, construct conclusions and to build, develop, revise or support theory to understand

'violent' extremist in the present study, individuals must have been convicted of conducting a violent act and/ or on the basis that a perceived threat of action existed. This meant that as well as individuals who had actually conducted acts of (extremist-related) violence, individuals who had not conducted an act of violence, but were arrested prior to such and convicted on the basis that there was sufficient evidence to suggest that they would have conducted the act if they had not been disrupted, were also included.

complex social phenomena (Kohlbacher, 2006). As a method it holds up well to scrutiny compared to other methods (Flyvbjerg, 2006), and is a reliable and respectable procedure of social analysis (Eckstein, as cited in Stake, 2005).

Selecting case studies

The selection of cases should be based on three criteria: (a) each case represents the phenomena of interest (the 'quintain'⁷); (b) cases provide diversity across contexts; and (c) cases provide opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts (Stake, 2006). Case studies should be chosen on the basis of their 'fit' regarding the definition of what is being examined (Stake, 2005). Exemplary cases are strong examples of the phenomenon of interest; cases that are most likely to illuminate research questions (Ragin, 1992; Yin, 2003). Selection should be based on their typicality, with detailed descriptions and definitions necessary to judge the degree and the extent of that fit with regards to the special cases of interest (Stake, 2005). The present study took a strategic approach to select critical case studies that best represented the definition, criteria and requirements of the research. Strategic selection involves choosing cases that represent the 'most likely' or 'least likely' exemplars to confirm or challenge propositions and hypotheses; in this instance cases that clearly fitted one of the two types of extremists were chosen. Thus, for the present study, cases that best represented violent or non-violent extremists were chosen, following these respected ground rules.

⁷ 'Quintain' is a term used to describe the object or phenomenon to be studied. Cases are selected to provide the best opportunities to study the quintain (the unusual and the ordinary) (Stake, 2006).

Case study development

Prior knowledge of a phenomenon can guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2003), and allow for a degree of generalisation where appropriate, in terms of how far and where findings can inform our understanding of and make inferences regarding phenomena outside of the original cases examined (Kohlbacher, 2006). Data collection and analysis should be an iterative process, involving careful description of information and development of categories. Data can then be organized around certain topics, key themes or questions. Examination should query whether data fits well into expected categories (Kohlbacher, 2006). It follows that specific case studies should only be used analytically if embedded in an appropriate theoretical framework (Mitchell, as cited in Stake 2005). Data can be examined, categorized, tabulated and tested against the research questions, initial propositions and expected patterns that have been informed and guided by research conducted prior to data collection. To demonstrate rigour, research questions must be clear, and a review of the literature can lead to carefully posed questions and guide data collection.

Four principles of data collection have been identified (Yin, 2003), and were followed in the present research: (i) Use multiple sources of evidence, which allows data triangulation in order to maximize credibility and strengthen construct validity; (ii) Create a case study database, including references and sources of data etc., to increase reliability; (iii) Maintain a chain of evidence by keeping a paper trail to ensure reliability, to build a story, to provide evidence for interpretations and conclusions reached; and (iv) Be cautious regarding data from electronic sources –

set limits and priorities regarding web searches and sources to be included; cross-check information.

First an initial pool of individuals were identified that fit our working definition of 'extremist' and inclusion criteria. This was achieved via internet searching for individuals named in existing literature in this area (e.g. in government reports and academic journal articles) and by consulting subject matter experts (SMEs). Then, for each case study, all information, from various sources (such as research reports, articles and internet news sites), that could be found and verified, was gathered and collated until saturation was reached, in that no new information about that individual could be found⁸. Finding cases that were of sufficient detail and could be easily categorized as violent or non-violent was difficult, especially for the NVEs: Few such cases were reported, and when they were, the amount and level of detail available was often sparse⁹. The number of cases was therefore determined by saturation, in that as many cases as possible were developed. This led to a total of 56 case studies, determined by availability of data. Three researchers then independently reviewed every case study and were required to categorize each of these as either a VE or NVE. When agreement could not be reached, case studies (n = 16) were discarded from the sample, resulting in a final sample size of 40 comprising 24 violent (VE) and 16 non-violent (NVE) cases in total¹⁰.

⁸ Violent attacks have attracted most media coverage from 9/11 onwards and as such, compared to NVEs, there were inevitably many more VE cases available. Those that best fitted definitions of 'violent' and 'extremism', and those that generated the most information were chosen.

⁹ The mean word count was 1841.87 (SD=1148.78) for VE case studies, and 1206.12 (SD=902.61) for NVE case studies.

¹⁰ Other studies have achieved larger sample sizes but most have not sought to investigate the number of variables and depth of understanding that our case studies include. The current study required substantial details regarding, for example, psychological issues, potential trauma, exclusion/rejection, sense of purpose, belonging etc., therefore many case studies were excluded because this information and level of detail was not available

Exclusion criteria

Cases were excluded when: (i) there was insufficient information and/or evidence to clearly categorize the individual as either violent or non-violent; (ii) agreement could not be reached between three independent researchers in terms of which of these to assign it to; (iii) there was insufficient (in terms of amount and detail) information to develop a substantial case study; (iv) the individual was operating in and/ or planning an attack outside of the UK¹¹; and/or (v) the case was pre-9/11¹².

Analytical approach

The aim of this study was to identify factors that underlie extremism, and to compare different types of extremism (violent versus non-violent) in order to understand how these are similar and how they are different. As such, analysis of all case studies was conducted to identify themes, sub-themes (and the variables that constitute these) that emerged¹³, and then compare VE and NVE cases regarding these factors. “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the dataset” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p 86). Thematic analysis is an appropriate technique for identifying repeated patterns of meaning across a set of data (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006). Analysis commences by reading and exploring the data

¹¹ Empirical research on extremism has included individuals operating across UK and the US; however, at present we cannot know whether differences might exist between countries regarding factors underlying extremism. As such, we cannot know whether findings from this previous research can be applied to extremism in specific countries such as the UK. For this reason it was decided that only UK-based extremists would be included in this study.

¹² This was chosen because the nature and prevalence of extremism has changed since the attack on the US on September 11 2001.

¹³ A bottom-up approach was taken in that we did not have a priori themes.

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in order to search for themes, sub-themes, patterns and relationships, and insights.

The present study followed six overlapping stages¹⁴:

1. Case studies were read several times in order to understand the general life histories and events.
2. Initial coding commenced and notes of initial thoughts were made.
3. Data was colour-coded to clarify emerging themes and sub-themes, and notes were made of patterns and re-emerging relationships etc.
4. Write-up of themes for each sub-group commenced, and data explored further to establish and clarify sub-themes (and the variables that made up each of these), patterns and relationships. This act of writing up added another layer of analysis, further understanding of themes and sub-themes, nuances, patterns and relationships.
5. Stage 4 findings were summarized and clear categories of themes and sub-themes established in order to enable comparison of sub-groups¹⁵.
6. Each case was examined for evidence of each variable that had emerged from analysis. When there was evidence of a variable, the case study was given a score of '1' (i.e. yes, that variable was evident for that individual) and a score of '0' if not. This allowed inferential statistics to be conducted to demonstrate

¹⁴ Analysis was undertaken by one researcher and software was not used. As such, the researcher was immersed in the data that led to rich insights, however, criticisms that are often made of qualitative research of this nature, regarding subjectivity and the potential of the researcher to bias findings may be made. In response, the author is experienced in these methods and made all efforts to ensure that reported findings were evidence-based and grounded in the data.

¹⁵ CSR was conducted initially to identify themes, sub-themes etc. (i.e. Stages 1-5), and then the two groups were compared (stage 6). It was at stage 5 that it became clear that we needed a methodical and rigorous approach to compare the groups because differences regarding themes and sub-themes were complex and nuanced, and as such it was then decided that statistical comparison would be the best approach to understand where the largest differences lie.

where notable differences and similarities between the two sub-groups of interest were evident.

Analysis examined the number of VEs that presented evidence for each measure compared to the number of NVEs. For this type of nominal data the chi square test would usually be conducted, however, in this instance, due to the small sample size, the Fisher's Exact Test (FET) was chosen because it is appropriate for nominal data when cells have low expected frequencies, i.e. of less than 5 (Brace, Kemp, & Snelgar, 2006; Siegel & Castellan, 1988).

Results

General descriptives

VE offences included terrorist attacks (or plots) that attempted and intended to kills others, or led to one or more deaths. NVE offences included possession of, writing, distributing and/ or disseminating extremist or terrorist literature, sending racist 'hate mail', and/or fund raising to support extremist organizations.

General descriptives allowing comparisons between violent versus non-violent extremists are presented here (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptives for Violent (VEs) and Non-Violent Extremists (NVEs)

Descriptives	VEs (n = 24)	NVEs (n = 16)
Type of extremism: Islamic (IS) or right-wing extremism (XRW)	IS= 19 XRW= 5	IS= 14 XRW= 2
Mean age when arrested/ convicted (approx.)	26.5 (SD=7.12)	31.62 (SD=11.59)
Gender: Male (M) or Female (F)	M= 23, F= 1	M= 13, F= 3

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Race (%)	White British	25	6.3
	Mixed race	8.3	0
	British Asian	37.5	56.3
	African	25	31.3
	(Non-British) Asian	4.2	0
	Unknown	0	6.1
Citizenship (%)	British National	37.5	12.5
	Immigrant, legal British citizenship	37.5	25
	Second generation immigrant	20.8	43.8
	Illegal immigrant	0	12.5
	Born in UK, grew up in Pakistan	4.2	0
	Unknown	0	6.2

Clearly there were different degrees of variation between VEs and NVEs regarding type of extremism¹⁶, age, race and citizenship.

Key themes, sub-themes and underlying variables

Thematic analysis identified six key themes, referred to here as: (i) internal factors; (ii) grievances; (iii) identity; (iv) connectedness; (v) opportunities; and (vi) behavioral indicators of extremism. Each of these comprised a number of sub-themes, and each of these comprised various underlying variables (see Table 2).

¹⁶ The sample is a similar composition to that of the extremist population in prison in the UK, comprising mainly Islamic extremists, but also right wing extremists

Table 2. Themes, sub-themes and variables underlying violent and non-violent extremism

Theme	Sub-themes	Underlying variables	
Internal factors	Psychological issues	Asperger syndrome	
		Depression	
		Suicidal	
		Personality disorder	
		Schizophrenic	
		Fantastist/ narcissism	
		Obsessive	
		Paranoia	
		Grandiosity	
		Irrational	
		Delusional	
		Unspecified mental health issue(s)	
		Substance abuse	
	Potential trauma	Refugee	
		Asylum seeker	
		Loss of significant other	
		Exposure to extreme violence	
	Grievances	Ingroup - outgroup thinking	Perceived external threat/ outgroup to blame
			Perceived competition for resources
			Perceived persecution of others (see below)
Identification with a persecuted others (see above)			
Exclusion, rejection		Rejected by significant other	
		Experiences of being bullied	
		Victim of racism/ prejudice	
		Rejected by certain group(s)	

		Rejected by school/ employer
Identity	Sense of self	Sexual exploration
		Seek fame
		Perceived superiority
		Lack of significant other
		Lack of secure/ stable background
		Deliberately disconnected self from certain groups
		Status seeking
	Search for purpose & meaning	Attempted to connect to like-minded others via internet
		Seek like-minded others
		Ideology
		Links to influential others
		Visited various mosques
		Travelled abroad
		Tried Western behaviors
Sense of failure	Ability to develop significant (intimate) relationships	
	Lack of social skills	
	Low self esteem	
	Sexual frustrations	
	Dropped out of education/ employment	
	Under-achieved	
	Unemployed	
Connectedness	Isolation & alienation	Described as a loner
		Lack of friends
		Disconnected / separated from family
		Lack of significant other (intimate relationship)
		Lack of supportive family background
		Not socially integrated

	Seeking to belong	Converted to Islam
		Attempted to join group
		Sought acceptance from certain groups
		Connected with Western others
		Connected to like-minded others via internet
		Exhibited Westernised (un-Islamic) behaviors
		Gang membership
		Team membership
		Status seeking
Opportunities	Cognitive opening	Catalyst/ crisis
		Personal responsibility to act
		Sense of under-achieving
	Opportunity to act	Operating environment
		Physical opening (time on hands)
Behavioral indicators	Physical activity	Training
		Sport
	Behaviors	Travel abroad
		Leakage

Comparisons between violent and non-violent extremists

Thematic analysis was followed by a content analysis approach, whereby numbers of cases were counted for evidence of all underlying variables, in order to allow comparisons between sub-groups. The Fisher's Exact Test (FET) was conducted to compare the number of VEs presenting evidence for each variable, compared to the number of NVEs. Tables 3-8 present the percentage of VEs and

NVEs exhibiting evidence for each variable, and indicate where significant differences were found ($p < .05$, FET).

Internal factors

Internal factors comprised two sub-themes: *psychological issues* (e.g. a range of mental illnesses), and *potential traumas* (e.g. being a refugee, or experiencing the loss, death or long term separation from a parent and/or sibling, in some cases it was more than one of these). The most prevalent underlying variables were being reported as *obsessive, irrational and having unspecified mental health issues, loss of significant other and exposure to extreme violence* (including Internet materials).

Table 3 presents differences between VEs and NVEs on those variables categorized as internal factors.

Table 3. Percentage of Violent (VEs) versus Non-Violent Extremists (NVEs) exhibiting evidence of internal factors (* indicates where significant differences lie)

Sub-themes	Underlying variables	VEs (%)	NVEs (%)
Psychological issues	Asperger syndrome	4.2	0
	Depression	12.5	12.5
	Suicidal	8.3	6.3
	Personality disorder	4.2	6.3
	Schizophrenic	4.3	0
	Fantastist/ narcissm	12.5	12.5
	Obsessive	75	50
	Paranoia	8.3	0
	Grandiosity	8.3	6.3

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	Irrational	20.8	18.8
	Delusional	16.7	18.8
	Unspecified mental health issue(s)	12.5	31.3
	Substance abuse	20.8	0
Potential trauma	Refugee	4.2	0
	Asylum seeker	12.5	12.5
	Loss of significant other	45.8	50
	Exposure to extreme violence (inc. internet)*	87.5	56.3

The only significant difference was found here was for exposure to extreme violence.

Grievances

This theme captured those variables related to grievances that might underlie extremist attitudes and actions, and had two sub-themes: *ingroup-outgroup thinking* and *exclusion and rejection*. For example, feelings of marginalization and that Muslims are being persecuted ('The West hates Islam'), being (or perceiving to be) rejected by certain groups (including other extremist groups), being bullied and/or experiencing racism and prejudice, especially Islamophobia ('Whites against Asians') and separation from parent(s) that led to sense of abandonment. The most prevalent underlying variables were *perceived external threat/ outgroup to blame, perceived persecution of others, identification with persecuted others, rejection by a significant others, being bullied and/or victimized, and being rejected by certain groups*. Table 4 outlines the differences between VEs and NVEs in terms of grievances.

Table 4. Percentage of Violent (VEs) versus Non-Violent Extremists (NVEs) exhibiting evidence of grievances (* indicates where significant differences lie)

Sub-themes	Underlying variables	VEs (%)	NVEs (%)
Ingroup- outgroup thinking	Perceived external threat/ outgroup to blame	100	100
	Perceived competition for resources	25	12.5
	Perceived persecution of others	79.2	93.8
	Identification with a persecuted others	75	87.5
Exclusion, rejection	Rejected by significant other	37.5	18.8
	Experiences of being bullied*	45.8	6.3
	Victim of racism/ prejudice	58.3	87.5
	Rejected by certain group(s)	25	12.5
	Rejected by school/ employer	20.8	12.5

The only significant difference found was that more VEs had experienced bullying compared to NVEs. Not surprisingly, this demonstrates that all extremists have grievances, but that other factors are important regarding whether these grievances lead to violent or non-violent action.

Identity

This theme had three sub-themes: *sense of self*, *search for purpose and meaning* and *sense of failure*. It relates to the individual's sense of who they are, what they believe in, how they view themselves and the world, and how they think they should behave. It links to a need for a belief system, purpose and meaning, and their self-esteem, and can determine where they see themselves fitting in with others (see 'Connectedness'). The most prevalent underlying variables were: *perceived*

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superiority, lack of significant other, ideology, attempting to connect with like-minded others via the Internet, seeking like-minded others, links to influential others, ability to develop significant (intimate) relationships, under-achievement and unemployment.

Table 5 outlines where differences lie for identity for VEs and NVEs.

Table 5. Percentage of Violent (VEs) versus Non-Violent Extremists (NVEs)

exhibiting evidence of identity (* indicates where significant differences lie)

Sub-themes	Underlying variables	VEs (%)	NVEs (%)
Sense of self	Sexual exploration	4.2	0
	Seek fame	4.2	6.3
	Perceived superiority	41.7	75
	Lack of significant other	41.7	75
	Lack of secure/ stable background	41.7	31.3
	Deliberately disconnected certain groups*	54.2	12.5
	Status seeking	37.5	31.3
	Search for purpose, meaning	Connected via internet to like-minded others	83.3
	Seek like-minded others	91.7	81.3
	Ideology	100	100
	Links to influential others	79.2	81.3
	Visited various mosques	70.8	18.8
	Travelled abroad	45.8	12.5
	Tried Western behaviors	66.7	50
Sense of failure	Ability to develop significant relationships	66.7	43.8
	Lack of social skills	20.8	18.8
	Low self-esteem*	33.3	6.3
	Sexual frustrations	29.2	6.3

Dropped out of education/ employment	41.7	25
Under-achieved*	70.8	31.3
Unemployed	37.5	50

Here, VEs and NVEs differed significantly regarding deliberate disconnection from certain others, low self-esteem and under-achievement (in terms of an incongruence between academic achievements and employment status). Also, compared to NVEs, significantly fewer VEs had expressed a perceived superiority over certain others.

Connectedness

This theme had two sub-themes: *isolation and alienation* and *seeking to belong*. The first relates to how individuals are connected to other individuals and social groups, being isolated and alienated, for example lack of friends or intimate relationships. And the latter relating to being disconnected from family or specific social groups, and seeking to belong, for example by attempting to join certain groups or gangs, exhibiting 'un-Islamic' behaviors during adolescence in order to fit in, and attending a variety of mosques to meet like-minded others. The most prevalent underlying variables were: *being described as 'a loner', being disconnected from family, lack of significant (intimate) relationship, lack of social integration, attempts to join a group, being connected with Westernized others and connecting with like-minded others via the Internet*. Table 6 presents differences between VEs and NVEs on those variables categorized as connectedness.

Table 6. Percentage of Violent (VEs) versus Non-Violent Extremists (NVEs) exhibiting evidence of connectedness (* indicates where significant differences lie)

Sub-themes	Underlying variables	VEs (%)	NVEs (%)
Isolation, alienation	Described as a loner	29.2	43.8
	Lack of friends	20.8	37.5
	Disconnected / separated from family	41.7	25
	Lack of significant other (intimate relationship)	33.3	62.5
	Lack of supportive family background	29.2	31.3
	Not socially integrated	41.7	43.8
	Seeking to belong	Converted to Islam	20.8
Attempted to join group	87.5	68.8	
Sought acceptance from certain groups	50	68.8	
Connected with Western others	79.2	93.8	
Connected to LM others via internet	83.3	81.3	
Exhibited Westernised (un-Islamic) behaviors	66.7	50	
Gang membership	29.2	6.3	
Team membership*	54.2	12.5	
Status seeking	37.5	31.3	

Here differences were present between VEs and NVEs but were only significant for team membership: Significantly more VEs were used to being part of a team of some sort (mainly regarding sport before leaving school).

Opportunities

This theme had two sub-themes: *cognitive opening* and *opportunity to act*. It concerns cognitive openings and the opportunity for (extremist-related) action. ‘Cognitive opening’ is the term used to describe circumstances (often involving a personal crisis), when individuals are particularly vulnerable to extremist influences and conversion (Leiken, 2012). For this theme the most prevalent underlying

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variables were: *a catalyst, personal responsibility to act, sense of under-achieving, operating environment and physical opening*. Table 7 shows variables categorized as opportunities and where differences between VEs and NVEs were found.

Table 7. Percentage of Violent (VEs) versus Non-Violent Extremists (NVEs) exhibiting evidence of opportunities (* indicates where significant differences lie)

Sub-themes	Underlying variables	VEs (%)	NVEs (%)
Cognitive opening	Catalyst/ crisis	62.5	31.3
	Personal responsibility to act*	87.5	18.8
	Under-achievement*	70.8	31.3
Opportunity to act	Operating environment*	91.7	43.8
	Physical opening (time on hands)	75	87.5

Significant differences were found in that more VEs felt a personal responsibility to act, had under-achieved (in terms of an incongruence between academic achievements and employment status), and were in an 'open' operating environment (an environment that did not especially constrain their extremist behavior, especially regarding planning and preparing for violent action).

Behavioral indicators

This theme comprised two sub-themes: *physical activity* and *behaviors*. It captured activities likely related to extremist action, such as attending training camps and travelling abroad to train and/or meet with influential others. It also captured when individuals were reported as being passionate about participating in (team) sports, which provides a sense of membership and other physiological benefits. The most prevalent underlying variables were: *travel abroad and sport*. Table 8 shows

where differences between VEs and NVEs were found for variables categorized as behavioral indicators.

Table 8. Percentage of Violent (VEs) versus Non-Violent Extremists (NVEs) exhibiting evidence of behavioral indicators (* indicates where significant differences lie)

Sub-themes	Underlying variables	VEs (%)	NVEs (%)
Physical activity	Training*	45.8	0
	Sport*	54.2	12.5
Behaviors	Travel abroad*	45.8	12.5
	Leakage	45.8	12.5

For behavioral indicators, significant differences were found in that, compared to NVEs, more VEs had participated in extremist-related training, had travelled abroad for extremist-related events, and had been involved in and reported as passionate about participating in team sport.

Discussion

Until recently, few studies have distinguished between violent and non-violent extremism (or indeed have any comparison or control group), and little is understood about which factors specifically underlie different types of extremism (e.g. violent versus non-violent action). The present study identified a number of factors that distinguish between the two. Compared to NVEs, significantly more VEs had: under-achieved (in terms of an incongruence between academic achievements and employment status); experienced a turning point (e.g. a crisis) that catalyzed their

actions and perceived a personal responsibility to act; deliberately disconnected themselves from other individuals or groups; visited a variety of mosques; operated in an environment that did not especially constrain their behavior (an 'open' operating environment); participated in extremist-related training; travelled abroad for extremist-related events; been involved in and reported as passionate about participating in team sport. And compared to VEs, significantly more NVEs had expressed a perceived superiority over certain others. This list provides an indication of the type of things law enforcement CT practitioners should be looking for when assessing individuals of interest. Future research is now needed to understand how these differences can be used to assist risk assessment. For example, to guide those responsible for law enforcement and CT, to focus efforts on those at most risk of conducting or actively facilitating acts of violence. Moreover, factors identified here should be compared to those proposed in existing risk assessment tools such as the ERG, VERA-2 and MLG to further refine how risk assessments are conducted.

Previously identified were a range of factors associated with extremism, including personal, social and demographic, psychological, physical and other factors that can affect resistance and vulnerability. However, this creates a problem in that the number and potential combination of factors that might characterize extremist individuals are too large to have any meaningful application for practitioners. The present study identifies factors that characterize and distinguish between VEs and NVEs, thus providing a more manageable number of factors that can be used for risk assessment practices. That is, whilst there are a large number of variables that underlie extremism in general, those needing to distinguish between

violent and non-violent extremists should focus on those variables where significant differences were found.

Previous research examining VE and NVEs has identified some themes and commonalities. For example, most violent extremists have an internal motivation (e.g., a perceived injustice, a grievance) and a perceived external threat that is blamed for these, and an appropriate target to be attacked or eliminated accordingly (e.g. Chiozza, 2010). Other variables found included a perceived persecution of others and identification of these, however, as many non-violent as violent extremists presented evidence for these, indicating that these variables may be key to extremism but are equally important for violent and non-violent actors. Nor does a perceived external threat to blame for grievances distinguish between these different types of extremists, since this variable was evident in all of the case studies examined. Alternatively, Taylor and Louis (2004) stressed that a sense of purpose is key to understanding those drawn into terrorism. The current study found strong evidence for a sense of purpose, but for both VEs and NVEs, indicating that this psychological need does not specifically drive violent behavior. Other factors which overlap with previous research on extremism (e.g. Leary, Twenge, & Quinlivan, 2006) were identified (such as identity, seeking belonging), but again, were not found to distinguish between VEs and NVEs. This indicates that there are a number of shared attributes that underlie extremism in general, plus some factors that are distinct to different types of extremism (violent or non-violent).

Factors that did distinguish VEs that might have increased their vulnerability to push and pull factors included experiences of bullying during adolescence, low self-esteem, and actual or a perceived sense of under-achievement. This is in-line

with Jasko, LaFree and Kruglanski's (2016) research that highlighted a 'quest for significance' resulting from a loss of personal significance (through for example rejection, achievement failure, abuse), which they found to be predictors of the use of violence by perpetrators of ideologically motivated crimes (see also Kruglanski et al., 2009; 2014). A perception of being the victim of anti-Muslim discrimination is also associated with violent extremism (Victoroff, Adelman, & Matthews, 2012), as are emotions such as humiliation (e.g. Schomerus, El Taraboulski-McCarthy & Sandhar, 2017; McCauley, 2017), hate and disgust (e.g. Baumeister & Butz, 2005; Halperin, 2008; Staub, 2005), marginalization (e.g. Hassan, 2012) and lack of professional choices (Botha & Abdile, 2014). Our findings and those of others indicate that the choice to use violence to achieve certain goals is linked to negative life experiences, resultant emotions and low self-esteem.

Dehumanization has been proposed as key to violence (e.g. Borum, 2003; Cole & Cole, 2009) and a 'red flag' indicator that can facilitate a psychological preparation to kill (Cole & Cole, 2009). However, again in the current research a significant difference between violent and non-violent extremists on this variable was not found. This indicates that dehumanization is common in extremist thinking, even for those who opt for non-violent action. However, significantly more VEs felt a personal responsibility to act, which seems to be a key factor in determining violent action. It may be that NVEs may believe they are achieving more in their relatively 'executive positions' than they could as a VE. Consistent with this interpretation are the findings that NVEs do not experience low self-esteem and have not participated in physical training. Alternatively, it may be that the NVEs analyzed here were actually 'pre-violence' rather than non-violent. That is, they had so far only conducted

non-violent action but may be on a pathway to violence. This is a key issue with conducting real-world research in this area: Individuals included in the non-violent category may have later become violent if intervention had not occurred, or they may have opted for non-violent action because they did not have the capability and/or opportunity for violence. It has also been noted that whilst some individuals may stay the same (and therefore be categorized as violent or non-violent), others individuals may become more or less dangerous over time (Horgan, et al., 2016).

Perliger, Koehler-Derrick & Pedahzur (2016) distinguished between those willing to commit violence and those willing to join an organization that commits violence, finding evidence for different types of terrorists. Gherabeyya's distinction between symbolic and material violence implies that those categorized as NVEs may be those responsible for radicalizing, recruiting, motivating, managing and organizing the 'foot soldiers'. Extremist organizations can be sophisticated in their selection, gradual isolation and indoctrination of individuals they consider vulnerable to their message. Therefore NVEs in particular may be well educated and highly motivated individuals who play a vital role in the success of the organization, and as such will also be of interest to CT practitioners responsible for the prevention of extremism and the disruption of terrorist capabilities. These findings and those from our study also have theoretical implications in terms of the commonly accepted message that there is no single terrorist profile. It may be that if we look at intragroup differences then we may be able to get closer to understanding the shared characteristics of different types of extremists and how this may play out in terms of their behavior.

Methodological issues

Here, thematic analysis was applied to identify six themes, a number of sub-themes and variables that underlie extremism. Despite small sample and cell sizes, statistical comparisons found significant differences between VEs and NVEs for a small proportion of these variables¹⁷. Methodological issues that emerged from this research demonstrated that extremism is a difficult topic to study, especially empirically, and that those attempting to distinguish between violent versus non-violent offenders will face various challenges. Whilst definitions of violence and extremism were developed at the start of the research, categorizing a number of the cases identified was problematic. Three independent researchers were assigned the task of categorizing extremists, which led to a debate around three key areas. *First*, if an offender was arrested prior to execution of a violent act, could we be certain that they would have gone on to perform the action? That is, could we categorize them as 'violent' when they hadn't actually conducted a violent act, based on evidence that they were planning to? *Second*, if an offender had conducted a non-violent action (e.g. fund raising) that would contribute to and/or facilitate a violent action (e.g. a terrorist attack), should we categorize them as violent or non-violent? Also, when are non-violent extremists likely to remain non-violent, and when are they likely to move towards violence? And *third*, for a substantial number of cases there was simply not enough data of sufficient detail to categorize an individual in a reliable manner; consequently, these cases were excluded from the sample. For cases that we did include, data was also missing for certain variables. However, excluding these cases would have reduced the sample size greatly, and so it was decided that those with

¹⁷ It is worth noting here however that whilst the Fisher Exact Test (used to distinguish between groups) is somewhat conservative, the number of tests conducted in the present study increases the likelihood of Type 1 (false positive) errors occurring.

considerable detail would be included, even if we could not be sure if lack of evidence for certain themes and variables was due to reporting bias or evidence did not exist. As such, further research is now needed to examine the validity and reliability of our findings.

Recommendations for future research

So what does it mean to be involved in terrorism? This question was asked by Borum (2015), who flagged the need for risk assessment tools that can distinguish between different types of extremists. Borum identified four basic categories of terrorist-related activities: direct action, operational support, organizational support, and logistical support. The terms 'terrorist' and 'extremist' can be used to refer to a range of different types of individuals, from, for example, those espousing radical views, to homegrown terrorists, to foreign jihadi fighters. This is unhelpful for policy makers and practitioners responsible for conducting risk assessments, or for preventing or countering extremism. Therefore a key requirement for future research is to distinguish between and develop a better understanding of different types of extremists, and why those 'at risk' choose not to become involved in violent extremism.

Whilst this study aimed to overcome some of the problems regarding previous literature in this field, there were various issues that future research may take note of and attempt to overcome. First, in the present study, individual cases were only included when they fitted with our definitions, however, many were excluded because they did not. If we consider that extremists may actually sit on a continuum in terms of how violent they are rather than being 'violent' or 'non-violent', which is mostly likely the case, then it is problematic to exclude those who sit near the middle

of the axis. For the purpose of this study, we needed to categorize individuals in order to make comparisons, and so only those towards the more extreme points in terms of whether their behavior was violent or non-violent were included. Future studies need to consider whether this issue can be overcome to include the types of extremists that were excluded from this study, in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the different types of extremism.

Second, because numbers of cases in each sub-group were small, so, inevitably, were the differences between these. This is a difficult problem to overcome because of the overall population of extremists to draw from is small. More variables that distinguish between VEs and NVEs are likely to exist but may only emerge as significant with a larger sample size. Future studies might therefore increase more cases by including, for example, extremists from Europe and the US. Only UK-based extremists were examined in this study. As such we cannot know how generalizable findings are to other parts of the world. Further research is needed to understand whether the factors that underlie different types of extremism differ across different countries. It is likely that the general overarching themes will not, however, there may be more nuanced differences in terms of the variables that make up the sub-themes, because they will be influenced by, for example, culture, context, societal norms and so on.

Third, within-group variance may be examined, in order to understand these and compare to between-group differences alongside more research on protective factors and how these might explain differences between VEs and NVEs. Some have suggested that those less vulnerable to becoming involved in violent action may exhibit protective factors that include a well-informed and well-developed non-

violent ideology, strong feelings of belonging (due, for example, to family ties and friendships), and may be less obedient to authority figures (Cole & Cole, 2009; Home Office, 2011a). The current research found evidence for a range of internal motivations such as psychological issues and trauma, and significantly more violent extremists had experienced bullying, had low self-esteem and had under-achieved in their lives. Studies on the effect of trauma and emotions that result from perceived grievances are now required to investigate whether these are key to decisions to participate in violence (Schomerus, El Taraboulski-McCarthy & Sandhar, 2017).

Fourth, models of threat include intent, opportunity and capability¹⁸, but the present study examined only the first two of these based on the data that was available. Moreover, McCauley and Moskaleiko (2014) proposed that context and opportunity for action are key. The current study found that opportunity (open operating environment) was one factor that distinguished VEs, but details regarding the context within which individuals were operating were scarce and therefore could not be examined here. Future research should therefore try to gather this data in order to examine the relationship between motivation/ intent, capability and opportunity.

Finally, lack of detailed data, for non-violent cases in particular, was a critical methodological issue for the present study. This research applied a score of '1' to indicate a variable was present and '0' if it was not. Whenever possible data was triangulated to ensure that information was validated by various sources of the same

¹⁸ 'Intent' refers to motivation, grievances and other such push and pull factors, whereas 'opportunity' refers to the context – are there opportunities to conduct an attack (e.g. if CT measures are not in place, or if a person has access to the location where the attack is to be conducted). 'Capability' refers to the individual or group's ability to conduct an attack (e.g. if they have the weapons needed and the skill necessary to use the weapons effectively).

information. But some information may be missing because we cannot know everything there is to know about these individuals when relying on secondary sources of data, and other researchers have recognized that open-source data has its limitations (Horgan, et al., 2016). A key question relates to reporting bias and how this may have skewed findings. For example, if evidence for a factor was missing, did this mean that the factor did not exist for that case, or did it mean that it simply had not been reported? Smith (1989, cited in Horgan, et al., 2016) noted that illegal acts and/ or those that may be more interesting or 'newsworthy' are more likely to be reported whilst those that are less exciting are not. This was reflected in the amount of information available for VEs compared to NVEs: Case studies were much longer for the former compared to the latter. To mitigate, the coding approach requiring a "hard no" or a "hard yes" used by Horgan et al. (2016, p.1229) is recommended for future research. This involves ensuring that a variable is coded as not present only if there is clear evidence to support this and factors should be coded as 'unknown' if not mentioned.

Conclusions

Whilst there is a wealth of literature that attempts to explore and explain terrorism and violent extremism, research comparing different types of extremists is scarce. The current study found nuanced differences between VEs and NVEs that may assist policy-makers, practitioners and law enforcement agencies to better understand and identify VEs and NVEs, and to tailor responses accordingly. More empirical research that considers the role of emotion and investigates the relationships between push, pull and protective factors is now needed, especially to understand the similarities and differences between different types of extremists. The

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present study provides a basis for empirical work aiming to do so, by identifying the types of factors that might be examined in order to guide data collection and analysis.

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