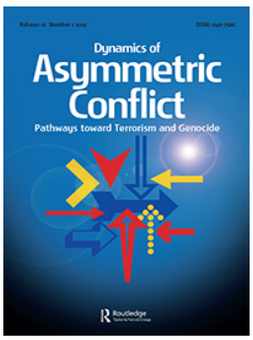

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Pathways to violent extremism: a qualitative comparative analysis of the US far-right

Susan Fahey[a] and Pete Simi[b]

[a]Criminal Justice, Stockton University, Galloway, NJ, USA; [b]Sociology, Chapman University, Orange, CA, USA

ABSTRACT

In this research, we analyzed extensive life history interviews and open-source data on a sample of 35 current and former white supremacists. These individuals had all committed ideologically motivated violence, some of which clearly exhibited a greater degree of planning, who we termed the "planned violence" sample while those in the "spontaneous violence" sample had committed more opportunistic violence, such as "wilding-style" attacks on available victims. Using Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), we examined whether there were important differences in the presence and combination of prior risk factors, such as offending history, truancy, delinquent peers, family members involved in extremism, a lower- or working-class childhood and academic failure, which led to the outcome condition of either planned or spontaneous violence. Our findings demonstrated differences between the two samples, with the spontaneous violence sample demonstrating higher risk than the planned violence sample. However, no support was garnered for the identification of distinct pathways of homogeneous risk factors among either sample of violent offenders.

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Terrorism; right-wing extremism; radicalization; risk factors; juvenile delinquency; adult crime

Introduction

The notion of a variety of pathways to violence has gained traction across several fields of study (Loeber, Farrington, Stouthamer-Loeber, Moffitt, & Caspi, 1998; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2010; Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Widom, 2014). In her presidential address to the American Society of Criminology, Widom (2014) provided the inspiration for this paper when she explained, "I am suggesting that we may be missing important information about violent offending by assuming homogeneity among violent offenders rather than considering the heterogeneity. . .there is meaningful heterogeneity in violent behaviors and offenders and these varieties may have implications for understanding causality and ultimately, for the design of prevention programs and interventions" (p. 315).

While the search for individual pathways to committing violence continues to develop, the literature examining terrorism has grown rapidly since 11 September 2001 (Silke, 2008). For decades, there has been an ongoing debate regarding how to define terrorism (see e.g., Schmid & Jongman, 1988). The definitional ambiguity of terrorism continues to

CONTACT Susan Fahey susan.fahey@stockton.edu

challenge scholars, law enforcement, and policymakers (Schmid & Jongman, 1988). Recently, the term violent extremism (VE) has begun to gain greater prominence although it is unclear how the two concepts differ (Borum, 2011). In short, VE refers to violence committed by an individual and/or group in support of a specific political or religious ideology, and this term is often used interchangeably with terrorism (Borum, 2011).

In general, scholars have conceptualized terrorism as fundamentally distinct from generic types of violence (Mullins, 2009). Previous studies suggested the ideological basis of terrorism required specialized frameworks outside of the criminological field (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 2001). In the past several years, however, a growing number of studies have employed various types of criminological frameworks to help explain terrorism (e.g., Argomaniz & Vidal-Diez, 2015; Fahey & LaFree, 2015; Hsu & Apel, 2015; Parkin & Freilich, 2015; Perry & Hasisi, 2015; Pisoiu, 2015; Simi, Sporer, & Bubolz, 2016). Despite these more recent advances, several areas remain unexplored.

Criminologists have long studied the degree of planning among different types of offenses and whether unique individual characteristics distinguish offenders who commit more planned acts compared to relatively spontaneous crime (Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 2001; Wright & Decker, 1997). Although leading definitions of terrorism do not necessarily require a specific degree of planning, there is an implicit assumption that most successfully executed terror incidents are relatively well planned. In fact, terms such as terror plots and terror cells suggest planning is an important feature of this type of violence. Yet, the terrorism literature includes few efforts to compare incidents of ideologically motivated violence which involve high degrees of planning versus spontaneous incidents of ideologically motivated violence.

The purpose of the current paper is to examine the pathways to ideologically motivated violence among a sample of North American-based right-wing extremists, largely white supremacists and neo-Nazis. We relied on a developmental life-course approach to studying violence which emphasizes the importance of various risk factors (Farrington, 1998, 2000). We attempted to use these risk factors gleaned mostly from the extant criminological literature on the prediction of violence to differentiate between right-wing extremists who perpetrated planned violence (e.g., bombings and shooting rampages) relative to those who committed spontaneous violence, such as "wilding-style" attacks on interracial couples and other targets.

Framework and prior literature

Life-course criminology (LCC) encompasses a broad range of theoretical elements across the entire criminological discipline. The influence and analytic power of LCC is so substantial some observers have contended, "[l]ife-course criminology is now criminology" (Cullen, 2011, p. 310). Farrington, (2000) in particular, has proposed combining developmental and life-course approaches to best understand the antecedents of criminal behaviour and various types of offending trajectories. One of the most widely studied areas related to the antecedents of crime has focused on identifying different types of risk factors (Dahlberg, 1998; Farrington, 1998, 2000; Hawkins et al., 1998; Loeber et al., 1998; Moffitt, 1990; Staff, Whichard, Siennick, & Maggs, 2015). In short, risk factors involve the presence of different types of adverse conditions which increase the likelihood of delinquent and criminal behaviour (Coie, Terry, & Lochman, 1993; van der

Geest, Blokland, & Bijleveld, 2009). The risk factor paradigm was originally inspired by public health approaches to addressing problems like heart disease and lung cancer (Farrington, 2000). Since that time, it became a major perspective within criminology as a substantial volume of criminological research has found risk factors, which significantly increase the odds of short-and-long-term offending (Hautala, Sittner, & Whitbeck, 2016).

Risk factors, however, do not operate in isolation but are situated within a broader context of mediated processes (Maschi, Bradley, & Morgan, 2008). A number of studies support a cumulative risk hypothesis – wherein it is the number of risk factors instead of any particular combination – which has been associated with childhood misconduct both contemporaneously and over time (Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1998; Rutter et al., 1975). The potential effects of risk factors include negative psychological and physical consequences, and, in some cases, may be so significant that they result in trauma. In turn, these symptoms of trauma typically include various negative emotional states, such as anger, hostility, lowered self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (Neller, Denney, Pietz, & Thomlinson, 2005).

There is a broad literature which has examined the relationship between various risk factors and criminal offending. For example, several studies support the notion that there are specific, distinctive pathways to criminality based on early childhood social and developmental influences, social bonding in childhood and adolescence, and the extent of prosocial adult relationships (e.g., Loeber et al., 1998; Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1993). In a recent study most closely related to our interest in ideologically motivated violent offenders, Simi et al. (2016) found that there was a substantial amount of risk factors and adolescent misconduct present in the sample prior to the individuals' involvement in violent extremism. In fact, they found support for a model of extremist participation which was age-graded and involved traditional criminological risk factors. In childhood, family dysfunction, victimization, and other risk factors increased negative emotions, like anger or depression, which in turn, influenced the probability that adolescent crimes, such as violence or truancy, would manifest. Adolescent conduct problems increased the risk of seeking coping mechanisms in extremist groups and ideologies. Similar to the sample used here, their sample was high-risk, having experienced higher than expected levels of childhood and adolescent adversity and conduct issues.

Their study did not, however, examine whether the nature and extent of risk factors varied across different types of violent extremist offenders. As such, we elaborate on the Simi et al. (2016) study to assess whether individuals who commit planned attacks can be differentiated from those offenders who commit relatively spontaneous acts of violence in terms of individual-level risk factors. Such a difference might suggest that degree of planning is a meaningful way of categorizing different types of violent extremists.

Methods

Data collection

This study relied on two forms of data collection: (1) life-history interviews and (2) open-source coding procedures. Thirty subjects were interviewed using an in-depth life history methodology while we relied on open-source searches to study fivesubjects. First, we

describe the life history interviews and sampling techniques used to identify the interview subjects. Then, we explain the open-source searches and the sampling technique used to identify the subjects whose data were obtained from the open-source. We conclude with an overall description of the sample characteristics.

Life history interviews are commonly used by social scientists as a tool to gather data pertaining to self-concept, social relations, and the biographical experiences which influence human development. A robust literature within criminology has long relied on interview methods (e.g., Athens, 1992; Shaw, 1966; Shover, 1973; Steffensmeier, 1986; Sutherland, 1937; Wright & Decker, 1997), a tradition which continues more recently as well (e.g., Copes, Hochstetler, & Forsyth, 2013; Topalli, 2005; Topalli, Jacques, & Wright, 2014).

As there is no way to compile a list of either current or former members of the white supremacist movement to serve as a sampling frame, we identified interviewees by snowball sampling from multiple starts to ensure variety in the location and type of extremist group (Wright, Decker, Redfern, & Smith, 1992). We developed initial contacts for the snowball chains through a variety of means, including the team's extensive prior research with active and inactive far right extremists (Simi, Blee, DeMichele, & Windisch, 2017; Simi & Futrell, 2010; Simi et al., 2016; Simi & Bubolz, 2017) and by using referrals from various civil rights/watchdog organizations which monitor extremist movements. As multiple individuals were used to generate unique snowballs, only a small segment of the participants were acquainted with each other.

Interviews were conducted in-person by the second author and were audio recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed into text files and ranged from three-to-six hours to more than 15 hours, with three interviews lasting over multiple days. The telling of life histories produces a narrative which allows the researcher to better understand the complexities and intersectionality of ideology and life experiences (Becker, 1970; Blee, 1996; McAdams, 2006; Shaw, 1966). Respondents provided a rich and detailed history of their lives which involved themes such as family socialization, romantic relationships, job attainment and stability, reasons for joining and leaving the white supremacist movement, and involvement in criminal and violent behaviour. Each interview concluded with more structured questions and scale items to collect comparable information across interviewees in terms of risk factors (such as history of child abuse and mental health problems among others), demographic information, and criminality.

The interview sample generated 3,113 transcribed pages of life history data, which indicates the level of detail generated through the interviews. We analyzed the data using a modified grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; see also Berg, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994), which allows researchers to combine a more open-ended, inductive approach while also relying on existing literatures and frameworks to guide the research and help interpret the findings.[1] The constant interaction with data also involved a virtual ongoing analysis and identification of social processes which affected each new round of interviews.

The initial data coding began by reading entire interview transcripts line-by-line to determine differences and similarities within and across our subjects. Subsequent coding techniques helped to identify and extract relevant empirical and conceptual properties and organize the data into similar concepts. Inductive codes emerged from the initial phase of line-by-line analysis (Berg, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, &

Lofland, 2005). Deductive codes were extracted from the scholarly literature on risk factors and concepts more broadly related to LCC (Aho, 1990; Blee, 2002; Dahlberg, 1998; Farrington, 1998, 2000; Hawkins et al., 1998; Loeber et al., 1998; Moffitt, 1990; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Staff et al., 2015). After the initial codes were developed, we compared and contrasted data themes, noting relations between them, and moving back and forth between first-level data and general categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In addition to the interview-based sample, we relied on the American Terrorism Study (ATS) as a sampling frame for the open-source sample. We used the ATS as the primary sample frame for our open-source searches (Smith, 1994). The version of the ATS we relied on includes a publicly available indictment-based dataset of domestic terrorist incidents and includes information on over 500 terrorists from about 65 terrorist groups. These persons were indicted for approximately 7,000 violations of federal criminal law from 1980 to 2002. Our sample, however, was restricted to individuals categorized as "far-right terrorists" in the ATS database (n = 118). We evaluated all of the 118 cases in order to determine what types of data were missing and could be collected through open-source searches.

We began the open-source coding by first culling through federal court documents available through the ATS. The court documents were coded using a structured codebook focusing on issues related to recruitment, radicalization, and various biographical characteristics. In some cases, the court documents included items such as psychological evaluations with detailed individual-level data. Following a review of the available court documents, the research team searched for additional data sources such as newspaper articles and books written by investigative journalists. From the open-source sample, we sought to produce a comparable amount of data with the interview sample in terms of biographical characteristics. The five subjects selected for this analysis were the cases with the most complete data. For example, for one of the subjects in the open-source sample, academic failure was coded based on information culled from a book written by investigative journalists (Flynn & Gerhardt, 1995). As part of our coding using that book, we found information that the subject stopped attending high school during his senior year without graduating which as we discuss below would be an indication of academic failure.

Open-source searches required members of the research team to search publicly available materials (Freilich, Chermak, Belli, Gruenewald, & Parkin, 2014; LaFree & Dugan, 2009). All information was digitally archived and provided to a coder. Graduate students trained in criminology and violent extremism relied on these materials to code predetermined variables included in our risk factor and recruitment codebooks. These codes included determining the presence or absence of background experiences, such as physical abuse. When a coder encountered conflicting material, greater weight was granted to more trusted sources.[2] The data collected from the open-source materials paralleled the variables contained in the codebooks generated to extract information from the life history interviews. Thus, we collected comparable data for both methodologies and were able to examine similarities and differences across the two samples. As most studies rely exclusively on either open-source or interview data to explore these issues, our methodological approach can help overcome this type of mono-method bias which permeates the literature, similar to studies which utilize both official statistics and self-report data on criminal offending. Rather

than viewing the multiple methods as a drawback of this study, we believe it provides a useful example of how to overcome mono-method bias.

Sample

Qualitative comparative analysis

Qualitative comparative analysis was the primary analytical method used in this research (Ragin, 1987). The method of QCA holistically compares cases to one another to identify common values on causal conditions, which are known as independent variables in quantitative analyses, leading to common values on outcome variables, also known as dependent variables. In our study, cases were conceptualized as individual extremists. Thus, QCA was used to compare individuals and their specific values on combinations of explanatory conditions with the presence of the outcome variable to others with differing values on explanatory conditions who also manifested the outcome variable. Using Boolean algebra, QCA finishes the analysis with a smaller group of causal conditions which result in the presence of the outcome condition. In this study, the process was also repeated to produce the reduced set of explanatory conditions which resulted in the absence of the outcome variable.

One of the hallmarks of the comparative case approach is the truth table. A truth table contains information on all cases included in the analysis. Each row in the truth table presents the values for the causal conditions for each case referenced in that row (columns one to six; see Table 3). Then, the value on the outcome condition for each case referenced in that row is included in the table (column seven; see Table 3). The next column in the truth table contains the unique id numbers for each case referenced in that row followed by a description of the number of cases represented by the row. When the last column of a truth table contains a number followed by another number in parentheses, this indicates the row is in contradiction, meaning cases in that row, with those specific values on the explanatory conditions, resulted in both the presence and the absence of the outcome condition. (For example, in row 5 in Table 3, the first number in the last column is the number of users of spontaneous violence, and the second number is the number of users of planned violence with this combination of explanatory conditions.) This is also represented by a C for those rows in the outcome condition column where a contradiction was present.

In the truth table, each individual case is grouped, according to its values on the causal conditions and on the outcome condition. QCA implicitly recognizes that the effects of a specific explanatory condition can vary from case to case, depending on its values on other explanatory conditions (Drass & Miethe, 2001), meaning for some individuals the presence of one explanatory condition, such as academic failure, may result in the use of planned violence while for another individual, it may result in the use of spontaneous violence. Then, QCA compares the set, or group, of individuals who all experienced one factor, like academic failure, to all individuals who experienced the next causal condition and so on and so forth, seeking combinations of the explanatory conditions which lead, more or less often, to the presence of the outcome condition. These combinations of explanatory conditions are termed solutions.

Next, Boolean algebra is used to minimize the number of required solutions to cover all of the explanatory condition combinations which produce each value on the

outcome. For example, if the presence of academic failure and the presence of low socioeconomic status in one individual led to the outcome condition of planned ideological violence while in another individual the absence of academic failure and the presence of low socioeconomic status led to the same outcome value, then the simplification process using Boolean algebra would omit academic failure from the solution. This would be done, because in the presence of low socioeconomic status, both the presence and absence of academic failure resulted in the same value on the outcome condition (i.e., planned violence). Thus, in this example solution, two cases would be explained by the presence of low socioeconomic status, resulting in the outcome condition of planned violence. Further interpretation of this example would suggest that being of low socioeconomic status, regardless of academic failure, is a potential route to planned violence for some individuals.

Soulliere (2005) referred to this method as, "…combinatorial logic [which] focuses on the contribution of unique combinations of variables thought of as 'causal conjectures'… or 'scenarios.' The goal of qualitative comparative analysis is to identify which combinations are crucial for distinguishing one outcome from another" (p. 423). However, the method of qualitative comparative analysis also assumes there will be a variety of causal conditions or "alternative scenarios" (Soulliere, 2005, p. 423) which may also lead to the same outcome.

As Elder (1998) observed, lives are lived messily, and this type of analysis is an attempt to capture the mess in a holistic but parsimonious manner. QCA assumes that a holistic examination of combinations of explanatory conditions, rather than multivariate inferential statistics, provides a more accurate model for considering the complexity of human lives. While conventional variable-based approaches address complexity by controlling for the variation of competing independent variables, QCA includes all factors in the solution terms which are found to be involved. Within these combinations, QCA treats the presence of a factor, such as academic failure, just as conceptually important as the absence of that factor, which differs substantially from the approach in multivariate inferential statistics, where only the presence of a factor results in controlled variation for the factor. As such, QCA can handle the "incredible complexity" of multiple pathways leading to the use of ideologically motivated violence as well as non-linear causation (Jensen, Seate, & James, 2018, p. 17).

Further, qualitative comparative analysis is a method well-suited to study smaller sample sizes as it does not rely on inferential statistics, but rather Boolean algebra, which does not require a large sample.[3] The ability to analyze small sample sizes is an important advantage over traditional statistics, because it allows for the smaller, more in-depth interview or case study-based samples specifically lacking in the study of terrorism and extremism. This is another distinct advantage of the QCA method.

In order to use crisp set qualitative comparative analysis, all variables must be dichotomized to utilize the analytical techniques for minimizing the solutions (Ragin, 1987; Ragin, 2008). For some samples with continuous measurement of interesting factors, using dichotomous variables might be a disadvantage. For those samples, fuzzy set QCA can be employed (Ragin, 2008). For this sample, however, many of the factors lent themselves easily to dichotomization once the interview data were transcribed and placed into a quantitative format. Using only dichotomous case conditions allows us to speak in

terms of the absence or presence of each of the case conditions, which is an advantage for interpretation and clarity of results.

While the use of QCA is growing across the social sciences (see Pincus & Metten, 2010), within criminology, the technique remains underutilized. Several important exceptions, however, are worth noting. Some crimes which have been studied using the technique include homicide (Miethe & Drass, 1999; Miethe & Regoeczi, 2004); robbery, assault, sexual assault and kidnapping (Drass & Miethe, 2001). However, the use of QCA to study terrorism has been especially uncommon. Two notable exceptions to this are Jensen and LaFree (2016), in which QCA was used alongside traditional statistical techniques to model pathways to domestic radicalization, and Jensen et al. (2018), in which a QCA model was used to explore the radicalization process.

Outcome condition

In this research, we sought to explain both the use of planned violence and the use of spontaneous violence so, following Rihoux and de Meur (2009), we used Boolean minimization on both values of the outcome condition separately (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). In the cases of the interview subjects, involvement in different types of violence was determined through self-reports and in the non-interviewed subjects, involvement was coded based on open-source materials related to the person's arrest and indictment in terrorist-related criminal activity.

In order to be included as a subject who used planned violence, the subjects were required to have committed one or more act of violence which involved some type of plot which could only be executed with some degree of planning such as an assassination, shooting rampage, or bombing. For those who used spontaneous violence, the subjects were involved in more spontaneous wilding-style attacks on individuals from a target group, such as interracial couples, individuals in the LGBTQ+ community, the homeless, or anti-racist groups. We termed this type of behaviour as spontaneous, because the interview data provided direct support for the lack of planning in these incidents. However, we recognize the distinction between planned and spontaneous is a matter of degrees rather than a completely distinct type of violence. We also recognize that an individual may be involved in one incident of a relatively spontaneous act of violence and another incident of planned violence. To address this issue, we used the interview data to develop an overall assessment of the person's violent conduct while the individuals selected through open-source searches were coded in terms of their violent histories with the nature of the indictment incident as the primary determining factor.

An example of how we handled the difference between these two types of attacks is provided below. The first interview excerpt illustrates planned violence followed by spontaneous violence in the second excerpt.

> I told him what I wanted, briefcase of full of explosives for some adult bookstore [perceived as promoting homosexuality] and a silence gun for shooting someone at the park, so he told Kevin to put it together. He [Kevin, the ammunitions expert] showed me how to set the bomb and that was it. There was no need to talk to Jeff [the leader] about anything else. By that point, I had convinced myself that this is what I got to do. I knew how to shoot somebody. We had been practicing for years and years how to do that, so he didn't need to tell me anything on that. Jeff would never have known what to do with a bomb anyway.

> Kevin had to show me on that. Once it was all prepared for me, all Jeff said was, "We're going to watch the news, see what all happens" (Interview, 5/4/13).

> Yeah, sometimes, there was probably more going on in Buena Park in Hillside and going there [to go] gay bashing. There is an area in there where a lot of gay prostitution happens, kind of loops down Sixth Avenue and comes back and it's known locally as the 'fruit loop' and we would go down there looking for people…That was what Steve [member of white supremacist group] was there for and what actually ended up happening was just some random Vietnamese [person],…he [Steve] ended up hitting one of them in the face and just split his face wide open (Interview, 11/1/13).

These excerpts demonstrate a clear difference in the degree of planning present in each type of violent crime. Thus, this research asks whether there are meaningful differences in the risk factor history for those who used spontaneous violence relative to those who used planned violence. The excerpts also illustrate ideology was an underlying motivation in both cases of violence.

Explanatory conditions

The risk factors we included here are largely ordinary criminological risk factors, demonstrated in the risk factors literature to be correlated with later offending. These risk factors were prior offending, truancy, delinquent peers, familial deviance, low socioeconomic status and academic failure. For all of these conditions, they were coded dichotomously, with 0 representing absence of the characteristic and 1 representing its presence. We included excerpts of the transcript data to demonstrate an example of the types of situations in which each were coded.

We operationalized prior offending as prior property offenses in both adolescence and adulthood. An example of this from the interview data is as follows.

> We'd go around and like try to break into cars and shit and so we could steal cars to go cruise around…I stole this truck from a, like a factory or whatever. We used one of the tractors to move the bricks out of the way and drove the truck out and so like then we had a truck and like a tank full of gas, a couple 13-year-old kids and I ended up stashing that by our house and I had it for like weeks and was out driving around. (Interview, 6/21/14).

We also included a measure of prior truancy. An example of truancy gleaned from the subject interviews includes the following from one of the participants.

> In that first apartment we went to live in, I ended up getting in so much trouble. My mom couldn't control me. When I went to court for that second arrest, the judge literally ordered me to go to school…He told me I'm going to take your mom to jail, because apparently, she's not doing what she needs to do to keep you in school. (Interview, 8/1/13).

Further, we included a measure of whether the subject associated with a delinquent peer group. An excerpted example of delinquent peer group is as follows.

> Steve got this big house and we lived there, and that is kind of where I first started running with like these older guys who sold weed and they were like meth heads and shit like that… [I was] about 13 or 14. Then these guys okay, these guys were really violent. I mean they were known for doing crazy and fucking people up. (Interview, 4/7/13).

We operationalized familial deviance as whether the subject reported having family members involved in extremism (e.g., grandparents, parents, and siblings).

> I was raised by people who believed they were better than those that were not white and my entire family was involved in the movement…I committed my first hate crime when I was 13 with a knife. I cut another kid because he wasn't white and he was talking to a white girl in a park. I was just trying to prove to my family I was a soldier for the movement ready to do what must be done to rid our world of the plague that threatened to destroy our society" (Interview, 2/9/13).

A series of demographic information was collected, such as the subject's childhood socio-economic status, which we then converted to dichotomous (lower- or working-class childhood versus middle- or upper-class). The example of an excerpt showing a lower- or working-class childhood is as follows.

> The east side of Ester Park, which was like the poor side of Ester Park, was almost all Italian, Polish, and German…That's where my parents still live there…Growing up nobody had any money… then after eighth grade we moved because they wanted to be close to my grandparents who were getting old. I think it was probably because they didn't have a whole lot of money and they probably needed help. Freshmen year I went to another Catholic high school, my whole freshmen year. I went to six different high schools in four years. Sometimes the same one twice (Interview, 10/22/13).

Finally, we coded whether the subject had dropped out or ever been expelled from school during K-12 which we termed academic failure. An example of a subject who described academic failure in his/her life included the following.

> Then there was the punk rock. I had some issues there. I had anger issues. I'd fight in school. Later on, I'd get kicked out of all the schools in Lewis County because I'd always fight. I don't know if you can tell by the nose. It's been bent back a couple of times (Interview, 7/27/14).

Hypothesis

Based on our review of the existing literature, we sought to discover whether the risk factor histories of those who committed planned, ideologically motivated violence differed from those who committed spontaneous, ideologically motivated violence. As such, we hypothesized that individuals who committed planned, ideologically motivated violence were likely to have a fewer number of risk factors in their personal histories than individuals who committed spontaneous, ideologically motivated violence. From our perspective, spontaneous ideological violence is more similar to generic violent offending, which is typically associated with a wide variety of risk factors which generate instability and vulnerabilities toward a range of anti-social behaviour including violence (Dahlberg, 1998; Farrington, 1998, 2000; Hawkins et al., 1998; Loeber et al., 1998; Moffitt, 1990; Staff et al., 2015). Planned acts of ideologically motivated violence, however, meet the criteria used to define what is more widely known as terrorism (Freilich et al., 2014, Hamm, 2013; LaFree & Dugan, 2009). As such, we expect planned acts of violence to have been committed by offenders who look less like traditional criminal offenders and, as such, display fewer risk factors.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics for the total sample organized by offender type. Thirty-four offenders in the total sample were male; all of the users of planned violence were male whereas 23 users of spontaneous violence were male. A majority of the total sample, including nine of the planned violence users and half of the spontaneous violence users, were single at the time of the research. Only two of the users of planned violence were married, and none were cohabitating. Nine of the offenders who used spontaneous violence were married while three were cohabitating.

During childhood, 16 individuals in the total sample, including more than half of those who committed planned violence and nearly half of the spontaneously violent, were raised in lower- or working-class environments. Twenty individuals in the sample, including more than half of both subsamples, had completed "some college" or more.

Regarding organizational membership for the users of planned violence, the planned users of violence were somewhat evenly divided between the various organizational types. Three of the planned violence users reported membership in Christian Identity oriented organizations while another three were members of hybrid organizations. Two were members of the Klan and one each were members of skinhead and militia-style organizations.

In contrast, the majority of spontaneously violent subjects were members of skinhead type groups, including the Hammerskin Nation. The next most commonly reported organizations were hybrid style, blending multiple types of far-right extremism as part of a single group (e.g., a combination of militia and neo-Nazi) with six of 24 subjects. Interestingly, none of the spontaneous violence users were members of militia organizations and only one and two subjects reported membership in a Christian Identity type organization or the Ku Klux Klan, respectively.

Finally, the majority of both groups of subjects were recruited face-to-face rather than through media or computers with eight of planned violence users and 15 of spontaneous violence users reporting face-to-face recruitment.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

	Total Sample	Users of Planned Violence	Users of Spontaneous Violence
Male	34/35	11/11	23/24
Single	21/35	9/11	12/24
Married	11/35	2/11	9/24
Cohabitating	3/35	0/11	3/24
Lower- or working-class during childhood	16/34*	6/10*	10/24
Any college (or more)	20/35	6/11	14/24
Type of organization: Klan	2/35	2/11	1/24
Type of organization: CI	3/35	3/11	2/24
Type of organization: Skinhead	22/35	1/11	15/24
Type of organization: Hybrid	6/35	3/11	6/24
Type of organization: Militia/param	1/35	1/11	0/24
Recruited face-to-face	23/35	8/11	15/24
Individual interviewed in-person	30/35	6/11	24/24

*For one individual, this information is missing

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on explanatory conditions.

	Total Sample	Users of Planned Violence	Users of Spontaneous Violence
Use of planned violence	11/35	11/11	24/24
Prior property offenses	22/35	7/11	15/24
Truancy	20/35	3/11	17/24
Delinquent peers	26/35	6/11	20/24
Family involved in extremism	9/35	2/11	7/24
Lower/working class childhood	16/35	4/11	12/24
Academic failure	21/35	4/11	17/24

Table 3. Truth table.

Prior property offenses	Truancy	Delinquent peers	Family involved in extremism	Lower/ working class childhood	Academic failure	Use of planned violence	id	Number of cases
1	1	1	1	0	1	0	285	1
0	0	0	0	1	0	0	125,287	2
1	1	1	0	1	1	0	124, 131,302,121,309,118	7
0	1	0	0	0	1	0	305	1
1	0	1	0	0	0	C	73,295	1(1)
1	0	0	0	0	0	1	68,77	2
1	0	1	0	1	0	1	6	1
1	1	1	0	0	1	C	292,2,301	2(1)
0	0	0	1	1	0	1	16	1
1	1	1	0	0	0	0	293	1
0	0	1	1	0	1	0	294	1
0	0	0	0	1	1	1	254	1
1	0	1	0	0	1	1	35	1
0	1	1	0	0	0	0	117	1
0	0	0	1	0	1	0	283	1
0	1	1	0	0	1	0	114	1
0	0	1	0	0	1	0	130	1
0	0	1	0	0	0	1	42	1
0	1	1	0	1	0	1	210	1
1	1	0	1	0	1	1	129	1
1	1	1	0	1	0	0	312	1
1	0	1	1	0	0	0	308	1
1	1	1	1	1	1	0	297, 126	2
0	1	1	1	1	1	0	288	1

Table 2 contains descriptive statistics for the explanatory conditions used in the qualitative comparative models. Twenty-four individuals in the sample primarily used spontaneous violence while 11 used planned violence, which was the outcome condition.

A majority (approximately 60%) of both subsamples had histories of property offending. A majority of the total sample had committed truancy; however, being truant was far less concentrated in the planned violence subsample (27%) relative to the spontaneous violence subsample (71%). Having delinquent peers was quite common in the sample and across the subsamples with 54% of the planned violence users and 83% of the spontaneous violence users reporting delinquent peers. Family members involved in extremism were the least common of the risk factors included here. Only about 18% of the planned violence subsample and just under 30% of the spontaneous violence subsample reported this risk factor. Being raised in the lower- or working-class was relatively common, with just under half of the total sample. Thirty-six percent of the planned violence subsample were raised in the lower- or working-class compared to 50% of the spontaneous violence

subsample. Finally, academic failure was experienced by more than half of the total sample, with 36% of the planned violence users having experienced it compared to 70% of the spontaneous violence users. Examining the descriptive statistics demonstrated that the spontaneous violence users appear riskier, more commonly having experienced the traditional criminological risk factors described in Table 2.

No one case condition achieved necessary status for either the outcome of spontaneous or planned violence, using the consistency threshold of 0.9 (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012).[4] Two conditions achieved near-sufficiency status on their own (consistency threshold of 0.8; see Jensen et al., 2018; Jordan, Gross, Javernick-Will, & Garvin, 2011, p. 1166). These were academic failure (consistency = 0.81) and truancy (consistency = 0.85) for spontaneous violence only, meaning in (nearly) all cases where an individual had experienced academic failure, this individual had also used spontaneous violence (outcome equal to 0) relative to planned violence. Further, in the majority of cases where an individual had delinquent peers, they had also used spontaneous violence relative to planned violence.[5] The findings of two singular sufficient conditions for spontaneous violence is only one piece of understanding the causal complexity which leads to the use of violence by right-wing extremists. We turn now to the centrepiece of QCA, the truth table and its logical minimization.

Truth Table

Table 3 contains the truth table for this analysis. This truth table demonstrated some of the complications of a case comparative analysis. Thirty-five individuals were included in this truth table with six case conditions and five contradictory cases. That is, there were five individuals for whom the same values on the explanatory conditions resulted in either value on the outcome condition. Selecting the number of case conditions is not an exact science but rather, should be guided by theory and prior research. Further, the more case conditions included, the fewer the number of cases left in contradiction, but the more particularized or diversified the solutions are (Rihoux & de Meur, 2009). We did extensive work examining various models with as few as three case conditions and as many as eight. Guided by theory and prior research on the risk factors for offending, we arrived at six case conditions.

Boolean simplification and solutions

The final piece of qualitative comparative analysis involved the use of Boolean algebra to simplify the truth table into a smaller set of solutions which cover a larger set of cases. This is accomplished by the program running QCA pairing together cases whose explanatory condition values vary only by one or more conditions and whose outcome was the same. The simplification via Boolean algebra drops out the varying case conditions, leaving only the static case conditions for the similar cases with the same outcome condition. This should lead to more parsimonious solutions; however, in complex samples with substantial natural diversity, such as this one, there will be more complex and less parsimonious solutions (Rihoux & de Meur, 2009).

Table 4 contains the simplified solutions for individuals who used planned violence; Table 5 contains the solutions for the use of spontaneous violence. Of immediate note was the degree of diversity and complexity present in the solutions for both values of the outcome condition, but particularly, for the users of planned violence. For eight of

Table 4. Qualitative comparative analysis solution for individuals who used planned violence.

Solutions for the use of planned violence: 9/11 cases*	No of cases covered by solution	Coverage	Consist.
PROPERTY OFFENSES * truancy * delinquent peers * family involved in extremism * lower/working class childhood * academic failure	2	0.18	1
property offenses * truancy * DELINQUENT PEERS * family involved in extremism * lower/working class childhood * academic failure	1	0.09	1
property offenses * truancy * delinquent peers * FAMILY INVOLVED IN EXTREMISM * LOWER/WORKING CLASS CHILDHOOD * academic failure	1	0.09	1
property offenses * truancy * delinquent peers * family involved in extremism * LOWER/WORKING CLASS CHILDHOOD * ACADEMIC FAILURE	1	0.09	1
PROPERTY OFFENSES * truancy * DELINQUENT PEERS * family involved in extremism * LOWER/WORKING CLASS CHILDHOOD * academic failure	1	0.09	1
PROPERTY OFFENSES * truancy * DELINQUENT PEERS * family involved in extremism * lower/working class childhood * ACADEMIC FAILURE	1	0.09	1
property offenses * TRUANCY * DELINQUENT PEERS * family involved in extremism * LOWER/WORKING CLASS CHILDHOOD * academic failure	1	0.09	1
PROPERTY OFFENSES * TRUANCY * delinquent peers * FAMILY INVOLVED IN EXTREMISM * lower/working class childhood * ACADEMIC FAILURE	1	0.09	1

*Two of 11 cases were in contradiction and are not solved for here
Solution coverage: 0.818 Solution consistency: 1.0
The solution coverage for Table 4 (0.818/1.0) indicates a high proportion of cases are covered by the sufficient pathways of the eight solutions explaining the outcome of planned violence. Solution consistency is 1.0/1.0 as all contradictions were excluded and thus, not solved for.

Table 5. Qualitative comparative analysis solution for individuals who used spontaneous violence.

Solutions for the use of spontaneous violence: 21/24 cases+	No of cases covered by solution	Coverage	Consist.
PROPERTY OFFENSES * TRUANCY * DELINQUENT PEERS * family involved in extremism * LOWER/WORKING CLASS CHILDHOOD	7	0.29	1
PROPERTY OFFENSES * TRUANCY * DELINQUENT PEERS * FAMILY INVOLVED IN EXTREMISM * ACADEMIC FAILURE	3	0.13	1
property offenses * TRUANCY * family involved in extremism * lower/working class childhood * ACADEMIC FAILURE	2	0.08	1
TRUANCY * DELINQUENT PEERS * family involved in extremism * lower/working class childhood * academic failure	2	0.08	1
property offenses * truancy * FAMILY INVOLVED IN EXTREMISM * lower/working class childhood * ACADEMIC FAILURE	2	0.08	1
property offenses * truancy * delinquent peers * family involved in extremism * LOWER/WORKING CLASS CHILDHOOD * academic failure	2	0.08	1
property offenses * truancy * DELINQUENT PEERS * lower/working class childhood * ACADEMIC FAILURE	1	0.04	1
TRUANCY * DELINQUENT PEERS * FAMILY INVOLVED IN EXTREMISM * LOWER/WORKING CLASS CHILDHOOD * ACADEMIC FAILURE	1	0.04	1
PROPERTY OFFENSES * truancy * DELINQUENT PEERS * FAMILY INVOLVED IN EXTREMISM * lower/working class childhood * academic failure	1	0.04	1

+Three of the 24 cases were in contradiction and are not solved for here
Solution coverage: 0.875 Solution consistency: 1.0
The solution coverage for Table 5 (0.875/1.0) indicates a high proportion of cases are covered by the sufficient pathways described by the nine solutions explaining the outcome of spontaneous violence. Solution consistency is 1.0/1.0 as all contradictions were excluded and thus, not solved for.

the nine, there was little commonality between these individuals, with eight solutions needed to cover the nine cases. Only one solution represented more than one case. Thus, there were few commonalities between the individuals who used planned violence.

For two individuals who committed planned violence, they had previously committed property offenses and manifested no other risk factors (raw coverage = 0.18). The rest of the solutions only covered one individual each (raw coverage = 0.09), ranging from one person who had only delinquent peers and no other risk factors present to one individual who experienced four risk factors, including having committed property offenses and truancy, experiencing academic failure and having family involved in extremism. With only one individual per solution, there was no minimization possible for those paths.

Beyond the degree of individuation and diversity, the users of planned violence looked somewhat lower risk with respect to traditional criminological risk factors. For nine of the 11 planned violence users, their solutions demonstrated that the vast majority of planned violence users showed evidence of having experienced three or fewer risk factors.

For the users of spontaneous violence, seven had committed property offenses, truancy and had delinquent peers as well as having a lower- or working-class childhood with academic failure minimized (raw coverage = 0.29) while another three had committed property offenses, been truant and had delinquent peers, had family involved in extremism and experienced academic failure with lower- or working-class childhood minimized (raw coverage = 0.13). Two individuals had not committed property offenses but had been truant, had no family involved in extremism, had not been lower- or working-class during childhood but had experienced academic failure with delinquent peers minimized (raw coverage = 0.08). Another two in the sample had committed truancy and had delinquent peers but did not report having family involved in extremism, a lower- or working-class childhood, or academic failure with property offenses minimized (raw coverage = 0.08). Two other individuals had not committed prior property offenses or truancy but did have family members involved in extremism, were not lower- or working-class in childhood and did experience academic failure with delinquent peers minimized (raw coverage = 0.08). Two more individuals manifested only a lower- or working-class childhood but did not commit prior property offenses or truancy, had no delinquent peers or family involved in extremism and did not experience academic failure (raw coverage = 0.08). One more individual had no prior property offenses or truancy, but did have delinquent peers, was not raised lower- or working-class, and had experienced academic failure (raw coverage = 0.04). One individual committed truancy, had delinquent peers and family involved in extremism, had a lower- or working-class childhood and experienced academic failure (raw coverage = 0.04). Finally, the last included solution described one individual who committed property offenses but not truancy, had both delinquent peers and family involved in extremism but did not have either a lower- or working-class childhood or academic failure (raw coverage = 0.04).

When a solution pathway described above comprised fewer than the six case conditions included in the analysis, such as in the first solution for the users of spontaneous violence, it meant that a case condition was minimized using Boolean algebra. That solution covers seven individuals who had committed property offenses and truancy, had delinquent peers and a lower- or working-class childhood but no family involved in extremism. These seven individuals had all committed spontaneous violence and varied on whether they had experienced academic failure; as such, during the minimization

process, academic failure was dropped from the solution as it was immaterial to whether they experienced the outcome of spontaneous violence.

None of the solutions for the users of planned violence had any minimized factors. This made sense since only one of the solutions included more than one individual. However, five of the solutions for the users of spontaneous violence minimized one factor. Further, nine solutions covered the 21 individuals who used spontaneous violence and whose combination of causal conditions did not result in a contradiction, demonstrating larger clustering in the users of spontaneous violence than planned violence. These findings demonstrate how complex these subjects' lives were. There was very little commonality between the lives of users of planned violence while somewhat more similarities were found between the spontaneously violent. The pathways to ideologically motivated violence clearly demonstrated the complicated nature of life-course experiences which ultimately produce this type of violence.

The qualitative comparative analysis demonstrated there are no clear combinations of risk factors which clearly lead to violence of either type in a sample of ideologically motivated offenders. Yet, the individuals who engaged in spontaneous violence appeared to have a higher risk profile; that is, to have experienced traditional criminological risk factors more commonly than the individuals who committed planned violence. In terms of background risk factors, the spontaneously violent looked more like traditional violent offenders.

Discussion

We started this paper with the question of whether there was a difference in the early lives of those who committed spontaneous violence relative to those who committed more planned violence. The simple answer to that question was yes, there were differences. However, the more nuanced and complete answer to the question demonstrated that there was no one combination of risk factors which led to violence (Widom, 2014), regardless of whether the violence was spontaneous or relatively well planned. We were also unable to identify any necessary conditions.

For the users of planned violence, the combinations of case conditions varied quite a bit from one another. In fact, only one solution covered more than one individual. Generally speaking, this group of individuals demonstrated fewer risk factors in the solutions, with all experiencing four or fewer, and one-fourth of the individuals experiencing only one. Meaning, on the surface, it would not have been expected that these individuals would have used violence – especially planned and ideologically motivated violence – if risk factors are an important predictor of engaging in ideologically motivated and planned violence.

For two individuals who used planned violence, their only included risk factor was a history of having committed property offenses. For another subject, the only risk factor present was having delinquent peers. Given the ubiquity of adolescent misbehaviour, it is surprising that a history of property offenses or delinquent peers would be the only indicator of future misbehaviour. However, there were also subjects who had experienced multiple risk factors, such as one individual who had committed property offenses, had delinquent peers and experienced academic failure. Further, the vast majority had no family involved in right-wing extremism. Perhaps the lack of high-risk

profiles for this group of individuals may signal the importance of participation in organizations and the greater resources present in such organizations, which may override the paucity of risk factors for some individuals. Overall, this sample of planned violence users did not manifest as many risk factors in their pathways to violence as the users of spontaneous violence.

Looking individually at the outcome of spontaneous violence, two risk factors met the criterion for sufficiency, demonstrating when an individual manifested either truancy or academic failure, they often also were likely to be users of spontaneous violence. Looking specifically at the sufficient conjunctions of conditions for spontaneous violence, the solutions demonstrated the higher risk of this subsample. The vast majority of solutions covering the users of spontaneous violence demonstrated the presence of more than one risk factor with solutions covering slightly more than half of the sample manifesting four or more risk factors. Property offenses, truancy, and delinquent peers were particularly common. Further, four solutions, covering seven individuals, showed the presence of family members involved in right-wing extremism, making this a more commonly experienced risk factor than for the users of planned violence. Overall, however, family membership was rare for all individuals in the sample. Informal family socialization consistent with aspects of far-right extremism, however, such as the use of racial slurs, and the expression of various ideas consistent with racism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia was relatively prevalent in both subsamples. In the end, the 11 subjects covered by the solutions with four or more manifested risk factors, overlooking the minimized case conditions, exemplify how much higher risk and how much the spontaneously violent individuals look like non-ideologically motivated (traditional) offenders. These individuals were likely at risk for all types of offending regardless of ideological motivation.

As noted above, there were interesting differences between the two subsamples. The planned violence sample demonstrated broader diversity; that is, more solutions were needed to cover fewer cases. These subjects were drawn from a wide spectrum of lifestyles as some had previously experienced high-risk behaviour while others led low-risk, non-offending lives but were radicalized nonetheless. Planned users of violence seemed to possess less noticeable traditional risk factors, suggesting these individuals may be harder to detect or less likely to exhibit risk factors than other types of violent offenders.

By contrast, the spontaneous violence users were drawn from a narrower spectrum; many had previously led high-risk, offending lifestyles (petty crime, drug dealing, motorcycle or street gangs) and demonstrated more risk factors, with some serving prison time. These differences were described by the interviewees and were demonstrated in the QCA analysis as well. Ultimately, this sample well demonstrated the Elder's (1998) truism: lives are lived messily. It was clear from the accounts of these individuals that risk factors were common, and many of these people experienced difficult, hardship-laden lives.

Implications of heterogeneity

Negative findings play an important, if often overlooked and underappreciated, role in science (Matosin, Frank, Engell, Lum, & Newell, 2014). In short, negative findings include results which do not support a research hypothesis and are sometimes erroneously referred to as non-findings (Fanelli, 2010). Negative findings are important, in part,

because they encourage a critical evaluation of existing lines of thought which may be flawed or completely inaccurate. In this sense, negative findings help identify what we do not know, which is equally as important as identifying what we do know (Matosin et al., 2014).

As such, our negative findings point to an area within terrorism studies deserving of continued scrutiny. Distinct psychological profiles have long been disregarded as unreliable and inaccurate, unable to predict or better understand the conditions which produce terrorism (e.g., see Horgan, 2004). While profiles have fallen from favour, pathways to terrorism remain a staple in the vernacular among both scholars and practitioners. A pathway refers to "a common pattern of development shared by a group of individuals, which is distinct from the behavioral development experienced by other groups of individuals" (Loeber, 1991, p. 98). Despite its ubiquity today, pathway is no more useful as a heuristic device than profile, unless specific and consistent combinations of conditions can be reliably identified as explanatory factors related to terrorism. Our research here suggested there is no single, or even multiple pathways or combinations of risk factors which led reliably to either planned or spontaneous violence. As such, the field of terrorism studies should reconsider whether pathway is, in fact, a useful concept moving forward or whether this term encourages a distorted understanding as some observers have previously suggested (Patel, 2011).

However, disregarding the idea of distinct pathways may be more difficult than it sounds. For decades, the study of terrorism has been criticized for being overly politicized, and, too often, neglecting accepted scientific standards of research (Silke, 2008). Cultural and political forces have influenced the development of terrorism studies in a number of important ways. One relatively recent example is the growing interest in formalizing terrorism risk assessments (see e.g., Violent Extremist Risk Assessment/VERA 2; Extremism Risk Guidelines/ERG-22+). While terrorism scholars have been discussing this issue for some time (for an overview, see Sarma, 2017), the development of risk assessment tools is encouraged, in part, by American federal funding agencies who see these products as concrete deliverables or tangible outcomes which can help justify budgetary allocations (McCulloch & Wilson, 2015). Part of the problem lies in the fact that once assessment tools are developed, these tools may take on a life of their own and gain more currency or gravitas than they should. Even more of a problem, tools developed for one area of study may be inappropriately applied to another area (Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Baird, 2009).

At the most basic level, valid assessment tools require robust empirical data, which demonstrate distinct and reliable patterning. Without distinct patterns, the validity of any risk assessment is compromised. The current focus on pathways within terrorism studies implicitly suggests that distinct patterns exist, but our findings, among others, may demonstrate that these pathways may be more apparent than real. For example, a recent study of violent Sovereign Citizen offenders, who are one type of violent extremist, employed the TRAP-18 (see also Meloy & Gill, 2016) to "post-dict" a sample of these offenders (Challacombe & Lucas, 2018). This study found that 50% of the TRAP-18 indicators were detected retrospectively in 70% of the sample of positive cases. Thirty percent of the sample demonstrated having fewer than half of the TRAP-18 indicators. What these findings indicate, more than anything, is that even among a relatively distinct subset of violent extremist offenders (i.e., Sovereign Citizens), there was still substantial heterogeneity.

Like Challacombe and Lucas (2018) and Meloy and Gill (2016), our findings provide an important cautionary tale regarding the desire to develop terrorism risk assessments. Given the high degree of heterogeneity evident among both the planned and spontaneously violent extremists, the field should approach these tools with a healthy degree of scepticism. It should not be assumed, a priori, these tools are effective or helpful. In fact, predicting risk when few, if any, clear patterns can be discerned in such populations of offenders, given the present state of the empirical evidence, is at odds with scientific reasoning and analysis.

Violent extremism is a complex problem. Identifying and reducing a complex problem down to a small number of individual indicators on which practitioners or the general public can focus in terms of risk assessment may produce a myopic perspective which is overly narrow and may miss important warning signs, as was the case with Nikolas Cruz, the Stoneman Douglas High School shooter. Alternatively, a focus on risk factors can also produce a net-widening effect, with substantial false positives where large numbers of individuals from certain populations are treated as at-risk, and, thus subject to heightened levels of stigma and a variety of different types of surveillance and monitoring (McCulloch & Wilson, 2015).

We are not suggesting that heterogeneity among violent extremists should necessarily result in a hands-off approach related to prevention and intervention. While strategies to predict future behaviour based on flawed assumptions about distinct pathways should be avoided, it is important to continue rigorous empirical investigations which may provide additional information about the nature and extent of risk factors among violent extremists (Monahan, 2012). In fact, as Skeem and Monahan (2011) helpfully pointed out, risk assessment includes four primary components with the first step being the identification of empirically valid indicators. The field of terrorism studies is still very much in this phase of the process and should be careful about making the proverbial mistake of putting the cart before the horse. While this type of slow, deliberate process may be unsatisfying, it is necessary for the development of valid and reliable tools and is ultimately, the only responsible course of action.

Problematizing the sample

It is important to note that our findings may be a partial or full artefact of the different data sources upon which we relied for each subsample. While each user of spontaneous violence was interviewed, only five of the 11 users of planned violence were interviewed. We relied on open-source searches for the majority of the latter subsample. There may be important differences in the coders' ability to find reliable and valid information on some of the risk factors for the case studies of the planned violence users. Juvenile records are often sealed and expunged at the age of majority; adolescent friendships with delinquent peers or family involvement in extremism may not ever be recorded in the open-source and so on and so forth. Thus, what in our analysis appeared to manifest as the planned violence users being a lower risk subsample may be in whole or in part attributable to the difference in data sources.

An interesting parallel on the difference between the interview and open-source data may be the distinction between self-report surveys and official data on offending (Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, 1981; Short & Nye, 1957, 1958). By this, we mean interview data, like self-report surveys, may provide more robust and detailed data regarding the

individual backgrounds of violent extremists and open-source data may have similar holes in coverage relative to official data on offending. Comparative research on terrorist and violent crime offenders is needed to examine the reliability and validity of interview and open-source data, respectively. Further research is also needed to determine if there is any variation regarding reliability and validity for offending histories for individuals who were spontaneously violent relative to those who engaged in planned violence (see also Jensen & LaFree, 2016; Jensen et al., 2018).

Conclusions

In this paper, we sought to understand the ways risk factors affected ideologically motivated violent offenders using interview and open-source data. Given such rich interview and open-source data, we sought to understand individual lives in the context in which they were lived; as such, utilizing QCA was a natural choice. In many ways, QCA was invented in order to analyze and understand individual cases in a richer, more context-driven way than traditional inferential statistics. Our QCA results demonstrated for both samples, there were important differences between the planned and spontaneous violence samples.

Finally, it is clear from what has been demonstrated here, though there was no single trajectory, there were risk factors present for many individuals in the two samples. It is likely there is no single pathway or trajectory to ideologically motivated violence; looking elsewhere in the literature on risk factors, perhaps the search for a risk factor profile is a flawed approach in general. Rather, risk factors may matter in a more general sense – as Simi et al. (2016) termed it, there is cumulative risk, with more risk factors present generating more risk of offending. Though the cumulative risk hypothesis is an incomplete explanation – it cannot explain low-risk users of planned violence – it may be a good explanation for the riskier offenders. Alternatively, it may be that the presence of any risk factors for some individuals are enough to tip them into the high-risk category of violence.

Notes

1. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed with only minor edits.
2. In order from most reliable to least reliable, we favoured government and legal documents over watch dog reports, watch dog reports over uncorroborated statements from people with direct access to information provided, and finally, statements from people who heard information second hand (Sageman, 2004).
3. We utilized the programs Tosmana, version 1.3.1.2 (Cronqvist, 2011) and Charles Ragin's fs/QCA 3.0 to analyze the data.
4. Necessity results available upon request.
5. Sufficiency results available upon request.

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Notes on contributors

Susan Fahey is an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Stockton University. Her research interests include terrorism, right-wing extremism, political instability, and criminological theories.

Pete Simi is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Chapman University. His research interests include social movements, political violence, juvenile delinquency, and life-course criminology.

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