

Chapter 2

A Note on Method

The comparative analysis presented in this volume draws on existing literature and empirical data to provide an overview and critical discussion of what we presently know and do not know about lone wolf terrorism. Due to the dearth of systematic academic research on the subject, extensive empirical data are used to enable a more in-depth analysis of the key dimensions of lone wolf terrorism. The bulk of these data was initially collected and analyzed as part of the European Commission Sixth Framework Program project *Transnational Terrorism, Security and the Rule of Law* (TTSRL), a three-year research project (2006–2009) that aimed to help Europe better understand terrorism. TTSRL focused on a broad range of terrorism-related subjects, including radicalization, the relation with the media, counterterrorism, theoretical background, academic discourse and practical case studies.

2.1 Chronology of Lone Wolf Terrorism in 15 Countries, 1968–2010

The data used here derive from multiple complementary sources. In order to assess the incidence, evolution and nature of lone wolf terrorism, I have compiled a database of all terrorist attacks carried out by lone individuals between 1 January 1968 and 31 December 2010 in the 15 countries that are covered in the TTSRL research project.² These countries are: United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Poland, The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Czech Republic, Portugal, Russia, Australia, Canada and United States. The database is primarily based on an analysis of the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and the RAND-MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base (TKB). All recorded incidents for the period 1968–2007 were cross-checked in both the GTD and the TKB. Because the TKB ceased operations on 31 March 2008, I used only the GTD for the period 2008–2010. The GTD

² The initial database of lone wolf terrorism compiled by the author in 2007 [1, 2] contained significant gaps, most of which have subsequently been resolved.

contains by far the largest number of domestic and international terrorism events compared to any of the other existing terrorism data sets, including the TKB [3].

Information in the GTD and TKB is drawn from open-source materials, such as electronic news archives, existing data sets, secondary source materials (e.g. books and journals) and legal documents. All information contained in these databases reflects what is reported in those sources. The GTD database developers seek to corroborate each piece of information among multiple independent open sources, and require that each case included be verified by at least two separate sources. However, they make no further claims as to the veracity of this information [4]. In developing and cross-checking the database of lone wolf terrorism using the GTD and TKB, only those cases were considered in which two criteria were met: (1) the act must be aimed at attaining a political, ideological or religious goal; and (2) there must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience than the immediate victims. Attacks that were attempted but not successfully carried out were included in the analysis.

The GTD and TKB have serious weaknesses, however, that should be kept in mind when interpreting the data. First and foremost, by relying on data culled from open sources, the data sets are likely to be biased toward the most newsworthy forms of terrorism. In particular, “it is reasonable to conclude that media accounts will be more likely to miss attacks that were averted by authorities, that were unsuccessful, or that happened in regions of the world with less media coverage” [3, p. 188]. It is certain that some potential terrorist attacks never came to the attention of the media and are thus excluded. This issue is taken up in [Chap. 4](#) in the discussion of the “hidden figure” of lone wolf terrorism. Second, the GTD and TKB (like all other open-source data sets) lack information on important issues associated with terrorism incidents. Specifically, three complicating factors were encountered during the research:

- In several cases the open sources are unable to identify the perpetrators; without this information, it is very difficult to accurately classify incidents as lone wolf terrorism. The following example from the TKB illustrates this issue: “Denmark, 15 September 1985, Unknown group. Coinciding with the Jewish New Year, a bomb exploded at an Israeli travel agency in Copenhagen. No one claimed responsibility for the blast. Twelve people were injured” (previously accessible at www.mipt.org). The GTD contains similar cases, for instance: “07/03/2007: Khavazh Daurbekov, deputy mayor of Karabulak town in the Ingushetia Republic of Russia, was assassinated near his home by an unknown gunman. No claim of responsibility was reported” (<http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=200707030010>).
- At times a known extremist group is suspected but no conclusive evidence is presented to verify the type of perpetrator (individual or collective; affiliated or unaffiliated). Consider the following example from the GTD: “12/29/2010: On Wednesday night, in Lombardy, Varese, Italy, two small improvised explosive devices detonated outside the political headquarters of the Northern League party. The building and some furniture were damaged but there were no

casualties reported. No group claimed responsibility but Informal Anarchic Federation militants *were suspected* to have carried out the attack” (<http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=201012290003>; emphasis added).

- In some instances, time and deeper exploration uncovers links to broader networks which indicate that a terrorist attack may not have been an instance of lone wolf terrorism [5]. The GTD and TKB do not always follow up and record this subsequent information. In a number of cases the GTD and TKB do relate seemingly individual acts of terrorism to broader extremist organizations. The alleged connection between Richard Reid and Al Qaeda is a case in point (<http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=200112220002>). Reid attempted to detonate explosives in his shoes on a flight en route to Miami from Paris, on 22 December 2001. After several failed attempts Reid was restrained by passengers. Reid, who converted to Islam while in prison, was reportedly trained by Al Qaeda [6, 7]. Where perpetrators can be tied to an established or identifiable extremist group (even if such a connection remains inconclusive), they have been excluded from the list. For example, Alexei Korshunov, the accused killer of court judge Eduard Chuvashov in Moscow on 12 April 2010, is reportedly a member of the neo-Nazi group OB-88 whose members include suspects in other high-profile murders of Russian left-wing activists and officials [8, 9].

Taking into account these limitations as well as the difficulties associated with defining lone wolf terrorism (see Chap. 3), it is clear that some degree of arbitrariness inevitably remains present in labelling an act “lone wolf terrorism”.

The recorded incidents of lone wolf terrorism were corroborated through an analysis of media reports, security reports, and chronologies and encyclopedias of terrorism (e.g. [10–13]). A number of ambiguous incidents were excluded due to either profound confusion about the identity of the perpetrator, the perpetrator’s alleged connections with a terrorist group, or the absence of a “terrorist purpose” (see Chap. 3).³ In a few cases it has not been possible to trace the exact circumstances of an attack, which resulted in their exclusion from the database. The analysis of alternative sources also led to the inclusion into the database of lone wolf terrorism incidents that were not recorded in the GTD and TKB.

The process of cross-checking resulted in the exclusion from the database of a number of recent violent acts by stand-alone individuals that were carried out for reasons of personal motivation, or simply with criminal intent. Four such incidents deserve mention here because they are sometimes wrongly classified as lone wolf terrorism. The first incident is the mass shooting on the campus of Virginia Tech

³ The arson attack on a house inhabited by refugees in Lübeck, Germany, in January 1996 is a case in point. The attack killed ten people and injured 38. Investigators suspected Safwan Eid, a Lebanese national living in the house. Others claimed that it was the work of neo-Nazis and that the accused was in fact a victim. Eid was twice acquitted due to lack of evidence. The case may be reopened due to new evidence that four neo-Nazis were the perpetrators of the attack.

on 16 April 2007, in which 33 students, including the shooter, lost their lives. In a series of videos broadcast days after the shootings, the perpetrator, Seung-Hui Cho, revealed himself as a deeply disturbed individual obsessed with violence and harboring profound and unexplained grievances, apparently against his fellow students [14]. The second event, also in the United States, involved a hostage situation at the Discovery Communications headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, on 1 September 2010. The perpetrator, James Lee, was reportedly motivated by his disapproval of the Discovery network's television programming. In the manifesto he posted on the Internet, Lee laid out demands for the network to change its programming. Lee was eventually shot to death by police snipers; all three hostages were freed unharmed.

The third incident took place on 1 May 2009 in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, where eight people were killed, including the driver, when 38-year-old Karst Tate drove his car into a crowd of civilians attending a festival. The intended target of the attack was a bus carrying the Dutch royal family. Tate left no note or any other indication of his motivations; it is therefore not possible to determine with any certainty a political motive. The fourth incident involved the airplane hijacking at Moscow's Domodedovo airport on 29 July 2010. Thirty-nine-year-old Magomed Patiyev held 105 passengers hostage and demanded a meeting with law enforcement officials and journalists, claiming to have valuable information about a bombing that occurred earlier that year. Patiyev was unarmed and made no direct threats during the standoff [15, 16]. As noted, all four incidents outlined above were excluded from the database due to the presumed absence of a political, religious or social goal.

The database of lone wolf terrorism compiled by the author comprises a total of 88 lone wolves who in conjunction have committed a total of (at least) 198 terrorist attacks in the 15 countries under study between 1968 and 2010. The details of these cases can be found in the Appendix. Only two perpetrators were identified as being female (American anti-abortion activist Rachelle Shannon and radicalized British Islamist Roshonara Choudhry), which means that almost all lone wolf terrorists in the sample are men. Specific details from this database are referred to throughout the text.

2.2 Qualitative Case Studies

In addition to developing a database of lone wolf terrorism, five cases were studied in depth to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. These cases are used here to analyze the nature and key dimensions of lone wolf terrorism. The case studies were selected on the basis of their diversity in terms of (a) the number of fatalities and injuries, (b) the time span (ranging from a single attack to a prolonged terrorist campaign), and (c) the geographical location of the attacks. The case studies are based on an analysis of writings and statements by the perpetrators, media reports (print and online), police and court transcripts, psychological

Table 2.1 Lone wolf terrorism case studies

Name	Location	Time span	Fatalities/injuries
Theodore Kaczynski	United States	1978–1995	3/23
Franz Fuchs	Austria	1993–1996	4/15
Yigal Amir	Israel	Single attack in 1995	1/0
David Copeland	United Kingdom	Two-week spree in 1999	3/129
Volkert van der Graaf	Netherlands	Single attack in 2002	1/0

and psychiatric evaluations, and relevant literature. It is important to stress that these cases are by no means exhaustive or representative of all known acts of lone wolf terrorism, but are used in an explorative way to gauge some of the key features of the phenomenon. The five cases exemplify many differences in the political or ideological backgrounds of the perpetrators, their radicalization, targets and modus operandi, which highlight the absence of a single, standardized profile of a lone wolf terrorist [2, 17]. The cases are summarized in Table 2.1.

Finally, this analysis of lone wolf terrorism draws on the writings of a number of other, more recent lone wolves, including the accused Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik and American anti-abortion activist Paul Ross Evans. First, however, in the next chapter lone wolf terrorism will be defined and conceptualized.

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