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DOCTORAL THESIS

A Social Network Approach to Jihadist Mobilization: Analyzing Radicalization and Recruitment among Underage Youth in Spain

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A toda la red de afectos que me rodea

A Marisa y Miguel, mis padres

A Eloy, mi hermano

A Luis, mi primera influencia política, y Paca, mis yayos

A mis amigos y compañeras

Acknowledgments

A key tenet in social network theories and analysis is that individual actions find meaning within the social context in which they occur. People and the pathways they take are, to a large extent, shaped by their interactions with other individuals. Their choices, ideas, and actions are rarely isolated phenomena. This principle, which is the central focus of my research, has also been its driving force.

Some of these social influences are difficult to unravel. Having lived in a country deeply affected by terrorism for many decades, growing up impacted by the news of each attack perpetrated by ETA, sensitized me to the consequences of political violence. Perhaps it planted the seed of my subsequent interest in understanding its causes and contributing to explain them.

The progress I have made in this endeavor owes much to the generous support of many individuals. Among them, I must first recognize the director of this doctoral thesis, who actually began mentoring me long before starting this research. Initially as his reader, and later as his student, Fernando Reinares has been an invaluable guide. He played a pivotal role in my decision to embark on this venture, and in many of the choices I have made since then and up to the present writing of these lines (the last, in fact) of my thesis. His advice and help throughout the research, in accessing sources of information, in navigating the intricate and demanding process of publishing the articles that make up this dissertation or in the presentation of the results at public events, has been fundamental. His words and gestures of encouragement, recognition and appreciation over the years have also been an important emotional sustenance.

A significant part of the work involved in this thesis coincides with my time serving first as a research assistant and later as a researcher at the Elcano Royal Institute. I have experienced personal and professional growth under the auspices of

this institution and its members. Special recognition is owed to my colleague Carola García-Calvo, from whom I have learned so much. Having undertaken and completed this journey before me, she has shared her experiences, imparted her knowledge, and offered her unconditional support.

As an associate professor initially, and later as a pre-doctoral researcher, I have found great motivation at the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos over the years. The experience of discussing the progress of my research with students in the classroom, as well as engaging in enriching conversations with two exceptional colleagues, Rut Bermejo and Isabel Bazaga, has provided significant impetus for the completion of my thesis.

Analyzing radicalized youth and their personal networks is a formidable challenge that would have been impracticable without the indispensable aid of many people. They generously shared their knowledge and information with me, granting me access to data crucial to my research. I extend a special acknowledgment to José Luis Castro, the Juvenile Court Judge at the National Court, for his trust and unwavering support. This dissertation is greatly indebted to his generosity in sharing the admirable work carried out by him, the Juvenile Prosecution Office, and the dedicated team at the Juvenile Court. I am also grateful for the limitless collaboration and appreciation received from Maite García Membrives and Luis Cieza from the Agency for the Reeducation and Reintegration of Juvenile Offenders (ARRMI) in the Community of Madrid. During my visits to Ripoll, I engaged in profoundly insightful conversations with exceptional professionals such as Alicia Mesas, Nuria Riera, and Nuria Perpinyà. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the General Secretariat of Penitentiary Institutions (SGIP) of the Ministry of the Interior and the Secretariat of Penitentiary Measures, Reintegration, and Victim Care, under the Department of Justice of the Government of Catalonia, for graciously opening the doors of their facilities and facilitating interviews with some of the subjects included in this study. The Attorney General's Office of the National Court played a crucial role in granting access to a significant portion of the documentary evidence I analyzed, as did the counter-terrorism units of the National Police and the Civil Guard. In my visits to Ceuta and Melilla, the interactions with the provincial brigades

dedicated to the investigation of jihadism proved to be a valuable resource for gathering and verifying information.

During the course of my study, I have also benefited greatly from having taken the Postgraduate Course in Applied Social Research and Data Analysis at the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS). Thanks to its professors and my fellow colleagues. Additionally, the valuable lessons and evaluations from Laura Salas, along with the diligent corrections by Cheryl Whittaker, have greatly enhanced this thesis.

The empirical chapters of this study have been published in three international peer-reviewed journals. I am deeply grateful to the editors of *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, and *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* for accepting and publishing my work. Being published in TPV and SCT is a remarkable milestone for someone who initially sparked his interest in terrorism studies by reading and photocopying articles from these two journals in the university library. Furthermore, I extend my gratitude to the nine reviewers who have reviewed my manuscripts and provided invaluable advice for their improvement. I presented preliminary results of this dissertation at conferences and events organized by the International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP), International Juvenile Justice Observatory (IJJO), and the Sociedad Española de Investigación Criminológica (SEIC), to whom I am thankful for the opportunity to publicly share my findings and receive feedback from the audience. Finally, I would like to thank the jury of the Council for European Studies (CES) Radicalism and Violence Early Career Researcher Best Paper Prize (2022), and the "Solveig Nordström" Prize of the Peace and Justice Chair of the University of Alicante (2023), for having awarded part of the work presented in this thesis.

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List of published studies

Paper 1   Álvaro Vicente. "How Radicalizing Agents Mobilize Minors to Jihadism: A Qualitative Study in Spain", *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 14, no. 1 (2022): 22-48, DOI: 10.1080/19434472.2020.1800063

Paper 2   Álvaro Vicente. "Social Ties and Jihadist Participation: A Mixed-Methods Approach to the Differential Recruitment of Radicalized Youth in Spain", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 35, no. 4 (2023): 988-1006, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2021.1989415

Paper 3   Álvaro Vicente. "Terrorist Participation Despite Social Pressures Opposing Violent Extremism: A Qualitative Study among Jihadists in Spain", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (published online on 4 December 2022), 1-25, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2022.2151094

Resumen

Las investigaciones en el campo de los estudios sobre terrorismo generalmente revelan una fuerte correlación entre los vínculos interpersonales y la participación en actividades terroristas. Aunque el periodo histórico, el contexto geográfico y la ideología pueden variar de un estudio a otro, un argumento central en la literatura académica es que los militantes de grupos terroristas o movimientos extremistas a menudo mantienen algún tipo de conexión personal con otros activistas antes de ser reclutados. Sin embargo, pese a la sobrada evidencia empírica que corrobora esa relación entre redes y violencia política, aún existen lagunas analíticas que nos impiden comprender cómo funciona la relación entre ambas. Los enfoques relacionales de la movilización extremista han pasado por alto en gran medida dos condiciones que desafían analítica y teóricamente la idea de que las redes son inequívocamente determinantes e incondicionalmente favorecedoras de la movilización. En concreto, los estudios sobre terrorismo no han abordado suficientemente el hecho de que 1) la participación en violencia política puede no producirse a pesar de la presencia de vínculos sociales que la promuevan, mientras que 2) puede producirse a pesar de la presencia de vínculos sociales que la rechacen.

A la luz de lo anterior, la investigación sobre violencia política aún tiene que desarrollar una explicación comprensiva de cómo las conexiones interpersonales influyen en la movilización terrorista, siendo el reto dar cuenta de los casos en los que tales vínculos fomentan y facilitan la participación en contraste con las situaciones en las que no lo hacen o lo logran. El objetivo de esta tesis doctoral es, por tanto, evaluar empíricamente la relevancia de las redes sociales en la radicalización y reclutamiento de jóvenes menores de edad en España, desentrañando los mecanismos, procesos y propiedades que subyacen al impacto de los vínculos en el alineamiento ideológico y el compromiso conductual de los militantes.

Para analizar el impacto de las interacciones sociales en la movilización de los jóvenes dentro del movimiento yihadista, recurro a una extensa producción teórico-empírica en el ámbito de la ciencia política, y más particularmente en las subdisciplinas de los estudios de los movimientos sociales y la psicología política, en combinación con teoría e investigación en los estudios sobre el terrorismo.

Objetivos y preguntas de investigación

El objetivo de esta tesis es explicar la relación entre redes sociales e implicación terrorista, estudiando el caso de la movilización yihadista de menores de edad en España durante los años de la guerra civil siria y la emergencia y posterior colapso territorial del Estado Islámico (2012-2019). Para ello, esta tesis persigue dos objetivos generales: [1] desarrollar una conceptualización integral del papel de las conexiones interpersonales en el proceso de movilización yihadista, y [2] explicar las variaciones en el impacto de los vínculos sociales sobre la participación yihadista.

Estos dos objetivos generales se concretan en una serie de preguntas que se abordarán en los siguientes capítulos. Esta tesis pretende responder en primer lugar a la siguiente pregunta:

¿Qué papel jugaron las redes sociales en la movilización yihadista de los jóvenes españoles? (Capítulo 2)

Si, además de ser decisivas a la hora de generar una base de apoyo para el movimiento yihadista, las conexiones personales también desempeñan un papel crucial a la hora de implicar a los jóvenes en actividades relacionadas con el terrorismo, cabría esperar que los vínculos sociales de quienes adoptan un papel activo como activistas yihadistas difieran de los de quienes permanecen en el estado pasivo de simpatizantes yihadistas. Por este motivo, la segunda pregunta de la investigación se plantea:

¿Explican las diferencias en las propiedades de las redes sociales las variaciones observadas entre los jóvenes radicalizados que participan y aquellos que no participan en actividades yihadistas? (Capítulo 3)

Finalmente, para comprender plenamente el impacto variable de las redes en el compromiso terrorista, esta tesis también se pregunta:

¿Cómo afectaron las interacciones con los vínculos sociales contrarios al extremismo violento en la movilización de los jóvenes partidarios de la yihad? (Capítulo 4)

Metodología

Esta tesis combina diferentes estrategias metodológicas, muestras de estudio, métodos de recogida de datos y fuentes de información.

El estudio adopta principalmente una metodología cualitativa. En la medida en que el análisis de redes sociales se ha caracterizado como un esfuerzo principalmente cuantitativo, la elección de una metodología cualitativa puede parecer inusual. Sin embargo, el método cualitativo se ha demostrado más apropiado para comprender no sólo cómo las relaciones personales y los efectos que desencadenan afectan a las ideas y comportamientos de los individuos a lo largo del proceso de radicalización y reclutamiento, sino también las experiencias subjetivas de los simpatizantes de un movimiento y los significados que atribuyen a las conexiones que causan estos efectos. Los datos y métodos de análisis cualitativos también permiten captar la naturaleza dinámica de la interacción social, abarcando así la dimensión contextual de las asociaciones y dependencias entre los actores.

Esta tesis adopta un enfoque cualitativo inductivo para investigar en el capítulo 2 cómo los vínculos interpersonales contribuyen a construir un potencial de movilización en apoyo del yihadismo global. Para ello, utilizo datos originales sobre militantes y activistas del movimiento yihadista global que intentaron radicalizar y reclutar a menores musulmanes en España entre 2012 y 2018. Así mismo, esta disertación adopta un enfoque cualitativo deductivo en el capítulo 3, donde estudio las propiedades de los vínculos que, según estudios previos, podrían predecir la participación yihadista de los jóvenes. Este capítulo emplea una metodología mixta, que incorpora datos y métodos de análisis cualitativos y cuantitativos. Para contrastar las hipótesis sobre el reclutamiento diferencial, utilizo una muestra de jóvenes movilizados en España entre 2012 y 2019 por el movimiento yihadista que incluye participantes (activistas) y no participantes (simpatizantes). En el capítulo 4, utilizo

un enfoque cualitativo deductivo para analizar las influencias opuestas y las estrategias de resistencia que surgen cuando los jóvenes radicalizados se enfrentan a la discrepancia y el desacuerdo social en el contexto de la movilización yihadista. El análisis se basa en una muestra de conveniencia de jóvenes musulmanes que se enfrentaron a la oposición y la desaprobación dentro de su entorno social inmediato antes de participar en el movimiento yihadista.

Esta investigación se nutre de un notable volumen de datos empíricos recogidos de varias fuentes, como entrevistas semiestructuradas, sesiones de juicio oral, sumarios judiciales e informes policiales. En mucha menor medida, la recopilación de datos se basó en información de prensa.

En primer lugar, he realizado 21 entrevistas semi-estructuradas entre octubre de 2019 y junio de 2021 con jóvenes movilizados por el movimiento yihadista y con sus familiares. También entrevisté a expertos policiales, funcionarios de prisiones y profesionales de primera línea con conocimiento directo sobre algunos de los individuos que componen la muestra de estudio. Los entrevistados componen una muestra de conveniencia (por tanto, no probabilística). Además, en el transcurso de mi investigación asistí a 11 vistas judiciales celebradas en el Juzgado de lo Penal de la Audiencia Nacional. En todos los casos, se juzgaba a jóvenes que habían iniciado su radicalización cuando eran menores de edad, pero que fueron detenidos tras cumplir los 18 años. Finalmente, otra fuente de datos vital para esta tesis fue el material documental recopilado en sumarios judiciales, informes policiales y sentencias.

Resultados y conclusiones

Esta tesis demuestra [1] que las conexiones sociales forman parte integral de las distintas fases de la movilización yihadista de los jóvenes, ya que desencadenan múltiples mecanismos que promueven la alineación ideológica y actitudinal con la yihad global, conforman las motivaciones para participar en actividades yihadistas y facilitan el reclutamiento por parte de organizaciones terroristas (capítulo 2); también prueba que [2] las diferencias en las características de las redes sociales pueden explicar por qué sólo una parte de quienes apoyan la yihad global participan finalmente en ella, en la medida en que los participantes poseen conexiones más fuertes y numerosas con militantes

yihadistas que los no participantes (capítulo 3); y, por último, este estudio pone de relieve [3] la importancia de examinar los vínculos compensatorios que se oponen a la participación en actividades yihadistas, ya que pueden contribuir involuntariamente a la movilización al desencadenar una reafirmación reactiva de los alineamientos ideológicos y las identidades colectivas, así como un refuerzo de los vínculos con individuos afines (capítulo 4).

Estos resultados llevan a dos conclusiones clave: 1) los vínculos sociales son decisivos para aumentar las posibilidades de que un joven participe en una acción yihadista, aunque no lo garantizan como consecuencia última del proceso de radicalización y reclutamiento; y 2) el proceso global de movilización entre los jóvenes yihadistas es el resultado de la interacción entre vínculos sociales con orientaciones contrapuestas (de facilitación y oposición).

Abstract

Research in the field of terrorism studies has consistently shown that most militants of terrorist organizations were previously connected to people active in the extremist movement before their recruitment. While this finding evinces a strong correlation between social networks and terrorism, specific analytical gaps still prevent us from understanding how the relationship works.

This thesis aims to address this research gap by exploring the role of social ties in the cycle of jihadist mobilization of underage youth that unfolded in Spain during the years of the Syrian civil war and the emergence and fall of IS (2012-2019). It pursues two goals: first, to develop a comprehensive conceptualization of the role of interpersonal connections in the process of jihadist radicalization and recruitment; and second, to explain variations in the impact of social ties on youth participation in jihadist activities (i.e., participation may not take place even when some ties support it; participation may take place even when some ties reject it).

Building on theoretical and empirical approaches from social movement studies, political psychology studies, and terrorism studies, this dissertation develops an analysis based on original, extensive data on youth mobilized by the jihadist movement in Spain, as well as on agents of radicalization and recruitment who attempted to mobilize minors for global jihad.

The dissertation offers three key insights: [1] social connections are integral to the various phases of the jihadist mobilization of youth, as they trigger multiple mechanisms that promote ideological and attitudinal alignment with global jihad, shape motivations to engage in jihadist activities, and facilitate recruitment by terrorist organizations; [2] differences in the characteristics of social networks can account for why only a fraction of those who support global jihad ultimately participate in it, insofar as participants possess stronger and more numerous

connections to jihadist militants than non-participants; [3] countervailing ties that oppose participation in jihadist activities may unintendedly contribute to mobilization by unleashing a reactive reaffirmation of ideological alignments and collective identities, as well as a reinforcement of ties with like-minded individuals.

These findings lead to two key conclusions: first, social ties are decisive in increasing a young person's chances of participating in jihadist action, although they do not guarantee it as an ultimate consequence of the mobilization process; and second, the overall mobilization process among young jihadist sympathizers is the result of the interplay between social ties with conflicting orientations (facilitating and opposing).

Contents

List of tables and figures

List of acronyms

CGI. General Commissariat of Information [Comisaría General de Información], General Information Commission of the Mossos d'Esquadra [Comissaria General d'Informació de los Mossos d'Esquadra]

CSCC. Mossos d'Esquadra's Higher Central Coordination Commission [Comissaria Superior de Coordinación Central de los Mossos d'Esquadra]

DAO. Dirección Adjunta Operativa de la Guardia Civil [Deputy Operational Directorate of the Civil Guard]

DGGC. Directorate-General of the Civil Guard [Dirección General de la Guardia Civil]

DGP. Directorate General of Police [Dirección General de la Policía]

FTF. Foreign Terrorist Fighter

GJM. Global Jihadist Movement

ICC. Intraclass Correlation Coefficient

IS. Islamic State

ISIS. Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

MUJWA. Movement for Unicity and Jihad in Western Africa

P/CVE. Prevention and countering of violent extremism

SMT. Social Movement Theory

SNT. Social Network Theory

UN. United Nations

UNICEF. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNODC. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Chapter 1.
Introduction

1.1. Background

What drives individuals to support global jihad? And why do some of them engage in political violence and others do not despite their shared ideological and attitudinal affinity with jihadist organizations? It will come as no surprise that these questions served as the initial triggers for this doctoral thesis. Decades of research on terrorism have been dedicated to determining the causes and pathways of violent radicalization that lead people to support and use violence for political aims, in spite of which gaps in our understanding still persist.[1]

The need to identify and address the drivers of radicalization and recruitment became particularly pressing during the 2010s, when a cycle of jihadist mobilization unprecedented in its magnitude and characteristics ensued. The triggering event occurred in Syria, after the regime of Bashar al-Assad began to crack down violently the mass protests that extended throughout the country in March 2011. Unlike most episodes of anti-authoritarian uprising that swept across the Maghreb and the Middle East beginning that decade, in what was known as the "Arab Spring", the Syrian revolution ended up turning, a year after its eruption, into a civil war with sectarian overtones and spillover effects into neighboring Iraq. Though, its ramifications had a global impact.

Within the atomized and unstructured local rebellion scene, jihadist factions, and particularly Islamic State (IS), gained international prominence because of their

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[1] Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, "Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 9 (2010): 797-814.

combination of religious fervor and military expertise.[2] IS, which emerged first as a territorial branch of al-Qaeda in Iraq and eventually as a splinter organization, became the main driving force in the battle. By attracting worldwide over 40,000 volunteers of all ages, both men and women, the group unleashed the largest flow of jihadist activists travelling to a war zone in modern history.[3] Moreover, by purposefully recruiting minors, IS extended the scope and breadth of jihadist mobilization to an unparalleled extent.

The expansion of the jihadist militancy on the ground and its global impact were decisively boosted by IS propaganda machine, which framed the conflict as a campaign of repression and injustice against Sunni Muslims by a Shia-led dictatorship, as well as a prophetic announcement that the final battle for apocalypses was approaching.[4] IS' global mobilization potential was also built on its unique sense of timing and ability of generating expectations of success. As a definitive proof of this, the leader of IS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, proclaimed a caliphate in June 2014 that spanned over large swathes of the territory of Syria and Iraq, achieving a long-cherished goal of global jihad that no organization, especially its direct rival Al Qaeda, had reached before. To further enhance its capacity to attract followers, al-Baghdadi, in a public address delivered in a mosque in Mosul, urged all Muslims to support the new territorial entity and pledge allegiance to the caliph.[5]

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[2] Charles R. Lister, *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Evolution of an Insurgency* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015).

[3] Lasse Lindekilde, Preben Bertelsen, and Michael Stohl. "Who Goes, Why, And With What Effects: The Problem of Foreign Fighters From Europe," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 5 (2016): 858-877; Joana Cook and Gina Vale, *From Daesh to Diaspora. Tracing the Women Minors of Islamic State*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (London: King's College London, 2018); Efraim Benmelech and Esteban F. Klor, "What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32, no. 7 (2020): 1458-1481. For a comparative exploration of the mobilization potential of other conflicts that have attracted jihadist volunteers, see Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35, no. 3 (2010): 53–94.

[4] William F. McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*, First ed. (New York: St Martin's Press, 2015).

[5] Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside and Charlie Winter, *The ISIS Reader: Milestone Texts of the Islamic State Movement* (London: Hurst, 2020).

However, with international counterterrorist operations first leading IS to curb its expansion and subsequently to lose territorial control, the organization advocated for militants from the global jihadist movement (GJM) to support the cause of jihad elsewhere.[6] In the West, most of them opted for disseminating online propagandistic content extolling the activities of terrorist organizations, logistically supporting their violent campaigns, or even perpetrating terrorist attacks at home.[7]

It was precisely in the months following the outbreak of war in Syria that the first groups of jihadi volunteers, usually known as foreign terrorist fighters (FTF), left Spain to join the ranks of terrorist organizations in the war zone. Among them was a 16-year-old boy.[8] His was an unprecedented case in the country: for the first time since jihadist organizations began operating in Spain, a radicalized minor was proved to have participated in jihadism-related activities. The event also marked a rising trend: by the end of the cycle of mobilization in 2019 – when IS lost its last territorial foothold in Syria –, 25 youngsters who underwent their radicalization processes before coming of age had been convicted – either by juvenile or ordinary courts – for terrorism offences; other 18 had traveled to Syria and Iraq; and 3 died while committing terrorist attacks in Spain.[9]

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[6] Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser. "Assessing the Islamic State's Commitment to Attacking the West," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (2015): 14-30.

[7] EUROPOL, "European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report. TE-SAT 2016", (The Hague: European Police Office (Europol), 2016); EUROPOL, "European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report. TE-SAT 2017", (The Hague: European Police Office (Europol), 2017); EUROPOL, "European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report. TE-SAT 2018", (The Hague: European Police Office (Europol), 2018); Manuel Ricardo Torres-Soriano, "How do Terrorists Choose Their Targets for An Attack? The view from inside an independent cell," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 33, no. 7 (2021): 1363-1377.

[8] Silvia Vivanco, "Perdonadme, Por Favor, Pero No Voy A Volver", *El Faro de Ceuta*, April 03, 2013, https://elfarodeceuta.es/perdonadme-por-favor-pero-no-voy-a-volver/; Ignacio Cembrero, "Un hijo para la guerra", *El País*, April 14, 2013, https://elpais.com/politica/2013/04/12/actualidad/1365793242_768848.html.

[9] Data on individuals convicted or dead as a result of their involvement in jihadist activities in Spain come from the Elcano Database on Jihadists in Spain (known as BDEYE), which is managed and maintained by the researchers of the Program on Violent Radicalization and Global Terrorism of the Elcano Royal Institute, to which I belong. The data on individuals displaced as FTF come from judicial sources who have shared the data in the course of informal conversations with me.

Their youth was not the only factor that caught the attention of police investigators, academic researchers, policymakers, or the media. Of particular significance was the prevalence of extensive and closely-knit social networks connecting the young jihadists and other militants of global jihad, both in Spain and abroad. These interpersonal connections had become a remarkable empirical regularity. They existed among a sizable group of jihadists from the neighborhoods of El Príncipe, in Ceuta, or Cañada de Hidum, in Melilla, who perished in battle in Syria.[10] The phenomenon also proved noteworthy among the members of the Ripoll cell, consisting mostly of brothers, cousins, classmates, and teammates, who carried out two attacks in August 2017 that killed 16 people in Barcelona and Cambrils.[11] In addition, this pattern was observed among young people who had initiated their plans to join Islamic State as a result of the intense virtual connections they had forged with fighters in the region, or among supporters who created groups on Facebook, WhatsApp or Telegram to exchange propaganda videos and discuss issues of mutual interest.[12]

However, criminal investigations and judicial proceedings revealed that, during those years, the number of underage youths in Spain associated with the GJM and connected to jihadist militants exceeded that of the minors who eventually committed jihadist offences. Between 2012 and 2019, the National Court, the primary

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[10] José María Irujo, "Catorce Familias Residentes en España se Unen al Estado Islámico en Siria," *El País*, July 12, 2015. https://elpais.com/politica/2015/07/10/actualidad/1436552087_736955.html

[11] Fernando Reinares and Carola Garcia-Calvo, "'Spaniards, You Are Going to Suffer': The Inside Story of the August 2017 Attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils," *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 1 (2018): 1-11; Carola García-Calvo and Fernando Reinares, "How Members of the Islamic State-Linked Ripoll Cell Grouped, Radicalized and Plotted Mass Casualty Terrorist Attacks in Barcelona", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2022): 1-28; Irene González, Manuel Moyano, Roberto M. Lobato and Humberto M. Trujillo, "Analysis of the radicalization of the 17-A terrorist cell: An Empirical Approach Using the 3N Model (Análisis del Proceso de Radicalización de la Célula Terrorista del 17-A: Una Aproximación Empírica Desde el Modelo 3N)," *International Journal of Social Psychology* 37, no. 3 (2022): 529-553; Carola García-Calvo and Fernando Reinares, "Atentados en Barcelona y Cambrils: (I) formación de la célula de Ripoll, radicalización de sus miembros y preparación de unos actos de terrorismo a gran escala," DT 3/2022 (Madrid, Real Instituto Elcano, 2022).

[12] Lucas de la Cal, "Nos Decía Por Internet que Éramos las Leonas de la Yihad", *El Mundo*, July 16, 2017, https://www.elmundo.es/cronica/2017/07/16/596a45a9ca47416b378b45f6.html.

judiciary body in Spain dealing with terrorist crimes, initiated a total of 61 investigation procedures concerning juveniles between 14 and 17 years of age associated with jihadism, the majority of which were closed.[13] In most cases, prosecution authorities decided to put an end to the judicial inquiry for lack of evidence that juveniles had been engaged in jihadist activities despite their manifest attitudinal affinity with Salafi-jihadism.[14]

How did social ties contribute to the extraordinary youth mobilization in Spain during the years of the Syrian war, and the emergence and subsequent territorial collapse of IS? And in what ways can a network analysis help explain the differences between the participation and non-participation in terrorist activities of young people who sympathized with the GJM? The central theme of this thesis is the intrinsic nature of mobilization – the passage through which individuals, groups or organizations are activated and jointly undertake collective action to achieve a common goal[15] – and the critical role of social bonds in youth jihadist participation.

In the following sections, I introduce the research object and approach of this dissertation (1.2.) and outline its goals and research questions (1.3.), before reviewing the main theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of the relationship between social networks and political mobilization (1.4.). I then provide some terminological clarifications (1.5.), detail the research design (1.6.) and present the structure of the thesis (1.7.).

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[13] This figure refers exclusively to cases investigated in the Central Juvenile Court [Juzgado Central de Menores] of the Audiencia Nacional but does not include cases heard in the Criminal Court [Sala de lo Penal] of the Audiencia Nacional against individuals who were radicalized prior to turning 18 but were investigated after reaching the age of majority. The number of cases opened in the Juvenile Court between 2012 and 2019 for jihadist terrorism has been obtained from: State Attorney General's Office, *Annual Report*, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020.

[14] During informal conversations, judicial sources familiar with the investigations shared with me the reasons for the final dismissal of the cases.

[15] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1978); Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

1.2. Research object and approach. A justification for this thesis

One argument that has been commonly used to explain our incomplete understanding of the radicalization process leading to terrorism is that it is an overly complex phenomenon involving a myriad of micro-, meso- and macro-level elements (such as social, political, psychological, historical and cultural factors), all interacting in various ways and to varying degrees.[16] While this dissertation is not intended to further monocausal explanations of violent radicalization, it focuses on a specific factor that has been empirically shown to play a central role in political mobilization in general, and in the jihadist mobilization in particular, but about which, strikingly, there are significant knowledge deficiencies. This factor is social networks, that is to say, "the set of social and affective ties an individual belongs to".[17] More significantly, these social relationships are "the setting in which processes of collective attribution are combined with rudimentary forms of organization to produce mobilization for collective action".[18]

Research in the field of terrorism studies consistently shows a strong correlation between social networks and terrorist participation.[19] While the historical

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[16] Alex P. Schmid, "Comments on Marc Sageman's Polemic "The Stagnation in Terrorism Research," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 4 (2014): 587-595; Lorne Dawson, "Clarifying the Explanatory Context for Developing Theories of Radicalization: Five Basic Considerations," *Journal for Deradicalization* 18, (2019): 146–84; James Khalil and Lorne L. Dawson, "Understanding Involvement in Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Theoretical Integration through the ABC Model," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2023): 1-16.

[17] Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 13.

[18] Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, "Social Movements," in *Handbook of Sociology*, ed. N.J. Smelser (Beverly Hills/London: Sage, 1988): 709, as cited by Mario Diani, "The concept of social movement," *The sociological review* 40, no. 1 (1992): 7.

[19] Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany;* Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Mohammed M. Hafez, "Dying to be martyrs: The symbolic dimension of suicide terrorism," in *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism. The Globalization of Martyrdom*, ed. Ami Pedahzur (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006): 54-80; Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The homegrown threat* (New York: Police Department, 2007); Thomas Hegghammer, "Saudis in Iraq: Patterns of radicalization and recruitment," *Cultures & Conflits* 64, no. 4 (2008): 1-14; Noemie Bouhana and Per-Olof Wikstrom, "Al Qai'da-Influenced Radicalisation: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Guided by Situational Action Theory," *RDS Occasional Paper* 97 (London: Home Office Research, 2011); Carola García-Calvo

period, the geographical context and the ideology can vary across studies, a central argument in the academic literature is that militants were often connected to other people active in the extremist movement before they joined it. This claim has been recurrently expressed with loud numerical terms ever since it was first brought to attention in several influential, formative works. In 1989, Della Porta found that 69% of the cases of recruitment by left-wing terrorist groups active in Italy in the 1970s involved individuals who had at least one personal contact within these groups.[20] In 2004, Sageman's study of 150 terrorists who were part of jihadist groups before the 9/11 attacks found that 75% of them already had ties to other militants before joining jihad.[21] A year earlier, Post, Sprinzak and Denny found in interviews with 35 activists from Palestinian groups – both secular, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and Islamist-oriented, such as Hamas and Hezbollah – that "in many cases it was a friend or acquaintance of the group who recruited the subject".[22] This salience of interpersonal connections in militants' pathways to violence has been attributed to several factors, including the key role that social networks play in socializing individuals into radical

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and Fernando Reinares, "Procesos de Radicalización Violenta y Terrorismo Yihadista en España: ¿Cuándo? ¿Dónde? ¿Cómo?" *Documentos de Trabajo Real Instituto Elcano* (Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2013); Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, *ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa* (Washington, D.C.: Program on Extremism, The George Washington University, 2015); Fernando Reinares and Carola García-Calvo, *Estado Islámico en España* (Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2016); Francesco Marone, "Ties That Bind: Dynamics of Group Radicalisation in Italy's Jihadists Headed for Syria and Iraq," *The International Spectator* 52, no. 3 (2017): 48-63; Sean C. Reynolds and Mohammed M. Hafez, "Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, no. 4 (2019): 661–86. There are, of course, studies that point to the contrary. For instance, see Leonard Weinberg and William Lee Eubank, "Neo-Fascist and Far Left Terrorists in Italy: Some Biographical Observations," *British Journal of Political Science* 18, no. 4 (1988): 531–49.

[20] Donatella Della Porta, "Recruitment Processes in Clandestine Political Organisations: Italian Left-Wing Terrorism," in *From Structure to Action: Comparing Social Movement Research Across Cultures*, ed. Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney G. Tarrow (Oxford: JAI Press, 1989): 155–69.

[21] Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*.

[22] Jerrold Post, Ehud Sprinzak and Laurita Denny. "The Terrorists in Their Own Words: Interviews With 35 Incarcerated Middle Eastern Terrorists," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15, no. 1 (2003): 171-184.

ideas, linking them with extremist movements, generating the incentives that promote violent activism, or providing opportunities to terrorism engagement.[23]

However, although the relationship between social networks and terrorist involvement is well established empirically, specific analytical gaps still prevent us from understanding how this relationship works.[24] Notably, network approaches to extremist mobilization have often failed to acknowledge analytically and account theoretically for two conditions that challenge the notion of networks as unequivocally determinant and unconditionally supportive of mobilization. In particular, terrorism studies have insufficiently addressed the fact that 1)

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[23] Numerous studies can be cited. Among those that have specifically investigated jihadist terrorism: Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising. Muslim Extremism in the West* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Edwin Bakker, "Jihadi Terrorists in Europe", *Clingendael Security Paper* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2006); Peter R. Neumann and Brooke Rogers, *Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe* (Kings College, University of London, for the European Commission (Directorate General Justice, Freedom and Security), 2007); Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (2008):415-433; R. Kim Cragin, "Resisting Violent Extremism: A Conceptual Model for Non-Radicalization," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 2 (2014): 337–35; Arie W. Kruglanski, et al., "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism," *Political Psychology* 35, no. S1 (2014): 69-93; Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 11 (2015): 958–75; Arie W. Kruglanski, Jocelyn J. Bélanger, and Rohan Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization: Needs, Narratives, and Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Reynolds and Hafez, "Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq." For other ideologies, see: Weinberg and Eubank, "Neo-Fascist and Far Left Terrorists in Italy"; Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*; Lorenzo Bosi, "Explaining Pathways to Armed Activism in the Provisional Irish Republican Army, 1969–1972," *Social Science History* 36, no. 3 (2012): 347–90; Donatella Della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[24] Dalgaard-Nielsen, "Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know"; Todd C. Helmus, "Why and How Some People Become Terrorists," in *Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting the Pieces Together*, eds. Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin, eds., (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009).

participation in political violence may not occur despite the presence of social ties that promote it, while 2) it may occur despite the presence of social ties that deter it.[25]

In contrast, extensive research on conventional political mobilization (e.g., participation in political discussions, campaigns, voting or demonstrations) has examined both of these circumstances. Scholars researching individual variations in political participation have referred as "differential recruitment" to the phenomenon that not all individuals who are ideologically aligned with a social movement and possess interpersonal bonds to its members ultimately join it.[26] In this context, their research efforts have focused on examining the properties of social ties that exert a greater influence on political participation, and that help to account for the different trajectories of those who engage in collective action and those who do not.[27] Social network researchers have also paid attention to the fact that those joining a social movement not only have personal links that support and facilitate their militancy, but often also have connections that oppose or even constrain movement participation. Scholars have referred to exposure to political discrepancy in social

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[25] As will be developed in Chapters 3 and 4, empirical and theoretical studies that have addressed the role of social networks in extremist mobilization and, in particular, in jihadist mobilization, have focused on social ties that not only promote individual involvement in political violence, but also succeed in producing it. As a result, the main focus of research has been on those subjects who end up participating in acts of terrorism. This tendency is called "sampling on the dependent variable bias" and reveals that scientific studies are mainly based on samples of activists who had past relationships with other activists before becoming involved, thus ignoring cases of a) non-activists with social ties to activists and those of b) activists with social ties to non-activists. As Doug McAdam and Ronnelle Paulsen, two leading scholars in the field of social movements and contentious politics, noted in 1993, the predominant focus on cases of activists connected to activists promotes a "truncated" understanding of the relationship between social networks and collective action, "inflating the positive influence of existing social ties." See: Doug McAdam and Ronnelle Paulsen, "Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism," *American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 3 (1993): 640-667.

[26] Sharon E. Nepstad and Christian Smith, "Rethinking Recruitment to High-Risk/cost Activism: The Case of Nicaragua Exchange", *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 4, No. 1 (1999), 25–40; Jeroen Van Laer, "The Mobilization Dropout Race: Interpersonal Networks and Motivations Predicting Differential Recruitment in A National Climate Change Demonstration," *Mobilization* 22, no. 3 (2017): 311-329.

[27] David A. Snow, Louis A. Zurcher, Jr., and Sheldon Ekland-Olson, "Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment," *American Sociological Review* 45, no. 5 (1980): 787–801.

exchanges as a problem of "affiliative cross-pressures," "multiple ties," "multiple embeddings," or "cross-cutting networks."[28] Research aimed at clarifying the effects of network composition on political mobilization has focused on examining under what conditions social ties impact participation.

In light of the above, research on political violence has yet to develop a comprehensive explanation of how interpersonal connections influence terrorist mobilization, with the challenge being to account for instances where such ties foster and facilitate participation in contrast to situations where they fail to do so. The aim of this doctoral thesis is, therefore, to empirically assess the relevance of social networks in the radicalization and recruitment of underage youth in Spain by disentangling the mechanisms, processes, and properties that underly the impact of ties in the ideological alignment and behavioral commitment of militants.

If the relationship between social ties and jihadist mobilization still requires further theoretical and analytical grounding, exploring how this relationship applies to the radicalization and recruitment of individuals who have not yet reached the legal age of adulthood, typically set at 18 years old, becomes even more significant, given the paucity of research in this area.[29] The fact that the jihadist mobilization of

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[28] G. Bingham Powell Jr, "Political Cleavage Structure, Cross-Pressure Processes, and Partisanship: An Empirical Test of the Theory", *American Journal of Political Science* (1976): 1-23; Roger V. Gould, "Multiple Networks and Mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871", *American Sociological Review*, 56, no. 6 (1991): 716–729; McAdam and Paulsen, "Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism"; Diana C. Mutz, "The Consequences of Cross–Cutting Networks for Political Participation," *American Journal of Political Science* 46, (2002): 838–855.

[29] In recent years, however, some studies have been appearing in international scientific journals that deserve to be mentioned, such as Elga Sikkens, Marion van San, Stijn Sieckelinck and Micha de Winter, "Parents' Perspectives on Radicalization: A Qualitative Study," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 27 (2018): 2276-2284; Nicolas Campelo, et al., "Who Are the European Youths Willing to Engage in Radicalisation? A Multidisciplinary Review of Their Psychological and Social Profiles," *European Psychiatry* 52 (2018): 1–14; Shandon Harris-Hogan and Kate Barrelle, "Young Blood: Understanding the Emergence of a New Cohort Of Australian Jihadists," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32, no.7 (2020): 1391-1412; Anne Muxel and Olivier Galland, *Radical Thought Among The Young: A Survey Of French Lycée Students* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Carl Philipp Schröder, et al., "Radicalization in Adolescence: The Identification of Vulnerable Groups," *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 28, no. 2 (2022): 177-201.

minors in Spain and other Western European countries is still quite recent, primarily emerging with the rise of IS, largely explains the dearth of studies. So far, the examination of their mobilization has been predominantly shaped by two well-established approaches in terrorism studies: research centered on the association of adults with the jihadist movement and works investigating the dynamics of minor's recruitment in conflict contexts. Considering that individual participation in jihadism is not a one-of-a-kind phenomenon, but context-dependent, and that research has failed to observe a consistent replication of the influence of social ties across movements and contexts,[30] it is unjustified to assume that bonds affect the jihadist mobilization of youth in the West in the same manner as adults, or juveniles in other geographical contexts. This claim finds ample support within the specialized scientific literature. On the one hand, studies have shown that young people exhibit, compared to adults, a higher prevalence of risk factors for violent radicalization due to the physical, cognitive, social and emotional changes that characterize this stage of life.[31] On the other, research has also pointed out that factors driving children and adolescents' involvement in the West differ markedly from those operating in contexts affected by violent conflicts, where jihadist organizations hold territorial control and have broad social support.[32] Thus, this thesis seeks to address a gap in research on the radicalization and recruitment of underage youth in the Global North.

To analyze the impact of social interactions in the mobilization of juveniles within the jihadist movement, I draw on a wide range of primarily political science literature in the subfields of social movement studies and political psychology, blended with theory and research in terrorism studies. Being "mobilization" a central concept of this research, Social Movement Theory (SMT) constitutes a fundamental framework for understanding the importance of social ties, communication patterns and network dynamics in facilitating collective action. Movement scholars generally

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[30] James Kitts, "Mobilizing in Black Boxes: Social Networks and Participation in Social Movement Organizations."

[31] Campelo et al., "Who are the European youths willing to engage in radicalisation?; Schröder et al., "Radicalization in Adolescence: the Identification of Vulnerable Groups"; Alice Oppetit, et al., "Do radicalized minors have different social and psychological profiles from radicalized adults?," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 10, no. 644 (2019).

[32] Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven, eds. *Cradled by Conflict. Child Involvement with Armed Groups In Contemporary Conflict* (United Nations University, 2018).

treat mobilization as a sequential, multi-stage process in which individuals can be located in analytically different points in the process leading to movement participation.[33] Hence, it is not presupposed that all people who initiate the process will eventually join the social movement. Indeed, an established fact in SMT research is that a good number of individuals who are ideologically aligned with a social movement (what some researchers call the "mobilization potential")[34] never participate in it.[35]

Similarly, scholars studying violent radicalization have generally accepted that "not everyone who holds radical beliefs will engage in illegal behavior,"[36] promoting an analytical differentiation between the notion of "radicalization of ideas" (cognitive radicalization) and "radicalization of acts" (behavioral radicalization).[37] While there is ongoing debate about the relationship between the two forms of radicalization, many scholars recognize that ideas may be a precursor to actions without necessarily producing that outcome.[38] In sum, this implies that

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[33] Bert Klandermans and Dirk Oegema, "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, And Barriers: Steps Towards Participation in Social Movements," *American Sociological Review* 52 (1987): 342-360; Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Alan Schussman and Sarah A. Soule, "Process and Protest: Accounting for Individual Protest Participation", *Social Forces* 84, No. 2 (2005), 1083–1108; Matthew Ward, "Rethinking Social Movement Micromobilization: Multi-stage Theory and the Role of Social Ties," *Current Sociology* 64, no. 6 (2016): 853–874; Van Laer, "The Mobilization Dropout Race: Interpersonal Networks and Motivations Predicting Differential Recruitment In A National Climate Change Demonstration."

[34] Klandermans and Oegema, "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, And Barriers: Steps Towards Participation in Social Movements."

[35] Mario Diani and Doug McAdam (eds.) *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[36] John Horgan, "Discussion Point: The End of Radicalization?" Retrieved from National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2012.

[37] Peter Neumann, "The Trouble with Radicalization", *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (2013), 873–893.

[38] Although it is beyond the purpose of this presentation of the research object and approach, I consider it necessary (1) to acknowledge that the various theoretical models overall represent two conflicting views of the relationship between radical ideas and acts, as well as (2) to justify the approach that my study follows. Some researchers consider "radicalization to extremist opinions" (i.e., the justification of violence to achieve a political end) and "radicalization to extremist actions" (ranging from legal actions to terrorist attacks) to be separate phenomena. Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, for instance, argued that the connection between

individuals who participate in jihadist activities will ultimately emerge from the pool of persons who have developed an affinity with the jihadist movement and who are connected to its social and political environment.[39] This theoretical approach orients

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ideas and acts, if any, is weak; James Khalil, John Horgan and Martine Zeuthen directly asserted that there is a disconnect between attitudes and behaviors, and rejected the concept of "radicalization" as emphasizing the role of ideology. Critics of the notion of a "conveyor belt" between ideas and acts argue this position on the grounds that not all individuals involved in terrorist activities are driven by ideology, some may have limited knowledge about the belief system of the movement they associate with, and others are even forcibly recruited into such activities. See: Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Toward a Profile of Lone Wolf Terrorists: What Moves an Individual From Radical Opinion to Radical Action," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 1 (2014):69-85; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Understanding Political Radicalization: The Two-Pyramids Model," *American Psychologist* 72, no. 3 (2017): 205–216; James Khalil, John Horgan and Martine Zeuthen, "The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model of Violent Extremism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 3 (2022):425-450. A second perspective on the relationship between ideas and actions argues that such a relationship does exist, and that the adoption of a radical belief system (cognitive radicalization) generally precedes participation in activities inspired by that system (behavioral radicalization), although it is not an inexorable relationship, and therefore those who adopt the ideas do not always engage in activities consistent with those ideas. It is this second perspective that this dissertation embraces. It does so on the basis of several criteria. The first is that in my experience as a researcher I have found that although there are subjects who become involved in jihadist activities in the absence of a prior process of cognitive radicalization, these are minority cases, in no way comparable in number to cases in which there is both cognitive and behavioral radicalization. This observation also seems to align more closely with the phenomenon of violent radicalization in Western democratic societies. In these contexts, forced recruitment processes or structural conditions that typically foster the association of individuals who do not share the strategies and objectives of armed groups are not common. A final reason that leads me to question the approach of those who deny the relationship between ideas and action is the widely accepted distinction between strong and weak attitudes. Strong attitudes are more likely to guide an individual's behavior. Strong attitudes are also more resistant to change due to various motivational and cognitive factors: these include the degree of personal importance and psychological significance attributed to the attitude, the intensity of the emotional reaction it elicits, the certainty with which it is held, the ambivalence and evaluative conflict it evokes, and its moral underpinnings. This suggests that attitudes associated with violent extremism may be strong for some individuals, and thus guide their behavior, but weak for others, and thus not influence their actions to the same degree. See Penny S. Visser, George Y. Bizer, and Jon A. Krosnick, "Exploring the Latent Structure of Strength-Related Attitude Attributes," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38 (2006): 1-67.

[39] Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany*; Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003); Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed. *Islamic Activism. A Social Movement Theory Approach*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Stefan

the present research towards explaining the role of social ties in the initial formation of a connection between youth and the GJM and, subsequently, in the transformation of the potential for jihadist mobilization into actual participation in jihadist actions. In other words, this dissertation focuses on elucidating how relational processes lead to cognitive radicalization, and how they then bridge cognitive and behavioral radicalization.

This research centers on the jihadist movement. Global jihad constitutes a social movement in the sense that it is a "conscious, concerted and sustained" effort "by ordinary people to change some aspect of their society by using extra-institutional means."[40] In this "deliberate collective endeavor" to produce far-reaching structural changes, people "orient themselves to the same belief system and act together to promote change on the basis of the common orientation".[41] The GJM draws on supporters and militants who base their attitudes, ideas and actions on an ideology known as Salafism. Salafism promotes a general narrative according to which Islam is currently in a state of political and cultural decline due to what it considers deviations from God's original message (e.g. the influence of Western secularism or the reinterpretation of Qur'anic sources in light of modern conditions), and preaches the restoration of Islamic prominence by returning to the beliefs and practices of the early believers. This is why Salafism is considered to be an Islamic revivalist movement, in that Salafists pursue regression – manifested in the application of a literal interpretation of the primary Islamic texts – as a way to restore the authenticity and purity of Muslim religion.[42] Although within the Salafist doctrine different methods for its realization are distinguished, jihadists argue that violence is the unique way to effectively address the acute crises facing the Muslim world and to protect and promote Islam globally.[43] For them, jihad – understood exclusively as

Malthaner, "Contextualizing Radicalization: The Emergence of the "Sauerland-Group" from Radical Networks and the Salafist Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 8 (2014): 638-653.

[40] Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, eds., *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 3.

[41] Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 39-40.

[42] Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[43] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006): 207-239.

the physical struggle for the cause of Allah – is a divine command emanating from the Prophet's experience after the migration to Medina and constitutes one of the principles of faith, to the extent that it is obligatory for believers in certain circumstances. To impose an order of life subject to Allah, violent jihad is legitimized as both defensive and offensive action; therefore, it must be used to eliminate those who pose an obstacle, whether they are secular regimes in Muslim-majority countries (often labelled "apostates") or foreign powers blamed for interfering in the affairs of the Muslim World and waging war against Islam (often characterized as "Zionists and Crusaders").[44] In sum, the violence promoted by the GJM is political in nature, to the extent that it aspires to reshape the nation-state and the international order as a whole.

1.3. Research goals and questions

The objective of this thesis is to account for the relationship between social networks and terrorist involvement, studying the case of the jihadist mobilization of underage youth in Spain during the years of the Syrian civil war and the emergence and territorial collapse of IS (2012-2019). To this end, and following a research agenda outlined by network scholars who have investigated conventional political mobilization,[45] this dissertation pursues two overall goals: [1] to develop a comprehensive conceptualization of the role of interpersonal connections in the process of jihadist mobilization, and [2] to explain variations in the impact of social ties on jihadist participation (i.e., participation may not take place even when some ties support it; participation may take place even when some ties reject it).

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[44] Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, pp. 1-24.

[45] McAdam and Paulsen, "Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism"; Florence Passy, "Social Networks Matter. But How?" in *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, Mario Diani and Doug McAdam (eds.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 21-44; Florence Passy and Gian-Andrea Monsch, "Do Social Networks Really Matter in Contentious Politics?" *Social Movement Studies* 13, no. 1 (2014): 22-47.

These two general objectives take shape in a series of questions and sub-questions that will be addressed in the following chapters. This dissertation seeks to firstly answer:

What roles did social networks play in the mobilization of young people in Spain with the jihadist movement? (Chapter 2)

This question raises additional sub-questions: Are there differences in how the jihadist mobilization occurs within the various relational environments (family, circle of friends, neighborhood, online setting) in which young people's social lives unfold? How does the type of relational environment interact with other aspects of network dynamics during the process of radicalization and recruitment? And are there notable disparities in how young individuals are recruited compared to how the literature explains this process among adults?

If, in addition to being decisive in generating a support base for the jihadist movement, personal connections play a crucial role too in engaging young people in terrorism-related activities, one would expect the social ties of those who take an active role as jihadist activists to differ from those who remain in the passive state of jihadist supporters. For this reason, the second research question asks:

Are differences in social network properties explanatory of variations between radicalized youth who do and do not participate in jihadist actions? (Chapter 3)

Further pertinent sub-questions arise from this enquiry: what are the network properties that best predict jihadist involvement among young people? What are the mechanisms underlying the importance of certain network properties in jihadist participation? Moreover, given the focus on the connections between youth and jihadist supporters, it is also worth asking: do social influences aligned with the jihadist movement unconditionally exert a positive, supportive effect on mobilization?

Eventually, to fully understand the variable impact of networks in terrorist engagement, this dissertation also asks:

How did interactions with social ties opposing violent extremism affect the mobilization of young supporters of jihad? (Chapter 4)

This question reflects an interest in exploring issues such as: how do young people manage opposition from their social environment to their ideas, attitudes, and commitments to global jihad? How do connections supporting and opposing jihadist mobilization relate? And, finally, what role does the social isolation of global jihadist sympathizers play in the process?

1.4. Theoretical framework

I expect that the join insights of social movement studies, social psychology and terrorism studies can provide a comprehensive framework to answer the research questions and sub-questions of the present dissertation. With this objective in view, this section presents an extensive theoretical and empirical review and discussion, bridging different contributions in the three fields. These contributions, which could guide in elucidating the mechanisms and functions that interpersonal bonds activate throughout the youth violent radicalization and recruitment, and the properties that shape its effects, are often generically encompassed in what is called Social Network Theory. I must clarify that the aim of this theoretical framework is not to provide an exhaustive description of the literature on the subject, but rather to highlight those contributions that have been considered most relevant in both SMT and terrorism studies.

Network accounts of recruitment and mobilization processes from an SMT-approach reflects a broader interest in understanding the comprehensive dynamics and processes of political mobilization, that is to say, how social networks are shaped by the larger socio-political environment and, in turn, shape it.[46] SMT conceives network members as rational actors driven by a political agenda, and attempts to account for the role and dimensions of social networks that operate in the diffusion of information, the recruitment of new members or the coordination of collective

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[46] Daniela Pisoiu and Sandra Hain, *Theories of Terrorism: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

action.[47] But SMT adopts a proper political-psychology perspective when it goes down to the micro level and attempts to explain the relevance of networks for individuals, their ideas, decisions, and actions, and the processes through which personal changes occur in a social context.[48] Socio-psychological approaches highlight the importance of emotions, identity, instrumentality and grievances as motivators of collective action, among others. [49] Drawing upon these theoretical and conceptual foundations of SMT and political psychology, a large body of research in the field of terrorism studies has elucidated how the relational dynamics shapes and interacts with the cognitive processes of radicalization.[50]

Insofar as this thesis aims to examine the relationship between social ties and the jihadist mobilization of minors in Spain, the present section surveys the scholarship on three specific aspects that lie at the core of this relationship: a) the mechanisms by which social ties affect political mobilization and participation; b) the process by which networks influence the generation of ideological affinity, the construction of a willingness to participate, and the eventual engagement in collective

[47] Mario Diani, "Introduction: Social Movements, Contentious Actions, and Social Networks: 'From Metaphor to Substance'?", in *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, ed. Mario Diani and Doug McAdam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-18; John Krinsky and Nick Crossley, "Social Movements and Social Networks: Introduction," *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 13, no. 1 (2014): 1-21.

[48] David B. Tindall, "Networks as Constraints and Opportunities," in *Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*, eds. Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 232-35.

[49] Jacquelien van Stekelenburg, and Bert Klandermans, "Social Psychology of Movement Participation," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, eds. David A. Snow, Donatella Della Porta, Bert Klandermans, and Douglas McAdam (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2013): 1220-1224.

[50] Wiktorowicz, ed. *Islamic Activism. A Social Movement Theory Approach*; Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, "Studying Violent Radicalization in Europe I. The Potential Contribution of Social Movement Theory," DIIS Working Paper, (2008); Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, "Studying Violent Radicalization in Europe II. The Potential Contribution of Socio-psychological and Psychological Approaches," DIIS Working Paper, (2008); Thomas Olesen, *Social Movement Theory and Radical Islamic Activism* (Aarhus, Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation (CIR), Department of Political Science, 2009): 7-33; Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories," *Journal of strategic security* 4, no. 4 (2011): 7-36; Stefan Malthaner, "Radicalization: The Evolution of an Analytical Paradigm", *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 58, no. 3 (2017): 369-401.

action; and c) the structural properties and network variables that predict participation in collective action.

1.4.1. Network mechanisms

In the words of Tilly and Tarrow, causal mechanisms are "a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations".[51] Although in the context of SMT mechanisms have primarily been employed to explain dynamics of political mobilization occurring at the meso and macro levels of analysis, they also prove useful at the micro level.[52] In essence, mechanisms provide "causal analogies with wide applicability, and thus […] offer the key in understanding and explaining the unfolding of the processes".[53] Hence, its value lies in elucidating how interpersonal connections operate and how they impact individual decisions and actions related to alignment with a social movement and participation in collective action.

The causal mechanisms underpinning the correlation between interpersonal ties and political mobilization have been studied in the context of various social science theories and perspectives, usually presented as incompatible with each other. This is reflected in the most recognized typology on the role of ties in mobilization, as presented by Kitts based on a comprehensive literature review.[54] According to his categorization, scholars generally ascribe the significance of personal networks to one of three key mechanisms: identity construction, exchange of social assets, and information transmission.[55] This subsection reviews the main theoretical

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[51] Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 29.

[52] Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

[53] Mario Diani, "Networks and Participation", in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, eds. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Holly J. McCammon, (Malden: Blackwell, 2019): 345.

[54] James Kitts, "Mobilizing in Black Boxes: Social Networks and Participation in Social Movement Organizations," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2000): 241-2.

[55] In Chapter 4, we explore a framework developed by Deutsch and Gerald that helps bridge the three approaches. This framework distinguishes between two types of influence:

contributions within these three approaches. Table 1 summarizes the key causal mechanisms that fall under each of them.

Table 1. Causal mechanisms in social network approaches

Approach	Causal mechanisms
Identity construction	– Building collective identity (feelings of similarity, in-group/out-group biases). – Generating political consciousness. – Transmitting social norms and moral values.
Exchange of social assets	– Generation of benefits and incentives (approval, validation). – Generation of sanctions and punishments (disapproval, invalidation). – Cost offsetting and barrier removal.
Information transmission	– Structural connection. – Motivational support (collective efficacy and action support). – Emotional arousal.

Academic explanations framed within the identity construction approach have emphasized that social interactions, by virtue of fostering feelings of similarity, group cohesion and solidarity, and promoting the adoption of shared norms and values, contribute to creating a sense of belonging to a group or collective (e.g., a religious community, an ethnic group or a sexual and gender minority).[56] This social identity can have a significant impact on individuals' self-affirmation and self-perception, to the extent that, if endowed with meaning and emotional relevance, it

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informational and normative. The informational influence relates to the informational approach identified by Kitts, while the normative influence aligns with the exchange approach. Scholars focusing on the identity construction approach have outlined mechanisms which fall into both informational and normative influences. See Morton Deutsch and Harold Gerald, "A study of normative and informational influences upon individual judgment," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 51, no. 3 (1955):629–636.

[56] Debra A. Friedman and Douglas Mcadam, "Collective Identity and Activism: Networks, Choices, and The Life of a Social Movement," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, eds. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992): 156-173; Passy, "Social Networks Matter. But How?"; Jacquelien van Stekelenburg and Bert Klandermans, "Individuals in Movements: A Social Psychology of Contention"; Stefaan Walgrave and Ruud Wouters, "More than Recruitment: How Social Ties Support Protest Participation," *Social Problems* 69, no. 4 (2021):997-1024.

can result in individuals adopting the attitudes they associate with their group membership.[57] It can also lead individuals to transcend their self-centered interests and encourage commitment to collective action for the benefit of their group. This social identity is, thus, at play any time that activists "are acting as a representative of the group and the action is directed at improving the conditions of the entire group".[58]

As they shape one's understanding of their own group, social interactions also impact their view of the broader society. In this regard, research has found that it is through social negotiation and communication that perceived intragroup similarities are accentuated, and perceived intergroup differences are amplified, which tends to lead individuals to have more favorable opinions of members of their in-group than of those of their out-group.[59]

These assumptions are echoed in terrorism studies. A considerable body of research has substantiated that relational dynamics are pivotal in shaping the social identity of those who support extremist movements. This includes how they characterize, discuss, and communicate conceptions of the in-group and out-group context.[60] Additionally, some terrorism scholars have emphasized the significance of

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[57] Henri Tajfel, "Social categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparison," in *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Henri Tajfel (London: Academic Press, 1978): 61-76; Henri Tajfel and J. C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1979): 33-47; John C. Turner, "Some Current Issues in Research on Social Identity and Self-Categorization Theories", in *Social Identity*, eds. Katherine J. Reynolds, John C. Turner, and Alexander Haslam, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999): 6–34; Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63, no 3 (2000):224–237.

[58] Stephen C. Wright, "Strategic Collective Action: Social Psychology and Social Change," in *Intergroup Processes: Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology*, eds. Rupert Brown and Sam Gaertner, (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2001):409-30.

[59] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[60] Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Miles Kahler, "Collective Action and Clandestine Networks: The Case of al Qaeda", in *Networked Politics: Agency, Power, and Governance*, ed. Miles Kahler, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011): 103-124; Fernando Reinares, *Patriotas de la Muerte. Por Qué Han Militado en ETA Y Cuándo Abandonan*, 6th Edition (Madrid: Taurus, 2011); Laura G. E Smith, Leda Blackwood and Emma F. Thomas, "The Need to Refocus on the Group as the Site of Radicalization," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 15, no. 2 (2020): 327–

intra-group affection and solidarity as well as the desire to make a difference for the in-group as strong drivers of involvement in political violence.[61]

The construction of a sense of self also concerns the role of interpersonal bonds in promoting the adoption of specific values and norms. A strand of research describe networks as "vehicles of meaning" that, in addition to building and reinforcing identities, also construct consensus around issues and interpretations that are at the core of the claims and demands of social movements.[62] Social bonds would intervene here by arousing political interest in the cause advocated by a social movement, therefore creating a socio-political consciousness that enables individuals to ideologically align themselves with a political issue in an orientation that is congruent to that of social movement organizations.[63]

This approach to the effect of social networks has been especially cultivated by scholars of the framing theory on social movements. Frames are carriers of meaning and mobilizing beliefs; they guide movement supporters in making sense of socio-political reality by assessing problems and conditions, evaluating causation, suggesting proscriptive solutions, and encouraging collective action.[64] However, for frames to be effective at mobilizing people, there needs to be a connection, a "frame

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352; James Khalil and Lorne L. Dawson, "Understanding Involvement in Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Theoretical Integration through the ABC Model".

[61] Robert W. White, "Commitment, Efficacy, and Personal Sacrifice Among Irish Republicans," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 16, no. 1 (1988): 77–90; Jerrold M. Post, *The Mind of a Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to Al Qaeda* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2007); Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How radicalization happens to them and us*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Marc Sageman *Turning to Political Violence: The Emergence of Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Neil Ferguson and James W. McAuley, "Dedicated to the Cause," *European Psychologist* 26, no. 1 (2021): 6-14.

[62] Manlio Cinalli, "Relational Structures and the Study of Collective Action," paper presented at the Political Sociology Seminar of CEVIPOF-Sciences PO, Paris, April. (2006), as cited by Manuela Caiani, "Social Network Analysis", in Donatella della Porta (ed.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* (Oxford: Oxford Academic 2014): 368-396.

[63] David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Steven K. Worden and Robert D. Benford, "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 4. (1986): 464-481; Florence Passy, "Socialization, Connection, and The Structure/Agency Gap: A Specification of The Impact of Networks on Participation in Social Movements," *Mobilization* 6, no. 2 (2001): 173-192; Van Laer, "The Mobilization Dropout Race."

[64] David Snow and Robert Benford, "Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilization," *International Social Movement Research* 1, no. 1 (1988): 197-217.

alignment," between the interpretive and action schema they promote and the movement's supporter, to the extent that it resonates with the latter, their attributional orientations, life priorities, and state of mind.[65] The process of social identification and that of frame adoption are intimately connected. Thus, for example, as researchers such as van Stekelenburg and Klandermans have explained, the awareness of similarity between members of a group can later lead to a growing awareness of shared grievances and a clear idea of who or what is responsible for those grievances.[66]

Theorists have shown that the creation of meaning, and the construction of narratives is contingent on social networks in two senses: first, these rationalities emerge, are consensualized and validated in relational contexts; second, their dissemination depends on the persuasive leverage of the agents engaged in mobilization.[67] The first aspect refers to the very essence of group dynamics, which find in discussion and debate the channel for shaping the desired social reality and the validation of the means that produce social change; also in extremist relational environments, where support and the intention to exercise violence are reinforced by the consensualisation and legitimisation that interactions between like-minded people produce.[68]

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[65] Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, (2000):611–39.

[66] Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, "Individuals in Movements: A Social Psychology Of Contention".

[67] Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment"; Smith, Blackwood and Thomas, "The need to refocus on the group as the site of radicalization".

[68] Kruglanski, Gelfand, Bélanger, Sheveland, Hetiarachchi and Gunaratna, "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism,"; Katarzyna Jasko, Gary LaFree, and Arie Kruglanski. "Quest for Significance and Violent Extremism: The Case of Domestic Radicalization," *Political psychology* 38, no. 5 (2017): 815-831; Emma F. Thomas, Craig McGarty, Avelie Stuart, Laura G. E. Smith, and Luc Bourgeois, "Reaching Consensus Promotes the Internalization of Commitment to Social Change," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 22, no. 5 (2019): 615-630; González, Moyano, Lobato and Trujillo, "Analysis of the Radicalization of the 17-A Terrorist Cell: An Empirical Approach Using the 3N Model".

The second aspect refers to the prominent role played by specific actors within a social network. In this regard, research has shown that one of the factors that determine the resonance of a frame is the credibility of the source that articulates it, which is in turn a function of variables such as status, knowledge and credibility.[69] A large body of research on political violence has provided evidence consistent with this line of enquiry. Studies on extremist movements of different ideologies have shown that the role of agents of radicalization and recruitment is often assumed by charismatic leaders, such as religious figures who are attributed with a deep knowledge of Islam or veteran activists who are expected to have experience in the strategic, logistical and operational aspects of militancy in terrorist organizations.[70]

Considering participation in collective action through an instrumental lens, the contribution of other scholars fall into what Kitts categorizes as the exchange approach of social networks. From this perspective, the real mobilizing power of interpersonal bonds resides in their ability to generate benefits and incentives, which

[69] Robert D. Benford, *Framing Activity, Meaning, and Social Movement Participation: The Nuclear Disarmament Movement*, (Austin: The University of Texas at Austin, 1987); Patrick G. Coy and Lynne M. Woehrle, "Constructing Identity and Oppositional Knowledge: The Framing Practices of Peace Movement Organizations During The Persian Gulf War", *Sociological Spectrum* 16, no. 3 (1996): 287-327.

[70] Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in The West*; Silber And Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*; Hegghammer, "Saudis in Iraq: Patterns of radicalization and recruitment"; Peter R. Neumann, "Chapter Three: The Recruiters," *The Adelphi Papers* 48, no. 399 (2008): 31-42; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Laura Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists in the US and UK: An Empirical Study of the Radicalization Process* (Washington, DC: FDD Press, 2009); Jon A Olsen, "Roads to Militant Radicalization: Interviews with Five Former Prepetrators of Politically Motivated Organized Violence", no. 2009: 12. *DIIS Report*, 2009; Jytte Klausen, "Al Qaeda-Affiliate and 'Homegrown' Jihadism in the UK: 1999–2010," *Institute for Strategic Dialogue Research Report,* (2010); Lindekilde, Bertelsen, and Stohl. "Who Goes, Why, and With What Effects"; Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2018); Fernando Reinares, Carola García-Calvo and Álvaro Vicente. "Differential Association Explaining Jihadi Radicalization in Spain: A Quantitative Study", *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 6 (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center U.S. Military Academy): 29-36; Michael Kenney, *The Islamic State in Britain: Radicalization and resilience in an activist network* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Fernando Reinares, Carola García-Calvo, and Álvaro Vicente, *Yihadismo y Yihadistas en España: Quince Años Después del 11-M* (Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2019); Rut Bermejo, "Spain. Profiles and Patterns of Jihadist Radicalization, *Radicalisation in Theory and Practice: Understanding Religious Violence in Western Europe*, eds. Thierry Balzacq and Elyamine Settoul (MI: University of Michigan Press, 2022): 212-236.

ultimately motivate individual commitment. Social movements rely primarily on their ability to generate immaterial incentives to attract activists. Some of these incentives are derived from the social norms that are constructed and articulated within the groups to which individuals belong, which are a reflection of the conceptions of what group-members approve of and do.[71] Through a simple process of social comparison, individuals deduce which attitudes are considered correct, socially approved and preferred among the members of their closest social circles or, on the contrary, problematic and undesirable, and, thus, anticipate the incentives or sanctions that will result from conforming or not conforming to these social norms.[72]

Accordingly, an expectation within this line of research is that when social norms promote a positive view on movement participation, they tend to provide incentives that make attractive participating in collective action or sanctions that raise the costs of non-participating in it.[73] Indeed, proponents of the collective action theory posit that the social rewards and punishments generated in networks are an effective mechanism for overcoming the "collective action dilemma" presented to those who believe they can benefit from the collective goods produced by a movement without directly participating in it.[74] Especially, since people are often motivated by a need to

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[71] Leon Festinger, "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes," *Human Relations* 7 (1954):117–140; Robert B. Cialdini, Raymond R. Reno and Carl A. Kallgren, "A Focus Theory of Normative Conduct: Recycling the Concept of Norms to Reduce Littering in Public Places", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58, no. 6 (1990):1015–1026; Robert B. Cialdini, Carl A. Kallgren and Raymond R. Reno, "A Focus Theory of Normative Conduct: A Theoretical Refinement and Reevaluation of the Role of Norms in Human Behavior," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 24 (1991): 201–234.

[72] Lindsey C. Levitan and Brad Verhulst, "Conformity in Groups: The Effects of Others' Views on Expressed Attitudes and Attitude Change", *Political Behavior* 38, no. 2 (2015): 277–315.

[73] Katherine M. White, et al., "Social Influence in the Theory of Planned Behavior: The Role of Descriptive, Injunctive, and Ingroup Norms," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 48, no. 1 (2009):135-158; Karl-Dieter Opp and Christiane Gern, "Dissident Groups, Personal Networks, and Spontaneous Cooperation: The East German Revolution of 1989," *American Sociological Review* 58, no. 5 (1993): 659–80; Stacy Ulbig and Carolyn L. Funk, "Conflict Avoidance and Political Participation," *Political Behavior* 21, no. 3 (1999): 265–82; Robert B. Cialdini and Noah J. Goldstein, "Social Influence: Compliance and Conformity," *Annual Review of Psychology* 55, no. 1 (2004): 591–621; Robert Huckfeldt, Paul E. Johnson and John D. Sprague, *Political Disagreement: The Survival of Diverse Opinions within Communication Networks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[74] Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

belong, the prospect of gaining the approval and social acceptance of those close to them is a powerful incentive.[75]

Conformity with group norms also preserves relational harmony and prevents social conflict. The satisfaction of needs through insertion into social groups is perhaps one of the aspects most frequently pointed out in studies on terrorism to explain the relevance of interpersonal ties in the radicalization process, insofar as integration into an extremist movement satisfies basic needs and provides social and emotional rewards such as belonging, empowerment, sense of fulfillment, or sense of community.[76] In addition, the militant commitment shared with friends can be seen as a way of making a contribution that adds value to the friendship, imbuing it with an exceptional sense of meaning.[77] When presented to individuals who are not socially integrated or who are separated from their closest social circles, either as a result of migration or crises that have strained connections, these affective rewards become even more significant. For instance, Sageman's research found that a large number of militants of organizations of the GJM had gone through a process of social estrangement before joining jihad. Consequently, the ideal of brotherhood that jihadi militants represent "has strong appeal to alienated youths expatriated in the West, bored youths without any economic or social prospects in Core Arab counties, and disenfranchised youths without much hope in Maghreb Arab countries"[78]. Precisely,

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[75] Leon Festinger, "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes," *Human Relations* 7, no. 2 (1954):117–140; Icek Ajzen, "From Intentions to Actions: A Theory of Planned Behavior," in *Action Control: From Cognition to Behavior*, eds. Julius Kuhl and Jürgen Beckmann, (Berlin: Springer, 1985):11-39; David Nicolas Hopmann, "The Consequences of Political Disagreement in Interpersonal Communication: New Insights from a Comparative Perspective," *European Journal of Political Research* 51, no. 2 (2010):265–287.

[76] Neumann and Rogers, "Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe"; Michael Jonsson, *A Farewell to Arms: Motivational Change and Divergence Inside FARC-EP 2002-2010*. (Uppsala: Diss. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2014); McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us;* Murat Haner, Ashley Wichern and Marissa Fleenor, "The Turkish Foreign Fighters and the Dynamics behind Their Flow into Syria and Iraq," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32, no. 6 (2022): 1329-1347.

[77] Roger V. Gould, "Why Do Networks Matter? Rationalist and Structuralist Interpretations," in *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, eds. Mario Diani and Doug McAdam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 233–257; Kraig Beyerlein and Kelly Bergstrand "It Takes Two: A Dyadic Model of Recruitment to Civic Activity," *Social science research* 60 (2016): 163-180.

[78] Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 149.

Sageman characterized those who joined jihad as the most fanatical, as they were the only ones willing to make social sacrifices or were already socially alienated.

In contrast, deviating from group norms that support collective action may result in individuals experiencing costs in intra-group relations, such as tension and discord; sanctions from network members, such as invalidation and criticism; or even pressures such as rejection or isolation.[79] The anticipation of these potential punishments generates social pressures, so that to preserve interpersonal harmony and avoid social conflict, individuals may feel forced to conform with the rest.

The effects of peer pressure are widely discussed in the literature on terrorism. McCauley and Moskalenko noted that "informal face-to-face sanctions" applied in small groups can explain group polarization and groupthink that occur in extremist movements, which manifests in network actors silencing or ignoring discrepant social sources and adopting increasingly extreme positions.[80] Extensive theoretical and empirical research on militants of terrorist organizations also indicates that the strong pressures characteristic of cohesive groups lead to the progressive isolation of its members. This isolation results in the elimination of countervailing social ties that promote visions contradictory to those of the extremist movement and expose its members to mainstream moral standards.[81] Indeed, increasing isolation from mainstream society and closest social circles seems to be a rather distinctive feature of mobilization by extremist movements and terrorist organizations.

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[79] Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague, *Political Disagreement: The Survival of Diverse Opinions Within Communication Networks*; Cialdini and Goldstein, "Social Influence: Compliance and Conformity"; Lindsey Clark Levitan, "Social Constraint and Self–Doubt: Mechanisms of Social Network influence on Resistance to Persuasion," *Political Psychology* 39, no. 4 (2017): 957–975; Ulbig and Funk, "Conflict Avoidance and Political Participation."

[80] McCauley and Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism."

[81] Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*; Neumann and Rogers, "Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe"; McCauley and Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism"; Olesen, *Social Movement Theory and Radical Islamic Activism*; Irene González, Manuel Moyano, Roberto M. Lobato and Humberto M. Trujillo, "Evidence of Psychological Manipulation in the Process of Violent Radicalization: An Investigation of the 17-A Cell," *Frontiers in psychiatry* 13 (2022).

Another theoretical stream within the exchange approach of social networks holds that, when deciding about becoming militants, movement supporters not only consider the benefits of participation in contrast to the punishments and sanctions of non-participation. They also take into account the benefits of participation relative to the costs and risks of participation. This strand of research operates under the premise that supporters will only proceed with the mobilization if the benefits outweigh the costs.[82] Hence, literature represent costs as obstacles and barriers that stand between the stage of sympathizing with a movement and participating in it; in other words, the flip side of motivations.

To overcome barriers, interpersonal bonds with militants can be crucial.[83] Walgrave and Ketelaars found that bonds help to surmount three specific obstacles that potential participants face: informational – i.e., difficulties in accessing information about a movement's activities and the possibilities of getting involved in them; persuasive – i.e., lack of sufficient incentives and motivations to overcome barriers; and social – lack of accompaniment to get involved in collective action.[84] As has been theoretically substantiated, the costs of participation, and therefore the barriers, are considerably higher in forms of activism that involve risks and costs for militants, when movement organizations operate clandestinely or engage in illegal actions, as is the case with terrorist groups.[85]

Finally, Kitts categorizes another set of theoretical contributions on social networks as belonging to the informational approach. Researchers have argued that social access to information affects decision-making and opportunities for mobilization in many ways. On the one hand, personal interactions allow people to learn about movement events and campaigns and make them aware of possibilities

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[82] Klandermans and Oegema, "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, And Barriers: Steps Towards Participation in Social Movements,"; Stefaan Walgrave and Joris Verhulst, "Selection and Response Bias in Protest Surveys", *Mobilization* 16, no. 2 (2011): 203-222.

[83] Gould, "Why do Networks Matter? Rationalist and Structuralist Interpretations"; Stefaan Walgrave and Pauline Ketelaars, "The Recruitment Functions of Social Ties: Weak and Strong Tie Mobilization for 84 Demonstrations in Eight Countries," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 60, no. 5 (2019): 301-323.

[84] Walgrave and Ketelaars, "The Recruitment Functions of Social Ties."

[85] Olesen, *Social Movement Theory and Radical Islamic Activism*.

for recruitment. [86] Given that one of the basic postulates of social network theories in the field of SMT is that an individual rarely joins a collective action if not previously invited by a militant, it can be argued that the informative function is one of the true essences of network effects in mobilization as it helps to build a structural bridge between potential participants and an opportunity for participation. [87] Other academics have viewed this process as the recruiting function of social networks, alluding to the social influence and persuasion that occurs when activists encourage supporters to become actively involved in a movement. [88]

Social exposure to information has also been shown to affect movement participation, as the decision to engage in collective action may be influenced by the perceived mobilization potential of a movement, which is, in turn, based on the

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[86] Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson, "Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment"; Mark Granovetter, "Threshold Models of Collective Behavior," *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 6 (1978): 1420–43; Pamela Oliver, Gerald Marwell, and Ruy Teixeira, "A Theory of the Critical Mass. I. Interdependence, Group Heterogeneity, and the Production of Collective Action," *American Journal of Sociology* 91, no. 3 (1985): 522–56; Klandermans and Oegema, "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, And Barriers: Steps Towards Participation in Social Movements"; Nepstad and Smith, "Rethinking Recruitment to High-Risk/cost Activism: The Case of Nicaragua Exchange"; Passy, "Socialization, Connection, and The Structure/Agency Gap: A Specification of The Impact of Networks on Participation in Social Movements"; Mario Diani, "Introduction: Social Movements, Contentious Actions, and Social Networks: 'From Metaphor to Substance'?"; Reinoud Leenders, "Collective Action and Mobilization in Dar'a: An Anatomy of the Onset of Syria's Popular Uprising," *Mobilization: An International Journal* 17 (2012): 419–434.

[87] David A. Snow, Louis A. Zurcher, Jr., and Sheldon Ekland-Olson, "Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment"; Klandermans and Oegema, "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, And Barriers: Steps Towards Participation in Social Movements"; Roberto M. Fernandez and Doug McAdam, "Social Networks and Social Movements: Multiorganizational Fields and Recruitment to Mississippi Freedom Summer," *Sociological Forum* 3, (1988):357-382; McAdam and Paulsen, "Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism"; Doug McAdam, "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer," *American Journal of Sociology* 92, no. 1 (1986): 64-90; Sharon E. Nepstad and Christian Smith, "Rethinking Recruitment to High-Risk/cost Activism: The Case of Nicaragua Exchange"; Gould, "Why do Networks Matter? Rationalist and Structuralist Interpretations"; Dana R. Fisher, "On Social Networks and Social Protest: Understanding the Organizational Embeddedness of Large-Scale Protest Events", *ISERP Working* Papers 08-01, Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy, Columbia University (2010).

[88] Walgrave and Ketelaars, "The recruitment functions of social ties".

decisions and actions of other group members.[89] As rational actors, potential participants are more likely to be convinced to participate if they know that enough people is also willing to engage themselves in.[90] This theoretical approach argues that information can influence the perception of a social movement's supporters regarding the feasibility of achieving group-related goals through collective efforts ('collective efficacy'), as well as their confidence in the willingness of other like-minded people to get involved in the political action ('action support').[91] These pieces of information alter people's expectations and views on the costs and benefits of participation.

Also relevant to the informational approach to social networks is the strand of literature that emphasize the role of networks in the activation of emotions that function as triggers for mobilization.[92] Some emotions are socially constructed and become politically relevant, for example when they arise from events that have negative consequences for the in-group. Studies have shown that certain intergroup emotions trigger strong emotional responses that, in turn, can elicit support for collective action, such as anger and indignation. Thus, social movement activists may try to activate these types of emotions to mobilize support.[93]

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[89] Pamela Oliver, Gerald Marwell and Ruy Teixeira, "A Theory of the Critical Mass. I. Interdependence, Group Heterogeneity, and the Production of Collective Action," *American Journal of Sociology* 91, No. 3 (1985), 522–556; Gerald Marwell, Pamela E. Oliver, and Ralph Prahl, "Social Networks and Collective Action: A Theory of the Critical Mass. III", *American Journal of Sociology* 94, No. 3 (1988).

[90] Mark Granovetter, "Threshold Models of Collective Behavior," *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 6 (1978): 1420-1443; Pamela Oliver, Gerald Marwell, and Ruy Teixeira, "A Theory of the Critical Mass. I. Interdependence, Group Heterogeneity, and the Production of Collective Action," *American Journal of Sociology* 91, no. 3 (1985): 556.

[91] Jacquelien van Stekelenburg and Bert Klandermans, "Social Psychology of Movement Participation."

[92] Florence Passy and Gian-Andrea Monsch, "Do Social Networks Really Matter in Contentious Politics?"; Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, "Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements," in *The Blackwell companion to social movements*, eds. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004): 413-32.

[93] Jacquelien van Stekelenburg, and Bert Klandermans, "Social Psychology of Movement Participation."

1.4.2. Network processes and dynamics

Mechanisms combine to produce processes, which are "regular combinations and sequences of mechanisms that produce similar (generally more complex and contingent) transformations of those elements".[94] While the network mechanisms involved in political action have been the subject of numerous theoretical and empirical studies, few researchers have attempted to model the processes through which these different functions unfold during mobilization. According to most process-focused researchers, the sequence in which the causal mechanisms are triggered is crucial to the positive association between social ties and recruitment.[95] This subsection briefly discusses the most prominent models of political and extremist mobilization, all of them offering an empirically grounded rather than theoretically-driven perspective.

Crucially, the review presented in this subsection shows that mobilization models allow to offer comprehensive explanations of the role of interpersonal connections in collective action participation. As such, process-focused researchers have merged originally distant approaches, combining to varying degrees mechanisms ascribed to various theoretical strands. Specifically, three approaches are explained here.

A first model sees mobilization as the result of the three functions of interpersonal bonds, with apparently equal relevance. One example of this approach is the work that Passy developed on the basis of a large sample of political activists in Switzerland. Passy observed that networks serve three distinct, concatenated purposes throughout the mobilization process: at the initial stage, they socialize individuals into certain norms and values and favor political consciousness and identification with a particular cause, thus creating an initial disposition to participation (*socialization function*). At a second phase, networks intervene by facilitating the structural connection between subjects and movement organizations,

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[94] Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 29.

[95] This is not shared by all researchers who have promoted the mechanism-process approach. Stefaan Walgrave and Pauline Ketelaars, for example, argue that the three basic functions that linkages play in mobilization (namely, information, persuasion and accompaniment) need not occur in a sequential order, but may do so at the same time or in reverse. See Walgrave and Ketelaars, "The recruitment functions of social ties."

and by promoting recruitment opportunities (*structural-connection function*). At the end of the process, they shape decision making, influencing the cost-benefit calculation of the action, and thus converting an individual's mobilization potential into participation (*decision-shaping function*).[96]

In Passy's model, functions related to different theoretical approaches are integrated to form a cohesive network account of participation, thereby bringing together in relatively equal terms the three key mechanisms identified by Kitts. In addition, Passy furthers a phenomenological approach to the role of social networks in political participation, insofar as she understands that they contribute in a continuous way throughout the process that leads from the generation of an interest to participate to the consummation of involvement. Social relationships shape individuals' perceptions and preferences about reality, as well as constructions of identity, and it is individuals who ponder and make sense of the outcome of these interactions, incorporating it into their own worldview. While she accepts the significance of social networks, she also highlights the relevance of human agency. Specifically, she argues that people's judgments about the efficacy of collective action and the risk associated with involvement are determinant in their decision to participate.

A second model understands mobilization as a process in which interpersonal ties influence participation in collective action primarily through the construction of identity and the generation of benefits and sanctions. In this category fits the work of McAdam and Paulsen, who delineated four successive mechanisms to account for the impact of networks on mobilization.[97] For them, networks intervene first by facilitating a *recruitment attempt* that connects potential participants to a social movement; then by generating a connection between the movement and the individual's salient identity (the *identity-movement linkage*); and later, by supporting

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[96] Passy, "Socialization, Connection, and the Structure/Agency Gap: A Specification of the Impact of Networks on Participation in Social Movements"; Passy, "Social Networks Matter. But How."

[97] McAdam and Paulsen, "Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism"; McAdam, "Beyond Structural Analysis: Toward a More Dynamic Understanding of Social Movements."

and reinforcing that connection (*positive influence attempts*). Individual activism occurs if the recruitment attempt, the identity-movement linkage, and the positive influence are not countered by the strong opposition from significant members of the immediate social environment on whom other salient identities depend (*negative influence attempts*).

Although McAdam and Paulsen's model integrates mechanisms from different theoretical approaches, the key network mechanisms they delineate (identity amplification and identity-movement linkage) fall within the identity construction function of social ties.[98] It can be argued that their proposal also gives centrality to mechanisms related to the exchange of social assets, since the model is based on the assumption that people act guided by the desire to preserve and maintain the fundamental pillars of purpose and personality in their lives. Thus, participation is explained by mechanisms such as solidarity or conformity with those whose validation and emotional sustenance is fundamental to people's lives. Interestingly, McAdam and Paulsen's explanation grants a strong potential for process disruption to countervailing ties, as they argue that the mere presence of opposition from prominent members of a personal network can abort activism in an individual.

A third approach conceives of the process through which linkages influence mobilization exclusively in terms of identity construction. A paradigmatic study of this approach is Wiktorowicz's work on al-Muhajiroun, a transnational Salafist movement based in London.[99] His approach has been recognized as one of the few works in the field of terrorism studies to be explicitly grounded in SMT.[100] Wiktorowicz explains that in the process that leads an individual to join a radical Islamic group there are three basic requirements: the first is cognitive opening, the second is religious seeking, the third is frame alignment. Interpersonal ties play a

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[98] McAdam, "Beyond Structural Analysis: Toward a More Dynamic Understanding of Social Movements."

[99] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam," *The Roots of Radical Islam*, Department of International Studies, Rhodes College, (2004); Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising. Muslim Extremism in the West*.

[100] Bouhana and Wikstrom, "Al Qai'da-Influenced Radicalisation: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Guided by Situational Action Theory."

prominent role in all of them. Initially, prior socialization experiences influence the perceptions and opinions that individuals form about the radical movement and condition the likelihood that they will voluntarily expose themselves to its message. This cognitive openness to movement discourse can also be fostered through outreach activism, if activists leverage their social networks or establish new contacts to trigger a sense of crisis through discussions and interactions. When cognitive openness is channeled in the form of a religious quest, interpersonal ties can operate by acting as a reliable source of information to which sympathizers turn for advice and direction. Finally, personal network members play a key role in promoting frame alignment, by constructing the movement's message so that it resonates with the biography, personal background, and experiences of new activists.

Once these three prerequisites have been met, socialization in the movement properly takes place. In this phase, the potential militant becomes a learner of the movement's ideology through study groups, one-on-one interactions and discussions, independent readings, social events, and other movement activities. In the process, an alteration of the individual's values and attitudes occurs, so that a collective identity is constructed from which his or her personal interests and priorities become aligned with the movement's goals and beliefs. In addition to this construction of identity, social networks operate here by offering a new space in which to satisfy the need for belonging and solidarity. The internalization of the ideology and the adoption of the movement's identity lead naturally to formal integration into the movement.

For Wiktorowicz, the process leading to joining the Islamic movement is a fundamentally identity-building process, to the extent that networks function primarily in the construction of meaning and significance. As such, in his model, aspects such as emotions or incentives have only a subordinate role to identity within the group.

Wiktorowicz's work is valuable in demonstrating the existence of multiple pathways through which individuals engage in movement participation, a point that has been emphasized in a substantial body of literature on social movements. Many models describe the way in which potential participants come into contact with social

movements as a process of organizational outreach or social selection, whereby movement activists act as recruitment agents. Scholars have characterized recruiters as rational prospectors who strive to identify individuals with "participation potential"; in this vein, recruiters use information to find likely targets; after locating them, recruiters offer information on participation opportunities and deploy incentives to persuade recruits to say 'yes'".[101] This understanding of the process of integrating new militants into the movement is consistent with the "top-down strategy" and the "horizontal strategy" for recruitment that is described in terrorism studies. While we usually speak of a top-down strategy when recruitment is driven by organizational ties, namely militants of extremist movements and terrorist organizations, we speak of a horizontal approach when recruitment is triggered by pre-existing ties such as friends or family.[102] Regardless of which type of social bond drives the process, recruitment typically proceeds as follows according to both strategies: a radicalization and recruitment agent makes contact with an individual receptive to radical ideas and then promotes a change in attitudes and behaviors consistent with the ideological framework; the agent then induces social closure and the severing of ties with those who do not share his worldview, followed by exposing the potential participant to propagandistic materials.[103]

However, the SMT also recognizes that supporters of a movement may reach out to movement activists by actively seeking opportunities to be recruited and join on their own initiative through a mechanism known as self-selection. According to Tarrow, self-selection processes are triggered only after mobilization has reached a certain level, in a highly politicized environment in which many militants have

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[101] Henry E. Brady, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Sidney Verba. "Prospecting for Participants: Rational Expectations and the Recruitment of Political Activists," *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 1 (1999): 154.

[102] Scott Matthew Kleinmann. "Radicalization of Homegrown Sunni Militants in the United States: Comparing Converts and Non-Converts", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 4 (2012): 278-297.

[103] Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Neumann and Rogers, "Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe"; Tinka Veldhuis and Jørgen Staun *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2009).

previously demonstrated and specified the route of participation.[104] This approach fits with the bottom-up recruitment strategy that terrorism scholars date from the widespread use of the Internet.[105] Some factors may function as drivers of self-selection, such as the religious seeking highlighted in Wiktorowicz's work on al-Muhajiroun, or the political interest, the thrill seeking, or the desire for social beloning.[106]

1.4.3. Network properties

As has become evident thus far, interpersonal ties can play different roles during the mobilization process depending on the various causal mechanisms they activate (generating collective identities, building the interpretative and action frames, shaping social norms, producing incentives and punishments, removing obstacles and barriers, providing information, facilitating access to recruitment opportunities, activating emotions). However, a large body of research has shown that not all bonds can potentially fulfill these functions, to the same degree, in all forms of collective action or political issues.[107] As such, the analysis of social network properties has been mainly dedicated to identifying "which ties explain what" within political mobilization.

The literature suggests a number of structural properties of interpersonal connections that might have some influence in an individual's decision whether to become engaged or not in collective action. Specifically, scholars studying high-risk

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[104] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[105] Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Hegghammer, "Saudis in Iraq: Patterns of radicalization and recruitment."

[106] Olsen, "Roads to Militant Radicalization: Interviews with Five Former Prepetrators of Politically Motivated Organized Violence".

[107] McAdam, "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer"; Mario Diani, *Green networks: A structural analysis of the Italian environmental movement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995); Florence Passy and Marco Giugni, "Social Networks and Individual Perceptions: Explaining Differential Participation in Social Movements" *Sociological Forum*, vol. 16. (Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers, 2001); Mario Diani, "Networks and Participation" in *The Blackwell companion to social movements*, eds. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Holly J. McCammon (Malden: Blackwell, 2019): 339-359; Walgrave and Ketelaars, "The Recruitment Functions of Social Ties."

and high-cost activism have focused on (1) the type, (2) the number and (3) the strength of ties. Studies on terrorism have also explored these three properties. In the remaining of this subsection, I provide an overview of the main findings in the theoretical and empirical literature, complemented by a more in-depth discussion in Chapter 3.

In addition to these three properties, this dissertation also examines (4) the effects of the level of homogeneity or heterogeneity present in a social network. This refers to the presence of countervailing ties in the social environment of movement supporters, which can expose them to political disagreement in social exchanges. While this property has been extensively explored in research on conventional political action, studies on high-cost and high-risk activism in general, and studies on terrorism in particular, have not given special attention to it. In this subsection, I briefly examine the research findings on the effects of social disagreement on political participation, while a more comprehensive theoretical discussion can be found in Chapter 4.

The collective action literature has extensively studied the type of ties as the primary structural characteristic of social networks, with two main types distinguished: pre-existing ties and organizational ties. Pre-existing ties are those that link individuals to people in their closest social circle, which can be further categorized into ascriptive ties (kinship ties) and acquired ties (ties of friendship, neighborhood, acquaintance).[108] Organizational ties are those forged within social movement organizations (e.g., trade unions or activist groups). A number of studies have pointed to pre-existing ties as strong predictors of political mobilization on account of various explanatory factors and mechanisms, including trust,[109] incentives and benefits[110], and the removal of obstacles and barriers.[111] Social movement scholars have also provided sound evidence that organizational ties play a paramount part in

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[108] Florence Passy and Marco Giugni, "Social Networks and Individual Perceptions: Explaining Differential Participation in Social Movements", *Sociological Forum* 16 (2001): 123–153.

[109] Passy, "Social Networks Matter. But How?"

[110] Gould, "Why Do Networks Matter? Rationalist and Structuralist Interpretations."

[111] Ward, "Rethinking Social Movement Micromobilization: Multi-Stage Theory and The Role of Social Ties."

connecting prospective participants with an opportunity to participate. They do so by ensuring firm social support for collective action inspired on a highly salient identity embodied in the organization's core values, and by sustaining feelings of collective efficacy.[112] Similar conclusions have been reached in studies on political violence. [113]

Another major focus of research on collective action is the effects of the number of social ties that link a sympathizer with a social movement. Research in the field of social movements has amply demonstrated that individuals with more interpersonal connections tend to participate more. However, there are different theoretical attributions to this empirical regularity, including the likelihood of accessing information about movement events, expectations of movement success, perceptions of a movement's mobilization potential (what Sageman calls the "illusion of numbers") or the generation of incentives and benefits.[114]

While scholars generally agree on the influence of the number of ties in political mobilization (though the mechanisms for this influence may differ), findings on the effects of tie strength have been mixed. In his classic study "The Strength of Weak Ties", Granovetter viewed tie strength as a multidimensional feature, which is a function of how much effort goes into maintaining the social connection, how strongly it makes people feel, how close they are, and how willing the person is to help the other individual in return for his or her help.[115] Strong ties are carriers of trust and intimacy, and connect individuals with a close relationship forged in regular, intensive interactions. Strong bonds are also characterized by homophily,

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[112] McAdam, "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer"; McAdam and Paulsen, "Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism".

[113] Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*; Della Porta, "Recruitment Processes in Clandestine Political Organisations: Italian Left-Wing Terrorism."

[114] Schussman and Soule, "Process and Protest: Accounting for Individual Protest Participation"; Stefaan Walgrave and Bert Klandermans, "Open and Closed Mobilization Patterns. The Role of Channels and Ties," in Stefaan Walgrave and Dieter Rucht (eds.) *The World Says No to War*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): 169-192; Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Rickard Sandell and Charlotta Stern, "Group Size and the Logic of Collective Action: A Network Analysis Of A Swedish Temperance Movement 1896-1937," *Rationality and Society* 10, no. 3 (1988): 327–345.

[115] Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties."

that is, by grouping similar partners together. Weak ties, to the contrary, are more distant, exchanges are less frequent and not founded on prior bonds. They are, however, a major source of potential new ideas and attitudes and, consequently, a key source for change. Empirical research has corroborated that weak ties are decisive for the diffusion of information.[116] However, strong ties have been found to be more suitable for influence and persuasion, more relevant for participation in activities that entail higher costs and risks, as well as more valued as a companion for joint participation in collective action.[117] In this sense, cases of "block recruitment", whereby entire groups join a movement intact, have been attributed to the effects of strong ties.[118]

A final feature that has been linked theoretically and empirically to the likelihood of involvement is the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the social networks of movement sympathizers. The presence of countervailing or oppositional ties to mobilization has been found to have variable effects on conventional political action.[119] These fluctuate between (1) no impact; (2) demobilization, inaction, passivity, and apathy; and (3) mobilization, reinforcement, and over-reactive affirmation.[120] However, the varied impacts of heterogeneous social networks have

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[116] Fisher "On Social Networks and Social Protest: Understanding the Organizational Embeddedness of Large-Scale Protest Events; Diana R. Fisher and Marije Boekkooi, "Mobilizing Friends and Strangers: Understanding the role of the Internet in the Step It Up day of action," *Information, Communication & Society* 13, no. 2 (2010): 193-208.

[117] McAdam, "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer"; McAdam and Paulsen, "Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism"; Damon Centola and Michael Macy, "Complex Contagions and the Weakness of Long Ties", *American Journal of Sociology* 113, No. 3 (2007): 702-734; Nicolás M. Somma, "How Strong re Strong Ties? The Conditional Effectiveness of Strong Ties in Protest Recruitment Attempts," *Sociological Perspectives* 52, no. 3 (2009): 289-308; Stefaan Walgrave and Ruud Wouters, "More than Recruitment: How Social Ties Support Protest Participation".

[118] Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

[119] Anand E. Sokhey and Paul A. Djupe. "Interpersonal Networks and Democratic Politics," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no.1 (2011): 55-59; Casey A. Klofstad, Anand Edward Sokhey, and Scott D. McClurg. "Disagreeing About Disagreement: How Conflict in Social Networks Affects Political Behavior", *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no.1 (2013): 120-134.

[120] Jan E. Leighley, "Social Interaction and Contextual Influences on Political Participation," *American Politics Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1990):459–475; David Knoke, "Networks of Political Action: Toward Theory Construction," *Social Forces* 68, no. 4 (1990):1041–1063; Diana C. Mutz,

not been adequately considered in studies on terrorism. In fact, the literature on extremist mobilization has almost exclusively considered heterogeneity in the composition of social networks as a factor that can delay or impede mobilization.[121]

The argument that exposure to social disagreement has a negative effect on mobilization can be traced back to the classic study of McAdam and Paulsen.[122] Likewise, terrorism scholars have argued that there is less propensity to hold violent attitudes and, consequently, less willingness to engage in extremist activities when an individual is socially exposed to both supportive and unsupportive attitudes of violent extremism.[123] For instance, Wiktorowicz argued that compensatory ties have

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"The Consequences of Cross–Cutting Networks for Political Participation," *American Journal of Political Science* 46, (2002): 838–855; Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague, *Political Disagreement: the Survival of Diverse Opinions Within Communication Networks*; Lilach Nir, "Ambivalent Social Networks and Their Consequences for Participation," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 17, (2005): 422-442; Scott D. McClurg, "The Electoral Relevance of Political Talk: Examining Disagreement and Expertise Effects in Social Networks on Political Participation," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 3 (2006):737–754; Levitan, "Social Constraint and Self–Doubt: Mechanisms of Social Network influence on Resistance to Persuasion"; Charles J. Pattie and Ron J. Johnston, "Conversation, Disagreement and Political Participation," *Political Behavior* 31, no. 2 (2008):261–285; William P Eveland Jr. and Myiah Hutchens Hively, "Political Discussion Frequency, Network Size, and "Heterogeneity" of Discussion as Predictors of Political Knowledge and Participation," *Journal of Communication* 59, no. 2 (2009): 205-224; Seung–Jin Jang, "Are Diverse Political Networks Always Bad for Participatory Democracy?" *American Politics Research* 37, no. 5 (2009):879–898; McAdam and Paulsen, "Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism"; Lilach Nir, "Disagreement and Opposition in Social Networks: Does Disagreement Discourage Turnout?" *Political Studies* 59, no. 3 (2011):674–692; Sokhey and Djupe, "Interpersonal networks and democratic politics"; Allison Harell, Dietlind Stolle and Ellen Quintelier, "Experiencing Political Diversity: The Mobilizing Effect Among Youth," *Acta Politica* 54, no. 4 (2016):1–29; Riccardo Ladini, Moreno Mancosu and Cristiano Vezzoni, "Electoral Participation, Disagreement, and Diversity in Social Networks: A Matter of Intimacy?", *Communication Research* 47, no. 7 (2020): 1056-1078.

[121] Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising. Muslim Extremism in the West*; Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*; Cragin, "Resisting Violent Extremism: A Conceptual Model for Non-Radicalization"; Sikkens, van San, Sieckelinck and de Winter, "Parents' Perspectives on Radicalization"; Rune Ellefsen and Sveinung Sandberg, "Everyday Prevention of Radicalization: The Impacts of Family, Peer, and Police Intervention," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (published online February 10, 2022): 1–24.

[122] McAdam and Paulsen, "Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism": 647.

[123] Wojciech Kaczkowski, et al., "Impact of perceived peer attitudes and social network diversity on violent extremist intentions," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 8 (2022): 1530-1548.

a strong potential to delay or interrupt the mobilization process by providing an alternative ideological and interpretative framework that raises doubts about the radical movement. Thus, his model insists on the idea that isolation helps the potential militant to reinforce his commitment to the framework promoted by al-Muhajiroun.[124]

However, literature on political participation has also demonstrated contacts with actors outside the movement can also produce the opposite of the desired effect. A number of studies have linked diversity in network discussions to an increase in political engagement through improved political interest and understanding, as well as polarized, reactive reaffirmation of ideas.[125] Theoretical and empirical work has also shown that people can circumvent the discomfort produced by social sanctions and punishments by disengaging with countervailing ties and strengthening attachment to facilitating ties, which provides validation and approval.[126]

1.5. Terminological clarifications

While the central concepts of this study have already been outlined in the previous pages (violent radicalization, mobilization, social networks, minors, social movement, jihadism), some terminological clarifications are in order to ensure a correct understanding of what this dissertation explores and explains. Many of the terms that

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[124] Wiktorowicz, "Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam".

[125] Klofstad, Sokhey and McClurg, "Disagreeing about Disagreement: How Conflict in Social Networks Affects Political Behavior"; Dietram A. Scheufele, Matthew C. Nisbet, Dominique Brossard and Erik C. Nisbet, "Social Structure and Citizenship: Examining the Impacts of Social Setting, Network Heterogeneity, and Informational Variables on Political Participation," *Political Communication* 21, no. 3 (2004): 315–338; Elif Erisen and Cengiz Erisen, "The Effect of Social Networks on the Quality of Political Thinking", *Political Psychology* 33, no. 6 (2012): 839-865.

[126] Michael A. Hogg, "Self-Uncertainty, Social Identity, and the Solace of Extremism," in *Extremism and the psychology of uncertainty*, eds. Michael A. Hogg & Danielle Blaylock, (Boston: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011): 19–35; Laura G. E. Smith, Emma F. Thomas, and Craig McGarty, "We Must be the Change We Want to See in the World": Integrating Norms And Identities Through Social Interaction," *Political Psychology* 36, no. 5 (2015): 543-557.

articulate this work and that guided me in formulating the research goals and questions have been used interchangeably in the literature, and in this thesis.

For example, in this dissertation, terrorism and political violence are used to refer to the same reality, i.e., the use or threat of violence primarily by non-state actors, carried out systematically and unpredictably to generate states of intimidation or fear in order to achieve political or religious goals.[127] The essence of terrorism is that the psychological impact it has on society as a whole is more far-reaching than the physical or lethal harm it causes. Often directed at symbolic targets, terrorism utilizes damage or destruction to convey messages aimed at influencing the attitudes and decisions of leaders and citizens.[128] However, while terrorism is a form of political violence, it is not the only one. Political violence encompasses a wide repertoire of actions including civil war, state repression, political riots, genocide, military coups, or targeted killings.[129] To the extent that this dissertation draws on classical social movement theory and research, it also sporadically refers to terrorism as an expression of collective action. Collective action is a coordinating effort on behalf of a shared interest or agenda, instigated by a social movement and inspired by an ideology.

The repertoire of actions undertaken by those who join extremist movements, or integrate cells, groups or networks associated with terrorist organizations, is very diverse. While discussing terrorism-related or jihadist activities throughout this work, it is important to note that I do not solely refer to direct acts of violence, such as planning or executing attacks, or travelling to conflict zones to join a terrorist organization. I also mean activities that facilitate and promote such violence, aiding third parties in their engagement (e.g., radicalization and recruitment of new militants, fundraising or logistical support for sustaining terrorist campaigns,

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[127] Alex P. Schmid, "The Definition of Terrorism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*, ed. Alex P. Schmid (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011): 39-98.

[128] Fernando Reinares, "Conceptualising International Terrorism," ARI *82/2005* (Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2005).

[129] Stathis N. Kalyvas, "The Landscape of Political Violence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, eds. Erica Chenoweth, Richard English, Andreas Gofas, Stathis N. Kalyvas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019): 11–33.

dissemination of propaganda produced by these organizations, etc.). All of these are activities that the Spanish Penal Code classifies as crimes of terrorism.[130]

At this point, it is worth stating in more explicit terms what the reader has already been able to infer from the previous pages: the incorporation of a young person into the jihadist movement is taken for granted when he or she participates, deliberately and in accordance with an ideological conviction, in any activity that contributes to the objectives of organizations such as Al Qaeda or the Islamic State. In this regard, I occasionally refer to individuals aligned ideologically with the global jihadist movement as sympathizers or supporters, and within this constituency, I distinguish those who engage in activities as activists or militants.

The pathway leading to participation in jihadist activities is characterized in this dissertation either as a mobilization process, employing the SMT terminology, or alternatively as a radicalization and recruitment process, as commonly understood in terrorism studies yet also recognized in SMT literature. Radicalization, which is a core topic in my research, is understood here as the gradual adoption of a set of beliefs that legitimizes, in moral and utilitarian terms, the use of violence for political aims, and may eventually lead to terrorism.[131] These beliefs are typically characterized as extremists, in the sense that they "oppose a society's core values and principles".[132] In addition, recruitment explains the efforts invested by the social movement to bring its supporters closer and involve them in collective action. As such, it has been defined as "the process leading to the decision of an individual to join (or not) a protest event and/or a social movement".[133]

The social ties constitute the primary focus of this study, to which a determining causal force is presupposed as catalysts of jihadist radicalization and

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[130] María Ponte, "La Reforma Del Código Penal En Relación a Los Delitos de Terrorismo," *GESI*, accessed May 19, 2023, https://www.seguridadinternacional.es/?q=es%2Fcontent%2Fla-reforma-del-c%C3%B3digo-penal-en-relaci%C3%B3n-los-delitos-de-terrorismo

[131] Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *ICCT research paper* 97, no. 1 (2013).

[132] Peter R. Neumann, *Prisons and Terrorism. Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation in 15 Countries*, (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, Kings College London, 2010).

[133] Walgrave and Ketelaars, "The Recruitment Functions of Social Ties."

recruitment. Throughout these pages, I refer to them interchangeably as social or personal networks, social ties or circles, interpersonal bonds, relational spheres, or immediate environments, among others. However, the nature and characteristics of these networks are labeled with different terms in the scientific literature that do present notable differences. The most prominent distinction, in the field of social movements studies, is between pre-existing ties and organizational ties. In Chapter 2 of this thesis, pre-existing ties encompass both the intra-family and extra-family immediate environments. Organizational ties are represented by the extra-family non-immediate environment.

I must make a last remark, in this case in relation to the study universe of this thesis, which I refer to as "minors", "underage youth", "children and adolescents", "juveniles", or more broadly, "young people" or "youth". This universe is clearly delimited in Spain: it encompasses individuals who have not reached the age of majority and are therefore under 18 years of age. However, the reader will note that while Chapter 2 provides an analysis of the efforts of radicalizing agents to target both children and adolescents, the remainder of the empirical work presented in Chapters 3 and 4 focuses on the social networks of those underage youth who were 14 years of age or older when they initiated their process of radicalization, i.e., those who had reached or exceeded the minimum age of criminal responsibility in Spain. Gathering evidence on the mobilization, and particularly the jihadist participation, of individuals below this age threshold is unfeasible given the means and methods of data collection available, and there are numerous precautions and ethical considerations that advise against it. Consequently, terms such as "youth", "adolescents" or "young people" gain relevance as the study progresses, while others such as "minors" or "children" lose prominence.

1.6. Research design

This dissertation combines different methodological strategies, samples of study, methods of data collection and sources of information to get a comprehensive picture of how social networks impacted the jihadist mobilization of youth in Spain between 2012

and 2019. This section provides a broader perspective on the methodological choices that drive the empirical research as a whole, while each chapter delves into the specific research design used in specific stages of the study. These decisions were not only determined by the overall research objectives and questions of the dissertation, but also by the methodological constraints I encountered in the process, which are outlined in each chapter and in the conclusions of this dissertation.

1.6.1. Analytical strategies and samples of study

This thesis mainly embraces a qualitative methodology. Inasmuch as social network analysis has been characterized primarily as a strictly quantitative endeavor, the choice of a qualitative methodology may seem unusual. However, a qualitative method seems more appropriate for understanding not only how personal relationships and the effects they trigger affect individuals' ideas and behaviors throughout the mobilization process, but also the subjective experiences of movement supporters and the meanings they attach to the connections causing these effects.[134] Qualitative data and methods of analysis also make it possible to capture the dynamic nature of social interaction, thus encompassing the situational dimension of associations and dependencies between actors.[135]

Moreover, this dissertation understands that social interactions are a highly contextual phenomenon, dependent on a wide variety of factors, including cultural norms, social expectations, or collective identities. Therefore, it does not seek to find patterns that can be generalized to other contexts, as is usually the case with inferences based on the statistical analysis of probability samples. On the contrary, it studies specific social networks to understand the mechanisms, properties and processes that explain the social phenomenon that is the object of analysis in these pages. In fact, it is interesting to note that influential works at the intersection between social movement studies and terrorism studies have generally approached

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[134] Passy, "Social Networks Matter. But How?"

[135] Elisa Bellotti, "Introduction", in *Qualitative Networks: Mixed Methods in Sociological Research*, ed. Elisa Bellotti (London: Routledge, 2014): 1-19.

the role of social networks from a qualitative perspective.[136] Consequently, the three chapters that represent the empirical core of the thesis (chapters 2 to 4) adopt analytical techniques typical of this methodology, although with differences and even, in one case, complemented with a quantitative methodology (chapter 3).

In coming to a decision about what kind of qualitative approach to take I considered three key issues: the specific research question to be addressed; the predefined analytical framework; and the nature of the data available. This thesis adopts a qualitative inductive approach to investigate in chapter 2 how interpersonal ties contribute to build a potential for mobilization in support of the GJM. Specifically, this undertaking follows an empirically guided and theoretically informed approach based on grounded theory. The dearth of academic research on the peculiarities of jihadist radicalization and recruitment of underage youth in a non-conflict-affected Western context, and the potential emergence of variations in the radicalization process depending on the relational environment in which it occurs, necessitate an inductive approach to uncover new perspectives. To do so, I use original data on GJM militants and activists who attempted to radicalize and recruit Muslim minors in Spain between 2012 and 2018. Annex 1 presents descriptive information on the individuals in the study sample analyzed in Chapter 2.

In contrast, this research adopts a qualitative deductive approach when it seeks to test theoretical assumptions in a context where it has not been tested earlier. To that end, I use variations of thematic analysis. In chapter 3, I study the properties of ties that, according to previous studies, could predict youth jihadist participation. This chapter employs a mixed methods approach, incorporating qualitative and quantitative data and analysis methods. This choice was motivated by the fact that the combination of the two methods enables to assess not only which network properties are most prevalent among those involved, but also what meaning

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[136] These may include, among others, Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*; Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising. Muslim Extremism in the West*; or Reinares, *Patriotas de la muerte. Por qué han militado en ETA y cuándo abandonan*.

individuals assign to these links.[137] To test hypotheses about differential recruitment, I use a sample of Muslim youth mobilized in Spain between 2012 and 2019 by the jihadist movement that includes participants (activists) and non-participants (sympathizers). Annex 2 presents the main characteristics of the sampled individuals, and Annexes 3 and 4 present the data that allowed the quantitative analysis developed in Chapter 3.

In chapter 4, I use a qualitative deductive approach to analyze the opposing influences and resistance strategies that arise when young individuals encounter social disagreement in the context of the jihadist mobilization. The analysis is grounded in a convenience sample of Muslim young individuals who faced opposition and disapproval within their immediate social environment prior to affiliating with the jihadist movement.

1.6.2. *Data sources and methods*

For this thesis, I collected extensive empirical data from a wide variety of sources, including semi-structured interviews, court hearings, judicial summaries, and police reports. To a much lesser extent, data collection relied on press information.

The sources of information were not used in the same way in the three empirical chapters: while chapter 2 makes priority use of documentary sources (police and judicial documents) and, to a lesser extent, of oral hearings, chapters 3 and 4 make more intensive use of semi-structured interviews, combined with the rest of the secondary sources. Each chapter gives a more detailed account of the type of data used, and the method of analysis employed in each case; here I will provide an overview of the sources of information and the data collection methods employed throughout the whole research.

A total of 21 interviews were conducted between October 2019 and June 2021 with youngsters mobilized by the GJM and their relatives. I also interviewed police

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[137] Mario Diani, "Network analysis," in *Methods of Social Movement Research*, eds. Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg, Vol. 16. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): 173-200.

experts, prison officials, and front-line practitioners with first-hand knowledge about some of the individuals that make up the study sample. Table 2 below lists the interviewees, their profile, and the date and setting of the interview. A more extensive note on the context of each interviewee, their relationship to the subject of this study and the topics addressed in the interviews can be found in Annex 5.

Table 2. List of interviewees.

$N^{\underline{o}}$	Category	Sex	Interview date	Type of interview and setting
1	Young jihadi activist	M	October, 2019	In person. Madrid
2	Penitenciary professional	F	October, 2019	Questionnaire.
3	Local social educator	F	October, 2019	In person. Ripoll
4	Friend and acquaintance of four young jihadi activist	M	October, 2019	Telephone.
5	Law enforcement agent	M	October, 2019	Questionnaire.
6	Law enforcement agent	M		
7	Law enforcement agent	M		
8	High-school principal	F	November, 2019	In person. Ripoll
9	High-school teacher	M		
10	Psychologist	F	November, 2019	In person. Ripoll
11	Local cultural mediator	F		
12	Young jihadi sympathizer	F	December, 2019	Chat.
13	Young jihadi sympathizer	M	December, 2019	Chat.
14	Relative of a young jihadi activist	F	December, 2019	Telephone.
15	Psychologist of a juvenile center	F	January, 2020	In person. Madrid.
16	Social worker of a juvenile center	F		
17	Young jihadi activist	M	February, 2020	In person. Granada.
18	Lawyer	M	August, 2020	Telephone.
19	Young jihadi activist	F	September, 2020	In person. Salamanca.
20	Young jihadi activist	F	June, 2021	In person. Girona.
21	Young jihadi activist	M	June, 2021	In person. Barcelona.

As can be seen from the above list, the sample of interviewees is not composed exclusively or mainly of the subjects under study in this thesis. On the contrary, it is a non-probabilistic convenience sample made up of a wide variety of profiles. This criterion for choosing interviewees, as atypical as it may seem, fits perfectly with the way in which guided conversations have been a method of social movement research. What is called "key informant interviewing" allows researchers to delve into the workings of a social movement through the choice of well-placed informants who provide, through structured conversations, relevant descriptive information.[138] Generally, the main criteria for selecting key informants is that a) they have information (of interest, valid, in depth, in quantity) about the aspects of the functioning of the social movement to be addressed, as well as b) a willingness to share this information. Movement scholars have turned to key informant interviews to address research objects that are difficult and time-consuming to approach through comprehensive and systematic data collection techniques, and to triangulate information gathered from other sources.[139] The restrictions on accessing data in social networks within the GJM provides a good reason for using the key informant interview approach in this dissertation.

When interviews were conducted in person or by phone, they were recorded with the consent of the interviewees and transcribed verbatim. On three occasions, interviewees refused to be recorded, in which case verbatim notes were taken to reproduce as closely as possible the words and meaning of the interviewee's message.

The study received a favorable opinion from the Research Ethics Committee of the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos with internal registry number 1605201909719. As established by the protocols in these cases, informed consent was obtained for all interviews. Both in writing (through the consent form) and orally (before the interview begins), interviewees were informed about the purpose of the study and

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[138] Kathleen M. Blee and Verta Taylor. "Semi-Structured Interviewing in Social Movement Research" in *Methods of Social Movement Research*, eds. Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg, Vol. 16. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): 92-117.

[139] Among the studies employing this data collection method, notable examples include Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of The Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Free Press, 1984); Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp, *Survival in The Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

the confidential and anonymous processing of the results. None of the interviewees is a minor.

The interviews conducted in prisons (4) and juvenile detention centers (2) were carried out within the framework of the collaboration agreements between the Elcano Royal Institute and the General Secretariat of Penitentiary Institutions, which is part of the Ministry of the Interior; the Secretaria de Mesures Penals, Reinserció i Atenció a la Víctima, belonging to the Consellería de Justicia of Generalitat de Catalunya; and the Agencia para la Rehabilitación y Reinserción del Menor Infractor (ARRMI), dependent on the Consejería de Justicia of Comunidad de Madrid. The framework of collaboration between the Elcano Royal Institute and the three public bodies regulates the ethical aspects of the research. The interviews with police (3) and penitentiary (1) informants were also carried out within the framework of the collaboration of the Elcano Royal Institute with the Ministry of the Interior of the Government of Spain, and the Secretaria de Mesures Penals, Reinserció i Atenció a la Víctima, belonging to the Consellería de Justicia of Generalitat de Catalunya.

In parallel to interviews, this research benefited from informal meetings developed in the course of study visits in Ceuta (April 2019), Melilla (October 2019), Barcelona (October 2019 and June 2021) and Ripoll (October and November 2019).

In addition, in the course of my research I attended 11 court hearing held at the Criminal Court of the National Court. All trials involved young people who had initiated their radicalization when they were minors but were arrested after turning 18. During each trial, I took notes about the composition of the sampled youth's personal network and captured evidence about how they interacted with members of the GJM and with extra-movement ties. This information came from the statements made by the defendants themselves, their family and friends, and police investigators. Table 2 provides a complete list of the trials, according to the summary of each case, the date of the trial and the sentencing court.

Table 3. List of court hearings from which data was collected for the study.

Nº	Judicial Summary	Date	Criminal Court Sentencing Chamber
1	07/2015	December, 2016	Sección 4, Audiencia Nacional
2	02/2015	December, 2016	Sección 2, Audiencia Nacional
3	04/2016	March, 2017	Sección 1, Audiencia Nacional
4	3/2016	July, 2017	Sección 2, Audiencia Nacional
5	10/2017	March, 2018	Sección 4, Audiencia Nacional
6	04/2015	April, 2018	Sección 4, Audiencia Nacional
7	14/2015	June, 2018	Sección 3, Audiencia Nacional
8	2/2017	July, 2018	Sección 4, Audiencia Nacional
9	9/2018	June, 2019	Sección 3, Audiencia Nacional
10	35/2017	December, 2019	Sección 3, Audiencia Nacional
11	60/2017	November, 2020	Sección 3, Audiencia Nacional

Another vital source of data for this thesis was the documentary material found in judicial summaries, police reports and verdicts. Some of these documents were consulted at the National Court, both in the Central Juvenile Court and in the Prosecutor's Office, while others were consulted at the main anti-terrorism units of the National Police and the Civil Guard. In addition, I also had access to the reform records elaborated by the technical teams of the juvenile institutions where adolescents served a detention term. Access to this documentation was also subject to collaboration agreements between the Elcano Royal Institute and the different institutions in possession of the material consulted.

While detailed and rich in information that is relevant for this thesis, it is important to note that the documentary sources consulted were not originally intended to systematically collect evidence on the existence, role and effects of social ties connecting young jihadists with their personal environment and the GJM. For this reason, this information source has proven more valuable in cross-checking data gathered through other techniques, and in developing a descriptive rather than explanatory view of the research problem. In each chapter specific reference is made to the documentary material, including all the judicial proceedings and law enforcement reports, that has been most useful to address each milestone of the thesis.

1.7. Structure of the study

This dissertation has been conducted in the form of a thesis by publication. The core of the research is built on three independents yet centrally connected empirical papers. As table 4 show, each of them addresses a particular research question, focusing on a specific dimension of the interplay between jihadism, social networks, and youth. The overall conclusions of the thesis are drawn from the summative, accumulated findings of the collection of studies.

Table 4. Summary of the empirical analysis developed throughout chapters 2 to 4.

	Study 1 (Chapter 2)	Study 2 (Chapter 3)	Study 3 (Chapter 4)
Research question	What role did social networks play in the mobilization of young people in Spain with the jihadist movement?	Are differences in social network properties explanatory of variations between radicalized youth who do and do not participate in jihadist actions?	How did interactions with social ties opposing violent extremism affect the mobilization of young supporters of jihad?
Focus	Agents of radicalization and recruitment.	Participant and non-participant sympathizers of the GJM.	Participants and their opposing ties.
Study sample	44 jihadist activists arrested in Spain between 2013 and 2019 due to their involvement in the indoctrination and recruitment of minors.	44 youth mobilized in Spain between 2012 and 2019 by the jihadist movement. 23 of them became involved in jihadist activities; 21 did not despite their affinity with global jihadism.	11 youth who experienced opposition to their ideas and dispositions from their social environment before engaging in jihadist activities.
Method	Qualitative method. Grounded theory	Mixed methods.	Qualitative method. Template analysis

In Chapter 2, the functions and mechanisms of interpersonal contacts as conduits for the mobilization of young jihadists are examined in depth. Drawing on data from 44 radicalizing agents involved in youth mobilization in Spain from 2012 to 2018, this chapter examines how different relational contexts (family; closest

environments made up of friends and neighbors; and online settings where previously unrelated individuals interact) contribute to building a potential for mobilization among underage youth and facilitate recruitment to jihadist activism. In addition, chapter 2 explores the specific role of minors in the strategic frameworks of jihadist organizations, while also addressing the growing trend of their recruitment in Western countries.

In Chapter 3, the focus shifts to the problem of differential recruitment, with the aim of understanding how social networks transform the participation potential into actual participation. By using a comparative sample of 44 radicalized youth in Salafi-jihadism (23 involved and 21 not involved in terrorism-related activities), the study examines whether differences in the type, number, and strength of their ties with jihadist militants could account for variations in their terrorist engagement. The chapter presents empirical evidence indicating that participation in jihadism is influenced by the number of connections, while also partially supporting the association between tie strength and political violence. Notably, the study also reveals that cognitive radicalization processes do not always aim to generate behavioral impact, thus explaining why the type of tie does not possess explanatory power.

Chapter 4 centers on the issue of ties multivalence, examining the effects of opposing and participation-constraining influences. By adopting an integrated theoretical framework on the network mechanisms, the study examines how countervailing ties seek to disrupt the association between young individuals and the jihadist movement, as well as the resistance strategies they develop to sustain their commitment to militancy. The findings demonstrate that cognitive dissonance and social disapproval have an emotional impact on the youth, but do not affect their behavior. On the contrary, the results indicate a positive effect of exposure to social discrepancy on mobilization.

Chapter 5 serves as the culmination of the analytical framework, offering a comprehensive synthesis and analysis of the results and discussion points from the individual articles comprising the thesis. It presents a unified and cohesive summary of the research findings, shedding light on the key contributions of the study to the

understanding of jihadist mobilization and the significance of interpersonal ties in this process. Additionally, the concluding chapter addresses the main limitations of the dissertation and proposes potential avenues for future research that can build upon the results presented in this work.

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Chapter 2.
How radicalizing agents mobilize minors to jihadism: a qualitative study in Spain

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How Radicalizing Agents Mobilize Minors to Jihadism: a Qualitative Study in Spain

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the global jihadist mobilization triggered by the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2012 and the subsequent emergence of Islamic State, child and adolescent recruitment has reached unprecedented levels in Spain. Between 2013 and 2019, 44 jihadists were arrested in this country due to their involvement in the indoctrination and recruitment of individuals below 18 years of age. How did they carry out the mobilization of minors in support of global jihadism? Adopting a qualitative approach guided by grounded theory methods to address the question, this article relies on evidence collected mostly from primary sources (police reports, criminal proceedings, court hearings, as well as semi-structured interviews with police experts and front-line practitioners). The results indicate that their radicalization strategies varied as a function of the existence of previous personal ties between the recruiter and the minor; the age of the minor; and the environment in which the process unfolded. The interaction of these three factors generates the outline of three different formulas used in Spain for jihadist indoctrination of underage youth: one unfolds within the family milieu, another within the immediate social environment and a third via cyberspace.

Introduction

Minors have been a strategic goal of global jihadism since the very emergence of Al Qaeda in 1988. Two of the founders of this terrorist organization, Abdullah Azzam and Osama bin Laden, justified and even argued in favour of the participation of people below 18 years old – the age signifying the end of childhood as defined by the United Nations (UN) and the beginning of legal adulthood as established in most Western societies – both in 'defensive jihad' against international troops deployed in Muslim majority countries and in offensive terrorist actions in other parts of the world (Azzam, 1985; Bin Laden, n.d.; U.S. Foreign Broadcast Information Service Report, 2004). They did so based on two principal criteria: on the one hand, they were stimulated by practical concerns which advised terrorist organizations to cover their functional and operational gaps and short-comings with individuals who were easy to indoctrinate, instruct and discipline; on the

other hand, they were guided by the jurisprudence of fundamentalist *sheiks* who hold that both adults and minors of a certain age are equally obliged to participate in the violent defence and promotion of Islam. Dictated by the circumstances and sanctioned by Islamic scholars, jihad was thus seen by Al Qaeda initiators as an individual duty for young Muslims, particularly when children reach puberty, and more specifically 15 years old, a time in life at which practising the five pillars of Islam – starting with the acts of worship – becomes obligatory to them (Akbar Mahdi, 2003; United States District Court for the Southern District of New York, 2002; U.S. Foreign Broadcast Information Service Report, 2004).

All in all, the association of minors with political violence is not unique to global jihadism. From ethno-nationalist groups to right-wing movements, and from narco-guerrillas to left-wing organizations, a wide variety of terrorist and extremist groups have recruited underage youth to further their aims (O'Neill & Van Broeckhoven, 2018; Simi et al., 2016; Singer, 2015). However, by increasingly involving juveniles in almost any capacity, jihadist organizations have ended up turning the exploitation of minors into a strategic rather than a tactical trend (Bloom & Horgan, 2019). Ever since Al Qaeda began deliberately targeting children and adolescents, other non-state armed groups espousing variants of the Salafi-jihadist ideology have become gradually more active in mobilizing minors. In the context of this study, the mobilization of minors into jihadism means the process whereby individuals below 18 years of age are encouraged to adopt a Salafi-jihadist belief with a view to engaging in activities in support of that extremist ideology. According to the 2019 UN Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, at least 17 jihadist armed groups operating in 11 countries exploited individuals from 8 to 17 years old to serve combat roles, to transport military equipment, to carry out suicide attacks or for sexual exploitation, among other functions (United Nations, General Assembly, Security Council, 2019).

This global trend for juvenile recruitment began to escalate significantly following the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2012 and the subsequent emergence of Islamic State (IS). Especially after the proclamation of its caliphate in June 2014, IS actively contributed to the doctrine on minors' involvement in jihad to expand territorial control and compensate for militant losses, but also to ensure its long-term survival (McCue et al., 2017; Pinheiro, 2015). Through its official English-language magazine, *Dabiq*, the organization advocated for the enlistment of 'child soldiers' by invoking Qur'anic sources that relate the story of two 15-year-olds who made a key contribution to the first military victory of the Prophet Muhammad (The Lions of Tomorrow, 2015). The media content produced by its propaganda outlet also frequently featured children and adolescents either participating in violent activities or being exposed to violence, attempting to normalize the use of underage youths for terrorist purposes and openly espousing their indoctrination and training (Benotman & Malik, 2016; National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism and General Intelligence and Security Service, 2017). As a result, thousands of minors have been associated with IS in its former main strongholds in Syria and Iraq, as well as in other countries where it has local branches, such as Afghanistan, Libya, Nigeria, the Philippines, Pakistan and Somalia (United Nations, General Assembly, Security Council, 2017, 2018, 2019). Furthermore, significant numbers of juveniles mobilized in countries where the jihadist organization did not maintain territorial control or a sustained presence. In Western Europe alone,

more than a thousand minors were recruited between 2012 and 2018, mostly to serve as foreign terrorist fighters in Syria or Iraq (Cook & Vale, 2019; Simcox, 2017).

It is in the context of the Syrian civil war and the emergence of IS that the radicalization and recruitment of children and adolescents also reached unprecedented figures in Spain. Between 2013 and 2019, 10 adolescents aged 14 – the minimum age of criminal respon-sibility in Spain – and over were convicted for their participation in jihadist activities; 1 more was killed in a police raid against the perpetrators of the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks in August 2017, in which he participated; and at least 18 individuals between 14 and 17 years old who were residents of Spain managed to integrate into the ranks of jihadist organizations established in Syria and Iraq, 4 of whom returned from the conflict area. Over the same period, another 17 youngsters began their radicalization pro-cesses before turning 18, even if they were arrested or died after exceeding that age threshold.[1] There are no official figures available for minors below 14 years of age associ-ated with jihadism in Spain.

Despite this recent surge of child and teenage recruitment to jihadism in Western democratic societies – as Spain's case exemplifies – there is little published research on this topic in the field of Terrorism Studies. Most of the related literature in this discipline is focused on the mobilization techniques used on juveniles by jihadist organizations in conflict contexts. These latter procedures are determined by factors such as the insti- tutional resources (schools, madrasas, mosques, orphanages) managed by jihadist groups in areas under their control; its predatory and coercive methods, sometimes extreme, of child recruitment; or the existence of social environments (families, groups of friends, communities) that are supportive of terrorist organizations. Other factors that are instrumental in underage youths' involvement in jihadism in war-torn countries are the everyday presence of violence and its communal acceptance, to which minors are exposed both directly (experiencing deaths or witnessing bombings, public amputations or executions) and from secondary sources (through the constant exhibition of violent content, as Islamic State supporters used to do in schools and public spaces in IS-held ter- ritories); as well as the structural conditions that put children and teenagers at risk of association with armed groups (for instance, uncontrolled population growth or poverty) (Almohamad, 2018; Anderson, 2016; Asal et al., 2008; Bloom & Horgan, 2019; Horgan et al., 2016; McCue et al., 2017; Morris & Dunning, 2018; O'Neill & Van Broeckhoven, 2018; Vale, 2018).

Nevertheless, it is clear that drivers of minors' participation in terrorist violence differ between youth living in contexts of political violence and armed conflict and those who reside in areas far from a war theatre. Although studies have pointed out some factors that play a significant role in the mobilization of minors into jihadism in the West, such as family membership in extremist groups, or the Internet and social media, which have made accessible information from the battlefield and connections with IS members, as well as enabled access to propaganda materials and Salafi-jihadist preachers (Horgan et al., 2016; Malik, 2019; O'Neill & Van Broeckhoven, 2018; Spalek, 2016; UNODC, 2017; Weimann, 2016), research has yet to systematically investigate child and teenage recruit-ment techniques used by jihadists outside conflict areas.

The present study aims to broaden the empirical literature on the jihadist mobilization of minors by focusing on the strategies put into effect in Spain between 2013 and 2019. To that end, the techniques and procedures employed in the

recruitment of children and adolescents have been analysed, as well as the main social, temporal, spatial and procedural dimensions of these dynamics. On the basis of that empirical foundation, this article proposes a three-formula model of the mobilization of juveniles into jihadism built through an inductive analytical process.

Study universe, sources and analytical induction

To examine the jihadist mobilization of minors in Spain, specific steps of research design were taken which included appropriately delimiting the universe of study, systematically collecting all the available evidence and inductively analysing the data gathered. Given the little empirical scholarship on this topic, the present study adopted a grounded theory approach. As an exploratory method, grounded theory enables the generation of theoreti- cally oriented conclusions in a flexible research process that is guided by insights emerging from the scholarly informed analysis of collected data (Charmaz, 2008; De Bie & De Pot, 2016).

A total of 95 individuals who were arrested or died in Spain from 2013 to 2019 were involved in the jihadist radicalization and recruitment of other fellow militants. At least 44 of them (46.3%) directed their mobilization efforts at underage youths. This group was comprised of 32 men and 12 women. Their ages ranged between 17 and 52 years at the time of their detention (M = 29.0; SD = 9.9). Four of them were minors themselves. As many as 23 were married, and nearly half had children. All of them, except two, held IS as their reference organization, although seven also considered as a reference organiz- ation Al Qaeda and its territorial branches in Syria (initially called the al-Nusra Front) and in the north of Africa (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb), as well as an associated entity, at the time still existing as such, the Movement for Unicity and Jihad in Western Africa (MUJWA).

Eleven of the radicalizing agents who mobilized minors in Spain between 2013 and 2019 resided in the autonomous city of Melilla, an enclave under Spain's sovereignty located on the north coast of Morocco; ten in the province of Barcelona; six in Ceuta, a Spanish city also situated in the north of Africa; and another four in the Catalan province of Girona. Another eleven lived in eight more provinces. The remaining two resided in France. Their geographical distribution largely replicates that of the main clusters of radi- calization in Spain (Reinares et al., 2019). Ceuta and Melilla, the two demarcations with the country's largest Muslim populations in relative terms, have been considered hotspots of jihadist activity since Salafism penetrated specific areas of both autonomous cities where conditions of religious spatial segregation, social and economic marginalization, and crime have resulted in a troubling combination of impeded police control, recruitment activity and jihadism appeal. In the wake of the Syrian war, the proximity of Ceuta and Melilla to Morocco favoured the formation of several cross-border networks devoted to enlisting volunteers in IS.

Islamic fundamentalist currents also have presence in some areas of Catalonia, where a third of Islamic worship places are controlled by Salafists (Reinares & García-Calvo, 2018). The region is also a centre of jihadist activity, which is reflected in a string of terrorist plots planned and launched in this region since the late noughties. Between 2013 and 2019, a number of police operations were carried out in several Catalan localities, particularly in the province of Barcelona (such as Terrassa and Badalona), and two terrorist attacks

were executed in Barcelona city and Cambrils, in August 2017, and in Cornellà de Llobregat, in August 2018.

The findings presented in this research are built on data collected mostly from primary sources, such as police reports, criminal proceedings and court hearings, as well as semi-structured interviews with police experts and front-line practitioners with first-hand knowledge about some of the individuals that make up the universe of study. These interviews were conducted between April and November 2019 in the municipalities of Ceuta, Melilla and Ripoll. To a lesser extent, data collection relied on secondary sources (press reports and published biographical accounts).

The result of the inductive analytical process was a typology of formulas employed by these 44 radicalizing agents in the jihadist recruitment of individuals who had not reached adulthood. This typology is based upon the identification of three factors which in Spain have noticeably shaped efforts to recruit children and adolescents.

The first of these determining factors in the jihadist mobilization of minors is the existence of previous social bonds between the recruiter and their potential target. The incidence of this variable is extraordinarily high: 37 out of the 44 individuals studied in this article (84.1%) attempted to recruit children and adolescents from their immediate daily environment, with whom they often had ties of kinship, friendship or neighbourhood. The relevance of pre-existing personal bonds in drawing individuals to jihadism has been highlighted in extensive research, both conceptual and empirical (Bakker, 2006; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Neumann & Rogers, 2007; Sageman, 2004; Wiktorowicz, 2004, n.d.) – also in the case of Spain (Reinares et al., 2019). However, these social ties take on even greater importance in the case of individuals under 18 years of age, given that they are particularly vulnerable to influences emanating from their closest circles (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005; Richards, 2011; Van der Heide & Geenen, 2017).

A second factor that plays a role in determining the techniques used in the mobilization of minors is the scenario in which the processes of jihadist radicalization and recruitment unfold. This factor is closely linked to that of the recruiter's previous knowledge of the person who is the target. In this vein, it has been observed that when the radicalization agent and the minor both knew each other before, the interaction between the two tended to take place primarily in an offline environment. By contrast, when no previous knowledge or contact existed between the two, the interaction tended to begin online, and it also continued to develop, largely, in cyberspace.

Finally, the recruitment formula is influenced by a third factor: the age of the minor to be mobilized. It is logical that the extraordinary dependence on family during the first years of life makes it difficult for anyone without kinship ties to establish contact with a child and indoctrinate them for an extended period of time. On the contrary, to the degree that the child grows and advances from infancy to adolescence, the individual acquires a sense of autonomy from the family, begins to move within new social settings, and to intensify the use of communication technologies. In consequence, the radicalization and recruitment formulas to which they could potentially be exposed expand.

In addition to aspects related to transformations in the minor's environment, other elements concerning the development of potential joiners conditioned the techniques used by the indoctrinators analysed in this research. Infancy, childhood and adolescence are periods of transition defined by physical, cognitive, social and emotional changes that affect a person's risk of becoming engaged in radical ideas and behaviours. Infancy and

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childhood, which extend from the first months of life to the start of puberty (usually placed at the age of 10), are stages marked by the development of attachment, conscience and morality through interaction with adults and peers, and, at a later time, the ability to process information and solve problems (Goldstein & Naglieri, 2011). However, the key developmental processes connected to the eagerness to experiment with beliefs and con- ducts occur during adolescence. Adolescence is often divided into three phases: early (10– 13 years), middle (14–16 years) and late (17–19 years). Early adolescence is the stage in which concrete thinking skills begin to develop but it is during middle and late adoles- cence that the minor is able to think abstractly and reason. It is also in the early stage that youths commence exploring decision-making, while other emotional experiences, such as the development of the sense of identity, start to take shape later on. Increasing influence from peers and sexual interest characterize social maturation throughout adolescence. Behaviourally, young people experiment with new forms of acting in early adolescence, although they do not usually begin to take risks until middle adolescence, which are assessed during the late stage (UNICEF, Adolescent Development and Participation Unit Programme Division, 2005).

Formulas shaping jihadist mobilization of minors in Spain

The combination of the three determining factors of the jihadist mobilization of minors (the prior existence of social ties and their type; the scenario where the process is to take place and the age of the minor) generates the outline of three formulas used in the radicalization and recruitment of juveniles. The first, the 'intra-family formula', was used by 22 of the 44 radicalizing agents (50.0%) studied, who tried to exert influence over members of their own nuclear family. The ages of the minors ranged from early infancy to 17 years old. Up to 19 subjects (43.2%) recruited friends, partners, neighbours or acquaintances through the 'extra-family formula within the immediate environment'. Finally, 12 individuals (27.3%) followed the 'extra-family formula in the non-immediate environment', to mobilize minors with whom no previous social bond existed, and with the initial tie made primarily online. These youths were between 13 and 17 years old, an age range when access to Internet content tends to rise with respect to earlier ages, along with other risk factors which facilitate virtual interaction with recruiters. On occasion, the same indoctrinator used more than a single formula for mobilizing minors (Table 1). Not all of the recruiters analysed in this study succeeded in associating children and teenagers with global jihadism. According to the information available, 27 out of the 44 indoctrinators (61.4%) managed to involve underage youths in a wide variety of actions, ranging from disseminating propaganda online to radicalizing other individuals, as well

Table 1. Formulas for jihadist radicalization and recruitment of minors in Spain, 2013–2019.

Formula	Previous social bond and type	Scenario	Age of the minor
Intra-family	Yes, kinship ties	Offline	All stages of infancy, childhood and adolescence
Extra-family within the immediate environment	Yes, partnership, friendship and/or neighbourhood ties	Offline, primarily	Adolescence
Extra-family in the non-immediate environment	No	Online, primarily	Beginning in middle adolescence

as joining the ranks of jihadist organizations in conflict theatres or planning and carrying out terrorist attacks in Spain. However, several instances show that these agents of radicalization only drew to extremism a fraction of all the minors they approached (Dirección General de la Policía [DGP], Comisaría General de Información [CGI], 2014d; police expert of Melilla, personal communication, October 18, 2019; first-line practitioners of Ripoll, November 14, 2019). Furthermore, in a number of cases, it is apparent that the indoctrinators took advantage of the very young age of their targets to involve them in activities they did not understand, as was the case with infants, toddlers and young children.

On the contrary, the remaining 17 recruiters (38.6%) failed in their attempts to attract new followers. Minors not completing the mobilization process despite an indoctrinator's diligence may be better understood if taking into consideration that the socialization of children and adolescents is a complex, dynamic process comprised of multiple actors and interactions (Perez-Felkner, 2013; Peterson, 2005). Juveniles, especially as they grow up, are embedded in manifold social environments and subjected to different influences. It is therefore unsurprising that radicalizing agents' attempts to indoctrinate underage youths were occassionally countered by countervailing social forces that hindered, altered or even halted the recruitment dynamic. Other circumstances related to a minor's sense of agency also have the potential to undermine the process, such as their refusal of the jihadist message, their perception of risk and the costs of militancy, as well as their moral rejection of violence (DGP, CGI, 2015b; Sentencia 25/2016, 2016; Defendant in the court record 11/2016. Court hearing. July 18, 2018).

Irrespective of the results of radicalizing agents' efforts, this article sets out to systematically explore the techniques put into practice by all the individuals arrested in Spain between 2013 and 2019 for their alleged role in the jihadist mobilization of children and adolescents. The following sections examine and illustrate in more detail the three formulas for radicalization and recruitment of minors that they used.

The intra-family formula for mobilizing minors

As the family represents the first group to which a minor belongs, most of the primary political socialization, as well as the acquisition of fundamental norms and social values, takes place within it. The transmission of political affinities and attitudes in the domestic sphere is fostered by the strong, trusted ties generated by lengthy communication, as well as by the constant exposure and heightened receptivity that characterize kin interactions (Jaime, 2010). The process is channelled in conversations about public and current affairs where minors are not mere receivers, but practice opinion expression and validate views. Sociological surveys indicate that political talks at home are relatively common for slightly more than half of Spanish adolescents, who engage much less frequently in such kinds of conversations with friends and other members of their social milieu (Injuve, 2011, 2017). This makes the family the most propitious environment for the construction of social and political identities from a very early age. In this sense, an analysis of the empirical evidence gathered in the case of Spain reveals that parents' or older brothers' alignment with Salafi-jihadism and their involvement in jihadist activities tends to generate enabling conditions for the radicalization of minors. In some cases, this even leads to a parallel effort by immediate

relatives to explicitly inculcate them with values and behaviours consistent with this fundamentalist and violent way of understanding Islam.

Among the 22 radicalizing agents who followed the 'intra-family' formula, 13 were parents (59.1%) who attempted to mobilize their own children in support of global jihad- ism. This mode of exercising parental responsibilities demonstrates that jihadists do not perceive a contradiction in combining their parental duties with their political conviction and militant commitment. Such an alignment of identities and roles results from a belli-cose Salafist conception of parenthood as a form of activism; that is to say, as an oppor- tunity for its followers to both reaffirm their cognitive and behavioural engagement with global jihadism and to meet the collective expectations of this ideological movement. As a matter of fact, 'activist parenting' is explicitly promoted by jihadist organizations. Through their propaganda they incite progenitors, particularly mothers, to raise ideologically aligned children and advocate initiating indoctrination from early childhood to prevent later ideological dissonances between parents and their progeny (Sister Al, 2001; Sumayyah al-Muhajirah, 2015; The woman is a shepherd in her husband's home and responsible for her flock, 2017).

Attempts to transmit the jihadist ideology within the family are not only intergenera- tional and vertical, but also intragenerational and horizontal. The present research shows that older brothers have contributed to building solidarity with this movement in Spain by encouraging their younger brothers to identify with and support jihadist organ- izations. This was the case for 9 of the 22 radicalizing agents (40.9%) who resorted to the 'intra-family' formula. Their strong influence over their younger siblings may have stemmed from the closer relationship and frequent contact that existed between them, in contradistinction with the parent–child gap that occurred due to the adults being absent during the social and emotional development of their offspring. Older brothers may also have acted as role models because of having coped in the past with the same conflicts and tensions that their younger siblings would face, usually related with identity uncertainties or perceived discriminations. This seems particularly true for the younger members of a jihadist cell formed in the town of Ripoll, who adopted Salafi-jihadist ideas under the direct influence of their older siblings, who in turn had been indoctrinated by a local imam. In mid-August 2017, members of the cell carried out two terrorist attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils, killing 16 people (Reinares & García-Calvo, 2018).

Family efforts geared towards radicalizing underage youth in Spain were initiated, in a number of cases, when the potential recruits were at the first stages of child development. Two principal mechanisms were elicited with the purpose of indoctrinating children that young. The first technique focused on teaching them to imitate the type of behaviour which makes up the action repertoire of jihadist organizations, and to integrate into their vocabulary the usual terms of aggressive rhetoric that terrorist groups employ. Evi- dence of this child instruction practice can be clearly seen in a phone conversation between a 30-year-old Moroccan woman resident in the Barcelona metropolitan area and the top commander of an IS military unit in Syria, whom she claimed she would be married to once in the caliphate. During the call, which takes place while mother and son are held in a Turkish detention centre close to the Syrian border, the woman pushes her three-year-old son to follow her directions in order to impress the IS combatant:

Mother: Tell him 'I will behead the police officer and I will go [to Syria]'. Son: I behead the police officer …
Mother: How are you going to do? This way: 'gjjjjj'. He is going to behead the police officer and he will go to see you.
        (…)
Mother: Tell him 'I miss you'.
Son: I miss you … I want to go with the mujāhidīn. (…)
Mother: Who is our emir? Our emir [is] Abu Baker al-Baghdadi.
Son: Abu Baker Al-Baghdadi … With the mujāhidīn … with [those] who kill. (Auto de prisión provisional, 2015, p. 3).

The second technique for ideologically training children from an early age consisted in exposing them to media material produced by jihadist organizations for the purpose of encouraging them to identify with such entities and trigger positive emotions about its members and activities. Presumably, this practice was also aimed at desensitizing minors to violence. This is evident in the case of a 23-year-old Moroccan girl who entertained her 7-year-old brother with the same violent videos she was watching while deepening her own radicalization process:

One day, I was (…) I was watching [a video] while my little brother was sleeping. Do you remember that plane? Do you remember the one [the pilot] who was burnt? The one from the plane? My brother said: 'Wow, that's cool! Put it again, put it again!' I rewound the video, and he said: 'Wow, how cool! Put it again!' And now, a time has passed, and he still says: 'please, I want to watch it, it's really cool'. (Fiscalía de la Audiencia Nacional, 2017, p. 25)

Once minors grew and achieved enough cognitive development to comprehend basic political concepts, the processes of jihadist radicalization became more complex and intensive. Some of the dynamics mentioned above were maintained, such as the exposure of adolescents to audio-visual propaganda, but it was typical for the indoctrinator to introduce general ideological considerations into the discourse, along with orientations concerning partisan and sectarian loyalties. At this developmental stage of minors, rather than building a deep understanding of the ideology, the adult's efforts were usually aimed at drawing their kin towards adherence to a simple master narrative sustained on an in-group and out-group dichotomy constructed along religious lines. By doing so, parents attempted to build children's identity and self-perception in accordance with such a notion of division between an imagined 'us' and 'them'.

The internalization of this delineation also paved the way for the minor's gradual detachment from overall society, a central step in the radicalization process. Social isolation contributes to increasing the family member's influence by triggering 'spirals of encapsulation' (Della Porta, 1995), whereby underage youths' personal contact with their surroundings becomes restricted as family loyalty strengthens, resulting in the loss of touch with reality and outside viewpoints. On this basis, with the progressive incorporation of the minor into new socialization settings – like school or peer groups – the immediate relatives who acted as radicalizing agents increased control over the juvenile's broader environment in the effort to filter unwanted external influences that could operate as players in ideological transmission. To enforce this regulation of social interactions and behaviours, parents hardened their educational style by becoming more

punitive and authoritarian, subjecting their children to strict discipline and total obedience. The following testimony, provided by the Spanish wife of a member of an IS-aligned jihadist cell called the *Al-Andalus Brigade*, dismantled in Madrid in June 2014, describes this procedure in her husband's radicalization of their two children, a 9-year- old girl and an 11-year-old boy:

> He began very lightly, but insistently, to teach them *shuras* and require them to recite them. (…) One day the girl came to me saying that she had come from the cemetery with her father, who had told her: 'Here are all of the unfaithful and all of them will go to hell.' (…) He showed the older boy jihadist videos with girls faces destroyed by bombs … The boy told me this, crying with terror; he was convinced that he would not be able to sleep. The boy asked that he not been shown this, but his father insisted: 'You are a man, you have to see it.' And he would do it during the time when I went down for bread. (…) He wanted to take my son and his friends to a farm that my father has in Avila [were the cell members used to meet]; he wanted to take him to Morocco, also with the same friends, who – I later learned – also were to receive the same orders from their superiors'. (Escrivá, 2017, para. 11, 16 and 28)

The complete sequence of actions undertaken by the father – from the rigid teaching of Islamic practices to the attempts to neutralize those voices, like the mother's, that contradicted his discourse – reveals the multistep process that leads to the introduction of the kin to an extremist milieu outside the family unit and, eventually, to their organizational involvement, an ultimate goal facilitated by the father's affiliation to a jihadist cell. Such preparation of the potential joiner also included control over their academic education. Thus, it was not uncommon for adults who tried to radicalize the minors of the family to interfere in their schooling by impeding them from following the same classes as their classmates. This may have taken different forms, such as prohibiting them from studying music, substituting their juvenile literature books with Salafī readings, or interrupting their basic compulsory studies to have them trained in religious schools in Muslim-majority countries (Alonso, 2018; DGP, CGI, 2014a; Sentencia 24/2017, 2017).

These dynamics were completed by the elimination from everyday life of any element that contradicted the Salafī codes of conduct. To this end, the home became an ideological refuge in which photographs were prohibited, along with the viewing of movies and cartoons, and listening to music, all of them aspects of secular, modern society that are regarded as undesirable and corrupting. Beyond the domestic sphere, juveniles were also kept away from influences considered to be threats to their Islamic identity. On the contrary, in some instances, they were persuaded to get close to extremist circles. The wife of another member of the abovementioned *Al-Andalus Brigade* wrote in a personal diary of the kind of family activities that her husband had prohibited her and their adolescent children from undertaking to prevent them from adopting secular norms and practices or interacting with non-Muslims: these included celebrating birthdays or Christmas holidays; or going to the movies, swimming or the beach (DGP, CGI, 2014a).

The opposite trend is illustrated by a Muslim convert mother of four resident in Alicante, on the south-eastern coast of Spain, who attempted to take her offspring to IS-controlled Syria to reunite with the father, a Moroccan foreign fighter. In preparation for the trip, the woman encouraged one of her adolescent sons to join a radical football fan club in Tetouan (in the north of Morocco) whose members used to display IS symbols and flags

at their gatherings. It did not come as a surprise for police investigators that some of the club members ended up travelling to Syria and Iraq to become fully fledged militants of the jihadist organization (Sentencia 8/2019, 2019).

By building a highly ideological environment within the family, immediate relatives not only aimed to transmit beliefs and values, but also to promote attitudes and practices. Parents and older brothers who acted as radicalizing agents used their role and authority to cognitively manipulate minors, thus shaping the latter's opinion about the use of vio- lence and their willingness to engage in jihadist activities. For that purpose, the use of emotion-based arguments that espouse sentiments of heroism, solidarity, empowerment and commitment became a key technique, as well as others expressed in more explicit ideological terms, such as devotion and duty. With promises of non-material selective incentives (significance, status, role, meaningful life), family members tried to make offers of engagement more enticing. When these persuasion practices failed, it was likely that they adopted some type of coercive strategy. This pattern is revealed in the two quotes reproduced below. The first is the instructive speech of a mother of 16- year-old twins, all three residents in a medium-sized city in the metropolitan area of Bar- celona province. This mother prompted them to follow the example of their older brother, who died in Syria fighting for IS, and at the same time instructed them to ignore opposing views from other social actors. A police operation in April 2015 disrupted the siblings' plans to travel to that country. The second excerpt is the rebuke of a father, arrested in Madrid in June 2014, who attempted to impose disciplinary rules with respect to engagement in jihad to his 15-year-old son:

Mother (M):   You have to take care of your religion, your education, you have to behave well, you have to adopt your dead brother's good manners.

Son (S):   I wish.

M: You are going to be beloved by God and the people. You don't have to care about people's opinion and what they say, they can say whatever they want, the most important thing is that you are educated, so that people won't have anything to say about you. [You have to] say yes, as-salāmu ʿalaykum, as your brother used to do. Even though [people] criticized him, he never cared about them, he always said yes, as-salāmu ʿalaykum. He used to talk to everyone, to laugh to everyone, as Allah dictates.

S: Yes.

M: You have to follow the path that satisfies God and move away from that which doesn't (…) You know why [they criticized your brother]? Because they were fearful, they are afraid. Even though they know Allah's religious principles, they are afraid. I don't know why they are afraid! What would those who fight in the name of Allah in defence of Islam say? (Dirección General de la Guardia Civil, Sección de Información, VII Zona de la Guardia Civil, 2015, p. 13).

I feel bad to know that my children have lied to me and hidden things from me since they were very small. I cannot trust you; it seems like you are a two-year-old, yet those of your same age are already in jihad, fighting the infidels. Be a man and be strong; we want you to be men. You can't keep on like this:

'I have a headache; today, I will stay home.' You have to be a man! Do you hear me? It has all been for nothing then. Do you understand me? What makes me sick are your actions. Please pay attention to me, you understand what I am saying … Well, do what you think best.' (Sentencia 25/2016, 2016, p. 124)

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Regulating the interactional field, demanding adherence to a strict lifestyle and subjecting to an intensive indoctrination were all techniques used most often to turn minors' family members into committed activists. The rationale that supports such methods lies in the expectation that, once external ties are severed or substantially reduced, the chances of underage youth refusing to become involved in terrorist activities drastically decrease. If considered, it could come at a double cost: the loss of kinship ties that provided a sense of belonging, and the loss of the sense of identity and purpose shaped by inter-action with family members.

The extra-family formula in the immediate environment

With the onset of adolescence, individuals widen their social circles and become exposed to the influence of new socialization agents. In this stage of personal development, the family, without losing its importance, gives way to the group of peers as the principal environment for acquiring beliefs and experimenting with new practices. But in this phase of exploration of one's immediate environment and otherness, the search for social references can also put adolescents within the sights of others in their close circles that can act as transmitters of Salafi-jihadist ideas and practices.

Of the 19 radicalizing agents that followed the 'extra-family formula within the immediate environment' for the indoctrination and recruitment of minors, 4 of them aimed their efforts at peers with whom they had a close, even special relationship: their girlfriends. Two of these recruiters were minors themselves. Their techniques reveal how they exploited the sentimental bond with the objective of getting their partners to conform to the conservative ideal of womanhood and, eventually, take on the ideological principles of global jihad. For instance, they asked their girlfriends to change their habitual clothes to wear niqab or require them to give up their work and abandon studies so that they do not leave home. Recruiters also constantly asked their partners to read writings about jihad and showed them videos of combats and executions disseminated by jihadist organizations. Their strategies entailed a set of actions targeted not only at their lovers but also extended to other members of their closest social networks, such as relatives or friends, in order to avoid them buffering the recruiters' radical rhetoric. If those extra efforts failed, indoctrinators tried to replace their girlfriends' external affiliations with intragroup associates (Dirección General de la Guardia Civil [DGGC], Dirección Adjunta Operativa [DAO], Comandancia de Melilla, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Mossos d'Esquadra, Comissaria Superior de Coordinació Central [CSCC], Comissaria General d'Informació [CGI], 2015a).

These four radicalizing agents planned to travel to the IS-held territories and shared their plans with their girlfriends in an attempt to emotionally involve them. This is clearly apparent in the following excerpts from two conversations. The first is a phone dialogue between a young Melilla resident and his 17-year-old girlfriend, both of whom were detained in December 2014; the second one is an audio recording that a 16-year-old girl sent via WhatsApp to her partner, an adolescent recruiter who was arrested in the province of Barcelona in April 2015:

Boyfriend (B): Do you love me or not? Minor (M): A lot.
B: But what if you lose me?
M: I don't want to imagine that.

B: But if you lose me, you already know why (…) I want you to be happy. I wantyou to say: «He left me to obey Allah, insha Allah». I want you to think thatway, and not to think «he deceived me» or other nonsense. Because you know that my intention is to get married with you and stay with you. (DGGC, DAO, Comandancia de Melilla, 2014a, p. 71)

About you leaving, I don't know. I have been told that it is *haram* [sin] to leave behind your family and children and leave. I don't know, I am far from convinced. I don't know, you can go to *Yannah* [paradise] perfectly by doingwhat Allah asks of you (…) I don't know why you obsess about going to those countries. If you go there, then take me with you, and that's that, but I won't let you go alone. If you want to go in the end, and I am married to you – insha Allah – then take me with you, but I won't let you leave by yourself. You just don't convince me, seriously. This would be the only issue on which we did not see eye to eye. The only one. (Mossos d'Es- quadra, CGI, Área Central de Información Exterior, 2015a, pp. 1005–1006)

Much like partners, peers can play a key role in the mobilization of minors into jihadism. There is evidence showing that adolescents could join jihadist groups following acquaintances who enlisted before them. In so doing, peers act as facilitators who drive their friends into an environment where radical ideas are shared, expressed and lived out, fostering bottom-up radicalization processes. This development is consistent with studies on teenagers' decision-making in risk-taking behaviours, which show that friends exert unique influence in a juvenile propensity for misconduct due to a number of mechanisms in play, such as the low resistance to peer stimuli, the high priority assigned to peer norms for behaviour, or the heightened sensitivity for anticipated rewards from peers (Albert et al., 2013; Ciranka & Van den Bos, 2019). Just as with maladaptive decisions, sociological research also demonstrates that friendship networks play a pivotal role in Spanish adolescents' decisions to participate in collective action and group affiliation (Benedicto et al., 2016).

Peer influence in the jihadist radicalization of underage youth in Spain is illustrated by the case of a Brazilian adolescent who converted to Islam and was then recruited by the so-called *Islamic Brotherhood, a group for the preaching of Jihad*, a jihadist cell that planned to carry out terrorist attacks against different targets in Barcelona city. After interacting with some of the members of the group at a local mosque, the Brazilian joined the cell and brought with him other new members. In particular, he invited a classmate, who also converted to Islam, to accompany him to the mosque and, later on, to the meetings of the *Islamic Brotherhood* (Mossos d'Esquadra, CGI, Área Central de Información Exterior, 2015a; Mossos d'Esquadra, CGI, Área Central de Información Exterior, 2015b).

The previous case shows that the 'extra-family formula within the immediate environment' has also been followed by individuals from the minor's everyday life different from partners or friends. It is clear from the evidence analysed that this role was played by individuals who had easy access to young teens and teenagers, which reveals that, when selecting a target, recruiters focused on minors who were already familiar to them. They tried to attract adolescents that lived in their neighbourhood or who regularly visited the same public spaces as them. For instance, one member of the *Islamic Brotherhood* gave a USB drive with *ayahs* inciting jihad to a student who attended the same school as his children (Sentencia 2018, 2018; Sentencia 14/2015, 2015). The members of this

cell, and of another dismantled in Melilla in May 2014, radicalized minors who prayed in small neighbourhood mosques that they also often frequented (DGP, CGI, 2014b; Senten-cia 14/2015, 2015). In the same vein, a radicalization agent arrested in Ceuta in December 2015 tried to recruit girls who took extracurricular classes at an Islamic cultural centre directed by his brother (Auto de prisión provisional, 2016). Examples of minors' indoctri- nators also include the case of an individual, arrested in 2017 in Melilla, who did a job that provided him with routine access to young people in a juvenile facility (Ortega, 2017). It seems certain that most of these adults who acted as radicalizing agents of such ado-lescents were only slightly acquainted with them before the radicalization process started. Compensation for this initial lack of familiarity and intimacy was pivotal in the preparatory stage of the jihadist mobilization of minors. Data collected indicates that some indoctrina-tors pretended to be friendly and trustworthy in order to build an initial bond of trust, or even attempted to initiate a seductive interaction with identical purpose. This covert behaviour also made it possible for recruiters to learn about certain vulnerabilities of teen-agers (economic, health, family or emotional issues), which offered them the opportunity to provide social support and portray themselves as someone to whom one could go for advice and counsel. Thus, by generating a perception that an exclusive, genuine and affec-tionate relationship existed between the two, recruiters were able to increase adolescents' attachment to them. The significance of this tactic for building trust and, eventually, cooperation can be seen in the case of the abovementioned jihadist arrested in Ceuta in December 2015: he usually targeted students between 13 and 14 years of age with clear affective needs and then offered to help them. He approached a girl who was receiving treatment for cancer and promised her a thousand euros and economic assistance for her family if she accepted the idea of going to Syria. He assured another female minor that he would marry her once they both reached that country (DGGC, Jefatura de Información, UCE-2 GIC Ceuta, 2015; Sentencia 23/2017, 2017).

When attempting to attract potential joiners, other recruiters focused their proselytiz- ing actions on youngsters who might seem more receptive to learning alternative ways of thinking. The individuals' conscious exposure to radical ideas and the alignment of the new interpretative framework with the persons' perceptions and worldview are facilitators for value internalization and commitment to a movement (Wiktorowicz, n.d.). By taking a graded approach on that basis, indoctrinators could confirm the adolescents' cognitive opening, as well as the resonance of the radical message on their audience, before inviting them to private meetings where the radicalization eventually took place. The persuasion effort that sparked the learning process comprised apparent innocuous discussions, subtle dialogues and exchange of ideas through which recruiters attempted to convince minors that the extremist narrative matched with their personal trajectories, background and experiences, providing a consistent, credible and appealing explanation to current concerns and questions (DGGC, DAO, Comandancia de Melilla, 2014b; DGP, CGI, 2014b; Sentencia 2018, 2018; Sentencia 14/2015, 2015). An intercepted conversation between members of the *Islamic Brotherhood* outlines this progression in the mobilization of minors attending the mosque:

> Sound out the boys first, and spend time talking to them, a lot, you know? Five months. You get to know them well, you talk with them, and then you know. (…) A lot of the boys here we can help, to begin to talk with them first of *wuḍū'* [ablutions], *salat* [ritual prayer], '*ilm* [wisdom],

'*aqīda* [creed], and *tawhid* [oneness of God] and … then you bag him! You know? Once they have the path well into their heads, you know? Then you focus them and then they see it (…)These times we are in jihad, indeed! The children also have to grow up with lines of the jihad, as well'. (Mossos d'Esquadra, CGI, Área Central de Información Exterior, 2015c, p. 901)

To focus minors on jihad, as this recruiter proposes, involves an extensive and incremental process of socialization that usually unfolds in restricted gatherings: a process that is not only intended to ensure the acquisition of the ideas, values and associated meanings that compose the Salafi-jihadist belief system, but also to achieve an extreme degree of interdependence between adolescents and their recruiters, thus ensuring ideological and personal commitment to the movement. As intragroup ties mature, pressures of conformity and compliance become stronger, leading to value consensus and shared norms and goals (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Participation in group aims is also encouraged by non-material incentives shaped all along the radicalization process.

The constituents of the *Islamic Brotherhood* built fellowship with new joiners by spending time together after mosque prayers, sharing meals in local restaurants and inviting them to regular meetings in homes and particular businesses. In these gatherings, the more versed members of the cell used to give talks about specific elements of the ideology and discussions usually ended up reverting to the duty of waging jihad, either by travelling to an area controlled by a jihadist group or by committing terrorist attacks in Spain. Youngsters were also exposed to videos of IS operations and to images of women and children slaughtered by the Assad regime in order to provoke emotional responses (excitement and hope or, conversely, outrage and resentment), thereby activating processes of identification and transformation which could increase the acceptance of violence and foster mobilization. Capitalizing on motivational frames that exploit ideological, emotional and social incentives (religious duty, thrill, sense of collective belonging), the cell managed to involve two teenagers in jihadist activities: one of them attempted twice to reach Syria, being arrested in December 2014 in Bulgaria shortly after turning 18; the other, conscious of the lack of chances to leave Spain legally because of his irregular status, devoted himself to collecting intelligence on potential targets in Barcelona (Sentencia 2018, 2018). The ideological socialization of minors also involves a continuous effort on the part of recruiters to reconfigure the interpersonal networks of their young targets and promote commitment to the point of no return. It entails tracking and controlling teenagers' daily activities and distancing them from their parents and other members of their closest social circles to avoid influences that could neutralize the cell's message. The plan followed in these cases is clear in a guidance document under the eloquent title of 'Didactic material, teaching and rigid indoctrination in Islam directed at minors', elaborated by a foreign terrorist fighter who returned to Melilla from Mali. He and the rest of the members of his cell implemented the method in a marginalized neighbourhood of Melilla where all of them resided by outreaching underage youths and trying to foster a cognitive opening to them. His manuscript advises attracting adolescents with playful or entertaining activities and then, once their loyalties have been won, imposing a pro- gramme of indoctrination that substitutes television and videogames with instruction in the Koran and Islamic practices, the viewing of jihadist propaganda and participation in Salafist meetings. The handwritten document reveals that strengthening intragroup camaraderie was also a central step in minors' paths towards adopting Salafi-jihadist

ideas. 'It all requires patience and many prayers until the result can be seen', he concluded (DGP, CGI, 2014b).

Additionally, to become full members of the cell, developing radicals must go through initiation rates which consisted of taking part in criminal acts, such as violent robberies (DGP, CGI, 2014b). It is likely that with this act of bridge-burning the recruiter sought not only to test the minors' loyalty and to validate their radical commitment, but also to make them subservient to his will, and thereby deter potential desertions. This pattern for fostering total adherence is also illustrated by the case of a recruiter who operated in Ceuta until his arrest in 2016, who even took occasional recourse to physical violence to strictly enforce the tough behaviour rules that he imposed on an adolescent, whom he demanded should wear the niqab and instructed in the use of firearms (Sentencia 23/2017, 2017).

The deployment of manipulation techniques and physical violence seems to stem not only from the interest of radicalizing agents to achieve the subordination of the minor, but also from their efforts to reduce uncertainty regarding the problem of mistaken target selection. Kinship bonds, even partnership and friendship ties, increase information about the teenager who is to be indoctrinated, thus minimizing suspicion and distrust. Nevertheless, the recruitment of individuals beyond the closest environment entails higher risk, especially in the case of minors, due to their inconsistency and impressionability. To unite the fate of the adolescent with that of his recruiter and to exercise a strong authority over them were two mechanisms used to begin the radicalization and recruitment process limiting the possibilities of desertion cases along the way.

The extra-family formula in the non-immediate environment

The interaction of the adolescent with new socialization actors also occurs online. If Internet penetration now reaches practically all age groups, various risk factors increase the possibilities that virtual contact with jihadist recruiters will be made from middle adolescence. Studies of media habits among Spanish minors indicate that, unlike children and younger teens, those who have reached mid-adolescence have (a) more access to the Internet and more presence on social media; (b) less parental control over their online activities; (c) a greater predisposition to reveal personal information and (d) a greater tendency to make contact with unknown people through virtual platforms (Garmendia et al., 2016). Research has also pointed out that Spanish adolescents typically use interactive online platforms not only for maintaining and expanding existing social ties but also for establishing intense relationships with new acquaintances with whom they share common interests, and, to a much lesser extent, to denounce injustices and support causes they care about (Ballesteros & Picazo, 2018).

The evidence collected shows that these digital behaviour patterns greatly increased the chances available to online radicalizing agents' intent upon establishing contact with adolescents. Recruiters' efforts to mobilize minors were also helped by the large number of online platforms and communities where it is relatively easy to find plausible targets and initiate simultaneous conversations with some of them, while at the same time having the advantage of using fake chat identities. This procedure was followed by a 26-year-old Moroccan man – the leader of a virtual network dismantled in March 2015 in various localities of the provinces of Barcelona, Avila and Ciudad Real – who

acted through an extensive system of false profiles on different social networks: seven on Facebook; four on Tuenti (a Spanish digital platform for the adolescent public until the company changed its business model in 2016); two on YouTube; and one on Twitter. Through these numerous accounts he could direct himself to a multitude of adolescents, multiplying his possibilities of gaining access to potential recruits. Using different profiles also allowed him to reach multiple times the same person who he perceived might be open to his message, if still reluctant to get involved in any activity (DGP, CGI, 2015a).

This individual's method alternated two different techniques for interacting with teen-agers: on the one hand, after examining the personal information and the available content on the profiles to which he gained access, he individually contacted those who he deemed potentially receptive to the Salafist message. For instance, he typically picked those users who showed moral outrage over the suffering of Muslims in Palestine, Syria or Myanmar or who criticized the situation of Muslim communities in the West. This profiling procedure facilitated a tailored approach, whereby the recruiter attempted to lure adolescents who frequented the internet with messages that exploited their concerns and resonated with their interests and beliefs. The online activist relied on seductive nar-ratives that appealed to receivers' reasons and emotions (their feelings of alienation, rela- tive deprivation, or vicarious humiliation), in the expectation that as they accepted the alternative frame of reference, they would increasingly proselytize among their contact networks. Alongside this strategy of narrowcasting, the recruiter also followed an unstruc-tured, non-linear system by which he addressed teenagers who existed on interactive online platforms in a uniform and indiscriminate manner, as if they were a homogeneous audience receptive to the radical narrative. For instance, he published messages praising jihadist militants and their actions across a range of social media networks and dissemi- nated propaganda material, such as photographic compositions with Qur'anic verses or fake news about the situation of jihadist groups in different conflict theatres. Upon tracking the reaction to such content among his followers, he proceeded by communicating with those who commented or shared them (Head of group in DGP, CGI. Court hearing. December 14, 2016). Judging by his contacts' reactions, it is apparent that his extensive efforts inspired mostly passive behaviours, as evinced in the limited number of retweets and Facebook likes he obtained, proving less effective in leading users to dis- seminate jihadist propaganda or engage in online discussions with other possible new sympathizers.

The virtual mobilization of minors is not an exclusively top-down and one-directional endeavour. Data gathered indicate that sometimes it was the minors themselves who established contact with online activists on their own initiative driven by different motivations. In some instances, their virtual behaviour responded to cognitive needs related to the desire to deal with a personal quest for learning about Islam, to understand recent developments in the Muslim world, or to access first-hand information about the activities of jihadist groups, which might be perceived as being badly reported by the mainstream Western media. Identity needs also played a major role in youngsters taking personal steps to connect with like-minded discussion partners, which offered an opportunity to strengthen ties within a social movement and to form group membership (DGP, CGI, 2014c; DGP, CGI, 2015a). Additionally, juveniles who were at advanced stages of their radicalization processes contacted online activists urged by doctrinal, logistical or operational issues concerning, for instance, a search for fatwas that legitimize disregarding parents'

authority when they reject the minor's travel to Syria or the necessity to find a supporting network to make their way to IS-controlled areas (Sentencia 3/2018, 2018; Sentencia 11/ 2017, 2017). As they look for gratifications to their individual needs, adolescents become immersed in a bottom-up mobilization dynamic that leads them to deepen their radicalism and to discover a channel for involvement in jihadism (Aly, 2017). In this way, in those cases in which an ideological affinity existed between recruiter and minor, a fluid and close communication between them developed naturally.

However, more often than not, the radicalizing agents who employed the 'extra-family formula in the non-immediate environment' resorted to persuasion techniques in their conversations with their targets to draw initial interest. In a number of cases, indoctrinators pretended to share the teenagers' innocent interest in religion and customized their narrative to suit the potential joiners. Taking it a step further, recruiters invited their targets to join chat groups where exchanges and discussions eventually turned to jihadism. In so doing, activists linked individuals with similar interests and opinions, and with the same sociodemographic background (age group, gender and ethnicity), activating a process of collective identity formation. Social similarity is associated with individuals having a wider range of topics to talk about and activities to get involved in, which favours intimate, supportive and emotionally meaningful ties (Mesch, 2006). This was the rationale behind the strategy of an online activist who tried to mobilize a 15-year-old girl in support of IS. The virtual recruiter's method is illustrated in the following quote, which reproduces the initial contact between both actors:

Recruiter (R): I have a Facebook group. Well, in WhatsApp. In the group I only have girls, we only talk about religion. When I get home, I will add you to the group. I have a lot of information, and you can ask the questions you want, we send a lot of videos and photos about Islam. When we don't have anything to do, we read and learn things together.

Minor (M): Ok, add me, so I can meet the girls and talk to them.

R: They are good girls, there are even Spanish girls converted to Islam. There are too many, more than 100 girls in the group.

M: From your town?

R: No, from different places: Valencia, Barcelona, Madrid, Ceuta, America. There are even [girls] from the U.S.

M: But they are young girls, aren't they?

R: Yes, there are girls with 12, 13, 14, 15, 16. And there are women aged 30 and 40 years. We usually learn things together, we ask questions each other and we comment. We play quiz games about religion, like the game we played in the bus. (Sentencia 33/2018, 2018, pp. 8–9).

Other cases show how radicalizing agents guided their conversation with minors towards jihadism after having analysed their interlocutors' vulnerabilities and enacted techniques adapted to them. These involved, for instance, finding individual needs that were not covered, such as affection, attention or care, and, consistently, providing the adolescents with appreciation and a sense of belonging. Occasionally, this occurred after the teenagers themselves openly shared messages related to the issues and concerns in their life, their moods and states of mind. It is empirically well established that experiencing personal and psychological crisis might trigger a period of self-discovery and exploration, a cognitive aperture that leads individuals to question previous beliefs and values, and renders

them open-minded to new interpretative frameworks of reality, a circumstance that can be exploited by recruiters to promote online jihadist affiliation (Neumann & Rogers, 2007).

This progression in the indoctrinators' use of the Internet is apparent in the recruiting of a 17-year-old Moroccan woman who was arrested in Gandía, province of Valencia, in September 2015, after she started preparing to travel to Syria and Iraq. The beginning of the recruitment process could be placed at the moment when, after publishing comments on social media about her growing sense of disconnection from parents and friends, the teenager was contacted by another girl who acted as a radicalizing agent:

> When I returned from Morocco, I became depressed for reasons connected to family and love. Then I met her. She was nice, and she told me that she wanted to be my friend. (…) She taught me things about religion, about how a woman should dress … She began to speak with me about the Islamic State and to tell me what was happening in Syria. She sent me very good images of the place. (…) I was very innocent, impressionable. She was very kind with me. My friends did not help me much after my break-up [with her boyfriend], but she did. Later I realized that she had tried to split me from my other girlfriends. She told me: 'I see you on a bad path with them.' (Defendant in the court record 4/2016. Court hearing. March 5, 2017)

By the time the radicalizing agents introduced topics related to global jihadism into conversation, they had already established intimacy and trust with the new sympathizers. The development of such central elements of friendship, like perceived closeness, self-disclosure and reciprocity, requires a sustained and cumulative bi-directional online engagement which places emphasis on, among other aspects, the channel of communication (Mesch, 2006). Thus, it was not unusual for those who reached a minor on a social network to try to rapidly consolidate this link via other means of communication which allowed more secrecy. In several cases, indoctrinators had mobile phone conversations with the teenagers they tried to radicalize. Less frequently, they attempted to arrange offline meetings with the adolescents, an option often impeded by geographic distance (DGP, CGI, 2015a; Sentencia 11/2017, 2017). For example, the individuals arrested in the police Operation Kibera, which during 2014 and 2015 dismantled the widest jihadist network for women's recruitment in Spain, typically shifted to private and encrypted platforms like WhatsApp for conversations with girls first contacted on Facebook. One of these recruiters, a 28-year-old man from Melilla, tried to get the address of an adolescent girl who had raised a doubt about Islam in a WhatsApp group. After speaking by phone with her and using seduction techniques to break down the adolescent's resistance, the radicalization agent tried to get information about her home to make an offline encounter possible (DGP, CGI, 2014c).

Migrating relations formed online to offline settings is a logical progression for indoctrinators who wanted to generate opportunities for intimate discussions. This movement is consistent with research in the quality of online and face-to-face relationships, which have suggested that virtual ties are more distant, less developed and the length of connections shorter than face-to-face interactions (Mesch, 2006). This argument is confirmed by studies on Spanish adolescents' use of social networking sites, which show that while young users perceive that digital intermediation is a factor of personal protection and boosts self-disclosure, in-person interactions inspire greater confidence and allow a closer communication (Ballesteros & Picazo, 2018).

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Once the link had been established and the relationship tightened, recruiters attempted to ensure and accelerate the process of involving minors in jihadist activities. With this objective in mind, some radicalizing agents made use of incentives as part of a motivational strategy. For instance, a female administrator of a WhatsApp group where tens of girls were exposed to videos of Abu Bakr-al Baghdadi attempted to convince them to make the journey to the caliphate by promising that, once there, the adolescents would meet young combatants to whom they could get married. Another activist of the same group said that every Muslim has the religious duty to 'migrate to a land where there is fighting for establishing an Islamic caliphate, whether it is your country or not' and asked their acolytes not to stand aside 'while our Muslim brothers are being abused' (DGP, CGI, 2014d). To deepen the commitment of the new sympathizers, other indoctrinators sought to involve them in small tasks through which they could hone their commitment and dedication. The leader of a virtual network for propaganda dissemination appointed a teenager as administrator of a Facebook group and provided her with media material to publish. This practice allowed the recruiter to test the adolescent's engagement with the cause while, at the same time, deter her from leaving the mobilization process by prematurely involving her in criminal acts (DGP, CGI, 2015a).

In other cases, to obtain the participation of the minor, recruiters relied on persistence and an incremental increase in the intensity of communications, even using intimidatory practices. This technique was used by the top leaders of the Kibera network, who lived in Morocco, with some Spanish women whom they tried to persuade to go to Syria and Iraq. For many months they sent a 14-year-old girl daily messages via social media in which they encouraged her to emigrate to the caliphate. Later when she began to express doubts, the recruiters threatened to go to her house and force her onto a plane if she tried to pull out (Fiscalía de menores de Melilla, 2014). The adolescent was eventually arrested in August 2014 when she was about to cross the border between Melilla and Morocco after agreeing to travel to the IS-held territories.

Conclusions

In the aftermath of the outbreak of the Syrian civil war and the subsequent emergence of Islamic State, 44 individuals arrested in Spain between 2013 and 2019 tried to mobilize children and adolescents to jihadism, that is to say, attempted to encourage them to adopt Salafi-jihadist beliefs with a view to engaging in activities in support of that extremist ideology. In exploring the techniques used by these radicalizing agents, it emerges that their recruitment dynamics varied as a function of the existence of previous personal ties between the recruiter and the minor, the age of the minor and the environment in which this process unfolded. Collected data proves that opportunity and proximity were determinant factors in the indoctrinators' selection of their targets. Notwithstanding, recruiters not only leveraged their pre-existing social ties to draw underage youths to extremism and violence but also developed associations with individuals with whom they were previously unconnected.

These findings allow to propose a three-formula model of the mobilization of under-age youth into jihadism built through an inductive analytical process supported by empirical research. The analytic framework is informed by the main social, spatial and temporal dimensions of the recruitment of minors. First is the 'intra-family

formula', employed by individuals who tried to indoctrinate members of their own nuclear family ranging from early infancy to 17 years of age. Second, there is the 'extra-family formula within the immediate environment', used by people who maintained personal links of varied nature with their targets: sentimental relationships, friendships or neighbourhood ties. Finally, there is the third formula: the 'extra-family formula in the non-immediate environment' allowed recruiters to use the Internet and social media to make contact with adolescents whom they had not previously met and could not know by any other means. While in the first two formulas the procedures took place principally, if not exclusively, in an offline environment, the third formula unfolded fundamentally in cyberspace.

A review of the techniques and mechanisms put into practice by the 44 individuals who developed these three formulas also reveals the basic elements of the dynamic of the mobilization of minors, even though data collected from the study universe do not enable to capture the recruitment process in full detail. One of the points that emerges from the analysis is that the enlistment of underage youth is a dynamic and participatory process, in which minors are not mere receivers without the ability to change the course of events. Juveniles can play an active role in their socialization into extremism. They could alter or stop the process, as evidenced by the fact that not all the children and teenagers approached or influenced by indoctrinators adhered to the radical ideology or became involved in jihadist activities. On the contrary, they could proactively activate bottom-up dynamics through which to deepen their radical commitment and find ways for involvement.

Nevertheless, the mobilization process was usually led and guided by the recruiters. The research suggests a progression between stages in their strategy, which began with the target selection. Indoctrinators generally followed a rational and well-planned procedure to choose the underage youth they would try to radicalize. Among other factors, their calculations were based on the ease of access to their target. Empirical evidence shows that 84.1% of the mobilization contacts took place within the framework of kinship, partnership, friendship and neighbourhood ties. Other criteria that informed the recruiter's selection of followers was an estimate of the minor's cognitive opening to the process, as well as the identification of objective or subjective elements of vulnerability.

The second stage in the mobilization process involved gaining access to the target. It is all the more evident that favourable conditions for interacting with minors exist quite naturally within the family and immediate environment, but the widespread use of the Internet also enables contact between people who do not know each other, thus facilitating interactions between recruiters and possible recruits. Exposure to this kind of contact appeared to be more likely among young people who had entered middle-adolescence. In the case of those indoctrinators who approached juveniles beyond their closest social circles, gaining minors' trust and tightening the relationship with them constituted the next step. The recruiters accomplished this by befriending such adolescents, by pretending to share the teenagers' interests or by offering advice and social support, among other practices. During this stage, radicalizing agents tailored their approaches to the targets' needs and perceived vulnerabilities and tried to fulfil them. They also attempted to generate a cognitive opening that rendered minors receptive to new worldviews.

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Later on, indoctrinators began introducing themes related to global jihadism into their conversations with potential joiners. The ideological transmission accelerated progressively. By and large, this occurred when minors became ostensibly receptive to the radical rhetoric and the violence-supportive attitudes of their recruiters. This escalation took different forms, such as children's and teenagers' exposure to discourses of jihadist preachers in regular meetings or invitations to Salafist events. In the same way, underage youth were exposed to media content produced by jihadist organizations, in a desensitization effort with the intention of them getting increasingly comfortable with the prospect of engaging in jihadist activities. Another key technique to intensify the adoption of radical beliefs comprised subjecting minors to an intensive socialization process with others who had embraced jihadism while, at the same time, isolating them from social forces that opposed violent extremism. In parallel, radicalizing agents attempted to subject their targets to a strict code of conduct, limiting thus their exposure to secular practices and influences.

If brought to completion as planned, the course of action for jihadist mobilization of individuals below 18 years of age eventually drives them to participate in extremist actions. In order to accomplish it, recruiters tried to shape minors' viewpoints regarding the use of violence by framing jihad as a religious duty, by depicting terrorist attacks as a legitimate reaction against all the grievances experienced by Muslims or by portraying militancy as an expression of bravery and empowerment, as well as an opportunity for emotion-seekers to engage in combat or find love. Furthermore, before becoming fully fledged militants, possible recruits were tested in their commitment to the cause by way of bridge-burning acts. These practices also served the purpose of deterring disengagement, a risk that appears to be more likely among young recruits and that could endanger the whole group.

As the analysis of the techniques deployed by the recruiters who used the three formulas shows, the mobilization of minors into jihadism is permeated throughout by manipulative and coercive techniques. The radicalizing agents studied in this article resorted, at some point and to varying degrees, to a broad repertoire of persuasive instruments, including deception, seduction, emotional involvement, pressure and even physical aggression. These strategies, that relied primarily on fostering trust and offering incentives, had a number of purposes, namely, gaining access to potential new followers, building membership and obtaining cooperation.

Note

1. These data were retrieved from the Database on Jihadists in Spain (DBJS) of the Elcano Royal Institute's Programme on Violent Radicalisation and Global Terrorism.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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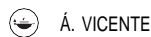
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Chapter 3.

Social Ties and Jihadist Participation: A Mixed-Methods Approach to the Differential Recruitment of Radicalized Youth in Spain

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Social Ties and Jihadist Participation: A Mixed-Methods Approach to the Differential Recruitment of Radicalized Youth in Spain

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between social ties and jihadist participation has garnered substantial attention from terrorism scholars. However, further research is needed to understand what specific properties of interpersonal bonds influence terrorist involvement and how they operate. Drawing on social network theory, the current study tests the effects of the type, number, and strength of interpersonal ties with jihadist activists in explaining the occurrence and absence of individual engagement in jihadist activities. For that purpose, this paper analyzes the social links of 23 youths involved in terrorism and 21 youths who, despite their attitudinal affinity with jihadism, did not take part in such actions. Combining quantitative and qualitative data and methods of analysis, the study found empirical evidence that participation in jihadism is affected by the number of connections between young people and the global jihadist movement. It also found partial support for the relationship between tie strength and jihadist involvement. However, it rejected the assumption that the type of social tie influences participation.

Introduction

Why do some individuals get involved in jihadist activities while others remain inactive despite their shared attitudinal affinity with the goals and tactics of jihadist organizations? Individual variation in jihadist participation has been at the core of research efforts for some time.[1] The phenomenon, which scholars analyzing social movement participation call "differential recruitment," underscores the well-established fact that the adoption of radical beliefs does not inexorably lead to involvement in illegal ideologically driven actions.[2] While the majority of those who justify or advocate political violence actually stay out of criminal acts, a few of the most militant radicals turn to violence or participate in supporting violent actions.

To account for differential recruitment, the relevance of social embeddedness and interpersonal contacts has been raised by scholars studying terrorism.[3] Social ties have been signaled as important determinants of terrorist engagement because they shape worldviews, reinforce identities, satisfy basic social needs, bring together like-minded individuals, motivate collective action and, eventually, facilitate participation.[4] It has also been argued that the fact that terrorist involvement is, in the majority of cases, an interdependent choice rather than a socially detached decision is nothing but a demonstration that interpersonal contacts are the key facilitating factor for participating.[5]

However, empirical research has shown that, of the many individuals connected to militant activists, only some end up engaging in political violence.[6] Then, if jihadist mobilization may not occur despite the presence of interpersonal ties to the jihadist movement, how are bonds and jihadist

participation actually related? The particular properties of social networks which predispose individuals to engage, or inhibit them from engaging, in political violence, as well as how these features of ties operate, require further consideration in the field of terrorism studies.

This paper aims to examine the association between differential recruitment into jihadism and interpersonal connections. To do so, it seeks to answer the following core research questions: What structural features of social ties influence participation in jihadist activities? How did these properties shape the effects of links in jihadist involvement? While the first question is addressed quantitatively, by putting to the test several hypotheses through inferential statistics, the second is dealt with qualitatively, by thematically analyzing a corpus of textual data.

To explain participation and non-participation in jihadism, this study examines the effects of the type, number, and strength of social ties. The article draws on social network theory to compare and analyze the relations of 23 underage youths involved in jihadist activities and 21 adolescents who, despite their attitudinal affinity with jihadism, did not take part in such actions. They all underwent their radicalization process in Spain between 2012 and 2019. In this research, the terms "underage youth" (often replaced by "youth" for simplicity), "young people" and "youngsters" refer to individuals who became radicalized before turning 18 years old, the age signifying the end of childhood according to the United Nations definition and the beginning of legal adulthood established in most Western countries. "Participation in jihadism" or "participation in jihadist activities" includes activities of both a violent (engaging in combat in a conflict zone, planning and carrying out attacks) and a non-violent nature (producing online jihadist material, radicalizing and recruiting people) inspired by the ideology of Salafi-jihadism.

The article proceeds as follows. It first outlines the theoretical framework for the social network approach to differential recruitment and a set of hypotheses based on these academic contributions and on insights drawn from terrorism studies. It then describes the research design, sample used and methods. The next section presents separately the quantitative and qualitative results and is followed by a discussion of the theoretical implications of the study's findings.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Social network theories are built on the empirical reality that individuals do not act in isolation, but their choices, ideas, attitudes, and behaviors are shaped through interchanges with others. By acknowledging the importance of social context in individual actions, this theoretical tradition explores the functions and dynamics of interpersonal bonds that affect mobilization. Social networks researchers have attempted to elucidate the causal role of ties in people's decisions to participate or not in collective action, as well as to identify which features of connections are influential in behavior.[7] Insofar as involvement in terrorism can be understood as a form of collective action, network theory offers a suitable framework for exploring individual variation in jihadist participation.

Among the properties of ties that act as predictors of political and civic engagement, some of the most mentioned in the literature are the types, number, and strength of the connections between individuals and people already immersed in a social movement.[8] Focusing on these features, network researchers have tried to understand to what extent people's participation in collective action depends on a) the origin of the relationship they have with activists already involved; b) the number of those interpersonal links; and c) their intensity and stability. Terrorism scholars have also explored the relationship between these three features of social bonds and involvement in political violence.

Type of social ties

In attributing causal significance to the types of bonds connecting people to a social movement, scholars have theorized that certain ties are more influential than others in fostering mobilization. Much of the scientific research has centered on the role played by two main types of links with activists: immediate ties and organizational ties. The former refers to bonds of kinship, friendship,

neighborhood, and acquaintance with people active in a social movement; the latter, to bonds forged in social and political organizations in which people participate and which facilitate subsequent forms of engagement with a social movement.[9]

An extensive body of literature points to the relevance of immediate ties in promoting participation in different expressions of hazardous activism, ranging from civil disobedience movements to pro-democracy uprisings or campaigns of inter-communal ethnic violence.[10] Research on terrorism has also observed the significance of such close and intimate ties in engaging in political violence across ideological traditions, including Salafi-jihadism, nationalism, extreme left, and extreme right.[11] Several explanatory mechanisms may be at work in making immediate social connections a strong predictor of mobilization, such as trust, social pressure, reassurance, social leverage, conformity, and diffusion of responsibility.[12]

Nevertheless, social movement researchers have also provided sound evidence that organizational ties are paramount in connecting prospective participants with an opportunity to participate, since they ensure firm social support for collective action and are associated with feelings of personal efficacy.[13] However, research on political violence has shown that although organizational connections have a strong effect on promoting involvement, they influence the recruitment process frequently in combination with immediate ties.[14]

It can be assumed, then, that immediate ties with individuals sympathetic to Salafi-jihadism or already committed to this movement are—whether *per se* or in conjunction with organizational ties—a sound predictor of youths' participation in jihadist activities. Therefore, the following two competing hypotheses have been formulated:

H1a: Youths who have immediate ties with jihadists are more likely to participate in jihadist activities than youths without such social ties.

H1b: Youths who have both immediate and organizational ties with jihadists are more likely to participate in jihadist activities than youths who lack a combination of both types of social ties.

Number of social ties

A second structural property of interpersonal bonds that has been identified as a catalyst of mobilization is the number of ties between prospective participants and activists. There is a broad consensus within the literature that individuals who are well connected to a social movement through a high number of personal relations are more exposed to opportunities to become socially and politically active and are recruited more frequently.[15] Accordingly, being tied to many relevant others within a network is associated with participating in different forms of contentious collective action, such as protest, party organization, intercommunal violence, and terrorism.[16]

Why does having multiple personal connections make a difference in social movement participation? Four causal mechanisms appear to be key in the explanation: information access, social reaffirmation, individual rewards, and critical cooperation. For one thing, empirical assessments have found that individuals embedded in large social networks are more likely to be informed of an opportunity for collective action, and, as a result, have a higher chance of being asked to participate.[17] Furthermore, being exposed to multiple sources leads to reinforcement and reaffirmation in the adoption of norms, values, and behaviors, which is crucial for the successful transmission of dangerous and controversial ideas and actions.[18] On another note, it has also been observed that big networks are well suited for deterring people from free-riding because they are more effective in generating selective incentives for participation, such as social leverage or solidarity.[19] Finally, theorists of the "threshold" and "critical mass" models of collective action have noted that individuals considering taking part in high-risk and high-cost activism are more likely to be convinced to participate if they are assured that enough other actors are willing to engage themselves.[20]

Accordingly, it is plausible to extend the existing empirical evidence to the youth involvement in terrorism. Therefore, one may hypothesize that:

H2: Youths with a greater number of social ties with jihadists are more likely to become involved in jihadist activities than youths with a smaller number of such social ties.

Strength of social ties

Finally, participation in collective action has also been associated with variations in tie strength. In his classic study "The Strength of Weak Ties," Granovetter conceptualized tie strength as a multidimensional trait, which is a function of "the amount of time spent for its maintenance, the emotional intensity it evokes, and the intimacy and reciprocal services that are attached to it."[21] Granovetter postulated that weak ties can reach a larger number of people and cross a greater social distance than strong ties, making them a major source of potential new ideas and attitudes and, consequently, a key source for change. Nevertheless, Granovetter's thesis was disputed by social movement researchers, who objected that strong ties are decisive for participation in collective action, and especially in challenging and risky conduct, because commitment to militant movements is not only a matter of access to ideas and information but, above all, of influence of behavior.[22]

The superiority of strong ties for terrorist involvement fits well with the picture of the highly centralized functioning of Al Qaeda before 9/11.[23] In one of the first attempts to test Granovetter's thesis on terrorist activity, it was found that the network behind these 2001 attacks was made up of strong ties, which kept the group interconnected, and that outside contacts were curtailed to prevent leaks.[24] Relying on strong ties for mobilization has other implications since they are associated with higher social pressure to participate, more supportive interactions, and a greater level of social similarity (homophily) among individuals, which in turn is related to durable connections.[25]

However, recent scientific contributions indicate that weak ties play an increasingly relevant role in terrorist recruitment, particularly with the rise of social media platforms. It has been theoretically substantiated that terrorist organizations with a worldwide base leverage weak ties to engage volunteers from distant places and disjointed social networks.[26] Furthermore, by brokering unconnected groups, weak ties mitigate segmentation, a major problem for transnational terrorist networks aimed at mobilizing supporters.[27] Notwithstanding, empirically grounded knowledge supporting these assumptions is scant.[28] In the absence of consolidated empirical literature providing enough evidence of the effect of variations of tie strength on current jihadist participation, a non-directional hypothesis was laid out:

H3: The strength of ties between participant youth and jihadist activists is significantly different than the strength of ties between non-participant youth and jihadist activists.

Research design, study sample and methods

This research employed a mixed-methods design, which is an approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative traditions within a single study.[29] The use of mixed methods of research does not come without possible shortcomings and challenges, such as operating without conforming to a standardized framework, or reconciling the different epistemological and ontological approaches of the techniques employed.[30] Despite this, its application has become widespread in social network analysis due to its potential to explain the complexity of network structure and processes.[31]

The rationale for mixing both strategies of analysis in this work was that while quantitative data focuses on the form of the relationships that young people had with actors of the global jihadist movement, qualitative data sheds light on the content, meaning, and effects of those interactions. The combination of methods thus offers the opportunity to gain both an inside and an outside view of

social networks.[32] In addition, the advantages of mixing approaches in this study included increasing the construct validity of the results, strengthening the reliability of the analysis, and complementing the findings derived from each method.[33]

Study universe and study sample

The present research assesses the role of social ties in the jihadist mobilization of underage youth that unfolded in Spain between 2012 and 2019, during the mobilization cycle prompted by terrorist organizations active in Syria, with the Islamic State (IS) as the main driver. Over that period, 23 youngsters were either convicted in Spain—by juvenile or ordinary courts—of terrorism offenses, or died while committing terrorist attacks. But criminal investigations and judicial proceedings show that the actual number of underage youths in the country attracted by the global jihadist movement and its organizations—and, to some extent, associated with them—exceeded the number of youths who eventually committed jihadist crimes.[34]

This study draws on a sample that reflects these individual variations in jihadist involvement among young people radicalized by Salafi-jihadism in Spain. To demarcate the boundaries of the sample, this research followed an inclusion and exclusion strategy based on McAdams' concept of "bounded forms of activism," which places emphasis on discrete instances of movement involvement to set the participant/non-participant distinction.[35] Hence, for someone to be included in the sample as a "participant" the youngster must have been convicted of committing terrorist actions in Spain or was unable to be tried because he or she died as a result of engagement in jihadist activities. Participant youths included in the sample committed different terrorist crimes, ranging from producing and disseminating online jihadist material (n = 8) to radicalizing other individuals (n = 6), as well as attempting to travel to jihadist-held territory in Syria (n = 5) or planning and carrying out terrorist attacks in Spain (n = 4).

On the other hand, individuals who could fit into the "non-participants" group must have refrained from or been incapable of engaging in terrorism despite their affinity to Salafi-jihadism. Evidence of this attitudinal affinity among the non-participant group comprises statements of support to jihadist organizations published on social media or captured by law enforcement agencies by wiretapping, as well as declarations of willingness to travel to Syria. Other bounded forms of non-participation include regular attendance at meetings in Salafi milieus where violent jihad was openly advocated, or active membership in virtual communities where jihadist groups were praised. A small number of non-participant youths were also involved in bridge-burning activities, such as committing violent robberies or briefly assuming the management of virtual communities.

To identify youngsters who could fit into both sub-groups, this research used documentary sources (police and judiciary files), court sessions, and semi-structured interviews. These sources offered a detailed account of the work conducted by Spain's National Court—the main judiciary body dealing with terrorism—against cases involving underage youth. Individuals were included in the sample only when information could be obtained for all independent variables. The resulting study sample consists of 44 individuals, 23 of whom fall into the "participants" group and 21 into the "non-participants" group. Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of both sub-samples. All sample individuals were aged between 14 and 17 at the outset of their radicalization process. The sample includes 19 girls and 25 boys. Regarding their place of residence, 10 of the subjects lived in Barcelona province and 6 in Girona province, both in Catalonia; 9 in Melilla and 5 in Ceuta, two Spanish autonomous cities situated in the north of Africa; and 4 in Madrid and its metropolitan area. The remaining 10 individuals resided in five other provinces.

Quantitative stage

To test the hypotheses, a database was constructed with data about the patterning of connections of the sample individuals. Quantitative data was obtained from police reports, criminal proceedings, and court hearings,[36] and was triangulated with information drawn from semi-structured interviews. The

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Table 1. Sub-samples characteristics.

Characteristics	Participants (n = 23)	Non-participants (n = 21)
Age at the start of the radicalization process	14–17 years old	14–17 years old
Sex	6 females; 17 males	13 females; 8 males
Residence	Ceuta, Melilla, Barcelona, Madrid, Girona, Tarragona, Valencia, Las Palmas, Córdoba	Ceuta, Melilla, Barcelona, Madrid, Girona, Alicante, Córdoba.
Ideological affinity with jihadist organizations	Publicly and/or privately declared	Publicly and/or privately declared
Behavioral commitment to the jihadist movement	Sentenced for committing different jihadist crimes.	No evidence that they committed jihadist crimes.

social network resulting from the database contains a total of 125 nodes and 202 ties. The term "social network" is used here to denote the set of relationships between the 44 individuals of the research sample and their direct contacts within the jihadist movement.

The activists with whom the sample individuals were linked included people convicted of jihadist crimes in Spain, but also subjects who operated in other European countries and in Syria. People involved in the Salafi-Jihadist scene were also considered, even if they were not prosecuted for any crime. A link was coded as present if there was documented evidence of interaction between two nodes (such as in-person meetings, phone calls or chat conversations). Figure 1 visualizes the social network. Participant youths are colored red in the sociogram, and non-participant youths are colored blue. Jihadist activists are colored in light grey. The graph also visualizes in dark grey the mobilization entities (i.e., virtual communities or mosques) in which sample individuals forged organizational ties.

The sociogram shows that the jihadist mobilization of youth developed in a non-cohesive and non-integrated manner. Most of the youngsters were closely connected to only a small number of nodes in the entire network. The lack of extensive interconnection between individuals resulted in the fragmentation of the social network into 12 components: three solitary nodes, as well as nine separate entities whose members were only directly linked to a few nodes, and either indirectly connected or completely disconnected from the rest.

As is so often the case in research on dark networks—which, like terrorist networks, are engaged in crime—this study was conducted in an imperfect data situation, with missing and faulty data potentially affecting data gathering.[37] Overlooking nodes and ties (false negatives) or inaccurately capturing relationships (false positives) is common in social network analysis of actors operating covertly and illicitly, and in ways to avoid detection and infiltration.[38] Individuals associated with global jihadism often rely on informal and loose connections, which complicates the retrospective reconstruction of all their bonds. Furthermore, their networks are usually heterogeneous, forcing the dissociation between links related and unrelated to the jihadist movement. As an added methodological challenge, the accessible information on individuals involved in jihadist activities tends to be greater than that available on individuals not involved in but sympathetic to the jihadist cause. To mitigate the impact of these constraints on the analysis, this research drew on a variety of information sources, which ensured access to a broad body of evidence on the social ties of the sample individuals and allowed for data triangulation.

Dependent variables

The dependent variable for this study was the youngsters' participation in jihadist activities. It was measured as a dichotomous, categorical variable. Youngsters who engaged in jihadist activities were coded 1, "participants." On the contrary, youngsters who showed an affinity with jihadism but did not take part in illegal actions were coded as 0, "non-participants." Overall, 52.3 percent of the sample were participants and 47.7 percent were non-participants.
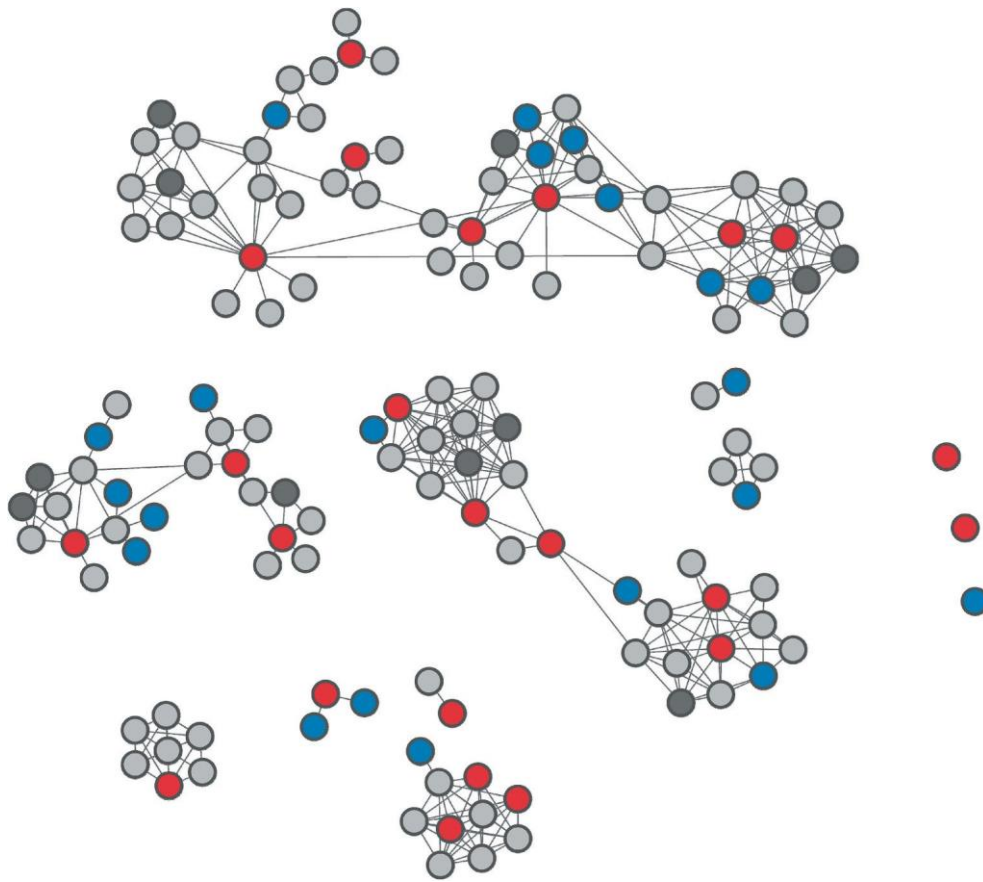
Figure 1. Sociogram of the social network.

Independent variables

As a test of the "types of ties" hypotheses (*H1a* and *H1b*), four dummy variables were created, namely: "immediate ties," "organizational ties," "immediate and organizational ties," and "no ties." For all four variables, an individual was coded as 1 when the category was present, and 0 otherwise. "Immediate ties" was present when sample individuals had links of kinship, friendship, neighborhood and/or acquaintanceship with jihadist activists. "Organizational ties" was present when sample individuals forged ties with jihadist activists engaged in virtual platforms and/or mosques, with whom they had no personal relationship prior to the onset of their radicalization. "Immediate and organizational ties" was present when they had the two types of personal connections.

To examine the "number of ties" hypothesis (*H2*), a continuous variable was used for counting the number of jihadist activists with whom a youngster was directly connected.

To test the "strength of ties" hypothesis (*H3*), an average indicator was obtained for each sample individual by calculating the mean strength of all their interrelationships. To do so, a 4-point ordinal scale was used first to value the strength of each tie. This variable took a value of 0 when no ties were documented; 1 for weak ties; 2 for medium-strength ties; and 3 for strong ties. These values were assigned based on Malthaner and Lindekilde's model, which differentiates three degrees of strength of ties based on connection duration, level of personal closeness, and intensity of interactions.[39] Subsequently, a mean value of the strength of all bonds was calculated for every sample individual. To assess the consistency of this indicator, intra-rater reliability was determined by comparing the mean values estimated at two different moments of the research process. For that purpose, the

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Table 2. Operationalization of variables.

Categorical variables	%	n	Operationalization
Dependent variable Participation	52.3	23	Participation in jihadist activities. 0 = No; 1 = Yes.
Non-participation	47.7	21	
Independent and control variables Gender			0 = Women; 1 = Men.
Male	56.8	25	
Female	43.2	19	
No ties			0 = No; 1 = Yes.
Yes	6.8	3	
No	93.2	41	
Immediate ties Yes	68.2	30	0 = No; 1 = Yes.
No	31.8	14	
Organizational ties Yes	63.6	28	0 = No; 1 = Yes.
No	36.4	16	
Immediate and organizational ties			0 = No; 1 = Yes.
Yes	40.9	18	
No	59.1	26	

Continuous variables	Mean (SD)	Min.	Max.	Operationalization
Age	16.3 (0.85)	14	17	Age at the start of the radicalization process.
Number of ties	4.73 (4.17)	0	21	Number of ties with activists.
Strength of ties	1.64 (0.76)	0	3	Mean value of the strength of all social ties with activists.

Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) was calculated using SPSS version 27.0, based on a mean rating, absolute agreement, two-way mixed-effects model. ICC = 0.91 with 95 percent confidence intervals (0.84–0.95) indicated excellent intra-rater reliability.

Finally, gender (female was the reference category) and age (in years) were explored as control variables. Table 2 shows a descriptive analysis of the study variables.

In collecting data on the theoretical variables, it was considered that mobilization is a gradual process in which individuals forge new social ties and intensify existing ones as they deepen their commitment, and possibly move from violent ideas to violent behavior. Since the fundamental interest of this study is to understand the impact of bonds in people's progress (or lack of) from thinking to acting, data collected captures the state of the interrelationships between each sample individual and the jihadist movement before some of them became involved in jihadist activities. This way, reversal causality—the possibility that data does not reflect what leads to participation (the causes) but what occurs after participation (the effects)—was controlled.

Qualitative stage

The qualitative data corpus was collected from three sources: semi-structured interviews, documentary evidence and court sessions. While information gathered from interviews referred mainly to the participants sub-group, the data obtained from the other sources comprised all sample individuals.

A total of 18 interviews were conducted between May 2019 and June 2021 with actors selected using convenience and snowball sampling techniques. Six of the interviewees were subjects included in the sample (four participants and two non-participants). The other 12 were chosen because of having first-hand knowledge of several sample individuals. These key informants included, among others, first-line practitioners (psychologists, social workers, and social educators) working in juvenile facilities or at the local level, who provided information about eight participants and three non-participants; law enforcement agents involved in the investigation of cases concerning three participants and two non-participants; and relatives of two participants. Table 3 provides a breakdown of all interviewees. The

Table 3. Interview sample.

Category	Number of interviews
First-line practitioner	5
Participant youngster	4
Law enforcement agent	3
Non-participant youngster	2
Family member of a participant youngster	1
Friend of a participant youngster	1
Lawyer	1
Prison intelligence official	1
Total	**18**

choice of a convenience sample composed of different actors gave access to comprehensive information about the impact of social interactions in participants' and non-participants' paths. This would not have been possible by only interviewing sample individuals due to the difficulty of accessing most of them. Overall, interviews provided material on 23 of the 44 sample individuals (52.3 percent of the total: 16 participants and 7 non-participants).

The interviews sought to capture interviewees' experiences, perceptions, or knowledge regarding the effects and dynamics of social ties. Interviewees were asked to provide detailed answers regarding the three potential explanatory variables examined in this paper. Open-ended questions were raised about how connections shaped youngsters' decisions to become or not become involved in jihadist activities. The process of social network formation and dissolution was also scrutinized.

Out of the 18 interviews, 9 were conducted in person, 4 in writing, 3 by phone, and 2 via social platforms. Face-to-face conversations were conducted in Madrid, Ceuta, Barcelona, Melilla, Salamanca, and Girona. They took place in different settings, including three prisons, a juvenile facility, offices, and cafeterias. With the consent of the interviewees, oral interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. When this was not possible, verbatim notes were taken by hand.

When it comes to the documentary review, evidence was obtained from police reports and criminal proceedings. Examples of the textual data analyzed in this study include interrogation reports, telephone-tapping transcripts and captures of chat conversations. Also, oral evidence was gathered during court hearings. These information sources were used to collect instances about how interactions developed within the boundaries of the social network presented in Figure 1.

Qualitative data was interpreted using hybrid, deductive-inductive thematic analysis. Following this procedure, the analysis identified theory-driven and research-driven codes based on concepts from the literature review, as well as data-driven codes gained from the raw information. The analytic process involved recognizing thematic patterns through an iterative reading of the qualitative data corpus.[40] Guided by selective coding, the significant coded data was grouped into themes, and less prevalent codes were omitted.

Ethics

The ethics committee of Universidad Rey Juan Carlos approved this study (internal register number: 1605201909719). For reasons of data protection, sample individuals were given a simple code derived from their participation outcome and the chronological order in which they were included in the sample. Interviewees gave informed consent, but they are identified only by their category to maintain their confidentiality.

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Results
Quantitative evidence

The quantitative strand of this study aimed to gain insight into the structural properties that differentiate the social connections of participant and non-participant youths. To this purpose, bivariate analyses were conducted first to identify statistically significant associations between the dependent and each independent variable. These analyses entailed performing Fisher's exact tests for the categorical variables, and the Mann–Whitney U test for the continuous variables. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 27.0. Table 4 reports the results.

Out of the four variables used to operationalize the "types of ties" hypotheses (*H1a* and *H1b*), the combination of immediate and organizational ties showed a significant relationship ($p = .007$) with participation at the bivariate level. While 60.9 percent of youngsters who participated in jihadist activities had both types of ties with elements of the jihadist movement, only 19.0 percent of non-participants had such a combination of social links. On the contrary, no statistically significant relationship was found between participation and the other three possible categories, namely immediate ties, organizational ties, and no ties.

There was also a significant association ($p = .001$) between participation in jihadism and the only variable related to the "number of ties" hypothesis (*H2*). While participant youngsters had on average 6.61 connections to other actors of the jihadist movement, non-participants had a mean of 2.67 bonds. By contrast, there was no relationship between youth participation in jihadism and the strength of their ties with jihadists (*H3*). Finally, among the control variables, gender was significant ($p = .017$) at the bivariate level: 73.9 percent of participants were male, while 38.1 percent of non-participants were male. On the contrary, no statistically significant difference existed between the ages of both subgroups.

The second step in the quantitative analysis entailed conducting a binary logistic regression to assess the multivariate relationship between youth participation in jihadism and the variables that showed a preliminary significant association at the bivariate level. Given the small sample size, Firth's logistic regression (also known as penalized maximum likelihood) was performed first. Because of its good properties in mitigating the bias caused by a low number of cases in a data set, Firth's logistic regression is an appropriate approach for the regression analysis of binary outcomes with small-n.[41] However, the probabilities predicted by both binary logistic regression—which is the standard procedure for analyzing the effects of independent variables on a binary dependent variable—and Firth's logistic regression showed negligible variations. Therefore, binary logistic regression was chosen as the main analysis tool for this study due to its wide use.

The complete model with the dependent variable and the identified potential predictor variables is presented in Table 5. To perform the analysis, the enter method (model 1) was used to first introduce all variables, and then the forward stepwise method was used to generate the final model with the significant predictors (model 2).

Table 4. Bivariate relationships between dependent and independent variables.

	Participants (n = 23)	Non-participants (n = 21)	Total (n = 44)
Categorical variables		%	
Male*	73.9	38.1	56.8
No ties	8.7	4.8	6.8
Immediate ties	73.9	61.9	68.2
Organizational ties	73.9	52.4	63.6
Immediate and organizational ties**	60.9	19.0	40.9
Continuous variables		Mean (SD)	
Age	16.2 (0.99)	16.4 (0.67)	16.3 (0.85)
Number of ties**	6.61 (4.63)	2.67 (2.33)	4.73 (4.18)
Strength of ties	1.81 (0.76)	1.45 (0.73)	1.64 (0.76)

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Table 5. Binary logistic regression of youths' jihadist participation.

Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	B	S.E.	ExpB	p	B	S.E.	ExpB	p
Male	1.881	0.812	6.560	.020*	1.837	0.791	6.276	.020*
Immediate and organizational ties	0.876	0.949	2.401	.356				
Number of ties	0.307	0.154	1.359	.046*	0.378	0.137	1.460	.006**
Constant		−2.647	0.846 0.075	.002* *	−2.516	0.816	0.081	.002**

*p < .05, **p < .01.

The final model indicates that two of the independent variables are significant, which results in only one hypothesis being confirmed in the multivariate model. Specifically, results showed support for the "number of ties" hypothesis (*H2*). The model found that participant youngsters are distinguished from non-participants based on their number of social connections with jihadist activists ($p = .006$). In this sense, for each additional tie, the odds of a youngster becoming mobilized increased by 1.46 times. Nonetheless, the model did not support the "type of ties" hypothesis (*H1a* and *H1b*). The relationship between youth participation in jihadism and the combination of immediate and organizational ties was statistically non-significant when controlling for the rest of potential predictors. Finally, gender was confirmed to be significant ($p = .020$). The odds of participating were 6.27 times higher among men than women.

The final model obtained with binary logistic regression was statistically significant. The inferential goodness-of-fit test used was the Hosmer-Lemeshow test, which indicated that the model was well fitted to the data (χ^2: 12.475; $p = .131$). The final model explained 46.7 percent of the variance in jihadist participation (Nagelkerke R2) and correctly classified 81.8 percent of cases. Sensitivity was 90.5 percent and specificity was 73.9 percent.

Qualitative evidence

The qualitative strand of this research aimed at developing an understanding of the role played by social ties in pulling youngsters into the jihadist movement, and the mechanisms through which interpersonal connections enable or constrain participation. The analysis was structured around the three core properties of social bonds assessed in this paper. Differences and similarities were sought between participants and non-participants applying Boyatzis's approach.[42] Table 6 outlines the main findings. Organization and coding of the textual data was conducted using QSR NVivo computer software (March 2020 release).

Type of social ties

In examining the role played by immediate and organizational ties in mobilizing the sample individuals, it is observed that both types of bonds affected jihadist participation to relatively similar degrees. Likewise, no clear differentiated patterns were found between participants' and non-participants' experiences regarding this property of their links to the jihadist movement.

For one thing, the textual data suggests that immediate and organizational ties were crucial in initiating and sustaining the violent radicalization of the sample individuals. Being connected to the jihadist movement through one of the two kinds of social connections, or through a combination of both, allowed youths to be socialized into jihadist norms and values and to develop a positive association with the jihadist movement. However, neither type of bond systematically or unconditionally promoted involvement in jihadist activities.

Table 6. Main results of the qualitative analysis.

Theme	Intra-thematic differences	Sub-group differences
Type of social ties	Immediate and organizational ties affected the mobilization process in similar ways: both were key in transmitting radical ideas and attitudes, but neither systematically promoted participation in jihadist activities. However, unlike organizational ties, immediate ties sometimes even constrained participation.	No differences were found betweenparticipants and non-participants.
Number of social ties	A large number of ties favors a strong awareness of the jihadist movement'sgoals, generates incentives for participation, and provides a greateraccess to mobilization opportunities.No evidence was obtained on the effects of a small number of ties.	It has not been possible to compare thetwo sub-groups due to the lack of data on the effects of this property innon-participants' paths.
Strength of social ties	Strong ties facilitate prolonged interaction and group pressure toward participation, while preventing disengagement. Weak ties are usually short-lived, which can impede them from effectively promoting participation.	Clear differences were found: non-participants' ties with the jihadist movement tended to be weak, whilethose of participants were strong.

Non-participant 12 recounted in her police statement that organizational ties often provided her with ideological guidance, but did not always facilitate assistance for translating ideas into action:

> She declares that when she opened this Facebook account, she also opened a second one. That with those Facebook accounts she chatted with several people, almost always on religious topics, but only a few of them proposed several times that she go to Syria to join the jihad.[43]

Participant 14 also referred to immediate ties failing to promote participation, despite having played a key role in her radicalization:

> The first thing I asked him [her brother] was, 'Why didn't you take me with you [to Syria]?' He was always very realistic when talking to me. He said: 'Look, this is very hard. This is not a vacation. This is a war. (. . .) He told me: 'What you see in the videos is only a little, even though there are videos that show many things. This is very complicated; if it is complicated for us, imagine for you.' (Participant)

On occasions, if activists did not encourage engagement in jihadist activities, it was because they endorsed legal forms of mobilization in line with the ideological premises of Salafi-jihadism. Non-participant 15's statement to the police reflects this:

> She reports: Yes, she was ready to go with him [a neighbor with whom she had started a romantic relationship] to IS [-held territories]. Nordin [all names used are pseudonyms] told her first that she would go with him, but later he told her that she wouldn't go. He told her that he wanted to go alone and that he wanted her to take care of their children, which she also accepted, even though she now rejects the idea.[44]

The main difference between types of links detailed in the textual corpus is that, in contrast to organizational ties, radicalizing agents belonging to a youth's closest social circle sometimes even actively constrained jihadist involvement, inhibiting the desire of and possibilities for these youths to take action. Participant 13's father, a regular at a radical mosque, isolated his son from the influence of a group of local activists dedicated to the creation of jihadist material for online dissemination, as the young man recounted in his police statement

Asked to say what was the reason for their move to Belgium, he says that after the arrest of those investigated in Operation Javer, they [his family and him] went there as a way of distancing him from the defendants in the aforementioned operation.[45]

In the case of Participant 1, her sisters played a relevant part, first in promoting the adolescent's support for the Islamic State and later in aborting her trip to the Syrian conflict zone

She was a girl that . . . her sisters seemed worried about her. Indeed, when she left [to go to Syria], she changed her WhatsApp profile and the oldest sister rapidly noticed it because the girl had been living with her. So, the sisters went to the police and reported it. They didn't want her to leave. We are pretty sure about that. But, well, the values, the ideology, were transmitted by the women members of the family. (First-line practitioner)

Number of social ties

The qualitative data about the number of social links connecting individuals in the sample to the jihadist movement only make it possible to explore the effects of large social networks on the subgroup of young participants. Since it does not provide information on how the number of social ties affected the courses of action of non-participants, a comparison between subgroups regarding this feature of bonds was not possible.

Collected evidence indicates that being surrounded by many people ideologically close to Salafi-jihadism ensured that youngsters were able to hear about jihad and the organizations that support it, creating a strong awareness of the movement's issues. It also generated mechanisms that promoted participation and favored access to mobilization opportunities.

In the case of the abovementioned Participant 1, such incentives for engagement included expectations of fulfilling a sense of belonging and obtaining collective acceptance:

She said that, at that moment, a trend emerged in the neighborhood: people talked a lot about jihad. (. . .) She talked about it as if it were the normal thing in [Participant 1's hometown]. She knew people and everything they said was compelling: they told her that women were treated like jewels [in Syria] and she wanted to feel that way. She started with the idea that, by wearing certain clothes, she would attract peoples' attention, so as she was digging deeper into social media she received support, and reinforcement – one of the things she wanted the most. That gained her more and more attention and led to her becoming more mobilized in social media, because she got what she wanted: becoming the center of attention, and not being just one more in her household and her neighborhood. (First-line practitioner)

Living in a socio-spatial setting where the jihadist movement had thrived also led Participant 17 to see militancy as a socially approved and legitimized practice; even a profitable one:

It wasn't just my brother. Many friends from my neighborhood went [to Syria]. Many people from my city. Because in Morocco . . . look, the majority, 90% of Moroccan people who are there are from [Participant 17's hometown]. Because I tell you, they are the ones who pay the most. For doing that, they pay a lot. I mean, they give you amounts of money, also for your family . . . (Participant)

In examining the process of forming large social networks, two patterns can be clearly identified. On the one hand, creating a multitude of connections with like-minded people satisfied different cognitive needs that reinforce the process leading to adopting jihadist ideas, as was the case of Participant 9:

As a result of going to the mosque, he said that he met a lot of good people, good Muslims, and that he wanted to meet more people of that kind, so he reduced all his social relationships to people studying the Koran (. . .) Furthermore, when we asked him to write about what led him to commit his crime, he wrote: "I keep informed about the injustices that Muslims suffer, and me myself, as a Muslim brother – I have to do something". So, he said that he also started getting into forums and social media to get informed about these injustices. (First-line practitioner)

On the other hand, young people also sought to increase their number of interpersonal links with the jihadist movement to find opportunities for terrorist involvement. As an example, the above-mentioned Participant 14 relied on online activists for assistance in her attempt to follow in her brother's footsteps in Syria

> When my brother left, I stopped leaving home . . . I built an entirely different life, a virtual life. My social environment was limited to what I had on my phone. (. . .) And when my brother died, for instance, his phone number was given to another person and I also knew that guy . . . it is like, through one person you know another, but only virtually; I never met them in person. (Participant).

Strength of social ties

Clearly distinct patterns were observed between participants and non-participants regarding the strength of their social bonds with the jihadist movement. Because networks are not static relational structures but evolve as their members make new connections and regulate exchanges, the strength of people's links to a social movement waxes and wanes over time as mobilization intensifies or is disrupted.

At one end of the strength continuum, weak ties represent the least stable and intense pattern of social connections. The textual data provides evidence of the relevance of such ties among the interpersonal connections built by the non-participants in the sample. Weak bonds served as an initial contact with the Salafi-jihadist scene, but proved to be fragile in most cases. Both internal and external pressures explain their dissolution. Sometimes it was the young people who decided to interrupt contacts with activists when they felt uncomfortable and insecure. In other instances, the exposure to extra-movement actors served as an effective counter-attitudinal influence. This was the case of the aforementioned Non-participant 15, as she admitted in her police statement:

> She reports that, being in a relationship with Nordin, she met Ammar through Facebook in the summer. He opened her eyes and gave her good pieces of advice about Islam. She states that she felt a victim and felt that she had been radicalized, and it was thanks to Ammar that she was not recruited in the end.[46]

Breaking bonds was also a discretionary decision on the part of recruiters, who might be concerned about the risks involved in the radicalization and recruitment of young people. In the case of Non-participant 9, this meant losing her anchor to the jihadist movement since she was not capable of creating new ties that enabled engagement, according to her account in a police report:

> [The recruiter] told her that he had contacts with the Daesh. On two occasions, he brought her to Morocco, to Martil, where he bought her Islamic clothes and introduced her to his friends, whom he presented as "the people from Daesh". Soon, for reasons she does not know, [the recruiter] started distancing himself from her. (. . .) After he distanced himself from her, she despaired and thought that he had gone to Syria without her. She contacted the Daesh-sympathizers in Martil so that they could help her to go to Syria. She went to Martil with a friend who also wanted to go to Syria. When she found them, she told them that she wanted to meet [the recruiter], but their faces changed, and they gave her the runaround.[47]

The qualitative data also provided evidence to the contrary: young people who were able to restore a weak, precarious relationship with an activist, to the point of leading to terrorist involvement. This course of events is reflected in the efforts of Participant 3 to keep alive the affective relationship she had initiated with a neighbor:

> He started changing, becoming more deeply radicalized. He told her that he could not go forward with the relationship because they followed different doctrines. She didn't share his ideas. She was affected by that, and by the guy's decision to break up with her. As a result, she started going to the same mosque that he frequented, and when he saw that [her efforts] he began approaching her again. (First-line practitioner)

The most revealing case of the effects of strong ties on jihadist participation is that of Participants 19, 20, and 21, who were part of the terrorist cell that carried out a series of attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils in August 2017, killing 16 people. The small, tightly knit group was formed in the context of multiple overlapping social bonds. Close, intensive interactions driven by affective and emotional attachment promoted internal cohesion and conformity, reinforced commitment, and prevented defection, as a friend of Participant 20 expresses:

> He left a note for his mother, his relatives, asking for forgiveness for what he was going to do. He didn't want to be a part of that [the attack], but he couldn't do anything. The imam [the leader of the cell] knew that by recruiting people who knew each other no one would leave the group. They would pressure each other. (Friend)

Discussion

The main purpose of this paper was to understand the relationship between social ties and differential recruitment into jihadism. This study found that the number of interpersonal connections within the jihadist movement affects a youth's chances of participating in jihadist activities. On the one side, the quantitative analysis indicated that participant youths had links with more jihadist activists than non-participants. On the other, the qualitative analysis showed that embeddedness in large networks committed to Salafi-jihadism enabled sample youngsters to see violent jihad as a socially accepted and relevant cause, to identify incentives for engagement, as well as to build a disposition for participation and transform it into concrete action. This is in consonance with previous literature that pointed to information access, social reaffirmation, and individual rewards as the causal mechanisms through which a high number of social ties within a social movement influence participation. However, the qualitative study could not provide insights into how the number of bonds affected the courses of action of non-participants, which prevented comparisons between sample sub-groups at that level of analysis. The results of the regression analysis should also be taken with caution, as the availability of more information on young participants than on non-participants may have biased the results related to this variable.

Moreover, this research came to relevant findings regarding the other two properties of social ties explored. First, qualitative accounts suggested that the influence of a tie's strength on participation is a function of the intensity and stability of social interactions. Clear differentiated patterns for participants and non-participants were found in this regard in the qualitative corpus: while non-participants' personal links with the jihadist movement tended to be of short duration, participants' connections were solid, which allowed for sustained radicalization and group pressure for involvement, and ultimately prevented disengagement. These qualitative findings support the widely held claim in social movement research that the stronger the connection an individual has to a social movement, the more likely they are to be drawn into engagement in high-risk activism. Nonetheless, tie strength did not vary statistically in a significant manner in the quantitative analysis between both subgroups of the sample.

Finally, the mixed-methods analysis rejected the assumption that the types of ties linking individuals to the jihadist movement impact their likelihood of participation. Inferential statistics revealed that neither immediate nor organizational ties, nor the combination of the two, were significant in conditioning youth involvement in jihadist activities. This finding was supported by qualitative evidence, which showed that no kind of social bonds systematically or unconditionally promoted terrorist engagement, even after having played a key role in the adoption of radical ideas and attitudes. This result recognizes the fact that ties that serve as a conduit for radical ideas and attitudes do not necessarily drive violent behavior. In many of the cases analyzed in this study, the social influence processes involved in jihadist radicalization had an exclusive, genuine cognitive focus not tied to any behavioral aspiration.

Altogether, this research showed that it is erroneous to assume that bonds acting as sources of radicalization intentionally lead to violent conduct (as may be the case for the two types of ties). Results also indicated that links actively promoting mobilization may be ineffective in driving participation (as may be the case for weak ties). Consequently, it appears that the positive association between the number of social connections and participation in jihadism may be a function of large networks' abilities to compensate for those ties that do not motivate engagement and those others that fail to enable it. Inasmuch as only certain interpersonal bonds successfully drive a young person to participate, the greater the number of social ties youngsters have with jihadists, the greater their chances of connecting with activists who actually propel involvement.

A note of caution should be considered when interpreting these results, on account of some analytical and methodological limitations. As already noted, missing and flawed data potentially affected the collection of information, which makes it necessary to consider the results as preliminary and to carry out further research to confirm this study's findings. Some of the data limitations have to

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do with the sources of information—specifically, the differential access to data on participants and non-participants—while others relate to the weaknesses of some research techniques. For instance, retrospective accounts gathered in the semi-structured interviews could have been altered by selective memory, ex-post rationalization, or omissions. In anticipation that some limitations might affect the study, it was decided to choose a mixed-methods design, since the combination of quantitative and qualitative data and research methods allows for compensation for the deficiencies of any single approach and facilitates the triangulation of information.

The composition of the study sample may also represent a limitation. While the participants sub-group is composed of all young people convicted in Spain between 2012 and 2019 for jihadist crimes, the non-participants sub-group only gathers a portion of those associated with the jihadist movement over that period. Becoming supportive of global jihadism does not involve asking for official acceptance in an organization. Instead, jihadist activists and sympathizers operate covertly, drawing primarily on informal and loose connections. This makes it hard to gain an accurate picture of all people related with the jihadist movement, which ultimately complicates obtaining a random study sample that is representative of the population. The sample's non-random selection may entail that results are unique to the specific context and universe of this research, and, therefore, that findings may hardly be generalized.

Conclusions

Scholars in the field of terrorism studies have largely supported the claim that interpersonal ties are decisive in promoting individual participation in political violence. However, a pending issue in this field of research is to specify what structural properties of social bonds influence jihadist involvement, as well as to examine the way networks intervene in this process.

This study found substantial empirical support for the hypothesis that the number of personal links within the jihadist movement affects an individual's chances of participating in jihadist activities. It also found partial support for the relationship between tie strength and jihadist engagement. However, it rejected the assumption that the type of social bond influences participation.

More generally, findings evidenced that ties serving as conduits of radical ideas and attitudes do not necessarily drive violent conduct. They also showed that bonds that promote mobilization may fail to translate ideas into action. This might explain why youngsters with many connections to the jihadist movement are more likely to become engaged in jihadism: since only certain links enable involvement, the greater the number of social ties youngsters have with jihadists, the higher their possibilities of connecting with activists who successfully drive them to participate.

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Chapter 4.

Terrorist Participation Despite Social Influences Opposing Extremism: A Qualitative Study Among Young Jihadists in Spain

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Terrorist Participation Despite Social Influences Opposing Violent Extremism: A Qualitative Study among Young Jihadists in Spain

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ABSTRACT

This article uses a sample of 11 juveniles involved in jihadism in Spain to analyze how they experienced and resisted disagreement with members of their personal networks. Drawing on data from interviews, criminal proceedings, and oral trials, the study provides support for a theoretical framework that holds that: (1) opposing ties attempt to leverage informational and normative forms of influence (confrontation of perspectives, exposure to warnings, and application of pressures and constraints) to induce attitudinal change, and that (2) these mechanisms are countered through cognitive and social resistance strategies (contestation, selective social exposure, and circumvention). The research suggests how social disagreement can counterintuitively contribute to mobilizing young people for political violence.

Introduction

Like many individuals faced with an opportunity for political engagement, jihadists make decisions regarding participation in terrorism by following some members of their personal networks while dismissing others. Empirical evidence shows that sup- porters of jihadist organizations are often embedded in heterogeneous social environ- ments, as they are simultaneously connected to people that advocate and promote violent mobilization and others that reject and constrain it.[1] Since decisions about political involvement tend to be socially constructed,[2] the question then becomes how militants weigh and deal with social disagreement while going forward with engaging in political violence. In particular, how do jihadists persist in their radical attitudes despite contrary preferences, adverse information, and the sanctions and pressures of a part of their social surroundings?

This article aims to further our understanding of how violent extremists experience and resist opposing social influences by analyzing the instances of disagreement that a convenience sample of 11 juveniles involved in terrorism-related activities in Spain

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encountered in their interactions with family, friends, and other acquaintances. In so doing, the present study seeks to broaden the dominant research agenda on the role of social networks in jihadist mobilization and offers relevant insights for the design of policies and programs aimed at preventing violent radicalization.

The impact of conflicting social ties on individual views and behaviors has been studied in relation to various manifestations of collective action,[3] including expressions of high-risk and high-cost activism.[4] However, their effects on participation in an extremist form of political mobilization, such as jihadism, have received little attention.[5] Terrorism scholarship has largely focused on the bonds linking prospective participants with militants already embedded in the global jihadist movement (what some social movement researchers refer to as reinforcing and facilitating ties), often overlooking connections that reject and curb political violence (what is often termed in social movement studies as countervailing ties).[6] In the limited cases in which oppositional connections to violent extremism have been explored, research interest has often been narrowed to specific types of bonds (paternal-filial or peer group) or to cases where terrorist involvement was ultimately prevented or disrupted, and explanations have been based on a partial view of two-way communication.[7] This article differs from those previous studies in several points. First, the analysis is not restricted to a single type of relation- ship but takes account of the variety of ties that make up jihadists' immediate social environments. In addition, it aims to capture the nature of social relations by under- standing both the actions of opposition actors and the responses of jihadists. More importantly, the study seeks to improve the comprehension of the mechanisms of social influence at work in terrorist mobilization by examining when interpersonal connections fall short of their intended goals, rather than when they succeed.

Drawing on previous research on social network influence, this article presents a framework that explains how opposing social ties try to modify the ideas and predispositions of jihadists, and how the latter defy such influential efforts. Countervailing ties relied on both the sharing of compelling arguments (informational influence) and the enforcing of social norms (normative influence) to induce terrorist desistance, attempting to use dissonance and disapproval as leverage. Jihadists, reacting consequently, developed cognitive and social resistance strategies, using them to either expose themselves to disagreement, avoid it, or prevent it from occurring. Ultimately, this research provides evidence congruent with theoretical predictions that social disagreement can contribute to political action, even when it takes the shape of a violent extremist movement like jihadism.

A few conceptual clarifications are in order at this point. The term "jihadist" is used in this article to refer to individuals who have undergone a process of radicalization into Salafi-jihadism.[8] A second key concept is social disagreement, which is understood here as the interaction between people who have differing opinions on and approaches to relevant issues.[9] Disagreement might lead to social influence, which is any change produced in a person's attitudes due to processes triggered by her or his interactions with other people.[10] Influence can be the result of a concerted effort of network partners to induce attitudinal change, but it can also stem from ordinary interaction, the mere exposure to alternate perspectives.[11] Finally, this article adopts the definition of attitudes as "evaluations people hold in regard to themselves, other people, objects, and issues" which "can be based on a variety of behavioral, affective,

and cognitive experiences, and are capable of influencing or guiding behavioral, affective, and cognitive processes."[12]

The rest of the article proceeds in four sections. It begins with a description and review of the theoretical framework. It next describes the study sample, data collection methods, and analysis procedure. The section that follows presents the results of the qualitative analysis, and then the paper turns to a discussion of the findings' theoretical implications.

Theoretical Framework

Social network theories analyze how both individual and collective action are affected by people's embeddedness in interpersonal relationships, constituting a vital strand of social movement studies.[13] Movement scholars have traditionally argued that personal links operate as a crucial basis for mobilization and recruitment – abundant evidence shows that preexisting ties explain the adherence of new members to jihadist organi- zations[14] – but they have also acknowledged that bonds have variable impact. Since people are usually immersed in multiple relationships, some of which promote collective action while others discourage it, the presence of connections that push in one direc- tion or the other does not necessarily predict a particular participation outcome.[15] As such, early academic contributions claiming that bonds with conflicting groups diminish political involvement were refuted by subsequent scholarship emphasizing different elements, such as the type of political action involved, the source, scope, and nature of political disagreement, or its effects and the responses to it.[16] Indeed, research has found that the presence of simultaneous antagonistic considerations in an individual's social environment may indeed foster political mobilization.[17]

This study builds on and tests a theoretical framework that has been applied to understand how exposure to social disagreement affects different domains of conven- tional political action. It primarily combines perspectives in social network theory, bringing together interactional and psychological angles.[18] First, it connects literature on social disagreement and social influence. These academic contributions shed light on the means and mechanisms through which heterogeneous social ties affect people's political ideas and predispositions. Second, it acknowledges theoretical work on how individuals resist counter-attitudinal influences. This is complemented with research on closed-mindedness, a central concept in the psychology of terrorism studies. These approaches are used to delve into the resistance strategies through which political actors minimize the effects of uncongenial and oppositional interactions.

How Might Exposure to Social Disagreement Influence Political Attitudes?

Social network researchers have laid out three main ways by which opposing bonds directly affect people's political views and actions: (1) by giving information; (2) by signaling potential problems with attitudes; and (3) by applying social pressures.[19] How these means impact on attitudes, either by weakening or reinforcing their behavioral manifestations, can be understood in terms of two broad forms of social influence: on the one hand, informational influence stirs people's desire to be right; on the other hand, normative influence exploits people's need to be liked.[20]

Individuals may be susceptible to informational influence when they are socially exposed to arguments that conflict with their ideas. Research shows evidence that, when facing discrepancies with those close to them, people become better informed about reasons that challenge their views, as well as more inclined to seek out new knowledge.[21] The sheer awareness that significant others hold a divergent stance on a subject − even without knowing the rationale − could also instill questions about others' correctness.[22] A central theoretical concept to account for this reaction is that of dissonance, which is the inconsistency between related cognitive elements that is caused by conflicting messages. Festinger explained that experiencing dissonance makes people feel psychologically uncomfortable and may lead to a state of imbalance that they want to redress.[23] When this is accomplished by a critical reconsideration of one's own viewpoints, individuals are more likely to suffer an intrapersonal conflict as they grow to have ambivalent attitudes. In her seminal work on the effects of exposure to social disagreement on political participation, Mutz found that such uncertainty makes it more difficult for people to make decisions and ultimately causes them to retreat from critical action.[24] However, to the contrary, a number of studies have linked diversity in network discussions to an increase in political engagement through improved political interest and understanding, as well as polarized, reactive reaffirmation of ideas.[25]

On the other hand, individuals might experience normative influence when they are subjected to pressure to comply with social standards and expectations. Since people are normally driven by a need to belong, the prospect of gaining social approval from significant others is a strong incentive to adhere to ideas and behaviors that are socially regarded as correct and appropriate.[26] Conformity with group norms not only brings individual rewards (social validation and acceptance, for instance), but it also preserves relational harmony and prevents social conflict. Deviation from group norms, to the contrary, can lead to costs like tension and discord, sanctions such as invalidation and criticism, and, in the end, pressures like rejection or isola- tion.[27] Social disagreement is thus also depicted in the scientific literature as a source of interpersonal conflict since the use of sanctions and pressures by opposing ties induces social discomfort to rectify people's initial misalignment with group standards. Theoretical and empirical work has shown, however, that when people realize they do not fit the norms of the group and, as a result, believe they will not be socially accepted, they may begin a process of dis-identification with the group and develop attachment to a new collectivity with different standards that have more personal resonance.[28] Because they can look to this new group for validation and membership, the potential for normative influence from the old group of reference lessens.[29] Additionally, there is abundant empirical evidence proving that conformity does not always imply a genuine change in attitude, since public compliance with social norms might hide a private non-acceptance of the demands and political views of the group.[30]

How do Individuals Resist the Influence Stemming from Social Disagreement?

Social influences can fail. One of the reasons is that people sometimes oppose, counter, and resist the efforts of network partners to induce change. People are particularly likely

to become unreceptive − even hostile − to others' arguments, judgements, and pressures when influential attempts affect attitudes to which they are strongly committed and about which they care most.[31]

Several loosely related accounts of how individuals reject opposing influences and resist their impact have been proposed in the political science literature and related fields. Despite their disconnected nature, most of these theoretical formu- lations converge in evincing the complexity of resistance behaviors, which generally combine cognitive and social strategies, as well as diverse individual responses to social disagreement, typically along a continuum ranging from prevention to avoid- ance and exposure. For example, Huckfeldt and Sprague, in their widely cited theory of resistance to cognitive dissonance, identified three techniques by which people deal with adverse political information encountered in their personal net- works.[32] First, by selecting social sources of information with which they agree, thereby avoiding interactions that may elicit disagreement and preserving the biases and frames of reference that support their existing worldview. Second, by reinter- preting and misinterpreting unfavorable messages, which ultimately involves con- trolling the assessment and processing of information. Finally, by eluding confrontation with network partners who hold divergent ideas via distorting or softening one's stances.

Also consequential is Baumgardner and Arkin's study on individuals' responses to social disapproval, which distinguishes between techniques used to respond to and prevent the discomfort induced by group rejection. Reactive mechanisms for managing negative feedback include denying the existence of the disapproval; dis- crediting the invalidation and its personal relevance; derogating the source of poten-tial rejection; or resorting to approving social referents. Preemptive methods of social invalidation consist of diverting the focus of attention of the disapproving source.[33]

Although these theories provide a fairly complete picture of resistance responses to oppositional influences, they lack clarity about the connection between their cognitive and social dimensions. One option to bridge this gap is to consider the integrative notion of closed-mindedness, which relates to the propensity of humans to shut their minds against sources of knowledge instability and inconsistency. The discomfort with ambiguity that drives the resolution of dissonance and the reduction of uncertainty; the quest for validation that motivates a preference for homogeneous over heterogeneous social net-works; and the desire for agreeing and confirmatory messages are all traits that cohere with the need for closure.[34] As Kruglanski has shown, closed-minded dispositions are related to a series of cognitive and social mechanisms that are often based on in-group favoritism and out-group rejection. While the in-group comprises of people with whom individuals identify and whom they can trust, the out-group consists of those whom they do not regard as like themselves; whilst the first enables consensus and satisfies desires for approval and acceptance, the second does not.[35] As a result, individuals operating under a high need for closure are more likely to prefer members of their group of reference over those of other groups because the in-group provides the shared reality that they are seeking, while the out-group represents a contrasting, conflicting alternative.[36]

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Research Design and Method

Sample

To test the theoretical framework outlined previously, this research draws on data coming from a sample of 11 juveniles, all of whom had undergone a process of jihadist radicalization and whose views and intentions were challenged by those closest to them before they committed terrorist crimes in Spain.[37] Their involvement in activities related to terrorism occurred between 2012 and 2019, during the jihadist mobilization cycle prompted in Western Europe by the outbreak of the civil conflict in Syria, with the Islamic State (IS) as the main driver. This terrorist organization reached the peak of its mobilization potential after the proclamation of a caliphate in June 2014 that stretched across large swathes of Syria and Iraq. Five years later, when IS's last stronghold fell, the territorial project collapsed and, with it, the group's inspirational impact diminished. During those years, at least 29 minors were radicalized in Spain into Salafi-jihadism before they turned 18. They were later found guilty of terrorism-related crimes by Spain's National Court, the only court in the country with first-instance jurisdiction over jihadist crimes.[38] These 29 juveniles form the universe of the current research. Applying the principles of purposive sampling, the 11 cases that make up this study's sample were chosen for their potential to provide detailed information on the fundamental interest of this research, as well as to illustrate the diverse ways in which this manifests itself. The aim of this approach was to produce a contrasting and structurally relevant selection of cases to capture overarching themes that cut across a maximum variation sample.[39] Such core themes acquire greater significance precisely because they appear in heterogeneity and mirror the similarities and differences between the research subjects.[40]

Cases differ in many biographical characteristics, with the only exception of age range. All individuals in the sample were between 14 and 17 years old at the beginning of their radicalization process, a developmental stage in which individuals tend to be more exposed to and influenced by their peers in their search for identity, belonging, meaning, and pur- pose, and at the same time more distanced from their long-standing reference group, the family.[41] This makes adolescence a phase with a higher prevalence of risk factors for violent radicalization.[42] Other than that, the sample included 5 girls and 6 boys. Regarding their place of residence, 4 of the subjects lived in the Province of Barcelona; 3 in Melilla; 2 in Ceuta; and 1 each in the Community of Madrid and the Province of Valencia. In terms of religion, 8 of them were Muslims by origin, while the remaining 3 converted to Islam without their families and friends following them in the process of embracing their new religion.

All of the sampled youths subscribed to the ideology of Salafi-jihadism and sought different ways of promoting its goals, including both online and offline forms of jihadist participation. Of those sampled, 5 were convicted of creating and sharing virtual violent propaganda; 4 of attempting to travel to terrorist-controlled areas in Syria; 1 of planning to commit an attack in Spain; and finally, 1 other of radicalizing and recruiting other youngsters via social networks and neighborhood contacts. Table 1 summarizes each sampled individual's characteristics.

Cases also vary regarding the nature of the heterogeneity of their personal networks and the scope of disagreement to which they were exposed. While they were all exposed to influences that rejected both Salafist-jihadist ideology and individual

Table 1. Main characteristics of sampled individuals.

Case	Sex	Age	Religious background	City of residence	Type of jihadist participation
1	F	14	Originally Muslim	Ceuta	Attempting to travel to Syria to join IS
2	M	17	Convert	Barcelona	Attempting to travel to Syria to join IS
3	F	15	Originally Muslim	Melilla	Radicalizing and recruiting other youngsters
4	M	16	Convert	Barcelona	Creating and sharing online propaganda
5	M	17	Convert	Barcelona	Planning to execute a terrorist attack
6	F	17	Originally Muslim	Valencia	Attempting to travel to Syria to join IS
7	M	17	Originally Muslim	Melilla	Creating and sharing online propaganda
8	F	16	Originally Muslim	Ceuta	Attempting to travel to Syria to join IS
9	F	17	Originally Muslim	Barcelona	Creating and sharing online propaganda
10	M	17	Originally Muslim	Madrid	Creating and sharing online propaganda
11	M	16	Originally Muslim	Melilla	Creating and sharing online propaganda

Note: F: female; M: male.

engagement in jihadist activities, at least 5 were also exposed to subjects who opposed the youth's violent mobilization but supported their radical beliefs.

Data Collection

A combination of sources was used to collect and triangulate data from the 11 juveniles. The primary source is eight semi-structured, in-depth interviews with some of the sampled individuals and other key informants. Qualitative evidence was also col-lected from court sessions, police reports, and criminal records.

Between May 2019 and June 2021, I interviewed four of the sampled youths, a relative of another youth, and two front-line practitioners with first-hand knowledge of two of the other sampled cases. Two researchers with whom I am associated, Fernando Reinares and Carola García-Calvo, conducted an additional interview of a sampled youth. The sample of interviewees includes a diversity of relevant profiles, which is a common practice in research on hard-to-reach populations. The selection of interviewees was based on convenience sampling techniques, which values respon- dents' accessibility, availability, and willingness to share their insights.[43] Initial contact with them was made through different means, including requests to various official institutions in Spain, among them the General Secretariat of Penitentiary Institutions of the Ministry of the Interior, the General Secretariat of Penitentiary Measures of the regional autonomous Government of Catalonia, and the Agency for the Reeducation and Reinsertion of Juvenile Offenders of the Community of Madrid. Interview requests were also made through informal conversations with private attorneys.

Six of the interviews were conducted in person in four prisons (Barcelona, Girona, Granada, and Salamanca), a juvenile facility (Madrid), and the offices of a law firm (Madrid). An additional interview was conducted by phone at the request of the interviewee. With the consent of the participants, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In the only case in which the interviewee did not give permission to record, I took verbatim notes by hand.

Interviews adopted a semi-structured format and lasted one to two hours. The inter-view guidelines sought to capture respondents' experiences, perceptions, or knowledge regarding a wide array of topics. Since many issues were addressed during the interviews, the relationships of sampled youths with their countervailing social ties were discussed

in varying degrees of detail. Open-ended questions explored two aspects: 1) the counter-attitudinal influences the sampled youths experienced; and 2) the resistance strategies they developed to avoid the persuasive effects of disagreement.

In addition, this study was complemented with oral evidence collected in court sessions. Between December 2016 and June 2019, I attended oral hearings held against 9 of the sampled youths at the National Court. During each trial, I took notes about the composition of the sampled youth's personal network and captured evidence about how they interacted with disagreeing members of their social circles. This information came from the statements made by the defendants themselves, their family and friends, and police investigators. The information gathered in this way was expanded and triangulated thanks to access to police reports included in the criminal proceedings of the 11 individuals that make up the study sample. Examples of the textual data analyzed include interrogation reports, telephone-tapping transcripts, and screen captures of text conversations.

Research Strategy and Data Analysis

This research is aimed at theory testing. By corroborating or refuting the expectations derived from the literature, the article seeks to extend the scope conditions of the aforementioned theoretical framework. The process of theory testing entailed a regular reconciliation between evidence from different cases, data from diverse sources, and between the qualitative corpus and the framework of this research.[44] To implement the process, all of the qualitative material (transcripts of interviews, notes taken during oral trial sessions, and evidence obtained from police reports and criminal proceedings) was imported into QSR NVivo computer software for thematic analysis.[45] This method of encoding consists of finding thematic patterns in a qualitative corpus and organizing them in a structured, coherent way to inform interpretation. Specifically, this study used a version of template analysis, as this technique is suitable for analyzing a small dataset composed of different forms of textual data, using descriptive, hierarchical, and predefined codes.[46] Unlike ordinary template analysis, which follows an inductive logic, this research adopted a deductive approach. Although the themes were defined at the beginning of the analytical process, they were modified as I identified nuances and emphasis in the textual data.[47]

Ethics

The ethics committee of the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos approved this study (internal registration number: 1605201909719). For data protection reasons, a number was assigned to each of the individuals in the sample. As for the interview participants, they were informed of the purpose of the study and of the confidential and anonymous treatment of the results, and were provided with consent forms.

Results

The results of the qualitative analysis illustrate two aspects and discern six themes: the instances of social disagreement that the youth experienced within their personal

Table 2. Occurrence of themes in the qualitative corpus.

Case	Experiences of disagreement			Resistance strategies		
	Confrontation of perspectives	Exposure to warnings	Punishments/ constraints	Contestation	Selective social exposure	Circumvention
1	x		x			x
2	x					x
3	x	x		x		
4	x	x		x		
5			x	x	x	
6	x		x	x	x	
7	x		x	x		x
8		x	x	x	x	
9	x	x	x		x	
10		x		x		
11	x	x	x		x	

networks (confrontation of perspectives, exposure to warnings, and pressures and constraints), and the strategies they developed to resist its effects (contestation, selective social exposure, and circumvention). Table 2 presents their occurrence in the qualitative corpus. This section examines each aspect in turn. The analysis also briefly describes how disagreement affected the sampled individuals.

Experiences of Disagreement

Social disagreement between the sampled individuals and members of their personal networks occurred in three main ways: confrontation of perspectives, exposure to warnings, and application of punishments and constraints. These experiences of dis- agreement allowed for the flow of both informational and normative forms of socialinfluence.

Confrontation of Perspectives

A confrontation of perspectives was noted when youngsters and their opposing social ties clashed in ways that exposed the former to alternative interpretations of a range of issues that figured prominently in their justifications for jihadist violence and their motivations for terrorist involvement, such as personal and collective experiences of grievances against Muslims, geopolitical crises affecting Muslim-majority countries, or religious precepts justifying violence. Discrepancies on these topics were disclosed and debated in diverse ways and with varying degrees of intensity.

The qualitative corpus captures a few instances in which the young people were challenged with theological or intellectual reasonings that contradicted their defense of jihadist organizations. These occasional, argument-driven interactions tended to revolve around the interlocutors' respective interpretations of Qur'anic texts as either supporting or opposing violent jihad. A paradigmatic example of this is the discussion between Case 3 and her father, recounted in a police report:[48]

> [Case 3] says that she was arguing with her father: he was watching TV while images of the [Syrian] conflict and a mujahideen talking with his back turned were displayed. She asked who he was, and her father said that he was a terrorist, so she responded: 'Since when is a mujahideen a terrorist?'. The father told her that neither jihad nor mujahideen exist today.

> She responded by asking him whether he knew that an Islamic State already exists in Iraq and Syria, and that the Prophet declared that jihad will continue until the end of time, or when the world ends. Everyone who has grasped the Sunnah and the Koran is aware of this. Her father said that jihad cannot exist without an emir or caliph to declare it. She said, 'there already is and he [former ISIS emir, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi] has already called it.'

In other instances, the exchange of views was based more on expressions of preference or opinion than on the provision of reasons in support of a position. Confrontations developed in the form of a moral or spiritual debate on the appro- priateness of political violence and individual participation in it in cases where discussion partners had a gap in Islamic knowledge that might have impeded them from engaging in an ideological argument, as was, for instance, the case with the converts. The appeal to emotions is also seen in the way some young people raised relevant issues in their conversations with disagreeing others. Case 2, the only convert to Islam in a family of Evangelical Christians, exemplifies how the appeal to solidarity and civilian protection as justifications for mobilization was met with social opposition:

> I didn't tell [my mother] that I was leaving [for jihadist-held territory in Syria], but I told her: 'look at the horrible things [the Bashar al-Assad regime] are doing'. I showed her the video of children being removed from a bomb site, and they took out the dead child… things like that… My mother, who is very patient, very kind, she believes in God a lot… told me: 'No! God will help them. Don't worry, it will pass' and similar things.

In addition to the dispute of their arguments and opinions, the young people in the sample perceived a general disagreement with their social network when their sources of information were questioned and discredited, as well as when they were encouraged to broaden and diversify the views on which they based their own vision of reality. The mother of Case 4 explained that she tried to get her son to reconsider his radical attitude by encouraging him to be skeptical of users' opinions, news, and propaganda content he accessed through social media: "I told him: 'When you want to know something about religion, don't listen to people. Get a book! People will give you their view, they won't tell you the truth.'"

In contrast, analysis of the qualitative corpus shows that some of the sampled youth did not argue their radical ideals much or at all with their oppositional ties. This was the case where disagreement with their personal networks arose not when the young people first started to adhere to Salafi-jihadism, but later, when they began to act in a way that was consistent with this ideology. For instance, Case 8 recalled that jihad was considered a "taboo subject" in conversations with relatives and friends while they were unaware of her plans to travel to Syria. Sometimes, though, the absence of inter- personal discussion is explained by the fact that the individuals' immediate environment was supportive of jihadist ideals.

Exposure to Warnings

Close contacts also demonstrated their opposition to the ideological affinities of the youths sampled by expressing their disapproval of jihadist beliefs or informing them of the costs and dangers of mobilization. Such a combination of arguments and sanc-tions in social interactions was found in the qualitative corpus when disagreeing

members of their social circles raised concerns and objections to the radical personal connections of the youngsters. Examples abound. A friend of Case 3 warned her against a neighbor renowned for his Salafist activism and advised her to stay away from him. In three other instances, family members criticized the ultra-conservative religious practice of the youngsters' new friends and cautioned them of the danger of being "brainwashed." In a similar vein, Case 11 recalled that close acquaintances tried to alert him to the fact that the group of worshipers with whom he had started to associate could drag him into extremist beliefs:

> The same community said to me: 'Hey, you're making a mistake. You're going from one extreme to the other'. And I said: 'Why?' 'We have told you to come to pray, not to get together with these people. Don't you see how they look?' 'Yes, but they say that there is a *hadith* [a tradition or saying of the Prophet Muhammad] that says that'. 'No, they are deceiving you.'

Sanctions were also used in response to the actions of the youth. Disapproval was exercised, for instance, in bringing attention to the penal consequences of jihadist participation. Case 10 explained that he was the only one in his immediate environment to support his older brother's trip to Syria. After publicly praising his sibling's death and the organization he had joined, he was reprimanded: "I had people close to me there who came to me warning me many times: 'Hey, don't share this on Facebook! You could get into trouble.'"

In other instances, dissonant messages were intended to increase awareness of the risks associated with terrorist involvement. Significant others who sympathized with jihadism but opposed the action plans of the sampled individuals deployed this strategy as a deterrent. Case 8 offers a clear illustration of this. She recalled how her radicalization was sparked by watching videos about the Syrian conflict and IS propaganda with her elder brother, who eventually traveled to the combat zone. At a time when relatively few women had joined the jihadist organization and there were no security assurances for young women like her, he warned her against following in his footsteps:

> I assumed that when we talked about it, he was including me in his plans. He used to say: 'We have to go.' Well, if you say 'we' when you and I are talking, I won't think [you mean] you and your friends. But no, he didn't include me. That really… when he left, that was what hurt me the most. He left me feeling abandoned. The first thing I asked him was: 'Why didn't you take me with you?' (…) He said: 'Look, this is very hard. This is not a holiday; this is a war. There are people with amputated arms here… you can see a lot of things.' (…) He told me: 'What you see in the videos is only a little, even though there are videos that show many things. This is very complicated; if it is complicated for us, imagine for you.'

Punishments and Constraints

Sampled individuals also faced explicit social pressures to desist from their violent attitudes when their determination and intents to engage in jihadist activities became apparent. Qualitative evidence suggests that countervailing ties applied punishments and coercive actions to reaffirm social norms contrary to Salafist principles and to enforce collective preferences over peaceful forms of collective action, with the ultimate purpose of triggering a scenario in which the rising social costs of terrorist

involvement and the emerging obstacles to participation would cause the renunciation of violent mobilization.

Those in disagreement with the sampled individuals subjected them to specific forms of rejection, such as social devaluation and lowered acceptance. Hostilities manifested in mistrust, reduced communication, and avoidance. As social interactions declined, some ties vanished. Case 8 explained that relations with her family and peers were dominated by blame and wariness following her brother's departure to Syria. Suspicions and surveillance intensified when her own plans to travel were revealed:

> When my brother left, my father beat me even more: 'You knew he was going, you're his accomplice!' My family started to ramble. Instead of supporting me or trying to help me in some way, they blamed me more. (…) When I came back from Turkey… socially I had a lot of rejection. I mean, from everybody. It was quite a hard situation. My family, my aunt, and so on, what they did was… as if I was a person who was hooked. But if someone doesn't want to get off and you force him, you're not going to achieve anything.

Rejection-related experiences took on particular significance when they occurred within the family. Social punishments in this context are sanctioned by a religious precept placing the honoring of parents as a general obligation of every believer and reprehending as a sin any action contrary to their express wishes. Violation of this principle may even be penalized by the severing of kinship ties. For instance, the mother of Case 6 relied on that convention to threaten her daughter with disownment if she persisted in her plans to migrate to the caliphate, disregarding repeated warnings that the Salafi-jihadist beliefs ran counter to how the family understood and prac- ticed Islam.

In order to impose moderate social norms, disagreeing others also used methods of authority − rather than noncoercive influence − aimed at increasing barriers to participation. Attempts to physically separate young people from their jihadist asso- ciates and to keep them away from their radicalizing environments were particularly common. In some cases, family members forbade the youth from inviting their associates home and from keeping such company in the street. In other instances, they decided to geographically separate the sampled individuals from their networks after determining that they were in danger of being recruited. The father of Case 7 was sympathetic to Salafi-jihadist views, but nevertheless resolved to move the entire family to Belgium to prevent his son from keeping in touch with a group of local activists committed to creating jihadist propaganda for online dissemination. Case 8 was also relocated. "My aunt sent me to Marbella. She told me: 'You're not going to stay here.'" Prior to that, her father had confiscated her passport to keep her from leaving the country.

Coercive techniques escalated to a higher level when countervailing ties assumed the failure of the pressures they had previously applied. Fearing that the youths would eventually become involved in terrorism, opposing ties turned occasionally to law enforcement agents for help. This was an option even for those social links that showed an ideological affinity with Salafist-jihadism but rejected individual participation, as Case 1 illustrates. Her sister, herself married to a man convicted of jihadist crimes, was instrumental in aborting the girl's travel:

When she left [to go to Syria], she changed her WhatsApp profile and the oldest sister rapidly noticed it because the girl had been living with her. So, the sisters went to the police and reported it. They didn't want her to leave. We are pretty sure about that. But, well, the values, the ideology, were transmitted by the women members of the family. (First-line practitioner related to Case 1)

Resistance Strategies

Experiencing dissonance and disapproval produced a state of imbalance in most of the sampled individuals. The empirical evidence indicates that negative reactions to their ideas and predispositions from their social environment had an impact on their thoughts and emotions, even if this did not stop young people from eventually being involved in terrorist activity.

For one thing, the qualitative data reveal instances of intrapersonal tension in the young jihadists. Discrepant and condemning messages over their beliefs heightened uncertainty and prompted an introspective examination, to the extent that most sought information to allay their concerns and even questioned their envisaged mobilization. Case 6, for instance, told a virtual peer that family and friends' criticism had weakened her resolve to migrate to the caliphate:

Well, I have doubts. Like your sister Ana [all names used are pseudonyms]. Is what the [Islamic] State does right? What does it do with the girls who emigrate? Is it obligatory for sisters to emigrate? I see that everyone around me is against the [Islamic] State.[49]

Data also shows that social disagreement gave rise to interpersonal tensions. Some of the juveniles experienced unpleasant emotions related to real or expected rejection experiences, with several variations. Case 2 evoked the distress and anxiety he suffered as he tried to conceal his radicalization from family and friends and preserve his social image. Case 8 explained that she felt hopeless and abandoned when her brother disavowed her mobilization plans ("he has always been my reference"); later, her com- munity's refusal left her feeling alone and vulnerable. Other youngsters, out of concern for how their ideological positions would damage their relationships, negotiated their level of engagement in jihadist activities and delayed it. Case 11 eventually gave up trying to preserve social harmony when he assumed the impossibility of pleasing conflicting groups:

Interviewer (1): So, you listened to your mother…?
Interviewee (2): As much as possible.
(1): …it's not always like that.

(2): I know. I tried to reconcile two worlds that were irreconcilable, and that, in the end, led me to what it led me to.

In order to mitigate these negative effects of disagreement and continue with their planned jihadist involvement, young people evolved a range of cognitive and social resistance strategies over time. These could be broadly categorized into three themes: contestation, selective social exposure, and circumvention. The remainder of this section examines them.

Contestation

One of the ways through which young people resisted the impact of opposing influences was by reacting defensively against disagreeing voices within their personal networks. So as to defend their jihadist ideals, sampled individuals reinterpreted messages that contradicted their views and beliefs and placed doubt on the credibility and reliability of countervailing social ties. At the core of this resistance strategy was the propensity of the sampled youths to turn to corroborating social sources that reflected their biases and preferences. This validation propelled them to actively participate in conversation with opposing discussion partners and willingly expose themselves to social disagreement. Case 3, for example, had intense discussions about jihad with family and friends. She was also a frequent participant on Facebook pages like "Denounce ISIS," where she supported the terrorist group against the critics of other young Muslims. Poorly versed in Islamic fundamentals, her counterarguments relied heavily on inputs she gleaned through jihadist propaganda. A police report recounts that when a friend forewarned her about the news that two Austrian teenage girls who had traveled to the caliphate decided to return home and expressed their regrets, she replied that "the girls who go are very happy and have religiously fulfilled the duty of defending Islam" and that "they cannot remain silent in the face of the outrage suffered by their Muslim brothers." [50]

Jihadists evolved further denial techniques to counter discrepant messages. Typical of their information processing style was the interpretation of the unfavorable data to which they were socially exposed as intentional attempts to deceive them. In this manner, Case 3 countered that the news about the Austrian teenagers consisted of "manipulations by the Police to deter potential women who would like to leave for Syria and to offer a distorted image of the people who go there." Case 4 provides a similar example. He argued in a virtual conversation with a friend that the hadiths usually employed as evidence to disprove IS "could have been fabricated by the police. Many hadiths have been fabricated for political purposes and many hadith scholars have criticized Kitab al fitan for having very weak and strange narrations."[51] "And me doubting so much for nothing" he followed, alluding to the initial effect such hadiths had had on him.

Too often, youngsters derogated opposing ties out of a sense of moral superiority, claiming to be the only ones in their immediate environment who accurately inter- preted the Islamic tradition. Confident in this presumed correct observance of religious norms, duties, and responsibilities, they also denied the personal relevance of unfa- vorable social views. Case 6 defied the sanctions and continuous pressures from her mother to desist from her plans to travel to Syria on the grounds that she was ignorant of Islam. In an online chat with a like-minded peer, the girl justified her refusal to comply with her mother's demands: "It is not possible to obey a created being in disobedience to its creator."[52] She went on with a proud reaffirmation of her stand- points while neglecting the signals of disapproval: "I don't need anyone to understand me. I have already understood my religion. I'm on the right path, and with Allah's permission, I'll do my duty and emigrate."[53]

The data also shows how jihadists developed their capacity to resist opposing influ- ences by leaning on referents who shared their beliefs and could validate the correctness of their views. The reliance on reinforcing sources of influence allowed some of them to maintain a sense of confidence, an illusion of personal control over future events, and to disregard warnings about the repercussions of their actions. Case 3 acted in

that way when she disdained a friend's warning messages: "And as for what you said about prison, I swear I don't care. The best sheiks, those who induce and talk about the obligation of jihad and talk with truth and knowledge, are in jail."

Selective Social Exposure

Jihadists also resisted the negative effects of social disagreement by interrupting their exposure to opposing influences. As dissonance and disapproval are diluted in homogenous environments, some sampled individuals created structurally and attitudinally coherent social networks to reduce their chances of encountering alternative belief systems, receiving contrasting messages, and facing social hostility. Social closure often comprised two concurrent movements: as youngsters withdrew from interactions with dissenting partners, they intensified their physical or virtual connections with like-minded people. Case 9 stopped hanging out with her group of friends as criti- cism and rebuttals against her sympathy for IS and cautions against the influence exercised by her boyfriend intensified: "My friends, my family, they didn't want me to go with him. And as much as everyone was against it, I became more and more attached to him. And, at the same time, I stopped partying. I just quit going out." The qualitative evidence shows that this redefinition of their communities' bound- aries first targeted those contacts who acted as direct sources of disagreement. However, in most cases, the exclusionary drift extended to other members of the youths' personal networks who belonged to social categories that had acquired a novel relevant and determining distinctiveness, and who might pose a challenge to their worldview and sense of self. Jihadists often used religious affiliation as a dividing line when initially determining who fit into their group and who did not, as Case 8 recounted:

> I stopped hanging out with my friends. I had a friend whose father was a policeman, so I didn't talk to her anymore. My friends who were Christians, I didn't see them again. My friends were those who, for me, were no longer friends because they were unfaithful, unbelievers.

Sampled youths also avoided being exposed to influences that contradicted their perceptions, values, and beliefs by distancing themselves from other Muslims who adhered to alternate understandings of Islam, and who therefore held competing views on the very roots that inspire pro-jihadist attitudes. This preference for social closure appears to have been aided by source derogation strategies that accentuated differences in judgment between individuals and diminished the perception of shared group mem-bership. For Case 11, the indications of his most radical close acquaintances led him to reduce the diversity of attitudes in his social surroundings under the pretense that the majority of those closest to him were poor observers of Islam. In this way, a false social consensus sympathetic to the goals and tactics of jihadist groups was imposed:

> One day, they told me: 'Hey, the other day we saw you walking with Said. You shouldn't hang out with him. He'll lead you astray. You have to keep yourself pure'. 'But we've always been friends' (…) 'If you're walking with us, you can't do that. You can't go around with whoever you want because they're going to see you with us and they're going to think we're that way. If you want to be a good Muslim, this is the way'. So, I gradually reduced my friendships, my social circles.

Not all of the sampled individuals ended up in social bubbles, however. Notably, qualitative data failed to reveal any indication of a selective social exposure strategy

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among youngsters who did not exhibit out-group rejection. Case 2 serves as an illustration. He described his conversion to Islam as an individual process which only became salient "from my bedroom door inwards" and that did not alter the way he saw and treated his significant others: "I didn't care if someone was an atheist or a Christian; only that he was a good person." He noted that despite his increasingly radical convictions, he did not separate himself from his community:

> My case is not like that of people who became radicalized and then distanced themselves from others. No, I didn't go through that. I remained the same with my family, with my friends… the same as always. The weekend before [I left for Syria], I had a basketball game, and I went. On Saturday and Sunday, I partied with my friends. And on Thursday, I left.

Circumvention

A less common strategy used by jihadists to resolve the conflict between their aspirational goals and the preferences and demands of their closest ties was to keep their radical ideologies or violent aspirations hidden to avoid disagreement being aimed directly at them. The few youngsters who opted for self-censorship cared about rejection from those with whom they had strong emotional connection, and feared the consequences that being subjected to social censure would have on their opportunities to pursue their goals. The abovementioned Case 2 explained that, by circumventing his immediate environment, he was able to maintain harmony with relatives and friends who shared neither his religion nor his approach to the Syrian conflict. More significantly, he acted in this manner so as not to have to compromise his ideological leanings to preserve social acceptance from those close to him:

> If [my mother] had told me 'no'… [if] she had found out about [my plans to travel to Syria] and she had told me 'no', that would have been the end of it for me. Also, internet and stuff. No, no, no… This reaches my mother's ear and [she would have said] 'stop there… Don't move from there'. And I can't say 'no' to my mother.

Jihadists also resorted to circumvention when they feared their militant intentions would be thwarted by members of their personal networks who were sympathetic to jihad but opposed individual participation in political violence. Case 1 took every precaution to keep the measures she had taken in her progress toward terrorist activity from her sister, despite that sister having been crucial in starting and sustaining her radicalization. She hid her visits to Salafist mosques, her social media connections with jihadist activists, and later also her travel plans to the caliphate, as recounted in a police statement:

> She declares that on August 1, she left her sister's house at six o'clock in the morning, went to the Castillejos border, from where she took a taxi to Tétouan, where she took a bus to Al Hoceima. That the money she had was given to her by her sister a long time ago, without the sister knowing what she was going to use it for. That when she left her sister's house, her sister asked her where she was going, the affiant told her that she was going out but that she was going to come back. That her sister did not see the suitcase, as the affiant had left it outside the night before.[54]

Discussion

This article contributes to the literature on the role of social ties in terrorist participation by presenting a framework that explains how jihadists experience opposing

social influences and resist their effects. The framework identifies that interpersonal bonds opposing jihadist involvement exerted their influence through information and norms, and that these mechanisms were countered through cognitive and social resistance strategies. Drawing on a maximum variation sample of juveniles involved in jihadism in Spain, the findings further discern variances in the interactions between the jihadists and their disagreeing significant others. The study also provides the basis for testing, in the specific context of jihadist mobilization, theoretical assumptions about the relationship between social disagreement and participation in political action.

Jihadists' Experience and Resistance of Opposing Social Influences

Efforts to prevent the sampled youths' jihadist mobilization by disagreeing members of their personal networks can be interpreted in terms of the distinction between informational and normative forms of social influence. Findings show that when opposing social ties tried to induce attitudinal change, they usually did it via either the creation of reasons to agree or pressures to comply.[55] Further, the means by which informational and normative influence might flow (confrontation of perspectives, exposure to warnings, and pressures and constraints) demonstrate that relatives, friends, and other acquaintances tried to exploit dissonance and disapproval as primary causal mechanisms to produce desistance from terrorist involvement.

Opposing ties exposed the sampled individuals with information that contradicted their prior views, motivating doubts and sparking reconsideration of their positions. In line with previous research, the results suggest that network members who had a more sophisticated and up-to-date understanding of politics and religion, as well as those who were not afraid to have difficult conversations, were more likely to talk to jihadists about their attitudes.[56] Variations in how informational influence was exercised were also due to the extent and nature of disagreement between network members, as other studies have shown. Those youngsters who maintained a pro-jihadist stance in isolation from their social circle were exposed to evidence and opinions that contradicted key constructs of their radical worldview and had the integrity and trust- worthiness of their social ties and information sources questioned. In contrast, those others who were immersed in jihadist-friendly social environments, while opposed to individual involvement, were subject to an informational influence that fundamentally discouraged their participation in terrorism on the basis of risks and costs that the young people had not contemplated.

Opposing ties also attempted to curb jihadist participation by promoting compliance with norms based on custom, family tradition, community practices, or mainstream conventions. Social disapproval was expressed when youths were exposed to critics of their radical acquaintances or their activities. They also faced explicit social rejection and hostilities from their closest contacts, were physically removed from environments that enabled their radicalization and recruitment, and, in some instances, even their detention was facilitated to prevent jihadist mobilization. Results seem consistent with previous work indicating that individuals attempt to capitalize on their capacity to enforce normative influence when they hold the majority opinion in the social aggregate − and therefore form part of the social consensus that determines what is acceptable − and when their target of influence depends on them in some way − for welfare

and safety, for instance, as is the case with parents or older siblings.[57] This last aspectalso helps us to understand that individuals sometimes try to impose norms against participation in high-risk, high-cost political activities even when they themselves participate, as other previous works have found.[58]

This study further shows that the effects of social disagreement that are theoretically expected to reduce jihadist involvement did not operate in such a manner. Thepattern of results evinces that intrapersonal and interpersonal tensions may occur and still not cause a change in attitude. While dissonance produced ambiguity and doubts in youngsters, and disapproval made them feel socially uncomfortable, neither agreement nor conformity ensued, and thus jihadists persisted in their radical attitudes despite social efforts to prevent violent mobilization. In this regard, the thematic analysis lends credence to the hypothesis that individuals are capable of resisting attitudinal change when social influence targets attitudes to which they are strongly committed. In particular, the analysis found that different cognitive (contestation) and social resistance strategies (selective social exposure, circumvention) helped the sampled individuals override and mitigate the effects of informative and normative forms of influence.

Resistance to opposing influences is a complex phenomenon, insofar as the natureand intensity of its manifestations may differ among individuals. In coincidence with previous theoretical explanations, this study finds that while disagreement prompted some of the sampled individuals to defend their ideas and thus expose themselves voluntarily to dissonance and disapproval, others chose to suppress it from their immediate environment, so as to avoid the discomfort of knowledge inconsistency and social criticism, and a minority maneuvered to prevent it from even manifesting itself, in order to preserve the state of their social relations and their public image.

These competing responses are, however, not that disconnected. The analysis suggests that contestation and selective social exposure are cognitive and behavioral strategies through which opposing ties are denied their status as sources of information and normativity, because the sense of shared group membership between young people and their disagreeing significant others has been diluted. In the qualitative corpus, bothstrategies appear linked to a strong in-group identification and out-group demonization, in consistency with explorations of closed-mindedness. It could be argued that when the young people sampled began to see those with opposing views as dissimilar, deviated, or corrupting, when they imputed ignorance, dishonesty, or immorality to those who disapproved of them, they started to exclude the countervailing ties from theirin-group, and eventually no longer felt receptive to the substance of their argumentsor pressured to comply with their expectations. Interestingly, these results are also inline with theoretical approaches to social group influence that have emphasized thatone is socially influenced even without direct interpersonal contact. This explains why the sampled individuals reshaped the boundaries of their community of interactions to keep out even those who had not tried to exert on them a conscious, deliberate effortto induce behavioral change, but who were nevertheless clearly outside their in-group.Cognitive and social closure were not always explicitly manifested, however. Those sampled who opted for circumvention ignored dissenting arguments without reactingto opposing views, justifying themselves or limiting social relationships, and often avoided the causes of disagreement in their interactions in order to evade their effects.

Yet circumvention demonstrates that jihadists can disregard their oppositional ties as informationally and/or normatively inconsequential, while still seeking acceptance and a sense of belonging and purpose from those same members of their personal net- works. Consequently, it stands to reason that the sampled individuals preferred this strategy to challenge members of their personal networks who sympathized with jihadism but failed to support their violent mobilization.

Implications and Limitations

By showing that interpersonal and intrapersonal tensions caused by disagreement did not curb jihadist involvement, this article contradicts research that connects exposureto discrepancies with nonparticipation in political activities [59] in general, and violent extremist activities in particular.[60] The results of this study, however, raise other important questions about causality. Is it possible, as one stream within studies of social disagreement and political action suggests, that exposure to oppositional influences positively influenced these youths' violent mobilization? Even though this article cannot go so far as to prove a causal relationship, it can postulate, in accordance with the theoretical framework, the potential ways in which social opposition may have contributed to jihadist participation to some extent. If jihadists looked to congruent sources of information and like-minded people to alleviate their ambivalence and anxiety, it can be inferred that they achieved their needed level of attitudinal confi- dence in dealing with oppositional influences. The results also lend credence to the hypothesis that the confrontation of viewpoints with their oppositional ties may have prompted jihadists to reinforce and reaffirm their radical attitudes toward jihadismas a defensive response against threats to their strongest ideological commitments. Finally, the results also allow us to argue that jihadists might have mitigated the distress caused by social disapproval by strengthening their attachment to their constituencies comprised of like-minded individuals, ultimately boosting their personal commitment to jihadism. These hypotheses mark lines along which to advance the work begun in this article.

Both the understanding of how jihadists resist social influences opposing extrem- ism and how disagreement can impact individual engagement in terrorism offer important insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to prevent violent radicalization. To the extent that a central pillar in the design of public policies to fight extremism has consisted of the dissemination of virtual content that counteracts the propaganda of jihadist organizations, the empowerment of credible voices that question the legitimacy of the religious interpretation of Salafi-jihadism, or the promotion of social diversity in all its dimensions – and with it the potential expo- sure to dissent – the unintended and undesirable effects that these initiatives may have, in terms of an exacerbation of resistance strategies that nullify any positive influence or that even bolster violent mobilization, must be anticipated and taken into account.

Although this study contributes to advancing a research agenda on the impact of conflicting social influences on participation in terrorism-related activities, it is not without limitations. A number of methodological and analytical constraints should be taken into account. First, the retrospective accounts collected in the semi-structured interviews

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represent a potential source of inaccurate information, as they might be altered by selective memory, a posteriori rationalization, or deliberate omission. Secondly, the other two sources of information (oral trials and documentary evidence) provided only an episodic view of the relationship between the young people in the sample and their opposing ties, as only passages captured in phone taps, WhatsApp conversations, or social media were available. This makes it advisable to be cautious in interpreting and generalizing the results. Third, the small sample size may have reduced the observable diversity of the phenomenon studied. It is possible that a larger number of cases would have led to a more thorough understanding of the attempts of jihadists' opposing social ties to alter their attitudes and interfere in their decisions to participate in terrorism-related activities, as well as of the way jihadists resist and confront such influential efforts.

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Chapter 5.
Conclusions

This dissertation has aimed to shed light on the effect of social networks in the pathways that led young people in Spain to support and in some cases join the jihadist movement during the mobilization cycle initiated by the Syrian civil war and the subsequent rise of Islamic State and the collapse of its caliphate (2012-2019). Through an examination of the mechanisms, dynamics and properties of interpersonal bonds operating in violent radicalization and recruitment, I developed an empirically grounded explanation of the role of interpersonal connections in jihadist mobilization, and the variations in its effects on jihadist participation.

In this respect, this dissertation has shown that: social connections are integral to the various phases of the jihadist mobilization of youth, as they trigger multiple mechanisms that promote ideological and attitudinal alignment with global jihad, shape motivations to engage in jihadist activities, and facilitate recruitment by terrorist organizations (chapter 2); it has also demonstrated that differences in the characteristics of social networks can account for why only a fraction of those who support global jihad ultimately participate in it, insofar as participants possess stronger and more numerous connections to jihadist militants than non-participants (chapter 3); and finally, this study has highlighted the importance of examining countervailing ties that oppose participation in jihadist activities, as they may unintendedly contribute to mobilization by unleashing a reactive reaffirmation of ideological alignments and collective identities, as well as a reinforcement of ties with like-minded individuals (chapter 4).

These findings lead to two key conclusions: 1) social ties are decisive in increasing a young person's chances of participating in jihadist action, although they do not guarantee it as an ultimate consequence of the mobilization process; and 2) the

overall mobilization process among young jihadist sympathizers is the result of the interplay between social ties with conflicting orientations (facilitating and opposing).

While each chapter has already concluded with an interpretation of its respective empirical results, the following pages outline the overall conclusions of this dissertation (5.1.), along with its main contributions and implications (5.2.), limitations (5.3.) and possible future research directions (5.4.).

5.1. Discussion of the main findings

1. *Social ties are integral to the various phases of jihadist mobilization.*

Chapter 2 offers a descriptive study of the methods and techniques used by a sample of 44 radicalizing agents who attempted to recruit minors for global jihad in Spain between 2013 and 2019. The findings reveal the key, multiple roles that interpersonal connections play at the different stages of the youth jihadist mobilization.

At the start of the process, interpersonal connections attempt to generate support for the GJM in an interrelated endeavor of collective identity building, frame alignment and value transmission. In most instances, the initial aim of jihadist activists' social interactions with young individuals was to foster a salient Muslim identity, strongly associated with an in-group/out-group dichotomy, and subsequently link it with endorsement of violent jihad. Exploiting feelings of similarity, jihad was usually represented as a solution to the shared grievances (such as humiliations, alienation, and relative deprivation) endured by co-religionists in Syria, other Muslim-majority areas, as well as in Western societies. In their efforts to inculcate in minors social norms and moral rules that support violence, radicalizing agents portrayed jihadist organizations as protectors of Islam and defended individual engagement in jihad as a personal obligation incumbent upon all devout Muslims. Significantly, it was within relational contexts that young people later derived most of the benefits of supporting or participating in political violence (in particular, social approval, support, belonging and recognition), while also experiencing the emotions (solidarity, empowerment, heroism) that potentially impel

them toward collective action. The costs of opposing or staying on the sidelines were also apparent in social contexts, taking the form of punishments such as criticism or repudiation, which contributed to group pressure dynamics. In this phase of motivating supporters for jihad, interpersonal connections seemed also crucial in removing obstacles and barriers in the form of opposing influences that may interfere with the radicalization of young people, fostering thus their social isolation. Finally, to ensure effective engagement with the GJM, interpersonal links provided information and access to radical milieus conducive to indoctrination and to opportunities for participation.

The study also identified some aspects that characterize the radicalization of minors in contrast to that of adults. First, when radicalization and recruitment target minors, the transmission of values and norms conducive to violent jihad can be ingrained during the primary socialization that occurs in the early stages of life, predominantly within the family environment. This can have lasting implications for individual development, shaping aspects such as personality construction and social interactions. Secondly, minors may show greater sensitivity to social incentives that favor mobilization, inasmuch as their social desirability is very acute and they are prone to conform to the environment in which they seek a sense of belonging and validation. It is not surprising, therefore, that social rewards and punishments stood out as predominant strategies used by radicalization agents – whether in the context of family, immediate surroundings, or the online sphere – to steer young people towards participation in jihadist activities. Thirdly, the utilization of a wide range of manipulative and coercive practices, ranging from deception and emotional manipulation to physical aggression, also emerges as highly distinctive within the mobilization strategies experienced by children and adolescents.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that, as expected, different social contexts influence mobilization through distinct techniques and methods, although no significant differences were observed in the network mechanisms activated in each mobilization formula (intra-family; extra-family within the immediate environment; and extra-family in the non-immediate environment). In addition, the study revealed that the structural connection between the youth and the GJM was moderated by the

type of relational context involved in the mobilization. As such, the association of minors with global jihad was typically instigated by a radicalization agent using a horizontal or top-down strategy when the radicalization and recruitment occurred within the family, and also often when it occurred within social circles made up of friends and acquaintances. In contrast, it was more commonly initiated by the young people themselves through a bottom-up strategy in the case of mobilization in online settings.

Chapter 2 further shows that, similar to any other cycle of political mobilization, the efforts to radicalize and recruit youth in Spain between 2012 and 2019 resulted in a mobilization deficit. In particular, the study reveals that 38.6% of the young people targeted by agents of radicalization did not participate in any type of jihadist activity, either due to the absence of an ideological and attitudinal alignment with jihadism or, in cases where such affinity did exist, to the lack of motivation or obstacles hindering their involvement. That is, while different relational contexts supportive of the jihadist movement can potentially mobilize young people, they are not always capable of producing that result. This realization drove the research presented in chapter 3.

2. *Differences in the number and strength of social ties with jihadist activists explain youth variations in terrorist participation.*

Chapter 3 demonstrates that variations in participation among young people who sympathized with global jihad are contingent upon the overall effectiveness with which their social ties with the jihadist movement fulfilled crucial mobilization roles. Thus, one explanation for why some individuals connected to the jihadist movement engaged in terrorism-related activities while others did not can be found in differences in the properties of their interpersonal connections with other jihadi supporters. This key conclusion was drawn from a mixed-methods comparative analysis of the personal networks of 44 youngsters who supported the jihadist movement in Spain in the period 2012-2019, encompassing both jihadist participants and non-participants.

The study found that consequential differences in network properties relate to the number and the strength of social ties. Large networks – which result from

individuals having a high number of ties to jihadist militants – could be more determinant in mobilization than small networks due to the complex nature of jihadist radicalization and recruitment, which may require the involvement of multiple actors to fulfil the full range of social functions associated with high-risk, high-cost activism. But large networks also have their own unique qualities. The study found that they contributed to an increased awareness of the activities and goals of jihadist organizations, a normalization of extremist values, and the reaffirmation of Salafi-jihadi beliefs, which in turn affected individuals' dispositions to engage in jihadism. Additionally, they were better suited to satisfy the social needs of prospective participants through the provision of incentives such as social approval, support, and a sense of belonging. Having a wide-reaching network also ensured that sympathizers had greater access to information about jihadist mobilization opportunities and amplified the chances of encountering them.

Secondly, strong ties proved more critical than weak ties in driving jihadist participation, as they more effectively fulfilled several of the functions of social networks. While the findings of the study concur with previous research that weak bonds were a greater source of new information and thus more capable of disseminating the jihadist frame of reference in youth previously unconnected to the jihadist movement, they were also found less likely to affect youth perceptions and preferences regarding participation in jihadism. Strong ties, in contrast, are more leveraged for persuasion due to the affective and emotional weight they carry, the trust and intimacy they inspire, and the similarity among the individuals they connect. Group dynamics based on strong ties are typified by small cliques in which prolonged interaction and intense isolation facilitate the persistent echo of jihadist discourses, paving the way for groupthink and peer pressure. As a result, such ties were more capable of producing social benefits from engagement, as well as enforcing punishments and sanctions.

While the study addresses one variation in the impact of interpersonal connections, i.e., the differential *capacity* of social ties to produce participation, it points to a second variation in influence: namely, the differential *disposition* of social ties to produce participation. In this regard, the study finds that although the

sympathizers and activists connected to the youth in the sample endorsed violent jihad, not all of them considered it an individual obligation for every Muslim. As such, jihadist militants could act as both facilitating and countervailing influences in the mobilization process, fostering ideological affinity with global jihadism at the outset, but also deterring or even preventing youngsters from participating in terrorist activities later on. This underlies the limitations of social influence, as the existence of countervailing ties in the personal networks of jihadist sympathizers was not a predictor of non-participation. The evidence that ties exerted a multi-valent and differential effect in the jihadist mobilization of youth in Spain led to the research presented in Chapter 4.

3. Opposing social ties can play a key role in jihadist mobilization by triggering resistance strategies to social disagreement among radicalized youth.

Chapter 4 centers on the unsupportive sector of jihadists' social networks. By examining the instances of disagreement that a convenience sample of 11 juveniles involved in jihadist activities in Spain encountered in their interactions with family, friends, and other acquaintances, the study reveals that interactions with disagreeing others not only may fail to interrupt mobilization but can also paradoxically foster engagement through the activation of resistance strategies. This finding contribute to an understanding of jihadist mobilization as the result of the cumulative interplay of the multiple ties in which activists are immersed, with some endorsing and others rejecting participation in political violence.

In general terms, opposing ties leveraged network mechanisms that mimic, in reverse, those that facilitating and reinforcing ties try to exploit throughout the radicalization and recruitment process. The evidence presented in chapters 2 and 3 reflected the deliberate efforts of radicalization agents to shield and isolate potential participants from social influences contrary to violent extremism on the assumption that exposure to an alternative frame of reference may weaken their ideological commitment with jihad, and that the negative perception of jihadism prevalent among society could dissuade them from continuing their association with the jihadist movement. While this rationale aligns with the effects mainly ascribed to countervailing ties in the terrorism literature, chapter 4 proves that sources of

opposition activate mechanisms capable of exerting a far-reaching impact on the entire mobilization process. In addition to challenging the ideas and attitudes of the young jihadists and questioning their sources of information, discrepant others generated disincentives for involvement. This was accomplished by increasing information available to prospective participants on the risks and consequences of terrorist activities; by mitigating group-based emotions of anger and solidarity, and by raising the social costs of participation through criticism, rejection, hostility, and dissociation. Moreover, opposing ties created obstacles to engagement and attempted to disrupt the structural connection between the youth and jihadist organizations, imposing physical separation from jihadist activists or restricting youth's access to the necessary resources for participation.

To overcome these obstacles to the mobilization process, potential activists evolved a range of cognitive and social coping strategies. The youth resisted the impact of negative opinions from their social environment by contesting messages that contradicted their views and derogating discrepant voices as legitimate sources of information. The unintended repercussions arising from countervailing ties become apparent as jihadi sympathizers actively sought out coherent sources of information and supportive interpersonal connections to alleviate their ambivalence and concerns. This pursuit potentially enabled them to attain the necessary level of ideological and attitudinal certainty to transition from a passive state of sympathizing to an active one of participating. Moreover, young people coped with social rejection by resorting to social closure, striving to exclude from their relational sphere any potential social influence that opposed their worldview and sense of self. This exclusionary drift might have contributed to the prominence and instrumentality of collective identity in individual pathways towards jihadism, as selective social exposure stems from and, in turn, reinforces perceived in-group similarities and out-group differences. While isolation from opposing ties allowed jihadist supporters to escape cognitive dissonance and social disapproval, it also increased the importance of group membership, insofar as it was ties to jihadi sympathizers and militants that provided validation and support, and nurtured a consensus on the correctness of attitudes and commitments related to violent jihad.

Interestingly, the analysis offered a nuanced view of the emergence of isolation during radicalization and recruitment. Findings obtained throughout the study indicate that isolation may derive from at least one of three possible dynamics: the pressure exerted by jihadist activists, who seek to protect potential activists from alternative sources of influence; the response of the young person's social environment, which rejected their affinity with jihad; and the reaction of potential activists themselves, who attempted to flee cognitive dissonance and social disapproval, seeking consensus and validation from like-minded peers.

5.2. Scientific contributions and policy implications

This thesis and its findings contribute on a methodological, empirical, and analytical level to the existing research agenda on the effects of social networks in jihadist mobilization. It also offers insights that bear policy implications.

This research has advanced a more nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between beliefs, actions, and interpersonal connections within the dynamics of violent radicalization. Past scholarship on terrorism fostered a deterministic view of the relationship between social ties and terrorist mobilization, so that the former was seen as unequivocally determinant and unconditionally supportive for the latter. This perspective was influenced by the fact that certain researchers focused their analyses solely on bonds that promote participation, and mainly relied on study samples of individuals engaged in jihadist actions. In contrast, this dissertation contributes to an increasing body of research that contends that social ties are crucial in increasing the likelihood of an individual's involvement in political action, while not ensuring it as an ultimate outcome of the mobilization process.[140]

To develop this basic line of reasoning, my research has overcome some methodological and empirical limitations identified in previous network analysis of

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[140] Matthew Ward, "Rethinking Social Movement Micromobilization: Multi-Stage Theory and the Role of Social Ties".

jihadist mobilization. One of the aspects it corrects is the tendency of relational analyses in the field of terrorism studies to sample on the dependent variable. It does so by adopting a case-control design in chapter 3, comparing a sample of young participants and non-participants with personal connections to global jihadism. Case-control designs are rare in studies of conventional political action, and even rarer in studies of political violence, due to difficulties in data collection.[141] However, this methodological design is key to explaining how social ties lead jihad sympathizers to become activists, since the absence of a control group impedes empirical contributions from providing a robust causal account of why, subject to identical structural factors and with the same individual characteristics, some persons join terrorist organizations and others do not.[142]

This thesis also sustains its contribution to the examination of how social networks shape individual paths to political violence in the empirical acknowledgment of all the potential sources of discrepancy prevalent within the social environment of global jihad sympathizers. This analytical endeavor has enabled me to develop a complete picture of how opposing ties affect the ideas, predispositions, and actions of young jihadists, thus capturing how they can positively impact mobilization. This finding is particularly novel in research on jihadism, as terrorism scholars have often treated the effects of ties that reject and constrain extremism in ways that emphasize their role in preventing, deterring, or disrupting jihadist actions. In investigating how jihadists experienced and confronted disagreement within their networks, my research has also yielded evidence consistent with an emerging scholarly discourse in terrorism studies underscoring the complex nature of the multivalence of social ties.[143] This discourse challenges simplifying assumptions in research in the domains of collective action and high-risk, high-cost activism, which presumed a direct correspondence between the influence

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[141] Walgrave and Ketelaars, "The Recruitment Functions of Social Ties."

[142] Dalgaard-Nielsen, "Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know"; Helmus, "Why and How Some People Become Terrorists".

[143] Malthaner, "Contextualizing Radicalization: The Emergence of the "Sauerland-Group" from Radical Networks and the Salafist Movement."

wielded by an individual and his or her own trajectory.[144] Such an assumption would imply that all activists exert a supportive effect on jihadist participation, whereas the evidence presented in this dissertation indicates otherwise: the same social bond can have both positive and negative impacts on mobilization, with its effects evolving throughout the radicalization process.

The scholarly contributions of this research hold relevancy for policymakers and practitioners seeking to prevent violent radicalization and counter terrorism.[145] By shedding light on the network processes and group dynamics that contribute to jihadist involvement, this dissertation suggest the relational factors that could be addressed to decrease the chances that cognitively radicalized youth will become behaviorally radicalized. That is, to put it in terms in line with SMT, the potential interest of this dissertation lies in that it could provide insight into how to increase the mobilization deficit of the GJM, thereby diminishing its ability to attract sympathizers, motivate them to become involved, and, eventually, help them make the leap to action.

Some concrete implications can be formulated, both in the repressive dimension of counter-terrorism and in the preventive dimension of countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Firstly, the greater likelihood that individuals who are immersed in wide social networks associated with the jihadist movement will end up becoming involved in terrorist activities underscores the need to act in those contexts where these extensive relational structures emerge and take shape. On the one hand, this implies identifying the areas that serve as "hotbeds" or "breeding grounds" for violent radicalization and intervening both through police action, with the dismantling of the cells and groups that recruit in these areas, and through social

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[144] McAdam, "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer"; Omar McDoom, "It's Who You Know: Social Networks, Interpersonal Connections, And Participation in Collective Violence" No. 140. *Households in Conflict Network* (2011).

[145] Some of the policy implications derived from the findings of this thesis have been discussed previously in analytical reports I have authored for the Elcano Royal Institute. See: Álvaro Vicente, "Fórmulas Utilizadas Para la Radicalización y el Reclutamiento Yihadista de Menores en España", *Revista Elcano* 24, (Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2018): 76-94; Álvaro Vicente, "Social Ties And Jihadist Terrorism: What Turns Violent Radicalisation Into Terrorist Involvement?", *ARI 55/2021*, (Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2021): 1-12.

action by local government institutions and civil society organizations, putting an end to the exclusion, marginalization and discrimination that dominate in these local environments. This can help to undermine social support for global jihad among their populations, and prevent the structural connection to jihadism. Secondly, preventing the configuration of extensive networks supportive of jihadism also requires targeting virtual platforms, as this dissertation has shown that the removal of radicalizing agents can be effective in interrupting the recruitment cycle of new followers by jihadist organizations. However, if the neutralization of profiles does not occur early in the radicalization process, it is possible that communication between radicalized youth and jihadist activists may end up moving to spaces that offer greater confidentiality and where it is more difficult to intervene. Thus, acting in the online sphere in a short period of time is decisive to stop the strengthening of weak bonds forged online.

Likewise, preventing the consolidation of contacts between young people and jihadist activists involves promoting initiatives in the field P/CVE. A good example of the former is the actions developed in some European countries to encourage young students to develop socio-emotional skills such as those related to identifying and resisting group pressures. Similarly, the training of parents, first-line practitioners (such as educators or social care workers) and members of local communities in the detection of vulnerabilities to radicalization processes is already a widespread practice in the European context. However, the results of this thesis also point to the risks of these initiatives producing unwanted and undesirable effects, in terms of an exacerbation of resistance strategies in radicalized youth that nullify any positive influence or even reinforce violent mobilization.

Finally, this thesis has shown that radicalization processes in the private sphere of the family, as well as in groups of friends and romantic relationships, can have an exclusively cognitive orientation and therefore do not necessarily aim to transcend to the level of illegal and violent behaviour. This is a relevant consideration in, for example, any decision regarding the care and custody of minors in radicalized families, as the protection of the integral development of children and adolescents requires careful assessment of the situations in which situations of risk and neglect

occur. A response adapted to each case makes it necessary to assess this circumstance, so as to comply with the principle of the best interests of the child, which always governs the adoption of any measure in this area.

5.3. Research limitations

While this dissertation makes a contribution to the research agenda concerning the interaction among social networks, political violence, and youth, it is not exempt from limitations. Some of these have already been acknowledged throughout the empirical work.

Particularly relevant are the obstacles related to access to social network data, which poses significant challenges related to defining, observing, measuring, and modelling interpersonal associations and influences. Two concepts are essential to elucidate these obstacles and to understand the methodological limitations that affect the analysis in this dissertation. The first of them is "dark networks", which refers to those relational structures that engage in covert, illegal activity and take precautions to prevent being exposed or infiltrated. The data associated with these covert groups are usually incomplete, uncertain and ambiguous.[146] Specifically, there are often two limitations that researchers encounter when attempting to compile valid information from dark networks: (1) missing nodes and links – i.e. overlooking members of these networks–, which results in false negatives; and (2) incorrectly capturing relationships –i.e. including individuals who do not actually belong to these networks–, which results in false positives. Moreover, if proving the existence or inexistence of interpersonal links within dark networks is challenging, defining their specific characteristics is far more problematic.[147] The reader will have noted that this dissertation draws on multiple sources of information and data collection methods to triangulate the evidence obtained about the subjects under analysis. Even so, fragility

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[146] Luke M. Gerdes, "Introduction" in *Illuminating Dark Networks: The Study of Clandestine Groups and Organizations*, ed. Luke M. Gerdes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2.

[147] James F. Morris and Richard F. Deckro, "SNA data difficulties with dark networks," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 5, no. 2 (2013): 70-93.

of dark network's data may have impacted on the results and conclusions drawn from the study.

The second concept that illustrates the methodological hurdles faced in this dissertation is the concept of "hard-to-reach populations", which refers to those study sub-groups that are difficult to access and involve in research. Jihadi sympathizers and activists can be considered a paradigmatic "hard-to-reach population" due to their clandestine activity, incarceration, or deliberate efforts to distance themselves from the population of interest as a result of stigmatization. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the difficulties in obtaining a statistically representative sample of radicalized youth, selected using a random sampling technique, were an impediment to adopting a quantitative methodology. Although the use of non-probability sampling methods in qualitative methodologies is commonplace, and even more so in studies with hard-to-reach populations, these choices also have limitations.[148] The use of convenience samples, or snowball samples, as in this thesis, are affected by biases in sample composition that can limit the theoretical relevance and generalization of the results.[149]

In addition to these methodological challenges that affect the research as a whole, each of the chapters may be affected by particular constraints. Chapter 2, which examines the different routes through which minors are mobilized according to the relational context in which the process occurs, would have benefited from greater conceptual consistency around the mechanisms and dynamics of social networks. Even though this dissertation assumes that jihadist mobilization is a multiphase process, Chapter 3 models it as if it were a one-step process (participate/non-participate). If the data access restrictions I mentioned above did not operate, a study with a larger sample would have allowed us to examine the role and differential impacts of social ties in successive analytical phases, such as the generation of ideological affinity (distinguishing between youth who ideologically align with the jihadist movement and youth who do not), the creation of motivations

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[148] Laura S. Abrams, "Sampling 'Hard to Reach Populations in Qualitative Research: The Case of Incarcerated Youth," *Qualitative Social Work* 9, no. 4 (2010): 536-550.

[149] Jean Faugier and Mary Sargeant, "Sampling Hard to Reach Populations," *Journal of advanced nursing* 26, no. 4 (1997): 790-797.

for involvement (comparing youth who develop a desire to engage in jihadist activities and youth who do not), and actual participation. Finally, Chapter 4 would have benefited from a case-control sample, which would have allowed me to study the differential effects of exposure to oppositional ties on radicalized youths who showed variation in the dependent variable (participate/not participate).

5.4. Future lines of research

Addressing the limitations outlined above in new studies would contribute significantly to a more nuanced and complete understanding of the relationship between personal ties and jihadist involvement. In addition, from the findings and implications of my work, specific issues emerge that research could also further develop.

Future research on network effects in jihadist participation could go further by examining more thoroughly the complex interactions between ties' disposition to produce jihadist participation and radicalization outcomes. Social movement research has shown that the role of social bonds varies depending on the costs and risks attached to the actions that are supposedly facilitated, and this could occur within the social networks of the young jihadist sympathizers. While this dissertation has shown that social closeness between sympathizers and activists (as when there is a kinship link between the two) tends to limit participation in high-risk and high-cost activities, such as traveling to a conflict zone, it remains to be assessed whether minors would face constraining pressures if they had opted for less dangerous forms of participation, such as promoting jihadist content online.

Further research efforts could also examine other sub-aspects raised in this dissertation, such as the differences between countervailing ties who oppose jihadist participation. Chapter 3 and 4 have shown that both intra-movement ties and extra-movement ties can serve as deterrents of terrorist involvement, but a significant difference between the two exists: the former promote radicalization while discouraging participation; the latter reject both radical ideas and actions. While Chapter 4 has provided anecdotal evidence that social bonds connected and

unconnected to the jihadist movement activate different network mechanisms to constrain jihadist participation, this issue begs for more research due to its relevance in terms of policies aimed at preventing violent extremism.

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Annexes

Annex 1.

Table A1. Characteristics and formulas of radicalization and recruitment in the study sample of chapter 2.

Nº	Police operation date	Police operation name	Province of residence in Spain	Sex	Age	Nationality	Intra-family	Extra family within the immediate environment	Extra family in the non-immediate environment	Succeeds in generating mobilization potential
1	06/2013	Cesto	Ceuta	M	39	Spanish		X		Yes
2	03/2014	Azteca	Melilla	M	51	Spanish			X	Yes
3	03/2014	Azteca	France*	M	22	Belgian			X	Yes
4	03/2014	Azteca	France*	M	23	France			X	Yes
5	05/2014	Jáver	Melilla	M	32	Spanish	X	X		Yes
6	05/2014	Jáver	Melilla	M	43	Spanish		X		Yes
7	06/2014	Gala	Madrid	M	42	Spanish	X			No
8	06/2014	Gala	Madrid	M	44	Moroccan	X			No
9	08/2014	Kibera	Melilla	M	19	Spanish		X		No
10	12/2014	Kibera	Melilla	M	24	Spanish		X		Yes
11	12/2014	Kibera	Ceuta	F	17	Spanish			X	Yes
12	12/2014	Kibera	Melilla	M	28	Spanish		X	X	Yes
13	12/2014	Kibera	Melilla	F	19	Spanish		X	X	Yes
14	02/2015	Unknown	Tarragona	M	17	Moroccan	X			Yes
15	03/2015	Ghuraba	Ávila	M	27	Moroccan	X		X	Yes
16	03/2015	Tebas	Barcelona	F	52	Moroccan	X			Yes
17	03/2015	Pasarela	Barcelona	F	33	Moroccan	X			Yes
18	04/2015	Caronte	Barcelona	M	45	Spanish		X		Yes
19	12/2014	Caronte	Barcelona	M	24	Moroccan		X		Yes

Nº	Police operation date	Police operation name	Province of residence in Spain	Sex	Age	Nationality	Intra-family	Extra family within the immediate environment	Extra family in the non-immediate environment	Succeeds in generating mobilization potential
20	12/2014	Caronte	Barcelona	M	18	Brazilian		X		Yes
21	04/2015	Caronte	Barcelona	M	17	Paraguayan		X		No
22	04/2015	Caronte	Barcelona	M	34	Moroccan		X		Yes
23	04/2015	Ulbah	Melilla	F	27	Spanish	X			Yes
24	07/2015	Kibera	Arrecife	F	44	Spanish			X	No
25	07/2015	Kibera	Melilla	M	29	Spanish	X			No
26	10/2015	Custodia	Badalona	M	20	Spanish		X		No
27	10/2015	Custodia	France*	M	27	Portuguese	X			No
28	10/2015	Custodia	Xaraco	F	20	Moroccan	X	X	X	Yes
29	10/2015	Custodia	Santa Cruz de Retamar	F	23	Moroccan	X		X	Yes
30	12/2015	Gungan	Ceuta	M	34	Spanish		X		No
31	12/2015	Pompeya	Las Palmas	F	19	Moroccan	X			No
32	08/2016	Cola	Barcelona	M	22	Pakistani			X	No
33	11/2016	Unknown	Roda de Ter	M	26	Moroccan	X			No
34	12/2016	Endor	Ceuta	F	26	Spanish	X	X		Yes
35	12/2016	Endor	Ceuta	F	21	Spanish	X			Yes
36	01/2017	Unknown	San Sebastián	M	25	Spanish	X		X	No
37	02/2017	Unknown	Alicante	F	36	Spanish	X			No
38	08/2017	Atentado Barcelona	Ripoll	M	45	Moroccan		X		Yes
39	08/2017	Atentado Barcelona	Ripoll	M	28	Moroccan	X			Yes
40	08/2017	Atentado Barcelona	Ripoll	M	22	Moroccan	X			Yes

Nº	Police operation date	Police operation name	Province of residence in Spain	Sex	Age	Nationality	Intra-family	Extra family within the immediate environment	Extra family in the non-immediate environment	Succeeds in generating mobilization potential
41	08/2017	Atentado Barcelona	Ripoll	M	24	Moroccan	X			Yes
42	09/2017	Unknown	Melilla	M	39	Spanish		X		No
43	11/2016	Ghanima	Ceuta	M	22	Spanish	X			No
44	02/2015	Jardin Beni	Melilla	M	-	Spanish		X		No

* Three individuals had their official residence in France, but operated in Spain

Annex 2.

Table A2. Descriptive statistics for the study sample in chapter 3.

	Province of residence in Spain	Sex	Age	No ties	Immediate ties	Organizational ties	Immediate and organizational ties	Number of ties	Strength of ties
Participant 1	Ceuta	F	14	0	0	0	1	12	1,50
Participant 2	Barcelona	M	17	0	0	0	1	10	2,10
Participant 3	Melilla	F	17	0	0	0	1	9	1,44
Participant 4	Tarragona	M	15	0	0	1	0	1	1,00
Participant 5	Tarragona	M	16	0	0	0	1	2	2,00
Participant 6	Barcelona	M	17	0	0	1	0	8	1,13
Participant 7	Barcelona	M	15	0	0	0	1	9	1,89
Participant 8	Barcelona	M	15	0	0	0	1	9	1,89
Participant 9	Barcelona	M	17	0	0	0	1	10	2,00
Participant 10	Valencia	F	17	0	0	1	0	4	2,00
Participant 11	Girona	F	17	0	0	1	0	5	2,00
Participant 12	Las Palmas	M	17	1	0	0	0	0	-
Participant 13	Melilla	M	15	0	0	0	1	9	1,89
Participant 14	Ceuta	F	15	0	0	0	1	21	2,05
Participant 15	Madrid	M	17	0	0	0	1	3	2,00
Participant 16	Barcelona	F	17	0	0	0	1	5	2,00
Participant 17	Madrid	M	16	0	1	0	0	5	1,60
Participant 18	Melilla	M	17	0	0	0	1	9	1,89
Participant 19	Girona	M	16	0	0	0	1	6	2,67
Participant 20	Girona	M	17	0	0	0	1	6	2,67

	Province of residence in Spain	Sex	Age	No ties	Immediate ties	Organizational ties	Immediate and organizational ties	Number of ties	Strength of ties
Participant 21	Girona	M	17	0	0	0	1	6	2,67
Participant 22	Madrid	M	17	0	0	0	1	3	2,33
Participant 23	Córdoba	M	15	1	0	0	0	0	-
Non-participant 1	Madrid	M	16	1	0	0	0	0	-
Non-participant 2	Melilla	M	17	0	1	0	0	8	2,13
Non-participant 3	Melilla	M	16	0	0	0	1	9	1,89
Non-participant 4	Ceuta	F	17	0	0	1	0	1	1,00
Non-participant 5	Girona	M	17	0	0	1	0	1	1,00
Non-participant 6	Barcelona	F	16	0	1	0	0	4	2,00
Non-participant 7	Barcelona	F	15	0	0	1	0	2	1,00
Non-participant 8	Ceuta	F	17	0	0	0	1	3	1,00
Non-participant 9	Barcelona	F	17	0	0	1	0	1	1,00
Non-participant 10	Valencia	F	16	0	0	1	0	2	1,00
Non-participant 11	Melilla	F	16	0	1	0	0	3	2,00
Non-participant 12	Barcelona	F	16	0	1	0	0	2	2,00
Non-participant 13	Alicante	M	16	0	0	1	0	1	1,00
Non-participant 14	Melilla	F	17	0	1	0	0	3	1,33
Non-participant 15	Melilla	F	17	0	0	0	1	4	1,25
Non-participant 16	Melilla	F	17	0	0	0	1	5	1,00
Non-participant 17	Córdoba	M	17	0	1	0	0	1	3,00
Non-participant 18	Córdoba	M	16	0	1	0	0	1	3,00
Non-participant 19	Girona	M	17	0	1	0	0	1	1,00
Non-participant 20	-	F	17	0	0	1	0	1	1,00
Non-participant 21	Ceuta	F	14	0	0	0	1	3	1,00

Annex 3.

Table A3. Coding of nodes in the sociogram.

Code	Role	Code	Role	Code	Role
A1	Activist	A54	Activist	MS12	Mobilization structure
A2	Activist	A55	Activist	MS13	Mobilization structure
A3	Activist	A56	Activist	NPa1	Non participant
A5	Activist	A57	Activist	NPa2	Non participant
A6	Activist	A58	Activist	NPa3	Non participant
A7	Activist	A59	Activist	NPa4	Non participant
A8	Activist	A60	Activist	NPa5	Non participant
A9	Activist	A61	Activist	NPa6	Non participant
A10	Activist	A62	Activist	NPa7	Non participant
A11	Activist	A63	Activist	NPa8	Non participant
A12	Activist	A64	Activist	NPa9	Non participant
A13	Activist	A65	Activist	NPa10	Non participant
A14	Activist	A66	Activist	NPa11	Non participant
A15	Activist	A67	Activist	NPa12	Non participant
A16	Activist	A68	Activist	NPa13	Non participant
A17	Activist	A69	Activist	NPa14	Non participant
A18	Activist	A70	Activist	NPa15	Non participant
A19	Activist	A71	Activist	NPa16	Non participant
A20	Activist	A85	Activist	NPa17	Non participant
A21	Activist	A72	Activist	NPa18	Non participant
A22	Activist	A73	Activist	NPa19	Non participant
A23	Activist	A74	Activist	NPa20	Non participant
A24	Activist	A75	Activist	NPa21	Non participant
A25	Activist	A76	Activist	Pa1	Participant
A26	Activist	A77	Activist	Pa2	Participant
A27	Activist	A78	Activist	Pa3	Participant
A28	Activist	A79	Activist	Pa4	Participant
A29	Activist	A80	Activist	Pa5	Participant
A30	Activist	A81	Activist	Pa6	Participant
A31	Activist	A82	Activist	Pa7	Participant
A32	Activist	A83	Activist	Pa8	Participant
A33	Activist	A84	Activist	Pa9	Participant
A34	Activist	A87	Activist	Pa10	Participant
A35	Activist	A86	Activist	Pa11	Participant
A36	Activist	A88	Activist	Pa12	Participant
A37	Activist	A89	Activist	Pa13	Participant
A38	Activist	A90	Activist	Pa14	Participant
A39	Activist	A91	Activist	Pa15	Participant
A40	Activist	A92	Activist	Pa16	Participant

Code	Role	Code	Role	Code	Role
A41	Activist	MS1	Mobilization structure	Pa17	Participant
A42	Activist	MS2	Mobilization structure	Pa18	Participant
A45	Activist	MS3	Mobilization structure		
A46	Activist	MS4	Mobilization structure		
A47	Activist	MS5	Mobilization structure		
A48	Activist	MS6	Mobilization structure		
A49	Activist	MS7	Mobilization structure		
A50	Activist	MS8	Mobilization structure		
A51	Activist	MS10	Mobilization structure		
A52	Activist	MS10	Mobilization structure		
A53	Activist	MS11	Mobilization structure		

Annex 4.

Table A4. Matrix of relationships between nodes.

PA01	PA03	A19	MS5	MS6	A62	A63	A65	A42	A13	MS7	A87	A86							
PA02	A61	A37	A8	A26	A20	A16	A58	A32	A59	A76									
PA03	A10	MS4	A63	MS6	A19	A63	A65	A17	MS7										
PA04	MS12																		
PA05	PA04	MS12																	
PA06	A3	MS3	MS2	A24	A14	A15	A33	MS1											
PA07	A64	A57	A7	A2	A69	A22	A12	A41	A56										
PA08	A64	A57	A7	A2	A69	A22	A12	A41	A56										
PA09	PA02	A61	A37	A8	A26	A20	A16	A58	A32	A59									
PA10	A60	A33	A35	A78															
PA11	A52	A75	A77	A78	MS11														
PA12																			
PA13	A11	A45	A48	A54	A28	A10	A25	A70	MS4										
PA14	A36	A46	A21	A9	A34	A71	A51	A55	A31	A47	A29	A23	A10	PA03	A50	A88	A89	A90	A91	A92	MS13
PA15	A80	A79	MS8																
PA16	PA02	A61	A7	A2	A76														
PA17	A38	A72	A82	A83	A84	A85													
PA18	A11	A45	A48	A54	A28	A10	A25	A70	MS4										
PA19	A68	A66	A39	A40	A53	A1													
PA20	A68	A66	A39	A40	A53	A1													
PA21	A68	A66	A39	A40	A53	A1													
PA22	A6	A67	MS10																
PA23																			

NPA1								
NPA2	A11	A45	A48	A54	A28	A10	A25	A70
NPA3	A11	A45	MS4	A48	A54	A28	A10	A25	A70
NPA4	MS1							
NPA5	MS1							
NPA6	A64	A57	A69	A22				
NPA11	A3	A5						
NPA12	A27	A18	A9					
NPA13	A60							
NPA14	A3	MS1						
NPA15	A25	A63	PA03					
NPA16	PA09	A58						
NPA17	A2							
NPA18	A63	A19	PA03					
NPA19	A63	A19	PA03	MS7				
NPA20	A63	A19	PA03	MS7	A65			
NPA21	PA23							
NPA22	PA23							
NPA23	A1							
NPA24	A30							
NPA9	A73	A74	A81					
A7	A2	A69	A22	A12				
A2	A69	A22	A12					
A69	A22	A12						
A22	A12							
A57	A64	A56						
A36	A46	A21	A55	A47	A29	A62		
A46	A21	A55	A47	A29	A62			

A9	A34	A31	A47	A62			
A31	A34						
A55	A21	A47					
A51	A29	A62					
A6	A67						
A11	A45	A48	A54	A28	MS4		
A45	A48	A54	A28	MS4			
A54	A28	MS4					
A28	MS4						
A10	A25	MS4	A63	A19	A87	A86	
A25	MS4	A63	A19				
A61	A37	A8	A26	A20	A16	A58	A32	A59
A37	A8	A26	A20	A16	A58	A32	A59
A8	A26	A20	A16	A58	A32	A59	
A26	A20	A16	A58	A32	A59		
A20	A16	A58	A32	A59			
A16	A58	A32	A59				
A58	A32	A59					
A32	A59						
A62	A29						
A63	A19	A65					
A68	A66	A39	A1	A40	A53		
A66	A39	A1	A40	A53			
A39	A1	A40	A53				
A1	A40	A53					
A40	A53						
A24	MS3	MS2	A3	A14			
A14	MS3	MS2	A3				

A27	A18			
A3	MS1	MS2	MS3	A33
A60	A35	A33	A78	
A75	A77			
A38	A72	A82	A83	A84	A85
A72	A82	A83	A84	A85
A83	A84	A85		
A84	A85			
A57	A7	A2		
A7	A2			
A78	A75			
A79	A27			
A73	A74	A81		
A74	A81			
A87	A86			
A88	A89	A90		
A89	A90			
A91	A92			
MS13	A36			

Annex 5.
Subjects interviewed

Interviewee 1 – Young jihadi activist

Type of interview	In-person interview. Recorded and transcribed *verbatim.*
Date and time	October 17, 2019. From 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm.
Location	Madrid. Offices of a law firm.
Background information	Young male born in Tetuan (Morocco) in 1997. In 2018, the individual was convicted to 2 years of prison for glorifying terrorism online.
Interviewee summary	The young male became radicalized in Salafi-jihadism during his adolescence while residing in a center for unaccompanied minors in the city of Ceuta. The onset of his radicalization can be traced back to the moment when his older brother decided to travel from Morocco to Syria, where he ultimately died while fighting alongside the Islamic State. The interviewee disseminated propaganda material about IS and other jihadist organizations through the internet and glorified his brother's death as that of a martyr.
Context and relationship to research	Within the social milieu of the young individual, there were individuals who expressed sympathy towards global jihad, including family members and friends, as well as activists who travelled to Syria as FTF. Notably, this cohort includes not only his older brother but also several acquaintances from his hometown, with whom he made periodic visits while still residing in Ceuta.
Main discussion topics	Attitudes towards jihad in his family environment, peer group, and neighborhood; social influences during his radicalization and involvement in jihadist activities (collective identity, frame alignment, transmission of values and norms, social incentives, emotions, structural connections, pre-existing ties, organizational ties, strong ties, weak ties, number of ties); experiences of disagreement within his social environment (exposure to warnings); resistance strategies to disagreement (contestation).

Interviewee 2 - Penitentiary professional

Type of interview	Questionnaire-based interview
Date and time	October 19-20, 2019
Location	-
Background information	Female key informant holding a position of responsibility in the intelligence unit of the Catalan penitentiary system dedicated to the supervision and assessment of inmates convicted of jihadist terrorism offenses.
Interviewee summary	The interviewee provided information about two individuals who served prison sentences for jihadist activities. The first is a young male who was convicted for attempting to travel to Syria to join the Islamic State (interviewee 20). The second is a young woman who was convicted for the dissemination of jihadist propaganda (interviewee 21).
Context and relationship to research	Both young individuals became radicalized through individuals who were part of their extra-family immediate environment (classmate, neighbors, and romantic partners). The peer group plays a less prominent role in the process, as while some grievances are expressed within the group based on the suffering of the Syrian civilian population, there is no support for the Islamic State. The closest family members of the young individuals are unaware of the radicalization process and therefore do not interfere with it.
Main discussion topics	Attitudes towards jihad in their family environment, peer group, and neighborhood; social influences during their radicalization and involvement in jihadist activities; exposure to opposing influences in their environment.

Interviewee 3 - Local social educator

Type of interview	In-person interview. Recorded and transcribed *verbatim.*
Date and time	October 29, 2019. From 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm.
Location	Ripoll (Girona). Municipal Offices.
Background information	Female key informant employed as a local social educator (first-line practitioner). Had direct and prolonged involvement with some youngsters who integrated the cell that committed the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils, in August, 2017. Furthermore, she resided in close proximity to one of these minors and his brother, both of whom were part of the jihadist cell.
Interviewee summary	The interviewee provided information about three young individuals who underwent radicalization during their teenage years and lost their lives while carrying out a terrorist attack on August 17, 2017, in Cambrils (Tarragona).
Context and relationship to research	The three individuals were the youngest members of the cell, drawn into it by their older brothers, and radicalized under the influence of an imam who led prayers at a local mosque. The small, tight-knit group was in a context of multiple overlapping social ties: some of its members were brothers and cousins, and most had played in the same football team, attended the only local public high-school, and lived in the same neighborhood. The intensive mobilization process was also facilitated by their similar backgrounds: all were – except for the imam – youngsters aged between mid-teens and early twenties, second-generation descendants of immigrants from Morocco, with common professional and leisure interests.
Main discussion topics	Attitudes towards jihad in their family environment, peer group, and neighborhood; social influences during their radicalization and involvement in jihadist activities (collective identity, frame alignment, social incentives, conformity, peer pressure, pre-existing ties, strong ties); isolation.

Interviewee 4 - Friend and acquaintance of four young jihadi activist

Type of interview	Phone interview. Recorded and transcribed *verbatim.*
Date and time	October 30, 2019. From 11:30 am to 12:00 pm.
Location	-
Background information	Male key informant. Resident in Ripoll. Childhood friend of one of the youths who died while carrying out a terrorist attack in Cambrils (Tarragona) in August 2017. They were classmates in a vocational training program and belonged to the same group of friends, visiting the gym together. Furthermore, the interviewee was acquainted with two other young members of the cell.
Interviewee summary	The interviewee provided information about one of the young individuals who belonged to the Ripoll cell.
Context and relationship to research	The same as that provided in Interviewee 3's note.
Main discussion topics	Connections between cell members (social incentives, conformity, peer pressure, pre-existing ties, strong ties); attitudes towards jihad in their family environment, peer group, and neighborhood; relations with the social environment opposed to the jihadist movement (selective social exposure, circumvention).

Interviewees 5, 6 & 7 - Law enforcement agents

Type of interview	Questionnaire-based interview.
Date and time	Questionnaire 1: 19-25, October 2019. Questionnaire 2: 1-6. November 2019.
Location	-
Background information	Male key informants serving as law enforcement officials with counterterrorism tasks in Melilla. They were responsible for conducting police investigations into different agents of radicalization who targeted minors in the city, as well as a group of young people who were mobilized by the jihadist movement in the early years of the Syrian conflict.
Interviewee summary	The interviewees provide information about four young sympathizers of the Islamic State and their social networks. Two of the individuals were involved in jihadist activities and were subsequently convicted: one, arrested in 2016, received a two-year prison sentence for participating in a virtual platform dedicated to disseminating official IS propaganda; the other, arrested in 2017, was sentenced to two and a half years in prison for radicalizing and recruiting other youths. The remaining two sympathizers, whom the interviewees provide information about, did not engage in jihadist activities. They frequented radical milieus where discussions regarding the evolution of the Syrian conflict and support for IS took place.
Context and relationship to research	The four young individuals, about whom the key informants provided information, were radicalized by a jihadist cell dedicated to the recruitment of volunteers for deployment to conflict zones. The young individuals were friends and residents of the same neighborhood, where they lived alongside other sympathizers and activists of the global jihad. Among them were members of the radicalizing cell, as well as other activists and even FTF who died while combatting in Syria. The brother of one of the non-participating youth was a member of the recruitment cell and was convicted of terrorism offenses
Main discussion topics	Attitudes towards jihad in their family environment, peer group, and neighborhood; social influences during their radicalization and involvement in jihadist activities (collective identity, frame alignment, social incentives, structural connection, pre-existing ties; strong ties; number of ties); exposure to opposing influences in their social environment (confrontation of perspectives).

Interviewees 8 & 9 – High-school teacher and principal

Type of interview	In-person interview. *Verbatim* handwritten notes.
Date and time	November 14, 2019. From 10:30 am to 12:45 pm.
Location	Ripoll (Girona). County council offices.
Background information	Key informants, a female high-school principal, and a male teacher, both of whom work at the educational institution where the three radicalized individuals studied during their high school and vocational training years in Ripoll. While one informant had direct teaching contact with the youths, the other, as the school principal, shares insights gathered from other teachers.
Interviewee summary	The interviewees provided information about three young individuals who underwent radicalization during their teenage years and lost their lives while carrying out a terrorist attack on August 17, 2017, in Cambrils (Tarragona).
Context and relationship to research	The same as that provided in Interviewee 3's note.
Main discussion topics	Relationships among cell members (social incentives and punishments, conformity, peer pressure, strong ties); social ties outside the jihadist movement; social isolation.

Interviewees 10 & 11 - First-line practitioners in a Social Welfare Consortium

Type of interview	In-person interview. Recorded and transcribed *verbatim.*
Date and time	November 14, 2019. From 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm.
Location	Ripoll (Girona). County council offices.
Background information	Female key informants employed as a psychologist and a local cultural mediator (first-line practitioners) in the Social Welfare Consortium of the county council of Ripollet. They worked extensively with the families of the three adolescents of the town of Ripoll who participated in the 2017 Barcelona and Cambrils attacks. The interviewees have meticulously mapped the immediate environment of the young individuals who formed that jihadist cell and have conducted interviews with several of their closest associates.
Interviewee summary	The interviewees provided information about three young individuals who underwent radicalization during their teenage years and lost their lives while carrying out a terrorist attack on August 17, 2017, in Cambrils (Tarragona).
Context and relationship to research	The same as that provided in Interviewee 3's note.
Main discussion topics	Connections between cell members (collective identity, frame alignment, transmission of values and norms, social incentives, conformity, peer pressure, emotions, structural connection, pre-existing ties, strong ties); connections with jihadist sympathizers who are not involved in terrorist activities (normalization of violence); links with non-jihadist Salafists; relations with the social environment opposed to the jihadist movement (selective social exposure, circumvention).

Interviewee 12 – Young jihadi sympathizer (non-participant)

Type of interview	Online chat interview.
Date and time	December 2, 2019. From 14:35 to 16:20.
Location	-
Background information	A young female from Ceuta. She exhibited sympathy for the jihadist movement. She participated in several Facebook groups and followed Twitter profiles that promoted a discourse endorsing violent jihad, frequently expressing approval through likes and comments. Notably, one of these groups was created and administered by an agent of online radicalization who specifically targeted teenagers. The individual responsible for this activity was arrested in 2015 and subsequently sentenced to a six-year prison term. Additionally, the interviewee posted messages of support for individuals who had been detained and convicted for their involvement in jihadist activities within Spain.
Interviewee summary	The young woman's online activity revealed that she was connected to several online activists in Spain. In addition, she lives in a neighbourhood in Ceuta from which some of her neighbours have left to fight in Syria as FTFs.
Context and relationship to research	The interviewee had a network of virtual contacts that connect her to the global jihadist movement, although she was not involved in its activities. While people in her close environment was also involved in jihadist activities, she has no direct links to them.
Main discussion topics	Contacts with global jihadist sympathizers and activists (collective identity, frame alignment, transmission of values and norms, social incentives, emotions, structural connection).

Interviewee 13 – Young jihadi sympathizer (non-participant)

Type of interview	Online chat interview.
Date and time	December 7-8, 2019.
Location	-
Background information	A young male from Morocco, but a resident of Catalonia since childhood. His online activity reveals that he is sympathetic to global jihad. He also has relations with other sympathizers and activists of the jihadist movement.
Interviewee summary	The interviewee is linked to several global jihadist activists and sympathizers in Spain.
Context and relationship to research	The interviewee related to a young activist who was a former classmate and neighbor. The activist was convicted for having attempted to travel to Syria and Iraq. The interviewee also actively participated in a Facebook group that disseminated content and messages in support of jihadist organizations. One of the administrators of the group was convicted of several offences, including attempted recruitment of minors.
Main discussion topics	Contacts with global jihadist sympathizers and activists (collective identity, frame alignment, transmission of values and norms, social incentives, emotions, structural connection); links with non-jihadist Salafists.

Interviewee 14 - Relative of a young jihadi activist

Type of interview	Telephone interview. Recorded and transcribed *verbatim.*
Date and time	December 2, 2019. From 11:00 am to 12:15 am.
Location	-
Background information	Female key informant. She is the mother of a young man arrested in 2015 for participating in jihadist activities. He was sentenced to 5 years and a half in prison.
Interviewee summary	The interviewee provided information about her son, who was an active member of a virtual platform dedicated to the creation and dissemination of IS propaganda content. He was also very active in online forums defending the jihadist organization and propagating the discourse of extremist preachers
Context and relationship to research	Her son became radicalized during his adolescence through the Internet. At first, he interacted through Facebook with other peers who were interested on the evolution of the Syrian conflict and the role of jihadist organizations, particularly IS. As his cognitive radicalization progressed, the young man exponentially increased the number of links with other jihadi sympathizers, with whom he always communicated virtually or via instant messaging applications, such as WhatsApp. The young man even made contact with a member of Jabhat al-Nusrah, the then al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria and Iraq, with whom he communicated via Facebook and WhatsApp.
Main discussion topics	Contacts with sympathizers and activists of the global jihad (collective identity, frame alignment, social incentives, organizational ties, weak ties); experiences of disagreement between the young person and the family environment (confrontation of perspectives, exposure to alerts); effects of disagreement (cognitive dissonance, ambivalence); strategies of resistance to disagreement (contestation, selective social exposure).

Interviewees 15 & 16 – First-line practitioners in a juvenile center

Type of interview	In-person interview. Recorded and transcribed *verbatim*.
Date and time	January 23, 2020. From 10:00 am to 4:30 pm.
Location	Madrid. Juvenile center.
Background information	Female key informants employed as a psychologist and a local cultural mediator (first-line practitioners) working at a Juvenile Detention Center in the Community of Madrid. This detention center housed five minors who had been convicted of jihadist activities by the Central Juvenile Court of the National High Court.
Interviewee summary	The interviewees provide information about five young individuals who underwent radicalization during their teenage years and became engaged in jihadist activities before turning 18. The interview takes place once the youths have fully served their sentences and are of legal age. The five cases correspond to the following: [a] a 14-year-old female who was detained while en route to Syria; [b] a 17-year-old female who was a member of the cell that recruited the aforementioned 14-year-old; [c and d] two 16-year-old adolescents who wanted to emulate their older brother, who tragically lost his life in Syria while engaging in combat with IS; [e] a 17-year-old male who was a member of a jihadist cell that planned to carry out a terrorist attack in Barcelona.
Context and relationship to research	The five youths had a personal network consisting of several sympathizers and jihadist activists. In most cases, their family members were involved in jihadist activities, as well as friends and acquaintances. Similarly, the majority of them had established a virtual network of contacts with other sympathizers and jihadist activists.
Main discussion topics	Connections with jihadist activists (collective identity, shared grievances, frame alignment, transmission of values, social incentives, conformity, peer pressure, information, structural connection, emotions, pre-existing ties, organizational ties, strong and weak ties; number of ties); connections with jihadist sympathizers who are not involved in terrorist activities (normalization of violence); experiences of disagreement within their social environment (confrontation of perspectives, exposure to warnings, punishments/constraints); resistance strategies to disagreement (contestation, selective social exposure, circumvention).

Interviewee 17 – Young jihadist activist

Type of interview	In-person interview. Recorded and transcribed *verbatim.*
Date and time	February 20, 2020.
Location	Albolote (Granada). Prison center.
Background information	Young male born in Melilla in 1988. In 2017, the individual was sentenced to 6 years in prison for integrating a cell dedicated to radicalization and recruitment of young people to be sent to conflict zones.
Interviewee summary	The young man became radicalized during his adolescence when he began to associate with members of a Salafist group with whom he met in a mosque. He later left the group to join a jihadist cell.
Context and relationship to research	Many of the members of this cell were people from his social environment, such as neighbors or acquaintances. Interactions with non-violent Salafists, and later with jihadists, played a prominent role in shaping his identity as a Muslim and his awareness of the suffering of other co-religionists in different territories. The need to belong to a group played a key role in his integration into the jihadist cell, which also imposed strong sanctions to prevent him from dissociating himself from it. Some of his family members endeavor to distance him from the radical milieus he associated with, but they failed in their efforts.
Main discussion topics	Connections with jihadist activists (collective identity, frame alignment, transmission of values and norms, social incentives and punishments, conformity, peer pressure, emotions, pre-existing ties, organizational ties); links with non-jihadist Salafists; experiences of disagreement within his social environment (confrontation of perspectives, exposure to warnings, punishments/constraints); effects of disagreements (interpersonal tensions); resistance strategies to disagreement (contestation, selective social exposure); isolation.

Interviewees 18 – Lawyer

Type of interview	Telephone interview. Recorded and transcribed *verbatim.*
Date and time	August 8, 2020. From 12:30 pm to 13:30 pm.
Location	-
Background information	Male key informant. He was the attorney representing a young man born in 1997 in Larache who was sentenced in 2019 to two years in prison for radicalizing online other youths.
Interviewee summary	The interviewee provided information about the young activist and his interpersonal relations with other jihadist activists.
Context and relationship to research	The young activist maintained a radical activity on Facebook and internet forums, where he posted a substantial amount of content related to jihad and the Islamic State (IS), as well as violent messages against Shiites. This enabled him to establish an extensive network of contacts with sympathizers and jihadist activists. He also engaged in conversations with his brother, who sympathized with the global jihad. Furthermore, he was completely socially isolated.
Main discussion topics	Connections with jihadist sympathizers and activists (collective identity, shared grievances, normalization of violence, organizational ties); relations with the social environment opposed to the jihadist movement (selective social exposure); isolation.

Interviewee 19 – Young jihadi activist

Type of interview	In-person interview. Recorded and transcribed *verbatim*.
Date and time	September 11, 2020. From 16:15 pm to 19:00 pm.
Location	Topas (Salamanca). Prison center.
Background information	Young female born in Ceuta in 1995. Detained for the first time in Turkey in 2015 while trying to access Syria to join IS, she was subsequently arrested for the second time in Spain in 2016. She received a six-year prison sentence for her involvement in a jihadist cell that recruited and deployed volunteers to conflict zones, where she remained determined to relocate.
Interviewee summary	She began her radicalization process at the age of 15, when an older cousin became one of the first FTF to travel from Spain to Syria. Her older brother, whom she considers a mentor, also traveled in the first months after the outbreak of the conflict. From then on, she attempted her journey, but was detained twice.
Context and relationship to research	The young woman's personal network comprises a considerable number of sympathizers and jihadist activists. Several members within her familial, friendship, and local communities have either traveled to Syria or faced arrest in Spain due to their involvement in jihadist activities. Driven by her desires to emulate her relatives, the young woman established virtual connections with like-minded peers seeking to travel to the caliphate, as well as with fighters already present in the region. Her radicalization and recruitment were detected by other relatives and friends who opposed violent extremism and who attempted to thwart her attempts to relocate.
Main discussion topics	Connections with jihadist activists (collective identity, frame alignment, transmission of values and norms, social incentives and punishments, emotions, pre-existing ties, organizational ties, weak ties, strong ties); multivalence of social ties; experiences of disagreement within her social environment (exposure to warnings, punishments/constraints); effects of disagreements (interpersonal tensions); resistance strategies to disagreement (selective social exposure); isolation.

Interviewee 20 – Young jihadi activist

Type of interview	In-person interview. Recorded and transcribed *verbatim.*
Date and time	June 1, 2021.
Location	Figueres (Girona). Prison center.
Background information	Young female born in Morocco in 1997. She was arrested in 2017 and sentenced to two years in prison for disseminating jihadist propaganda and glorifying terrorism.
Interviewee summary	Radicalized under the influence of her romantic partner (interviewee 21). She engaged in disseminating propaganda content extolling IS fighters, and conveying a romanticized view of the role of women in jihad.
Context and relationship to research	Her personal network includes several jihadist activists: in addition to her partner, the young woman interacts with other neighbors convicted of terrorism offenses, as well as two high school classmates who were also involved in jihadist activities. Initially, within her circle of friends, there was a favorable view towards the Islamic State, although this perception changed upon learning about the campaign of violence perpetrated against civilian populations in Syria. This leads to the rejection and distancing of the young woman and her friends.
Main discussion topics	Connections with jihadist activists (collective identity, transmission of values and norms, social incentives and punishments, emotions, pre-existing ties, organizational ties, weak ties, strong ties); experiences of disagreement within her social environment (exposure to warnings, punishments/constraints); resistance strategies to disagreement (selective social exposure); isolation.

Interviewee 21 – Young jihadi activist

Type of interview	In-person interview. Recorded and transcribed *verbatim.*
Date and time	June 1, 2021.
Location	Sant Esteve Sesrovires (Barcelona). Prison center.
Background information	Young male born in Brasilia in 1996.
Interviewee summary	Radicalized under the influence of her romantic partner (interviewee 21). Arrested in December 2014 in Bulgaria while in transit to Syria, where he intended to join al-Qaeda's territorial branch in Syria, al-Nusra Front. He was sentenced to 8 years in prison.
Context and relationship to research	The young man was lured by a friend into a radical milieu where they both ended up being recruited by a jihadist cell. The cell is composed of jihadist activists who resided in the same locality as the interviewee and who met frequently in different public and private spaces. The cell is first engaged in recruiting people for travel to Syria: the interviewee started the journey together with two other neighbors. The young man also interacted with other jihadist sympathizers and activists through the network, and radicalized his girlfriend. Despite his radicalization, the interviewee maintained his social links with people in his social environment who opposed jihad.
Main discussion topics	Connections with jihadist activists (collective identity, frame alignment, transmission of values and norms, social incentives, emotions, pre-existing ties, organizational ties, weak ties, strong ties, number of ties); experiences of disagreement within her social environment (confrontation of perspectives); resistance strategies to disagreement (circumvention).