A Crime Script Analysis of Violent and Nonviolent Extremists

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Abstract

Extremists and the behaviours performed by extremists are a growing concern. There is a growing body of research showing the differences between violent and nonviolent extremists in terms of developmental pathways and actions. The current research used a temporal approach, crime script analysis, to map the pathways of violent and nonviolent extremists. Results showed differences between the groups in terms of Internet use, social networks and methods of enacting their beliefs. This research provides a new approach to understanding extremism and highlights the role of temporal methods in showing key differences that require different intervention strategies.

The threat from terrorism is longstanding, pervasive and has evolved over time. Most recently, acts of indiscriminate violence in the West are a favoured tactic of Islamist and Far Right extremists. Individuals, groups and organizations with different strategies and goals have conducted a number of high-profile, successful attacks. This has led to devastating outcomes in terms of causing death and injury to civilians, and economic and societal damage. As such, there is an urgent need to understand the factors underpinning extremists' attitudes, beliefs and actions to provide an evidence base that can inform those responsible for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and developing interventions designed to disrupt (deny, detect and deter) terrorist actors. The method used in the current study, crime script analysis (CSA), can help to highlight similarities and differences in the life histories and crime commission of violent and nonviolent extremists.

To understand why people become involved in terrorism, research from the criminological, behavioural and social science disciplines has attempted to identify a terrorist "profile," which outlines the characteristics that such individuals share. Despite multiple attempts, research has shown that people engage in extremist-related violence for a number of different reasons.1 This is referred to as "equifinality": When individuals reach the same end state (such as a choice to use violence to achieve extremist goals) but are influenced by different combinations of variables.2 In fact, individuals who take part in terrorist activities can vary dramatically, in terms of the push, pull and protective factors underlying their behaviour. Key factors underlying violent extremism can include religious beliefs and an ideology that supports the use of violence. It is important to note that not all extremists are ideologically driven and hold radical beliefs. For example, some are motivated mainly by money, prestige

and status,3 and others may join an extremist group due to peer pressure, but later come to believe in the ideology that is shared by the group. In sum, a key lesson from previous research is that not all radicals become terrorists, and not all terrorists are radical: Radicalization is just one of various "pathways" to violent extremism.4 Furthermore, it may be that a "check-box" approach to identifying risk from terrorists (whether lone-actor, involuntary celibates or extremists) is limited, due to the complexity of the crime and criminals. A timeline approach, mapping their complex life histories, may offer additional insight.

Another lesson from the literature relates to a lack of distinction between radical ideas and extremist-related violence; in effect, the difference between those who may hold views and not act on them, compared to those who hold views and act on them.5 In reality, while many express extremist views and may even support the use of violence to achieve aims and objectives, very few of these actively facilitate or commit acts of extreme violence.6 Understanding risk and threat management of these complex and interacting issues may require more complex, temporal approaches. Zekulin7 noted in a study of homegrown terrorists that it is necessary to distinguish between cognitive radicalization (thoughts) and behavioural radicalization (actions). Sageman8 noted the need for a distinction between extremist beliefs and violent action, describing the "two-step" model (radicalization; followed by mobilization to violence), as being one of the few advances in the terrorism literature, and one that is understood and recognized by intelligence communities. This two-step model also begins to place temporal progression at the heart of understanding radicalization and violence. As such, distinguishing between different types of extremism is clearly important, as there are multiple possible behavioural outcomes that might result from radicalization; Reidy9 referred to this as "multifinality." In recognition that "terrorists" are not a homogeneous group, researchers are now examining different subtypes of extremists to understand similarities and differences between these. For example, research has compared those who act as part of a group with those who act alone, lone actors and common homicide offenders, and those who choose to act violently compared to those who do not.10

Pathways and Temporal Methods of Analysis

In recent years, researchers have made a lot of progress in seeking to understand how, when and why different individuals get involved in different criminal activities. It is widely agreed that seeking to identify a criminal or terrorist "profile" has limited applied efficacy and that no such single, encompassing profile exists.11 However, examining different subgroups of extremists based on, for example, their role within a group (e.g., active participants, facilitators, ideologues) or their behaviours (e.g., violence or nonviolence) will provide a more

nuanced understanding of these subtypes and the characteristics that they do or do not share.12. Recently, there has been an increase in research comparing different types of extremists, such as violent and nonviolent individuals, or in terms of individual roles within a terrorist group or organization.13 In particular, the 2017 American Psychologist Special Issue on "The Psychology of Terrorism" included a collection of articles that highlight important differences between different types of extremist-related actions, while also recognizing that we still have much to learn about terrorist behaviour.

The current study compares violent and nonviolent extremists; however, given the complex and multifaceted reasons that individuals become involved in terrorism, instead of focusing on the characteristics that extremists might share in a solely quantitative manner, here we compare life history "pathways" into violent versus nonviolent extremism. Pathways refer to the process by which a person's "life history" progresses along a timeline, capturing their characteristics, situation, environment and events that they experienced. These accounts are typically very rich in detail, qualitatively outlining an individual's life history. Of course, a limitation of qualitative approaches is the depth of detail produced in the output, making quick summation difficult. Therefore, in the current study, the in-depth, qualitative accounts were analysed with a method that allows more simplified comparison and contrast between groups (e.g., violent and nonviolent extremists). The analyses help to make sense of the factors that may facilitate or impede individuals becoming involved in criminal acts such as terrorism, to understand whether events and experiences, and the sequence in which these occur, affect a person's behavioural choices. For example, while certain life events may occur for both violent and nonviolent extremists, the order in which events occur may influence whether they choose to act violently or not. The objective of the study was to understand different pathways toward violent extremism, in order to identify how, why and when people reach different "destinations" (i.e., become involved in violent extremism or not, alone or as part of a group).

Understanding temporal pathways can inform those interested in violent extremism and those responsible for P/CVE efforts, including law-enforcement practitioners and policymakers. For example, if we know which occurrences are likely to take place just prior to an extremist's action, then individuals need to be quickly denied opportunities and capabilities that will enable this action. However, if a criminal is some temporal distance from conducting an act of violence, then prevention or deterrence measures may be different to proximal times. If caught early in the timeline, it may be a more appropriate response to avoid extreme interventions, which may actually lead to the individuals feeling more marginalized. Understanding key events and the temporal sequence in which they occur

may provide a different lens through which to examine different types of terrorists and reveal new insights and understanding.14 This kind of approach highlights a sequence of events that precedes terrorist action, from planning, through to preparation, implementation and escape and/or exploitation. In her doctoral thesis, Jacques conducted a pathway analysis to provide a dynamic explanation of female mobilization to conduct violent acts of terrorism.15 Commonalities and differences were found between males and females and it was proposed that key life events can predict female involvement in terrorism.

There has been recent growth in focusing on temporal methods of analyses in criminology and related fields.16 The benefit of temporal methods is not only in highlighting key risk factors that emerge in suspects' life histories, but to understand how a complex chain of these risk factors (alongside other events and behaviours) leads toward the commission of crimes.17 The focus on sequential timelines has been seen in several areas of forensic psychology and criminology.18 From this approach, key "hot spots" (points that commonly occur across subjects and predict later criminal behaviours) can be highlighted to explain how individuals reach different endpoints. Taking a temporal approach in the current research allows the possibility of finding explanations for differences between violent and nonviolent extremists. As research has shown, motivations for planning and commissioning attacks vary widely between individuals and groups, and no single risk factor is a sufficient predictor. Temporal analyses allow researchers to build a framework that can be continually developed and extended as new cases emerge, allowing not only the discovery of hot spots "now," but also to see how these risk factors change when new data are added.

CSA19 was a development from cognitive psychology concepts of schema and scripts.20 In the original conceptualization, scripts are general directives or outlines of actions that people perform, akin to actors following a script in the theatre. The typical example of a script is the restaurant script, which outlines that we all know how to behave when entering a new food-serving establishment. Regardless of the name or location, we very quickly attune to the expected chain of behaviours, based on our internal script. If there are no staff members greeting us at the door, we know to find our own table, typically labelled with a number, which we know to take to the bar to order food. The script concept can also be conceptualized in terms of computer scripts, which are programs run through to reach an outcome goal, or scripts in a theatrical production, in which actors follow lines. In the same manner that we all follow generalized scripts (patterns of behaviour in particular contexts or situations), criminals can follow similar scripts when planning and committing a crime. That is, the cognitive processes underpinning how we know how to behave in a restaurant are likely to be similar to the scripts criminals follow when committing a crime. Scripts, therefore,

help to explain mental rehearsal (or fantasy) in crime, as well as repeated or serial crimes. Scenes within each script are broad "phases" that group together similar behaviours or events in the timeline. These scenes are not individual points in time, per se, but instead broad areas in time that convey the progression of a crime commission. In this way, CSA differs from behaviour sequence analysis (BSA),21 which is another temporal method that looks for transitions between individual behaviours and events. BSA is very "piecemeal" and focuses specifically on transitions across time between individual behaviours. While BSA is very informative at a descriptive, fine-grained level it is sometimes more useful to see how similar, related behaviours group together in periods, or phases (called "scenes" in CSA). Thus, if several behaviours are all performed to reach a particular goal (e.g., becoming operationalized, or disseminating views, then these related behaviours may be grouped into the same scene). Scenes are then structured into timelines.

CSA allows the temporal flow of behaviours to be outlined. A strength of CSA over other temporal methods (such as BSA22) is that it typically uses a more top-down approach and is therefore less data hungry, and also it positively endorses expert input into the creation of scripts. Crime scripts allow detailed, qualitative life history accounts of criminals (e.g., extremists) to be read and analysed in a way that provides clear temporal frameworks (or scripts) of the patterns seen across a sample. While BSA requires as much detail as possible and only requires expert input post-hoc, CSA is possible when only broad outlines of typical behaviours in a scene (the sequential stages of a script) are known. For instance, it is enough to know that criminals in the "preparation" scene are preparing for their attack, without knowing the individual, consecutive steps that the preparation takes. Clearly, the more detailed a script, the more useful it becomes at the fine-detail level; however, CSA also uses expert knowledge to understand data in order to provide a useful interface between academics and practitioners, which is another benefit of the CSA approach.

Present Study
To date, CSA has been used in life history research23 as well as research on terrorism.24 The aim of the current article is to show the use of CSA to identify, map and compare the sequential stages/scenes in life histories of violent and nonviolent extremists. To the authors' knowledge, this is the first study to use CSA to compare the life history of violent and nonviolent extremists. Also of interest was whether capabilities, opportunities and motivations differed for violent versus nonviolent extremists. The current approach also allows an examination of the role of not only motivations and capabilities, but also of opportunities that can enable certain actions. The COM-B model is well-established and tried and tested. The model was initially developed to understand health behaviours and provides

a framework to describe how (physical and psychological) capability (C), opportunity (O) and motivation (M) are all necessary for behaviour (B) to occur.[25] The terrorism literature generally focuses on drivers that influence the motivations and capabilities of extremists, but studies have neglected the role of opportunities in terms of how these contribute to certain behaviours. Moreover, previous research has not yet applied a capability–opportunity–motivation framework to understand terrorist behaviours. The current research explores the applicability of the COM-B model[26] to facilitate our understanding of why extremist individuals choose to behave differently (e.g., to act violently or to opt for nonviolent action), despite having similar motivations and goals.[27] For example, while some people oppose the use of violence to achieve certain goals, a lack of opportunities may be another reason why others are not violent, even when they hold extremist beliefs and might be capable of acts of violence. Comparing sequential life histories of violent and nonviolent extremists, and how these might relate to their motivations, capabilities and opportunities, may demonstrate what distinguishes between individuals. This clarification of timelines may then enable us to identify those who are most likely to express their extremist beliefs via violent action. This knowledge can inform those responsible for P/CVE in terms of when, how and why to intervene, deny, detect or deter those who pose a threat to society.

No a priori hypotheses or models were made, owing to the relatively novel approach and focus of the current research. However, the current research was not atheoretical; it was expected that key themes and events would emerge in the data—the assignment of these to particular scenes in the script, however, was not made beforehand. Instead, the data were analysed and the script built around the information.

Methods

Sample

Case study research (CSR) enables the identification of patterns and meanings in order to inform our understanding of complex social phenomena. In the current study, CSR was applied to examine the similarities and differences regarding the pathways into violent versus nonviolent extremism. Each individual is referred to here as a "case," and cases that provided detailed exemplars of the groups of interest were included in the sample. This approach is known as "strategic selection," where the goal is to develop a sample of cases that represents the "most likely" or "least likely" exemplars to be analysed to address the aims of the study. Therefore, in the current research, the inclusion/exclusion of cases was determined by the degree and extent that cases were perceived to "fit" with regard to the topic to be investigated.[28]

The sample consisted of case studies of individuals allocated to one of two groups: violent or nonviolent extremists. All individuals had been convicted of committing extremist-related offenses in the United Kingdom post-2001. Individuals were categorized as "violent" if they were responsible for conducting or knowingly facilitating a violent attack (or a plot that was foiled via external intervention) that was intended to kill others. For example, terrorist attackers were included but also others who physically contributed to an attack, such as those providing weapons or an improvised explosive device.29 Individuals were categorized as "nonviolent" if they had conducted acts, such as distributing extremist literature, writing and sending hate mail and other activities, whereby they provided nonphysical support from afar (e.g., online fundraising, awareness-raising via Internet forums).

Initially, a comprehensive list of individuals known to the researchers to exemplify either a violent or a nonviolent extremist was developed. This was based on the research team's expertise, experience and knowledge of the literature in this field. Case studies of these individuals were developed to include all information that could be found regarding their backgrounds and the offense they had committed. Multiple sources of evidence were sought in order to allow data triangulation to ensure that cases comprised reliable and valid content. Many cases of violent extremists could be easily found; however, nonviolent extremist cases were more difficult to find. This was a reflection of a bias in the literature whereby violent extremism attracts more interest from both academic researchers and other investigators (e.g., journalists). A number of nonviolent cases were identified, but many were limited in terms of how much information was available on the case. Only those cases in which sufficient background information to develop a clear timeline was available were included in the current study.

All data (from government documents, research reports, academic articles and Internet news sites) were open source and found via Web of Science and EBSCO Discovery Service, and open source Internet (Google) searching. Additional documents were found via references in those found from the initial search, and some were provided directly by subject matter experts in this area. When no new information about an individual could be found, cases were then reviewed by experts known to the research team in order to verify the content credibility and reliability. When experts queried certain aspects of the cases, further research was conducted to determine the evidence for these, and whenever doubt remained regarding certain pieces of information, this was removed from the case study.

Description

The final sample comprised 40 cases that included 24 violent (VE) and 16 nonviolent (NVE) extremists. Table 1 shows details regarding age, gender, race and citizenship of the groups and demonstrates differences in types of extremism related to ideology for extremists. The latter reflects the composition of the extremist population in prison in the United Kingdom, comprising mainly Islamic extremists, but also right-wing extremists.

Table 1. General descriptives of violent and nonviolent groups. (Tables at end of document).

Script Development

A benefit of CSA research is that the scripts can be built from a variety of data. This flexibility allows researchers and practitioners to make the most use of the most sources of information (also allowing cross-referencing of information to improve validity of facts). The actual outline of the (crime) script can be developed in terms of the number and type of scenes in a script.30 It is more important that the script parsimoniously accounts for the entire dataset, without being overly complex, rather than researchers attempt to follow a rigid outline, and force scripts into scenes that are not clearly representative of the data. For that reason, the current research used some of the more recent developments in CSA, which allow for scenes that provide a clear and comprehensive overview of the data (see Table 2 for VE scenes, and Table 3 for NVE scenes).

Table 2. CSA of VE.

Table 3. CSA of NVE.
(Tables at end of document).

The process for developing the script in the current data followed general outlines previously proposed and published in the literature.31 First, cases (of both violent and nonviolent individuals) that had in-depth information about the life history of the person, as well as information about their actions surrounding the attack, were identified. It was important that information was sequential or time-stamped to allow it to be placed into a life history timeline. For example, to know that a number of the cases analysed here had "suffered rejection" would not be sufficient, without some indication of when this was experienced. Details regarding the lives of individuals was required in order to place information into the script at the appropriate scene. Once multiple case studies of both violent and nonviolent individuals had been developed, a process of familiarization took place. This involved repeated re-readings of the life histories of the individuals, so that researchers had a good, clear outline of the general trends and patterns evident in the data for both groups. After several readings,

a CSA outline was used to begin filtering timelines into scenes within the script. This process involved two researchers to start, who independently worked through the cases and built crime scripts. Once this was completed, scripts were compared, and any discrepancies were discussed. There were only a few minor discrepancies, based more on linguistic/semantic differences than conceptual issues. However, for completion, the final crime script, agreed on by two researchers, was shown to a third researcher who is an expert in the field to ensure that the scripts did not miss any information, and provided a clear outline of the temporal life histories as known to the expert. Once all researchers agreed all important behaviours and events were included in the scripts, and the scenes within the script were sequential but distinct, the CSA was finalized.

Coding

Cornish32 suggested a standardized method for crime scripts, allowing comparable scripts across different cases, which is referred to as a universal script. The universal script provides researchers with a generalized framework on which to build. Given that this is the first study to focus on VE and NVE, the coding procedure for the present research was based as a more generalized level, wherein general patterns and trends across scenes were outlined.33

Results

Cornish34 suggested a series of universal script scenes for use in crime scripts (preparation, entry, precondition, instrumental actualization, doing, postcondition, exit), each scene relating to a consecutive part or phase of the script that a criminal passes through in the commission of a crime. These were used as a starting point in the current research; however, newer developments to CSA have been incorporated to keep up with current research.35 Therefore, the current script had the following scenes: influences, signals, triggers, operational, planning, activity and withdrawal. While this map is close to Cornish's original suggestion, the inclusion of "signals" and "triggers" aligns more closely with the research into precipitators of future events, such as violent attacks, and provides practitioners with a clearer understanding of what the scene entails.

Crime Script Analysis

Review and analysis of the life histories of VE and NVE led to the development of several scenes that map the general progression of individuals' life course trajectories. The scenes that were found are listed below, from early influences to crime commission and exit from crime. Where findings relate to the COM-B model, we italicize the text to highlight differences in capabilities, opportunities and motivations between the two groups.

Influences

In the current CSA, "influences" relate to an individual's early years and/or upbringing. This is similar to Keatley and colleagues'36 conceptualization of factors related to those responsible for school shootings, and those outlines by Jacques and Taylor.37 The term "influences" outlines any childhood event or factor that may be seen to influence later life outcomes. While neither violent nor nonviolent individuals had a particularly positive upbringing, there were some notable similarities between the groups. Both groups included educated individuals; for example, Andrew Ibrahim attended a private school and several "top" independent schools in Bristol; Bilal Abdulla attended top-rated schools in Baghdad; and Dhiren Barot attended a highly sought-after high school in North West London. Therefore, the option for education was not absent in the VE group; however, within this group, there appeared to be marked points in time wherein education was interrupted or terminated as a result of the individual's behaviour (i.e., resulting in being suspended, expelled or dropping out of school). Given the similar level of education and educational backgrounds of extremists in both groups, this could support their ability (capability) to plan and develop more complex violent and/or nonviolent attacks. The differences between the two groups in terms of education were minimal for this scene, indicating that "influences" identified do not result in different behavioural choices, to act violently or not. This reflects findings from previous studies that have compared VE and NVE.40

In terms of motivations, one difference observed between the groups related to isolation from and ostracism by others. The majority of individuals in the violent group had been bullied by and/or isolated from their peers at an early age (during school). This led to several of the VE turning to video games (e.g., Andrew Ibrahim, Germaine Lindsay), which allowed them a sense of role play or fantasy at earlier ages. This may have been the beginning of individuals in the violent group being influenced by playing violent video games, becoming desensitized to violence, and endorsing acts of violence. Spending more time on a game console then escalated into other computer-based activities, such as Internet searching. Seeking to belong and establish a sense of identity is a factor that many researchers see as key motivations for individuals to join extremist groups. The feelings of ostracism as well as pain of rejection by peers may have been what caused many of the individuals to find extremist websites. Once websites were found, people may have felt a sense of belonging and acceptance from people within those forums, plus potential opportunities to become involved with VE (see also "Triggers" below) The NVE were less likely to make associations with others online and therefore lacked some of the opportunities that this might proffer.

Triggers

The next scene in the script is referred to as "triggers" and is similar to what Wortley[41] refers to as "precipitators." This scene demonstrates that the violent group was more exposed to and sought after more triggers that (1) enabled them to be more psychologically and physically capable of violence, and (2) provided them with more opportunities to be violent. As such, this provides partial evidence that extremists may choose to be violent or nonviolent because of exposure (or lack of) to triggers that lead to capabilities and opportunities. In the violent group, analysis revealed triggers relating to drug and alcohol consumption. This may be because the consumption of alcohol has been linked to violence and aggression, as it can reduce inhibitions and psychological barriers that usually prevent violent action.[42] That is, alcohol may have led to psychological capability for violence. In addition, alcohol may have been consumed with like-minded others, which contributed to both a physical capability for violence (e.g., via sharing information on weapon use or other violent tactics) and a psychological capability (e.g., polarization of opinions, gaining approval for violence). Networks with others also enable access to more opportunities to conduct acts of violence, for example, access to weapons or an explosive device provides an opportunity to conduct an impactful attack that may not have otherwise been possible. Many of the VE had manuals and documents related to bombmaking. Finally, alcohol-related violence may be cathartic for some, while the NVE group may experience catharsis via other means (e.g., being able to express themselves at a protest).

In the NVE group, triggers related mainly to exposure to political speakers or specific extremist-related events. For example, Rizwan Ditta is believed to have been influenced by the shooting of Muhammed al Durrah by Israeli soldiers. A key difference in this scene was that while VE had a larger interest and obsession with war and war material in earlier years/childhood, the NVE group was less exposed to war scenes and extreme violence. This may have an effect on both capabilities and the motivations driving behaviour. For example, knowledge of, and an obsession with, war could provide a capability for violence (e.g., by providing a better understanding of how to conduct acts of violence, how to use a weapon or explosive device). It may also reduce psychological barriers to violence; for example, knowledge of previous wars may indicate that violence is an acceptable "norm" in certain circumstances (i.e., Just War theory. It may desensitize people to the idea of hurting others and support the dehumanization of certain groups.

Operational

The "operational" (or "precondition") scenes are the stages in which the offense begins to take shape, and planning and preparation occur. This will be influenced by the interaction

between the person's motivations (what they want to achieve), opportunities (what chances there are to conduct the plan), and capabilities (what they are able to do).43 Capability refers to the individual's psychological and physical capacity to engage in the act.44 For the VE, this scene relates to their capability to source what is needed to conduct an attack (e.g., tools, components of a weapon or the weapon itself), including funds to purchase items and so on. In contrast, the NVE group needed to be able to design, make and disseminate materials that evoked racial hatred and/or to radicalize and recruit others. The difference between these scenes for the two groups is apparent. The VE group included many cases in which the individual travelled abroad prior to the attack (e.g., Garcia, Abdulla, Barot, Osman), compared to the NVE group. The NVE group was more likely to spend their time connecting with individuals in the radical community and creating racial or political materials. The use of the Internet was prevalent for both groups, but with a different focus and purpose. For the VE the Internet was used as a resource to gather information (including learning about and obtaining weapons/materials) and plan the attack (i.e., to support their capability development needed to conduct a violent attack). For the NVE, the Internet was more a means to spread ideas and link with other similar-minded individuals. In terms of opportunities, these are those external factors that make a behaviour possible or prompt it. For the VE, determining an opportunity to commit the offense involves scouting or reconnaissance of an area before the attack; for example, Barot, Ibrahim and Copeland all state they spent time conducting reconnaissance at the site of the attack. It is unclear whether the NVE group lacked opportunities—given they had Internet access, it would seem likely they had some of the same opportunities as the VE; however, they lacked the motivation or capability to move forward in a violent sequence.

Activity

The activity scene is the "doing" scene, and reflects the "behaviour" part of the COM-B model. This is the action (violent or nonviolent) or "doing" scene that differentiates between the groups compared here. For the VE, the attack is either thwarted by outside intervention or carried out. For the NVE, material is distributed or attempted to be distributed (although sometimes intervention from authorities stops this) in this scene. This is the key difference, of course, between the violent and nonviolent methods of "attack" or doing. For the VE, the grouping factor is the intention and/or completion of a violent attack. However, the "attack" of NVE is in the dissemination of ideas and propaganda.

Withdrawal

Finally, the withdrawal or "exit" scene is the post-attack or offense scene in which the suspect is either killed or arrested in the violent group. It is typically in this scene when a

message or manifesto may be seen or found and linked to the attacker. Manifestos, although typically prepared and written in earlier scenes, are often not found until after the attack (being posted online or found in the person's property). Additionally, suicide, or at least planned suicide, was the most common way to die in the VE group, showing their willingness to die for a cause. In the NVE group, where suicide is not a part of the post-offense activity, individuals, once caught, were more likely to deny allegations of involvement or downplay their role in dissemination of ideas. For example, Samina Malik attempted to suggest her monica "Lyrical Terrorist" was chosen because it "sounded good," rather than as a means to motivate VE.

General Discussion

Overall, there is no simple profile of a terrorist and no single pathway to radicalization. Similarly, while there are many risk factors and predictors of extremism and behaviours, these are dynamic and complex processes and should be studied with methods that allow clear timeline pathways to emerge. The aim of the current research was to begin building timeline frameworks and scripts of VE and NVE. We compared VE and NVE, applying an analytical method that, to our knowledge, has not previously been used to compare these groups. Scenes were identified and similarities and differences between VE and NVE were explored. Findings highlight some of the unique sequences of events that lead to different extremist-related acts.

There are some similarities in the early stages of both VE and NVE. Regarding the "Influences" scene, VE appeared to suffer from more serious family disturbances in their early years, including loss of a parent (through death or abandonment), which was not seen in the NVE group. Therefore, it may not be "disturbances" per se that are important to note in early life, but the type of disturbance and the psychological effect it has on the individual. Both groups appeared to do well in school, but had histories of minor, petty crimes (including thieving and burglary). Consistent with Jacques and Taylor's[45] findings regarding educational achievements, many individuals in both groups completed secondary school, although the VE were less interested in academic success and were more likely to have been expelled or suspended or to have left school early of their own accord. The issue does not seem to be individuals' ability to learn, but rather their choice to dismiss or give up on education.

There was a difference between the type of media/material with which VE and NVE engaged. VE showed more interest in war and violent imagery, whereas the NVE group was exposed to more polemic spoken and written sources. For the VE group, this may be an

attempt at catharsis—watching footage to relieve some of the internal pressure and desire to enact the same behaviours; or it may be a means of learning how to operationalize their attitudes—which explains why they progressed to forums and training/learning manuals on how to build bombs. In contrast, the NVE are learning to use their voice and/or writing to express their views, rather than violence.

Ostracism, through bullying or feeling rejected, was a clear difference between the two groups. The majority of individuals in the VE group were reported to have been bullied and/or ostracized by their peers during school. This led to isolation at home, and them spending larger periods of time alone in their bedrooms, playing videogames and/or searching for online forums and groups to fulfil their social needs (relatedness, belonging and acceptance). In contrast, the NVE did not highlight as much bullying or isolation, and this could explain why they perhaps felt that they could spread their views through written communication—as they had larger social networks to influence. While both groups were found in possession of large quantities of terrorist publications (manuals, manifestos and videos) the VE group were less likely to disseminate this, while the NVE group spread their views and shared the content. If the motivation of both groups is to enact their beliefs, then the VE group has a history of rejection from their peers and learning from violent war scenes, while the NVE group has a history of learning how words can affect others. This was a clear difference between the groups.

Another difference between the groups was seen in the Operational scene, which is to be expected, given that this is the penultimate scene before the activity. The VE group appears to begin seeking sources on how to create bombs, and several took trips abroad to gain further training, which increased both their physical and psychological capability for violence. They also attended meetings and were in contact with influential others, such as the group/organization's leader(s). Finally, they begin to purchase items to make their (explosive) weapons. By contrast, the NVE group are more likely to make connections with individuals in the radical community (through online means as well as in-person). While some may have researched previous attacks, the majority did not move beyond writing extremist materials and/or raising funds to support terrorist organizations.

The current research adds to a growing literature focusing on the sequence of events and life histories of terrorists. While other researchers have focused on life histories of lone-actor terrorists[46] and female-perpetrated terrorists,[47] the current research focuses on the similarities and differences between VE and NVE. A limitation of the current study is that it uses known (i.e., caught) cases. This is typical of most/all research in criminology and

terrorism. We cannot know about the cases that we do not know about. However, given the sample size, the extensive research conducted on each individual case, and the analytical strategy, we can be reasonably sure that we have outlined and captured the main scripts and motivations of both VE and NVE.

Because research has shown that a terrorist profile does not exist, sound, scientific research on extremism and terrorism that takes an empirical approach to distinguish between different types of individuals and groups of interest is needed. This research has started to tease out characteristics that distinguish between different kinds of extremism and can be used by those responsible for P/CVE (e.g., to detect those individuals who most likely pose a serious threat to others, and to design tailored interventions for different individuals). The current study can help counterterrorism and law-enforcement practitioners understand how events and the sequence in which they occur might lead to certain behaviours (in this case, violent or nonviolent action). This is important to inform how and when to intervene in order to best disrupt extremist-related activities.

Conclusions

Extremism is a growing concern around the world. Understanding the timelines of VE and NVE is important to highlight the developmental antecedents underpinning each group. The current research provided a CSA approach to show the timelines of VE and NVE. A consistent key finding across the groups was the use of online resources, including forums and websites. A key difference between the groups was that the violent VE appear to search for and find other like-minded VE, and begin to learn and prepare for their attacks, often traveling to learn new skills. The NVE, however, tend to use online resources as a platform to disseminate their views and share their views with like-minded individuals. It is unclear, based on the current research, how or whether NVE may become violent. Further research is required to understand the pathways, if they exist, from nonviolent-to-violent extremism. This research highlights the importance of understanding and tracking online activity in the development of extremism.

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Table 1. General descriptives of violent and nonviolent groups.

Descriptives		VEs (*n* = 24)	NVEs (*n* = 16)
Type of extremism: Islamic (IS) or right-wing extremism (XRW)		IS = 19 XRW = 5	IS = 14 XRW = 2
Mean age when arrested/convicted (approx.)		26.5 (*SD* = 7.12)	31.62 (*SD* = 11.59)
Gender: Male (M) or Female (F)		M = 23, F = 1	M = 13, F = 3
Race (%)	White British	25	6.3
	Mixed race	8.3	0
	British Asian	37.5	56.3
	African	25	31.3
	(Non-British) Asian	4.2	0
	Unknown	0	6.1
Citizenship (%)	British National	37.5	12.5
	Immigrant, legal British citizenship	37.5	25
	Second-generation immigrant	20.8	43.8
	Illegal immigrant	0	12.5
	Born in United Kingdom, grew up in Pakistan	4.2	0
	Unknown	0	6.2

Table 2

Violent script scene	Universal script scene	Behaviors	Examples
1. Influences	Influences	• Felt inferior to older sibling (1) • Experienced bullying (2) • Good education/top schools (9) • Death of loved one (4) • Moving around a great deal as a child (9)	• *Andrew (Isa) Ibrahim*: Lived in the shadow of his brother, and reacted by constantly seeking attention • *David Tovey*: Parents and younger brother died in quick succession when in his teens • *Roshonara Choudhry*: Attended Plashet School in East Ham and achieved straight As in her General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) • *Germaine Lindsay*: Bright child, successful academically and good at sport
2. Signals	Warning signs	• Petty theft (2) • Unusual sexual interests (i.e., foot fetish) (3) • Expelled from schools (1) • Mental health concerns (3) • Considered "loner" (4) • Clear racist attitudes (8) • Interest in weapons at young age (1)	• *Andrew (Isa) Ibrahim*: Videos of women's feet he had taken on his mobile phone at college without their knowledge • *David Copeland*: Paranoid schizophrenic and a depressive • *David Copeland*: Interested in sadomasochistic sexual activities • *Neil Lewington*: Stated the only good Paki was a dead Paki
3. Triggers	Triggering behaviors	• Drug addiction (1)	• *Andrew (Isa) Ibrahim*: Hooked on heroin and crack cocaine, using the drugs several times a day

Table 2

Violent script scene	Universal script scene	Behaviors	Examples
		• Regular alcohol consumption (6) • Association with "troublemakers" (8) • Obsessive watching of war/bombing-related videos or reading material (12)	• *Neil Lewington*: Drank 16 pints of lager a day • *Shehzad Tanweer*: Attended the radical Stratford Street mosque in Beeston, where he met the other bombers • *Yasin Hassan Omar*: Spent more time associating with Muktar Ibrahim • *Ramzi Mohammed*: Regularly drinking and clubbing
4. Operational	Precondition	• Active involvement in political protest/activism (11) • Attending Islamist political meetings/contacted political leaders (16) • Reconnaissance of area before attack (9) • Buying tools to make, or intending to make, explosives/weapons (13) • Recruiting individuals to assist (6)	• *Andrew (Isa) Ibrahim*: Obsessively download videos of U.S. troops being killed in Iraq • *Bilal Abdulla*: Employee complaining of the time he spent on *jihadi* websites • *David Copeland*: Joined British National Party (BNP) but left because they did not advocate direct violence • *Andrew (Isa) Ibrahim*: Decided to make a suicide vest to "occupy his time" using a video he found on the Internet • *Rajib Karim*: Deliberately set out to find a job that would be useful for terror attacks • *David Tovey*: Sketched map showing a mosque in Swindon and made lists of number plates from black or Asian people • *Anthony Garcia*: Won respect among fellow Muslims by fundraising for Kashmir militants
5. Activity	Doing	• Intervention from authorities before mission in motion (9) • Mission carried out, but not completed in full (4)	• *Andrew (Isa) Ibrahim*: Tip-off from within the city's Muslim community • *Dhiren Barot*: 51 compact disks as a result of an Al Qaeda arrest containing reports and targeting research supposedly compiled by Barot

Table 2

Violent script scene	Universal script scene	Behaviors	Examples
		• Mission carried out (5)	• *Roshonara Choudhry*: Security guards became concerned as she grew visibly more agitated waiting to see a member of Parliament
6. Withdrawal	Exit	• Left note/message (6) • Showed some sort of resistance (3) • Some given diagnosis after arrest (1) • Killed during the attack (suicide) (2) • Attempted suicide but failed (3)	• *Bilal Abdulla*: Got out of the car and began to fight with police • *Bilal Abdulla*: Left note revealing his thirst to "lick the blood" of Westerners and attack the "Kingdom of Evil" • *David Copeland*: Suffering from religious, grandiose, persecutory delusion • *David Tovey*: Graffiti was found in public toilets "all whites are shit," "Black powa" and "die white trade center scum" • *Dhiren Barot*: Credited with creating 39-page memo described as an "Idiots Guide to Bomb-Making" • *Salahuddin Amin*: Claimed he was tortured and forced into false confessions

Note: Shows the scenes for VE (column 1) and how these developed scenes overlap with Cornish's[39] universal script scenes (column 2).GCSE = General Certificate of Secondary Education; BNP = British National Party.

Table 3. CSA of NVE.

Nonviolent script scene	Universal script scene	Behaviors	Examples
1. Influences	Influences	• Seemingly "average" upbringing (3) • Military history in family (1) • Poor/deprived upbringing (2) • Strong academic performance (5) • Parental mental illness (3) • Moving around a lot (2)	• *David Irving*: Father was a lieutenant commander in the Royal Navy • *Mohammed Atif Siddique*: Attended Alva Academy, where he was a "model student" • *Mohammed Gul*: Described as an intelligent young man who had a good law degree from a good university • *Shafiq and Shabir Ali*: Had a mother who suffered from depression and schizophrenia
2. Signals	Warning signs	• Previous criminal history (4) • Intense religious beliefs (4) • Evident obsession with war/war material in childhood (10) • Mental health issues (3)	• *Brahim Benmerzouga*: Arrested after trying to open another fraudulent account, but skipped bail • *Baghdad Meziane*: Lied to authorities that his life would be in danger if he returned to Algeria • *David Irving*: Used to run toward bombed-out houses shouting "Heil Hitler!" • *Houria Chahed Chentouf*: Developed an obsessive interest in *jihad* and the more extreme forms of Islam

Table 3. CSA of NVE.

Nonviolent script scene	Universal script scene	Behaviors	Examples
3. Triggers	Triggering behaviors	• Prison time (1) • Influence of political/historical event (7) • Influence from political speaker (3) • Rejected from military (1) • Personality disorder (1) • Obsessive watching of war-related material (8)	• *David Irving*: Rejected by the Royal Air Force as being medically unfit • *Jefferson Azevedo*: Got the idea of white powder in the post from United States, when anthrax was sent through the post • *Rizwan Ditta*: Influenced by the shooting of Muhammed al Durrah by Israeli soldiers • *Mohammed Gul*: Offenses followed an attack by Israeli forces in December 2008
4. Operational	Precondition	• Creating connections with individuals in a radical community (8) • Researching previous terror attacks (4) • Creating racial material (i.e., videos, writings) (10) • Active involvement in "terror network" (3) • Raising funds (or attempting to) for	• *Houria Chahed Chentouf*: In contact with Mohamed Chentouf (no relation), a convicted Islamic terrorist • *Jefferson Azevedo*: Carried out research in the public library in newspapers and on the Internet • *Mohammed Gul*: Self-radicalized over the Internet • *Jefferson Azevedo*: Tried to find out how to contact the individuals concerned with terror attacks • *Mohammed Atif Siddique*: Caught watching videos of suicide bombers in class • Brahim Benmerzouga: Created a support group for a terror network, exchanging coded messages and details for cash transfers • Houria Chahed Chentouf: Created mini-encyclopedia of weapons-making

Table 3. CSA of NVE.

Nonviolent script scene	Universal script scene	Behaviors	Examples
		terrorist organizations (6)	
5. Activity	Doing	• Distributing racial material (7) • Plan to distribute racial material but intervention from authorities (6) • Sending money to terror organization (3)	• *Bilal Mohammed*: Developed a business distributing extremist Islamic (and other) material on DVD and CD • *Mohammed Gul*: Placed 30 of his own edited videos on YouTube and the Anti-Imperialist forum website • *Houria Chahed Chentouf*: Possessed documents that could have helped commit an act of terrorism • *David Irving*: Wrote on the military and political history of World War II, focusing on Nazi Germany • *Mohammed Atif Siddique*: Stopped at the airport and informed the pair that they would not be allowed to fly
6. Withdrawal	Exit	• Denying allegations (7) • Plan to commit suicide but intervention (1) • Note/message left (1)	• *Brahim Benmerzouga*: Denied "entering into funding arrangement for the purposes of terrorism" • *Houria Chahed Chentouf*: Prepared to sacrifice her life and that of her children • *Khalid Khaliql*: Told police in a statement that he did not support Al Qaeda • *Mohammed Atif Siddique*: Stated he was labeled as a terrorist but never had any bombs or plans to hurt anyone

Note: Shows the scenes for NVE (column 1) and how these developed scenes overlap with Cornish's [39] universal script scenes (column 2).