

The Organization and Leadership of Violence

OVERVIEW

The primary goal of *The Leadership of the Extreme and Dangerous for Innovative Results* (LEADIR) study is to examine ideological organizations using theory and methods that are typically applied to more conventional, for-profit organizations. For example, we know from organizational psychology that leadership and organizational structure are explicitly tied to organizational performance, but to date these concepts have been given limited attention in the domain of violent groups.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Integrate existing START resources (e.g., the organizational data in Victor Asal’s and Karl Rethemeyer’s BAAD dataset) with new data collected on organizations to examine organizational determinants of violence and performance.
- Identify organizational characteristics that differentiated violent from non-violent ideological organizations.
- Assess how these organizational characteristics (e.g., structure, leadership style) predict violence and performance in ideological groups using START’s Global Terrorism Database (will be completed in Year Two (2014)).

METHOD

To examine organizational and leadership characteristics, the team identified 85 ideological/belief-based organizations whose height of power fell between 1972 and 2011. To ensure that the sample represented a diverse population of ideological

Organizational Structure	Cell-Based
	Hierarchical
Method of Goal Achievement	Violent
	Non-Violent
Geographic Region	Western
	Non-Western

organizations, they evenly sampled organizations according to three criteria: organizational structure, use of violence, and geographic region. The team then developed behaviorally-anchored benchmark rating scales to assess structure, culture, tactics, and leadership characteristics of the organizations for each year of their height of power. Based on these ratings, the team then used discriminant function analysis to determine characteristics of the organizations and their leaders that differentiate between violent and non-violent ideological organizations.

INTERIM FINDINGS

While Year Two of the LEADIR study should give information about the implications of differences among violent organizational structures and leaders, preliminary findings in Year One indicate that violent versus non-violent ideological organizations are quite different in how they operate. Specifically, they showed that **a cluster of certain characteristics are a hallmark of ideological groups poised for violent action in the name of their beliefs or cause.** It is known that ideological organizations in general (e.g., focus on sharing beliefs, delineation between in-group and out-group members) are unique when compared to more conventional for-profit organizations, but less is known about the salient organizational and leadership characteristics of ideological groups that adopt violent strategies.

Violent ideological groups are more *insularly aggressive*.

Even in groups with a “global” mission, violent organizations are much more tied to local grievances and issues than non-violent counterparts. In addition, violent groups use more aggressive themes in storytelling to potential recruits and the media. Both of these mission characteristics—identifying a target for proximal problems and a history of heroic violence—likely have mobilizing influence on new members.

Violent ideological groups have elements of hierarchy.

Even in organizations that were primarily cell-based, violent groups have elements of hierarchy that likely facilitate decision-making and planning. One of the most oft-found distinctions between violent and non-violent groups is that violent groups tend to use titles to distinguish members. While titles (e.g., Brother, Father, Comrade) are often used in non-violent ideological groups, in violent groups many of the titles were actually codification of status differences among members. These titles codified differences in functional expertise (e.g., the Punishment Squad members versus the Media Arm members), tenure in the organization (e.g., “Senior”), or even individual lines of authority (e.g., Aum Shinrikyo had a Chief Technology Officer). While organizations might look more cell-based externally, the use of titles

Even groups that appear “leaderless” have elements of hierarchy that facilitate decision making, knowledge sharing, and expertise development.

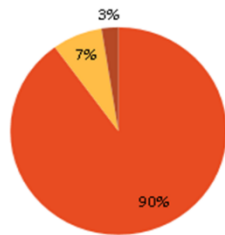
to signify status differences facilitates knowledge transfer (i.e., members know who to ask for specific information), decision making authority, and expertise development (i.e., the use of performance-based titles connotes the need to achieve such distinctions through action and performance). This has implications for the ways in which members of such organizations interact, and also explains why some organizations that appear to be “leaderless” actually do have an element of leadership to guide decisions and shape performance.

Leadership styles differ between nonviolent and violent organizations.

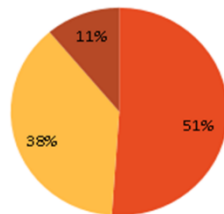
Preliminary findings suggest that leadership looks very different in violent versus non-violent ideological organizations. While we examined 13 types of leadership characteristics and how they relate to violence, one of the most interesting early results was identified by applying House and Howell’s (1992) theory of power orientation to top leaders of ideological organizations. By examining the content of how leaders described their vision and power/authority in their organization, the team was able to assess whether leaders manifested a predominantly socialized versus personalized orientation. Socialized leaders promote a vision for the betterment of the organization or even movement at large, and deemphasize their places in that movement, share decision-making, and sacrifice themselves if the organization requires it.

Leadership Styles

Non-Violent Organizations



Violent Organizations



■ Socialized
■ Personalized
■ Undetermined

Conversely, personalized leaders (e.g., Shoko Asahara) enhance their own place in the mission, reflecting their personal need for power. Personalized leaders tend to view close followers as objects meant to support their own advancement, and often will have difficulty maintaining a long-term cadre of close lieutenants.

The team found that personalized leaders are much more likely to rise to power in violent ideological organizations (38% of leaders were personalized) when compared to non-violent organizations (only 7% were personalized). This has implications for how such leaders make decisions, as well as errors they are likely to commit. For example, personalized leaders are more likely to value decisions that will help them to

“save face” with followers than those that socialized leaders endorse. In addition, personalized leaders are likely more affronted by slights, threats to power, and personal attacks than socialized leaders. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, personalized leaders often feel threatened by others who could claim power. Thus, they are unlikely to groom their successors in a way that would allow them to resume command of the organization in the event of leader decapitation (i.e., the forced removal of top leadership via death or capture) or departure (i.e., exiting the group in non-violent ideological groups).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The goal of Year Two is to identify how these organizational characteristics in structure, practices, and leadership relate to organizational destruction and performance. Thus, the team is coding attacks of violent organizations in the sample to identify which organizational characteristics and leaders predict the most malevolently creative attacks in terms of destruction to people, property, processes, and symbols of the target group.

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