Bad Guy(s)

An interdisciplinary analysis of governance of terrorism

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Introduction

Humans do not behave rationally when faced with uncertainty or risk.[1] They do not reason carefully first, and then choose the options that are best for them on paper. Rather, we use heuristics and biases that may be inaccurate, but that are easily and readily available to us and that we can use automatically. As a result of these biases, the Nobel-prize winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman argues, humans are generally bad at correctly using statistics to evaluate scenarios, decisions, and risks, and tshis even goes for statisticians themselves.[2] Kahneman and his research partner, Amos Tversky, provided a crucial new insight into the workings of our minds and decision-making. Other scientists working within the field of behavioural economics further explored the way we make decisions with little or incomplete information. What is especially interesting is that they investigated this for both individuals and institutions. In his book *Laws of Fear,* Cass Sunstein specifically analyses the ways in which policy is shaped by precisely those biases and heuristics that individual humans have. One of the largest problems in this area lies in our inability to correctly estimate the risk of a bad thing happening. Especially 'salient' events, like a terrorist attack or plane crash, are perceived as far more likely to happen to us than they really do. For instance, if I were to ask my readers what is more dangerous, a bike ride or terrorism, the latter would likely win. We are far more likely to experience a traffic accident than a terrorist attack, but the latter make a far greater impression on us, and we therefore overestimate the probability of such a dramatic event occurring. Salient events – like terrorist attacks – receive a significant amount of attention (and funding) from governments as well.[3] While we tend to see government as a bureaucratic institution, exempt from human errors or at least capable of correcting for them, Sunstein's research indicates that this assessment is inaccurate. The capacity of government to accurately respond to and anticipate unpredictable events is critical to its capacity to protect its citizens. Consequently, limitations should be carefully studied by any scholar with an interest in (national) security and political philosophy.

This thesis is about how governments act under uncertainty. I aim to show that government is just as biased in its decision-making under uncertainty as individual humans are.

[1] For an analysis on the difference between risk and uncertainty, I refer to Kristel De Groot, 'Burst Beliefs – Methodological Problems in the Balloon Analogue Risk Task and Implications for Its Use', *Issue 1* 1, no. 1 (8 October 2020), https://doi.org/10.36850/mr1.
[2] See for instance Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (London, UK: Penguin Random House Ltd, 2012).
[3] Cass Sunstein, *Laws of Fear: Beyond the Precautionary Principle* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

I will do so using one specific, particularly salient case (terrorism) that represents precisely the kind of risk that humans tend to overestimate. By comparing government efforts in counterterrorism to the reality of terrorist organisations I demonstrate how and why governments fall short. Part of this analysis includes the argument that any assessment of terrorist organisations and terrorist agents as 'irrational' misses the mark, as even agents whose targets are picked at random act rationally and in a goal-directed manner. Lastly, I will look to insightful political theory on the shortcomings of contemporary representative democracy. The final part of this thesis is dedicated to an exploration of alternative approaches that could correct the biases that persist within government, as well as an examination of the desirability of correcting these biases.

Before I delve into the material, I need to make a clarification about this dissertation. Firstly, it differs from 'traditional' philosophy theses in a rather significant way: it is a highly interdisciplinary work, that not only borrows in methods and knowledge from political and applied philosophy, but also uses insights from (behavioural) economics, psychology, and political and organisational sciences. As such, this work offers a unique perspective on the topic, bringing together insights from various fields. It benefits from empirical insights from the social sciences, as well as historical insights on specific terrorist organisations and their respective modus operandi. Additionally, it uses philosophical rigour and methodology to critically examine empirical findings as well as put forward insights for change. This interdisciplinary character is especially useful for examining terrorism and counterterrorism strategies (as I aim to do) because terrorism itself is not just relevant to political scientists or historians. Instead, as Paul Wilkinson argues, "[researching terrorism] is clearly a multidisciplinary field involving not only political scientists and historians, but also sociologists, psychologists, lawyers, and some scientists and technologists with particular interests in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons".[4] The insights brought forward from this thesis could be incredibly valuable additions to the existing literature on (counter)terrorism because of its interdisciplinary nature. However, the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis also generates specific limitations. This thesis will inherently lack the philosophical rigour and depth that can be found in traditional theses within philosophy. It will lack the original empirical findings and (statistical) analyses that one might find in a thesis within the social sciences. I believe that those drawbacks are worth the benefits that lie in an

[4] Paul Wilkinson, "Implications of 9/11 for the study of terrorism", in Mary Buckley & Rick Fawn (eds.), *Global Responses to Terrorism: 9/11, Afghanistan, and beyond*, 26.

interdisciplinary approach, but it would be naïve not to acknowledge the limits that interdisciplinarity inevitably brings with it and the reader must be aware of the costs of my approach.

My key question is to what extent terrorist and government organisations are acting rationally in either committing terrorist attacks or preventing them. I argue that governments tend not to act rationally even though we might expect them to, whereas terrorist organisations often tend to act more rationally than one might expect. In chapter one, I will examine the question of how to define both rationality and terrorism. Chapter two delves into how rationality can be applied to terrorist groups as well as individual terrorists, analysing the motivations for opting to use this tactic. In chapter three, I will examine the counter-terror efforts made by governments and assess to what extents governments respond in a rational way to (the threat of) terrorism and I will argue that they do not respond particularly effectively. In this argument I will develop a systematic typology of human decision-making that underlies the limitations of counterterrorism. I argue that it is undesirable for governments to behave this way and investigate what alternatives exist to aid government in acting more rationally. Finally, in the conclusion I will bring these three elements together and look for a way forward.

1: What is terrorism?

Let me start by defining two concepts central to this thesis, namely 'rationality' and 'terrorism'. In this paper I shall use a rather pragmatic definition of 'rationality', simply taking it to mean that an agent acts in a deliberate way to further a specific goal. Under this definition, an agent can be either an individual, a group, or an organisation, and their goal can be anything that they strive to do or achieve. This means that it does not matter whether that *goal itself* is rational or commendable; it only matters that they act in a thought-through manner to achieve it. An agent may desire to commit an act of terrorism that impresses the media of a certain state and that causes them to be remembered, drawing attention to the cause they believe in. To achieve this goal, it is perfectly rational to use a suicide bombing technique, as these tend to harm and/or kill many people. Suicide bombings also draw the attention of journalists and the public through their seemingly random and irrational character. Note that I do not want to argue that it is rational to want to kill others, that it is rational to want to be killed, *or* that either is a good act. However, given the goal of the agent in this scenario, their strategy is a rational strategy under my definition. Thus, 'rationality' is nothing more or less than 'acting thoughtfully to further one's goal'; it has no connotation of 'goodness' nor does it say anything about the content of a goal.

Defining terrorism is a difficult task, that has taken up much space within academic debates on the topic. Depending on one's definition of 'terrorism' one could (for instance) include or exclude violent acts committed by the state. In any academic work on terrorism, there should thus be careful attention paid to the precise definition of the term. As with 'rationality', the definition of terrorism that I use is a rather pragmatic one that suits the aims of my research well and allows me to delve into the questions stated earlier within the scope of this thesis. For the purpose of this dissertation, I consider the following as terrorism:

> An act of violence *or* the credible threat of violence against non-combative individuals, committed with the intention of influencing political decisions.

Note that whichever definition of terrorism I adopt, there will always be examples to the contrary. There will always be cases that we intuitively label terrorism that fall outside of my definition, or that another scholar *does* dub a terrorist attack. At the same time, there will be acts that – under my definition – constitute acts of terror but that (in the public eye or according to another scholar) are not. This is an unavoidable limitation of setting definitions regarding any research topic, so I do not consider it as a particularly problematic issue for my research.

In what follows, allow me to quickly elaborate on a few key elements of my definition, namely the act, the targets, and the motive for the act.

An act or threat of violence

First, the act of violence or threat of violence. Violence is an intuitive criterion for defining terrorism and since few definitions omit it, neither shall I. Some additional explanation on the inclusion of also the threat of violence is desired, however. I am also including specifically the *credible threat* of violence as for my research, it does not matter whether the act of terror has been committed or it was simply planned and (for whatever reason) not carried out. This allows for the inclusion of cases of possible terror attacks that were successfully prevented by the relevant government agencies, which is particularly necessary because the topic of this thesis deals to a large extent with (un)successful counterterrorism measures. In my research I also examine the specific organisational strategy of both terrorist and government organisations, for which the successful execution of a specific attack does not matter. Rather than the carrying out it is the intent and planning behind such an attack that matter in answering this question. This automatically implies that threats of violence should only be counted under this definition when they are credible; not – for example – when they are random outings in a bar fight.

The target(s)

The second crucial element to unpack concerns the targets of terrorist acts, namely non-combatants. It is important to distinguish between acts of violence against combatants (like soldiers or others who are actively involved in a state's military) and against non-combatants, who are not involved in the military activities of a state. While both actions might be used in asymmetric warfare (that is, warfare between two parties of unequal strength) only one of these can be classified as terrorism. Committing a violent act against combatants of a particular state is usually categorised as an act of guerrilla warfare. This is harder to morally evaluate because the victims are to varying extent directly involved in the conflict, whereas terrorism as violence against non-combatants is both significantly different from guerrilla warfare and easier to evaluate as it targets innocent civilians.

One objection that might be raised, however, is that civilians cannot be separated from their state because civilians are *also* combatants, at least to the extent that they are complicit in the military actions of that state. By voting for specific politicians with a certain policy preference and by paying their taxes, thereby contributing to the resources a state has available

to use, citizens contribute to not only the direct policy that is set by the government but also provide it with the necessary resources to carry it out. Thus, the argument would go, terrorism does not target innocents when it targets civilians. This is an interesting point of view and so I wish to address it quickly. In this thesis, I will not follow that approach, mostly because it would broaden the category of 'terrorism' too much. As this thesis has a limited scope, I want to focus primarily on a dominant conception of terrorism that is broad enough to encompass the various ideologies and motivations of terrorist groups but that is also workable. Besides that, I would argue that there is a substantial difference between the act of voting and paying taxes and enlisting in a military or acting in some other capacity to aid this. Both voting and paying taxes are acts one can easily do without any regard for military or foreign policy. While I hope that citizens do recognise their impact on the policies enacted by the government, they often have any number of reasons to vote for their candidate of choice or pay taxes. I did, however, want to raise this nuance because it highlights the importance of paying close attention to one's definition.

The motive

Regarding the motivation of terrorists, existing literature distinguishes terrorist activity from other violent acts. It defines terrorism as an act with the specific intention to influence politics or policy in some way or another. This could be to enact or revise a specific policy or to address existing anger around a set of policies. That might sound vague but is in fact a key distinction because it designates terrorism as a specific strategic act, rather than an act of personal grievance or emotion. What this addition excludes, is for instance acts of partner violence or organised crime. Both include violent acts against non-combatants, but because the motive for these acts is different – personal, monetary, emotional, but definitely not political – these are not acts of terrorism. This final element ensures that the definition includes those crimes we intuitively do see as terrorist attacks, like car bombings by the IRA to achieve an independent Irish republic, or plane hijackings by extremist Islamic groups to draw attention to American foreign policy. Therefore, I argue that the motive for an attack must be included in a definition of terrorism.

2: We love death as you love life

Now that I have introduced the topic of this thesis, as well as the main areas of focus, let us take a closer look at the first of the actors that I will examine: terrorists and terrorist organisations. Often, terrorism is associated with some variation of the words in this chapter title, spoken by Osama bin Laden in one of his many videoclips: "We [terrorists] love death as you [the general public and our targets] love life."[5] This gives us quite horrible associations with terrorism and paints those who commit terrorist acts in a particularly grim light. They are individuals who take joy in destruction, who (can) commit horrid deeds of violence and feel no regret. These sentiments make it easy to dismiss terrorism as just an act of senseless violence or as something that is rather irrational to do, because a terrorist does nothing to make individuals in a liberal democratic society sympathetic to the cause. So why do it? In this chapter, I study these organisations as well as the motives and actions of their members in closer detail and I argue that – while it might surprise us and while their objectives are arguably rarely achieved – terrorist organisations are remarkably well-organised. Furthermore, I respond to arguments describing individual (violent, radicalised) members of these groups as fundamentally misguided, unthinking, or irrational persons. I will do so by paying careful attention to the gains an individual can obtain by joining a certain group.

Aside from defining terrorism as any act or credible threat of violence against non-combatants to obtain specific ideological or political objectives, remember that I do not restrict my definition of terrorism to a specific ideology. I want to emphasise this fact, because recent trends could steer the reader towards for instance right-wing extremist violence or radicalised Islamic groups, while for my research, the content of one's beliefs does not matter. What matters instead is the fact that the group has specific goals and a vision for their ideal society that differ(s) from the status quo (i.e., establish a white-supremacist society or an Islamic Caliphate), attracts individuals at least in part because of this goal, and acts violently to obtain this ideal. Note that an organisation does not *need* to have a broad, ideological stand to qualify for this definition. Those groups acting to prevent a specific policy from taking place may appear bypassed, but I would argue they are not. Even relatively minor objectives still contain a preference for specific structuring of society that is not equal to the status quo – a difference, albeit a rather small one. Having clarified this, let us return to the main question of this thesis:

[5] Citation found in Olivier Roy, 'Who Are the New Jihadis?', *the Guardian*, 13 April 2017, http://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/apr/13/who-are-the-new-jihadis.

why do terrorist organisations commit attacks? To answer this question, I will first present two arguments to the contrary, developing perhaps intuitively appealing objections to the rationality of terrorism as a tactic: illegality and potential harms to the actor. After presenting these, I develop the case that terrorism is in fact a rational strategy to pursue for terrorist organisations.

Terrorism is illegal

Terrorism is a tactic that has certain characteristics that make it hard to imagine it could be effective. One could argue that the illegality of organising and committing a terrorist attack is a significant obstacle towards its effectiveness. This is an attractive argument, because at first glance, outlawing an action does seem to complicate matters: it may mitigate incentives to join the operation and makes organising more complex. Materials and training become harder to obtain, for instance, because they cannot be provided openly and publicly (or else individuals are arrested). But terrorist attacks still take place despite these obstacles, so clearly outlawing terrorist acts does not eliminate the appeal of terrorism. Let me briefly explain why through a comparison with another form of illegal organising, namely organised crime, especially human trafficking. In many respects, (human) trafficking operations face the same challenges terrorists do and studying the way these organisations operate tells us that illegal organisations need not be ineffective. Now, clearly, human trafficking is not identical to terrorism, but they do not have to be identical for a comparison to be useful. Human trafficking, as opposed to terrorism, is an activity that organisers generally want to keep *invisible*, and it does not necessarily carry a political message out to society at large. It does, however, share important characteristics that are relevant to the effect of illegality on organising, namely the fact that it is an operation that is illegal, that requires many human interactions, and that usually consists of several smaller cells. Moreover, like many recent terrorist operations, human trafficking often operates across city, state, or country borders, meaning they must evade the authorities in several locations.[6] After examining whether trafficking operations can run efficiently, we must admit that they very much can. Recent reports of human trafficking in Italy, for instance, show us incredibly sophisticated networks across the Mediterranean Sea that appear to have no problem with borders. Operations can be run relatively safely from abroad.[7] Significant numbers of Nigerian women arrived in Italy to work for superiors, oftentimes

[6] Thomas M. Sanderson, 'Transnational Terror and Organized Crime: Blurring the Lines', *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 24, no. 1 (2004): 49–61, https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2004.0020.
[7] Lorenzo Tondo, 'Sex Traffickers Left Thousands of Women to Starve during Italy Lockdown', *the Guardian*, 10 July 2020, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jul/10/sex-traffickers-left-thousands-of-women-to-starve-during-italy-lockdown-coronavirus.

women who had been trafficked themselves and who had obtained managerial roles. The trafficked women performed sexual labour for clients in Italy under near-constant supervision and for very little money.[8] Nigerian women are not the only victims of significant networks of trafficking and human trafficking is not always about sex, though. Examples of other reasons are numerous and range from organ harvesting to marriage to adoption to forced labour.[9] Trafficking, like terrorism, can occur nearly anywhere: it occurs West- and East-European countries, but also in the United States, Mexico, and India.[10] Such widespread occurrence does not suggest that illegality hampers trafficking. Louise Shelley, an expert on the topic, notes that multinational trafficking operations in fact *benefit* from operating in different jurisdictions, as it gives them advantages while law enforcement agencies – who rarely cooperate effectively – are put at a disadvantage.[11] This effectiveness translates into high estimations of profits, making it an attractive means to generate large amounts of cash.[12] All this goes to show that illegal organisations need not be ineffective *or* unattractive and that legal obstacles are not as large as one might believe. If trafficking operations can be well-run, so can terrorist organisations, and joining one is not irrational on this basis alone.

Committing terrorism is against one's own interests

Now, one might ask: "But what about the methods, what about the risk of death? Surely it is not beneficial to die for one's cause, so how can participating in an attack that might kill the perpetrator ever be rational?" Again, this seems reasonable at first glance, as terrorist groups ask a lot from their members. Typically, groups employ terrorist tactics to create as large a psychological impact to accompany their attack as possible (something we will return to later in this chapter).[13] As a result, a terrorist attack requires its members to harm citizens. Moreover, however cold it sounds, killing citizens is preferable, because this causes a greater outrage. Attackers will then face considerable risks to their personal life and liberty; if caught, they will likely receive a long prison sentence and they can generally count on little sympathy from the public if indeed they choose to kill. Recently, terrorist organisations have opted for specific tactics that include the killers' death as well as the victims', like suicide bombing.

[8] Ottavia Spaggiari, 'Escape: The Woman Who Brought Her Trafficker to Justice', *the Guardian*, 27 August 2020, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/27/nigeria-italy-human-trafficking-sex-workers-exploitation-justice.
[9] Osita Agbu, 'Corruption and Human Trafficking: The Nigerian Case', *West Africa Review* 4, no. 1 (2003).
[10] Patrick Belser, 'Forced Labor and Human Trafficking: Estimating the Profits' (2005), https://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=forcedlabor.
[11] Louise Shelley and Maggy Lee, 'Human Trafficking as a Form of Transnational Crime', in *Human Trafficking* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 116–37.
[12] Belser, 'Forced Labor and Human Trafficking'.
[13] Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want* (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007).

While effective in generating outrage and shock precisely for its apparent ridiculousness, committing such an act seems incredibly unattractive for any rational individual. The individual that dies does not apparently receive a direct benefit unless one is motivated by religious beliefs that reward the terrorist in the afterlife. The striking fact, however, is that not all groups who rely on suicide attacks are religiously motivated. Indeed, even secular organisations like the Tamil Tigers have used suicide bombings to further their cause.[14] Certainly, secular individuals are unlikely to receive personal benefit from their actions after their death, so why do it? It turns out that there might be good reasons to, so in the next section I will examine what makes terrorism – *including* suicide attacks – a rational strategy.

Terrorism as a rational act

In what follows I will argue that many of the challenges specific to terrorism are not so difficult to overcome as they appear at first sight and illustrate this with a few cases. We will see that terrorist organisations need not be ineffective by definition and can indeed be well-organised. Difficulties with measuring the effectiveness of terrorism will be presented, problematising methods of assessing its rationality. In response, I develop a hierarchical model of goals that allows indications of the rationality of terrorism as a tactic. In chapter 2, this will be contrasted with counterterrorism measures.

The efficacy of terrorism is hotly debated, with good reason. In examining the effectiveness of any terrorist organisation, after all, we need to establish what they aim to achieve as well as how close they get to achieving it. Both questions are tricky. First, identifying the goal of an organisation is not straightforward, for what it communicates to the outside world may not be its actual or only goal. We could imagine a (hypothetical) organisation that claims to fight for independence, but that is content with increases in fundraising, attention and (international) pressure, or the removal of a specific politician from office. Second, certain goals are either clearly impossible to achieve or incredibly difficult to measure. Take for example the Red Army Faction (RAF), a German left-wing terrorist group that was active in the last decades of the 20th century and aimed to achieve a political revolution. The group acted against perceived notions of consumerism, exploitation of developing countries, and political and economic developments in Germany at the time of its founding.[15] The lack of a concrete formulation of this overarching goal complicates assessing the RAF's

[14] Richardson, *What Terrorists Want*, 108-109.
[15] Assaf Moghadam, 'Failure and Disengagement in the Red Army Faction', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 2 (1 February 2012): 156–81, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2012.639062.

efficacy; what does it mean to 'create a political revolution'? What specific changes would constitute a successful action for the group? One might respond that this is specific for the RAF, which is a particularly ideological group, but the same and similar questions may be raised for many groups that are less ideological. For instance, if a group has multiple aims and succeeds in one of them, is it effective? Scholars like Brigitte Nacos who have analysed the success and failure of many terrorist groups argue that terrorist groups rarely succeed in achieving their goal. It does not really matter if that goal is the establishment of a utopia on earth (i.e., a Caliphate in the case of ISIS), the creation of an independent state for separatist groups (the Irish Republican Army (IRA) or the Tamil Tigers) or changing certain specific policies (Al Qaeda and radical left- and right-wing groups). All of these have, in the end, not managed to achieve their goal.[16] While ISIS did shortly manage to create a Caliphate during the Syrian Civil War in which it enforced its own rule, this was not acknowledged as a legitimate state, nor did it remain in existence for a long time. At the end of the day, ISIS has failed to create a sustainable Caliphate.[17] One could argue that the organisation has thus ultimately failed, even if some success was achieved. This matters for the question of whether terrorism is a rational tactic for a group to adopt, because if organisations that employ terrorism generally fail to succeed, adopting the tactic is likely not going to lead to desirable results. If it does not lead to achieving one's goals, it is indeed an irrational tactic.

However, Nacos' claim is not undisputed in the field. Organisational theories on terrorism draw quite a different conclusion, as they argue that terrorist organisations differ little from 'regular' organisations and thus their *main* goal is not truly to obtain a certain result. Really, their main goal is to survive, like any other organisation strives to. To survive, terrorist organisations adopt techniques of appeasing their members to ensure support and adoration.[18] As such, terrorist groups do not solely strive for the achievement of their stated, idealistic goals, but they also conduct public relations work and engage in strategic communication with a larger audience. Such tactics and the importance of them can be seen in many groups, for instance in the Red Army Faction.[19] This view of terrorist organisations operating in essentially the same manner as regular organisations holds promise, as there are many ways in which

[16] Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011).
[17] BBC News Editorial Team, 'The Rise and Fall of the Islamic State Group: The Long and Short Story', *BBC News*, 23 March 2019, sec. Middle East, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47210891.
[18] Özgür Özdamar, 'Theorizing Terrorist Behavior: Major Approaches and Their Characteristics', *Defense Against Terrorism Review* 1, no. 2 (2008): 89–101.
[19] Liane Rothenberger, 'A Terrorist Group's Strategic Communication—The Case of the Red Army Faction', *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 11, no. 4 (8 August 2017): 286–305, https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2017.1339191.

terrorist organisations do resemble regular forms of organising. Two areas in which this is visible are the organisational structure of the organisation and their capacity to innovate when necessary. Studies of Al Qaeda reveal that within the organisation, there is a clear hierarchy between those who spend their time leading the organisation and strategizing and those who compose the 'rank and file' members, the ones who ultimately commit terrorist attacks.[20] Moreover, terrorist groups develop their public relations and recruitment tactics to fit the times. This demonstrates that they can make innovative changes to their modus operandi to ensure their continued existence. One example of this is the use of short videos by Al Qaeda, especially ones in which Osama Bin Laden himself spoke to the public. Another example concerns the recruitment tactics and promotion of ISIS. This organisation mastered the use of social media to recruit members and distribute propaganda, putting a spotlight on the actions of individuals loyal to the cause.[21]

In response to this argument, I intend to put forward the idea that organisations, including terrorist organisations, and individuals have a hierarchy of goals. An organisation's effectiveness is not necessarily limited to obtaining those goals that may be dubbed 'primary' goals, i.e., those goals related to its outwardly stated mission. Effectiveness also relates to 'secondary' goals, i.e., those goals related to an organisation's existence and support. Louise Richardson presents this distinction in her book *What terrorists want* and a similar distinction can be found in Paul Wilkinson's contribution to the essay collection *Global Responses to* Terrorism. Richardson distinguishes between primary and secondary goals, whereas Wilkinson calls these primary or ultimate goals and 'auxiliary goals'.[22] In my argument, I will follow Richardson and distinguish between 'primary' and 'secondary' goals rather than primary and auxiliary. However, both authors' distinctions serve the same purpose and create the same categories, so my choice is arbitrary. While we tend to look at primary goals of terrorist organisations most, we should not overlook the secondary ones – especially when looking at terrorism from a counterterrorism standpoint.[23] The final part of this chapter shall be dedicated to outlining certain goals and objectives of individual terrorists, which again are important to counterterrorism measures.

[20] Richardson, *What Terrorists Want*.
[21] Brendan Koerner, 'Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War—And How to Fight Back', *Wired*, April 2016, https://www.wired.com/2016/03/isis-winning-social-media-war-heres-beat/.
[22] Paul Wilkinson, 'Implications of the Attacks of 9/11 for the Future of Terrorism', in *Global Responses to Terrorism: 9/11, Afghanistan and Beyond* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003). 29-35.
[23] Richardson. *What terrorists want.*

Analysing terrorism at an organisational level

Primary goals of terrorist groups are essentially the group's ultimate objectives; these are the specific ideological outcomes that the group strives towards. If we return to the earlier examples of RAF and ISIS, their primary goals would be the creation of a social and political revolution and the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate respectively. Secondary to these objectives, however, a terrorist organisation may have a variety of other goals that are geared less towards the achievement of one specific ideological ideal and more towards the day-to-day sustainment of the group. Secondary goals consist of promotion of the cause and raising (media) attention for it, aligning a general population with their goals, alienating the public in a target country from their government, recruiting new members to the cause, and maintaining the organisation.[24] Crucially, meeting these goals is far less complicated and terrorist organisations achieve them with relative ease. Nacos succinctly summarises the mechanism through which terrorist organisations can achieve these goals successfully in her 'terrorist calculus'. This calculus is informed by the following points:[25]

- Terrorist groups are involved in a conflict that they cannot hope to 'win' in a conventional war because they are simply too weak to do so, but they have good hopes to be effective when using (or threatening to use) violence against civilians.
- Governments are in a naturally bad position to respond to terrorism, because of terrorism's inherently unpredictable nature. It is hard, sometimes impossible, to correctly estimate what kind of attack takes place, when it takes place, who are involved, and how it will be committed.
- Terrorists can easily attack liberal democracies and have a seemingly large impact on these countries, as their guarantees of civil liberties like freedom of association, freedom of speech, and press freedom can be used to "transmit the false message that everyone in [the] target society is a potential victim."[26]
- Lawmakers and politicians in democracies are likely to overreact to terrorist attacks, sacrificing crucial civil liberties in the name of national security and possibly alienating their own populations, thereby increasing sympathy for terrorists among some communities.

[24] Idem. See also Wilkinson, 'Implications of the Attacks of 9/11'. 29-35.
[25] Nacos, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*. 6-7.
[26] Idem, 7.

In this analysis it becomes clear that opting for terrorism as a tactic is not always a bad idea and it may be a strategy worth pursuing in certain cases. This holds especially when it is used a last resort and in cases where there is public support for the terrorist organisation. Public support is a notably strong indicator of an organisation's ability to achieve its secondary goals and ensure a continued existence. It decreases the likelihood of knowledge about terrorist operations being spread to police and increases the pool of possible new members for the organisation. A clear example is the IRA, which maintained a persistent presence in Northern Ireland between the 1960s and 1990s, during the Troubles, because it enjoyed large public support. Citizens rarely turned in IRA members if they knew of their activities and police had difficulty investigating incidents because they received few tips.[27] However, this is a delicate balance. The German RAF's decision to launch aggressive, repetitive terrorist attacks contributed strongly to the diminishment of its second generation, for instance. These attacks were too extreme, even for those who in principle may have agreed with the RAF's ideological points.[28] Nevertheless, terrorist organisations need success in their secondary goals to make an impact. As such they *must* operate strategically and innovate where necessary, like any regular organisation needs to. New terrorist movements, like Al Qaeda and ISIS, have indeed shown their willingness to innovate and successfully launched online recruitment and media distribution.[29] The earlier mentioned capacity of terrorist organisations to innovate and operate as regular organisations do are thus a result of this necessity to sustain oneself.

Analysing terrorism at the individual level

One response to the argument above might be to say: any organisation clearly needs to consider carefully what tactics they employ and naturally terrorism groups do so too. It is not unusual to expect terrorist groups to care about their following and public image, because as an organisation, they need to do so in order to survive. As such, the fact that terrorist *organisations* operate rationally with respect to their goals is not surprising. What is strange is that individuals subscribe to these organisations and seem willing to die for them. What is their interest for doing so?

The argument that terrorism is a choice made by individuals with a predisposition toward violence and destruction has long been disproven. Though there are not many psychological studies of terrorists, existing ones reveal that there is not one 'type' of terrorist,

[27] Richardson, *What Terrorists Want*.
[28] Moghadam, 'Failure and Disengagement in the Red Army Faction'.
[29] Jason Burke, 'How the Changing Media Is Changing Terrorism', *The Guardian*, 25 February 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/25/how-changing-media-changing-terrorism.

nor is there one set of circumstances that produces terrorism.[30] Rather, there is a diverse set of reasons that might drive an actor to join a terrorist organisation and perhaps a different set of reasons altogether that lead one to commit a terrorist attack. These incentives also differ for members operating at various levels within an organisation. Given the variety of reasons, as well as the complexity of the topic, it would be impossible to give a full coherent answer to the question of why an individual might commit suicide. For a clear theoretical framework, however, we might turn to the work of Louise Richardson again. Richardson provides a clear categorisation along three lines ('the three Rs'): revenge, renown, and reaction (from the targeted community).[31] I'd like to illustrate the complexity of individual motivation along these three dimensions, as they capture the different motivations nicely and allow for a quick overview of the essentials.

Revenge

The first dimension Richardson identifies is a desire for revenge or belief that an individual needs to act on behalf of a group that has been harmed to some extent (a group that the individual also believes they relate to or are a part of). This may be personal revenge, as Richardson describes for some IRA members who experienced personal violence at the hands of the British state or members of Hamas who are personally affected by the Israeli state, but it does not have to be.[32] Many of the foreign recruits for ISIS, for example, were at least geographically far removed from the conflict in Syria and on the surface and had little to do with the civil war. Moreover, while most European foreign fighters came from disenfranchised backgrounds, many did not: Scott Gates and Sukanya Podder point out that most British fighters in contrast had relatively affluent backgrounds. Still, revenge against those who have done perceived harm to a community that recruits identify with is explicitly named as one of the most attractive features of membership of ISIS in studies.[33]

Renown

The second dimension is a more social one, that may vary in expression for individuals at higher and lower levels within terrorist organisations. While commanders within a terrorist organisation desire (inter)national recognition of their cause, this is not necessarily what most

[30] Martha Crenshaw, 'The Causes of Terrorism', *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (1981): 379–99, https://doi.org/10.2307/421717. See also Richardson, *What Terrorists Want,* 107-120.
[31] Richardson, *What Terrorists Want*. 75-90.
[32] Idem.
[33] Scott Gates and Sukanya Podder, 'Social Media, Recruitment, Allegiance and the Islamic State', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (2015): 10.

motivates rank and file members of the organisation. Terrorist organisations can function as a social network that gives young individuals a place to belong, a place where they matter and are viewed with respect. Gates and Podder mention among other things a "desire to impress […], a search for identity […], the desire for camaraderie, [and] the desire to make history" as motivations for foreign recruits to join the fight in Syria.[34] ISIS specifically provides its members with many opportunities to increase their fame, especially if they commit an act of terrorism in name of the Caliphate. The group has built up an extensive online presence and ensures that acts caught on camera (as most attacks are nowadays) are circulated widely and gain much attention.[35] The group also utilises its (social) media presence to build an identity for its members, guide public opinion, and to promote the identity that it has created of itself and its members abroad.[36] Renown can also express itself in other practical manners that motivate individual to go beyond just joining the organisation and ensure loyalty and commitment to the act. Examples of such renown or prospective rewards may be religious (i.e., by becoming a martyr, one receives the highest possible status and ensures entrance to paradise). Another example could be the comfort of becoming a hero to those left behind, which might in turn give protection or prosperity to one's family. Indeed, Simon Perry and Badi Hasisi point out that motives for suicide bombings are usually self-interested and rational.[37] Especially for young individuals, the social group, (sense of) belonging, as well as the fame and rewards that they perceive can be achieved in terrorist organisations provide them with a way to leave their mark on the world.

Reaction

Finally, perhaps the most closely aligned to the primary goals of terrorist groups is a desire for a response from the rest of the world, including the public and government. A common, readily understandable metaphor for terrorism is the idea of terrorism as a spectacle, in which the terrorists captivate their audience's attention and affects them to change their behaviour and achieve their (political) goals.[38] This metaphor makes the importance of other

[34] Gates and Podder. 109.
[35] James A. Piazza and Ahmet Guler, 'The Online Caliphate: Internet Usage and ISIS Support in the Arab World', *Terrorism and Political Violence* Latest articles (2019), https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1606801.
[36] Khalil Sardarnia and Rasoul Safizadeh, 'The Internet and Its Potentials for Networking and Identity Seeking: A Study on ISIS', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, no. 6 (2019): 1266–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1341877.
[37] Simon Perry and Badi Hasisi, 'Rational Choice Rewards and the Jihadist Suicide Bomber', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27, no. 1 (1 January 2015): 53–80, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.962991.
[38] Jonathan Matusitz, 'Terrorism as a Communication Process: The Audience', in *Terrorism and Communication* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publishing Inc., 2013), 77–110, https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/51173_ch_4.pdf.

actors than the terrorist clear. Whether the purpose of an attack is to achieve a primary or secondary goal of the group, the response to it matters. As Nacos argues in her terrorist calculus, the strength of terrorism as a tactic lies in the inappropriate response it tends to gather from governments, something which aids support for the group or distances populations from their government. For instance, citizens in liberal democracies, valuing the guarantees of personal freedoms and privacy, could feel aggrieved when those rights are infringed upon in a perceived unjust manner.[39] In the end,"[p]art of the genius of terrorism […] is that it elicits a reaction that furthers the interests of the terrorists more often than their victims."[40]

Taken all together, these three factors may help explain why individuals die for their cause, for instance through suicide bombing. In a passage on the choice for suicide bombing as a tactic by the Tamil Tigers, Richardson brings these three factors together neatly:[41]

> [Suicide terrorists] volunteer to avenge the atrocities committed against their communities, to further the cause of national liberation, and to bring glory to themselves. They do so because they have been personally affected by the conflict in which they live, because their community supports their action, and because their movement's ideology legitimizes it.

Implications for counterterrorism

Why does this matter for counterterrorism measures? For starters, it underscores the importance of developing an intricate strategy that pays the utmost attention to the details. If the motivations of young foreign fighters are hard to pin down and their backgrounds are diverse, there apparently is not one factor that attracts them to the Califate, for instance. As a result, deradicalization programmes that focus solely on one or two characteristics of radicalised fighters are likely to fail.[42] Second, if terrorists count on an exaggerated response from liberal governments and are intent on alienating their population, measures that play into terrorists' expectations should be evaluated with extra care. As we have seen from theoretical models such as the terrorist calculus, the predictiveness of government response may make terrorism more attractive as it increases the likelihood of support for the terrorists' cause and the chance that one makes a large impact with an attack.[43] Third, governments should respond to terrorist organisations preferably in an intelligent manner, while acknowledging that these organisations are not inherently different from regular organisations. As a result, measures

[39] Nacos, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*.
[40] Richardson, *What Terrorists Want*. 101.
[41] Idem. 108-109.
[42] David Anderson, 'Understanding Prevent', Analysis, accessed 14 December 2020, https://open.spotify.com/episode/1IUdWps2UpXTaolzmckCDQ.
[43] Nacos, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*.

should not just focus on deradicalizing (actual and potential) terrorists and diminishing support for the group's primary goals but should also target those secondary goals that sustain the organisation and allow it to exist. Measures targeting the latter could include prioritising the end of funding for these organisations, for example, or increasing internal tensions between members or leaders.[44] Due to the highly diverse character of terrorist organisations and their members, it is good to work on a case-by-case basis and decide what strategy to pursue based on this. Executing the leader of an organisation, though effective in some cases, may not work for other organisations because their organisational structure is different, for instance.[45] Such things should be considered when formulating counterterrorism measures. In the next chapter, we will turn to current approaches to counterterrorism and evaluate these against the expectations derived from the research presented above.

[44] For one example of effective meddling in internal organisational tensions, see Moghadam, 'Failure and Disengagement in the Red Army Faction'.
[45] Richardson, *What Terrorists Want*.

3: In the name of democracy, in the name of security

Now that we have examined in closer detail the question and motives of terrorist organisations, we can turn to their counterpart: the government.[46] It is generally accepted that, if there is one thing a government must do, it is guarding the safety of its population. The importance of security and safety is part of the reason why even philosophers pleading for a small government, like political philosopher Robert Nozick, continue to see a role for government and argue against anarchy.[47] In his seminal 1974 book, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Nozick in fact specifically argues that the existence of a minimal state – a "state that is limited to the protection of the rights of person, property, and contract"[48] – is consistent with individuals' state of nature rights (the utmost basic rights that they hold simply for being a person and that cannot be infringed upon). It must be noted that Nozick's argument was nowhere near the final word on this matter and that the political philosophical debate has continued to evolve after the publication of *Anarchy, State, and Utopia.* My point is not to argue for or against this specific position. It is to simply to state that, even for those who are – to put it lightly – no great fans of the state and who believe individual rights have primacy over state action, security is an issue that is of such importance that it must be the state's responsibility. Indeed, other authors like Isaac Taylor, have used similar argumentation.[49] Clearly, terrorism provides a threat to individual and national security: its specific aim is to harm individuals to influence political processes or decisions. If terrorism is a threat to (national) security and it is the government's duty to protect said security, it is rather important to determine whether government is succeeding in this duty. The central question in this chapter is therefore: when it comes to managing terrorism as a security challenge, are governments in general succeeding? If not, why are they failing?

My response is that, while it is difficult to fully analyse any governments 'success rate' in preventing a terrorist attack, governments display significant faults when responding to terrorism. There is a myriad of possible reasons for this, ranging from 'it is simply very difficult

[46] Chapter title derived from: Ben Taub, 'Guantánamo's Darkest Secret', *The New Yorker,* 15 April 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/04/22/guantanamos-darkest-secret.
[47] For an overview of Nozick's arguments, see Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1974). Or see Eric Mack, 'Robert Nozick's Political Philosophy', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/nozick-political/.
[48] Mack, "Robert Nozick's Political Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
[49] Isaac Taylor, 'State Responsibility and Counterterrorism', *Ethics & Global Politics* 9, no. 1 (1 January 2016): 32542, https://doi.org/10.3402/egp.v9.32542.

to fix complex issues' to fundamental organisational flaws in government structures to human psychology (and more). It is impossible to outline all of these in the present paper, so I will focus on by far the most fundamental of these: human psychology and its influence on our politics, as mediated through government structures. I posit those human cognitive biases that influence our individual ability to make decisions under uncertainty are influencing governments' decision-making under these circumstances as well. Finally, I investigate possible solutions to this. To do this, I will first provide a brief trend analysis of counterterrorism strategies and examine their overall likely effectiveness, then present possible causes and showcase the most important of these, analyse its effects on government efficiency, and lastly present possible fixes.

Counterterrorism strategies: Are they effective?

Assessing the total effectiveness of counterterrorism strategies is a difficult task and before I present insights into this, I must briefly mention three limitations to this assessment. First and most obviously, we cannot prove a negative: we cannot speak about attacks that did not happen, because they did not happen, and we very well might not know why that is. Was it because government actors stepped in at the right time or was it because group members were not ready to carry out the attack and decided against it? There is little information on events that did not take place. But this may be too easy a cop-out, for not all of us know equally little about prevented terrorist attack. In their tracking of specific individuals and cells, secret services, intelligence agencies, and counterterrorism taskforces may keep data that shed a light on why some attacks succeeded and why some did not. Moreover, governments publish relevant information, with details confounded. This is what the Dutch intelligence services (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, AIVD) do: given the public's right to information, they release a yearly review including details on how many inquiries have been opened, how many investigations of different levels have been concluded, and general trends in national security.[50] Naturally, this does not include specifics – releasing too much information might be detrimental to covert operations – but it yields more insights into counterterrorist operations.

A second difficulty that I want to highlight is methodological in nature, because it relates to correctly classifying certain acts as 'terrorism'. While many terrorist organisations

[50] For an example, see: Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, 'AIVD-jaarverslag 2019', jaarverslag, Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, 29 April 2020, https://www.aivd.nl/documenten/jaarverslagen/2020/04/29/jaarverslag-2019.

do claim credit for their attack, this does not always happen, and terrorists are not always linked to existing terrorist organisations. Examples of lone wolf attackers, who act based on their own convictions and not based on their membership of a group, are legion and occur in many places around the world. The 2019 attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, was committed by an individual who was not a member of any organisation and decided of his own accord to launch an attack.[51] Additionally, there are instances of terrorist organisations not claiming credit for attacks committed by their members. In Germany, police only connected a string of (racially motivated) murders to the National Socialist Underground after one of its leaders turned herself in and two others committed suicide. The group had been able to murder individuals in broad daylight, set off bombs at Turkish neighbourhoods, and commit robberies for over a decade.[52] Most crucially, debate exists even on the most seemingly obvious definitions of what terrorism is and definitions can be followed inconsistently, as one critical book review of Richardson's work rightly points out for her research.[53] Correctly identifying terrorist attacks is not easy, but it is crucial to setting effective counterterrorism policy.

Finally, scientific literature on counterterrorism also struggles to determine any causal relationships between steps taken to combat terrorist groups and attacks that may or may not have taken place. Many measures that seem clear enough to use (such as referring to the number of terrorist attacks and seeing whether these decrease after a specific measure takes effect) are riddled with further methodological errors.[54] As Cynthia Lum and her colleagues note in a systematic review of scientific studies into this precise question "[t]he available scientific evidence was drawn from only a handful of studies which use moderately rigorous research designs".[55] This means not only that there is precious little information in the scientific field that we might use, but that the little information that does exist, might be imperfect, too.[56] Moreover, the effectiveness of counterterrorism measures may also vary significantly between different methods. Take for instance the use of drone strikes, as utilised by the United States in

[51] BBC News Editorial Team, 'Christchurch Massacre: Inquiry Finds Failures Ahead of Attack', *BBC News*, 8 December 2020, sec. Asia, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55211468.
[52] Lee McGowan, 'Right-Wing Violence in Germany: Assessing the Objectives, Personalities and Terror Trail of the National Socialist Underground and the State's Response to It', *German Politics* 23, no. 3 (3 July 2014): 196–212, https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2014.967224.
[53] Jeff Goodwin, 'What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat', *Archives Europeennes de Sociologie/European Journal of Sociology* 47 (1 January 2006): 477–82.
[54] T.W. van Dongen, 'Break It Down: An Alternative Approach to Measuring Effectiveness in Counterterrorism', *Journal of Applied Security Research* 6, no. 3 (July 2011): 357–71, https://doi.org/10.1080/19361610.2011.580264.
[55] Cynthia Lum, Leslie W. Kennedy, and Alison J. Sherley, 'The Effectiveness of Counter-Terrorism Strategies', *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 2, no. 1 (2006): 1–50, https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2006.2.
[56] Ibid, pp. 3-6.

attempts to undermine terrorist organisations in Pakistan. The effectiveness of this technique is a hotly debated topic, with researchers finding varying degrees of effectiveness, especially regarding long-term and short-term impact.[57] And this is just one example of a (by comparison) rather simple technique, using drone strikes to target specific infrastructures of terrorist groups. Preventive counterterrorist measures, aimed at preventing radicalisation of individuals at home, often cover many more areas of life and their effectiveness is thus even harder to determine. Take a counterterrorist initiative like the British Prevent programme, which is (as the name indeed suggests) a preventive strategy that aims to spot signs of extremist beliefs in individual. In the event that an individual is radicalised, Prevent aims to stop them from taking the leap towards terrorism via a buddy-system, pairing up individuals with extremist beliefs with experience experts.[58] The precise effectiveness of such a strategy is incredibly difficult to establish, as it is a long-running intervention, which leaves many variables that may confound its overall effectiveness and that cannot be removed. Did an individual deradicalize because of conversations with their buddy, or because they simply hang with a different crowd after a few years? Was a radicalised individual even seriously interested in committing a violent act, or was it nothing more than fantasy? Such questions illustrate the difficulty of evaluating longitudinal, complex programmes.

Having established how difficult it is to assess how well counterterrorist efforts work, what can we still say about it, then? One thing that remains is that, in the public eye, terrorism measures tend to be announced not too long after an attack has taken place and tend to be out of proportion when compared to the threat that terrorism poses to safety.[59] This matters because it is easy to imagine the impact that this has on society, which in turn may well affect the extent to which terrorist activity can be decreased. Allow me to clarify. I argued in the previous chapter, that terrorism is a tactic that is at least in part employed to elicit a particular response from governments. Specifically, the desired outcome is an overblown response that can alienate populations from their government. This response serves several purposes, but most important is the fact that it allows anti-government sentiments to grow *and* allows terrorist organisations to garner attention for their cause, cultivate sympathy, and perhaps even increase membership

[57] Asfandyar Mir, 'What Explains Counterterrorism Effectiveness? Evidence from the U.S. Drone War in Pakistan', *International Security* 43, no. 2 (1 November 2018): 45–83, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00331.. See for one instance of contrasting views: Michele Malvesti, 'Bombing Bin Laden: Assessing the Effectiveness of Air Strikes as a CounterTerrorism Strategy', *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 26 (1 January 2002).
[58] Anderson, 'Understanding Prevent'.
[59] See for instance Brigitte L. Nacos, 2012, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism*. New York: Longman; or Jessica Wolfendale, 'Terrorism, Security, and the Threat of Counterterrorism', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 1 (1 January 2007): 75–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100600791231.

and recruitment. As such, these goals of a terrorist organisation are diametrically opposed to those of a government with regards to security: the two actors cannot *both* be successful at the same time. We could model this as a zero-sum game: *either* terrorists succeed in their aims to make an impact on a particular society and government loses out as it has failed in its task of providing a safe environment, *or* government succeeds as attacks are prevented and terrorists fail to make an impact. This insight matters because this is one way to establish government at least fails to achieve security *in some cases* and if it fails in some cases, we must examine if and how it is possible to improve this record. Evaluations of terrorist attacks regularly conclude that an attack was likely not preventable, but that counterterrorism efforts should have been significantly better nonetheless.[60] It is unlikely that we can fully prevent terrorist attacks from happening in a liberal democracy, but it may be possible to prevent some and importantly, to reduce the damage done.

Obstacle: Decision-making under uncertainty

One obstacle is the fact that humans are particularly bad at creating policy for highly salient but statistically unlikely events. In their Nobel prize-winning research, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky explain how human psychology is not capable of operating like a calculator. Instead of correctly calculating the probabilities of events occurring and basing our decision on that information, our brain uses two different 'systems' of making decisions when we miss (some) information. Kahneman and Tversky dub these systems 'system one' and 'system two'. While system two systematically calculates the information available to it, operates economically rationally, and makes accurate decisions, this takes a lot of energy and time. As a result, system one makes most of the decisions for us, and system one is not accurate. Instead, it uses numerous heuristics (rule of thumb) that are useful because they provide quick instructions that are *usually* accurate, but not always.[61] There are many different heuristics or biases, that serve us well on most occasions but that are no real alternative to a careful analysis by system two. One such heuristic is the so-called availability heuristic. This estimates the probability of an event occurring based on the ease with which one can bring it to mind. Though this is easy and takes far less time and energy than thoroughly combing through one's memory to bring information to mind, it is not accurate and that is a problem.[62] Let us look at terrorism again as an example. If we carefully analyse how likely it is that an attack will affect us (i.e.,

[60] BBC News Editorial Team, 'Christchurch Massacre'.
[61] Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.
[62] Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, 'Availability: A Heuristic for Judging Frequency and Probability', *Cognitive Psychology* 5, no. 2 (1 September 1973): 207–32, https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(73)90033-9.

use our system two), we realise that such attacks are highly unlikely to happen and especially unlikely to personally hit us. But if we use system one, the availability heuristic kicks in and we realise that there are many examples of terrorism that come easily to mind, because terrorist attacks are the sort of event that we remember easily. And there are many similar biases that sneak into our decision-making in risky situations, like loss aversion (we are more impacted by the prospect of losing something we have than by the possibility of gaining something we do not) or 'inside view' (we are prone to "treat [our] problems as unique so that [we] can ignore historical statistics").[63]

As these insights made their way into behavioural economics and became more mainstream, they were applied to other fields as well. The American legal scholar Cass Sunstein applies them to governance in *Laws of Fear*, in which he explains how these human biases make their way into the laws that politicians enact. In this monograph, Sunstein critiques a specific policy-guiding principle (the precautionary principle, which essentially guides one to act in a 'better safe than sorry' manner). Sunstein posits those human cognitive biases are clearly reflected in the kinds of policy governments create.[64] For example, the availability heuristic that I explained before leads voters to care more deeply about particularly salient events (like a terrorist attack, an economic crisis, or a pandemic) and to feel less strongly about topics that come to mind less easily (like infrastructure, education, or foreign policy). The fact that voters care deeply about certain topics, means that these are more easily talked about and acted upon, because representatives want to signal to their electorate that they represent their interest. Representatives need to do this if they wish to keep their seat, after all. Furthermore, representatives themselves are also human and tend to care more easily about these big, memorable issues. Sunstein also points out our preference for simple solutions to complex problems in what he calls 'system neglect', a bias that makes us fail to see the impact of small changes or decisions on the system as a whole.[65] Essentially, we have a tendency to fail to see the full effect of laws we instate. For instance, if government decides to make cuts to the education budget, this affects a great many individuals in ways that may not be clear at first. Less money for schools might mean lower quality of education (i.e., because there is less

[63] Kevin Arceneaux, 'Cognitive Biases and the Strength of Political Arguments', *American Journal of Political Science* 56, no. 2 (2012): 271–85, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00573.x.;
T. K. Das and Bing-Sheng Teng, 'Cognitive Biases and Strategic Decision Processes: An Integrative Perspective', *Journal of Management Studies* 36, no. 6 (1999): 757–78, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00157. Quotation found on page 760.
[64] Sunstein, *Laws of Fear*, 2009.
[65] Idem.

money to spend on additional props for in the classroom). It also means lower wages for teachers (and as a result, teaching becoming less attractive, leading to shortages and higher work pressures for those who still decide to teach). This in turn creates less joy from learning *or* teaching (leading to lower education rates, higher rates of reading difficulties, leading to problems with employment), et cetera. Not all these effects are clear when we first look at the question and some things may only be clear if you have direct experience with teaching. To the politician, this might just mean a little less money per student. To the system, however, the effects are far bigger, especially as we continue to 'zoom out' and review the potential effects that occur years into the future. According to Sunstein, this problem is present throughout the political system, especially when policies get more complicated than this – as they do with crisis management and national security, questions that have much more uncertainty and much larger consequences.[66]

The reader might wonder at this point: is that bad? On the one hand, the answer to that could be, not really. Governments are ultimately human, and so are terrorist organisations. Mistakes will happen on both sides, as it were. However, the mere fact that we can never completely rule out any mistakes, and that failures will occur no matter what we do, should not be taken as an excuse to accept the status quo. The fact remains that terrorist attacks happen, do kill and maim individuals, and have a lasting impact on livelihoods in certain areas because of unforeseen impacts on the economy. Terrorism is not something we can neglect, but neither should we overestimate it. To the extent that levels of terrorism appear to rise even as counterterrorism measures get increasingly stringent, government as it is, is failing us and we should critically think on how to fix that – if it can be fixed at all. The fact that (counter)terrorism is so salient and thus gets a large, disproportionate amount of funding and (media) attention hampers governments' effectiveness on other policy terrains.[67] Governments do have limited resources, so crudely put, every euro or dollar that is spent on terrorism can no longer go towards something else that might be equally (or more) destructive. One scholar who has written extensively on this, Jessica Wolfendale, names climate change research as an example; another example that might be considered is public health policy.[68] Underfunding these areas could be disastrous and as such, ineffective counterterrorism policy should be

[66] Sunstein, *Laws of Fear*, 2009.
[67] Jessica Wolfendale, 'Terrorism, Security, and the Threat of Counterterrorism', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 1 (1 January 2007): 75–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100600791231.
[68] Idem.

actively avoided. We must examine, then, what solutions might arise. In the following section – the final section of this chapter – I will explore three potential responses.

An exploration of alternatives

It must be said that all the following potential remedies against human irrationality finding its way into policy are limited. Neither will be a perfect fix, and all will have drawbacks. My intention in this section is therefore not to propose a new form of governing – that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I merely intend to show that we need not accept the status quo and that it is possible to improve upon current political systems. The three alternatives that I will outline here can be distinguished as small-scale and large-scale changes to the current system.

Small-scale change

For a quick, small change to our democracy, we could imagine enacting legislature that imposes a mandated waiting period between impactful events and legislature, essentially a mandatory pause between events and policy. That corrects for politicians' tendencies to react quickly to news and overreact when not all information is known yet. It might also give politicians more support in defying pressures from their constituency, freeing them from acting prematurely as they no longer have a choice. However, this strategy also has the clearest problems out of all the three I present. The drawback will be that sometimes emergency legislature is very necessary and we cannot afford to wait (see for instance the coronavirus pandemic, in which governments had to respond quickly for the sake of public health). And even if we purely limit this to terrorism, it is unclear whether such a measure would even solve anything, because the biases that this policy targets are not the only biases we hold. The risk of a terrorist attack will always be more salient and thus easier to remember than the risk of bad-quality high school education, for instance, and so *even* in 'calmer' times attention is more easily turned towards combatting terrorism. And by attention, I also mean funding. Larger-scale solutions appear to hold more promise, then.

Large-scale change

Large-scale changes could go one of two ways: either one introduces more bureaucracy into governance, or one opts for less bureaucracy and redirects authority back to the people. In the former option, governance would move from governing by the people and their representatives (democracy) towards governance via experts (technocracy). Though technocracy removes some of the connection between the public and their government, it is a

system that emphasises responsible government.[69] Daniele Caramani identifies such systems of technocracy already present in large organisational bodies (such as international governance) or independent think tanks. He posits that technocracy is specifically well-suited to handle complex policy questions because it places experts in managerial positions. Moreover, technocracy is a way to avoid 'mediatization', or the growing power of media and the accompanying surge in populist governments as mediatization necessitates politicians' emphasis on communicating with their constituency. Caramani argues that the distance placed between politicians and the people benefits policy-setting, because it gives politicians control over the political agenda and removes criticism that calls for more expert governance.[70] Technocratic government, specifically with our case study of terrorism in mind and as a solution to systemic cognitive bias, may not work, though. In studies done by Kahneman and Tversky, even statisticians (who really should know how statistics work) were not able to accurately assess likelihoods.[71] Moreover, more bureaucracy is also not very likely to help government be more effective, as public opinion at least in part is influenced by whether individuals understand what is going on. Bureaucracies tend to be quite difficult to understand for any average person who does not want to spend a few hours each day to see what meetings have produced what outcomes. Bureaucracies can alienate individuals from the purpose of the very system.[72] That would be a significant weakness of this approach because alienation from government and mistrust are two characteristics that, as I argued in chapter 1, help terrorist organisations be more effective.

A second systemic change, then, might go in the complete opposite direction and remove professional politicians from the equation altogether. This argument focuses on forms of direct citizen government. One proposed model of direct citizen government is a so-called lottery democracy, which is enacted by electing a (previously determined) number of citizens randomly and allowing them to at least play a large role in if not determine the policy that is set. The Belgian philosopher David Van Reybrouck published a persuasive manifesto for citizen government entitled *Against Elections*, in which he argues that today's democracies are flawed and do not *really* reflect governance by the people. Van Reybrouck points to

[69] Daniele Caramani, 'Will vs. Reason: The Populist and Technocratic Forms of Political Representation and Their Critique to Party Government', *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (February 2017): 54–67, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000538.
[70] Idem.
[71] Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.
[72] Rogers Brubaker, 'Why Populism?', *Theory and Society* 46, no. 5 (November 2017): 357–85, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-017-9301-7.

experiments with citizens assemblies, citizen committees, or lottery democracy throughout history to highlight the potential this form of government holds. This form of government functions through a random, representative selection of participants in an assembly, who – over the course of a set period – dedicate time and effort to comb through the relevant information and create a policy. Citizens meet and speak with experts on the topic, people who would be impacted by the laws that they enact, politicians, and each other. At the end of the project, they decide on the implementation of the policy, and it may be either recommended to parliament for a vote or signed into law immediately.[73] Examples of such experiments include the reform of the Icelandic constitution (2009-2013), the Irish Constitutional Convention (2012-2014), which again recommended changes to the constitution, and the Irish citizen's assembly that preceded the country's referendum on abortion.[74] The focus of the latter was not just on abortion, but on a broad range of complex social issues, and the assembly brought forward several recommendations that were later passed via referenda.[75] This suggests that using this strategy for complex regulatory questions makes sense and is a productive avenue for change. Citizen's assemblies also hold a relatively good track record according to Van Reybrouck, as they tend to make informed decisions about the matter at hand, in a manner that carefully examined every issue in the debate.[76] The number of meetings of a citizen's assembly can also be varied so that decisions are not taken in a matter of one parliamentary debate, but potential policy is spoken about at some more length. Notwithstanding these advantages, deciding on matters via a citizen's assembly is complicated and again this system is not perfect. Its outcomes, for instance, depend a lot on the way the system is set up: not everyone is interested in spending their weekends discussing policy with strangers (and not everyone has the time for it), so a large selection bias may be visible, which particularly harms those citizens who were already disengaging from the political system.[77] Naturally, this could be corrected by some

[73] David Van Reybrouck, *Tegen Verkiezingen*, 17th ed. (Amsterdam, NL: De Bezige Bij, 2018).
[74] Hannah Fillmore-Patrick, 'The Iceland Experiment (2009-2013): A Participatory Approach to Constitutional Reform', *Democratization Policy Council Note*, August 2013, 21;
'Convention on the Constitution', Citizens Information, 27 February 2019, https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/government_in_ireland/irish_constitution_1/constitutional_convention.html;
Louise Caldwell, 'I Took Part in a Citizens' Assembly – It Could Help Break the Brexit Deadlock', *the Guardian*, 16 January 2019, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/16/citizens-assembly-ireland-abortion-referendum.
[75] Caldwell, 'I Took Part in a Citizens' Assembly – It Could Help Break the Brexit Deadlock'.
[76] Van Reybrouck, *Tegen Verkiezingen*.
[77] Michiel Stapper, 'Burgerparticipatie dient vooral ontwikkelaars en bevoorrechte burgers', Universiteit van Amsterdam, 24 November 2020, https://www.uva.nl/content/nieuws/nieuwsberichten/2020/11/burgerparticipatie-dient-vooral-ontwikkelaars-en-bevoorrechte-burgers.html;
E. W. Stapper, 'Do Contracts Have Politics? Contracts, Planning Consultants, and Urban Development in the

form of compensation, but the issue of interest does remain. Successes of past experiments have also depended to a large extent on their execution and development. Relevant questions to ask relate to the participation of politicians in the project, the role of media, and the role of the public at large. Should politicians be included in citizen's assemblies? Should a resolution formed by the assembly be passed on to politicians? And what elements of the assembly should be covered by press: private discussions of assembly participants, information given to the members, draft resolutions? How should the assembly communicate with the public? And lastly, should non-elected citizens participate during the process, for instance through online voting? Should they vote on the policy in referenda? Or should they be excluded?[78] One's answer to these questions determines to a large extent how effective the assembly is.

Age of Participation' (Amsterdam, NL, University of Amsterdam, 2020), https://dare.uva.nl/personal/pure/en/publications/do-contracts-have-politics(041c93d2-8e01-4ac7-9799-08c626daaa50).html.

[78] Van Reybrouck, *Tegen Verkiezingen*.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have closely examined two types of organising, namely terrorist organisations on the one hand and governments on the other. I have examined the inner functions of both kinds of organisations, concluding that terrorist organisations can function quite rationally with respect to their goals and governments – in contrast – do not. In the first half of this thesis, I analysed the behaviour and decision-making of terrorist organisations, concluding that these organisations should be seen in mostly the same way as 'regular' organisations. Like regular organisations that do not engage in political violence, terrorist organisations have a hierarchy of goals that they attend to and strive to achieve. These range from specifically ideologically motivated goals specific to the organisation (i.e., establishing an Islamic Caliphate, creating an independent state, driving a political revolution) to organisational goals (i.e., maintain funding, attract new recruits, spread the word about their cause, and finally, continue their existence). I expand on existing characterisations by contrasting this with the operations of governments in the second half of my thesis. I also emphasise the important implications these distinctions have for counterterrorism, maintaining that the most effective counterterrorism measures are likely those that treat terrorist organisations on a case-by-case basis and eliminate the infrastructures that support their existence. Governments should not underestimate the extent to which terrorist organisations are able to predict their response to an attack and play into this. This last factor returns in the second half of my thesis, wherein I argue that governments' actions in counterterrorism policy reflect certain human flaws – notably a tendency to overreact and simplify. Following Cass Sunstein, I argue that this is because humans have cognitive biases that come out especially strongly when we make decisions under uncertainty, an insight that is gleaned from the relatively new field of behavioural economics. The fact that governments display the same cognitive biases as humans individually do, is problematic, because it hampers the effectiveness of the policy it sets in high-pressure, complicated situations. This relates to terrorism specifically (hence my use of this case study) but note that it does not only relate to terrorism: there are many situations in which it is important for governments to keep their cool and set effective policy, but that human beings are somewhat unequipped to deal with. That makes this dissertation extremely relevant in today's political climate, as well as an important contribution to the field. I explore three solutions could mitigate our biases, presenting their potential and their limitations, but due to the scope of this work, I am unable to make definitive recommendations. I highlight small-scale change, like adapting our governance structure to create a pause between key events and laws relating to

them, and large-scale change, either through increased technocratic governance or forms of citizen government. The potential for the latter is more powerful, but the changes needed for these are drastic and it is unsure whether these solutions solve the problem of bias in politics. As such, a key recommendation of this thesis for future research is to investigate bias in technocratic political systems and in citizen's assemblies. This specific research is needed to give concrete recommendations for change, but I hope that this exploratory chapter of my thesis provides the inspiration needed to move further. In the name of democracy, in the name of security, we can do better.

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