

Why People Enter and Embrace Violent Groups

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Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest

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Radicalization, terrorism, identity fusion, collective identity, social influence

Abstract

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We distinguish two pathways people may follow when they join violent groups: compliance and internalization. Compliance occurs when individuals are coerced to join by powerful influence agents. Internalization occurs when individuals join due to a perceived convergence between the self and the group. We searched for evidence of each of these pathways in field investigations of former members of two renowned terrorist organizations: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (Study 1) and Islamist radical groups (Study 2). Results indicated that ex-fighters joined LTTE for reasons associated with both compliance and internalization but that ex-fighters joined Islamist radical groups primarily for reasons associated with internalization. When compliance occurred, it often took the form of coercion within LTTE but involved charismatic persuasion agents within Islamist groups. This evidence of systematic differences in the reasons why fighters enter violent groups suggests that strategies for preventing radicalization and fostering de-radicalization should be tailored to particular groups.

Contribution to the field

The paper aims to contribute to understanding why people join violent groups in three ways. First, we distinguish two general pathways through which people may come to join violent groups: compliance and internalization. Second, we elaborate three situationally-driven sub-pathways that give rise to compliance (charismatic persuasion agents, propaganda, and coercion) and three identity-driven sub-pathways that give rise to internalization (personal, relational, and collective identities). Third, we assess the applicability of our formulation to determining why members of two violent terrorist organizations (Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and Islamist radicals) joined the group.

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Ethics statements

Studies involving animal subjects

Generated Statement: No animal studies are presented in this manuscript.

Studies involving human subjects

Generated Statement: The database on members of jihadist-linked networks was created using interviews conducted by a member of non-profit research organization Artis International. Those who analyzed the database did not have access to any primary material from the original interviews such as audio recordings, transcripts or field notes. The database was anonymized and therefore did not contain any information that could be used to identify the interviewees.

The database on members of Tigers of Tamil (LTTE) is part of broader research carried out by InReach Global. Ethics committee approval for collecting data was required and granted by MacQuarie University.

Inclusion of identifiable human data

Generated Statement: No potentially identifiable human images or data is presented in this study.

Data availability statement

Generated Statement: The datasets generated for this study will not be made publicly available. The data are taken from anonymized interviews of former terrorists. Due to sensitive content and that participants were informed that their responses would not be accessible, the interviews are not publicly available.

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22
23 **Abstract**

24 We distinguish two pathways people may follow when they join violent groups:
25 compliance and internalization. Compliance occurs when individuals are coerced to join
26 by powerful influence agents. Internalization occurs when individuals join due to a
27 perceived convergence between the self and the group. We searched for evidence of
28 each of these pathways in field investigations of former members of two renowned
29 terrorist organizations: the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (Study 1) and
30 Islamist radical groups (Study 2). Results indicated that ex-fighters joined LTTE for
31 reasons associated with both compliance and internalization but that ex-fighters joined
32 Islamist radical groups primarily for reasons associated with internalization. When
33 compliance occurred, it often took the form of coercion within LTTE but involved
34 charismatic persuasion agents within Islamist groups. This evidence of systematic
35 differences in the reasons why fighters enter violent groups suggests that strategies for
36 preventing radicalization and fostering de-radicalization should be tailored to particular
37 groups.

38 **Keywords: radicalization, terrorism, identity fusion, collective identity, social**
39 **influence**

40

41 **1. Why people enter and embrace violent groups**

42 Violent extremism and terrorism pose a growing threat to peace and security worldwide.
 43 To reduce this threat, the UN has recently declared 2020-2030 the Decade of Action. A
 44 top priority is fighting violent extremism through the adoption of systematic preventive
 45 measures (UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, A/RES/60/288, 2006). Identifying
 46 these measures requires understanding the fundamental issue of why people join violent
 47 groups. Although previous researchers have developed several distinct classification
 48 systems for organizing the reasons people join violent groups (e.g., Bjørge, 2011;
 49 Cottee & Hayward, 2011; Hafez & Mullins, 2015), no single formulation has won
 50 widespread acceptance among researchers.

51 The present research aims to contribute to understanding why people join violent
 52 groups in three ways. First, we draw on the attitude change literature (e.g., Bagozzi &
 53 Lee, 2002; Kelman, 1952, 1958) to distinguish two general pathways through which
 54 people may come to join violent groups: compliance and internalization. Second, we
 55 elaborate three situationally-driven sub-pathways that give rise to compliance
 56 (charismatic persuasion agent, propaganda, and coercion) and three identity-driven sub-
 57 pathways that give rise to internalization (personal, relational, and collective identities).
 58 Third, we assess the applicability of our formulation in understanding why members of
 59 two violent terrorist organizations joined the group. Specifically, in Study 1 we used
 60 semi-structured interviews to directly assess the experience of ex-members of the
 61 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a militant terrorist organization of Sri Lanka.
 62 In Study 2 we analyzed the life stories of former Islamist radicals who were ex-
 63 members of violent jihadist groups. Prior to introducing our formulation, we review past
 64 attempts to understand the roots of terrorism.

65

66 **2. Why people join violent terrorist groups: basic personal needs, shared realities,
 67 and the desire for immersion through identity fusion**

68 Previous studies have devoted considerable attention to the question of why people join
 69 violent groups (e.g., Borum, 2011; Campana & Lapointe, 2012; Horgan, 2005;
 70 Horowitz, 2015; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Moghaddam, 2005; Newman, 2006;
 71 Sánchez-Cuenca & de la Calle, 2009; Scull et al., 2020; Wiktorowicz, 2005).
 72 Intuitively, one might believe that alignment with terrorist groups is explained by
 73 radical ideology.

74 This commonsense assumption collides with the fact that most people holding
 75 radical ideas do not actually engage in terrorism, and many terrorists are not completely
 76 radicalized (Bjørge, 2011). Radicalization does not inevitably lead to violence and
 77 terrorism, even though it can facilitate them (Bjørge & Horgan, 2009). After all,
 78 previous research indicates that attending religious services (thought to enhance
 79 coalitional commitment) is a more powerful predictor of support for suicide attacks than
 80 religious devotion (Ginges et al., 2009). Therefore, radical worldviews are only one
 81 among many potential causes of joining violent terrorist groups (Kruglanski & Fishman,
 82 2009).

83 With such distinctions in mind, Borum (2011) defines *radicalization* as “the
 84 process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs”. This development of ideology
 85 is conceptually different from actual extremist acts, which Borum defines as *action*
 86 *pathways*, or “the process of engaging in terrorism or violent extremist actions” (p. 9).

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87 Our current focus is not the adoption of extremist ideologies per se, but the reasons that
88 motivated former terrorists to join and support a terrorist group in the first place.

89 In line with the foregoing reasoning, the 3N model (Bélanger et al., 2019;
90 Kruglanski et al., 2018; Lobato et al., 2020) identifies three general drivers of joining
91 violent groups: need, narrative and network. According to this perspective, group
92 membership can satisfy basic needs such as the need to feel valued and to be respected
93 by others (Kruglanski et al., 2018). Different factors such as personal failures,
94 interpersonal rejection, individual or collective grievances, or social alienation can
95 induce a loss of personal significance through the loss of a compelling life narrative and
96 the corresponding sense of purpose. To restore it, people may join groups that offer
97 them a sense of purpose paired with feelings of camaraderie (Bélanger et al., 2019).
98 Therefore, through joining such groups, individuals can address the basic need to be
99 respected by others, they can establish a new narrative that gives their life meaning, and
100 they also can experience the social benefits of being part of a network of people.

101 Groups do not operate in an ideological vacuum, but promote a shared reality
102 (Hardin & Higgins, 1996), an ideological narrative that in the case of terrorist and
103 violent organizations legitimizes violence. Such a narrative could be extraordinarily
104 appealing after suffering a loss of personal significance or meaning, when people
105 usually experience a thirst for revenge against those they consider blameworthy
106 (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011). By virtue of being part of a violent group and the
107 adoption of its narrative, the use of violence that is generally reprimanded becomes
108 tolerable (Bélanger et al., 2019).

109 Another motive that could explain why some individuals join these violent
110 groups is identity fusion, or the development of a feeling of visceral sense of connection
111 with the group (Swann et al., 2012). One of the key characteristics of violent and
112 terrorist groups is that their members are willing to fight and even die for the group, and
113 identity fusion research has consistently confirmed that fusion is a successful predictor
114 of such extreme actions (see Gómez et al., 2020 for a review). Up until now, two main
115 mechanisms have been identified as a cause or an amplifier of fusion with a group:
116 shared experiences with other individuals, particularly dysphoric experiences (e.g.,
117 Whitehouse et al., 2017), and shared values (e.g., Swann et al., 2014). Of particular
118 interest here is the fact that individuals might even fuse with groups that they do not
119 (yet) belong to and with whom they do not share any previous association, such as when
120 they perceive that the negative treatment suffered by an outgroup clashes with one's
121 own beliefs (Kunst et al., 2018). Examples of fusion with a group have been found
122 among Libyan insurgents fighting against the Gaddafi regime (Whitehouse et al., 2014),
123 captured ISIS fighters (Gómez et al., 2017), Pakistani participants supporting the
124 Kashmiri cause (Pretus et al., 2019), supporters of an Al Qaeda associated group
125 (Hamid et al., 2019), Northern Irish loyalist and republican paramilitaries (Ferguson &
126 McAuley, 2020), and fighters against the Islamic State including Peshmerga, Iraqi army
127 Kurds, and Arab Sunni Militia (Gómez et al., 2017).

128 Although there is an impressive number of theoretical models on the causes of
129 violent extremism (e.g., Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Neumann & Kleinmann, 2013; Pisoui
130 & Ahmed, 2016; Vergani et al., 2018), less common are investigations including
131 empirical data about this issue. A recent qualitative examination of the themes
132 explaining why people join terrorist groups (i.e., ISIS and Al-Qaeda) in Kuwait through
133 interviews with prison inmates identified five reasons for involvement: religious
134 identity development (progression of the religious identity), personal connections
135 (development of close social bonds with individuals and religious organizations),
136 propaganda (influence by social media), defense of Islam (perception that Islam and

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137 specifically the Sunni sect of Islam is under threat), and social marginalization (social
138 risk factors) (Scull et al., 2020). Although this model is promising, one of its limitations
139 is that it is based on the analyses of interviews with members of terrorist groups that are
140 focused on ideological factors. Terrorists from groups with a different focus than
141 ideology or from groups with a similar focus but in different contexts might decide to
142 embrace such groups for reasons not captured with this sample. For instance, some
143 authors have suggested that the reasons for entering into terrorist groups differ in
144 conflict zones (i.e., trauma and revenge) and non-conflict zones (i.e., discrimination,
145 marginalization, frustrated aspirations, desire for adventure, romance, personal
146 significance, or the desire to be heroic) (Speckhard, 2015). Another limitation of this
147 model is that it is based on interviews with only nine terrorists, so its generalizability is
148 questionable.

149 While the previous models have contributed enormously to the identification and
150 systematization of the reasons leading to involvement in violent groups, they have
151 stopped short of providing an overarching scheme that explains how the various factors
152 relate to one another. Another important limitation is that most of these classifications
153 have not been supported by empirical data (see Scull et al., 2020 for an exception). In
154 other words, previous research has not tested whether the classification is valid for
155 groups with diverse organizational structures and whether the reasons for joining
156 specific types of terrorist groups differ.

157 Our goal here is to take a preliminary step toward developing an overarching
158 scheme informed by empirical data. At a very general level, the approach we suggest is
159 reminiscent of the time-honored distinction within social and personality psychology
160 between explanations of nature vs. nurture, genetics vs. environment, or traits vs.
161 situations (e.g., Mischel, 1968). In a more specific sense, our approach draws on a
162 classic theme in the social influence literature first advanced by Kelman (1958). He
163 distinguished two forms of attitude change, one produced by internalization and the
164 other produced by compliance. In the present context, we argue that internalization
165 occurs when people are drawn into terrorist groups by the fit between the group and
166 personal qualities such as identities, ideologies, narratives, needs, grievances, or
167 background characteristics. It comprises an ample variety of motives that include,
168 among others, the pursuit of power, status, and the desire to become a hero (e.g.,
169 Kruglanski et al., 2019); the establishment of close relational bonds with others (e.g.,
170 Gómez et al., 2019); and the adoption of highly valued causes (e.g., Atran, 2010). In
171 contrast, compliance occurs when people are compelled to enter the group due to
172 features of the situation, most notably propaganda, threats, or other situational
173 pressures.

174 Although some authors have discussed compliance and internalization as
175 potential reasons for joining violent groups (e.g., McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008), no
176 research to date has systematically studied the role of these processes in the decision to
177 join such groups. To determine the viability of this approach, we sought to identify
178 terrorist groups in which either compliance or internalization seemed likely to emerge.

179 For evidence of the role of compliance, we were guided by a report by the
180 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018), which indicated that
181 forced recruitment is especially high in Africa and Asia (see Becker, 2010). For
182 example, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has been accused of forced
183 recruitment of children, especially after 2002 (Ramesh, 2004).

184 For evidence of internalization, we referred to accounts of religious terrorist
185 groups such as ISIS who are renowned for recruiting followers in mosques, prisons, and
186 though social media sites in Western democratic countries (Berger, 2015).

187 Given these accounts, we selected a sample of former LTTE members and a
 188 second sample of former Islamist terrorists (mainly ISIS and Al-Qaeda members) for
 189 the current research. We expected to discover more evidence of compliance among
 190 former LTTE members than former members of Islamist groups. Conversely, we also
 191 expected to find more evidence of internalization among former members of Islamist
 192 groups than former members of LTTE.

194 **3. OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH**

195 To test our predictions, we examined two groups that varied in ideology, nationality,
 196 and type of radicalization. Study 1 analyzed ex-members of the Liberation Tigers of
 197 Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a ruthless ethno-nationalist separatist terrorist group, proscribed
 198 by 32 countries as a terrorist organization (including the European Union, Canada, the
 199 United States, and India). The LTTE is the only terrorist group that has assassinated two
 200 serving heads of state using suicide bombers (the Prime Minister of India in 1991 and
 201 the President of Sri Lanka in 1993). All the participants interviewed in Study 1 were
 202 Asian.

203 Study 2 focused on Islamist radicals who, at some point, were members of
 204 violent jihadist groups. These groups included ISIS, Al-Qaeda, or one of their
 205 associated organizations that can be considered part of the global jihadi movement. All
 206 groups associated with the global jihadi movement oppose liberal democracies and are
 207 in favor of authoritarian religious oligarchies ruled by a fundamentalist interpretation of
 208 Sharia (Islamic law). While some of these groups believe in nationalism in the short-
 209 term, all of them ultimately seek to establish a borderless worldwide Caliphate in the
 210 long-term. In addition, these groups consider violent offensive jihad (Holy War) as the
 211 only way to achieve these goals. They also claim that it is incumbent upon all Muslims
 212 to engage in or facilitate this holy war. Most of the participants interviewed in Study 2
 213 were European.

214 We pooled analyses for the protocols from either semi-structured interviews
 215 (Study 1), or from narratives derived from audio recordings (Study 2). Based on our
 216 research questions, the characteristics of the studies, and the nature of the data obtained,
 217 we combined data-driven coding in the First Cycle (descriptive coding method) with
 218 theory-driven coding in the Second Cycle (theoretical coding) that allowed us to refine
 219 our initial categorization (for a discussion of coding methods see Saldaña, 2013). After
 220 an initial review of the data using a descriptive coding method, we extracted specific
 221 codes for each participant. Such codes were labels –words that reflected the main topic
 222 of the reasons to embrace the radical group– such as force, propaganda, family issues,
 223 personal issues, and/or ideals. This first descriptive coding revealed two main patterns:
 224 internal forces (i.e., reasons related to the individual that push to the radical group, that
 225 based on Kelman, 1952, correspond to identity-related reasons or internalization) and
 226 external forces (i.e., reasons related to external sources that pull the participant towards
 227 the radical group, that based on Kelman, 1952, correspond to influence or conformity
 228 reasons or compliance). These two categories were subdivided into subcategories. We
 229 elaborated three identity-related reasons for joining terrorist groups that reflect different
 230 forms of internalization (influences on personal, relational, and collective identities),
 231 and a second cluster of three reasons that involved compliance (charismatic persuasion
 232 agent, propaganda, and coercion). *Personal identity* refers to those aspects of the self-
 233 concept that allow differentiation from all others and make us unique; *relational identity*
 234 is derived from connections with significant others and encompasses one's roles in close
 235 relationships; and *collective identity* comprises the cognitions, emotions, and values
 236 strongly linked to group membership. Compliance through a *charismatic persuasion*

237 *agent* refers to being convinced by an individual group member such as a radicalized
238 Imam cleric or a professional recruiter; *propaganda* refers to being convinced to join by
239 recruitment material such as videos on the Internet; and *coercion* refers to being taken
240 into the group by force. With the foregoing theoretical framework in mind, two judges
241 recategorized the reasons in a second cycle coding, and then, intercoder agreement was
242 evaluated. Then, frequency counts were presented for each category and subsequent
243 subcategories and they were ordered in a hierarchical way with typical exemplars. Chi-
244 squared tests was used to compare pairs of percentages within groups, and z-score tests
245 were used to compare proportions between groups. What follows is a presentation of the
246 methodology and results of each individual study.

247

248 **3.1. STUDY 1. WHY EX-MEMBERS OF THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF** 249 **TAMIL EELAM (LTTE) JOINED THE GROUP**

250 The LTTE's guerilla and terrorist activities were targeted at achieving a mono-ethnic
251 separate state for the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. Upon its foundation on 5 May 1976,
252 the LTTE commenced its campaign for a separate state. The murder of the Tamil Mayor
253 of Jaffna, Alfred Duraiappa, in 1975, was the LTTE's first assassination and was
254 conducted personally by Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE. The LTTE
255 was a well-developed terrorist group that operated an overt/semi-covert political wing
256 and a clandestine military wing. Over time, the LTTE developed capabilities in guerrilla
257 and mobile warfare but continued to employ terrorism until the end of the movement.
258 They even developed affiliations with outside organizations, both within and beyond the
259 theatre of conflict, to establish a support base and ensure a steady stream of funding.
260 The LTTE was finally defeated militarily in May 2009. The Sri Lankan government
261 launched a formidable rehabilitation program to reintegrate the majority of the former
262 members of the LTTE into the community. However, while the LTTE's operational
263 capability on the ground has been neutralized, LTTE's overseas networks remain intact,
264 and continue to pose a threat to Sri Lanka. Study 1 aimed to understand the reasons that
265 a sample of ex-Tamil Tigers gave for joining this terrorist group.

266

267 **3.1.1 METHOD**

268 **3.1.1.1. PARTICIPANTS**

269 Seventy-five ex-members (38 women and 33 men; four did not report sex) of the LTTE
270 were interviewed by a member of the research team. Their age varied from 22 to 56
271 with a mean age of 34 ($SD = 7.82$). Seventy-three had Sri Lankan nationality (two did
272 not report nationality). Most of them were of Tamil ethnicity and Hindu. Only forty-
273 four of them gave reasons for joining the group and were included in the analyses.

274 **3.1.1.2. PROCEDURE**

275 Interviews were conducted in Kilinochchi and Viswamadu community centers, two
276 regions where former LTTE members were reintegrated. The sample was selected
277 randomly from a group of former LTTE members during community follow-up visits
278 by the researcher. Community leaders gathered all the former terrorists who were
279 available to participate in the study during the community visits. The data were
280 collected using a structured questionnaire. Respondents were asked "How did you or
281 others come/happen to join the LTTE? (What were the key reason that encouraged
282 others/you to join this group?)". Because we were interested in the main reason for
283 joining the group, participants were asked to think and choose only one, so the reasons
284 showed in the result section are mutually exclusive. To diminish social desirability bias,

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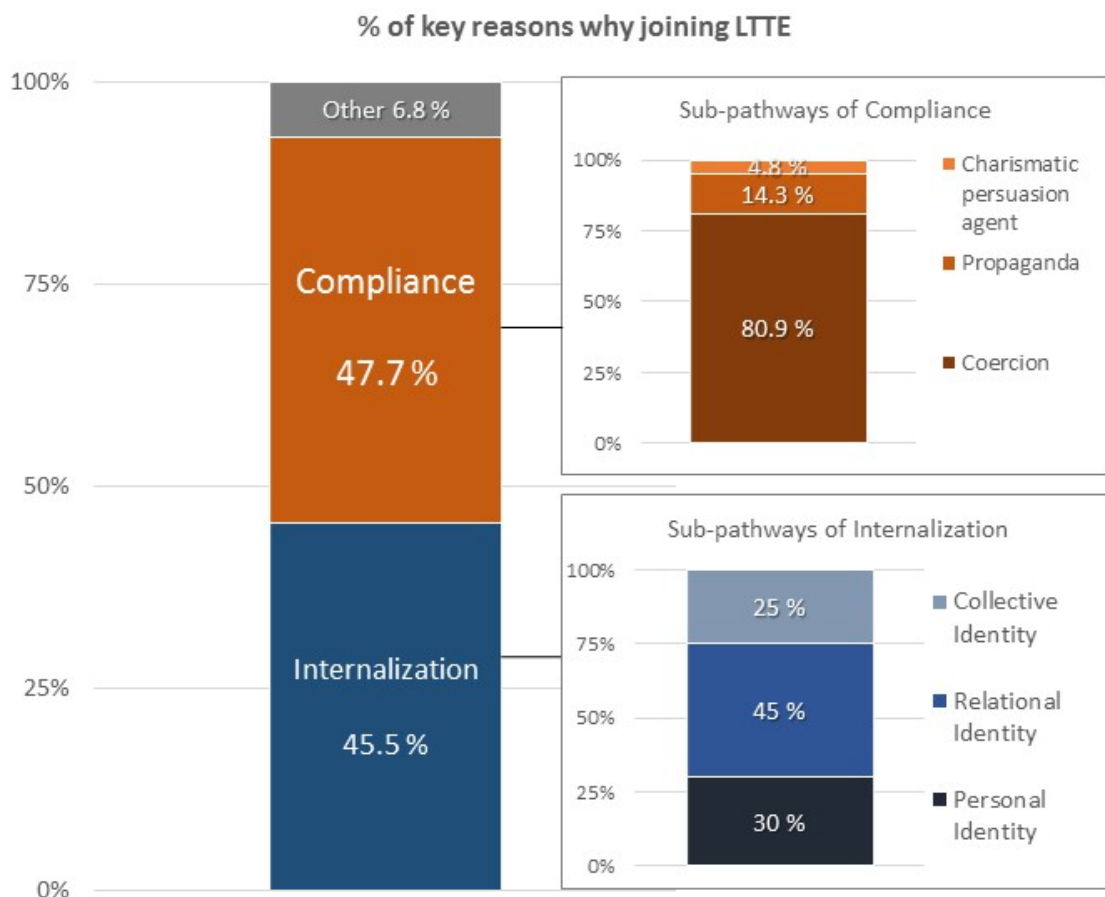
285 the interviewer used third-person language instead of second-person language when
286 discussing highly sensitive topics.

287 After the interview, two judges read all of the reasons provided by the
288 participants and decided which pathway aligned with each given reason. They could
289 discuss preliminary disagreements as needed. The reasons that didn't fit in with any of
290 the pathways were classified as *other*.

291

292 3.1.2. RESULTS

293 Judges showed a complete agreement in the sub-pathways of collective identity,
294 relational identity, propaganda, and charismatic persuasion agent ($k = 1$), and an
295 adequate inter-judge agreement in the sub-pathways of personal identity ($k = .83$), and
296 coercion ($k = .86$). Those three reasons where there was disagreement were categorized
297 as Other¹. Figure 1 shows the percentage of the key reasons why participants joined
298 LTTE. Ex-fighters from LTTE expressed an equivalent number of reasons for
299 compliance versus internalization, $\chi^2(1) = 0.02, p = .876$. Within sub-pathways of
300 compliance, more participants expressed reasons related to coercion than propaganda,
301 $\chi^2(1) = 9.80, p = .002$, or charismatic persuasion, $\chi^2(1) = 14.22, p < .001$. Within sub-
302 pathways of internalization, there were no differences in the percentages of participants
303 who expressed reasons related to personal, relational or collective identity.



304
305

¹ Three reasons (P27: LTTE being there – everywhere; P61: LTTE was always there; and P62: When I was arrested by security) were categorized as “other” due to disagreements in the categorization process.

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306 Almost half of the participants mentioned some form of compliance as the key
307 reason for joining (47.7%). Looking at the compliance pathway, most identified
308 *Coercion* as the main reason for entering the group (80.9% of the total reasons referred
309 to compliance). Some examples of coercion are (“P” refers to the participant number):
310 P14 remembered joining “By force when going to school”; P21 told that she “did not
311 like to join but had to” because “one in every family joined”; P50 explained he joined
312 “When LTTE forcefully gathered people”; and P60 told she joined because of death
313 threats by LTTE.

314 *Propaganda* was mentioned by a 14.3% of participants. Some examples of
315 propaganda are: P25 mentioned different kinds of publicity by LTTE; P38 mentioned
316 “Street drama of LTTE media”; and P44 referred to “Publicity, street drama, video” and
317 “LTTE publicity”.

318 *Charismatic Persuasion Agent* was mentioned by a 4.8% of participants. An
319 example was P3, who talked about politicians highly valued by the community who
320 recruited them.

321 Approximately half of the participants gave reasons for joining related to
322 internalization (45.5%). Around half of these participants referred to *Relational Identity*
323 as the reason for joining the group (45%). The examples for this sub-pathway refer to
324 the loss of relational ties as a reason for becoming part of LTTE: P1 recognized having
325 joined because people he knew died; P10 referred to losses and displacement; P15
326 remembered joining when his family died; P40 joined after his mother died; P49 joined
327 because of loss of relatives; and P56 declared he joined after his wife’s death.

328 *Personal Identity* was mentioned by 30% of participants who referred to
329 internalization. Some examples are: P4 mentioned “Not much education”, whereas P5
330 talked about the “Bad situation around us” as reasons for joining. P8 recognized having
331 a very hard life and P59 joined because she was systematically neglected from jobs.

332 Finally, *Collective Identity* was mentioned by 25% of those who referred to
333 internalization. Examples are: P12 said “The attachment I have about my ethnicity”;
334 P13 “Thought we wanted a Tamil nation”; P19 joined “To get rights for Tamils”; P73
335 did it “to fight against discrimination and differences in social status, class”.

336

337 3.1.3. DISCUSSION

338 Study 1 shows that when we asked former LTTE about their main reason for joining the
339 group, around half of them mentioned compliance while the other half referred to
340 internalization. In the case of compliance, most participants explained that they joined
341 the group because of coercion, some of them because of propaganda, and almost none
342 because of the influence of a charismatic leader. However, in the case of internalization,
343 the motives referring to the different sub-pathways were more balanced. The loss of
344 relational ties such as, for example, the death of family members, was a key reason that
345 encouraged joining LTTE. However, personal and collective identity were also
346 mentioned as reasons for joining the group.

347 One of the limitations of this study is that former LTTE members were
348 instructed to report “the key” reason that encouraged them to join. This procedure does
349 not allow for the possibility that several, instead of just one, factors motivated them to
350 enter the group. That is, complex social phenomena, such as entering violent groups, are
351 often due to multiple causes acting together (e.g., Atran, 2020; Vergani et al., 2018). To
352 learn more about the full range of considerations that led people to join violent groups,
353 in Study 2, we recorded life stories of members of radical Islamist organizations to
354 identify all the myriad reasons that drove them to embrace violent groups as opposed to
355 just the most important reason.

356

357 **3.2. STUDY 2. WHY ISLAMIST RADICALS JOINED THE GROUP**

358 Study 2 analyzed the life stories of twenty-one Islamist radicals who were, at some
359 point in their lives, members of violent jihadist groups. These groups included ISIS, Al-
360 Qaeda, or one of their associated organizations that are considered part of the global
361 jihadi movement.

362

363 **3.2.1. METHOD**

364 **3.2.1.1. PARTICIPANTS**

365 A total of 21 participants (18 men and 3 women, ranging in age from 21 to 59 years)
366 qualified for this study by indicating that they had been a member of a jihadist terrorist
367 organization at some point in their lives. There were no age, gender, or nationality
368 criteria pre-established. Most participants were European. Six participants were Belgian,
369 another three were Belgian-Moroccan, four participants were from Britain and three
370 from France. Single individuals were Belgian-Tunisian, Pakistani-Spanish, Kosovan,
371 Egyptian, and German.

372 **3.2.1.2. PROCEDURE**

373 A member of the research team interviewed participants and then created life stories
374 based on each interview. The way each participant was recruited for the interview
375 varied person-to-person. In some cases, the participant was introduced to the researcher
376 by a social worker or a community member. Sometimes, it was another participant who
377 introduced the researcher to the next participant following a snowball technique. Other
378 times, a friend or a family member introduced the participant. On some occasions, a
379 lawyer introduced the participant, or the researcher contacted the participant online and
380 arranged a face-to-face meeting.

381 The locations of the meetings were as diverse as the recruitment method. Some
382 interviews took place in a lawyer's office with the participant's attorney present. Other
383 times, they took place in the participant's domicile with no one else present. Lastly,
384 some of the interviews were conducted in cafes or parks. All participants were told that
385 the purpose of the interview was to attain their life history to show how and why they
386 joined the Islamist group. They were informed that this research would be used for
387 academic publications and that their identities would be anonymized. After oral consent
388 was obtained, the researcher followed a semi-structured questionnaire. In some cases,
389 there were multiple meetings with the same participant. The interviews took two hours
390 on average and all responses were handwritten by the researcher.

391 The researcher gathered all the information of the life stories of each participant
392 and then recorded a clip-summary of each life story separately. Then two members of
393 the research team listened to the recordings and did a first round of coding by discussing
394 the pathways that aligned with the reasons given for joining the Islamist groups. We
395 organized the reasons for joining these violent Islamist groups into the same pathways
396 as in Study 1: compliance (charismatic persuasion agent, propaganda, or coercion), and
397 internalization (influences on personal, relational, or collective identities). Then two
398 independent judges categorized the reasons given within the life stories of why
399 participants joined the terrorist groups. They were offered the possibility to discuss
400 preliminary disagreements. It was decided whether the reasons of each participant *did* or
401 *did not* pertain to each of the pathways presented by indicating *yes* (coded 1) or *not*
402 (coded 0) in each rationale. Reasons where disagreement was found were then rated as
403 *other*. It is important to note two key differences in methodology between this and the
404 previous study. First, in Study 1 we asked participants directly about the reasons for

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405 why they had joined the group, whereas in Study 2 this information emerged
406 spontaneously during the conversation. Second, participants could only give one reason
407 for why they joined the group in Study 1; in Study 2 they were able to give multiple
408 reasons.

409

410 **3.2.2. RESULTS**

411 The inter-judge agreement was complete for the sub-pathways of personal identity,
412 relational identity, charismatic persuasion agent, and propaganda ($k = 1.00$). The
413 agreement for collective identity was acceptably high ($k = .89$). There were no reports
414 of coercion in this sample. Each life story included several reasons that could explain
415 why participants joined radical groups. This study did not include one unique reason,
416 but several, as the process of radicalization is complex and might entail different
417 sources of influence throughout the life of an individual. So, contrary to what was
418 reported in Study 1, where the total number of reasons was equivalent to the total
419 number of participants, in Study 2 the 21 participants gave a total of 60 different
420 reasons for joining the terrorist group. Many life histories contained elements with
421 overlapping themes. For example, 16 life stories included reasons related to personal
422 identity, but some of the same life stories also included reasons related to relational
423 identity, collective identity, or some kind of social influence. The internalization
424 pathway included a total of 47 reasons, with 16 life stories including personal-identity
425 reasons, 17 included relational-identity reasons, and 14 included collective-identity
426 reasons. A total of 13 reasons were considered evidence of compliance, with 8 life
427 stories including reasons related to the presence of a charismatic agent and 5 including
428 some form of propaganda. To transform the percentage of life stories where a reason
429 was present (e.g., internalization) to the percentage of that specific reason among the
430 total number of reasons presented in the life stories, we considered the total number of
431 reasons offered as 100% (n reasons = 60) instead of the total number of participants/life
432 stories analyzed ($n = 21$). So, the 47 reasons related to internalization corresponded to
433 78.3% of the total reasons present in the life stories. As in Study 1, the percentage of the
434 subcategories took the total number of reasons in each category to be 100%. Please see
435 Table 1, for reconversion values for both studies.

436

437 Table 1. Percentage of reasons among total reasons

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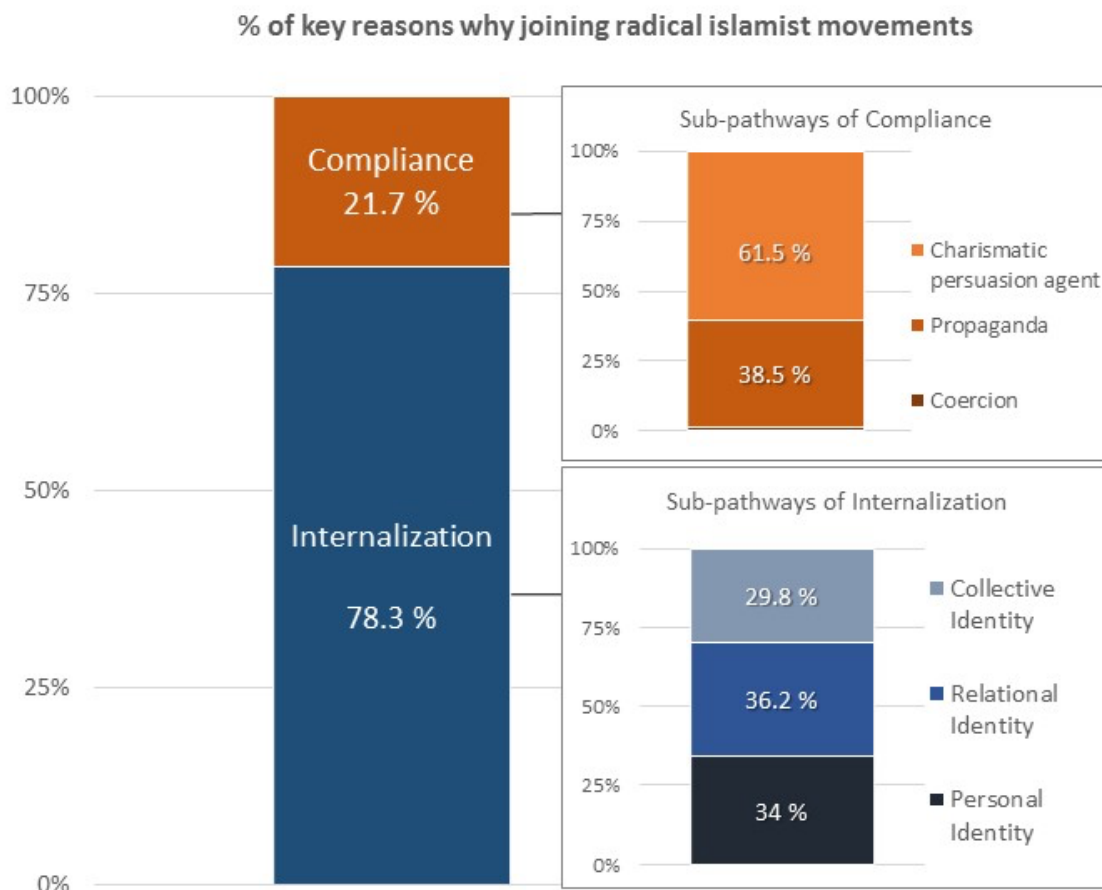
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Figure 2 shows the percentage of life stories in Study 2 where the specific reason (compliance versus internalization) was mentioned. For each of these two pathways, the percentage of reasons that referred to each of the corresponding sub-pathways were listed. Note that for clarity, we are reporting the results here in the same format that we did in Figure 1. However, the data collection process was different in that participants in Study 1 reported only the single most important reason for joining, whereas participants in Study 2 reported all the reasons that came to mind. Overall, life stories in Study 2 included more reasons related to sub-pathways of internalization (a total of 47 reasons) than reasons related to compliance (a total of 13 reasons), $\chi^2(1) = 19.27, p < .001$.

LTTE ex-fighters			Ex-Islamist radicals		
<i>Reasons for joining</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Reasons for joining</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Total	44	100%	Total	60	100%
Compliance	21	47.73%	Compliance	13	21.67%
Internalization	20	45.45%	Internalization	47	78.33%
Compliance			Compliance		
Total	21	100%	Total	13	100%
Charismatic agent	1	4.76%	Charismatic agent	8	61.54%
Propaganda	3	14.29%	Propaganda	5	38.46%
Coercion	17	80.95%	Coercion	0	0%
Internalization			Internalization		
Total	20	100	Total	47	100
Personal Identity	6	30%	Personal Identity	16	34.04%
Relational Identity	9	45%	Relational Identity	17	36.17%
Collective Identity	5	25%	Collective Identity	14	29.79%

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Over 80% of the life stories analyzed included some kind of internalization as the key reason for joining the group. Regarding the sub-pathways of internalization, about one third of the reasons reported by participants referred to *Relational Identity*, such as disappointments with the close family that deteriorated their relational ties: P1 was very upset with her father, her family was disappointed at her, and she ran from home; P4 experienced feelings of exclusion and isolation from his family and his community. P4's family and community did not understand him from the beginning, and he remained isolated; P8 showed an unhealthy family relationship, and he was looking for a home, a place to belong; P10 also came from a broken home (i.e., his parents got divorced when he was very young, he had an absent father who was unable to help him), he had a big network of Moroccan friends, with whom he felt oneness and who satisfied his need to belong. One of his friends died, and, during the funeral in the mosque, he had a transformative experience and realized that he wanted to be part of the religious community. The group of Jean Louis Denis (a recruiter who convinced others to go to Syria to fight against the Syrian government) became a kind of family to him. The idea of going to Syria was important to him because he thought that there, he would be offered a family, a wife, a home, and the support necessary to sustain them; P11 also came from a broken home (i.e., divorced parents) and experienced tension with his parents, including lots of conflicts with his father. He went to Morocco to see some friends and he felt a sense of belonging. Finally, he went to Syria with his friend; P16 also came from a broken home and had experienced losses and divorce. She got in touch with a man from Syria online and initiated a virtual romance with him. She later converted to radical Islam to be with him and to marry him. Another participant, P9, mentioned that during a stay in prison he found a group of radical Islamists who were

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476 willing to accept him; he established close relational ties with members of a terrorist
477 group which allowed him to overcome his feelings of social isolation.

478 Approximately another third of the reasons reported by participants refer to
479 examples of setbacks or advancements of their personal identity. P1, for example, used
480 to live in the street after leaving her home, she had a “wild life”, no self-respect and
481 feelings of desperation. She wanted personal recognition and looked for redemption. P2
482 had depression and emotional problems and found in radical Islam an escape from
483 depression; she also wanted to be part of something exciting. P6 saw in Syria an
484 opportunity to become someone important: to be a hero. P11 was very overweight and
485 had been teased because of that. P16 was looking for a change in her life. P15 had
486 problems with the law. P19 has been kicked out from school and has an aggressive
487 personality.

488 Finally, 29.8% of the internalization reasons included references to collective
489 identity in terms of Muslim identity or sharing values and important ideas with a
490 radicalized group. For example, P3 wanted to live a conservative religious life. P6
491 wanted to help Syrians because he believed that his own group (Kosovans) had lived
492 through something similar in the 1990s. P7 and P15 mentioned problems with the “new
493 world order”. P11 was committed to ideas such as liberating Palestine and feeding
494 refugees. He really wanted to embrace the Islamic identity, and he was very politicized.
495 P12 was committed to the idea of defending and standing up with other people to fight
496 against the discrimination of Muslims. Born from a white Belgian mother and a
497 Moroccan father, he had some identity conflict issues. He was an Arab in Belgium and a
498 White in Morocco. He was looking for a new, broader, and clearer collective identity.
499 Feeling oppression and racism in both countries, he was really attracted to the idea of a
500 Muslim Ummah.

501 On the other hand, less than a quarter of participants reported reasons related to
502 compliance as a pathway for joining the group (21.7%). When looking at the sub-
503 pathways of compliance, about two thirds of their expressions (61.5%) referred to the
504 influence of a charismatic persuasion agent. For example, P1 was deeply influenced by
505 an Arabic teacher who helped refugees. P3 was persuaded by neighbors, and,
506 presumably by P2 (who was his wife). P10, P11, and P13 were politicized by Jean
507 Louis Denis, the charismatic leader mentioned before, who encouraged them to go to
508 Syria to show that they were real Muslims by trying to stop the humanitarian crisis of
509 the refugees by combating its true causes. P20 met this top recruiter in Brussels as well
510 and he became radicalized.

511 The other third of reasons related to compliance referred to propaganda (38.5%),
512 that in most cases was combined with the influence of charismatic leaders. For example,
513 P2 was recruited by her neighbors as well as by watching videos on internet. P4 met an
514 Imam who influenced him, in addition to watching propaganda videos. P12 met an old
515 colleague, the son of a radicalized Imam, who put ideas in his mind about what it meant
516 to be a true Muslim. Afterwards he and his friends began to watch videos of
517 propaganda. No examples of coercion were identified in the life stories of the former
518 Islamist terrorists.

519

520 **3.2.3. DISCUSSION**

521 When we analyzed the main reasons that former Islamist terrorists spontaneously gave
522 for joining their terrorist group, results indicated that most examples referred to the
523 internalization pathway. Here, the distribution of the reasons in the three sub-pathways
524 was quite evenly balanced between examples referring to relational, personal, and
525 collective identity. Less common were examples of the compliance pathway, which

526 usually corresponded to the influence of a charismatic leader combined with
527 propaganda.

528

529 **3.3. ADDITIONAL ANALYSES**

530 Although the procedure of Study 1 and Study 2 was different, we sought to make rough
531 comparisons between them by transforming the original percentage of participants in
532 Study 2 to make it comparable to Study 1 (see Table 1). We then compared the
533 proportions of specific reasons for each group using a z-score test. Ex-Islamist radicals
534 showed significantly more internalization reasons (47 over a total of 60 reasons) than
535 LTTE ex-fighters (21 over a total of 44 reasons), $z = 3.46, p < .001$. The opposite
536 pattern was found for compliance, with LTTE ex-fighters offering more reasons
537 regarding compliance than ex-Islamist radicals, $z = 2.80, p = .005$. More specifically,
538 within the compliance reasons, LTTE ex-fighters showed more reasons related to
539 coercion than Islamists, $z = 5.26, p < .001$, whereas Islamists offered slightly more
540 reasons related to a charismatic persuasive leader than LTTE ex-fighters, $z = 1.98, p =$
541 $.048$. However, there were no differences between groups in the proportion of
542 propaganda, $z = 0.29, p = .772$. Within the internalization category, there were no
543 differences between LTTE ex-fighters and Islamists in the proportion of reasons related
544 to personal, relational, or collective identity.

545

546 **4. GENERAL DISCUSSION**

547 The current research provides empirical evidence regarding why people enter terrorist
548 groups. Specifically, in two studies former members of terrorist groups were asked for
549 either their primary reason for joining (Study 1, former LTTE members), or for their life
550 narratives in which they spontaneously referred to reasons for joining (Study 2, former
551 members of radical Islamist groups). Mindful of the classic distinction in attitude-
552 change literature advanced by Kelman (1958), we inspected participants' responses. We
553 identified two pathways through which people may join violent groups: compliance and
554 internalization. Compliance occurred when individuals joined groups because they were
555 persuaded by a charismatic persuasive agent, exposed to propaganda, or coerced. In
556 contrast, internalization occurred when individuals joined groups because of a
557 convergence between the self and the group associated with their personal, relational, or
558 collective identities.

559 The results of these two studies offered empirical evidence in line with our
560 hypotheses. As expected, compliance was more frequently cited among former LTTE
561 members than among former Islamist radicals. While almost half of former LTTE
562 members reported compliance as a reason for joining the group, Islamist radicals cited
563 compliance much less frequently. Also consistent with our expectations, former
564 members of Islamist groups cited internalization more frequently than former LTTE
565 participants: while more than three quarters of the reasons given by Islamist radicals for
566 why they joined the group referred to internalization, less than half of former LTTE
567 participants reported that this was a motive for joining.

568 As we have seen, a sizeable proportion of LTTE members were forced to join
569 through coercion. As a consequence, we notice that some of them, even if they had been
570 engaged in the radical group, were not cognitively radicalized. This was the opposite of
571 our sample of Islamist radicals, who embraced the importance of the "cause" (collective
572 identity). These findings confirm Borum's (2011) contention that the process of
573 radicalization is not necessarily the same as the process of action pathways, and that
574 some members of terrorist groups can commit violent actions without being deeply
575 ideologically radicalized. Whereas LTTE members were forced to enter in the group by

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576 coercion, Islamist radicals were persuaded by propaganda, which can explain why
577 Islamist radicals show more cognitive radicalization than LTTE members. Another
578 relevant finding is that personal identity reasons were more important for Islamist
579 extremists than for LTTE members. This finding was not surprising given that most
580 members of LTTE were forced to join, which could explain the relative powerlessness
581 of their group to fit their personal identity. This confirms what has been commonly
582 highlighted in the context of violent extremist research: non-identical root causes might
583 apply to different types of terrorism and to the same types of terrorism in different
584 contexts (e.g., Noricks, 2009; Rapoport, 2004; Speckhard, 2015). It is necessary to note
585 as well that most of the former Islamist extremists that we interviewed were European,
586 whereas most LTTE members were Asian, which is consistent with Vergani and
587 colleagues' (2018) conclusions that personal factors play a more prominent role in
588 Europe, North America, and Australia than in the rest of the world.

589 Previous research might support why internalization in general, and personal
590 identity in particular, is a relevant factor for joining Islamist radical groups. Although
591 persuasion and propaganda are also important for understanding Islamist radicalization
592 (e.g., Gendron 2017; Kruglova, 2020), people do not become Islamist radicals through
593 mere coercion or brainwashing (Sageman, 2004, 2008). Islamist terrorists typically go
594 through a process involving active and selective engagement with groups that fit their
595 idiosyncratic characteristics, thus suggesting internalization (Chernov-Hwang &
596 Schulze, 2018; Scull et al., 2020). Other examples of internalization might be the
597 research by Scull and associates (2020), indicating that participants in their study
598 experienced a process in which religion became a central part of their personal identity.
599 As their religious identity developed, they met people involved with Al-Qaeda or ISIS
600 who, in turn, exposed them to propaganda in support for the radical ideology (see also
601 Dawson & Amarasingam, 2017 who suggest existential concerns and religiosity). And
602 some other investigations suggest that establishing relational bonds and relationships
603 with members of Islamist terrorist groups are the common thread encouraging entry as
604 well as in fostering commitment (Chernov-Hwang & Schulze, 2018).

605 Taken together, the present studies make a series of theoretical and empirical
606 contributions to previous research regarding the reasons for entering into terrorist
607 groups. First, we have introduced a new way of conceptualizing the reasons why people
608 enter violent groups that draws on classic work on attitude change (Kelman, 1958). Our
609 conceptualization is also based on an extensive review of the main theoretical models
610 on the causes of engagement in terrorist groups, including the 3N model (Kruglanski et
611 al. 2018), the model of the three Ps of radicalization (Vergani et al., 2018), and the
612 model developed by Hafez and Mullins (2015), among others. By integrating the
613 insights offered by these approaches, our conceptualization offers a new lens through
614 which to contemplate the reasons that motivate individuals to join violent groups. Our
615 conceptualization also makes it possible to establish distinctions between different types
616 of terrorist groups that have been not considered until now. We believe that these
617 distinctions will be useful for explaining why and how people decide to enter terrorist
618 groups and for identifying the people and circumstances which are at high-risk for the
619 creation of more adherents to a terrorist group.

620 Second, most of previous research on the causes that explain why individuals
621 join terrorist groups is based on theoretical approaches to the phenomenon and does not
622 satisfy the minimal methodological and empirical requisites of rigorous science
623 (Neumann & Kleinmann, 2013; RAND, 2016). At an empirical level, for instance,
624 studies have usually relied on secondary sources, opportunistic interviews, and even
625 anecdotal evidence to support their arguments; investigations including samples of

626 current and former terrorists have been inappropriately scarce (e.g. Neuman &
627 Kleinmann, 2013; RAND, 2016). As a result, there is a huge quantity of concepts and
628 theoretical models that are not backed up by tangible evidence within the field, which
629 has prompted some experts to make a call for more scientifically-grounded research on
630 why people join terrorist groups (e.g., Schuurman, 2018). Our studies responded to this
631 call by including two samples of former terrorists and, as such, they increase our
632 confidence in the possibility that the different pathways and sub-pathways leading to
633 engagement with violent extremist groups that we have established with our model are a
634 true reflection of this process.

635 Third, our research also may be useful for designing cost-effective strategies to
636 counter violent extremism and, more specifically, to prevent people who are not yet
637 members of terrorist groups from joining them. Our results indicate that factors related
638 to compliance and internalization play a determining role in this process and that their
639 relative importance vary as a function of the type of terrorist group along with the
640 context in which the groups operate. This could help us design preventive interventions
641 tailored to the specific characteristics of different terrorist groups and socio-political
642 circumstances in which these interventions are meant to be applied.

643 When dealing with groups or contexts in which internalization predominates as
644 a reason for joining, these strategies should be aimed at fighting feelings of
645 discrimination, marginalization, and social alienation so that people from populations
646 that are at risk may experience a better fit between themselves and groups that do not
647 support violence. This goal can be achieved in several ways, such as advancing
648 community-aimed educational interventions (RAN, 2019), promoting the values of
649 tolerance, solidarity and acceptance (RAN, 2019), or running interventions aimed at the
650 development of feelings of brotherhood toward nonviolent people through the practice
651 of sport, like the London Tiger group has been doing in the UK for more than a decade
652 (National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine, 2017). People are often
653 looking for new groups that allow them to satisfy their personal needs, to engage in
654 meaningful relational roles, and to feel that there is a noble and legitimate cause behind
655 their actions. When non-violent groups are able to provide these things, people may be
656 more open to joining the ranks of such groups even though they do not commit violent
657 offenses (e.g., Atran, 2010, 2020).

658 On the other hand, when we approach groups or circumstances in which
659 compliance is more important than internalization as a reason for joining, the specific
660 strategies that we should use will depend on the sub-pathways through which
661 compliance exerts its effects. If people join terrorist groups mostly through propaganda
662 and charismatic influence agents, strategies aimed at increasing resistance to persuasion,
663 like the diffusion of counter-narratives, educational interventions to increase
664 individuals' critical thinking, or public discrediting of terrorist leaders by former
665 terrorists should be particularly effective (RAN, 2019). However, although some
666 research focused on the Islamic state support the positive effect of counter-narratives,
667 there is also evidence that counter-narratives can have counterproductive effects on
668 sympathizers of ISIS and individuals at great risk of radicalization, and regardless of the
669 source of the message all counter-narratives with a religious argument backfired
670 (Bélanger, Nisa, et al., 2020). If people join because of coercion, "hard" measures, like
671 the decapitation of terrorist organizations, that is, the killing or imprisonment of terrorist
672 leaders, may be needed (Price, 2012).

673 Lastly, our studies highlight some potential future lines of research. First, future
674 investigations could test whether our conceptualization applies not only to ethno-
675 nationalist separatist and religious terrorists but also to single-issue, left-wing, and right-

676 wing violent extremists by examining the relative importance that compliance and
677 internalization have in these different groups. Given the upsurge of terrorism from the
678 radical right that has occurred in the last decade in some Western countries (Atran,
679 2020), we think that a deep exploration of the reasons that are driving people to join
680 right-wing extremist groups at increasing rates would be particularly advisable. Second,
681 other studies could test our model with violent groups that do not fall under the
682 umbrella of terrorism, like Latin gangs or criminal organizations like the mafia, and
683 compare them to terrorist groups. As gang members are more motivated by friendship,
684 affiliation, and personal interest and less motivated by ideological causes than terrorists
685 (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011), we think that internalization via personal and relational
686 identity fit may be more frequent among gang members than among terrorists and,
687 conversely that internalization via collective identity may be more common among
688 terrorists than gang members. Third, some longitudinal studies could be run to gain a
689 better understanding of how the process of joining violent extremist groups unfolds in
690 real-time and to discover the different ways in which the factors covered by our model
691 interact and influence the end result of this process. It is possible, for instance, that
692 charismatic influence agents and propaganda mutually reinforce the impact of the
693 internalization sub-pathways, thus making individuals more prone to becoming
694 terrorists.

695

696 3. LIMITATIONS

697 The present research has some limitations. In particular, the different results obtained in
698 the two studies could be due to methodological differences as opposed to the intrinsic
699 characteristics of the groups (i.e., LTTE members were asked about the main reason for
700 joining the group, whereas Islamist radicals recounted their life stories and the reason/s
701 for joining were extracted from the narratives).

702 Another potential limitation is that former terrorists may be concerned with presenting
703 themselves in a favorable light that is not particularly accurate, which raises concerns
704 about the validity of their reports. In particular, the interviewees may adjust their
705 responses to give a good impression of themselves or the group, to appear less
706 responsible for their actions and decisions, or to preserve their positive self-image. After
707 all, former terrorists tend to overemphasize the role of situational/external factors such
708 as persuasion, coercion and duty in explaining their involvement to dilute their own
709 culpability (Horgan, 2014). They are also inclined to downplay the role of personal
710 motives such as need for power, status, and thrill-seeking, which are rarely expressed in
711 interviews (Horgan, 2014). These issues are especially notable in Study 1, where
712 participants were explicitly asked for their reasons for joining the group. Although some
713 researchers have found that terrorists are sincere in their answers (Kruglanski et al.,
714 2019) and others have argued that it is necessary to take terrorists accounts of their
715 motivations seriously (Dawson, 2019; Nilsson, 2018), we need to be cautious when
716 interpreting interview data from terrorists or we run the risk of over- or under-stating the
717 significance of certain experiences and events (Horgan, 2012, 2014).

718 Also, terrorists go through a dynamic and transformative process as they move along
719 the different stages of radicalization and engagement. Their explanations of their
720 reasons for joining the group may differ depending on their stage of (dis)engagement
721 (Horgan, 2012). There is no reason to suppose that the explanations offered at one
722 particular stage should be taken as more valid than those given at others (Dawson,
723 2019). Furthermore, as our main research interest is extreme behavior, our focus has
724 been members of two of the most violent groups in history, whose members are willing
725 to kill (and maybe some of them actually did it) and die if necessary, for the group or

726 for their convictions, whether the categories that we have used here would apply to non-
727 violent groups is an empirical question that open the door for future research. Finally,
728 the samples were quite small. Future research should assess the generalizability of our
729 findings.

730 To address these limitations, future researchers might consider: (1) using the same
731 methodology for data collection independently of the group and the stage of
732 radicalization; (2) making use of sophisticated coding and analysis techniques (Miles et
733 al., 2019); (3) combining qualitative and quantitative research methods (White, 2000);
734 (4) collecting data with people at different stages of radicalization; and (5) comparing
735 and verifying the data obtained from interviews with other data sources, such as the
736 penitentiary and judicial records.

737

738 4. CONCLUSIONS

739 As the UN has acknowledged, (UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, A/RES/60/288,
740 2006), measures and policies aimed at countering violent extremism should focus on the
741 prevention of radicalization among members of vulnerable communities. To this end,
742 we need to understand the reasons that drive individuals to join violent extremist groups
743 (e.g., Bakker, 2015; Schuurman, 2018). With the present research, we have attempted to
744 integrate classic socio-psychological research on attitude change (Kellman, 1958) with
745 more contemporary approaches to the study of terrorism (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2018;
746 Vergani et al., 2018). We report two studies with former members of terrorist groups
747 that offer empirical support for our conceptualization that reasons for joining terrorist
748 groups fall under the categories of internalization or compliance, which in turn can
749 further be broken down into easily identifiable sub-pathways. It is our hope that this
750 new theoretical frame will provide new insights into how to prevent violent
751 radicalization as well as foster de-radicalization.

752 7. FIGURES

753 **Figure 1. Percent breakdown of key reasons that former members joined LTTE.**

754 **Figure 2. Percent breakdown of key reasons that former members joined Islamist**
755 **terrorist groups**

756

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