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Editor's Preface to the Fall Edition

Here at Elon University, we are extremely grateful to host *The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics* for the seventh semester. This Fall Elon University was given the opportunity to host the *Journal* for a second term. We are proud to present the Fall 2023 issue and congratulate all authors published in this issue for their high achievement.

This publication seeks to highlight the intellectual curiosity that leads to innovative scholarship in all subfields of political science, scholarship that addresses timely questions, is carefully crafted, and utilizes diverse methodologies. We are committed to intellectual integrity, a fair and objective review process, and a high standard of scholarship as we showcase the work of undergraduate scholars, most of whom pursue questions that have been traditionally ignored in scholarship but that drive our discipline forward.

Following the lead of the American Political Science Review (APSR) Editorial Board, we are excited to publish research in the areas of “American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, public law and policy, racial and ethnic politics, the politics of gender and sexuality and qualitative and quantitative research methods.” This publication also values the relationships formed through student–faculty collaboration and aims to build a culture of scholarship that expands beyond the college campus. We hope to encourage and empower students to seek out knowledge and pursue their potential, contributing to scholarship in a variety of disciplines.

This year, we thank our advisors Dr. Baris Kesgin and Dr. Aaron Sparks for their support, without which the issue would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the entirety of the Political Science and Policy Studies Department at Elon University; our Faculty Advisory Board; and all the students who shared their exceptional work with us this semester. Finally, we would like to thank our editorial board for the countless hours they have spent reading, dissecting and discussing all the submissions to the *Journal*.

We are excited to present the Fall 2023 edition of the *Journal*. Thank you for your continued support and readership of our publication; we hope you enjoy the Fall 2023 edition.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Board at Elon University

Submission of Manuscripts

The *Journal* accepts manuscripts from undergraduates of any class and major. Members of Pi Sigma Alpha are especially encouraged to submit their work. We strive to publish papers of the highest quality in all areas of political science.

Generally, selected manuscripts have been well-written works with a fully developed thesis and strong argumentation stemming from original analysis. Authors may be asked to revise their work before being accepted for publication.

Submission deadlines are September 15th for the Fall edition and February 15th for the Spring edition. Manuscripts are accepted on a rolling basis; therefore, early submissions are strongly encouraged.

Students may submit their work through Elon University's submission portal, found here: <https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/arts-and-sciences/political-science/psa-journal/>. Alternatively, students may email psajournalelon@gmail.com with an attached Word document of the manuscript. In the body of the email, students are asked to include their name and university, the title of the manuscript, and the closest subfield of political science to which their manuscript pertains (American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, or policy studies). Due to the time committed to the manuscript review process, we ask students to submit only one manuscript per submission cycle.

Submitted manuscripts must include a short abstract (approximately 150 words) and citations/references that follow the *APSA Style Manual for Political Science*. Please do not exceed the maximum page length of 35 double-spaced pages, which includes references, tables, figures, and appendices.

The *Journal* is a student-run enterprise with editors and an Editorial Board that are undergraduate students and Pi Sigma Alpha members at Elon University. The Editorial Board relies heavily on the help of our Faculty Advisory Board, which consists of political science faculty from across the nation, including members of the Pi Sigma Alpha Executive Council.

Please direct any questions about submissions or the *Journal's* upcoming editions to the editors at Elon University: psajournalelon@gmail.com.

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Stop Crying Lone Wolf: Shifting the Narrative on “Incels” and Their Role in Domestic Terrorism

Sara Miller, Tulane University

When addressing terrorism and the actors who qualify as such, the current research rarely mentions misogynistic mass violence; additionally, scholars studying online extremism put insufficient emphasis on the terroristic nature of these community members’ violence (Agostón 2022). Previous research and governmental action reduce extremism within the manosphere as gender-based violence, yet this term does not encompass the nuances and political connection that such acts reproduce. As an incel’s actions are inherently political in their relation to the “black pill” ideology of structural change and used as a furtherance to promote ideological values, such as misogynistic ideals of the Sexual Market Value, this paper will argue that incel extremists fit the classifications of U.S. definitions of domestic terrorism. Additionally, in examining specific instances of incel extremism and other countries’ responses, this paper posits that terrorism charges for extremists and the revision of the governmental view on the incel community are incredibly complex yet must occur for citizens’ safety. This paper, therefore, hypothesizes that the reclassification of incels as domestic terrorists is necessary within the United States.

INTRODUCTION

In conjunction with the rise of the Internet, Western societies are seeing a sharp increase in mass violence stemming from online extremist communities. One group which remains central to this phenomenon is the incel community. The term “incel” describes an individual who identifies as “involuntarily celibate” due to a self-proclaimed inability to find sexual and romantic partners. While the term originated as merely a non-judgmental self-descriptor, it morphed into an identity that espouses a myriad of harmful, destructive, and deadly ideologies (Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook 2021). In this paper, I argue in favor of shifting the definition of incel violent action from gender-based violence into the realm of domestic terrorism. I will analyze several case studies of incel actors’ mass violence to elucidate a socio-political, ideological, and overall terroristic motivation which proves their ability to fit into the U.S. definition of domestic terrorism with ease. Additionally, I will compare incel attacks with other types of terroristic violence as determined by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism and the University of Maryland.

Despite the proven terroristic features of incel extremism, policymakers and leadership within the U.S. still tend to avoid reclassification of this violence. In an effort to prove the efficacy of such redefinition, I will explore Canada’s recent successes in reclassification of this facet of extremism, as well as the viewpoints of other Western leaders and academics

on the matter. Finally, I will explore possible drawbacks and limitations of redefinition, whether it be in the realm of implementation and formal policy or the public and professional critiques of this narrative shift.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The History of the “Manosphere”

The Men’s Rights Movement or Men’s Rights Activism (MRA) movement arose in the 1970s. Evolving from the Women’s Liberation Movement on college and university campuses, the MRA sought to expose societal pains and their impact on men’s emotions, relationships, and sexuality. While male liberation initially sought to “aid in destroying the sex role stereotypes that regard “being a man” and “being a woman” as statuses that must be achieved through proper behavior,” hoping to end the idea that “men cannot play freely, neither can they freely cry, be gentle, nor show weakness,” the movement shifted from the destruction of sex roles toward disparagement, hate, and violence against women (Messner 1998, 262). The early movement walked a fine line between the acknowledgment of sexism and the toll of patriarchal masculinity upon men; however, by the mid-1970s, the two ideological pathways split, and the latter faction gained momentum, resulting in a misogynist role-rigidity which remains today (Messner 1998).

As MRAs radicalized and began advocating to recognize men as an oppressed class, the rhetoric of feminists as men’s

oppressors moved online in the early 2000s (Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook 2021). The formation of the manosphere, or the “online interconnected web of men’s rights activist groups,” marks the beginning of the movement’s evolution into “incel” culture (Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook 2021, 2). The term “manosphere” first appeared in 2009, describing an online network of men’s interest communities (Ging 2017, 651). Ian Ironwood, a porn marketer and self-published author of *The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity* (2013), popularized the term, which MRAs and journalists readily adopted (Ging 2017). Men acting within the manosphere promote heteronormative, sexist, misogynist, and oftentimes racist beliefs. Within the umbrella of the manosphere, a myriad of other MRA groupings exist, including Pick Up Artists (PUA), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and Incels (Ging 2017). While subcultures within the manosphere differ by community, groups within this umbrella share a basic ideology that “men are the victims of an unfair feminist system which materializes in the form of the so-called “sexual marketplace” allegedly created and controlled by women” (Agostón 2022, 3). The manosphere’s logic is incredibly dangerous, although it may seem innocuous if outdated and unsound. Similarly, the manosphere provides men access to a network within which they may express conspiratorial and violent beliefs about women, as well as a proven potential to lead to physical violence and other branches of extremism (Agostón 2022).

The specific methodology of each manosphere community sets one subculture apart from the next, though. One hub within the manosphere is MGTOW, whose proponents recommend avoiding women altogether, as “they are hardwired not to care about men” (Ging 2017, 638). They argue that marriage and cohabitation with women are even unsafe for men, should they risk interacting with them at all. Alternatively, the PUA community stems from a belief in the “seduction” industry, which “promis[es] to teach men how to seduce or pick up women” (Agostón 2022, 5). They promote improving one’s “sexual market value” (SMV) through learning the “game,” earning more money, improving one’s physical appearance, and not only condoning but promoting rape (Ging 2017, 660).

Involuntary Celibates

Among the forums emerging in the 1990s surrounding men’s emotional strife and efforts toward liberation was Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy (Incel) Project (Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook 2021, 3). While this forum, founded by a bisexual woman, originated to support individuals lacking romantic relationships, its audience greatly overlapped with manosphere subcultures. This led to the unique creation of an “incel” community, which consists mainly of young men who feel rejected by mainstream society, blaming it for their involuntary celibacy, or “inceldom,” and taking to the Internet to voice their desire for revenge (Regehr 2020, 6). This community pervades the manosphere and, based on the initial Reddit

thread, numbers in the 40,000s (Regehr 2020). One recent survey attempted to identify the number of self-identifying incels on a popular manosphere platform, as well as record statistics about this community. The survey showed that 36% of the 667 respondents were 18–21 years old, and 27.9% were 22–25 (Regehr 2020). Six hundred sixty-nine participants responded with their location, with 42.8% being from Europe and 38% from North America (Regehr 2020). 0 identified as female (Regehr 2020).

Terrorism: Swallowing the Black Pill

The “pill” narratives within the manosphere stem from an analogy drawing on *The Matrix*, a film in which the protagonist is given a choice between taking a red or blue pill (Lindsay 2022). The blue disconnects one from reality, allowing him to exist in a delusional world; meanwhile, the red reveals life’s “hard truths” (Lindsay 2022, 212). Incels believe that to be “red-pilled” means to awaken to the realization that feminists construct reality, seeking to reduce men’s rights and that men must take steps to fight against this (Lindsay 2022). Even more extreme is the incel belief in the “black pill” which, “if metaphorically swallowed makes one aware of the unchanging reality: that the world is stacked against low-status men in favor of women and ‘alpha’ [physically attractive, wealthy, and sexually active] males; that there can be no personal solutions to systemic oppression” (Lindsay 2022, 215). The “black pill” categorizes society into a three-tiered system based primarily on physical attraction, with a minority of undesirable males, including incels, at the bottom (Lindsay 2022). This self-pitying narrative relies on structural hierarchies and the belief that one cannot transcend genetics, thus utilizing cherry-picked interpretations of genetic determinism to justify toxic forms of masculinity, ethnonationalism, and antifeminism (Lindsay 2022). As such, incel “black-pillers” assert that, since looks are genetically determined and women choose sexual partners based solely on physical features, becoming an incel is predetermined. In this, “black pill” philosophy fosters a radicalizing sense of collective helplessness and alienation.

This hopeless worldview fosters desperation, resulting in incels adopting a binary path belief. One must either accept his fate as an incel, which inevitably leads to suicide, or he may dedicate himself to implementing structural change to reshape society to his advantage (Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook 2021). The second path, while seemingly innocuous, is framed as possible strictly through means of widespread violence and terror (Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook 2021). Proponents of the latter argue that “mass bloodshed is ‘the only way that [they] will realize and accept that there are serious consequences for allowing so many males to live their lives in misery,’” according to one incel’s blog post (Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook 2021, 7). This large-scale destruction has been coined the “Incel Rebellion” or “Beta Uprising” and shows no signs of stopping (Lindsay 2022, 211).

Pathway Toward Violence

Incels' ideology of false science and genetic predeterminism leads to the dehumanization and objectification of women. One self-defined incel states, “[it’s] literally seen in biology [...] these bitches are identical to animals[...] We know from the data and science what makes women happy, and its patriarchy [...] They are very child or animal-like and primitive when it comes to decision-making” (Lindsay 2022, 218). Dehumanization is a psychological prerequisite for violence, as incels disregard the burden of identifying women as fellow human beings with their own names, emotions, or motivations. For incels, referring to women as ‘foids,’ ‘roasties,’ or ‘sluts’ and claiming they possess animalistic tendencies permits them to justify violence against such inhuman beings (Lindsay 218). Another incel described women as “so beautiful as to not be human, very edible” (ABC News 2009). Thus, rights-bearing women transform into apolitical objects who must bear the threat or action of rape, doxing, and extreme violence.

Incels often employ “over-the-top ‘political incorrectness’ with regard to misogyny, sexual objectification, and racism, as well as a type of recreational nastiness/sadism” (Regehr 2020, 7). In particular, incels seek to assert dominance over women primarily by casting them as inherently evil. In framing women as a source of trauma, incels consistently justify feelings of being bullied and humiliated (Lindsay 2022). As incels rely heavily on polarization, individuals constantly compare the in-group as “just” or “good” against the “evil” female out-group to strengthen homogeneity (Lindsay 2022, 218). A collective venting of frustration and anger follows, often alongside advocating for extreme violence against the out-group to reinforce this collective identity. One user states, “If I get the chance to kill, I’m taking it. I don’t care if I go down in history as the most evil and hated human being. I’d wipe everything out if I could [...] everyone” (Lindsay 2022, 218).

What Constitutes A Terrorist Threat?

Given the widespread, political, and specific nature of incel violence, this question of why such a pervasive form of extremism has not entered the formal definition of domestic terrorism in the United States becomes unavoidable. Despite a growing abundance of existing literature asserting incel violence must be formally codified as terrorism, this classification is neither widely accepted nor sufficiently discussed in the discourse on domestic terrorism. The definition of terrorism remains relatively vague and encompasses a great deal. Broadly, according to the U.S., terrorism is separated into DT, domestic terrorism, and IT, international terrorism. DT is defined as activities “[i]nvolving acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; [a]ppearing to be intended to: [i]ntimidate or coerce a civilian population; [i]nfluence the policy of government by intimidation or coercion; or [a]ffect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping;

and [o]ccurring primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States” (FBI 2021, 3). The FBI defines a “DT incident” as “a criminal act, including threats or acts of violence made to specific victims, made in furtherance of a domestic socio-political goal, which has occurred and can be confirmed” (FBI 2021, 20). A “DT plot,” similarly, is defined as “a combination of criminal activity and planning that collectively reflect steps toward criminal action in furtherance of a domestic political or social goal” (FBI 2021, 20).

The DHS lays out detailed criteria to identify terrorism classifications to the FBI regarding DT investigations (FBI 2021, 15). These include five categories: racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism; anti-government or anti-authority violent extremism; animal rights/environmental violent extremism; abortion-related violent extremism; and all other domestic terrorism threats (FBI 2021). In connection with incel violence, the areas of assignment may fall under anti-government or anti-authority violent extremism, as the goal to restructure society lies at the center of incel ideology; however, incel extremism may also fall under “all other domestic terrorism threats.” This assignment encompasses any “threats involving the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence in furtherance of ideological agendas which are not otherwise defined under or primarily motivated by one of the other DT threat categories” (FBI 2021, 16). This area of assignment usually describes acts of terrorism that carry biases related to religion, gender, and/or sexual orientation, which are all linked with incel extremism (FBI 2021, 16). As incel violence poses women at the center of their ideological rhetoric, their biases against women are apparent. Finally, as the definition of terrorism, especially DT, has shifted over the past decades, FBI officials state that “the threat posed to the United States has expanded from sophisticated, externally directed plots to attacks conducted by self-radicalized lone actors” (Fomin 2021).

CASE STUDIES

Lone Wolves or Terrorist Foot Soldiers?

In the past, incidents of incel extremist violence were framed in media and the criminal justice system as the unpredictable actions of violent “lone wolves” (O’Donnel and Shor 2022). Commonly known as “the First Incel,” Marc Lepine was a mass shooter who murdered 14 women and shot himself at École Polytechnique in 1989 (Bloom 2022). The 25-year-old entered a classroom, dismissed the men, and said to the women, “I am fighting feminism” before opening fire, killing six of the nine women (Bloom 2022, 40). Lepine’s rampage lasted 20 minutes, and by the end, he had shot 27 people and killed 14, all of whom were women; finally, he turned the gun on himself (Bloom 2022). This attack came to be known as the Montreal Massacre, Canada’s deadliest mass shooting until 2020 (Bloom 2022). In his suicide note, Lepine admits that his motivations were political and that he

was targeting “feminists” who “have always ruined [his] life” (Bloom 2022, 41).

One of the many to follow in Lepine’s footsteps, university student Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 people in a 2007 attack on Virginia Tech University (ABC News 2009). Cho left a long, “disturbing” note in his dorm room where he murdered the first two victims (ABC News 2009). He then killed another 30 individuals before fatally shooting himself (ABC News 2009). Law enforcement also states that Cho had a romantic interest in one young woman who was found dead after the first of his shootings (ABC News 2009).

In 2009, George Sodini opened fire in a Pittsburgh gym (ABC News 2009). Sodini killed three and injured nine others before turning the gun onto himself (ABC News 2009). Following his attack, his blog was discovered, which details his horrifying, misogynistic, nihilistic worldview. Sodini shared that “30 million women rejected [him] — over an 18 or 25-year period” (ABC News 2009). Intermingled with his loneliness and self-loathing, Sodini espoused incel rhetoric and hinted toward his destructive plan online.

Elliot Rodger began incels’ increasingly mainstream, publicized descent into offline violence. In 2014, the 22-year-old member of many early incel communities launched a spree attack (Hoffman 2020). The gunman targeted a sorority house outside the University of California, Santa Barbara, and stated on video that “[i]f I can’t have you girls, I will destroy you” (Hoffman 2020). After his rampage, which left six people dead and 14 more injured, Rodger emailed his 107,000-word manifesto entitled “My Twisted World” to 34 different addresses, both to explain and publicize his attack before taking his own life (Hoffman 2020). This manifesto detailed his deeply troubling, misogynistic worldview as Rodger blamed women for ignoring him, men for finding love while he could not, and society itself for perpetuating the system that caused his loneliness (Hoffman 2020). These themes are central to the incel movements, and following his attack, most platforms still use Rodger’s face, name, initials, and ideas to justify current and future violence. He is considered the movement’s patron saint, an inspirational figure who must not only be celebrated but imitated.

Chris Harper-Mercer engaged in a shooting spree in 2015 at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, killing nine people and then himself (McCain Institute 2022). He frequented many incel forums as an active poster, expressing anger over his loneliness and lack of sexual prowess (McCain Institute 2022). Harper-Mercer cited Rodger in a manifesto discovered after his killing spree. Another adherent of Rodger, Edward Atchinson, attacked the Aztec High School in Aztec, New Mexico, killing two people, then himself, in 2017 (McCain Institute 2022).

Scott Beierle attacked in Tallahassee, Florida, in 2018, targeting a yoga studio and killing two individuals, injuring an additional four, before turning the gun on himself (Ling and Cotee 2020). Prior to his attack, Beierle uploaded a myriad of

videos praising Rodger, as well as identifying with the violent incel movement (Ling and Cotee 2020). Beierle had been previously arrested twice and banned from FSU’s campus for groping female students (Hendrix 2019). He wrote fantasies about raping and killing women as a teenager and was fired from teaching jobs, booted from the Army, and even brought before his high school principal for violating the opposite sex (Hendrix 2019). Beierle traced his fury at the world back toward women, calling them “the most rancid, putrid, sickening essences” of humanity (Hendrix 2019).

In April 2018, Alex Minassin rented a cargo van and plowed through a 1.5-mile stretch of Yonge Street in Toronto, running through red lights and a crowd of pedestrians (Ling and Cotee 2020). Ten people died in this attack, and Minassin was charged with 26 counts of first-degree and attempted murder (Ling and Cotee 2020). Minassin posted to his Facebook shortly before the attack, stating, “Private (Recruit) Minassian Infantry 00010, wishing to speak to Sgt 4chan please. C23249161. The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacy’s! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!” (Ling and Cotee 2020). While this message may seem incomprehensible and even insane, it references a series of well-known trigger words and phrases to incels, including praising Rodger.

In 2019, Patrick Crusius engaged in a mass shooting in El Paso, killing 22 people (Ailworth 2019). The 21-year-old spent nearly 8 hours a day on the Internet, and according to law enforcement, he posted on an online forum directly prior to the attack (Ailworth 2019). Crusius expressed a desire to “kill as many Hispanics as possible,” on this website, which is home to incels, racists, and those espousing hateful sentiments (Ailworth 2019). This attack proves the interconnected nature of sexism, racism, and xenophobia within the incel community, as well as its connection to white supremacy.

Brian Clyde was shot and killed by officers while attacking a federal building in Dallas, Texas, in June 2019 (Ling and Cotee 2020). His online posts prior to this attack prove his indoctrination into the incel world, and his family believes his death was a case of suicide via the police (Ling and Cotee 2020). The same month in 2019, Alexander Stavropoulos was arrested in Sudbury after stabbing a woman in the parking lot and attempting to attack her infant daughter (Ling and Cotee 2020). He admitted in court that he was a self-described incel and that he drew inspiration from Minassian’s crimes (Ling and Cotee 2020).

In 2020, just before the six-year anniversary of Rodger’s attack, a mass shooting in an Arizona mall sent three individuals to the hospital (Ling and Cotee 2020). Armando Hernandez Jr., a 20-year-old, admitted to intending to attack ten people at the mall that day, as well as his goal to “target couples” and identifying as an incel (Ling and Cotee 2020). That same year, Tres Genco, a self-identified “incel,” was charged by a federal jury with attempting a mass shooting of women and illegally possessing a machine gun in

Hillsboro, Ohio (Department of Justice 2021). Genco was a frequent poster to incel websites, espousing violent rhetoric and comparing himself to Elliot Rodger in 2014 (Department of Justice 2021). Genco wrote a manifesto declaring his intentions to “slaughter” women “out of hatred, jealousy and revenge,” hoping to “aim big” for a kill count of 3,000 people (Department of Justice 2021). He attended Army Basic Training in 2019 and conducted surveillance at an Ohio university on January 15, 2020 (Department of Justice 2021). On March 12, 2020, local police arrived at his residence and found a trunk containing firearms, loaded magazines, body armor, boxes of ammunition, and more (Department of Justice 2021). He has been charged with one count of attempting to commit a hate crime involving an attempt to kill (Department of Justice 2021).

In 2020, a seventeen-year-old in Toronto attacked the Crown Spa, stabbing a young mother over 40 times with a sword (Charlebois 2022). This youth, whose identity is protected under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, inscribed the sword with the term “thot-slayer,” referencing a derogatory term used against women in the manosphere (Charlebois 2022). This teenager self-identified as a “proud incel.” Investigators later found search history proving his participation in the manosphere, as well as profiles on which he named himself “The Killer” and identified as a “seeker of martyrdom” and hater of “feminists/atheists/satanists and all kinds of other degenerates” (Mandel 2023). Notably, this is the first case in Canadian history to be treated as an act of terrorism, labeling involuntary celibacy as an “ideologically motivated violent extremist movement” (Mandel 2023).

Previously fascinated by mass shootings, serial killers, and incel “heroes,” 22-year-old Jake Davidson raised many concerns before the attack that resulted in him ending his own life, among five others, in Plymouth in 2022 (Morris 2023). Just over one year before, Davidson posted a video asserting that an insult to his ego was “why incels were more prone to killing themselves - or going on a killing spree” and referencing Rodger (Morris 2023). Three days prior to his attack, Davidson searched online for information about Ted Bundy and incel murderers, as well as videos on how to use firearms (Morris 2023). While Davidson’s Internet history “refers to violence, misogynistic views,” as well as revealing that “he had explored on numerous occasions mass killings and referred to people idolized in the incel community for perpetuating mass killings,” the senior investigating officer on his case asserted that there was no prior indication of his actions since “there is no evidence of manifesto planning” (Morris 2023).

DATA AND METHODS

The following analysis utilizes the case studies above, comparing their physical destruction and impact on their communities. Materials include online articles, journals, and databases. Figure 1 focuses on individual case studies, whereas

Figure 2 compares these individuals as a group, known as “incel extremists,” with alternate terroristic groups.

The bar graph utilizes several secondary sources of incel extremists’ crimes. Each of the individuals in the case studies above cite socio-political reasoning for their attacks, from the desire to restructure society in favor of to the goal of killing off a whole group of individuals, whether it be females or another minority (Fomin and Ramesh 2021; O’Donnell and Shor 2022; Bloom 2022; ABC News 2009; Hoffman et al. 2020; Ling and Cottee 2020; McCain Institute 2022; Hendrix 2019; Washington Post 2019; Ailworth et al. 2019; Department of Justice 2021; Morris 2023).

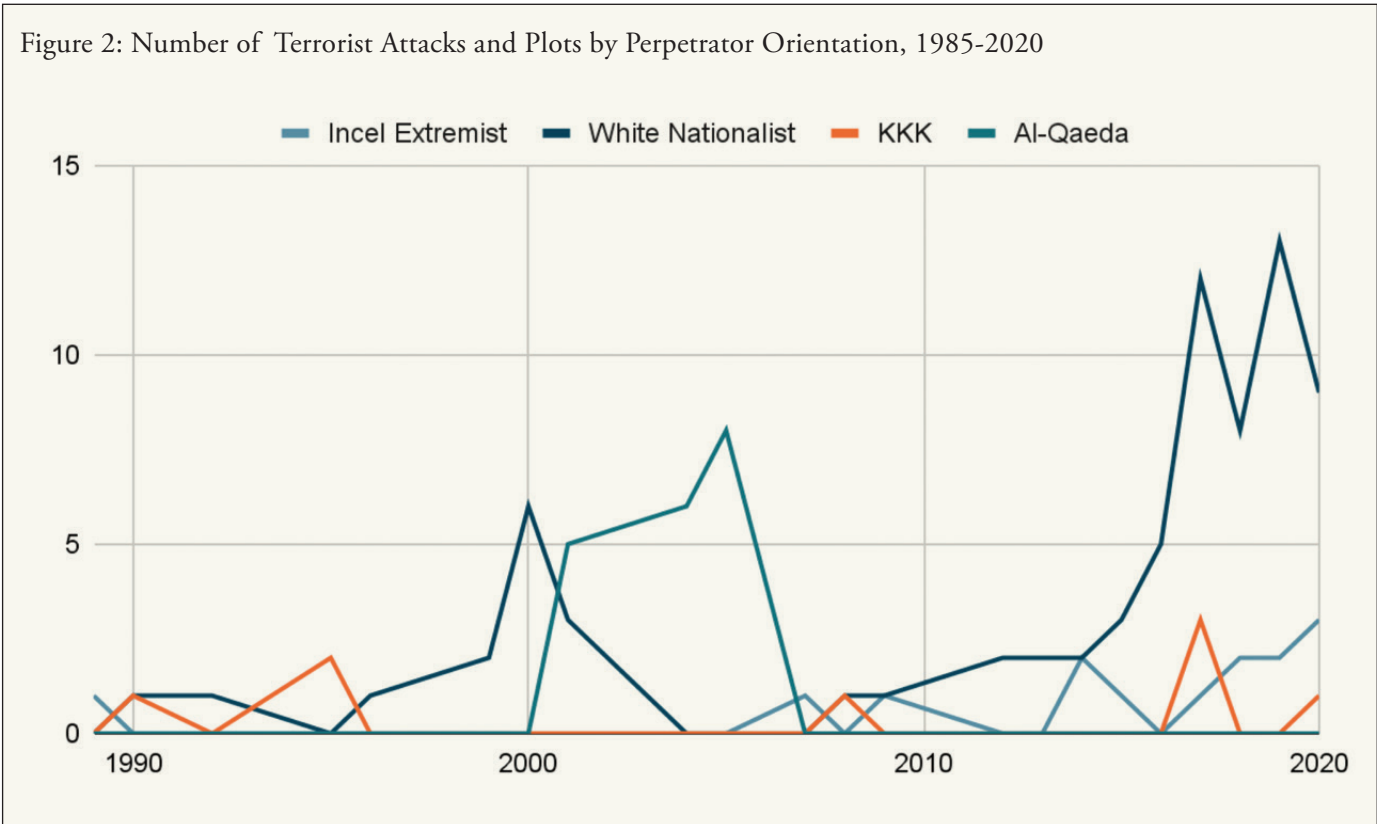
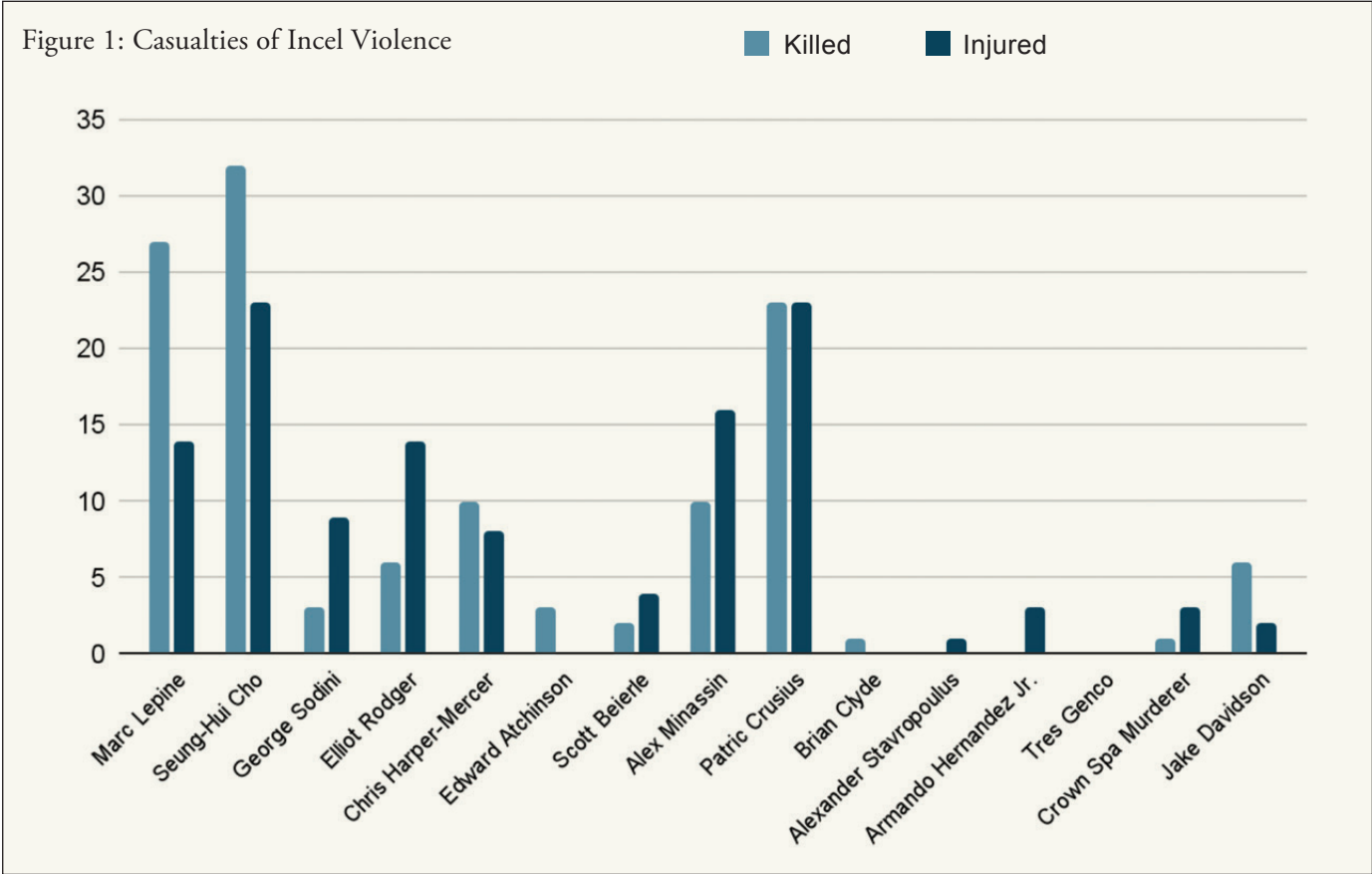
Figure 2 utilizes research via the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism via the University of Maryland (START 2009). Widely recognized as START, the Consortium is an international network of scholars who study the causes, as well as the human consequences, of terrorism (START 2009). In Figure 2, I applied this database to showcase the trend of attacks attributed to different ideological perpetrators during each year. To create a timeline, I utilized START to investigate cases of terrorist events starting in 1985, the year of the “First Incel’s” attack, and ending with 2022, the most recent completed year.

The chosen groups within Figure 2 are all present and active to this day. The line graph includes two DT groups, including white nationalists and the Ku Klux Klan, as well as one IT group, Al-Qaeda (START 2009). I chose Al-Qaeda for a twofold purpose: first, as it is a group that stereotypically comes to mind when the word “terrorist” is spoken; secondly, because it reflects the tendency to associate terrorism with Middle Eastern groups. In fact, one source utilized in this research is entitled, “Are ‘Incels’ The Next Al-Qaeda?” verifying this stereotype (Fomin 2021). Overall, these figures prove the prevalence of instances of incel violence, which rival and even surpass other defined terrorist groups in destruction and number of attacks.

DISCUSSION

It’s Up to the U.S.

As research on incel communities and acts of violence progress, experts agree that we must reclassify incel violence from the baseless actions of “lone wolves” to a coordinated instance of violent misogyny. Violent misogyny encompasses acts ranging from honor killings to sexual violence, and the World Health Organization positioned it as a significant public health problem impacting 35% of women worldwide (Regehr 2020). Alternatively, I and other thinkers assert that incel violence should instead fall under domestic terrorism; still, no matter one’s beliefs, a growing consensus posits that this level of extremism must be addressed on more than just an individual scale. Given the overwhelming evidence of a connection between the incel community and instances of DT, one must



question which bodies are seeking to redefine incel extremism: upon whom can we rely on to change the narrative?

In December 2022, U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin, Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Congressman Adam Schiff “urged the CEOs of Alphabet and YouTube to take new, aggressive actions to limit the spread of extreme and harmful content on their platforms” (U.S. Senator Dick Durbin 2022). YouTube is one major platform on which incel rhetoric thrives, as a report shows that active incel channels accrued over 24 million views (U.S. Senator Dick Durbin 2022). This report illuminates the manosphere’s prevalence and ability to embed itself within “highly active, densely-interconnected online communities that encourage and celebrate their horrific beliefs and acts” (U.S. Senator Dick Durbin 2022). Durbin and Schiff’s letter not only details the threat of incel extremism and rhetoric but also demands a prompt response. The letter was co-signed by Senators Bob Mendez and Mazie Hirono, as well as Representatives Hank Johnson, Andre Carson, Jackie Speier, Ed Case, Darren Soto, Lori Trahan, and Mondaire Jones (U.S. Senator Dick Durbin 2022).

Additionally, in the U.S., the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism recognizes incel violent extremism as a potential single-issue motivator for terrorism (McCain Institute 2022). While this definition does not explicitly classify incel violence itself as a terrorist action, it does prove marked progress for the recognition of incel extremism within U.S. discourse on terrorism. Unfortunately, even while politicians and academics work to dismantle the narrative that incel actors do not qualify as domestic terrorists, others seek to perpetuate this destructive belief. Some arguments are reasonable, such as Professor Kent Roach, who noted that “terrorism offenses [won’t] make a difference when it comes to the sentence” (Lewis and Ware 2020). Others, though, stem from seemingly personally paranoid warnings against a “terrorist response to misogyny” (Lewis and Ware 2020).

Looking Forward

Outside the U.S., other countries also tackle incel extremism with greater coordination. Following the Crown Spa murder in Toronto in February 2020, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) signaled its intent to change how it discusses extremist threats (Charlebois 2022). In the very same city where Minassian conducted his infamous van attack, this 17-year-old teenager will be facing not only murder charges for his attack rooted in incel ideology but also charges of terrorism (Charlebois 2022).

Jonathan Hall KC is the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation in the UK. In 2019, Hall identified Incels as one of the “Potential Terrorist Causes” in his report (Hall 2021). Similarly, academic Laura Bates of the UK defines incel extremists as dangerous. She estimates the death toll of incel violence at nearly 100 in the past decade, with 10,000 members

of the movement in the UK (Littlewood 2021). She states that “men acting specifically in the name of incel ideology have gone offline and have committed mass murders. [They] speak about wanting to murder and inflict pain on women [...] It is not taken seriously enough— [they are] not described as terrorists or their acts as terrorism and that makes it difficult to tackle [or] prevent the radicalisation” and future attacks (Littlewood 2021). Bates asserts that if considered terrorism, incel ideology would then fall under the UK Prevent agenda, allowing it to be addressed in schools, online, and more.

Structural Criteria

Incel organizations’ online existence as a “loosely organized, virtual community” requires no leader, ideological figurehead, or even in-person meetings between followers (Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro 2020). Instead, incels may hide behind seemingly meaningless screen names, cartoon profile pictures, and false personal details, concealing their true identity from not only those involved in possible counterterrorism measures but their own fellow radicals. Leaderless resistances have posed a challenge to defeat in the past, with this type of organization being propagated largely by White Power groups (Powers 2022). Fitting the definition of “a kind of lone wolf operation in which an individual, or a very small, highly cohesive group, engage in acts of anti-state violence independent of any movement, leader or network of support,” incel organizations are a direct threat as an offshoot of leaderless resistance (Powers 2022, 6). Leaders within any group not only manage its organization but also “invariably stand at the center of a collective action problem,” determining methods and targets of violence (Powers 2022, 13). A leaderless resistance, then, must rely on other measures to spread its ideology and inspire violent actions. Often, the closest individuals to a “leader” are propagandists publicizing their interpretation of the organization’s agenda; however, propagandists do not coordinate the power of the group (Powers 2022). This is up to individual actors, who may choose to enact violence at their own discretion based on propagandists’ rhetoric and their own personal drive.

Individuals within the incel movement are more likely to radicalize and mobilize since they are isolated from existing social networks (Powers 2022). This estrangement lends itself to the Internet, wherein radicalization happens virtually and, often, unnoticeably to the outside world. The incel movement also relies on an extensive vocabulary specific to the in-group, further isolating the movement from external groups or lines of thought. The movement specifically espouses sentiments of exile and self-pity, encouraging alienation of members from external social networks and catering explicitly toward lonely individuals. This self-imposed isolation is reinforced by propaganda and uplifting former “martyrs” such as Rogers, encouraging hate and violence in a disorganized, leaderless movement. Thus, due to this configuration, the incel movement must be approached with new counterterrorism

efforts to understand and dismantle the loose, unstructured network within the leaderless organization.

Next Steps

Labeling a group as a terrorist organization holds a myriad of effects, all of which would likely lessen the harm that such extremist groups could perpetuate. On a governmental and law-enforcement scale, the terrorist label affects which agencies and government authorities are responsible for handling these groups and individuals. The CSIS' decision to label the Crown Spa incel as a domestic terrorist impacted not only the young man's life and his victims' family but global policy and national security as well (Chan 2022). In a public report released in May of that year, the CSIS argued that "the terminology used when discussing threats to our national security is important," and now breaks down ideologically motivated violent extremism (IMVE) into four categories, rather than simply "right wing" or "left wing" (Lim 2020). These categories include xenophobic violence, gender-driven violence, anti-authority violence, and other grievance-driven and ideologically motivated violence (Charlebois 2022). This differentiating language provides national security authorities with the verbiage necessary to accurately identify and address incel extremism and other instances of IMVE (Charlebois 2022). In the U.S., this reclassification also shows promise in differentiating between the levels of law-enforcement oversight necessary. For example, protests, which the country sees on a near-daily basis, are traditionally a matter for the police, even regarding more violent riots or attacks (Byman 2020). Terrorism, on the other hand, directly involves the FBI and other national security agencies (Byman 2020).

Similarly, the redefinition of incel violence as terrorism elucidates a shift in the image of terrorists themselves. Sadiya Ansari, a Pakistani-Canadian journalist, points out that "[t]errorism laws have long been used against brown and black bodies" (Lim 2020). Of the 57 terror charges laid in Canada, 56 are cases of Islamist-inspired extremism (Lim 2020). Finally, changing the label of incel violence from extremism or gender-based violence to DT is a low-cost method of condemning membership within a destructive, harmful, and dangerous organization. While it may be easy for teens and young adults to identify with a community that they deem simply politically incorrect, quirky, and innocent, save for one or a few violent members in the past, it is another beast altogether to identify as a terrorist openly and proudly. The terrorist label, even when not utilized as a formal legal tool, signals to the public which types of political behavior cross the line from questionably immoral to completely unacceptable (Meir 2020).

DRAWBACKS AND LIMITATIONS

The most challenging aspect of labeling and addressing incel violence is the movement's online, unstructured, leaderless network across the globe. Incels are not an established

organization or group composed of a clear structure or hierarchy; instead, they exist as an undefined group that is largely active online, often under pseudonyms or aliases (Van der Veer et al. 2020). Social media plays a crucial role in incels' ability to spread their rhetoric, recruit new members, and carry out acts of violence. This capacity to enable and amplify hate speech appears in three stages: the connective ease with which platforms enable community formation that is conducive to radicalization, the reinforcement of violent rhetoric and the rise of a martyrdom discourse praising past offenders, and the strengthening of connections through social media between incels and other far-right groups (Regehr 2020). As the movement remains completely decentralized, lacking a true hierarchy or established leaders, there are no targetable offline systems; thus, it is challenging to form a singular, cohesive counterterrorism method.

As for active individuals themselves, they are difficult to identify; in a March 2020 survey of the incels.co forum site, more than 50% of respondents claimed, "nobody in the real world knew they were incels" (Lewis and Ware 2020). Whether or not this is indeed the case, it is proven that "the movement's online safe haven facilitates the radicalization of new recruits, encourages ideological convergence with more recognized far-right currents, and anonymizes extremist rhetoric, rendering counter-terrorism far more difficult by hiding the few truly plotting violence while increasing the number of adherents" (Lewis and Ware 2020). Additionally, without the assistance of governmental leadership, identifying and punishing incel identification proves difficult. The public and private sectors must enhance their partnerships to allow online platforms to engage with governmental efforts supporting the necessary enforcement of terrorist content (Lewis and Ware 2020). Similarly, the government must prove itself a reliable partner to support and engage with the private sector. This seems improbable in the case of the UK, as the Head of Knowledge and Insights on the Commission for Countering Extremism, William Baldet, warns that "[w]hile we want to identify genuine concerns of radicalization to terrorism, we don't want every sexist or misogynistic comment ending in a referral" (Littlewood 2021). He states that training front-line forces to identify truly violent, dangerous individuals as opposed to nonviolent misogynists will prove especially difficult.

Just as the FBI and other national security organizations are beginning to redefine and further act upon cases of violent extremism, increased law enforcement regarding incel action has forced the movement into increasingly dark and private online forums (Hoffman et al. 2020). Posts on incel-created websites often comment on potential surveillance, encouraging users to use private networks (Migration and Home Affairs 2021). Similarly, the movement now benefits from many of the same social and online tools that propelled the Islamic State and far-right extremists to increased prominence as more violent fringes of the movement migrate to smaller, less-policed online sites, including Telegram. (Migration and

Home Affairs 2021). Telegram is an encrypted app that other terrorist groups, including the Islamic State, favored in the past (Migration and Home Affairs 2021). Once on these apps or in more tame public forums, the manosphere leads curious or misled outsiders directly into a realm populated solely by this community, where veteran incels expose initiates to extremist topics and eagerly radicalize newcomers. These spaces are often carefully moderated as well, making it difficult for non-incels to intervene.

Incel extremists also follow another example that the Islamic State perfected, seeking out “soft targets” rather than “hard targets” or areas of political importance (Lewis and Ware 2020). In “soft targets,” defenses are limited or even nonexistent, and there is a wide range of options (Lewis and Ware 2020). Incel extremists target sorority houses, busy streets, yoga studios, massage parlors, schools, homes, and shopping malls, choosing weapons ranging from an everyday van, to machetes and knives, to explosives and military-grade ammunition (Lewis and Ware 2020). Finally, and most worryingly, many incels and their far-right counterparts benefit from prior military service (Hoffman et al. 2020). A staggering two-thirds of incel attackers hold some degree of military experience, and at least one incel attack was incited by a U.S. Army veteran (Hoffman et al. 2020). Finally, as the Internet and social media allow “terrorism [to become] 21st-century performance art,” there is an increasing possibility of copycats who may not share incel ideology, instead only wishing to replicate acts of violence (Hoffman et al. 2020).

Security organizations also struggle to enlist individuals with similarly extremist views, yet who eschew violence, to serve as interlocutors within this cause. Domestic law enforcement agencies worldwide can rarely legally track online speech or police language; still, even so, incels pride themselves on their penchant for “shitposting” or the use of humor to conceal extremist and violent language (Migration and Home Affairs 2021). This provides a separate challenge of being able to discern the authenticity of statements and threats.

The most concerning facet of incel identification lies in the increasingly young ages of these extremists. Hall is working to devise plans in the UK that deal with children arrested for lower-level terrorist offenses and has identified a gap in police response to children arrested for terrorism (Warren-Lister 2023). He asserts that a legislative solution is necessary to not only divert children from being arrested but also to guide law enforcement on how to proceed after arrest. Hall wishes to focus such legislation on ensuring that “criminal justice measures do not squeeze out the possibility of early intervention and support” for these youths (Warren-Lister 2023).

While law enforcement remains incredibly necessary to counter incel violence, many existing systems rely on outdated legal frameworks to counter emerging DT threats. Due to the online, public nature of incel forums and radicalization processes, this new frontier provides a blank canvas to

test innovative deradicalization strategies (Warren-Lister 2023). Similarly, this inspires a potential for non-traditional counterterrorism measures geared toward educational programs which address misogyny, hypermasculinity, and other predecessors to mobilization within the incel community (Warren-Lister 2023). Increased mental health resources online also show promise, as many incels self-report as having diagnosed mental disorders, alongside the proven high rate of suicide among incel extremists (Broyd, Josephine, Lauren Boniface, Damon Parsons, David Murphy, and Jonathan D. Hafferty 2022). In the case studies examined above, eight of the 14 incel extremists took their own lives as well as harming and killing others; at just over half, this extraordinarily high rate of suicide is incredibly worrying and must also be addressed to prevent violence at any level. Thus, the redefinition of incel extremism as DT would lead to further efforts toward assisting rehabilitation for individuals within the movement and preventing further destruction beyond merely the law-enforcement realm.

CONCLUSION

Despite the many challenges and obstacles to adequately enforcing a terrorist definition of incel extremism, the requirements are undeniably present. These acts occur within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S. and are “dangerous to human life” as well as being in “violation of the criminal laws” of the U.S. or any State (FBI 2021, 3). They appear “to be intended to: [i]ntimidate or coerce a civilian population; [i]nfluence the policy of government by intimidation or coercion; or [a]ffect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping” as black pillers seek to restructure society in their own favor via the Incel Rebellion (FBI 2021, 3). As such, policymakers, the media, and governmental structures must not only accurately represent it as such but engage in efforts to legislate and openly discuss incel extremism as a form of domestic terrorism. Additionally, should this redefinition occur, a myriad of policies and efforts gain the focus and resources necessary to benefit a variety of communities in countering extremism. Therefore, shifting the narrative on incel extremist action from gender-based violence to domestic terrorism is possible, beneficial, and necessary for national security. ■

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