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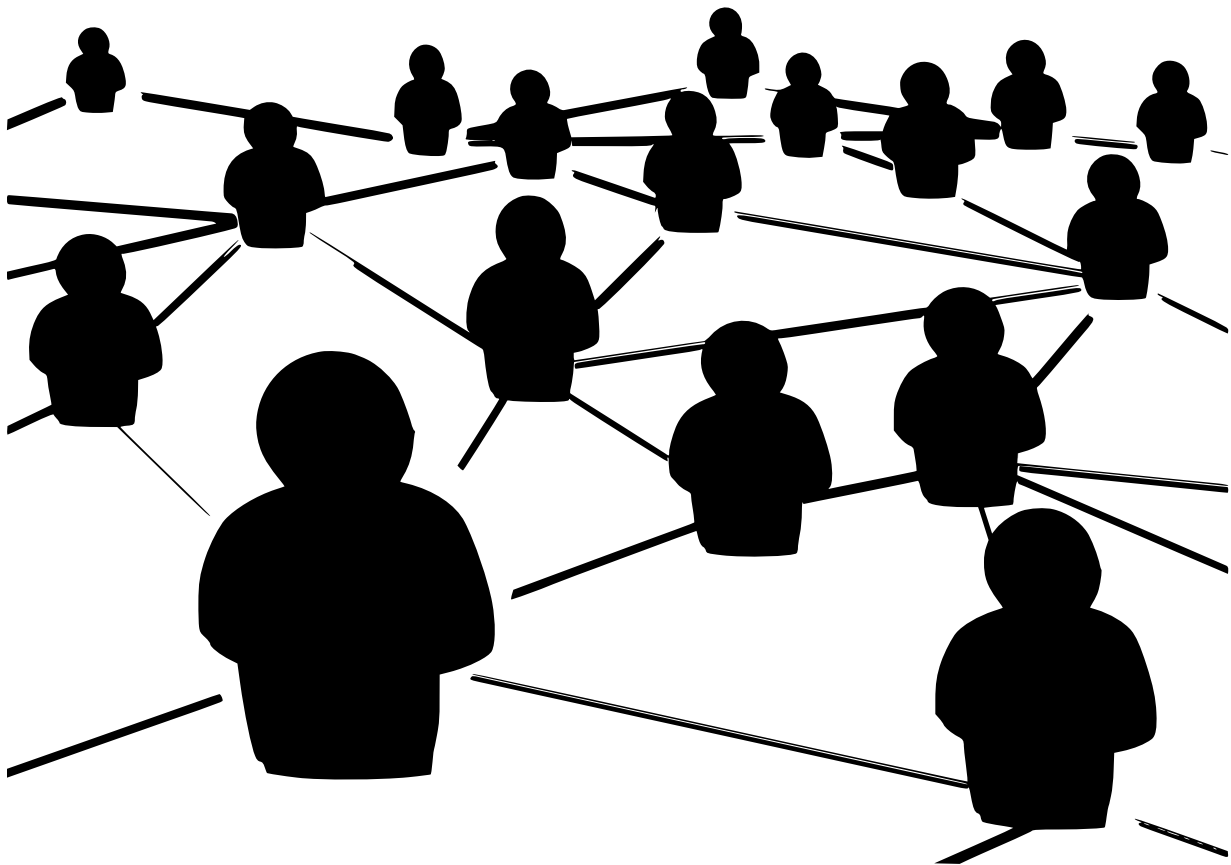*Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism*

Crowdsourced Political Violence:

A Literature Review on How the Internet Embodies Leaderless

Resistance and Empowers Lone Actors

By: Paula Granger

Abstract:

One of the most significant challenges and changes in political violence in modern times is not necessarily ideological but structural. The DHS and FBI identify lone offenders and small groups—particularly RMVEs, AGAAVEs, and HVEs—as persistent and lethal threats. "Lone wolf" attacks account for 93% of fatal terrorist incidents in the West in the past five years. These trends underscore how the Internet accelerates radicalization, connects lone actors to online communities, and provides logistical support. Traditional political violence emphasized group action and ideological coherence; in contrast, contemporary violence often involves lone actors addressing grievances outside formal organizations. The Internet democratized access to information, politicizes everyday life, and accelerates grievances into action. Leaderless resistance, revived by Louis Beam and embodied by groups like The Terrorgram Collective, helps explain this decentralized model. This literature review explores three dominant themes: 1) The Internet Enables Lone Actor Political Violence; 2) The Internet Reshapes Political Violence's Structure; and 3) The Internet Embodies Leaderless Resistance Strategy. It concludes with future research directions, including applying the Cynefin Framework, revisiting U.S. counterinsurgency lessons, and integrating cybersecurity into COIN efforts to address internet-enabled political violence.

About the Author:

Paula Granger leads the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Unit in the Office of Counter Terrorism at the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services. She oversees the statewide development of Threat Assessment and Management Teams that focus on identifying concerning behavior early in order to prevent targeted violence and help the individual in crisis before it escalates to violence.

Earlier in her career, she served as a domestic violence liaison, working closely with law enforcement and community partners to support survivors and multidisciplinary interest holders—an experience that deepened her understanding of how urgent responses often miss the complex, underlying dynamics that drive violence and why violence prevention investment is nonnegotiable.

Paula holds advanced degrees in nonproliferation and terrorism studies from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies and in cybersecurity risk and strategy from New York University. She served 12 years in the Army National Guard as a Persian-trained intelligence analyst, including active duty at U.S. Cyber Command.

Her current research interests are to explore how online and offline behaviors intersect as part of the same ecosystem—despite the tendency to treat them as separate—and how violence prevention strategies at all layers of society can evolve to reflect that complex and integrated reality.

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"We do not need 'leaders;' we need leading ideas. These ideas would produce leaders. The masses would produce them, and the ideas would be their inspirations. Therefore, we must create and convey these ideas to the restless peoples concerned with them." - attributed to Col. Ulius Louis Amoss

1. Introduction

One of the most significant challenges and changes in political violence in modern times is not necessarily ideological but structural. The United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) stated in a May 24, 2023, bulletin: "Lone offenders and small groups motivated by a range of ideological beliefs and personal grievances continue to pose a persistent and lethal threat to the Homeland."[1] In particular, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) noted that RMVEs (racially motivated violent extremists) and AGAAVEs (anti-government or anti-authority violent extremists) are their top domestic terrorism threat. Homegrown Violent Extremists (HVEs), those located in the United States (U.S.) but are inspired by foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs), were called out in the same speech as being "the greatest, most immediate international terrorism threat to the homeland."[2] This concern is not limited to the United States – "lone wolf" attacks are reportedly responsible for 93% of fatal terrorist attacks in the West in the last five years.[3]

These examples note a connection between the Internet and some facets of political violence, including accelerating radicalization, connecting lone actors to broader online communities, and providing training and information on the logistics of conducting an attack. Traditional notions of political violence, such as terrorism and insurgency, emphasize group action (to various degrees) in opposition to a government, and some ideological coherence. In contrast, contemporary trends in political violence in the

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[1] U.S. Department of Homeland Security. *National Terrorism Advisory System Bulletin*, May 24, 2023. https://www.dhs.gov/ntas/advisory/national-terrorism-advisory-system-bulletin-may-24-2023.

[2] Christopher Wray, *Statement Before the House Committee on Homeland Security: Worldwide Threats to the Homeland*, Washington, D.C., November 15, 2023. https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches-and-testimony/worldwide-threats-to-the-homeland-111523.

[3] Institute for Economics & Peace. *Evolving Patterns of Terrorism & Radicalisation in Western Democracies: Lone Wolf and Youth Terrorism*. March 2025. https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Lone-Wolf-and-Youth-Terrorism.pdf.

West suggest that it is increasingly carried out by lone actors, often divorced from a larger, organized group, in an attempt to address a grievance, regardless of its ideological or personal origins. The connective tissue for this decentralization seems to be the Internet's role in democratizing and facilitating easy access to information which has contributed to politicizing everyday life and accelerating grievances into action. It is important to note there is still much debate on the motivations behind these attacks whether they be ideological, personal, or both.

In this context, the leaderless resistance strategy, resurfaced and proposed by Louis Beam as a way to bypass a surveillance state and to minimize vulnerabilities associated with groups, remains a valuable perspective for understanding the phenomenon of lone actor political violence in a digital, decentralized age. Leaderless resistance is applicable not only for its core of decentralized action under a united ideology in some cases but for its infrastructure facilitated by the Internet that allows individuals to bypass traditional notions of collective organization and hierarchy.[4, 5] Current frameworks fail to capture the decentralization enabled by the Internet and its technology, leaving us unable to confront and address this shift effectively. A novel example of leaderless resistance as a strategy and as an internet embodied infrastructure is The Terrorgram Collective, an online group primarily operating on Telegram, an encrypted social media platform.[6] In January 2025, the U.S. Department of State designated Terrorgram and three of its leaders as Specially Designated Global Terrorists due to their connection to RMVE terrorist attacks. This decision is notable for several reasons including that American Citizens were implicated and can "now be designated as members of a terrorist group for acts that have been committed domestically, albeit with transnational connections" – the first time this has happened in connection to an RMVE attack.[7]

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[4] George Michael, "The New Media and the Rise of Exhortatory Terrorism," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 40–68, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/SSQ/documents/Volume-07_Issue-1/Michael.pdf. 43.

[5] National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), *Patterns of Lone Actor Terrorism in the United States: Research Brief*, University of Maryland, 2015, START_ATS_PatternsofLoneActorTerrorismUS_ResearchBrief.pdf.

[6] U.S. Department of State. *On the Terrorist Designations of the Terrorgram Collective and Three Leaders*. Press Statement by Matthew Miller, January 13, 2025. https://2021-2025.state.gov/office-of-the-spokesperson/releases/2025/01/on-the-terrorist-designations-of-the-terrorgram-collective-and-three-leaders/.

[7] Colin P. Clarke, Camden Carmichael, and Seamus Hughes, "Why the Terrorgram Collective Designation Matters," *Lawfare*, January 15, 2025, https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/why-the-terrorgram-collective-designation-matters.

This literature review was inspired by the question, "How has the internet changed political violence, particularly terrorism and insurgency?" While this question is primarily focused on the United States, it is not limited to the U.S., the West, or domestic violent extremists, such as RMVEs. The concept of a decentralized and internet-enabled jihadist strategy, or "leaderless jihad," is noted and debated in literature as well.[8, 9] This literature review assumes political violence is a dynamic spectrum with various impacts from the advent and adoption of the Internet. Though this inquiry ends up primarily focused on lone actor political violence, it is important to state that this does not mean "traditional" political violence, such as organizational and hierarchical groups, are obsolete – on the contrary, they are still active and a threat.

This literature review will briefly touch on terminology and data sources before moving to the three dominant themes that surfaced during the review process: 1. The Internet Enables Lone Actor Political Violence; 2. The Internet Reshapes Political Violence's Structure; and 3. The Internet Embodies Leaderless Resistance Strategy. Though there was much agreement across the literature on internet influences on political violence, there are also key disagreements briefly addressed in each section. Next, the review will look at the most promising argument found in this review of how the Internet has changed political violence. The review will end with suggestions on areas for potential research including: 1. Explore the Cynefin Framework as a "sense-making framework" to help map complexities introduced or enhanced by the Internet; 2. Examine the U.S. counterinsurgency "lessons learned" that may be useful to an emerging manifestation of political violence facilitated by the Internet; and 3. Integrate cybersecurity considerations into U.S. counterinsurgency operations to wholistically address internet-enabled political violence, including insurgency.[10]

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[8] Marc Sageman. *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-first Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

[9] Bruce Hoffman. "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama bin Laden Still Matters." *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 3 (May/June 2008): 133–138.

[10] Cynthia F. Kurtz and David J. Snowden, "The New Dynamics of Strategy: Sense-making in a Complex and Complicated World," *IBM Systems Journal* 42, no. 3 (2003): 462–483, https://doi.org/10.1147/sj.423.0462.

2. Terminology

This literature review will use "lone actor political violence" to refer to acts of physical violence that an individual carries out without direct organizational support that is political, ideological, or identity-based in nature. This definition focuses on the violent actor carrying out violent acts alone, or with minimal assistance, as a manifestation of political, ideological, or identity expression. This definition may include some hate crimes and terrorism if they meet the broader lone actor political violence criteria. The choice to use this definition as a composite definition comes from an attempt to sidestep the definitional disagreements over almost all key terms associated with "lone actor political violence." Definitional disagreements are debated over the following words that include, but are not limited to:

- Political Violence [11, 12]
- Lone Wolf [13, 14]
- Terrorism [15, 16, 17]
- Lone Actor [18, 19]

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[11] Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 3.

[12] Daniel Mider, "The Anatomy of Violence: A Study of the Literature," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 18, no. 6 (November–December 2013): 702–708, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2013.07.021.

[13] *Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces*, "2019, Volume 51, Number 2(192): 173–189," https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0013.2592.

[14] Jonathan Kenyon, Chris Baker-Beall, and Jens Binder, *Lone-Actor Terrorism: A Systematic Literature Review*, pre-publication version, accepted February 13, 2021, forthcoming in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2021.1892635.

[15] National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), *Global Terrorism Database (GTD)*, University of Maryland, accessed [May 2025], https://www.start.umd.edu/research-projects/global-terrorism-database-gtd.

[16] Jeffrey M. Bale and Gary Ackerman, *Recommendations on the Development of Methodologies and Attributes for Assessing Terrorist Threats of WMD Terrorism* (Monterey, CA: Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism Research Program). Microsoft Word - LANL-FinalReport.doc.

[17] Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Terrorism*, accessed May 5, 2025, https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism.

[18] Max Tu'inukuafe, *Terrorist Designation and the 'Lone Actor' Problem: Is Designation Fit For Purpose in the Modern Age* (LLB (Honours) thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2021). https://ir.wgtn.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/13371d7e-264b-45eb-a4d3-e38c79894b35/content.

[19] Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), *Lone Actors in Digital Environments* (Brussels: European Commission, October 2021), https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-10/ran_paper_lone_actors_in_digital_environments_en.pdf.

- Domestic Terrorism [20, 21, 22]
- Domestic Violent Extremism [23, 24]
- Violent Extremism [25, 26]
- Insurgency [27, 28]

Key terms associated with lone actor political violence are often unclear or overlapping with one another. For example, the United States Secret Service defines targeted violence as "a premeditated act of violence against a specific individual, group, or location regardless of motivation and generally unrelated to other criminal activity."[29]   This category is broad and includes many different types of violence, including political violence if premeditated, that may be personal, ideological, or a mix. The intention behind this definition is within a larger prevention framework to help practitioners identify concerning behaviors early to stop acts of targeted violence. For some, terrorism falls well within this definition, but terrorism is another hotly debated term which some attribute to its multidisciplinary nature.[30]

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[20] Ibid.

[21] New York State Senate, *New York Penal Law § 490.28 – Crime of Terrorism*, accessed May 5, 2025, https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/PEN/490.28.

[22] U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Domestic Terrorism: Additional Actions Needed to Implement an Effective National Strategy*, GAO-25-107030 (Washington, D.C.: Government Accountability Office, April 2025), https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-107030.

[23] Ibid.

[24] National Counterterrorism Center, *Mobilization Indicators: A Guide for CT and HSGP Partners* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021), https://www.dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/news_documents/Mobilization_Indicators_Booklet_2021.pdf.

[25] U.S. Government Accountability Office. *Domestic Terrorism: Additional Actions Needed to Implement an Effective National Strategy*. GAO-25-107030. Washington, D.C.: Government Accountability Office, April 2025. https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-107030.

[26] National Counterterrorism Center, *Mobilization Indicators: A Guide for CT and HSGP Partners* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021), https://www.dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/news_documents/Mobilization_Indicators_Booklet_2021.pdf.

[27] U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, C1: Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies. Change No. 1* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, June 2, 2014), https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf.

[28] ML Cavanaugh, "July 4: Celebrating the Good-Guy Insurgents," *Modern War Institute at West Point*, July 4, 2018, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/july-4th-celebrating-the-good-guy-insurgents/.

[29] U.S. Secret Service, *Behavioral Threat Assessment Units: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement to Prevent Targeted Violence* (Washington, D.C.: National Threat Assessment Center, October 2024), https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2024-10/Behavioral-Threat-Assessment-Units-A-Guide-for-State-and-Local-Law-Enforcement-to-Prevent-Targeted-Violence.pdf.

[30] Mark Youngman, "Building 'Terrorism Studies' as an Interdisciplinary Space: Addressing Recurring Issues in the Study of Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32, no. 5 (2020): 1091–1105, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2018.1520702.

Some of the terms listed already have more specific legal definitions that, if met, trigger consequences if an individual were to cross the criminal threshold. For example, participating in terrorism as defined by the law has consequences. However, in the case of what some call domestic terrorism, there is no federal domestic terrorism law leaving the legal ramifications predicated upon other better-defined categories in pursuit of legal remedies. Some states, such as New York State, do have legal definitions of domestic terrorism that often include hate crimes as well.[31] The inclusion of hate crimes into terrorism is yet another hotly debated subject.[32]

Another example is the difference between violent extremism and terrorism. Although different federal entities use different definitions, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (U.S. GAO) has pointed out that the federal government has failed to clarify the distinction between these two words. The differences in the definitions likely reflect the differences in the defining entities' mission areas.[33]

The mixture of academic, legal, and policy definitions of the same words creates much confusion over topics, such as targeted violence, political violence, and terrorism, among others. More research should be conducted to help unravel these different definitional motivations to more clearly define the concepts and the consequences of carrying out these activities.

3. State of the Research:

This literature examination involved reviewing a variety of literature that originated primarily from peer-reviewed journal articles, government documents, a few theses and dissertations, internet journal sources, and some internet articles. Some sources included case studies and quantitative research though the topic of the Internet's impact on political violence, specifically lone actor political violence, appears to be underrepresented in literature. While there was substantial research on topics such as terrorism and insurgency with the traditional understanding of political violence, little research addresses

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[31] New York State Senate, *New York Penal Law § 490.28 – Crime of Terrorism*, accessed May 5, 2025, https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/PEN/490.28.

[32] Kathleen Deloughery, Ryan D. King, and Victor Asal, "Close Cousins or Distant Relatives? The Relationship Between Terrorism and Hate Crime," *Crime & Delinquency* 58, no. 5 (September 2012): 663–688, https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128712452956.

[33] U.S. Government Accountability Office. *Domestic Terrorism: Additional Actions Needed to Implement an Effective National Strategy*. GAO-25-107030. Washington, D.C.: Government Accountability Office, April 2025. https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-107030.

the Internet's role in changing this understanding. Fewer studies have examined leaderless resistance as a strategy and the Internet as the infrastructure that enables lone actor political violence.

4. Key Argument Summaries:

The Internet Enables Lone Actor Political Violence

There is broad agreement across literature that the Internet generally enables decentralized, lone-actor violence. However, what role the Internet plays in enabling individuals to conduct acts of political violence is less understood. Additionally, the contours of what "lone actor" means are highly contested along with other definitional disagreements, as noted earlier in this review. Radicalization is acknowledged as a significant component of lone actor political violence, though the connection between radicalization and violence is not agreed upon. Essentially, the Internet's role in enabling lone actor political violence falls into three categories: 1. Connection; 2. Radicalization; and 3. Training. Research collectively suggests that individuals connect with ideas and people through the Internet (though not necessarily exclusively), which may lead them down a radicalization pathway. Individuals who decide to conduct an attack can find training materials and other information, including help with researching potential targets, as well as an encouraging audience on the Internet.

Connection

The Internet as the connective tissue between geographically dispersed individuals brings the world to individuals right in their homes. This internet connection allows individuals to move from social platforms to encrypted chatrooms and be exposed to various ideas, as well as introduce others to ideas, through engaging with individuals and ideas on a staggering scale. These virtual communities play important roles in an individual's persuasion to adopt, and potentially action, violent extremist narratives.[34] Though this connection is not always negative it can be negatively impactful for vulnerable individuals, especially young people, who may be exposed to ideas that promote violent action. Terrorists

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[34] European Commission – Migration and Home Affairs. Radicalisation Awareness Network, *Lone Actors in Digital Environments*. October 21, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/publications/lone-actors-digital-environments-october-2021_en.

and others interested in promoting political violence to achieve a goal can take advantage of this connection by exploiting those vulnerable individuals and recruiting them to their cause. Several scholars have noted that the Internet facilitates nefarious individuals' access to vulnerable individuals, such as young people, for communications, recruitment, and fundraising, all while not having to leave their homes. [35, 36]

Online Radicalization

Literature is rife with disagreement about radicalization, including its definition. Some contest both its possibility and its connection to violence. A good working definition of radicalization is "the willingness to engage in violent, illegal political action to support ideologies that exhibit out-group hostility and the rejection of egalitarian and democratic values."[37] It is important to note that while radicalization occurs more often online, it is not exclusive to the Internet.

The rate at which individuals radicalize online is cited as a significant concern across literature, especially among youth. The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) conducted research on lone actor terrorism in the West, highlighting the sharp decrease in the amount of time it took from exposure to extremist material to an attack in 2002, with an average of sixteen months to less than ten months. IEP attributes this 40% radicalization acceleration, at least partly, to the Internet and its social media platforms, including algorithms that "expose vulnerable individuals to radical content" by amplifying extremist narratives.[38] Other scholars' research supports this idea including through a rare study conducted by researchers Gaudette, Scrivens, and Venkatesh that involved in-depth interviews with ten Canadian former right-wing extremists. This study highlighted that "exposure to extremist content online

[35] Marwick, Alice, Becca Clancy, and Katherine Furl. "Far-Right Online Radicalization: A Review of the Literature." *The Bulletin of Technology & Public Life*, 2022. https://doi.org/10.21428/bfcb0bff.e9492a11.

[36] George Michael, *The New Insurgents: A Select Review of Recent Literature on Terrorism and Insurgency* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, October 2007), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294090339_The_New_Insurgents_A_Select_Review_of_Recent_Literature_on_Terrorism_and_Insurgency.

[37] Marwick, Alice, Becca Clancy, and Katherine Furl. "Far-Right Online Radicalization: A Review of the Literature." *The Bulletin of Technology & Public Life*, 2022. https://doi.org/10.21428/bfcb0bff.e9492a11.

[38] Institute for Economics & Peace, "Evolving Threat of Lone Wolf Terrorism in the West," *Vision of Humanity*, accessed May 7, 2025, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/evolving-threat-of-lone-wolf-terrorism-in-the-west/.

played a critical role in sparking participants' interest in violent extremist ideologies" which the authors acknowledged was widely considered but which had not been evidenced by research.[39]

As already stated, research emphasizes that young people tend to be more at risk of the Internet's role in radicalization. Meleagrou-Hitchens and Moustafa Ayad's research drew from a PIRUS dataset from 2010-2020 that showed "…a 413% increase in cases where the internet played a primary role in the radicalization process for those under the age of 30, as compared to the previous decade."[40] However, researchers note that by itself, radicalization online does not pose a high threat and is seen as more of an enabler and not a driver to violence.[41,42]

Taken together, the research suggests that while radicalization may not be agreed upon in terms of a strict definition or even its connection to violence, the Internet is playing a significant role in the way in which people, especially youth, are introduced to extremist narratives, which impacts the choice to carry out lone actor political violence.

Training

Researchers and practitioners have noted the Internet's role in helping provide materials that assist those interested in conducting political violence across a spectrum. Propaganda was one of the first ways in which the Internet was championed as a conduit for recruitment by Louis Beam in the 1980s, who authored an essay entitled "Leaderless Resistance" that was distributed via computer networks. Other

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[39] Tiana Gaudette, Ryan Scrivens, and Vivek Venkatesh, "The Role of the Internet in Facilitating Violent Extremism: Insights from Former Right-Wing Extremists," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 7 (2020): 1339–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2020.1784147.

[40] Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Moustafa Ayad, *The Age of Incoherence? Understanding Mixed and Unclear Ideology Extremism* (Washington, DC: Program on Extremism, George Washington University; National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center, 2023), https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/2023-06/the-age-of-incoherence-final.pdf.

[41] Jens F. Binder and Jonathan Kenyon, "Terrorism and the Internet: How Dangerous Is Online Radicalization?" *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (2022): 997390, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.997390.

[42] European Commission – Migration and Home Affairs. Radicalisation Awareness Network, *Lone Actors in Digital Environments*. October 21, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/publications/lone-actors-digital-environments-october-2021_en.

RMVE organizations also used the Internet to advertise their message and communicate in the early days of the Internet, such as with electronic bulletin boards.[43]

Individuals interested in conducting political violence can find training guides aligned with their belief system to help them in the process. These guides range from instructional guides on how to build different weapons to entire training manuals with ideological justifications.[44] Notable for RMVE groups is the *Turner Diaries*, a work of neo-Nazi inspired fiction that is a roadmap for a white supremacist revolution.[45] Following this model, The Terrorgram Collective has published a digital magazine called *The Hard Reset*, which glorifies the RMVE cause and provides instructions on finding targets and other extremist information.[46] Posting this material online is common across the political violence spectrum, including publications such as *The Anarchist's Cookbook* and *The Complete Improvised Kitchen*, among others, though the accuracy of these training manuals is questionable.[47]

Jacob Ware also points out that individuals may be exposed to extremist material online, radicalize, and then make their own extremist material tailored to their personal tastes resulting "in a dangerous feedback loop" where other individuals consume materials that directly appeal to their taste.[48] As an enabler of lone actor political violence, the Internet connects vulnerable individuals to content and people who may exploit those vulnerabilities by tailoring recruitment to them in various ways or who may simply encourage them to take violent action. Research suggests that vulnerable people can more quickly radicalize or be converted online, which could inspire them to try to conduct political violence themselves.

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[43] George Michael, "The New Media and the Rise of Exhortatory Terrorism," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 40–68, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/SSQ/documents/Volume-07_Issue-1/Michael.pdf. 43.

[44] *"Al Qaeda Training Manual," Frontline*, PBS, accessed May 6, 2025, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/network/alqaeda/manual.html.

[45] Andrew Macdonald, *The Turner Diaries* (Washington, D.C.: National Vanguard Books, 1978), https://archive.org/details/turner-diaries_202402.

[46] Matthew Kriner and Bjørn Ihler, "Analysing Terrorgram Publications: A New Digital Zine," *Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET)*, September 12, 2022, https://gnet-research.org/2022/09/12/analysing-terrorgram-publications-a-new-digital-zine/.

[47] Clare Ellis, Raffaello Pantucci, and Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, "Analysing the Processes of Lone-Actor Terrorism: Research Findings," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 2 (2016): 56–63, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26297631.

[48] Jacob Ware and Cleary Waldo, "Ideological Leaderless Resistance in the Digital Age," *Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET)*, October 26, 2022, https://gnet-research.org/2022/10/26/ideological-leaderless-resistance-in-the-digital-age/.

All of this combined leads to a sort of do-it-yourself political violence model where an individual could be exposed to, adopt a belief system, and train for political violence all without leaving their bedroom.[49, 50]

The Internet Reshapes Political Violence's Structure and Meaning Structure

Across the literature, there is broad agreement that the Internet encourages more loosely affiliated groups that do not follow a traditional hierarchical structure. This notion of "phantom cell" activity associated with strategic leaderless resistance existed before the Internet, but the Internet's decentralization only further collapses this traditional structure. Several scholars note that extremist and terrorist movements (including in the U.S.) are taking advantage of this loosely organized structure and are less hierarchical than before. Many connect this phenomenon to the role of online communities in inspiring violence and the ease with which an individual can act alone.[51, 52]

In researching for this review, inevitably the search leads back to the concept of leaderless resistance, or "uncoordinated violence," with general agreement that this formation is increasingly common within political violence, especially terrorism and especially online.[53] Most of the research points out the usefulness of violent extremists adopting a loose organization in carrying out political violence, but it is not without its vulnerabilities. The National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center's (NCITE) research paper entitled *Fighting the Hydra* highlights three main vulnerabilities that may be exploited to interrupt or suppress these efforts, one of which reflects the reverse side of having a loosely organized base: "poor organizational cohesion and control."[54] Still, while this may be a

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[49] Marie Wright, PhD, C.H.S.-IV, "Technology & Terrorism," *Forensic Examiner* 17, no. 4 (2008): 13–20, https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/technology-amp-terrorism/docview/207639023/se-2.

[50] Blaine M. Powers, *Domestic Extremists and Leaderless Resistance* (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2022), https://hdl.handle.net/10945/69702.

[51] Louis Beam, "Leaderless Resistance," *The Seditionist*, no. 12 (February 1992), originally written in 1983, https://archive.org/details/Leaderless_Resistance_The_Seditionist.

[52] Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Moustafa Ayad, *The Age of Incoherence? Understanding Mixed and Unclear Ideology Extremism* (Washington, DC: Program on Extremism, George Washington University, June 15, 2023), https://extremism.gwu.edu/age-incoherence.

[53] Iris Malone, Lauren Blasco, Kaitlyn Robinson, and National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center, *Fighting the Hydra: Combatting Vulnerabilities in Online Leaderless Resistance Networks* (2022), *Reports, Projects, and Research*, no. 24, https://irismalone.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/50bbc-fightingthehydra.pdf.

[54] Ibid.

problem for ideologically cohesive groups, it may not be as much of an issue for the lone actor of political violence.

While broadly literature suggests more familiarity with and recognition of terrorism adapting to a decentralized structure, other forms of political violence, including insurgency, may not be immune to the Internet's transformative nature. Like other key terms pointed out at the start, insurgency also has different definitions, though it is generally understood as an organized group's armed struggles against a power and often in pursuit of "ungoverned space."[55]

Several scholars argue that classical notions of insurgency will change mainly due to the Internet becoming more connected and decentralized. The use of cyberspace as a battlefield will only further blur the lines between types of political violence, such as terrorism and insurgency.[56] The Internet has the potential to change insurgency's structure by encouraging individual action. Although decentralized, these actions are united by ideas, with cyberspace as the battlespace and potentially the "ungoverned space" mentioned in counterinsurgency references.[57]

Meaning

The big "P" in political violence is generally understood to be mostly just that – violence expressed to influence a political power. However, with increasing polarization and politicization of everyday life evident in the U.S. and democratization of information through the Internet, little "p" politics is diluting more traditional ideas of what constitutes political violence. Even though the definition of political violence is debated along with the rest of the key terms mentioned there are older more established definitions, such as Ted Gurr's definition, which can be used as a base reference: "Political violence refers to all collective attacks within a political community against the political regime, its actors, including competing political groups as well as incumbents, or its policies."[58]

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[55]U.S. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual 3-24 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 15, 2006), 1-1, https://iccforum.com/media/background/sanctions/2006-12-15-US_Army_Field_Manual-Counterinsurgency.pdf.

[56] Steven Metz, *The Future of Insurgency* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 1993), https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/275/.

[57] U.S. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24, 1-1.

[58] Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 3.

However, what does political violence, in the view of more traditional definitions, mean in an internet age of mixed motivation political violence, and ideological convergence that privileges individual action over collective attacks? The question of motivation looms large in the literature with little consensus over questions of whether personal grievances or ideology is a primary motivation for individuals to commit political violence, particularly terrorism.[59] Researchers in writing about composite violent extremism note that the Internet's diffuse nature may contribute to more decentralized extremist networks with ideologies that mirror the decentralized and personalized nature of the Internet and are less ideologically consistent. This may present challenges for the more traditional terrorist and insurgency groups themselves because the more decentralized and diffuse, the more difficult it may be for a group, especially a loosely defined group, to maintain control over the narrative.[60]

In discussing the possibilities of internet insurgencies, Metz and Michael, respectively, also note changing narratives associated with insurgencies.[61, 62] Metz forecast in 1993 that there would be two dominant types of insurgencies in the aftermath of the Cold War.[63] In his writing, he states that a search for meaning and justice primarily drives the Spiritual Insurgency while the Commercial Insurgency is predicted to be driven by greed, power, and a pursuit of the Western ideal of wealth. In a later work, Metz consolidates these ideas by anticipating that the next generation of insurgency will operate in a narrative-centric conflict, meaning that the narrative will be more important than other aspects, such as the "political and psychological domain."[64]

This literature suggests that the Internet may influence or even change what "political violence" means in a global, decentralized space populated with a menu of grievances and ideologies that may or may not be political. Overall, research suggests that the Internet is making the political even more personalized, and individualized, which political violence is evolving to mirror.

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[59] Donald Holbrook and John Horgan, "Terrorism and Ideology: Cracking the Nut," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 6 (2019): 2–15, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26853737.

[60] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Thomas Plant, *Composite Violent Extremism: A Radicalization Pattern Reshaping Terrorism* (Valens Global, April 18, 2023), https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/04/18/composite-violent-extremism-a-radicalization-pattern-reshaping-terrorism/.

[61] Metz, *The Future of Insurgency*.

[62] Michael, *The New Insurgents*.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Steven Metz, "The Challenges of Next-Gen Insurgency," *Parameters* 54, no. 3 (2024): 5–18, https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol54/iss3/5/.

The Internet Embodies Leaderless Resistance

Beam's vision of using the leaderless resistance strategy to evade authorities is well suited to an internet-enabled age.[65] Individuals who may be isolated, alone, and with few tactical skills can go from idea to action in a relatively short amount of time and "have that act be broadcast around the world, often in real time." [66] While a fully internet integrated leaderless resistance strategy has not been explicitly studied,

Table 1. Modern Leaderless Structures in RMVE

	Leaderless Structure	
	Deliberate	**Organic**
Description	Group/movement intentionally adopted a leaderless structure for its strategic benefits	Group/movement developed a leaderless structure organically due to its crowd-sourced development and fluid membership
Formation	Group/movement announced by a particular individual or group of individuals. Recruitment to this group/movement occurs online, and it can be selective. Followers adopt a central set of goals and ideological tenets.	Consumption of online content (e.g., memes) and widely available literature (e.g., *The Turner Diaries*) generates a shared sense of community and shapes an overarching ideology and set of goals. Any user can identify with the group/movement and contribute to its ideological development.
Tactics	• Coordinated campaigns (e.g., swatting) • Planned attacks carried out by group cells • Lone actor ("lone wolf") terrorist acts	• Coordinated campaigns (e.g., Gamergate) • Lone actor ("lone wolf") terrorist acts
Examples	Minutemen Atomwaffen Division (AWD) The Base	Boogaloo Bois Groypers Users of 8chan /pol imageboard

existing research suggests that the Internet amplifies notions of pre- or early internet leaderless resistance as a strategy and embodies leaderless resistance strategy as an infrastructure. Malone et al. divides the idea of leaderless (infra) structure into two categories: "Deliberate" and "Organic."

Broadly, in the "Deliberate" category, RMVE groups have adopted a leaderless resistance (infra) structure for their survival and use the Internet as simply an aspect of their functioning. The "Organic" category adopts the leaderless resistance (infra) structure by nature of the group's Internet-enabled fluidity, and the Internet is central to its function, as shown in Table 1.[67]

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[65] Louis Beam, "Leaderless Resistance," *The Seditionist*, no. 12 (February 1992), originally written in 1983, https://archive.org/details/Leaderless_Resistance_The_Seditionist.

[66] Jacob Ware, "The Evolution of Far-Right Terrorist Tactics and Targeting," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2024): 1–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2024.2358541.

[67] Malone, Blasco, and Robinson, *Fighting the Hydra*, 12.

This research provides the scaffolding to better understand leaderless resistance as a strategy and infrastructure for modern times. While "Deliberate" leaderless structure is not very surprising as it incorporates Internet usage into the group's existing structure, the leaderless resistance as both a strategy and a structure (referred to as "Organic" above) is quite different. This Organic structure arose out of the decentralized nature of the Internet itself where geographically dispersed individuals, who most likely would have never met in real-life, can communicate, and unite, with some lone actors moving to violent action. Using this framework, the Terrogram Collective would fall under the "Organic" category and present new challenges in preventing political violence over the long term due to the fluidity of these online groups and their ability to adapt and shift with efforts to suppress or eliminate them.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the Internet is transforming political violence: at the individual level by supporting the introduction and encouragement to commit political violence; at the structural level by collapsing hierarchy and broadening what "political" means; and at the infrastructural level through internet embodied leaderless resistance.

5. Synthesis of Findings:

The consensus across literature is that the Internet has transformed our world, and lone actor political violence is not exempt from these changes. Political violence focused on collective action has become more individualized, though not divorced from a "collective." Though not well understood, the Internet plays a role in introducing individuals vulnerable to extremist narratives to new extreme ideas and people of similar ilk. This interplay of factors at the individual level can lead to a desire to act even if the action is autonomous, though not without a group, even if decentralized. The individual may be acting alone, but they are not alone – they often have global audiences encouraging, assisting, and cheering them on.

> "Next-gen insurgency will be networked, swarming, global, and focused on narrative-centric conflict and integrated cost imposition. Social media and the virtual world will be its central battle spaces. Failing to grasp this fact-to think about what is coming rather than what happened in the past-is dangerous." -Steven Metz

Decentralized political violence, especially terrorism, is not a new concept and was championed by those who adopted leaderless strategies as a way to evade authorities and encourage autonomous action aligned with one ideology. However, the Internet has collapsed the hierarchy and shortened the

amount of time necessary for political violence to occur, which seems to promote lone actor political violence. Additionally, the "political" component to political violence is being stretched to its limits with an increased politization of the everyday and social media's amplification of these narratives.

Even though the idea of leaderless resistance as a strategy is certainly not new in that it predated the Internet, the application of leaderless resistance strategy in different ways, such as in a "Deliberate" way where it is incorporated into political violence processes and the "Organic" evolution of leaderless resistance as political violence is a relatively new phenomenon. Even more novel is the idea that the Internet itself embodies leaderless resistance infrastructure, meaning that not only does the Internet facilitate the leaderless resistance strategy which encourages decentralization and autonomous action, but it also serves as a type of leaderless resistance infrastructure itself by connecting geographically dispersed individuals with different motivations and grievances to carry out the leaderless resistance strategy.

Though generally the literature covers lone actor terrorism as political violence, there is much debate over the parameters of different terminology as previously noted; there is not much that covers how the Internet has evolved the concept of insurgency, much less the role of lone actors. Here, a few authors stand apart in their warnings about what the future may hold in the way of internet-enabled insurgents. Dr. Steven Metz first wrote about "The Future of Insurgency" in 1993 and highlighted changes he forecasted would occur post-Cold War, predicting two primary types of insurgency would emerge: Spiritual Insurgency ("driven by the problems of modernization, the search for meaning, and the pursuits of justice" and Commercial Insurgency ("…driven less by the desire for justice than wealth").[68]

Just over 30 years later, in 2024, Metz wrote "The Challenges of Next-Gen Insurgency," which updates and builds on his previous paper warning that authorities continue to view modern phenomena through old paradigms that must be updated to reflect the current environment. He writes about Mao's "people's war" framework: "No nation has fully grasped that the 'people's war' reflected the military, economic, political, informational, and technological, and social conditions of its time." [69]

Metz's paper parallels the concept of leaderless resistance as a decentralized but individual-empowering political violence strategy and infrastructure, though he never uses this specific language. Metz envisions the next generation insurgency scenario as an example where the youth of his fictitious

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[68] Metz, *The Future of Insurgency* (no page numbers in the document).
[69] Metz, "The Challenges of Next-Gen Insurgency." 37.

nation use cyber means to carry out individually executed but collectively coordinated cyber political violence to address mostly personal grievances related to inequity and lack of upward mobility. Though motivation may come from personal grievances, a "revolutionary narrative" mobilizes to action; all the while, the nation's security apparatus has no idea what is going on or what to do about it.

Insurgency as political violence is not a word that is typically applied to the United States in recent history or really in the Western Context. However, literature suggests that the Internet has, and will continue, to blur geographic boundaries and along with this blurring local politics and other localized concerns are likely to follow. This general blurring of physical boundaries will likely blend even further our mental boundaries between concepts such as terrorism, insurgency, and perhaps other forms of political violence. As a facilitator and embodiment of leaderless resistance, the Internet empowers individuals to act individually as part of a collective like never before in history.

6. Areas for Future Research:

This literature review highlights that the Internet is changing how we think about political violence, including terrorism and insurgency. Traditionally, these terms depended on some form of structure, were associated with a specific location and geography, and were limited in scale. Internet-enabled lone actor political violence is decentralized, boundaryless, and not specific to one political, cultural, or identity–based grievance. However, it still poses significant challenges to all sectors of society. More research should be conducted to understand the current phenomenon better to prevent future political violence. The three areas of research discussed in this section seem most ripe for exploration.
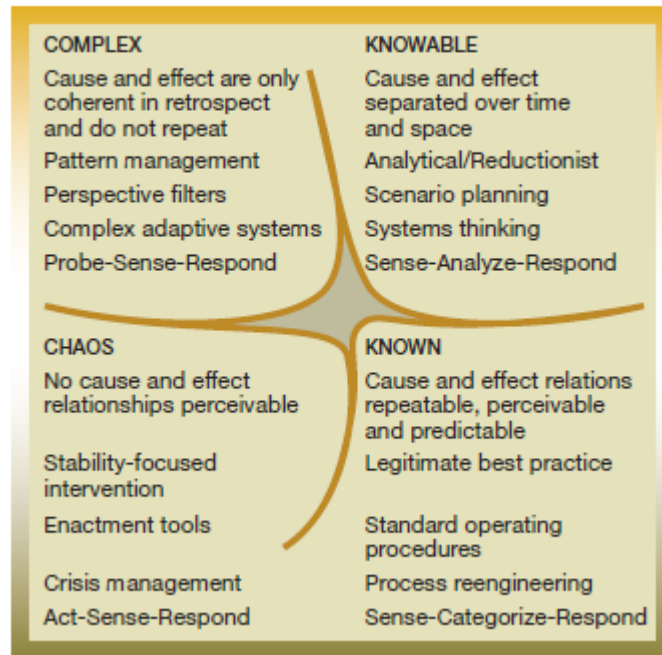
Explore the Cynefin Framework in Research and Application

Metz warned that failing to think about what is coming with next generation insurgency is dangerous.[70] The Cynefin Framework, as a "sense-making device," seems particularly suitable for helping understand the complexities that the Internet introduces to an already complex topic such as lone actor political violence.[71] Kurtz and Snowden's paper "The new dynamics of strategy: Sense-making in a complex and complicated world" states that Cynefin "…originated in the practices of knowledge management as a means of distinguishing between formal and information communities, and as a means of talking about the interaction of both with structured processes and uncertain conditions." In particular, the Cynefin Framework offers a way to order complex elements, which seems like a handy tool in looking at existing and emergent phenomena and attempting to understand that particular category's status.

Figure 1   Cynefin domains

COMPLEX
Cause and effect are only coherent in retrospect and do not repeat
Pattern management
Perspective filters
Complex adaptive systems
Probe-Sense-Respond

KNOWABLE
Cause and effect separated over time and space
Analytical/Reductionist
Scenario planning
Systems thinking
Sense-Analyze-Respond

CHAOS
No cause and effect relationships perceivable
Stability-focused intervention
Enactment tools
Crisis management
Act-Sense-Respond

KNOWN
Cause and effect relations repeatable, perceivable and predictable
Legitimate best practice
Standard operating procedures
Process reengineering
Sense-Categorize-Respond

The Cynefin Framework is divided into three domains: 1. the Ordered Domain (Known Causes and Effects and Knowable Causes and Effects); 2. the Unordered Domain (Complex Relationships and Chaos); and 3. the Disorder Domain (see Figure 1). The authors make a point to use "un-order" when referring to "emergent order" to avoid repetition and clarify that un-order does not mean there is no order. Instead, the authors draw a similarity with Bram Stoker's usage of the word "undead," which means "…neither dead nor alive but something similar to both and different from both." Similarly, with the term

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[70] Metz, "The Challenges of Next-Gen Insurgency."
[71] Kurtz, C. F., and David J. Snowden. "The New Dynamics of Strategy: Sense-making in a Complex and Complicated World." *IBM Systems Journal* 42, no. 3 (2003): 462–483.

"unordered," the authors challenge the idea that "…order not directed or designed is invalid or unimportant."

The authors point out also that the Disorder Domain is crucial for understanding conflict from different perspectives and note that it is in this domain that people using the tool will try to manage the disorder according to their comfort. For example, "…experts seek to conduct research and accumulate data; politicians seek to increase the number and range of their contacts." [72]

An everlasting challenge within counterterrorism studies is that by the time the trend is understood and confronted, a new threat is already at play. Additionally, as several scholars have pointed out, there is an automatic reaction to force new political violence phenomena into antiquated and potentially no longer useful frameworks. [73, 74] Applying the Cynefin Framework to Internet-enabled lone actor political violence that challenges traditional political violence models could illuminate areas of unordered and disorder domains respectively and help academics, policy makers, and practitioners make sense of the challenges. This understanding could lead to better multidisciplinary approaches to addressing political violence, especially lone actor political violence in a digital environment. [75, 76]

Examine Whether COIN Can Offer Helpful Insights

The United States has been involved in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations since its inception and has provided support to other countries' COIN operations. There is no doubt a need to reexamine classical COIN strategy and operations and take the many critiques seriously. [77] Part of this need is to reexamine and include an internet-enabled operational environment that impacts realities on the ground.

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[72] Ibid.

[73] Metz, Steven. "The Challenges of Next-Gen Insurgency." *Parameters* 54, no. 3 (2024): 5–18. https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol54/iss3/5/.

[74] Michael, George. "The New Media and the Rise of Exhortatory Terrorism." *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 40–68. https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/SSQ/documents/Volume-07_Issue-1/Michael.pdf.

[75] Jacob Ware. "The Third Generation of Online Radicalization." *The International Centre for Counterterrorism*, June 2023. https://vdc.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Sense-making-in-a-complex-and-complicated-world.pdf.

[76] It is worth noting that David Snowden and Mark Lazaroff contributed a chapter called "Anticipatory Models for Counterterrorism" to the 2005 book Emergent Information Technologies and Enabling Policies for Counterterrorism, though the chapter is not easily accessible to determine the extent to which it covers this topic.

[77] Baker, Steven Alexander. "The Revision of FM 3-24 Is Overdue: Rethinking Classical Counterinsurgency to Defeat Contemporary Insurgents." U.S. Army War College, 2022.

Still, COIN operations can offer lessons learned from its long history that may be useful in confronting and addressing a digital era of political violence.

Counterinsurgency is defined as "military, paramilitary, political, economic, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency" according to the military's FM 3-24. This military COIN reference also states that insurgencies "normally seek to achieve one of two goals: to overthrow the existing social order and reallocate power within a single state, or to break away from state control and form an autonomous entity or ungoverned space that they can control."[78] An earlier version of the guide promoted using whole-of-government approaches to address the conflict's root issues. [79] Lessons learned from these COIN efforts could be helpful even for a domestic population in preventing political violence, especially if considering implementing the whole-of-government approach to addressing root causes.

The RAND corporation conducted research to analyze U.S. COIN operations and noted several successes and lessons. One of the highlighted lessons was that, by the stated intention of using the whole-of-government approach, the researchers could not discern any one most crucial factor in COIN practice and pointed out that "the good practices all occur together." [80] A central theme in their recommendation is a concert of actions pursuing multiple lines of effort simultaneously. Part of the empirical findings support an intuitive understanding of COIN efforts in that insurgents were weakened when their supply chains and support were disrupted. At the same time, the governments that provided basic, real-world services to the population were better able to counter the insurgents successfully.[81]

Even though this paper evaluated operations based on earlier versions of COIN, these insights may be useful for confronting lone actor political violence in a domestic context. To be clear, this would require much more research to better understand how these lessons may be transferred, and tailored, to a domestic population, with additional consideration given to the sensitivities associated with the lessons' origins and potential subsequent application as well as the complex digital layer.

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[78] U.S. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24.
[79] U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, C1*.
[80] Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, and Beth Grill, *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010), https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG964.html.
[81] Ibid.

Research Integrating COIN and Cybersecurity for a Holistic View

Although the latest update to the U.S. Army's COIN Field Manual 3-24 includes several considerations of cyberspace as a new domain, it is unclear if these have been deployed and if those implemented have been evaluated to distill lessons learned. Healy advocates applying the lessons of COIN operations to the concept of cyber conflict and integrating more cyberspace considerations into existing COIN operations.[82]

These considerations are most useful when applied to Metz's idea of "Next-Gen Insurgents," as they envision more traditional irregular warfare with integrated cyber capability considerations.[83] The concept of "Deliberate" and "Organic" categories from a leaderless structure referenced earlier still stands when considering this new kind of insurgency.[84] Healey argues that cyberspace is the "space," and cybersecurity companies are the host nation in cyber conflict. He also notes that identifying the insurgents from the rest of the population is a big challenge, especially when the domain is virtual. These are similar challenges that society currently faces with lone actor political violence, primarily occurring online, prior to an attack.

Applying the lessons learned from COIN operations with cyber considerations woven throughout would be especially useful in combination with COIN successes highlighted by research in the previous section. These combined lessons could be incorporated and tailored for domestic populations with a focus more on the population's well-being and good governance. This perspective would assist with blending the holistic approach to address lone actor political violence in all domains, including online.

7. Conclusion:

This literature review was inspired by the research question of how the Internet has impacted political violence, to better understand the current rise of lone actor political violence. The review highlighted three main themes: 1. The Internet Enables Lone Actor Political Violence; 2. The Internet Reshapes Political Violence's Structure and Meaning; and 3. The Internet Embodies Leaderless Resistance. There are disagreements, particularly about definitions of key terms associated with lone actor political

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[82] Jason Healey, "A Bizarre Pair: Counterinsurgency Lessons for Cyber Conflict," *Parameters* 50, no. 3 (2020): 85–94, https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol50/iss3/9/.

[83] Metz, "The Challenges of Next-Gen Insurgency."

[84] Malone, Blasco, and Robinson, *Fighting the Hydra*, 12.

violence, including terrorism and insurgency, which may further confuse general understanding of the topic. The literature suggests that the Internet is enabling lone actor political violence through a variety of ways, including connecting vulnerable individuals, especially youth, to ideas and people who promote violent extremism that may radicalize them towards violence.

Many scholars believe that the Internet is promoting more decentralized lone actor political violence due to its own nature of connection without geographic boundaries but make the point that even though individuals may be acting alone, they are not alone in spirit as their actions are cheered on by online audiences. This decentralization of political violence is a modern manifestation of the leaderless resistance strategy championed by white supremacist Louis Beam to evade authorities and avoid detection. However, the Internet not only appears to help promote the leaderless resistance strategy but also to embody leaderless resistance itself in that some modern political violence is occurring organically online, such as in the case of The Terrorgram Collective, operating as its own ecosystem devoid of traditional hierarchy.

A new framework capable of considering complexities introduced by the Internet and technology is necessary to understand and confront these challenges better. One potential option, though not very new, is using the Cynefin Framework, which is sense-making, and can help determine what is ordered, un-ordered, and in disorder in pursuit of greater understanding. In this age of apparent structural and strategic leaderless resistance in the forms of lone actor political violence, analyzing and applying COIN lessons learned may be a good option for considering how to confront these challenges from a whole-of-government approach. Older versions of COIN doctrine did not have much in the way of cyber operations or cyberspace considerations. However, tightly interweaving cyberspace considerations into the COIN doctrine and implementing these practices can be further helpful in addressing next-generation political violence that may operate fluidly online.

Marshall McLuhan, a philosopher and visionary in media studies, stated that "the medium is the message," and that the way in which messages are relayed influences their audience. [85] This concept, though well before the Internet was created, was prophetic in nature and rings true today in an internet-connected world. In the case of internet-enabled lone actor political violence, it may be more accurate to go further and state that "the medium is the method." The Internet is not just the medium that impacts

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[85] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/mcluhan.mediummessage.pdf.

us collectively and shapes us individually but is also the method by which enabling factors, such as recruitment, radicalization, training, financing, and other core activities related to political violence are carried out, sometimes to the point of attack. The themes highlighted by the literature further emphasize the need to update how we think about internet-enabled political violence, especially lone actor political violence, as it is increasingly a threat that shows no signs of abating. New frameworks that can help us better understand and confront these threats are a dire necessity so we do not rely on outdated frameworks that may not be wholly relevant today.

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