Drew University

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# France as a Target for Terror:

# A Study of Lone Wolf Terrorism

# in the 21st Century

A thesis in International Relations

by

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## Abstract

Among other European countries such as Belgium, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom, France has endured some of the worst attacks carried out by jihadists outside of the Middle East in the past decade, highlighting the country's status as a target for terrorism and militancy. The 2015 Paris attacks alone were the deadliest terrorist attacks on European soil since the Madrid bombings in March of 2004. This thesis aims to understand why modern jihadist terrorist organizations like ISIS have chosen France as a long-time target for terror and why the country has been attacked the most out of all European countries within the time frame of 2014 to 2018. In addressing this question, this paper will illustrate how the Islamic State's ability to conquer the hearts and minds of despondent minority populations of French nationality contributes to a higher amount of lone wolf terrorism. This paper will utilize datasets, public opinion data, the views of scholars, historical evidence, and ISIS propaganda to conclude that France's complex history of secularism combined with the alienation of the Muslim community has created conditions that breed lone wolf terrorists who are inspired by radical Islamic ideology and resort to jihad to express their frustration against French government and society.

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# Introduction

## A Brief History of ISIS

At the time of this writing, the Islamic State, also referred to as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and wa-Sham or Levant), and *Da'esh*, is the prime mover of the global jihadist movement. The terrorist organization was born as a splinter group of their once sister organization, Al-Qaeda, and aspires to establish a caliphate across the world. However, the attacks carried out by or inspired by ISIS are more bold and transparent than Al-Qaeda. While Al-Qaeda operates with an underground approach, ISIS and those that it inspires act boldly above the ground, wanting the world to see its victories in expanding the geographical boundaries of the new caliphate. To achieve this primary goal, ISIS relies on the use of raw terror on civilians and military personnel to occupy a region and force Muslim inhabitants to submit to the Sharia Law (Addicott, 2016, 126). All of the terror carried out is justified through the organization's strict constructionist reading of the Koran (127). While ISIS is pro-state, similar to organizations such as the Taliban, it differs because it has created a new "state" that has crossed international borders. The Taliban is, for the most part, a Pashtun group and appeals to Pashtuns in South Asia, whereas ISIS appeals to radical Muslims all over the world.

ISIS aims to create a society that is a portrait of eighth-century Islam, as it is a firm believer in Sharia Law. ISIS is famous for carrying out and broadcasting brutal

violence including crucifixions, public executions, and the murder of dozens of people at a time (Lévy, 2019, 219). It is estimated that after ISIS's declaration of the "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq in June 2014, over 200 terrorist acts were committed by the organization or its "branches" in 28 countries, resulting in the death of over 3,000 people (Lévy, 2019, 219). The organization's revenue is derived from controlling crops, extortion, oil production, collecting ransoms from kidnappings, selling stolen precious artifacts, and smuggling ("ISIS Fast Facts", 2019, 1). ISIS has also destroyed numerous holy sites such as Iraq's ancient Assyrian cities, Nimrud and Khorsabad. The terrorist group struck the sites with power tools, sledgehammers, and explosives, which the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon has dubbed a "war crime" ("Calling Attacks 'a War Crime', Secretary-General Strongly Condemns Destruction of Cultural Heritage Sites in Iraq", 2015, 1). Despite consequential public outrage, ISIS takes tremendous pride in the cultural destruction it has generated. Following the destruction of the Mosul Museum in Iraq, an unnamed ISIS fighter provided an explanation for the group's actions in a video, stating,

> "*These antiquities and idols behind me were from people in past centuries and were worshiped instead of God. When God Almighty orders us to destroy these statues, idols and antiquities, we must do it, even if they're worth billions of dollars*" (Ford and Wedeman, 2015, 1).

The account provided by this ISIS fighter also demonstrates a key tool ISIS uses for recruitment and spreading their reactionary politics and religious fundamentalism—social media. ISIS is well-known for broadcasting propaganda and

updates over social media platforms and even magazine publications.

From April 2010 to October 2019, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was the leader or "caliph" of ISIS. After being trapped by United States forces during their two-hour raid of his compound in northern Syria, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi committed suicide. On October 31, 2019, ISIS announced its new leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi (Dearden, 2019, 1). At the height of their power, ISIS controlled an expanse of territory, spanning 34,000 square miles across Iraq and Syria. In 2017, the captured territory had a reported population of 6 million to 9 million people (Gerges, 2017, 1). In capturing such a large amount of land, the Islamic State became more legitimate to its followers and fighters, as the occupation of territory signifies a stronger state capacity in international relations. Although in 2018, the terrorist organization's self-declared caliphate collapsed after numerous years of international intervention to minimize its violence. Nonetheless, ISIS is far from accepting defeat. The group currently maintains pockets of territory in Syria and along the Iraqi border and is organizing in the Sahel of Africa along with Al-Qaeda efforts ("La France va déployer 600 soldats supplémentaires au Sahel", 2020, 1). In specific provinces, including Anbar, Diyala, and Salah Al-Din, ISIS is regrouping and preparing to conduct its next wave of terror. Across the world, particularly in the Middle East, Africa, and Russia's North Caucasus, ISIS is consistently using the internet to recruit new members (Halawa, 2020, 1). Even during this period of regrouping and lower frequency of attacks, ISIS still poses a threat to the world, specifically Europe. From 2014 until the

present day, ISIS has set its sights on attacking European states in order to further its anti-Western agenda. This thesis aims to create a better understanding as to why France has been attacked the most by Islamic terrorist organizations like ISIS out of all European countries. The methodology of this research stems from a case study analysis of France because it has experienced the most deadly ISIS attacks and has the highest number of foreign fighters in Europe. For the purpose of this research, the case of France will be compared briefly to other hotspots for European terrorism such as Belgium, Germany, or the United Kingdom.

**Defining "Terrorism" on the International Stage**

In order to understand the Islamic State's terrorist attacks against France, it is first necessary to explore the meaning and principles of international criminal law and justice as they apply to terrorist crimes. In the international community, the concept of terrorism has been firmly addressed in their daily lexicon. However, there is no universally agreed-upon definition of terrorism in existence, as each nation maintains its own interpretations of what the issue entails ("Counter-Terrorism Module 4 Key Issues: Defining Terrorism.", n.d., 1). In general, disagreements on defining the term stem from whether or not terrorist attacks are perceived as beneficial or detrimental to an actor's respective national, political, or religious interests (Addicott, 2016, 3). The lack of general consensus thus influences how state actors and institutions aim to create solutions. Historically, the United Nations has avoided the term and instead,

discusses it generally in international treaties. Although, the shock of 9/11 prompted the United Nations to produce a clearer definition of terrorism and encourage measures to pursue counter-terrorism. Following 9/11, The United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on Terrorism proposed a definition for terrorism to the General Assembly, which was unsuccessfully received (Addicott, 2016, 4). On September 28, 2001, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1373, which aims to create a shared legal basis for all states to take effective action against terrorist efforts through the criminalization of terrorist fundraising and the blocking of all terrorist assets. Resolution 1373 also requires that member states "take the necessary steps to prevent the commission of terrorist acts;" "deny safe haven from those who finance, plan, support, or commit terrorist acts;" and "prevent those who finance, plan, facilitate, or commit terrorist acts from using their respective territories for those purposes against other States or their citizens" (5). In 2006, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed a definition for terrorism that was never adopted by the UN General Assembly. While the United Nations General Assembly has yet to criminalize terrorism, the fact remains that the organization has sponsored 19 conventions in favor of counter-terrorism since 1963. Therefore, UN member states have agreed to outlaw specific terrorist tactics in order to prevent future attacks and have created a broad conceptualization of terrorism. For instance, the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings generates "a regime of universal jurisdiction over the unlawful and intentional use of explosives and other lethal devices in, into, or

against various defined public places with intent to kill or cause serious bodily injury, or with intent to cause extensive destruction of the public place" ("International legal instruments", n.d., 1). In 1999, the Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism was drafted and one of its strongest supporters was France. Article 2 of this treaty defines terrorism as

> "act intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to any person not actively involved in armed conflict in order to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act" ("International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism", 1999, 40).

In ratifying the Convention, numerous states added reservations that limit this definition's application in their national legal system. Additionally, not all states have agreed with this definition. However, the conceptualization of terrorism provided by Article 2 is the closest to agreed-upon definition terrorism in the international community. In 2004, UN Security Council Resolution 1566 was adopted under the Charter's Chapter VII rules and also enforces a binding definition for terrorism ("Security Council resolution 1566 on Threats to International Peace and Security Caused by Terrorist Acts", 2004, 2).

For the purpose of this study, this thesis will follow the definition provided by these aforementioned UN conventions and the *Global Terrorism Database's* Codebook. The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) describes terrorism as "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a

political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation" ("CODEBOOK: INCLUSION CRITERIA AND VARIABLES", 2019, 10). For an event to be considered an act of terrorism by the GTD, three elements must be present.

1. The attack is intentional and the product of a perpetrator's deliberate schemes.
2. The incident includes a level of violence of an immediate threat of violence to people or property.
3. The perpetrators are sub-national actors.

This thesis' definition of terrorism mirrors these three elements, however, the targets will be expanded to include attacks against both civilians and militaries. The GTD definition of terrorism also requires that two of the following characteristics must be satisfied (11).

1. The attack is carried out with the aspiration to fulfill a political, economic, religious, or social goal.
2. There must be evidence of the decision-maker or planner's objective to coerce, intimidate, or broadcast a message to a large audience.
3. The act must occur outside the context of legitimate warfare activities and international humanitarian law.

Each terrorist incident presented in this thesis meets some, if not all the aforementioned criteria for this definition. While the conceptualization provided by the GTD is not 100 percent in-line with that of France, the definition along with its additional criteria, does mirror France's definition of terrorism.

**The French Definition of "Terrorism"**

While the international community may not share a universal definition, France has developed a legal definition for terrorism through its penal code and counter-terrorism laws. Terrorism is generally understood by the French population as a method of action aimed at "creating a climate of insecurity to blackmail a government, to satisfy hate of a community, country or system" (Lévy, 2019, 220). The French Code pénal (criminal code) defines terrorism as a number of listed acts committed with the aim to severely disturb the public order through intimidation or terror ("Terrorism: France's International Action", n.d., 1). These acts range from assault, digital crimes, extortion, forgery, habitual access to websites that encourage engaging in terrorism, hijacking, intelligence gathering and training, intentional homicide, kidnapping, membership in an illegal armed group, property destruction, and theft. Seeking or possessing material to be used for an act of terrorism and scheming to engage in terrorism is considered terrorism under France law as well. Intelligence gathering and training for the purpose of carrying out an act of terrorism also fall under this definition. Under French law, terrorism is perceived as an aggravating circumstance to an underlying criminal offense. For instance, article 221-1 declares that murder is punishable by thirty years of imprisonment. However, article 412-3 states that if the murder was committed as an act of terrorism, the sentence is increased to life imprisonment ("Chapitre Ier : Des actes de terrorisme", 2020, 1).

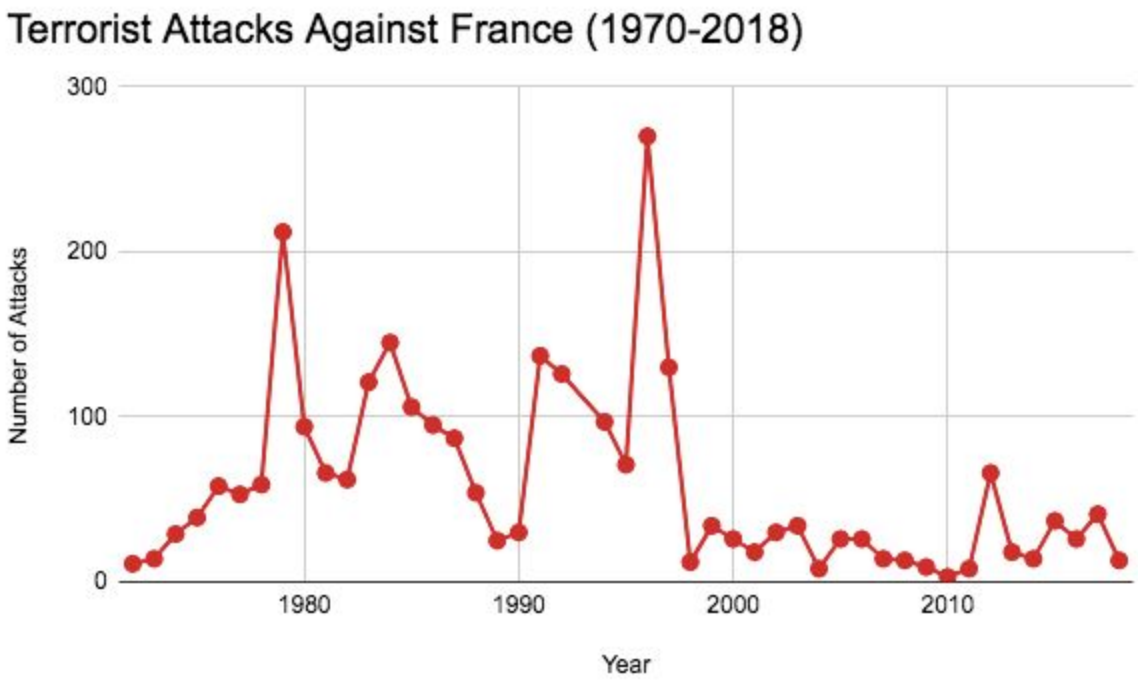
Moreover, many French law enforcement agencies engage in the fight against terrorism to some degree. One of the key agencies involved in the French counter-terrorism initiatives is the Direction générale de la sécurité intérieure, a domestic intelligence agency ("La Direction générale de la sécurité intérieure", 2011, 1). In order to combat terrorism on a more international level, France utilizes its external intelligence agency, the Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure (General Directorate for External Security). In addition, France has two "generalist" law enforcement agencies, the Gendarmerie ("Le rôle du ministère des Armées", 2019, 1) and the National Police ("Police Nationale: Histoire", n.d., 1), which both use specialized SWAT teams that handle situations involving terrorist attacks and hostage-taking. The National Police's special unit, RAID, spearheaded the attack on Amedy Coulibaly, a French-born terrorist who will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6 ("Le RAID: Recherche, Assistance, Intervention et Dissuasion", n.d., 1). The GIGN, a specialized unit of the Gendarmerie orchestrated the attack against the perpetrators of the Charlie Hebdo attack which will also be discussed in Chapter 5 ("Portrait d'un réserviste opérationnel au GIGN", n.d., 1).

**Tracing the Roots of Terrorism in France**

The tactic of terror has been a part of French history for a very long time. Many scholars trace the etymology of the term "terror" to the "reign of terror" in France under Robespierre and the Jacobin Committee of Public Safety (régime de la terreur). The term "terrorism" itself was conceived following the 1789 French revolution as a title for the government's campaign against counter-revolutionaries. It was only until the late 19th century that the term attained its more negative connotation. During the Decade of Regicide between 1892 and 1901, anarchists around the world were inspired by their counterparts in Russia and set their sights on heads of state and civilians. After World War I, this anarchism eventually subsided and was replaced with the ideology of fascism which captivated numerous French home-grown terrorists like the Comité Secret d'Action Révolutionnaire (La Cagoule) (Karel, 2013, 00:38-52:07). In the wake of the Nazi invasion of France in 1941, the French communist party began to bomb and assassinate the German military and collaborationist groups. In addition, the civil conflict in Algeria during the 1950s led to the creation of the Algerian Front de la Libération Nationale (FLN), involving the bombing of civilians and the shooting of French government officials and police. Similarly, pro-imperial Europeans in Algeria formed the Organisation de l'armée secrète (Secret Organization of the Army) to combat the FLN and later moved to France when Algeria gained independence (Harrison, 2008, 112-113). The 1970s and 1980s experienced violent radicalism from the left-wing through groups like Action Directe ("Action Directe", 2020, 1). The

recent trend of political and religious terrorism gained traction during the 1990s when Algeria, a longtime French colony found itself in a civil war. During this event, the Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA), a radical Islamist group, carried out attacks on French-owned territory to take revenge against France for its imperialist past and to propel their political campaign forward (Vriens, 2009, 1).

**Figure 1.**




Source: *Global Terrorism Database*.

Figure 1 illustrates these instances of terrorist attacks in France between 1970 to 2018. The data showcases the visible spikes in terrorism in the 1970s to 1980s carried out by

Action Directe, in the 1990s carried out by the GIA, and in the 2010s carried out by Al-Qaeda and ISIS. While instances of terrorism in France have decreased compared to the past, the phenomenon has not disappeared entirely. The more recent attacks are among the most murderous in the last 50 years. A majority of the attacks in France that took place between 1970 and 2014 (86 percent) were non-lethal. From 1970 to 2014, the deadliest terrorist attack in France occurred in 1978 when nine people were killed in Marseille (Rivinius, 2015, 5).

**Contemporary Terror in France**

As demonstrated by the aforementioned terrorist groups, France has been subjected to many different forms of terrorism. One of the most notable and recent is jihadi lone wolf terrorism. In the international community, jihadi terrorism involves acts such as "profoundly cruel murders, massacres, enslavement of women and children, rapes and pillaging, all in the name of religion" (Lévy, 2019, 221). This thesis defines lone wolf terrorism as acts of terrorism carried out by radicalized, violence-prone individuals who are not formally led by or do not belong to a terrorist organization. This study also argues that lone wolves can be characterized by their aimless nature which predisposes them to follow and find purpose in the ideology of terrorist organizations like ISIS. From time to time, these lone wolves may communicate or conspire with others who share similar beliefs, however, they carry

out the attacks themselves.

The current series of jihadi terrorist attacks in France began with the murders committed by Mohamed Mehra, a self-styled Al-Qaeda jihadist between the 11th and the 19th of March 2012. Jihadist attacks in the past decade have shocked Europe, not only because of the brutality of the attacks themselves, but because the perpetrators of jihadi-inspired terrorism are largely French. The high occurrence of French jihadists illustrates the ability of jihadist ideology to fester in the disadvantaged areas of France and further their agenda. The prevalence of French jihadists also highlights the security threat created by poorly integrated and socially alienated Muslim and minority populations in Europe. Although French Muslims have historically been key participants in the political life of the nation, they are often perceived as an isolated and politically alien sub-group.

France is one of the prime targets of the Islamic State and its operatives, making it an important case to study in order to understand the evolving threat against Europe and how the Islamic State is able to effectively terrorize a population and infiltrate a country by capitalizing on their structural and cultural weaknesses. The indiscriminate nature of the attacks in France signals a shift from previous terrorism patterns that are likewise concerning. The recent targeting of France signals a shift away from complex planning in terrorism, as the Islamic State has improved its ability to plan and carry out plots involving a large group of terrorists who do not formally

belong to an organization. The recent terrorist attacks in France further suggest that jihadist plots will increasingly draw on lone wolves or foreign fighters with a criminal background and networks in their native country. The Paris attacks of November 13th specifically have also highlighted the major issues in European border control policy, the exchange of information between European Union member states, and the ability of law enforcement agencies to detect and investigate transnational threats. Therefore, the case of France serves as a cautionary tale for every European nation facing this complex and seemingly intractable threat.

# Chapter 1: The Distribution of Terrorism in Europe

According to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), an index that systematically ranks countries of the world according to their terrorist activity, France has been a major target for terrorism in general within Europe between 2014 and 2018.

**Figure 2.**

**ISIS Attacks in Europe (2014-2018)**

| | Sum of Attacks |
|---|---|
| Belgium | 3 |
| Bosnia | 1 |
| France | 22 |
| Germany | 4 |
| United Kingdom | 5 |
| Russia | 9 |
| Spain | 1 |

Source: *Global Terrorism Database*.

Figure 2 demonstrates the high occurrence of ISIS orchestrated or inspired terrorist attacks in Europe between 2014 to 2018. The data table collected data across the world, selecting European countries that experienced an ISIS-related terrorist attack between 2014-2018. Figure 2 adds that within this timeframe, France has been

subjected to the highest amount of terrorist attacks carried out by the Islamic State. The numbers above suggest that France is a special case surrounding the issue of radical Islamic terrorism. It is then important to question why the Islamic State has made the decision to attack France the most out of Europe.

Each year, the Global Terrorism Index publishes scores for each country based on the averages of the total number of terrorist attacks, the total number of fatalities due to terrorist attacks, the total number of injuries due to terrorist attacks, and the total property damage due to terrorist attacks. A high score according to this index equates to a country experiencing a high amount of damage to people or property due to terrorism. In 2019, France had a reported score of 5.01, ranking 36th out of 163 countries around the world. Additionally, Germany had a score of 4.25, Russia had a score of 4.90, Belgium had a score of 3.64, Spain had a score of 3.35, and Bosnia had a score of 3.64. The United Kingdom ranked 28th out of 163 countries, with a score of 5.41 (Global Terrorism Index 2019, 2019, 1).

At first glance, it appears that jihadi-inspired terrorism is a larger issue in the United Kingdom, as it has a higher score than France on the Global Terrorism Index. However, further research reveals that this score is not the best depiction of the phenomenon being discussed in this thesis. While terrorism has been on the rise in the United Kingdom in 2019, the attacks are far less deadly than the attacks in France. When the individual components of the GTI scores are broken down, the data

illustrates that terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom are less deadly than those of France. In 2019, the United Kingdom experienced 95 incidents of terrorist attacks, 2 consequential fatalities, 18 injuries, and 170 total property damages. France however, witnessed 9 incidents of terrorist attacks, 12 fatalities, 30 injuries, and 12 total property damages. Therefore, the statistics reveal that while the GTI score of the UK is higher than that of France, France has experienced more fatalities.

**Figure 3.**

**Jihadi-Inspired Attacks in France and the United Kingdom (2014-2018)**

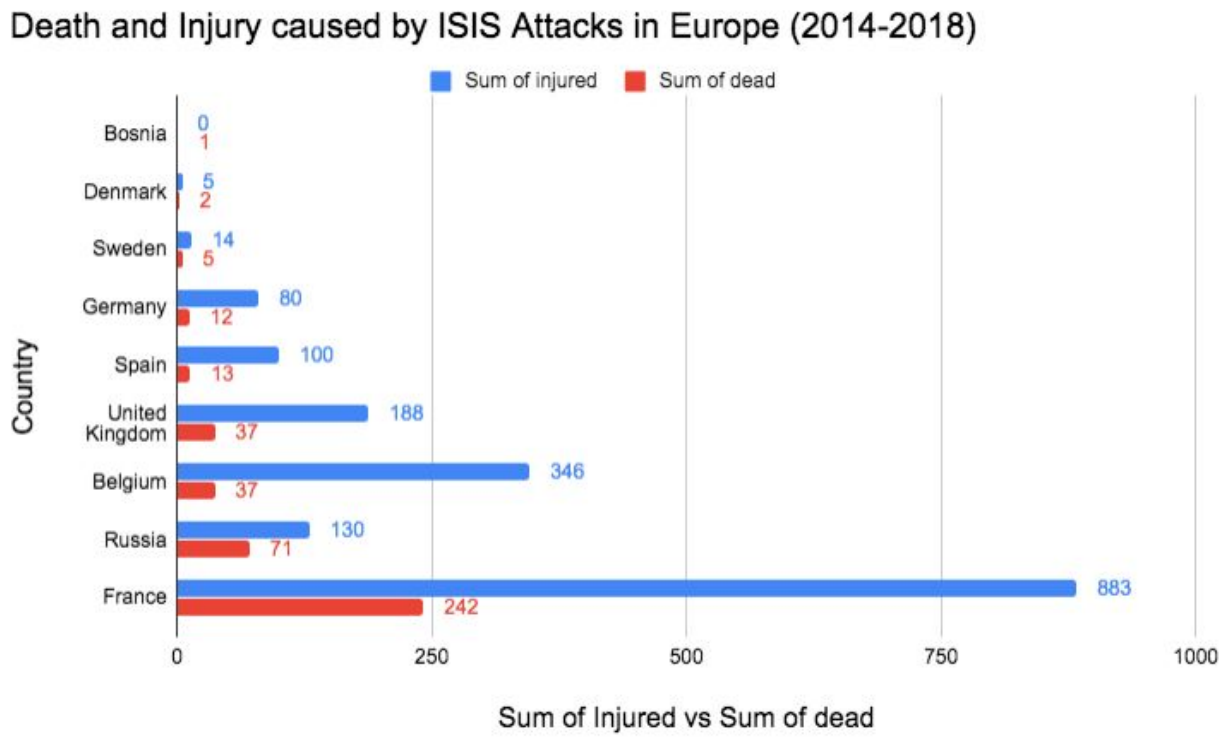
| France | | | United Kingdom | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Year** | **Fatalities** | **Injuries** | **Year** | **Fatalities** | **Injuries** |
| 2018 | 12 | 30 | 2018 | 0 | 3 |
| 2017 | 3 | 13 | 2017 | 11 | 48 |
| 2016 | 7 | 6 | 2016 | 1 | 0 |
| 2015 | 8 | 8 | 2015 | 0 | 3 |
| 2014 | 1 | 3 | 2014 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | 19 | 30 | **Total** | 12 | 54 |

Source: Source: *Global Terrorism Database.*

Figure 3 presents data provided by the Global Terrorism Database comparing jihadi-inspired terrorist attacks in France and the United Kingdom from 2014 to 2018.

The numbers above reflect attacks which classifies its perpetrators as “jihadi-inspired” rather than “Muslim-extremist” or “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (suspected)”. The selection of these attacks was also dependent on the weapon type, reflecting those used by lone wolf terrorists. The weapons used in these attacks range from firearms, melee weapons, vehicles, explosives, bombs, and dynamite. Each attack represented in the image includes a mixture of targets ranging from civilians, property, police, military, educational institutions, governments, and religious institutions or figures. This selection was intentional in order to understand which Islamic terrorist attacks in both countries were carried out by lone wolves. The illustrated comparison above demonstrates that France experienced more fatalities than the United Kingdom as a result of lone wolf jihadi terrorism. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom experienced more injuries during this time frame. However, it is important to note that France was attacked more by lone wolves during this time, as the GTD reported 23 attacks in France and only 4 in the United Kingdom from 2014 to 2018.

**Figure 4.**




Source: *Global Terrorism Database.*

Figure 4 presents a comparison of European regions attacked by ISIS between 2014 to 2018 using variables of death and injury. The sum of each variable is calculated by adding each individual country's reported number of deaths and injuries for the 2014 to 2018 period in order to produce 2 overall totals for each country. The image demonstrates that France does, in fact, endure the most deadly ISIS attacks, as those attacks produce more deaths and injuries than any other European nation that has been targeted by the Islamic State in some way, shape, or form.

**The Jihadist Threat in Europe**

Since the 1990s, there has been a rise of homegrown, radical Islamic terrorists. Europol statistics in 2011 and 2012 for Europe and France specifically reported that this kind of radical terrorism was insignificant with regard to the number of attacks and individuals arrested (Khosrokhavar, 2017, 72). However, the deadliness of these attacks and increased sentiment of public anxiety towards jihadi terrorism varies greatly from this finding in 2012, suggesting that the issue of jihadism is an issue needing to be further explored and properly addressed. In recent years, French societal fear has been influenced by radical Islam more than any other type of terrorism such as Corsican and Basque separatism. Fear of Islamic terrorism was further ignited by ISIS provocation, such as a 2015 video in which the organization's members declared "We will conquer Rome, by the Will of Allah" (134).

Following the 2015 ISIS terrorist attacks in Libya and Tunisia and the rising amount of graphic videos depicting violence against Christians, Europe soon realized that the threat of radical Islam was near. The Koran refers to Christians and Jews as "People of the Book", meaning they have strayed from God's true faith because they worship prophets such as Abraham, Jesus, and Moses ("Islam: Empire of Faith - Faith - People of the Book", n.d., 1). ISIS views this group as an enemy, thus partially explaining their attack on Christian populations worldwide. In conquered areas, ISIS has destroyed Christian churches and residences and has converted them into ISIS homes or mosques. Under this form of radical Islam, civilians are forced to convert to

Islam or face death. Many civilians are also assaulted, abducted and sold into sex slavery, forced to become ISIS fighters, or forced to pay a *jizyah* (a toleration tax). ISIS has further become a world-class threat as it has conquered large amounts of territory in the Middle East by violating state sovereignty, boundaries, and borders. The organization believes it is an invincible caliphate with Allah on their side, which allows for the defeat of bigger and better-supplied opponents like Europe (Addicott, 2016, 127). This principle of radical Islam has inspired jihadists followers worldwide, encouraging the belief that jihadists should be mobile and partake in and support violent jihadism in "impure" nations such as France.

The magnitude of willing European Muslims who travel to the Middle East to train with ISIS and then back to the West has created statistical certainty that jihadi terrorism in Europe will increase over the coming years (137). In 2014, the European Union's chief of anti-terrorism reported that the total number of Europeans that have joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq has reached over 3,000. While a majority of Western recruits do not return to European soil, it is important to note that there are some that do. French officials report that of the 930 known French citizens that have voyaged to Syria for training, 180 of them have returned to France (Byman and Shapiro, 2014, 6). France is also home to the highest number of Muslims that live in a Western European country and the proportion of Muslims to the global population is also one of the highest (Khosrokhavar, 2009, 188).

**French Lone Wolves**

Since the late 20th century, jihadi terrorist blitzkrieg attacks have been carried out by a combination of forces, including ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and lone wolf terrorists galvanized by the cause. While the occurrence of lone wolf terrorism is not entirely new, there has been a statistically significant increase in its employment and changes in its technique during the past two decades (Ellis et al., 2016, 185). From 1970 to 2010, the number of lone wolf attacks per decade has grown by 45 percent in the United States and by over 400 percent in 14 other developing countries. Both Europe and the United States have experienced almost twice as many successful lone wolf attacks in 2015 and 2016 than they did in 2011 to 2014. Lone wolf terrorism has also grown due to its appealing single-operation nature which ensures fewer casualties to ISIS fighters because only one or a few individuals are carrying out the violence. Lone wolves have become ideal instruments for terror that can remain under the radar because traditional, meaning organized, terrorist groups are "easy prey for government infiltration, entrapment, and destruction" (Byman, 2017, 98). Additionally, lone wolves are effective in scaring the population because they can strike anywhere at any moment. Lone wolves can also target important aspects of identity and life. For instance, a murder at a nightclub or restaurant may scare the public more because it targets their personal security.

Often times, terrorist organizations like ISIS encourage lone wolf terrorism when they are too weak to carry out the attacks themselves. In 2016, an ISIS

spokesman shared "The smallest action you do in the heart of [the West] is dearer to us than the largest action by us and more effective and more damaging" (Weimann, 2012, 12). ISIS embraces this specific type of terrorism because it creates a large political statement while only killing a few, as its unpredictable and undetectable nature creates a sense of fear in Western civilizations (Byman, 2017, 4). When US-led coalition attacks diminished ISIS territory in Iraq and Syria, ISIS found itself short of funds and had difficulty carrying out large scale operations, getting new recruits, and maintaining morale. Lone wolves proved to be a way for the organization to continue its work even in hard times. Lone wolves are cheap and finance themselves, so a terrorist organization can easily take credit for their violence for free and bring attention to events that the public could have very well ignored.

As lone wolf terrorism has become increasingly popular, the non-governmental organization Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs), based in London, launched the Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism (CLAT) project to better determine what constitutes a violent lone-actor terrorist, specifically in the European Union from 2000 to 2015. After completing analysis of comprehensive data on lone wolf cases across Europe, the project has produced another interpretation of lone wolf terrorism, defining the term as:

> "The threat or use of violence by a single perpetrator (or small cell), not acting out of purely personal-material reasons, with the aim of influencing a wider audience, and who acts without any direct support in the planning, preparation and execution of the attack, and whose decision to act is not directed by any group or other individuals (although possibly inspired by others)" (Bakker and de Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015, 3).

Lone wolf terrorists possess traits such as being detached from society, reclusive, and ready to act at any moment. Lone actors are commonly thought to be suffering from severe mental health issues that can trigger the urge to commit immoral, irrational, and violent acts as well (Bakker and de Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015, 5).

The CLAT project looked at 14 elements in their comprehensive analysis of 120 perpetrators of lone wolf terrorist attacks. The 120 perpetrators partook in 98 plots and 72 attacks. The different factors include age, gender, education, employment, relationship status, children, indication of a successful sibling, indication of social isolation, previous criminal sanctions, indication of previous physical violence, evidence of drug use, indication of a mental health disorder, diagnosis and treatment, and indication of a noteworthy life event. The findings support the fact that lone wolf terrorists are a mixed picture with different variables, however, most of the actors are male (96 percent). The study also reports that 28 percent of the lone wolf subjects were socially isolated, therefore this number does not suggest that the average lone wolf is lonely (6). However, this statistic risks the potential of being an overgeneralization, as 28 percent may be a high number when compared to the entire population. In addition, the CLAT project finds that religiously-inspired perpetrators are seldom socially isolated. In the religiously inspired group interviewed in the CLAT project, only 9 percent were socially isolated, as these individuals tend to maintain strong ties to their fellow believers, but can carry out acts alone (10). This thesis, therefore, does not define a lone wolf terrorist as an isolated

individual because a lone wolf's social isolation in the real world does not guarantee that they are socially isolated online. For many lone wolves, they become radicalized through online social interaction with others via the internet. While there is no one cohesive identity of lone wolf terrorists, identifying the aforementioned variables can serve as a helpful way to identify threats. Applying this reasoning and the CLAT's conclusions to the case of France, it can be drawn that religion is not the primary motivator of lone wolves to carry out violent attacks against civilians. The French lone wolves may be persuaded to act by terrorist organizations like ISIS for other reasons than solely believing in spreading the Islamic caliphate or possessing one specific trait associated with lone wolf terrorists.

# Chapter 2: The *Banlieues* that Breed Hatred

When attempting to understand how a French jihadist comes to be, it is necessary to identify where they are bred. This section proposes that French jihadists are the byproducts of the poor urban zones of France, also known as the *banlieues.* This chapter hypothesizes that a lone wolf terrorist is more likely to originate from the *banlieues* than from any other rural or urban areas. This chapter will employ empirical evidence in order to argue that the socioeconomic conditions imposed on minorities by the French government propagate negative feelings towards French society. These conditions have socially and physically isolated minorities in France which have increased frustration within their community and prevented their integration into most aspects of French life.

In France, the term *banlieue* (suburb) refers to the communities in the peripheries of city centers. These areas tend to experience high unemployment, poverty, and crime, with a large population of ethnic minorities. This type of suburb has different characteristics than American suburbs, as the *banlieues* connote distressed social conditions similar to American inner-city areas. In terms of geographic location, the *banlieues* are located on the outskirts of cities, reflecting the French government's decision to build on cheap, available land. Unlike upscale city-centers like Paris, the *banlieues* are under-equipped and isolated from the city center and the rest of the country. Most French suburbs lack adequate public transportation, shops, and social amenities (Dikeç, 2002, 91). Additionally, inexpensive construction materials and rapid

construction strategies used to build the *banlieues* have caused its inhabitants to suffer great physical degradation (Dikeç, 2002, 91).

The *banlieues* are specific to France in many regards. In Germany, a majority of second- and third-generation Turkish migrants reside in old working-class districts but are not segregated from the city center like the *banlieue* inhabitants are. While German Turks live in a specific area of the city, they are more integrated into German society than *banlieue* minorities, specifically North African migrants, in French cities. Unlike the *banlieue* inhabitants, German Turks do not have a colonial past, are more community-oriented, and have been able to form social bonds with the rest of the population. Therefore, there is a lack of notable jihadist activity in Germany compared to the Muslim communities in France (Khosrokhavar, 2009, 189).

Since 1980, the *banlieues* have been a consistent issue on the French agenda. The origins of French urban policy can be traced to the first Housing and Social Life Plan in 1977 (*Habitat et vie sociale, CVS*), which was created to address the issues plaguing large social housing estates (*grands ensembles*). The creation of the *banlieues* dates back to the post World War II era, as the French government encouraged what they viewed as temporary immigration of people from French colonies including the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa (Dikeç, 2002, 91). After World War II, the state of France was in shambles. Over 1.7 million French lives were lost, the economy was in ruins, and infrastructure was destroyed. In order to completely reconstruct the state and the economy, France took action to obtain a *main d'oeuvre* (workforce). Because France

itself was devastated, the government relied on immigrants to fulfill this role, as it did during the war when soldiers from colonized territories fought and died to liberate France against Nazi Germany (Angélil and Siress, 2012, 59). First, France encouraged the implantation of European immigrants from countries such as Italy, Portugal, and Spain because they were "culturally compatible" with the French identity. That is to say, European immigrants presumably shared the same religion and skin color as the French. However, when this plan did not produce much success, France turned to its colonized people of African, Arab, and Jewish origin.

During this period of reconstruction, the National Office of Immigration distributed residency cards to these minority groups ranging from 1, 5, or 10 years in duration. In 1956, the National Society of Construction for the Housing of Workers was established to build *grand ensembles* for workers and to create a large-scale response to the housing crisis in France's post-war urbanization. The design of these lodgings was meant to be uncomfortable for the immigrants residing there as a way to discourage them from remaining in France. Much to the dismay of the French government, this intentional design did not have the desired effect of persuading workers to leave France, as they and the *banlieues* still exist today.

The modern state of France's suburbs can be explained by the housing finance reform (*aide à la personne*, APL) in 1977. The goal of this reform was to facilitate owner-occupied housing (Dikeç, 2002, 91). The more financially advantaged benefitted from this reform and moved out of these regions as time passed. These individuals were

then replaced by socio-economically weaker groups, often other immigrants, with unstable resources (Dikeç, 2002, 91). These groups who remained included those of Jewish, Arab, Muslim, and African descent. Muslims and other minority groups are seldom welcomed by the property market in the cities, therefore, the *banlieues* have become the better or the only option for these disadvantaged groups. This thesis will focus specifically on the Muslim population in the *banlieues* in order to understand if their physical and social segregation makes them more likely to act as lone wolf terrorists.

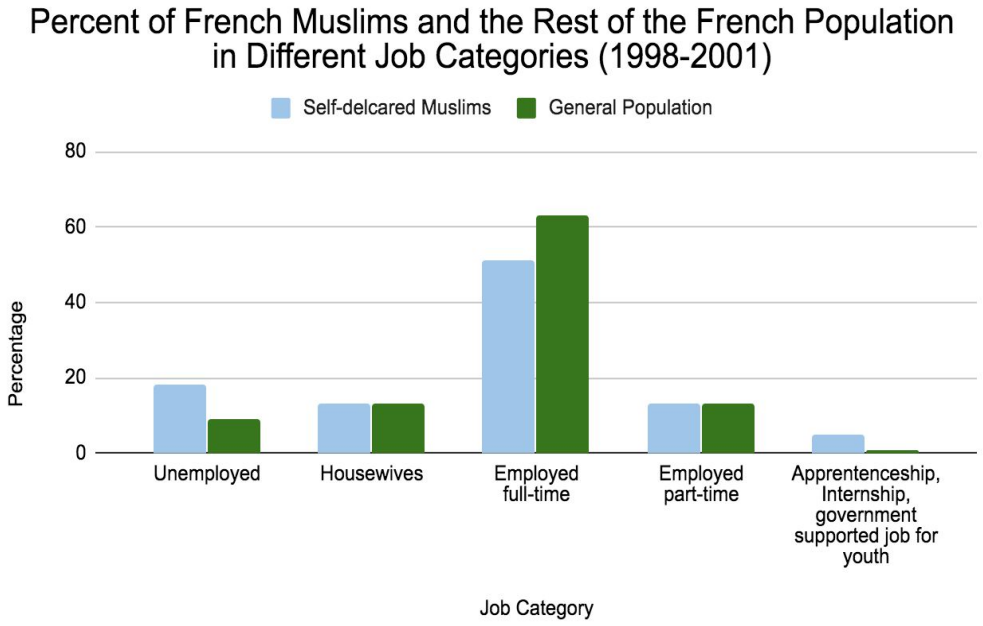
Suburbs with a large immigrant or minority population along with high levels of disparities are classified as the priority neighborhoods of urban policy, meaning these areas require the most improvement. In an attempt to improve the *banlieues'* social and economic disparities in 1977, the French government created the HVS, an inter-ministerial committee for improving housing and social life through physical amelioration (92). The objective of the HVS was to combat the physical degradation of the *Habitation à Loyer Modéré* (HLM) ("Le glossaire de l'immobilier - Square Habitat", n.d., 1). Ultimately, the HVS program was a failure because its focus was too centralized, as it involved neither inhabitants nor local elected representatives. The program also attempted to add an extra 'coloring' to the HLMs to convince the public that these areas were improving. In reality, the HVS did nothing to make these lodgings more comfortable to live in (Jaillet, 2000, 31). Therefore, no substantial action was taken in order to minimize the stigma of the *banlieue* population. The failure to improve French

suburbs across the country has paved way for a less than nice narrative of life in the *banlieues*. These priority neighborhoods of urban policy have been referred to as 'neighborhoods of difficulty', 'neighborhoods of exile', 'gray zones', 'outlaw zones', and 'sensitive neighborhoods' (Dikeç, 2002, 92). These terms are quite offensive to use to designate the *banlieues* because, in the past, these terms were used by intelligence services to refer to uncontrolled regions in the Amazon that were used by dealers and producers of cocaine (Collovald, 2001, 108).

**Economic Disparities in the *Banlieues***

For decades, rising unemployment has exacerbated inequality in the *banlieues* and there is reason to believe that the phenomenon has structural causes. From 1996 to 2019, the unemployment rate in France averaged 9.24 percent. Meanwhile, from 1990 to 1999, the level of unemployment in the priority neighborhoods located throughout the *banlieues* increased three times higher (18.9 percent to 25.4 percent) than the level of unemployment for the average of the country minus the *banlieue* population (10.8 percent to 12.8 percent) ("France Unemployment Rate 1975-2019", 2020, 1).

**Figure 5.**




Source: Enquêtes OIP/ Conseils régionaux 1998 to 2001.

Figure 5 presents an illustration of the inequality in employment in France between Muslims and the rest of the French population based on a poll taken by the OIP (L'Observatoire interrégional du politique). The graph separates self-declared Muslims from the rest of the population (which consists of different religions, ethnicities, and political affiliations) to illustrate that the general population experiences more economic success than self-declared Muslims in France. The data reveals that self-declared Muslims are more likely to be unemployed or employed less than the general population of France. Job categories that may require less professional skills such as "Employed

part-time" or "Housewives" do not appear to be influenced by being Muslim, as the percentages in these categories are equal for Muslims and the general population. While the data does not explicitly state that the Muslims presented in this image reside in the *banlieues*, the image mimics the fact that unemployment runs high for minorities in the *banlieues*. The unemployed Muslims represented in this data, whether they are inhabitants of the *banlieues* or not, have been less economically successful than the rest of the French population.

Given this visible trend in unemployment, it is also helpful to apply the same theory to a more recent time frame. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the French foreign-born unemployment rate, which includes Muslim immigrants, was 14.6 percent in 2018. The foreign-born unemployment rate for men was 13.8 and 15.6 for women ("Migration - Foreign-born unemployment", 2018, 1). This rate includes persons aged 15 to 64 in the foreign-born labor force (the sum of employed and unemployed foreign-born individuals). These findings further demonstrate that immigrant laborers are more affected by unemployment than native-born workers in France.

**The Anger Brewing in the *Banlieues***

Throughout history, the *banlieues* have been the home to widespread animosity between the French government and its minority inhabitants. The largest riots in French history began in the *banlieues* following the death of two French boys of Malian and

Tunisian descent in 2005 in the Parisian suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois. The two youths were fleeing from the police when they were electrocuted. Their tragic death combined with the population's frustration over social and economic exclusion, racial discrimination, and the weak capacity of the French Republic to respond to these issues sparked almost 3 weeks of violent riots throughout 274 towns in France, where residents of the *banlieues* took to the streets to set fire to cars, to destroy public property, and to fight with French police (Sahlins, 2006, 1). This widespread feeling of unrest is not foreign to the *banlieues* today, as the population's social deprivation and cultural alienation are strengthened by their topographical isolation from the city center. For the inhabitants of the *banlieues*, hatred towards the French government and society who limit or judge the expression of Islam in public makes jihadism a more likely possibility in France. The French Muslim population's lack of understanding of Islam makes jihadism more likely to occur as well because they have never been taught how to practice their faith because the government has discouraged it (Khosrokhavar, 2009, 187). The majority of Western Muslim jihadists have a rudimentary knowledge of Islam due to the hyper-secular nature of Europe. Consequently, Western jihadists are more easily radicalized because their knowledge of Islam is quite limited or even nonexistent. The hyper-secular nature of Europe and Islamophobic comments of political parties such as the Front National make Islam less understandable to second- and third-generation Muslims who are culturally uprooted. The ancestors of these young Muslims have had no capacity to impart their ritualistic religion, as France has historically encouraged

assimilation of immigrants rather than the practice of integration. As a result, younger generations of Muslims are left to their own devices in the quest to understand their Islamic history and culture. Moreover, the ignorance of Islam is apparent in French prisons as well. More than 80% of French Muslim prisoners lack much Islamic culture, as they are unable to follow the religious prescriptions to perform the rituals of purification (wozou) or recite daily prayers (salat). These prisoners know very little about Islam's view towards the forbidding of alcohol, eating pork, premarital sex, or women's veiling. Similar to the inhabitants of the *banlieues*, these prisoners share a deep resentment toward French society. Islamic terrorist groups have taken note of the vulnerabilities of French Muslims and have preyed on them in order to manipulate these individuals into becoming lone wolf terrorists who want to attack France in order to engage in the ideal worship of Islam (Khosrokhavar, 2009, 186).

# Chapter 3: France as a Symbol of the Separation of Religion and State

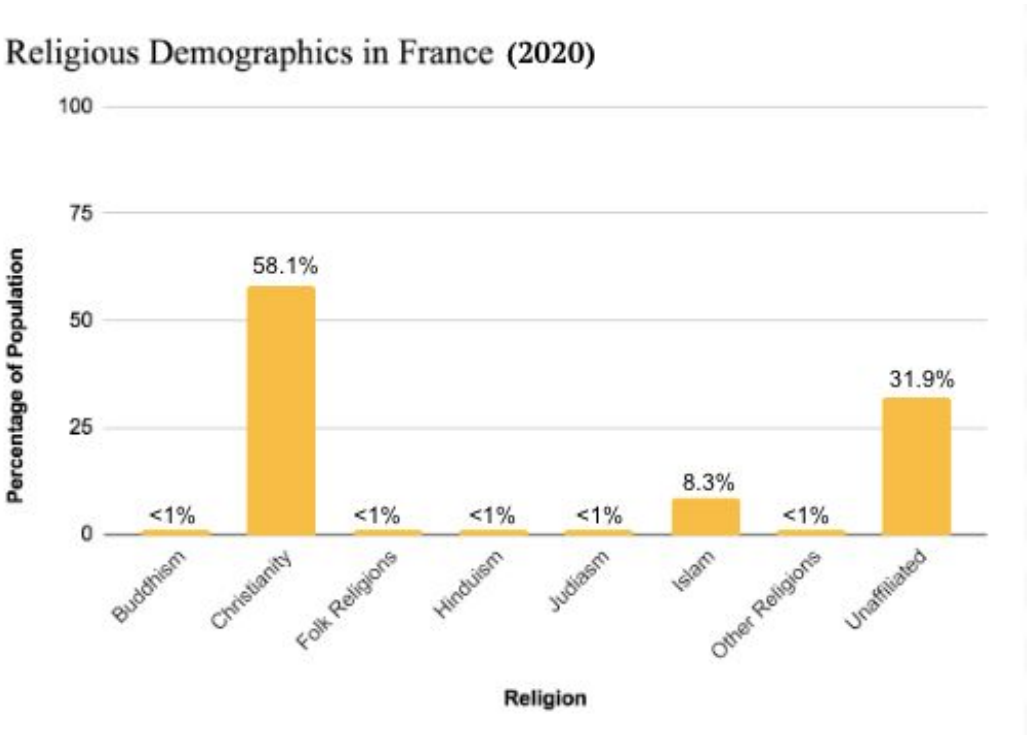
Now that factors such as exposure to crime, economic disparities, and social and physical isolation have been discussed in the presentation of French lone wolves, this chapter will explain how the institutional policies of France have ignited Muslim anger towards France. Historically, France has prided itself on being a secular nation, favoring no religion over the other in the public sphere. However, in contemporary times, is this an accurate depiction of France? With the rise of far-right political parties such as the Front National, anti-immigrant sentiment in France is becoming more and more evident, especially towards Muslims. While secularism may have benefits, in theory, creating a space of equality among various groups, its application is actually flawed. This chapter argues that the practice of secularism in France breeds tension between minority groups and the rest of the population, thus leading a specific group of French Muslims to take radical action to either seek vengeance or cope with being alienated and targeted by society. This study will use the specific example of Islam in France and the public treatment of Muslims in order to demonstrate that secularism does not necessarily promote neutrality. In actuality, French secularism oppresses and subjects minority religions like Islam to widespread discrimination.

From 2010 to 2016, 7 million people from all religious backgrounds arrived in Europe as regular migrants or refugees. More than half of these people (3.7 million) were

Muslim ("The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050", 2019, 1). As of January 2020, the population of France reached a total of 65,273,511 ("France Population (LIVE)", 2020, 1), with an estimated 6,635,327 people being Muslim (Kettani, 2010, 157). In France, Islam is the second most practiced religion, behind Christianity. In modern-day Europe, the proportion and the number of second- and third-generation Muslim immigrants have progressively increased. Meanwhile, the fertility rate of non-Muslim Europeans has experienced a decrease. While the Muslim population is rising, especially in France, their economic and social situations are not experiencing the same upward trend. As a result, the dissatisfaction of the French Muslim population is rising.

Upon launching a demographic study on the religious affiliations of the French population in 2010, the Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project found that the religious profile of the world and France has been undergoing a drastic change. The study reveals that in 2010, the French population was 63 percent Christian, 7.5 percent Muslim, 28 percent Unaffiliated (meaning the person in question does not belong to any religion), and less than one percent Buddhist, Folk Religion, Hindu, Jewish, or other. As of 2020, the Pew Research Center documented that the percentage of Muslims in France has increased and the percentage of Christian and Unaffiliated has decreased ("The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050", 2019, 1).

**Figure 6.**




Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

Figure 6 presents the rise of the Muslim population in France when compared to the data provided by the Pew Research Center's 2010 report. Since 2010, the Muslim population has grown by .8 percent, reaching 8.3 percent. The data above demonstrates that Christianity remains the most represented religion in France, with an estimated 38 million people identifying themselves as Christians. Additionally, 20.8 million people identify as religiously unaffiliated, but this number has been decreasing over the years ("The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050", 2019, 1), suggesting that this group has chosen to identify with a religion. Whether the increase of Muslims in

France is attributed to the decrease of the religiously unaffiliated population is not clear. The trend above does however reflect how the Muslim portion of Europe's entire population has been consistently rising and will continue to do so as time goes on.

**The Creation of *Laïcité* and its Implications for Muslims in France**

Despite being home to the largest population of Muslims in Europe, France has not exactly thrived in integrating this group into society due to its rising concern over its national identity and culture. This lack of integration is attributed to the principle of *laïcité*, meaning secularism. Secularism or *laïcité* is defined as the principle of separation of the state from religious institutions. *Laïcité* was officially established in the French law of 1905, which organized the separation of religion and the state. Thus, creating neutrality between daily life and all religions in the public sphere ("Secularism and Religious Freedom", n.d., 1). *Laïcité* requires an individual in the public sphere to follow a social contract and abstract her/himself from those traditions (from their religion and culture) and histories.

Over time, *laïcité* has become a conceptual foundation of French culture and politics, similar to the United States' coining of the word *democracy*. For French citizens, politicians, and scholars, the philosophy embodies *francité*, what it means to be French. French citizens perceive *laïcité* as the embodiment of a collective French national identity. In the application of *laïcité*, the majority of the population aims to protect their collective French identity from minority differences, notably those pertaining to minority

religions. Removing minority differences allows for the maintenance of a sense of one secular community with a common identity that unites them.

While the contemporary use of *laïcité* is often perceived as a way to promote religious and cultural tolerance, the concept was actually born during a time in which France experienced great religious tension. Following the French Revolution in 1789, the new French government seized the reorganized property of the Catholic Church and controlled the Catholic Protestants Church and Jews in France for years. This shift led to the notion to move away from pluralism and instead secularize the entire country. On February 21, 1795**,** the French Republic passed a law that formally separated the church from the state, interdicting religious ornaments or clothing in public ("France", n.d., 1). This period in French history was characterized by a recurring demand that citizens choose between the state and their religion and the desire to remove power from the church. Although, an important vote in 2004 in France demonstrates that this philosophy has reformed in a way that has Islam as its main target. In the 20th and 21st centuries, it has become clear that much of this principle was directed towards the Muslim religion. This chapter proposes that the high amounts of French-born lone wolf terrorism are also caused by the controversies that took place from 1989 to 2019 in France which sought to eliminate symbols of Islam in the public sphere in the name of religious neutrality. Through the examination of contemporary laws and controversies surrounding the expression of Islam, this chapter asserts that *laïcité* has been reshaped in order to calm France's fear of terrorism and being dominated by the Islamic world.

**Neo-Republicanism's Attack on Islam**

When François Mitterrand's socialist experiment collapsed in 1982 to 1983 and the Parti socialiste (Socialist Party) was unexpectedly challenged by the far right, socialists began to rely more on progressive republicanism to improve their government credentials (Chabal, 2017, 69). During this period, republicanism was an interesting alternative to the discredited socialist ideology. The threat of Algerian terrorism in the 1990s and the lingering controversies over the Islamic headscarf gave more power to the right. The right has used neo-republicanism as a means to fight against the "Islamization" of France. This idea greatly influenced the contemporary perception and the practice of secularism so that it focuses more on the Muslim faith (70). During the 1990s, France placed a large emphasis on national sovereignty and statism. In 1995, President Jacques Chirac employed neo-republican ideas such as *la fracture sociale* to call for social integration and warn the public of national disunity. In the 2000s, *laïcité* became a rhetoric tool for the right to discourage the public expression of Islam. The nomination of Marine Le Pen as the leader of the Front National in 2010 also contributed to *laïcité*'s focus on Islam.

**Figure 7.**


Source: *L'express*, 2010. Available at:

https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/le-fn-copie-l-affiche-suisse-anti-minarets_851307.html

Marine Le Pen and the Front National have published propaganda to demonstrate the themes of their campaign (Cailleau, 2010, 1). The poster entitled Figure 7 depicts a woman in a niqab standing beside a map of France. France is covered by the colors of the Algerian flag, flanked by minarets in the shape of missiles. The words on the poster, "No to Islamization", demonstrate the opposition to the idea of a Muslim occupation of France. In Marine Le Pen's speeches, she berates France for not respecting the country's republican values and urges France to engage in more proactive secularism to fight Islamic terrorism and expression (Chabal, 2017, 70).

**The Fight Against the Expression of Islam**

The issue surrounding public displays of Islam began in 1989 with the *I'affaire du foulard* (the affair of the headscarves), which involved three young French girls attending high school Gabriel Havez in Creil in l'Oise. The three Muslim students refused to stop attending their school at the demand of their principal, who was motivated by the belief that the hijab that they wore is a religious symbol that is incompatible with the function of a scholarly institution. Consequently, the students were suspended. In response to the conflict, the then-Minister of Education Lionel Jospin, who later readmitted the three Muslim students, requested a statement on the legal rights of female Muslim students to wear veils in public places of education from the Conseil d'Etat, France's highest administrative court (Rouquette, 2019, 1). The Council stated:

> "[*The display*] *by students, in the schools, of signs whereby they believe to be manifesting their adherence to one religion is itself not incompatible with... laïcité, since it constitutes the exercise of their liberty of expression and manifestation of their religious beliefs; but this liberty does not permit students to exhibit... signs of religious belonging which, by their nature... would constitute an act of pressure, provocation, proselytizing or propaganda*" (Davis, 2011, 124).

The council argued that a ban on religious symbols like the headscarf was illegitimate and instead supported a balance of freedom of conscience and *laïcité.* However, the Council's conclusion left a sense of ambiguity in the air concerning the interpretation of the legality of the wearing of the hijab in public schools. The conclusion also left room for future conflict over the expression of religion, specifically Islam, as the Council heard

forty-nine legal disputes over the hijab between 1992 and 1994. However, all but eight battles ended in favor of the Muslim student in question (Davis, 2011, 125).

Over 10 years later, on May 27, 2003, the French National Assembly established a Committee of Inquiry with the goal of investigating the presence of religious symbols in schools. In July of that same year, the then-French President Jacques Chirac launched the Stasi Commission, an independent commission responsible for investigating the application of the principle of *laïcité* in French society and politics (Rouquette, 2019, 1). The Commission, led by Benjamin Stasi, made several conclusions and recommendations so that *laïcité* could be applied in a more inclusive manner. However, Chirac ignored the majority of the propositions made. Most notably, Chirac rejected the recommendation to add more national holidays for all religions in the official calendar to create a semblance of equality between religions in the state. Instead, the French President encouraged the public to unite around the principle of *laïcité.* On December 11, 2003**,** the Presidential commission produced twenty-six recommended measures. Two measures required legislation and only one was passed by Parliament in the Act of March 15, 2004. The passed measure was a ban on "the wearing of signs or clothing which conspicuously manifests students' religious affiliations…" (Davis, 2011, 124). This law states that if French law permits discreet symbols of religion, such as a small cross necklace, the law must then interdict the wearing of ostentatious religious symbols or signs that promote a certain religion. The 2004 vote, therefore, prohibits the wearing of the hijab or large, visible symbols of religion in schools, but not in universities.

A third event important to this discussion took place in 2006 and concerns Muslim mothers who accompany their children and students on scholarly trips. The French government argued that if the law of 2004 applies to the children of these mothers, the law should apply to the mothers as well, meaning they must remove their hijabs on school-related trips. This decision is perceived by the French government as respecting the principle of neutrality. Similarly, in 2009, the French government began to consider banning the wearing of the burqa in public. This contemplation came in response to a call by cross-party members of Parliament, led by Communist André Gerin, to establish a parliamentary commission to investigate the increasing trend of Muslim women in France wearing the burqa and study its compatibility to secularism. On June 22, 2009, French President Nicolas Sarkozy delivered a controversial address to Parliament at the Chateau of Versailles, as he expressed his dislike of the burqa. Sarkozy described the burqa as a violation of "the French [R]epublic's idea of women's dignity" (Davis, 2011, 117) and unwelcomed in France. The address evoked mixed reviews from the different political factions in the French Parliament and a five-month study through a parliamentary commission created by the French National Assembly. The commission concluded that the veil must be banned in the public sphere, viewing it as a challenge to the Republic. The commission also called for the requirement of individuals to show their faces in public. With a vote of 335 to 1 on July 13**,** 2010, the French lower house of Parliament approved a full ban on veils that cover the face in public**.** With the approval of the Constitutional Council, the highest judicial authority in France, the French Senate

approved the bill to fully ban women from wearing the veil in public on October 7, 2010. This ban called upon the European Court of Human Rights to ensure that the decision to minimize this religious expression would not violate the European Convention on Human Rights, which was established to "interpret, articulate, and enforce the norms of the European Human Rights Convention" (Davis, 2011, 119). The ECHR has not had any cases involving France's Act of 2004, however, historical evidence suggests that the court would not challenge the ban. For instance, in *Sahin v. Turkey,* the EHRC ruled that a ban in Turkey similar to the Act of 2004 did not violate Article 9 of the Convention, which protects an individual's right to manifest his or her religion (131). However, the rulings on the veil in France do not sit as well with French Muslims. In September 2019, the French Institute for Public Opinions (IFOP) for *Le Point* magazine conducted a survey among French-born Muslims and found that 18 percent feel that Sharia law should be adopted by France's legal system. Among foreign-born Muslims in France, 46 percent believe Sharia law should be adopted by France. The survey also reveals that 41 percent of Muslims in France feel that Islam must be integrated and practiced into French customs. In response, Éric Ciotti, a member of the French National Assembly since 2007, called for the Muslim return to assimilation. Over Twitter, Ciotti, defends his remark, "*In the face of Islamist communitarianism, which is growing and threatening the (French) republic, we must stop immigration and rediscover assimilation as the core of our integration policy*" ("Poll: 46% of French Muslims believe Sharia law should be applied in-country", 2019, 1).

The public debate over the veil in France still continues in more recent times as well. In February 2019, Décathlon, a French athletic clothing company decided to release a hijab for running. This decision ignited a frenzy over social media, as the French condemned the company and called for a complete boycott of the brand. French citizens took to Twitter to voice their opinions, claiming that Décathlon's decision supports radical Islam and terrorism, betrays the values of the French Republic, and encourages the oppression of women.

**Figure 8.**


Source: Official Décathlon Twitter.

The images presented in Figure 8 were posted by Décathlon on Twitter in order to showcase the number of insults and threats made in response to the release of the running hijab and the expression of Islam in this secular society. The responses accuse the company of being "Pro-Islamist", financing the humiliation of women, and encouraging a radical Islamic occupation of France. Additionally, Décathlon employees were insulted and threatened, sometimes physically. Members of the French government such as Édouard Philippe argued that the running hijab creates a rift in French society, stating that it crashes "with our values" (Carron, 2019, 1). Others criticized the French outcry, arguing that the French have an obsession with the veil and Islam. Six days after the news broke, Décathlon decided to halt the production and distribution of their running hijab. The controversy highlighted the question of whether or not the French government is

impeding upon the freedom of expression of Muslim women. On the matter, a French correspondent for the *Washington Post* shared:

> "*Once again, France has plunged into ridicule by talking about the clothes that Muslim women can choose to wear or not. The clothing that Muslim women choose to wear is a subject of controversy in France, an officially secular society which prohibits any religious sign and symbol in public life - with the exception, of course, of the cribs and Christmas trees that decorate town halls in winter*" (Carron, 2019, 1).

Months later on October 11, 2019, another controversy over the veil appeared once more, this time during a government meeting. That day, Julien Odoul, the head of the National Front Group in Bourgogne-Franche-Comté requested that Marie-Guite Dufay, the incumbent president of the regional council of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, to remove the Islamic veil from a school assistant during the event. Odoul defended his decision, declaring "*It is the Republic, it is secularism!*" (1) and argued that tolerating the veil would excuse the deaths caused by Islamic terrorism.

These events demonstrate the French desire to favor a sense of community, *le communautarisme*, in order to house a Muslim population that is assimilated into their society. The French government also asserts that its goal is to educate all children and do not want them to be influenced by radical Islam. In the eyes of the French government, these laws protect *l'égalité et la fraternité* (equality and brotherhood), two famous values of the French Republic. However, the pursuit of this goal oftentimes has the opposite effect, making French Muslims feel as if they are forced to assimilate into society and removing all traces of their Muslim heritage or beliefs. Critics of France's bans have accused the state of being Islamophobic and discriminatory. On the other hand, French

officials' arguments in defense of the bans are constitutional, based on secularism and preventing gender discrimination, as some believe that the burqa and hijab oppress women (Carron, 2019, 1). The examples of French islamophobia discussed in this chapter reveal that *laïcité* does not create a neutral community, instead, it has targeted the Muslim population so that it is unwelcomed in French life. The propaganda of Marine Le Pen combined with laws prohibiting the expression of Islam and public scrutiny of Muslim inclusion in society demonstrates that France does discriminate against its Muslim inhabitants. Not only are French Muslims physically alienated in the *banlieues*, but they are socially alienated as well in French society, as discriminatory laws emphasize the inferiority of their religion. As a result of these actions, French Muslims may grow to resent the French state and become more likely to act out against it by seeking revenge in a violent way. This hypothesis will be explored in Chapter 6 which presents several cases of French lone wolves inspired by jihadism.

# Chapter 4: Attracting the Wolf

When seeking to understand why France has the most incidents of deadly jihadist terrorist attacks in Europe, it is important to study how the Islamic State successfully recruits French lone wolves to carry out the violence so that the organization can further their terror campaign. This chapter proposes that the Islamic state has created French lone wolves through the spread of jihadi propaganda and specific targeting of the social, political, or economic vulnerabilities of a potential recruit. The Islamic State uses social media and propaganda to manipulate aimless French Muslims who are institutionally alienated and discriminated against by their native country. ISIS recruiters provide these lost individuals with a purpose and a connection to a broader cause.

Following the 2010 Arab uprising and the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, thousands of foreign fighters from all over the world joined ISIS and extremist groups in Syria. Most of these foreign fighters originate from Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia (Gouda and Marktanner, 2017, 1). In addition, a large number of foreign fighters come from countries such as Belgium, France, Germany, Kazakhstan, the United Kingdom, Uzbekistan, and Russia. The increase of foreign fighters from more Western regions can be explained by the birth of the physical territory of the Islamic State in 2014, which drew many young Europeans to the cause. However, out of all of Europe, the highest number of ISIS foreign fighters are French (1,700) (Benmelech and Klor, 2016, 4). Investigations following the 2015 Paris attacks also reveal that a majority

of the organizers, perpetrators, ringleaders of this campaign against the West were of French nationality. The Center for the Analysis of Terrorism (CAT), court documents and judgments related to multiple European terrorism cases, and interviews with European counterterrorism officials disclose that the French-born jihadists have devised and executed more attacks in Europe than any of ISIS' other cadres of Western foreign fighters. France's attacks are the most deadly in Europe due to the high amount of French contingents who have been recruited by ISIS but still reside in France.

Since the declaration of the Caliphate in July 2014, ISIS has ordered supporters in the West who cannot perform *hijrah* (emigration) to Iraq and Syria to remain in place and organize attacks at home. Additionally, the Islamic State deliberately chose to focus their violence on France and advised their supporters to follow suit. In a 2014 speech, the Islamic State's late spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, expressed ISIS' hatred of the West and the need for lone wolves to terrorize France specifically (Brisard and Jackson, 2016, 1). Abu Muhammad al-Adnani states:

> "*Mujahideen in Europe, Australia, and Canada…O mujahideen in Morocco and Algeria…O mujahideen in Khorasan, the Caucasus, and Iran…O mujahideen, we call you up to defend the Islamic State…. So rise O mujahid. Rise and defend your state from your place wherever you may be….You must strike the soldiers, patrons, and troops of the tawāghīt. Strike their police, security, and intelligence members, as well as their treacherous agents. Destroy their beds. Embitter their lives for them and busy them with themselves. If you can kill a disbelieving American or European – especially the spiteful and filthy French – or a Canadian, or any other disbeliever from the disbelievers waging war, including the citizens of the countries that entered into a coalition against the Islamic State, then rely upon Allah, and kill him in any manner or way however it may be. Do not ask for anyone's advice and do not seek anyone's verdict. Kill the disbeliever whether he is civilian or military, for they have the same ruling. Both of them are disbelievers. Both of them are considered to be waging war* [*the*

> *civilian by belonging to a state waging war against the Muslims*]" (Engel, 2017, 1).

In November 2014, three French jihadists responded to Abu Muhammad al-Adnani's call to attack France and induce fear among civilians. In a video, one French Islamic State fighter urged his fellow fighters to take all necessary action to humiliate the French and "*kill and spit in their faces and run over them with your cars… for they deserve only this*" (1). These statements can be categorized in the three concurrent messages that ISIS transmits to its foreign supporters:

> 1) Perform Hijrah- participate in jihad by traveling to Iraq and Syria
> 2) Declare Bay'at- remain in place and create communities of ISIS support
> 3) Conduct Lone Wolf Attacks- remain in place and conduct attacks against the enemies of ISIS

This list of messages can also be translated into more customized messages that jihadist recruiters utilize to win over the hearts and minds of French extremists. The recruitment process actually takes calculated thinking so as to effectively persuade French youths into becoming lone wolves. Dounia Bouzar, the former head of the French Ministry of Justice Youth Protection Directorate of *laïcité*, and Carol Rollie Flynn, a Senior Fellow in the Program on National Security at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, have found that not all recruits are ideologically driven at the starting point of recruitment. In 2017, Bouzar and Flynn performed a study on the jihadist engagement process in a qualitative analysis of a sample population of 809 individuals who left France for Syria (Bouzar and Flynn, 2017, 2). The research is conducted in an indirect

fashion, preferring 1:1 interviews between the subjects and the Centre de Prévention contre les Dérives Sectaires liées à l'Islam. The analysis concluded that jihadist recruiters actually study the profiles of their prey in order to better adapt the jihadist ideology to their different emotional, political, and social aspirations (Bouzar and Flynn, 2017, 2). The messages used by jihadist recruiters can be categorized into seven different narratives that have been identified by interviewing French foreign fighters. These narratives are applied to potential lone wolf terrorists to target their vulnerabilities and desires so that they are more inclined to attack France and comply with the ISIS agenda. The implementation of this method of recruitment efficiently increases the size of the potential recruiting pool to anyone who is significantly disillusioned with society or his or her own life due to their living conditions under secularism and in the *banlieues*.

**The Seven Narratives**

Bouzar and Flynn describe the first narrative as "The Search for a Better World". In this narrative, the recruiter identifies an individual who is disappointed with society. The recruiters work to assure the individual that by joining ISIS, he or she is creating a new society that is built upon brotherhood, equality, and unity. The target is provided with videos depicting men and women living in harmony, sharing meals, helping one another, children playing with toys, food being distributed to the poor, etc. The recruiter, however, equates the promise of this utopian society to total submission to divine law (2).

The second narrative is known as the "Mother Teresa" narrative, in which a recruiter targets a youth planning to pursue an occupation focused on helping people. These fields include medicine, nursing, or social work. The recruiter takes advantage of the target's enthusiasm to help society in order to persuade the target into believing that he or she must go to where they can do the most good. For instance, potential recruits under this narrative are led to videos of infants being gassed by the Assad Regime in Syria to invoke a moral shock. Resolutely, the target internalizes the suffering of the victims portrayed in the video, and jihadism is showcased as the only means to ending the pain, thus incentivizing the individual to engage in jihad abroad or at home through lone wolf attack (Bouzar and Flynn, 2017, 2).

The next narrative is the "Savior" narrative, in which a recruiter leverages the pain of an individual who has recently lost a loved one and their yearning to be reunited. This potential recruit is pointed towards videos that embody a heavenly paradise ensured by jihadism. In this case, the narrative draws upon the prediction that the end of the world is close to fruition and that ISIS and their beliefs are the only salvation (3).

The "Marriage" narrative is often used on radicalized young women recruited by ISIS. This narrative is centered around an individual's desire to find a husband that will never abandon her. The analysis performed by Bouzar and Flynn suggests that these females are both physically and psychologically vulnerable from past trauma, which makes them more susceptible to jihadist recruitment methods. For example, over 90 percent of the women who cited this narrative are victims of actual or attempted sexual

abuse but have not sought treatment or mentioned it to anyone. Individuals who fall under this narrative believe that marriage to an ISIS member would be the equivalent of marriage to a hero who fights to end the suffering caused by apparently evil regimes and will protect their spouse, like a knight in shining armor. This narrative is not applicable to the research presented in this thesis because the lone wolves being studied are male and do not meet this criteria (Bouzar and Flynn, 2017, 4)

Furthermore, jihadist recruiters use the "Lancelot" narrative to target young men with the desire to mirror the qualities of a historical figure or a knight. These men long for a community full of warriors and adventures where their skills and masculinity will be tested and applauded. These men are oftentimes children of military families or have endeavored to have a career in law enforcement or the military. The potential recruits are directed towards discourse featuring music from the film "Pirates of the Caribbean", evoking a sense of excitement and a risky undertaking. Propaganda under this narrative contains a theme of justice, where the weak and oppressed are able to stand up and reinstate their dignity by taking vengeance against enemies of ISIS. The focal point of these videos is the necessary sacrifice of self for history and posterity because the international community has not taken sufficient action to end the atrocities caused by the Assad regime. Subjects attracted by this narrative who were interviewed by the Centre de Prévention contre les Dérives Sectaires liées à l'Islam expressed their willingness to die for their new community more than for their family (5).

The "Zeus" narrative is cited by recruits motivated by the desire to impose Sharia law on the world and to use the name of God to make others submit to them (Bouzar and Flynn, 2017, 5). These recruits, typically men, habitually engage in dangerous activities such as drugs, unprotected sex, or reckless driving. Exchanges between the recruits and the CPDSI staff reveal that this narrative applies to recruits who behave as if they have unlimited power and are able to do anything. These men have a strong urge to test their limits and are not interested in submitting to God's will. Therefore, jihadism is an outlet for these individuals to express their wishes to be omnipotent.

The final and most recent narrative is the "Fortress" narrative, which references how radicalized recruits divulge that they looked to radical Islam to find a better version of themselves. These recruits hope that radical Islam will provide them with protection, like a fortress from their obsessions. These obsessions are of sexual nature, which vary from heterosexual, homosexual, to pedophilic. These men are terrified of giving in to these urges so they turn to Islam for protection, purity, and saintliness. Oftentimes, the subject realizes that jihadism does not transform them into their idealized self and then resorts to death through martyrdom (Bouzar and Flynn, 2017, 6).

**The Evolution of Jihadist Recruiters**

Now that the messages used by jihadist recruiters to seduce French lone wolves have been broken down, it is helpful to study who recruiters are and how they have increased their efficacy. Not all Jihadist recruiters are tasked by ISIS, some are

individuals with the goal of "saving" their family and friends from the West by showing them the truth—radical Islam. In the 21st century, jihadist recruiters have become progressively sophisticated, as they implement recruitment techniques resembling those of state intelligence agencies. ISIS' fine-tuning of these techniques has enabled them to avoid detection and gain access to a wider prospective recruiting pool. Social media has become the jihadist recruiter's primary instrument for recruitment because the anonymity of computers allows the recruiter to reach a large amount of targets all over the world. When using social media, the recruiter presents themself as a new friend online. The internet provides recruiters with the ability to be whoever they want to be in order to exploit their subject, who may be vulnerable to one of the seven narratives. For instance, a recruiter can pretend to be an expert in a field, a teacher, or a student. Over social media, a recruiter starts conversations with targets while simultaneously assessing the target's vulnerabilities. The recruiter aims to establish a trusted relationship and uncover details about the individual's cultural, social, and psychological level. Gradually, the recruiter introduces jihadist ideology to the target (Bouzar and Flynn, 2017, 6).

**The Use of Propaganda to Inspire a Lone Wolf**

While it has been made known that terrorist organizations like ISIS use social media to recruit French jihadists, it is also important to note that magazine publications can manipulate their minds as well. Through the proliferation of propaganda, ISIS has provided violence-prone misfits who might not otherwise have acted on their murderous

impulses with reasons to attack the West and with ideas of how to do so. ISIS propaganda magazines such as *Rumiyah* feature articles that provide tips to lone wolves on how to execute attacks at home. In the article "Just Terror Tactics", *Rumiyah* teaches readers how to carry out a knife attack, how to choose a knife, and how to choose a target. The article states that knives "are widely available in every land and thus readily accessible" and "extremely easy to conceal and highly lethal, especially in the hands of someone who knows how to use them effectively" (Breeden, 2017, 1). In 2014, former ISIS spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani advised that jihadists should single out the disbelieving American, Frenchman, or any of their allies. Smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car, or throw him down from a high place, or choke him, or poison him" (1).

A common theme within ISIS propaganda magazines is the desire for revenge. According to the publications, revenge for injustice against Muslims is possible, as long as violent action is taken against France. The magazines portray France as a major villain that is fundamentally incompatible with the teachings of Allah and radical Islam in particular. In an ISIS video in 2014, a member told French followers, "If you are unable to come to Syria or Iraq, then pledge allegiance in your place — pledge allegiance in France. Operate within France" (1). Issue 4 of *Dabiq* refers to France as being at the forefront of the "Crusader campaign" (Staffell and Awan, 2016, 9). Throughout several issues of these magazines, ISIS offers a sort of justification for their violence against

France and its people. This section will analyze *Dabiq,* the Islamic State's first propaganda magazine. ISIS states that *Dabiq* is,

> "a periodical magazine focusing on the issues of *tawhid* (unity), *manhaj* (truth-seeking), *hijrah* (migration), jihad (holy war) and *jama'ah* (community). It will also contain photo reports, current events, and informative articles on matters relating to the Islamic State" ("Islamic State's Horrific Magazine", 2014, 1).

The title of the magazine makes a reference to a site in Syria, which according to some Muslim myths, is the home of one of the last battles of the apocalypse. The choice to name the magazine after this location demonstrates ISIS's goal of widespread destruction and establishing a radical caliphate. In addition, the explicit and gruesomely violent magazine showcases the Islamic State through their own eyes. The pages consist of articles boasting about their victories and killings while maintaining a romantic tone concerning the heralding of an Islamic golden age and of a new caliphate induced by holy war.

**Figure 9.**


Source: Front page of *Dabiq,* issue 12, 2015.

In issue 12 of *Dabiq*, ISIS discusses the 2015 Paris attacks and provides their justification for the massacre. The tone of the text is full of anger and resentment, as the writers insult French citizens and officials. For instance, the magazine refers to former French president François Holland as 'that coward' (Dabiq, 2015, 2). According to the propaganda source, France lacks courage and deserves the chaos caused by jihadism because they attack ISIS "within fortified cities or from behind walls" (2). This quote makes reference to France launching airstrikes against the Khilāfah on September 19, 2014. The Islamic State argues that France was deserving of the bloody massacre of November 2015 because, like other Western nations, it was blinded by arrogance. The

passage contends that the decision to execute airstrikes gives the French the false impression that they are safe from "the justice of the mujāhidīn" (Dabiq, 2015, 2). Additionally, the magazine refers to France as a 'crusader nation' deserving of the suffering that ISIS inflicts upon it due to its imperial past, support of *laïcité*, and military power (29). Furious with the loss of ISIS fighters, the Islamic State refers to the 2015 Paris attacks as an act of revenge and a way to show France that they are not invincible from their Islamic caliphate and agenda. Citing the word of Allah, the literature declares "Allah decreed that punishment befall the warring crusaders from where they had not expected" (4). On the matter, the Islamic State also reveals,

> "Islamic State dispatched its brave knights to wage war in the homelands of the wicked crusaders, leaving Paris and its residents 'shocked and awed'. The eight knights brought Paris down on its knees, after years of French conceit in the face of Islam. A nationwide state of emergency was declared as a result of the actions of eight men armed only with assault rifles and explosive belts" (3).

The magazine also provides an explanation for their attack on Russia during the same year for similar reasons as France. According to the literature, both France and Russia are crusader nations that have destroyed their homes with their hostility towards Islam and Muslims (5). For instance, the Islamic State executed an attack in Russia 17 days after the Paris attacks in September 2015 because of Russia's support of the Nusayrī tāghūt (worshipping anything but Allah) in the war against the Muslims of Shām. The article reports that Russia had direct participation in the conflict through the employment of its air force in the war. Similar to France, the Islamic State believes that Russia is full of hubris. As a way of avenging the Islamic State, ISIS decided to target a Russian plane

and the Sharm el-Sheikh International Airport. During the attack, a bomb was smuggled onto the plane, killing a reported 219 Russians and 5 “crusaders”, meaning Westerners.

The magazine also makes it a point to celebrate and commend its lone wolves abroad, especially in France. The Islamic State refers to its lone wolves as ‘lone knights of the Khilāfah’ who should be praised for their bravery and engagement in jihad. The foreword of this issue states that these lone wolves should be commended because they “were not content with merely hearing news about jihād battles” (Dabiq, 2015, 3), they decided to take violent action against France. In general, ISIS propaganda like *Dabiq* or social media platforms has specifically targeted troubled French Muslims so that they finally feel special. By targeting the innermost desires of these young Muslims, ISIS and its recruiters are able to gain their trust and have an easier time in convincing them to engage in jihad on their own. Due to the general disappointment that French Muslims may feel after being discouraged from expressing their devotion to Islam or having difficulty forming social bonds with the rest of the French population, French Muslims are more likely to fall into recruitment traps and carry out lone wolf attacks against France, a country painted out to be evil by ISIS. The next chapter of this thesis will apply the theories presented in the past four chapters to case study analyses of four French lone wolves to prove that France’s structural and institutional makeup has led to the creation of lone wolf terrorists who have carried out the deadliest and most frequent jihadi attacks in Europe.

# Chapter 5: The Curious Case of the French Jihadist

Among research communities over Europe, there is a consensus that there is no single profile of a jihadist because there is no one personality trait that can predict that a citizen will radicalize against their home country. Therefore, inherent attributes associated with terrorists such as isolation, alienation, struggles with identity, or personal ties with jihadists are not sufficient in predicting whether or not an individual will radicalize against their country. Literature on the subject argues that the only common theme among jihadists is their age, as most subjects range from 15 to 25 years old (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2010, 82-91). However, French jihadists pose a challenge to this belief, as their ages range from the early 20s to 30s. This age category has not yet been presented in literature concerning French Islamic terrorism, therefore, this alternative age range may be a factor that determines the likelihood of Muslim radicalization in France.

At the request of the French government in 2014, the Centre de Prévention contre les Dérives Sectaires liées à l'Islam (Center of Prevention against Sectarian Drifts linked to Islam) conducted a detailed investigation on the issue of French radicalization. In August 2016, the organization published its findings in a progress report on 1,134 religiously radicalized youths who were questioned. Over 800 of these subjects were stopped by the police or their parents at the French border as they endeavored to travel to Islamic State territory. In addition, 64 percent of the population in question was female.

However, the representation of females is skewed, as female radicalization is more obvious with the wearing of Muslim clothing and the discontinuance of attendance at school or sports. Additionally, the organization found that the young jihadists originated from poor areas or middle-class households, thus strengthening the argument presented in this thesis that economic class and geographic location play a role in radicalization (Bouzar and Flynn, 2017, 1).

**The Lost Children of the Republic**

When studying the backgrounds of the perpetrators of jihadist attacks in France in the past decade, a similar pattern emerges. The perpetrators are mostly lone wolves inspired by jihadism. Between 2014 to 2018, the Global Terrorism Database reported a total of 39 terrorist attacks related to Islamic extremism. Perpetrators of these attacks include Muslim extremists, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and jihadi-inspired individuals ("SEARCH RESULTS: 131 INCIDENTS", 2019, 1). Global Terrorism Database has also disclosed that 23 of these attacks were perpetrated by jihadi-inspired individuals, using melee weapons, firearms, bombs, or vehicles. This finding demonstrates that a majority of Islamic attacks in France are carried out by untrained French lone wolves who utilize whatever weapon they can in order to maximize fear and violence. French lone wolves rely on these types of weapons because they lack the training of ISIS fighters to carry out more coordinated or complex attacks.

The known perpetrators' recent Jihadist terrorist attacks are mostly of Arab descent and reside in the poorer neighborhoods of France. Chapter 2 has demonstrated that there is an ongoing sense of exclusion and anti-immigrant sentiment against minorities residing in these areas. Historically, these disadvantaged urban zones create lawlessness, hopelessness, and hate felt by minorities against their oppressors. This chapter argues that discrimination towards these minority groups increases the likelihood that they will act out against the French government. The following section will study several French lone wolves, influenced by jihadist terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda in order to determine if the difficult socio-economic situations of French Muslims correlate with being a lone wolf terrorist. The following subsections of this chapter will analyze four cases of some of the most infamous and lethal French lone wolf attacks on civilians, military, religious figures or institutions, public property, or police over the past decade in order to determine whether or not arguments presented throughout this thesis are applicable to actual instances of radicalization.

**The Kouachi Killers**

The perpetrators of the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attack in Paris were born, raised, and radicalized in France. The attackers, Chérif (age 32) and Saïd (age 34) Kouachi, one by one, used Kalashnikovs to murder 12 people including journalists and designers of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and a Muslim policeman on the street outside the building. The brothers used violence to instill mass hysteria, fear, shock, and panic in the

public. Three days after the brothers' attack, the two were shot dead by French police following a hostage drama just north of Paris. The brothers were motivated by their desire to seek revenge for a cartoon that portrayed the prophet Mohammed and ridiculed Muslim extremists. One week following the barbaric attack on Charlie Hebdo's offices, Nasser bin Ali al Ansi, the senior leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, proudly claimed responsibility for the killings (Delattre et al., 2015, 32).

Although the Kouachi family was of Algerian descent, the brothers were French-born and from the Paris area. In their early life, Chérif and Saïd were average individuals. Chérif Kouachi was born in 1980 in Paris' 10th arrondissement. A source familiar with Chérif told the *Guardian* in 2005 that he was abandoned at a very young age and was placed in care homes outside of Paris before the age of 10 (Chrisafis, 2015, 1). The care homes were located far from Paris and his childhood was described as chaotic. At the age of 18, Chérif returned to the north-east of Paris with his brother Saïd. Chérif had potential in sports but lacked adequate grades in school and familial support. For the rest of his life, Chérif was affiliated with the Buttes-Chaumont group and lived immaturely and precariously. The Buttes Chaumont park is located in the 19th arrondissement of Paris, which houses a large number of North African immigrants. Evidence reveals that this park is the meeting place for lone wolf terrorists to meet and undergo physical training for committing terrorist acts against France and the West (Burke, 2015, 1). Jean-Charles Brisard, a Parisian consultant and an expert on terrorism and security describes the Buttes-Chaumont cell as a foreign fighter facilitation network

designed “to recruit and make individuals travel to the conflict zone in Iraq at the time of the first war in Iraq in 2004 and 2005” (“Paris Attack Suspects Would Have Been Hard To Track”, 2015, 1). Since the first war in Iraq, the cell has remained active during the time of radicalization and attacks of more recent lone wolf terrorist attacks in France.

Chérif Kouachi and the other members of the Buttes-Chaumont group embody a new generation of jihadists. Similar to Chérif, these individuals are born in France, have no formal military experience, and are disconnected from official terrorist organizations and French society (C.D., 2005, 1). A majority of the Buttes-Chaumont members have been condemned by French authorities and have served time in jail. After these individuals were jailed, there was nothing France could do against them judicially. Following the members’ release from jail, they were placed under surveillance. French law dictates that in order to place an individual under surveillance, there must be evidence, good reason, sufficient resources, or information suggesting that the individual will become radicalized or involve themselves in a violent act (“Paris Attack Suspects Would Have Been Hard To Track”, 2015, 1). According to *Le Monde*, Kouachi was placed under surveillance in 2010 when French investigators discovered a plan aiming to break out a man from prison who orchestrated a bombing at a train station in Paris in 1995 which injured 30 people. French authorities held Kouachi for three months under strict French anti-terror laws before releasing him due to lack of evidence (Burke, 2015, 1).

For the majority of his life, Chérif lacked ambition but appeared ordinary to the common eye. During his trial in 2005, Kouachi told the court that before joining the Buttes-Chaumont cell, he was a delinquent but "*after I felt great. I didn't even imagine that I could die...*" (Burke, 2015, 1). In this quote, Chérif demonstrates how radical Islam instilled a feeling of omnipotence within him, a selling point jihadist recruiters tend to use to manipulate potential lone wolves. The account provided by Chérif follows the "Zeus" or "Lancelot" narrative outlined by Bouzar and Flynn in Chapter 4 because jihadism has made Chérif feel all-powerful. Engaging in jihadi lone wolf terrorism attracts troubled individuals like Chérif Kouachi because it makes potential recruits believe that they can become a hero or a fighter—that they will be finally acknowledged in a society where they feel neglected and silenced.

In 2005, Chérif Kouachi's lawyer, Vincent Ollivier, defended his involvement and acts stating, "*Mon client a été manipulé. Plus l'échéance de son départ approchait, plus il avait peur. Il ne savait plus comment sortir de cette situation*" (*My client was manipulated. The closer he was to his approaching departure, the more he became afraid. He no longer knew how to get out of this situation*) (C.D., 2005, 1). Additionally, Chérif's lawyer described him as a 'confused chameleon', describing the cultural schizophrenia that can result from a 'dual cultural alterity' when living in the *banlieues* (Staffell and Awan, 2016, 192).

Prior to the Charlie Hebdo attack, Chérif's older brother Saïd had also been living a mundane life with his wife and children in the Champagne region of France. Saïd's

neighbors had described him as solitary and unlike his brother, never spent time in prison. While Saïd did earn a vocational training certificate, he was unemployed. Similar to Chérif, Saïd was radicalized through his affiliation with the Buttes-Chaumont network and connection to Salim Benghalem, one of France's most well-known ISIS foreign fighters (Kepel, 2017, 68). Another major component in Saïd's radicalization process came from his training in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen sponsored by Al-Qaeda. Before 2014, Saïd reunited with Chérif and Benghalem in the Middle East to receive more formal instruction on conducting and planning terrorist operations back home in France. United States officials report that Chérif and Saïd trained in Yemen in both 2009 and 2011. Additionally, Chérif told a French TV station that he had been funded by a network loyal to Anwar al-Awlaki (71). Counterterrorism researcher, Thomas Hegghammer contends that many French foreign fighters did not acquire a strong anti-Western sentiment while training or fighting overseas. In a comprehensive study on jihadist foreign fighters, Hegghammer found that only a small minority (one in nine) who leave their native country to practice jihad return home with the determination to commit terrorist acts at home (Byman and Shapiro, 2014, 17). Therefore, the anti-French sentiment felt by the Kouachi brothers was most likely developing during their time living in France under difficult socio-economic circumstances.

Overall, the brothers were perceived as banal, yet they were easily influenced by jihadist ideology enough that they were driven to commit one of the most deadly terrorist attacks in France in the last 50 years. The Kouachi brothers demonstrate an important

change in terrorism that must be paid attention to. Typically, French jihadists that have left for countries like Syria have emerged from an often varied, middle-class background. From time to time, these French jihadists do have a good education, prospects, and ambitions. However, the detailed descriptions of notable perpetrators between 2014 to 2018 demonstrate that this concept is not always applicable to a situation. The Kouachi brothers provide a sharp illustration of a new kind of terrorist that does not have to be weak or psychologically unsound to be persuaded into committing a heinous act of violence. For instance, 10 years ago in Iraq, foreign fighters were seen as psychologically fragile, poor, and lacking perspective (Kepel, 2017, 71). However, terrorists like the Kouachi brothers were able to reside in France undetected for quite some time while simultaneously plotting against the Republic. Evidence demonstrates that terrorist organizations offer some sort of gratification or ideas that appeal to these troubled lone wolves in exchange for terrorizing a population.

**Amedy Coulibaly**

Only days after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack between January 7 and 9 of 2015, 33-year-old Amedy Coulibaly killed a police officer and four people in a Jewish kosher grocery store in Paris's eastern district of Porte de Vincennes. French police also reported that days before this attack, Coulibaly shot and injured a jogger in the Parisian suburb of Fontenay-aux-Roses. Coulibaly was a French-born citizen with ancestry in Mali. The perpetrator also happened to be a close friend of Chérif and Saïd Kouachi.

Coulibaly met Chérif Kouachi in jail when Kouachi was serving time for his role in a jihadist recruiting network focused on the Buttes Chaumont park in Paris, where jihadist recruits did their training. At the time, Coulibaly was serving time for armed robbery. The main difference between Coulibaly and Kouachi was that Coulibaly was pro-ISIS and Kouachi supported Al-Qaeda (Kepel, 2017, 72). While the ideology of ISIS and Al-Qaeda differ, their radicalization tactics are similar. The argument in this thesis can be applied to French lone wolf terrorists inspired by ISIS or Al-Qaeda due to linkages between the wolves such as their involvement in the Buttes-Chaumont cell.

During their time in jail, Coulibaly and Kouachi also met Djamel Beghal, a French-Algerian Al-Qaeda recruiter who was convicted for an attempted attack on the US embassy in Paris in 2001. Both men emerged from the prison as dedicated jihadists. The formation of the bond between Coulibaly and Chérif Kouachi also illustrates how French prisons have become a sort of breeding ground for alienated, young lone wolves, especially if they are from an immigrant community. Shortly after being released from prison in 2010, the two men were arrested again for plotting to free an Algerian terrorist sentenced for bomb attacks on the Paris metro in 1995. Consequently, Coulibaly received a five-year sentence, and Kouachi was freed for lack of evidence of his hand in the scheme. Over the years, the duo practiced jihad consistently in Paris and was under surveillance by French authorities.

Like the Kouachi brothers, Coulibaly was a member of the Buttes-Chaumont cell, suggesting that this spot served as a meeting point for those who shared the same interest in committing jihadist attacks and seeking revenge against France. Coulibaly is now the third lone wolf terrorist discussed in this thesis who is a member of the Buttes-Chaumont cell in Paris. The prevalence of this particular park suggests that these radicalized individuals can very well communicate and share jihadist ideas with one another, but they ultimately act alone. As pointed out previously in Chapter 1, a lone wolf terrorist does not necessarily need to be isolated from others in order to be considered a lone wolf terrorist. Ideas, whether they reach the wolf online or in person, are effective in persuading the individual to commit an act of violence against France. The Buttes-Chaumont network demonstrates that lone wolf must be inspired somehow to engage in jihad and it is the vulnerable characteristics of the individual in question that predispose them to want to attack France (Kepel, 2017, 72).

Two days after his death, a seven-minute video was released depicting Coulibaly pledging his allegiance to the Islamic State and its then-leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In the video, Coulibaly is described as a "soldier of the caliphate" and adds that he had coordinated his attacks with the Kouachi brothers. Coulibaly also states they "did some things together, some things separate" and arranged "to synchronize [their movements]" (Kepel, 2017, 72). Despite his claims, there is no evidence suggesting that Coulibaly was an official member of ISIS. When interviewed by *Dar al Islam*, a French ISIS magazine, after fleeing to Syria, Coulibaly's wife Hayat Boumeddiene described her husband as

"burning to join his brothers and fight with them against the enemies of Islam in the Caliphate" (Kepel, 2017, 72), as he was not an official member of an ISIS cell. The description provided by Hayat Boumeddiene mirrors "The Search for a Better World" narrative outlined by Bouzar and Flynn in Chapter 4. The phrase "join his brothers" reflects this narrative's focus on brotherhood and unity in the fight against the West. Coulibaly's desires, actions, and behavior suggest that he was inspired by this ISIS narrative due to his unprivileged background and time in jail.

**Mohammed and Abdelkader Merah**

Another example of a home-grown lone wolf who attacked their native France is Mohammed Merah. On March 11, 2012, Merah, a 23-year-old French citizen with North African ancestry, went on a killing spree in Toulouse, France. The discriminant attack involved the targeting of French soldiers and a Jewish schoolhouse in Montauban. During three separate attacks over eight days, Merah murdered a Jewish rabbi, three French paratroopers of African descent, and three elementary school children. That morning, Merrah arrived outside the school on a residential street in Toulouse and opened fire using an Uzi submachine gun on a group of small children arriving for the day, alongside a young rabbi. The gun reportedly jammed and Merah proceeded to use a Colt .45 to execute his targets from close range. Among the four dead was an 8-year-old girl; the rabbi, age 30; and his two sons, ages 5 and 3. After the attack, Merah fled the scene on a motor scooter. Responding French law enforcement officers soon sieged Merah's block

of flats in Toulouse, where he opened fire on the police. Armed with a Kalashnikov assault rifle, an Uzi machine-gun, and handguns, Merah resisted arrest for almost a day and a half until he was shot in the head by French officers. French prosecutors reported that Merah expressed no regrets other than not having claimed more victims and was proud of having brought France to its knees (Sayare, 2018, 1).

Similar to other French lone wolves, Merah was raised in a low-income and broken household. The perpetrator was raised by his divorced mother in a family of 5 children. The French newspaper *Le Monde* reported that according to two of Merah's siblings, their household was toxic and full of disdain towards France, Americans, and Jews. Merah's brother Abdelghani Merah described their home life as an "atmosphere of racism and hatred". Abdelghani also revealed that their sister Souad and brother Abdelkader encouraged Merah to support anti-Semitic and extremist ideologies. Abdelghani has stated that their parents were abusive and neglectful throughout their upbringing. When Merah's mother, Zoulikha Aziri, found out about her son's killings, she proudly stated, "*Mon fils a mis la France à genoux*" (*My son brought France to its knees*) (Robert-Diard, 2017, 1). His mother was also married to Sabri Essid, who was convicted of recruiting fighters for Al-Qaeda and running a safe house in Syria ("Mohammed Merah", 2017, 1). The hatred and violent nature of Merah's family suggest that the disadvantaged backgrounds of French Muslims may make them more likely to engage in lone wolf attacks since violence and murder is a way to eliminate the individuals they disagree with. It is not only the formation of ties with other lone wolves

that increases the likelihood of attacks, but it is also the makeup and consequential tension within the *banlieues*.

Merah grew up isolated from mainstream society due to the geographic location of his impoverished neighborhood in Les Izards in Toulouse. This district is located in the north-east of Toulouse and houses a large North African population. As he grew older, Merah moved to a block of flats on Sergent Vigne Street, south-eastern district of Côte Pavée. Due to his background and upbringing, Merah experienced segregation, discrimination, and had difficultly finding purpose and work. During his youth, Merah was expelled several times from school and eventually dropped out. The French magazine *Le Point* reports that Merah became a mechanic and had a love for soccer and scooters, which was also his choice of getaway. Those around Merah have also said that he was a devoted Muslim, although he seldom spoke about religion ("Mohammed Merah", 2017, 1).

Throughout his life, Merah was well known to French authorities as a petty criminal and admirer of radical Islamic groups. Merah was first arrested in 2005 and served 2 short prison sentences in 2007 and 2009. Some of Merah's crimes included driving offenses, theft, vandalism, and viewing propaganda for radical Islamic ideology over the internet tracked by French intelligence (Sayare, 2018, 1). Merah is also said to have maintained connections with Forsane Alizza, an extremist group in France that supported Al-Qaeda. While in prison in December 2008, Merah reportedly attempted to commit suicide and consequently received psychiatric treatment. Following his release

from prison after 2009, Merah applied to join the French army but was rejected because of his criminal record. Two years later, Merah attempted to join the French Foreign Legion but withdrew or was rejected. Former French interior minister Claude Gueant reports that Merah ventured to Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2010 and 2011 to further his radicalization. On his way to Afghanistan, Merah was detained in Israel for possession of a knife and in Kandahar, Afghanistan for an undisclosed reason. After his detainment in Afghanistan, Merah was turned over to U.S. custody and eventually sent back to France. These travels raised alarm within French intelligence agencies but the suspicion was dismissed when Merah allegedly showed them photographs of him traveling for tourism only ("Mohammed Merah", 2017, 1). Later, Merah claimed that Al-Qaeda fighters in Pakistan provided him with financing to carry out terrorist attacks in France. This declaration is unlikely to be true, as French intelligence officers have found that Merah obtained the monetary funds through criminal activities and various jobs. Merah made another controversial claim when he stated that he was trained by an Al-Qaeda operative in Pakistan. A French newspaper debunked this assertion as they reported that Merah actually trained with Taliban fighters there who sent him to fight NATO forces in Afghanistan (Cruickshank et al., 2012, 1). Merah himself affirms that he became radicalized in prison, however, his upbringing illustrates that his jihadist beliefs manifested long ago ("Mohammed Merah", 2017, 1). Merah was already committed to anti-Western terrorism before he received a prison sentence or traveled abroad (Byman

and Shapiro, 2014, 17). Merah's attacks were the result of his own free will, motivation, and skill, not Al-Qaeda's, thus classifying him as a lone wolf terrorist.

Following Merah's terrorist attack, prosecutor François Molins told reporters that the incident had been motivated by France's military presence in Afghanistan, France's ban on the burqa, and the suffering of Palestinians (Sayare, 2018, 1). This motivation reflects "The Search for a Better World" narrative in Chapter 4, as Merah explains that he engaged in terrorism because be was disappointed with society. Merah's reasoning for being a lone wolf terrorist also mimics the "Mother Teresa" narrative because he aims to make a statement in order to deter the suffering of Palestinians. Taking Merah's isolation, adversity, and upbringing into account, the 2010 attack is arguably a byproduct of this radical youth interaction in the Buttes-Chaumont park which encourages youths to engage in jihadism to express their disapproval of France's treatment of them. Merah also is an important figure in which the unwillingness or inability of French Muslims to conform to the norms of French society republicanism is highlighted. Merah's upbringing, his justification for jihadism, and his actions demonstrate the anger and instability of young minorities in the more poor areas of France.

The radicalization of Merah may also be a product of his older brother's involvement in jihadism as well. More specifically, French authorities believe that his brother, Abdelkader Merah, was his mentor. When taken into custody by French law enforcement, Abdelkader Merah was 35 years old. Similar to his brother, Abdelkader was a violence-prone deviant whose choice of getaway vehicle was a scooter. As a teenager,

Abdelkader was reported for acts of violence 15 times, most likely as a result of his behavioral issues and violent nature as a child. During the same time as Abdelkader's first shooting, an unidentified source informed authorities that Abdelkader was a 'layabout', 'loner', 'unserious' and 'waster' after meeting him at a *rai* (a popular Arab music club). In general, Abdelkader resorted to jihadism to express and justify his resentment towards France. In a way, this vicious form of Islam provides home-grown terrorists like Abdelkader with validation after feeling unwanted and discriminated against by French society and the government. Similar to his brother, Abdelkader was a loyal member of the Buttes-Chaumont terror cell. Abdelkader often joined other French jihadists in the 19th arrondissement of Paris to prepare for combat, share ideas about radical Islam, and communicate with one another from time to time. Eventually, French authorities found Abdelkader guilty of being an accomplice to an attack in 2012 that resulted in him receiving a life sentence in prison. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, an individual can face terrorism charges under French law even without an attack being carried out. A court in Paris ruled that the judges saw sufficient evidence that Abdelkader shared the same extremist ideology as Mohammed which was enough to put him in prison. In court, Abdelkader insisted that he was innocent of his convictions, claiming that he was not involved in the assassinations carried out by his brother. This statement, however, contradicts Abdelkader's previous public statements after his brother's attack, in which he articulated his approval of the violence. Shortly before the verdict, Abdelkader allegedly changed his stance and informed the court that he now felt

"a mix of sadness, shame and regret" (Breeden, 2017, 1). Nonetheless, Abdelkader Merah was still sentenced to life in prison for his involvement with jihadism.

A key difference to note in these French terrorists is that unlike the Kouachi brothers, the Merah brothers did not need to leave their physical home to become radicalized. The words and beliefs of jihadism infiltrated their thoughts at home due to their geographic location in the *banlieues* of Paris and their alienation in France. The Merah brothers serve as a portrait of the new face of terrorism, depicting terrorists that do not travel to the Islamic State to engage in violence but instead decide to kill their fellow Frenchmen and women.

**The Bastille Day Bloodbath**

Certain lone wolf terrorists are not as precise or skilled when it comes to their method of attack. Some French-born terrorists like the Kouachi brothers are trained by radical Islamic groups, while others use whatever resources they have to incite fear in the French population. Lone wolves utilize a variety of weapons including knives, bombs, hammers, and automobiles.

At 22:33 on July 14, 2016, Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, a 31-year-old French Tunisian delivery man drove a 19-ton truck, packed with explosives, into a crowd of celebrators during a Bastille Day parade in Nice. The indiscriminate attack plowed down innocent pedestrians, stretching over two kilometers on the crowded Promenade des Anglais before he was killed by French police (Gunaratna, 2016, 1). The 45-second

incident orchestrated by this radicalized lone wolf resulted in 458 wounded people and 86 deaths, 10 of them being children. Following the attack, over 1200 formal complaints about physical and psychological injuries have been recorded (Massalou et al., 2019, 1). When describing the events of July 14, 2016, to NPR, American witness Eric Drattell disclosed,

> "*when we were walking from the beach to the first hotel, we saw one body. I saw a stroller that had been crushed, saw street signs and other debris. But when we were walking back from the Hyatt to our hotel, there were bodies everywhere- bodies and blood everywhere. It was just- I'm in complete shock. There's just- it was unbelievable carnage*" ("American Witness Describes Scene Of Truck Attack In Nice, France", 2016, 1).

Moreover, this lone wolf attack marks a milestone in jihadi terrorism because it was the first attack in Europe to use a vehicle as a weapon to terrorize, harm, and shock a crowd. The account offered by Drattell demonstrates just how lone wolf terrorism can incite fear in a population. The decision to attack civilians on Bastille Day, a holiday to celebrate France and its history, made the event a cataclysm, suggesting that Islamic terrorist organizations and its followers were declaring a sort of war against the French state and all that it stands for.

In investigations following the attack, French police discovered ISIS-related propaganda and photos of dead bodies and Osama bin-Laden and Mokhtar Belmokhtar on Lahouaiej-Bouhlel's computer. French prosecutors state that Lahouaiej-Bouhlel was not known to French intelligence services as a terrorist threat or an individual linked to ISIS prior to the attack. Lahouaiej-Bouhlel was born in M'saken, Tunisia and moved to

Nice in 2005, where he worked as a delivery man. Lahouaiej-Bouhlel was later fired from this job after falling asleep while driving ("Mohammed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel", 2018, 1). In 2006, Lahouaiej-Bouhlel married his French-Tunisian cousin and had three children together. Throughout their marriage, Lahouaiej-Bouhlel's wife reported her husband to the police for several incidents of domestic abuse towards her and her mother-in-law. The couple eventually separated and were in the midst of divorce proceedings when Lahouaeiej-Bouhlel carried out the terrorist attack.

Furthermore, Lahouaeiej-Bouhlel had a long history of being a petty criminal. After receiving a 10-year French residency permit in January 2009, Lahouaeiej-Bouhlel often partook in crimes such as violence and theft. In March 2016, Lahouaeiej-Bouhlel was charged with assault with a weapon for an incident that took place earlier that year. Consequently, Lahouaeiej-Bouhlel was given a six-month sentence, which was later suspended. Throughout his life, Lahouaiej-Bouhlel was not devoted to Islam or any religion. The lone wolf drank alcohol, engaged in gay sex, used drugs recreationally, did not pray, and ignored Muslim dietary restrictions. Lahouaiej-Bouhlel's interests included weightlifting, martial arts, salsa dancing, and violent online content. Lahouaiej-Bouhlel is believed to have self-radicalized over the internet before the Bastille Day attack and habitually researched verses from the Quran, details about international jihadist incidents, and *nasheeds* (jihadist propaganda chants). Taking this behavior and these interests into account, Lahouaiej-Bouhlel serves as a portrait of the "Fortress" and "Zeus" narratives outlined by Dounia and Bouzar in Chapter 4 because he lacked religious ties and was

involved in the dangerous behavior and obsessions outlined by these narratives (Bouzar and Flynn, 2017, 6).

**The Link Between the Wolves**

The culprits in the *Charlie Hebdo*, Toulouse 2012, Paris 2015, and Nice 2016 attacks can all be connected in some way or another due to their path to radicalization. While each path is respectively unique, the case studies of these lone wolves illustrate the commonalities between different wolves that make them more likely to take violent action against France and its citizens in the name of radical Islam. While some actions have been inspired by Al-Qaeda or ISIS, the reasoning used by perpetrators who claim allegiance to Al-Qaeda can still be applied to those loyal to ISIS. It is important to remember that ISIS is an organization born from Al-Qaeda, therefore, it shares similar beliefs. However, the two organizations differ in their techniques and approaches to terrorism. Nevertheless, the discussion of these lone wolves demonstrates that factors such as geographic and social isolation, economic disparity, racial discrimination are a common theme among lone wolves that play a key role in transforming them into lone wolves.

# Conclusion: What is the Future Threat?

Empirical and numerical evidence on French lone wolves offers a systematic analysis of the link between economic, political, and social conditions that encourage the rise of jihadism in French nations. While France is currently seeing a decrease in jihadist lone wolf attacks, the phenomenon has not disappeared entirely. This study demonstrates the ability of jihadi terrorist groups to utilize states like France to gain more supporters and create more distruction across the globe. While jihadism provides lone wolves with an outlet to be violent and seek vengeance against those they believe oppress them, terrorist organizations like ISIS also benefit. The more that lone wolves attack and instill fear in France, the more successful ISIS is in creating chaos, spreading their influence and beliefs, and establishing their dream caliphate. For example, before his death in December 2013, ISIS spokesperson and member of French jihadi terror cells, Abu Abdel Rahman, praised Mohammed Merah for his 2012 attack on French civilians. Abu Abdel Rahman recorded and posted a video, congratulating Merah for his proper exemplification of offensive jihad. The attack was ultimately successful in gaining the attention of the French and illustrating the impending threat of the Islamic State. Merah actually committed his murders in the final weeks of France's presidential campaign and caught the attention of Nicolas Sarkozy of France's right-wing political party. Following the killings, Sarkozy published a "Letter to the French" and proposed a "clash of civilizations" hypothesis. This claim makes reference to Samuel Huntington's publication

of “The Clash of Civilizations”, in which he presents the debate about how and if the world can be separated. The literature discusses whether or not modern conflict and competition among Western and non-Western nations is derived from a focus on cultural or ideological divisions. An important argument made by Samuel Huntington that is applicable to this thesis is that the world can be divided into seven or eight “civilizations” based on religious identity. Huntington also argues that future major wars will happen along the boundaries of these civilizations (Huntington, 2020, 1). Sarkozy’s address mirrors Huntington’s assertion as he believes that Merah serves as an ideologue for radical Islam and a representation of the jihadi movement “that is working for the destruction of the values of the West” (Sayare, 2018, 1).

The findings of this thesis suggest that a majority of the perpetrators of Islamic terrorism have been persuaded or incentivized to attack France due to varying forms of institutionalized social alienation. This lack of Muslim integration can be explained by examining housing by class in France, specifically the ghettos versus metropolitan areas. The backgrounds of the perpetrators of the attacks in France suggest that class does correlate with the likelihood of French citizens joining terrorist organizations. Furthermore, the contemporary pursuit of *laïcité* and assimilation of Islam in France fuels the stigma around Muslims, causing the group to feel unwelcomed and neglected. The case study analysis of this work concludes that the legislative attack on the expression of Islam combined with the disadvantaged backgrounds of French Muslims make them more vulnerable to radicalization tactics of ISIS or other Islamic groups.

Today, France has yet to solve their conflicting ethnic, social, and political issues and the population of Muslims in France is continuing to rise. The fact remains that France has witnessed the most foreign fighters leave the country out of all of Western Europe and has the longest history of Islamic terrorism. The cases of these lone wolves presented in this thesis suggest that with the growing influence of radical Islam, this French Muslim cannot be controlled by the French Republic. Just as France lost control of its former colonies like Algeria, it appears to be losing control from its Muslim population. While the jihadist movement in France appears to have calmed down at the time of this writing, that sentiment does not equate to the surrender of lone wolves. While ISIS is currently undergoing a regroupment and has lost territory in the Middle East, the ideology of radical Islam persists. It is also important to remember that ISIS was created as a splinter group of Al-Qaeda, a terrorist organization essentially defeated by the West. So while the organization may appear to be dead, it can very well transform into another that poses an even more deadly threat to France and the rest of the world. In addition, jihadist propaganda and recruitment still exist and unstable minorities in France continue to experience hopelessness and frustration towards France. With the option of jihad and the strong history of rebellion in France, it is not unlikely for these individuals to take physical action to express themselves. Therefore, it is necessary to study and understand the threat that ISIS and its lone wolves pose to France in order to understand the threat they present to the international community as well.

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