Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences, Volume 54, No. 1, 2027, 10982

Factors Driving Foreign Fighters to Join Militants: A Case Study of German Combatants in Iraq and Syria

Shamma Al-Dosari*

Department of Political Studies, College of Prince Al-Hussein Bin Abdullah II of Political Science and International Studies, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan

Received: 3/3/2025
Revised: 20/4/2025
Accepted: 14/8/2025
Published online: 1/10/2026

* *Corresponding author:*
team24@hotmail.com

Citation: Al-Dosari, S. (2026). The Factors Driving Foreign Fighters to Join Militants: A Case Study of German Combatants in Iraq and Syria. *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, *54*(4), 10982.
https://doi.org/10.35516/Hum.2026.10982

© 2027 DSR Publishers/ The University of Jordan.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC) license https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

Abstract

Objective: This study aimed to examine the psychological, social, political, and technological factors that drive German citizens to join the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria. It specifically sought to identify the push and pull factors, within the aforementioned categories, that contribute to the spread of extremism and to analyse their impact in the context of recruiting foreign fighters.

Methods: The study adopted a systematic review approach, using three databases, JSTOR, Gale Academic OneFile, and Emerald Insight, to conduct the search process. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, such as setting the time frame between 2015 and 2020 and focusing on peer-reviewed journals or academic articles. This process resulted in the selection of three research studies relevant to the topic.

Results: Recruitment was shaped by psychological vulnerabilities, social fragmentation, political grievances, and online mobilization. Pull factors included propaganda, mass recruitment, identity consolidation, and peer networking within Salafi Muslim communities. Push factors included weak social integration, unemployment, low education, and criminal records. Most recruits were socially marginalized young men. Social media acted mainly as a reinforcing tool, not a primary recruitment method.

Conclusion: The study found that social and political marginalization, combined with psychological vulnerability and technological exposure, significantly contributes to the radicalization of German foreign fighters. Weak social integration was the most consistent push factor. Proactive measures, such as inclusive social policies, investment in marginalized groups, and early-warning systems, are recommended to counter extremism.

Keywords: Foreign fighters, Germans joining ISIS in Syria and Iraq, Recruitment of foreign fighters by Militants

العوامل الدافعة للمقاتلين الأجانب للانضمام إلى الجماعات المسلحة: دراسة حالة للمقاتلين الألمان في العراق وسوريا

شمة محمد الدوسري*

قسم الدراسات السياسية، كلية الأمير الحسين بن عبدالله الثاني للعلوم السياسية والدراسات الدولية، الجامعة الأردنية، عمان، الأردن

ملخّص

الهدف: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة العوامل النفسية والاجتماعية والسياسية والتكنولوجية التي تدفع المواطنين الألمان للانضمام إلى تنظيم الدولة الإسلامية (داعش) في العراق وسوريا. وسعت الدراسة بشكل خاص إلى تحديد عوامل الدفع والجذب، ضمن نطاق العوامل المذكورة أعلاه، والتي تُسهم في دفع التطرف، وتحليل أثرها في سياق تجنيد المقاتلين الأجانب.

المنهجية: اعتمدت الدراسة على منهجية مراجعة منهجية، حيث تم استخدام ثلاث قواعد بيانات، مثل: JSTOR و Gale Academic OneFile وEmerald Insight، لإجراء عملية البحث. وقد تم تطبيق معايير الاستبعاد والشمول، مثل تحديد الإطار الزمني بين عامي 2015 و2020، والاعتماد على المجلات المحكمة، أو المقالات، مما أسفر عن اختيار ثلاث دراسات بحثية ذات صلة بالموضوع.

النتائج: كشفت النتائج أن عملية التجنيد تتأثر بمزيج من العوامل، منها نقاط الضعف النفسية، والتفكك الاجتماعي، والمظالم السياسية، وأدوات التكنولوجيا، مثل التعبئة الإنترنت.شملت عوامل الجذب الدعاية الإلكترونية، والتجنيد الجماعي، والتثبيت الهوياتي، وشبكات التواصل بين الأقران، خاصة ضمن المجتمعات الإسلامية السلفية. اما عوامل الدفع ضعف الاندماج الاجتماعي، والبطالة، وانخفاض مستوى التعليم العالي، والسجلات الجنائية السابقة. وقد تبين أن معظم المجندين من الشباب الذكورالمهمشين اجتماعيًا. ورغم إقرار جميع الدراسات بدور وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، فقد أكدت على وظيفتها كأداة تعزيز، وليست آلية تجنيد أساسية.

الخلاصة: خلصت الدراسة إلى أن التهميش الاجتماعي والسياسي، عند اقترانه بالضعف النفسي، والتعرض للتكنولوجيا، يُسهم بشكل كبير في تطرف المقاتلين الأجانب الألمان. وقد برز ضعف التكامل كعامل الدفع الأكثر ثباتًا. وتوصي الدراسة بجهود استباقية لمكافحة التطرف، تشمل سياسات اجتماعية شاملة، والاستثمار في الفئات المهمشة، وآليات الإنذار المبكر لرصد علامات التطرف.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المقاتلون الأجانب، انضمام الألمان إلى داعش في سوريا والعراق، تجنيد المسلحين للمقاتلين الأجانب

1.1: Introduction

The phenomenon of transnational fighters fighting on foreign soil emerged and became the centre of global attention in June 2014, when the Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria (ISIS) proclaimed the formation of the Caliphate (Pokalova, 2019). ISIS called upon all Muslims in the world to migrate and support their cause (Shawn, 2023). In response, many young people from Western countries joined the terrorist organization (Mullins, 2015). The involvement of transnational fighters in foreign conflicts is not new. Thousands of people have taken part in various conflicts in Bosnia, Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, and other countries since the 1980s (Hegghammer, 2010). However, the large-scale involvement of foreign fighters from wealthy Western countries, such as Germany, in the case of ISIS is unprecedented, thus requiring scrutiny. Understanding why people from Western countries, such as Germany, travelled to join ISIS requires focusing on the underlying socio-economic, political, and technological determinants (Bakker and De-Bont, 2017).

Examination of the reasons why German fighters joined ISIS requires an assessment of psychological and social determinants. This is because every social movement is considered a type of collective action (Schumacher, 2021). The existing literature suggests that crowd behaviour is influenced by both individual and group psychology (Borch, 2006). Therefore, individuals following a group tend to lose their ability to think rationally and instead start to behave as a collective hypnosis (Schumacher, 2021: p. 21). According to Heinke (2017), German youth who joined ISIS experienced social exclusion and discrimination that undermined their connection to mainstream society. As a result, extremist ideology provided them with a purpose and fraternity that appealed to socially dislocated individuals (Khosrokhavar, 2017). To this end, peer networks play a significant role in supporting the radicalization journey. This is because collective identity, rather than ideological commitment, tends to precede the mobilization of foreign fighters (Reynolds and Hafez, 2019). In the specific context of youngsters, factors such as trauma, cognitive closure, and thrill-seeking behaviour often contribute to an individual's attraction towards radicalization (Speckhard and Yayla, 2015).

On the other hand, while Germany is an economically developed nation, however internal disparities and political tensions have fostered radicalization (Said and Fouad, 2022). Extant literature highlights factors such as economic marginalization, particularly among immigrant communities, creating fertile ground for extremist organizations such as ISIS for recruitment (Verwimp, 2016). Ignorance of the integration of immigration in the socio-economic system, such as employment, upward mobility, and perceived systematic injustice, amplifies grievances among German Muslims, thereby fuelling radical sentiments (Martini, 2018). Moreover, the political polarization of German society towards mass immigration is intensifying identity politics and social fragmentation (Bakker and de-Leede, 2015). These factors are identified to provide a conducive environment for the extremists to motivate individuals to rebel against the system.

Digital platforms and online radicalization are the third factor that this study aims to investigate as a determinant of German foreign fighters joining ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Technological advancements such as social media provide people with convenience and a readily available form of communication (Tønnessen, 2017). Social media works as a guide for the cognitive transformation of foreigners and provides them with information about jihadi areas and advice to make the journey to get there (Reynolds and Hafez, 2019). At its peak time in 2014, ISIS had a presence on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Suresport, Twitter, Ask.FM, Kik, SoundCloud, Just-paste. It, WhatsApp, and Wikr (Khodijah et al., 2015). In their social media campaign, ISIS transmits the message to inform people about the threats to their transnational identity and portrays vivid imagery of Muslims' suffering in conflict zones such as Iraq (Reynolds and Hafez, 2019). Social media networks are a powerful tool for radicalization because conversations in these media tend to be end-to-end encrypted, thus providing individuals with horizontal communication that is user-generated, interactive, and instant.

2.1: General Framework of the Study

2.1.1: Problem of the study

The case of Syria and Iraq, on the other hand, is unique in that Western European countries accounted for approximately 17% of all foreign fighters in the region (Reynolds and Hafez, 2019). Hence, it raises questions about why one would leave their life in Western European countries to live in war-torn areas of Syria and Iraq and under terrorist organizations such as

ISIS (BBC, 2016). Thus, scholars have an escalating interest in the spectacle of foreign fighters. However, there are conflicting opinions about the main motives that drive transnationals, mainly from rich western nations, to join terrorist organizations.

The pressing reasons to investigate the causal drivers for foreign fighters to join ISIS in Syria and Iraq stem from the fact that such acts undermine the counter-terrorism strategies of states and raise questions about their socio-economic policies (Verwimp, 2016).

2.1.2: Hypothesis of the study

Extant literature identifies various dimensions to examine the phenomenon of foreign fighters such as anchoring, private networks, block recruitment, integration deficit, network/peer-to-peer mobilization, and online mobilization (Moore, 2018: Hegghammer, 2013: Reynolds and Hafez, 2019).

This research categorizes the determinants into pull and push factors. Pull factors describe those factors that attract men and women to join foreign conflicts or become militants. The underlying motivational message is to lure foreign combatants into committing to the militants' cause (Malet, 2013: P14). These factors include traditional and online mobilization, as well as block recruitment.

In contrast, "push factors" work as determinants for the supply of foreign combatants to foreign conflicts (Hegghammer, 2013). Therefore, the suffering of Muslims in foreign countries such as Iraq and Syria is used as an underlying message to motivate foreign fighters to join militants. However, such factors do not create a geographically diffused mobilization of foreign fighters; their effects tend to be more within local and peer-to-peer social networks.

Furthermore, the hostile local environment of foreign fighters, such as Muslim immigrants in the West facing discrimination and dealing with Islamophobia, is a key determinant that motivates them to join foreign causes that match their ideology. Therefore, pull factors in this study include integration deficits, anchoring, and network/peer-to-peer effects.

Table I below identifies the pull and push factors as dependent variables that encourage foreign fighters to join militants.

Table I: Dependent and independent variables

Dependent variables	Independent variables
Pull factors • Online mobilization • Bloc recruitment • Anchoring • Network/peer to peer	Foreign fighters joining militants
Push factor • Integration deficit	

Source: Adapted from Malet, 2013: P14: Hegghammer, 2013

Based on the independent and dependent variables identified in Table 1, this study hypothesizes that the following:

H_0: Push and pull factors do not affect the decisions of individuals from Germany to join ISIS

H_1: Push and pull factors impact the decisions of individuals from Germany to join ISIS

2.1.3: Questions of the study

Using the case of foreign fighters who travelled from Germany to join militants in Iraq and Syria, this study seeks answers to the following questions:

- What role do psychological and social variables play in influencing Germans to join ISIS?
- How do the economic and political environment of Germany contribute towards the recruitment of individuals from the country to join ISIS?

- What role digital platforms play in mobilizing German foreign fighters to join ISIS?

2.1.4: Objectives of the study

In the process of answering the above questions, this study will aim to achieve the following objectives:

- To conduct a literature review on the factors that encourage European fighters to join foreign conflicts.
- To assess the relationship between factors, such as integration deficit, online mobilization, and peer-to-peer networking, and encourage German fighters to join ISIS.
- To advise German authorities on policy initiatives for dealing with the flow of fighters from the country towards militant organizations.

2.1.5: Significance of the study

The findings of this study are crucial for strengthening counterterrorism strategies, not only in Germany but also in the broader region. Foreign fighters joining ISIS significantly enhance the ability of terrorist organizations to recruit manpower, which is vital for their operations (Hegghammer, 2010). Most jihadi groups today are the result of foreign fighter mobilizations, and these fighters play a central role in the structure of militant organizations (Benmelech & Klor, 2020). Studying this phenomenon is important because foreign fighters pose long-term security risks, particularly upon their return to their home countries (Babanoski, 2020; Leduc, 2021).

Foreign fighters often return with training and intentions to cause harm, and research shows that one in every nine returning fighters may launch an attack in their homeland (Hegghammer, 2010). Therefore, understanding the factors driving individuals to join such groups is vital for the security of German society. This study provides policy insights that can help prevent radicalization and inform law enforcement in addressing the foreign fighter threat.

Additionally, there is a lack of consensus in existing literature regarding the primary factors driving individuals to join militant groups. Some studies emphasize socio-economic deficits, while others highlight the role of peer-to-peer networks and radicalization (Reynolds & Hafez, 2019; Heinke, 2017). The mixed results in the literature highlight the need for further research to understand the motivations behind foreign fighter recruitment.

2.1.6: Limitations of the study

Like any other study, this research also comes with some limitations. While this study highlights the role of pull and push factors in recruiting foreign fighters for ISIS, it did not include other factors, such as what motivates converts to join militants. Segregation between males and females to encourage foreign fighters. According to some estimates, 23% of the German foreign fighters fighting alongside ISIS were new converts. Perhaps future studies can use the findings of this study to conduct a large-scale study. Additionally, this study's focus is limited to Germany. While the study justifies targeting Germany, Belgium has more citizens than any other European country fighting alongside ISIS (Capatides, 2016). Due to differences in the socio-economic environments of countries, the findings of this thesis lack generalization. Therefore, future studies should focus on the whole of Europe to identify the reasons why Westerners join militants in foreign conflicts.

2.1.7: Determinants of the study

The key determinants of this study are as follows:

- Psychological and sociological factors: Identity crisis and social exclusion act as push factors by inducing feelings of alienation and disconnection from society. These factors lead individuals to seek a sense of belonging in extremist groups (Kundnani, 2015).
- Political and economic factors: Disillusionment with the political environment and economic marginalization push individuals to rebel against perceived social injustice (Roy, 2017).
- Technological factors: Extremists use social media platforms to recruit individuals from foreign societies to join them by providing a radicalization narrative (Conway, 2017).

2.1.8: Terms of the study

- Foreign fighters: Individuals who travel to join militant organizations motivated by their religious or political ideologies (Malet, 2013).
- Radicalization: The process involving the adoption of extreme ideologies by individuals that may motivate them to engage or support violence (Borum, 2011).
- Recruitment: The process of identifying, targeting, and enlisting new members into extremist groups using social networks and digital methods (Horgan, 2008).

3.1: Theoretical framework

The phenomenon of foreign fighters is still a nascent topic in the context of academic literature (Schumacher, 2021: P19). Therefore, to understand the underlying drivers related to the motives of foreign fighters to join militant groups, this study explores the literature on collective action. The collective action theory is concerned with the actions taken by a group of people with the common objective of improving their condition (DeMarrais and Earle, 2017). A crowd may be involved in collective action for various incentives, such as economic benefits, perceived victimization, institutional grievances (including political marginalization), sacred religious values, and collective identity (Francisco, 2010). While collective action theory identifies various reasons for understanding foreign fighters' motives, scholars have criticized it for inadequately addressing the complexities of the political and social scenario related to deeply entrenched inequalities (Lash and Urry, 1984). To this end, social movement theory provides an ad hoc approach to analyzing the phenomenon of foreign fighters from various perspectives (Wiktorowicz, 2022). Social movement theory explains the role of collective views within a population in causing societal structural changes in society (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2008).

Existing literature defines foreign fighters as those who participate in civil conflicts in foreign countries as noncitizens through joining insurgents or militant organizations (Malet, 2013, 35). History shows that foreign fighters voluntarily engage in direct combat roles and even act as suicide bombers (Hafez, 2007). There are four characteristics of foreign fighters: they are driven by ideology; they are neither rebels, paid soldiers, nor mercenaries. Hegghammer (2010) is of the view that the four foreign fighters joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq because they are called militants. It is ironic that during the current crisis between Russia and Ukraine, various foreign fighters from Europe are fighting alongside the Ukrainian army (Blatchford, 2022). Foreign fighters fighting alongside the Ukrainian army are called legions and freedom fighters instead of militants. However, the same foreign fighters fighting in Kashmir, Palestine, and other conflicting zones are called militants (Hegghammer, 2010: p. 65). Hence, an international hypocrisy relates to Muslim foreign fighters being militants or terrorists, and non-Muslim fighting alongside foreign armies as freedom fighters or legions.

Discussions on the definition of foreign fighters show a diversity of opinion in academics. To this end, social movement theory provides a lexicon for identifying why foreign fighters join ISIS in Syria and Iraq (Mendelsohn, 2011).

The newness of the topic of foreign fighters means that very few empirical studies are being conducted in this context. Verwimp (2016), in his study, concludes that socio-economic marginalization played a key role in the radicalization of European foreign fighters fighting alongside militants in Syria and Iraq. In contrast, Hegghammer (2010) argues that European foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria are driven by their religious ideology that instills a moral duty to defend Muslims. Hegghammer (2010) particularly highlights the role of social networks and peer influence in driving European fighters to join militants. However, Fritz and Young (2020) investigate the motives behind American foreign fighters who joined the fight against ISIS in their study. Authors identified various reasons, such as a sense of desire to support victims of ISIS's violence, ideological commitment, and personal motivation, such as seeking adventure and longing for the camaraderie experienced during their time in the military.

The discussion above clearly indicates a lack of consensus in empirical studies regarding the key factors that drive foreign fighters to join conflicts in foreign lands. Moreover, most studies focus on biographies and demographics of foreign fighters recruited or volunteering in Syria and Iraq (Hewitt and Kelly-Moore, 2009). Additionally, a distinction exists among studies that identify pull factors (Malet, 2013) and those that focus on push factors (Hegghammer, 2013), motivating

individuals to join distant conflicts. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge the gap in the literature by identifying the role of both push and pull factors in motivating fighters from Germany to join ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria.

4.1: Methodology of the study

This study adopts a qualitative research design underpinned by the interpretivism philosophy to explore the subjective meaning and complex social processes that drive human behaviour (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Interpretivism suits this study because it considers the phenomenon of foreign fighters as a product of the complex social processes that encourage them to fight alongside militants.

4.1.1: Study's approach

Adoption of Interpretivism makes logical link to the inductive approach. This is because while extant literature identifies anchoring, personal network, bloc recruitment, integration deficit, network or peer-to-peer mobilization, and online mobilization as several factors affecting foreign fighters' decision to join militant organizations, the application of these factors needs to be judged in the context of Iraq and Syria. Unlike a deductive approach that tests hypotheses based on existing theory, the inductive approach enables the researcher to derive insights and themes directly from the data (Bryman, 2016). Given the limited and contested nature of empirical findings regarding foreign fighters, this approach allows for a more nuanced and contextual understanding.

The interpretivism philosophy and inductive approach to reasoning directly link this study to qualitative methodology. The adoption of qualitative methodology in this study is justified because it aims to describe people's experiences and feelings about joining militants in a foreign land (Khan, 2014; Reynolds and Hafez, 2019).

The research strategy employed Is a systematic qualitative literature review, designed to synthesize existing knowledge and uncover patterns relating to push and pull factors influencing foreign fighters, with a focus on individuals from Germany who joined ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Systematic literature reviews are particularly effective for synthesizing fragmented research on underexplored and sensitive topics (Paez, 2017), like foreign fighter mobilization

4.1.2: Area of study

This study focuses on the geographical area of Iraq and Syria, where ISIS operated as a primary military force (Shamieh and Szenes, 2015). Moreover, fighters from Germany were selected because among the estimated 41,490 individuals who travelled to join ISIS from over 80 countries, approximately 1,268 were from Germany (Hassan, 2021).

4.1.3: Data collection and sources

This study uses secondary data from a systematic review of existing peer-reviewed literature, governmental reports, and scholarly articles. Three databases, JSTOR, Gale Academic OneFile, and Emerald Insight, are used for the search. The Doha Institute in Qatar provided access to these databases.

4.1.4: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009), this study using certain inclusion and exclusion criteria for the selection of literature to conduct systematic review. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were used in qualitative research to ascertain the validity and reliability of the findings (Tong et al., 2007). This research inclusion criterion includes German foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria, Western foreign fighters joining ISIS, and foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria. Other criteria for inclusion and exclusion include a period of 2015-2020, peer-reviewed journals or articles, articles by credible authors, English language, access, and the subject of international relations and Middle Eastern studies.

4.1.5: Sampling

This study aims to illuminate the factors that encourage foreign fighters to join militant groups in Iraq and Syria, thereby rendering random and representative sampling methods unsuitable (Suri, 2011). Given that it is not feasible to collect qualitative data (through interviews) or quantitative data (through surveys) directly from foreign fighters, purposive sampling was deemed the most appropriate approach (Naderifar et al., 2017). Also known as judgment sampling, this method involves the deliberate selection of participants based on the researcher's knowledge and experience.

4.1.6: Data analysis procedure

This study conducts a thematic analysis to extract recurring themes and categories related to push and pull factors. Themes coded and categorized based on relevance to the theoretical framework (Collective Action Theory and Social Movement Theory) and the stated research objectives. The selected papers were categorized based on the different pull and push factors identified in Table 1 above. These factors were treated as thematic codes and analysed using NVivo software. Kraiwanti et al (2023) support using NVivo for thematic analysis in systematic literature reviews, as the large volume of qualitative data can complicate the analysis process.

4.1.7: PRISMA Flow Diagram

The PRISMA flow chart in Figure I below presents the search process. An initial search produced 7,308 papers. Applying exclusion and inclusion criteria such as 2015-2020, peer-reviewed journals or articles, and studies on international relations or Middle Eastern studies eliminated 7,128 papers. Thus, 180 papers remained. The review of 180 papers eliminated 120 papers.

After reviewing the abstracts of the remaining papers, 43 papers were excluded because of their irrelevancy. Finally, a full review of the remaining papers selected three papers for the review, as shown in the PRISMA flow chart in Figure I below.

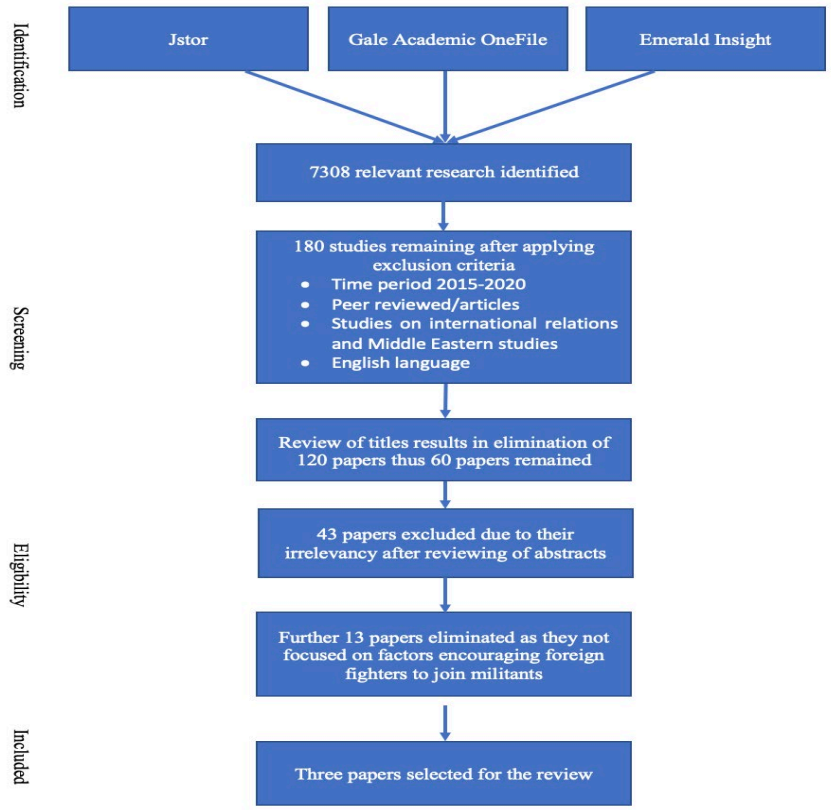


Figure I: PRISMA flow of search on the Database, Source: Adapted from (Alharbi, 2023: 6421)

5.1: Evaluation of quality of evidence

All three papers are of high quality, although their generalizability is limited due to self-selection in participant sampling. However, this limitation also reflects a rigorous approach to participant selection (Yang, 2010). Each study enhances reliability and validity by comparing results with reports from official sources. Using multiple sources of evidence bolsters the credibility of the conclusions drawn (Abu-Bader, 2021).

Nonetheless, aside from Heinke (2017)'s study, the other papers rely predominantly on unclassified, open-access sources and German media, which may reduce evidentiary strength. Given the sensitivity of the foreign fighter phenomenon, collecting direct data from participants is neither practical nor ethical. As such, reliance on documentary analysis is not only acceptable but also often necessary in this field of research.

6.1: Results

Table II summarizes the Matrix Coding Query results generated in NVivo. The studies by Heinke (2017), Reynolds (2016), and Reynolds & Hafez (2019) identify two, four, and two pull factors, respectively, that motivate individuals from Germany to join ISIS in Syria and Iraq. In contrast, only Heinke (2017) identifies both push and pull factors; the other two primarily focus on push factors. These variations underscore the complexity of understanding what drives German nationals to join ISIS.

Table II: Matrix query results

	Heinke (2017)	**Reynolds (2016)**	**Reynolds and Hafez (2019)**
1: Pull factors	2	4	2
2: Push factor	1	1	1

Table III below highlights factors identified in selected papers that influenced foreign fighters to join militant organizations in Iraq and Syria. Table III shows that Reynolds (2016) identifies the role of all five factors, such as anchoring, block, family mobilization, networks, online mobilization, and integration deficit, for influencing Germans to join militants in Iraq and Syria. In contrast, Heinke (2017) identifies networks and online mobilization as key determinants influencing Germans to become foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. Finally, Reynolds and Hafez (2019) identified networks, online mobilization and integration deficit for affecting German fighters to join militants. The findings in table III indicates varying focus of studies with Reynolds (2016) providing the broadest perspective on the factors driving Germans to join ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Moreover, it is noteworthy that while all studies agree on the role of networks and online mobilization, however additional factors highlighted by Reynolds (2016) adds to the complexity of recruitment by the militant organizations.

Table III: Factors impacting foreign fighters for joining militants

	Anchoring	**Block and family mobilization**	**Networks**	**Online mobilization**	**Integration deficit**
Heinke (2017)	×	×	✓	✓	✓
Reynolds (2016)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reynolds and Hafez (2019)	×	×	✓	✓	✓

7.1: Findings and Discussion

The systematic review in this study synthesizes the evidence from three core studies, such as Heinke (2017), Reynolds (2016), and Reynolds and Hafez (2019), aimed at understanding the factors that drive individuals from Germany to join ISIS. Findings are structured around three key interrelated determinants: psychological, social, political, and technological.

Each determinant captured differentiated but overlapping factors that influenced the radicalization of foreign fighters, leading to their path to join ISIS. Prior to moving into assessing the role of three determinants for pushing or pulling Germans towards ISIS, the demographics of the German fighters who fought alongside ISIS are presented.

7.1.1: Demographic findings

A review of three studies reveals that there are some standard demographics of German fighters fighting for ISIS in Iraq and Syria. For instance, most of the German fighters fighting for ISIS militants were young, single, and married, and travelled to the conflict zone along with their families. Furthermore, most of them were males. Additionally, most of them had criminal backgrounds in Germany before traveling to Iraq and Syria.

7.1.2: Psychological and social determinants

All three studies agrees that psychological and social factors play strong role for mobilization of foreign fighters. The identity crisis is identified as a prominent push factor experienced by many second-generation immigrants, resulting in them feeling socially excluded from both German society and the cultural background of their parents (Reynolds, 2016). Heinke (2017) further adds that sense of dislocation compounded by social marginalization and discrimination that results in young Muslim immigrants in Germany feeling excluded from mainstream society. Reynolds and Hafez (2019) agree with the assertion of Heinke (2017) but add that feeling of social and economic exclusion fuels emotional vulnerability, which contributes to the radicalization of Muslim immigrants in Germany. However, a study by Van-Zuidewijn et al (2022) suggests that the lack of social integration is due to most of the German fighters in Iraq and Syria lacking literacy skills, education, and jobs. Nevertheless, social disintegration is counterproductive for society as it leads nations towards anarchy, promotes criminality, and damages engagement (Kaplan, 2017). Past researchers also verify the impact of social disintegration on encouraging foreigners to join militants (Van-Zuidewijn et al., 2022).

Social integration theory asserts that new immigrants face the dilemma of integrating into a foreign land (Lee, 2009) The immigration policy initiative lies in liberal multiculturalism that stresses the complete assimilation of immigrants to promote a pluralist society by ensuring an equal playing field for all (Ireland, 2004: Givens, 2007). However, Western European countries have not enabled quality in its most exact nature due to Islamophobia and xenophobia. Both encourage racism and discrimination, causing an integration deficit as Muslims face consistent economic problems (Hackett, 2017). According to Zeyrek (2021), Islamophobia is rising in Germany, as at least 122 mosque attacks have been noted, along with several incidents of vandalism and arson against Muslims. Zeyrek (2021) further adds that German Muslims endure discrimination in the job market, with only 4.2 percent of female Muslims receiving a callback following an interview (De-Groot, 2021).

Moreover, this research finds substantial numbers of pull factors in the realm of psychological and social drivers driving German foreign fighters to join ISIS. For instance, many foreign fighters find opportunity to fulfil their desire for belonging and purpose, self-identity, and meaning motivated them to join ISIS. Additionally, close-knit social networks within the Muslim immigrant communities such as family, friends, and romantic partners, who had been drawn to the radical ideology of the ISIS, played critical role in supporting recruitment and reinforcing the cause (Kardas and Özdemir, 2018).

All three studies conclude that social networks or peer-to-peer networks significantly affect the recruitment of foreign fighters by militants in Iraq and Syria (Reynolds, 2016**:** Heinke, 2017: Reynolds and Hafez, 2019). The social movement theory emerges from the concept of social science to argue that social mobilization is the direct determinant of political, social, and cultural consequences, such as the creation of the freedom movement (Jasper, 2010). Pre-existing networks are a breeding ground for developing and shaping the social network. Pre-existing networks unite like-minded people to promote and encourage group thinking (Reynolds and Hafez, 2019). Geographical clustering and pre-existing ties play an important role in mobilizing foreign recruits. The impact of dense networking and consequent mobilization appears to be prominent in the context of European foreign fighters in Iraq (Holman, 2015). Dawson (2021) confirms the role of social networks in supporting and motivating the departure of foreigners to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS. Specifically, this study

indicates that the Salafi religion of Muslims in Germany is from where most German jihadists come to Iraq and Syria. Similarly, the charm of adventure and brotherhood offered by the ISIS along with the promised of spiritual reward also acted as pull factor (Heinke, 2017).

The social integration of immigrants in German society is necessary because it significantly and positively improves a country's economic performance. The US is a fresh example of a country's success through the successful social integration of immigration (Kerwin, 2021). Due to the concept of a free society in the US, foreign-born immigrants continue to be integrated into American society. However, the reality is that 100% integration of immigrants is possible. For instance, even the American open social system lacks a variety of living standards metrics for immigrants compared to European nations (Kerwin, 2021).

Likewise, immigrants in the USA also face challenging conditions such as rising nativism, outdated immigration policies, and even administrative attempts to disintegrate immigrants. The recent movement 'Black Lives Matters' came into being due to the daylight killing of an African American 'Eric Garner' (Worland, 2020). Therefore, it is evident that the German government can try to control the social disintegration of immigrants; however, it cannot eliminate it.

7.1.3: Political determinants

Analysis of selected papers in this study also reveals a variety of push factors, such as perceived global injustices, Western intervention in the Middle East's affairs, and perception of morally corrupt Western societies, that push German foreign fighters to join ISIS in Syria and Iraq (Heinke, 2017). Muslims often internalize these grievances in Western communities as collective injustices (Verkuyten, 2018). ISIS utilized this sense of injustice as a tool to call to action, whereby Western nations were represented as aggressors against Islam. Additionally, a study by Reynolds (2016) finds that many foreign fighters from Germany expressed deep disenchantment with the Western political systems, as they perceived liberal democracies as morally corrupt, anti-Islamic, and hypocritical. Analysis of studies by Reynolds (2016) and Heinke (2017) blames the failure of multicultural integration on a deficit. The integration deficit of Muslim immigrants in German society resulted in the emergence of the perception that their voices are not represented within the political structure of the countries, they call home.

Extant literature identifies that feelings of political exclusion are particularly high among the Muslim youth living in Western European countries such as Germany (Kanol, 2022). Drawing on Vergani et al (2020), although political grievances are often cited as a push factor, they also contribute to the pull of ISIS's ideological plot. For instance, ISIS framed the establishment of the caliphate as the solution to the perceived institutional injustice of the Western nations for the Muslims, as it offered them a place governed by the Islamic governance system known as Sharia law (Heinke, 2017). Therefore, the emergence of the caliphate became a powerful pull factor whereby individuals in western countries such as Germany considered joining ISIS not only as a just rebellion but also as a moral duty to restore the Islamic way of life (De-Bont et al., 2017: Wood, 2015). Reynolds (2016) also agrees with the above findings by arguing that ideological framing by ISIS provided a sense of purpose and legitimacy to ISIS to make a call to the Muslims in Western countries to jihad through appealing to those disillusioned by both their local and global political environments.

Additionally, political disintegration gives rise to the development of political convictions among immigrants (Hinger, 2020). For instance, due to social injustice, immigrants may believe that they are the victims and not welcomed in society. Institutional injustice paves the way for people to become politically active to the degree that they would not mind being involved in illegal activities (McGilloway et al., 2015). Extant literature explicitly suggests that a well-educated immigrant finds it absurd that their counterpart gets favorable conditions at the workplace despite having a comparable academic and professional background. Discrimination against immigrants leads to a feeling of marginalization; therefore, an immigrant would have more reasons to join militants. Hellmuth (2016) also correlates marginalization and exclusion with a higher level of participation in ISIS by foreign fighters.

7.1.4: Technological determinants

Findings in this study confirm that pull factors, such as traditional and online mobilization and bloc recruitment, play a role in attracting foreign fighters to join militants. However, there is a conflict among scholars. For instance, findings suggest that many German foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria radicalized through social media and the internet. However, Heinke (2017)'s finds that the internet plays a merely supportive role in reinforcing propaganda spread by social networks. Nevertheless, empirical evidence shows that ISIS recruited almost 40,000 foreign fighters from 110 countries through social media campaigns (Rand, 2018). Therefore, findings that social media effectively recruits foreign fighters for ISIS are valid and reliable.

The recruitment factor of the block is also highlighted in this study for recruiting manpower for militants. Block recruitment is also linked to social or peer-to-peer networks because it suggests that, typically, people join militants in groups rather than individually. Three UK girls traveling to join ISIS in the group during 2015 made the headlines of most international media (CBC, 2015). Given that most of ISIS's foreign recruits were young, they needed some psychological support and encouragement to cross the line. Bloc recruitment suits ISIS because it helps them establish interpersonal trust and foster mutual obligations among recruits (Della-Porta, 2008).

Social movement theory considers anchoring a practical step because it highlights the role of personal commitments, such as family and work, which individuals have to forgo while committing themselves to foreign conflict (McAdam, 1986). Using the biographical availability concept, McAdam (1986) further contends that young, unemployed, and single people are more likely to become involved in foreign fights because they have more time to devote to foreign conflicts. Counteracting factors differentiate between those who become foreign fighters and those who decide not to. Such counteracting forces are known as anchoring factors, including age, employment, marital status, and children. Furthermore, demographic data of German foreign fighters presented in three studies support the role of anchoring in encouraging them to join ISIS. For instance, all three studies found that most foreign fighters were young and had little commitment to their home. However, Reynolds (2016)'s findings show that nearly half of German foreign fighters were married with children. However, Reynold (2016) states that 10% of German fighters traveled to Iraq and Syria with their families. Extant literature suggests that the reason behind foreign fighters' joining ISIS along with their families is due to their religious obligation (Vidino and Hughes, 2015). It argued that the announcement by ISIS to form a caliphate motivated people to fulfill their religious duties. However, Western fighters could not forget their family obligations. Therefore, they decided to join ISIS along with their families.

Nevertheless, most of the German foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria are young and single. The young age group tends to be more vulnerable to terrorist propaganda and is more quickly recruited than mature individuals, according to a study commissioned by the United Nations (Darden, 2019). The low prospects theory suggests that the social disintegration of Muslim immigrants causes social disengagement (Wheelans, 2016). Consequently, the perceived lack of social acceptance of immigrants in Western societies is a core arsenal for militants to lure youngsters and socially disinterested individuals to join them.

Studies further reveal conflicting views about the role of online mobilization in the recruitment of foreign fighters by ISIS in Iraq and Syria. The existing literature suggests that technological advancements, such as social media, offer people convenience and a readily available form of communication (Tonnessen, 2017). However, militant organizations such as ISIS take advantage of the vulnerability of people on social media to carry out their recruitment activities by running propaganda campaigns. ISIS used technology to attract, radicalize, and establish a network of followers and supporters to entice people willing to join them. This factor has also been identified by Reynolds and Hafez (2019: P19) as they find that militants attempt to radicalize people by transmitting the threat to the transitional identity of immigrants living in Europe and other western nations. Social media works as a guide for the cognitive transformation of the foreigners and provides them with information about jihadi areas and advice to make the journey to get there. Khodijah et al (2015) also agree with Reynolds and Hafez (2019) as they find that at its peak time in 2014, ISIS had a presence on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Ask.FM, Kik, SoundCloud, Just-paste. It, WhatsApp, and Wikr. In their social media campaign, ISIS transmits the message to inform people about the threats

to their transnational identity and portrays vivid imagery of Muslims' suffering in conflict zones such as Iraq. Social media networks are a powerful tool for radicalization because conversations in these media tend to be end-to-end encrypted, thus providing individuals with horizontal communication that is user-generated, interactive, and instant. However, Reynolds (2016: p. 62) disagrees with the contention of Reynolds and Hafez (2019) as they find unsubstantial evidence of social media's role in radicalizing foreign fighters from Germany. Similarly, Heinke (2017) asserts that social media only supports and reinforces the militant narrative.

8.1: Conclusion

This exploratory study explores the factors driving German foreign fighters to join militants in Syria and Iraq. To this end, this study sought to assess the impact of social and psychological, political, and technological factors on pulling and pushing Germans to join militant organizations in Syria and Iraq. This study systematically reviews three empirical studies identified using PRISMA flow guidelines. The study successfully answers its research questions and offers a grounded explanation of the complex interplay between individual, societal, and institutional factors that contributed to the radicalization of the Germans. Analysis of the demographics of the German foreign fighters fighting for ISIS reveals that most of the German fighters fighting for ISIS are young, single, and married, and travel to the conflict zone along with their families. Furthermore, most of them are males. Additionally, most of them had criminal backgrounds in Germany before traveling to Iraq and Syria.

A qualitative analysis of the results from three studies suggests that pull factors, including online mobilization, block recruitment, anchoring, and social networks/peer-to-peer networks, serve as an effective arsenal for ISIS to attract foreign fighters to join their cause. In contrast, pull factors such as integration deficit work as reinforcers.

This study uses social movement theory to differentiate between structural enablers and motivators at both individual and group levels. Thus, the study effectively tests the hypothesis that both pull and push variables correlate positively with the recruitment of foreign fighters. Moreover, the study met its objectives by identifying and analysing the psychological, social, economic, and political factors facilitating radicalization. The study also finds the way extremist groups exploit digital platforms and examines how Germany’s societal structures may inadvertently support the appeal of radical ideologies.

The findings further revealed that although social media platforms such as Twitter and WhatsApp played a role in reinforcing radical narratives, there was limited direct evidence of initial recruitment conducted solely digitally. Instead, the presence of pre-existing social and ideological networks, particularly within Salafi communities, appeared to have a more substantial influence in mobilizing individuals to travel abroad and join militant groups.

In conclusion, this study effectively answered its research questions, tested its central hypothesis, and achieved its aims by applying a robust theoretical and methodological framework. The evidence highlights the multidimensional nature of radicalization and underscores the importance of addressing both the structural conditions and psychological mechanisms that enable terrorist recruitment. These insights make a meaningful contribution to the broader discourse on counterterrorism and social cohesion within Germany and beyond.

8.1.1: Implications

Based on the findings, this study implies that countermeasures of the German government to prohibit the flow of its nationals to radical organizations should focus on creating an inclusive society (Daily Sabah, 2021). The increasing development of social media technologies is creating challenges for counter-terrorism agencies to monitor every individual who may be the next target of militants. To this end, this study proposes three recommendations for the German government to stamp out radicalization in the country, such as:

1. Adopting counter-radicalization measures
2. Investing in immigrants to integrate them into the German society
3. Developing the capability to identify red flags.

Grant support details

This research received no external funding. It was conducted as part of my academic studies in the Critical Security Studies program at the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

REFERENCES

Abu-Bader, S. H. (2021). *Using statistical methods in social science research: With a complete SPSS guide*. USA: Oxford University Press.

Alharbi, H. S. (2023). Review: Factors influencing parents' decision to vaccinate children against Covid-19. *Vaccine*, 41, 6419–6425.

Babanoski, K. (2020). The threats of returning foreign terrorist fighters for the European security. *Journal of Applied Security Research*, 15(1), 10–27.

Bakker, E., & De Bont, R. (2017). *Belgian and Dutch jihadist foreign fighters (2012–2015): Characteristics, motivations, and roles in the War in Syria and Iraq*. In *Jihadist Insurgent Movements* (pp. 109–129). Routledge.

Benmelech, E., & Klor, E. F. (2020). What explains the flow of foreign fighters to ISIS? *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32(7), 1458–1481.

Blatchford, A. (2022). Band of others: Ukraine's legions of foreign soldiers are on the frontline. Politico. Available at [online]. Accessed January 12, 2025.

Borch, C. (2006). The exclusion of the crowd: The destiny of a sociological figure of the irrational. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9(1), 83–102.

Borum, R. (2011). Radicalization into violent extremism I: A review of social science theories. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4(4), 7–36.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford University Press.

Capatides, C. (2016). Which European countries have produced the most ISIS fighters? CBC News. Available at [online]. Accessed January 23, 2025.

CBC. (2015). Shamima Begum, Amira Abase, Kadiza Sultana: What we know about ISIS-bound teens. CBC News. Available at [online]. Accessed January 23, 2025.

Conway, M. (2016). *Determining the role of the Internet in violent extremism and terrorism*. In *Violent Extremism Online* (pp. 123–148). Routledge.

Daily Sabah. (2019). Over 900 anti-Muslim attacks recorded in Germany in 2020. Daily Sabah. Available at [online]. Accessed January 23, 2025.

Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2008). Studying violent radicalization in Europe II: The potential contribution of socio-psychological and psychological approaches (No. 2008:3). DIIS Working Paper.

Darden, J. T. (2019). Tackling terrorists' exploitation of youth. United Nations. Available at [online]. Accessed January 23, 2025.

Dawson, L. L. (2021). A comparative analysis of the data on western foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq: Who went and why? *The Hague: International Centre for Counterterrorism*, 1–51.

De Bont, R., Weggemans, D., Peters, R., & Bakker, E. (2017). Life at ISIS: The roles of western men, women and children. *Security and Global Affairs*, 3–17.

De-Groot, K. (2021). The 'hijab penalty': Feminist backlash to Muslim immigrants in Germany. Penn Today. Available at [online]. Accessed January 23, 2025.

DeMarrais, E., & Earle, T. (2017). Collective action theory and the dynamics of complex societies. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 46(1), 183–201.

Francisco, R. A. (2010). *Collective action theory and empirical evidence*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Finneran, R. (2020). *The Selective Fossilization Hypothesis: A longitudinal study of English language learners' persistent errors. Unpublished doctoral dissertation*, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

Fritz, J., & Young, J. K. (2020). Transnational volunteers: American foreign fighters combating the Islamic State. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32(3), 449–468.

Hafez, M. M. (2007). *Suicide bombers in Iraq: The strategy and ideology of martyrdom*. US Institute of Peace Press.

Hassan, L. (2021). Repatriating ISIS foreign fighters is key to stemming radicalization, experts say, but many countries don't want their citizens back. PBS. Available at [online]. Accessed April 12, 2025.

Hegghammer, T. (2010). The rise of Muslim foreign fighters: Islam and the globalization of Jihad. *International Security*, 35(3), 53–94.

Hegghammer, T. (2013). The recruiter's dilemma: Signalling and rebel recruitment tactics. *Journal of Peace Research*, 50(1), 3–16.

Heinke, D. H. (2017). German foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq: The updated data and its implications. *CTC Sentinel*, 10(3), 17–22.

Hellmuth, D. (2016). Of alienation, association, and adventure: Why German fighters join ISIL. *Journal for Deradicalization*, (6), 24–50.

Hewitt, C., & Kelley-Moore, J. (2009). Foreign fighters in Iraq: A cross-national analysis of Jihadism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 21(2), 211–220.

Hinger, S. (2020). Integration through disintegration? The distinction between deserving and undeserving refugees in national and local integration policies in Germany. In Politics of (dis)integration, pp. 19–39.

Hoffman, B. (2008). The myth of grass-roots terrorism—why Osama bin Laden still matters. *Foreign Affairs*, 87, 133.

Holman, T. (2015). Belgian and French foreign fighters in Iraq 2003–2005: A comparative case study. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38(8), 603–621.

Horgan, J. (2008). From profiles to pathways and roots to routes: Perspectives from psychology on radicalization into terrorism. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 618(1), 80–94.

Jasper, J. M. (2010). Social movement theory today: Toward a theory of action? *Sociology Compass*, 4(11), 965–977.

Kardaş, T., & Özdemir, Ö. B. (2018). The making of European foreign fighters: Identity, social media and virtual radicalization (pp. 213–235). Springer International Publishing.

Kaplan, S. D. (2017). A systems approach to social disintegration. National Affairs. Available at [online]. Accessed January 25, 2025.

Khan, S. N. (2014). Qualitative research method: Grounded theory. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 9(11), 224–233.

Khosrokhavar, F. (2017). *Radicalization: Why some people choose the path of violence*. The New Press.

Kraiwanit, T., Limna, P., & Siripipatthanakul, S. (2023). NVivo for social sciences and management studies: A systematic review. *Advance Knowledge for Executives*, 2(3), 1–11.

Kundnani, A. (2015). A decade lost: Rethinking radicalisation and extremism. Claystone.

Leduc, R. (2021). The ontological threat of foreign fighters. *European Journal of International Relations*, 27(1), 127–149.

Lee, C. (2009). Sociological theories of immigration: Pathways to integration for US immigrants. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 19(6), 730–744.

Malet, D. (2013). *Foreign fighters: Transnational identity in civil conflicts*. Oxford University Press.

Martini, A. (2018). Making women terrorists into "Jihadi brides": An analysis of media narratives on women joining ISIS. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 11(3), 458–477.

McAdam, D. (1986). Recruitment to high-risk activism: The case of freedom summer. *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(1), 64–90.

McGilloway, A., Ghosh, P., & Bhui, K. (2015). A systematic review of pathways to and processes associated with radicalization and extremism amongst Muslims in Western societies. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 27(1), 39–50.

Mendelsohn, B. (2011). Foreign fighters—recent trends. *Orbis*, 55(2), 189–202.

Moore, C. (2018). *Foreign Bodies: Transnational Activism, the Insurgency in the North Caucasus and "Beyond"*. In *Networked*

Insurgencies and Foreign Fighters in Eurasia (pp. 53–73). Routledge.

Mullin, J. (2015). What is ISIS' appeal for young people? CNN. Available at [online]. Accessed April 10, 2025.

Naderifar, M., Goli, H., & Ghaljaie, F. (2017). Snowball sampling: A purposeful method of sampling in qualitative research. *Strides in Development of Medical Education*, 14(3).

Norton, L. (2007). *Using assessment to promote quality learning in higher education*. In *Learning, Teaching and Assessing in Higher Education: Developing Reflective Practice* (pp. 92–101). Exeter: Learning Matters.

Oltermann, P. (2019). Women married to ISIS fighters due to land in Germany from Turkey. The Guardian. Available at [online]. Accessed January 20, 2025.

Paez, A. (2017). Gray literature: An important resource in systematic reviews. *Journal of Evidence-Based Medicine*, 10(3), 233–240.

Rand. (2018). ISIS's use of social media still poses a threat to stability in the Middle East and Africa. Available at [online]. Accessed January 23, 2025.

Reynolds, S. C. (2016). *German foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. Doctoral dissertation*, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA).

Reynolds, S. C., & Hafez, M. M. (2019). Social network analysis of German foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 31(4), 661–686.

Roy, O. (2017). *Jihad and death: The global appeal of Islamic State*. Oxford University Press.

Said, B. T., & Fouad, H. (2022). *Countering Islamist radicalisation in Germany: A guide to Germany's growing prevention infrastructure*. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Schumacher, M. J. (2021). *Dying to fight: The individual and social processes of the foreign fighter phenomenon*. Loyola University Chicago.

Shamieh, L., & Szenes, Z. (2015). The rise of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). *AARMS – Academic and Applied Research in Military and Public Management Science*, 14(4), 363–378.

Shawn, L. (2023). The rise and decline of ISIS: An analysis of the Islamic State's genesis, expansion, and demise. *International Journal of Science and Society*, 5(1).

Suri, H. (2011). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 11(2), 63–75.

Tong, A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): a 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 19(6), 349–357.

Tønnessen, T. H. (2017). Islamic State and technology – a literature review. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 11(6), 101–111.

Van Zuijdewijn, J. D. R., Bakker, E., & Note, I. B. (2022). *Returning Western foreign fighters: The case of Afghanistan, Bosnia and Somalia*. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Vergani, M., Iqbal, M., Ilbahar, E., & Barton, G. (2020). The three Ps of radicalization: Push, pull and personal. A systematic scoping review of the scientific evidence about radicalization into violent extremism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 43(10), 854–? (confirm end-page).

Verkuyten, M. (2018). *Religious fundamentalism and radicalization among Muslim minority youth in Europe*. European Psychologist.

Verwimp, P. (2016). Foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq and the socio-economic environment they faced at home: A comparison of European countries. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 10(6), 68–81.

Vidino, L., & Hughes, S. (2015). ISIS in America: From retweets to Raqqa. GW Program on Extremism. Available at [online]. Accessed January 23, 2025.

Wheelans, C. (2016). Analyses of government responses to stem the flow of foreign fighters. Master Programme in Peace and Conflict Studies, Uppsala University.

Wiktorowicz, Q. (2002). Islamic activism and social movement theory: A new direction for research. *Mediterranean Politics*, 7(3), 187–211.

Wood, G. (2015). What ISIS really wants. *The Atlantic*, 315(2), 78–94.

Worland, J. (2020). America's long overdue awakening to systemic racism. Time. Available at [online]. Accessed January 23, 2025.

Yang, K. (2010). *Making sense of statistical methods in social research*. Sage.