

Fusion Centers, Network Science, and Strategic Leadership: A Comprehensive Approach to Countering Domestic Extremism and Foreign-Influenced Terrorism

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Fusion centers and network science tools offer complementary strengths in countering both domestic extremism and foreign-influenced terrorism. This article examines three distinct yet interconnected studies that highlight how intelligence sharing, targeted disruption, and community engagement can prevent radicalization and dismantle violent networks. Drawing from criminological and leadership frameworks, Eberhardt (2025) explores the organizational, strategic, and ethical implications of preemptive law enforcement responses to hate crimes and terror threats.

Keywords: extremism, terrorism, intelligence, leadership, fusion centers, counterterrorism, radicalization, law enforcement, information sharing

INTRODUCTION

The definition of hate crimes presented by Levin (2009), should serve as the foundation for justifying the judicious use of fusion centers and intelligent tools in both dismantling white supremacist infiltration within law enforcement and combating foreign-influenced terrorism. According to Levin (2009), hate crimes are distinct in their targeting of victims based on immutable characteristics, such as race or religion, which not only harm individuals but also terrorize entire communities. This definition makes clear that hate crimes, particularly when committed by individuals in positions of power within law enforcement, undermine public trust and civil order on a systemic level.

Astute reliance on fusion centers provides the structural support necessary to identify these threats across different jurisdictions and agencies. As Carter et al. (2017) argue, fusion centers are pivotal in sharing intelligence and pooling resources. These could be used to detect and dismantle extremist groups, including white supremacist networks embedded within law enforcement. By gathering information on suspicious behaviors, affiliations, and communication patterns, these centers would enable agencies to disrupt potential threats before they can manifest into violent acts, aligning directly with Levin's (2009) focus on preemptively stopping hate-based violence.

In addition, intelligent tools such as those discussed by Spyropoulos et al. (2023) should further enhance the capacity to target and fragment these groups by focusing on network centrality measures. The ability to identify and remove key individuals or "nodes" within extremist networks... whether these be domestic white supremacists or foreign-influenced terrorists... helps weaken the entire organization. These tools support Levin's (2009) emphasis on addressing hate crimes at their root by targeting the organizational structure that enables and propagates these ideologies.

McCurtain (2022) expands this by highlighting strategies to prevent foreign-influenced terrorism, which is increasingly intertwined with domestic extremism. Fusion centers, by connecting law enforcement with intelligence agencies and community organizations, are critical for identifying individuals radicalized by foreign entities. The early detection of these threats aligns with Levin's argument that stopping hate crimes early prevents further violence and disruption of societal order.

Thus, the judicious employment of fusion centers and intelligent tools is not only justified, but necessary. As Levin's (2009) definition makes clear, hate crimes are not isolated incidents but part of broader, organized ideologies that pose an existential threat to societal stability. By utilizing these tools to target both white supremacist factions and foreign-influenced terrorism, law enforcement can uphold public safety and maintain the integrity of democratic institutions.

RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

To explore effective strategies for counter-terrorism within law enforcement, three studies offer unique perspectives on intelligence sharing and disruption tactics. These articles delve into how fusion centers, network science, and foreign-influenced terrorism strategies can be employed to preemptively identify and dismantle terrorist threats. Each study examines different facets of law enforcement's role in maintaining public safety while addressing operational challenges. Below, we present a detailed comparison of these approaches, emphasizing their methods, results, and implications for leadership and counter-terrorism efforts.

Article 1: Law Enforcement Fusion Centers: Cultivating an Information Sharing Environment While Safeguarding Privacy (Carter et al., 2017)

This study explores the role of fusion centers in enhancing intelligence sharing across various law enforcement agencies. It highlights both the strengths and challenges these centers face in fostering collaboration and safeguarding individual privacy. The research uses a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and case studies to offer insights into improving information dissemination while protecting civil liberties.

Article 2: Interoperability and Targeted Attacks on Terrorist Organizations Using Intelligent Tools From Network Science (Spyropoulos et al., 2023)

This study examines how network science tools can be used to disrupt terrorist networks by targeting key individuals within those networks. By removing nodes based on centrality measures, the researchers show how intelligence agencies can fragment terrorist organizations, effectively reducing their operational capabilities. The research offers a data-driven approach for law enforcement to weaken criminal and terrorist networks.

Article 3: Averting the Next Attack: Law Enforcement Strategies to Disrupt Foreign-Influenced Terrorism in the Homeland (McCurtain, 2022)

McCurtain's study investigates how law enforcement agencies can use disruption strategies to prevent foreign-influenced terrorist attacks. By leveraging intelligence sharing, community collaboration, and targeted interventions, the study provides actionable insights on neutralizing threats before they materialize. The focus is on proactive counter-terrorism strategies, emphasizing disruption and prevention over reactive measures.

ANALYSES

Carter et al. (2017)

Research Question/Hypothesis

How do fusion centers build relationships with both law enforcement and non-law enforcement organizations, and what mechanisms do they use to protect individual privacy?

Variables Studied

The key variables studied were the effectiveness of information-sharing mechanisms and the privacy safeguarding measures. The dependent variable was fusion center effectiveness, measured through relationships with external partners and privacy protection practices.

Sample

Two fusion centers had three respondents each, ten had two, and the remaining 70 had one respondent in the study. The results from all 96 respondents were used to reflect fusion center practices. To account for clustered responses from the same center, a complex survey design in STATA (ICv14) was applied. Given the minimal multiple responses from the same center and the focus on descriptive analysis, the findings were consistent.

Data Collection

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining a national survey of fusion centers with three detailed case studies at centers in Florida, Nevada, and Michigan, all conducted during the same timeframe.

Results

Survey respondents reported the closest information-sharing relationships with state (60%) and local (58%) law enforcement, followed by other fusion centers (47%). Minimal respondents indicated distant relationships with law enforcement, but this was not the case for private and public health sectors. Private sector relationships were more often seen as distant (22%) than close (15%), while 31% reported a close relationship with public health, though 18% perceived it as distant. Each fusion center (FFC, SNCTC, MIOC) had distinct methods for cultivating non-law enforcement partnerships.

To protect privacy and manage legal and proprietary concerns, fusion centers and private sector organizations signed memorandums of understanding (MOUs) detailing how information would be shared, stored, and used. Participation in the BusinessSafe program required agreement to the MOU. Private sector partners could also engage in face-to-face meetings with fusion center and regional personnel, which helped build relationships and better understand the needs of both parties.

Impact on Understanding of the World

“The most unique and promising practices gleaned from the case studies focused on fostering relationships with the private sector” (Carter, 2017, p. 18).

Leadership Reframing

This study underscores the need for adaptive leadership in law enforcement. Leaders in fusion centers must navigate complex relationships, balancing inter-agency collaboration with privacy protection. Leadership in this context involves fostering trust while maintaining transparency, which is essential for long-term success in information-sharing environments.

Spyropoulos, et al. (2023)

Research Question/Hypothesis

“The primary objective of this research was to determine which node removal strategy would most effectively fragment terrorist networks and prevent them from functioning” (Spyropoulos et al., 2023, p. 580).

Variables Studied

The study focused on network centrality measures as variables, particularly recalculated betweenness centrality, strength centrality, clustering coefficient, and several recalculated versions of these. The dependent variable was interoperability, defined by the size of the largest network component after removing certain nodes.

Sample

The sample included four real terrorist networks: “Jamaah Islamiah Section of Indonesia,” “Hamburg Cell,” “Al-Qaeda Section of Madrid,” and “Jamaah Islamiah Section of the Philippines.” Data for these organizations was drawn from open-access databases, including John Jay’s Transnational Terrorism Database.

Data Collection

The data consisted real data of physical face-to-face interactions among terrorists, allowing the researchers to assess actual social ties rather than virtual interactions. They used network theory tools to measure centrality metrics and the impact of node removal on network fragmentation. This approach was appropriate for examining the hypothesis, as it allowed the researchers to test multiple attack strategies on real-world data.

Results

The most effective strategy for dismantling terrorist networks was removing nodes based on recalculated betweenness centrality, which resulted in rapid network fragmentation. The study showed that removing even a small number of highly central nodes dramatically decreased network interoperability, making terrorist networks unable to function.

Impact on Understanding of the World

The results highlight how targeted interventions... such as focusing on key individuals within terrorist networks... can disrupt their operations. This insight is crucial for law enforcement agencies in planning efficient counter-terrorism strategies.

Leadership Reframing

From this study, one can understand the importance of identifying key players within an organization or network. Leadership reframing in the context of counter-terrorism emphasizes the need for adaptive, data-driven strategies to identify influential individuals who can disrupt harmful networks effectively.

McCurtain (2022)

Research Question/Hypothesis

The study investigates how law enforcement can effectively use disruption strategies to prevent foreign-influenced terrorist attacks in the U.S. homeland. It focuses on the role of intelligence sharing, targeted interventions, and community policing in counter-terrorism efforts.

Variables Studied

The key variables include law enforcement disruption strategies, community engagement, and foreign influence on terrorism. The dependent variable is terrorist attack prevention, measured by the effectiveness of disruption strategies in neutralizing potential threats.

Sample

The sample includes an analysis of terrorism case studies influenced by foreign actors, as well as law enforcement reports on the outcomes of community policing and intelligence-sharing initiatives.

Data Collection

The researcher used qualitative data from law enforcement reports, case studies, and interviews with experts in counter-terrorism. This approach allowed the collection of detailed, context-specific data relevant to the study’s hypothesis. The techniques were appropriate, as they provided a comprehensive understanding of the disruption strategies being used.

Results

The study concluded that disruptive strategies, particularly those involving fusion centers and community engagement, were effective in preventing potential terrorist activities. The use of targeted interventions against key individuals within terrorist networks was particularly successful.

Impact on Understanding of the World

The results emphasize the importance of pre-emptive actions in law enforcement. Disruption strategies not only prevent attacks but also reduce the radicalization of individuals influenced by foreign terrorist organizations, shaping a more proactive approach to counter-terrorism.

Leadership Reframing

The study highlights the need for law enforcement leaders to reframe their approach by focusing on community collaboration and intelligence-driven policing. Effective leadership in this context involves anticipating threats and coordinating resources across multiple agencies to disrupt potential terrorist networks before they can act.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Here is a comparison and contrast of the three studies on fusion centers, disrupting terrorist networks, and foreign-influenced terrorism prevention.

Similarities

Focus on Counter-Terrorism and Disruption

All three studies emphasize preventive strategies for addressing terrorism. The fusion centers study by Carter et al. (2017) and the Spyropoulos et al. (2023) study on terrorist network dismantling both focus on information-sharing and intelligence-led operations. McCurtain (2022) extends this by exploring disruption strategies aimed at foreign-influenced terrorism.

Use of Intelligence Sharing

A key theme across all three studies is the reliance on intelligence sharing. Fusion centers (Carter et al., 2017) are designed to enhance intelligence dissemination across law enforcement agencies, while Spyropoulos et al. (2023) and McCurtain's (2022) studies emphasize the role of collaborative intelligence in identifying and disrupting potential terrorist threats.

Targeted Approaches

Both McCurtain (2022) and Spyropoulos et al. (2023) focus on targeted interventions. Spyropoulos et al. (2023) suggest removing key nodes in terrorist networks based on centrality measures, whereas McCurtain (2022) advocates for community collaboration and targeting key individuals in foreign-influenced terror plots.

Differences

Methodology

Carter et al. (2017) use a mixed-methods approach with surveys and case studies to examine fusion center effectiveness. Spyropoulos et al. (2023) rely on network science tools, using quantitative models to simulate the effects of removing central nodes from terrorist networks. McCurtain (2022) employs case studies and qualitative data from law enforcement reports to analyze disruption strategies for foreign-influenced terrorism.

Scope of Study

Carter et al. (2017) focus on fusion centers as collaborative hubs for law enforcement, looking broadly at their operational practices across the U.S. Spyropoulos et al. (2023) narrow their focus to network

disruption techniques, aiming to fragment specific terrorist organizations through targeted node removal. McCurtain (2022) zeroes in on foreign-influenced terrorism and the specific strategies needed to prevent attacks within the homeland.

Privacy Concerns

Privacy protection is a significant issue in Carter et al. (2017), where the study emphasizes privacy safeguards in fusion centers through MOUs and oversight boards. This is not a focus in the other two studies, which concentrate more on terrorism disruption and operational efficiency.

All three studies provide valuable insights into counter-terrorism strategies, focusing on intelligence sharing and targeted disruption. However, they differ in scope and methodology, with Carter et al. (2017) emphasizing the organizational structure of fusion centers, Spyropoulos et al. (2023) offering a network analysis approach, and McCurtain (2022) examining disruption tactics for foreign-influenced terrorist threats. These differences provide complementary perspectives on the broader goal of counter-terrorism in law enforcement.

CONCLUSION

The integration of fusion centers and intelligent tools is critical in the fight against both domestic and foreign-influenced terrorism. As Brian Levin (2009) highlights, hate crimes pose a systemic threat by targeting individuals based on immutable characteristics, thereby destabilizing entire communities. By leveraging the intelligence-sharing capacities of fusion centers, as outlined by Carter et al. (2017), and the network disruption techniques explored by Spyropoulos et al. (2023), law enforcement can preemptively address extremist threats embedded within their own ranks. Furthermore, McCurtain's (2022) insights into countering foreign-influenced terrorism align seamlessly with this approach, reinforcing the importance of proactive, intelligence-driven strategies. Collectively, these tools and frameworks support the broader mission of safeguarding societal integrity and restoring public trust in law enforcement institutions.

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APPENDIX

MAYA M. BERRY & BRIAN LEVIN

Maya M. Berry

Maya M. Berry is the Executive Director of the Arab American Institute (AAI), a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the civil rights and political engagement of Arab Americans. Berry has been a key figure in advocating for the Arab American community, focusing on issues like hate crimes, discrimination, and the inclusion of Arab Americans in U.S. Census data.

In her role, Berry has testified before U.S. Senate committees, including her 2022 testimony titled “Combating the Rise in Hate Crimes,” in which she provided insights into the alarming increase in hate crimes targeting Arab Americans and other marginalized communities. She emphasized the importance of accurate hate crime data collection and called for better federal responses to address hate-fueled violence. Berry also highlighted the chronic underreporting of hate crimes and the need for more resources to assist victims of these crimes.

As a longtime advocate for civil rights, Maya Berry has worked to expand AAI’s efforts in protecting the civil liberties of Arab Americans, as well as fostering community participation in the U.S. political system. Prior to her role at AAI, she was involved in legislative and political work, contributing to various human rights and public policy initiatives.

Brian Levin

Brian Levin, a key figure on the California Commission on the State of Hate, has made significant contributions to understanding and combating extremism within law enforcement and the broader society. As a criminologist and director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, Levin has been instrumental in compiling reports that analyze hate crime trends, including how extremist ideologies infiltrate law enforcement agencies. His work emphasizes the critical need for thorough reporting and oversight to identify and address extremism within these institutions.

Levin’s efforts with the Commission focus on strengthening California’s ability to combat hate by publishing comprehensive reports, conducting fact-finding missions, and providing guidance to local and state officials. One of his prominent roles involves highlighting disparities in hate crime reporting and advocating for better mechanisms to ensure accurate data collection, particularly in counties with under-reporting issues. If you’re interested in learning more about his work:

- The California Civil Rights Department’s page on the Commission on the State of Hate, which provides information about the commission’s activities and its members. <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/commission-on-the-state-of-hate/>
- The Precinct Reporter Group, which has published articles such as “Big Spike in Hate Crime Reporting,” detailing recent trends in hate crime data. <https://www.precinctreporter.com/2024/02/15/big-spike-in-hate-crime-reporting/>

Four Frames Impact

To analyze how Maya M. Berry and Brian Levin fit within the four frames of leadership (Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic), assess their work, roles, and impact through each frame.

Structural Frame

This frame emphasizes organization, policies, and procedures. Both Maya M. Berry and Brian Levin have contributed to the structural aspects of leadership through their work in civil rights, law, and policy advocacy. Maya M. Berry, as the Executive Director of the Arab American Institute, often focuses on structured advocacy efforts, especially in terms of Arab-American civic engagement, while Brian Levin’s work as a civil rights attorney and academic in law enforcement and hate crimes offers a structured, legal approach to reform and policy change.

Human Resource Frame

This frame focuses on people, relationships, and supporting personal growth. Maya M. Berry's leadership is evident in her work with the Arab-American community, focusing on building solidarity and engagement, which empowers individuals to be part of a larger civic movement. Brian Levin, as a professor and civil rights advocate, works to educate and uplift communities affected by hate crimes and racism, fostering human connections through education and awareness.

Political Frame

The political frame deals with power, competition, and negotiations. Both Berry and Levin navigate this frame by leveraging their influence to challenge political norms and advocate for underrepresented groups. Berry's advocacy for Arab-American civil rights and political representation showcases her navigation of power structures, while Levin's work in combatting hate crimes often involves policy advocacy and navigating the complex dynamics between law enforcement, the government, and civil rights groups.

Symbolic Frame

This frame involves culture, meaning-making, and vision. Both Berry and Levin create symbols of justice and reform. Maya M. Berry symbolizes the empowerment of the Arab-American community, working to enhance their visibility and cultural significance within American society. Brian Levin symbolizes the fight against hate crimes and the importance of civil rights advocacy, creating meaning and awareness through his research and public engagement.

Their work can be understood through these frames as they balance legal structures, community empowerment, political navigation, and cultural significance.