

# **A Comparative Case Study Applying the Routine Activity Theory to Explain Terrorism**

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The exploration of the relationship between crime and terrorism is increasingly becoming a focus of attention (Freilich and LaFree 2015, 1; Fisher and Kearns 2023, 9). Despite the growing abundance of terrorism-related literature, there has been limited research exploring the application of criminological theories to explain terrorism. Terrorism is fundamentally a crime. This study aims to fill this gap by utilizing the routine activity theory as a theoretical framework to examine how criminology can be applied in terrorism studies. The approach will employ a criminal profile to gain insight into terrorist behavior. It includes a comparative analysis of a perpetrator's psychology in criminal and terrorist acts using case studies, archival research, crime statistics, and terrorism statistics. The study's primary goal is to bridge the gap between criminology and terrorism, thereby enhancing our understanding of terrorism as a type of crime.

The routine activity theory, or the crime triangle theory, examines crime from the perpetrator's perspective. According to this theory, for a crime to occur, three elements must be present simultaneously: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen and Felson 1979, 589). This study will begin by analyzing the psychological, biological, social, and cultural attributes contributing to the motivation of individuals who commit crimes. It will then analyze their crimes using individual factors and identify any external contributing factors. Finally, the study will examine the characteristics of the crimes using the routine activity theory.

When examining terrorism through the lens of the routine activity theory, the primary focus is on understanding the offender's motivation. For this study, the following case studies will be examined: David Berkowitz (Son of Sam), Ted Kaczynski (Unabomber),

and the DC Snipers, John Muhammad and Lee Malvo. These cases were carefully selected to aid in exploring individual psychology and to gain a deeper comprehension of their behavior and motives. Detailed insight into their thought processes is derived from their own words, including manifestos, writings, and interviews, complemented by expert psychological analyses that offer a more comprehensive understanding of their actions. These approaches seek to reveal the underlying factors that may have influenced their behavior and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between individual psychology, social context, and external influences.

This study seeks to address the knowledge gap in applying criminal theory to comprehend the complex phenomenon of terrorism. The aim is to enhance our understanding of how principles of criminal theory can be utilized to analyze and interpret acts of terrorism, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive framework for addressing this critical issue.

## References

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